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# The Place of Independent Candidates in South Africa's Multi-party Democracy

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***The Place of Independent Candidates in South Africa's Multi-Party Democracy***

This study aims to assess the place of independent candidates and elected independents in South Africa's multiparty democracy. This research attempts to answer the core question of 'What role do independent candidates and elected independents play in South Africa's multiparty democracy?' This question will be explored by focusing on the electoral performance of independents in local government. The focus is on local government because South Africa's current electoral system only permits independents to run and hold office at the local government level. The research will mainly draw from results of the local government elections in 2000, 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021. It will further briefly analyse the provincial and national levels of government and elections to interrogate the possible impact that of allowing independents to stand nationally might have for the future of independent candidates in the country.

This research is situated in the broader debate about electoral reform in South Africa since the dawn of inclusive democracy. Scholars have debated the extent to which SA's current electoral system allows for adequate accountability and citizen involvement. In recent times, the debate was reignited by a Constitutional Court (CC) judgement supporting independent candidates' integration into the national and provincial elections. In the case of *New Nation Movement NPC and Others v President of the Republic of South Africa and Others 2020 (6) SA 257 (CC) (11 June 2020)*, the CC declared the Electoral Act unconstitutional insofar as "it requires that adult citizens may be elected to the National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures only through their membership of political parties." What this judgement practically meant is that Parliament must make the necessary legislative amendments and electoral reform to allow for independent candidates (who are not members of a political party) to stand and, if elected, hold office in the provincial and national legislatures by 11 June 2022.

As independent candidates in the general elections is a new phenomenon in the SA context, independents have contested locally. This research attempts to extract some key data and analysis on the performance of independents at local level in order to provide statistical foundations for future scholarship on independent candidates in SA.