

The EFF's place in the politics jungle

South Africa

With South Africa rapidly moving away from being a one-party dominant state, opposition parties have become central to the functioning of the country, and it is therefore important that more literature on these parties is produced.. Specifically, we dissect the third largest party in the country, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) which has the capacity to generate far more noise and uncertainty than other opposition parties. The EFF has recently made headlines for switching alliance from the DA to the ANC and vice versa. We seek to unpack the party's fluid positions in relation to coalitions and coalition partners. Our aim is to provide a detailed scrutiny of the EFF's trajectory. We then use this dissection to zoom into the role that the EFF will play in South African politics in the future, given the upcoming 2024 general elections and the party's potential to further alter South African political dynamics through forming coalitions in particular with the ANC. We caution overall that the party will add much drama but stereotypes about how they may behave on policies and reforms in particular should be treated with great caution.

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The history of the EFF

The EFF can be considered a product of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL). It was founded in 2013 by the expelled leader of the then radical ANCYL, Julius Malema, alongside Floyd Shivambu who was also expelled from the ANC. Its policy and, to some extent, ideological orientation thus mirrors that of the ANCYL that Malema led. In many respects, the EFF espouses the radical character that was at one point, before 1994, synonymous with the ANC and much of the participants in the anti-apartheid struggle. It is fundamentally anti-status quo and is attractive to sections of society that still yearn for the radical alteration of the socioeconomic conditions of the previously disadvantaged black majority. It must be remembered that Malema's February 2012 expulsion from the ANC was preceded by his and fellow ANCYL leaders' pronounced criticism of the ANC's failure to radically change economic ownership patterns in the country.

Floyd Shivambu, who served as the League's spokesperson was expelled from the ANC in June 2013, following his suspension in 2012. Also suspended in 2012 was the then secretary general of the League, the late Sindiso Magaqa, whose suspension was fully served and not converted into an expulsion. Magaqa maintained close relations with Malema before his death in 2017. The entire ANCYL National Executive Committee was also disbanded in 2013 in what appeared to be an effort to purge those who were critical of then ANC president, Jacob Zuma. Malema had previously been one of Zuma's greatest supporters. Many of the League's leaders fell into political obscurity upon its disbanding, but some, like Ronald Lamola were able to make a return to politics. Lamola was fiercely critical of Zuma and endorsed Kgalema Motlanthe to succeed Zuma in 2012.

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The EFF's internal dynamics

The EFF subscribes to the doctrine of democratic centralism. That is imbedded in the party's constitution. It is for this reason that the president/commander in chief (CIC) of the party, Malema, exercises pronounced authority over the party's affairs. Malema's title of CIC further illustrates this point as does the title of its highest decision-making body between conferences or National People's Assemblies, the central command team (CCT). The party has often been involved in physical confrontations with its opponents, something that is consistent with the EFF's characterisation of its "revolutionary" cause. The centralisation of power is consistent with the party's Leninist and socialist underpinnings and is also visible in the constant changes the party has made in recent times in the position of national spokesperson, which has coincided with indications of disagreements between Malema and the individuals who have occupied that position.

The EFF's leadership has not been reluctant to exercise its power in as far as disciplining members is concerned. A fascinating fact is that by February 2018, 60% (15 out of 25) of the EFF's Members of Parliament (MPs) in the National Assembly (NA) had resigned or been expelled since the 2014 national and provincial elections¹. In the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), out of the party's six MPs, four resigned or were expelled over the same period. Among those expelled at the time were Andile Mngxitama, Mpho Ramakatsa and Khanyisile Litchfield-Tshabalala. These individuals had accused Malema and others of corruption and misappropriating the party's funds in 2015. The three were charged with several contraventions including absconding from Parliament; convening an unauthorised media conference in which false and unsubstantiated allegations were made about the EFF and its leadership; and convening an unauthorised and specifically prohibited rally.

In 2019, two EFF MPs resigned following revelations from the leaked CR17 banking records that they had received money from President Cyril Ramaphosa. Malema went on to describe their actions as ill-discipline that needed to be dealt with. These resignations were followed by the departure of the party's Gauteng Chairperson Mandisa Mashego in March 2020. While Mashego mentioned various reasons for her resignation, there were reports of her not seeing eye to eye with Malema. Mashego, who is now a member of the Abantu Batho Congress (ABC) had criticised the EFF's borderless Africa policy, of which Malema is a big proponent. In addition, Mashego contested the position of secretary general at the EFF's 2019 NPA that had been earmarked for Malema's close ally, Marshall Dlamini. While Mashego lost to Dlamini, Malema appeared unimpressed with her decision to contest the position. He went on to covertly deliver a tongue-lashing to one of Mashego's supporters, Naledi Chirwa, who had thanked the now fugitive "prophet" Shepherd Bushiri for praying for her to become an MP. Further demonstration of the centralisation of power in the party is the recent reconfiguration of the Eastern Cape top 5 provincial leadership based on the need for gender parity. The Eastern Cape EFF had held a Provincial People's Assembly which elected five men to the provincial leadership of the party. However, this decision was reversed by the EFF's War Council, which replaced two of the men with two women.

¹ Gareth van Onselen. 2016. "The EFF's internal revolution". <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/the-effs-internal-revolution>

It is thus clear that the EFF does not tolerate what it views as dissent or ill-discipline. This has led to much criticism from ex-members and ex-leaders, but it is interesting to consider how the party might behave in a coalition at national government level in future. We have seen already in metro coalitions a very significant degree of discipline imposed on councillors which has allowed the EFF to be part of a variety of combinations of coalitions.

The EFF's upward trajectory

The EFF's remarkable rise into being the third largest party in the country within a few years of its formation is a product of a very specific style of politics. The EFF has successfully utilised a confrontational style of politics. It is this style that has helped the party grab media attention and thereby stay central in public discourse around political affairs. The party has successfully employed this style in the NA. It is here that the most pronounced utilisation of this style has been witnessed, particularly during Jacob Zuma's tenure as the president of the country. The party was at the forefront of the campaign to recover the money used in the Nkandla security upgrades. This campaign played a big role in entrenching this style of politics as part of the EFF's identity. It is now accepted in society that the EFF is confrontational, despite this being a relatively uncommon approach to politics in South Africa.

The EFF has mainly found favour with the youth. This is to a large extent attributable to its relatively youthful leadership composition. The youthfulness of the EFF's leadership has culminated in the ability of the party to articulate the needs of young people in a manner that other parties cannot. This is very much observable in the popularity of the EFF and its leaders on social media platforms. In a country whose population is predominantly young, one would expect the EFF to grow exponentially. However, in as much as the party has consistently grown, growth has not been of exponential levels. This is largely because the EFF appeals to a demographic that is disinclined to vote.

The EFF's growth can also be attributed to its ability to ignite interest in policy areas to which the governing party's commitment is ambiguous. Land reform is one such issue that the EFF has used to expose the ANC's ambiguity. The EFF reignited the land reform discourse in the country after years of neglect. Whether the party uses such contentious and genuine issues for its own ends remains in question. However, the party has been able to use these issues to drive political discourse nationally and therefore stay relevant in the public eye. It is these multiple factors that have contributed to the EFF's steady upward trajectory. It is worth noting that the EFF is the only party among the biggest three that grew in the 2019 elections. Such was the case again in the 2021 Local Government Elections (LGE).

Central to the EFF's style of politics is its leader, Julius Malema, who does not shy away from vigorously confronting his opponents. Malema remains the focal point of the party and is expected to do so for the foreseeable future. Other key figures apart from Malema and Shivambu include Mbuyiseni Ndlozi who is the party's head of political education; another central figure is secretary general Marshall Dlamini who is said to have a background in construction and was previously aligned to the ANC; while well-known advocate Dali Mpofu remains a key member of the party. An interesting observation about the EFF is how it has managed to include highly educated individuals in its leadership.

A thorny issue within the EFF is political party funding. At its founding, the party is reported to have received funds from alleged illicit cigarettes kingpin, Adriano Mazzotti, whose relationship with Malema is no secret. Malema and Shivambu were also linked to funds syphoned out of the now defunct VBS

Mutual Bank. Funds from VBS were allegedly partly channelled towards Malema and the EFF through Mahuna Investments, a company of which Malema's cousin was a director. Mahuna Investments is also alleged to have benefitted from funds linked to a **City of Tshwane** fuel tender. The funds were supposedly from Hendrick Kganyago, director of Balimi Barui Trading (BBT) which won part of the fuel tender. Funds were also said to have been channelled to Santaclara Trading, a company whose founding director was Tebatso Malema.² Another recipient of the funds was supposedly DMM Media and Entertainment, a company linked to Marshall Dlamini, the secretary general of the party.² At the time (2018), the EFF was part of a DA-led coalition government in the **City of Tshwane**. Dlamini, Malema and Shivambu were also linked to a 2018 fleet contract in the **City of Johannesburg**.³ Here, the EFF was also in a coalition with the DA. Consequently, it appears that the EFF uses its influence in coalition governments to raise funds for the benefit of the party and its leaders, similar to some of the fund-raising exercises in which the ANC has engaged.

As already mentioned, the EFF's approach to politics has resulted in some electoral growth for the party. Contesting its first election in 2014, the EFF immediately became the third largest party in the country, with 6.35% of the vote. The party increased its share to 10.80% in 2019 but remained in third position. In LGEs, the party saw an increase in its support from 8.19% in 2016 to 10.31% in 2021, and thereby retained its third place. The party has performed relatively well in predominantly black areas. This is undoubtedly a product of the party's prioritisation of the interests of black people and some very rigid and strident positions relating to the interests of white people.

The EFF in coalitions

The EFF's electoral performance has positioned it as a central player in the local government sphere. The party has become a kingmaker in various municipalities, especially metros. The EFF's approach to coalitions in metros has been devoid of any ideological or service delivery considerations. Instead, the party has used its seats to launch retaliatory actions against different parties, in particular the ANC and the DA. In 2018, the party vowed to punish the DA for opposing its NA motion to enable a constitutional review aimed at actualising land expropriation without compensation by removing the DA's then mayor of the **Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality**, Athol Trollip. Trollip was replaced by the United Democratic Movement (UDM)'s Mongameli Bobani after the consolidated efforts of the ANC, EFF and UDM. Prior to that, the EFF had voted with the DA in 2016 for the latter to take-over the **City of Johannesburg**, with Herman Mashaba as mayor. Following Mashaba's resignation in 2019, the relationship between the EFF and DA collapsed. The EFF fielded its own candidate for the position of mayor in the city, who together with the DA's candidate, was defeated by the ANC's Geoff Makhubo.

Over the past few months, the EFF has been in the headlines for its ambiguous and fluid approach to coalitions in Gauteng metros. Following the 2021 LGE, the EFF and multiple parties voted the DA's Mpho Phalatse into

² Micah Reddy. 2021. "Hawks investigating 'Malema-linked' fuel tender". <https://www.news24.com/fin24/companies/hawks-investigating-malema-linked-fuel-tender-20211027>

³ Micah Reddy. 2018. "Firm that won R1bn Joburg fleet contract paid Malema-EFF 'slush fund'". <https://amabhungane.org/stories/firm-that-won-r1bn-joburg-fleet-contract-paid-malema-eff-slush-fund/>

the position of mayor of the **City of Johannesburg**. The party did use the same tactics in the **City of Ekurhuleni**, with the DA's Tania Campbell emerging as mayor. That was also the case in **Tshwane**. This is despite the DA indicating that it was not willing to form any coalition with the EFF. The EFF explained its actions as targeted at keeping the ANC out of power.

Fast-forward to 2022, when the EFF has worked with the ANC to oust the DA from Gauteng metros. In September, the EFF helped the ANC topple Phalatse from her position as mayor of Johannesburg. The decision to remove Phalatse was later reversed by the South Gauteng High Court and she was reinstated on a technicality. The ANC-led bloc vowed to table another motion of no confidence against Phalatse but that has not yet happened. In Ekurhuleni, the EFF abstained when Campbell was removed through an ANC-sponsored motion of no confidence. The ANC and the EFF could not agree on a candidate to take over from Campbell. The EFF had intended to take over Ekurhuleni in return for giving Johannesburg to the ANC. However, this did not happen as both parties fielded candidates, before the EFF's candidate withdrew from the race. This resulted in the EFF voting for the DA's Campbell who then reclaimed the mayoralship. This move has brought the ANC's power reclamation crusade in Gauteng metros to an abrupt halt as the EFF has indicated its intentions to vote against the ANC should it table another motion of no confidence against Phalatse in Johannesburg.

It would be difficult to make sense of the EFF's actions without understanding the character of the party. While the party subscribes to seven cardinal pillars, its approach to coalitions is based purely on political considerations. The EFF's leadership prides itself in understanding the "political game". This is precisely what the EFF's actions in municipalities are influenced by. At this point, the party does not have a nation-wide working relationship with either the ANC or the DA. Its voting behaviour in municipalities is determined by the benefits such behaviour can yield for the party. When no benefits exist, the party utilises its kingmaker status to administer "punishment" against parties with which it has had disagreements. That explains why the party opted to vote for the DA in Ekurhuleni despite the DA having publicly reiterated its unwillingness to work with the EFF. It was a move aimed at punishing the ANC for not giving in to the EFF's demands. The fluidity of the EFF's positions is highlighted by its unwillingness to get into formal coalition agreements with other parties. Instead, the party typically promises to vote with another party on important issues such as budget passing. Therefore, the EFF's behaviour in municipalities is heavily dependent on the political state of affairs at a given time.

The EFF's role in South African politics

The EFF is going to remain an integral part of South African politics. While the party is likely to continue growing, exponential growth is not to be expected, despite the decline of the ANC. One thorny issue that is going to be a significant factor in the EFF's growth is its borderless Africa policy which has received substantial opposition from the public. Going into 2024, we expect the EFF to continue as the third largest party with growth levels quite similar to those that have characterised it over the past few years. The party is expected to continue to benefit from the ANC's shedding of voters, however we struggle to foresee the EFF as a "government in waiting" at national level for at least the next two general elections. That goal is at the moment considerably farfetched, and the party may be aware of this which may explain its changed attitude towards state power.

While the party has in the past been confident of taking over government through an electoral majority, recently the EFF has demonstrated heightened levels of eagerness to govern with the support of other parties. In coalition talks with ActionSA, the EFF tabled a proposal which would have seen it take over the City of Tshwane, while ActionSA would take over Johannesburg, and the ANC Ekurhuleni. Prior to that, the EFF put forward a similar proposal to the DA in 2019. This change was also evident in the EFF's fielding of a candidate for the Johannesburg mayorship in 2019 and in the EFF's attempts to get its candidate to take over the Ekurhuleni mayorship. However, it is worth noting that the first EFF mayor in the country was elected in the **Metsimaholo Local Municipality** following the 2021 LGE. Malema then stated that the mayor would resign as she was put in power with the help of the ANC, which was asking for "illegal things". The mayor indeed resigned. This decision must be understood within the context of the prevailing conditions at the time. The EFF had just helped the DA secure Gauteng metros and vowed not to vote with the ANC. This once more highlights the fluidity of the EFF's positions.

During Zuma's tenure, the EFF regularly used the courts to fight its battles against him. Since Ramaphosa assumed power, the EFF has not used courts regularly to pursue its political goals. The usage of confrontational politics has also not been as frequent as it was during Zuma's tenure. These changes in approach have been necessitated by the difference in the characters of Zuma and Ramaphosa. However, we can expect heightened levels of confrontation towards Ramaphosa should the various ongoing investigations into the Phala Phala matter find that Ramaphosa is guilty of certain transgressions. That would give the EFF the ammunition it needs to launch an attack against Ramaphosa, particularly in Parliament. Importantly, this will all depend on whether Ramaphosa is able to retain his position as the president of the ANC in December and it is our baseline that he will.

An important determinant of the EFF's prospects is how the party will handle succession, especially in the role of CIC. While we expect Malema to continue to lead the party given his age and grip on centralised power in the party, he is likely to gradually lose control as the party grows, and as other leaders seek to challenge him for the party's presidency. How he reacts to threats to his power will determine how the EFF fares in South African politics. Up to now, the party has been very opposed to dissent, even at provincial level. It is for this reason that most of its members have not attempted to topple Malema. However, changes in its top six are bound to occur over time. That will be inclusive of the positions of president and deputy president. We can thus expect Shivambu to challenge Malema for the presidency in the future as other members will also seek to challenge Shivambu for the deputy presidency.

Policy

Investors are starting to become increasingly interested in how the EFF would behave in a coalition at national level. While we think the EFF in coalition will be generally more concerned with access to power and rent, we would not discount that they strategically use policy to show better service delivery in some instances. We should also not discount that in some areas they appear pragmatic while in others they are much more anarchical. That said, their belief in the state and its power runs deep in our view and combined with the fact they may try and create political chaos to their own ends, the space for any pragmatism may well be very limited indeed.

To stabilise energy supply, the EFF envisages an energy mix encompassing coal, nuclear energy and renewable energy. While the EFF is not opposed to

the introduction of renewable energy, the party envisages a central role for the state in the entirety of the value chain through Eskom, which it would instruct and assist to establish a massive renewable energy division while retaining “safe coal” and nuclear energy as a dependable energy base. In its 2021 municipal elections manifesto, the EFF communicated that municipalities governed by the party would incentivise businesses that use clean energy, have clear water recycling methods, and limit their levels of pollution. Despite this, the EFF remains very much opposed to independent power producers (IPPs). Its 2019 election manifesto highlighted the party’s plan to immediately cancel all contracts with IPPs and to halt the roll-out of new IPPs should the party assume power.

Land is central to the EFF’s identity. The party has pushed vigorously for the expropriation of land without compensation. The party is not interested in any watered-down version of land reform. This is precisely why it objected to the version of the Expropriation Bill that was adopted by the NA in September 2021. The party supports state custodianship of all land for equal redistribution to all. This redistribution would follow the country’s demographic patterns, meaning that black people would control most of the land, with at least 50% of the land being under the control of women and the youth. The EFF’s state-centric approach to national matters is also discernible in the party’s rejection of the version of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill that is currently before the Portfolio Committee on Health on the basis that it constitutes an outsourcing of the healthcare function to the private sector and does not solve healthcare access issues that confront the poor.

The EFF has also maintained a very combative approach towards financial institutions, specifically banks. In 2015, Malema communicated the party’s intention to occupy all ABSA branches in 2016 due to the bank’s historical connections with the Broederbond. This however did not materialise. Reports suggested that then Absa CEO Maria Ramos met with the leadership of the party to seek common ground.⁴ In 2017, Malema rejected calls led by Black First Land First (BLF) to occupy ABSA on the basis of the apartheid era Reserve Bank Bankorp bail-out. His argument was that this call was made by those on the payroll of the Guptas, and he would not be controlled by opposition parties. In 2021, the EFF leader indicated that the party would embark on campaigns against “racist banks” Absa and FNB for their alleged involvement in political battles. Most importantly, the EFF is a proponent of the nationalisation of the South African Reserve Bank and transference of the ownership of African Bank to the state. The EFF’s state-centric policy approach has been evident in the party’s drive for insourcing of workers in some of the metros where it has influence. The party was behind the push that saw the City of Johannesburg insourcing its security guards. Elsewhere, there has been very little push to actualise the party’s policies. The party has also argued that local government is predominantly about delivering services rather than implementing policies.

Conclusion

The EFF will continue to grow and solidify its place in opposition politics. Chances of the EFF assuming power, nationally remain very slim. However, the party’s role in the composition of government will be enhanced as the country gradually moves towards a coalition government. The fluidity of the

⁴ Business Tech. 2015. “Absa revolt as staff threaten to join Malema protest: report”. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/banking/106389/absa-revolt-as-staff-threaten-to-join-malema-protest-report/>

party's positions however poses a threat to the stability of whichever coalition government the party can influence. This has been witnessed at local government level and can be expected at national level. We therefore foresee the EFF moving from one coalition to another in an effort to maximise its influence and therefore seek rent. The stability of coalition governments will remain a challenge in South African politics until the country reaches a stage of maturity in handling these coalitions.

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