

REALISING THE OPEN OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY FOR ALL: A POLICY PLATFORM

Introduction

The Democratic Alliance’s vision for South Africa is of “an Open Opportunity Society for All”, a society in which every person has the right, the space and the capability to be himself, develop herself and pursue his own ends as an equal and fully legitimate citizen of South Africa.

Our updated policy platform – the Open Opportunity Society in Action – gives substance to that vision.

The purpose of this introduction is to fill out our understanding of the Open Opportunity Society for All, providing a clear exposition of the values and ideas on which it is based.

The three components of the Open Opportunity Society for All

The term “Open Opportunity Society for All” brings together three key concepts – individual freedom under the rule of law, opportunity with responsibility and full equality for all – and in doing so, creates a fourth concept that underpins our vision of the proper relationship between individuals, the state and society in South Africa today. Our vision is grounded in the idea that every human being has a right to dignity. Human dignity is the foundational concept that informs our values and vision.

An open society

There are five key components of an open society:

- A constitution that enshrines the rule of law, individual rights and freedoms and the separation of powers
- Transparency and accountability, without which governments abuse their power and compromise the freedoms enshrined in the constitution.
- Security of person and property
- An independent and free-thinking civil society, including a free and independent media and a free and independent political opposition that is loyal to the constitutional order
- A general tolerance of difference on the part of the population
- An economy that is characterized primarily by the free choices of individuals

The two key ideas that unite these five components are the related ideas of *individual freedom* and the *limitation of state power*. They are related because an extension of state power necessitates a limitation of individual freedom and *visa versa*. In other words, an open society is one in which individuals are free to be themselves and pursue their own

ends, and in which both the law and the attitudes of the population provide the space for them so to be.

In protecting and promoting an open society in South Africa, the Democratic Alliance must identify and oppose attempts to limit the space for individual freedom and actively promote the extension of such space.

An opportunity society

Every person in an open society enjoys the same formal freedoms, but those freedoms can be impossible to take advantage of in practice if the people concerned do not have the wherewithal – the money, power and opportunity – actually to be themselves, to develop themselves and to pursue their own ends.

For example, how can a child really be herself, develop herself and pursue her own ends if she is born into poverty, without the prospect of a decent education, without access to basic healthcare, with little prospect of gainful employment, without the money to fight for her rights in a court, constrained all the while by cultural traditions that pay little heed to her own wishes?

What is required then is for people to be offered the opportunity to develop the capabilities needed to take advantage of the formal freedoms they enjoy; the wherewithal *actually* to be themselves, to develop themselves and to pursue their own ends.

In an opportunity society, therefore, your path in life is not determined by the circumstances of your birth, including both your material and “demographic” circumstances, but rather by your talents and by your efforts. That is why, in an opportunity society, a child born in poverty should nevertheless be able to become a brain surgeon, provided he has the talent and puts in the effort required to succeed.

Both civil society and the state have a role to play in creating opportunity for citizens, while individuals have a responsibility to make use of the opportunities on offer.

The proper relationship between the state and the individual in an Open Opportunity Society for All is outlined below, and this relationship is given concrete expression in our policy platform.

First, however, the final concept in the Open opportunity Society - the idea that South Africa is “for all”, or as Nelson Mandela famously said, “belongs to all who live in it, both black and white.”

A society for all its people

There is a long history of racial and ethnic division in South Africa; of racist discrimination; of racial suspicion and competition.

In order to transcend this past, and usher in an era in which people are judged by their character, their effort and their contribution, and not by their race, we believe that attitude and policy should be based on the following:

- An absolute rejection of discrimination on grounds of race and other characteristics of birth
- A clear acknowledgement that there is a long history of racial discrimination and oppression in South Africa, that it was wrong and that positive action is now required to make it right. That positive action must be targeted at individuals who still suffer the effects of discrimination, not at groups. It must provide opportunity to the disadvantaged without shutting off opportunity to the advantaged.
- A clear acknowledgement that all South Africans are legitimate and enjoy full moral equality – that is what it means to say South Africa “belongs” to all who live in it.
- The active protection and promotion of the language and culture of all South Africans.

The proper relationship between the state and the individual in an Open Opportunity Society for All

In acting to extend opportunity to all, the state must ensure that it does not compromise the freedom of the individual. To do so, would be to shut down the open society. On the other hand, to neglect those without the wherewithal to direct their own lives in the name of freedom is to shut down the opportunity society.

Therefore, in an opportunity society *that also values individual freedom*, the state’s role must be to facilitate, not direct the activity of citizens; if it provides services, it must seek to expand choice, not determine choices; it must not simply “deliver” to a passive citizenry, which takes what it is lucky enough to get, but must allow the citizenry to determine which opportunities it requires; it must encourage independence, not dependence.

In other words, the free, independent, active individual is at the heart of the opportunity society, both in determining the opportunities required and in taking advantage of them.

Each policy put forward by the DA will tease out more concretely the relationship between the state and individuals in that area. But in each case, our policies will:

- Seek to give citizens a say in determining the opportunities and intervention they require from the state, not determine for citizens what they need.
- Expand choice, not contract it.

- Require people to take personal responsibility for making use of their opportunities, not reward laziness or a sense of entitlement.
- Promote excellence in performance, not be accepting of mediocrity.
- Promote independence and the attainment of self-reliance, not dependence and passivity.
- Be grounded in care and compassion for people, not coldness or callousness.
- Respect and promote the history and culture of all South Africans, not privilege some other others, wither explicitly or implicitly.
- Reject discrimination on grounds of race and other characteristics of birth, and not engage in practices that re-racialise South Africa.
- Promote redress for those individuals who today suffer the consequences of past discrimination, but not shut off opportunities for the advantaged in the process.

Conclusion

The DA's vision for South Africa is achievable. Our cause is to promote it and, through winning support for it, to put it into action.

We believe it is a compelling vision, harnessing all that is best in human kind, grounded in a rightly optimistic view of our capacity to live well together, and to succeed.

Our policy programme gives concrete expression to our vision. On the one hand, it is conservative: it seeks to protect the gains we have made in establishing a democratic society under a constitution; on the other hand, it is an agenda for radical change: it seeks a fundamental transformation of South Africa, from the racial division, abuse of state power, patronage and dependence of the past to a society in which every person really does have the right, the space and the opportunity to be themselves, develop themselves and pursue their own ends.