

*This edition of Focus is devoted to exploring some of the issues which confront state and society in South Africa. It self-consciously looks forward to the State of the Nation Address by the President which will be delivered in February 2013. It also seeks to remind readers of Focus of the wider social context in which the drama of South African politics is played out.*



**Francis Antonie** is the Director of the Helen Suzman Foundation. He is a graduate of Wits, Leicester and Exeter Universities. He was awarded the Helen Suzman Chevening Fellowship by the UK Foreign Office in 1994. From 1996 to 2006 he was senior economist at Standard Bank; thereafter he was director of the Graduate School of Public Development and Management at Wits University. He is the founding managing director of Strauss & Co.

**Aubrey Matshiqi** begins our discussion with *Reflections on the relationship between the state and the party*. He introduces his discussion by reminding us of the long historical political reality of single party dominance in the country: intriguingly and interestingly he traces this back to 1948. He explores the relationship between the ANC and the state and poses the question of whether or not the ANC, or some elements in it, is ambivalent towards democratic values. His discussion on the relationship of political actors to money is both insightful and troubling.

**Ivor Chipkin** examines the relationship between corruption and the state. He usefully brings to the fore both theoretical and historical understandings of corruption. His observation that in the late 18th century work of Edmund Burke and Adam Smith – that corruption came to be associated with specific activities that threatened to subvert the integrity of public office – is as apposite then as it is now. He puts forward an hypothesis – that corruption in South Africa has been made possible by the fact that the ANC in government does not have a liberal conception of politics and of the state. This, he argues, is not a normative claim but an analytical one.

**Manny da Camara's** article on *The state of political parties and electoral politics in South Africa* considers issues of accountability and political life. He raises the problem of high levels of factionalism which seem to dominate the governing party, but he also considers the wider problem of accountability and the legislature, and he calls for a radical re-think of proportional representation. In this, he reiterates a call made in these editorial comments last year when we urged that the van Zyl Slabbert Commission's Report on electoral reform should be revisited. Similar calls about electoral reform have recently been made at an HSF function by Dr Mamphela Ramphele.

**Tim Kenny** continues our discussion of our politics and seeks to contextualise developments in the judiciary. He is especially concerned with unwarranted criticisms by the executive of the judiciary, especially the higher courts.

**Wilmot James** reviews the meaning of race in modern South Africa. He usefully reminds us of how decisive race has been in the formation of our society and how all-pervasive the issue of race classification was in determining access to goods and services by the state. He argues that, notwithstanding the pervasiveness of race in our past, a new consensus is emerging, and that race is a declining factor in the popular calculus.

**Kalim Rajab** further explores the issue of race relations in South Africa. He poses two questions, namely, were our collective expectations in South Africa of moving beyond race too high to begin with, and secondly, were there lessons waiting to be found from other societies, had we dared to look. He explores ethnicity in the context of Malaysia and also looks to the US for some lessons which may be of use to us. His call for a little more pragmatism in race relations and the way we deal with them, is timely.

**Kate Francis** and **Michael Edmeston** reflect on public and private health care in South Africa. Edmeston's focus is on public health and he is particularly drawn to the topics of public hospital management and primary health care. Kate Francis reviews private health care and the right to health. Among the challenges facing private health care are the problems of market failure, the market power of hospitals and over-servicing. She forcefully reminds us not to forget who should be the beneficiaries of health care as she points out that in so much of the discussion around private health care, the glaring absence is proper consideration of patients and what they need.

**Sara Gon** gives a personalised account of the vagaries and vicissitudes, political or otherwise, which affect schooling in South Africa. Of particular importance is how School Governing Bodies manage the challenges, including those which arise from the state and from political pressures, while ensuring the best possible education for learners.

**Jen Thorpe** enquires whether women are better or worse off since 1994. She concedes that some things we have managed to do right, and here she notes the legislation which has been introduced during the past 18 years. But she is concerned about the political commitment to gender equality. We can only share her concern at the disaster which is called the Traditional Courts Bill which is now before Parliament.

**Jesmond Blumenfeld** concludes our exploration of state and nation with his discussion of youth unemployment in South Africa, and the politics around the wage subsidy. He reminds us of the scale and complexity of South Africa's unemployment problem, and especially of youth unemployment, and he cautions that no single and easy policy solution exists. It is within this context that he evaluates the political responses to the idea of a wage subsidy, and his sad conclusion is that the government currently shows no inclination to confront either the political or the implementation risks inherent in the adoption of any coherent policies that might effectively begin to address the problem of youth unemployment.

We conclude this edition with reviews by Lewis Mash and Anne McLennan.

*Erratum: In Focus 66, it was reported that John Endres was a Senior Researcher at the South African Institute of Race Relations. This is incorrect. John Endres is the CEO of Good Governance Africa.*