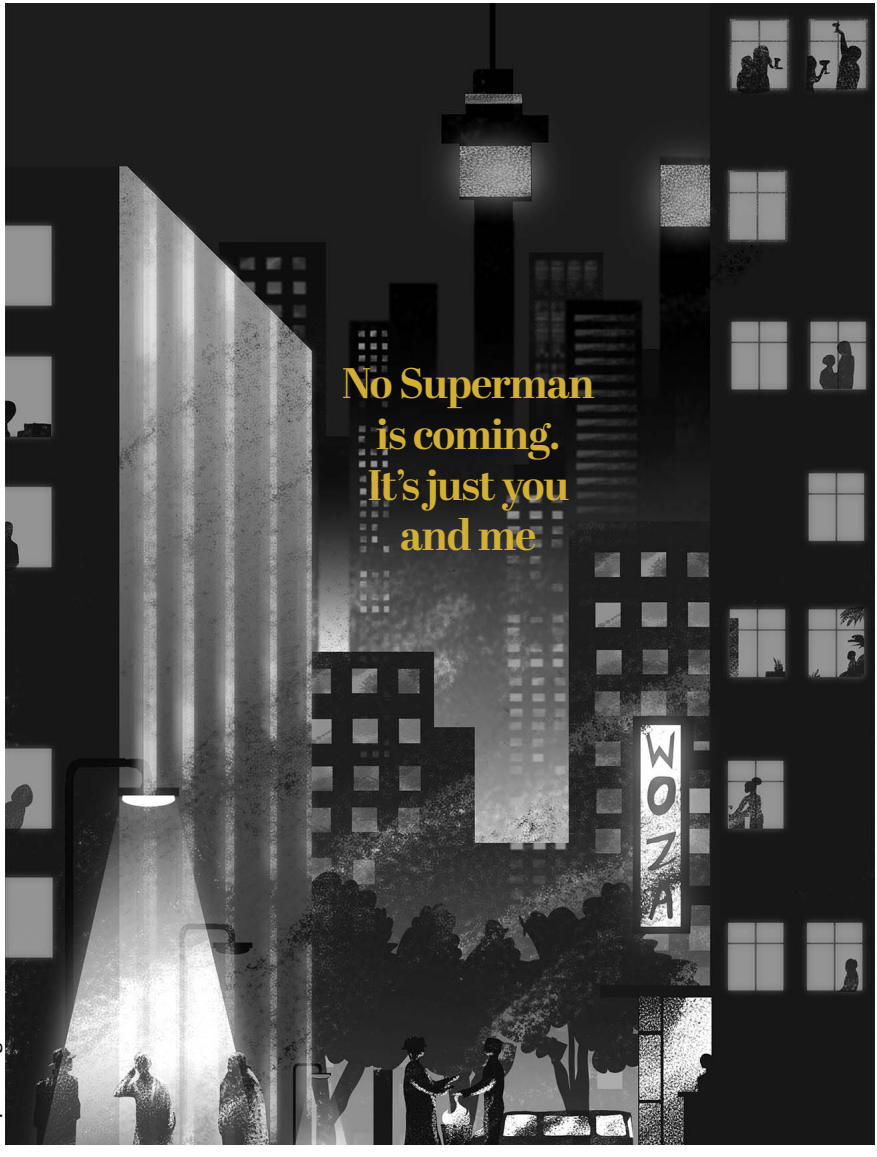
with The Continent

The Friday Paper

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM | 13 NOVEMBER 2026 | ISSUE 6



Graphic: Kagiso Diale

The intro

Selves and others: The people we would otherwise never meet

I spent this week in Nairobi at the African Investigative Journalism Conference, among journalists from across the continent who keep doing the work, often at great risk. I came home inspired.

I also came home carrying something heavier. I was profoundly moved by the Carlos Cardoso lecture, which honours the Mozambican journalist murdered in Maputo in 2000 for exposing corruption, and by the commemoration of 16 Eritrean journalists who were detained in 2001 and have not been seen or heard from since.

The Committee to Protect Journalists paid a much-needed tribute to their work and their lives. Twenty-five years later, their families still do not know whether they are alive.

It was a reminder of what journalism costs on this continent. On 2 November, the world marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The day exists because, too often, there are no consequences for those who threaten, jail or kill journalists. Each case that goes unpunished tells the next person with something to hide that it can be done.

This week's theme is "Selves and Others": the limits of ubuntu, and how we relate to each other in a divided society. Journalism is one of the ways we come to know people we would otherwise never meet. In these pages are a refugee who lost her job because Home Affairs kept telling her to come back next week; families on the Cape Flats who no longer feel safe even inside their homes; and voters who, as Natasha Marrian argues, are searching for someone they can trust.

There is also plenty to argue with: Lester Kiewit on why we should stop shouting "for president!" at everyone who does something well, and Carlos Amato on the country we glimpse when the Boks win.

And with most councils still without a government, we look at what your new council is inheriting, and why you should ask to see it.

The journalists in Nairobi reminded me why this work matters. Thank you for reading it, and for passing it on.

Khotsong,
Khadija

Quote Unquote

Let's make a deal

Most councils were left hung after the vote, and parties have 14 days to form coalitions. Here is what they are saying at the table.

"Very slim. Very, very slim."
— Herman Mashaba, ActionSA leader, on the chances of a coalition with the DA (*Sunday Times*)

"The ANC will not be in a hurry to get into coalitions. There is also an option to sit in opposition."
— Fikile Mbalula, ANC secretary-general (*Sunday Times*)

"All our negotiation agreements will be made transparently available after negotiations are concluded."
— Jan de Villiers, DA spokesperson (*EWN*)



In coalition? Nomvula Mokonyane hinted at working with the DA. Photo: Phill Magakoe/AFP



In opposition? Fikile Mbalula (left) raised a left-field option. Photo: Emmanuel Croset/AFP

"Everything is up for review, including the relationship with the Democratic Alliance." **— Nomvula Mokonyane, ANC first deputy secretary-general (*News24*)**

"It's a real pity that we don't have 30 days to get these coalitions going. All of those 138 are different electoral outcomes, different personalities, different political parties with different positions. So it's going to be complex to negotiate those coalitions." **— local government expert Professor Jaap de Visser (*EWN*)**

Over to you

You told us why you voted, what stuck with you this week, and what we should be writing about. Here is some of what you said.

Why we voted

For some of you, it was simply "the beauty of democracy and having the power to choose". For one reader, it was history: "I think of the unnamed heroes who died or were murdered for my right to vote. 'We are our ancestors' wildest dreams,' and I vote to honour their memories." Others couldn't make it, like the reader who was out of the country for work.

What stuck with you

One reader watched a video of Albie Sachs recounting how hard he fought for the right of everyone to vote. Another passed on a neighbour's question, which is everyone's question this week: will these election results "bring a positive change", or are they "just the ambitions of politicians, not necessarily about the people and the economy turning around"?

What should we be telling?

"Farming in the city," you said. If you grow food in your yard, on a rooftop or in a community garden, tell us.

Correction

In our edition of 30 October, Niren Tolsi's article on the MK Party in KwaZulu-Natal, "MKP at a local level is playing a smart game", said that his research was supported by a Taco Kuiper grant. It was supported by a grant from the Henry Nxumalo Foundation. We apologise for the error.

Your streets: One of you asked to see more local photography. So here are two of yours. Keep them coming: send us a picture of your street, using this link. (Top) A quiet street, townhouses and a block of flats under a clear sky, submitted by Motlatsi Khosi, Waverley. (Bottom) A palm-lined suburban street, taken through a gate, submitted by Zainab, Benoni.





And the winner is...

Congratulations to George Mapiye, who wins a copy of *Predatory Welfare* by Erin Torkelson (Jacana).

This week's question

What should your new council fix first? Tell us the one thing on your street or in your area. And are you still following the election, or would you rather read about something else?


SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY
FINDLAY NOVEMBER 2026
HEY WENA! STOP STEALING ALL THE BLANKETS!
VF PLUS
PA
IFP
MKP
EFF
ACTION SA
ANC
I GOT MY 34.79% SO TOUGHIES!
DA
DA
AND I DIDN'T WANT TO GET INTO BED WITH YOU LOT ANYWAY.
EFF
ACTION SA
ANC
SO, LIGHTS OUT, COMRADES, I NEED SOME SHUT EYE AFTER MY GRUELLING CAMPAIGN. WE'LL TALK COALITION DETAILS IN THE MORNING.
ACTION SA
ANC
LATER
SHE'S ASLEEP.
BEEP BEEP BEEP
ROOM SERVICE?
COULD WE HAVE SEVEN BOTTLES OF CHAMPAGNE IN ROOM 604.
THE TAPS ARE DRY, SO WE ORDERED SOME BUBBLY FOR A BUBBLE BATH.
DING DONG
WHAT THE...?!!
ANC
BRUT CLASSIC

ALL THE NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW

The election

The final results are in

On Sunday evening, 9 November, the IEC declared the results of the 2026 local government elections. Approximately 14.9-million South Africans cast their ballots in these elections, with the turnout of 52% up 6.1 percentage points from the 45.9% recorded in the 2021 LGE. The ANC received 30.75% of the vote and 3,278 council seats, and the DA 24.65% and 1,719 seats. The MK Party took 9.77% and 796 seats, the EFF 6.22% and 591 seats, and ActionSA 5.67% and 315 seats. Of the 212 councils with final results, 73 have a party with an outright majority of seats and 139 are hung. One council's result is still outstanding.

Coalition wheeling and dealing time

From the moment the election results were announced on Sunday night, it started a 14-day clock. That's 14 days of talking before the councils around the country need to meet and elect speakers, mayors and other office-bearers. Everyone is meeting everyone to discuss and calculate the coalition set-ups. Most of the parties put together coalition negotiation teams who meet with each other. The EFF has met with the MK Party, Rise Mzansi, ActionSA and ATM. ActionSA has laid down conditions for possible coalitions and has met the ANC. The big one between ActionSA and the DA took place on Thursday. The DA and MKP are also talking to each other. But the most important meetings are the ones that aren't publicised.

The ANC in opposition?

The ANC lost ground almost everywhere, and its own leaders are now asking whether it should govern at all. Fikile Mbalula, the ANC's secretary-general, said the party "will not be in a hurry to get into coalitions" and could sit in opposition. With the NEC having met on Thursday, decisions will be made about how to approach coalition negotiations. Turn to pages 12 to 14 for an analysis of who voters trust.

The race for Joburg continues

The City of Johannesburg faces the big question of who is going to secure that all-important position of mayor of South Africa's economic powerhouse. The DA is the biggest party in the city, with 91 of 270 seats, 45 short of a majority. Next is ActionSA with 63 seats and the ANC with 43 seats. ActionSA leader Herman Mashaba has labelled the chances of working with the DA as "very, very slim". *EWN* said that in a leaked letter from Mashaba to Geordin Hill-Lewis, Mashaba reportedly said his party is willing to support the DA, on condition that Helen Zille steps aside as its mayoral candidate. With the 14-day deadline looming, parties will need to make decisions soon.

Meanwhile...

Job gains fail to stem unemployment
Statistics SA's third-quarter labour force survey shows that the number of employed people increased by 101 000 to 16.8-million, while the number of unemployed people rose by 97 000 to 8.6-million compared with Q2. The official unemployment rate rose to 33.7%, up from 33.6% in the second quarter. A year ago, it was 31.9%. Unemployment rose because more people went looking for work than there were new jobs: the labour force grew by 198,000. Another 3.7-million people have given up looking altogether. Economist Duma Gqubule told *Mail & Guardian*, "People can't search for jobs that don't exist."

Nine foreign nationals arrested for planning to go to war in Russia
Late on 8 November, nine men were arrested by the Hawks at OR Tambo International Airport and a hotel in Bruma on allegations of attempts to leave South Africa to participate in the Russia-Ukraine war. The men appeared in the Kempton Park Magistrate's Court on charges relating to the contravention of the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act 15 of 1998. This Act says no person within South Africa can offer foreign military assistance without authorisation. The National Prosecuting Authority has identified them as Zimbabwean. There's been a growing concern around Africans, Asians and South Americans being recruited to fight for Russia in its war in Ukraine.

Sundowns Ladies aiming for third Champions League title
After beating Kawempe Muslim Ladies from Uganda 4-1 on Wednesday, Sundowns Ladies are through to the final of the CAF Women's Champions League. The final being played in Egypt on Sunday will see Sundowns take on Morocco's AS FAR. Sundowns, who are two-time winners of the tournament since its inception in 2021, will be hoping to complete the double for Sundowns over AS FAR. Earlier this year, the men's team beat AS FAR to win their second CAF Champions League title. The winner of Sunday's final will represent Africa at the 2027 FIFA Women's Champions Cup.

Asylum applications move online
Individuals applying for asylum will now be able to digitally register their intention to apply for asylum with the Department of Home Affairs, though this does not constitute an application for asylum. This new system is being implemented to partially carry out the 7 July Constitutional Court judgement that asylum seekers did not have to demonstrate "good cause" before applying for asylum. The system went live on 10 November for test cases and will begin public intake this coming weekend. Individuals can register their intention through the Home Affairs website myhomeaffairsonline.dha.gov.za. People without access to the internet can receive assistance at refugee reception offices. (See pages 16 and 17.)



Box of hope: Now that the votes have been counted, you can participate in democracy in your ward. Attend a council meeting, because it's your democratic right to do so. Photo: Emmanuel Croset/AFP

Do, connect, smile

You can witness the mayor being elected. Here's how

Now that the voting is over, the next step of public participation in democracy begins. Most council sittings are open to the public to attend unless a matter is confidential. Residents can go to the website of their local council to find the dates and times of the sittings. You can be in the chambers when the new speaker and mayor are elected. By now, you should know who your ward councillor is. Get in touch, find out about their plans and who they plan to back in the council meetings for the office-bearers. See page 15 for what your council is inheriting.

What should your new council fix first?

The new council has been elected and they're meant to carry out their promises. This week's theme is how we relate to each other. When did a stranger show you ubuntu? Tell us using the link on page 4. And are you still following the election, or would you rather read about other things?

The ANC even lost the coin toss

This entire election has been difficult for the ANC and this continued in the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality. Two ward candidates, one from the ANC and the other from its tripartite alliance member, the SACP, both received the same number of votes in the election. The law says a tie must be decided by lot, so a coin was tossed, and the SACP candidate won. It was the SACP's first time contesting elections on its own and it won a total of 271 seats.

LIFE GOES ON

Waiting for Superman: South Africa's obsession with a saviour

Whenever a South African does something extraordinary, someone shouts "for president!" But some great people matter precisely because they are not in government, argues LESTER KIEWIT.

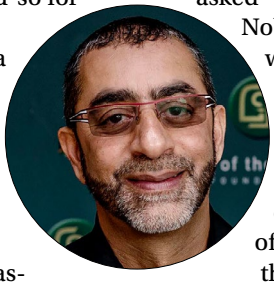
Certain South African slogans irritate me. "Local is lekker" is one: some things are local and, quite frankly, should be investigated. But the one that makes me want to throw something at the radio is "So-and-so for president!"

The Springboks win a Rugby World Cup: "Rassie for president!" Gift of the Givers gets water to a town where the taps have given up: "Sooliman for president!

No. Please stop. I want Rassie Erasmus to keep coaching the Springboks. I want Imtiaz Sooliman to keep doing what Gift of the Givers does best. I don't want either of them in Cabinet meetings about board appointments to the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority.

Perhaps we have grown so used to political mediocrity that competence in one area is mistaken for competence in all of them.

Take Sooliman, South Africa's best political failure. In 1994 he was the face of the African Muslim Party, which won 34,466 votes, not enough for a seat in Parliament. Instead, he built an organisation the state calls when it can't get water tankers to a drought-stricken town. How lucky we are that he failed.



Our best "failure": Imtiaz Sooliman

When Jacaranda FM's Martin Bester asked Navi Pillay, our newest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, whether she'd want to be president, she said: "I'm 85. Death must be a better option than becoming president." Her work never depended on political office, and she reminds us that we betray our own history when we attack people from elsewhere on the continent.

We need to stop treating the presidency as the reward for being good at something. Let the coaches coach, the humanitarians help, the judges defend justice. And let politicians do the job we elected them to do.

Perhaps the problem isn't that we lack people capable of becoming president. It's that we haven't learnt to appreciate the people already making a difference without needing to become one.

Our turn to eat

Butter chicken therapy

THAMEENAH DANIELS



Whether you're in India, the United Kingdom, Thailand or on the streets of Jozi, butter chicken is the comforting Indian meal you can count on finding even when you're far from home. There's something about its rich, creamy tomato-based sauce and fragrant blend of garam masala, jeera and chilli powder that makes it so irresistible.

My favourite butter chicken recipe is rich, creamy and has a touch of sweetness, something my Cape Malay roots have influenced. If you prefer your curry without the sweetness, simply leave out the sugar. For those who enjoy more heat, add an extra teaspoon of chilli powder. Whichever way you make it, both versions are mouth-watering!

Butter chicken has always been my ultimate comfort food. At the first sign of even the slightest inconvenience, you'll find me retreating to the kitchen, ready to whip up a pot. I always say why cry with empty hands when you could be crying into a bowl of botterhoendervleis.

Yes, that is my very own Afrikaans translation of butter chicken…

The recipe for butter chicken success

For the chicken marinade

800 g boneless, skinless chicken thighs (or breasts), cut into bite-sized pieces
½ cup plain yoghurt
1 ½ tbsp crushed garlic
1 tbsp minced ginger (or finely grated)
2 tsp garam masala
1 tsp jeera (cumin powder)
1 tsp arad (turmeric)
1 tsp red chilli powder
1 tsp salt

For the sauce

2 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp ghee/oil
1 large chopped onion
3 tbsp minced ginger-garlic
1 ½ tsp ground jeera
1 ½ tsp garam masala
1 tsp ground dhanya (coriander)
400 g crushed tomatoes (1 tin)
1 tsp red chilli powder (adjust based on your preference)
1 ¼ tsp salt
1 cup thickened cream (or evaporated milk as a lighter alternative)
1 tbsp sugar
½ tsp kasoori methi (fenugreek)

Combine all the ingredients for the chicken marinade with the chicken. Mix well to ensure the chicken is fully coated. Allow the chicken to marinate for 30 minutes to 1 hour (or overnight, if you have the time and sabr).

Heat oil in a large pot or deep pan over medium to high heat. Once the oil starts to sizzle, add the chicken pieces in small batches, ensuring you don't overcrowd the pan. Fry for about 3 minutes on each side, until the chicken is browned.

Remove the chicken from the pan and set it aside.



In the same pan, add butter or ghee over medium heat. Fry the onions until they soften and release their moisture, scraping up any browned bits from the pan.

Add the minced garlic and ginger to the pan and sauté for 1 minute, until fragrant.

Add ground dhanya, cumin, and garam masala to the pan. Cook the spices for about 20 seconds, stirring occasionally until the mixture becomes aromatic.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, chilli powder, and salt. Let the sauce simmer for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until it thickens and deepens in colour and becomes a rich brown-red.

Remove from the heat, scoop the mixture into a blender, and blend until smooth.

You may need to add a couple of tablespoons of water to help it blend (up to ¼ cup). Work in batches, depending on the size of your blender.

Note: Some people don't like blending their sauce. It's not a requirement, rather a texture preference.

Return the sauce to the pan. Stir in the cream, sugar, and crushed kasoori methi. Let it cook together, stirring to combine the ingredients.

Add the browned chicken back into the pan with the accumulated juices. Let it cook in the sauce for another 8-10 minutes, until the chicken is fully cooked and the sauce is thick and bubbling.

Garnish with freshly chopped dhanya and serve with rice or naan.

ELECTIONS



Exodus: The Kliplands Community hall polling station in Umlazi during the local government elections. This year, voters demonstrated their willingness to switch allegiances. Photo: Marco Longari/AFP

Who do South African voters trust?

South African voters are ungovernable. And that's a good thing, writes NATASHA MARRIAN.

Three decades after the snaking queues of 1994, the ballot is no longer a birthright, it is a verdict. This is the beauty of the emerging electoral trends in SA's long-fought-for democracy in 2026.

Those who abstained did so deliberately as a form of protest and there are many, roughly half of our 29.2-million registered voters. The Human Sciences Research Council survey on the 2024 election showed that young people who did not take part were dissatisfied with democracy and distrusted political institutions. This dissatisfaction stands at eye-watering levels in the two most populous provinces: 85% in Gauteng and 82% in KwaZulu-Natal.

Those who do vote are a fickle bunch.

They are willing to switch loyalty as soon as parties prove they are not worthy of their cross. Is that not democracy in action?

What the 2026 local government elec-

tion has shown is that voters have matured to a point where loyalty increasingly rests on the personal. Electoral analyst Dawie Scholtz says there were surprises in the election that evaded pollsters, and the willingness of voters to shift their allegiances on a whim was one of them.

"It looks as if voters are not wedded to particular parties. They're making rational calculations about who could deliver for them in a particular election," he says.

Take Gauteng, in the midst of a water crisis its metro governments woefully failed to get on top of despite being warned as far back as 2023.

Residents consume about 253L of water per person, while the global average stands at 175L per day. The demand problem, however, is compounded by severe supply weaknesses. The delay in the crucial Lesotho Highlands Water Project (due to corruption and capture), meant to help stop the gap between supply and demand in the province, is at the heart of the problem.

As a result, Gauteng cities endured lengthy periods of "water throttling" to curb excessive use. In the run-up to the election, access to water and electricity was in contention. Ailing local infrastructure due to years of maintenance failures across metros compounded the crisis.

In the week the election took place, the SA Municipal Workers Union held an illegal wage strike – ANC insiders report their volunteers trawled over trash heaps to conduct door-to-door visits as a result.

The ANC lost its majority status across Gauteng metros, and further afield in Buffalo City, Mangaung, eThekwini and Nelson Mandela Bay. It is what analyst Sam Mkokeli described as the "Zanufication" of the ANC – the party's relegation to the rural hinterlands.

Who benefitted from the ANC's loss and why?

Four parties enjoyed standout performances in the election: ActionSA, the MK Party, the SA Communist Party and the DA. The UDM and the PA also put on strong performances but limited to the Eastern Cape and Western Cape, respectively. The PA would be disappointed with its flat performance in Gauteng.

Who benefitted from the ANC's loss and why? Four parties enjoyed standout performances: ActionSA, the MK Party, the SACP and the DA

"If you look at just the black electorate in the metros, in every single metro, the ANC lost between 20% and 40% of the black electorate, and they went to different places. It was not a uniform swing to one party. They went to whoever was viable in their area as an alternative," Scholtz says.

This is clear from the results: Across two Gauteng metros, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane, ActionSA's support increased significantly. Despite the party's bluster around the City of Johannesburg, its support there remained stagnant.

In Ekurhuleni, ActionSA's seat count

swelled from 15 to 40, and it went from 19 to 48 seats in Tshwane. The DA's biggest jump was in Johannesburg, where it gained 20 seats compared to 2021. It also surprised on the upside in Mangaung.

The MK Party caused an upset across KwaZulu-Natal councils and put up a decent showing in Ekurhuleni. However, the MKP might be nervous about its performance across the metros – its support declined compared to its 2024 national election tally across the board, including in its base, eThekwini.

The SACP performed better than expected in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo – largely the focus of its electoral campaign, conducted with limited resources. Its end result was impressive for its debut election.

Did voters coalesce around a common cause in choosing these parties? Anti-immigrant sentiment was a prominent theme in the run-up to the election, but the evidence that it was the primary driver of electoral choices is thin. The parties voters rewarded hold views on immigration that run from the populist to the pluralist – hardly the signature of a single-issue electorate.

"A voter who wants corruption to stop and delivery to happen, but is left-leaning on economic policy and takes a hard line on immigration, who do they vote for? [The voting pattern] is so fluid because there are a lot of different influences spinning in different directions," says Scholtz.

Voters have spoken, and what they said about the ANC is unsparing: trust in the party is eroding, and faster than it had bargained for.

Voters are shopping for new political homes, and the ANC is declining. Fikile Mbalula, the party's secretary-general, did not reach for euphemism. For the ANC, he said, this election was a "catastrophe".



Issues-led: The elections were likely influenced by frustrations around service delivery, particularly water and electricity. Protests such as the People's Water Forum outside the Johannesburg Water head office became common. Photo: Ilaria Finizio/AFP

For the opposition, it is an opportunity, because an electorate this restless is more open to persuasion than ever before. It is also a warning, because voters who leave one party this readily will as readily leave the next one.

Loyalty can no longer be assumed. It is earned.

Natasha Marrian is a political analyst at the Bureau for Economic Research.

NEW BROOMS

What is your new council inheriting?

Before the new councils sit for the first time, every municipality must hand them a report card on the last five years. Here is what is in it, and why you should ask to see it.

The rules come from a joint circular sent on 2 October by National Treasury, the Department of Co-operative Governance and the South African Local Government Association, which represents municipalities. It asks every council to prepare two handover reports for whomever takes over.

The political report

Written by the outgoing speaker and mayor, it must give a "frank analysis" of the challenges of the past term, and a "frank reflection" on what still needs to be done. Where a council was run by a coalition, it must also set out the lessons learnt about keeping coalitions stable. Any major decisions taken in the six months before the election must be explained, with their costs.

The administrative report

Written by the municipal manager and chief financial officer, it is the detail:

- how much cash the municipality has, and whether its budget is funded
- bills it has left unpaid for more than 30 days, and why
- how much residents and businesses owe it
- its audit results for the past three years irregular, fruitless and wasteful spending, and what has been done about it
- the state of its water, electricity and refuse services, and plans to fix backlogs
- the infrastructure projects planned for this financial year

Metros must also report on their progress in reforming water, electricity and waste services.

Where a council was run by a coalition, it must also set out the lessons learnt about keeping coalitions stable

Can you see it?

The reports go to the provincial and national government before the first council meeting. Nothing in the circular says they must be published. But they should be, argues public policy expert Richard Humphries. Ask your new councillor for a copy. They will have one. ●

Compiled from Richard Humphries's *7th Administration Monitor*.

REFUGEES

Come back next week

For refugees in South Africa, a late permit can cost a job, a scholarship or a night in a police cell. TEBADI MMOTLA reports.

For seven years, Maria Williams worked at a supermarket in Roodepoort, west of Johannesburg, earning R1,700 a week. Then her asylum permit came up for renewal.

She applied online in July last year, as Home Affairs requires, then kept going back to the department's offices to find out why nothing had happened. "They make us sit for a long time. Then around three they say come back next week," she says. "Then they say our system is off, come again next week."



Pillar to post: Following a government clampdown, undocumented foreign nationals queued in Durban in September, waiting to be relocated to the Lindela Repatriation Centre. Photo: Rajesh Jantilal /AFP

Her employer would not accept her appointment confirmation as proof that her renewal was under way, and fired her, two days before the deadline the anti-migrant group March and March had set for undocumented foreigners to leave the country. Her renewed permit arrived in July this year. By then the supermarket had hired someone else. She has taken the case to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), where it will be heard on 2 December.

Williams, whose name has been changed to protect her, is 40. She was 17 when armed rebels came to her village in Rutshuru, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, looking for boys to force into their ranks. Her father tried to hide her three brothers. The rebels killed him with a machete, and beat one of her brothers so badly that he later died in hospital. The other two

were taken. "Today I don't even know if they are alive," she says.

Eastern Congo has been at war for more than 30 years. Her mother had died when she was nine, so alone, Williams sold peanuts to survive. She later had two children with a partner who, in 2006, fled to South Africa to escape being forcibly recruited. In April 2009, she followed him.

In South Africa, asylum seekers live on a Section 22 permit while their claim is considered. If Home Affairs accepts it, they become refugees, on a Section 24 permit. In practice, says Laura Freeman, an independent democracy and governance consultant, the process is full of complications.

On paper, those permits should protect people like Williams. Asylum seekers in the system have "the right to work, study and access healthcare, banking and other related services", says Carol Lemekwana, an attorney at Lawyers for Human Rights. Refugees have all the rights South African citizens have, she says, "except for the right to vote and hold office".

Asylum seekers live on a Section 22 permit while their claim is considered. If Home Affairs accepts it, they become refugees

The Department of Home Affairs told *The Friday Paper* that moving permit extensions online since 2022 has been "a major improvement", and that people who struggle with the system can get help at its offices. Applicants are obliged to keep their status valid, it said, and it is "considering other measures to emphasise this reminder".

Williams is not alone. Brian Muziringa, founder of the Disabled Migrants Rights Networking Organisation, fled political violence in Zimbabwe in 2001. Last year, his renewal was approved online, he says, but it took nine months to get a printed copy, and he lost a data-capturing contract with an international organisation. In 2017, delays to his refugee passport cost him a full scholarship to a Canadian university.

This week, Home Affairs introduced an online registration and appointment system for refugees and asylum seekers. It follows a Constitutional Court ruling in July that four provisions of the Refugees Act were unconstitutional, because they could send people back to countries where they face persecution. The ruling was followed by violent protests in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, fuelled by false claims that it would let migrants vote or become citizens. It does neither, Home Affairs Minister Leon Schreiber has said, and those whose applications fail will still be deported.

Williams now has five children, and a permit valid for three years. But the permits of the two daughters who came with her from Congo have not been renewed. Last year, police arrested her 20-year-old daughter and held her until midnight. "It is very stressful," she says. ●

INFORMATION INTEGRITY

Debunking ‘disinformation on steroids’

AI delivered a flood of fakes in these elections. New rules, and more people watching, helped hold the line. JANET HEARD reports.

For the first time, South Africa’s local elections were fought under social media rules. The Electoral Commission’s Code of Conduct on Countering Disinformation, gazetted at the 11th hour, was designed for an election in which AI has blurred the line between truth and fiction.

IEC chair Mosotho Moepya warned months ago of an “AI disinformation hurricane”. His deputy, Janet Love, predicted these elections would be “disinformation on steroids” compared with 2024. Scroll through your timeline and it is hard to tell synthetic images from real ones: just search “Zille doing Amapiano”. Days before the vote, *News24* showed how easily it could be done, creating a fictional party, candidate and election scandal “within minutes and at no cost”.

The Code is no silver bullet. It binds only parties and candidates, not the Big Tech platforms where manipulated posts spread at the speed of an F1 pit stop. But it reminded parties that they are accountable for what goes out in their name, and it came with more monitoring and debunking, by the IEC, independent partners and the Real411 platform.



Clean: A video showing Helen Zille shaya-ing i-step was created by artificial intelligence.

Africa Check confirmed five fakes in a single newsletter: fake accounts claiming Helen Zille said “what is good for white people is good for South Africa”; AI-generated images claiming President Cyril Ramaphosa was buying votes; misused images claiming vote-rigging; a R300 ANC giveaway scam; and the

recycled claim that IEC pens contained disappearing ink.

"There were more eyes on this election than ever before," Kyle Findlay, co-founder of Murmur Intelligence, told *The Friday Paper*.

This time looked different from 2024, he said, when parties attacked each other through paid influencers and the MK party used fake videos in its so-called "big lie" campaign to undermine the result. In 2026, the most inauthentic behaviour on X came from the anti-foreigner nationalist community, which includes ActionSA, he said. It showed the most "buzzing", the single-minded amplification of key influencers, and the strongest signs of artificial amplification.

But the March and March movement did not carry its violent protests into the elections, and while the EFF and MK communities were loudly amplified online, their effect appeared limited. "We did not see the 2024 experience of large-scale attempts to delegitimise the elections."

Yossabel Chetty, a researcher at the Centre for Information Integrity in Africa who tracked the campaign month by month, saw a shift to "cognitive warfare": dog-whistling and scapegoating based on identity. Bad actors no longer just chased views, she said. They filled comment sections with AI-generated memes and polarising text, which "boosts the algorithm" and often makes money.

Her biggest concern is foreign influence. Days before the vote, the prediction market Polymarket amplified routine Johannesburg Water alerts into claims of "total collapse". And leaked Russian intelligence documents, investigated by *News24*, detailed an alleged campaign to discredit the DA in 2024. TikTok, where AI-generated content spread most, was also the least closely watched, she said.



Wave after wave: An admittedly dire situation in Joburg was exaggerated by Polymarket.

All this comes as trust in institutions erodes, the IEC included. In the HSRC's post-election survey, 81% of voters said they trusted the IEC, down from 85% in 2024 and 91% in 2016.

"Misinformation and disinformation were spread each time the IEC made an announcement," said William Bird, director of Moxii Africa, which runs Real411. But he saw one hopeful sign. "The most positive unintended consequence of the Disinformation Code was that parties started to watch each other," he said, and that helped deter the kind of messaging seen in 2024.

Janet Heard is a practitioner at the Centre for Information Integrity in Africa.

AFTERMATH

When even inside is not safe



Bunkered: Gang violence in Lavender Hill has residents holed up in fear. Photo: Rodger Bosch/AFP

On the Cape Flats, families are retreating indoors, parents are rationing childhood, and young people wonder who is looking out for them. HASINA GORI reports from the Flats.

Imaan Hendricks's day starts before sunrise. From her home in Lavender Hill, on the Cape Flats, she takes a taxi and then a train to Stellenbosch University, where she is a second-year student. Depending on the trains, the journey takes two and a half to three hours.

Lavender Hill is a short drive from Muizenberg, but it bears little resemblance to the seaside town. The army was deployed in Lavender Hill under Operation Prosper in April. The killings have not stopped. Last weekend alone, at least 30 people were shot dead across Cape Town, in Mitchells Plain, Grassy Park, Elsies River, Manenberg, Bellville, Steenberg and Lavender Hill itself, according to *News24*, despite extra police deployments after a wave of gang and taxi shootings in September and October.

In October, nine people were shot dead a few streets from Hendricks's home, in two shootings a week apart. In the second, at a braai at a friend's house, five people were killed, among them





Precarious: Imaan Hendricks (above) takes the train to university, and Shamiela Jennings (right) keeps a spaza shop near the Delft Sunray Primary School, but only in the daytime. Photos: David Harrison

Keenan Nicholson, and three others were wounded. His family, active in the community, never expected to be afraid of gathering in their own homes.

"We are trying our best to enjoy everything inside, because we know the outside is not safe," says his sister, Nastasha. "But now it's becoming that the inside is also not safe."

About 20 kilometres away, in Delft, two taxi drivers were shot dead at the main taxi rank in early November. The rank is next to a primary school.

Shamiela Jennings, an informal trader whose two children attend the school, works with her mother-in-law across the road. When she heard the gunshots, she says, "I was so scared, I ran away and left the children at the school."

Another parent, Luvuyo Ncapayi, worries about what growing up here does to a child. "Honestly, bringing up our children in violence is almost sentencing them to a life of crime," he says. To



Out of control: Just last weekend, 30 people were shot across the Cape Flats. Photo: David Harrison

protect his 10-year-old son, he has even questioned whether to let him take part in after-school activities, rationing a childhood to keep it safe.

It is easy to tell these stories as stories about gangsters. Youth activist Yonela Msongelwa tells them as stories about poverty, and about how early it teaches children to fend for themselves. Nearly one in two young people aged 18 to 24 on the Cape Flats is not in employment, education or training, according to Statistics South Africa.

"If I see that in my house, my mother and father are not able to afford things, then I realise that I must not ask for money because they don't have it," Msongelwa says. "So I must always find ways or means to get it myself." Those ways can lead young people to places they never wanted to be.

Tashreeq Rank, from Manenberg, has been unemployed for two years. He sees little sign that anyone in power is looking out for people like him. "Our people don't get jobs, and as soon as [the election is] done, they forget about us."

Hendricks feels the same. Political attention arrives with the posters on the poles at election time, she says, and leaves with them.

"The government is making promises and then just under-delivering."

This time she did not vote.

"Why should I vote if my issues are not even being considered?" she asks.

The army is still on the streets of Lavender Hill. Hendricks still travels for hours to get to her lectures. For her, the question is less who won the election than who is looking out for young people like her.

ESSAY



Graphic: Carlos Amato

The country we see when the Boks win

Our national teams give us a glimpse of a South Africa of merit and unity that doesn't exist yet. CARLOS AMATO on why that illusion matters, and who it still leaves out.

Elite sport is defiantly real. It's all analogue, all palpable. Every action is still officiated by the ancient laws of gravity, motion and blood. Robots still can't catch a dollied tennis ball, let alone replicate a Cheslin Kolbe sidestep. Pitch markings do not bend under algorithmic manipulation. VR goggles might improve Kolbe's peripheral vision, but the All Black knee that shattered his jaw was anything but virtual.

In South Africa, however, the factuality of elite sport has some weirdly fictional implications.

The Boks' and the Test Proteas' winning cultures do express an authentic dimension of South African life: a maniacal toughness instilled by centuries of hostile landscapes, brutal oppression, Calvinist masochism and Pick 'n Pay meat counters. Our players wake up every day and choose violence — in a good way.

But whenever we watch them win, we can also see real people articulating an unreal nation. We sense through them a strange, holographic, parallel South Africa: a place of true meritocracy, equality of opportunity, stirring unity of purpose. We desperately want to live in the other country implied by their collective brilliance. We don't.

This illusory quality is not a bad thing. Because maybe you can fake it till you make it. We might all agree that our national teams' only job is to win, but in the course of doing so they might also soft-launch new ways of being a multi-hued group of South Africans with a job to do. That in turn can make us feel more South African — and, more importantly, more human.

Already, an unknowable number of neural pathways to racist conclusions have been permanently closed off by Temba Bavuma and Siya Kolisi's contrasting styles of peerless leadership (Kolisi's relentless fire, Bavuma's relentless ice).

Rassie Erasmus must have subtly liberated more than a few minds, too, with his rare ability to ignore a player's race and class when considering the player. Which seems a painfully obvious way to go about picking and coaching a national side. But Rassie had to methodically demonstrate to white South African rugby that it could be done, and that it worked. Did it ever work.

Of course, we can't expect our world-beaters to conduct an ongoing national antiracism workshop. They have a lot on their plate already. Focus on the ball, ouens, and a byproduct of that will be precious dopamine for all of us. Even our footballers are starting to deal dopamine again, despite having to swim into a vastly bigger sea than the Boks and Proteas (who swim in the cosy lake of the former British Empire).



Holograph of a dream: When we watch our teams win, we see real people articulating an unreal nation. Photo: Phill Magakoe/AFP

These days, I spend my Monday tea breaks researching the weekend exploits of the new wave of Bafana stars

who are currently cooking in middleweight foreign leagues.

Mbekezeli Mbokazi is the best defender in the MLS. Rangers' Olwethu Makhanya is the best defender in Scotland.

At table-topping Royale Union Saint-Gilloise in Belgium, Relebohile "The President" Mofokeng is wowing Brussels with a brand of incisive but distinctively South African playmaking that we haven't seen since the heyday of Shoes Moshoeu and Doctor Khumalo: one that combines kasi form with big-league function.

But we know that Bafana and Banyana will never even come close to winning a World Cup. The arena is too big, and we are too far from Europe, and our youth system is too weak. It lacks the dense competitive infrastructure provided by SA's elite rugby and cricket schools (a mix of private and quasi-private former Model C schools), which pump out an endless river of polished talent, all of it steeped in a coherent national style defined by the pro leagues.

You could argue that this elite school system offers a kind of blueprint for the parallel South Africa suggested by the Boks and Proteas: an enclave of meritocratic justice, where talent is seen and nurtured and fulfilled, where children can experience the fullness of life.

But in another sense, that enclave of justice is a quintessence of the real and intolerable South Africa we live in, because the enclave's lavish concentration of power and money is structurally dependent on the exclusion of the majority outside it. The fact that Makazole



Met eish: Temba Bavuma (cutout) leads teams with ice in his veins. Photo: Ihsaan Haffejee/GroundUp

Mapimpi conquered the rugby world without ever setting foot in that enclave as a child is a freakish miracle of defiance, not a sign that greatness will always rise to the top. It only does that if the right people see it at the right time. How many other mini-Mapimpis are out there in the gramadoelas right now, unnoticed and uncoached, surging over imaginary trylines?

The Boks and the Proteas are doing all they can to give all those unseen kids a fair shot. But they can't do it alone.

At home, we just installed a basketball hoop on our stoep for our beanpole 11-year-old son. He is obsessed. The boom of his ball is now the nerve-shredding soundtrack of our house.

Given both his parents' dubious athletic DNA, he is highly unlikely to play serious basketball. But his world is suddenly more vivid than it was last week, when there was no hoop on the stoep.

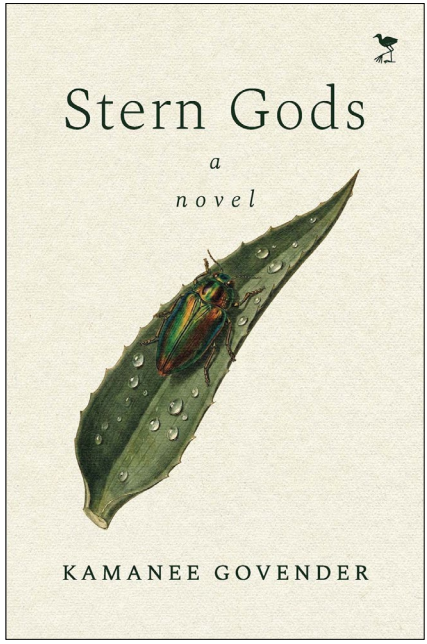
Because he is exploring the old laws: of gravity, motion and blood. They always apply, and they always make us feel more human.

BOOK EXTRACT

A family — and country — at war with itself

Stern Gods is the story of a young girl, Kaathi, growing up in an Indian township in 1980s Natal. Along the way, she encounters the "stern gods" of racism, patriarchy and organised religion. KAMANEE GOVENDER's skillfulness belies the fact that this is her debut work. Her voice is crystal clear, her prose transporting. Kaathi's childlike observations as she navigates misogyny, generational trauma and abuse are devastating, often humorous and utterly unforgettable. If you read one novel this year, let it be this one.

I'm still remembering what it is to sometimes be held against her, it's been so long. In fact, I don't know if my memories of this are real or made up in my head. The press of her chest against mine, looking at the creamy folds of her neck. But her words rip me back to the present and have the usual effect on me, like it always does, confusing what I thought was right for me and wrong for the whole world. I am a hateful, miserable bitch with a big mouth. I never do anything she asks me to do. I add to the misery of her life. So, I begin to think about leaving with Uncle Jay, to save her from this torture. I'm on the edge of my seat and about to get up and walk out with him when I think of the dark road ahead; the secretive house, silent and waiting with its closed walls and tight windows. I push myself back on the chair. Fear knots in my throat and my defiant voice melts away somewhere



Read it and weep: The novel deals with devastating subjects in an unforgettable manner.

inside me. I turn away from my mother and face the dead girl.

Mummy gives an exasperated sigh, muttering under her breath about what an ungrateful, horrible bitch I am. She shouts for my brother over the heads of the aunties in the other rows. Preshen slinks over to her. I hear her begin her commands and watch as the same argument as mine comes out of his mouth: "There's food here. Why me?"

I turn my head slightly to them, not wanting to draw attention back to myself and from the corner of my eye I see Uncle Jay slouch towards us. He isn't a drinker like Daddy, he's more of a smoker. The green grass is his thing, that's what they call it, grass, dagga, greens. I read up on it, it's a drug called marijuana and it has a thick, herby smell that makes me feel like there's a bubble of air in my throat threatening to choke me. I can tell that he'd found money somewhere and spent the afternoon indulging in his favourite pastime. His eyes are big and glassy, his mouth is in that droopy, sad shape that extorts sympathy and money from his ever-rescuing family. And he keeps his eyes on me all the time as he creeps forward. It's always like that when he's drugged, his red, oily eyes zoning in on me. Now he hears Preshen squabbling with my mother and as he approaches, he uses that weedy voice of his to say, "Ag, don't worry Seetha, I'll eat the food here. I just wanted to go home to bath, you know." This admission of his seems to evoke even more violence in her. Her poor brother, all he wants to do is



Authority: Kamanee Govender's debut novel is unflinching in its treatment of difficult subjects.

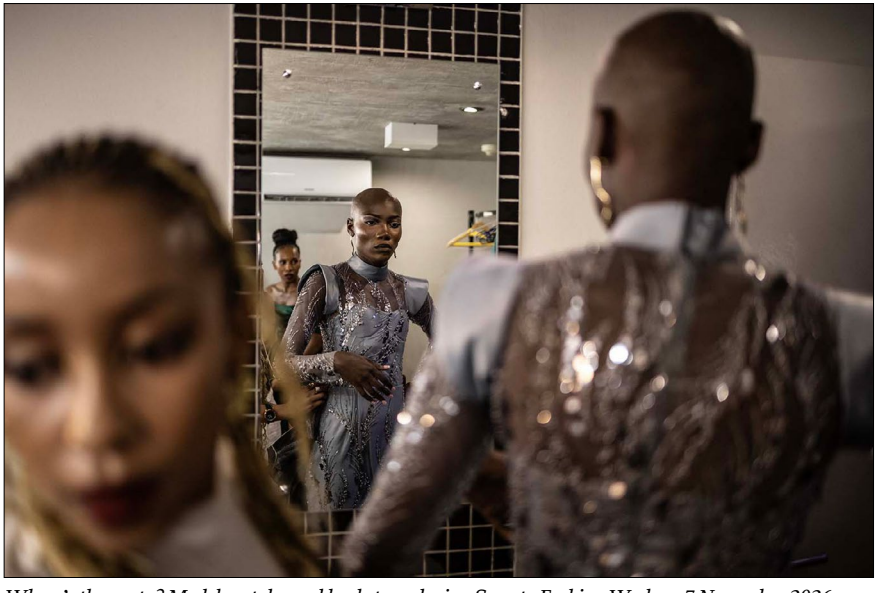
be clean. Nothing sinful there, nothing wrong with just wanting to go home and wash himself off this day. She's ashamed of us now; we are not the helpful and kind children every mother should raise.

"Sorry, Jay," she says, eyes downcast, ashamed that her children are showing her up. The minute he glances away, she yanks my hair again and adds, "These bastard children…"

And I'm dying with the blame of a thousand failures on my shoulders.

Stern Gods **is available in print from Jacana and in ebook format at Amazon or Snapplify.**

The Big Picture



Where's the party? Models get dressed backstage during Soweto Fashion Week on 7 November 2026. Photo: Ilaria Finizio/AFP

"It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive." — **James Baldwin**

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