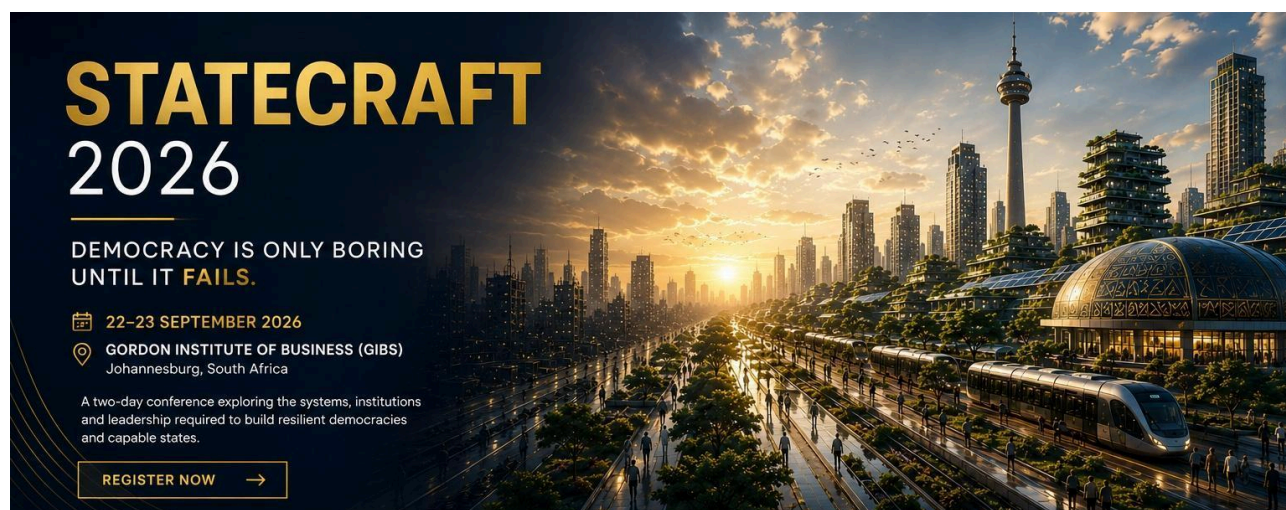




INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND DEMOCRACY

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

Host: New South Institute (NSI) · Confirmed-speaker programme as of 24 July 2026; additional participants to be announced.

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
16:45 – 17:55	Panel 10: Bureaucracy and Democracy — The Reform Agenda Ahead	In-Person
17:55 – 18:20	Closing Ceremony	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 CONFERENCE

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 conference 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 conference 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: Pan Suk Kim, Professor Emeritus, Yonsei University; former Minister of Personnel Management, South Korea; former Presidential Secretary for Personnel Policy; former President, International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) and Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA); Lifetime Fellow, National Academy of Public Administration, United States.

Professor Pan Suk Kim did not study civil service reform from the outside. He implemented it. Korea's civil service had a merit-based foundation since 1949, but it was also deeply seniority-driven and closed. What changed in the 2000s was the reform of senior appointments specifically: the 2006 Senior Civil Service introduced open competition, competency assessment, and performance-based pay for the positions that matter most politically. Kim served as Presidential Secretary for Personnel Policy during the design of these reforms and later as Minister of Personnel Management during their implementation. His contribution to this conference is a practitioner's account of what it actually took: navigating a bureaucracy that resisted openness, building political support across competing interests, and holding together a reform design that had to be technically sound and politically viable at the same time.

The keynote will open the conference with the questions that practitioners actually face: how do you draw on international experience without copying systems that do not fit your context? Who wins and who loses in a reform process, and how do you build the coalitions that make change possible? How fast should reform move?

Panel 1: Appointing Senior Officials

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

Confirmed to date: Magdalena Rojas Wettig, Professional Expert, Council for the Senior Executive Service, Chile; Eko Prasjo, public-administration scholar and former Vice Minister, Indonesia. Moderated by Brian Levy, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Additional international speakers to be announced.

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.

Chile's Servicio Civil is one of Latin America's most studied professionalization efforts, and the panel opens with that experience through Magdalena Rojas Wettig, who 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. Building on the keynote's account of South Korea's 2006 Senior Civil Service reform, and on further international cases as speakers confirm, the panel will examine what these cases actually reveal: not the ideal model, but what made reform possible, what the unintended consequences were, and what a well-designed system still cannot solve.

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, former Brookings Institution, co-creator of the Worldwide Governance Indicators. 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 spent decades building the Worldwide Governance Indicators and the cross-country data infrastructure 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. 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; Ivor Chipkin, CEO, New South Institute; Yoliswa Makhasi, New South Institute; Portia Derby, former Director-General, Department of Public Enterprises, and former Group Chief Executive, Transnet. Moderated by Yoliswa Makhasi, New South Institute.

South Africa's Public Service Amendment Act 9 of 2025 shifts the power to appoint senior officials and staff below Head of Department level from politicians to Directors-General and HoDs themselves, and separates political and administrative roles. Legislation is easier than implementation. This panel is not about what the Act says. It is about what is actually happening.

What resistance is emerging, and from where? Where are the regulations unclear or the enforcement mechanisms weak? What has surprised the people trying to make reform work? Ivor Chipkin has led NSI's decade-long push from state-capture research to the passage of the Act itself; 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 now redraws. The panel 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. Moderated by Martha Ngoye, attorney and NSI Board member; former Group Executive: Legal, Risk and Compliance, PRASA.

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?

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, Special Secretary for State Transformation, Brazil; Katarina Staronová, Comenius University, Slovakia; Conrado Ramos Larraburu, Secretary General, CLAD (Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo).

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.

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; Kadari Lincoln Singo, CEO, Uongozi Institute, Tanzania. 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. Kadari Lincoln Singo, at the Uongozi Institute in Tanzania, is running a parallel effort focused on leadership development for a new generation of African public servants — anchored in the conviction that the ethics and craft of public administration must be built alongside technical capability. Together they are working the same question from different angles: 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?

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 conference 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) and Governor of Antioquia (2012–2015); Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, Mayor of Buenos Aires (2015–2023). Moderated by Taibat Lawanson.

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 of Latin America's most consequential city leaders. 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. Horacio Rodríguez Larreta governed Buenos Aires through eight years of sustained administrative modernization, showing how a city can hold an institutional transformation agenda even when the national political cycle does not cooperate. 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.

Panel 9: Deepening Public Participation and Civic Engagement

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

Confirmed to date: Bhavanesh Parbhoo, Industrial Development Corporation. Additional speakers to be announced.

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.

Panel 10: Bureaucracy and Democracy — The Reform Agenda Ahead

16:45 – 17:55 · In-Person, Johannesburg (Closing)

Confirmed to date: Ivor Chipkin, NSI; Pan Suk Kim, Yonsei University.

The closing panel does not summarise the conference. It asks what it adds up to.

Ivor Chipkin has led NSI from research on state capture to advocacy for legislative reform to the harder work of implementation. Pan Suk Kim has studied and worked on civil service reform across more than three decades and dozens of countries. Together they will anchor a conversation about what two days of honest discussion has actually produced: where the clearest lessons are, where the most important questions remain open, and what the reform agenda requires from institutions like NSI and the people in the room.

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. Three to five shorter pieces, provocations, practitioner briefs, and comparative notes, will be published in the weeks following the conference.

All sessions will be recorded and made available on the NSI website. Participants who wish to develop their contributions into longer analytical pieces are welcome to submit them for NSI's working paper series.