Press Release

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Independent and opposition candidates gain as the ANC records a net loss at by-elections

The African National Congress (ANC) and the National Freedom Party (NFP) experienced net losses in the 12 sets of by-elections held between the May 2011 local government election and November 2012. The Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Congress of the People (Cope) have seen net gains, according to the *South Africa Survey*, recently published by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg.

The data, which came from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), revealed that between May 2011 and November 2012, the ANC suffered a net loss of six wards and the NFP a net loss of one. The DA achieved a net gain of three wards and Cope a net gain of one. The DA managed to win five wards from the ANC while the ANC won two from the DA. Subsequently the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) gained Nkandla (KwaZulu-Natal) in December 2012.

Independent candidates gained two wards since the 2011 local election. One such ward was Marikana (Rustenburg), site of the killing by police of 34 striking workers and protestors in August 2012, where the ANC lost to an independent candidate in a by-election held just three months later. The other ward won by an independent candidate was in the Northern Cape where an ANC councillor resigned and was re-elected as an independent candidate.

In terms of the Constitution, by-elections are never held at national and provincial level but only at local level. A by-election is held to fill a political office that has become vacant between regularly scheduled elections, through death, resignation from the party or the council, or if a councillor is expelled from his or her party or council. There are 4 277 wards in South Africa and between May 2011 and November 2012, 122 by-elections have been held.

A net loss or gain is calculated by subtracting the number of wards lost from the number of wards won over the period. Wards are retained when the ward is contested, but remains in the hands of the same party it did before the by-election. Retained wards are not taken into account when calculating the net losses or gains.

Overall the ANC controls 214 of the 278 councils in South Africa. The DA controls 18, and the IFP two, while 43 councils have no majority, so that no one party controls the council outright.

A researcher at the Institute, Georgina Alexander, said, 'The local level is where voters are able to hold their representatives directly accountable. The fact that opposition parties and independent candidates are gaining wards while the ANC is losing them is a sign of people using democracy to bring about change.'

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