

ANC vs DA: Who are the social media winners in this election?

 By [Tara Turkington](#)

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While politicians have been stomping back and forth across the country, arguing about toilets and attempting to upstage one another while putting up election posters, another battle has been playing out in the social media terrain. It's a tricky landscape, with fewer - but arguably more connected and more influential - potential voters than those who aren't hooked up to the likes of Twitter just yet.

Here's how the two main contenders in the 2011 local government elections have fared on the social media battleground...

African National Congress

The ANC has made impressive strides into the world of social media in the past few weeks in particular. Jacob Zuma finally joined Twitter on 9 May 2011 (one wonders what he's been doing with his iPad between signing up and showing it off at the opening of Parliament last year), and has seen followers growing at the speed of iPad 2 launch-day sales.



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As of today, Monday 16 May, he had nearly 15 000 followers, but had only managed to tweet four times. The choice of [@SAPresident](#) as a Twitter user name was also curiously impersonal (world presidents who tweet to large Twitter followings - such as the USA's [@BarackObama](#), who has more than eight-million followers, and Rwanda's [@PaulKagame](#), who has about 14 000 following him - usually do so in their own names).

More Twitter-literate ANC cadres include minister of public enterprises Malusi Gigaba ([@mgigaba](#)), who has been on Twitter for almost two years, has just over 3000 followers, and is known for his chatty and friendly ways to just about anyone who tweets him. Deputy minister of science and technology Derek Hanekom ([@Derek_Hanekom](#)) is also comfortable on Twitter, though no great shakes in terms of followers (just over 600).



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And the ANC's official Twitter account, [@MyANC](#), is competent enough, with about 6800 followers, while it follows around 6500 Twitter accounts. So it's not as snotty on Twitter as people like media personalities Gareth Cliff ([@Gareth_Cliff](#)) and DJ Fresh ([@DJFreshSA](#)), who hardly ever follow back. But considering the ANC attracted approximately [12-million votes in the 2009 election](#), it's punching below its weight on Twitter.

There are also a few notable Johnnies-come-lately in the ANC Twittersphere, who joined just in time to watch the election via Twitter. Minister of human settlements Tokyo Sexwale ([@SexwaleTokyo](#)) joined Twitter on 17 March this year, but has only managed six tweets so far and has fewer than 100 followers. Minister of arts and culture Paul Mashatile ([@PaulMashatile](#)) joined Twitter on Thursday 12 May, and hasn't yet reached 20 tweets.

On Facebook, the ANC is schizophrenic. The [most popular ANC fan page](#) has just over 25 000 fans (still nowhere close to the country's most popular fan page, which belongs to the [Springboks](#) and has over 330 000 fans), but this appears to be run by a supporter named Bheki Ngema, rather than the official organisation.

There are dozens of ANC groups, and the one that appears the most official, called "[African National Congress](#)", is still in the old group format (as opposed to a new-style fan page). This page has only about 18 000 fans and hasn't been updated since March 2011. The ANC's website links to a "[MyANC](#)" fan page, which ties in with the names of the Twitter and YouTube accounts, but is still far less popular than the old group, with just over 6000 fans.

The ANC's performance on YouTube is also poor. Back in 2009, a [MyANC channel](#) was created, and a few election ads were uploaded to it. There's none of that this time around, and the vast majority of the videos tagged with "ANC" on YouTube are negative about the party.

The ANC has also barely started to exploit photo networking site Flickr, with just one profile established (for the [ANC in the Western Cape](#) only), and only 25 photos uploaded to this.

Overall notes for the ANC

An underperformer in social media for far too long, but there has been some notable recent improvement. The ANC needs to respect its social media audiences more by understanding the various platforms and talking to its followers on a one-on-one basis.

It needs to consolidate its presence on both Facebook and YouTube and work to a strategy that is far less fragmented than the offerings at present. The party needs to signpost things far more clearly for its online followers.

While the percentage of ANC supporters on Twitter is probably lower overall than the percentage of DA supporters who tweet, the ANC is more talked about than the DA on Twitter, and would be wise to invest more time and energy here.

The ANC's social networking score - B for recent progress on Twitter, but D for overall effort, E for innovation.
Overall: C-

Democratic Alliance

It seems the DA took the proactive Barack Obama approach of electioneering online and has put loads of effort into Twitter. All the top leaders are Twitter-literate, and are engaging with their followers.



DA leader Helen Zille ([@helenzille](#)) is far and away South Africa's most prominent politician on Twitter, with over 30 000 followers (but Jacob Zuma is gaining ground fast, and is currently attracting about 500 followers a day). Zille tweets several times a day and it seems she (usually at least) tweets for herself (something we can't yet tell about Zuma).

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When I asked the Twittersverse late one night last week if Zille really were tweeting herself, she [answered back at dawn](#) the next morning with the words: "@taraturk1 hi Taraturk. 'Tis I. Up and rolling. Event at Kayasands and then tv debate. Grand Finale tomorrow in Khayelitsha. Hz." Impressive.

Other DA leaders to watch on Twitter include national spokesperson Lindiwe Mazibuko ([@lindimazibuko](#)), who has over 2000 followers, Cape Town mayoral candidate Patricia de Lille ([@PatriciaDeLille](#)), who has nearly 2000 followers and tweets regularly, and strategist Ryan Coetzee ([@RyanCoetzee](#)), who has over 1000 followers and is the organiser of several Sunday night "Twitter town halls" in the run-up to the election.

The town hall events entail a Q&A session on Twitter along the hashtag [#DAQA](#), with a couple of top and Twitter-savvy DA politicians answering questions thrown at them by the tweeting public. Coetzee has promised to continue these once a month or so after the election.



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If Twitter is the DA's social networking stronghold, its outposts on the other popular social networking platforms would be easy targets for an informed enemy. On Facebook, the DA has loads of fan pages seemingly started in an ad hoc way, much like the ANC's, and therefore its presence here is fractured and in disarray. There does seem to be an [official fan page](#), however, with over 8000 fans.

On YouTube, the DA seems to be a bit more in control of its online destiny than the ANC is,

though that's not saying much. There are also loads of splinter profiles and channels - such as for the DA Youth, various wards, in individuals' names - which is not great practice, but there do appear to be at least two dedicated YouTube channels (why two, one asks, when one would surely be better?).

These are the ["Democratic Alliance-Parliament Channel"](#), which to date boasts 33 videos, including some from the campaign trail (but fewer than 60 subscribers), and the [<http://www.youtube.com/user/DemocraticAllianceSA> "DemocraticAllianceSA Channel"]], with 10 videos uploaded to it. The latest one here, though, is about Jimmy Manyi (old news, yawn), and was uploaded two months ago. The channel has only 29 subscribers, which is hardly impressive.

One of the most popular DA-related videos on YouTube is [Leon Shuster's prank on Helen Zille](#), which has reached over 10000 views.

On Flickr, the [DA has a fairly active account](#), with over 300 images uploaded, some of them from this past weekend. The images (of people such as [Helen Zille](#) and Joburg mayoral candidate [Mmusi Maimane](#), among others) are good quality in general, and are Creative Commons-licensed, allowing media and the public to use them freely with attribution.

This does show a degree of *nous* about web and Flickr etiquette, so the DA scores some points there.

But there are still remnants on Flickr of the DA's more clueless days, such as one group, created nearly two years ago and named the "Democratic Alliance: Contribute to Change" which has a grand total of three members and as yet has uploaded no photos. Again, the DA should tidy up its Flickr presence by deleting extraneous accounts and focusing on just one.

Overall notes for the DA

Excellent on Twitter in the run-up to the election, but it will be interesting to see which DA politicians are able to keep up their tweeting and which will disappear (then we'll know for sure how authentic the move to this platform has been). There's clearly an understanding here amongst several top DA tweeps of what they're doing, and how to talk to people directly and with respect.

The party needs to look at a Facebook facelift. It also needs some clearer strategy on YouTube, but it's getting the basics right here, as well as on Flickr, where it's laying good foundations.

The DA's social networking score: A- for sustained good work on Twitter led by Helen Zille herself, C for overall social media strategy and clear thinking, B- for effort all round. Overall, B+

For more:

- World Wide Worx: [DA leads in online race](#)

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