

The State Reform Programme at PARI

The state reform programme aims to reduce the influence of corruption and patronage on the South African state, and to develop a public administration that better serves its democratic mandate. The programme provides evidence-based recommendations for reforms in key regulatory and administrative institutions with the aim of strengthening them.

Whereas there are many areas that can become the focus of state reform, PARI's State Reform Programme has been concentrating on a specific set of themes: professionalisation of the public administration and the institutions supporting civil service cultures, and public procurement reform. This focus flows from analysis undertaken previously by PARI (and other scholars in the field of political sociology in South Africa) that shows that these systems and institutions have been subject to sustained abuse to facilitate patronage, and that the nature of each has been foundational to the particular forms of clientelism and corruption we see in South Africa today.

The work of the state reform programme thus includes engagement with policy debates and advocacy efforts in the field of "anti-corruption". An important assumption underpinning PARI's engagement in policy debates in this field is that anti-corruption efforts should be developed from a strong understanding of socio-political context, including the institutional make-up of the state, the nature of the political economy and so forth. Therefore, the applicability of "best practice" or "model approaches" to anti-corruption should be judged in relation to the complex institutional landscape and development imperatives attending to the public administration in South Africa today. For example, PARI's work on the public procurement system has provided a nuanced account of the fact that whilst South Africa's public procurement system is very vulnerable to corruption, it is also not playing its proper role in driving more inclusive economic growth. Reform efforts should thus recognise both these concerns, paying attention to possible trade-offs between anti-corruption and operational efficiencies, development imperatives, and so forth.

The programme conducts research to develop feasible reform proposals, works with key government stakeholders to ensure that PARI's proposals can gain traction and become part of government policy, and conducts advocacy with civil society organisations to foster a broader alliance for change, supporting organisations that might be influential in effecting change.

The programme also aims to explore and support public and scholarly debate on themes relevant to the Programme, including the relationship between politics and the state administration, state capture, public procurement and development, anti-corruption and politics, state capacity, and more.

<https://pari.org.za/state-reform/>