



INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND DEMOCRACY

22–23 September 2026 | Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), Johannesburg, South Africa

Host: New South Institute (NSI) · Confirmed-speaker programme as of 22 September 2026.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Format column: “Online” means panellists join remotely, while the Johannesburg audience follows the conversation in the venue. “In-Person” means panellists and audience are together in the room. Note on Day 2: panel numbers reflect the thematic sequence, not the schedule order. Panel 8 runs before Panel 7 on the day, for logistical reasons; this does not affect the content of either panel.

DAY 1 — TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

TIME	SESSION	FORMAT
08:00 – 09:00	Registration and Welcome Coffee	—
09:00 – 10:15	Keynote: Opening Address	In-Person
10:15 – 10:30	Coffee Break	—
10:30 – 11:40	Panel 1: Appointing Senior Officials	Online
11:55 – 13:05	Panel 2: Political Patronage, Corruption, and Informal Power	Online
13:05 – 14:10	Lunch	—
14:10 – 15:25	Panel 3: Protecting Civil Service Independence in South Africa	In-Person
15:25 – 15:45	Coffee Break	—
15:45 – 16:55	Panel 4: Governing State-Owned Enterprises	In-Person
16:55 – 17:15	Day 1 Closing Reflections	In-Person

DAY 2 — WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

TIME	SESSION	FORMAT
08:00 – 08:45	Registration and Welcome Coffee	—
08:45 – 09:55	Panel 5: Managing the Political-Administrative Interface	Online
10:10 – 11:20	Panel 6: Training, Professionalization, and Leadership Development	Online

TIME	SESSION	FORMAT
11:20 – 11:40	Coffee Break	—
11:40 – 12:50	Panel 8: Governing Johannesburg — What Would It Take?	In-Person
12:50 – 13:50	Lunch	—
13:50 – 15:00	Panel 7: Urban Governance — What Makes Large Cities Well-Administered?	Online
15:00 – 15:20	Coffee Break	—
15:20 – 16:30	Panel 9: Deepening Public Participation and Civic Engagement	In-Person
16:35 – 17:00	Closing Remarks: What the Two Days Add Up To (Ivor Chipkin, NSI)	In-Person

Most panels are 70 minutes. Panel 3 and the keynote are 75 minutes. 15-minute transitions between consecutive panels. Online panels: international speakers participate remotely; the Johannesburg audience follows in the venue. In-Person panels: South African speakers and the audience are together in the room.

ABOUT THE CONGRESS

NSI has spent a decade studying why South African public institutions fail and how they can be fixed. The passage of the Public Service Amendment Act 9 of 2025 marked a turning point: the argument for reform had been won, and the harder work of implementation had begun. This congress is the next step.

For two days, NSI brings together practitioners, scholars, and senior officials from South Africa and across the Global South to have honest conversations about civil service reform. The audience is primarily senior public administrators, reform practitioners, and researchers working on state capacity in the Global South. The format is working discussion, not presentations of success stories: short interventions, moderated conversation, cross-comparison across contexts, and no papers or panels of the ordinary kind. The premise is that reform is necessary; the question this congress asks is how.

FORMAT

International panels bring together scholars and senior practitioners from outside South Africa; they join the panel remotely while the Johannesburg audience follows the conversation in the venue. South African panels feature local officials, practitioners, and researchers, together with the audience in the room. The two formats are kept clean per panel: each panel is either remote-speaker with in-room audience, or fully in the room for everyone.

Panels are facilitated by Ivor Chipkin, NSI CEO, unless otherwise noted, to keep the conversation anchored in South African realities.

Each panel runs 70 minutes. The format moves quickly to what matters: a brief introduction, substantive responses from panellists on the key trade-off or failure their experience reveals, cross-comparison across contexts, practitioner input from the floor, and a closing round. Papers and presentations are not part of the format.

PANEL DESCRIPTIONS

DAY 1 — TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

Keynote: Opening Address

09:00 – 10:15 · In-Person, Johannesburg

Speaker: Ivor Chipkin, Chief Executive Officer, New South Institute; founding director, Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI); author of leading studies of the South African state, including the report that first mapped state capture.

South Africa documented the capture of its state in forensic detail, argued the diagnosis in public for a decade, and won the argument: once in operation, the Public Service Amendment Act 9 of 2025 will move the power to appoint officials below Head of Department level out of the hands of ministers. Ivor Chipkin has been at the centre of that journey, from the early research on patronage networks and the shadow state to the legislative change itself. The keynote asks why the merit-based design of 1994 proved so vulnerable, what made legislative change possible, and why the hardest part, implementation, is still ahead.

The keynote frames the questions the two days return to: what makes reform possible, who wins and who loses in a reform process, how the coalitions that sustain change are built, and how fast reform should move.

Panel 1: Appointing Senior Officials

10:30 – 11:40 · Online, International speakers

Confirmed to date: Pan Suk Kim, Professor Emeritus, Yonsei University, and former Minister of Personnel Management, South Korea; Magdalena Rojas Wettig, Professional Expert, Council for the Senior Executive Service, Chile; Eko Prasjo, public-administration scholar and former Vice Minister, Indonesia; Margot Conrad, Senior Director, The Volcker Alliance, and former Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Moderated by Brian Levy, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

How countries appoint senior officials reveals how they think about the relationship between political leadership and professional administration. Get appointments wrong in either direction, too political or too insulated, and everything else becomes harder.

Korea's 2006 Senior Civil Service reform opens the comparison, told by the minister who implemented it: Pan Suk Kim served as Presidential Secretary for Personnel Policy during the design of the reform, which introduced open competition, competency assessment and performance-based pay for the positions that matter most politically, and later as Minister of Personnel Management during its implementation. Chile's Servicio Civil is one of Latin America's most studied professionalization efforts, and Magdalena Rojas Wettig worked on the reform that strengthened it from within. Eko Prasjo brings the view from Indonesia, where he helped drive bureaucratic reform from inside government as vice minister — including the introduction of open, merit-based selection for senior positions (JPT) across one of the world's largest civil services. Margot Conrad brings the United States into the comparison: at the Office of Personnel Management she helped shape governmentwide workforce policy for over two million civil servants, and earlier facilitated the executive order strengthening the U.S. Senior Executive Service. Set against the keynote's account of South Africa's own reform, the panel asks how comprehensive each merit system really is, what difference it has made in practice, and what travels to South Africa now that appointments below Head of Department level are to move from ministers to the administration.

Panel 2: Political Patronage, Corruption, and Informal Power

11:55 – 13:05 · Online, International speakers

Confirmed to date: Bálint Madlovics, political scientist and co-author with Bálint Magyar of *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes*; Dušan Pavlović, University of Belgrade; Daniel Kaufmann, Professor, University of Sussex, and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; Ivor Chipkin, CEO, New South Institute. Moderated by Jelena Vidojević, New South Institute.

Many countries have the right laws on paper. Civil service acts, merit requirements, transparency regulations. And yet appointments remain political, procurement remains captured, and reforms consistently disappoint. This panel addresses the gap between formal institutions and how power actually operates.

Bálint Madlovics's work on post-communist regimes — co-authored with Bálint Magyar in *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes* — maps how political elites convert state institutions into tools of wealth extraction and political reproduction, even in countries with formally professionalized bureaucracies. Daniel Kaufmann, of the University of Sussex and the Brookings Institution, has spent decades building the cross-country evidence that allows researchers to compare governance trajectories across time and context. Dušan Pavlović writes from his own time inside the Serbian government, tracing how party networks capture ministries from within. Ivor Chipkin brings the South African case into the comparison, drawing on a decade of research on state capture and the shadow state to show how patronage networks entrenched themselves inside a formally merit-based administration. The panel is analytical, not moralistic: what are the conditions under which informal power becomes entrenched, and what disrupts it?

Panel 3: Protecting Civil Service Independence in South Africa

14:10 – 15:25 · In-Person, Johannesburg

Confirmed to date: Andrew Boraine, independent partnering and systems change practitioner; Yoliswa Makhasi, New South Institute; Portia Derby, former Director-General, Department of Public Enterprises, and former Group Chief Executive, Transnet; Cynthia Stimpel, Director for Whistleblower Advocacy, Courage Hub SA, and former Group Treasurer, South African Airways. Moderated by Yoliswa Makhasi, New South Institute.

Once in operation, South Africa's Public Service Amendment Act 9 of 2025 will move the power to appoint senior officials and staff below Head of Department level from politicians to Directors-General and HoDs themselves, and separate political and administrative roles. Legislation is easier than implementation. This panel is not about what the Act says. It is about what it takes, in practice, for an official to be independent.

What does the boundary between politicians and administrators look like from inside the state? What happens to those who hold it, and what protects them, or fails to? What will have to change beyond the text of the law? Andrew Boraine brings four decades of practice in making South African institutions work together, from the democratic transition to city government. Portia Derby brings the view from inside the state — as a former Director-General she has lived the political-administrative boundary the Act will redraw. Cynthia Stimpel brings the perspective the Act is ultimately about: as Group Treasurer of SAA she refused an unlawful R256-million transaction, reported it to National Treasury and lost her job for it, a stand the Zondo Commission later described as the final defence against state capture in public entities; through Courage Hub SA she now works on what it takes for officials who say no to survive it. Yoliswa Makhasi, who led the Department of Public Service and Administration as its Director-General, moderates a session that functions less like a policy discussion and more like a working session among people responsible for the outcomes.

Panel 4: Governing State-Owned Enterprises

15:45 – 16:55 · In-Person, Johannesburg

Confirmed to date: Alec Erwin, former Minister of Public Enterprises; Claudelle von Eck, former Non-Executive Director, Eskom Turnaround Board; Martha Ngoye, Co-Founder of BlackQuartz, NSI Board member and former Group Executive: Legal, Risk and Compliance, PRASA. Chaired by Stephan Malherbe, Chair of the NSI Board and founder and Chair of Genesis Analytics.

South Africa's SOE failures are well documented. Eskom, Transnet, SAA. The list is familiar, and so is the analysis. This panel takes a different starting point: not what went wrong, but what it would take for things to go right.

Alec Erwin oversaw public enterprises during a period when several SOEs functioned with a degree of coherence that has since been lost. His participation, alongside Claudelle von Eck's board-level perspective from the Eskom turnaround, makes it possible to ask a question that is usually avoided: what, specifically, was different then? What governance arrangements, what political conditions, what institutional choices produced better outcomes, and what eroded them? Martha Ngoye adds the view from inside the machine: as PRASA's Group Executive for Legal, Risk and Compliance she defended lawful governance against sustained pressure, and her experience speaks to what protection professionals inside an SOE actually need. Stephan Malherbe, who has advised

governments across the continent on economic policy and helped design South Africa's competition framework, chairs the conversation.

DAY 2 — WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

Panel 5: Managing the Political-Administrative Interface

08:45 – 09:55 · Online, International speakers

Confirmed to date: Francisco Gaetani, Extraordinary Secretary for State Transformation, Brazil; Katarina Staronová, Comenius University, Slovakia; Conrado Ramos Larraburu, Secretary General, CLAD (Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo). Chaired by Dr Zukiswa Mqolomba, Deputy Chairperson and National Commissioner, Public Service Commission of South Africa, and Deputy Chairperson of the Police Advisory Panel.

The relationship between elected politicians and professional civil servants is one of the defining institutional problems of democratic governance. When it works, politicians can lead and civil servants can deliver. When it breaks down, you get either governments that cannot implement their programmes or bureaucracies that operate independently of democratic outcomes.

Brazil, Slovakia, and Latin America more broadly offer very different versions of this tension. Brazil — where Francisco Gaetani has been at the centre of successive reform efforts — has navigated frequent government turnover, coalition politics, and repeated attempts to professionalize the federal civil service while keeping it politically workable. Slovakia's post-communist transition, the focus of Katarina Staronová's research, shows what happens when professional norms compete with party patronage in a fragile institutional environment. From Latin America, the perspective of CLAD, led by Conrado Ramos Larraburu, which has spent decades studying and supporting civil service reform across the region, adds a comparative view on what does and does not transfer across contexts of high political turnover. The panel draws on these experiences to examine what protections actually work, how professional autonomy survives in high-turnover systems, and what lessons hold up beyond any single case. The conversation is chaired by Dr Zukiswa Mqolomba, Deputy Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, the constitutional body charged with overseeing the values and standards of South Africa's public administration, and Deputy Chairperson of the Police Advisory Panel, who anchors the comparison in the South African experience and in the Commission's own work on the professionalisation of the public service.

Panel 6: Training, Professionalization, and Leadership Development

10:10 – 11:20 · Online, International speakers

Confirmed to date: Funke Adepoju, Director-General, Administrative Staff College of Nigeria and Visiting Fellow, Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford; Guillermo Valdivieso Payva, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Universidad Continental, and former Executive President of SERVIR, Peru's National Civil Service Authority; Emma Crewe, Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People, SOAS University of London. Moderated by Ivor Chipkin, NSI.

There is a persistent assumption in public sector reform that better training produces better government. Sometimes it does. Often it does not, because the problem is not what civil servants know. It is the system they return to, which rewards political loyalty over professional performance regardless of their training.

Funke Adepoju is working to transform ASCON from a conventional training college into an institution that drives reform in Nigeria's public sector. Not just training civil servants, but changing how they govern. Guillermo Valdivieso Payva brings the view from the top of a civil service system: as Executive President of SERVIR, Peru's National Civil Service Authority, he was responsible for the body that sets the rules for the public workforce and oversees its professionalisation, including the training of public managers, and he has since returned to the academy as Dean of Law at the Universidad Continental. Together they are working the same question from different angles, one from inside a training institution and one from the authority that a training institution answers to: what does it actually require to shift a training institution from certifying civil servants to reshaping

how they govern, where is it running into resistance, and what does it reveal about the conditions under which training changes behaviour? Emma Crewe brings a different lens to the same question: her ethnographies of parliaments and political institutions show how leadership and organisational capability actually form beneath the formal descriptions, and therefore what training can and cannot be expected to change.

Panel 8: Governing Johannesburg — What Would It Take?

11:40 – 12:50 · In-Person, Johannesburg

Confirmed to date: Tanya Zack, urban development practitioner with deep work on Johannesburg's inner city; Ferial Haffajee, Associate Editor and Editor of the Johannesburg Bureau, Daily Maverick; Trevor Fowler, former City Manager, City of Johannesburg; Roland Hunter, Johannesburg public finance specialist. Facilitated by Ann Bernstein, Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE).

This panel is about the city the congress is taking place in. The audience will include officials, researchers, and practitioners who work with Johannesburg's governance challenges every day. The panel brings together people who know the machine from different angles: Tanya Zack from the inner city's streets and planning processes, Ferial Haffajee from years of accountability reporting on the city, Trevor Fowler from running its administration, and Roland Hunter from managing its finances.

The question is not what a well-governed Johannesburg would look like in theory. It is what it would actually take to get there: what changes in the relationship between the city, the province, and national government; what institutional reforms within the city administration; what political conditions would need to be different. The discussion is intended to be diagnostic and frank.

Panel 7: Urban Governance — What Makes Large Cities Well-Administered?

13:50 – 15:00 · Online, International speakers

Confirmed speakers: Sergio Fajardo, Mayor of Medellín (2004–2007), Governor of Antioquia (2012–2015) and Distinguished University Professor in Public Leadership, Tecnológico de Monterrey; Robert Soluntul Bestman, Mayor of Paynesville, Liberia (since 2024); joined in the room by Trevor Fowler, former City Manager, City of Johannesburg. Moderated by Taibat Lawanson, University of Liverpool and NSI Board member.

Cities are where the consequences of poor public administration are most visible. Transport that does not work, waste that is not collected, permits that take months, infrastructure that fails. These are not abstract governance failures. They are daily realities for millions of people.

This panel brings together two city leaders from opposite corners of the Global South, with a former head of Johannesburg's own administration in the room to test what travels. Sergio Fajardo led the transformation of Medellín — the urbanismo social model, the Parques Biblioteca, and the broader political project that turned one of the world's most violent cities into an international reference for urban renewal through public institutions and civic trust. Robert Soluntul Bestman brings a sitting mayor's perspective from West Africa: he leads the administration of Paynesville, one of Liberia's largest cities, drawing on earlier senior roles in national government, including as Deputy Minister for Technical Services at the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, and on training in urban planning. The conversation examines what distinguishes well-administered cities at the institutional level: how they appoint and retain capable officials, how they manage the political-administrative relationship across electoral cycles, and what the enabling conditions for sustained improvement actually were. Trevor Fowler, who ran Johannesburg's administration as City Manager and speaks on the Johannesburg panel that morning, joins the conversation from the room at GIBS to ask which of these instruments could work in Johannesburg, which could not, and why.

Panel 9: Deepening Public Participation and Civic Engagement

15:20 – 16:30 · In-Person, Johannesburg

Confirmed to date: Bhavanesh Parbhoo, Industrial Development Corporation; Nishendra Moodley, Chief Executive Officer, Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP); Fred Kusambiza-Kiingi, Executive

Director, Planact. Chaired by Stephan Malherbe, Chair of the NSI Board and founder and Chair of Genesis Analytics.

South Africa's constitution treats public participation as a requirement. In practice, it often functions as a formality: hearings held, comments collected, decisions made as planned. The gap between formal compliance and meaningful influence is wide, and it matters for democratic legitimacy and for the quality of policy.

Bhavanesh Parbhoo navigates the intersection of development finance and stakeholder accountability at the IDC — a vantage point on what it takes to make stakeholder participation consequential rather than decorative in the design and financing of large-scale projects. Nishendra Moodley leads the EDP, whose fourteen years of collaborative intermediary work between the state, business and community sectors in the Western Cape amount to one of South Africa's most sustained experiments in making participation consequential; he previously worked with the City of Cape Town and the Cities Support Programme. Fred Kusambiza-Kiingi leads Planact, which for more than three decades has worked alongside communities in Gauteng's townships and informal settlements to make their engagement with municipalities count in local development processes; he brings the view of participation built from the ground up rather than convened from above.

Closing Remarks: What the Two Days Add Up To

16:35 – 17:00 · In-Person, Johannesburg

Ivor Chipkin, CEO of the New South Institute, closes the congress. The closing remarks do not summarise the nine panels; they ask what the two days add up to: where the clearest lessons lie, which questions remain open, and what the reform agenda ahead requires from institutions like NSI and from the people in the room.

They also look ahead: where NSI intends to take this work, on the implementation of the Public Service Amendment Act and on the comparative agenda the congress has opened. The congress's own output is the synthesis report described below; all sessions are recorded. The congress concludes at 17:00.

OUTPUTS

NSI will publish a synthesis report of 15 to 25 pages within two months of the event, documenting the key arguments, areas of agreement and disagreement, and practical lessons for reform practitioners. This is the congress's principal output.

All sessions will be recorded and made available on the NSI website. Contributions that participants wish to develop further may be considered for NSI's publications.