



## INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

Building Institutions, Escaping Development Traps

### Reflecting on South Africa's Transition to a Nonracial Democracy

In 1990, Nelson Mandela's release from prison, cheered by crowds around the world, signaled the end of apartheid in South Africa. Four years later, the country held its first fully democratic elections, completing Mandela's journey from prison to the presidency. The country completed its transition with the promulgation of a new constitution in 1996.

Despite Mandela's inspiring leadership, peace and stability were not a forgone conclusion. South Africa required institutions that could serve diverse groups and earn the trust of citizens. ISS has documented South Africa's evolution during the past two decades in a set of [10 case studies](#), highlighted below in an ISS tribute to Mandela.

#### *Transitioning to Full Democracy*

The 1993 Interim Constitution extended the franchise to South African citizens, regardless of race. It also affirmed the division of the country into provinces, but left the number and borders of those provinces undefined. The [Multi-Party Negotiating Forum](#) defined criteria for the new jurisdictions in order for elections to go forward.

As the 1994 elections approached, the [Independent Electoral Commission](#) selected polling sites, dealt with parties' mistrust, reached alienated and hostile communities, and remedied shortages of electoral materials.

Following the elections, the [Commission on Provincial Government](#), operating under a two-year mandate, provided the new provincial leaders with assistance in setting up their new administrations. It created a trusted channel of communication, reducing tensions and supporting post-electoral peace.

Although the 1994 elections ushered in a largely peaceful transition to majority rule, political tension and violence marred the campaign period. Before the 1999 national elections, the Electoral Commission organized [conflict management mediation panels](#) to handle disputes before they

#### Featured Interviews

In an interview with ISS, [Roelf Meyer](#) describes the negotiations that transitioned South Africa to post-apartheid governance. Meyer, who served as Minister for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, discusses the process of drafting the interim and final post-apartheid constitutions and the role that Nelson Mandela played in helping him engage traditional leaders in the homeland areas.

[Mavuso Msimang](#) offers an account of the Department of Home Affairs' turnaround effort. Reflecting on his service as the director-general of the department, he ascribes the quick improvements in service delivery to efforts to recognize good performance and the technical reorganization of the department.

[Benedict van der Ross](#) and [Howard Sackstein](#) describe the challenges and innovative aspects of South Africa's 1994 elections. Van der Ross served on the Independent Electoral Commission while Sackstein served on the Commission's Investigations Unit.

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required Electoral Court or police intervention.

### *Reforming Central Government*

Since the end of apartheid, South African leaders have implemented a number of reforms to improve service delivery and extend basic services into previously underserved communities.

Beginning in 1998, the [South African National Roads Agency, Ltd.](#) applied the logic of private sector business management and more than doubled the country's road networks in its first decade. Between 1998 and 2009, the [South African Revenue Service](#) increased the number of income-tax payers by 45 percent by improving customer service and increasing the racial diversity of its staff. In 2007, the [Department of Home Affairs](#) embarked upon an ambitious strategy that reduced the average time required to receive government identity documents from more than 130 days to less than 40 days.

In 2009, in an effort to sustain and deepen improvements in service delivery, President Jacob Zuma established a [Ministry of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation](#), which reorganized ministries around 12 policy goals and set data-based performance targets for ministers and departments.

### *Municipal Reforms*

Reform efforts have extended down to the municipal level, affecting cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. When it faced a fiscal meltdown in 1997, [Johannesburg](#) increased the cost-effectiveness of service delivery by turning municipal service providers into quasi-independent units with clear delivery targets and increased flexibility.

In 2006, [Cape Town's](#) crumbling infrastructure and poor service delivery were undermining public confidence and jeopardizing the city's long-term economic prospects. To reverse the city's precipitous decline, Mayor Helen Zille initiated a package of innovative and far-reaching reforms.

## Improving Government Accountability and Leading Reform

[Innovations for Successful Societies](#) (ISS) helps public servants, policy makers, and scholars share institution-building strategies that work in especially challenging contexts. Interview-based case studies facilitate these exchanges and provide a basis for scholarly research. To date, ISS has published [117 case studies](#) and [370 interviews](#), all of which are available for free on a [web repository](#). Governments use the materials to learn from each other, inspire discussion in their ranks, and recall the steps they took to implement a reform. Universities and training programs use the case studies in the classroom to engage students in the operational and strategic aspects of public sector reform.

The ISS web repository is an idea bank that enables scholars and practitioners to evaluate the pros and cons of reform strategies and to weigh the effects of context. ISS invites feedback on its cases, including suggestions of additional topics and questions to be considered, corrections, and how case studies are being used:

[iss@princeton.edu](mailto:iss@princeton.edu).

### Where ISS Has Worked

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