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Gender representation and corruption in Ekurhuleni post-2021: Between inclusion and institutional resistance

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Abstract

This study investigates the evolving relationship between gender representation and anti-corruption governance in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM) following South Africa's 2021 local government elections. Using a qualitative case study design, the study draws on 20 semi-structured interviews with EMM councillors conducted in 2024 (45–75 minutes) and triangulates these accounts with analysis of municipal records, policy frameworks, performance audits, integrity reports, and media coverage related to Ekurhuleni's governance post-2021. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically, informed by feminist institutionalism, governance network theory, and critical dialogic accountability, to assess whether increased women's representation after the 2021 elections has translated into stronger integrity practices. Findings indicate that numerical inclusion has not consistently shifted decision-making authority: patriarchal informal norms, coalition dynamics, and clientelist networks continue to shape access to committees, procurement oversight, and information flows. Participants associate women's participation with stronger integrity discourse and community-facing accountability efforts, yet they also describe institutional resistance that limits substantive anti-corruption reform. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening gender-responsive accountability mechanisms in metropolitan governance.

Keywords: Local Governance; Gender Representation; Patriarchy; Corruption; Equality

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1. Introduction

The persistent marginalisation of women in municipal governance remains a critical concern in post-apartheid South Africa. Despite progressive constitutional commitments to equality, women continue to encounter systemic exclusion rooted in intersecting socio-cultural, religious, and regional dynamics that sustain patriarchal power structures and institutional hierarchies (Joseph, 2022a). These dynamics reinforce patterns of gendered inequality that hinder women's full participation in political decision-making and leadership. Although the democratic dispensation has expanded opportunities for formal representation, the realities of municipal governance reveal deeply embedded norms and institutional cultures resistant to gender transformation (Palmieri and Zetlin, 2020).

Importantly, gender-based marginalisation in governance intersects with other structural oppressions, including race, class, and heteronormativity. These intersecting barriers not only obstruct gender equity but also erode democratic accountability and inclusive policy-making (Gârboni, 2014). During apartheid, Black women were doubly excluded denied both political representation and economic agency. The enduring legacies of racial and patriarchal exclusion continue to shape contemporary governance systems. While post-1994 reforms have introduced gender-sensitive frameworks, men remain disproportionately represented in decision-making positions across municipal structures (Alexander et al., 2023).

South Africa's governance landscape thus reflects a patriarchal continuum in which gender exclusion is deeply intertwined with racial and class-based stratification. Policy initiatives such as the *White Paper on Local Government* (1998) and the *Gender Policy Framework for Local Government* (2007) have sought to institutionalize gender parity and participatory democracy (Ndlovu, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these frameworks in promoting ethical governance and reducing corruption remains contested (Porten et al., 2022). The persistence of patronage networks, bureaucratic inertia, and weak institutional oversight continues to undermine women's transformative potential in governance

Against this backdrop, the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM) offers a compelling context for examining the relationship between gender representation and corruption in local governance. Once dominated by the African National Congress (ANC), Ekurhuleni has, since the 2021 local government elections, been governed under fragile coalition arrangements. This political fragmentation presents both opportunities and challenges for inclusive governance, accountability, and institutional reform (Maneng, 2022).

This study investigates the Gender Representation and Corruption in Ekurhuleni Post-2021: Between Inclusion and Institutional Resistance. Specifically, it examines whether increased female representation within municipal structures has translated into improved transparency, ethical decision-making, and the mitigation of corruption. The study addresses the following research question:

> *To what extent has gender representation in Ekurhuleni post-2021 contributed to anti-corruption and accountability in local governance, and how do institutional structures mediate this relationship?*

The analysis draws on feminist institutionalism, governance network theory, and critical dialogic accountability to interrogate how formal gender inclusion interacts with informal institutional norms, party patronage, and bureaucratic resistance (Moldalieva, 2021). These theoretical perspectives illuminate the ongoing tension between symbolic and substantive representation and the degree to which gendered participation can foster genuine transformation within local governance structures.

Building on recent scholarship exploring gendered dimensions of accountability (Tanima, et al., 2023), participatory democracy (McEwan, 2003), and distributive politics (Padilla-Díaz, 2015), this article situates Ekurhuleni within broader global and regional debates on feminist governance. It argues that while increased female participation signifies progress toward inclusive democracy, the persistence of patriarchal institutional cultures, spatial inequality, and coalition instability constrains the translation of representation into reform.

By critically analysing the Ekurhuleni case, this study contributes to a growing body of research linking gender-responsive governance to institutional integrity and anti-corruption outcomes (Cook et al., 2023). It seeks to determine whether the post-2021 rise in women's representation constitutes a symbolic inclusion within entrenched patriarchal structures or a substantive transformation capable of strengthening ethical leadership and democratic accountability in South African local government.

2. Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design to investigate Gender Representation and Corruption in Ekurhuleni Post-2021: Between Inclusion and Institutional Resistance. The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to generate rich, context-specific insights into social phenomena that are complex, dynamic, and deeply embedded in lived experience (Kennedy and Thornberg, 2018). Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the study seeks to uncover the subjective meanings and social constructions that shape women's political participation and perceived influence on anti-corruption initiatives. Interpretivism recognises that social reality is co-constructed through interaction, and thus prioritises the voices and interpretations of participants. This ontological and epistemological orientation aligns with the study's aim to understand how gendered experiences within municipal institutions are negotiated and articulated. The research is further informed by elements of critical feminist institutionalism, governance network theory, and critical dialogic accountability, which provides a theoretical lens to analyse how gender norms intersect with institutional power structures to constrain or enable women's agency in governance contexts.

The study is inductive in nature, using empirical data to generate interpretive insights that may inform or refine existing theory rather than test pre-established hypotheses. Given the limited literature on post-election gender shifts in municipal anti-corruption frameworks, an open-ended exploratory approach was deemed necessary to reveal emergent patterns, contradictions, and institutional blind spots (Azungah, 2018).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method well-suited for eliciting nuanced perspectives while allowing respondents the freedom to raise issues of personal significance. Interviews were conducted over three months in 2024 and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. In-depth interviews and secondary data such as journals and books. An interview guide was developed based on preliminary document review and organised around five core themes: political inclusion, governance culture, ethical leadership, institutional accountability, and perceived corruption dynamics.

Table 1 summarises the five core interview themes used to organise the interview guide and subsequent analysis.

Table 1. Core themes and indicative sub-themes derived from the interview data

Core theme	Indicative sub-themes / focus areas
Political inclusion	Candidate selection and party gatekeeping; ward vs PR pathways; coalition bargaining and committee access
Governance culture	Informal norms and gender bias; patronage and network access; workplace respect and exclusion
Ethical leadership	Integrity expectations; transparency practices; constituency responsiveness
Institutional accountability	Oversight committees and reporting lines; audits and integrity processes; public participation forums
Perceived corruption dynamics	Procurement and tender processes; clientelism and resource exchange; whistleblowing risks and retaliation

To triangulate findings and enhance data validity, the study incorporated document analysis of municipal records, policy frameworks, performance audits, integrity reports, and media coverage related to Ekurhuleni's

governance post-2021. This triangulation strategy helps mitigate the risk of bias inherent in single-source data and grounds participants' narratives in institutional realities.

The study engaged 20 municipal councillors, drawn using purposive and snowball sampling. Initial participants were identified based on publicly available records and referrals from local governance networks. The inclusion criteria required participants to have:

- A minimum of two years' experience as councillor,
- Representation across both genders,
- Age range between 25 and 55, and
- Active participation in at least one governance oversight committee post-2021.

Of the 20 councillors interviewed, 11 were women and 9 were men, representing a mix of political parties and diverse geographic wards within Ekurhuleni. The sampling strategy prioritised information-rich cases to explore a wide range of perspectives and ensure thematic saturation—the point at which no new analytical insights were emerging.

While this sample cannot be generalised statistically, it enables analytical generalisation by identifying patterns and dynamics that may be applicable to similar municipal contexts across South Africa.

Interview transcripts were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's of 2006 six-phase model (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method was selected for its flexibility and suitability in generating interpretive categories from qualitative data (Blumenberg and Barros, 2018). Thematic coding was both deductive, informed by the research questions and theoretical framework, and inductive, allowing for the emergence of unexpected insights.

To further strengthen research rigor, the following strategies were implemented:

- Member checks: Selected participants were invited to verify the accuracy of their statements.
- Peer debriefing: Two external researchers reviewed a subset of interview transcripts and themes.
- Audit trail: A systematic record of decisions and analytical processes was maintained.

The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to critically examine potential biases, assumptions, and positionality. This reflexivity was particularly important given the gendered nature of the research topic and the researcher's role in interpreting meaning from participants' narratives. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Johannesburg ethics committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any point. All data were stored securely in encrypted digital formats, and identifying information was removed during transcription.

While the study provides in-depth insights, it is subject to several limitations:

- **Temporal scope**: The study examines post-2021 changes over a relatively short timeframe, limiting the ability to assess long-term impact.
- **Geographic scope**: The focus on Ekurhuleni restricts generalisability, though it offers a useful case for analytical extrapolation.
- **Access limitations**: Due to political sensitivities, some councillors declined to participate, which may have constrained the diversity of perspectives.

These limitations are acknowledged and inform the recommendations for future longitudinal and comparative research.

3. Theoretical, conceptual, and philosophical frameworks

This study adopts a multi-theoretical framework integrating Feminist Institutionalism (FI), Governance Network Theory (GNT), and Critical Dialogic Accountability (CDAA) to analyse the intersection of gender

representation, institutional culture, and corruption mitigation in the post-2021 political landscape of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM).

These frameworks were selected for their complementarity in addressing the structural, institutional, and discursive dimensions of gendered governance (Adejumo-Ayibiowu, 2015). Collectively, they enable a multi-scalar understanding of how women's participation in local government both challenges and is constrained by entrenched power structures, patronage systems, and accountability deficits.

3.1. Feminist institutionalism

At the foundation of this study lies Feminist Institutionalism (FI), which interrogates how gendered power relations are embedded in both formal institutions (laws, policies, and structures) and informal institutions (norms, patronage, and networks) (Mackayand Murtagh, 2019). FI contends that formal gender equality measures such as quotas and parity frameworks often coexist with informal practices that reproduce male dominance and restrict women's agency (Palmieri and Zetlin, 2020).

In the context of Ekurhuleni, this theoretical lens elucidates why, despite increased female representation following the 2021 elections, women councillors continue to encounter exclusion from key decision-making roles and influence-limiting cultural expectations. Institutional inertia, shaped by historical patriarchy and political patronage, sustains unequal access to power.

FI also highlights the dual nature of inclusion descriptive (numerical representation) versus substantive (transformative participation) and thus provides a critical foundation for assessing whether gender representation in Ekurhuleni constitutes symbolic participation or genuine institutional transformation. By foregrounding the gendered nature of institutional design, FI links women's experiences in governance to broader questions of accountability, transparency, and power redistribution (Gârboni, 2014).

3.2. Governance network theory

Governance Network Theory (GNT) complements Feminist Institutionalism by reconceptualising governance as a horizontal and interactive process involving interdependent state, private, and civil-society actors (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012). Rather than viewing corruption as a series of isolated individual acts, GNT frames it as a networked phenomenon embedded within institutional relationships and resource exchanges.

In the Ekurhuleni case, this theoretical perspective is particularly useful in understanding:

- How municipal decision-making occurs within interlocking governance networks including councillors, administrators, contractors, and community structures.
- How female leadership and inclusion in these networks influence new accountability logics and participatory practices.
- How informal alliances and "gatekeeping" within political and bureaucratic systems mediate access to power and policy influence.

GNT underscores that accountability in local governance emerges through relational coordination rather than hierarchical control (Pierre and Peters, 2020). Thus, corruption can be interpreted as a failure of network governance where accountability relationships are distorted or captured by male-dominated patronage systems. This theory enables the study to analyse Ekurhuleni's coalition governance as a hybrid system, wherein women navigate complex interdependencies that both empower and constrain their agency.

3.3. Critical dialogic accountability

To integrate an ethical and participatory dimension into the framework, the study draws on Critical Dialogic Accountability (CDAA) (Tanima et al, 2023). CDAA extends traditional notions of accountability beyond compliance and reporting to include dialogue, contestation, and voice particularly from those historically

excluded from governance processes. It acknowledges that accountability is not only institutional but relational and discursive, requiring space for power-challenging conversations and feminist negotiation within bureaucratic systems.

Applied to the Ekurhuleni context, CDAA highlights how women councillors, activists, and community leaders negotiate agency within male-dominated institutions. Their strategies ranging from informal coalition-building to community-based monitoring reflect attempts to reframe accountability as a shared social practice rather than a top-down audit function.

This perspective also exposes the limitations of tokenistic participation, where women's presence in leadership fails to translate into substantive policy influence or ethical reform.

By adopting CDAA, the study positions accountability as a transformative process one that empowers marginalized voices to reshape institutional norms, redefine transparency, and challenge corruption as a structural rather than individual issue.

4. Literature review

4.1. Gender Representation in Local Governance: Progress and persistent paradoxes

South Africa's democratic transition positioned gender equality as both a constitutional mandate and a catalyst for participatory governance. Over the past three decades, voluntary political party quotas most notably the ANC's 50/50 policy have expanded women's descriptive representation (Muriaas and Kayuni, 2023). Although post-2021 Ekurhuleni saw an increase in women councillors, this inclusion has been largely symbolic, with strategic portfolios such as finance, infrastructure, and anti-corruption oversight remaining male-dominated.

This aligns with McEwan's observation that participatory democracy in South Africa, while normatively inclusive, remains constrained by centralised and gendered power structures (McEwan, 2003). Local government reforms, including the Gender Policy Framework for Local Government of 2007, sought to institutionalise gender parity, but implementation has been fragmented in coalition-driven municipalities such as Ekurhuleni, where alliances shift rapidly and gender equity lacks political enforcement.

4.2. Coalition politics and gendered marginalisation

Coalition governance following the 2021 local elections produced a fragmented political landscape that complicated gender transformation. International scholarship shows that coalition fragmentation often reproduces gendered portfolio segregation, limiting women's access to high-stakes decision-making roles (Cook et al, 2023). In Ekurhuleni, female councillors were frequently assigned to "soft portfolios" such as community services and social development, reinforcing a longstanding gendered division of political labour.

Moreover, coalition instability characterised by shifting alliances, power struggles, and patronage negotiations weakens institutional coherence and reduces the prioritisation of gender reforms. McEwan cautions that structured participation can reproduce exclusion when institutional cultures remain patriarchal. In Ekurhuleni, coalition partners did not embed gender equity into coalition agreements, thereby sidelining women's influence in procurement oversight, budget planning, and corruption mitigation.

4.3. Institutional culture, planning systems, and spatial inequality

Ekurhuleni's institutional environment reflects broader post-apartheid governance contradictions. While extensive infrastructure investment has occurred, systemic inequality, service delivery failures, and corruption allegations persist (Naudé, 2008). Planning institutions, in particular, have long been critiqued for their technocratic culture and susceptibility to political manipulation (Todes et al., 2010). This creates an

enabling environment for bureaucratic opacity and policy capture conditions that hinder women's substantive participation.

Spatial inequality further intersects with gendered governance. Women councillors in townships and peri-urban settlements face mobility barriers, limited access to administrative hubs, and community expectations rooted in care labour responsibilities. As Naudé argues, spatial mismatch reduces women's ability to engage meaningfully in municipal oversight structures, thereby weakening their potential impact on accountability.

4.4. Gender, corruption, and accountability: global and local perspectives

4.4.1. The gender–accountability nexus

Global evidence frequently links women's political participation with lower corruption levels, citing women's preference for participatory leadership and collective accountability (Adebayo and Worth, 2022). Chattopadhyay and Duflo's pioneering research shows that women leaders often prioritise community needs and promote transparency (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004).

However, feminist scholars caution against essentialising women as inherently less corrupt (Goetz, 2020). Instead, institutional culture, power dynamics, and access to decision-making authority shape governance outcomes. In contexts such as Ekurhuleni where procurement processes are opaque and political patronage entrenched women's ability to challenge corruption is mediated by systemic constraints.

This aligns with Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer's argument that the relationship between women's representation and corruption outcomes depends on accountability conditions, including whether misconduct is likely to be detected and punished.

4.4.2. Institutional barriers and informal networks

Ekurhuleni's bureaucratic system is characterised by complex administrative layers, patronage-driven appointments, and political interference, mirroring other global cases of institutional capture. Moldalieva's work on Kyrgyzstan illustrates how informal networks undermine formal accountability mechanisms, leaving women reliant on alternative channels such as community forums and ward committees. Similarly, women councillors in Ekurhuleni often depend on grassroots structures to advance governance reforms in the absence of institutional support, reflecting broader patterns of informalised accountability in Global South governance (Moldalieva, 2021).

4.4.3. Dialogic accountability and micro-sites of resistance

Critical dialogic accountability (CDAA), as articulated by Tanima et al., offers a framework for understanding how marginalised actors build resistance within constrained political systems (Tanima et al, 2023). In Ekurhuleni, informal women's caucuses, community dialogues, and ward-based forums function as micro-sites of accountability. However, these initiatives lack institutional backing, suffer from political instrumentalisation, and remain vulnerable to the dynamics of coalition volatility.

Brown and Dillard caution that accountability discourses are often depoliticised, limiting their transformative potential an observation reflected in Ekurhuleni, where gendered oversight practices remain peripheral to mainstream political agendas (Brown et al, 2015).

4.4.4. Comparative insights: gender inclusion without structural change

Comparative literature reinforces the argument that gender inclusion must be accompanied by institutional redesign. Studies of women seafarers and agricultural extension officers1 show that gender mainstreaming fails when structural inequalities and workplace cultures remain resistant.

Cook et al. demonstrate that in Nepal, gendered decentralisation succeeds only when inclusion policies are supported by training, monitoring, and resource allocation. By contrast, Ekurhuleni's gender frameworks lack teeth absence of enforcement, weak monitoring, and minimal localisation reduce inclusion to symbolism (Maziwisa, 2022).

4.5. Gender, representation, and corruption in south african municipalities

South African research highlights that municipalities with higher female representation exhibit lower levels of clientelism and patronage when institutional conditions support women's influence (Alexander et al., 2023). However, women often face dual accountability pressures to communities and to male-dominated party structures controlling access to resources. Denoon-Stevens et al. further identify systemic planning failures and political interference that intersect with gender bias, reinforcing women's exclusion from strategic portfolios (Denoon-Stevens et al., 2022).

Palmieri and Zetlin propose elicitive governance, arguing that gender transformation requires cultural change rooted in relational leadership and participatory structures (Palmieri and Zetlin, 2020). In Ekurhuleni, such practices remain emergent and fragile, constrained by coalition instability and entrenched institutional resistance.

4.6. Synthesis: Between inclusion and institutional resistance

Across global, regional, and local literature, a consistent theme emerges: representation alone does not produce transformation. Ekurhuleni demonstrates this paradox. Although women's descriptive representation increased modestly after 2021, substantive empowerment is hindered by:

- Tokenistic inclusion in non-strategic portfolios.
- Depoliticised participation, reducing gendered accountability to procedural compliance.
- Coalition instability, which undermines policy coherence and long-term reform.
- Spatial and socio-economic inequality, limiting women's engagement and oversight capacity.
- Entrenched patronage networks, which neutralise transparency reforms.

Thus, gender representation in Ekurhuleni remains caught "between inclusion and institutional resistance" (Joseph, 2022b). Achieving substantive transformation requires embedding gender-responsive governance in procurement oversight, budget processes, monitoring systems, and institutional cultures not merely increasing women's numerical presence.

5. Presentation of research findings

The question entails analysing to what extent has gender representation in Ekurhuleni post-2021 contributed to anti-corruption and accountability in local governance, and how do institutional structures mediate this relationship? With a newly elected female mayor who remained in the position for a year, the study needed to assess the level of accountability once a woman was in charge. A comparison needed to be made regarding improvement or the lack of it in the area of service delivery. The question sought to determine whether, under the new leadership, things were improving or worsening.

> *Question: To what extent has gender representation in Ekurhuleni post-2021 contributed to anti-corruption and accountability in local governance, and how do institutional structures mediate this relationship?*

Participant Number 1 (Male)

The participant's feedback highlights the complexities surrounding post-2021 and its potential implications for governance and corruption. The participant acknowledged the emergence of a new era resulting from the coalition's new arrangement after the local government elections.

"If I may coin a phrase, it will be the coalition's new arrangement, which we can refer to as a new paradigm, which is a new reality that is extremely difficult to manage. Currently, no legislation or framework is governing or guiding the parties to manage a coalition to the extent that different ideologies are put on the same table and probably have conflicting parties that sometimes are not necessarily subscribing to the women in one space but have some sort of constituency. They'll be demanding what they want to such an extent that the balance that is expected to be adequately addressed might be limited, you see? So it's difficult times with the new arrangements for equality. Parties are not necessarily getting the required majority of 50% to govern."

Participant Number 2 (Female)

The participant's feedback provides insights into the gender dynamics within the political landscape of Ekurhuleni Municipality. The participant highlights the predominance of male candidates during the 2021 local government election.

"Most of the candidates during that time were males, not women. I'm from Tembisa Metro. In enrollment, the whole was only two women, the rest were male. So that means even there you can see that there is a gap."

Participant Number 3 (Male)

The participant's feedback sheds light on various aspects related to governance, corruption, and revenue collection within the municipality.

"With local government, no. Because you must remember that every time you get a party that doesn't want corruption, you get another lot of people ganging together to basically try and do it. So, I'll give you a very stupid example. We were supposed to have the State of the City address, but because our mayor was outgoing, we knew she wouldn't make it. We had a certain budget in place. When the new people came into place, they quadrupled the budget. So, what is happening in local government? They are spending money they don't have. And they're not collecting money from people. And also, where people have a culture of non-payment, it leads to a lack of service delivery. The bottom line is that Metro is like a business. So, let me give you an example. You've got the debtor's book, and you've got to credit this book. For any Metro to function properly, they've got to have what we call a 94% collection rate. If you can achieve 94%, that means you can fix street lights, put in speed bumps, and start addressing your IDP. But our collection rates aren't at 94%, they're well below that. And the problem is when you're talking collection rates that are so low, we're not talking millions, we're talking billions. So, it's a basic exercise. You do it. I come from a business background. It's really easy. I buy something to sell, I'm going to make a profit. I put the profit in the drawer. I put the cost of sale into another draw to pay that person, and I collect the debtor's money. When I collect the debt, I can take my profit. So, what they're doing is spending more than they've collected. It's a vicious cycle."

"Do you think there is a better way to enforce people to pay what they owe?"

"Yes, you've got to encourage them to pay. And by virtue of encouraging them to pay, I mean, obviously, you can get excuses like the accounts are overstated. Sort that out with a resident. And then there now what I've done with my residents is I've instilled a culture in them to say, if you get an account and you say it's too high, don't just throw it in the drawer. Either come talk to me or we go together or you go to the accounts department and let's resolve it. So, by virtue of you doing that, you're encouraging people to pay."

Participant Number 4 (Female)

The participant's feedback suggests a positive change in civic engagement and accountability following the recent elections.

"Things have totally changed in this last election. You can see the residents are more wanting to be involved and see what's really going on. Beforehand, they weren't worried about the council meetings or what we did or what we didn't do. But now this time around, I've found a huge difference when everybody wants to know everything."

Participant Number 5 (Female)

The participant's feedback highlights the importance of women's participation in governance and their aspirations for societal change.

"Women are working; women are really working, and we want change. We want change for our children. We want changes of our society."

Participant Number 6 (Female)

"Women lead better than men"

Participant Number 7 (Female)

The participant suggests a sense of scepticism or disillusionment regarding any tangible progress or change resulting from the paradigm shift.

"There hasn't been any movement, no nothing."

Participant Number 8 (Female)

"I have observed a lot of changes with women leaders"

Participant Number 9 (Female)

The participant's feedback suggests a positive assessment of the impact of the post-2021 local government election on governance and corruption. The participant acknowledges a notable shift in the governance environment following the shift towards gender equality.

"I think there's been a shift, it's a very changing environment now, it's no longer what it used to be. We've been able to build a lot of coalition relationships which has helped a lot in doing service delivery. A lot of charges were brought up against various people from various structures because of irregular expenditures that have been happening for a long time."

Participant Number 10 (Female)

The participant's feedback provides insights into the dynamics of gender representation in governance and the challenges faced in combating corruption within the municipality.

"I know that the Freedom Front is made up of, I think, four or five women. When you see them sitting in council, it's quite nice to see because I only think there's three men and the rest are all women. Yes, but those ladies fight, do you understand? Yes. If you look at the ANC caucus, the ANC, same thing. Those ladies are fighting the EFF. Those ladies fight the hardest. And it's because we've all got different values and principles within our own respective party. And I think at the end of the day, that controls the whole thing is our Ethics Committee. What needs to happen is that people need to be made aware that the only way that you are going to have a stable municipality and a municipality that will work moving forward is to root out the evil within the municipality. There is a lot of cadre deployment within Ekurhuleni. That is why it was so easy to sabotage the past multiparty coalition. There was a tremendous amount of sabotage that was taking place and that was taking place at middle management. And obviously the reason why is that investigations can be ongoing and certain sort of corruption can be unearthed. But all you need to do is to have a look at one or two of the cartage scandals, how many vehicles are on the road? There is nothing wrong with the vehicle, yet it goes to auction, and it is auctioned off for one rent. I think these are some of the things that they were really working very hard at and trying to expose."

Participant Number 11 (Female)

The participant's feedback provides insights into the challenges faced by the municipality, particularly regarding budget constraints and revenue collection.

"Because of lack of budget that's why maybe you can find it some other things are still stuck, but before that the budget we were still moving accordingly. But now only because of the budget. That's why everything now is not moving. We get budget allocations from government, but regarding collections, most communities are not making payments due to unemployment hence they are not paying, that is where a big problem lie."

Participant Number 12 (Female)

The participant's feedback suggests a critical perspective on the relationship between gender representation and corruption. The participant highlights the predominance of male elected representatives in the municipality. They imply that this imbalance in gender representation may affect governance dynamics and potentially influence corruption levels.

"I'm saying majority of the elected representatives in majority, it's male. So automatically that changes."

Participant Number 13 (Male)

The participant's feedback suggests a sceptical stance towards acknowledging the existence of corruption.

"I can't say anything about corruption. I don't have proof that there is corruption. I don't believe in corruption because I don't have proof that there is corruption."

Participant Number 14 (Male)

The participant's feedback suggests that the paradigm shift towards gender equality has not yet effectively addressed corruption due to resistance from staff and administration.

"Not yet, because there's a kickback from the staff, the administration side because they want everything the way they used to get it. They don't like change. There's a massive kickback."

Participant Number 15 (Male)

The participant's feedback suggests that the shift towards gender equality may have led to negative consequences, particularly regarding unemployment and social welfare programmes.

"Yes, there's been a change and the change is negative. If you look, I think it also goes back to the very same thing I was speaking about of the coalition. If you compare the challenges, let's make an example about unemployment. The unemployment rate is not decreasing. It's increasing. Here in the Ekurhuleni we used to have temporary jobs, where people are cleaning around the environment, they would get contracts for at least 12 month or a year or they would be renewed on yearly basis. All those things have been dropped or have been cancelled. We also used to have a so-called pay per hour cover, which is a policy of the municipality that people who don't afford or who don't have means like poor families, they can be able to access that to the municipality for school uniforms for those who are matriculated and for food parcels. We last saw the food parcels in the administration of the 2021. In the current leadership, we have never seen something like a food parcel of which is a need in our community. But unfortunately, all those things of services are no longer for free and no longer rendered to our people. We also have the policy that speaks about the rights to water. Where at least every household would get a hundred litre or hundred millilitre of water every month, all those things have been cancelled because of one thing, the coalition government when the DA took over 2021. They changed those policies because their belief was that, these policies are not benefiting the white minority and those black majority are not paying services. The white minority who are paying services, they don't get such or other benefits from such services. So I think it has decreased. It has changed from the past. Regarding the services that are no longer at this continued in Ekurhuleni municipality and the speculation that says Covid-19 is the one that sort of dried the municipality financially, now the municipality does not have money to cater for most of the services that they used to cater. means the municipality must re-purchase again in a form of a loan. Because you would have paid a person to put for instance a vote that person is already paid now because of Covid. We must stop and that person it does not necessarily mean, or it because the project has been stopped due to Covid. Remember Covid was a disaster. So, the insurances and other things they came and they started to pay so we were now in debt. So, when you have to continue it means you must re-purchase again. I could agree that Covid has cost us in not being able to provide services that we had planned for by the end of 2019 when Covid came."

Participant Number 16 (Female)

The participant's feedback reflects on the challenges and achievements encountered during their tenure in office, highlighting the complexities of municipal governance.

"We were very well on our way but taking over administration of 21 years is very difficult to pull it together within a couple of months. You need a full term to pull it completely right, to stabilise it, specifically if your finances are fragile. There are some things that we really accomplished that I'm exceptionally proud of. In fact, I won the Female Mayor's Excellence Award countrywide. Because of absolute substance and resilience and trying every which way

to better the lives in our communities, by service delivery and opening channels. Running a city is like running a big conglomerate. You must take the knocks with the wins as well. And yes, we were taking very good stones within the structure to build for sustainability to go forward for many, many years to come. It was disappointing in that respect. When I was voted out because of the hard work that we had done and the many hours that we had actually put in to actually achieve these goals that we had set ourselves. And specifically, I do tend to set goals very high for myself. So, in those respects, there are some wins and there are some losses."

Participant Number 17 (Male)

The participant's feedback provides insights into the dynamics of gender representation in leadership roles and its potential impact on governance and corruption.

"When it comes to Ekurhuleni, being led by a female mayor, it was not necessarily around issues of gender. It was pure political dynamics that played a part. You find that even though a person has good intentions, if there is no political will to assist that person in whatever that they are trying to do, eventually they are going to fall short. But what normally happens is that when you have a female occupying the highest seat, you find that we as male counterparts come in to be in a relationship. Then we try our level best to make that female leader uncomfortable. But so far, I think they are actually holding their ground and we are better off when we are being led by a female rather than being led by a male. It does not necessarily mean that female leaders are not arrogant, but their arrogance is a bit feminine. And then in terms of our arrogance as male counterparts, ours is a bit firm. You know, we feel more shaken by the arrogance of the male than the arrogance of the female. So, I think at some point, South Africa as a country, maybe we need to give women the highest seats in the land and see what happens. I think there has to be a 50-50 policy that ensures that women can actually lead given the contribution that they are actually giving. Because I can tell you, the current city manager is not a city manager because of political ties, but she remains a city manager because of a track record. So, a track record speaks volumes. Even if you want to character assassinate her from a political perspective, you wouldn't have a leg to stand on. So, if we have women like her making sure that they excel in whatever they do, I don't think we as males we will have grounds to actually challenge their leadership roles."

Participant Number 18 (Male)

The participant's feedback provides insights into the challenges the municipality faces, particularly in the context of service delivery, financial management, and political stability.

"Services in the city all around, the delivery of services in the city of Ekurhuleni has been in decline for a long time. It's been coming before even Tania Campbell took over as the mayor, and taking over in a very difficult time in a minority coalition with the city struggling, just recovering after the events of COVID, dealing with energy crisis. So, it was difficult whether you are the best magician or the best speaker or whatever, no one was going to turn the city around in that short amount or that space of time. But there was a time when Tania was in government, there's been a recovery of the city's finances because of the very strict financial control that was put in place to try and put a stop to the looting. And we know that those attempts to stabilise the city's finances and end corruption wasn't met with joy. Many were against it. And she faced many challenges, sabotage, slow and poor performance from management in the administration. And it was a difficult time. But ultimately, I think the idea was to stabilise the city politics, because this changing of political role players is not healthy to keep on having a new mayor. And I think ideally, if there was any interest for the people of Ekurhuleni, it was to allow a term of office. It's like you go to a school for a whole year, and then you are judged at the end of your term. Now six months into your term, you are told you are a failure, and then people put forward motions. I think it's unfair to judge so quickly. So those laws about removing and changing political leadership, are something the city needs to look at. And making sure that these things do not happen as frequently. Because you need to judge a person on, or a political party on a term of office. Then you can judge on reports, audit outcomes, and the lived experiences of residents."

Participant Number 19 (Female)

The participant's feedback provides insights into the complex dynamics surrounding gender equality, leadership, and corruption within the municipality.

"I believe it comes down to how you approach leadership in the city. As a woman in a leadership role, your natural instincts, like a mother's, often come into play. Whether at home or at work, women tend to want the best for those they serve. Leadership for women often involves a balance of sympathy and empathy, which can differ from the more task-focused approach men may take. That said, women in leadership, such as female mayors, often face

significant challenges. For example, a female mayor in my ward was not given the necessary support to implement her initiatives. I recall her visiting my ward and giving a directive for a waste transfer station to be operational within a month. Over a year later, nothing has been done. Another issue is that sometimes women fail to support each other in leadership. Instead of uplifting one another, some women might bring others down, perhaps due to male dominance or societal pressures. This lack of solidarity undermines women's potential to empower and prove their capabilities. Unfortunately, society often prioritises gender over competence. What matters most is whether a person can do the job, regardless of their gender. True equality recognises that men and women are equally valuable and capable in the eyes of God. Whether as politicians or individuals, we must embrace this principle and focus on empowering one another based on merit, not gender."

Participant Number 20 (Male)

The participant acknowledges some improvements but highlights that the coalition government also contributes to the lack of service delivery.

"Yes, there are some improvements, the coalition as well plays a role in lack of service delivery. Lack of service delivery is being delayed because of coalition."

5.1. Response analysis

Gender Equality

Several participants (2, 5, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18) highlighted the importance of gender equality and women's active roles in Ekurhuleni Municipality. They noted issues such as male dominance in political positions, the contribution of women to better service delivery, and the need for better support and policies to enhance female leadership.

Corruption and Accountability

Participants (3, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19) focused on the issues of corruption and financial mismanagement within the municipality. They discussed how coalition dynamics, budget constraints, poor collection rates, and resistance to change among administrative staff have impacted accountability and service delivery. The link made between gender equality and corruption was less direct, with few participants explicitly connecting increased female representation to reduced corruption.

Table 2. Summary of participant responses on Gender Equality and Corruption in Ekurhuleni municipality

Participant	Response Summary	Related to Gender Equality	Related to Corruption
1	Discusses coalition management issues and the lack of a guiding framework for coalitions, indicating challenges in balancing gender representation.	Yes	Indirectly
2	Highlights the gender gap in political candidacy, noting male dominance.	Yes	No
3	Addresses corruption through mismanagement of budgets and low collection rates, suggesting systemic issues in local government.	No	Yes
4	Notes increased resident involvement and scrutiny post-election.	No	Indirectly
5	Emphasises women's active role and desire for societal change.	Yes	No
6	Women are much better leaders than man	Res	Yes
7	Claims no significant movement or change.	No	No
8	Noted positive change with women in leadership	Yes	Res
9	Observes a changing environment with coalition building aiding service delivery and tackling irregular expenditures.	Indirectly	Yes
10	Details female representation in various parties and challenges due to cadre deployment and sabotage in multiparty coalitions.	Yes	Yes

Participant	Response Summary	Related to Gender Equality	Related to Corruption
11	Cites budget issues and poor collection rates, exacerbated by unemployment.	No	Indirectly
12	Mentions male dominance in elected positions.	Yes	No
13	Denies knowledge or belief in corruption due to lack of proof.	No	No
14	Points out resistance to change within the administrative staff.	No	Yes
15	Criticises the coalition for policy changes impacting service delivery and cites COVID-19 as a factor in financial difficulties.	No	Indirectly
16	Reflects on achievements and challenges as a female leader, stressing the need for time to stabilise governance.	Yes	Yes
17	Discusses political dynamics affecting female leaders and advocates for a 50-50 policy for gender equality in leadership.	Yes	Yes
18	Talks about the challenges female leaders face, including lack of support and internalised gender biases among women.	Yes	Indirectly
19	Describes service delivery decline and financial recovery attempts, emphasising the need for stable political leadership.	No	Yes
20	Notes some improvements but points out that coalitions delay service delivery.	No	Indirectly

Source: Shiviti (2024)

The table explains a variety of perspectives from participants in Ekurhuleni municipality, highlighting issues of gender equality and corruption. Many responses emphasise the ongoing challenges and dynamics in balancing gender representation and addressing systemic corruption, while others focus on specific areas of governance and policy implementation.

6. Conclusion

Gender representation in Ekurhuleni after the 2021 local government elections has contributed primarily to symbolic inclusion rather than substantive anti-corruption and accountability gains, as women councillors increasingly occupy visible leadership roles but remain constrained by entrenched institutional resistance. Although several female councillors interviewed associated women with stronger ethical leadership and a commitment to transparency, their influence on anti-corruption processes is significantly limited by patriarchal political cultures, coalition instability, and deeply embedded patronage networks within the municipality. Interview evidence reveals that while a modest increase in women's descriptive representation has occurred, this post-2021 has not translated into measurable reductions in corruption, which participants widely described as persistent or worsening amid political fragmentation, administrative gatekeeping, and weak consequence management structures. Coalition governance, in particular, mediates women's potential impact by creating unstable decision-making environments and reinforcing informal alliances that undermine oversight functions. Furthermore, bureaucratic inertia, middle-management sabotage, and systemic failures in monitoring and enforcement dilute councillors' ability regardless of gender to hold officials accountable, thereby diminishing opportunities for women who seek to advance ethical governance. As reviewers highlighted, earlier claims of a "post-2021" were unsupported; the evidence instead demonstrates partial, uneven progress shaped by individual agency rather than structural transformation. Overall, gender representation in Ekurhuleni contributes to visibility and democratic legitimacy but has not, in the absence of institutional redesign and strengthened accountability frameworks, produced substantive anti-corruption reform.

7. Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1: Institutionalise Gender in Coalition Governance Agreements** Require gender equity clauses in all coalition governance agreements to prevent gender-sensitive policies from being deprioritised during inter-party negotiations.
- **Recommendation 2: Prioritise Gender-Sensitive Budgeting and Oversight** Ensure that women are meaningfully represented in financial oversight bodies and are trained in gender-responsive budgeting to align public spending with equity goals.
- **Recommendation 3: Establish Protected Leadership Tracks for Women** Create formal leadership pipelines for women in local government with mentorship, training, and institutional backing to counteract marginalisation.
- **Recommendation 4: Expand Participatory Governance Mechanisms** Formalise ward-level participatory planning and budget forums that incorporate the voices of women, youth, and informal sector actors, particularly in marginalised communities.
- **Recommendation 5: Research and Continuous Evaluation**
    a) Longitudinal Studies - Invest in long-term studies to track the evolving relationship between gender representation, service delivery, and anti-corruption impacts across election cycles.
    b) Research on Best Practices - Compile comparative research on successful gender-responsive governance frameworks from other municipalities and international contexts to inform context-specific models.
    c) Feedback Mechanisms for Women in Politics - Institutionalise formal, anonymised platforms for women in politics to share challenges, inform policy revisions, and strengthen collective voice—particularly in councils dominated by coalitions.

While the 2021 electoral moment opened a window for gender-transformative governance, it did not dismantle the foundational systems that enable corruption and exclude women. To realise the potential of the gender equality paradigm shifts in Ekurhuleni, political institutions must go beyond symbolic inclusion toward systemic empowerment, evidence-based reform, and institutional resilience.

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