

The Friday Paper

with **The Continent**

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM | 23 OCTOBER 2026 | ISSUE 3

The battle for
a broken city:
At the sharp end
of the elections

Graphic: Kagiso Diale





Glad tidings? For the next five weeks, election news is in focus, starting with Joburg. Photo: Paul Botes

Welcome to The Friday Paper

Hello readers,
When I received the first page proofs for this opening edition of the local elections special capsule collection of this newspaper, I felt a surge of excitement. There is a kind of magic in watching a newspaper come together. No matter how many times you do it, there is still wonder to be shared in the meeting of ideas of journalists and their communities. I hope you will share some of the joy we've had in putting this edition together.

When we began planning these five editions in September I was frustrated that too much of the news of this elec-

tion has been Joburg alone. We need to cast the net wider. What do coastal communities think? What about the rural areas? But even as we settled on story ideas from across the country, we continued to come back to Joburg. So here it is: we begin with Joburg not because it is the only story of this election but because it is the start of many, many stories. What happens in Joburg does influence the rest of the country.

My name is Khadija, I am leading a team of friends over the next five weeks to connect you with the information you need during this election.

Khadija Patel

Quote Unquote

“On one level, Johannesburg’s elusiveness is a condition specific to the city itself; its apartheid history, its risky streets. The people who walk Johannesburg daily are not *flaneurs* at all, but migrants, or workers to whom the city still denies the right to public transport. Each time they walk it is not only a weight on their feet but a slight on their dignity: the stories their feet tell, unlike those of the idealised *flaneurs* imagined by Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin, are often ones of pain and dislocation. The rest of us drive.” — **Mark Gevisser**, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* (2012)

“What happens in Johannesburg is likely to have a decisive influence on what happens elsewhere in the country, it provides valuable insights into the problems of South Africa as a whole.” — **Harry Oppenheimer**, Foreword to Nigel Mandy’s *A City Divided* (1984)

“Pressures for change in South Africa are felt most strongly in Greater Johannesburg, the metropolis in a hurry.” — **Nigel Mandy**, *A City Divided* (1984)

“Johannesburg is full of bustle... It would be no exaggeration to say that the citizens of Johannesburg do not walk but run. No one has the leisure to look at anyone else, and everyone is apparently engrossed in thinking how



Graphic: Yemsrach Yetneberk

to amass the maximum wealth in the minimum of time!” — **Mahatma Gandhi**, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1928)

“If there is ever an African form of metropolitan modernity, then Johannesburg will have been its classical location.” — **Achille Mbembe**, “Aesthetics of Superfluity”, *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (2008)

“Interviewer: You work for a firm in the city, but consider Meadowlands home? “Boitumelo: Yes... But that’s different. Different place, different atmosphere, different people. In some ways I’m not the same person when I’m home, but everyone is different in their work life. How much that has to do with that I’m a black Sowetan who works in the city, I don’t know... It probably does, but I’m not sure how.” — **Nqobile Malaza**, “Black Urban, Black Research: Why Understanding Space and Identity in South Africa Still Matters”, *Changing Space, Changing City, Johannesburg After Apartheid* (2014)

ALL THE NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW

French oldies' fail turns into rallying cry

Amid the ongoing protests in France over education reforms and rising prices, a new rallying call has emerged. "Bismillah, c'est les ténèbres" means "In the name of God, it's the darkness." The chant finds its origins from a suspected police infiltration into the protest movement.

In October, a screenshot of a Snapchat conversation with the phrase began circulating from a user named Mamadou. The slogan then began appearing on posters and placards mock-



Low-key behind: Genuine France protest users left the (Snap)chat after a suspected police infiltration failed to read the room. Photo: Thibault Camus/AFP Photo

ing the racial stereotypes as a symbol of how authorities are out of touch with the realities of young people.

Coalitions to become permanent after 4 November

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) predicts coalitions are likely to become a permanent feature after the local government elections. The CSIR uses a statistical model to predict election outcomes at various levels. The framework relies on the analysis of voter behaviour patterns and the sequence in which voting results are announced on election day. It isn't a polling mechanism. The CSIR's Prof. Pravesh Debba said its data gives politicians information to start their coalition talks.

Ballots, bullets and political killings

As South Africa's local government elections draw near, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) has recorded at least 43 people who have been murdered in suspected political assassinations since the beginning of the year. Earlier, this month, two members of the African National Congress, a local councillor and a branch activist, were gunned down while campaigning in Umgababa, south of Durban. During the first voter registration of 20-21 June, six political campaigners were killed across four provinces, making it one of the deadliest months.

Mixed bag of news from the finance minister before the poll

On 21 October, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana delivered his Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement. With the elections just two weeks away, the minister used the statement to announce reforms to municipalities. The government will undertake the first comprehensive modernisation of the Municipal Finance Management Act in

23 years. The change is meant to bring about clearer accountability and earlier intervention when municipalities experience financial distress. In other announcements, the finance minister said the fuel levy will be reduced by R3 per litre for diesel and R1.50 per litre for petrol from 4 November until 1 December 2026.

Tshwane fails to warn residents about unsafe water

A water crisis has unfolded in the City of Tshwane after the city failed to warn residents about unsafe water. Hundreds of people have contracted gastrointestinal illnesses, with more than 400 cases reported between 7 and 18 October.

The government confirmed that contaminated water from the Bronkhorstspuit Water Treatment Works is the likely source of the outbreak. Investigations into the unsafe water found the treatment works went with-



Life-threatening water: Tshwane residents have to buy the life-giving liquid at great expense after an outbreak. Photo: Themba Hadebe/AFP Photo

out chlorination from 24 September until 14 October after the city experienced problems with its chlorine supplier.

No super-secret trial for Zuma's superspy

A court order has granted media organisations and civil society organisations access to the criminal trial of former State Security Agency (SSA) officials Thulani "Silence" Dlomo and Patrick Mshothola. In papers filed to the High Court of South Africa, *Media24*, *Daily*

Maverick, *amaBhungane* and the Campaign for Free Expression challenged the exclusion of public and media from the trial. On Thursday, 22 October, Judge Mashudu Munzhelele ruled that the trial must be conducted in open court.

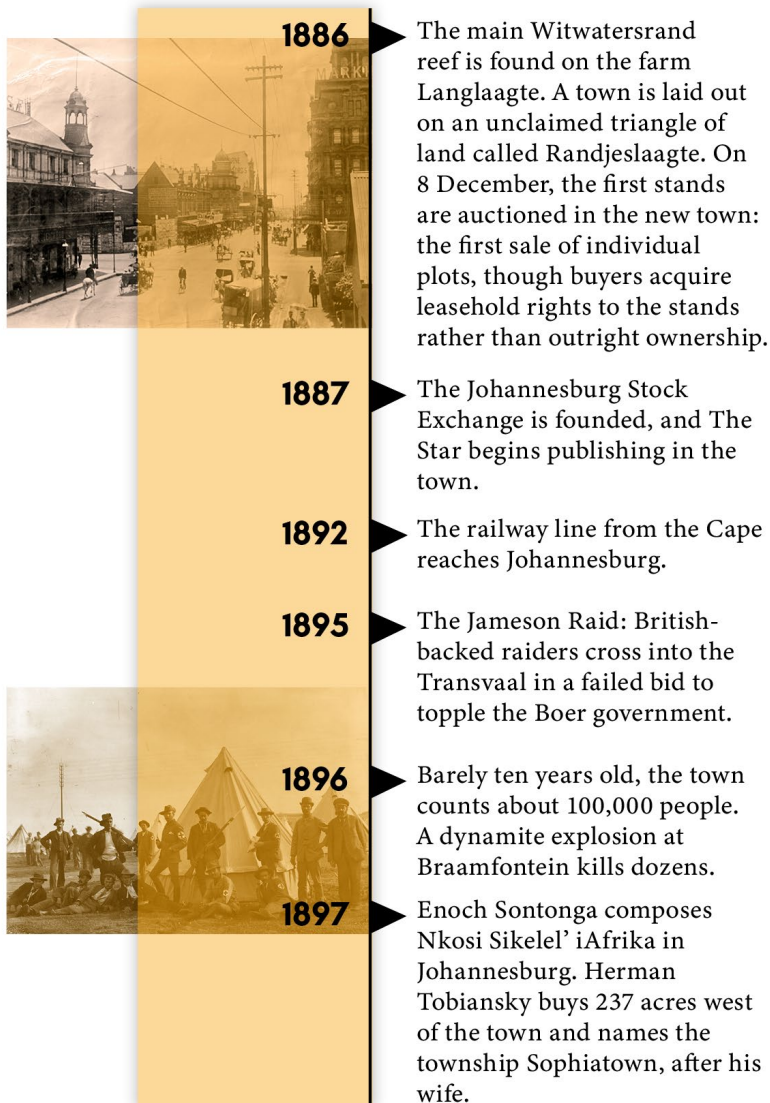
We live in the same country.

Let's read from the same page.



The Friday Paper

JOHANNESBURG AT 140: A TIMELINE



1886 The main Witwatersrand reef is found on the farm Langlaagte. A town is laid out on an unclaimed triangle of land called Randjeslaagte. On 8 December, the first stands are auctioned in the new town: the first sale of individual plots, though buyers acquire leasehold rights to the stands rather than outright ownership.

1887 The Johannesburg Stock Exchange is founded, and The Star begins publishing in the town.

1892 The railway line from the Cape reaches Johannesburg.

1895 The Jameson Raid: British-backed raiders cross into the Transvaal in a failed bid to topple the Boer government.

1896 Barely ten years old, the town counts about 100,000 people. A dynamite explosion at Braamfontein kills dozens.

1897 Enoch Sontonga composes Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika in Johannesburg. Herman Tobiansky buys 237 acres west of the town and names the township Sophiatown, after his wife.

JOHANNESBURG AT 140: A TIMELINE

1900

British forces occupy Johannesburg on 31 May, during the South African War.

1904

After a plague outbreak, the authorities burn the “Indian location” at Brickfields, the area currently occupied by the Market Theatre and Museum Africa, and move black residents to Klipspruit, later Pimville: the start of Soweto.

1906

Mahatma Gandhi launches satyagraha at a mass meeting at the Empire Theatre.

1915

The City Hall and the Johannesburg Art Gallery open.

1922

The Rand Revolt: white mineworkers rise against plans to employ more black workers, and the state crushes it with troops and aircraft. The University of the Witwatersrand is incorporated.

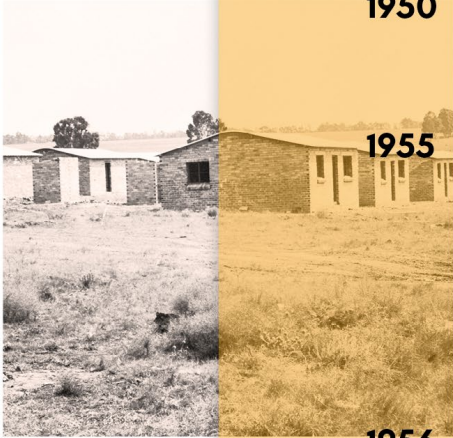
1923

The Natives (Urban Areas) Act turns urban segregation into law.



JOHANNESBURG AT 140: A TIMELINE

- 1928** ▶ Johannesburg is granted city status.
- 1944** ▶ James Mpanza leads thousands of homeless families onto vacant land in Orlando.
- 1946** ▶ More than 70,000 African mineworkers strike.
- 1948** ▶ The National Party comes to power and begins building apartheid.
- 1950** ▶ The Group Areas Act gives the state the power to divide cities by race and remove people from “wrong” areas.
- 1955** ▶ On 9 February, 2,000 armed police begin Sophiatown’s forced removals; by sunrise, 110 families have been trucked to Meadowlands, despite months of resistance under the slogan “We Won’t Move”. In June, the Freedom Charter is adopted at Kliptown.
- 1956** ▶ The Treason Trial begins.
- 1963** ▶ Police raid Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, leading to the Rivonia Trial. The name “Soweto” is formally adopted.



JOHANNESBURG AT 140: A TIMELINE

1976

16 June: Soweto's students rise against Afrikaans as a language of instruction.

1981

Sandton votes against a metropolitan authority for greater Johannesburg (Nigel Mandy, *A City Divided*, 1984).

1982

In *S v Govender*, Justice Richard Goldstone overturns the eviction of Gladys Govender, who had moved to Mayfair because there was no housing for her family in the areas set aside for Indians. He rules that a court ordering an eviction under the Group Areas Act must consider whether alternative accommodation is available. With almost none available, prosecutions under the act all but stop, and so-called grey areas like Mayfair and Hillbrow grow.

1986

Johannesburg's centenary, during a state of emergency and the Soweto rent boycott.

1990

Liberation movements are unbanned and Nelson Mandela is released.

1994

South Africa's first democratic elections.



JOHANNESBURG AT 140: A TIMELINE



1995

The Springboks win the Rugby World Cup final at Ellis Park. The first democratic local government elections are held.

2000

Unicity: the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality is created, one city with one tax base.

2002

Johannesburg hosts the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Sandton.

2006

Mayor Amos Masondo restores the name Sophiatown to the suburb apartheid had renamed Triomf, Afrikaans for “triumph”.

2008

Xenophobic violence breaks out in Alexandra in May and spreads across the country.

2010

Soccer City hosts the opening match and the final of the FIFA World Cup. The Gautrain begins running.

2013

Nelson Mandela dies at his home in Houghton.



2016

The ANC loses its outright majority on the city council for the first time since 1994, starting an era of coalitions and 10 mayors in 10 years.

JOHANNESBURG AT 140: A TIMELINE

2023

An underground gas explosion rips open Lilian Ngoyi Street in July. In August, a fire in a Marshalltown building kills 77 people.



2025

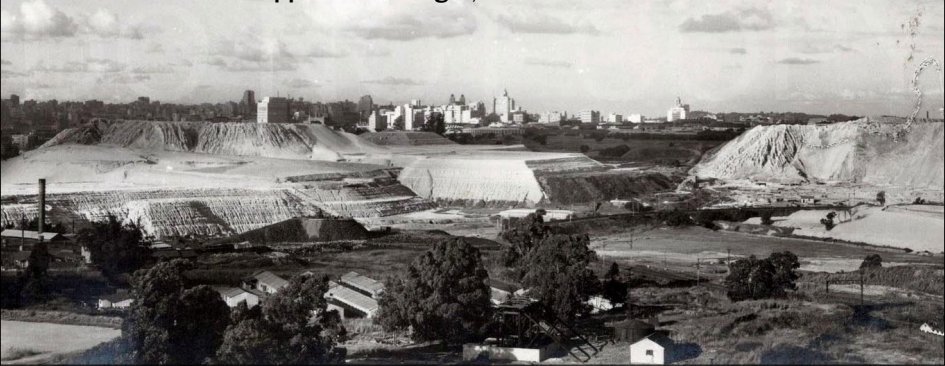
Johannesburg hosts the G20 summit, and the city is spruced up for the visitors.

2026

Johannesburg turns 140. The infrastructure backlog stands at about R220 billion, and the city has budgeted under 10 days of cash. Local elections are held on 4 November.

This Johannesburg has been a long, long time in the making

Joburg at 140 is broke, broken and about to vote.
None of it happened overnight, and none of it was inevitable.



"An accident of geology": The metropolis as we know it rose up at the same time as the mine dumps did. Johannesburg mid-1950s. Photo: Vintage Artco Postcard

Khadija Patel in Mayfair

My lifelong home of Mayfair used to be part of a 2 000-hectare farm. Gold was discovered here in 1886, marking the start of a rush, and of modern Johannesburg. At first the land was kept in the hope that more gold would be found. But once there was reasonable certainty that there was nothing particularly valuable, the first plots were sold on 24 August 1896 at an auction outside the Stock Exchange on Simmonds Street.

As homes went up, so too did the mine dumps that would come to define Johannesburg's skyline for the next 140 years.

As a child I mistook those mine dumps for mountains. Though I understand better now, there is still much to learn about this city. To live in Johannesburg is to accept the unknown: in the gentle twists of tree-lined streets pouring themselves into the setting sun, and in the throngs of people coming and going. Who are they anyway? And how did we all come to be here?

Historian Keith Breckenridge says Johannesburg owes itself to an accident of geology. It says a lot about the politics of, well, everything, that Johannesburg is rarely thought of as anything but barren land until gold was found here. And yet we can be reasonably sure that long before even the voortrekkers arrived,

people herded, farmed and smelted iron on these ridges. Humanity itself started not far from here (although our Kenyan cousins might disagree in favour of their claims).

The older stories have faded away. Now, like any other city, Johannesburg is the repository of the stories of all who live in it. And there are so many stories, trying to capture this sprawling metropolis that is everything that everyone says it is: Hard. Impenetrable. Friendly. Delicate.

Most noticeable, it never slows down

Gold made the city fast. Gandhi, who lived and worked here in the early 20th century, noticed that Johannesburg's people did not seem to walk so much as run. Nigel Mandy, described by *The Star* in 1984 as an "inter-

nationally acknowledged expert on the anatomy and psyche of cities", called it a metropolis in a hurry. Haste leaves people behind. And one truth runs through this city's history: It never fails to continue leaving people behind.

The city was built for the mines and the men who owned them. The British fought for these mines, and the apartheid state created a migrant labour sys-

tem with tentacles across southern Africa to supply them. Estimates are that 40% of all the gold sitting in the world's vaults came from under these rolling hills.

Few shared in that wealth.

Instead, the shape of this city, in the long roads that connect communities across rocky hills, comes from relent-



Pot of gold: Residents of Alexandra walk to work in Sandton early in the morning. Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

Gold made the city fast. It is a metropolis in a hurry. One truth runs through this city's history: Johannesburg never fails to continue leaving people behind.

less work to keep the people who did the digging on its edges: in compounds, in locations, in the periphery of formal society.

In 1981, the argument over who the city was for was being had out loud. Sandton, then its own municipality, voted against a metropolitan authority for greater Johannesburg. Its chairperson said Sandton would lose its inde-

pendence. Mandy, who sat through those debates, read it differently: the fear was of having to share money with the neglected areas (read: areas where Black people lived). The council's own pie charts showed that commerce and industry, whose workers were overwhelmingly black, paid most of the city's rates. My grand-uncle Ebrahim Abramjee, at the time a member of the House of Delegates and speaking for the Indian management committees, called the budgets offered to their communities misleading and farcical.

The people with the money won that argument. As is their wont. But change would eventually come.

In 2000, Johannesburg finally became one city, with one tax base. Sandton and Soweto, Mayfair and Meadowlands, all on the same books. It was meant to settle the argument. And it came with an assumption tucked inside it: that a united city would serve all who live in it. But when the services did not come, people did what citizens do and changed their votes. And they have kept changing their votes, looking for service delivery: a streetlight that works, a road that does not crumble, a councillor who answers the phone.

Now, the numbers

Mayor Dada Morero estimates the infrastructure backlog at R220 billion against an R8.8 billion capital budget. Not that it has the capacity to properly build. Recently, the city managed to spend just a quarter of its capital budget. Cash reserves cover less than 10 days of operations. The Treasury benchmark is 30 to 90 days.



A crowd of people gathered outside the Goldfields offices in Johannesburg, 1896. Photo: Hulton Archives

The assumption was that a united city would serve all who live in it. But when the services did not come, people did what citizens do and changed their votes.

Not that some things aren't improving: Rating agencies have shifted the city's outlook to positive, and Germany's KfW signed off on a R3.5 billion loan for electricity. But with 10 mayors since 2016, Johannesburg lacks the political courage, integrity and vision to



It shouldn't have to be this way: Johannesburg's urban decay is visible in the CBD and in the townships and suburbs. Photo: Emmanuel Croset/AFP

execute its turnaround plans. And the projections for this election point towards more compromise, where history shows support at City Hall is traded for favours and backhanders.

In the suburbs now, some residents pay twice: once in rates, and again to mow their own parks and fill their own potholes. Sandton's 1981 instinct is back, without the vote this time, and with a WhatsApp group instead. People are acutely aware that, as ever, the city has never served its people.

And yet. The city those men tried to keep apart has made itself anyway. Johannesburg is no longer a white city with black edges. It is an African metropolis, perhaps the African metrop-

olis: the place where a trader from Kinshasa, a student from Harare and a grandmother from Giyani share a taxi into town. Achille Mbembe, who has made his home here, calls it *Afropolitan*: a way of being African that is at home in the world, made of many places at once. You can hear it in Fordsburg on a Friday afternoon, in the queues at Park Station, in the many languages that swirl around Yeoville on any given day.

It is also why the xenophobic violence that keeps returning to this city is so bitter. The people who built Johannesburg came from everywhere. They still do. Johannesburg, for its many failings, is home to all who live in it.

NEWS

Day one: Where Johannesburg's would-be mayors would start

Four contenders, one question:
It's your first day in the mayor's office. Where do you begin?

Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh

Johannesburg's next mayor inherits an infrastructure backlog of about R220-billion, a liquidity crisis and a city where residents are paying more for services that keep failing. We put the same question to contenders from four parties: assume you've won. What do you do first?

Missing from these pages is the party that runs the city now. With just over two weeks to go before the vote, the ANC has not yet named its mayoral candidate: incumbent mayor Dada Morero, deputy mayor Loyiso Masuku and party veteran Reverend Frank Chikane remain on its shortlist. Morero says his administration is on track. He points to credit rating agencies moving the city's outlook to positive, and to his three priorities of by-law enforcement, financial sustainability and service delivery, while acknowledging that the backlog is the result of "years and years of disinvestment".

Bongani Baloyi

(uMkhonto weSizwe Party)

We are proposing one city, two plans.



'Johannesburg should be run by the sharpest minds.'

— Bongani Baloyi (MKP)

The first part is stabilisation, which grounds and builds a base for us to grow. We must fix our finances and the liquidity problem. We'll be confronted with consumer debt, business debt, wasteful expenditure and misuse of resources.

We need to claw back losses of water and electricity, unlock revenue in illegal buildings and ensure those able to pay their rates accounts do so.

We must maintain infrastructure while recapitalising and extending

its life span and planning new infrastructure. There's no one thing you do; you do a number of things at the same time.

For that to happen, you need to stabilise governance. First prize is to win a majority. If we don't, we must be the biggest party negotiating a stable coalition for the term, able to appoint credible, talented civil servants, not negotiated settlements.

Johannesburg should be run by the sharpest minds. We need a professional civil service, a clear buffer between their responsibilities and ours, and to hold them to account.

Helen Zille

(Democratic Alliance)

You can't do anything without money, and Johannesburg has a very serious liquidity crisis. There is no money even to put petrol in vehicles or buy stationery for licensing offices. All over Johannesburg, you see projects started and not continued because they haven't paid the contractors.

The first thing we'll have to do is focus on fixing the billing system. It's in chaos, and I think for a reason. Any chaos in Johannesburg helps those who want to be corrupt. It facilitates corruption.

Secondly, we must make sure all procurement is done with radical transparency. We will have to ring-fence the money coming in for water and electricity and make sure those services get attention first, because interruptions have hit many residents very hard.

We'll have to get public-private part-



'Any chaos in Johannesburg helps those who want to be corrupt.'

— Helen Zille (DA)



'We need to hold people accountable.'

— Lukhona Mnguni (Rise Mzansi)

nerships going and work very closely with the national Treasury and the presidency. If Johannesburg fails, South Africa fails.

I've studied the existing financial turnaround strategy at great length. It's a very good document. The plans are there. It just means implementation discipline, which is what we bring.

Lukhona Mnguni

(Rise Mzansi)

To achieve anything, you need money. It will be important to prioritise the city's adjusted budget. There must be no debate about whether it is fully funded or not.

The second thing is adequate consequence management. We need to hold people accountable, but you can't do it in secrecy. There must be transparency, and we must retrieve some of the money lost to wasteful and irregular expenditure.

In those first 70 days, a proper sit-down with the Auditor-General's office will be important, so there is understanding and collaboration on clear priorities, and the necessary political will to implement that roadmap.

On procurement, record bid evaluation and adjudication committee meetings. When the successful bidder is announced, issue the recordings. Give the public as much information as possible to scrutinise the deliberations and whether they match the outcome.

That is partly to avert corruption, but also to do what I call crowd the accountability space. If you do that, you begin a roadmap towards lessening corruption.

Herman Mashaba

(Action SA)

A month or so after announcing my return, I picked all 10 members of my mayoral committee. I work with them every day. They're doing the groundwork so that when we take over, we can



'I'm not going to surround myself with friends.'

– Herman Mashaba (Action SA)

hit the ground running. I'm not going to surround myself with friends.

The current budget is unfunded. We've got to look at how much money the city has, and projects budgeted without funding must be cut out. You don't want to continue with a budget where you can't fund your projects. We've got a team at work.

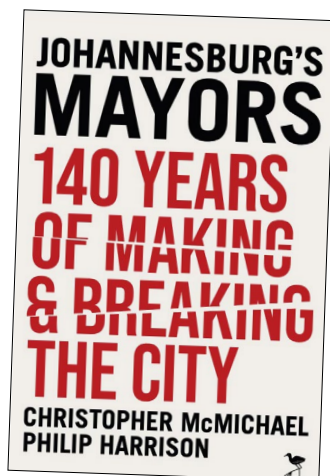
Within 100 days, we must start a skills audit. From the city manager downwards, their role is to ensure we create a professional public service. People must be appointed on merit.

This job is not like running Black Like Me, where I can employ a friend. In government, you've got to give opportunities to everyone. I have serious business to turn the city around, and the only way I can do that is with ethical, hardworking, professional people.

Watch the full interviews on the SMWX YouTube Channel.

BOOK EXTRACT

As South Africa's largest city faces an uncertain future, understanding its political history is more pressing than ever. *Johannesburg's Mayors: 140 Years of Making and Breaking the City* offers a sweeping exploration of more than 100 mayors, from the city's days as a ruthless mining town under Boer control to its troubled present, using their stories to trace how political power has been wielded across the colonial, apartheid and democratic eras.



Throwback to the early 1990s

“The date 24 September 1990 marked the formal beginning of Johannesburg’s local government transition, when the Soweto Accord was signed by the Soweto Civic Association, the Transvaal Provincial Administration and Eskom as a major service provider. This agreement broke a stalemate and marked a crucial shift in Soweto from protest to negotiation politics.

The leader of the Transvaal delegation was Olaus van Zyl, a former Randburg mayor-turned-provincial politician, while the seven-member Soweto People’s Delegation had a formidable lineup, including Cyril Ramaphosa, then leader of the National Union of

Mineworkers, and Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Under the deal, civic groups would suspend the rent boycott in exchange for an agreement by the Transvaal Administration and Eskom to write off arrears and introduce a discounted electricity payment system. The Soweto Accord also led to the creation of the Central Witwatersrand Metropolitan Chamber, launched in April 1991 to negotiate the form of non-racial, democratic local government for Greater Johannesburg.”

From: *Johannesburg's Mayors: 140 Years of Making and Breaking the City*, Philip Harrison and Christopher McMichael (Jacana: 2026)

Who we are

The *Friday Paper* is a newspaper for South Africa that arrives on your phone every Friday, for free. For five editions around the local government elections, we're doing one thing: telling you what's really going on in the government closest to your life, from the water in your taps to the people asking for your vote.

We're also an experiment.

The *Friday Paper* is published by All Protocol Observed, the not-for-profit behind Africa's most widely distributed weekly newspaper, *The Continent*. We're members of the Press Council of South Africa and follow its Code of Ethics, so if we get something wrong, you can hold us to account.

This edition was made by: Khadija Patel (commissioning editor), Sipho Kings (publisher), Refiloe Seiboko (production editor), Paul Botes (photo editor), Christian Stephen (layout editor), Margot Bertelsmann (copy editor), Athand-iwe Saba (data content engineer), Fatima Moosa (staff writer), Adam Oxford, Matthew du Plessis (finance and administration), Dumi Sithole (communities).

Contributors: Kagiso Diale, Mihle Mdashe, Qaanitah Hunter, Sizwe Mpo-fu-Walsh, Rosa Manoim, Robyn Fester, and Thameenah Daniels.

So consider this our side of the introduction. Now it's your turn.

Tell us who you are

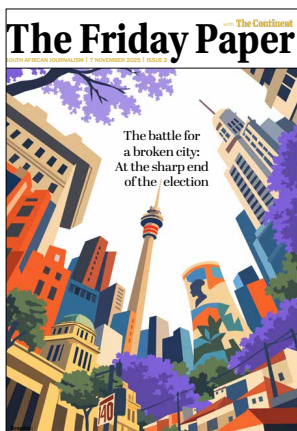
We've told you a bit about who's producing *The Friday Paper*. Now we'd like to hear from you. Who are you, where are you reading from, and how are you feeling about this election: hopeful, fed up, or still making up your mind? It takes two minutes in this simple and painless [form](#), and what you tell us will shape the editions to come.

One lucky reader, chosen at random by our AI

overlords, will win a copy of the upcoming book *Johannesburg's Mayors: 140 Years of Making and Breaking the City* (Jacana). Entries close at 08:00 on Tuesday 27 October 2026.

Whether *The Friday Paper* carries on after 20 November depends on you: whether you read it, share it, write back and tell us what you want more of.

Get in touch: read@thefridaypaper.org
Subscribe or share: TheFridayPaper.co.za



THE NUMBERS

AFRICA RUNS THROUGH JHB

Johannesburg carries a high concentration of Africa's financial, corporate and trade infrastructure. When it fails the consequences run beyond the city.

R 164 TRILLION

moved through one Johannesburg-headquartered bank in 2025.

19.7 M PASSENGERS

Johannesburg is one of Africa's two biggest aviation gateways, connecting southern Africa to the continent and the world.

307 M TELECOM CUSTOMERS

Johannesburg-headquartered MTN serves more than 307 million customers across 16 markets. Its mobile-money platform processed more than US\$500 billion in transactions in 2025.



Johannesburg

Graphic: Saseka

Data compilation: Athandiwe Saba

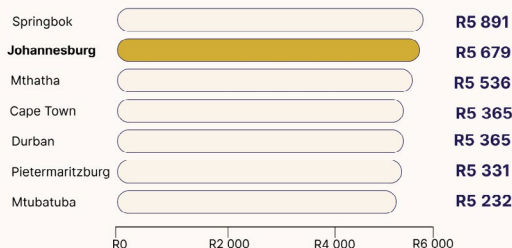
THE NUMBERS

Jozi, you're expensive

The bill for a typical middle-income home has doubled since 2020. Feeding a low-income family costs more here than almost anywhere else in the country. And every time you fill up, you pay more than drivers at the coast. Ro Manoim and Robyn Fester break down what it costs to live in eGoli.

Feeding A Family Costs More In Joburg Than In Most Cities

Every month, data-collectors price a basket of 44 basic food items that a low-income family of seven would try to buy under tight budget constraints: selecting the cheapest brands and stores in their area. In September 2026, that basket cost R5,679 in Johannesburg, more than in Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg or Mthatha. Only Springbok, in the Northern Cape, was more expensive.



Source: Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity Group (PMBEJD) Household Affordability Index. Household Food Basket in different areas - collected September 2026

A Joburg Household's Monthly Municipal Bill Has Doubled Since 2020

Every year, the City of Johannesburg works out what its new tariffs will cost a typical middle-income home. That home is worth R700,000 and uses 1,000 kWh of electricity and 30 kilolitres of water a month. Its bill covers electricity, water, sanitation, refuse removal, property rates and VAT. For the same house using the same amount, the monthly bill has roughly doubled since 2019/20.



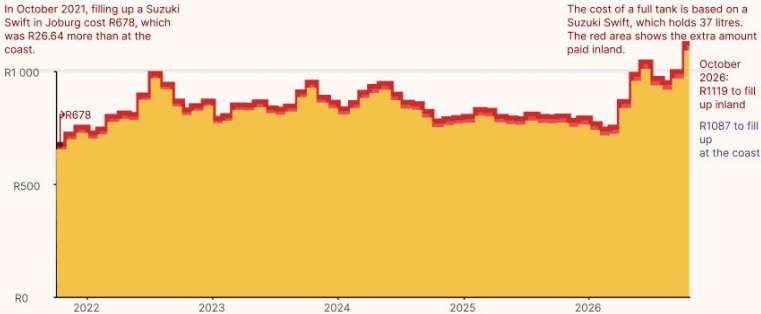
Source: City of Johannesburg budget books, 2019/20 to 2028/27 (Table SA14, "Household bills").

This is the city's example of a household, not an average of real bills. Joburg only charges rates on the part of a home's value above R300,000. Some homes in Johannesburg buy electricity directly from Eskom, so their bills can be very different.

Joburg Drivers Pay More Every Time They Fill Up

In October 2026, a litre of 95 unleaded costs R30.25 in Gauteng and R29.38 at the coast: 87c more. That adds up. A small car like a Suzuki Swift, Toyota Starlet or Hyundai i10 holds about 37 litres, so every full tank costs a Joburg driver about R32 more than a driver in Durban or Cape Town.

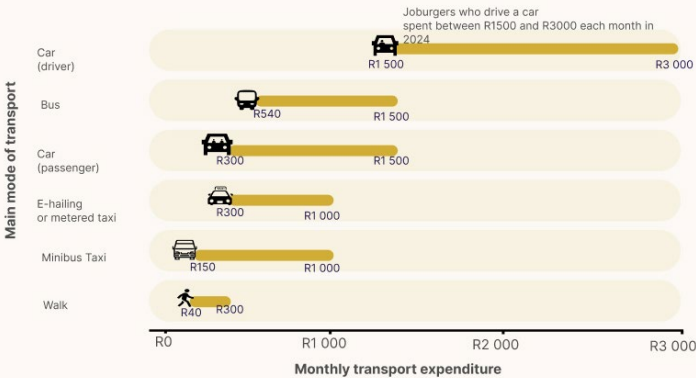
Coastal Inland (incl. Johannesburg)



Source: Automobile Association of South Africa (AA) fuel price history, and the Fuels Industry Association of South Africa. These are the official monthly prices for 95 unleaded, inland and at the coast.

What Joburgers Spend On Getting Around

The Gauteng City-Region Observatory asked people how much they spend on transport each month, and how they mainly get around. Most Joburgers who drive spent between R1,500 and R3,000 a month. When the survey was done in 2023/24, only 1.3% of residents mainly used e-hailing apps like Uber and Bolt.



Source: GCRO Quality of Life Survey 7 (2023/24), City of Johannesburg residents only. Notes: Each bar shows the range for the middle half of people: a quarter spend less, and a quarter spend more. A person's main way of getting around is the one they use for the longest part of their most common trip. The amounts are what people spend on all transport in a month, not just their main way of getting around. "Driver" and "passenger" include people who don't own the car. Ways of getting around with fewer than 50 answers are left out.

NEWS



Before and after: In parts of Emmarentia, residents' gardeners are maintaining neglected public spaces.

The Joburg residents doing the city's job

When grassroots civic action meets the moneyed middle class.

Qaanitah Hunter

Across the city, grass spills onto pavements and kerbs disappear beneath weeds. Roads and walkways bear the scars of digging, potholes and half-completed repairs. The coalition government has acknowledged the upkeep of public spaces remains a challenge. But with politicians campaigning ahead of the 4 November local government elections, some have placed responsibility on city officials tasked

with ensuring that basic maintenance happens.

Grass cutting in public spaces falls under Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, overseen by community development MMC Thapelo Amad (Al Jama-ah). Fixing and unblocking stormwater drains falls under the Johannesburg Roads Agency, which reports to transport MMC Kenny Kunene (Patriotic Alliance).

Deputy mayor and finance MMC Loyiso Masuku (ANC) said accountability was needed from supervisors of mainte-

nance teams. “To cut grass is budgeted for,” she said, arguing that stronger management and oversight were needed.

“Every single pavement was either wrecked from digging for water or potholes or overgrown with weeds,” development coach Carly Kay says of her neighbourhood. Kay established the Cross the Divide initiative that now employs 30 people to clean kerbs and pavements around Craighall and Dunkeld every Wednesday.

Masuku said the city welcomed communities stepping in to improve public spaces.

“Our door is open as COJ [the City of Johannesburg]. We want to formalise [the communities working] so they are not ad hoc.”

But doing the city’s work requires money. Kay needs to raise R5,000 for each clean-up and find transport to remove the grass, weeds and debris.

Neighbours initially helped. Businesses and schools have since contributed, allowing the initiative to tackle areas along major routes, including Jan Smuts Avenue.

“To date I’ve raised just over R200,000, which has translated to 800 new work opportunities. You can either get angry or you have to do something about it. My frustration got turned into something that helps the community and people who need to earn a living.”

In nearby Emmarentia, residents have found another innovative solution. Marissa Fitzpatrick’s Green Squad Initiative brings together gardeners employed by local households to maintain



Green Squad: The private initiative relies on fundraising to pay workers.

neglected public spaces. “We have 11 gardeners from 10 households.”

Residents adopted four traffic islands after conditions deteriorated badly.

“Vagrants were sleeping there, making fire there, littering there... They even used it as a toilet.”

The Green Squad relies on fundraising to compensate workers. But residents are raising private money to perform work that is already funded through the city, but not being done.

These initiatives expose yet another divide in an already deeply unequal city.

NEWS

Young people are making a difference in Johannesburg

The race for the City of Johannesburg council is heating up. With local government elections just around the corner on 4 November, things are getting interesting.

While the race for the council continues, one other important race has ended – the race of Johannesburg’s Student Council.

The Johannesburg Junior Council mimics a local government council. There’s a mayor, a chief whip and a speaker, along with a few deputies. From March this year, 16-year-olds Ronewa Mulaudzi and Ndivhuho Nthangeni began their campaign for junior mayor.

Cape Town-based podcasting studio Radio Workshop has been following their campaign in a new podcast, *In The Running*. Listeners follow Mulaudzi and Nthangeni as they hit the campaign trail while trying to balance high school and a normal teenage life.

From mental health to civic duty, both candidates used their platform to raise the issues that matter to them most.

While it will be some time before the over-18 voters will know who exactly emerges as Johannesburg’s first citizen, the young people have already had their say for junior mayor.

In August this year, the elections took place, with Ndivhuho Nthangeni being officially elected as the junior mayor on the council. He will have a direct line to the new mayor, who will be elected by the City of Johannesburg council in a few weeks’ time. Nthangeni will need to ensure the concerns of the young people are heard and carried out.

He already has plans for his time in office, including leaving a legacy behind. He doesn’t want to be forgotten and hopes people remember him as the “guy who changed my life”.

Tune in to find out the campaign went, including the all-important debate.



Power play: Ndivhuho Nthangeni has been elected as Johannesburg’s junior mayor.



FOOD



"Masala": The uncle at Solly's Corner is actually one of Khadija Akhalwaya's sons. Photo: Paul Botes

From Jozi to Cape Town with a suitcase full of sandwiches

A solid dyt should get the Joburg locals through the elections.

Thameenah Daniels

In Sandton City, tucked among the American chains and the Portuguese custard tarts, is a kiosk called Akhalwaya's. It is not exactly where you'd expect a brush with the divine but Akhalwaya's is a pilgrimage for this Capetonian. As a child, I looked up to an Indian uncle with the longest grey beard taking our order. Wizardry. We had weaved our way through Joburg's huge iconic mall just to get our hands on six

toasted steak sandwiches and nothing else. No shopping. Just Akhalz.

Years later, every time I head to Joburg, I somehow still return with a bag full of toasted steak sandwiches. The entire plane smells of them. (I do open one on the plane. I am that person, tamaaf).

Growing up with a Joburg Indian mom and a Cape Malay dad, Akhalwaya's has been a bridge of my parents' identities. It was never just about the food; it was part of the experience. And it carries a lot more than my own family history.

Just off Lilian Ngoyi Street in Fordsburg is a living museum of South African food culture. “Akhalz” is now on Uber Eats in most parts of Johannesburg, but its story began in one of the first spaces for halaal food in the city. In a city divided by apartheid, it’s not like Muslims had many options. So the community created their own. Two of its oldest landmarks still stand a couple of doors apart: Solly’s Corner and Akhalwaya’s.

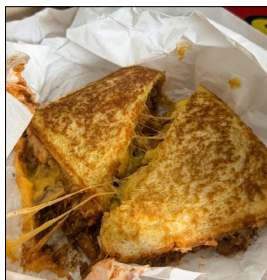
And they share a mother. In 1956, Khadija Akhalwaya opened a tiny take-away on the corner of Avenue Road (now Dolly Rathebe) and Lover’s Walk in Fordsburg to feed her 11 children and anyone else who came hungry. That makes it 70 years old this year, which is also half of Joburg’s age, and it’s why I’ve pronounced Akhalz a woman. It wasn’t called Akhalwaya’s then. It began as Zulfikas, then became Sie’s Corner. When the Group Areas Act and the Oriental Plaza cost the family their premises in 1968, they bought a shop from a man named Solici, and Solly’s Corner was born, a name chosen to slip past apartheid’s restrictions. The family says activists, students, taxi drivers and even Winnie Mandela passed through its doors. Only later did Khadija’s descendants adopt the family name Akhalwaya’s.

From the Akhalwaya’s counter I went next door to Solly’s to ask about the history, and the bubbly uncle running it turned out to be one of Khadija’s sons. Uncle Yunus told me his mother started the business with a handful of potatoes

and a passion for making food.

Walking through the doors felt like stepping into another era. You’ve got the uncles behind the counter taking orders, and the team in the kitchen putting together massive, heavenly sandwiches. Fordsburgers were constantly flowing in and out, and every customer seemed to know exactly what they wanted. “Masala.” Everyone except me.

I went for the Toasted Steak Special, which is what we Capetonians would call a “lekka dyt”. It’s massive and packed with chips, shredded steak and melted cheese. You somehow manage to finish the whole thing in 10 minutes, only to realise hours later that you’re still full. It doesn’t need fancy plating or a complicated menu.



Just generous portions, big flavour and that nostalgic, old-school type of goodness that keeps people coming back for more. The soft chips, shredded steak and melted cheese mush into one delicious bite, with secret marinade and seasoning that tastes like it’s been passed down through generations. It’s messy in the best way possible, and that’s what makes it so lekker.

Sometimes you don’t need a fancy sandwich with a million ingredients; you just need a good old toasted steak special that gets the basics right. If there’s one thing that will get you through this election, it’s an appetite for a solid dyt.

A toasted steak special at Solly’s Corner Fordsburg / Akhalz costs R125.

The Big Picture

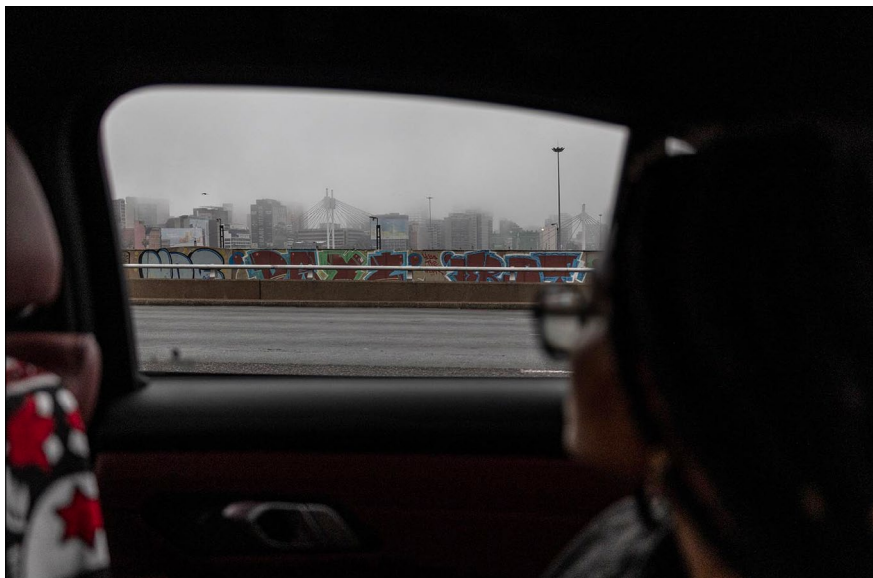


Photo: Wikus de Wet/AFP

*“First stop Mayfair, Langlaagte, ikona Westbury, New Clare ...
all stations Randfontein! U ya phi? Nkosi yam!
(Where are you going to? My God!)”*

— Es'kia Mphahlele, *Man Must Live*

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