

NEWSLETTER



South Africa's Third Transition Begins

President Ramaphosa has signed the Public Service Amendment Act, 2025 into law. This is a watershed moment for South Africa, the most important reform to the architecture of government in over three decades. It is also a significant milestone in the long struggle to professionalise the public administration.

The Act begins to redraw one of the most damaging fault lines in the post-apartheid government: the overlap between political office and administrative authority. It clarifies that politics and administration are not the same thing — and should not be.

[Read our statement here...](#)

Jelena Vidojević in conversation with Kaiser Kuo
The latest edition of *Missing Voices: Critical Thinking in Times of Polycrisis* features a conversation between NSI's Jelena Vidojević and Kaiser Kuo on China's role in a shifting global order, and what that shift reveals about the limits of the system it is unsettling.



Previous editions of the series have featured leading thinkers, from Shivshankar Menon to Amy Nlang and Yang Yao, in candid, in-depth discussions.

In this interview, Kuo argues that China is less the cause of the crisis of the liberal international order than a catalyst exposing its contradictions. He also suggests China acts as a mirror, reflecting a broader return to civilisational thinking across global politics.

The discussion challenges simplistic narratives on China's role in Africa, emphasising both African agency and persistent structural inequalities.

While new formations like BRICS+ point toward a more multipolar world, the interview underscores that a coherent alternative order has yet to emerge, leaving Africa's position as a key test of what comes next.

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NSI Working Paper: South Africa's Third Transition

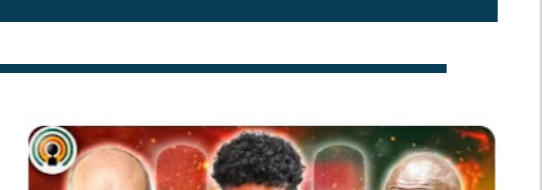


The New South Institute released its latest working paper, *South Africa's Third Transition*, by NSI Co-Founder and Director Ivor Chipkin. Published ahead of the enactment of the Public Service Amendment Act, the paper argues that the country's governance crisis is structural, rooted in the long-standing blurring of political and administrative roles.

By seeking to redraw this relationship, the reform aims to strengthen accountability and restore stability within government. While not a silver bullet, it marks an important step toward rebuilding state capability and contributes to wider debates on effective democratic governance.

[See the working paper here...](#)

Podcast discussion on public service reform
NSI Director Ivor Chipkin recently joined the podcast "Podcast Party" to discuss the significance of the PSAB.

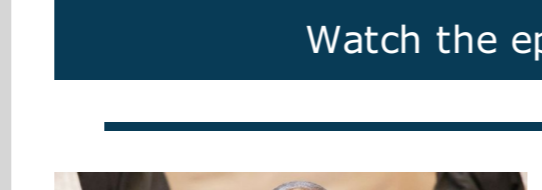


He argued that one of South Africa's core governance challenges lies in the blurred boundary between politicians and professional public servants, with political actors often inappropriately influencing administrative decisions. The proposed reforms seek to strengthen and clarify this distinction and strengthen the professionalism of government.

Ivor described the reform as potentially transformational, laying the groundwork for a more capable and accountable public administration.

[Watch the episode here...](#)

Public service reform in the State of the Nation Address



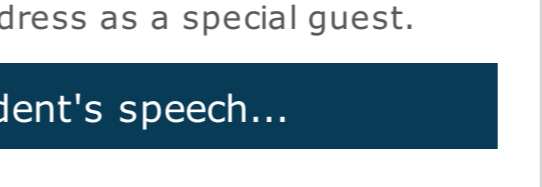
President Cyril Ramaphosa's 2026 State of the Nation Address also touched directly on the issues central to NSI's work. During his address, the President highlighted the importance of separating political leadership from administrative management, reflecting a position that NSI has long advanced in its work on public service reform.

Ivor Chipkin attended the address as a special guest.

[Read the President's speech...](#)

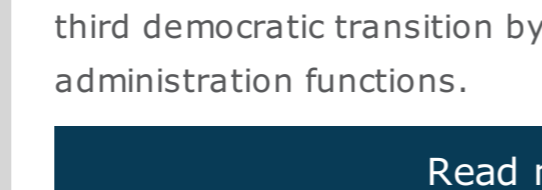
A quiet bureaucratic transition

In a recent Sunday Times op-ed, Ivor Chipkin argued that the current moment represents a rare opportunity to rebuild a professional, capable and politically neutral public service. He suggests that the PSAB could mark a third democratic transition by reshaping how government administration functions.



[Read more...](#)

Reforming the National Prosecuting Authority



On 26 February, the NSI hosted a virtual discussion unpacking the institutional challenges facing South Africa's National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).

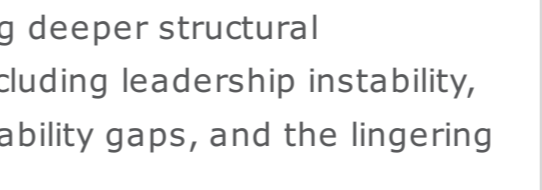
The discussion was based on a policy brief by Nicole Fritz, NSI affiliate, which forms part of NSI's broader work on strengthening public institutions and improving leadership appointments in the public service.

The brief argues that focusing on a single leadership appointment risks overlooking deeper structural challenges facing the NPA, including leadership instability, capacity constraints, accountability gaps, and the lingering effects of state capture.

[Read more...](#)

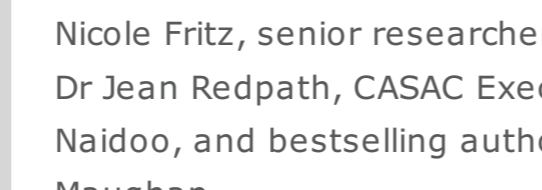
Webinar on the challenges facing the NPA

This NSI webinar was held in February to launch the policy brief mentioned above. It featured contributions from Nicole Fritz, senior researcher at the Duluth Omar Institute, Dr Jean Redpath, CASAC Executive Secretary Lawson Naidoo, and bestselling author and legal journalist Karyn Maughan.



[Watch the webinar here...](#)

Power, elites and political competition



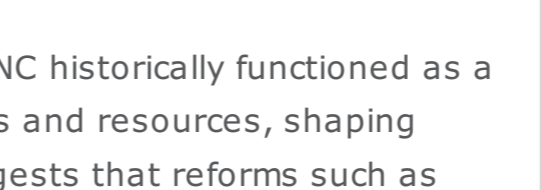
NSI co-founders Jelena Vidojević and Ivor Chipkin have published a new article in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* examining how political and economic power are organised in South Africa.

The article argues that the ANC historically functioned as a gatekeeper to state positions and resources, shaping elite competition. It also suggests that reforms such as the PSAB may reshape these dynamics.

[Read more...](#)

International law and the Kosovo dispute

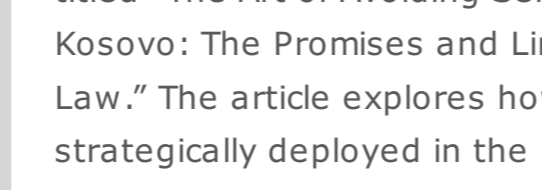
Miloš Hrnjuz, researcher at the NSI's South-South Dialogues programme, has published a new article in the *Review of Central and East European Law*.



titled "The Art of Avoiding Serbia's Defeat in the Case of Kosovo: The Promises and Limitations of International Law." The article explores how international law has been strategically deployed in the Kosovo dispute and how legal argument interacts with diplomacy, power, and state strategy.

[Read the full article...](#)

Urban settlements on traditional authority land



The NSI recently launched a new working paper by Andrew Charman and Andries du Toit titled "Urban Settlements on Traditional Authority Land: Four Case Studies".

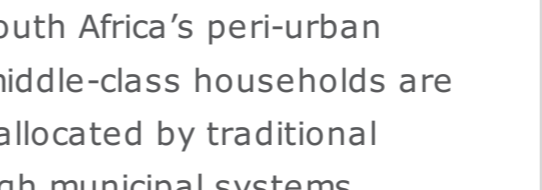
The research documents a largely overlooked pattern of urban development across South Africa's peri-urban areas, where working- and middle-class households are investing in housing on land allocated by traditional authorities rather than through municipal systems. Drawing on fieldwork and spatial analysis, the study argues that these settlements represent a distinctive South African urban form that challenges conventional planning assumptions.

The paper was launched at a seminar hosted by NSI at the Gordon Institute of Business Science in Johannesburg, with contributions from Dr Gaynor Paradzwa, senior researcher at the Public Affairs Research Institute, Prof Mfaniseni Sihlongonyane, Head of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand, and Dr Ngaka Mosiane, Senior Researcher at Gauteng City-Region Observatory.

[Read the paper here...](#)

Migration governance and digital citizenship

Alan Hirsch, head of NSI's Migration Governance Reform in Africa (MIGRA) programme, wrote in *The Conversation Africa* about South Africa's shift toward a digitally driven immigration and citizenship system.



While the reforms promise efficiency and modernisation, Alan argues that their success will depend on effective implementation, institutional capacity, and public trust.

[Read the full article...](#)

Academic Roundtable on Route-Based Approach in Southern Africa



The New South Institute collaboratively convened a roundtable in Cape Town with IQM Director-General Amy Pope and leading migration researchers to discuss governance challenges in Southern Africa. Alan Hirsch led the discussion, reflecting on the emerging concept of route-based approaches and their implications for regional cooperation and migration policy.

[Read more...](#)

Africa's financial realignment

In the *Business Day*, NSI affiliate researcher Mandira Bagwandeen reflected on the significance of Standard Bank's integration with China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS). She argues that the move signals broader shifts in Africa's financial landscape and raises questions about the future dominance of the US dollar in regional trade.



[Read the article here...](#)

South Africa's foreign policy in a changing world

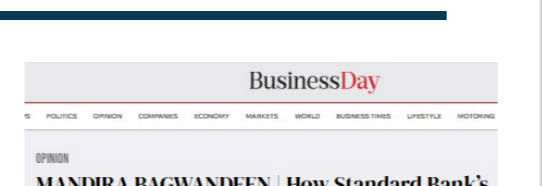


Jelena Vidojević and Mandira Bagwandeen published an opinion piece in *News24* exploring South Africa's evolving role in global politics and what it means for diplomacy and international partnerships. They argue that the country's policy of "active non-alignment" is under increasing strain, often perceived as inconsistent or tilted toward non-Western powers, and call for a clearer, more strategic approach to safeguard South Africa's interests in a shifting global order.

[Read more...](#)

Building Global Think Tank Networks

The NSI was represented at the 10th edition of the School for Thinktanks, hosted in Barcelona.



Revati Baboolal, NSI Operations Manager, joined the 2026 cohort of the On Think Tanks' flagship programme, which brings together think tank leaders from around the world to exchange ideas, develop skills, and strengthen policy institutions.

In Case You Missed It



Public debate rarely pauses between newsletters. In the weeks following our December 2025 edition, NSI researchers continued contributing to discussions on global alignment and institutional reform.

Jelena Vidojević and Mandira Bagwandeen reflected on the AU-EU Summit in Luanda, arguing that Europe's security-first approach risks limiting its relevance as African states increasingly seek partnerships that offer infrastructure, financing, and policy space. Read the analysis [here](#).

In addition, Ivor Chipkin wrote in the *Sunday Times* about the potential for a "quiet, bureaucratic transition to effective governance" through public service reform. Read the article [here](#).

[Read more...](#)

