

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### South Africa Monthly Briefing April 2026

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#### South Africa Summary 27 April 2026

*The country's second-largest party, the Democratic Alliance, holds its federal congress and elects a new leadership team, including Cape Town mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis as federal leader and deputy finance minister, Ashor Sarupen, as the new federal council chairperson. KuGompo magistrate's court sentences, Julius Malema, the leader of the country's second-largest opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), to five years in prison. Finance minister Enoch Godongwana orders a temporary cut to the general fuel levy to alleviate some of the impact of the fuel price increases caused by the ongoing conflict in the Persian Gulf. President Cyril Ramaphosa (2018-present) suspends national police commissioner Fannie Masemola with immediate effect after the commissioner is charged with violating the Public Financial Management Act (PFMA).*

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#### Democratic Alliance elects new leadership team

South Africa's second-largest political party, the **Democratic Alliance (DA)**, [held](#) its **Federal Congress** on 11 and 12 April, during which the party elected a new leadership team. This marked the party's first Federal Congress since it became a national governing party under the **Government of National Unity (GNU)** following the 2024 general election. This conference was particularly significant as both of the party's two highest office-bearers, federal leader **John Steenhuisen**, and federal council chairperson, **Helen Zille**, opted against re-election and vacated their positions (*see ARC Briefing South Africa Feb 2026*). As such, regardless of the outcome of the conference, the party was set for a noteworthy change in power.

Going into the conference, **Cape Town (Western Cape Province)** mayor **Geordin Hill Lewis** was considered a shoo-in as federal leader given the widespread support for his candidacy and the fact that he faced token opposition from a little-known politician, **Sibusiso Dyonase**, a councillor in **Gauteng Province's Sedibeng** district municipality. Unsurprisingly, Hill-Lewis easily won his election and was announced as the party's new leader on 12 April; the full results of the Federal Congress were as follows:

- Federal leader: Geordin Hill-Lewis, Cape Town mayor
- Federal chairperson: **Solly Msimanga**, DA Gauteng leader
- Deputy federal chairpersons:
  - 1st deputy: **Siviwe Gwarube**, basic education minister
  - 2nd deputy: **Cilliers Brink**, former **Tshwane** mayor
  - 3rd deputy: **Solly Malatsi**, communications minister
- Federal council chairperson: **Ashor Sarupen**, deputy finance minister
- Federal council deputy chairpersons:
  - 1st deputy: **JP Smith**, Cape Town Member of the Mayoral Committee (MMC) for safety and security
  - 2nd deputy: **Thomas Walters**, DA member of parliament (MP)
  - 3rd deputy: **Carl Pophaim**, Cape Town MMC for human settlements
- Chairperson of federal finance: **Mark Burke**, DA MP

These results mark a clear generational change in the party hierarchy. Most of the elected officials are new to their positions, and only two are over fifty years in age. Notably, Hill-Lewis is 39, and Ashor

Sarupen is 37; in fact, six of the ten elected individuals are under the age of 40. Furthermore, this is one of the most racially diverse DA leadership classes and, as such, this could mark the beginning of a shift in the party to being popularly viewed as a more youthful cosmopolitan party and no longer as a primarily a vehicle of older white interests. However, there has been criticism over Gwarube being the only woman elected to the party leadership council.

Overall, the outcome of the electoral congress indicates that the DA's rank and file membership desires a change in the party's direction and paradigm to both a more youthful, energetic party and one that is less focused on the party's Western Cape stronghold. This was best illustrated by Msimanga's (45) defeat of the incumbent **Ivan Meyer** (64) in the election for federal chairperson. Msimanga is a former Tshwane mayor and the DA's Gauteng leader, while Meyer is the Western Cape agriculture Member of the Executive Council (MEC).

Unsurprisingly, Hill-Lewis' election as DA leader was the hallmark outcome of the congress, even though his election was largely expected. Hill-Lewis has taken over the DA at a critical point in the party's history. The DA needs to prove that it can broaden its appeal among voters and grow its support base. Hill-Lewis is a young and intelligent leader who could potentially bring new energy and hopefulness to the party. He is certainly more popular than his predecessor; the boarder public disliked Steenhuisen, even though he had strong support within the DA itself.

However, Hill-Lewis is largely untested as a leader under election conditions. An internal DA committee selected him as the party's Cape Town mayoral candidate in 2021. Once he was tapped as the party's candidate, his election as mayor was little more than a formality, given the DA's dominance in Cape Town. Similarly, Hill-Lewis's election as DA leader was essentially a coronation, given the speed at which the party's loyalists and senior members rallied around him after Steenhuisen announced that he would not seek re-election and the lack of any real challenge in the election itself. As such, the new party leader has yet to prove his mettle in the challenging conditions that he will face as party leader in 2029. Notably, DA's support in Cape Town fell to 58.33% in 2021 from 66.61% in 2016, suggesting that Hill-Lewis has some shortcomings as a candidate, especially when fending off challenges from new parties campaigning on populist and identity politics.

The new DA leader will face several challenges in the coming year. First he will need to oversee the DA's local government election campaign while campaigning for re-election as mayor. The local government elections are set to take place between 1 November 2026 and 31 January 2027. There are expectations that the DA will perform well in these elections, especially in major metropolitan battlegrounds such as **Johannesburg** and Tshwane, and Hill-Lewis will be under pressure to help deliver these victories. Hill-Lewis will also need to navigate the DA's often contentious relationship with the **African National Congress (ANC)** (the largest GNU member), ensuring that the party does not get railroaded by the ANC while remaining in the GNU as desired by the majority of the DA's support base.

His decision to [remain as Cape Town mayor](#) will further complicate this latter goal; by refusing to take a seat in cabinet or **Parliament**, he will not work directly with President **Cyril Ramaphosa** (2018-present) nor have immediate oversight of the DA's parliamentary caucus. Hill-Lewis clearly believes there are benefits to this, including ensuring he does not constitutionally work for the president as a cabinet member, and enabling him to distance himself from unpopular legislative and policy decisions by the GNU.

Hill-Lewis is not the only new DA office-bearer who intends to keep their existing position; in fact, all the newly elected leaders intend to keep their existing positions. This should not be an issue for most of these office-bearers, but Sarupen's desire to remain as deputy-finance minister may be detrimental to the party. Federal council chairperson is an administratively important position that involves overseeing the day-to-day running of the party. Sarupen has a full-time job based in Pretoria and thus will not be at the party's headquarters in Cape Town. Notably, his predecessor, Zille, [cited](#) the importance and size of the Federal council chairperson role as the reason for her decision not to run for re-election while campaigning to be the next Johannesburg mayor. The DA needs the Federal

council chairperson to be focused on party issues and management, particularly when the party wants to enter a new era of growth and success and especially when the office bearer (Sarupen) has not held this role before.

### Court sentences Malema to prison on gun charges

The **KuGompo** magistrate's court [sentenced](#), **Julius Malema**, the leader of the country's second-largest opposition party, the **Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)**, to five years in prison on 16 April. This sentence followed Malema's 1 October 2025 [conviction](#) on charges of unlawful possession of a firearm, unlawful possession of ammunition, discharge of a firearm in a built-up area, failure to take reasonable precautions to person or property, and reckless endangerment to person or property (*see ARC Briefing South Africa Oct 2025*). This is related to a 2018 incident during which Malema performatively fired a live automatic firearm while on stage during a political rally.

Notably, Malema received less than the mandatory minimum of 15 years as prescribed under South African law. The magistrate likely did this to account for mitigating arguments the defence put forward, as well as undermine any allegations of political motivations. Malema has been granted leave for appeal and is expected to challenge this verdict as far as possible, potentially even to the constitutional court. This will delay any eventual prison sentence, but it does come with significant risk, as the appellate courts could impose a stringent sentence and find that the magistrate's court was not justified in issuing a sentence below the mandatory minimum.

This sentence presents both an existential threat and a major opportunity for Malema's political career. He will undoubtedly use this development to portray himself as a victim and political martyr, given the EFF's racialised politics, the party likely considers it a positive that the magistrate who issued the sentence, **Twanet Olivier**, is white. Malema will seek to use this narrative to bolster the EFF's flagging support ahead of the upcoming elections. However, South Africa's electoral law prohibits any individual who has received a prison sentence (even a suspended one) from serving in an elected capacity for five years after the sentence is completed. As such, Malema could be barred from being a MP for up to ten years; this will exclude him as a presidential contender, which could mark the end point for the EFF, which is essentially Malema's personal political party. In the interim, the EFF may also suffer if its opponents manage to portray Malema as a convicted felon in future elections in which crime will inevitably be a key issue.

### State cuts fuel levy to offset impact of price hikes

The ongoing war in the Persian Gulf forced regulators to [increase](#) consumer fuel prices on 1 April. The **Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources** [increased](#) petrol by R3.06 (\$0.18) per litre, diesel by between R7.37 (\$0.45) and R7.51 (\$0.45) per litre (depending on grade), and paraffin by R11.67 (\$0.70) per litre on 1 April. However, this hike was lower than initially feared after the finance minister **Enoch Godongwana** ordered a temporary R3 (\$0.18) cut to the general fuel levy on 31 March.

The reduction of the fuel levy was a welcome intervention by the state for economic operators. It also indicates that the government is more concerned about the inflationary effect of the fuel price shock rather than the possibility of fuel shortages. The **South African Reserve Bank (SARB)** (central bank) and the **National Treasury** have aggressively pursued inflation targeting in recent years and successfully brought consumer price inflation down to 3.1% in March from a five-year high of 7.8% in July 2022. Officials are concerned about the negative economic and social impacts of rising costs and are eager to avoid this.

However, it is unclear as to whether the government is willing to impose further fuel levy cuts. South Africa is continuing to record an [under-recovery](#) of fuel imports of around R2 (\$0.12) per litre for petrol and nearly R6 (\$0.36) for diesel. This is placing an unsustainable burden on the national fiscus and will likely compel the government to increase fuel prices again in early May.

Surging fuel prices will inevitably lead to high consumer price inflation and place an additional strain on economic operators. This will suppress economic activity in the country. Already, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has [revised](#) its 2026 growth forecast down from 1.4% of GDP to 1%. If the Middle East conflict persists, leading to worsening of the global fuel crisis, this will suppress South Africa's economic growth even further and could even lead to an economic recession.

### President suspends police commissioner

Ramaphosa [suspended](#) the national police commissioner **Fannie Masemola** with immediate effect on 23 April after Masemola was arrested and arraigned on 21 April for his alleged role in a police tender scandal. [According](#) to the **National Prosecuting Authority (NPA)**, Masemola allegedly violated the **Public Financial Management Act (PFMA)** when he approved a R360m (\$21m) health services contract to a company owned by suspected crime boss **Vusimusi "Cat" Matlala**.

Ramaphosa appointed Lieutenant **Puleng Dimpane** as the acting police commissioner; Dimpane is currently the **South African Police Service (SAPS)** chief financial officer (CFO). Ramaphosa likely appointed her as she was the one who flagged the issues around the health services tender, identifying potential criminal irregularities. Dimpane's past as an administrator is likely also intended to indicate the government's desire to address the clear structural flaws and lack of accountability in SAPS that have been highlighted by recent investigations and the **Madlanga Commission of Inquiry** (see *ARC Briefing South Africa Oct 2025*).

Dimpane's appointment means that at present, both the offices of the police commissioner and the police minister are held by acting incumbents; Ramaphosa appointed acting police minister **Firoz Cachalia** in July last year after **KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)** provincial police commissioner **Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi** accused police minister **Senzo Mchunu** of being captured by criminal interests (see *ARC Briefing South Africa Jul 2025*).

SAPS is facing an integrity crisis and the arrest of the police commissioner will worsen the public's perception of the police. If the allegations are proven, it will confirm the extent to which the police have been infiltrated and captured by criminal elements, which has allowed organised crime to proliferate in the country.

### Planner

28 May 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** **South African Reserve Bank (SARB)** (central bank) **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** meeting;  
Nov 2026 – Jan 2027 **(South Africa)** Local government elections;

### Chronology

27 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Business Day*. **United States (US)** secretary of state **Marco Rubio** says the US remains open to constructive engagement with South Africa, specifically in areas where their mutual interests align;  
22 April 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Jacaranda FM*. Constitutional court rules that the directives of the **South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)** are not legally binding and the commission cannot compel compliance;  
22 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. The state-owned power utility, **Eskom**, reveals that it does not expect to have to implement loadshedding during the upcoming winter months (June-August);  
22 Apr 2026 **Maseru (Lesotho)** *SABC*. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** and Lesotho's **King Letsie III** attend the official opening of the **Senqu Bridge** in Lesotho, part of the ongoing second phase of the **Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP)**, which is vital for South Africa's water security;

- 21 Apr 2026 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *News24*. **France's** ambassador to South Africa, **David Martinon**, reveals that the French and South African governments are in discussions about a potential R2 billion (\$120.78m) loan to help revive South Africa's municipalities;
- 20 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Daily Maverick*. **African National Congress (ANC)** secretary general **Fikile Mbalula** reveals that the party is considering external candidates in its search for mayoral candidates for the upcoming local government elections;
- 20 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *ENCA*. The **African National Congress (ANC)** reveals that it will instruct all party members who are also **South African Communist Party (SACP)** members to declare which party they will campaign for in the upcoming local government elections after the SACP affirmed its commitment to contest these elections;
- 17 Apr 2026 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *News24*. Finance minister **Enoch Godongwana** publishes proposed new regulations under the **Public Procurement Act** that will enable the government to reserve tenders of R100m (\$6.04m) and above exclusively for companies that meet new black economic empowerment (BEE) thresholds;
- 17 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. National police commissioner **Fannie Masemola** appoints **KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)** provincial police commissioner **Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi** to lead a new national crime-fighting initiative aimed at dismantling organised syndicates;
- 17 Apr 2026 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *EWN*. A new **University of Cape Town (UCT)** study indicates that illicit cigarettes make up as much as 50% of South Africa's tobacco market;
- 16 Apr 2026 **uMngeni (South Africa)** *News24*. **uMngeni Local Municipality (Kwa-Zulu Natal Province)** mayor, **Chris Pappas**, confirms that he will not stand for re-election in the upcoming local government elections, potentially endangering the **Democratic Alliance's (DA)** continued hold of the municipality;
- 15 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. The state-owned ports and railways operator, **Transnet**, implements a new R52 (\$3.14) handling surcharge per container to help manage increased fuel prices;
- 15 Apr 2026 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *Al Jazeera*. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** appoints former constitutional affairs minister **Roelf Mayor** as South Africa's new ambassador to the **United States (US)**;
- 8 Apr 2026 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *Bloomberg*. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** receives the credentials from the new US ambassador to South Africa, **Leo Brent Bozell III**;
- 8 Apr 2026 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *ENCA*. The **ActionSA** opposition party presses criminal charges against social development minister **Sisi Tolashe** after it was revealed that Tolashe failed to declare two vehicles that had reputedly been donated by the **Chinese** government to the **African National Congress (ANC) Women's League**, which Tolashe gave to her children instead;
- 7 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **Madlanga Commission of Inquiry** into criminality in the criminal justice system resumes hearings after a two-week hiatus;
- 7 Apr 2026 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. Cabinet approves a new white paper to amend citizenship and refugee laws that includes the introduction of a points-based system and stricter refugee regulations;
- 5 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. International research firm **Ipsos** releases the results of a poll conducted in December 2025 and January 2026 that indicates that support for the **African National Congress (ANC)** among voters has fallen to 33%;

2 Apr 2026 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** appoints **Johnstone Makhubu**, the deputy commissioner for taxpayer engagement, as **South African Revenue Service (SARS)** commissioner, effective from 1 May;

2 Apr 2026 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *SABC*. **Gauteng Provincial** premier **Panyaza Lesufi** appoints the **Economic Freedom Fighters' (EFF) Nkululeko Dunga** as the provincial Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for finance in return for the EFF's support in passing the provincial budget;

30 Mar 2026 **KuGompo (South Africa)** *EWN*. A demonstration protesting a staged 'coronation' of a **Nigerian** traditional leader in KuGompo (formerly **East London**) in **Eastern Cape** province devolves into a riot, leading to property damage.

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