

Image 3 — Research Document

The 34-Year Battle for Community Control over Government

"The Constitution is our shield. The people are our strength. Accountability is our weapon."— Plan to Save South Africa

★ HISTORIC MILESTONE ★

2027: The First Municipal Election Under the New Electoral Amendment Act of 2023

For the first time in South Africa's 32-year democratic history, communities have the full legal right to run their municipalities completely free from political party interference. The 2027 Local Government Municipal Elections are not just another election — they are the culmination of a 34-year battle fought in the streets, in the courts, and in the hearts of every South African community.

Part One: Research Summary

The struggle for community control over local government in South Africa has been a protracted 34-year battle, beginning with the transition negotiations of 1992. From the moment political parties took control of municipalities after 1994, citizens and ratepayers' associations began fighting back against the monopolisation of power. Decisions that should have been made in the interest of communities were instead made in the interest of political parties headquartered in Pretoria and Cape Town. The result has been catastrophic: 30%+ unemployment sustained for three decades, 60%+ youth unemployment, collapsed water and electricity infrastructure, and hundreds of billions of rands diverted through state capture.

The decisive legal turning point came on **11 June 2020**, when the Constitutional Court handed down its landmark ruling in *New Nation Movement NPC and Others v President of the Republic of South Africa* [2020] ZACC 11. The Court declared the Electoral Act of 1998 unconstitutional, finding that forcing citizens to participate in elections only through political parties unjustifiably violated their constitutional rights to freedom of association and political participation under Sections 18 and 19 of the Constitution [2](#). Parliament was ordered to remedy the defect within 24 months.

After extensive public consultation and two deadline extensions, the **Electoral Amendment Act, No. 1 of 2023** was signed into law by President Ramaphosa on **17 April 2023** [4](#). This Act gave full legislative force to the Constitutional Court ruling. For the **2024 National and Provincial Elections**, independent candidates were permitted to contest seats in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures for the first time in South Africa's democratic history.

But the most significant milestone is still ahead.

The **2027 Local Government Municipal Elections** — to be held between November 2026 and January 2027 — will be the **first full municipal election cycle in which communities can field fully organised, IEC-registered independent candidates**, protected by law from political party interference, to contest every ward in every municipality across South Africa. This is the election that the 34-year battle was always building toward. Independent ward candidates have technically always been permitted at municipal level, but never before have they been able to operate under a framework that gives them legal protection, organisational support, and constitutional backing all at once.

Organisations like the **Independent Ratepayers Association of South Africa (IRASA)**, established in 2011 as a People's Shield for independent candidates, have spent over a decade preparing communities for exactly this moment [3](#). The **Garden Route First** initiative in the Eden District is the proof-of-concept model: an independent, non-political party registered with the IEC to protect community-elected councillors from political interference in municipalities, as permitted under South African law. Their goal is to contest all 90 councillor posts across the 7 municipalities of the Garden Route District Municipality in 2027 — demonstrating that communities can govern themselves without political party control.

Further empowering communities is the **Koingnaas precedent**, which established that ratepayers have legal standing to challenge municipalities that fail to deliver services, and to arrange alternative delivery mechanisms when the municipality defaults on its constitutional mandate [5](#). Together, the 2020 Constitutional Court ruling, the Electoral Amendment Act of 2023, the IRASA framework, and the Koingnaas case form a complete legal arsenal that communities can now use to reclaim their government.

The 34-year battle has been won in the courts. Now it must be won at the ballot box — ward by ward, municipality by municipality, province by province.

Part Two: Why It Matters to You — the Community

This is your moment. For 34 years, your municipality was run by politicians who answered to a party boss, not to you. Your rates and taxes funded salaries of unqualified managers, while your water was cut off, your roads crumbled, and your children could not find work. That era is ending.

The **2027 Municipal Election is the first in history where your community can elect a councillor who is legally bound to serve only you** — not a political party, not a national leader, not a party list. Under the Electoral Amendment Act of 2023 and the IRASA model, your elected ward councillor signs a legally binding constituent mandate agreement, meaning they must vote in council exactly as your community ward meeting instructs them. If they betray that mandate, they can be recalled.

This means **you, the community, become the government**. Your ward meeting decides on service delivery priorities. Your councillor carries that decision into the council chamber. No political interference. No party whip overruling your needs. No cadre deployment of unqualified managers. Just community-elected, community-accountable, community-controlled local government — exactly as the Constitution always intended.

Register. Organise. Vote. Your ward. Your municipality. Your future.

References

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