

Power to the people as SA social media buzzes about elections

By [Andre Steenekamp](#)

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Social media conversations ahead of the 2016 local government elections in South Africa reveal a growth of nearly four-fold over discussions about the 2011 municipal polls. What's more, if they are an accurate reflection of how South Africa will vote on 3 August, both the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the African National Congress (ANC) could concede some of their ground to the Economic Freedom Front (EFF) this year.



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Data extracted from the Salesforce Marketing Cloud Social Studio by online media agency, 25AM, shows that there were nearly 22,000 social conversations about the topic between 1 May and 29 July 2016. Unsurprisingly, the ANC as the national ruling party, generated the most mentions, followed by the EFF and then the DA.

Indeed, the ANC generated more mentions than the DA and the EFF combined, while the EFF was mentioned twice as many times as the DA. Analysis of the data shows that around 50% of users who have indicated which party they will vote for said that they will vote for the ANC, 25.1% said they would vote for the EFF and 24.7% said they would vote for the DA.

The distribution of Internet access in South Africa means that social media isn't necessarily an accurate reflection of how the country will vote. But it is worth noting that the social mood also reflects the results of several recent [opinion polls](#) that indicate that the ANC may lose significant support in some of South Africa's metros. A caveat here is that the polls showed that many voters are still undecided about where they will make their mark.

The ANC attracted almost three times as many mentions with a negative sentiment as mentions reflecting positive sentiment. Positive and negative mentions for the DA and EFF show a more even split. Conversation about the ANC spiked on 21

June, when unrest started in Tshwane after residents were unhappy with the party's choice of mayoral candidate for the metro. #TshwaneUnrest is one of the top five hashtags associated with the election.

The top influencers around municipal elections include official party accounts and leaders [@helenzille](#), [@Julius_S_Malema](#), [@Our_DA](#), [@My_ANC](#) and media sources [@News24](#), [@SABCNewsOnline](#), [@eNCA](#), [@bonang_M](#). EFF advocate [@Odwa_Obose](#) is one of the top 10 influencers on Twitter, according to Social Studio data, with just 1,800 followers—an interesting insight into how social media is giving people a powerful platform to promote their beliefs.

Increased presence on social media by the leading political parties as well as institutions like the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) have helped to spark engagement about this election. The IEC has launched an iOS and Android app to make results and election info available to the public, for example. But it's interesting to note that it's not just media organisations and official party sources that are shaping the discussion agenda – it is millions of ordinary people using their smartphones and social media platforms to share their opinions, comment on unfolding developments and even report breaking news to their followers.

ABOUT ANDRE STEENEKAMP

As CEO of 25AM, Andre Steenekamp leads the company's expansion in South Africa's fast-growing digital marketing and advertising space. His 25-year career has seen him work in a range of sales, marketing and management positions for leading traditional and digital publishers and agencies. Steenekamp was appointed to his current role following the acquisition of a 50%-stake in Acceleration Media by Times Media Limited.

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