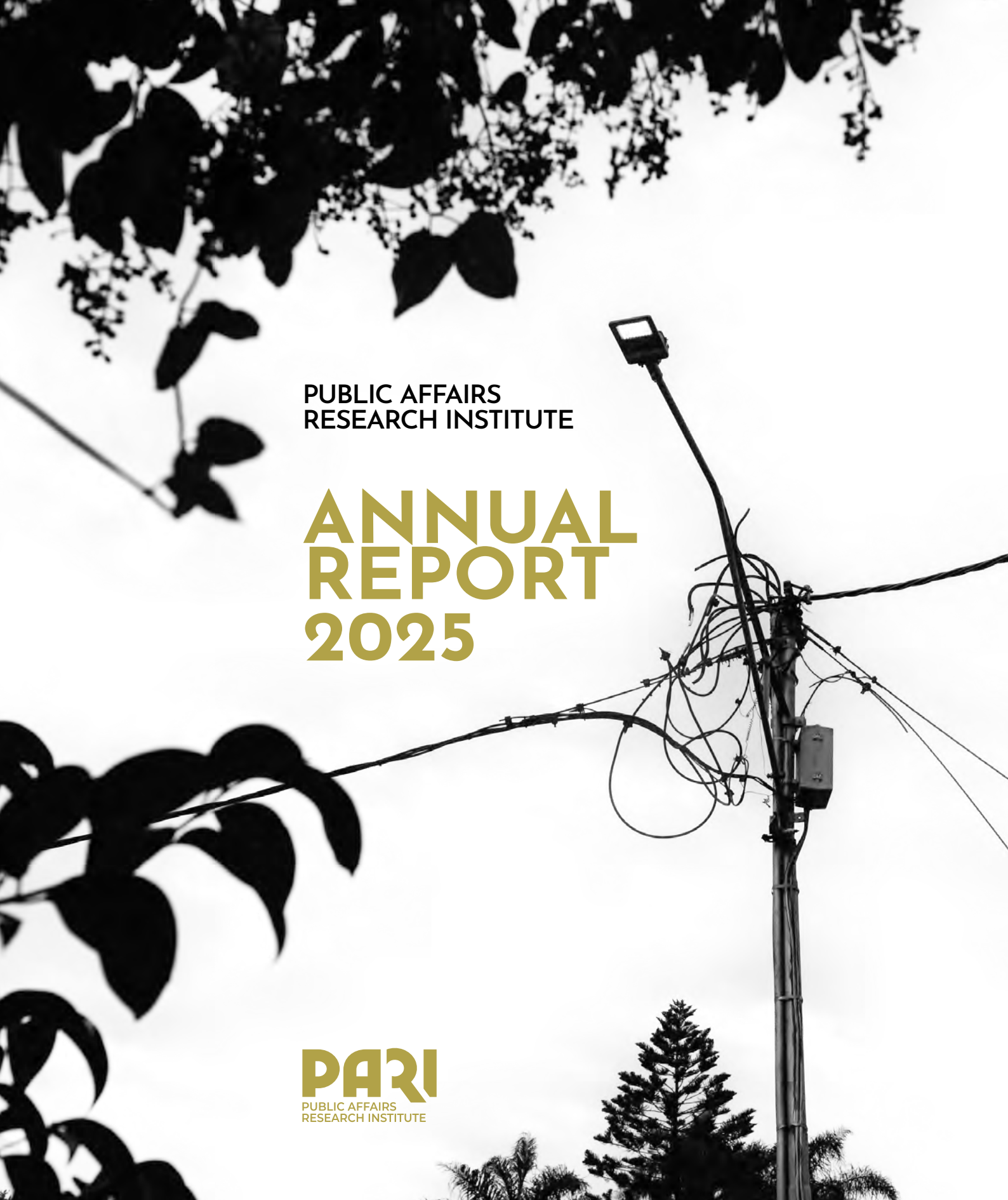


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ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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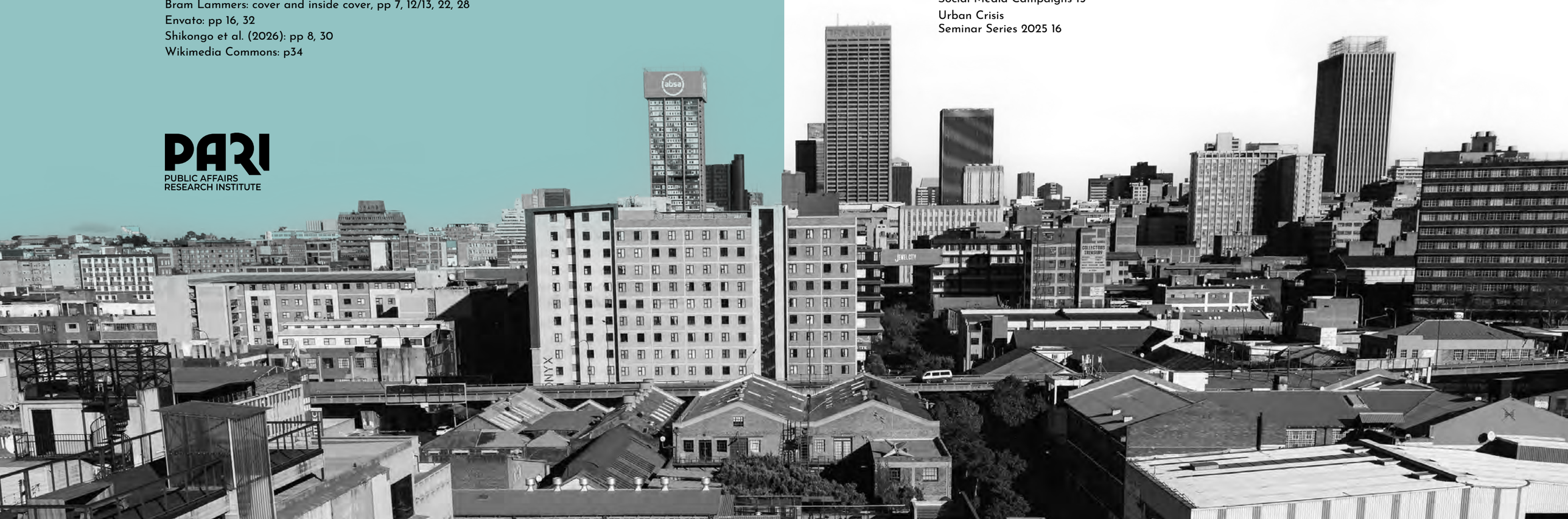
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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

I joined PARI as Executive Director in December 2024 in the middle of a leadership transition and the world around us was shifting fast. I identified two priority areas in the first year of my tenure. First, to refine PARI's strategic direction, maintaining the institute's innovation and research excellence, while growing its voice as a thought leader in public affairs. Second, to strengthen PARI's organisational and governance capacity, ensuring that the organisation has the human and financial resources to achieve its strategic goals.

These priorities shaped our work and sharpened our research to reach decisionmakers, renewed our governance structures and refreshed our strategy for the years ahead.

A YEAR OF RUPTURE AND REALIGNMENT

2025 tested democratic institutions at home and abroad. Donald Trump's return to the White House in January upended the global political economy. The freezing of USAID and US research funding sent the civil society sector reeling and many donors have since narrowed or shifted their priorities. South Africa found itself in the crosshairs of a hostile US administration, even as the country hosted the first G20 on African soil.

At home, the Government of National Unity held together despite repeated tensions over the budget, relations with the United States and redress policies. The Madlanga Commission hearings exposed how deeply organised crime has penetrated state systems, outstripping the state's capacities to address corruption. Local government continued to decline under unstable coalitions, fragile finances and collapsing services. Yet there were also signs of national recovery, including more reliable electricity, improving freight and rail performance, and stronger fiscal management.

In many ways, this environment raised the stakes of our work. Rigorous, independent research is more needed than ever to make sense of the moment and to equip policymakers and citizens with the tools to make evidence-based decisions.

A YEAR OF INFLUENTIAL RESEARCH

We are proud of the work we did this year in turning research into influence in the state and among our civil society partners.

Holding the state to its anti-capture commitments. Our State Reform programme produced an independent assessment for the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council of the state's progress on the President's 60 commitments responding to the Zondo Commission. It was included in the Council's final report to the President, Cabinet and the country in August. We then presented our recommendations to senior officials in the Presidency and other government agencies.

Reshaping local government policy. Our Local Government programme is at the forefront of the review of the 1998 White Paper on Local Government. PARI helped design the research agenda and are leading the research on finance and infrastructure, covering municipal expenditure needs, revenue potential and the affordability of services. This has positioned PARI as a central contributor to reimagining municipal financing and service delivery.

Making basic services affordable. In 2025, the issue of free basic services was elevated onto the national agenda. Over the past few years, our Just Transition programme has highlighted the problems with access to the free basic services that the government has an obligation to provide to South Africa's poorest households. We conducted the first detailed empirical study of how water and electricity costs affect the living standards of low-income households. It showed that many households funded to receive free basic services never receive them. Consequently, the National Treasury and other government agencies have engaged us to advise on improving the implementation of the free basic services programme and reviewing the free basic electricity allowance, with a clear policy goal of increasing it, based on our research.

Land governance for a just transition. The Land Governance Programme continued its work on developing guidelines for municipalities on land governance in the just transition. These guidelines were presented in validation workshops with government officials in Mpumalanga. We hope to disseminate them nationally when they are officially published in 2026.

Urban Crisis Seminar Series. Our Academic Engagement programme continued with our monthly hybrid workshops of scholarly discussion on the governance and public administration crisis facing the City of Johannesburg. This partnership with the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP), the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) and the Johannesburg Crisis: Concerned Academics provided a collaborative space for scholars, researchers, activists and policymakers to share their ongoing work on the City of Johannesburg.

COMPACT finalisation. Our EU-funded local government public participation programme came to an end in January 2026. On 1 and 2 December 2025, COMPACT and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) hosted a national research conference on reimagining developmental local government where we convened researchers, policymakers, and local government practitioners to reflect on four years of COMPACT and to discuss the evolving political, legislative, and governance context of local government. The work of COMPACT will now be integrated into our Local Government programme.

PARI also supported the Presidential Johannesburg Working Group as a research partner, which gave us valuable insight into the dynamics of the polycrisis in the municipality.

PARI has developed relationships with other organisations in government and civil society relevant to disseminating its work and building support for its proposals. The Land Governance programme is a member of NELGA which is a network of universities and research institutions in Africa that works to strengthen human and institutional capacities for land governance. Through our membership of INETTT we commenced a two-year research project with research institutes in Pakistan and Indonesia, that focuses on grid modernisation as a means to accelerate decarbonisation of the power sector.

A YEAR OF GOVERNANCE RENEWAL

The most significant organisational change of the year was the renewal of our Board. In a context of growing scrutiny of non-profit governance and a rapidly evolving external environment, we needed the right skills to meet our legal and fiduciary obligations and to help PARI chart its way into an uncertain future. We welcomed three new non-executive directors with expertise in finance and accounting, strategic communications, fundraising, organisational development and communications. I thank our directors, outgoing and current, for their stewardship during this period of transition.

In 2025, PARI conducted a peer review of its research publications as part of a broader organisational review. The review panel was composed of respected researchers from South Africa, the United States, India and the United Kingdom. Findings of the review were positive about the quality of PARI's work and unique value proposition at the nexus of theoretical and applied research. The peer review recommendations informed PARI's strategy refresh.

A YEAR OF STRATEGIC CLARITY

Between August and November 2025, the PARI team took part in a strategy refresh, testing whether the assumptions behind our PARI 3.0 strategy still held. Many did not.

The result is PARI 3.1, which guides our work from March 2026 to February 2028. Our vision is simple: a democratic, capable and responsive state that ensures a just society. Our scope now rests on three core issues that define public affairs: substantive democracy, sustainable livelihoods and state performance. We will pursue these through four programmes: State Reform, Just Transition, Land Governance and Local Government. For 2026 and 2027, local government will be a cross-cutting theme that brings all our programmes together behind a single PARI voice.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

The 2026 local government elections make this a pivotal year for the sphere of government closest to citizens. PARI will bring its research on municipal finance, public participation, procurement, coalitions and basic services to bear, before and after the elections. We will continue shaping the revised White Paper on Local Government.

Institutionally, we will induct our new Board, deepen our partnerships with our university partners and broaden our funding base.

I am deeply grateful to PARI's researchers and operations staff, whose dedication carried us through a year of change. My thanks also go to our Board, funders and partners for their trust and support. Together, we enter 2026 with a clear strategy, renewed governance, sharper vision and a fuller voice. ■

Sithembile Mbete

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

PARI has maintained momentum across its core programmes. The growing public concern around corruption, procurement governance, energy access, and municipal accountability offers a clear mandate for PARI's continued work.

The 2025/26 year began on a new note for the organisation, with Sithembile Mbete coming in proper as PARI's new Executive Director. The year's strategy set the tone for work in the programmes to broadly deal with the following questions, being cognisant of the local elections due to follow in 2026:

- How do we make sustainable policy recommendations?
- How do we best interact with municipalities?
- How do we work on public participation?
- How do we hold the state accountable?

Research agendas in each programme reflected these broad strategic areas, with groundbreaking reports, working papers, journal articles and policy briefs emerging from the programmes. The State Reform programme, in particular, made numerous public comment statements and submissions to Parliament. All programmes inputted into the review of the draft White Paper on Local Government, with the Local Government programme leading this process.

The COMPACT programme, being in its final year, produced a Toolbox – a comprehensive set of resources and materials developed by NGOs, research organisations and government departments, aimed at enhancing public participation.

The *Urban Crisis Seminar Series*, hosted by the Academic Engagement programme, continued with presentations and critical discussions around various areas of concern in the City of Joburg. The series saw a large increase in attendance and dedicated following as it built momentum in its second year.

Programmes worked collaboratively both within PARI and with external partners to convene spaces for critical engagement around PARI's focus areas. This took the form of symposiums, conferences, workshops, seminars and a host of webinars. Notable were the international symposium, *State, Democracy and the Promise of Development: South Africa in comparative perspective* held in conjunction with Brown University; and the national conference *Reimagining Developmental Local Government: New Approaches to Legacy Challenges* hosted with the South African Local Government Association.

Besides PARI's usual publications and engagement with the media to input into the broader public dialogue – radio, tv, op-eds – the programmes also ventured into new territories of communication, in an effort to diversify audience engagement and create further accessibility to their work. A six-part series of short video documentaries made visual the Just Transition programme's research in two informal settlements, and this format served to dramatically increase PARI's presence on social media platforms. Similarly, PARI released the first two episodes of an explanatory podcast series, *Just Access: The Real Transition,* that investigates how each programme understands the just transition and aims to deepen the listener's comprehension of scope of the topic.

In the 2025/26 year, the organisation to started looking at local government as an area that cuts across all PARI's programmes and research areas. Programmes strategically approached the topic, producing new and original research, engaging with and commenting on processes around new legislation and policy, engaging directly with municipalities and communities, and fostering a conducive academic environment to be able to hold meaningful discussion around the wide scope of local government issues from a PARI research perspective. All programmes contributed substantially to PARI's repository of publications, and the organisation also engaged meaningfully with the public discourse through new and existing media platforms and channels, increasing PARI's visibility as a credible voice on issues concerning the state and state-society relations.

This year laid the foundation for PARI to focus more closely on local government in the following 2026 local election year. ■



SHAPING CHANGE

REPORTS

Chakwizira, J. and F. Tshivhase (2025) 'Land Allocation and Development at the Municipal-Traditional Authority Interface: A Study of Limpopo Province, South Africa. A PARI Report. Limpopo: Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture University of Venda.

Ledger, T. and N. Mathibela (2025) 'Affordability of Basic Services for South African Households' A PARI Report. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

PARI (2025) 'Independent Assessment for the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council of the 60 Presidential Commitments to implement the State Capture Commission Recommendations'. A PARI Report. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

Salvoldi, S. (2025) 'Comparative Review of Global Approaches to Electricity Tariff Setting: Policy Implications for South Africa'. A PARI Report. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Beier, R., and N. Mathibela (2025) 'The occupation of state housing as a moral obligation? Housing welfare in Gauteng between reciprocity and liberalism'. *International Sociology* 40 (4): 515-32.

Dube, S. (2025) 'Stakeholder Power and Local Community Participation in Public-Sector Megaprojects: The Case of Medupi Power Station in Lephalale, South Africa'. *Journal of South African Studies* 51 (2): 215-34.

Duca, F., A. Mutua, L. Tetley-Brown, G. Karuri-Sebina and J. Backhouse (2025) 'A systematic review of smart city governance in the Southern African Development Community'. *Nature Cities* 2: 149-56.

Manoim, L. (2025) 'Legitimating Security Networks in South Africa's Exclusionary Suburbs'. *New Sociological Perspectives* 5 (1): 20-45.



WORKING PAPERS

Bhanye, J. (2025) 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the New Colonialism of Climate Data in the Global South' Working Paper No. 1. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

Bhanye, J., and G. Paradza. (2025) 'The Tyranny of Metrics, the Power of Stories and Epistemic Diplomacy'. Working Paper No. 2. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

BOOK CHAPTERS

Duca, F. (2025) 'Golf courses as new suburban centralities: the case of Johannesburg', in A. Phelps, K. Rogers and P.J. Maggin (eds) *Peripheral Centralities: Instances of Anticipatory Urbanism* Editors, pp. 52–61. Berlin: Jovis.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/ STATEMENTS/SUBMISSIONS

'Public Comment on the Public Service Amendment Bill [B13B—2023]: Submission of public comment to the National Council of Provinces', Public Affairs Research Institute and The Ethics Institute, 30 June 2025.

'Public Comment on the Public Service Amendment Bill [2023]: Submission of public comment to the Gauteng Provincial Legislature', Public Affairs Research Institute, The Ethics Institute and University of Johannesburg, 30 June 2025.

'Submission on the White Paper on Local Government Review Process', Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), 31 July 2025.

'Public Service Commission Bill (B 30B–2023): Submission of public comment to the National Council of Provinces', Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), Public Service Accountability Monitor, The Equality Collective and The Ethics Institute (TEI), 12 S

POLICY BRIEFS & RESOURCES

PARI (2025) 'Oversight in Parliament: The role of committees' Policy Brief. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

Brunette, R. (2025) Limiting Political Influence on Appointments in the South African Public Administration. Policy Brief. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

Kwena, M. (2025) 'Unjust Transition for Youth in South Africa: A case study of youth in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality'. Policy Brief. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

Ledger, T. (2025) 'Restructuring Free Basic Services to Support Equitable Development'. Policy Brief. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

Pillay, D. and Meny-Gibert, S. (2025) 'State Capture Commission Recommendations. Update 2025'. PARI/ CASAC Policy Brief. Johannesburg: Public Affairs Research Institute.

COMPACT (2025) 'Municipal Performance Management Technical Digest'. London, U.K.: Integrity Action.

BROADCAST MEDIA

CNN Newsroom, 28 May 2025. In a CNN Newsroom interview, PARI's Executive Director, Sithembile Mbete, commented on President Ramaphosa's visit to the Oval Office on 21 May 2025, where President Trump presented unfounded evidence depicting Afrikaner persecution in South Africa.

Newzroom Afrika, 20 September 2025. PARI's Sarah Meny-Gibert looks at the kind of leadership needed for the efficient running of a city. She spoke to Newzroom Afrika's Katlego Msomi just ahead of the DA announcing its mayoral candidate.

SABC News, 24 November 2025. The twentieth G20 Summit was held in Johannesburg over 22-23 November 2025 – the first G20 to be held in Africa. PARI's Executive Director Sithembile Mbete, gave wide commentary in interviews and panels on development in Africa and other areas of discussion, such as the United States' controversial decision to withdraw from the Summit.

Radio Islam, 2 July 2025. Tracy Ledger, lead author on PARI's latest report, *Affordability of Basic Services for South African Households*, spoke to Radio Islam about why it is imperative for South Africa to define and properly subsidise minimum levels of water and electricity required for dignified living and productive livelihoods.

Radio Islam, 25 September 2025. Sithembile Mbete, PARI's Executive Director, gives commentary on the proceedings at the Madlanga Commission of Enquiry into Criminality. This is following testimonies from KZN Police Commissioner Nhlanhla Mkwanazi and National Police Commissioner Fannie Masemola.

SMWX, 9 July 2025. PARI's Executive Director Sithembile Mbete participated in an SMWX podcast on the topic of the GNU and whether it can bring economic justice.



RESEARCH VIDEOS

Rampedi, M. and N. Ndhlovu (2025) 'Surviving on Four Buckets. Episode 1, Carrying the weight of water scarcity.' This episode situates access to water as a foundational determinant of health, dignity and socioeconomic development, and examines how chronic scarcity reshapes everyday life in Johannesburg's informal settlements.

Rampedi, M. and N. Ndhlovu (2025) 'Surviving on Four Buckets. Episode 2, Fragile Foundations.' This episode examines the effects of chronic water insecurity on early childhood development (ECD) provision, demonstrating how interruptions in water supply directly constrain the functioning of childcare and early learning systems.

Rampedi, M. and N. Ndhlovu (2025) 'Surviving on Four Buckets. Episode 3, Parched Fields' Drawing on residents' accounts, this episode examines efforts to cultivate vegetables as a strategy to offset rising food costs and strengthen household resilience and shows how the truck-and-tank system effectively forecloses such practices by rendering water availability irregular, insufficient and difficult to allocate to productive uses.

Rampedi, M. and N. Ndhlovu (2025) 'Surviving on Four Buckets. Episode 4, Empty Tanks.' Household-level 'self-provisioning' strategies focus on the acquisition of private storage tanks as a coping response to unreliable tanker-based supply.But households' investments in storage are frequently undermined by the absence of municipal refilling practices, thereby shifting residents toward private suppliers and informal water markets.

Rampedi, M. and N. Ndhlovu (2025) 'Surviving on Four Buckets. Episode 5, Paying to Survive.' This episode challenges the common assumption that residents in informal settlements do not pay for water. It demonstrates that households ostensibly covered by free basic water provisions frequently bear disproportionately high costs, particularly where scarcity enables the expansion of informal and private water markets.

Rampedi, M. and N. Ndhlovu (2025) 'Surviving on Four Buckets. Episode 6, Dirty Tanks.' Although the water often arrives relatively clean, the lack of regular cleaning and maintenance of these tanks has created growing concerns about water quality and public health. Over time, dust, dirt, and contamination accumulate in the tanks, leaving communities to rely on water they no longer fully trust. This episode documents the hidden burden of living without reliable access to safe water.

Our area is decent, but we have a huge challenge of water ...









PODCASTS

Just Access: The Real Transition is a 10-part documentary-style audio podcast that examines the deep social, economic and political implications of South Africa's just transition. As South Africa moves towards renewable energy, the transition risks repeating old patterns of exclusion. This podcast makes the case that true justice begins with access: to land, services, decision-making and opportunity.

The series weaves together the different facts of the transition, drawing from PARI's extensive research on service delivery, land governance, state reform and political dynamics. Through interviews with leading PARI researchers by our host, Tasneem Essop (Society, Work and Politics Institute), the series presents policy critique, grounded research and personal testimony to paint a realistic picture of what a just transition could look like.

Just Access: The Real Transition is created for policymakers, researchers, activists and citizens alike; this podcast both challenges and empowers listeners with new insights into one of the most important transformations facing South Africa today.

Produced by Richard Rumney in collaboration with PARI Communications.

The first two episodes were released in 2025/26:

Episode 1: Access and Affordability. Millions are connected to water/electricity but can't afford to use enough to live with dignity. Dr Tracy Ledger explains why affordability is the real test of access.

Episode 2: Rationed Rights. Basic rights become commodities in a revenue-driven system. Dr Tracy Ledger shows how outages and uneven repairs create a two-tier reality – and what policy could enable developmental access.

OP EDS

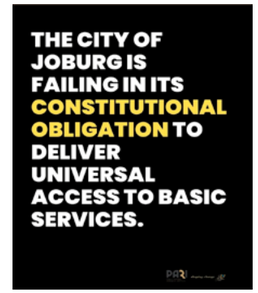
Daily Maverick, 'Joburg's failing infrastructure a result of poor prioritisation, not lack of funds', T. Ledger and J. Mahabir, 17 March 2025.

Engineering News, (2025) 'South Africa urged to firm up developmental vision for universal electricity access', T, Creamer, 4 August 2025.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Carousels | Joburg Basic Services for All, June 2025.

The 8-carousel campaign crystallised arguments coming out of the research conducted in the Just Transition programme. This campaign presented a new format for communicating PARI's research, consistent with social media trends for presenting information and logical narratives.









URBAN CRISIS
SEMINAR SERIES 2025

The Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP), Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) and the Johannesburg Crisis: Concerned Academics, continued the Urban Crisis Seminar Series to offer scholars, researchers and postgraduate students an opportunity to share their work, either by discussing work in progress or presenting upcoming and new publications on the City of Johannesburg.

In 2025, the seminar series provided a collaborative space and dialogue to scholars, researchers, activists and policy makers, to share their work on the urban polycrisis, and to benefit from critical discussion and feedback from participants in the room and online. ■



20 March 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: Urban Water Scarcity and Municipal Finance: A case study of Johannesburg by Kirsten Pearson with discussant Ferrial Adam. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



3 April 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: Shared Accountability for community safety by Emma de Villiers with discussants Esther Padi and Julia Hornberger. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



8 May 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: Acts on Decent and Insurgent Architectures by Thireshen Govender with discussant Paulo Moreira. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



29 May 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: Room for the poor in inner city Johannesburg? by Lauren Royston. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



31 July 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: South Africa's Electricity Crisis by Zachary Klamann with discussant Dr Christina Culwick Fatti. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



28 August 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: Polishing the City of Gold: Paid Domestic Work in Johannesburg, South Africa by David Du Toit with discussant Ruth Castel-Branco. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



16 October 2025 | Urban Crisis Seminar Series 2025: The 'Forefathers' of Braamfontein and Fashioning Black Masculinity by Mpho Thato Morare with discussant Thatshisiwe Ndlovu. Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI).



EVENTS

10 April 2025 | COMPACT webinar. The COMPACT project hosted a webinar on the topic of Enhancing Youth Participation in Local Government in South Africa, with inputs on different tools and programmes which seek to improve youth involvement in local government in South Africa.

15 April 2025 | PARI, GTAC and National Treasury Webinar. From Your Pocket to Public Services: Tracking Municipal Budgets. This webinar discussed the outcomes of the 2023/2024 MFMA Section 71 local government report and aimed to empower the public to uphold their constitutional role in holding representatives accountable for the transparent and responsible use of public funds.

8–9 May 2025 | Workshop
State Capture and Corruption in Africa: Towards critical engagement with anti-corruption policy. The two-day workshop was a collaboration between PARI, AfriCog, the African Leadership Network and Wits University to bring together scholars from around the continent to critically engage around anti-corruption policies and state capture in Africa.

15 and 16 May 2025 | PARI and Brown University Symposium.
State, Democracy and the Promise of Development: South Africa in comparative perspective. University of Witwatersrand. This symposium investigated the past and the future of democracy and the state in South Africa, including the state's role and capacities in social and economic transformation, the social and political costs of failure to deliver public goods and how this might shift attitudes to the state and democratic institutions. The symposium took a comparative approach to other countries, with reference to the future of the state and democracy.

5-8 August 2025 | COMPACT Collaboration Tool: Train the Trainer Workshop. In the COMPACT Collaboration Tool Train the Trainer Workshop, participants learned how to use the tool to unpack challenges, to cultivate vision and hope, and to implement/adapt effectively given the complex and unique nature of collaboration. The workshop was facilitated by Distillery and included Newcastle Municipality and Blue Crane Route Municipality, as well as the Compact partners: PARI, SALGA and Integrity Action.

15 October 2025 | COMPACT webinar. Municipal Financial Transparency. Know Where Your Money Goes: Tracking municipal spending.

1 and 2 December 2025 | COMPACT National Research Conference.
COMPACT and SALGA hosted a national research conference under the theme Reimagining Developmental Local Government: New Approaches to Legacy Challenges in Gauteng.

















MY MUNICIPALITY compact PARTICIPATE PLAN ACCOUNT

COMPACT
National Research Conference 2025

1-2 December 2025 | Southern Sun O.R. Tambo, Kempton Park

Reimagining Developmental Local Government:
New Approaches to Legacy Challenges

State, democracy and the promise of development

South Africa in comparative perspective

SYMPOSIUM 15-16 May 2025 A joint PARI / Brown University symposium

PARI PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH INSTITUTE BROWN

The symposium, State, Democracy and the Promise of Development: South Africa in comparative perspective took place at Wits University on 15 and 16 May, in collaboration with Brown University.

In the 2024 national elections, the African National Congress (ANC) lost its majority for the first time, and post-apartheid South Africa was launched into an era of national coalition-building with a 'Government of National Unity'. Despite significant expansion of public service delivery in the first two decades of democracy, recent regression in water and other service provision, deteriorating infrastructure, increasing inequality, and perceptions of high levels of corruption, have produced a decline in trust in the state, especially in local government. The country is at an inflection point. The ANC has been pushed into governing nationally alongside its erstwhile opponents, the Democratic Alliance and the Inkatha Freedom Party.

Starting from this new political situation, this symposium investigated the past and the future of democracy and the state in South Africa. This includes the state's role and capacities in social and economic transformation, the social and political costs of failure to deliver public goods, and how this might shift attitudes to the state and democratic institutions. The symposium adopted a comparative approach, examining how other countries face similar challenges, and identifying key parallels and differences with reference to the future of the state and democracy.











WORKSHOP 8-9 MAY 2025

State Capture and Corruption in Africa: Towards critical engagement with anti-corruption policy

The workshop brought together a small group of researchers with an interest in critically engaging with the concept of state capture, by way of a broader concern with the contemporary nature of corruption, democracy and state capacity in Africa today. The workshop is part of a project that aims, over the long-term, to critically and constructively engage with contemporary policy assumptions and debates about how to tackle serious forms of corruption on the continent.





PARI PROGRAMMES

PARI's work on the constraints to effective governance underlines the importance of improved institutional design and performance. Our long-term goal is to contribute to a more effective and accountable state that is better equipped and orientated towards the development of a just society. To do this, we collaborate with civil society organisations, think tanks, state institutions and academic institutions, to:

- Produce **new and original research** into public institutions, state formation, state-society relations and public policy;
- Realise **advocacy campaigns to achieve state reform**, focusing on the various programme areas, strategic collaborations and cooperation with the state;
- Maintain **an academic profile** through university affiliations and teaching programmes, to foster a conducive intellectual environment within the organisation, and contribute to the study fields of state governance and state-society relations
- Shape **public opinion** in relevant interest groups through targeted communications;
- Maintain a **repository of research** accessible to the public.

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ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

The Academic Engagement Programme continued its work of collaboration and relationship building with academic institutions, this also included providing supervision and support to registered students.



In 2025 PARI continued to collaborate with the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP), the Gauteng City Region Observatory (GCRO), the School of Social Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Concerned Academics at Wits for the *Urban Crisis Seminar Series*, providing a space for academics, civil society organisations and local government officials to discuss relevant topics of concern in the City of Johannesburg, ranging from water, electricity, housing, accountability, coalition government. This became an important space of convening and deliberation.

Collaboration and exchange also culminated in an international symposium titled: *State, Democracy and the Promise of Development*, convened with Brown University, and which saw the gathering of scholars from around the world to discuss the state of democracy in our times, state capacity, local government and claim making and development.

This year, the programme ran a peer review of PARI`s research and written outputs, convening scholars from different academic and research institutions in South Africa, India and the US. This was an important opportunity for PARI researchers to take stock of their work and to reflect on its impact, rigour and potential for further development of junior researchers and interns.

For internal development at PARI, we piloted a short intern and junior researchers' development programme and continued with activities such as weekly writing sessions, writing retreats, reading group (Urban Power by Benjamin Bradlow, University of Princeton Press, 2024) and internal seminars, providing an opportunity to unpack and discuss the work conducted at PARI.

The focus on spatial inequality and urban governance strengthened through the collaboration with the Groupement de recherche international–Sud) entitled Digital technologies and the management of urban services in Southern cities (NumSud) and engagement with a working group on the politics of smart cities.

COMPACT

COMPACT is a partnership between PARI, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and Integrity Action, designed to achieve a more responsive and accountable local government through enhanced community participation, planning and oversight.

COMPACT focused its final year ending February 2026 on finalising the coproduction and piloting of several tools with partner municipalities, which could be freely used by other South African municipalities, CSOs and communities. A comprehensive COMPACT Toolbox website (www.pari.org.za/toolbox) has been developed hosting all the COMPACT tools and resources, as well as other related materials developed by NGOs, research organisations and government departments towards the enhancement of public participation.

MY MUNICIPALITY
compact
PARTICIPATE
PLAN
ACCOUNT

COMPACT TOOLS

CITIZEN-BASED MONITORING (CBM)

The Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) approach trains ward committee members as citizen monitors, equipping them to monitor municipal infrastructure projects and provide feedback to communities, councillors and municipal officials. CBM has been piloted with Kouga Local Municipality and Oudtshoorn Local Municipality since 2024. In March 2025 refresher training workshops were conducted in both municipalities to re-energise the initiative, onboard new monitors, and address implementation challenges. A new reporting template was also introduced to strengthen communication between monitors and councillors, and site visits provided practical experience. A case study on the development and piloting of the CBM tool is available together with a practical guide on how to institutionalise CBM in municipalities.

COMPACT LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION MODEL

The Local Government Collaboration Model was developed to foster meaningful collaboration between three key municipal stakeholders: the administration, councillors, and the local community (which includes various subgroups like civil society, businesses, and citizens). The model focuses on the "how" (i.e. methods and processes) of collaboration. The tool was piloted in Newcastle and Blue Crane Route local municipalities, and a case study is available together with a facilitation guide which sets out how to convene collaboration workshops in municipalities.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION INDEX

The Community Participation Index aims to assist in measuring and monitoring community participation in municipalities. It is designed as a developmental capacity-building tool and was piloted with Witzenberg and Sol Plaatje municipalities in 2025. A Community Participation Index Protocol has been developed, which is a suggested way to embed the index in a municipality.

CIVIC EDUCATION

COMPACT has developed a comprehensive guide called *Working Towards Collaborative Local Government: A Reference Guide*, which covers key issues around local government. A Local Government Pamphlet Series with accessible pamphlets on various topics has been developed to complement the guide. These were piloted with Moses Kotane and JB Marks municipalities and have been translated into Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho and Setswana. The series covers the following topics: Understanding Local Government; Accountability and Oversight in Municipalities; Municipal Councillors; Ward Committees; and Youth Participation in Local Government.

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP) RESOURCES

COMPACT developed a user-friendly guide called *Understanding the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) Process: A Phased Approach* which draws from existing guides and resources and covers all phases of the IDP development process with key information provided. An IDP Roadmap poster has been designed for display in municipal offices, ward councillor offices etc. The poster sets out the different phases of the IDP development process (with timelines) and how different stakeholders are involved.

In 2025 COMPACT hosted a **Municipal Financial Transparency** webinar with National Treasury and engaged with **the e-Participation** tools developed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), with JB Marks and uMhlathuze local municipalities participating at a SALGA/HSRC e-Participation learning forum in Cape Town. A COMPACT partnership with SALGA Free State and the Gauteng and Free State Departments of Cooperative Government, around the **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)** approach, led to a councillor workshop and a train-the-trainer workshop for officials held with Tswelopele Local Municipality in the Free State Province. COMPACT has also worked with Activate! Change Drivers, a youth NGO, around youth participation, presenting the Toolbox at seminars and podcasts and coproducing a pamphlet on youth participation in local government.

In January 2026 COMPACT furthermore developed three policy briefs on enhancing participation in the IDP process, strengthening ward committees and bridging the municipal communication divide drawn from the action research findings and recommendations. The policy briefs have fed into COGTA's review of the White Paper on Local Government.





JUST TRANSITION

Our overarching goal is to contribute to the successful implementation of South Africa's Just Energy Transition Partnership Investment Plan (JETP IP).

We completed a groundbreaking empirical study of the affordability of basic services – electricity and water – for low-income households. This was the first study undertaken in South Africa that compared actual costs of varying amounts of services with different levels of household income, and which applied a relative approach to affordability. A relative approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining basic nutrition levels in households. The study demonstrated that even small amounts of electricity and water are unaffordable for some 7.5 million households that live below the minimum wage. The research findings have been presented in numerous forums, including a G20 side event and closed sessions with policymakers responsible for reworking the local government fiscal framework. Findings were also included in the Local Government White Paper review.

Against the background of unaffordable services for a significant number of households, we continued to advocate for improvements in the implementation of the free basic services, notably the free basic electricity (FBE). As a direct result of our efforts, approximately 55,000 additional households in the City of Johannesburg were receiving this benefit in 2025/26. We also continued our engagements with National Treasury, the Department of Electricity and Energy and SALGA on reform of the FBE policy through the AFD-facilitated engagements.

Research around access to water continued in the year, focusing on the challenges that communities living in informal settlements in Johannesburg face in accessing a reliable and affordable source of water from the City. Our research findings were developed into short documentary videos that spotlight the impact on livelihoods and living standards of the failure to consistently deliver the constitutionally mandated minimum amount of water to these communities.

Extensive research was undertaken in the year in township areas around Johannesburg to investigate how people (focusing on women) use basic services such as electricity and water to create employment and livelihood opportunities.

Our membership of two working groups under the Presidential intervention in the City of Johannesburg – water and electricity – gives us an opportunity to work with City officials to develop policy proposals to address access and affordability issues.

We commissioned extensive research around the use of freshwater in Eskom's coal-fired power plants. This research was used to propose a series of Just Transition projects to the PMU of the JET office in the Office of the President.

A ten-part documentary style podcast series was developed, examining the economic, social and political implications of South Africa's Just Transition.

We commenced a new project funded by the AFD, following our successful winning of a request for proposal process. The new project is a 3-year assignment, ending in December 2028. The research will contribute to increased equity in South Africa's energy transition.

We also commenced a new research project in partnership with two other energy transition think tanks (in Pakistan and in Indonesia) after successfully winning a large grant from INETTT. The research focuses on financing grid expansion in developing countries.

Programme Lead Tracy Ledger was appointed to the Electricity Market Advisory Forum at the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA). The EMAF will be supporting NERSA in the transition to a competitive electricity market.

We made input into the Local Government White Paper review, preparing the draft chapter on municipal support, capacity building and interventions. ■

LAND GOVERNANCE

PARI's land governance programme works towards realising Section 25 of the Constitution, which lays out the rights to secure tenure, restitution for land dispossession, and equitable access to land. The programme works with local, provincial and national government, civil society organisations, communities and the private sector to strengthen land governance and secure land rights for marginalised people who have insecure land tenure and livelihoods in South Africa.

During the past year, the land governance programme continued its research and advocacy around the themes of land and the just transition, building coherent land administration systems, supporting land rights and social justice movements, and strengthening tenure security.



LAND AND THE JUST TRANSITION

PARI continued its work with the ALIGN project on supporting municipalities to leverage their land governance functions for the just transition. During this year, PARI conducted advocacy on the issue through attending and presenting at number of different local forums including the SALGA Mpumalanga Provincial working group, Nkangala District Climate Change forum and Middelburg Eco-Industrial Conference.

The programme presented its work on land and the just transition at various international conferences and panels including the conference of the Planning, Law, and Property Rights International Association (PLPR) in Cardiff, Wales, the World Bank Land Conference and the Conference on Land Policy in Africa (CLPA). It also released a policy brief on youth involvement in the just transition.

A key output of the ALIGN project was the guide, *Land and the Just Transition: A guide for local government*. In June 2025, PARI in partnership with SALGA held a successful validation event in Mbombela at which a draft of the Guide was presented. The event brought together stakeholders from provincial, district and local municipalities in Mpumalanga, who offered valuable feedback. PARI and partners incorporated the comments received and developed a final version of the guide by the end of the year. The guide will be launched in 2026/27.

BUILDING COHERENT LAND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS

Within this theme the programme explores the diverse actors and systems which play a role in the land sector and how they can be better synchronised to protect land rights and manage land use. The key output this year has been the publication of a research report exploring the dynamics of land use and development on customary land in Vhembe District, Limpopo. Ongoing work on this theme will continue to build a base of evidence on local practices and relations between municipalities and traditional authorities which can be used to inform and strengthen policy.

SUPPORTING LAND RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

PARI continues to build partnerships with other land-focused organisations and highlight the work of social justice movements which assert people's rights to land. The team has consolidated its participation in the Land Network National Engagement in South Africa (LandNNES) and contributed to a LandNNES joint submission on the Communal Property Assocations Amendment Act Regulations.

The team also aims to build capacity within civil society and has presented to civil society gatherings on the intersection between care work and women's land rights, and the roles and possibilities for local government engagement around climate adaptation.

The Land Governance team is conducting ongoing research on indigenous communities contesting land dispossession in the Richtersveld.

STRENGTHENING TENURE SECURITY

As part of the focus on strengthening tenure security, PARI has built a relationship with the Doornkop Communal Property Association (CPA) in the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality. The CPA members are beneficiaries of land reform who have battled to access services and experienced a large-scale occupation on their land. The Land Governance team produced a questionnaire for household profiling in Doornkop to assist with their campaign for secure tenure and development. Additionally, they presented research on the CPA, arguing for recognition of their form of tenure, at the Land, Life and Society Conference at the University of Western Cape. ■

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The crux of the work of the Local Government programme for the 2025/26 financial year focused on the review of the 1998 White Paper on Local Government (WPLG). The WPLG review is a significant and timely initiative that provided a comprehensive assessment and diagnosis of the performance and challenges in the local government sphere towards a concerted effort for review and reform. This essentially translates to one of the most holistic reforms of the local government since the 1998 White Paper and the inception of the current local government structure in 2000. Such a review is a necessary response to the challenges at the local government level, including fundamental governance and institutional failures, as well as financial and fiscal crises that are severely compromising sustained service delivery to communities.



The programme provided both direct technical support to the process by supporting the research behind the WPLG review and coordinated PARI's institutional view and response to the overall process. This dual approach ensured that PARI could contribute to state reform by working with the government, while also protecting PARI's independent voice and advocacy role. As a result, PARI research and analysis had both a direct and indirect role in shaping the revised WPLG. PARI research was instrumental in generating ideas and proposals incorporated in the revised WPLG, most evident in Local Government programme researchers drafting large portions of the municipal finance chapter of the White Paper. In terms of its indirect role, the programme coordinated PARI's official response to the WPLG Discussion Document and the overall review process, highlighting the breakdown of the social contract between local government and communities, identifying challenges in the public participation framework, and proposing solutions to improve public participation. On the financial and fiscal side, PARI research highlighted the deteriorating state of local government revenues, particularly electricity surpluses and surcharges and the fuel levy sharing arrangement, substantial issues in municipal procurement processes, concerns with the reporting, monitoring and intervention framework in financial management and the need to ensure an explicit incorporation of affordability in the local government fiscal framework. PARI promoted greater attention to the level of free basic services and the need to review these levels towards higher subsistence and development consumption levels.

The Local Government programme also oversaw the establishment of new relationships for PARI with the Water Research Commission (WRC) and the Open Knowledge Foundation (OKF). We successfully secured funding from the WRC to undertake research on innovative sanitation tariffs, drawing on both national and international best practices to better recover costs and improve the delivery of sanitation services in municipalities.

Open access to data, knowledge and information is a key component in empowering communities to improve oversight of local government.

With the OKF, PARI is exploring better ways to make local government data and knowledge openly available to civil society, researchers and the public at large. Open access to data, knowledge and information is a key component in empowering communities to improve oversight of local government. This growing work on open access to local government data and information saw the LGP taking part in a special panel on *Data as a Commons Infrastructure* with the OKF at the 2025 Open Government Partnership Global Summit held in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, in October 2025. Further exploration of this interesting but complex area will continue in 2026.

The programme also partnered with the Department of Cooperative Governance to assist in developing the Department's research strategy. PARI is excited to have contributed to the development of this unique initiative as a first step toward building research capacity within a government department to better promote evidence-based policymaking informed by sound, comprehensive research. ■



STATE REFORM

The State Reform programme aims to develop a stable, developmentally directed, impartial public administration through reducing the impact of corruption and patronage on the administration, and supporting government's work towards 'professionalising' the public administration.

For many years, the programme has been advocating for changes to public service regulation, especially as it regulates the relationship between politicians and senior administrators. We have been active in Parliament in making submissions and have supported policy makers and civil society actors with research. The aim of this work is to reduce undue political interference in operational matters and create the enabling environment for a more stable senior management layer. This work has borne fruit. We have seen changes made to the Public Service Commission Bill to bolster the independence of the Commission – an institution we hope will play a role in appointment reform for senior public servants. The Public Service Amendment Act shifted responsibility for human resource decisions from politicians to administrators – which we have long advocated for. The reform journey is far from complete, and as we noted in a recent press release, much attention will need to be placed on strengthening appointment processes for heads of department if these amendments are to be effective.

The State Reform programme still acts as a secretariat to the Association of Former Directors- General (AfDG), who are committed to sharing their experience and skills to support the professionalisation agenda, and build the state's capabilities.

A new Public Procurement Act was gazetted in 2025. While it has many shortcomings, and is now being challenged in court, the sustained pressure from PARI and other civil society groups and labour saw gains in the area of public procurement transparency i.e. in relation to information about beneficial owners and politically exposed persons, and commitments to enhanced public procurement data transparency. In light of this, we have been developing proposals for how the state and civil society can use these clauses in the Act to enhance civil society oversight of public procurement in South Africa (see our latest publication). Our proposals can also be realised under the current regulatory regime for public procurement (i.e. even if the new Act is set aside by court challenge).

Via our new research on coalition government in Gauteng, we are building the empirical base for engaging in policy advocacy in two related area: around the regulation and delineation of the political-administrative interface, and around the regulation of coalition government.

The reform journey is far from complete, and as we noted in a recent press release, much attention will need to be placed on strengthening appointment processes for heads of department if these amendments are to be effective.

We engaged with scholarly discussions in fields relevant to the State Reform programme's work, and with the Academic Engagement programme, jointly hosted a two-day symposium with Brown University at Wits under the title, *State, Democracy and the Promise of Development.* Attended by academics, some practitioners and postgraduate students, the symposium explored the state's role and capacities in social and economic transformation, the social and political costs of failure to deliver public goods and how this might shift attitudes to the state and democratic institutions.

Our edited collection on the Zondo Commission is well underway, following our successful launch of an edited collection on state capture in South Africa (Wits Press: 2024).

Our reputation as an informed voice on the Zondo Commission also saw us approached by the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council (NACAC) to undertake an independent assessment of the state's progress in implementing the President's 60 commitments in his response to the Zondo Commission (the President submitted these commitments to Parliament in October 2022). Our independent assessment draws attention to the incomplete and halting nature of reforms, and critiques gaps in the state's reform agenda. This assessment received a wide and senior audience in the state. ■



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Sindy Moyo: Housekeeper
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ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2026

ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY **2026**

PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH INSTITUTE NPC
REGISTRATION NUMBER 2010/009156/08

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2026

Figures in Rand	Note(s)	2026	2025
ASSETS			
Non-Current Assets			
Property plant and equipment	2	292,343	281,745
Current Assets			
Trade and other receivables	3	1,392,707	633,841
Cash and cash equivalents	4	37,120,607	41,457,111
		38,513,314	42,090,952
TOTAL ASSETS		**38,805,657**	**42,372,697**
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Reserves		14,762,266	14,242,266
Retained surplus		6,289,889	6,272,292
		21,052,155	**20,514,558**
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Trade and other payables	5	17,753,502	21,858,139
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		**38,805,657**	**42,372,697**

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

Figures in Rand	Note(s)	2026	2025
Revenue	6	37,352,940	41,414,702
Other income	7	236,102	112,275
Operating expenses	8	(39,735,890)	36,896,196)
Operating surplus / (deficit)		**(2,146,848)**	**4,630,781**
Investment revenue		2,684,450	2,371,265
Finance costs		(5)	–
Surplus for the year		**537,597**	**7,002,046**





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