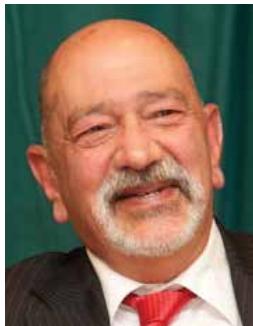


Democracy and its discontents



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This edition of Focus celebrates 20 years of democracy in South Africa. But it also draws attention to some of the institutional, economic and social problems which have either emerged, or which carry over from the pre-1994 dispensation.

The 2014 elections in South Africa will occur at a time of marked political and economic uncertainty. The political landscape is perhaps at its most unpredictable since 1994. Clear differences within the ruling African National Congress – but also within a growing but disparate opposition movement – reflect these uncertainties.

South Africa faces widening income inequalities highly correlated along racial lines, in a stable but under-performing economy; shifting labour dynamics between employers and workers; angry dissatisfaction at what is perceived to be poor service delivery at local level; and a growing perception of government corruption and encroaching state security.

Notwithstanding all these discontents – which, no doubt, are exacerbated by the turbulent global context – there is much to celebrate in our constitutional democracy. Above all, we should never forget where we have come from, even though it is not all that clear where we are heading. Perhaps we will know a little bit more after 7 May.

In this edition of *Focus*:

Raphael de Kadt and **Judith Hudson** evaluate the status of South Africa's democratic institutions, reveal its shortcoming and strengths and most important threats. They pointedly draw our attention to Nancy Bermeo's key insight that democracies are seldom failed or let down by 'ordinary people' – rather, they are let down by their elites.

Aubrey Matshiqi interrogates persisting narratives and attitudes about race in South African society. His plea – that the creation of a non-racial society is within the realm of possibility if we deploy conflict between master- and counter narratives about race as a crucible that clarifies thought – is both heartfelt and important.

Jesmond Blumenfeld, with impressive clarity, unpacks the economic performance of South Africa, drawing attention to South Africa's failure to generate sustained economic growth.

Jesse Harber, whose principal concern is inequality, argues that South Africa should focus on a long-run industrial policy to create jobs coupled with radical redistribution (at least in the short-run) to alleviate inequality.



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William Gumede surveys the state of opposition politics in South Africa, and considers what would be necessary to break our characteristic one-party dominance.

Greg Solik examines the South African electoral system's short-comings. He also brings into focus the problems surrounding party political funding.

Kameel Premhid criticizes the incentives created by our party-political system and its consequences for South African politics.

Sheila Camerer, in a personal reflection, reviews the delivery of Justice by our constitutional democracy during the first 20 years of its existence.

Glynnis Breytenbach raises concerns over political interference in our Criminal Justice System and considers a possible way forward.

Stephen Chan questions the idea that intellectual engagement with politics and society, specifically from a supposed 'objective' perspective, could ever be maintained.

We end with reviews by **Greg Mills**, **Michael Cardo**, and **Kalim Rajab**.