MAPUNGUBWE
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC REFLECTION(MISTRA)

MISTRA

COALITIONS BAROMETER 2026

ANALYSIS OF THE DATASET



LAURENCE CAROMBA

WITH SANELE SIMAYILE AND AYANDA NDLETYANA

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The dataset used to create this report can be found on
https://coalitions.mistra.org.za/

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Executive summary

from the 2026 dataset

The latest edition of the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer consists of a 2026 dataset (available on https://coalitions.mistra.org.za/) which, for the first time, describes coalition politics in South Africa in a structured format that allows for quantitative analysis of coalition trends and developments. The Barometer also includes this written analysis of the 2026 dataset, as an aid to interpreting the statistics. The key findings to emerge from the dataset are summarised overleaf.

1. Coalition politics is widespread.

Between the 2021 local government election and February 2026, 80 of South Africa's 213 municipal councils were 'hung' at some point, meaning that no single party held a majority of the seats. This is just over a third of all the elected councils in the country. The 2021 election left 70 councils hung, and by February 2026 there were 74 councils being run by a coalition or a minority government (one whose member parties together fell short of the governance threshold, which is the number of seats a government needs to control its council).

2. Many of those hung councils went through a series of different governments.

Between 2021 and February 2026, those 80 municipalities produced 175 separate governments, each with its own configuration of parties; this report refers to each of these as an 'administration'. In addition, four legislatures in other spheres were also hung after the 2024 national and provincial elections: Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Northern Cape and the National Assembly.

3. Many of South Africa's local administrations have been surprisingly stable.

In the 70 hung councils where new administrations were established after the 2021 local government election, 23 of those administrations were still in office four years later, surviving in essentially the same form in which they had started.

4. The governing arrangements in hung councils change often.

Half of the 175 administrations in the dataset lasted less than 21 months. However, a change of administration does not necessarily mean that the largest party lost power. Of the 101 changes that had occurred by February 2026, in 38 the largest party rebuilt its coalition with different partners, and in 5 it won an outright majority and could govern alone.

5. In more than half of the hung municipalities, the party that led the first administration never lost power.

In 46 of the 80 municipalities, there was no collapse (meaning a point at which the largest governing party lost power entirely) at any point between 2021 and February 2026. Of the 70 administrations formed after the 2021 local government election, only 22 had collapsed four years later.

6. The most common way for an administration to end was with a motion of no confidence.

Out of the 101 cases in which an administration ended, 47 ended with a motion of no confidence. In the other cases, there was usually no vote at all; instead, the administration changed when the parties rearranged themselves.

7. Coalitions that excluded the plurality party (the party holding the most seats in the council) were unusual.

Most coalitions were led by the plurality party, and those that excluded it from government declined sharply: 26 of the 70 administrations formed after the 2021 local government election excluded the plurality party, compared with only 6 of the 74 in office in February 2026.

8. Excluding the plurality party is the single biggest risk factor identified in this report.

These administrations collapsed at about four times the rate of those that included the plurality party. This was true regardless of whether the plurality party was the African National Congress (ANC) or a different party.

9. Governments without a legislative majority were surprisingly common in South Africa.

This type of government, a 'minority government', governed hung councils about 39 percent of the time. However, these tended to be unstable: coalitions without a legislative majority collapsed at nearly three times the rate of coalitions with one.

10. Minority administrations tended to require outside help in order to survive.

In many cases, a minority administration had a 'supporter' (a party outside the government that helped to keep it in power). Minority coalitions that lacked a supporter collapsed at about three times the rate of those that had one.

11. Ideological differences within a coalition appear to be dangerous.

It was somewhat common for South African parties to form donut coalitions (in which parties from both the political left and the right govern together while excluding a party that sits between them). However, these administrations tended to be unstable, and they collapsed at about two and a half times the rate of other coalitions.

12. Coalitions in the metros were significantly less stable than coalitions elsewhere in the country.

This is partially because the voting patterns in metro areas tend to create complicated politics, in which many different parties are required to work together to form a government. However, there are probably other factors that make metro councils intrinsically less stable.

13. The major parties have all responded to the challenges of coalition politics in somewhat different ways.

The ANC held seats in all 80 hung councils and was in government more often than any other party, but it led less often than its size would suggest, and in several cases it allowed smaller partners to take the office of mayor. The Democratic Alliance (DA) took the mayoralty in 43 of the 52 administrations it joined, but the number of administrations it was part of declined steadily after 2021. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) sat in more administrations than any party except the ANC and the DA, but led only two of them. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) took the mayoralty in all 30 of the administrations in which it was the largest party, almost all of them in KwaZulu-Natal. The Patriotic Alliance (PA) won nine mayoralties without ever being the largest member of its coalition.

14. The ANC and the DA were never part of the same municipal coalition.

This applies both before and after the Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed in 2024. Despite being partners in national government, these two parties competed aggressively in local government, and continued to use motions of no confidence to topple each other's administrations. This happened less frequently over time, although that appears to reflect a general slowdown in the rate at which administrations ended rather than any rapprochement between the two.

15. The GNU is a highly unusual coalition that is very different from any local coalition government.

At the data cut-off it held 287 of the 400 seats in the National Assembly even though it needed only 201 seats to govern, and it was so large that eight of its ten member parties could have left without it losing its majority. Across all 175 municipal administrations that have existed since 2021, there was no local coalition with a structure even remotely similar to this.

16. This report was not able to find reliable evidence that coalition instability has a harmful effect on audit outcomes.

Municipalities that went through more coalition collapses between 2021 and 2025 did not have significantly worse audit results at the end of the period than those that had been more stable. This could mean that local governments have done a better-than-expected job of insulating their technical capacity from instability at the political level. It could also mean that new variables or a different research design will be needed to understand how coalition instability affects the quality of governance – this is only a first look.

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This 2026 edition builds on two earlier MISTRA volumes: the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021–2023* and the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer II 2023–2025*. MISTRA is greatly indebted to Professor Susan Booysen, who led both of these projects, and Dr Zenzo Moyo, who worked on each of them. MISTRA also thanks Jennica Beukes for her work on the first volume, and Sanele Simayile for his work on the second. Their work established the Coalitions Barometer series and created the empirical foundation that this edition builds on.

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Abbreviations used in this report

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
AGSA	Auditor-General of South Africa
AIC	African Independent Congress
ANC	African National Congress
CI	confidence interval
COPE	Congress of the People
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
FF+	Freedom Front Plus (Vryheidsfront Plus)
GNU	Government of National Unity
ICOSA	Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
KDF	Karoo Democratic Force
KIP	Kannaland Independent Party
LGE	local government election
LWNC	plurality-led, minimum-winning, no outside supporter, coherent
LWNN	plurality-led, minimum-winning, no outside supporter, non-ideological
MISTRA	Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection
MK Party	uMkhonto weSizwe Party
MONC	motion of no confidence
MONCs	motions of no confidence
NFP	National Freedom Party
PA	Patriotic Alliance
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PAU	Power of Africans Unity

Terms used in this report

Administration: One continuous configuration of governing parties in a council or legislature, and the basic unit of the dataset. Appendix A explains how the beginning and end of an administration are determined.

Anchor party: The core member of a coalition. This report usually calls it the coalition's largest member. *See* Collapse, Rebuild.

Anti-plurality coalition: A coalition that governs without a plurality party. *See* Plurality party, Plurality-included coalition, Plurality-led coalition.

Coalition government: A government formed by a group of parties that believe themselves to be part of a coalition and that recognise one another as governing partners. *See* Appendix A.

Coherent coalition: A coalition whose parties are all ideologically connected, ranging from the centre to the left or from the centre to the right. *See* Donut coalition, Grand coalition, Non-ideological coalition.

Collapse: An ending in which the coalition's largest member loses office. *See* Rebuild.

Cox proportional hazards model: A statistical model of how different variables affect the time it takes for an event to happen. Its most common use is in medicine, for tracking patient survival times, but it works for any 'time-to-event' data, including the lifetime of an administration.

Data cut-off: The last day on which the 2026 edition of the dataset records events – 28 February 2026.

Donut coalition: A coalition that brings together parties from the left and the right while excluding a party that sits between them. *See* Coherent coalition, Grand coalition.

Governance threshold: The number of seats a government needs to control its council: more than half. A government at or above the threshold can pass budgets and defeat motions on its own votes.

Grand coalition: A coalition that brings together parties from the left and the right, including the parties that sit between them. *See* Coherent coalition, Donut coalition.

Hung council: A council in which no single party holds a majority of the seats.

Inaugural wave: The 70 first administrations formed in the municipalities left hung by the 2021 local government election (LGE).

Kaplan-Meier median: Often called the median survival time; the point in time by which half of the administrations being followed had ended. The estimate counts administrations still in office at the data cut-off as having lasted at least that long, rather than discarding them.

Member: A party that belongs to a governing coalition. *See* Opposition, Supporter.

Metro: Short for metropolitan municipality; one of the eight single-tier councils that govern South Africa's largest urban areas: Buffalo City, Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, eThekwini, Johannesburg, Mangaung, Nelson Mandela Bay and Tshwane.

Minimum-winning coalition: A coalition that has just enough members to form a government. *See* Oversized coalition.

Minority coalition: A minority government with two or more member parties. *See* Minority government.

Minority government: A government whose members hold fewer seats than the governance threshold, and which therefore holds office only for as long as enough non-members allow it to. A minority government may be a single party or a coalition. *See* Minority coalition.

National profile: A party that holds at least one seat in the National Assembly.

Non-ideological coalition: A coalition whose members share no identifiable ideological alignment, and which rests instead on local issues and transactional dealmaking. *See* Coherent coalition.

Opposition: A party that is neither a member nor a supporter of the government. *See* Member, Supporter.

Oversized coalition: A coalition that is larger than it strictly needs to be. *See* Minimum-winning coalition.

Plurality party: The largest party in a council. *See* Anti-plurality coalition.

Plurality-included coalition: A coalition that includes the plurality party as a junior partner rather than as its leader. *See* Plurality-led coalition, Anti-plurality coalition.

Plurality-led coalition: A coalition led by the plurality party. *See* Anti-plurality coalition, Plurality-included coalition.

Rebuild: An ending in which the anchor party keeps power, usually with the same mayor, while the coalition around it is reshaped. *See* Collapse.

Supporter: A party that helps to keep a government in office without being a member of the coalition itself; sometimes called a 'confidence and supply' arrangement. *See* Member, Opposition.

Veto player: A coalition member whose departure alone would take the member parties' combined number of seats below the governance threshold; the count applies only where the member parties hold a majority in the first place.

On the use of AI tools

AI software development tools were used to organise the underlying dataset, to develop the Python scripts used for the statistical analysis and risk modelling, and to produce the first versions of the figures in this report. The research design, coding decisions, analysis and text of this report are the authors' own.

Introduction: Five years of local coalition politics

For the first two decades of its history, the political landscape of !Kheis was fairly predictable. Since it was first demarcated in 2000, this small municipality in the Northern Cape (population roughly 22 000 at the 2022 census; Statistics South Africa, 2023) was governed more or less continuously by the ANC. The ANC won every local government election (LGE), and apart from one brief three-month period in 2013, when a by-election loss temporarily allowed a coalition of smaller parties to take control (Louw, 2013), it was able to govern throughout this period.

Then came the 2021 LGE, and the era of coalition politics arrived in earnest in !Kheis. Although the ANC was still the largest party in the region by a significant margin, it was only able to win 5 seats in the municipality's small, 11-seat council. Like 69 other municipalities that year, !Kheis had become (to use a somewhat unfortunate phrase that has nevertheless become entrenched in discussions about South African politics) a 'hung council': one in which no single party held a majority of seats. What followed was three years of political drama and turbulence.

With the ANC reduced to five seats, the second-largest party in the council, the DA, saw an opportunity to establish a new government in !Kheis with itself as the leader. However, since it had only two councillors of its own, it had to establish a 'coalition government': a group of political parties that govern together as a group. In this case, the coalition consisted of the DA itself (with two seats), the Congress of the People (COPE, one seat), and two independent candidates who occupied one seat each. Since this coalition held only five seats, the DA also had to rely on outside support from the EFF. The DA was able to secure that support, and on 25 November 2021 the new coalition government took office; the DA's Rolf Christie became the new mayor, and COPE's Koos Esau became the new speaker.

This was a government with no margin for error. The DA, COPE and the two independents held five seats between them, one short of the six-seat governance threshold. !Kheis was therefore a minority government: one whose own member parties did not have a majority in the council, and which depended for its survival on support from outside the coalition, or on a divided opposition.

The new administration also faced a powerful opponent. The ANC was the 'plurality party', the largest party in the council, but it was excluded from the new government. (See Figure 1.) With its five seats, it would only need to induce one of the DA's partners to defect in order to regain its majority. Meanwhile, the EFF's vote was the key to forming the new government, but it never joined it. This report refers to a party in this position as a 'supporter'. A supporter is not a member of the government: it holds no share of collective responsibility for it, and it is free to campaign against the government whose survival it underwrites. The price of staying outside is influence: a supporter has less say than a member over what the government actually does.

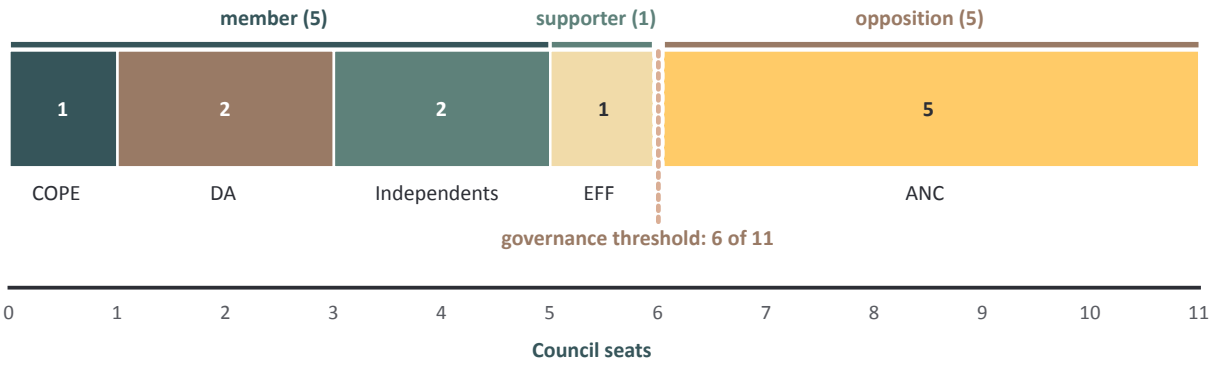


Figure 1. The !Kheis council after the 2021 election. The DA-led government held 5 of the 11 seats and reached the 6-seat threshold only with the support of the EFF, which did not join it.

Section 4 of this report develops a risk model for coalitions, in which both the exclusion of the plurality party and minority status emerge as significant risk factors. The DA-led coalition in !Kheis had both at once. In August 2023, approximately two years after it was formed, it fell into crisis. The EFF switched its support to the ANC, and on 23 August, the ANC and EFF councillors signed a letter demanding a motion of no confidence (MONC) in the mayor and the speaker. A contested council meeting took place on 14 September, in which the ANC's Davy Jacobs and the EFF's John Balies claimed to have been elected as mayor and speaker, respectively. They exercised power for 67 days before the Northern Cape High Court in Kimberley found that their election was invalid and restored the Christie-Esau administration to power (Christie and Others v Acting Municipal Manager of the !Kheis Local Municipality and Others, 2023). The DA-led coalition was able to govern for another 324 days, and the ANC and EFF did not attempt another MONC during this period. The dataset does not treat the 67 contested days as a separate administration, since Christie appears to have continued to exercise practical governance throughout them.

But then, in October 2024, one of the DA councillors left his party to join the PA, and this triggered a by-election to fill the vacant seat. That election was won by the ANC, which once again gave it a majority in the council. The incumbent coalition continued to govern for another 47 days during a lame-duck period (the time when an elected official or a legislative body is finishing out their term in office after their successor has already been chosen, or when they are no longer eligible for re-election), but then the ANC councillors carried out a successful MONC, and the DA-led coalition was replaced by an ANC majority government. !Kheis's experiment with coalition politics had, for the time being, come to an end. (See Figure 2.)

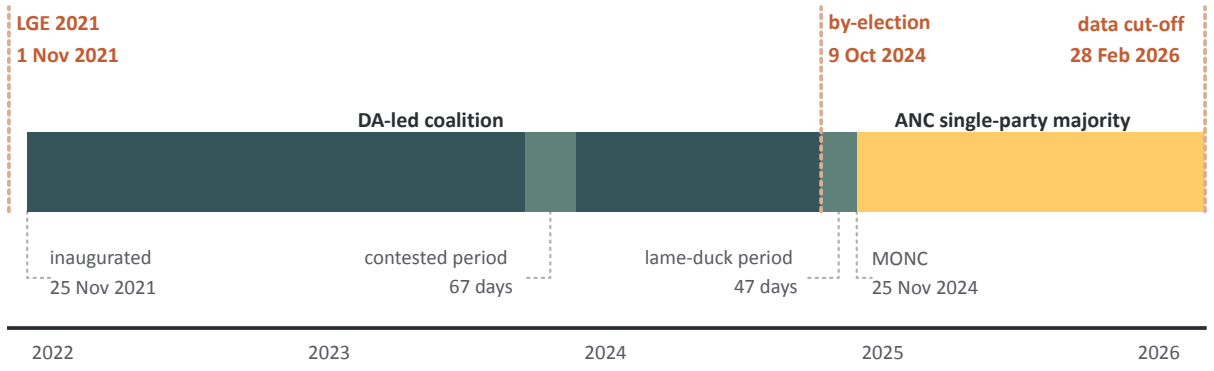


Figure 2. The !Kheis timeline, from November 2021 to the data cut-off point on 28 February 2026.

The challenges of coalition politics

The experiment with coalition government that was attempted in !Kheis is one that has been replicated, under different conditions and with very different results, in many parts of the country over the past five years. During the 2016-to-2021 period, only 27 municipalities were governed by coalitions or minority governments (Booysen, Moyo and Beukes, 2024: 9). The 2021 LGE left 70 councils hung, and more have followed since – Section 1 sets out the resulting landscape in full. Since 2024, South Africa has also had coalitions in three provinces, as well as a coalition in its national government: the GNU.

At the time of the 2021 LGE, South Africa was divided into 257 municipalities (Government Communication and Information System, 2025: 158), each one governed by a council that is elected every five years. In the 213 local and metropolitan councils whose members are all directly elected, half the seats were filled by ward elections and half from party lists (Republic of South Africa, 1998, s.22(1) and (2)). This ensured that each party was represented roughly in line with its overall support within the municipality, and allowed many smaller parties to win seats and participate actively in local politics.

The council elects a mayor, who heads the executive, and a speaker, who presides over the council; in most municipalities the mayor appoints a mayoral committee. For the whole of the period this report covers, there was no law governing coalitions.

Parties were not required to register their agreements or publish them, or notify anyone that they were governing together, and a council whose government changed hands was under no obligation to announce it. Whether a coalition exists, who belongs to it and when it ended are therefore matters of political fact that have to be established from the statements and actions of the parties – Appendix A explains how this report does so. A bill before Parliament, the Local Government: Municipal Structures Amendment Bill of 2026, proposes to make coalition agreements compulsory in hung councils and to require their publication, but it will not be in force before the 2026 LGE and it is not clear which of its provisions will ever be signed into law.

There are many reasons to expect that this trend towards coalition government will continue. While political parties presumably find it annoying to have to share power, coalition governance is arguably a feature, rather than a bug, of the South African democratic system. The term ‘hung’ suggests that there is something pathological about governments in which no single party has a majority, but this is the normal state of affairs in countries that use proportional representation (Clark and Golder, 2006). Indeed, scholars of comparative politics, such as Lijphart (1999) and Cox (1997), explicitly argue that one of the advantages of proportional systems of government, such as the one in South Africa, is their tendency to encourage power-sharing among diverse interests.

Even if power-sharing may be expected, however, this does not mean it is easy. While !Kheis is not a typical South African municipality, it provides a striking illustration of the challenges and political complexity that many South African municipalities have struggled with in the era of coalitions. In this small council in the Northern Cape, we can see the fragmentation of political support across different parties, and the corresponding increase in the complexity of electoral outcomes; the difficulty of building stable coalitions among large and diverse groups of partners; the use of both MONCs and court cases to advance political outcomes; and the fluidity of South Africa’s political norms, in which shifting allegiances of both parties and individuals are relatively normal.

Studying coalition politics

To understand the complex dynamics of coalition politics in South Africa, reliable data is necessary. For more than five years, MISTRA has conducted research on coalitions and compiled that data. In 2021, before that year's LGE, MISTRA published *Marriages of Inconvenience: The politics of coalitions in South Africa* (Booysen (ed), 2021). This was a landmark volume that shifted attention to how coalition politics actually works in South Africa, as well as in African and other democracies more generally. This laid the foundations for a series of MISTRA Coalitions Barometers, which have monitored South African coalition politics continuously across successive editions, with each volume picking up where the last left off. The first barometer, the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer 2021-2023* (Booysen, Moyo and Beukes, 2024), appeared in April 2024, and it monitored the evolution of local coalitions in the two-year period following the 2021 LGE. The second edition, the *MISTRA Coalitions Barometer II 2023-2025* (Booysen and Moyo, 2025), appeared in April 2025. This volume widened the scope of the project to include the national and provincial governments, and the coalitions that were formed in these during this period.

MISTRA is not the only organisation publishing information on coalition politics in South Africa. Apart from MISTRA's Coalitions Barometers, there is also an excellent Coalitions Tracker website maintained by the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), as well as elections data from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the annual reports that are published by municipalities, and copious volumes of political reporting and analysis published in the popular media. Researchers who study coalitions in South Africa have no shortage of information.

What has previously been lacking, however, is a method for *organising* all this information into a structured format that allows South African coalitions to be rigorously studied and compared. So, for this 2026 edition, MISTRA has taken the project a step further. Alongside this narrative report, MISTRA is now releasing the Coalitions Barometer as a dataset: a structured and quantitative record of every coalition administration, classified according to a consistent set of codes, across all three spheres of government.

Building the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer dataset required a series of surprisingly difficult theoretical decisions. For example, how do we define when a coalition begins and ends, and how do we decide which political parties are members of a coalition government? The report does not claim to have perfectly answered these questions; others will draw the lines somewhat differently. The process of building the dataset, and the decisions that were made while building it, are discussed in Appendix A to this report, and in more detail in the codebook that accompanies it.

Why has MISTRA invested so much effort in studying coalitions? For researchers, coalitions are fascinating in their own right: by forcing political parties to cooperate with their adversaries, coalitions create complex new forms of political behaviour and strategy. But the larger issue is that South Africa appears to be moving from a system of government by a single party towards one of government by coalition, and South Africans have to live under the governments that these coalitions produce. The public needs to know which coalitions are in charge, so that citizens can engage effectively with the politics of their country and their local area. Researchers and party officials need to know which conditions and practices are associated with stable coalitions and good governance, regardless of which combination of political parties is in charge.

1. The coalition landscape

The 2026 edition of the Coalitions Barometer covers 80 municipalities. Seventy of these were left hung by the 2021 LGE. Another ten became hung later, between April 2022 and November 2025: nine through ward by-elections and one through a whole-of-council election after the council was dissolved. Together, those 80 are 37.6 percent of the country's 213 directly elected councils (see Figure 3). The 80 were therefore never all hung at once, and the totals in the charts that follow are the councils with an administration in office at that point rather than all 80. The full list, with each municipality's province and how it became hung, is Table 4 in Appendix A.

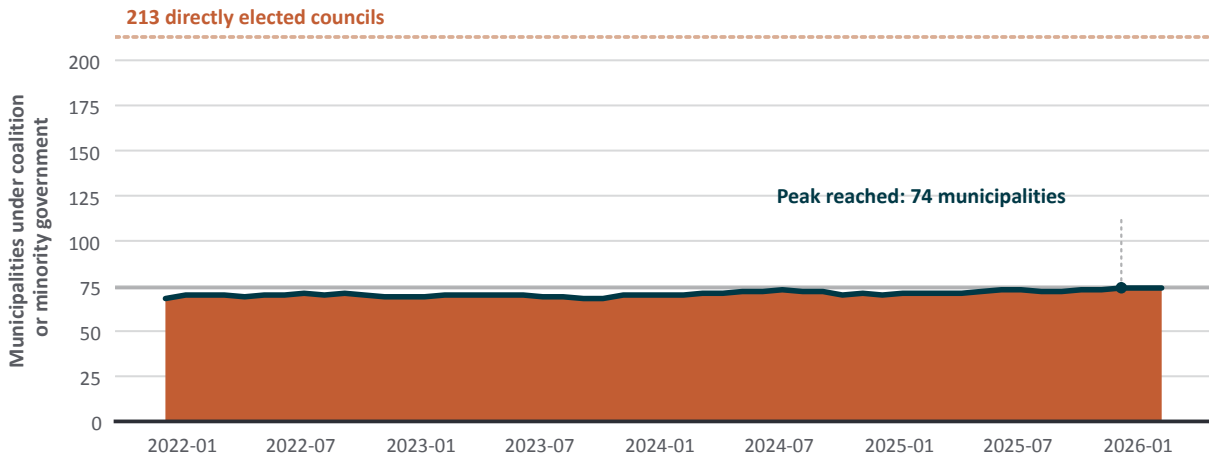


Figure 3. Municipalities under coalition or minority government, month by month, with the 213 directly elected councils as the reference line.

Across those 80 municipalities, the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer dataset identifies 175 distinct administrations up to the data cut-off of 28 February 2026. It also identifies four administrations in the provincial and national spheres of government: those of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape, and the national GNU, all of which were formed after the 2024 national and provincial elections.

Coalition governance was not evenly spread across the country. KwaZulu-Natal accounted for 24 of the 80 municipalities and the Western Cape for 17; between them the two provinces hold more than half of the dataset, while Limpopo contributes two.

What happened to the 70 governments of the inaugural wave? At the cut-off point, 23 of them (32.9 percent) were still in office in their original form, the same administration having governed continuously for more than four years. Figure 4 summarises the picture for all 80 municipalities: how each became hung, what kind of government it formed first, and where it stood at the cut-off.

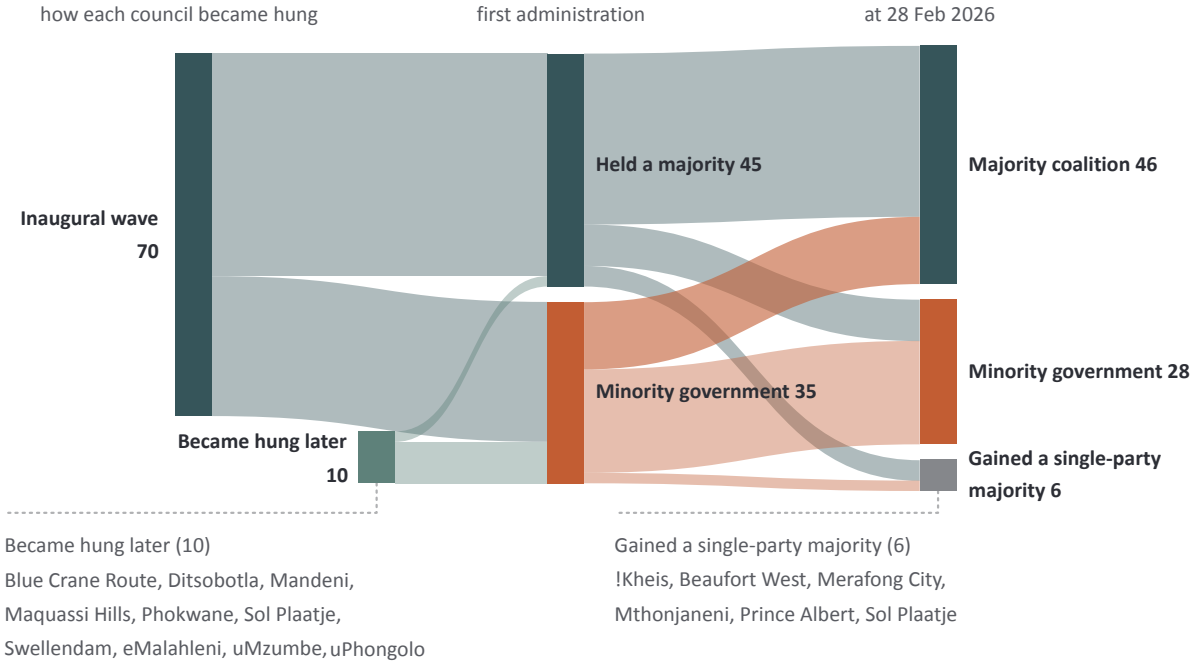


Figure 4. The 80 municipalities: how each became hung, the type of government it formed first, and its position at the data cut-off.

Many other municipalities, however, have experienced considerable political turmoil. Across the 80 municipalities in the dataset, 46 have gone through more than one administration, and the two most turbulent, Johannesburg and Karoo Hoogland, have each gone through six (see Figure 5). A change of administration is not the same thing as a collapse, however. Of the 101 endings, 58 were collapses, in which the coalition's largest member lost office. In 38 the coalition was rebuilt around the same anchor party, which kept the mayoralty in 29 of them. In the remaining five the anchor party won an outright majority and no longer needed a coalition; three of those municipalities left coalition politics altogether, and two, George and Karoo Hoogland, later returned to it.

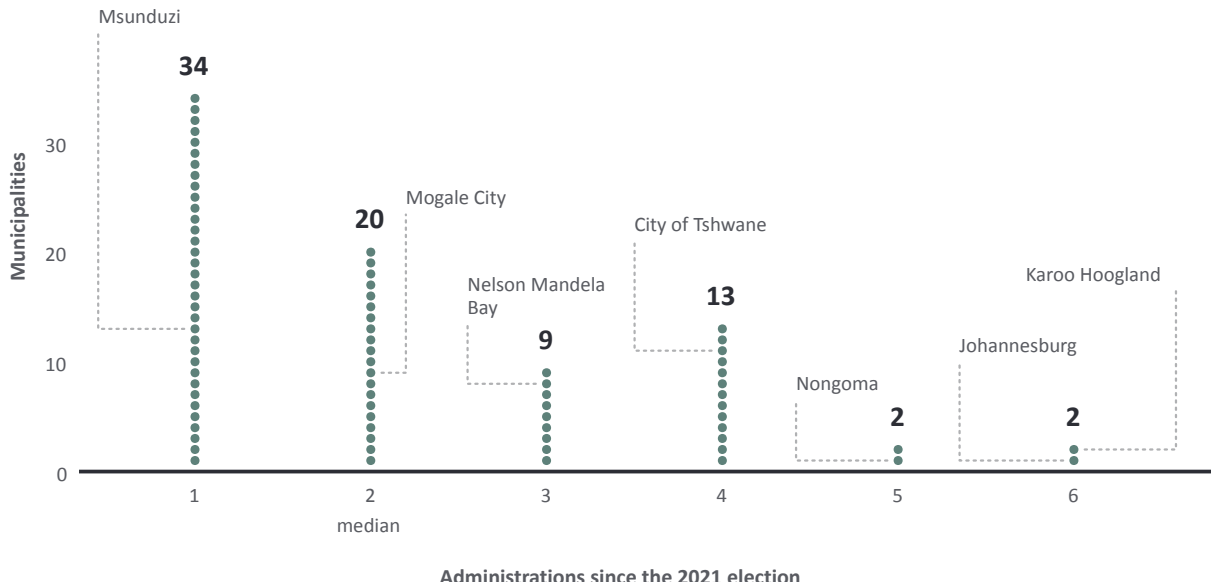


Figure 5. Administrations per municipality. Each dot is one municipality; the median municipality had two administrations over the period.

In six municipalities a single party won an outright majority, usually through by-elections, and the council was no longer hung: !Kheis (2024), Beaufort West (2025), Merafong City (2022), Mthonjaneni (2023), Prince Albert (2022) and Sol Plaatje (2025). In three of these, Merafong City, Mthonjaneni and Sol Plaatje, the majority went to the party that had been leading the coalition. In the other three it went to a different party. Over the same period, ten municipalities that had been majority-governed became hung, from Phokwane in April 2022 to Mandeni in November 2025, after by-elections or defections eroded their majorities. Both sets of changes are shown in Figure 4. The number of municipalities under coalition or minority government has been remarkably stable in aggregate, at 74 at the cut-off, even as its membership churns underneath (see Figure 3).

The median lifespan of a municipal administration in the dataset is relatively short: half of them were gone within 651 days, roughly 21 months. Since many of those endings were rebuilds (in which the anchor party kept power while the coalition around it was reshaped) rather than collapses, however, this understates how long governments held power. Measured by collapse, most municipal coalitions had not collapsed by the data cut-off. Section 4 discusses this point further.

Coalition politics by the numbers

80
municipalities in the Coalitions Barometer dataset

70
municipal administrations in the inaugural wave

74
municipal administrations in office at the data cut-off

175
municipal administrations across the whole period

101
municipal administrations ended by the data cut-off

3
provincial administrations

1
national administration

179
administrations in hung councils or legislatures in South Africa since 2021

2. A typology of South African coalitions

One of the things MISTRA wanted to do in this project was to create an exhaustive typology of coalitions in South Africa – a systematic classification of coalitions into categories based on shared characteristics. However, in trying to capture all the different dimensions in which coalitions can differ, the project ended up with a typology that is quite complex.

In popular discourse about coalition politics, coalitions are often classified according to their ideology. Commentators speak about 'left-wing coalitions', 'right-wing coalitions', and 'grand coalitions' (which combine parties from both sides of the political divide). However, there are other ways of distinguishing between coalitions. In academic political science, scholars often distinguish between 'minimum-winning' coalitions, which have just enough members to form a government, and 'surplus' coalitions, which are larger than they strictly need to be. The previous editions of the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer have also distinguished coalitions according to their plurality orientation (Booysen, Moyo and Beukes, 2024: 313-314): whether the coalition is one in which the largest party in the legislature brings in partners, or one in which the largest party is excluded.

For this edition of the Coalitions Barometer, the research team decided to classify each coalition along four axes: how it relates to the largest party in the legislature, its size relative to the majority threshold, whether it depends on support from outside its own membership, and its ideological character. Alongside these, the report uses one summary of a coalition's complexity: the number of veto players (coalition members whose departure alone would take the member parties' combined number of seats below the governance threshold) it contains.

Plurality orientation

A first way of classifying coalitions is in terms of their plurality orientation: the relationship between the coalition and the largest single party in the council. Three cases arise. There are plurality-led coalitions, in which the largest party leads the government; coalitions that include the plurality party as a junior partner; and anti-plurality coalitions, in which the smaller parties combine to govern without the largest party.

Finding 1: Most South African coalitions are plurality-led. Anti-plurality coalitions were a common minority type after the 2021 election, but they have become rare.

Measured by time in office across all 175 administrations, plurality-led coalitions accounted for 65 percent of all coalition governments, anti-plurality coalitions for 25 percent, and coalitions that included the plurality party without being led by it for only 9 percent (see Figure 6). In some respects, this is an intuitive finding, since a

government led by the largest party will by definition need fewer partners to reach the governance threshold. However, there is an interesting directional trend here. Right after the 2021 LGE, 26 of the 70 inaugural-wave governments (37 percent) were anti-plurality coalitions, making this a relatively common minority type, but this has declined over time: at the data cut-off, only 6 of the 74 administrations in office (8 percent) governed without their plurality party, while 60 (81 percent) were plurality-led.

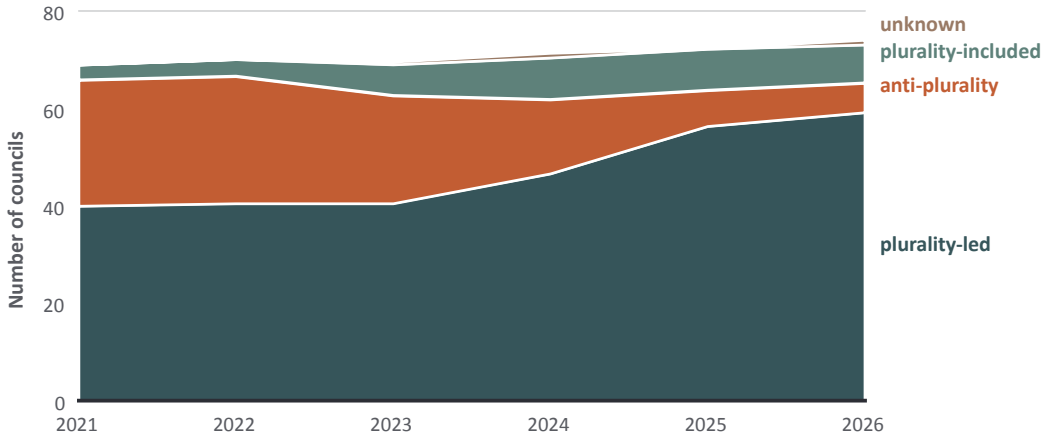


Figure 6. Changes in how South Africa's hung councils were governed, by plurality orientation, weighted by time in office.

In practice, most of these (21 of the 26 in the inaugural wave) were anti-ANC coalitions, formed to govern without an ANC plurality, although three excluded a DA plurality and two an IFP plurality. Over time, however, they generally proved unstable, regardless of which party had been excluded, and most were replaced (see Table 1). This is consistent with the statistical model developed alongside the dataset, which identifies governing without the plurality party as a risk factor for collapse (Section 4 returns to this topic).

Table 1. Plurality orientation: inaugural wave compared with data cut-off

Plurality orientation	Inaugural wave (70)	Share	At cut-off (74)	Share*
Plurality-led	40	57.1%	60	81.1%
Anti-plurality	26	37.1%	6	8.1%
Plurality-included	4	5.7%	7	9.5%
Unknown	0	0.0%	1	1.4%

* Shares may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

One noteworthy sub-type of this pattern were DA-anchored governments facing an ANC plurality. This configuration was attempted in 22 administrations across the Coalitions Barometer dataset, with 11 of them formed in 2021. However, this pattern has not fared well. At the data cut-off point, only two such administrations remained in office, both in small rural councils; every attempt at forming this type of government in a metropolitan municipality had ended.

At the same time, the number of plurality-included coalitions has grown, from 4 of the 70 inaugural-wave administrations to 7 of the 74 at the data cut-off. In every one of these seven cases, the plurality party is the ANC (alone in five cases, and in a two-way tie in the other two). This is not unusual; the ANC has a surprisingly high willingness to join coalitions in which it is the largest member but not the leader. This phenomenon is discussed in more detail in the profile of the ANC in Section 3.

Size relative to the governance threshold

A second way of classifying coalitions is in terms of their size relative to the governance threshold: the number of seats that a coalition needs to hold a majority in the legislature.

In terms of this variable, the Coalitions Barometer distinguishes between three types of governments. A minority government is one whose member parties together control fewer seats than the governance threshold; where it has more than one member party, it is a minority coalition. A minimum-winning coalition is one with just enough members to meet the governance threshold, so that even its smallest member could bring the government down by leaving it. Finally, an oversized coalition is one that has more members than necessary to meet the governance threshold, which means that it could survive the exit of at least one of its smaller members.

Finding 2: Most hung municipalities in South Africa are governed by minimum-winning coalitions, although minority governments are surprisingly common.

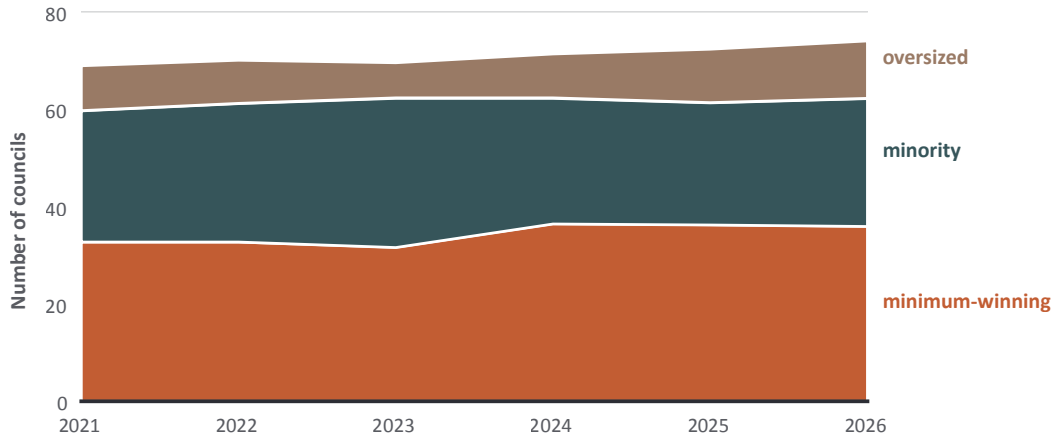


Figure 7. Changes in how South Africa's hung councils were governed, by size relative to the governance threshold, weighted by time in office.

Traditionally, political scientists who study coalition politics using game theory, such as Riker (1962) and Leiserson (1968: 775), have tended to regard small coalitions as more efficient, since the 'spoils' they gain from holding office are shared among fewer members. Therefore, these scholars assume that political actors will tend to form smaller coalitions whenever possible.

According to this report's dataset, South African political actors do indeed tend to behave in accordance with this rationalistic expectation, at least in the local sphere. At the data cut-off, minimum-winning coalitions were the largest category among sitting governments, and oversized coalitions remained rare at every point in the dataset (see Table 2 and Figure 7).

Table 2. Size relative to governance threshold: inaugural wave compared with data cut-off

Size relative to threshold	Inaugural wave (70)	Share	At cut-off (74)	Share
Minimum-winning	33	47.1%	35	47.3%
Minority	27	38.6%	28	37.8%
Oversized	10	14.3%	11	14.9%

Interestingly, the most heavily oversized coalition in the entire dataset is South Africa's national government after 2024, the GNU, with eight of its ten members arithmetically unnecessary. This is one of several ways in which the GNU is anomalous, a topic to which Section 5 returns.

One of the more surprising findings from the dataset is the high prevalence of minority governments. Across all 175 administrations, minority government is the most common size category, at 82 administrations (46.9 percent). However, the raw count overstates their weight: minority governments are 46.9 percent of the 175 administrations but account for only 38.8 percent of the governing time, partly because they tend to be shorter-lived, with a median lifespan of 529 days compared to 959 for other administrations, so there are more of them. Measured by time in office, minimum-winning coalitions are the most common form of government in hung councils.

Finding 3: Minority governments are common, but they are rarely durable, and the arrangements that sustain them over the long run are the exception rather than the rule.

Unsurprisingly, the Coalitions Barometer dataset shows that minority governments tended to be fragile. Of the 82 in the dataset, 34 had collapsed by the cut-off, compared to 24 of the 93 governments that held a majority. Section 4 puts the difference for minority coalitions at nearly three times the collapse rate of a comparable majority coalition. There are some exceptions, however. Six minority governments that were formed in 2021 were still in office at the cut-off, equating to a lifespan of 1 559 days: eNdumeni, Govan Mbeki, Emfuleni, Msunduzi, Newcastle and Rustenburg.

How, then, does a minority government survive at all? If we look at the incentives of the parties involved, there are two mechanisms by which an apparently unstable arrangement can be a stable equilibrium, because it serves every party's interests at once. The first model is a supporter-sustained minority government, in which a party outside the governing coalition agrees to keep it in office without joining it. Strøm (1990) argues that this can be a rational choice for all concerned: the governing parties obtain office, and the supporter obtains influence over policy without the responsibilities of government or the electoral costs of incumbency. The dataset shows that this is possible, though not common: of the 27 minority governments sustained in this way, 10 were still in office at the cut-off, and Section 4 finds that they collapsed at about one-third the rate of minority coalitions with no support at all. A good example is the DA's long-running support of IFP-led governments in KwaZulu-Natal, a relationship that has typically been solid precisely because both sides prefer it to the alternatives.

The second model is a minority government that survives because the opposition is fragmented. Even a minority government facing an opposition that holds a majority between them can last for a long time if those parties cannot agree on an alternative. For example, imagine a council in which a centrist party holds 45 percent of the seats, a right-wing bloc 35 percent and a left-wing bloc 20 percent. In theory, the two opposition blocs could combine to unseat the government, but if they cannot agree on a single alternative that satisfies both of them, the government survives because there is no majority that can be assembled against it; in the language of formal political science, there is no 'winset' that beats the status quo. The clearest instance in this dataset is Emfuleni, where the ANC governed one seat short of a majority from 2021 to the data cut-off with no support arrangement that could be discerned from the record, and survived two MONCs (Mofokeng, 2023; Jimta, 2025).

What outside supporters contribute

The first two axes (how a coalition relates to the largest party in the legislature, and its size relative to the majority threshold) describe a coalition's own membership, but some parties are neither members of the government nor plainly in opposition, as the EFF's position in !Kheis showed. A minimum-winning coalition and a minority government sustained from the outside may look different on paper while behaving almost identically in the council chamber.

So, a third axis in the report's typology asks what those outside supporters contribute. The Coalitions Barometer distinguishes between four types (see Table 3). The first type is a basic coalition in which there are no outside supporters at all. The second is a 'sustaining' pattern, in which the member parties fall short of the governance threshold, and the supporters make up the difference. The third type is one with 'surplus' supporters, where the government has enough seats for a majority without outside help, but it still maintains supporter relationships anyway. The fourth type is coded as 'insufficient': the government has supporters, but they are still not enough to reach the governance threshold.

Table 3. What outside supporters contribute, by size relative to the governance threshold (all 175 administrations)

	None	Sustaining	Surplus	Insufficient	Total
Minority	43	27	0	12	82
Minimum-winning	64	0	6	0	70
Oversized	21	0	2	0	23
Total	**128**	**27**	**8**	**12**	**175**

Figure 8 shows how this has changed over time.

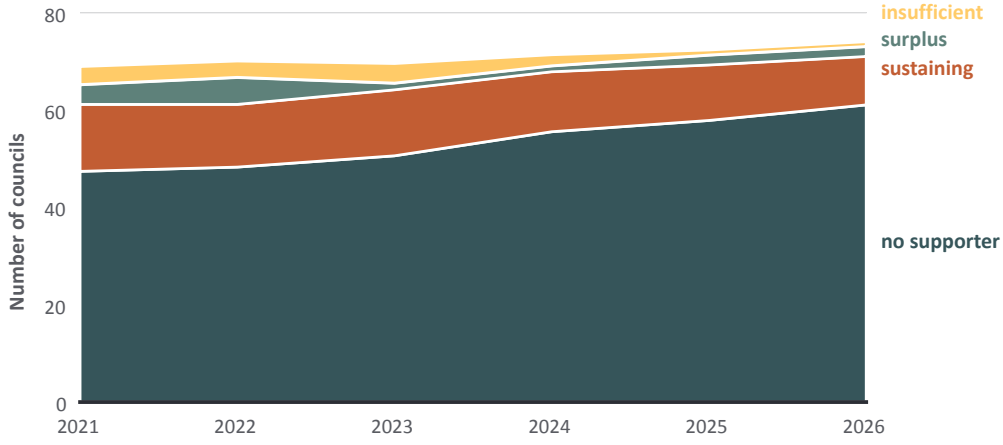


Figure 8. Changes in how South Africa's hung councils were governed, by what outside supporters contributed, weighted by time in office.

Most administrations – 128 of 175 – have no supporters coded. One interesting category is the set of eight administrations coded as having 'surplus' supporters: the governing parties already held a majority, and yet other parties supported them from the outside regardless. On the face of it, such an arrangement might seem irrational.

However, four of those cases are in KwaZulu-Natal, and in each of the four the redundant supporter is the DA. In these cases, the surplus support is the result of a standing provincial arrangement, the KZN Service Delivery Pact, which delivers DA support to IFP councils regardless of their local political arithmetic (Democratic Alliance and Inkatha Freedom Party, 2023).

Ideology

The fourth axis of classifying coalitions is in terms of their ideological configuration: whether a coalition brings together parties that all sit on one side of the country's left-right divide, or stands opposed on that divide, or relies on members that do not have a clear national ideological profile. These judgements are made by MISTRA researchers who specialise in South African politics, working inductively from the parties' own stated positions and political behaviours. This is the most subjective judgement in the dataset, given the eclectic politics and sometimes-contradictory behaviour of several South African parties, along with the intrinsic limitations of the unidimensional left-right scale itself. MISTRA expects that some readers would code some coalitions differently. Nevertheless, the coding was applied consistently, so this field does allow useful comparisons between coalitions in different provinces and different periods. Furthermore, since the Coalitions Barometer dataset is published under an open licence, readers who disagree can recode the ideological configurations by their own standard, and test whether the findings in Section 4 survive.

In the dataset, the simplest type of ideological configuration is one that is ideologically 'coherent'. This is one in which a group of parties are all ideologically connected, ranging from either the centre to the left, or the centre to the right, and line up on one side to form a government together. This is the connected coalition of Axelrod (1970), predicted to form more readily than alternatives. In practice, these types of coalitions might still have many internal differences; for example, a 'right-of-centre' coalition that includes a centrist pro-business party, a populist anti-immigration party and a conservative religious party will likely have many internal disagreements. Nevertheless, the coding schema would still treat it as coherent, because all the parties in the coalition are presumptively still members of the same political side. This type of coalition, in which all members have some sort of political agenda in common, is arguably the classic type of coalition that most people imagine when they think of coalition politics.

A second type of coalition is a grand coalition, in which there is a broad and inclusive alliance of parties from across the political divide, usually with the coalition's centre of gravity being located somewhere in the middle.

A third type of coalition is one this report refers to as donut-shaped. This is similar to a grand coalition in that it involves cooperation between parties on the left and the right. However, whereas grand coalitions tend to include all the centrist parties, a donut coalition instead leaves out one of the large locally present parties that would ordinarily fall within its political ambit.

In addition to these three ideological types, the dataset identifies a number of non-ideological-coalition configurations. These are coalition combinations that do not seem to be based on any identifiable ideological alignment, and are instead based on local issues and transactional dealmaking. For example, if a large national party requires a 'top-up' to reach the governance threshold, and it forms a partnership with a local service-delivery forum that does not have any national ideological profile, this coalition would probably be coded under this category.

Finally, the Coalitions Barometer treats single-party governments, such as single-party minority governments, as their own category, since there is no coalition to ideologically classify.

Finding 4: Coherent and non-ideological coalitions are equally common; grand coalitions are very rare; and donut coalitions are becoming rarer.

Measured by time in office across the 175 administrations, non-ideological and ideologically coherent coalitions are almost equally common, at 31.9 and 31.5 percent of governing time, respectively; donut coalitions account for 19 percent, single-party governments for 16 percent, and grand coalitions for 1.6 percent (see Figure 9).

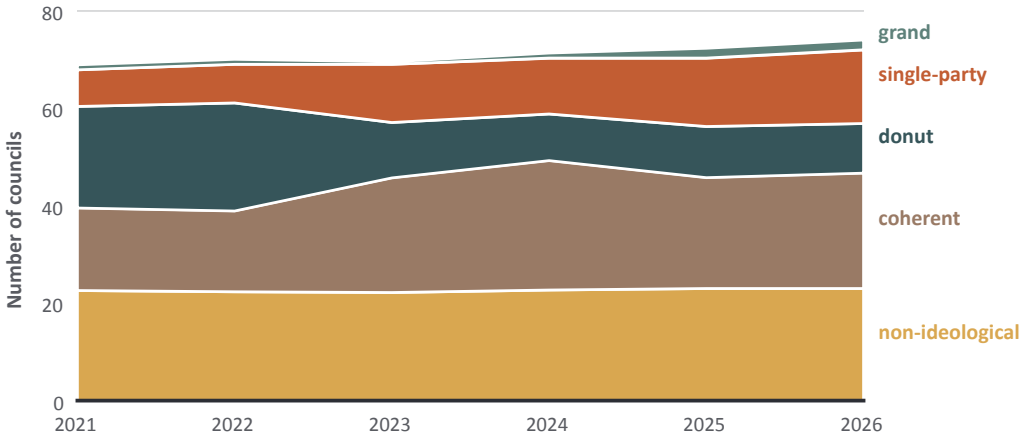


Figure 9. Changes in how South Africa's hung councils were governed, by ideological configuration, weighted by time in office.

The clearest trend is the decline of the donut. Donut coalitions made up 21 of the 70 (30 percent) inaugural-wave administrations, but only 11 of the 74 (15 percent) were in office at the data cut-off.

Much of this decline can be traced to a single event. After the 2021 election, the EFF and the IFP entered into a co-governance agreement in KwaZulu-Natal that created a set of administrations bridging left and right, usually against the ANC, which the dataset codes as donut-shaped. Then, on 29 January 2023, the EFF's national leadership ended that agreement. The next day, ten donut administrations across the province ended at once. None of these governments collapsed, however. In nine cases, the IFP was able to rebuild a coalition without the EFF, and in the tenth, Mthonjaneni, the IFP reached an outright majority. Nevertheless, the result was that the share of sitting administrations that were donut-shaped fell from 31 percent to 17 percent overnight, and it has stayed at roughly that level ever since. The decline of the donut is thus primarily the result of a single provincial decision with many local implementations, rather than a gradual decrease.

Grand coalitions in the local sphere in South Africa are vanishingly rare. Only three municipal administrations in the Coalitions Barometer dataset are coded as grand coalitions. Between them, they governed for 1 795 days, accounting for 1.6 percent of all governing time in the Coalitions Barometer dataset. (Two of those three were still in office at the data cut-off point.) By contrast, grand coalitions are more common in the national and provincial spheres of government, with the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government and the national government both coded, since 2024, as grand coalitions. If these trends continue, an important future goal for scholars of South African politics will be to understand why the prevalence of the grand-coalition type differs so much between spheres of government.

Coalition complexity

Alongside these four categorical classifications, the dataset records the number of veto players in each coalition. The terminology comes from Tsebelis (2002), although this report uses it more narrowly than he does; the number of veto players can be thought of as a proxy for a coalition's level of complexity.

The simplest type of government, according to this model, would be a single-party government with a legislative majority. Such governments are not recorded in the Coalitions Barometer dataset, but if one were, it would have a veto-player score of one, since the governing party itself is the only veto player. By contrast, a two-party coalition that needs both members to reach the governance threshold would have a veto-player score of two, and so on. However, once the governance threshold has been reached, adding more coalition members does not increase the number of veto players, since these additional partners are, in some sense, surplus to requirements.

Johannesburg's second administration after the 2021 LGE provides an illustration of how this works in practice. The DA-led coalition formed there in February 2022 had seven members, but only six of them were veto players. The government held 138 seats in a council where the governance threshold was 136, which meant that one of its partners (COPE, with a single seat) did not have veto-player status.

This variable does not apply to minority governments: by definition, a minority government is already below the governance threshold, so the departure of any one of its members would simply reduce the number of parties in government. As such, the Coalitions Barometer dataset only records the veto-player count for the 93 administrations whose members held a majority.

Finding 5: Among governments that hold a majority, small and simple coalitions are the norm.

Among the 93 administrations whose members held a majority, the typical government had two veto players, usually a single large party and one smaller partner that brought it past the governance threshold. Five governments had only one veto player; these were oversized coalitions in which none of the smaller partners was needed to reach a majority. The two most complex coalitions had six veto players each: a DA-led coalition in Johannesburg (JHB_02 in the dataset), and an ANC-led coalition in Maluti-a-Phofung (MAP_02) (see Figure 10). Interestingly, JHB_02 only lasted for 227 days, but MAP_02 was still in office at the data cut-off, after 876 days.

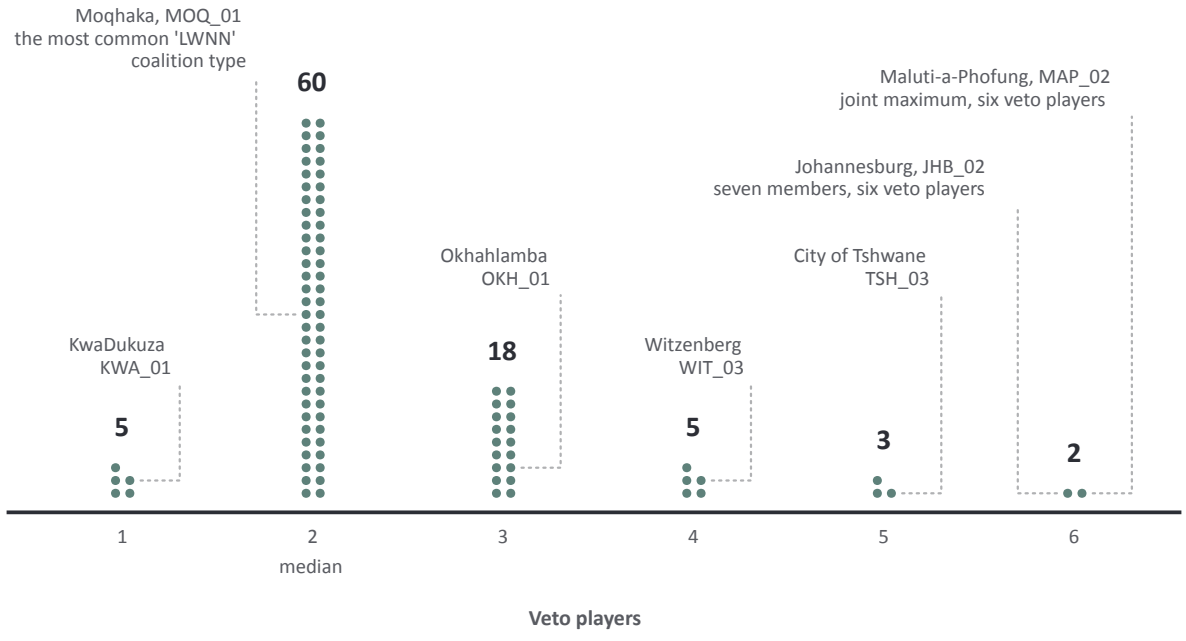


Figure 10. Number of veto players for each of the 93 administrations whose members held a majority. Each dot is one administration; the median administration within this set had two veto players.

What does a typical South African coalition look like?

By combining the four axes described above, it is possible to identify 180 possible coalition types, of which only 43 actually occur in the dataset. Measured by time in office, the most common is 'LWNN': a coalition led by the plurality party; minimum-winning; not reliant on outside supporters; and non-ideological in its composition. Seventeen administrations were of this type, and between them they governed for 14.3 percent of all time governed in the dataset. Its close relative, 'LWNC', is identical except that its members are ideologically coherent; it was formed more often, 19 times, but governed for slightly less time, 14.2 percent. Together the two types account for 28.5 percent of all time governed.

As this analysis has discussed, politics in these municipalities often looks very different from the drama and turbulence that characterises politics in areas such as !Kheis or the large metro areas, and which tends to capture the headlines. For an example of a more typical coalition, consider the government of Moqhaka in the Free State (MOQ_01 in the dataset), an example of the LWNN type, the most common in the dataset. After the 2021 LGE, the ANC was reduced to 22 of 44 seats in the council, bringing it one seat below the governance threshold. The ANC responded by forming a minimum-winning coalition with Power of Africans Unity (PAU), a local micro-party, although the ANC retained both the mayor and the speaker positions for itself (Motloheloa Mokatsane and Selloane Khiba, respectively).

Between then and the data cut-off point, the ANC-PAU coalition governed continuously. Of course, this does not mean that politics stopped taking place in Moqhaka. The mayor was the subject of a public controversy in 2022 after using a racial slur against community members, which drew an EFF call for his resignation and a public apology from him (Mokoaledi, 2022; News24, 2022); in June 2022 the DA filed a MONC against him, which reached the council only in November and was dismissed because it had not been tabled within the required 21 days (Booysen, Moyo and Beukes, 2024: 48; Booysen and Moyo, 2025: 122); and in April 2024 the president directed the Special Investigating Unit to investigate security-services procurement in the municipality (Special Investigating Unit, 2024). None of these disturbed the governing coalition. The DA announced a second MONC in November 2023 (Dalton, 2023), but it's not clear what became of it; in any event, there were no by-elections and no changes of partners, and to all outward appearances the ANC-PAU relationship held for the entire period.

Governments like the one in Moqhaka generally do not feature in news headlines, but they are part of the story of South African coalition politics, and it is important not to forget about them.

3. The political parties

So far, this report has treated administrations as the unit of analysis. However, coalitions are created by political parties, and the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer dataset provides a number of insights about the parties and their shifting political strategies since 2021. This section of the report asks what the Coalitions Barometer dataset shows about the parties: whether they tended to serve in government or the opposition (see Figure 11), the frequency with which they led coalitions, the median length of their governments and their most common partnerships (see Figure 12).

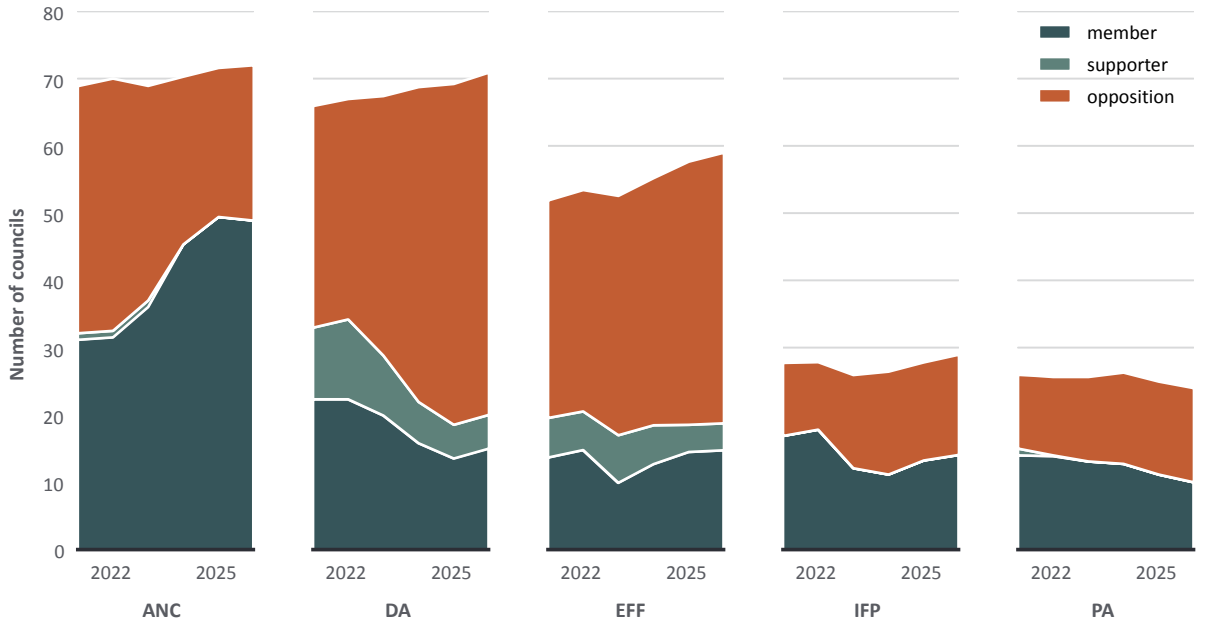


Figure 11. Roles held by the ANC, DA, EFF, IFP and PA, year by year, weighted by time in role.

The six parties profiled in this section were the six largest in the National Assembly at the time of writing, and so the six with the broadest national support. Figure 11 shows the five of them with a substantial municipal record; the sixth, the MK Party, is discussed at the end of this section. However, this should not imply that the large parties are the only ones that matter. Participation in coalition politics in South Africa is extraordinarily broad: there were 103 different parties in the Coalitions Barometer dataset that held at least one seat somewhere in the country; 64 of these parties were a coalition member at some point; and 14 anchored a government as its largest member. South African local politics is heavily shaped by the country's many local parties, residents' associations, one-councillor formations and so on. Often, these smaller parties are the decisive actors in determining which of the larger parties' coalitions are able to govern and survive.

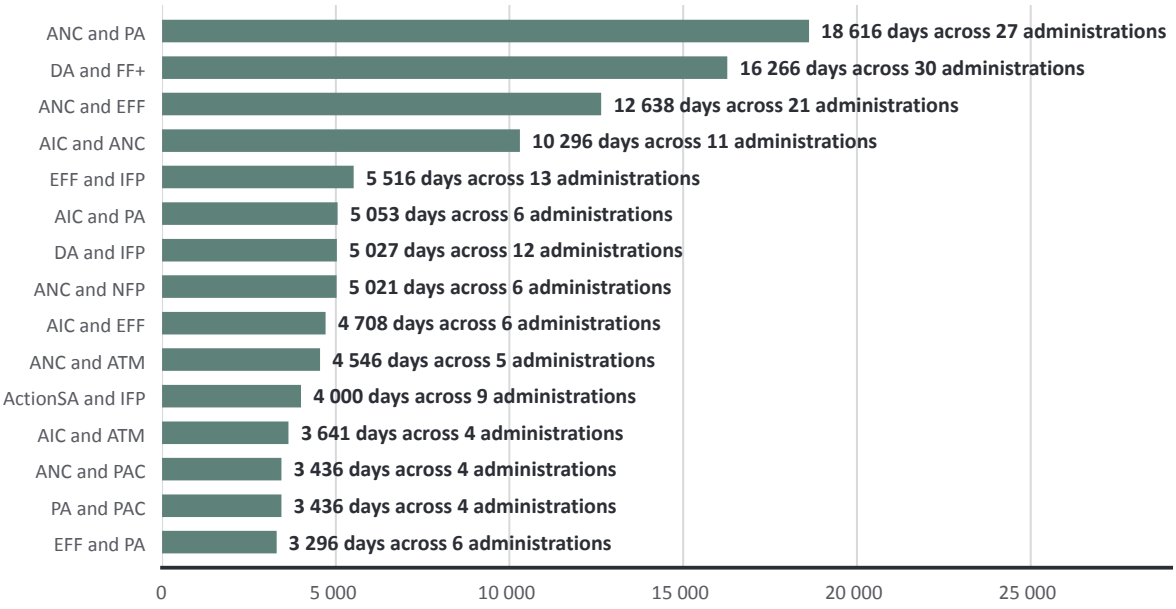


Figure 12. The 15 most common coalition partnerships, measured by days served together across all the administrations in which both parties were members.

The ANC: Pervasive but underrepresented

There are two striking facts that emerge from the ANC's participation in the politics of hung councils since 2021. The first is simply how big it was. In the scope and period covered by the Coalitions Barometer dataset – hung councils and coalition governments since 2021 – the ANC was ubiquitous: it was the only party that held seats in every council, and it was the plurality party in 117 of the 175 administrations (see Figure 13). The result is that almost every coalition in the country was in some sense a decision about the ANC: whether to govern in partnership with it, under it or against it.

A second striking fact is that, despite (or perhaps because of) its size, the ANC converted its position into office at a lower rate than expected (see Figure 14). In the councils where it held a plurality, it joined the government less often than the DA or the IFP did from the same position.

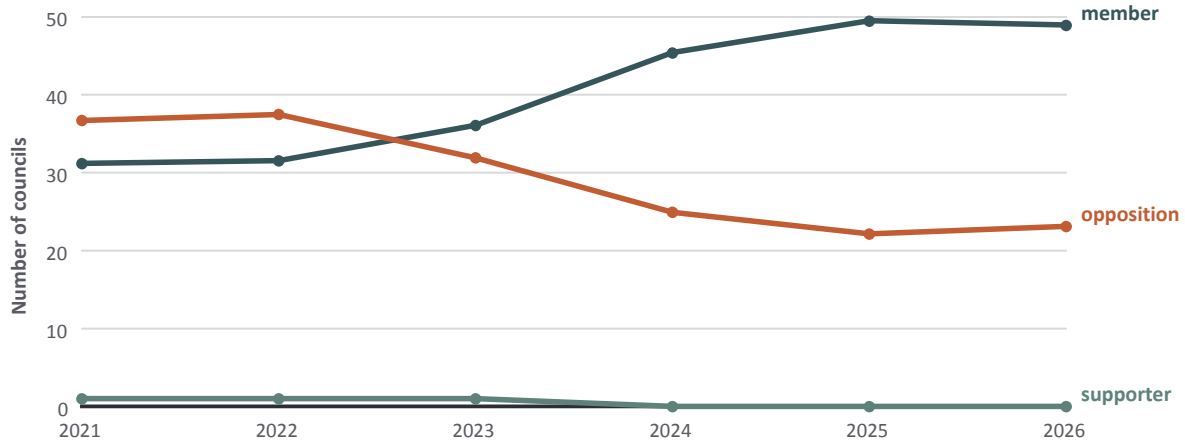


Figure 13. The ANC as member, supporter and opposition, year by year, weighted by time in role. Each chart in this series has its own vertical scale, so heights should not be compared between parties.

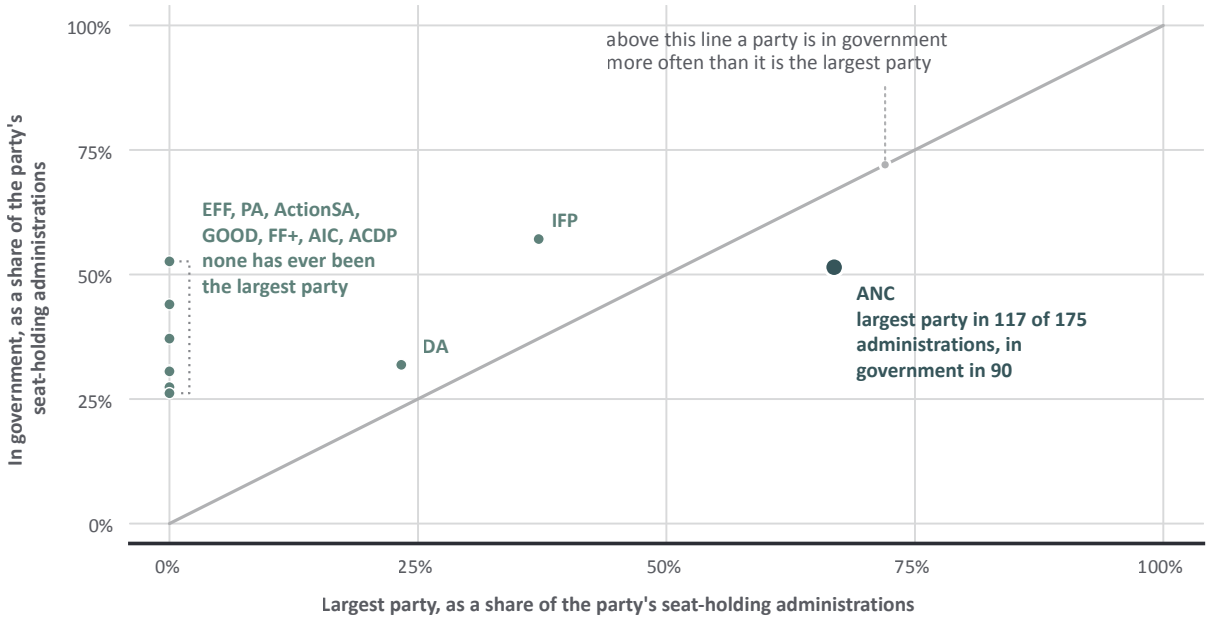


Figure 14. How often each party was the largest in a council, and how often it was in government. The ANC participated in government less frequently than its position in councils would suggest.

When it did join the government, even though it was almost always as the largest member, the mayoralty went to a smaller partner in more than a fifth of cases (16 of 71). The combined result is that the ANC led the government in fewer than half of the councils where it held a plurality (55 of 117), compared to roughly two-thirds for the DA and the IFP. Figure 15 sets out each step of the conversion process.

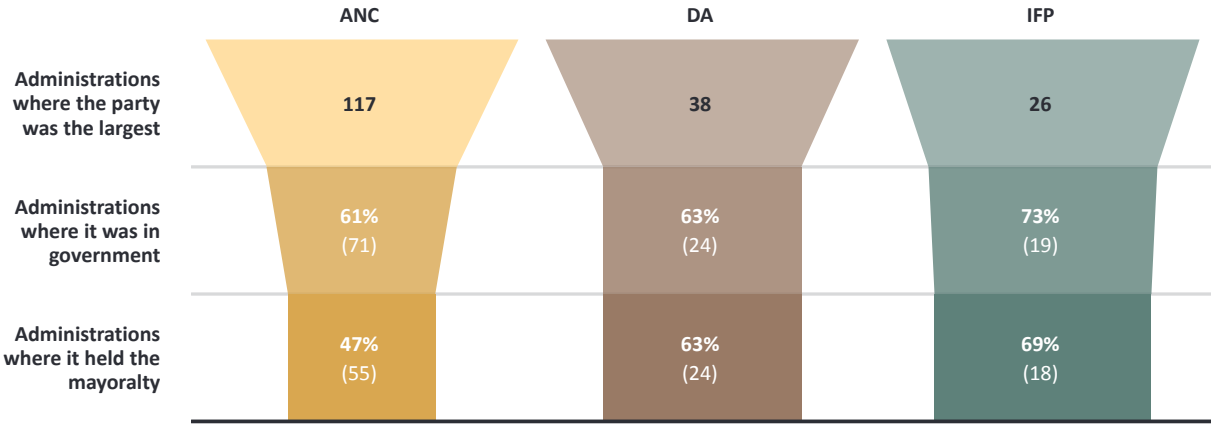


Figure 15. What the ANC, DA and IFP did with a plurality position. The ANC lost ground at both steps, converting a plurality into membership, and membership into the mayoralty, less often than the other two.

Once the ANC formed a government, however, it tended to last. Coalition administrations led by the ANC had a median lifespan of 1 056 days compared with 651 for the dataset as a whole (counting every type of ending).

One clear trend is that the ANC's presence in government grew: it governed in 45.6 percent of the coalition-governed councils in 2021 and in 68.4 percent in 2025, weighting each council by the time the ANC spent in government there (see Figure 13). Part of the picture was its willingness to serve under a smaller party's mayor, and the clearest instance of that was its relationship with the PA, discussed in the PA's profile below.

Who did the ANC govern with? Measured in days spent governing together, its most common partners were the PA (18 616 shared days, totalled across all the administrations in which they were partners), the EFF (12 638 days) and the African Independent Congress (AIC) (10 296 days). However, the ANC also frequently governed in coalition with smaller and local parties. If 'local parties' are defined as parties that sat in only one municipality in the country, the ANC governed with them for a total of 18 360 days across 26 administrations, which made them collectively the ANC's second-largest coalition partner after the PA. In general, the ANC seems to have recruited pragmatically, according to local conditions, with a clear preference for smaller parties. It never co-governed with the DA in any local coalition, only in the national GNU and the KwaZulu-Natal Government of Provincial Unity.

The DA: The all-or-nothing party

The most striking statistical fact about the DA in the Coalitions Barometer dataset is its very high rate of executive leadership. When the DA was part of a coalition, it usually led it: it held the mayoralty in 43 of the 52 (82.7 percent) administrations it belonged to, the highest conversion of membership into leadership among all the parties profiled here. However, its membership of governing coalitions has steadily declined since 2021: it was a member of 22 of the 70 governments of the inaugural wave, but only 15 of the 74 in office at the cut-off. During the same period, the DA's time spent in opposition has greatly increased, from 48.2 percent in 2021 to 70.1 percent in 2025. (See Figure 16.) Governments that were anchored by the DA were also comparatively short-lived, with a median lifespan of 553 days compared to 651 (when counting every kind of ending).

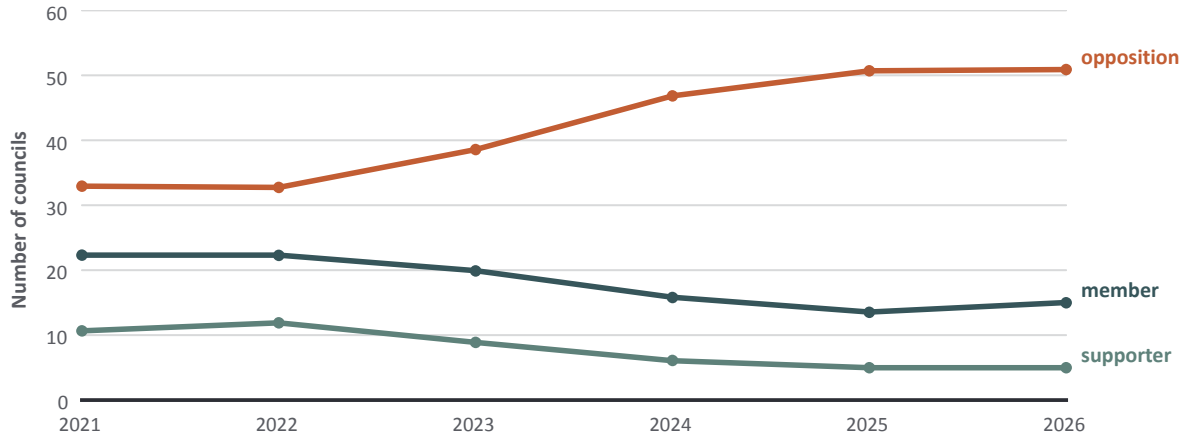


Figure 16. The DA as member, supporter and opposition, year by year, weighted by time in role. Each chart in this series has its own vertical scale, so heights should not be compared between parties.

Taken together, these facts suggest the image of an 'all-or-nothing' party. The DA appeared unwilling to settle for joining coalitions, and instead had a strong preference for leading governments. Where it was not in charge, it was usually not in the government at all. In every one of the 24 administrations in which the DA was both the plurality party and a member of the government, it took the mayoralty.

The Coalitions Barometer dataset reveals another interesting fact about the DA: it was coded as a supporter in 17 administrations across 12 municipalities, more than any other large party. This suggests that in municipalities where it preferred the incumbent government to the alternative, but had no plausible pathway to leadership, the DA chose to take a supporter role and sustain the government from the outside rather than join it as a junior partner.

In a sense, the DA's preference for leadership is a mirror image of the ANC's willingness to elevate smaller parties. Indeed, when considering the record of these two parties in local government since 2021, the data suggests that both were responding to the same basic problem: the question of how to manage relations with smaller coalition partners. However, they responded in different ways. In broad terms, the ANC seems to have sacrificed its leadership ratio to stay in government, whereas the DA seems to have sacrificed its government participation ratio to maintain its leadership ratio.

Unlike the ANC, whose partners varied with local conditions, the DA recruited from a small and stable set of partners. Its most durable partner by far was the Freedom Front Plus (Vryheidsfront Plus) (FF+), with 16 266 shared days in office, followed at a distance by the IFP (5 027 days) and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) (2 738 days). It had many other partners, ActionSA (1 880 days) and COPE (2 193 days) among them, but these partnerships accounted for many administrations and few days: they were formed and ended quickly.

The EFF: Influence without executive leadership

In the period covered by the Coalitions Barometer dataset, the EFF was notable for a very wide presence, combined with a paradoxical lack of executive leadership. Between the 2021 LGE and the data cut-off, it held seats in 135 administrations, more than any party except the ANC and the DA. And yet it led only two of those administrations: Thembelihle in the Northern Cape, for 860 days, and Metsimaholo in the Free State, for just 3 days, in November 2021 (Mkhwanazi, 2021). Figure 17 shows the EFF's coalition membership trends over time.

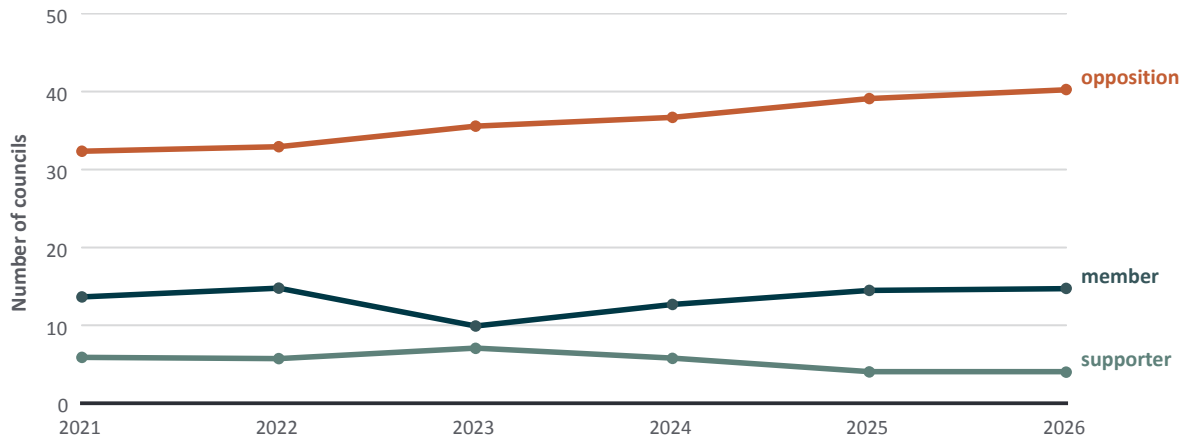


Figure 17. The EFF as member, supporter and opposition, year by year, weighted by time in role. Each chart in this series has its own vertical scale, so heights should not be compared between parties.

The combination of wide presence without executive leadership was the EFF's defining structural feature, and it was probably a consequence of the limits of its electoral map. The DA and the IFP both had concentrated regional support bases, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, respectively. The EFF's support, by contrast, was spread across the country without being dominant in any region. Figure 18 shows the result: when the EFF entered government, it generally had to do so as a junior partner in another party's coalition, rather than leading it.

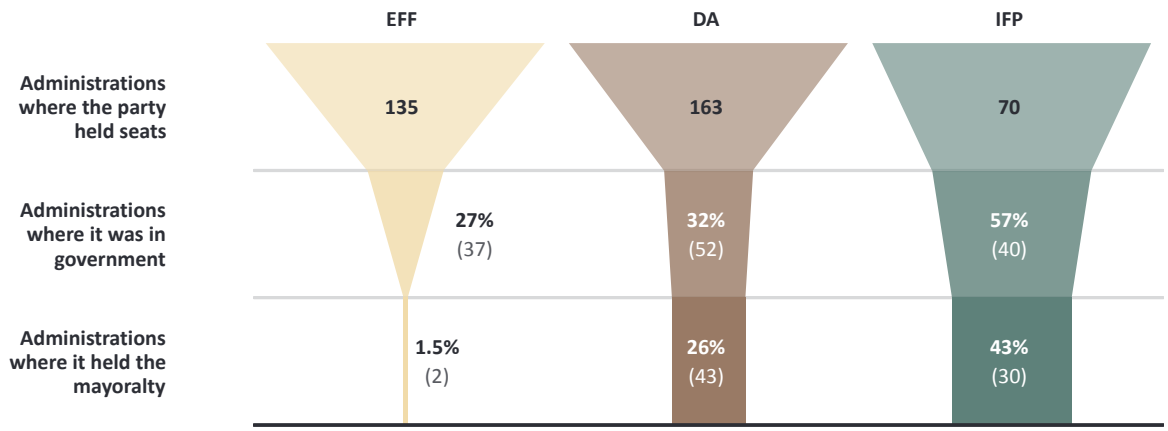


Figure 18. What the EFF, DA and IFP did with a presence in council. The EFF entered government at close to the DA's rate, but it almost never led.

The EFF's political strategy can be seen as a response to these underlying conditions. The party went through two distinct phases during the period the Coalitions Barometer dataset covers. In the first phase, the EFF mostly worked against the ANC. It supported many anti-ANC governments from the outside, including eight administrations in which it supported a DA-anchored government. In KwaZulu-Natal it went further, entering into a co-governance agreement with the IFP after the 2021 LGE that put the two parties into government together across much of the province.

Then, from late 2022 onwards, the EFF reoriented its political strategy towards cooperation with the ANC. In January 2023, it broke off its co-governance agreement with the IFP, which ended its participation in KwaZulu-Natal governments in the space of a few weeks. The EFF's break with the DA was slower: those arrangements fell away one by one, mostly by MONCs, from mid-2022 through 2023, with a last single-seat holdout surviving to late 2024. Taken as a whole, the strategic repositioning took about a year. Once it was complete, the EFF had lost most of its coalition memberships in KwaZulu-Natal, but it had become a co-governing member of coalitions in many other areas, including the metros of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni.

The EFF's relationship with the ANC was durable. In cases where the ANC-EFF co-membership ended, it was usually not because the EFF withdrew, but rather because the administration itself fell for some other reason (in three cases, due to a court order). Across the Coalitions Barometer dataset as a whole, the ANC was by far the EFF's largest partner, with 12 638 shared days in office, far ahead of both the IFP (5 516 days) and the AIC (4 708 days).

The IFP: The regional specialist

Unsurprisingly, most of the IFP's participation in local coalitions since 2021 was concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal. The IFP held seats in 31 of the 80 municipalities in the dataset, 24 of them in KwaZulu-Natal, where it held seats in every hung council. The IFP held seats in 70 administrations in the Coalitions Barometer dataset, 51 of them in KwaZulu-Natal, and was a member of the government in 40. In most of the councils outside of that province, the IFP was not represented at all.

However, the IFP got good value from the seats it held. Measured by time in office, it sat in government for half of the days on which it held seats in a hung council (see Figure 19). This is one of the highest rates of government participation among the parties with a national profile, second only to the ANC. Moreover, in municipalities where it was strong, the IFP almost always led. It took the mayoralty in every one of the 30 administrations in which it was the largest member. It led 30 of the 40 (75 percent) administrations it belonged to, and every one of those 30 was a government it anchored. Those 30 IFP-led administrations governed for 17 775 days between them. This put the IFP in third place for mayoral office-holding, behind only the ANC and the DA, even though its national support was significantly smaller than that of either of those two parties.

Measured by days governing together, its most common partners across the post-2021 period were the EFF (5 516 shared days), the DA (5 027 days) and ActionSA (4 000 days). Its most important relationship, however, was not with a co-member but with a supporter: the DA supported 14 of the 30 IFP-led governments from outside without joining any of them, across 9 municipalities. This is by far the largest member-supporter relationship in the Coalitions Barometer dataset, and it was never reciprocated: the IFP was either in government or in opposition, and never supported another party's government from the outside.

Governments anchored by the IFP were notably shorter-lived than those of the ANC or the DA. The median IFP-led administration had a lifespan of 434 days, compared to 651 for the dataset as a whole, when counting every type of ending.

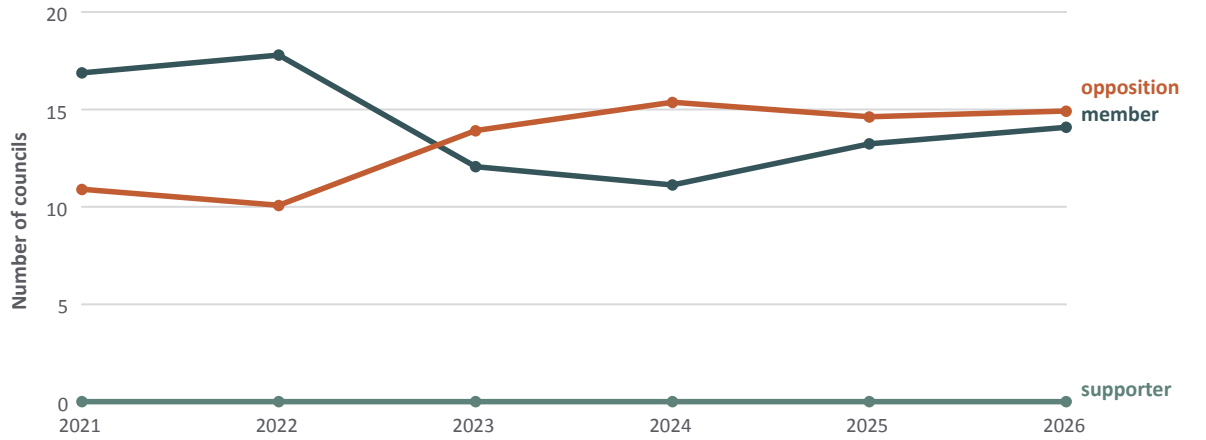


Figure 19. The IFP as member, supporter and opposition, year by year, weighted by time in role. Each chart in this series has its own vertical scale, so heights should not be compared between parties.

The PA: The junior partner with senior offices

The PA held seats in only 75 administrations and was never the largest member of a government (see Figure 20). Yet the most striking fact about the PA in the Coalitions Barometer dataset is that it held the mayoralty 9 times, in 27.3 percent of the 33 administrations in which it was a member (see Figure 21). There is no other political party with a national profile that has managed to convert junior membership into a mayoralty as often as the PA.

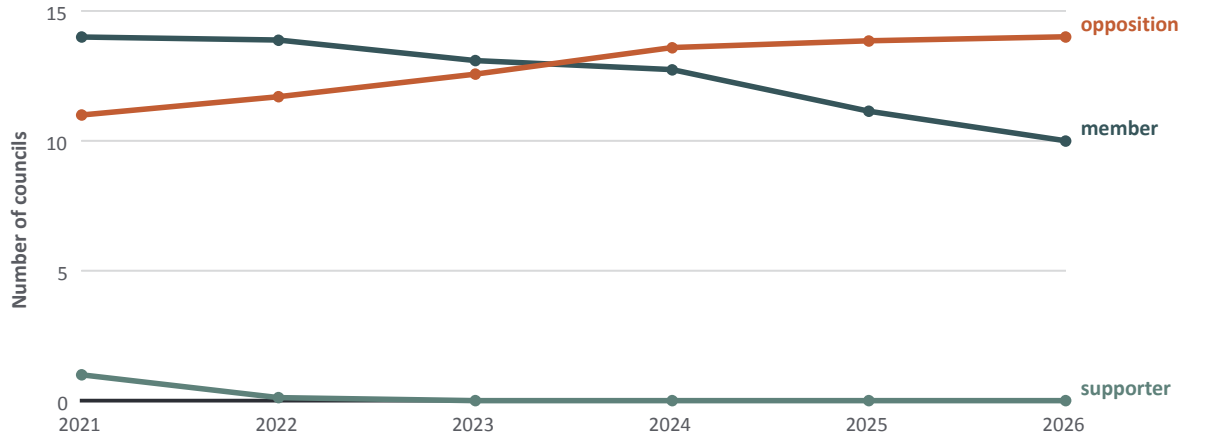


Figure 20. The PA as member, supporter and opposition, year by year, weighted by time in role. Each chart in this series has its own vertical scale, so heights should not be compared between parties.

Part of the explanation is that the PA was willing to cooperate with a wide variety of partners. Measured by days co-governing, its most important partnership was with the ANC (18 616 days), but it also governed alongside the AIC (5 053 days), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) (3 436 days), the EFF (3 296 days), the FF+ (1 526 days) and the DA (941 days). Due to its demonstrated willingness to partner with multiple parties, the PA was in a strong position to bargain effectively with its coalition partners. In practice, however, most of the PA's success in obtaining leadership positions came from its close relationship with the ANC: its nine mayoralties were all in ANC-anchored governments.

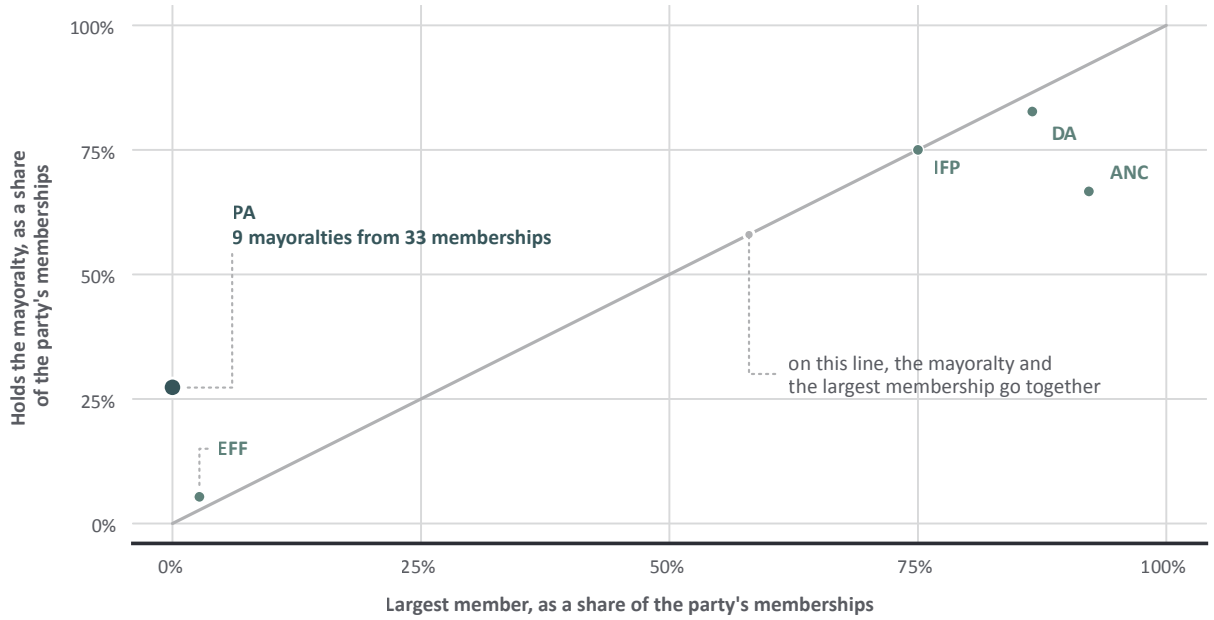


Figure 21. Anchoring compared with holding the mayoralty. The PA won nine mayoralties without ever being the largest member of its coalition.

The MK Party: The unknown quantity

As the third-largest party in South Africa's National Assembly after the 2024 national election, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK Party) is likely to feature prominently in future editions of the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer. For now, its presence in the municipal record is entirely the product of by-elections. These gave it councillors in three administrations by the data cut-off: uMzumbe, Thabazimbi and Mandeni. In all three it was coded as opposition.

This record does not provide enough data to make reasonable inferences about the MK Party's preferred coalition partners, its willingness to enter government or its broader political strategy. MISTRA expects that these questions will be explored in future editions of the dataset.

In the provincial sphere the picture is different. At the data cut-off, the MK Party was the plurality party in KwaZulu-Natal's provincial legislature, holding 37 of its 80 seats, but it faced an anti-plurality coalition formed without it. Section 5 discusses the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government in more detail.

4. What makes for stable coalitions?

How long do coalitions last, and what decides which ones last? Both of these turn out to be rather complex questions.

Survival rates

Finding 6: South African coalitions were surprisingly stable. Most of those formed after the 2021 elections were still anchored by the same party more than four years later.

The popular image of coalition politics in South Africa is one of instability. When MISTRA began work on this project, the research team assumed that the average lifespan of a coalition would be short, and that very few would survive a full term. In some respects, this turned out to be true. Half of all municipal administrations in the dataset had ended within 651 days (roughly 21 months) of being formed (see Figure 22).

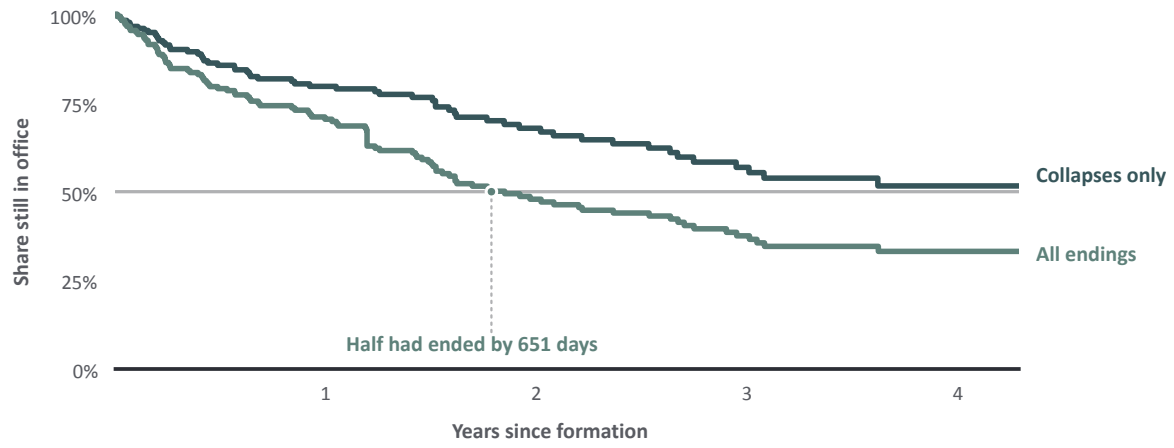


Figure 22. How long administrations lasted, counting every kind of ending and collapses alone.

An ending, as Section 1 explained, is not necessarily a collapse (the full range of possible coalition endings is outlined in Figure 23). Counting only collapses (in which the core party lost power and could not rebuild the coalition around itself), more than two-thirds of the coalition governments formed after the 2021 elections had still not collapsed by the data cut-off, more than four years into a five-year term. Because most of them were still standing, there is no median to report. This is arguably the most surprising finding in the report.

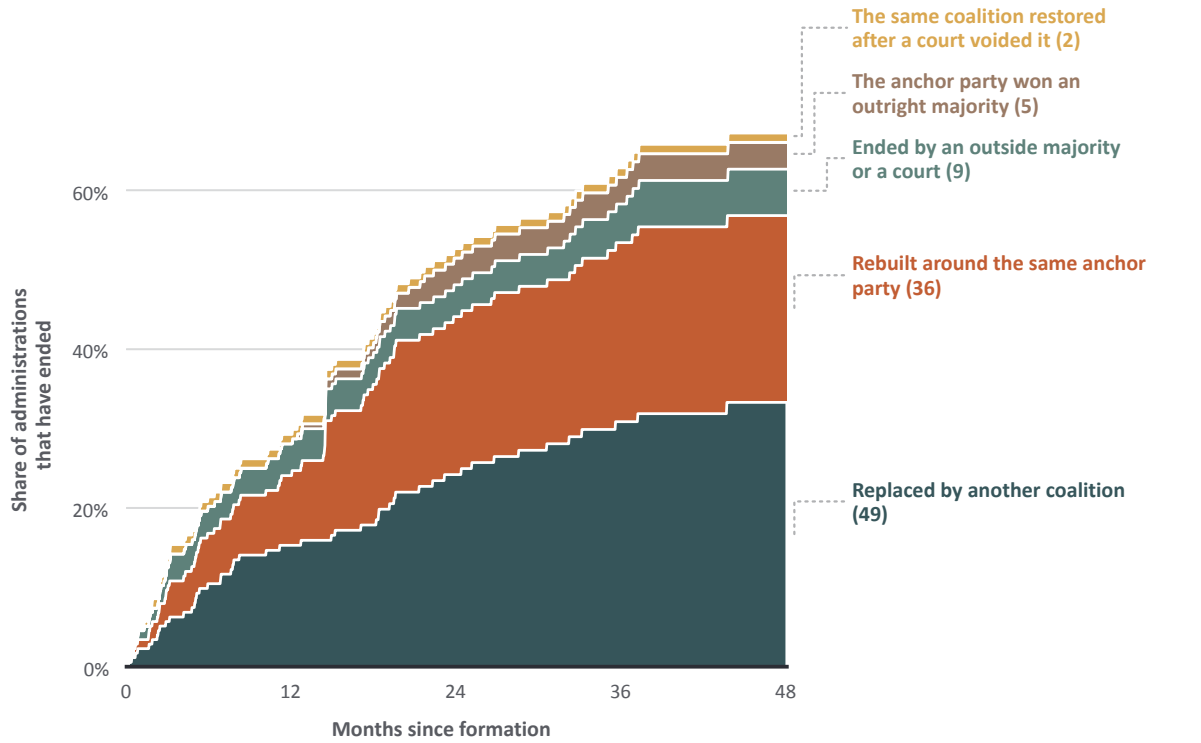


Figure 23. How administrations ended, and when. Each band is the probability that an administration had ended in that way by a given point in its life.

That said, some coalitions clearly did collapse, and some parts of the country suffered from high levels of political instability. Furthermore, much of South Africa's local political instability was concentrated in the metropolitan regions, which contain large populations and much of the country's economic activity. As such, understanding the causes of instability in hung councils remains an important task. To do this, MISTRA built a statistical model to help better understand which types of governments are likely to be more at risk.

Modelling survival

Which sorts of coalitions are most at risk of collapse? The typology used in the Coalitions Barometer dataset suggests a number of possible explanations: perhaps complex coalitions are fragile; perhaps ideologically mixed ones are; perhaps minority governments living on outside support are. The problem is that many of these risk factors are found in the same governments, so it can be tricky to disentangle the causes. Coalitions that exclude the largest party are more likely to need more partners, but they are also more likely to be ideologically mixed, more likely to be found in metro councils, and so on.

To separate out these different factors, MISTRA borrowed a set of methods from the discipline of medical science. Researchers who study the factors affecting human lifespans have developed a variety of statistical tools for doing this: they follow a group of patients over time, count those who are still living rather than discarding them, and measure the hazards that raise the risk of dying at any given moment (smoking, for example, is a well-known hazard that reduces human lifespan). This report effectively treats coalition administrations as the patients, counting those still in office at the data cut-off as evidence of survival, and calculates the hazards that appear to shorten their lives. The two techniques used here are the Kaplan-Meier survival estimator, which is used to calculate median lifespans, and the Cox proportional hazards model, which produces the risk factors. Appendix B sets out both in full.

The model considers the features of a coalition together and produces a risk multiplier for each one, holding the others constant. A multiplier of 2 means that coalitions with that characteristic collapsed at twice the rate of comparable coalitions without it; a multiplier close to 1 means the characteristic made no difference.

Two models were developed for this report. The primary model covers all 143 multi-party administrations, while a second model covers the 93 administrations whose members held a majority (which is where the veto-player count is meaningful). The primary model is depicted in Figure 24.

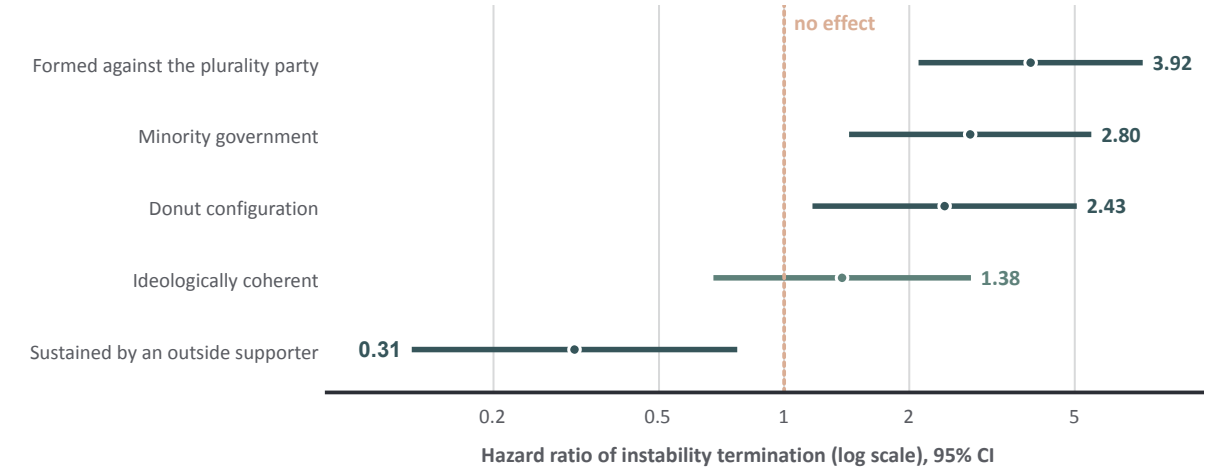


Figure 24. Factors that predict coalition collapse; a factor that crosses 1 is not distinguishable from chance. Risk multipliers come from the primary model with 95% confidence intervals (CIs); a logarithmic scale is used.

This model has a number of important limitations. It is an observational model fitted to 143 coalitions and 51 collapses: coalitions were not assigned their characteristics at random, and there is no control group. The model also tests only the structural political variables already present in the Coalitions Barometer dataset, rather than offering a complete explanation of why South African coalitions succeed or fail. Many plausible influences remain outside the specification, including local political cultures, the personal relationships between council leaders, the presence or absence of patronage networks, the municipality's level of economic development, the size of municipal budgets, and the strength of national or provincial party structures. MISTRA has published the dataset used to generate these findings partly so that other researchers can test it against different variables and consider explanations that have not yet been thought of. Within these limits, though, the anti-plurality, minority and donut findings are firmly established on this data. The veto-player result is suggestive rather than established.

Finding 7: Coalitions that governed without the plurality party collapsed at about four times the rate of those that included it.

Of all the risk factors in the model, the one most strongly associated with collapse is whether the coalition includes the largest party in the council. Anti-plurality coalitions collapsed at about four times the rate of plurality-led ones (see Figure 25), and this result is very robust, surviving every alternative specification it was tested against. The raw numbers behind the multiplier are stark: of the 55 administrations in the dataset that governed without the plurality party, 37 collapsed, compared to 21 of the 120 that included it.

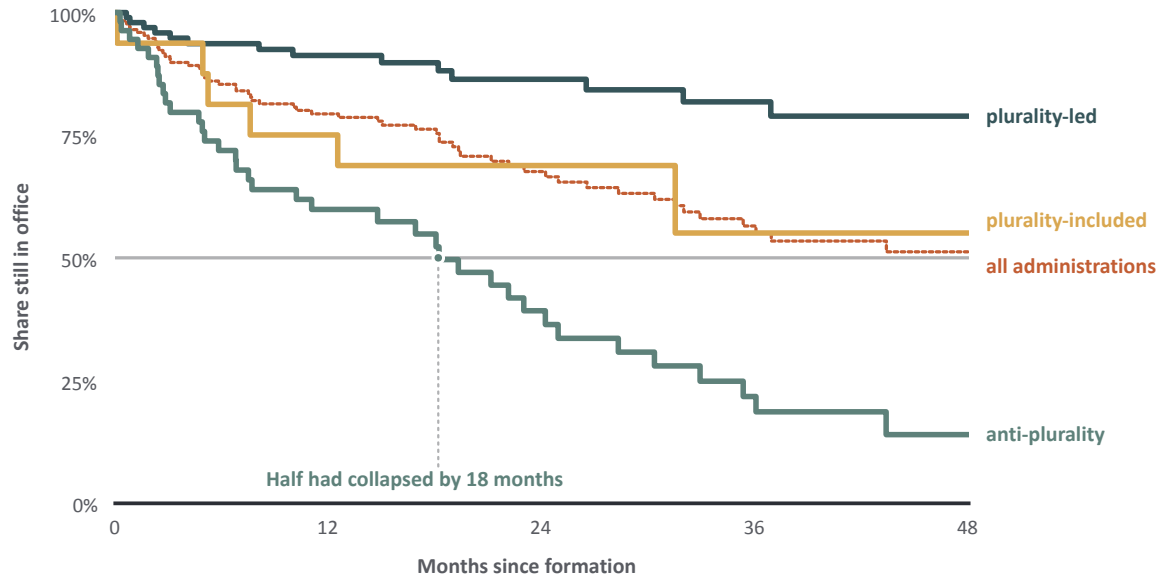


Figure 25. The share of administrations still in office as time passed, by whether the coalition included the largest party in the council. An administration ends here only when its core party lost power.

The ANC is the most frequent plurality party in the dataset, so it is reasonable to wonder whether the real risk factor is opposition from the ANC. However, the identity of the plurality party turns out to be irrelevant: coalitions formed against an ANC plurality were no more and no less fragile than the anti-plurality coalitions that excluded the DA or the IFP. The key factor is the distribution of seats within the council, not the identity of the plurality party itself.

Why is it so dangerous to exclude the plurality party from government? One problem is that it imposes structural constraints on coalition formation that make it more difficult to form a cohesive government. In order to put together an anti-plurality coalition, it is often necessary to build a complex coalition containing many different veto players and many different ideological perspectives. Indeed, both the number of veto players and the donut-shaped ideological configuration are risk factors in their own right (discussed below). But once these factors are controlled for, governing without the plurality party still emerges as the strongest risk factor, even for coalitions that are otherwise structurally simple.

Another problem is that an anti-plurality coalition leaves the strongest party in the council outside the government, and so is born with a built-in enemy that is strongly motivated to bring down the new government. The plurality party, whoever it is, will usually need only a handful of defections to return to government, and it has an ongoing incentive to offer a good deal to possible defectors. The data seems to support this hypothesis: of the 31 anti-plurality coalitions in the dataset that were replaced by another coalition, 29 were replaced by a coalition led by the very party they had excluded (see Figure 26).

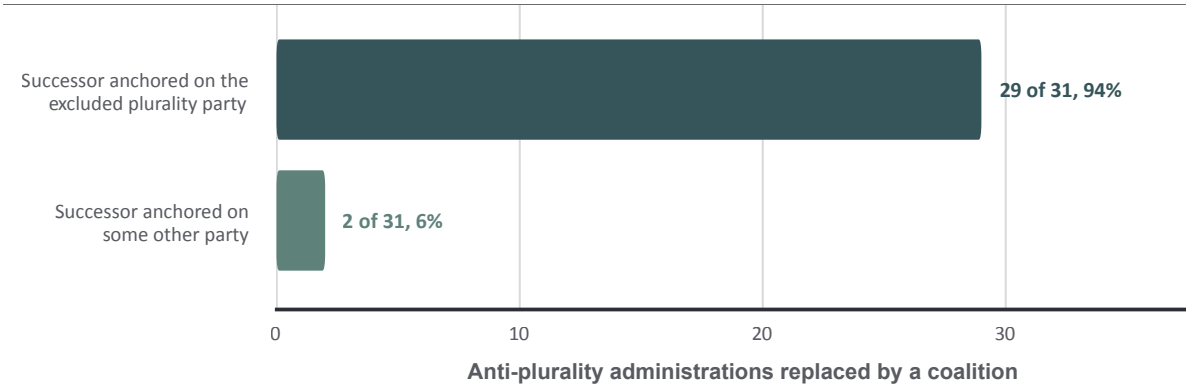


Figure 26. When an anti-plurality coalition fell, the plurality party usually returned.

Does this mean that coalition governments should always include the plurality party? Not necessarily: there might be good reasons to exclude it, and an anti-plurality government that commands a majority is still a legitimate reflection of the will of the voters. A political party does not have an automatic entitlement to govern just because it came first. Nevertheless, the data does strongly suggest that any coalition that attempts to exclude a plurality party is trying to do something difficult. To survive, an anti-plurality coalition will likely need to have a greater willingness among its members to compromise than coalitions that do not face the same headwinds.

Finding 8: Minority coalitions without an outside supporter collapsed at nearly three times the rate of coalitions that held a majority.

The second-largest effect in the model is a coalition's size relative to the governance threshold. A coalition whose combined members fell short of the threshold collapsed at nearly three times the rate of one that held a majority (see Figure 27). The model is fitted to coalitions, so this finding refers to minority coalitions, meaning minority governments with more than one member party; the 32 single-party minority governments in the dataset are not in it.

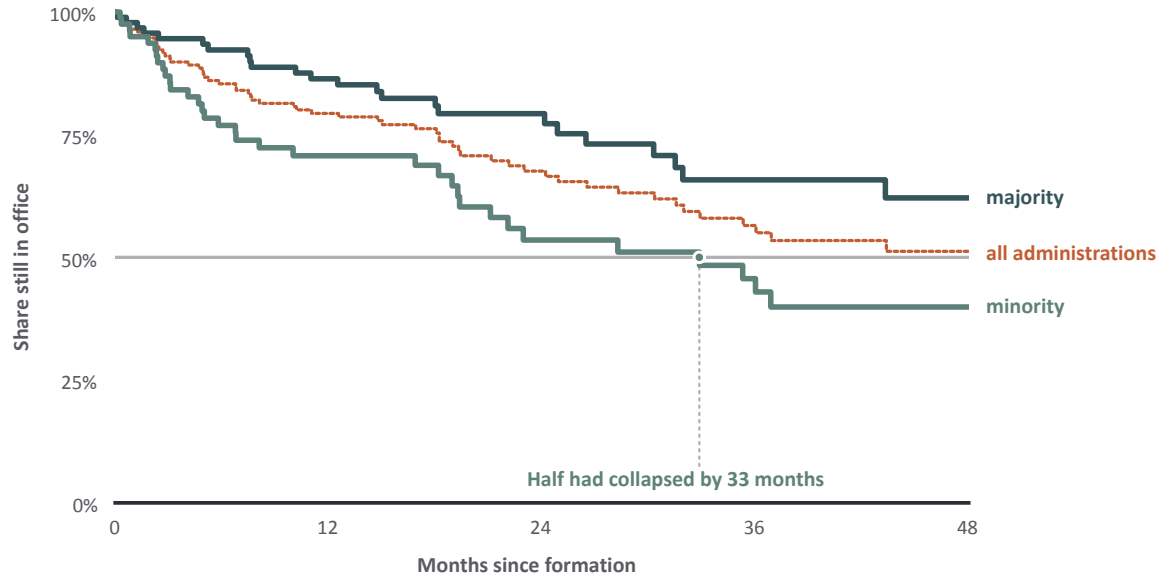


Figure 27. The share of administrations still in office as time passed, by whether the governing parties held a majority.

Like Finding 7, this one is intuitive. A minority coalition, especially one without outside supporters, can in principle be removed by the opposition parties at any time, so its survival depends on the opposition failing to coordinate with each other. The data suggests that in most cases, in the end, the opposition eventually tends to work together and remove the minority coalition from office.

Finding 9: Minority coalitions with a committed outside supporter collapsed at about a third the rate of those without one.

Not all minority governments are the same. As Section 2 discusses, some minority governments were able to secure the support of an external party, which provided 'confidence and supply' without joining the government. This type of arrangement can be a stable equilibrium, provided both sides consider it beneficial. Among minority coalitions, an external supporter adds considerable safety; these collapsed at one-third the rate of comparable minority coalitions that did not have external support.

Read in conjunction with Finding 8, these two estimates suggest that a supporter-sustained minority coalition has roughly the same collapse rate as a majority coalition. If that is true, it would imply that it does not really matter whether an administration reaches the governance threshold through members or supporters; both are equally reliable, so long as the governance threshold is reached. This would be a fascinating finding; however, the supporter estimate rests on 18 administrations and 7 collapses, so for now it is merely a hypothesis, albeit one that is consistent with the data.

It is also worth noting that supporter-sustained minority governments do face a potential threat from one very specific source: the government's own supporter party. Since the government is effectively in a dependency relationship with its supporter, the supporter is usually in a good position to bring down the government and, if it wishes, to anoint its replacement. Nine of the twenty-seven supporter-sustained minority governments in the dataset had collapsed by the cut-off (seven of them fall within the model, which excludes single-party governments). In four of those nine cases, the supporter ended up joining the administration that replaced it.

Finding 10: Donut coalitions collapsed at about two and a half times the rate of other ideological configurations.

One of the counterintuitive findings from the risk model is that ideological structure, in some respects, is less important than expected. Coalitions in which all the members were aligned with one side of the ideological divide did not have a survival advantage over coalitions in which most of the parties had no clear national ideological profile. However, one particular ideological configuration does emerge as a clear risk factor: donut coalitions (which combine parties of the left and the right in order to govern, without a party that sits between them) collapsed at about two and a half times the rate of other coalitions (see Figure 28).

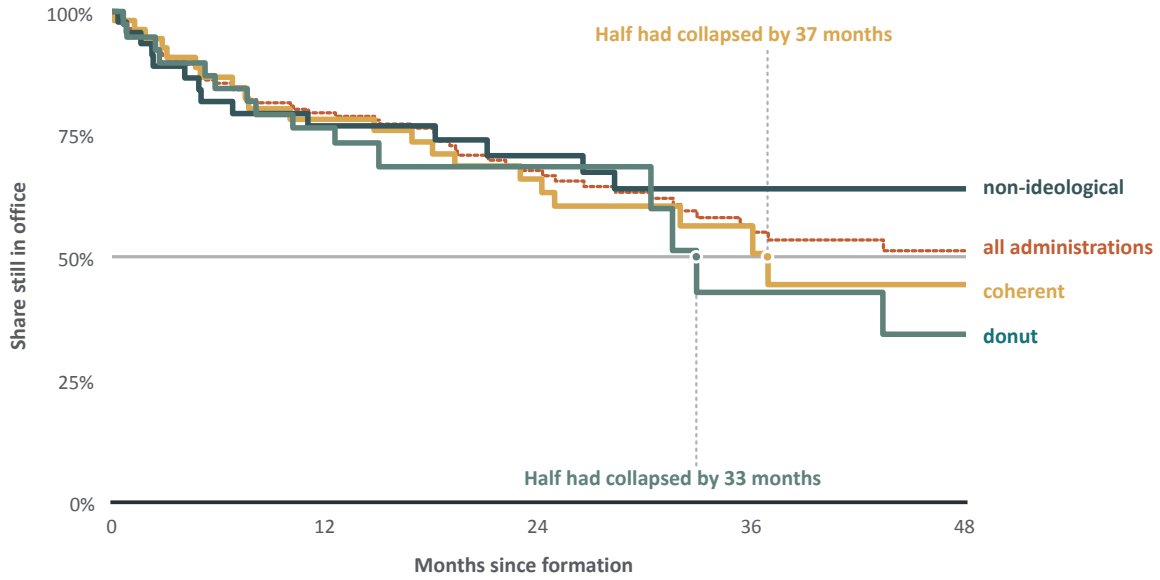


Figure 28. The share of administrations still in office as time passed, by ideological configuration.

The most intuitive explanation for this is that donut coalitions, by definition, combine parties that hold very different policy preferences. In the local sphere, a coalition may be able to paper over such differences for a time, since big-picture policy questions are often less important than basic questions of governance and service delivery. Eventually, however, diverging policy preferences are likely to surface, and this acts as a wedge that drives the coalition apart.

This hypothesis fits the data. In particular, it explains why coalitions that are coded as coherent and those that are coded as non-ideological seem to perform equally well. The real issue is not the *presence* of ideological affinity, but rather the *absence* of diverging policy preferences. If this is true, then we would expect to see that grand coalitions, which also bring together partners that hold divergent policy preferences, would also face an increased risk of premature collapse. However, as Section 2 notes, grand coalitions in the local sphere are extremely rare, so the comparison cannot be tested in this edition of the Coalitions Barometer dataset.

Finding 11: Coalition government in the metros is markedly less stable than elsewhere; metro coalitions are more complex, which explains part of the gap but not all of it.

Coalition politics in metropolitan councils such as Johannesburg and Tshwane generates a large volume of media coverage, and the popular image of the metros is often one of turmoil and 'coalition chaos'. The dataset shows that there is a large amount of truth to this characterisation. Of the 19 metro administrations in the model, 9 collapsed, a rate of 47 percent compared to 34 percent elsewhere. Across all 175 administrations, and counting every kind of ending, the median metro administration lasted 338 days compared to 735 elsewhere. In the model, metro status carries a risk multiplier of about 2.1.

So, yes: metro coalitions are less stable than coalitions elsewhere. The harder question is why. One possible explanation is that metro councils are large and fragmented, so the coalitions they produce tend to be more complex. Among governments that held a majority, metro administrations contained on average 3.4 veto players, compared to 2.3 veto players in non-metro administrations. Metro coalitions were also more likely to exclude the plurality party, although that is already controlled for in the model. In the secondary model fitted to the 93 administrations where the count is meaningful, each additional veto player was associated with collapse at about 1.25 times the rate.

However, coalition complexity on its own does not fully explain the high instability of metro councils. Adding the veto-player count to the model reduces the metro multiplier only slightly, from about 2.1 to 1.9, which would be consistent with two different mechanisms operating simultaneously.

How else might this high rate of political instability be explained? It seems plausible that the high political stakes of governing a metro – the intense media coverage and large budgets, and the possibility for officeholders to convert local success into a national profile – have the effect of intensifying political competition in ways that make it more difficult to hold coalitions together. It also seems plausible that these dynamics would tend to exacerbate the already-tricky problem of trying to hold together a large, complex coalition in which any single member has the power to bring down the government by leaving it.

Overall, metro status and coalition complexity are correlated in the dataset, but there are too few metro collapses in the 2026 dataset to reliably separate their effects. That is a limit of the current data, however, and not evidence that either mechanism is absent.

5. Coalition politics after the GNU

Since June 2024 the ANC and the DA have governed the country together, along with eight other parties, in the arrangement the Coalitions Barometer dataset records as ZA_01 and codes as a grand coalition.

The GNU's first year was plagued by infighting: it almost collapsed due to a dispute over the March 2025 budget (Capa, Gerber and Felix, 2025), and three months later it almost collapsed again after a DA deputy minister, Andrew Whitfield, was removed from the cabinet (Capa, 2025; The Presidency, 2025). By the data cut-off point, however, the arrangement appeared to have stabilised, and the dataset records its membership as unchanged. This section considers whether these developments in the national sphere have influenced local politics in South Africa.

Finding 12: The GNU is in many respects the most anomalous coalition in the country.

The GNU holds 287 of the National Assembly's 400 seats, compared to a governance threshold of 201. Eight of its ten member parties, holding forty-one seats between them, could leave together and the government would still command a majority of 246. Compared with almost any municipal coalition in the Coalitions Barometer dataset, this coalition configuration is extraordinarily unusual. It is the most heavily oversized government in the dataset, and it is a grand coalition, a configuration that occurs municipally just three times in 175 administrations. Finally, it is one of only two coalitions in the entire dataset (along with the KwaZulu-Natal Government of Provincial Unity) in which the ANC and the DA are both coded as members. In structural terms, the national government is a type of coalition that is essentially never produced by South African politics in the local sphere.

It is worth considering the GNU's unusual structural features in relation to the coalition stability model described in Section 4. The two biggest risk factors identified by the model are governing without the plurality party, and governing without a majority. The GNU does not have either of these problems: it is led by the plurality party and it has a massive legislative surplus. Despite its size, the GNU also scores relatively low in terms of complexity, at least if we measure this concept in terms of veto players. The GNU has only two veto players, the ANC and the DA, since the eight smaller members could all leave without reducing it below the governance threshold. The one major risk factor it does have is its ideological heterogeneity: while grand coalitions are too rare to be included in the risk model, the decreased survival rates associated with donut coalitions do suggest that ideologically diverse coalitions can be difficult to sustain. In all other respects, however, the risk model suggests, somewhat surprisingly, that the GNU has a good prospect of surviving to the end of its legislative term.

Finding 13: Cooperation between the ANC and the DA is almost non-existent in the local sphere, and the GNU has not changed that.

As noted above, the core GNU formula of co-governance between the ANC and the DA has not been attempted in any municipality. In the dataset, the ANC is coded as a member of 90 administrations and the DA as a member of 52, and these two sets do not intersect at all. This was true for the 142 administrations formed before June 2024, and it is also true for the 33 administrations that have been formed since then.

The closest case anywhere in the dataset is Witzenberg, where the DA briefly governed in a coalition with GOOD from 22 November 2021 to 21 June 2023, with the ANC coded as a supporter. In three other administrations, two at Karoo Hoogland and one at Laingsburg, one of the pair was a member, and the other's relationship to the government could not be determined from the record. Overall, this is an extraordinarily low level of local cooperation between two parties that are coalition partners at the national level.

Finding 14: The ANC and the DA are displacing each other's governments less frequently than they once did, but this probably is not the result of the GNU.

In the period after the formation of the GNU, the ANC and the DA have continued to aggressively topple each other's local governments by means of MONCs. Across the dataset there are 28 occasions on which a government containing one of them was ended by a MONC and replaced by a government containing the other.

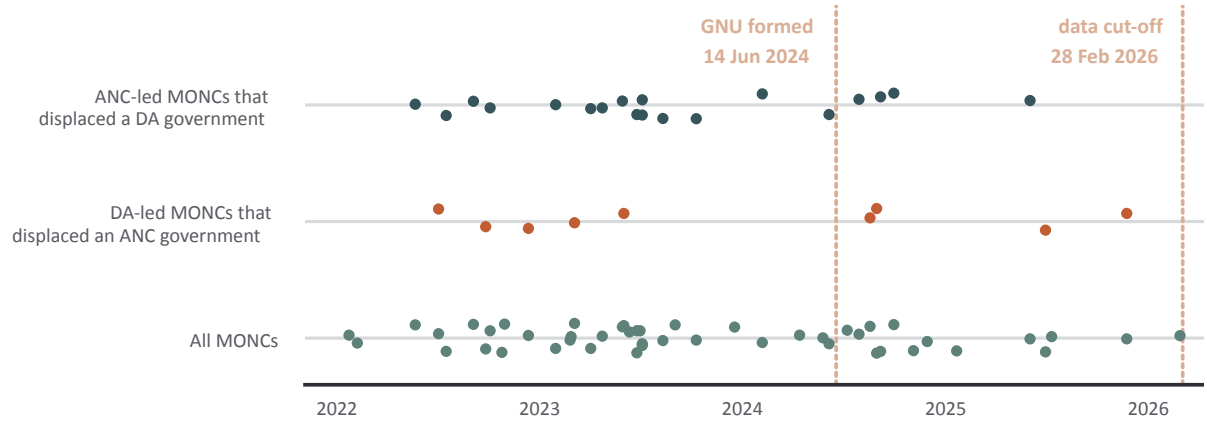


Figure 29. Coalition substitution between the ANC and the DA, compared with all MONCs.

Since the GNU was formed, the rate at which this happens has fallen, from 7.8 to 4.7 such events a year (see Figure 29). However, this probably does not reflect any sort of ANC-DA rapprochement. MONCs in general have become less frequent over the same period, and the fall in ANC-DA substitutions is roughly proportional to that general decline, which suggests that local coalition politics has become more settled overall.

The provincial coalitions

Finding 15: Of the three provincial administrations formed in 2024, Gauteng's resembles some municipal arrangements; the Northern Cape's has parallels in nine local governments; and KwaZulu-Natal's is an atypical anti-plurality arrangement.

The 2024 provincial elections left three provincial legislatures hung. Each of those provinces opted for a very different model of government.

In Gauteng, the ANC lost its majority for the first time, winning 28 of the legislature's 80 seats while remaining comfortably the largest party (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024). For three weeks, it seemed possible that the GNU formula would be reproduced: Panyaza Lesufi was re-elected premier unopposed on 14 June 2024, with the DA seconding his nomination (Moichela, 2024). However, negotiations over the allocation of provincial portfolios failed, and on 3 July the DA abandoned the talks and moved to the opposition benches (Njilo, 2024).

Lesufi then announced a minority government with three small partners: the PA, the IFP and RISE Mzansi, holding 32 seats (40 percent) between them, 9 short of a majority. This gap was covered by the support of the EFF, which held 11 seats. Although the EFF did not initially join the coalition or sign any agreement, it supported the government during a number of key votes, including a DA-sponsored MONC in November 2025, which was defeated by 54 votes to 24 (Mafisa, 2025). The dataset codes this arrangement as a supporter-sustained minority government, anchored by the ANC and supported by the EFF. Of the three provincial coalitions formed after 2024, this is the one whose form recurs most often in the local sphere.

In the Northern Cape, the ANC won exactly half the seats, 15 of 30 (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024), and it chose to govern alone. Zamani Saul was re-elected premier with the support of the FF+ and the PA. Neither of these parties joined the government, and every provincial portfolio went to the ANC. For its part, the ANC stated that it had not entered into a coalition agreement with anyone, and instead described the relationship as a working one (Dyani, 2024). The Coalitions Barometer dataset codes this as a single-party minority government sustained by two supporters, a configuration that has also been attempted in nine local governments.

The most unusual provincial coalition is KwaZulu-Natal. In that province, the MK Party won 37 out of 80 seats in its first election (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024), and the four established parties combined to keep it out of office. The IFP, the ANC, the DA and the National Freedom Party (NFP) formed a coalition under an IFP premier, Thami Ntuli, who was elected by 41 votes to 39 on 14 June 2024 (Ardé, 2024). With 41 seats, exactly at the governance threshold, this was an anti-plurality and minimum-winning coalition with four veto players. According to the stability model described in this report, this is the riskiest coalition configuration ever attempted in South African provincial politics. Indeed, this government has come close to collapse on a number of occasions. It only barely survived an MK-sponsored MONC in December 2025, when the NFP's sole member voted with the coalition despite pressure from her own party to defect (Hlangu, 2025; Ardé, 2025). In January 2026, the NFP announced that it would withdraw (eNCA, 2026), an event that had not taken effect at the data cut-off point. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, the provincial coalition is still in place.

6. Coalitions and governance outcomes

Does coalition instability have a measurable effect on how municipalities are run? This question is important because the deepest worry about the coalition era is that all the political drama, with governments shuffling in and out of power, has real-world governance consequences that may be harmful to the people living under them.

This report tested the most direct version of this question that the current data allows. Each municipality's 2024/2025 audit outcome was compared to the number of coalition collapses it had gone through during the previous four years, for the 78 of the 80 municipalities whose 2024/2025 audit was complete. The audit outcomes come from a panel that MISTRA has maintained since the first Coalitions Barometer, and which now covers four completed financial years.

The collapse of a governing administration is the strongest signal of instability defined in the Coalitions Barometer dataset. Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) audit outcomes, meanwhile, measure the quality of a municipality's record-keeping and its compliance with other elements of municipal financial statutes, which is a useful proxy for administrative effectiveness in South African local government. They allow for consistent comparison because they are collected on the same basis for every municipality, and because they are determined by an external authority rather than being self-reported, they reduce the risk of bias.

Finding 16: There is no statistically reliable association between coalition collapses and audit outcomes.

Before the test was run, the prior assumption was that municipalities that had experienced repeated cycles of 'coalition chaos' (with governments moving in and out of office) would suffer a degradation of their administrative capacity, and that this would show up at the end of the period in the form of worse audit outcomes. However, the test did not find this.

AGSA ranks each municipality on a scale, from best to worst: clean, unqualified with findings, qualified, adverse and disclaimed. Comparing each municipality's first-year and last-year outcomes on this scale, 46 were stable, 19 improved and 13 declined, while 2, Maluti-a-Phofung and Nala, could not be placed because their 2024/2025 audits were still pending.

The relationship can be seen in Figure 30. The line in the chart slopes downwards, showing that municipalities that experienced more collapses did indeed perform very slightly worse on average. But the spread in each column is wide, and only five municipalities had three or more collapses, so the right-hand end of the line rests on very few cases. The overall relationship does not meet any conventional standard of statistical significance and is effectively indistinguishable from random chance.

That said, 78 municipalities is a small sample for a test like this. It is possible that collapses do affect audit outcomes, and that the effect is simply too small to detect in the current version of the dataset. Appendix B reports the test in detail.

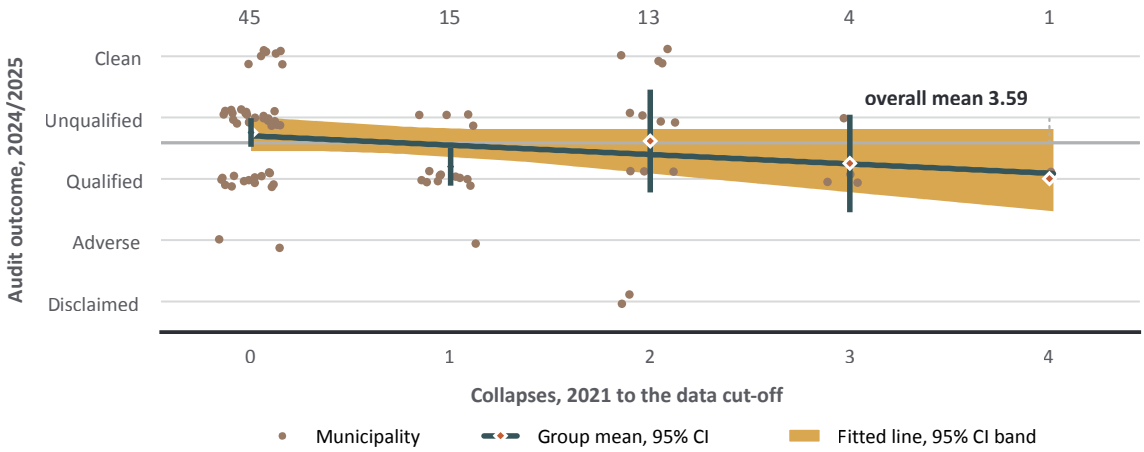


Figure 30. Collapse count and the 2024/2025 audit outcome, for the 78 municipalities whose audit was complete. Each dot is a municipality, and the number above each column is the count of municipalities in it.

What does this finding mean? It could be good news – an indication that municipal governments are managing to insulate their technical capacity from instability at the political level. However, it could also mean that the test is measuring the wrong thing. Audit outcomes are only one possible measure of the quality of governance, and a fairly narrow and technical one; they do not tell us whether the citizens of a particular municipality have access to clean water, working roads or reliable refuse collection. Running the same test against other indicators of municipal service delivery might prove informative.

Furthermore, even if coalition instability is correlated with poor governance, this would not prove that the former is causing the latter. It would also be possible that administrative weakness makes a governing coalition harder to hold together, or that other factors (such as poverty or institutional weakness predating 2021) are driving both problems at once.

Overall, more research is needed to understand the relationship between coalition instability and governance quality in South Africa. What this report can say is that there is some suggestive evidence that the problem might be smaller than is often assumed.

Conclusion

This report began by describing the DA-led coalition that took office in !Kheis in November 2021. That government had two of the risk factors that this report has identified as being particularly dangerous: it tried to govern without the plurality party and without a legislative majority. Even so, it managed to survive a contested MONC, a court case and the defection of its outside supporter. But then it fell to a by-election, triggered when one of its own councillors crossed over to a rival party. When most South Africans think about coalition politics, this is probably the sort of chaotic picture they have in mind.

That picture contains a great deal of truth. Since the 2021 LGE, MONCs, defections and court cases have all been routine features of politics in hung councils. Any administration that managed to last from 2021 to the data cut-off point will probably have spent a great deal of time worrying about how to placate its partners and ensure its own survival. And yet the Coalitions Barometer dataset shows that many of these administrations did, in fact, survive. Of the 70 administrations formed in hung councils in the inaugural wave, 23 were still in office at the cut-off in the same form in which they were founded, and 22 had collapsed. Others had rebuilt themselves, changing the coalition around them while keeping the same anchor party in power. A true collapse, in which the largest governing party lost office, was less common than the headlines suggest: 46 of the 80 municipalities in the dataset never experienced one.

Over time, the coalition landscape has partially stabilised. The government configurations this report has identified as particularly fragile have tended to fail, and have thus become rarer over time. Apart from anti-plurality coalitions and minority coalitions, these also included donut coalitions, in which parties from the left and the right governed together while excluding a party between them. Complex coalitions, which contain many veto players, also appear to have been risky. However, it is difficult to determine the extent of this from the data because complex coalitions are concentrated in the metropolitan areas where instability is already very high.

Political parties presumably do not wish to form unstable governments. They operate under a set of constrained choices that are created by the voters, and they then try to advance their political interests and policy preferences. Within these constraints, it is possible to identify a number of patterns that reveal something about each party's idiosyncrasies. The ANC was sometimes willing to serve under a smaller partner's mayor in coalitions where it was the largest member; the DA was not. The IFP used its geographically concentrated support to join and lead governments; the EFF used its dispersed support to exert influence in coalitions it did not lead.

In 2024, South African politics was greatly altered by the formation of the GNU, a ten-party coalition that included both the ANC and the DA. And yet, seen from the local sphere of government, perhaps the most striking thing about the GNU is how little it has changed. The core GNU model, consisting of an oversized grand coalition that includes both the ANC and the DA as members, has never been attempted in any local council. Instead, local parties have continued to form minimum-winning coalitions, usually between partners without deep ideological differences. The ANC and the DA have continued to topple each other with MONCs, albeit at a slowing rate. The most consequential realignment in the local sphere since 2021 was arguably the EFF's reorientation towards the ANC, and yet it sat in opposition to the ANC in the National Assembly throughout that period. It is almost as if, since 2024, national and local coalition politics have run on two separate tracks that only rarely interact with each other.

What does all this suggest about the future of coalition politics in South Africa? In many respects, it seems likely that coalition politics is going to become even more difficult. The voting patterns that produce hung councils are created by the electorate, not by politicians, and for several electoral cycles, South African voters have been dividing their support among a growing number of parties. If the trend towards fragmentation continues in the

2026 LGE, then hung councils will be more numerous, and will require more complex coalitions to reach the governance threshold. If South Africa is to have functional government in the local sphere, the political parties will likely have to develop stronger habits of cooperation, create norms of crafting agreements and sticking to them, and provide the public with greater transparency about what has been agreed to.

Finally, an important goal going forward will be to understand how coalition politics affects the lives of ordinary citizens: whether instability in the political system influences the quality of governance and service delivery that South Africans receive from their governments.

This report has taken a brief exploratory look at the issue. MISTRA publishes the Coalitions Barometer dataset alongside this report so that these questions can be explored more thoroughly going forward.

Appendix A: How the dataset was built

The findings in this report are all based on the dataset published alongside it, the MISTRA Coalitions Barometer dataset. This appendix explains how that dataset was built, and why MISTRA believes it can be trusted as a research instrument.

Table 4. The 80 municipalities in the dataset, their province and how each became hung

Municipality	Province	Code	Became hung	Still in at cut-off?
Blue Crane Route	Eastern Cape	BCR	24 April 2024, by-election	yes
Dr Beyers Naudé	Eastern Cape	BN	2021 LGE	yes
KouKamma	Eastern Cape	KKM	2021 LGE	yes
Nelson Mandela Bay	Eastern Cape	NMB	2021 LGE	yes
Maluti-a-Phofung	Free State	MAP	2021 LGE	yes
Metsimaholo	Free State	MTS	2021 LGE	yes
Moqhaka	Free State	MOQ	2021 LGE	yes
Nala	Free State	NAL	2021 LGE	yes
City of Ekurhuleni	Gauteng	EKU	2021 LGE	yes
City of Tshwane	Gauteng	TSH	2021 LGE	yes
Emfuleni	Gauteng	EMF	2021 LGE	yes
Johannesburg	Gauteng	JHB	2021 LGE	yes
Lesedi	Gauteng	LES	2021 LGE	yes
Merafong City	Gauteng	MRF	2021 LGE	no
Mogale City	Gauteng	MGC	2021 LGE	yes
Rand West City	Gauteng	RWC	2021 LGE	yes
AbaQulusi	KwaZulu-Natal	ABQ	2021 LGE	yes
Alfred Duma	KwaZulu-Natal	ALD	2021 LGE	yes
Dannhauser	KwaZulu-Natal	DAN	2021 LGE	yes
KwaDukuza	KwaZulu-Natal	KWA	2021 LGE	yes

Municipality	Province	Code	Became hung	Still in at cut-off?
Mandeni	KwaZulu-Natal	MAN	26 November 2025, by-election	yes
Maphumulo	KwaZulu-Natal	MPH	2021 LGE	yes
Msunduzi	KwaZulu-Natal	MSU	2021 LGE	yes
Mthonjaneni	KwaZulu-Natal	MTJ	2021 LGE	no
Mtubatuba	KwaZulu-Natal	MTB	2021 LGE	yes
Newcastle	KwaZulu-Natal	NEW	2021 LGE	yes
Nongoma	KwaZulu-Natal	NON	2021 LGE	yes
Okhahlamba	KwaZulu-Natal	OKH	2021 LGE	yes
eDumbe	KwaZulu-Natal	EDU	2021 LGE	yes
eMadlangeni	KwaZulu-Natal	EML	2021 LGE	yes
eNdumeni	KwaZulu-Natal	END	2021 LGE	yes
eThekwini	KwaZulu-Natal	ETH	2021 LGE	yes
iNkosi Langalibalele	KwaZulu-Natal	ILB	2021 LGE	yes
uMdoni	KwaZulu-Natal	UMD	2021 LGE	yes
uMhlabuyalingana	KwaZulu-Natal	UMH	2021 LGE	yes
uMhlathuze	KwaZulu-Natal	UML	2021 LGE	yes
uMuziwabantu	KwaZulu-Natal	UMZ	2021 LGE	yes
uMvoti	KwaZulu-Natal	UMV	2021 LGE	yes
uMzumbe	KwaZulu-Natal	MZU	19 June 2024, by-election	yes
uPhongolo	KwaZulu-Natal	UPO	2 April 2025, by-election	yes
Modimolle-Mookgophong	Limpopo	MDM	2021 LGE	yes
Thabazimbi	Limpopo	TBZ	2021 LGE	yes
Govan Mbeki	Mpumalanga	GVM	2021 LGE	yes
Lekwa	Mpumalanga	LEK	2021 LGE	yes
Steve Tshwete	Mpumalanga	STT	2021 LGE	yes
eMalahleni	Mpumalanga	EMA	1 October 2025, by-election	yes
Ditsobotla	North West	DTS	14 December 2022, whole-of-council election after dissolution	yes
JB Marks	North West	JBM	2021 LGE	yes
Lekwa-Teemane	North West	LKT	2021 LGE	yes
Maquassi Hills	North West	MAQ	4 December 2024, by-election	yes
Rustenburg	North West	RUS	2021 LGE	yes
!Kheis	Northern Cape	KHE	2021 LGE	no
Gamagara	Northern Cape	GAM	2021 LGE	yes
Hantam	Northern Cape	HAN	2021 LGE	yes
Kareeberg	Northern Cape	KRB	2021 LGE	yes

Municipality	Province	Code	Became hung	Still in at cut-off?
Karoo Hoogland	Northern Cape	KHO	2021 LGE	yes
Kgatelopele	Northern Cape	KGT	2021 LGE	yes
Nama Khoi	Northern Cape	NAK	2021 LGE	yes
Phokwane	Northern Cape	PHK	20 April 2022, by-election	yes
Siyancuma	Northern Cape	SYC	2021 LGE	yes
Siyathemba	Northern Cape	SYT	2021 LGE	yes
Sol Plaatje	Northern Cape	SOL	11 October 2023, by-election	no
Thembelihle	Northern Cape	TBL	2021 LGE	yes
Beaufort West	Western Cape	BWE	2021 LGE	no
Bitou	Western Cape	BIT	2021 LGE	yes
Breede Valley	Western Cape	BRV	2021 LGE	yes
Cape Agulhas	Western Cape	CAG	2021 LGE	yes
Cederberg	Western Cape	CED	2021 LGE	yes
George	Western Cape	GEO	2021 LGE	yes
Kannaland	Western Cape	KAN	2021 LGE	yes
Knysna	Western Cape	KNY	2021 LGE	yes
Laingsburg	Western Cape	LGB	2021 LGE	yes
Langeberg	Western Cape	LAN	2021 LGE	yes
Matzikama	Western Cape	MAT	2021 LGE	yes
Oudtshoorn	Western Cape	OUD	2021 LGE	yes
Prince Albert	Western Cape	PRA	2021 LGE	no
Saldanha Bay	Western Cape	SAL	2021 LGE	yes
Swellendam	Western Cape	SWD	22 March 2023, by-election	yes
Theewaterskloof	Western Cape	TWK	2021 LGE	yes
Witzenberg	Western Cape	WIT	2021 LGE	yes

What is a coalition government?

When MISTRA first began working on the 2026 edition of the Coalitions Barometer, the intention was to release it as a structured dataset, a format that would allow MISTRA and other researchers to ask new kinds of questions about South African politics. What the research team did not initially anticipate was how quickly this new format would confront it with a set of philosophical problems. To record coalitions in a structured format, it was necessary to decide, precisely and consistently, what was being counted. And to do that, the team had to think about South African politics in a new way.

In the first place: what is a coalition government? Most people can recognise one when they see it: if a reader were to see in the newspaper that Johannesburg is now governed by an 'ANC-EFF coalition', this would probably convey a fairly accurate understanding of what the arrangement entails. Nevertheless, defining the concept tightly enough to code it in a dataset proved surprisingly difficult.

One option would be to treat a coalition in legalistic terms, as an agreement between two or more political parties. This works in some countries, where formal coalition agreements are common, but it does not work in the South African case. There is no 'coalition register' in which South African parties declare which coalitions they belong to. Some coalitions are based on a signed document, but most are not; in this research, as in previous MISTRA Coalitions Barometers, the research team has found little evidence of coalition formalisation, as discussed in the Introduction.

Another option would be to define a coalition as a set of political behaviours, for example when a group of parties agree to share the executive offices of a council. Here too there are problems. While certain forms of political behaviour are typically associated with coalitions, they tend to be inconsistent, and none is dispositive. In some areas coalitions share executive office; in others they do not. In some municipalities the research team has seen parties engage in seemingly incongruous behaviour, such as sponsoring MONCs against their own coalition partners. Eventually the research team had to concede that there is no single observable behaviour, or set of behaviours, that can serve as a reliable proxy for the existence of a coalition.

The breakthrough came when the research team began to think of coalitions as social constructs. In this view, a coalition exists where a government is formed by a group of parties that believe themselves to be part of a coalition and that recognise one another as governing partners. It is this act of mutual recognition, rather than a document or a particular pattern of conduct, that constitutes the coalition.

A social-constructivist understanding of coalition governance may seem vague. In practice, though, once the concept was in place it allowed the research team to develop a clear standard of evidence that could be applied consistently in every region of the country. That standard takes the parties' own understandings seriously, and the coding establishes, from the parties' own perspective, who is a member of a coalition, who is a supporter of it, and who is in opposition.

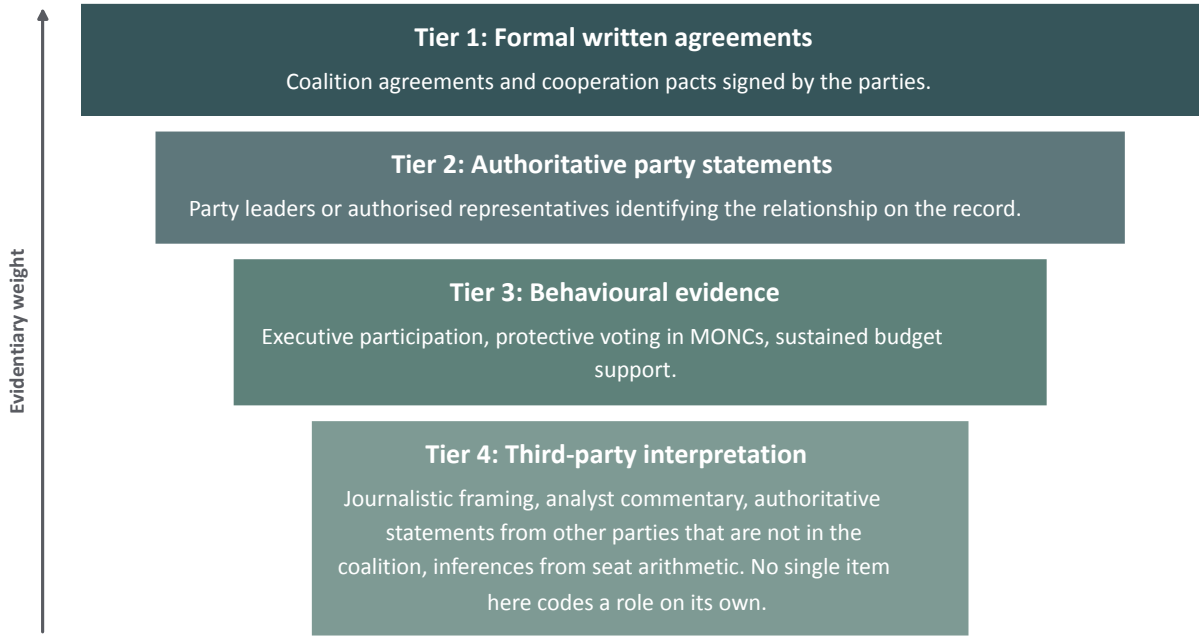


Figure 31. The evidence hierarchy for coalition membership.

At the highest tier of the report's evidence hierarchy are formal coalition agreements, in the relatively rare cases where they exist. (See Figure 31.) This is not because a formal agreement is what makes a coalition, but rather because a signed agreement, where one exists, provides the strongest possible evidence that the parties have recognised one another as partners.

The second tier of evidence consists of first-hand statements by the principals: local political leaders, government officials and party insiders, and press statements by the parties themselves. In most municipalities this is the highest tier of evidence practically available. Although such statements tend to be less precise than formal agreements, they nevertheless offer direct first-hand insight into whether a coalition exists and who its members are.

At the third tier there are behavioural observations. The coders look at a suspected coalition and ask whether it shows the behaviour expected of parties that regard one another as partners: voting together to inaugurate a government, supporting one another's budgets and policy initiatives, sharing executive offices, and protecting one another from outside threats such as MONCs. On its own, each of these is an unreliable indicator. There are many reasons a party might cast an inaugural vote for a government it opposes, for example: perhaps it simply sees no better alternative. The record quite often shows parties behaving in ways seemingly at odds with their formal coalition status. However, where the coders observe repeated instances of parties behaving as partners, this is treated as evidence that a coalition exists, even if the parties themselves remain circumspect about it.

At the fourth and lowest tier, there are statements by informed third parties such as journalists, academics and political analysts, including MISTRA's own Coalitions Barometers. This tier also includes inferences drawn from political arithmetic: where a governing party sits below the governance threshold but consistently wins legislative votes and survives attempted MONCs, it may be inferred that it has informal coalition partners or outside supporters. The coding never relies on this lowest tier alone; it is used to validate or support inferences drawn from higher-tier evidence, not to establish a coalition by itself.

Through this framework the coding integrates multiple forms of evidence to answer a single underlying question: do the parties believe themselves to be members of a coalition, and do they recognise one another as members of the same coalition?

When does a coalition begin and end?

Once the research team had a clear and consistent understanding of what a South African coalition is, it faced an even trickier problem: when does a coalition begin, and when does it end?

In most cases, the point at which a coalition ends is fairly obvious. One day a government is in power, and the next it collapses all at once: the chief executive, the key members and perhaps the ideological character of the government all change at the same time. In these cases, identifying the point at which the ruling coalition changed is easy.

However, there are also cases where a coalition changes in small ways. For example, what if one small party leaves the government, but the other coalition members remain in place, and the government continues to govern? Or a mayor is forced out through a MONC, but is replaced by a new candidate from the same governing parties? What if a governing coalition loses a by-election and slips into being a minority government, but nevertheless continues to govern? Which of these situations, if any, should be considered the start of a new coalition government?

As the research team considered this problem of periodisation, it was frequently reminded of a famous philosophical puzzle: the ship of Theseus. The ship in which Theseus, the hero-king of Athens in Greek mythology, returned to Athens was preserved by the Athenians, who replaced its planks one at a time as they rotted, until eventually no original plank remained. Is that still the same ship, and if not, at what point can we say that a new ship has replaced the old one? A coalition government is similar: it can continue to exist even while individual components are changed, but at some point, if enough components are changed, it becomes reasonable to say that the old government has ended and a new one has replaced it. The question is where to draw that line.

At first, the research team tried to look for a single clear-cut rule that would determine when a coalition ends, but every rule the research team considered turned out to have edge cases in which it produced the wrong result. For example, a change in the chief executive does not prove that a coalition has been replaced. At Laingsburg, the mayoralty passed from the PA to the ANC and then back to the PA, but the same overall ANC-PA-Karoo Democratic

Force (KDF) coalition remained in place throughout the period. At Kannaland, the reverse happened: when the ANC withdrew from the governing coalition in late 2021, the coalition changed from one between the Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa (ICOSA), the ANC and the Kannaland Independent Party (KIP) to one between ICOSA and KIP alone, while the same mayor remained in place across the change. This might suggest that the key factor is political parties, rather than personnel. However, that also produces counterintuitive results. A large coalition that possesses a substantial legislative surplus can survive the loss of a single member without significantly changing either the government's legislative support base or its political character.

Perhaps governments should instead be periodised according to their structural characteristics, for example their ability to meet the governance threshold. But this would also have strange implications: at Cederberg, a by-election cost the governing ANC-PA coalition a seat and left it short of a majority for the rest of its time in office, and yet to all outward appearances the government remained the same: the same member parties, the same mayor and the same coalition, which continued to govern until it was removed by a MONC months later. Nobody in Cederberg would have perceived themselves as suddenly living under a new government.

To solve this problem, the research team approached it from a social-constructivist point of view, imagining a perfectly informed observer within the municipality: a hypothetical voter who is entirely aware of everything that transpires in the political record. The question then becomes whether such a person would subjectively perceive their government as having changed. Such an observer would not think about their government in terms of only one variable, but would consider multiple factors: the parties, the mayor and the political character of the government.

Applied in coding, this standard means that rather than privileging any single indicator over the others, the coders look for multiple and convergent signals that a government has changed. These might include the coalition's membership, the executive team, the coalition's political arithmetic, its formalisation status, and the government's ideological orientation. None of these signals on its own is proof that the government has changed, but where two or three of them change at the same time, this is often a strong indication that it has.

Admittedly, this is one area where the dataset relies on the judgement of human coders; no mechanical rule could adequately tame the ship-of-Theseus problem, and not everybody will agree with every decision about where the boundaries were drawn. Nevertheless, the judgement was exercised from a clear set of principles, and MISTRA believes it was applied consistently.

Other notes

The ideological configuration of a coalition (coherent, non-ideological, donut or grand) depends on whether each member party is read as belonging to the left or the right of South African politics, and the dataset takes a position on that for every party that has governed. No numerical scale is used. The placements are the research team's expert coding, taking into account the parties' own professed positions as well as their revealed preferences. Similar combinations of parties were coded consistently across the dataset. All of the municipal coding, including ideological configurations, was completed before any of the survival analysis was run.

In cases where rival groups claimed to have installed a government, the dataset records the administration that was installed and exercised the powers of office, even if a court later ruled in favour of its rival. This is because a later ruling that an administration was illegitimate does not change the political reality that it existed and exercised power for a time. If the evidence does not show who exercised the office, the row follows the lawful authority that the courts confirmed.

A veto player is defined as a member party whose departure alone would take the member parties' combined number of seats below the governance threshold; supporter seats are not taken into account for this calculation. The count is recorded only for administrations whose member parties met the governance threshold in the first place; where they did not, no count is recorded, because every member would register as a veto player and the measure would carry no information.

The dataset stops on 28 February 2026 and no administration is coded beyond that date.

Appendix B: Statistical methods and tests

The body of this report states statistical results in plain terms. This appendix records the methods and the tests behind them, for readers who want them, in the order the results appear. The results below were generated using the 2026 edition of the Coalitions Barometer dataset, which has a data cut-off of 28 February 2026.

Populations and units

There are three populations that recur throughout this report: the inaugural wave (70 administrations, the first administration of each municipality left hung by the 2021 election), the municipalities covered in the dataset (80), and the total number of municipal administrations (175, of which 101 had ended by the cut-off and 74 were in office).

The unit of analysis throughout is the administration. Administrations can end in different ways. 'Any ending' counts every terminated administration as an event. By contrast, 'collapse' is defined as an ending in which the coalition's largest member lost office, which in the codebook's terms is a transition type of 'replacement by coalition', 'replacement by majority' or 'reversal'; every other ending is censored at its date.

The 'collapse' rule follows the largest member, defined as the member party with the most seats and, in an exact tie, the party of the inaugural mayor; it does not follow the mayoralty itself. The two 'court order' endings in which a court restored the same coalition ('reconstitution') are therefore not counted as collapses. The five endings in which a court reversed an installation in favour of the previous government ('reversal') are. Of the 40 non-collapse endings that were followed by a new coalition, ten changed the mayor; in four of them the mayor's party changed.

Two conventions apply throughout the report. Every median is a Kaplan-Meier median unless otherwise stated. Where the report counts days of mayoral office, it counts the days governed by administrations that took office under a mayor of the party named, because the dataset records the mayor at formation, and a mayor replaced within a single administration is not visible to it.

Survival estimates

The model in Section 4 distinguishes between descriptive survival estimates and regression-based risk estimates. The survival estimates show how long administrations lasted under different event definitions. The Cox models then ask whether particular coalition characteristics are associated with faster collapse once other measured characteristics are held constant.

Durations are estimated with the Kaplan-Meier method, which uses the administrations still in office at the cut-off as evidence (they survived at least this long) rather than discarding them. Under the 'any ending' definition (175 administrations, 101 events) the median is 651 days, with survival of 0.699 at 12 months, 0.472 at 24 and 0.370 at 36. Under the 'collapse' definition (175 administrations, 58 events) the median is not reached, with survival of 0.794, 0.676 and 0.565, respectively, at the same horizons; because more than half of the administrations were still in office and had never collapsed at the end of follow-up, the curve never falls to 0.5 and no median exists within the observed period.

Because rebuilds compete with collapses, the share of administrations that had collapsed by a given time is reported as the Aalen-Johansen cumulative incidence rather than as one minus the Kaplan-Meier estimate: 0.1945 at 12 months, 0.2838 at 24, 0.3595 at 36 and 0.3934 at 48.

Censoring is assumed uninformative. Because the 2026 LGE will end every administration that is still open, this is an approximation; the completed-term calculation that becomes possible after that election is logged as a check for the next edition.

Fifty inaugural-wave administrations carry a start date of 22 November 2021. For 30 of them the day is attested; for 20 it is the dataset's convention for an inauguration attested to the week but not the day, disclosed on the row. Fifteen further rows carry an approximate start date with the basis recorded. No result in this report is sensitive to these conventions at the resolution reported.

Life tables

Table 5 sets out conditional annual risk under both 'any event' and 'collapse' definitions. Under the 'any ending' definition, risk peaks in the second year; under the 'collapse' definition, it does not. The difference is the rebuilds, which cluster in the middle period, and in particular the ten KwaZulu-Natal endings of 30 January 2023, which resulted in nine rebuilds and one exit to an outright majority.

Table 5. Conditional annual risk, computed as events divided by the number at risk less half the withdrawals during the year, under both event definitions; q is that risk for the year

Year of life	At risk	Any ending: events	q	Collapse: events	q
1	175	51	0.301	33	0.206
2	113	34	0.325	13	0.138
3	62	12	0.214	9	0.165
4	38	4	0.123	3	0.094

The instability model

Specification. The model is a Cox proportional hazards regression at the administration level, with collapse as the event and every other ending censored at its date. The primary fit uses the 143 multi-party administrations (51 events), excluding the 32 single-party administrations on the grounds that a single-party government is not a coalition. Standard errors are clustered by municipality, since 46 municipalities contribute more than one administration. Formation cohort enters as a stratum rather than a covariate. Table 6 reports the fit.

Table 6. The primary specification: 143 administrations, 51 events, concordance 0.744; p is the probability of a hazard ratio at least this far from 1 if the factor had no effect

Covariate	Hazard ratio	95% CI	p
Anti-plurality	3.92	2.11 to 7.29	<0.001
Minority	2.80	1.43 to 5.48	0.003
Donut configuration	2.43	1.17 to 5.06	0.017
Supporter-sustained	0.31	0.13 to 0.77	0.012
Ideologically coherent	1.38	0.68 to 2.81	0.377

Three rules hold throughout this section. No category is retained with fewer than five events. Every term is refitted with each municipality in the model base left out in turn, 71 refits in all, and the results say where a term survives them. And the veto-player count is carried in a separate model rather than in the primary specification. The count is defined only where the member parties themselves meet the governance threshold; where they do not, the quantity it returns is the number of parties in government rather than the number that could break a majority, and the two are not the same variable. Codebook version 0.85.0 records the field as blank on those rows, and the primary specification therefore carries no veto term.

Anti-plurality. Within the model population, 49 administrations governed without the plurality party and 32 of them collapsed, compared to 13 of the 78 that were led by it; Section 4 quotes the corresponding figures on the full dataset. The multiplier does not work through the fragmented arithmetic that governing without the plurality party forces. The model was built up in stages to test this: the term is significant at every stage, and its magnitude is not materially reduced by the addition of the other structural covariates. Within the anti-plurality administrations alone, complexity does not independently predict collapse, so the effect is not simply fragmentation under another name.

Minority and supporter-sustained. These two terms are nested and must be read together. Every supporter-sustained administration in the dataset is also a minority administration, and no non-minority administration is supporter-sustained, so the supporter-sustained coefficient compares sustained minorities with everything else. Read jointly, an unsustained minority government collapsed at about 2.8 times the rate of a majority coalition, and a sustained one is estimated at close to the ordinary rate. The supporter term rests on 18 administrations and 7 collapses.

Ideology. The ideology dummies are measured relative to a non-ideological reference, with the three grand coalitions pooled into it. The donut configuration is significant. Ideological coherence is not, and it is the one term in Table 6 that fails the leave-one-municipality-out refits, which is why the report does not present it as a finding.

The majority-coalition model. Fitted to the 93 administrations whose members met the governance threshold, with the same controls, each additional veto player was associated with collapse at about 1.25 times the rate (95 percent CI 0.94 to 1.68) on 24 collapses. The point estimate is stable across specifications, but on 24 collapses it is not statistically significant at conventional levels, which is how the body reports it. On the same 93 administrations, a plain count of member parties reads 0.90 and points the other way, so the veto count is not simply a party count in disguise. The dataset supports the veto count as the measure of coalition complexity, but on 24 collapses it is

not large enough to establish that pivotality rather than size is the mechanism. An interaction form that keeps the veto term in the 143-row model but switches it off on minority rows returns 1.32 (p 0.024) and survives 70 of 71 refits. It is not the primary specification because it competes with metropolitan status, falling to 1.19 (p 0.18) when metro status is added, and its likelihood contribution does not support its Wald test.

Metro status and council size. Fitted alone, metropolitan status carries a hazard ratio of 1.94 (p 0.020); with the primary terms added, the multiplier is 2.13 (p 0.016), and it moves only between 1.90 and 2.13 across every specification tested. Metro status and the veto-player count cannot be separated on this dataset. Each is significant alone and neither is significant with the other present, on 19 metro administrations and 9 metro collapses, and the fit on the 93 administrations that would settle it carries 3 metro events, below the 5-event floor. Adding the veto term shrinks the metro coefficient only slightly, from 2.13 to 1.90, which leans towards two mechanisms operating together rather than one, without establishing it. Total council seats cannot be entered as a separate term: it correlates with metro status at 0.93. Table 7 compares the two groups. Administrations, collapses, collapse share and anti-plurality share are taken on the 143-row model base. The Kaplan-Meier median is taken on all 175 administrations under the any-ending definition, where the metro group has 20 rows and 15 events. The mean veto-player count is taken over the rows where it is defined, 8 of the 19 metro administrations and 85 of the 124 non-metro ones, which together are the 93-administration majority base.

Table 7. Metro and non-metro administrations compared

	Administrations	Collapses	Collapse share	Kaplan-Meier median	Mean veto players	Anti-plurality share
Metro	19	9	47.4%	338 days	3.38	42.1%
Non-metro	124	42	33.9%	735 days	2.34	33.1%

Checks on the whole model. Two further checks were run. First, the primary specification was refitted with every ending counted as an event (101 events on all rows; 85 on the multi-party base). Anti-plurality and minority are stable in direction and significance under both definitions, and the donut configuration is significant under both; the veto-player term weakens to 1.27 (p 0.09) on 85 events when every ending counts, which is the direction an arithmetic veto measure should move. Second, a cause-specific analysis treated each manner of ending as its own event, with the others censored. Anti-plurality raises the hazard of 'replacement by coalition' (3.62, p 0.0002, on 44 events) and does nothing to the hazard of a rebuild (0.91, p 0.81, on 30 events); minority does the same (2.99, p 0.0003 and 1.15, p 0.82); the donut effect does not localise to either. Cumulative incidence by manner of ending (Figure 23) shows replacement accruing throughout, while rebuilds level off after the second year. These analyses were exploratory, run after the primary model with predictions stated in advance. Across the leave-one-municipality-out refits, every term in Table 6 except ideological coherence survives all 71.

Substitution definitions

The GNU section's substitution count uses the report's own definition: a boundary where the outgoing administration ends by a MONC, one of the ANC/DA pair is a member of the outgoing administration, and the other is a member of its successor (28 events). Before and after rates are annualised over unequal windows (30.9 months before 14 June 2024, 20.5 after) and reported alongside the all-cause motion count in each window (33 and 14) as the base rate.

The governance tests

The association between collapse counts and the 2024/2025 outcome is a Spearman rank correlation: rho -0.185 (n = 78), p 0.106. An ordinary least squares slope on the same data is -0.150 (p 0.132, R-squared 0.03). Neither test distinguishes the association from zero at conventional levels, and the R-squared indicates that collapse counts account for about three percent of the variation in audit outcomes. With 78 municipalities the test has limited power against a modest true effect.

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