



The Pulse of the People:

Public Sentiment Report on South Africa's Leading Metros

1 December 2024 – 28 February 2025

*This report captures public sentiment toward four of South Africa's largest metros—**Cape Town, Johannesburg, Tshwane, and eThekweni**—based on an analysis of nearly **300,000 online public mentions**. Using our hybrid intelligence approach, we processed and labelled online conversation to surface the true drivers of public trust, frustration, and perception across South Africa's major cities.*

Key Takeaways



Clean water access is a reputational catalyst. Amid growing public dissatisfaction across South Africa's major metros, visible improvements in essential services—particularly water—drove measurable sentiment shifts.



Public trust is built through consistent action. Communication campaigns and urban development initiatives influenced sentiment only when supported by reliable delivery.



Service failures pose the greatest reputational risk. When problems build across essential infrastructure such as water, electricity, and waste, they consistently spark the strongest public backlash, signalling a clear collapse in trust and tolerance.



Water was a dominant service concern in two of the four metros, accounting for almost half of their service delivery complaints.

City spotlights



City of Tshwane

Tshwane recorded the best overall Net Sentiment. Residents praised the delivery of clean water to Hammanskraal, mayor-led clean-up campaigns, and proactive bylaw enforcement.

Highest proportion of praise: **15%**

Lowest proportion of complaints: **24%**



eThekweni municipality

Sentiment toward eThekweni was split. The City drew praise for beachfront redevelopment and festive safety initiatives, but ongoing water crises and governance concerns significantly eroded public confidence.



City of Cape Town

Despite receiving reputational praise for being named the World's Best City, by TimeOut, Cape Town's local sentiment was mixed. Residents expressed frustration over water-related issues and allegations of corruption and poor transparency. However, many also praised the City's performance in housing, transport, and general service delivery.



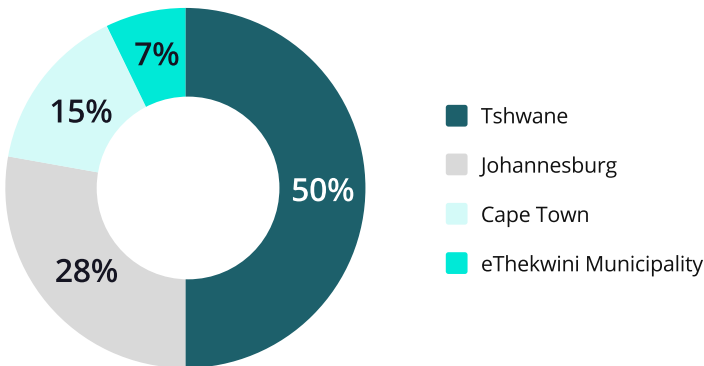
City of Johannesburg

Joburg received the highest volume of negative conversation, with residents voicing frustration over prolonged power outages, infrastructure failures, and lack of municipal response.

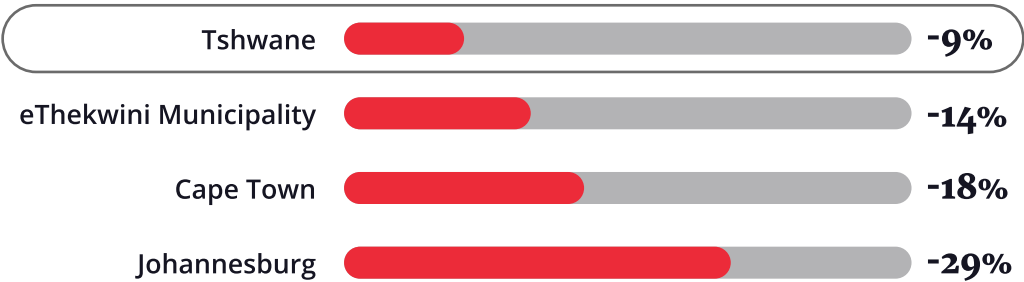
Highest proportion of complaints: **34%**

Lowest proportion of praise: **4%**

Share of voice



Net Sentiment



What matters most to residents?

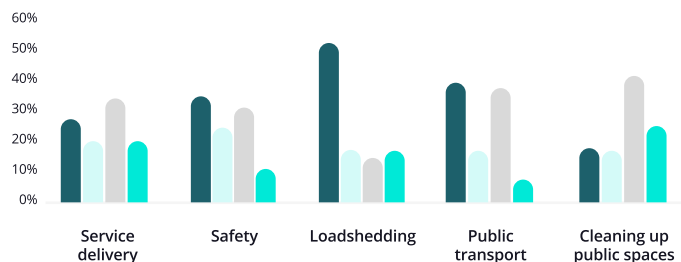


Service delivery was a key concern among residents

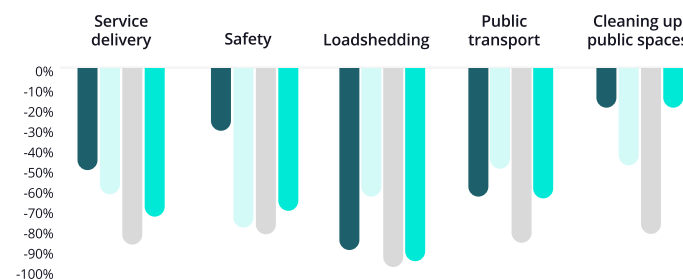
Theme volume distribution and Net Sentiment



Share of voice per theme



Net Sentiment per theme



■ Tshwane ■ Cape Town ■ Johannesburg ■ eThekweni Municipality



Service delivery emerged as a key area of interest for residents as it was the most widely discussed. This topic measured a notably negative Net Sentiment indicating a high level of dissatisfaction.

Although Net Sentiment for cleaning up public spaces was in the negative, it was less negative than all others.

Water was the most frequently discussed—and most negatively perceived service delivery theme for the City of Cape Town and eThekweni metros.

Loadshedding and blackouts were a consistent source of frustration, —especially during peak disruption weeks.

Service delivery: Water

Themes cited within service delivery complaints*



City of Cape Town:

47%



eThekweni Municipality

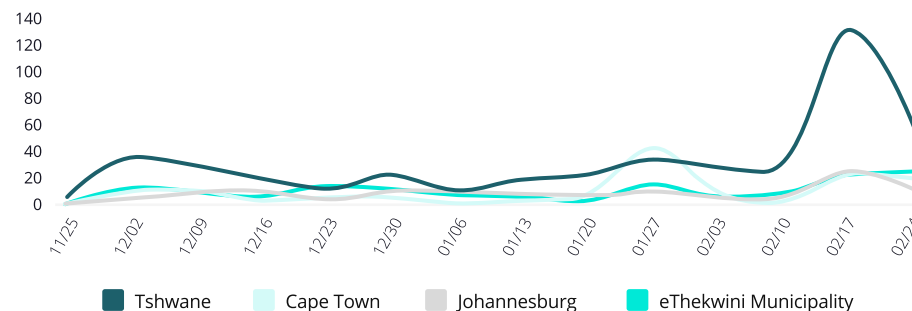
49%

**Values shown are a proportion of each municipality's volume of service delivery complaints. Other municipalities were excluded due to lack of theme volumes*

- **Cape Town:** Residents cited outages, leaks, and raw sewage as top concerns.
- **eThekweni:** Long-term outages, leaking infrastructure, and poor communication were key drivers of frustration.

Loadshedding

Loadshedding conversation per municipality



- **Tshwane:** Residents reacted strongly to widespread outages in February.
- **Johannesburg:** Despite less commentary, citizens were the most negative towards loadshedding, with a Net Sentiment of -97%.
- **Cape Town:** The City's loadshedding protection plan prompted a mix of concern and cautious praise.

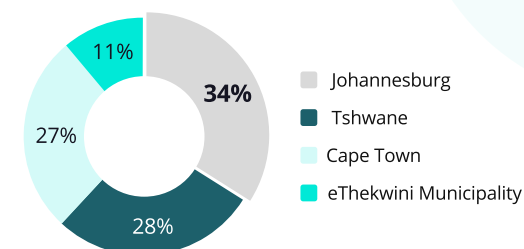
Cleaning up public spaces

- **Tshwane:** Earned recognition for visible clean-up campaigns.
- **Cape Town:** Residents commended cleanliness and efficient service execution.
- **eThekweni:** Citizens praised clean up efforts on Durban beachfront.
- **Johannesburg:** Earned the lowest Net Sentiment of -81% as residents criticised the city for inconsistent waste collection and deteriorating public space hygiene.

Safety

Over one-third of all safety-related complaints were linked to the **City of Johannesburg**.

Citizens referenced illegal activity, crime, and called for stronger enforcement and accountability.



What role did city mayors play?



City of Tshwane:

Tshwane mayor showcased the success of the 'Reclaim Our City' campaign

The City of Tshwane's communications, led by Dr Nasiphi Moya's #ReaSpana campaign, focused on inner-city revitalisation, crime prevention, and by-law enforcement. While these efforts drove high engagement, public response was mixed—some praised the push for safety and order, while others raised concerns about the impact on informal traders and vulnerable groups. The city's most engaging content involved enforcement actions against non-compliant businesses and illegal activity, particularly targeting illegal foreigners.



@CityTshwane The High Court has ruled no to illegal impounding of ride hailing vehicles? What other illegal activities is the overzealous but ignorant mayor involved in?



City of Johannesburg:

The mayor's G20 post generated no engagement, as citizens complained about service delivery

The city's official posts, though more frequent, attracted criticism tied to ongoing dissatisfaction with power cuts, water shortages, safety concerns, and urban decay. Public responses emphasized that event-driven improvements, such as those anticipated for the G20, should not replace consistent, long-term service delivery. While the Executive Mayor posted once to announce the 2025 G20 Summit—with no public engagement—this was overshadowed by external commentary highlighting the city's infrastructural and service delivery failures.



@CityofJoburgZA They fix things just before it happens so that we look like a first class African city. Post the summit we go back to default settings and the decay 😞😞😞



City of Cape Town:

The mayor's use of X helped address misinformation and political disputes

The mayor's posts functioned as an extension of the City of Cape Town's official communications, shifting the focus from routine service updates to politically charged issues. While city profiles primarily provided operational updates with limited engagement, the mayor's content addressed misinformation and political disputes, resulting in higher visibility and more polarised reactions.



@geordinhl @geordinhl although I'm not a fan of Project Blue's m.o., in all fairness the City tried to spin away the results in the report by claiming incorrectly that the labs weren't accredited. Also, JP Smith's cringey attack on them on FB was uncalled for. daily Maverick.co.za/article/2025-01-09-tides-of-controversy-coastal-water-quality-becomes-a-battleground-in-cape-town/

eThekweni Municipality posted infrequently, with most content centred around the festive season, resulting in low engagement and limited resident interaction. Unlike other cities, the mayor did not post on social media at all, creating a noticeable absence of visible leadership online. The municipality could improve resident participation and increase sentiment by posting more frequently.

Conclusion & recommendations



Summary

South Africans are increasingly vocal about urban service delivery. Their feedback reveals not only dissatisfaction, but a roadmap for action. When municipalities deliver—residents take notice. When they fail—trust erodes quickly and visibly.



About the report

Timeframe: 1 December 2024 – 28 February 2025

Sample: 296,497 non-brand mentions collected across social media and online news; 23,319 labelled and analysed for sentiment with 95% confidence level and 0.6% margin of error.

Sources: X, online media, and community forums.



Actionable opportunities

Improve Communication

Silence in response to outages or crises compounds frustration. Cities must prioritise real-time, transparent updates to build resident confidence.

Elevate Service Wins

Positive sentiment around campaigns like #ReaSpana shows the reputational impact of delivery. Municipalities should actively highlight progress and success stories.

Focus on Core Services

Water, electricity, and safety dominate public discourse. Strategic investment in these areas offers the most immediate opportunity to rebuild public trust.

For a detailed view, with **full report findings**, get in touch.

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