

The DA's elusive role in politics

South Africa

The Democratic Alliance's recently concluded federal congress took place during a time of considerable preoccupation with how opposition parties will fare in next year's elections. Despite being the second-largest party and having a defined ideological posture, the party has found it difficult to drive home to voters its position and role in South African politics as the political landscape undergoes consistent change. It is also struggling to get a particular type of ANC voter and even non-voters to swing to the DA. We delve into these and other issues as we assess the factors that could determine how the DA fares in 2024 and beyond – including problems of being overstretched in terms of capacity, centralised control, unstable coalition management, and prioritising purity of view over support.

Since its formation, the DA has experienced gradual growth which has attracted various political leaders. That diversity of leaders has resulted in divergent views on the direction that the party should pursue. This is normal for a party that is experiencing growth and therefore venturing into new territories – albeit with limited success. The party has, however, struggled to handle the increasing multiplicity of views within its ranks. This has resulted in an exodus of leaders and muted electoral gains. Maintaining the gradual growth after problems in Gauteng (explained below) may be tricky. Yet in KwaZulu-Natal the DA is showing slight momentum showing it would be a mistake to underestimate it.

The upshot is that the party has been concurrently everywhere and nowhere. It is trying to consolidate its core base while simultaneously seeking to grow its support. Solving this conundrum, at least temporarily, through the formation of a "moonshot pact" with other opposition parties for 2024 may be a step too far, yet a DA coalition with the ANC might self-destruct both parties. We see them getting slightly higher than the last election next year but on markedly lower turnout.

Whilst our ongoing coverage to subscribers focuses so much on the ANC in general – we start to take a deep dive into other parties, starting with the DA.

History and leadership structure

The DA is a product of numerous mergers of political parties. Its roots can be traced back to the Progressive Party (PP) which was formed in 1959 by United Party (UP) members who left because of its lacklustre opposition to apartheid. In 1961, the PP won its first and only seat for some time in parliament, which was occupied by Helen Suzman. In 1975, the PP merged with the Reform Party to form the Progressive Reform Party (PRP). Two years later the Committee for a United Opposition merged with the PRP to form the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), which became the official opposition that same year. In 1989, the PFP merged with the Independent Party and the National Democratic Movement to form the Democratic Party (DP), led by

14 APRIL 2023

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Zach de Beer. In 2000, the DP merged with the New National Party and the Federal Alliance to form the DA. When the merger collapsed a year later, the DA name was retained. The DP was disbanded in 2003 following floor-crossing and became the DA at all levels of government.

Tony Leon, who led the DP from 1994 until its dissolution, led the DA from 2000 to 2007. He was succeeded by Helen Zille in 2007, who led the party until 2015 and has now become the party's matriarch. She was succeeded by Mmusi Maimane, who resigned in 2019 following the party's poor performance in elections that year, and was succeeded by John Steenhuisen on an interim basis. Steenhuisen assumed the role of federal leader on a permanent basis in 2020 and was re-elected to the position at the recently concluded federal congress.

The leadership structure of the DA now consists of:

- Federal leader (Steenhuisen), a role akin to a party president;
- Chairperson of the federal council (Zille), a role akin to the secretary-general in the ANC;
- Federal chairperson (Ivan Meyer), a role similar to a deputy federal leader or president in practice);
- Federal finance chairperson (Dion George), a role similar to a treasurer;
- Three deputy chairpersons of federal council (Ashor Sarupen, Annelie Lotriet and Thomas Walters);
- Three deputy federal chairpersons (Jean-Pierre (JP) Smith, Solly Malatsi and Anton Bredell).

The federal congress is the highest policy making and governing body of the DA. The congress is generally convened once in three years. When the congress is not in session, the federal council becomes the party's highest policy making and governing body. The federal council is similar to the national executive committee of the ANC. The federal council is in part made up of all members of the federal executive (FedEx) who are not already members of the federal council through other means. FedEx is partly composed of the federal leader, federal chairperson, deputy federal chairpersons, chairperson of the federal council; deputy chairpersons of the federal council; and the federal chairperson of finance. FedEx may be loosely equated to the national working committee in the ANC.

In the aftermath of the regression of the party in the 2019 national elections (from 22.23% in 2014 to 20.77%), Maimane commissioned a review to identify the reasons behind its poor showing. The review panel was made up of Leon, Ryan Coetzee and Michiel Le Roux. This panel, while apportioning blame on the broader federal leadership, laid serious blame on Maimane (the federal leader at the time). It concluded that the "party leader ... can be indecisive, inconsistent and conflict averse".⁶ Citing a breakdown in their relationship, the panel recommended that the federal leader, chairperson of the federal council and chief executive vacate office. This indeed happened as Maimane, James Selfe (then chairperson of the federal council) and Paul Boughey (then CEO) either resigned prior to or after the release of the panel's report. The panel also found incoherence in the DA's approach to race, insensitivity of some party public representatives to the feelings generated by the country's racialised past and present, and other race-related shortcomings.⁶

Federal congress review

The outcomes of the DA's recent federal congress, largely reflecting a retainment of the status quo, were closely in sync with expectations. Most positions were retained by incumbents. Out of the six positions contested, there were only three changes of personnel in just two positions. Annelie Lotriet replaced James Masango as one of three deputy chairpersons of the federal council, while JP Smith and Solly Malatsi replaced Refiloe Nt'sekhe and Jacques Smalle as two of the three deputy federal chairpersons. Smalle was not in contention for the position. Also worth noting is that Zille and George were re-elected uncontested. Steenhuisen was able to withstand a challenge from Mpho Phalatse for the position of federal leader with ease, winning 83% of the vote.¹ Phalatse's candidacy had minimal chances of succeeding given that she was standing against an incumbent with an established footing in the party while she is still relatively new. This marks the continuation of the pursuit of the agenda that was set in motion when Zille returned to active leadership in 2019.

Position	Elected candidate(s)
Federal leader	John Steenhuisen
Chairperson of federal council	Helen Zille
Federal chairperson	Ivan Meyer
Federal finance chairperson	Dion George
Deputy chairpersons of federal council (3)	Annelie Lotriet, Ashor Sarupen, and Thomas Walters
Deputy federal chairpersons (3)	Anton Bredell, Jean-Pierre (JP) Smith, and Solly Malatsi

The federal congress passed a number of resolutions but the one important issue that it was supposed to resolve – whether it would enter into a coalition with the ANC in 2024 – was fudged, neither adopting nor rejecting the idea (at least publicly). The DA spoke ambiguously about defeating the ANC and preventing an ANC-Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) coalition. While the “moonshot pact” (more on this later) proposed by Steenhuisen may suggest that the idea of working with the ANC has been abandoned, we must be mindful of the fact that the DA did not conclusively dismiss the idea.

How the DA works: capacity constraints?

Reflecting on the state of the party in the lead up to the congress, one of Steenhuisen's suggestions was that the DA needs to communicate more and demonstrate care for voters. For a moment, let us park that the DA's communication challenges arise from how and what the party communicates and not necessarily the absence of communication. Back to Steenhuisen's point. Like many opposition parties, the DA fails to register countrywide visibility. For a party as old as it is and the amount of electoral support it has, however, its visibility is actually very poor. It is common for the DA not to contest by-elections in rural areas, especially in predominantly rural provinces such as KZN, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. This is also a case for some wards during municipal elections, which is perplexing considering that the DA's constitution implores the party to strive to establish a branch in every ward in South Africa. The question is whether this is a result

¹ The Star. 2023. “South Africa's main opposition leader Steenhuisen wins another term”. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2023/04/02/south-africa039s-main-opposition-leader-steenhuisen-wins-another-term>

of constrained capacity (financial or otherwise) or perhaps a strategy tailored to focus on areas with greater growth potential for the party.

The DA's federal head office is in Cape Town, where the federal leader is also based and the party governs the province (Western Cape). Its resources, particularly valuable human capital, are thus naturally concentrated in the Western Cape, and Cape Town in particular. This set-up appears somewhat myopic for a party that should be preparing to take over government nationally. However, this may be more an identity issue rather than just a capacity constraint problem (more on this later). In fairness, the DA's campaign headquarters is in Johannesburg.

Further demonstration of disproportionate capacity distribution is highlighted by the fact that the Western Cape, and the City of Cape Town are more functional than other parts of the country where the DA governs. This is confirmed by the Brenthurst Foundation's poll which found that the Western Cape and Cape Town are the best governed province and city respectively.⁷ It therefore appears that premier Alan Winde and Cape Town mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis have a good team to work with. Contrast this to the City of Tshwane where, apart from being politically unstable, the auditor-general found irregular expenditure amounting to about R10bn for the 2021/22 financial year. This led to the resignation of mayor Randall Williams in February this year. Of course, the DA governs the Western Cape and Cape Town with an absolute majority while it governs municipalities such as Tshwane through a multiparty coalition. This does suggest though that the party is failing to manage coalitions, or at the least is failing to select coalition partners that would be helpful in governing. Coalitions, if utilised optimally, may serve as an indication of how the party leading the coalition would perform should it be given a majority. In other words, coalitions may serve as an auditioning platform for parties interested in taking over government through a majority at all levels. The DA's preoccupation with the Western Cape has led to questions about its willingness to govern other parts of South Africa. This disproportionate attention, coupled with poor coalition management as well as flirting with conservative groupings that advocate Cape independence through the Western Cape Devolution Working Group, does not bode well for the DA's ambitions to govern nationally. However, we must recall that like many African opposition parties the DA is an urban party. As such its support and therefore presence is found mainly in urban areas. This is why it has been able to fully govern the Western Cape and perform well in Gauteng, especially in the metros. Nonetheless, to govern the country the DA has to find ways to attract more rural voters. The first step towards that would be building and establishing branches in rural areas, especially where the party is virtually non-existent.

Apart from the Western Cape, one province in which the DA is demonstrating its ability to lead is KZN. Since his election in 2021, Christopher Pappas, the DA's mayor of uMngeni Local Municipality, has made significant strides towards improving service delivery. This has earned him respect and popularity within and outside the party, so much so that that he has been lobbied to contest the position of DA provincial leader at the upcoming provincial conference of the party. He is also being lobbied to stand as the party's KZN premier candidate in 2024. Pappas declined the proposal to

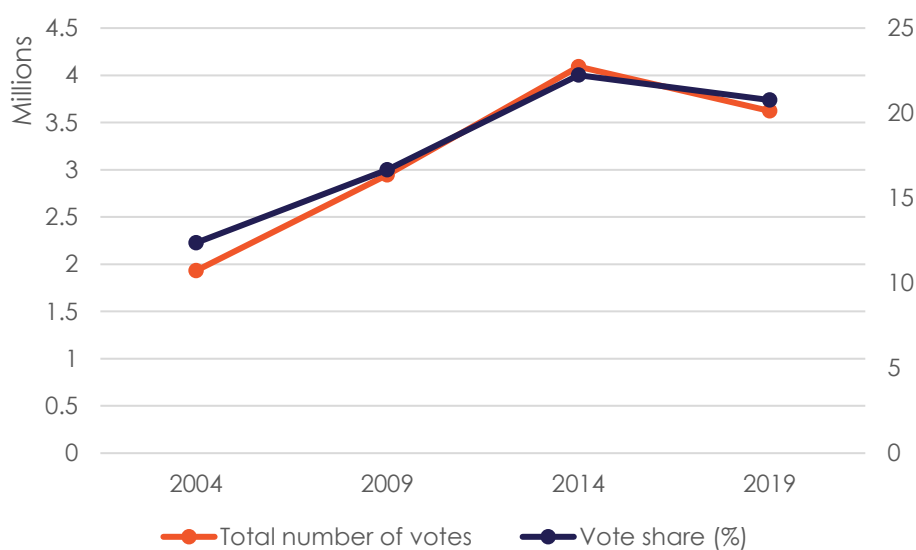
contest as provincial leader but has indicated his intention to step down as deputy provincial leader.²

KZN presents an interesting prospect for the DA. The party has managed to forge a relationship with the IFP, which is witnessing remarkable growth, if judged by its performance in by-elections. This relationship could translate into a coalition to take over the provincial government should the two parties manage to topple the ANC in the province though would be complicated by the fact the IFP will be courted strongly nationally by the ANC. Its Mayor in uMngeni in the province has also shown with (moderate) ease how it is possible to turn around seriously neglected relatively quickly which is a story the DA has previously struggled to show outside the Western Cape, and didn't in Gauteng metros fully given their complexity. Nonetheless, the DA still has considerable work to do in rural areas in the province to improve on its 2019 showing, which saw it winning just 14% of the vote.

Electoral performance and identity

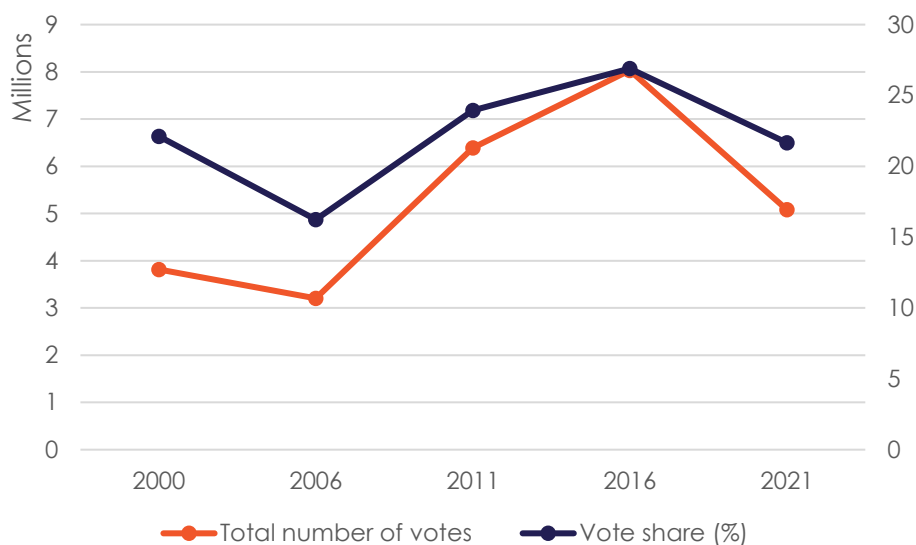
After experiencing growth in all the previous national elections, the DA suddenly declined in 2019. In 1999, the party (then the DP) received 10% of the vote, 12% in 2004, 17% in 2009, 22% in 2014, and 21% in 2019. In all these years, it remained the official opposition. In the local government sphere, the party received 22% of the vote in 2000, 16% in 2006, 24% in 2011, 27% in 2016 and 22% in 2021.

Figure 1: The DA's performance in national elections



Source: IEC

² Thami Magubane. 2023. "Popular Chris Pappas mooted for premiership of KZN". <https://www.iol.co.za/mercury/news/popular-chris-pappas-mooted-for-premiership-of-kzn-d16fe6cd-4224-4fb5-82f1-44c21919a3d5>

Figure 1: The DA's performance in local government elections

Source: IEC

The DA's poor performance in 2019 and 2021 is largely a product of its protracted expedition to ascertain its precise identity. It identifies itself as a liberal party. In subscribing to such a well-developed ideology, one would expect that the DA would find it easy to identify its position in South African politics. This, along with the party's position as the second-largest party in the country with roots in some of the oldest parties in the country's history, means that identity issues should be beyond the DA. However, the DA is a victim of the demands of South African politics. The DA's growth over the years has been a result of its appeal to white South Africans, mainly liberals. The party's growth has also been aided by conservative elements of the white community albeit not so significantly. Of course, the party has also received some support from the black community. However, given the size of the black electorate, the party has barely begun scratching the surface here. This is where the DA's identity issues emanate.

Electoral success nationally requires a party to appeal to and attract the black electorate. Without that, there is a natural ceiling to its support. Faced with this problem, the DA looked towards making space for black leaders so as to present itself as a viable, non-racial/non-racist alternative to the governing party. Consider the 2010 merger with Patricia De Lille's Independent Democrats; the failed co-option of Mamphela Ramphele into the party's upper echelons (she would have stood as the DA's presidential candidate in the 2014 elections and her party, Agang, would have ultimately merged with the DA); Lindiwe Mazibuko's election as the leader of the opposition in parliament in 2011; and various "promotions" of black leaders.³⁴

The DA's reidentification or rebranding strategy culminated in the election of Mmusi Maimane as the leader of the party in 2015. Overall, the DA's strategy failed as the party declined in the 2019 national elections. However, the party did grow in the 2016 municipal elections and an important factor is that this period is when the unholy relationship between the Gupta family and

³ Democratic Alliance. n.d "History" <https://www.da.org.za/why-the-da/history>

⁴ Paddy Harper. 2023. "Burned by its 2019 'woke' experiment, the DA is unlikely to follow the same path leading up to 2024". <https://mg.co.za/politics/2023-02-20-burned-by-its-2019-woke-experiment-the-da-is-unlikely-to-follow-the-same-path-leading-up-to-2024/>

then ANC president Jacob Zuma was orchestrating state capture. But DA's failure to build support among the black electorate has since been highlighted by the exodus of black leaders. Chief among these is Maimane who resigned after taking much of the blame for the party's 2019 poor performance. Other notable departures include those of Herman Mashaba, Lindiwe Mazibuko, Makashule Gana, Phumzile van Damme, Mbali Ntuli and Bongani Baloyi.

After the failure of this experiment, the DA sought to revert to its former self in order to avoid further alienation of its white voter base. In 2019, Zille returned to active party leadership and was elected chairperson of the federal council while Steenhuisen was elected interim leader. They replaced Selfe and Maimane respectively. The two leaders retained these positions in the 2020 and 2023 congresses, alongside other leaders already mentioned. This marked the severing of ties between the DA and "wokeness" or race-based politics as Zille often avers. Recall her utterances that "the tragedy is [Hendrik] Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, was trying to banish blackness from SA and now wokeness is trying to banish whiteness from SA but the fundamental architecture of the ideology remains the same".⁵

The DA's reaction to its setback in 2019 may have been over the top. It would be expected that an organisation that is seeking to rebrand may lose some support from its traditional voter base and in 2019 the only race group in which the party's support grew, albeit minimally, was black. The party concluded that its poor performance in 2019 was a result of the significant loss of white voters, particularly white Afrikaners, as well as the loss of coloured voters combined with minimal growth of support among black voters.⁶

With eyes on the future, however, the DA should have been able to accept this setback as part of the process of building a new voter base. It is probable that it would have been able to gradually build trust with the targeted voter base and subsequently reap the rewards in the form of heightened electoral support further down the line. Instead, as the 2021 election results demonstrate, the DA risks losing the trust of both its traditional voter base and the base it had intended to pursue when it handed the reigns to the likes of Maimane. The overreaction and inability to look beyond the 2019 setback may symbolise a lack of ambition in the DA. What the DA effectively communicated with this is that it has turned off the path of laying a foundation which may result in losses in the short term but lead to higher levels of growth in the future, eliminating the need for coalitions.

Zille's utterances in particular have been symptomatic of the poor messaging that has become characteristic of the DA. Chief among these problematic statements are her remarks on social media sanitising colonialism, which drew significant criticism and outrage towards the DA and resulted in her being found to have violated the executive code of ethics by the public protector. The tweets were made while she was still the premier of the Western Cape. Zille's social media conduct has been so problematic that she has been involved in arguments with then party members such as Van Damme on social media.

The DA as a party has also had its fair share of poor messaging. Recall the posters with the deeply problematic message: "The ANC called you racists",

⁵ Unathi Nkanjeni. 2021. "Helen Zille: 'Wokeness is trying to banish whiteness in SA'".

⁶ Ryan Coetzee, Tony Leon and Michiel Le Roux. 2019. "A Review of the Democratic Alliance". <https://cdn.da.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/29170634/Review-Panel-Report.pdf>

the DA calls you heroes." These were erected in the predominantly Indian suburb of Phoenix by the party in the lead up to the 2021 elections. Phoenix was the site of racial profiling which resulted in the death of 36 predominantly black people in the July 2021 unrest. The DA's use of such a tragic incident for politicking was perplexing given how the party has for the longest time reiterated its stance against race-based politics and therefore styled itself as a non-racial organisation. After initially defending the posters, the DA's KZN provincial chairperson Dean McPherson apologised for them. It is these racially polarising incidents that continue to create some degree of mistrust between the DA and sections of the electorate, something which was acknowledged by the losing federal leader candidate, Mpho Phalatse.

The DA in 2024

With its new leadership composition, in particular Zille and Steenhuisen, the DA will seek to reclaim the support it has lost to parties such as the Freedom Front Plus (FF+). However, this will not be easy, as the 2021 municipal elections, where the party lost support, demonstrated. This means that the DA's "new strategy" characterised by the party's attempts to reconcile with its old self has already resulted in a degree of failure. Moreover, the FF+ continues to grow and eat into the DA's voter base as post-2021 by-elections, particularly in the Western Cape, have demonstrated. The DA's challenges will be compounded by the presence of Mashaba's ActionSA, which will contest national and provincial elections for the first time in 2024. ActionSA will be competing for both the DA's liberal white vote as well as the black vote. Add to this newly established parties which will be competing for the same base as the DA, such as Baloyi's Xiluva, Songezo Zibi's Rise Mzansi and Maimane's Build One South Africa (BOSA). Not to be discounted is Gayton McKenzie's Patriotic Alliance (PA) which has already demonstrated its ability to lure coloured voters away from the DA in by-elections.

Given these realities, the DA's fortunes in 2024 may depend on voter turnout – it has generally performed well in instances when voter turnout is low. However, the 2024 elections may just be the most important since 1994, as they may very well be the difference between South Africa totally collapsing or staying afloat. Should that materialise into a higher voter turnout, it is likely to be disadvantageous to the DA.

The results of the DA's federal congress indicate an intention to retain the status quo that was established in 2019. This collective led by Steenhuisen and Zille has demonstrated its intentions wrestle back the support it lost to the likes of FF+ which improved as the DA declined. A key determinant of the DA's success in 2024 will be whether it will be able to balance this and the need to appeal to the broader electorate in order to unseat the ANC. The danger here is that the simultaneous pursuit of these two ends may result in neither of them being attained. The 2019 and 2021 elections should serve as a warning for the party.

Overall, the DA's success in 2024 will depend substantially on whether the party will receive the protest vote from voters who will be keen on demonstrating their dissatisfaction with the ANC. Given that the DA has more governance experience than most opposition parties, (by virtue of governing the Western Cape as well as some municipalities across the country either solely or as part of a coalition), one would expect the DA to be the obvious alternative to the ANC. However, the party's challenge is that there are smaller parties which may better represent the interests of some of the DA's potential voters. The rise of the FF+ and the PA highlight this point.

One of the ingredients to the ANC's success over the years has been its ability to appeal to broad sections of society and position itself as a representative of their differing interests. The decline of the ANC has resulted in voters opting to vote for parties that better champion specific issues that they (voters) consider paramount. The consequence is that all parties stand to profit from the ANC's decline. The DA therefore has the mammoth task of positioning itself as a champion of broad and sometimes competing interests of different sections of society, which is something that has proven to be difficult for the party.

A survey conducted by the SABI Strategy Group for the Brenthurst Foundation between October and November 2022 forecast that the DA will secure 24% of the vote in 2024 with the ANC declining to 48%.⁷ This is consistent with the Social Research Foundation's polling which sees the DA receiving 24% of the vote, although this only sees the ANC declining to 52%.⁸ These forecasts should explain the DA's focus on preparing itself to lead a coalition government next year rather than preparing to unseat the ANC by itself.

Management of coalitions

After being re-elected federal leader, Steenhuisen announced a proposal for a pre-election "moonshot pact" with like-minded parties and civil society organisations aimed at toppling the ANC, keeping the EFF out of power and forming an opposition coalition government.⁹ "Like-minded parties" mainly include parties with which the DA already has a working relationship in local government such as the IFP, ActionSA, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), and the FF+. Reaction has been varied and some parties still have to discuss the proposal internally so it's still early to predict whether this will come to fruition. The challenge here is that while parties such as the FF+, IFP and ActionSA have demonstrated some interest in the pact, they have warned about the DA's "ownership" of the pact and called for equality. The FF+ in particular has communicated that it will attend discussions but will only commit once the details of the arrangement have been laid out.

For opposition parties this arrangement is risky as it may communicate that a vote for any of them is practically a vote for the DA. This may result in the DA gradually swallowing these parties. Parties such as the ACDP, Rise Mzansi and the UDM have expressed opposition to the pre-election arrangement. Interestingly, the newly established Xiluva party was invited to the discussions on the pact, while Maimane's BOSA was not.¹⁰ This perhaps reflects the state of the relationship between Maimane and his former party.

The moonshot pact proposal may be viewed as the DA's attempt to formalise coalitions. The formalisation and formation of standing coalitions is usually a gradual process which results when coalitions become entrenched in a political system. The DA is therefore attempting to fast-track this process in an effort to prevent the instability that has come to characterise many

⁷ Brenthurst Foundation. 2023. "Survey of Voter Opinion; South Africa – October/November 2022". <https://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/downloads/south-african-voter-sentiments-23-november-2022-brenthurst-foundation-2-read-only.pdf>

⁸ Business Tech. 2023 "New poll shows EFF, DA losing support, and the ANC gaining – but there's a catch". <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/675769/new-poll-shows-eff-da-losing-support-and-the-anc-gaining-but-theres-a-catch/>

⁹ Democratic Alliance. 2023. "Re-election victory speech by DA Federal Leader John Steenhuisen". <https://www.da.org.za/2023/04/re-election-victory-speech-by-da-federal-leader-john-steenhuisen>

¹⁰ Malaika Ditabo. 2023. Mmusi Maimane shut out of DA's 'moonshot pact' led by John Steenhuisen. <https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/political-parties/mmusi-maimane-shut-out-of-das-moonshot-pact-led-by-john-steenhuisen-20230412>

coalition-governed municipalities from spilling over to national government. The party has been working on this as recent by-elections demonstrate, where only one coalition partner has contested. In this arrangement, the party with a more realistic chance of winning would contest a by-election. This avoids votes from being spread across coalition partners and usually happens in municipalities where the loss of a seat to the opposition, in many cases the ANC, may result in the loss of power. The IFP in KZN and the FF+ in the Western Cape have been part of this arrangement recently.

The moonshot pact proposal looks a bit tenuous in the context of the great instability where coalitions govern locally, particularly in Gauteng metros. As with the pact, after the 2021 elections the DA sought to form coalitions with parties on the basis of coalition agreements. It succeeded and managed to take power in Gauteng metros, albeit with the help of the EFF. As the ANC began its mission to wrestle back power in these metros, the weaknesses of the DA's agreement-anchored style of coalition management surfaced. Since these agreements are in no way legally binding, parties such as the PA and the Congress of the People (Cope) simply defected without facing any punitive measures. Coalitions require active management rather than ineffective regularisation. The DA's approach however centres on legislation, with Steenhuisen advocating an introduction of legally binding legislation to guide the functions of coalitions.¹¹ This is important for the DA to get right or it risks having its coalition governments toppled by the ANC and EFF, which are proving to be better adapted to coalitions.

Outside of coalitions, the DA is still finding it hard to respond to the implications of changing political dynamics which demand more than simplistic opposition to the ANC that opposition parties have become accustomed to offering. The changes require that opposition parties position themselves as potential governing parties with a value proposition to offer. In short, the changes require parties to be more proactive than reactive. Given how dysfunctional the coalitions have been, including those led by the DA, the success of the moonshot pact would hinge on the legislative framework. For an agreement-anchored approach, the agreements will need to be legally binding in order to offer any buffer against instability.

Another problem for the DA is the limitation brought by inviting only like-minded parties, making its mission to topple the ANC and keep the EFF out of power even more difficult. Some have already rejected the proposal although this is subject to change – it is politics, after all. Even when coalitions are elected, they will need enforceable punitive measures in place to prevent the ANC-EFF from tempting coalition partners to their ranks.

An important reason why the DA-led coalition governments were removed from power in Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni was the party's unwillingness to work with the EFF, having been willing to ascend to power with the EFF's help, thereby setting a trap for itself. The DA made it clear from 2021 that it would not work with the EFF, which then voted with the ANC to oust Phalatse the DA's former Johannesburg mayor, and elect incumbent Thapelo Amad. In Ekurhuleni, the EFF abstained from the vote of no confidence against the DA's former mayor, Tania Campbell. Campbell was ousted but voted back to power with the help of the EFF once more following disagreements with

¹¹ EWN. 2023. Steenhuisen: Coalitions Should Be Legally Guided to Avoid Instability". <https://ewn.co.za/0001/01/01/steenhuisen-coalitions-should-be-legally-guided-to-avoid-instability>

the ANC. When Campbell was ousted for the second time in March this year, the EFF voted with the ANC.

Relations between the DA and EFF are getting worse, with Steenhuisen expressing open disdain for the EFF. In his speech after his re-election, he repeatedly referred to a potential ANC-EFF coalition as a doomsday coalition due to the EFF's participation in it. Steenhuisen declared the EFF an enemy of progress and the DA's political enemy number one.⁹ It may be premature for the DA to indicate its unwillingness to work with the EFF in 2024, as there may be circumstances that may force this to happen. However, what is important to deduce from this is that the DA has not completely dismissed the possibility of working with the ANC but instead declared its intention to prevent the EFF from accessing power. While hoping to achieve this through a coalition government constituted by like-minded opposition parties, Steenhuisen highlighted that should this fail, the DA would do "everything" in its power to prevent an EFF and ANC marriage in 2024. A declaration of an intention to work with the ANC would be too risky for the DA at this point but after the elections in 2024, cooperation between the two parties will remain a possibility although we do not see it happening.

As the party's matriarch, Zille's role in the coalitions drama is often overlooked. Like Steenhuisen, Zille has in the past argued in favour of the regulating of coalitions. She has chastised smaller parties for their role in the instability of coalitions, even going as far as suggesting an introduction of a threshold for parties to have seats in councils.¹² The DA's chairperson of federal council disapproved of these parties labelling the DA as arrogant for refusing to renegotiate coalition agreements as soon as they received better offers from the likes of the ANC. While Zille attributes this refusal to the DA's respect for the rule of law and thereby honouring of agreements, it is such inflexibility that threatens DA-led coalitions. The key ingredient in coalitions is the willingness to compromise, and Zille's argument highlights an absence of this in the DA which may alienate potential coalition partners. It also provided a basis from which Steenhuisen could lay his criticism against the EFF. Importantly, Notably, Phalatse, a victim of coalition instability, expressed an opposing view to this.

Conclusion

The DA has an opportunity to profit from the ANC's impending decline in 2024. With more ambition, the party would be able to garner more votes than the 24% it is expected to receive. However, its preoccupation with winning back the support of those who "subscribed to the values and principles of the party" may limit its ability to become a truly national party (of order of 30-40%). We expect the DA to garner between 24% and 26% of the vote in 2024, in a very weak turnout scenario (our baseline). However, in Gauteng with its large population and economic importance, the DA's performance is difficult to forecast, especially given its participation in messy local government coalitions. Nonetheless, we foresee the party growing to around 35% from 27% of the vote in 2019.

¹² Helen Zille. 2002. Coalitions in SA are not working. What needs to change? <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/fridaybriefing/helen-zille-coalitions-in-sa-are-not-working-what-needs-to-change-20221006>

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