

# SOUTH AFRICA LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION 2016: A THREE-LAYER EXTRAPOLATION FOR 2019 - MINING THE DEPTH & SCOPE OF ANC DECLINE

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SOUTH AFRICA ELECTION UPDATE 2016

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There has been much debate about the extent of, and the reasons for, the ANC's 'bad result' in the 'game-changing' August 2016 local government election. This article takes a different angle in evaluating the result from an ANC perspective, and reaches a distinctive conclusion: that even allowing for regional and local specificity and differences, there is ample evidence to rebut the original, pre-election supposition, as well as some post-election analysis, that the ANC decline was largely limited to 'cosmopolitan', larger metro areas when, in fact, while maybe not universal or evenly spread, ANC decline was significant even in places where it has traditionally been dominant. In turn, this suggests that an ANC majority in 2019 is no longer a foregone conclusion.

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## METHODOLOGY & PURPOSE

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Our research extracts and then compares three apparent, emergent trends:

1. The big city picture – ie **from some of the largest urban centres**;
2. The picture from some **provincial hub cities**; and
3. The picture from some **'rural' provincial cities** - to see whether and to what extent there was a disparity between so-called 'urban' ANC voters and 'rural' ones (which required, in turn, a careful selection of a sample of such 'rural provincial municipalities').

We are interested in posing and attempting to answer this question: are the three sets of trends, extracted from the slice of the electoral picture that we have taken, aligned or do they contradict each other, and if so, how? From this we attempt to extrapolate the results towards the national picture: what do the 2016 results tell us about trends in support, not least given the 'coupling' effect of the past 20 years, when the mid-term municipal election results tends to provide a strong indication of what lies ahead at the next national election.

For the purpose of this three-level analysis we thus focused on the following municipalities:

- At big 'cosmopolitan' metro level: we focused on the key electoral battlegrounds, which were Tshwane (Graphic 1.a) and Johannesburg (1.b) and on nearby black working class, 'township' areas.
- At medium-sized level, we selected the provincial hubs/capitals in the North West and Limpopo provinces, which are respectively Mafikeng (Mmabatho) (2.a) and Polokwane (2.b).
- Finally, within both provinces, we chose two to three 'rural' municipalities (that is to say, municipalities that are set in otherwise rural areas), which are Naledi (3.a), Maquassi Hills (3.b) and Greater Taung (3.c) in the North West, and Blouberg (3.d) and Greater Tubatse (3.e) in Limpopo.

In order to have a suitable comparative basis between elections, we carefully handpicked specific municipalities, and within each of these, two wards which show traditionally very high electoral scores for the ANC (above 70%) to see what impact voter choices had on this traditionally high level of support in the 2016 election. In order to make it as accurate as possible, we also specifically tried to isolate the wards that kept a similar shape and size of population from one election to another since - as shown in the maps below - important variations take place in the ward demarcation depending on the year of election.

This is the case for instance of ward 15 (Mamelodi) in Tshwane for which very important changes of ward and voting district delimitation were made. It is well-known that the demarcation of constituencies may have a strong impact on the electoral scores. We thus searched for another ward that shares similar characteristics from one election to another, hence allowing for a more accurate and reasonable comparison, and so chose, in that case, ward 17 instead of ward 15.

It is neither a large sample and nor does it pretend to be a necessarily representative one. However, the intention is to provoke further thought and research. Notwithstanding the care we have taken in our choice of comparator wards/voting districts, it must also be recognised that comparing results even at the lowest level possible (ie voting district) is not without its risks. Recognising also the impact of turn-out, and differentiated turnout (between parties and areas), and other variables such as the entrance into the electoral market place of new players such as the EFF in 2016, there are inherent limits to how far one can compare results between elections and, therefore, extrapolate the impact of the results for the future.

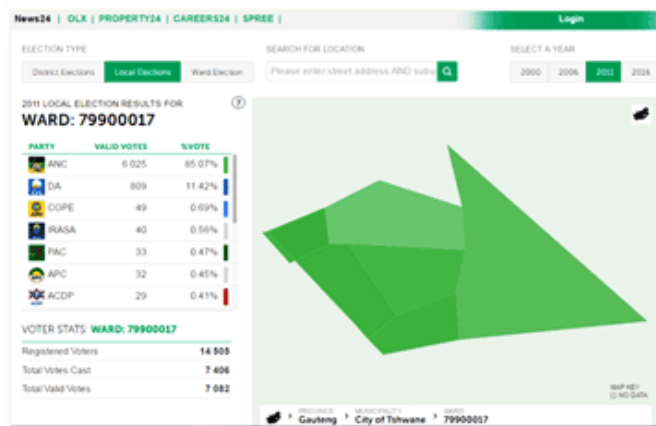
Even so, it is also clear that South Africa's electoral map is changing dramatically, and perhaps faster than many analysts and party political protagonists are yet able to appreciate. The ability of all concerned to absorb the results and to interpret their meaning may, in turn, have significant implications for what happens next - especially in terms of how the ANC responds to Election 2016, in terms of both leadership changes and political strategy looking ahead to the next national election in 2019.

## 1. First level of analysis: the ANC in the big metros (Tshwane and Johannesburg)

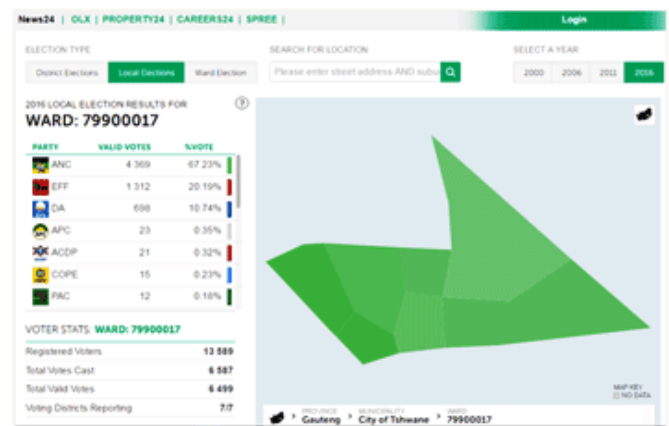
Understandably, given their place and power in the South African political, economic and cultural psyche, most attention has been focused on what we call the 'frontline' battleground metros: Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB), Tshwane and Johannesburg. This is where the most dramatic and politically impactful (at least in the short-term) swings occurred, sweeping the ANC out of power, as opposition gains pushed the ruling party below 50% in all three cities. This was in line with the national election trends of the past two elections when, for example, in Gauteng, ANC support fell from around 70% in 2004 to 52% in 2014. So, the fall in support of the ANC in wards in and around the cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg - as illustrated by our chosen sample of wards - are aligned with that national/provincial trend, with the ANC tending to drop in support by 10-15% from its 2011 result.

### Ward 79900017 - Mamelodi

In 2011:

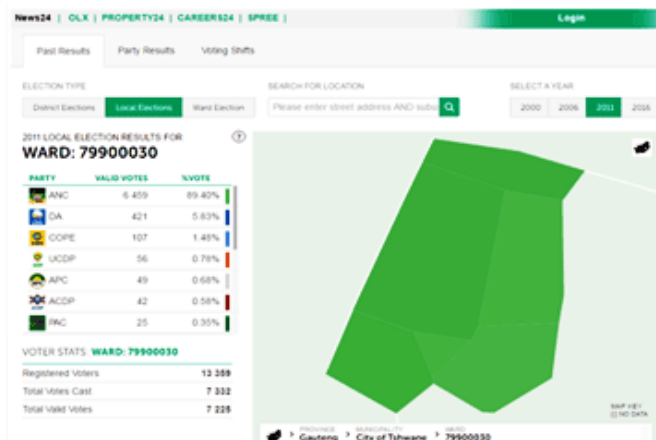


... and in 2016:

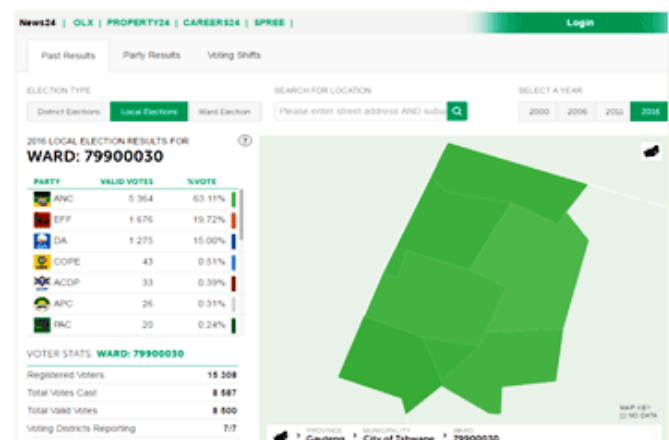


### Ward 79900030 – Ga-Rankuwa

In 2011:



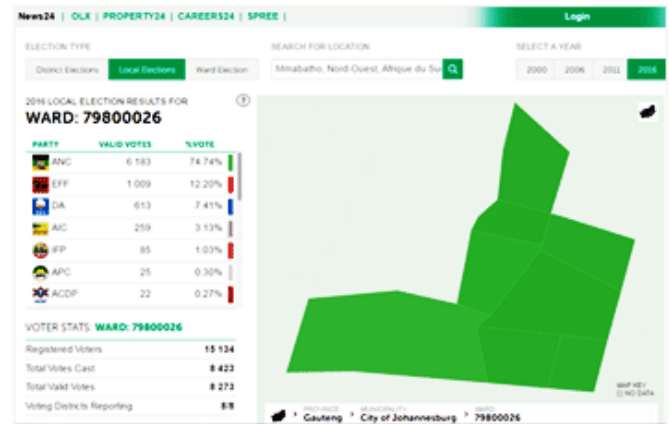
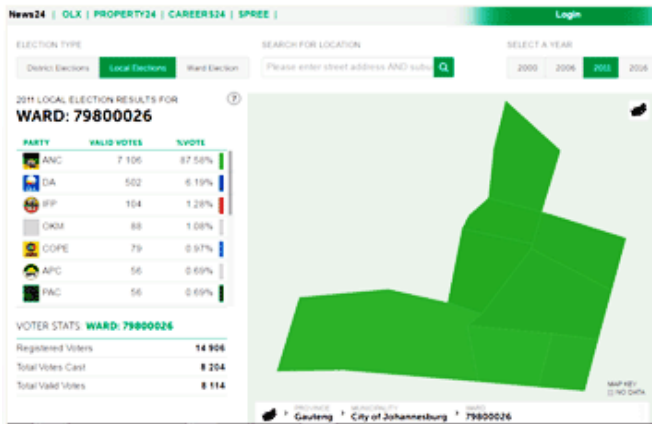
... and in 2016:



## 1.b Johannesburg

### Ward 79800026 - Diepkloof ... and in 2016:

In 2011:



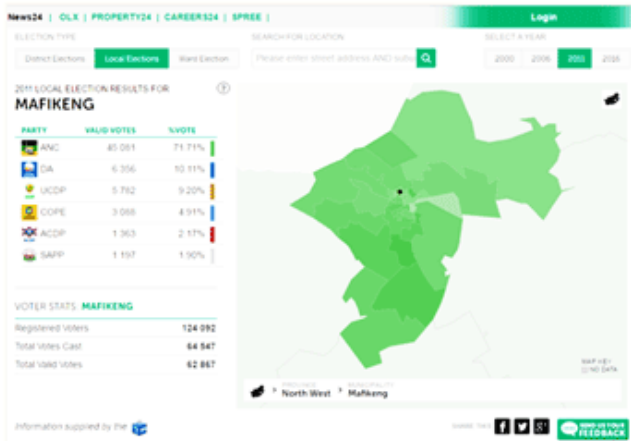
The use of 'bellwether' wards in both Tshwane and Johannesburg proves useful to grasp the scope of the changes taking place in black working class areas ('Townships')<sup>1</sup>. The trend of a sharp rebuke of the ANC's electoral dominance can clearly be observed in these areas where the ANC usually does very well. In Tshwane, this is for instance the case in Mamelodi (figure 1a) or Ga-Rankuwa (ward 79900030) - where the ANC lost between 15 and 20% of support in 2016, leading to a proportionate increase for the new kid on the block, the EFF. On its side, the electoral score for the DA in these selected areas appeared, certainly in contrast to the EFF, to stagnate, remaining close to its 2011 level (generally not higher than 10%, save for Ga-Rankuwa where it climbs up to 15%). On the same line, this could, in turn, confirm the potential for the EFF to emerge as the best alternative to the once-impregnable ANC, in working class township areas if this trend was to be confirmed in upcoming election rounds - with vast implications for the DA's prospects of ever getting a majority in a national election.

## 2. Second level of analysis: the ANC in the provincial hub cities

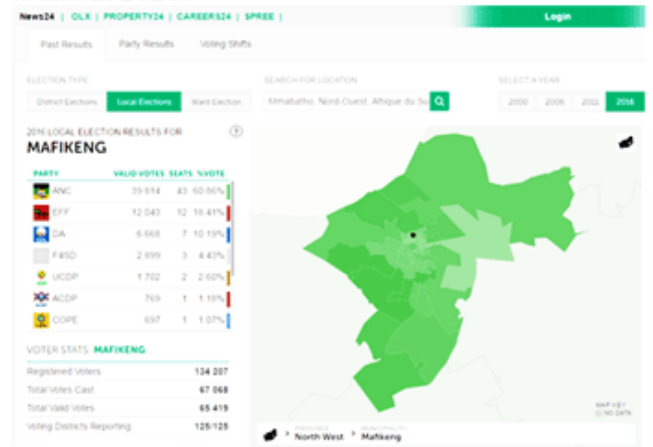
Very similar trends can be observed in this second layer of analysis. We begin with the two provincial hubs, which are Mafikeng (North West) and Polokwane (Limpopo), and then go down to the ward or even voting district level.

2.a North West

In 2011:

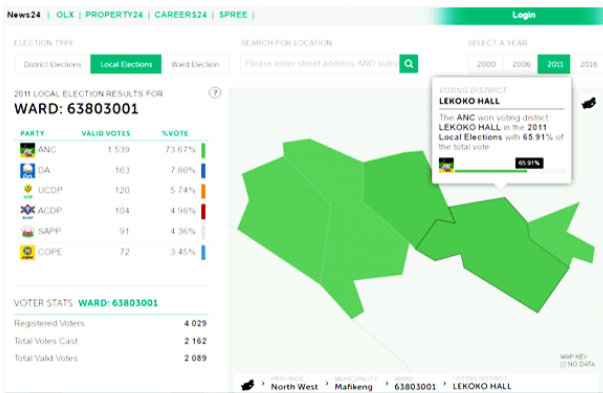


**Mafikeng:**  
... and in 2016:

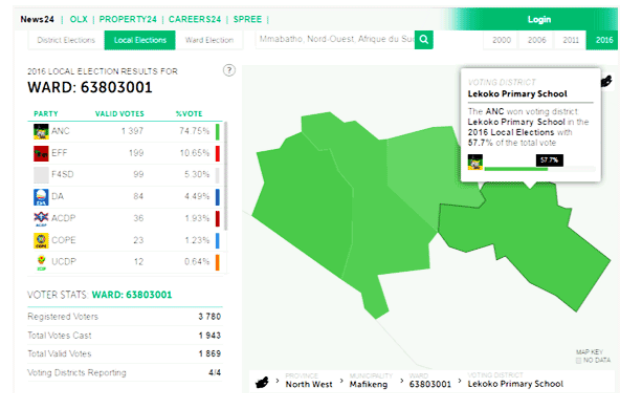


**Mafikeng - ward 63803001 - Lekoko Hall vs. Lekoko Primary school voting districts:**

In 2011:

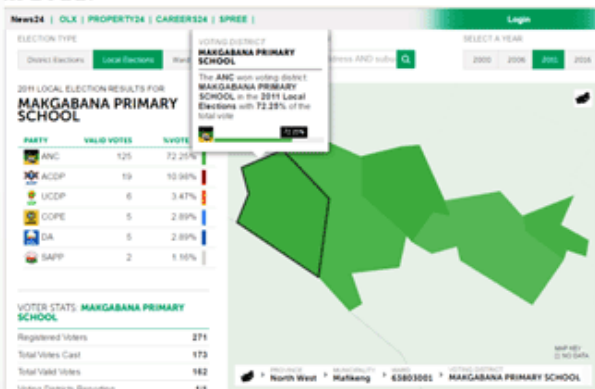


... and in 2016:

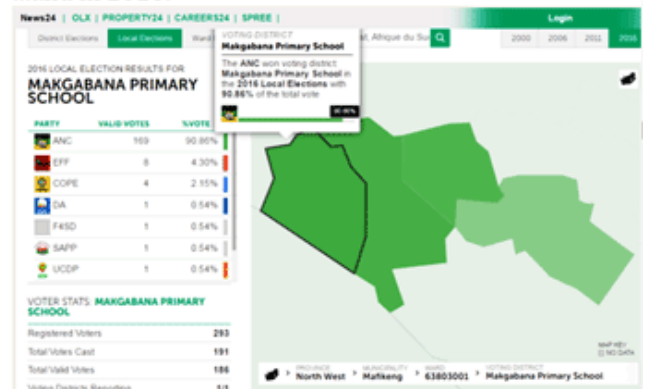


**But in the same ward, another district shows a different result:**

In 2011:



...and in 2016:

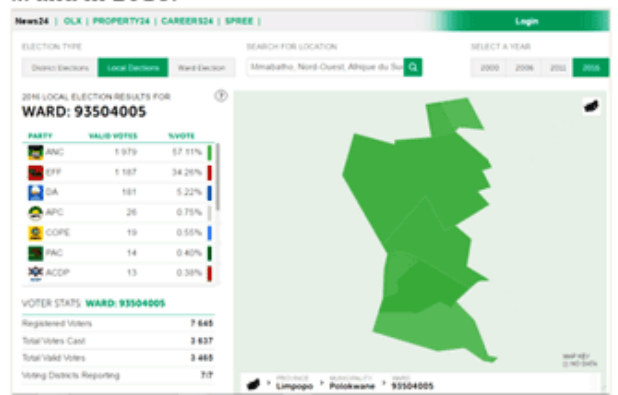


In this specific district, the declining trend of the ANC was actually reversed (i.e. in Makgabana Primary school), thanks to the collapse of all minor parties (besides COPE which maintained its level of support) and the very limited performance of ANC's national challengers, the EFF and DA. But the results of all other samples would rather confirm that this is an exception to the rule.

## 2.b Polokwane (Limpopo):

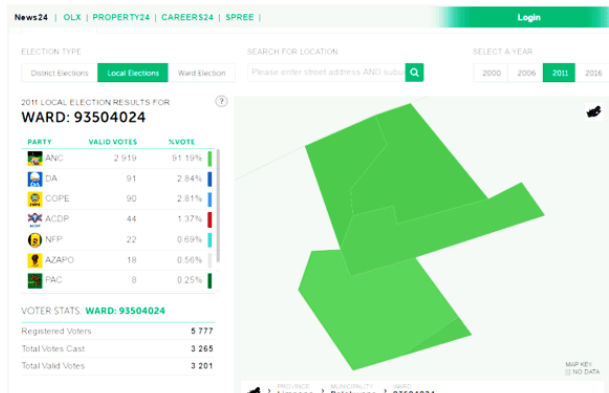
### Ward 93504005 ... and in 2016:

In 2011:

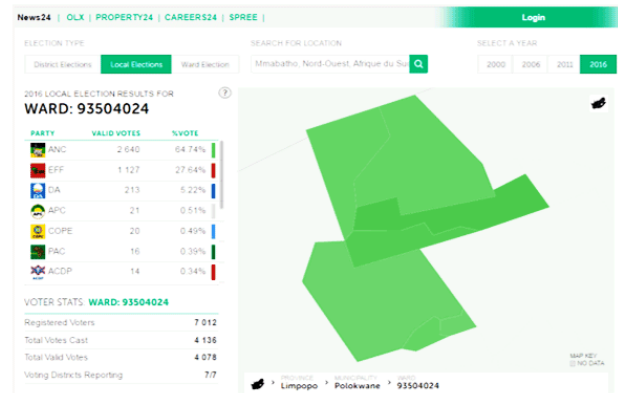


### And also in Polokwane, in ward 93504024:

In 2011:



... and in 2016:



Indeed, in Polokwane, at both municipality and ward levels, the results also show a strong downward pattern for the ANC, even more amplified than what has been seen at the big metros of Tshwane and Johannesburg - and in the North West with the EFF showing a broader platform for further advance by eating into the ANC's core voters.

### 3. Third level of analysis: the ANC in select 'rural' municipalities

In this third layer of analysis, the situation, while more complicated in terms of the performance of the opposition parties and the implications for them, does not differ from the other two layers of analysis in terms of the extent and depth of ANC decline. While support for the EFF and/or the F4SD appears to have 'got in the way' of substantive DA progress in many black, working class areas, with some exceptions that will provide some cause for greater optimism in DA ranks, it has also created further, new problems for the ANC.

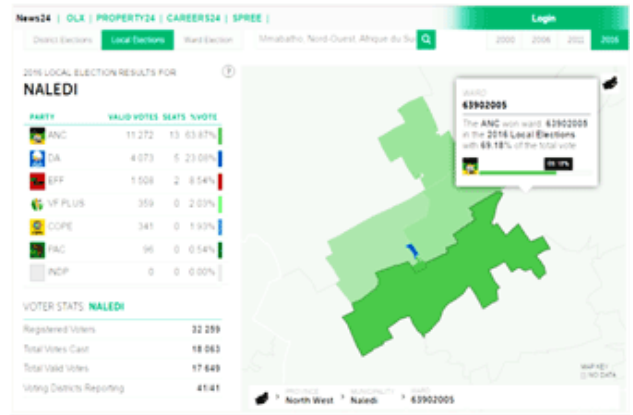
#### 3.a. North West, Naledi

In 2011:

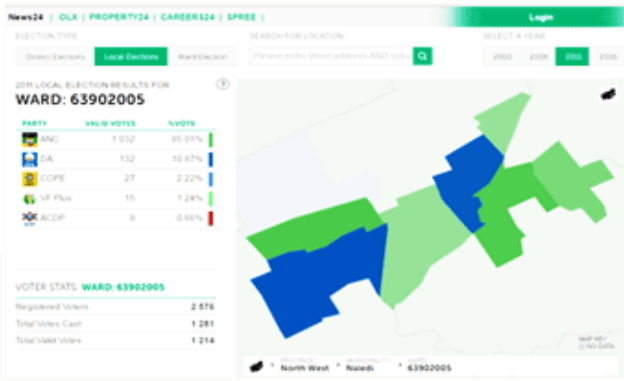


Naledi

... and in 2016:

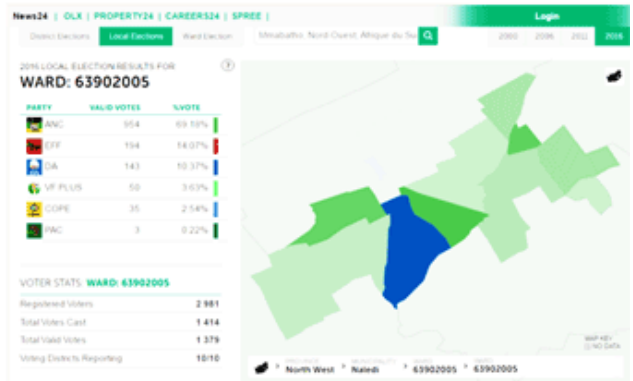


In 2011:



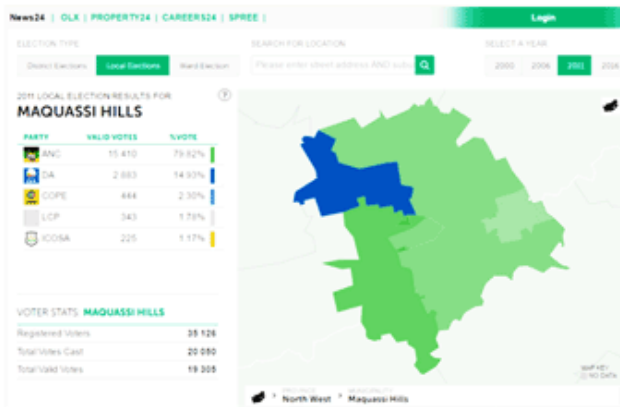
Naledi Ward 63902005:

...and in 2016:



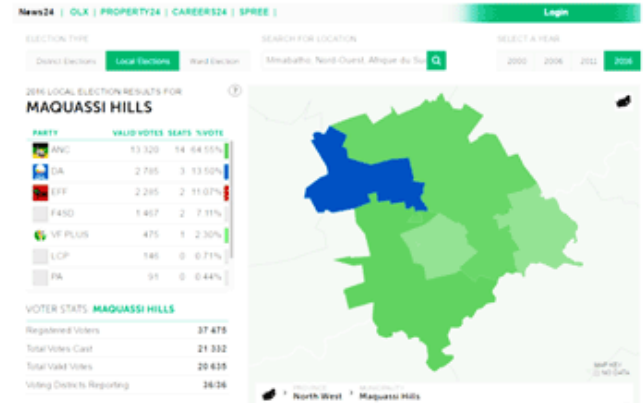
### 3.b. North West, Maquassi Hills

In 2011:

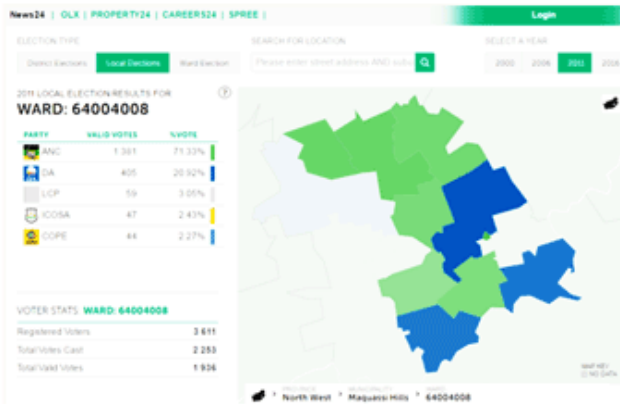


Maquassi Hills

... and in 2016:

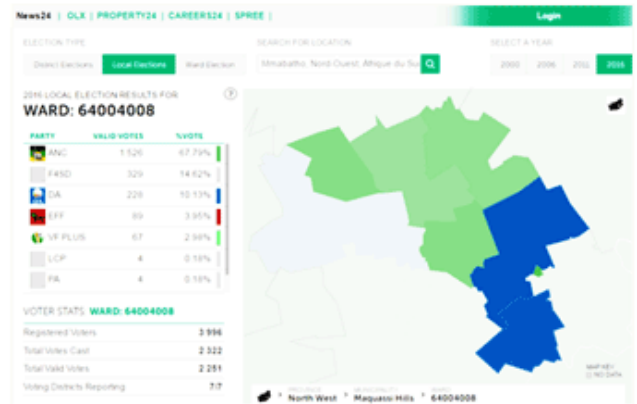


In 2011:



Maquassi Hills ward 64004008:

... and in 2016:

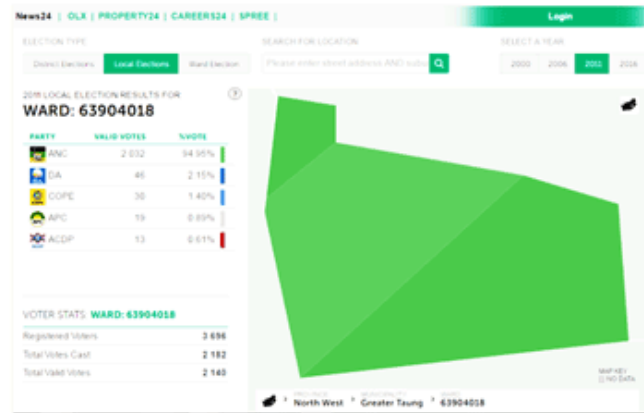




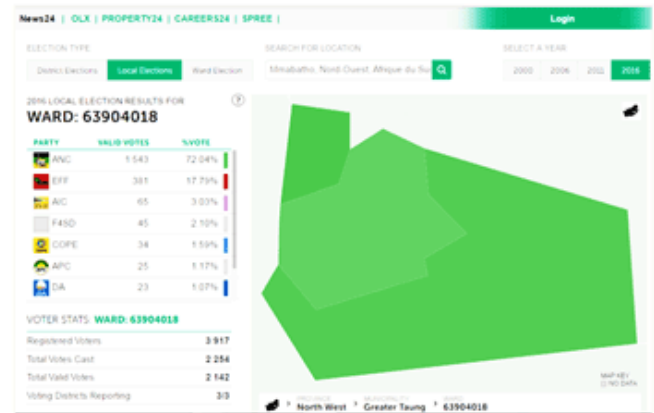
### 3.c. North West, Greater Taung

#### Greater Taung Ward 63904018:

In 2011:

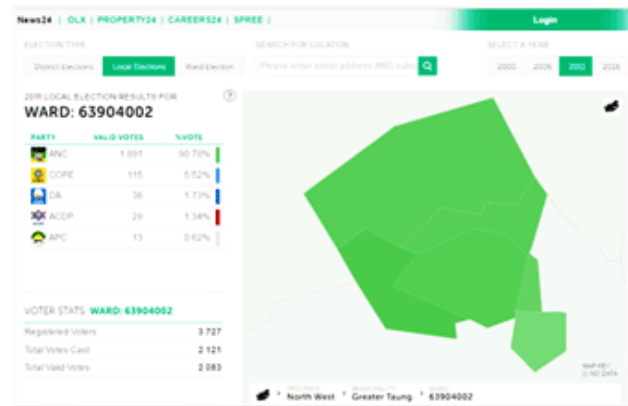


... and in 2016:

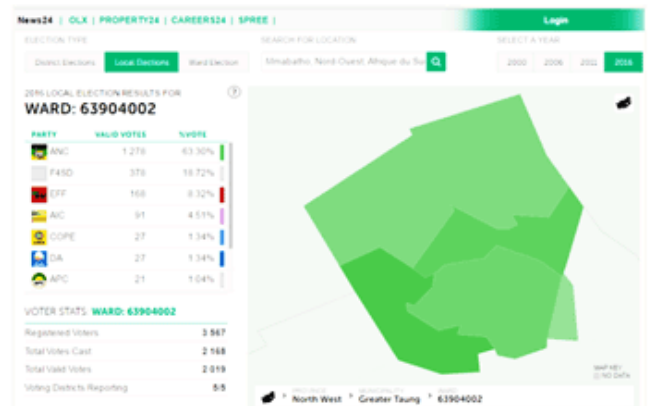


#### Greater Taung Ward 63904002:

In 2011:



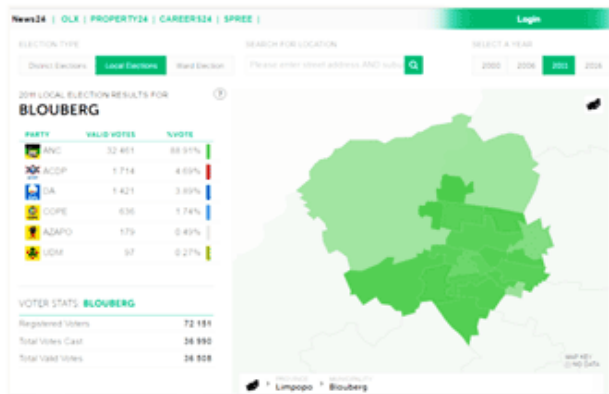
... and in 2016:



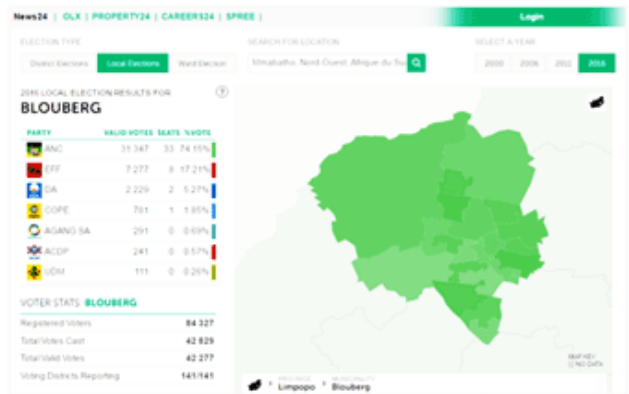
In the North West, in particular, the main rationale behind the change in voting pattern in recent years seem to lie in a growing discontent of the traditional ANC electorate. Indeed, a closer look at wards and districts in all three chosen municipalities indicates that when the EFF is not the party benefitting the most from the decline of the ANC vote, then the Forum 4 Service Delivery (F4SD) - formed by discontented former, ANC councillors - gain. This is notably the case in ward 64004008 and 63904002 where this newcomer scores impressively high - demonstrating that the ANC dominance is under attack from more than one source.

### 3.d Limpopo – Blouberg

In 2011:

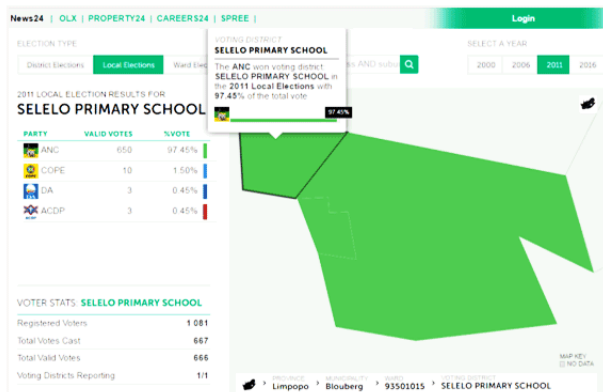


**Blouberg:**  
... and in 2016:

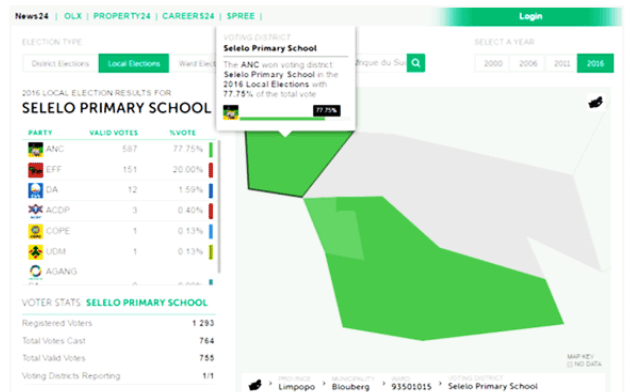


**If we zoom in a bit more, in Blouberg - ward 93501015 - district Selelo Primary School:**

In 2011:



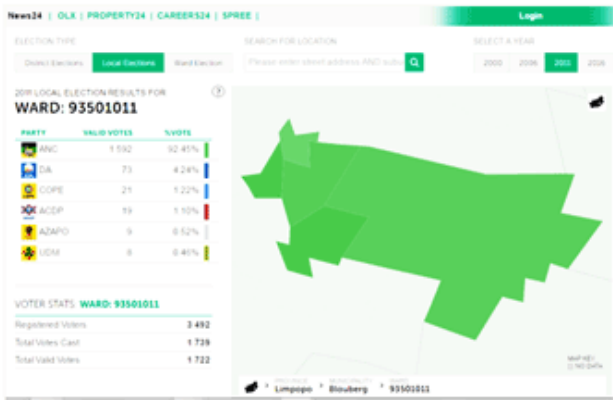
... and in 2016:



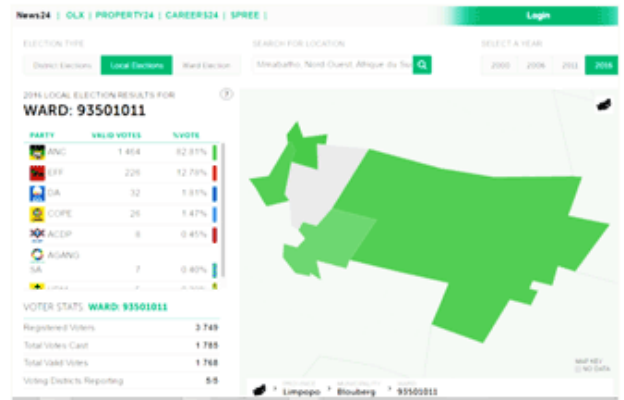
In Limpopo, neither Blouberg or Greater Tubatse provide an exception to the two first layers of our analysis. From the sample gathered here, there would appear to be a substantial alignment between the three layers of analysis.

**In Blouberg - ward 93501011**

**In 2011:**



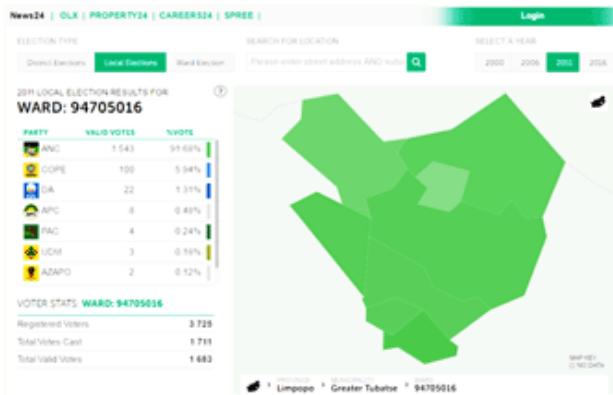
**... and in 2016:**



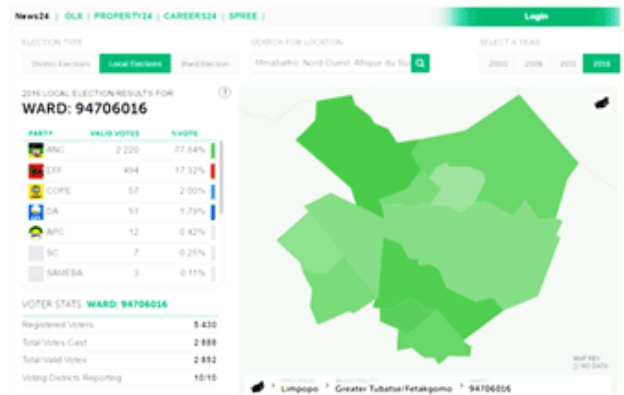
**3.e Limpopo - Greater Tubatse**

**Greater Tubatse Ward 94705016**

**In 2011:**

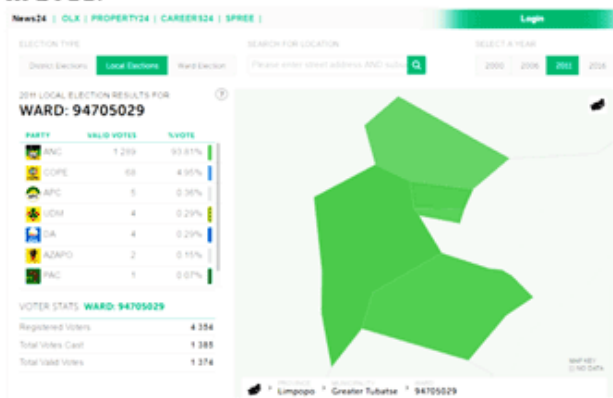


**... and in 2016:**

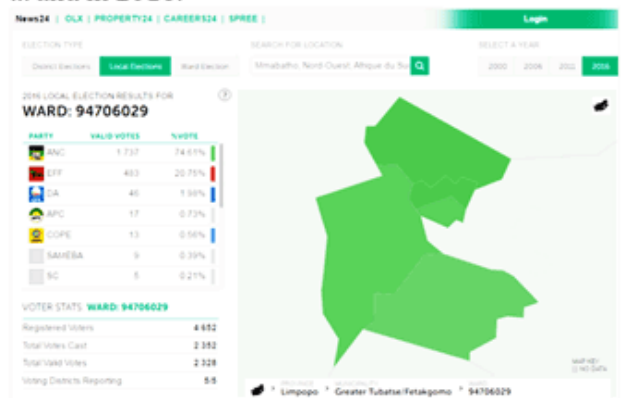


**Greater Tubatse Ward 94705029:**

**In 2011:**



**... and in 2016:**



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## CONCLUSION

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It has been asserted that "the story of consolidation is a relatively simple one. The ANC maintained its grip across most municipalities and especially in the rural areas of the country." We are not so sure about this. We certainly don't think this averment tells the whole story. Beneath the surface, lurks a more worrisome trend - from an ANC perspective. On the one hand, the ANC did maintain its hold on power in the rural areas as the overall electoral map shows. But a closer look at the results suggest that, in fact, its 'grip' on power may well be slipping, and faster than anyone has hitherto appreciated or thought was even possible. While, naturally, the ANC's drop in support in the big metros commanded attention, not least because it took them under the crucial threshold of 50% in NMB, Tshwane and Johannesburg, the fall in support in places where the ANC has always done extremely well, with very high levels of support, is no less concerning for the ANC leadership, should they care to look carefully enough at the evidence.

As our analysis of the three sets of sampled data shows, there is reason for the ANC hierarchy to be anxious about the underlying trends and their implications for future electoral outcomes. While it is important to note that there is a good deal of regional specificity to not lose sight of (as we showed with one example above - Makgabana Primary school voting district in the North West), and many dangers in presenting a 'one narrative' analysis, so, too, the evidence of significant decline in surprising places is clearly there to see.

There may be many reasons for this decline. And the ANC may be able to decipher the causes, and address them powerfully. In which case, it may well bounce back in 2019, especially if the opposition are unable to maintain stable, effective coalition arrangements or cope with the pressures of minority government in important cities such as Tshwane and Johannesburg. The possibility of such a return could indeed find a resonance in the above mentioned case of Greater Taung and Maquassi Hills (North West) with the disruptive role played by former ANC councillors who gave the electorate an entirely different option from the traditional parties or even the EFF, with their Forum 4 Service Delivery party. It is clear that the ANC is much under attack from former supporters and leaders, including Julius Malema, as it is from the official opposition, the DA.

By and large, however, the ANC, at least in its public commentary, is stuck with its own 'one narrative' analytical take, which is that 'our people did not turn out', despite the fact that as others have pointed out turnout in ANC strongholds was not, in fact, greatly diminished from 2011. So, the ANC may continue to stick its head in the sand, and, in its denialism, fail to take the necessary action to arrest a decline that could gather momentum over the next three years. While it is highly unlikely that even in this latter scenario the ANC would be pushed beneath 50% in the provinces where it has traditionally dominated the most, such as the North-West and Limpopo provinces from which we drew a sample of voting results for our specific analytical purpose here, since the national election puts all the votes in one big counting basket, the fact that ANC support fell significantly not just in 'cosmopolitan' but in other, surprising, place - suggests that the ANC could well be pushed to the wire in 2019 and that an ANC majority at national level is no longer a foregone conclusion.

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