

DA

Founded:	2000
Leader:	John Steenhuisen
Political position:	Centre right
Ideology:	Federal liberalism



History

South Africa's official opposition is rooted in the Apartheid era liberal order with its original incarnation being the Progressive Party that was founded in 1959. After many mergers and break aways, the party fought the 1994 elections as the Democratic Party with Tony Leon as its leader, but secured less than two percent of the vote. The Democratic Party became the official opposition in 1999 before merging (and eventually splitting) with the remnants of the Apartheid era National Party and Federal Party to become the Democratic Alliance (DA) in 2000.

The party has consistently grown its voter share in each election since 1999 and with Helen Zille as leader, became the government of the Western Cape in 2009. However, a marginal dip in support in the 2019 national elections led to the departure of former leader Mmusi Maimane and current leader John Steenhuisen taking over in 2020.

The DA's constitution states its goal is to build one nation with one future, built on freedom, fairness, opportunity, and diversity for all (13). The party's governance record is impressive with it currently leading majority governments in not only the Western Cape, Cape Town, and George, but is the current and former leader of numerous coalition governments. Its service delivery record speaks for itself with the party consistently delivering services to the communities where they govern and receiving the highest ratio of clean audits in the country (14). Albeit with the constant criticism from their detractors that poor communities

in DA-run municipalities and the Western Cape do not enjoy the same level of service attention as affluent areas.

The party's coalition governance record is also not as impressive as where they govern in majority. The party has largely failed to make a sustained impact in Tshwane where they have led various coalition governments since 2016 and did not show a marked improvement in governance or service delivery in Johannesburg after several years in power across two coalition governments from 2016 to 2019 and 2021 to 2023.

Zille's shadow continues to fall over the DA with Zille currently serving as chairperson of the Federal council—the second most powerful position in the party. Prior and post Maimane's departure, the party has regularly been accused of no longer being an attractive home for black leaders. The party is currently trying to form a multi-party pact ahead of elections in 2024 to unseat the ANC. However, despite a lack of interest from several smaller opposition parties, specifics on policies the pact will pursue, as well as who exactly would lead the government remains unclear.

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Electoral record (15)

- 1994: 1.73%
- 1999: 9.56%
- 2004: 12.37%
- 2009: 16.66%
- 2014: 22.23%
- 2019: 20.77%

Positions

(Source: Direct conversations with party's head of policy Mat Cuthbert)

Economic growth and job creation

The DA strives to halve unemployment within five years by pursuing labour market reforms that would make it easier for the unemployed to access economic opportunities. The party believes that South Africa's rigid labour laws are among the chief reasons for stubborn unemployment and that obtaining a first work experience is critical. To this end, the DA would like to introduce a job seekers' exemption certificate for the long-term unemployed. Such a certificate will enable prospective employers and employees to enter short-term contracts that include wage flexibility whilst protecting fundamental worker's rights. The party also supports means-based redress which seeks to empower disadvantaged communities through sectoral specific corporate empowerment of communities whereby businesses support job creation and socioeconomic development in the communities they operate.

Safety and security

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The DA wants the law to be applied without fear or favour and to place the victims of all crime at the centre of the country's safety and security strategy. It will drastically overhaul the South African Police Service beginning with a skills audit and improve its immediate performance through the focused deployment of the country's police officers in crime hotspots. Furthermore, the party also aims to combat the root causes of crime by offering all communities a path towards employment and a livelihood independent from crime. A tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime approach.

Foreign affairs

The DA wishes to pursue foreign policy that grows the economy and creates jobs while being driven by a culture of promoting universal human rights and maintaining the post-World War 2 democratic world

order. While recognising the significance of South Africa's growing trade and diplomatic relationship with China, the party wants to expand ties with historical trading partners, such as the USA and the EU.

Energy security

The DA commits to a transition towards renewable energy; however, the pursuit of energy security must correspond with South Africa's economic development goals. While recognising that fossil fuels, such as coal and oil will form part of the country's energy mix in the short-to medium-term, every effort should be made to ensure that renewable energy sources are the back-bone of the energy mix. State investment in solar panel production and battery storage must be aggressively increased. The party supports the gradual but complete privatisation of Eskom, barring its transmission division which should remain state-owned.

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Education

The DA aims to focus on the basics of education to ensure all learners can read, write, and count at their appropriate age level. Key to this, the party wants to introduce competency assessments for all teachers and to incentivise them based on performance by linking rewards with the academic results of their learners. It also wishes to address the unequal funding of schools by providing government subsidies to schools based on their learner profile as opposed to the area the school is situated to focus state funding and interventions on learners that need it most. The party will undertake an infrastructure audit in the education sector to ensure each school has adequate classrooms and no pit toilets.

Mineral resources

The DA plans to diversify South Africa's mineral exports to reduce the dominance of precious metals, like gold and platinum, and develop the potential of other deposits, like uranium, manganese, and titanium. The party also wants to develop further mineral beneficiation processes, such as manufacturing and refinement to prevent solely raw materials being the country's primary mineral export—where the local capability exists. The party will scrap the mining charter due to its race-based empowerment that deters international investment and increases unemployment.

Youth development

The party wants to foster entrepreneurship among South African youth by making it easier to start and manage a business. Through their reforms on teacher performance and basic outcomes in the education sector, the party believes young people will also be better suited to tackle the job market and provide the skills the economy needs. To this effect, if a young person is not academically inclined, the DA would like to ensure they have a clear path to an alternative livelihood, such as the artisanal or agricultural sectors.

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Housing

In the short-term, the DA wants to ensure that all South Africans provided a home by the government, must receive a title deed to leverage the benefits of property ownership. While in the medium- to long-term offering serviced plots of land instead of housing. Ultimately though, the party wants to ensure housing and residential development is pursued in existing areas that are accompanied with employment opportunities and services instead of creating new communities.

The environment and climate change

The DA recognises the urgent need to address global warming and accepts climate change. However, the party does not want South Africa's pursuit of reduced greenhouse gas emissions to jeopardise the urgent need for economic development and job creation. This balance needs to factor in the fossil fuels—such as coal and uranium—readily available to South Africa alongside renewables to provide energy for economic growth.

Tourism

The DA believes tourism is one of the easiest avenues to provide employment to low- and medium-skilled workers in South Africa. Key to this, a safe and secure environment is critical to attract tourists to South Africa to spend their greenbacks or renminbi. Tourist visas should also be completely digitised and provided on arrival to all visitors.

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Immigration and xenophobia

The DA will implement a skills audit at the Department of Home Affairs to root out corruption in the long-term visa process and enable legal immigration, focusing on finding critical skills among potential or current migrants. It would seek to regularise the tenure of illegal migrants as opposed to criminalising them further. The party believes South Africa has a moral duty to provide asylum to any foreign national suffering in their home country due to South Africa's foreign policy failures.

LGBTIQA+ rights

The DA wants to enshrine the existing rights afforded to the LGBTIQA+ community and further protect the entire community from any form of victimisation. The party has several openly gay senior leaders.

South Africa's twelve official languages

The DA advocates for the continued promotion, institutionalisation, and academic development of all South African languages. This is with the long-term goal of mother tongue language learning and instruction at all levels of the South African education system. The party believes this process should be led through the academic development of language instruction at universities relevant to the linguistic area they are found.

Artificial intelligence

The DA recognises that Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents an opportunity to address some of society's most pressing challenges through enhanced learning and the creation of new industries. However, the party calls for the regulation of AI to prevent its malicious use by governments and corporations. Moreover, the DA is cautious of the introduction of AI in South Africa, as it poses a threat to the employment of low-skilled and semi-skilled workers.

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Sources:

- (13) Democratic Alliance constitution - <https://cdn.da.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/19132045/DA-Constitution-As-Adopted-on-1-April-2023.pdf>
 - (14) Consolidated general report on local government audit outcomes 2021/2022 - <https://mfma-2022.agsareports.co.za/>
 - (15) Independent Electoral Council 2019 National & Provincial elections - <https://results.elections.org.za/dashboards/npe/app/dashboard.html>
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