

Vote for the only party that gets things done. Vote DA!

By **John Steenhuisen** - Leader of the Democratic Alliance

My fellow Democrats, fellow citizens,

Welcome, and thank you for coming out here today to Mary Fitzgerald Square in beautiful Johannesburg for the DA's "Get Things Done" rally - our final national rally before we go to the polls to vote next Monday.

We still have just over a week left to reach even more people and persuade them to put their trust in the only party that has shown it has what it takes to save our towns and cities.

The only party that can say, with complete honesty: We Get Things Done!

So let's make that week count, because the stakes in these elections could not possibly be higher.

A week from now all of you will stand before a decision that could make or break your town or city, and very possibly set the course for our country to follow.

It will take you a few seconds in that voting booth to make your mark and fold your ballot paper, but the choice you make there will stay with you for many years.

And that's why you need to be smart about this. You need to think very carefully about what exactly it is you want for your town or city, and what it will take to make it happen.

And then you need to vote with your head.

Forget for a moment about all the emotional appeals from parties who will beg for your loyalty because once, long ago, they played a role in the liberation struggle.

Forget about all the brand new parties that spring up before every single election like a field of overnight mushrooms, and then fade away just as quickly afterwards.

Forget about all the small parties that just don't have the numbers to properly represent you, and certainly don't have the numbers to keep the ANC or EFF out.

And forget about gimmicks like independent candidates who don't stand for any particular values, policies or manifesto offers and cannot be held to account on any of these things once the votes are cast.

Vote smart. Vote with your head.

So what is it we're voting for next Monday?

This is a Local Government Election, which means you're voting for a government that will be tasked with the day-to-day running of your town or city.

This is about service delivery. It is about infrastructure maintenance. It is about looking after every last cent of public money and making sure this money is spent well and not stolen.

If you can do these things well, your municipality has every chance to succeed. But if you fail to do the basics, your municipality will fail. That is guaranteed.

And by fail, I mean the total collapse of a municipality's service delivery, the total collapse of its finances and ultimately the total collapse of its local economy.

That is not some scary prediction for one day in the future. That has already happened in dozens of municipalities across the country.

In August, national government put together a list of 64 municipalities they consider delinquent or dysfunctional. A new in-depth study by News24 into municipal governance has added another 43 on-the-verge-of-collapse municipalities to this list.

That means right now 107 out of South Africa's 278 municipalities have either already failed or are about to do so.

This is a disaster for the millions of South Africans who have no choice but to continue living in these failed municipalities.

If we want to save these places, we have to be honest about what is wrong with them. We have to find a common thread that runs through all these failing towns and cities - a thread that we can identify as being responsible for this decay.

And when we find that common thread, we need to loosen it and pull it out or else the decay will become so bad that we may never fix it.

Now I suspect you know what that common thread is, don't you?

The one thing that all these broken towns and cities share is an ANC local government.

The mark of the ANC sits like fingerprints on a crime scene across every single failed town and city. One by one, they have broken these municipalities and then left the residents there to pick up the pieces.

Some of you who have tuned into this broadcast this morning will be listening from these broken municipalities. And you will know exactly what I'm talking about.

You will know all about raw sewage that runs freely down the streets, or is pumped straight into streams and rivers.

You will know about electricity outages that go on for days on end, not because of load-shedding but because no one has done any substation maintenance.

You will know about water shortages that have nothing to do with droughts and dam levels, and everything to do with a local government that cannot maintain its pumps or fix pipe leaks.

You will know about filthy streets where piles of refuse go uncollected for weeks, and where grass on the verges has not been cut in months.

You will know about traffic lights that have been broken for longer than they have worked, and street lights that haven't worked at all this year.

I have been to these towns. I have seen all these things for myself.

And I have seen communities where people are still subjected to inhumane and dangerous pit toilets.

I have seen people walking kilometers with wheelbarrows and containers to collect water for that evening's meal and bath.

I have seen the rot and the decay in these ANC-run towns, and it is horrible. Nobody should have to accept that.

But even sadder than the physical collapse of these places is the loss of hope for the future.

When a municipality falls apart like that, it's only a matter of time before the local businesses start closing down or moving elsewhere.

And this is happening all across the country as we speak. It's not just a few big factories, like Clover in Lichtenburg which we saw on the news.

It's hundreds of small businesses and micro-enterprises that would struggle to break even at the best of times. But now throw in the world's worst governing party plus a very poorly managed pandemic, and it becomes almost impossible to keep your business afloat.

For every small business that folds, dozens of workers and their family members are left destitute and join the long queues of the unemployed in these economic ghost towns.

In these places, youth unemployment is so high that many simply accept they will never, ever have work.

Why must South Africa be that country? Why should we have the world's highest youth unemployment rate? Surely we can do better than that.

And the answer is: Yes we can! But only if we are prepared to acknowledge why things got so bad in the first place.

The short answer is: The ANC.

Because as a party of government, the ANC has a fatal flaw. It puts its own interests ahead of the interests of the people it is meant to serve.

And what I mean by this is that it places its own people in crucial government positions regardless of whether they can do the required job. All that matters is that those people in the inner circle are rewarded with jobs and access to contracts.

They call this cadre deployment, and they're not ashamed of it. It's not a secret they try to hide. In fact, they're very proud of it.

But what this cadre deployment does is it hollows out government - and particularly local government - to the point where it just becomes an empty shell of cadres drawing salaries and adding nothing of value.

When this is repeated across all departments, and for many years, local governments simply stop working.

Bit by bit, the critical functions of a municipality grind to a halt.

Municipal vehicles aren't serviced, and eventually towns have no more working trucks to collect refuse.

Water treatment plants are not maintained, leading to catastrophic failures and ongoing sewage spills.

Pipe leaks and broken pumps cause water interruptions that go on for weeks at a time.

Once you reach this stage of service delivery collapse, your municipality enters a death spiral. Because if you can no longer deliver services, you can no longer charge residents for them. And without income, your municipality is dead.

All these things happen slowly at first, and then they start to happen very quickly.

And because no one is ever held accountable for their performance, this carries on until the entire thing just collapses.

That, my fellow citizens, is the bad news.

But today is about the good news. Today is about what we can do to stop this collapse and to rescue these towns and cities from the decay. And trust me, it is possible.

I can say this with such confidence because we have evidence of what happens when you do the opposite of what the ANC has done to these failing towns and cities.

I am talking, of course, of all the municipalities run by the Democratic Alliance - many with outright majorities, and some in coalition governments.

Across the country these DA municipalities serve as a constant reminder of what our country could be under a better government.

Because that's what the DA is - a far better government than the ANC.

There are many differences between our two parties - our political ideologies are very different and our approaches to the economy are polar opposites - but arguably the biggest difference between us has to do with our values. Our motivation for doing what we do.

In the DA, we believe the people come first, not the party. And this means that every decision we take in government places the interests of the people front and centre.

We don't fill our governments with ill-equipped cadres who have no skills and no interest in public service.

We don't bloat our governments to the point where cadres' salaries suck up the entire budget.

And we don't tolerate poor performance or corruption. There is no recycling and redeployment of disgraced cadres in the DA.

That is the only way to build a capable government that is able to deliver. That is why DA governments work and ANC governments fail.

But I don't want you to just take my word for it. Because anyone can make claims about how good they are and how bad their opponents are.

Luckily there are independent measurements that you can look at to see who is lying and who is telling the truth when they make these claims.

It is the job of trusted institutions like Stats SA and the Auditor General, as well as independent organisations like Ratings Afrika, to pore over the data and compile reports on all sorts of governance performances.

That's where you need to go if you want to cut through all the spin and lies.

Thanks to the Auditor General's report every year, we can see which municipalities are financially responsible, and which ones are guilty of waste and poor reporting. And year after year it is DA governments that come out on top with clean audits.

Thanks to Stats SA, we know which municipalities and metros offer their poorest residents the widest access to free basic services. And again, it is DA governments that are shown to have the most pro-poor offer of services.

Stats SA also tells us where you will find the highest and lowest unemployment rates. And here we see that Cape Town has the lowest unemployment rate of all the metros, by some distance, and that DA-run Midvaal in Gauteng has a far lower unemployment rate than any of its ANC-run neighbours.

Thanks to Ratings Afrika, we can rank municipalities according to their financial sustainability. And these rankings put DA-run municipalities in the top five positions. Which is remarkable when you consider that the DA governs less than 10% of the country's municipalities.

This DA dominance in rankings was also backed up by an in-depth municipal report just released by News24. This report, called the Out of Order Index, confirms that 14 of the top-20 municipalities in the country are in the DA-run Western Cape.

But this index also shows that DA-run Kouga is the best-performing municipality in Eastern Cape and DA-run Midvaal in the best-performing municipality in Gauteng.

You cannot argue with those facts.

That is why our message to voters, ahead of these elections, is that the DA - and only the DA - gets things done.

And when we say this, we are stating verifiable facts that have been independently measured and reported by others.

Objectively, you are more likely to have access to water, electricity and regular refuse removal if you live in a DA municipality.

Objectively, you are more likely to receive these services for free if you are poor and live in a DA-run municipality.

Objectively, you have a better chance of finding work if you live in a DA-run municipality.

Objectively, less public money will be wasted, stolen or misreported in a DA-run municipality.

And because these things are true, DA municipalities operate in a sustainable cycle.

Because we are able to deliver reliable services, we are also able to bill for these services, And because we collect payment, we are able to then expand our service delivery, maintain our equipment and roll out infrastructure projects.

Simply put, the DA understands what it takes to run an efficient municipality, and we understand the positive effect this can have on people's quality of life.

However, this does not mean we are satisfied. Ours is a country with enormous social and economic challenges, and this is true in DA-run towns and cities too.

We know very well that life is hard for many where we govern. We know that poverty and unemployment still haunt many people, even if they live in a municipality that is better run than the one next door.

We are not complacent about this at all, and we will never be content with our achievements. We can - and must - do better.

But the base from which we need to improve is already so much higher. We are so far ahead of ANC governments that we are in a far better position to reach our goals.

With your help next Monday, we can bring this DA difference to even more South Africans.

But, fellow South Africans, while the primary job of a local government is to provide basic services, maintain the municipality's infrastructure and look after public money, DA governments don't stop there.

Our mission is also to protect South Africans from the failures of national government.

Many of these national government failures - such as load-shedding, the collapse of commuter rail and insufficient policing - fall well beyond the mandate of local governments. But if we were to just leave these things to the ANC government, they would drag millions of people under with them.

We cannot stand by and let that happen, and particularly not where we govern. And this is why we have made commitments to fight for the power to take on these functions.

We will challenge national government's monopoly on all these things, and we will ultimately win.

When you elect a DA local government, know that you are getting far more than just the job description of a local government. You are getting a party that will fight to insulate you from the worst failures of national government.

We have to get our cities' trains running again, at full capacity, if we want local economies to thrive. And to do so, competent metro governments will have to take over this function from national government and PRASA.

This is not something the ANC will give up easily, but the DA has never backed away from a fight. We will succeed in this, sooner or later.

Another area where we will succeed is in the provision of reliable electricity to residents of DA-run metros and municipalities. Eskom's inability to keep the lights on is the single biggest threat to our economy, and we cannot let them sink our country like that.

We have already been fighting for several years to allow municipalities to procure their own electricity directly from independent power producers, and we have a pilot programme underway in six Western Cape municipalities preparing for this scenario.

When this pilot programme has been completed, we plan to roll it out to other DA-run municipalities too.

And then a third area where DA local governments will step in to rescue residents from the failure of national government is safety and policing.

It is no secret that SAPS is ill-equipped, outnumbered and outgunned in almost every community across the country.

By the Police Minister's own admission, this under-resourcing of police precincts is a nationwide problem, but yet they are unwilling to devolve some of these policing functions to local governments.

Well, the DA doesn't accept that. As with the electricity issue, we have been fighting for a devolution of policing powers for years, and we will not stop until the people tasked with fighting crime are the people closest to the problem and closest to the affected communities.

This is true whether we are talking about urban communities under attack from gangs and drug dealers, or vulnerable rural communities who are victims of farm attacks.

Already, the City of Cape Town has augmented visible policing on the Cape Flats by deploying its own LEAP officers there, and after the 2016 elections the DA government in Nelson Mandela Bay launched that city's first Metro Police Force.

We have also committed to introducing a Rural Safety Unit to Tshwane's Metro Police Force if we are given a mandate by voters to do so.

We will not sit back and say: These things are not the job of a local government. Because we know that if we don't do it, it won't get done.

But we cannot do it alone. We can lay the facts before you and ask you to join us on this mission, but ultimately it will fall to each of you to choose that path.

So let's talk about that choice for a moment, because it is important that you know exactly what is at stake here.

The simple truth is that on the 3rd of November you will wake to either a DA government or an ANC government. There are no other realistic options. How you vote on the 1st will determine this outcome.

I know a lot of you believe that a vote for any of the other small parties could do the trick too, but this is simply not true.

The ANC can't get your vote, they would love you to vote for another small party. Because by splitting the non-ANC vote up among smaller parties, their own slice of the pie just becomes more dominant.

The best outcome for the ANC is a fragmented opposition vote. Don't be fooled into thinking any vote is good as long as it's not for the ANC.

But they're not the only party hoping that you will split the vote among smaller parties. In many municipalities the EFF is waiting for precisely this to happen. Such a split won't eat into their own votes, and so there is a very real possibility that they could end up as the official opposition in these municipalities.

If this were to happen it will be catastrophic for these towns and cities, as the ANC and EFF will be left fighting to be more radical and more populist than each other, which will certainly leave poor people in these towns far poorer.

Then you also have to consider what happens to your vote after you have given it to one of these smaller parties, or an independent candidate. Because many of those votes will end up with the ANC anyway.

Some of these parties have even been swallowed up in the ANC national government. By voting for them you're effectively handing your vote to the ANC on a platter.

I strongly recommend that you look at how all these parties have behaved in coalition governments in the recent past. See how many of them have flip-flopped between coalitions - how many of them were mysteriously enticed to jump back into bed with the ANC.

If you are not 100% sure that a party will not hand your vote straight back to the ANC, don't risk it. The only way to ensure defeat of the ANC and to ensure that the EFF stays far away from your local government is by uniting behind the one party that can keep them out.

But what about coalitions, you might ask. Won't some of these parties stand with the DA when coalition governments are formed?

The answer is: Yes, some of them will. And we have to find ways to make coalition governments work. Because as the ANC fades, coalitions are going to become a reality in more and more municipalities.

But the undeniable truth is that where the DA governs with an outright majority, we get far more done. All those top-ranked municipalities in the Ratings Africa rankings or in the News24 Index are all run by the DA alone, and have been for multiple terms.

When we alone have our hands on the steering wheel, we are able to point a municipality where we want to take it and not worry about others continuously pulling the wheel this way and that.

Consider that the best-run municipalities in the Western Cape are all outright DA-run, and the worst ones are either run outright by the ANC or by ANC-dominated coalitions.

In fact, of the nine coalition governments in the Western Cape, only one is a DA-led coalition. The other eight are ANC coalition governments, and they are all a mess.

That is why I have been asking people, across the length and breadth of the country these past months, to give the DA an outright mandate to bring our vision and our brand of clean governance to their towns and cities.

Give us five uninterrupted and uncompromised years to stabilise the finances, to clean out the corruption and to get service delivery back on track.

If those five years convince you that the DA can be trusted, then we can talk about another five years after that. Because that's how a mature democracy should work.

No one owes any party their loyalty for life - it is a five-year contract that doesn't have to be renewed.

No one owes any party a reward for a long-ago struggle history. Our task is to secure the future, not live in the past.

No one owes any party their vote simply because of their race or language or culture. That kind of voting behaviour is a dead-end.

When you stand in that voting booth next Monday, look through the list of parties on your ballot paper and ask these questions of each of them:

Does this party have any experience in running a government? Do they have a track record I can look at?

What does this track record say? How does it compare with the only other governing party, the ANC?

Where does this party stand on clean, efficient governance and sound financial management? Does it regularly achieve clean audits?

Does this party have a proven track record of fighting corruption?

Does this party deploy unqualified cadres to government, or does it build capable governments with fit-for-purpose individuals?

Is this party big enough to challenge the ANC's dominance and keep the EFF out?

And most importantly, does this party do what it says? Do I have reason to believe the promises it makes in its election manifesto?

If you were to answer each of those questions honestly, your choice will be simple.

There is only one party that can save our failing towns and cities and turn them around.

There is only one party that doesn't just do the minimum of its job, but goes beyond to fight for the dignity and the future of the people where it governs.

There is only one party with a proud track record in government, backed up by every independent report and ranking, that says: This party gets things done.

Fellow South Africans, that party is the DA.

So, if you care about what happens to your town or city - if you want to do your bit to fix this country and ensure that your children have a future here - join me as we make a stand next Monday.

Join me in putting our crosses next the one party that can do what needs to be done: the Democratic Alliance.

Viva, DA! Viva!