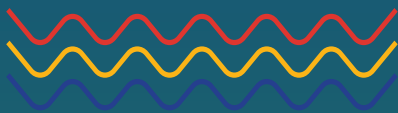


YOUTH Choose Your Leaders



My Participant Toolkit



Contents

1. About this toolkit	3
2. How South Africa is governed	4
3. Constitution FC	5
4. Sample ballots	6
5. The 8 Steps of Voting	7
6. Beyond the Ballot: My Action Plan	8
7. My Pledge Card	9
8. Accountability from the Manifesto	10
9. Know Before You Go	11
10. Glossary of Key Terms	13
11. Quick Facts	14



About this toolkit

The “My Participant Toolkit” was developed under the *YOUth Choose Your Leaders* project of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), supported by the Social Justice Initiative (SJI). Under the project, SAIIA aims to engage young people – especially first-time voters – in the Free State province on democratic rights, civic responsibility, and the process of voting in the upcoming Local Government Elections.

This toolkit will be your guide to connecting your lived experiences with the institutions and frameworks that govern us. It aims to help you connect the dots by identifying what works in your community, what doesn't work in your community, and will provide step-by-step walkthroughs of how government is structured, how you can contribute to creating change, and what to expect at the voting station.

The toolkit has *you* in mind – the issues that matter to you, the outcomes you want to see achieved, the questions you have, and the role you can play both through and outside of elections.

You can also share this document or the link to download it within your social networks.

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HOW SOUTH AFRICA IS GOVERNED

02 Whose Job Is It? Quick reference

Government is organised into three spheres: national, provincial and local. The Constitution requires these spheres to co-operate with one another rather than compete. Each sphere has three arms:

Legislature
makes the law

Executive
carries out the law

Judiciary
settles disputes about the law

No single arm or sphere holds all the power. This system of checks and balances exists specifically to prevent the abuse of power.

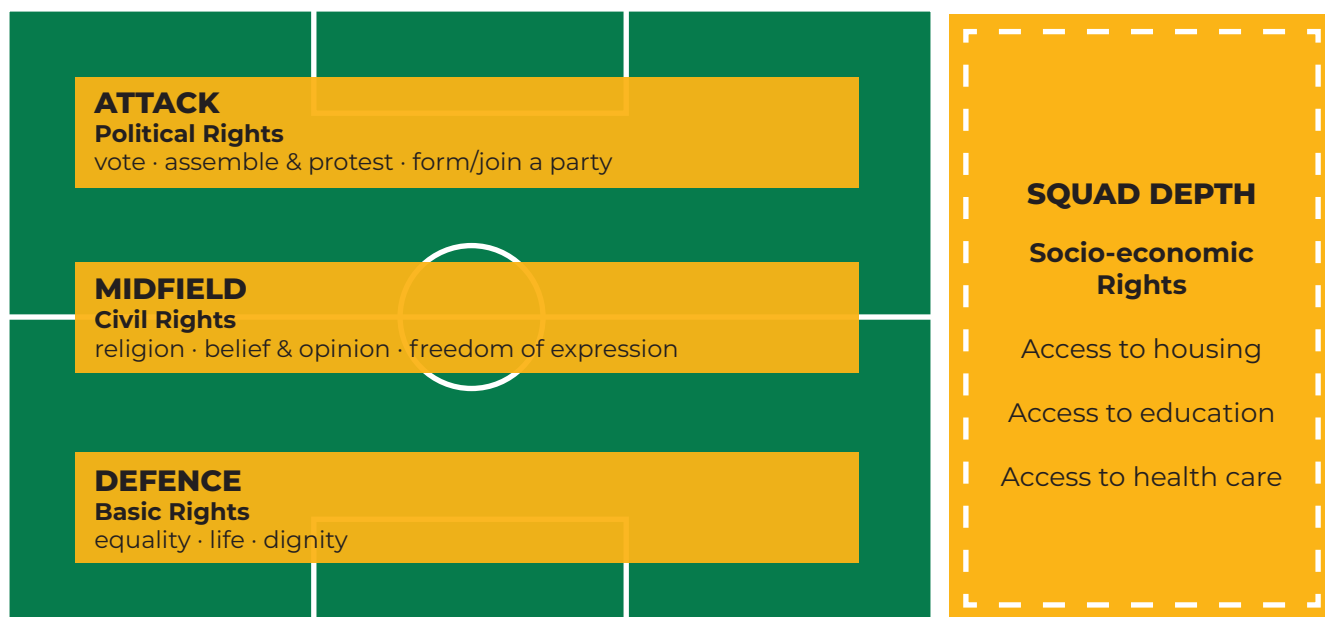
Issue type	Sphere mainly responsible	Notes
Water supply, sanitation, refuse removal, local roads, streetlights, electricity reticulation	Local (municipality)	Constitution Schedule 4B/5B (read with Section 156 – Powers and functions of municipalities); bulk infrastructure may involve provincial/national entities (e.g., Eskom, water boards)
Housing (implementation)	Local , as implementing agent	Housing policy itself is not a municipal function but municipalities plan and implement on behalf of national/ provincial government
School education, public health/ clinics and hospitals	Provincial	Provincial departments administer these; national government sets overarching policy
Policing policy, social grants, macroeconomic and job-creation policy, national ID/civic documents	National	Set and largely funded nationally, though implemented locally (e.g., SAPS stations)
Unemployment, corruption, public safety perceptions	Shared / all spheres	A good moment to discuss co-operative government rather than force one answer

BILL OF RIGHTS REFERENCE

03

Constitution FC — Playing by the Rule

The Constitution works like the Laws of the Game, it protects everyone, not just the star striker, and applies equally to whoever is in charge on a given match day.



Category	Examples
Basic rights	Equality · Life · Dignity
Constitution FC — Playing by the Rules	
Civil rights (Midfield)	Religion · Belief & opinion · Freedom of expression
Political rights (Attack)	Right to assembly & protest · Right to vote · Right to form/join a political party
Socio-economic rights (Squad Depth)	Access to housing · Right to education · Access to health care
Remember: socio-economic rights build up over time, subject to available resources and progressive realisation, not a blank cheque, but not optional either.	

FOR ACTIVITY 4

04

Sample Ballots

Sample only

SAMPLE ONLY — NOT A REAL BALLOT

This is a practice ballot for a training exercise. It uses invented, fictional names. It is not connected to any real political party or candidate.

SAMPLE WARD BALLOT

Vote ☒ Choose one only

NAME	PARTY 1			
NAME	PARTY 2			
NAME	PARTY 3			
NAME	PARTY 4			
NAME	INDEPENDENT			
NAME	PARTY 6			
NAME	PARTY 7			
NAME	PARTY 8			
NAME	INDEPENDENT			
NAME	PARTY 10			
NAME	PARTY 11			
NAME	PARTY 12			
NAME	PARTY 13			

SAMPLE DISTRICT COUNCIL PR BALLOT

Vote ☒ Choose one only

NAME	PARTY 1		
NAME	PARTY 2		
NAME	PARTY 3		
NAME	PARTY 4		
NAME	PARTY 5		
NAME	PARTY 6		
NAME	PARTY 7		
NAME	PARTY 8		
NAME	PARTY 9		
NAME	PARTY 10		
NAME	PARTY 11		
NAME	PARTY 12		
NAME	PARTY 13		

SAMPLE LOCAL COUNCIL PR BALLOT

Vote ☒ Choose one only

NAME	PARTY 1		
NAME	PARTY 2		
NAME	PARTY 3		
NAME	PARTY 4		
NAME	PARTY 5		
NAME	PARTY 6		
NAME	PARTY 7		
NAME	PARTY 8		
NAME	PARTY 9		
NAME	PARTY 10		
NAME	PARTY 11		
NAME	PARTY 12		
NAME	PARTY 13		

05 The 9 Steps of Voting

Walk through these 9 real steps, then practise with the sample ballots on the previous page.

- 1 Arrive at the voting station where you are registered.
- 2 A voting officer checks your ID and finds your name on the voters' roll.
- 3 Left thumb/thumbnail marked with indelible ink.
- 4 Your ballot paper(s) are stamped.
- 5 You receive your ballot(s).
- 6 You go behind the private voting screen.
- 7 You mark your choice with a clear X.
- 8 You fold your ballot and place it in the sealed ballot box.
- 9 You exit the station — you've taken part in the democratic process.

If a ballot is spoiled by mistake: tell a voting officer before placing it in the box so they can issue a replacement. Mark with a clear X, not a tick or initials, an unclear mark risks the ballot being spoiled.

FOR ACTIVITY 6

06 Beyond the Ballot: My Action Plan

Voting happens once every five years, the tools here can be used the following week. Choose one issue you personally care about and complete this worksheet.

The issue I care about most:

Which sphere/institution is responsible (national / provincial / local / shared)?

One non-voting action I will take:

By when?

Am I registered to vote? If not, my plan to fix that:

Non-voting tools you could use

- Attending a ward committee meeting; commenting on a draft municipal by-law
- Participating in your municipality's IDP public meetings
- Contacting your ward councillor directly
- Using your municipality's official service complaint channel
- A petition
- The media
- A peaceful demonstration
- Joining a community-based organisation

07 My Pledge Card

Tick any that apply to you.

☐

I will check my voter registration status

☐

I will attend one ward or IDP meeting before the election

☐

I will talk to two friends about registering

☐

I will vote on 4 November 2026

☐

I choose not to vote, but I understand my other options for participating

08

Accountability from the manifesto

Use these guiding questions to see if a party's manifesto speaks to the issues that matter to you. This will help you to hold your leaders accountable to their commitments.

- Can I identify key priorities from this party's manifesto?
- Do these priorities speak to the issues I care about most?
- Which problems does the party say it will address?
- How does the party say it will address the issue/issues?
- How will citizens know that the issue has been addressed?
- How will the party pay for what it says it will do?
- Has the party set clear timelines so that their actions can be measured?
- Does the party have a record of delivering on previous promises?
- Which policy proposal will have the most positive impact on my life?
- Which promises seem realistic and achievable

09 Know Before You Go

Items marked with a fill-in box need real local information from your facilitator.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Wednesday, 4 November 2026

Register from age 16. Vote from age 18. Bring your green ID book, smart ID card, or valid Temporary Identity Certificate.

Check your registration: SMS your ID number to 32810 (R1.00) · elections.org.za · registertovote.elections.org.za · WhatsApp 060 088 0000 · 0800 11 8000 (toll-free, limited periods)



My ward councillor



My municipality's service-complaint channel



SPECIAL VOTE WINDOW

Monday, 21 September - Monday, 12 October

Registered voters who can't travel to their voting station because of a disability, pregnancy, or physical frailness, or who can't vote at their voting station on election day can apply for a special vote. In the case of disability, physical frailness or pregnancy, the voter can vote from their home or care facility on PRE-DETERMINED DATES set by the Electoral Commission. If unable to vote at their voting station on election day, the voter can cast their ballots at their voting station on PRE-DETERMINED DATES set by the Electoral Commission.

Special Votes for this year's Local Government Elections will take place on 2 and 3 November and voters need to specify in their applications whether they must be visited in their homes or care facilities, or if they will be voting at their voting station on the special vote days.

To find out more about the Special Vote option and apply, visit www.elections.org.za/pw/specialvotes/about-special-vote.



THE NEXT DAY

You voted - now what?

Election Day is not the end of the process. The next day is important and this is when you will be able to start tracking the outcomes of the vote.

- 1. Vote counting starts immediately after polling stations close and continues overnight. If not completed, this could continue the next day.**
- 2. Election results are published as counting finishes.**
- 3. Councils are allocated and where no party wins a majority, coalition negotiations start.**

Here are some questions you can ask yourself after the election. Your role as voter did not end when you cast your ballot and the period between elections is when you can track the responsiveness of the new government to the needs of citizens. The day after the election is when you can begin reflecting on the results and coalition negotiations to ultimately feed into how governments can be held accountable to communities.

1. Did any party win a majority or is a coalition needed?
2. Which party won my ward?
3. Who is the new mayor?
4. What promises were made by the winning party during their campaign?
5. How can community members monitor the actions of the government to determine whether promises are kept?

10 Glossary of Key Terms

Terms used throughout today's workshop, in plain language.

Bill of Rights

Chapter 2 of the Constitution, listing the rights the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil for everyone in South Africa.

Constitution

The supreme law of South Africa; all other laws and government action must be consistent with it.

Councillor

An elected member of a municipal council, either a ward councillor (elected by a specific area) or a PR councillor (allocated by party vote share).

Democracy

A system of government based on rule by the people, usually exercised through elected representatives.

Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)

The independent body responsible for managing elections and the voters' roll.

Executive

The arm of government that implements laws and runs day-to-day administration. Cabinet nationally, the Premier and MECs provincially, the Mayor and officials locally.

Independent candidate

A person who contests an election without belonging to a political party.

Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

A municipality's core multi-year strategic plan covering infrastructure, budgets, and development priorities, which the public must be consulted on.

Judiciary

The courts, which interpret the law, apply the Constitution, and settle disputes.

Legislature

The law-making arm of government, Parliament nationally, the provincial legislature, the municipal council locally.

Proportional representation (PR)

An electoral system in which parties win seats roughly in proportion to the share of votes they receive.

Ward committee

A body of elected community representatives that advises the ward councillor and channels community input into council decisions.

11 Quick Facts

A few numbers worth knowing, on why your voice and vote matter.

60.9%

National youth unemployment (ages 15–24) in Q1 2026, the highest of any age group.

Source: Statistics South Africa, Quarterly Labour Force Survey Q1 2026

18%

Share of registered voters aged 18–29 in 2024, down from 28% in 2004. Over 70% of eligible 18–19-year-olds remained unregistered as reported by the IEC in mid-2026.

Source: EISA Journal of African Elections (2024); TimesLive reporting on IEC data (2026)

2023

Independent candidates, long allowed for ward councillor seats, were extended to National Assembly and provincial legislature elections by the Electoral Amendment Act 1 of 2023 (signed 17 April 2023), following a 2020 Constitutional Court ruling.

Source: gov.za; Parliament of South Africa; Constitutional Court (New Nation Movement NPC case)

1 + 4 + 18

The Free State's municipal structure: 1 metropolitan municipality (Mangaung) + 4 district municipalities (Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyana, Xhariep), subdivided into 18 local municipalities.

Source: municipalities.co.za; Free State Provincial Government (2026)

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.





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