



MY VOTE
COUNTS

Vision 2027





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Address:

67-69 Main Rd, Mowbray, Cape Town, 7700

Tel: +27 (0)21 447 2950

Email: info@myvotecounts.org.za
NPC Registration: 2014/046956/08

Published in February 2023
Design: polygram.co.za

INTRODUCTION

This document aims to guide the My Vote Counts staff and Board of Directors to carry out the Vision of the organisation from 2023-2027. The document is a result of a consultative strategy process that included an analysis of the organisation, an analysis of the political context of South Africa and an analysis of the next 5 years.

The document is split into 4 sections:

- 1 Who we are:**
Gives context to the organisation since its emergence in 2012.
- 2 Context:**
Unpacks the political context that the organisation is operating in over the next 5 years.
- 3 Theory of Change:**
Illustrates how will work towards our vision.
- 4 Theory of Action:**
Unpacks how we will implement our Theory of Change.





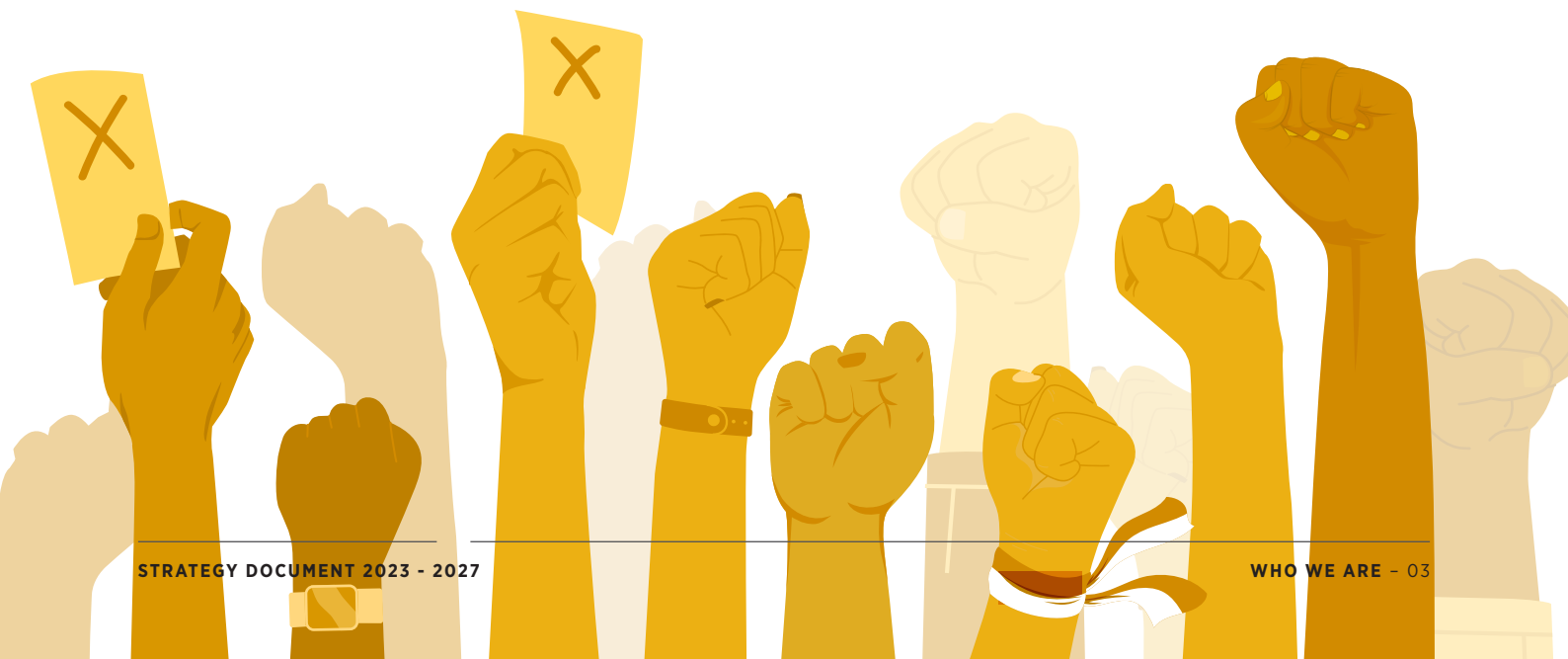
WHO WE ARE

My Vote Counts (MVC) emerged out of campaigns by South African civil society, in 2012, that aimed to address the scourge of corruption and the hollowing out of South Africa's democracy.

It was launched as a public campaign in that year to advocate for an electoral system that utilises both proportional representation and constituency-based representation and to instigate increased transparency and openness in political party funding. Both campaigns garnered traction and have contributed towards shaping the future of politics and democracy in South Africa. In 2016 MVC registered as a Non-Profit Organisation. In that year MVC successfully challenged the constitutionality of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) and influenced the development of the Political Party funding Act (PPFA). PAIA was amended in 2019 and the PPFA and an amended PAIA came into operation in 2021.

The PPFA came into effect in April 2021 and has proven to be one of the most important pieces of legislation in South Africa's democracy. It is also the first piece of legislation that governs the internal workings of political parties. It provides a transparency framework for political party finances and, importantly, limits private influence in the country's politics. The enactment of the legislation has taken the work of MVC, as a social justice organisation, to a new phase of its life cycle.

In this context in 2021, MVC has broadened its vision to one that focuses on deepening democracy, public transparency and accountability, social justice and building people's power. MVC, thus, has three streams of work: Political Party Funding, Electoral Systems and Intra-Party Democracy. We carry out these streams through research, political education, campaigning and, as a last resort, litigation.





VISION AND PRINCIPLES

MVC now operates as an independent non-profit organisation, with the following vision:

We strive for a democracy where every person has equal influence in all the decisions that affect them.

Our principles encapsulate our approach as we work towards achieving our vision. They also direct the way that we operate and how and when we work with stakeholders.



DEMOCRACY:

We believe in a democracy where every adult has equal power to influence decisions that affect them.



TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

We believe that the electorate should have access to all information that they need to exercise their political rights and make political choices from an informed position. We believe that political parties, decision-makers, and public representatives should openly share all necessary public information timeously and in accessible formats for all.



SOCIAL JUSTICE:

We believe that power should be equally shared and that social mobility barriers should be removed.



PEOPLE'S POWER:

We believe that people must lead the drive for ensuring their rights are met, and we support popular participation, the building of grassroots organisation, and equipping all people with tools to hold public representatives to account, and to be part of decision-making.



STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

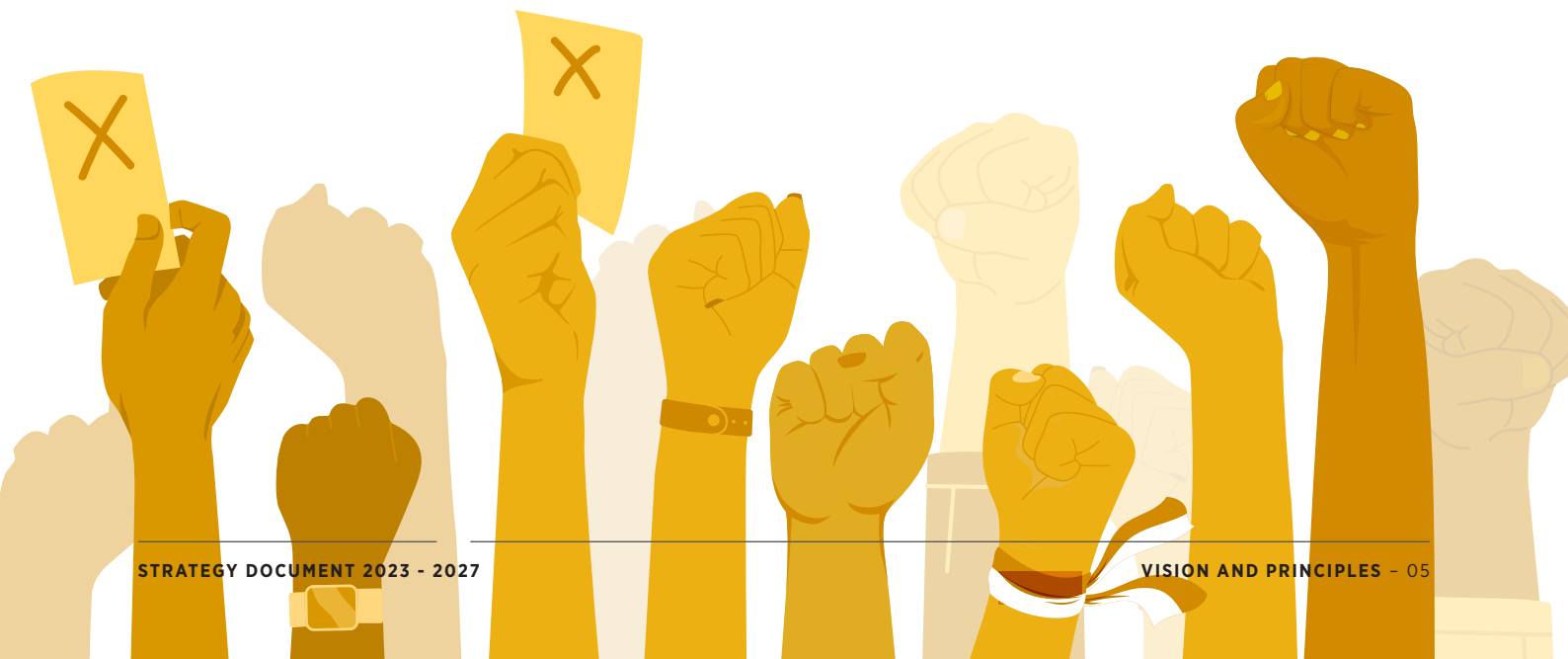
MVC is governed by a Board of Directors, which is convened under the My Vote Counts Board Charter.

As per the Charter, the function of a Board is to provide oversight and strategic direction to MVC and its staff and to ensure that all activities undertaken are directly in line with the organisation's vision and mission. It is not the role of the Board to be involved in the running of the organisation daily nor is it the role of the Board to be involved in the implementation of specific projects. The Board shall, however, maintain oversight over the management of MVC.

The Board appoints an Executive Director who is responsible for the implementation and daily running of the organisation. The Executive Director reports to the Board.

The Board, also, institutes policies which support the governance of the organisation.

MVC may appoint an Advisory Board, to support the Executive Director in strategy development.





CONTEXT

28 years since the first democratic election, South Africa's democracy is at a crossroads.

Since 1994, South Africa's democracy has largely remained intact. This is despite the age of state capture, the hollowing out of some democratic institutions, politics characterized by patronage, and collapsing state institutions. This has been, partly, due to an independent judiciary and electoral commission, strong civil society and community activism and independent media.

However, in mid-2021, mass riots were sparked to meet political ends and were fuelled by mass hunger and social insecurity. The riots laid bare the fault lines of the South African democratic project. Several months following the riots, in November, the country held its Local Government Elections and saw the lowest voter turnout in its democratic history. In the main, people who chose not to vote simply do not have a sufficient alternative to represent them¹.

The Local Government Elections also produced several largely unstable coalition governments², an illustration of the political crisis. The governing party's share of the vote dropped below 50% for the first time, as it continued to be consumed by factionalism and patronage.

Linked to this, trust in all public institutions is at an all-time low, with only 27% of South Africans having trust in Parliament, 38% trusting the President and 43% of people having faith in the courts and the justice system. Even the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has trust levels of only 36%³. Ultimately, this is an indication of a serious trust deficit in democracy.

Further, this year the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture concluded and released several reports on state capture. The Commission's findings exposed the extent to which and the brazen nature of how money was used to influence the South African state, in favour of unscrupulous private interests.

On top of this, we see a closing of democratic space by the political elite. There have been murders of 24 members of the shack dwellers movement⁴, Abahlali baseMjondolo, several activists campaigning against mining in their community in Xolobeni, and many others for simply expressing their constitutional rights. There have also been attacks by the political elite on the NGO sector.

These issues are flourishing in a context of a stagnating economy and economic austerity, commodification of the state, and a deepening ecological crisis.

References

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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY VOTE COUNTS' WORK?

Our politics and democracy are in a crisis. This crisis could deepen in the next few years. There are 6 key considerations for My Vote Counts

THE NATURE OF PARTY POLITICS IS CHANGING

The nature of South African politics is changing. The ANC will not be at the centre of our politics in the near future. This could make way for national coalition governments and possibly political instability.

We also know that many voters have shown that they do not have anyone to vote for. There is a huge hole in the centre of party politics which has widened even further the gap between the people and those they elect.

Already, parties are seen to act in their narrow interests, rather than the interests of the public.

DISILLUSIONMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

There is a clear public disillusionment with democracy and politics, broadly. This is shown by the trust deficit in public institutions, the low voter turn-out in the Local Government Elections, and the retreat to populism by sections of society.

Political parties are also disconnected from communities, unaccountable to their constituencies, and highly centralized.

IMBALANCE OF POWER

28 years into democracy, our politics is dominated and influenced by a few, with the majority of people having little to no say. Those who are heard, ultimately, decide what's best for the majority who are not heard. This is also shown in the disconnect between people and the public representatives they elect.

Since 1994, there remains a highly toxic relationship between money and politics. Private entities and individuals are able to use money to influence politics towards their narrow interests and to the detriment of the public.

ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICIT

The disconnect between public representatives and people is most starkly illustrated in the lack of accountability. Mechanisms for accountability need to be strengthened, made more effective and prioritise transparency.

WEAKENED DEMOCRATIC SPACE

Threats to civic space by the political elite are increasing. This is shown, most starkly, through the killing of community activists by local power holders, the attacks on civil society by the political elite and shrinking funding.

Further, community organisations, popular grassroots movements and trade unions have been demobilised or weakened. This, in turn, has weakened people's power.

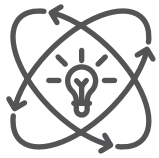
WEAKENING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Along with the trust deficit, democratic institutions are being weakened and, in some cases, hollowed out. For MVC, the Independent Electoral Commission, whose primary mandate is to ensure free and fair elections, is of particular concern. The IEC's mandate is expanding while its budgets are being cut. This makes the Commission vulnerable to threats.

EIGHT KEY QUESTIONS FOR MY VOTE COUNTS

- 1 How do we contribute to dismantling power imbalances in our politics?
- 2 How do we ensure there are mechanisms in place for deepened accountability and transparency?
- 3 How do we support voters to use the vote effectively and strategically, in the context of the emergence of coalitions?
- 4 How do we contribute to rebuilding trust in democracy?
- 5 How do we contribute to protecting and sustaining IEC?
- 6 How do we encourage people on the margins to participate in and have trust in democracy?
- 7 How do we defend democracy against elites with narrow interests?
- 8 How do we respond to the ANC no longer being at the centre of our politics?





THEORY OF CHANGE

Over the next five years, we will work towards our vision of a South Africa where every adult has an equal influence in all decisions that affect them. This vision will be guided by people's power, democratic institutions and open political institutions.



The next section will describe the steps we will take to progress towards this Vision 2027.

OUR IMPACT

We will work towards a democracy that is rooted in the principle of popular sovereignty. We define popular sovereignty as every adult having an equal influence in the decisions that affect them – all the time. This includes when citizens use the vote during Local Government-, General- and By-Elections and when citizens engage with and influence public representatives between elections.

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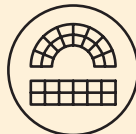
A democracy where every person has equal influence in all the decisions that affect them.

OUR MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Voters have the tools to organise themselves around the vote



The civic space remains open and inclusive



Public accountability mechanisms are more effective and enhance transparency



The IEC remains independent and is better resourced



Political parties are more committed to democratic principles

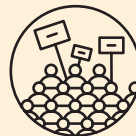


Money in politics is used more to deepen democracy than for private influence

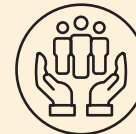


OUR LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

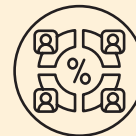
Every adult can more meaningfully participate in the democratic process



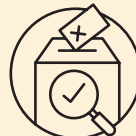
Our politics is driven by the interests of people



People have political alternatives to represent them



Elections are always free and fair

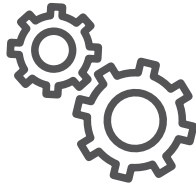


Democratic institutions are more reliable and trustworthy



Public representatives are more accountable and responsive





THEORY OF ACTION

Our activities are designed to meet our outcomes. Over the next five years, we will undertake the following activities under each immediate outcome:

1

Public accountability mechanisms are more effective and enhance transparency

- a. We will work towards ensuring that political party funding information is accessible and useful, through an online tool
- b. We will guard against threats to the principles of the Political Party Funding Act
- c. We will work towards ensuring that information on the electoral system is accessible and useful, through online information sharing
- d. We will work towards ensuring that the Political Party Funding Act is appropriate for changes in the electoral system
- e. We will scrutinise the internal democracy of the major political parties and make this information publicly available.
- f. We will campaign for the Right to Recall public representatives, in the electoral system

- g. We will campaign for a Constituency System that prioritises accountability and effectiveness
- h. We will campaign for effective coalitions ahead of the 2024 General Elections
- i. We will campaign for an opening up of the closed-list system

2

The Independent Electoral Commission remains independent and is better resourced.

- a. We will analyse and critique the South African Treasury's budget cuts to the IEC
- b. We will research and analyse the IEC's mandate and present proposals to the Minister of Home Affairs
- c. We will monitor the Parliamentary processes to appoint Commissioners to the IEC, and make the information accessible to the public

3

Political parties are more committed to democratic principles

- a. We will analyse the state of internal democracy in the major political parties in South Africa
- b. We will lobby political parties to adopt internal democratic principles

4

Money in politics is used more to deepen democracy than for private influence

- a. We will campaign towards strengthening the Political Party Funding Act
- b. We will campaign towards strengthening legislation on public funding to political parties
- c. We will develop a political party funding framework that promotes a broad base of funding

5

Voters have the tools to organise themselves around the vote

- a. We will support collaboration between social movements, community organisations, NGO's and labour ahead of the major elections.
- b. We will support the smaller convenings between social movements, community organisations, NGO's and labour ahead of the major elections.
- c. We will research strategies and tactics to use the vote strategically.

6

The civic space is open and inclusive

- a. We will monitor attempts by the political elite to close civic space, and respond via statements and solidarity support
- b. We will connect with other civil society organisations and contribute to building collective campaigns, towards our vision.

We will conduct an annual review to make necessary adjustments to these activities, and a comprehensive mid-term review in the third year of the strategy period.

OUR PROGRAMMES

We will organise these activities under four intersecting programmes:



1. MONEY IN POLITICS

We successfully campaigned for the enactment of the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA), which came into effect in 2021. The Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation since 1996, and the first one that regulates the internal operations of political parties.

We will now work towards understanding the relationships between money, influence and politics and remove the use of money to buy influence in politics.



2. ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

In 2020, Parliament embarked on a process to reform the Electoral Act to allow for independent candidates to stand for the General Elections. We have campaigned for electoral reform that centres public participation and prioritises accountability.

We will now work towards ensuring that mechanisms within the electoral systems ensure deeper accountability.



3. INTER- & INTRA- PARTY POLITICS

We recognise that functioning political parties are crucial to our multi-party democracy. In order to deepen government democracy and accountability, parties must value democracy and accountability. We will work towards ensuring that political parties withhold democratic principles and practices.

As we move towards the 2024 General Election and coalitions emerge at the centre of our politics, we will understand mechanisms for coalition relationships that are stable and based on principle.



4. DEMOCRACY FROM BELOW

We will work with community organisations, social movements and labour to develop the tools for people to organise themselves around the vote.



MY VOTE
COUNTS

