

South African Local Government Elections: Service Delivery Profile, Protests and Promises

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ABSTRACT This paper examines whether politicians fulfil their electoral promises and whether voters can rely on these promises when choosing political parties and candidates. Does voting based on campaign promises give an accurate representation of the local government's actions? To answer this question, the paper compares the service delivery records of communities with the promises made by various political parties during the 2016 South African local government elections. Using a qualitative approach, the paper systematically analyses research on political campaign promises in municipal elections. The study reveals a widespread belief that politicians are insincere in their campaign promises during election season. The paper argues that this perception undermines the effectiveness of voting in low-income communities, where some people choose to abstain or engage in protests or other forms of resistance to obtain basic services.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study is to examine promises made by politicians in the 2016 local government elections in South Africa and to analyse if electoral promises are something which the electorate may consider as a measure of the possible performance of political parties when elected. Section 195 (1e) and (1f) of the South African Constitution (1996) clearly call upon people in charge of the affairs of the state, including municipalities, to be accountable and to respond to the needs of the people and that the public must be encouraged to participate in governance processes that affect them. Elections are crucial in enabling the political mass participation of citizens. The South African government is divided into three spheres of multi-level governance, that is, national, provincial and local. South Africa holds national, provincial and local government elections every five years. So far, the country has had six local government elections, with the latest held on 1 November 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The local government comprises municipalities that are responsible for delivering basic services. Municipalities administer through local councils, which are elected during local government elections. Although some functions are shared with other spheres of the government, voters choose local government representatives who will best provide basic services such as

sanitation, water, electricity and roads, taking the legacies of apartheid policies into account. In order to serve local communities, parties and independent candidates broadcast their manifestos, where they promise what they would do if they win elections. In seeking to understand electoral promises, this study examines the link between election promises and eventual service delivery. To achieve this, the study sets out two main objectives. First, to identify the factors influencing the link between election promises and service delivery, and second, to evaluate how often these promises are fulfilled.

According to existing literature, service delivery protests that have plagued the nation as a result of the post-apartheid government's failure to keep its promises have caused municipal instability (Managa 2012; Masiya et al. 2019). To properly address concerns with the delivery of fundamental services, local government must be strengthened. Dawson (2014) observed that struggles for patronage take place within the ANC rather than against the party in her study on patronage politics. Communities reportedly protest in opposition to suspected favoritism, corruption, and "the overriding grievance of unfulfilled promises" (Dawson 2014:527). In this situation, protesters aim to oust local political leaders who are thought to have broken their electoral commitments. The protesters seek to remove local political officials who are seen to have failed to deliver on their electoral

promises. Based on their findings in Sedibeng district, Gauteng, Akinboade et al. (2014) caution politicians against making empty promises which create unrealistic expectations.

Similar to this, Masiya et al. (2019) contend that political leaders' overstated pledges and a long list of broken promises can contribute to people's discontent with service delivery. The authors specifically contend that political promises made during electioneering have an impact on dissatisfaction and it creates an impression that all or most of the service delivery issues will be resolved once new leadership takes power. The result is that "unfulfilled promises also tend to be relieved after every election and creates an unrelenting chain of dissatisfaction" (Masiya et al. 2019:33).

Although several studies highlight poor or inadequate delivery of election promises, not many studies (at least to the knowledge of the authors) compare the election manifestos of the political parties with the actual profile of delivery after the elections. To fill in the knowledge gap, the study referred to Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism. Zhou and Brown (2015:20) explain that this theory views behaviour as a result of the person and their surroundings, or as a result of the interaction between the person and their environment. Bandura believed that behaviour has an impact on both the person and the environment and that they, in turn, impact behaviour and each other.

In this study, the researchers interrogate the promises made by three main parties in the 2016 local government elections. The study juxtaposes the service delivery profile of communities with the promises issued by these political parties prior to the elections. If people vote based on campaign promises, are they given the correct picture of what the government will do? Therefore, this paper explores the promises made by political parties and local government leaders, and the extent to which these promises are fulfilled.

This study contributes to an enhanced understanding of the effect of campaign promises on service delivery. Local government is central to South Africa's development and consolidation of its democracy. Consequently, much is at stake in the success or failure of local politics and governance. Thus, this study helps pinpoint areas and issues that local authorities and parties need to improve to consolidate democracy and service delivery. Few studies seem to have attempted to analyse the relationship between

electoral campaign promises and the fulfilment of those promises in South Africa. Consequently, the study will help fill this information gap and help local politicians make realistic promises and avoid past mistakes. As will be discussed in the following sections, there is a general observation that party campaign politics can harm citizen participation, representation and governance in general.

The paper is divided into six sections. The first provides a brief background and context of local government elections in South Africa. The second considers the theoretical underpinnings of the paper, and the third provides the material and methods used in the study. The fourth section presents the findings, while the fifth provides the discussion analysis and discussions. This section juxtaposes the promises given in the 2016 local government elections with the service delivery profile of select communities from 2016 to 2021. The sixth section is the conclusion.

Objectives

In seeking to understand electoral promises, this study examines the link between election promises and eventual service delivery. To achieve this, the study set out two main objectives:

1. To identify the political promises of the three prominent political parties.
2. To evaluate how often these promises are fulfilled.

Local Government Election: Background and Context

The Constitution of South Africa provides an electoral system where there is proportional representation (PR) for municipalities and the national assembly. Proportional representation, as a system, matches voting patterns with the structure of the legislature. This means if a party wins 20 percent of the vote, it holds 20 percent of the legislature seats, as per the proportional representation model used to allocate seats. The chief weakness of this system is that voters cannot elect candidates directly and hold them accountable (Russon 2011). However, the ward representation system for local government, also known as the majoritarian, gives voters a chance to elect individuals directly. This model encourages accountability because the electorate can choose not to re-elect candidates who do not deliver on election promises. Municipalities have two options

of either full PR based on a closed-party list or a mixed system combining PR with ward representation. Local elections in South Africa use a mixed system to balance proportionality and accountability.

Two key perspectives highlight South Africa's decisions on voting. The first underlines identifying with the party, a particular personal affinity that is influenced by different socialisation processes, including learning from family and engagement in an organisation (Goren 2005). The second viewpoint underscores retrospective voting, whereby voters' decisions are informed by views of previous performances and anticipations for future performance (Healy and Malhotra 2013). This is crucial in determining why voters choose a political party.

With the fading of apartheid into the distant past, views and expectations of government performance have become crucial in local government elections. Local government is critical in 'service delivery' related issues such as housing, electricity, water, and refuse collection. Communities have staged numerous protests, with inadequate service delivery as one of the key reasons driving protests (Masiya et al. 2019; Alexander 2010). However, the exact association between voting and protests is unclear and varies across different localities (Schulz-Herzenberg 2016).

Elections are a new form of political participation or engagement with the government (Booyesen 2012, 2007; Oldfield 2002). In local government elections, the electorate sometimes supports opposition parties as a way of punishing the ANC or improving the performance of the local government. ANC support was 4-5 percent lower in 2006 and 2011 and 8 percent lower in 2016 compared to national elections in the years 2004, 2009 and 2014, respectively (Paret 2018). Whereas Booyesen (2007) sees protests and elections as a 'dual repertoire', which does not signify a lack of support for the ANC (because the ANC has continued to receive support) but a way to pressure the government to deliver, Alexander (2012) argues that protests bolster opposition.

The African National Congress (ANC) still wields much support as a party that liberated South Africa from apartheid. The main opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), is sometimes seen as the party that concerns itself with white interests (Ferre 2010). Although the DA has attempted to overcome this view by roping in black leaders such as Mmusi Maimane and Herman Mashaba, these leaders have left the party and formed new parties. The Economic

Freedom Fighters (EFF) has roots in the ANC and emphasises economic freedom for blacks. The EFF enjoys support mainly from the younger generation.

During election time, political parties deploy vote-catching strategies aimed at wooing voters. Consistent with its focus on the urban electorate, in 2016, the DA singled out what it regarded as battleground metros (in Gauteng, Tswane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni; in Eastern Cape, Nelson Mandela Bay) due to perceived ANC weaknesses in governance and leadership in the areas (Berkowitz 2016). Indeed, the ANC's own internal poll revealed that it would be hard to win these battleground metros (Sunday Independent 2013).

The 2016 local government elections results show that although the ANC maintained its dominant position (due in part to its rural support), the results differed from previous trends with a first time below 60 percent post-1994 electoral support. The ANC lost 8 percent of the votes, the DA gained 3 percent of the vote and a new entrant in local government elections, and the EFF gained 8.2 percent. The ANC lost power in key urban areas such as Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay through a DA-led coalition. The DA retained control of the City of Cape Town, entrenched the status quo and consolidated its base in other municipalities (Africa 2016).

In this study, the researchers compare the electoral manifestos of the ANC, DA, and EFF with the profile of performance supplied by the auditor general following the 2016 local government elections.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper analyses the extent to which electoral promises in South African local governance are fulfilled by politicians and if the electorate should rely on promises made during campaigns in voting for political parties and individuals. This analysis is done through the theoretical lens of Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism. According to Zhou and Brown (2015:20), this theory, "considered behaviour to be a function of the person and their environment or a function of the interaction between the person and their environment. Bandura believed that behaviour itself influences both the person and the environment, each of which affects behaviour and each other. The result is a complex interplay of factors known as reciprocal determinism."

Thus, Bandura's theory argues that human behaviour is influenced by its environment (Bandura 1974). In this context, this theory helped the researchers appreciate the link between environmental factors, in particular, municipal services and elected public office holders on the one hand and voters' personal experiences on the other. However, Bandura (1974) accepted that the external environment is not the sole determinant of human behaviour. He argued that the intervening influence of cognition changes human behaviour (Bandura 1974). He explained that people play a dialectic role in actively creating a society and reacting to environmental stimulants (Bandura 1978).

The case of campaign promises and service delivery fits Bandura's (1974) theory in that it explains that external consequences are most effective in affecting human behaviour when they are conjoined with personal experiences. Bandura (1977) argued that "behaviour partly creates the environment, and the resultant environment, in turn, influences the behaviour" (p. 40). Reciprocal determinism explains how the environment produces effects. The theory of reciprocal determinism was suited for this study because it presupposes that environmental factors drive voters' behaviour.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research employed secondary data sources that have been published within the past five years, specifically concentrating on pledges made during political campaigns and the subsequent fulfillment of these pledges. The study employed a qualitative systematic review methodology. In conducting a systematic review, an exploration of pre-existing qualitative research discoveries was carried out, encompassing various research frameworks. Information was sourced from diverse outlets, including Scopus, Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN), and Research Gate, among others. The process is visually outlined in the Prisma flow chart (refer to Figure 1). The search criteria involved key terms such as "voters," "campaign manifestos," "local government," and "South Africa." These terms were extracted from titles, keywords, abstracts, and similar sources. Boolean operators were enlisted to refine the quest within these research documents, enhancing precision and efficiency. Only data from the most recent five years were garnered from the databases. Moreover, the selection and exclusion of research findings were dictated by factors like

ineligibility concerning countries/territories outside of South Africa, subjects that did not meet the criteria, and years falling outside the eligible category.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the connection between the promises made by politicians during the 2016 local government elections and the actual realisation of these promises. To accomplish this, the researchers analysed the election manifestos of the top three political parties, namely, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the African National Congress (ANC), and compared them to the municipal service delivery in the municipalities. The selected political parties all had significant numbers of councillors in municipalities in the last five years. This section is divided into the following parts, that is, an overview of top three political party manifestos and an in-depth discussion of the municipal performance based on the key priority areas depicted in manifestos for the selected politics namely, financial accountability, service delivery, and curbing corruption.

Political Party Manifestos

Economic Freedom Front (EFF)

The EFF stated in their local government campaign manifesto that they aimed to break away from unaccountable and unresponsive municipalities and councillors. They promised to provide monthly reports on their plans and programs to create job opportunities and deliver services to the community. Thus, the EFF manifesto was meant to provide hope for the ever-elusive jobs in the South African local economy and improved service delivery. It stated that it sought to correct the imbalances of the past and unfulfilled promises by previous councils. It projected its manifesto as representing the "hope for jobs and service delivery, and this is the last hope because all municipalities have produced the imbalances of the past. Despite many promises by political parties to bring electricity for all, provide water for all, abolish the bucket system, abolish informal settlements, build houses, and many other promises, a significant number of South Africans still do not have access to these basic needs" (Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) 2016:3).

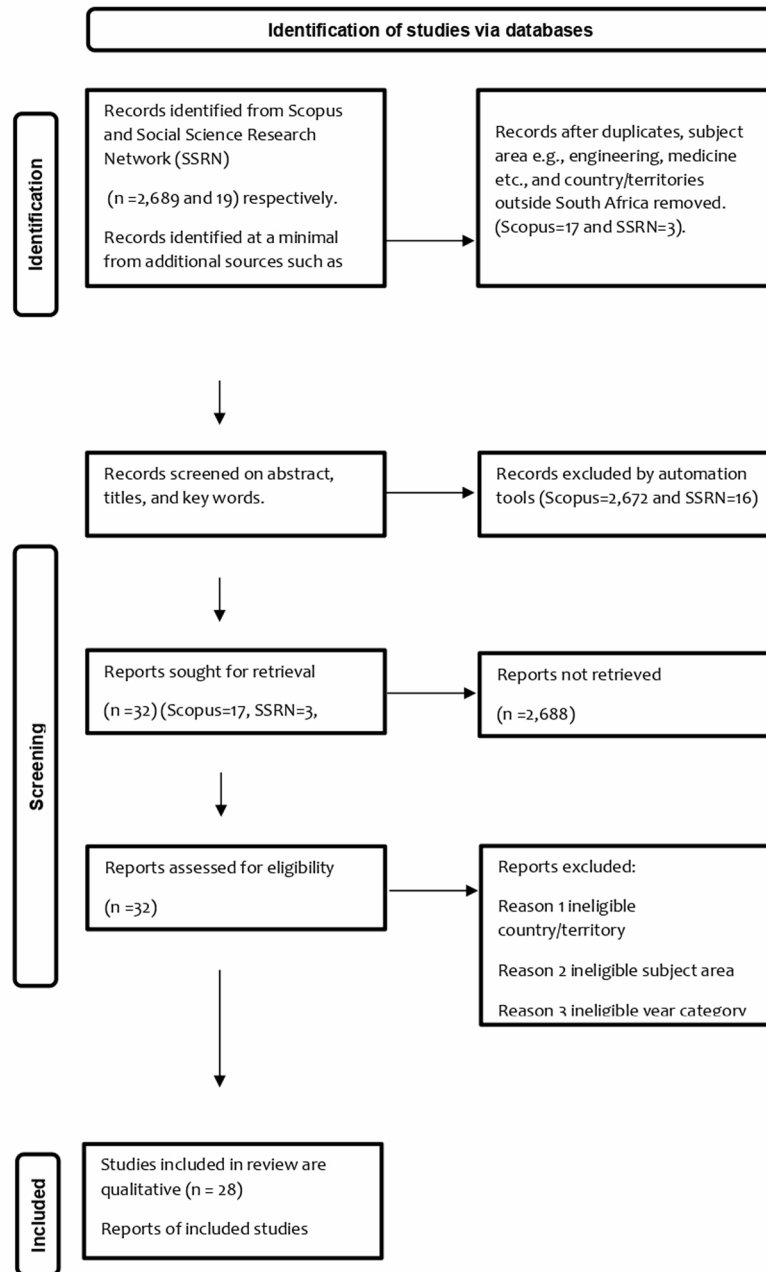


Fig. 1. Prisma flowchart

Democratic Alliance (DA)

The Democratic Alliance (DA) based their campaign on a core agenda of giving primary focus to effective service provision and progress. Their approach involved establishing performance benchmarks for service delivery and development in every local governance area. These benchmarks would be consistently assessed to guarantee the optimal feasible services for inhabitants. The DA also committed to enhancing services in informal settlements. This involved a priority on expanding service delivery to those residing in backyard setups, improving the conditions of informal settlements, and offering serviced sites to ensure all residents could access essential amenities. The party's campaign manifesto also underscored their dedication to prudent use of public funds and their determination to combat and prevent instances of corruption (Democratic Alliance (DA) 2016).

African National Congress (ANC)

The ANC made several key commitments within the five years covered by its manifesto. It pledged to build on the progress made in providing basic services, increase accessibility to municipal services, decrease outsourcing, increase public participation and accountability, strengthen local economies, create jobs and promote job placements, particularly for young people, and end fraud and corruption in local government (African National Congress (ANC) 2016).

In this context, the key priority areas for the selected political parties in their 2016 local government manifestos were improving financial accountability, service delivery, and curbing corruption. However, existing evidence reveals that during the last five years, limited improvement was made in these areas as depicted below.

Financial Accountability

The Auditor General South Africa (AGSA) Reports prior to the pandemic show that the finances of the local government were under "severe pressure and were not being managed as they should" (AGSA 2020:7). To highlight the mismanagement of funds in local governments, the 2018-2019 Auditor General report was titled "Not much to go around, yet not the right hands at the till". In the

report, the Auditor General lamented the ways in which billions of Rand were managed, noting that they were not in line with laid out accounting disciplines. The report offered several solutions, including bolstering preventative controls to compact accountability failures, strengthening monitoring and oversight by councils, municipal leaders and senior officials and ensuring that there are consequences for accountability failures. In the report on the material irregularity process, the Auditor General underlined the significance of creating an environment where poor performance and transgressions are dealt with in order to deter further wrongdoing. Still, the latest report laments the lack of necessary improvements to prevent and deal with accountability failures (AGSA 2020). To stress the critical role local government leaders play in turning this tide, they titled the 2019-2020 report, "Ethical and accountable leadership should drive the required change".

Regarding local government finances, the 2019-2020 report revealed that the financial state of more than a quarter of municipalities was dire. Nearly half of the other municipalities had indications of financial strain. In 2019-2020, wasteful expenditure stood at R3.47 billion (AGSA 2020). The report also noted that only 28 percent of the municipalities provided financial statements of a quality which could be audited. This is worrisome because, in addition to accountability, financial statements inform key financial decisions by different stakeholders, for example, the National Treasury, councils, mayors and banks.

Another worrying trend relates to disclaimed opinions. A municipality gets a disclaimed opinion when it fails to provide the Auditor General with evidence for the majority of amounts and disclosures in its financial statements. Resultantly, the Auditor General cannot ascertain the credibility of the financial reports or establish how funds were used. Notwithstanding prior messages, actions and initiatives regarding disclosure of financial statements (including placing certain municipalities under administration), by 4 June 2021, the Auditor General had issued 22 municipalities with disclaimed opinions. Four (in the Free State, namely, Tokologo, Maluti-A-Phofung and Masilonyana and in the Northern Cape, namely, Renosterberg) of the municipalities, which had received disclaimed opinions before had not yet submitted their statements to the Auditor General by the time the 2019-2020 report was

submitted. The absence of comprehensive and correct records undermines reliable financial reporting during and at the end of the year.

According to the Public Audit Act, this constitutes a material irregularity. The Auditor General should therefore notify the responsible municipal managers, and so the Auditor General issued 96 material irregularities by 11 June 2021. In response, municipal managers have to adequately explain the cause of the irregularity, take necessary steps to prevent affecting service delivery and ensure that individuals responsible for the poor state of the municipality face the consequences for their actions and or inactions. Noteworthy, the Auditor General noted that there are signs of behavioural change by a majority of municipal managers as evidenced by responses to the notifications as well as actions to address material irregularities stated in the 2018-2019 report. However, to adequately address the material irregularities, councils and mayors need to lend their support, and the Auditor General has not yet observed significant support from them.

The Auditor General singled out 10 municipalities, which earned disclaimer opinions to show what transpired, what this means and how it affects residents. The report noted that for most of these municipalities, there was evidence of political and administrative leadership instability, poor oversight by councils, major financial problems, strikes and protests, absence of consequences, and ineffective interventions (AGSA 2020). Table 1 provides a list of 22 municipalities that received disclaimed opinions, and four that had prior disclaimed opinions but had not yet submitted their 2019-2020 financial statements.

As shown in Table 1, the Auditor General highlighted some of the worst-performing municipalities in the local government and stressed the need for swift intervention. Although five of the municipalities which received disclaimed opinions were placed under administration for two or more years, the Auditor General Report notes evidence of continued poor performance in these municipalities, prompting questions about whether the administration process is effective. Another worrisome trend relates to the regression of audit outcomes, and more than 77 percent of municipalities received disclaimed opinions since 2016-2017. The financial situation of some of these municipalities was so dire that they admitted in their financial statements a “material uncertainty as to whether they can continue operations”

(AGSA 2020:68). Other municipalities were unable to deliver their mandated services and the Department of Cooperative Governance regarded them as dysfunctional. The Auditor also gave notifications to municipalities where their audits were still outstanding when the report was published, for example, Kgetlengrivers in North West and Mafube in the Free State. Next, the researchers briefly consider some of the municipalities which received disclaimed opinions.

Service Delivery

As described by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (2023), service delivery refers to the distribution of essential services, including clean water, power, health care, transportation, street lighting, and traffic management, along with municipal parks and recreation. Municipalities play a key role in the delivery of services since they are directly accountable for preserving a healthy environment and raising community standards of living (Constitution of 1996). However, municipalities continue to face challenges in effectively delivering services, causing residents hardships. This is why service delivery was and remains a topical issue in political party manifestos. Evidence reveals that service delivery has not improved following the different political parties’ different manifesto promises.

The municipality of Tokologo in the Free State, which caters to around 29,149 residents, is currently facing issues with inconsistent service delivery. These problems stem from various concerns, such as the lack of maintenance at water treatment plants resulting in inconsistent water supply. The town is also grappling with overflowing sewage on its streets. Additionally, there have been reports that some homeowners were not consulted or did not give their consent for the installation of prepaid electric meters in certain parts of town. Put by one interviewee, Hattingh to the OFM News, it is as if “there is no municipality” because they do not get answers when probing the aforementioned service delivery issues. She says that citizens are doing their best to remedy the situation by going to the municipality, but it does not appear to yield any positive results (Motse 2021).

Due to insufficient backups, the municipality failed to restore reliable data. It continued to use unreliable data, as reflected in the municipality’s audit outcomes (AGSA 2020). According to the

Auditor General's report, the municipality had not completed a water pipeline between its three towns (Hertzogville, Dealesville and Boshof) for many years (AGSA 2020:73). Notwithstanding, contractors had been paid approximately R17,48 million, nearly 60 percent, of the contract value of R29,59 million. This slow pace of development forced the municipality to source water from boreholes. Mhluzi residents embarked on a protest after two weeks without water, and the executive Mayor, Bagudi Tolo, met disgruntled residents and explained the reasons for the water interruptions (Campher 2020). There were also reports of growing service delivery unhappiness over inconsistent water, and sewage flows in the streets of the towns (Motse 2021). The AGSA (2020) also noted that municipal infrastructure at landfill sites was broken, unmaintained and unrehabilitated. The Auditor General's Report described the municipality as operating in a crisis mode.

The Northern Cape's municipality of !Kheis provides services to 4,307 households. Unfortunately, the municipality has experienced a decline in its financial management. The Auditor General's Report indicates unauthorised, irregular, fruitless, and wasteful expenditure. Consequently, the municipality has received three consecutive disclaimed opinions from 2017-2018 to 2019-2020. Additionally, the Public Protector is investigating the management of conditional grants by the municipality. As a result of inadequate maintenance, the infrastructure is collapsing, causing water shortages, and affecting water quality. The ANC-led municipal council's mismanagement and abysmal administration have led to poor budgeting and short-sighted decisions. This has resulted in rising bills owed to service providers and statutory obligations. Ultimately, residents and ratepayers bear the brunt of the incompetence of the officials. The municipality struggles to pay salaries on time, and officials have had to wait for up to three months to receive their salaries (Isaacs 2021).

The Lekwa Teemane municipality's poor cash-flow management affected service delivery in the municipality. The municipality failed to pay Eskom and the Department of Water and Sanitation, leading the latter to take the municipality to court to claim R173 million for water extraction from the Vaal River. The municipality's financial situation has led to a failure to replace dilapidated infrastructure leading to a high loss in electricity

and water. The fencing to the solid water disposal areas in Bloemhof and Christina were vandalised which meant that anyone could access these sites. The Auditor General noted the link between these issues with the prevalent service delivery protests and calls for the removal of the municipal manager. Indeed, service delivery protests have rocked the Lekwa Teemane for many years. In 2014, the ANC in North West recalled the mayor of the Lekwa Teemane municipality, Moeder Makodi, after three babies died due to water contamination and protests that ensued (Muller 2014). In 2018, the mayor of Lekwa Teemane local municipality, Kagiso Palagangwe described the wave of protests in the municipality and across the province as criminal, and the protesters blamed the then North West Premier Supra Mahumapelo for service delivery problems in the province and alleged fraud and corruption and demanded him to resign (Maine 2018). The Municipal IQ (2018) noted that Lekwa Teemane's second quarter of 2017-2018 towards Section 71 Municipal Finance Management Acts reports show that the municipality owed creditors more than it had in its coffers and underlined "the very real prospect of service throttling" residents faced.

Corruption

Reports have been made of corruption within South African municipalities, with instances ranging from low-level bribery and kickbacks to more complex forms of embezzlement and fraud. Furthermore, there have been documented cases of irregularities in procurement processes, mismanagement of funds, and nepotism. The head of Hawks, Mr. Lebeya, confirmed this in a briefing to members of the National Assembly's portfolio committee on co-operative governance and traditional affairs, stating that municipalities, particularly in the North West, are grappling with corruption (Mkhwanazi 2023).

In the Motlasana municipality, a series of 14 corruption cases had attracted the attention of the Hawks investigative unit. Rustenburg followed closely, with nine corruption cases currently being probed by the same unit. Meanwhile, in the Dr. Kenneth Kaunda municipalities, eight cases were undergoing investigation (Mkhwanazi 2023).

The situation in the Madibeng Local Municipality, as highlighted by sources like the Mail and Guardian, has been marred by allegations of maladministration and corruption for over a decade. The report

Table 1: Sample Municipalities that have repeatedly received disclaimer audit opinions across the various provinces over a 5-year period (2016-2017 - 2020-2021)

<i>Province</i>	<i>Controlling party</i>	<i>Local Municipality</i>	<i>Additional comments</i>
<i>North West</i>	ANC	Mamusa	Notification issued (11/06/21)
	ANC Composition of Council: ANC 44, EFF 14, DA 12, VF PLUS 4, SM 3, ACDP 1, AIC 1, ALJAMA 1, F4SD 1, UDM 1	Madibeng	- Notification issued (11/06/21) - Under administration for 2 years
	ANC Composition of council: ANC 13, EFF 4, DA 2, F4SD 1, SAPA 1, VF PLUS 1	Maquassi Hills	- Notification issued (11/06/21) - Under administration for 1 year
	ANC Composition of the council: ANC 19, EFF 3, F4SD 3, DA 1, UCDP	Ratlou	The municipality is under S139 administration for the reasons contained in SS 138 (c) and (d) of the Municipal Finance Management Act.
	ANC Composition of the council: ANC 23, EFF 6, F4SD 5, DA 1, UCDP 1, VF PLUS 1	Ramotshere Moiloa	- Notification issued (11/06/21) The municipality is under S139 administration, for the reasons contained in SS 138 (c) and (d) of the Municipal Finance Management Act.
	ANC Composition of the council: ANC 8, EFF 2, DA 1, VF PLUS 1	Dipaleseng	Notification issued (11/06/21)
<i>Mpumalanga</i>	ANC Composition of the council: ANC 13, EFF 3, DA 2, APEMO 1, F4SD 1, IFP 1	Dr Pixley Ka Isaka Seme	Notification issued (11/06/21)
	Hung Council Composition of the council: ANC 26, DA 17, EFF 13, VF PLUS 3, ARP. 2, ATM 1, IFP 1	Govan Mbeki	- Notification issued (11/06/21) - Under administration after 2019-2020 year-end
	Hung Council Composition of the council: ANC 13, LCF 6, DA 4, EFF 3, VF PLUS 3, ATM 1	Lekwa	Notification issued (11/06/21)
	Hung Council Composition of the council: IFP 21, ANC 17, DA 3, NFP 3, EFF 2, INDEPENDENT 1	Inkosi Langalibalele	- Under administration for 3 years The municipality is under S139(1) (b) administration, effective from December 2017.
	IFP Composition of the council: IFP 19, ANC 14, ABC 3, EFF 1	Nquthu	The municipality has been placed under S139 administration.
<i>Kwazulu-Natal</i>	n/a Composition of the council: IFP 6, ANC 4, ABC 1, DA 1 (40% PR Seats)	uMzinyathi District	Notification issued (11/06/21) The municipality is under S139(1) (b) administration, effective from October 2016.
<i>Eastern Cape</i>	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 12, DA 2, EFF 1, THE INDEPENDENTS 1, UDM 1 (40% PR Seats)	Chris Hani District	
	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 46, EFF 6, INDEPENDENT 4, CI 2, DA 2, AIC 1, APC 1, ATM 1, UDM 1	Makana	- Notification issued (11/06/21) - Under administration for 1 year
	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 10, DA 4, EFF 1, GOOD 1	Sundays River Valley	Notification issued (11/06/21)

<i>Northern Cape</i>	Controlling party: Hung Council Composition of council: ANC 5, DA 2, INDEPENDENT 2, COPE 1, EFF 1	!Kheis	Notification issued (11/06/21)
	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 18, EFF 8, DA 1, F4SD 1, SARKO 1	Joe Morolong	
	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 10, HFTF 4, DA 3, EFF 1, VF PLUS 1	Kai !Garib	Notification issued (11/06/21)
<i>Free State</i>	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 8, DA 2, EFF 2, VF PLUS 1	Tokologo	- Notification issued (11/06/21) - Audit outstanding
	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 28, MAP16 20, EFF 7, DA 5, DPSA 3, ACM 2, AIC 1, ATM 1, AULA 1, SARKO 1, VF PLUS 1	Maluti-A-Phofung	- Notification issued (11/06/21) - The municipality is under S139(1)(b) administration, effective from February 2018.
	Controlling party: ANC Composition of council: ANC 11, DA 4, EFF 2, F4SD 1, VF PLUS 1	Masilonyana	- Audit outstanding - Notification issued (11/06/21) - Audit outstanding
			The municipality is under S139(1)(b) administration, effective from March 2017.
<i>Western Cape</i>	Controlling party: ANC/PA/KDF Coalition Composition of council: ANC 4, DA 4, PA 3, GOOD 1, KDF 1	Beaufort West	The municipality is currently in a Financial Recovery Plan.

Source: Authors compilation based on the AGSA (2016-2017/ and 2020-2021) and Municipalities of South Africa (2023)

from the Auditor General revealed a staggering irregular expenditure of more than R400 million in the preceding financial year. It is worth noting that this figure might even be higher due to the municipality's incomplete disclosure (Sibanyoni 2020).

Adding to the concerns, Madibeng has been struggling to deliver satisfactory services to the areas around Brits and Hartebeespoort. Incidents of sewage spills and water leaks have become almost biweekly occurrences. Interestingly, the same Auditor General's Report that highlighted these issues also raised a flag regarding the municipality's reliance on consultants, all while receiving disclaimed audit opinions. Remarkably, the financial records revealed a salary expenditure of R33.6 million for the salaries of 105 staff members within the finance section and an additional R35.4 million allocated to consultant fees (Sibanyoni 2020).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed at investigating the connection between the promises made by politicians during the 2016 local government elections and the actual realisation of these promises at local municipalities. Based on key priority areas for

the selected political parties in their 2016 local government manifestos, namely improving financial accountability, service delivery, and curbing corruption, the study finds that none of the promises have been fulfilled in the analysed local municipalities. For example, financial accountability remains a challenge across local municipalities, irrespective of the governing party.

This was supported by the Auditor General's findings that municipalities' own reports on their performance were worse than their report on financials. Less than a quarter provided quality performance reports to the Auditor General to audit, prompting the Auditor General to comment that "[i]t is not surprising that citizens experience poor service delivery from municipalities" (AGSA 2020:9). The Auditor General also noted that "[e]ven after addressing our findings" just less than half of municipalities published unreliable information on performance or provided information that "had little relevance to what they had promised to do in their strategic planning documents" (AGSA 2020:9). The report disclosed "widespread non-compliance with legislation and reported material non-compliance at 86 percent of municipalities" (AGSA 2020:9). Further, the report noted the prevalence of non-compliance

related with regard to supply chain management legislation and its important contribution to the R26 billion irregular expenditure. The majority of municipalities are in a worse state compared to their position at the beginning of the 2016-2017 administration (AGSA 2020). While 46 municipalities improved their outcomes, 61 regressed over the period under consideration.

In agreement with these findings, Glasser and Wright (2020) assert that the contribution of these financial accountability problems in municipalities is mostly internal and can be attributed to a lack of proper financial management, such as under-collection of revenues or uncontrolled expenditure. Additionally, Ratings Afrika's latest municipal financial sustainability index revealed that South Africa's municipalities are commercially bankrupt, with liabilities surpassing assets and insufficient liquidity for operating costs (Ryan 2020).

Regarding service delivery, the study reveals that improvements have not been made despite the different political parties' manifesto promises. Local municipalities still struggle with service delivery challenges regardless of which party is in power. This aligns with the Parliament's 2022 report on local government week, which noted that service delivery in municipalities has been declining and occasionally putting communities at risk (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2022). Agreeing with this sentiment, Masuabi (2023) echoes similar sentiments, underscoring the unreliability and quality of services in certain municipalities stating that some municipalities' services are unreliable with poor quality or unavailable water and uncollected refuse are an issue. This predicament also finds resonance with Baloyi's findings (2022), affirming that the failure of municipalities to meet their service obligations has become a catalyst for widespread protests in South Africa. In fact, according to the SAPS Incident Registration Information System (IRIS), a staggering 909 protests were recorded between August 1, 2020, and January 31, 2021. These concerns are substantiated by the research conducted by other scholars such as Bayers (2015), Masiya et al. (2019), and Asha and Makalela (2020), who collectively reinforce the notion that inadequate provision of fundamental household services ranging from water and electricity to sanitation and refuse removal—has become the hallmark of numerous municipalities in South Africa.

Finally, the study highlights the issue of corruption as a key priority area, and unfortunately, political parties have not fulfilled their promise to curb it. Despite legislation prohibiting the awarding of contracts and accepting quotations from employees, councillors, or other state officials, this practice persists. In fact, the value of contracts awarded to employees and councillors amounted to R10 million across 39 municipalities in 2016-2017, R14 million in 34 municipalities in 2019-2020, and R27 million in 28 municipalities in 2020-2021 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2022). This same sentiment is shared in research by Visser et al. (2020), who assert that corruption is a pervasive issue that plagues not only politicians but also public servants at all levels of government, be it local, provincial, or national. Sometimes, councillors and municipal officials collude to misappropriate public funds, while at other times, they conspire with private individuals. This complex challenge is further illuminated by a report from Corruption Watch (2019), indicating that municipalities accounted for 6.6 percent of the reported corruption cases. Procurement emerged as the epicentre of corruption, followed closely by instances of bribery in sectors related to licensing, property transactions, and employment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study rigorously examined the link between the lofty assurances made by politicians in the lead-up to the 2016 local government elections and the subsequent tangible fulfilment of these pledges within the realm of local municipalities. Scrutinising the core focal points outlined in the respective 2016 local government manifestos of various political parties, specifically, the paramount objectives of enhancing financial accountability, augmenting service delivery, and combating corruption, the findings cast a disheartening shadow over the realisation of these commitments across the analysed local municipalities.

The analysis underscores a disconcerting reality, and none of the assured promises have materialised within the scrutinised local municipalities. This unsettling revelation is strikingly evident in the enduring predicament of financial accountability, which remains a pervasive challenge irrespective of the prevailing ruling party. Echoing this sentiment, the Auditor General's discerning evaluations unearthed a stark dissonance between municipalities'

self-reported performance and their financial standings. A mere fraction of municipalities furnished substantial performance data for audit, prompting the Auditor General to aptly comment that this dearth of transparency and reliability is intricately intertwined with the citizens' lamentable experience of subpar service delivery.

The analysis also reveals the concerning issue of non-compliance with legislation. An alarming 86 percent of municipalities are facing reported material non-compliance, which is a cause for concern. The cloud of non-compliance also affects supply chain management and contributes to irregular expenditure amounting to R26 billion. Additionally, it appears that most municipalities have experienced a decline since the start of the 2016-2017 administrative term. Out of the total, only 46 municipalities showed improvement while a disappointing 61 municipalities experienced regression during the same period. This is a disconcerting panorama.

The deplorable state of service delivery remains an unyielding conundrum, stubbornly persistent regardless of the alternating political leadership. This worrying trend finds corroboration in the Parliament's 2022 report on local government, which blatantly highlighted the receding quality of service delivery, at times even imperilling local communities. Clearly, certain municipalities continue to grapple with unreliable service provisions, manifesting in deficiencies such as compromised water quality, refuse accumulation, and insufficient amenities.

Finally, the study magnifies the critical concern of corruption, a typical priority area where political assurances have unfortunately failed to translate into effective action. Despite legislative injunctions explicitly prohibiting the awarding of contracts to employees, councillors, or state officials, the deeply entrenched practice of contract awards continues unabated. Evidently, the value of these contracts extended to staggering sums of money.

In essence, this study's compelling findings unravel a stark reality where political pledges, regardless of their party origins, have yet to meaningfully translate into the transformative changes desperately sought by the populace within South African municipalities. The gap between political rhetoric and substantive action remains palpable, underscoring the pressing need for steadfast and resolute measures to bridge this disconcerting divide and restore the citizens' faith in the promises of accountable and effective governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To try and bridge the above-mentioned gaps, the study recommends the following:

It is essential to prioritise holding political parties accountable for fulfilling their electoral promises. To achieve this, an independent body or platform should be established to objectively assess the feasibility and impact of political party manifestos. This will enable voters to make informed decisions and hold parties accountable for their promises.

Additionally, there should be user-friendly platforms such as digital platforms, hotlines, and public consultations for citizens to provide feedback on the performance of political parties in fulfilling their promises. Furthermore, exploring legal mechanisms to penalise or fine parties found to have made false or misleading statements is necessary to ensure accountability.

Lastly, promoting political education programs that empower citizens to evaluate campaign promises and demand accountability from political parties critically is crucial. An informed electorate is more likely to hold parties to their commitments.

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