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# Politics, state and society in South Africa: Between leadership, trust and technocrats

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## **Abstract**

*This article argues that leadership and trust are central to democratic and participatory governance, where governance is understood as a function and product of politics. Politics is seen as the contestation for power, and governance as executive administration and as a regulatory system. Effective governance, it is posited, derives from the consent of citizens through the inculcation of interpersonal trust, institutional trust and trust in societal as well as political leadership. The paper provides some comparative international data on levels of interpersonal and institutional trust, and trust in political leadership. However, it focuses largely on South Africa and argues that periods of social, economic and political crisis require high levels of institutional and interpersonal trust, alongside trust in leadership. Consistency, predictability and certainty are important elements of governance and integral to promoting the levels of trust required for sustainable governance and in inculcating the notion of public service. Public service itself, it is argued, needs to be re-conceptualised as a service to the public, both from within government, and from outside of it. The relationship between trust, leadership and public service is then explored and the notion of leadership is unpacked in its different dimensions: leadership as vision setting on the one hand, and leadership as a management function on the other. The paper concludes by positing that a modern mandarin is required for societal leadership that will ensure the development of democracy and the democratisation of development.*

## **1. Introduction: The citizen as rational actor**

A global financial crisis, market instability and uncertainty and the attendant consequences of rising food, fuel and finance prices have introduced not only social instability and uncertainty, but revealed a global political, market and bureaucratic leadership that is unable to provide the certainty and stability required by a global citizenry to steer society through the turmoil. Increasingly, an uncertain global citizenry has in recent months turned increasingly to direct action as a mode of expressing their political agency. Large numbers of South Africans have been part of this insurrectionary behaviour for much longer than the onset of a global food, fuel and finance crisis. After all, since 2004, official statistics put the incidence of social protest at 881 protests, of which at least 50 were violent (Wines, 2005). A year later the number had jumped to a total of 5085 countrywide (Wines, 2005).

These trends have important implications for governance and public institutions as well as for the mode in which citizens and states engage with each other. It implies a trend long evident in South Africa, that political participation will not be restricted to the episodic vote, or to formal processes of participation and decision making either through direct formal participation or through elected public representatives and other public or regulatory institutions. Direct action, community mobilisation and political action through protest and resistance to decisions deemed to be unpopular, remain important modes of political expression. Thus, trends appear to suggest that political expression occurs on dual tracks, that is political participation through formal processes as well as political expression

through direct action (Fakir, 2006). It equally appears that political expression is mediated through an instrumental calculus made by citizens: that where participation through formal political processes have the potential to yield tangible benefits, formal participation will be pursued. Where participation in formal processes are not expected, or fail to yield any tangible direct benefits, then direct action through strikes and protests will be pursued. This is a conclusion which could have been reached on an almost instinctive basis, with the evidence narrated thus far seeming to suggest bifurcated modes of political expression. The issue is nevertheless stated since the assumptive premise that this paper adopts as a starting point is that of the standard rational choice, instrumental view of the citizen as a rational actor pursuing what is in his/her own rational interests.

With this in mind this paper attempts to situate the question of 'trust', trust in institutions and trust in people generally, within the frame of politics and governance. More specifically, the paper argues that effective governance derives from citizens' consent through inculcating interpersonal trust, institutional trust and trust in societal and political leaders and explores what the implications of a lack of such trust may be. The paper then dwells on the nature and type of leadership that it is argued, will be required to inculcate this seemingly rare commodity called trust, by exploring how in modern states, characterised by a necessary impersonal bureaucratic rationality, leadership and trust in certain types of leadership are both central to promoting certainty, stability and predictability in governance. The paper concludes by arguing for a specific type of leadership, one which brings a commitment to a set of values and principles, and which is animated by the idea of leadership as service, inside and outside of government.

## 2. Do something, but not just anything

The latter half of 2008 has seen increased calls globally, by citizens, for their leaders to steer society through a period that appears to be one of instability and uncertainty. The dawning reality is that the systemic structural edifice of the 'global market' is about to fracture because of the accumulative and avaricious agency exercised by individuals and corporations in the tragic absence of strong political leadership, which would have regulated and tempered the irresponsible extension of credit on capital markets and the scandalous misuse of financial instruments that manipulated the structural designs (or lack thereof) of the imperfect market. Tragically, 'no one really knows what to do. It is impossible for politicians [and leaders] to do nothing in such a crisis. We may have to pray that the agreements crafted with the toxic mix of special interests, misguided economics and right-wing ideologies that produced the crisis can somehow produce a rescue plan that works' (Zizek, 2008).

On every occasion in which a global citizenry has been susceptible to a political or economic crisis (a burst DOTCOM bubble in 2001, the ENRON scandal in 2002, the twin towers bombing of 9/11 and the London bombings of 7/7, a failed state in Somalia, a failing state and collapsing society in Zimbabwe and a global crisis of confidence in political leaders, emergent democratic deficits, political leaders who are increasingly unaccountable), the usual leadership responses in each of these crisis moments and places, has been an empty rhetoric about the necessity of fast and decisive action.

Usually, this has implied the conundrum of either the partial suspension of values and civil liberties in order to save those same values and civil liberties - as in the United States and the United Kingdom where civil liberties and traditional values based on equality, rights and justice for all are suspended or under threat (Younge, 2007). Closer to home, in the developing world in moments of social and political crisis, leaders tend to make sub-rational appeals to culture and tradition, or whip up the impressively progressive sounding but increasingly recidivist rhetoric appealing to an imaginary radical nationalism, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism – when in reality what their societies require is radical democracy in an environment of stable, sound and strong states. Market leaders, bankers and traders on the other hand have simply continued through these crises to play game of market competition with a 'business as usual' approach.

As a result of what appears to be the worst political and economic crisis, at least in contemporary history, from mid 2008 (*The Guardian*, Editorial Comment 2008) an increasingly restive global citizenry has called upon its leaders – political and otherwise to 'do something', in the face of this perceptible crisis, to be more responsive and interventionist. Leadership has been challenged by the citizenry to provide some relief, to save banks, protect jobs, to exercise more oversight on their behalf, and to be generally, more accountable.

## **2.1 Expectation and disappointment**

Curiously, the very people the citizenry call upon to come to their rescue, are the ones who appear to have repeatedly disappointed them and who are therefore, not the most trustworthy in their eyes. After all, across the world, 2005 data from a time at which the world economy and the South Africa economy were buoyant, suggest that 65% (Gallup, 2005) of people didn't believe that their countries are run by the will of the people. The lack of more recent worldwide data notwithstanding, if data from 2005 suggests a trend of declining levels of trust in political leaders and institutions, the reasonable expectation is that by 2009 lack of confidence in leadership would have declined further. Using 2005 worldwide data, a combined 80% of people would rather give more power to religious leaders, academics, intellectuals and journalists than business leaders and politicians (Gallup, 2005). Religious leaders are the most trusted group and politicians the least trusted, with just 13% of people around the world expressing trust and confidence in politicians (Gallup, 2005). Religious leaders are the most trusted group in Africa, trusted by 74% against 33% globally (Gallup, 2005). There is low level of trust in all types of leaders throughout Europe. Almost a third of people did not trust any of military, religious, business or political leaders (Gallup, 2005).

Faced with a disaster over which they appear to have no real influence with the attendant pressure 'to do something', leaders and the administrators of developed societies acted in reaction to tame the monster they helped to create. And they did so by implementing policies and governance instruments that they not long ago foreswore – that is government intervention in the market by allowing the public fiscus to correct market imperfections. In short the bank bailouts in Europe, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Russia are tantamount to the nationalisation and

socialisation of losses, and here is the caveat, the continued privatisation of profits. Is this perhaps another case of leaders reactively relenting to the pressure to do something without taking a moment to 'talk and think about them, like quickly throwing \$700 billion at a problem instead of reflecting on how it came about' (Zizek, 2008). Does this signal a politics devoid of ideas? If the bailout can be called a 'socialist' measure, it is a very peculiar one: a 'socialist' measure that does not aim to help the poor but to save the market. Socialism is OK, it seems, when it serves to save capitalism, but this does not ask what 'moral hazards' are inscribed in the fundamental structure of the current interventions decided on by leaders (Zizek, 2008), re-enforcing the image, not just of a politics devoid of ideas, but a leadership short of them.

### 3. The South African conjuncture

In South Africa, in addition to a global fuel, food and finance crisis, South Africans are faced with an energy crisis in addition to the inherited social fractures and cleavages inherited from Apartheid, the 1994 Post-Apartheid context, characterised as it is by continuing social inequality and poverty lends greater force to feelings of gloom in a period of uncertainty. Using a variety of different statistical measures, a number of experts have suggested that the percentage of people living in poverty range from approximately 4.2 million to approximately 20.6 million. High levels of poverty are exacerbated by the high level of income inequality which has been rising since the advent of democracy in 1994. Like poverty, there is no consensus on the actual magnitude of inter- and intra-racial inequality with some studies suggesting that the Gini coefficient<sup>2</sup> rose from 0.68 in 1994 to 0.73 in 2001 (Ndungu and Frye, 2008). Indicators released by the Presidency show that the Gini coefficient has dropped from a high of 0.68 in 2003 to 0.66 in 2007. Using the Theil Index, the same Indicators show that inequality has dropped between races (0.41 in 2006 to 0.34 in 2007) as well as within races (0.61 in 2006 to 0.57 in 2007 (Ndungu and Frye; 2008). However, the high indices of inequality mean that South Africa is still one of the most unequal societies in the world (Ndungu and Frye; 2008).

To exacerbate matters, a manufactured political, social and economic consensus in South Africa, that saw the transition period from 1990 onwards to circa 2008 through with relative stability, has fractured. This was attributable to a policy domain in a democratic society in which it appeared that an unassailable governing party would continue to provide policy predictability – but which seems to have entered a period of crisis following a leadership battle and what appears to be a battle for the political, policy, organisational and ideological identity of the party. Because of the current ruling party has an electoral majority and institutional and policy predominance, the battle for its leadership, contestation for its political/ideological approach and for its organisational form, have ramifications for wider societal development and modernisation, as well as for the project of democratic development.

#### 3.1 The politics of policy

In theory, democracies provide intelligent institutional rules for periodic leadership succession, yet, in practice they may only appear to do so, as many leadership successions are not the product

solely of electoral processes. Moreover, leadership successions do not unfold particularly smoothly. They involve considerable risks for all involved and they may have ramifications beyond the personal well-being and political power of the individual protagonists.

*The parties, governments and polities involved may experience shocks, setbacks, boosts and turning points at the occasion of, if not due to, particular leadership succession dramas. Unlike the institutionalised nature of parliamentary elections resulting in the appointment of Representative institutions, heads of State, Executives and Cabinets, party leadership successions are rooted in either the incumbent's state of mind, dissatisfaction with the incumbent's performance within the party, and/or in interpersonal or factional power struggles. Given this, it is easy to grasp why comparative studies find that many leadership successions are more likely to generate much uncertainty, agony and even trauma, not only within parties, but within societies as a whole ('t Hart, 2007: 273)*

This may have serious consequences for the political and governance cultures in a society. It would not be untrue to suggest that the 2007 leadership contest in the ANC was discursively about two styles of leadership pitting itself against each other. The one is a leadership tradition that appears to grant agency to followers, thereby deriving its legitimacy. It appears responsive, in touch, penetrated and permeated into society's grassroots. Its appeal is a mode of engagement with political structure and agency through rhetoric and the political spectacle. Its broader appeal is to tradition and culture (organisational and societal), sentiment and history.

The other is a leadership that also appears to be responsive, but which derives its legitimacy by appealing to a modernising impulse and a modernist rationality. An appeal is made to processes and institutions for delivering to citizens and party members what it is assumed, is wanted. It is a type of leadership that grants agency by appropriating the structural elements of politics and society to its own control. In short it imposes a bureaucratic rationality to politics.

Ideologically drained (or heavily contested), historically evacuated, such compromised narratives perhaps announce that the contest here is not so much about politics minus memory and context, but the very battle for appropriation within the ruling party, of memory, history, tradition and context, all of which have implications for wider society and the policy trajectories that may be emergent from whichever way in which the appropriation is resolved. The resolution may take the form of further organisational splits, as has been the case with the formation of the Congress of the People (COPE), or it may take the form of internal contestation for policy hegemony.

In the first tradition of politics and leadership, political agency vests in the people and in doing so eschews structure – whether it be principles, laws, bureaucracy or organisation, and it privileges insurrection over organisation. Here political agency is consigned to the people, but it is a people who have no relation to structure, with a leadership which provides no direction rooted in principle. Without principle, the legitimacy that leadership can lend to progress is eroded.

The counter impulse to this type of leadership is one that pretends to be stoic.

*It counters itself as rational and deliberative – something conducive to democracy, but in doing so, aggregates to itself the notion of the democratic. It works on the principle that because 'we know' better, we will decide what is best in establishing the ground-rules and the institutional edifice required to give effect to development. In doing so, it eclipses the democratic and substitutes for it the developmental. This type of leadership embraces the technical. Instead of fetishising the individual it fetishises the instrumental, where the focus is not the people, but the procedural and creates the impression through this process, not that the institutions serves the individual (and the person), but the individual is a tamed person, tamed to serve the institutional (Fakir, 2007: 10)*

In this context, political citizenship within the party, and citizenship in society abrogates and appropriates agency, and posits unwittingly, that it is only principle and structure that matter. It becomes a domain of governance in which leadership stands for both agency and structure, but since it has appropriated agency it is ultimately a leadership that lacks the legitimacy required to give content to structure. Both leadership traditions seem anachronistic in a time of uncertainty, simply because both seem to pursue a path to politics that excludes either one of; 'principle' or 'people'. It is the familiar conundrum of authority without power, or power without authority.

With the fracturing of the ruling party as we have come to know it, the relative stability, certainty and predictability with which the state managed society and the economy has become less certain. The international context, together with problems in South Africa's northern border, Zimbabwe, and the internal strife within the ruling party have rendered South Africans less certain with respect to governance. Despite challenges to political and policy approaches pursued by Government, stability and certainty were relative safeguards to most South Africans with respect to policy and governance, even though predictability was not always a strong feature of the governance system – particularly in the criminal justice system. Crime and the criminal justice system is a prime example that demonstrates the way in which citizens respond to a perceived social crisis and how they expect that leaders in public authority will respond to this social crisis. It is thus a good measure of the governance contours of the state-society relationship and the way in which the state-society-leadership nexus unfolds. Crime is a widespread social problem that South Africans rate high among their priority problems and there is a widespread perception that alleged criminals who may have committed a crime, will either not be apprehended, or if apprehended then not tried, and if tried and prosecuted that the punitive measures handed down may be inappropriate (either too lax and lenient, or on the other hand, overly punitive).

The issue for most South African's then is both the fear of crime itself, and the absence of three key factors – predictability, certainty and consistency in the apprehension of criminals and the application of the law. Predictability refers to the relative chances of being caught, then tried (adjudicated) and if necessary, punished when a crime is committed. Certainty is in part dependent on predictability, the certainty that if one should do something wrong one will be caught, predictably, that if one

is caught, one can be confident that one will be treated fairly, and that the appropriate law will take its course, that it will be diligently applied, and that there will be fair and impartial administrative action, and if found to be guilty of an alleged offence, that the punitive measures will be commensurate both with the legal prescriptions and the societal expectation with respect to punitive action.

Consistency, on the other hand refers to the fact that in every instance of a contravention of the law the same standards of certainty and predictability will apply, and that they would be administratively fair, just, efficient and equally applicable in all such instances of contravention. In the absence of predictability, certainty and consistency citizens lose trust in government and governance processes and institutions, and the ability of government to effectively govern and regulate society.

### **3.2 The policy of politics**

Because government is ultimately the product of political contestation, what is considered political, matters for governance, and it follows from this that when a party in government with a large unthreatened majority determines the governance trajectory, what transpires in that party is a matter of interest in itself.

Thus, what is negatively perceived as political machinations in the ruling party, renders South Africans in general more susceptible to negative overall perceptions of government. Fourteen years after political liberation, South Africa, at least politically, seems to be entering a post-transition phase, where the manufactured political, social and economic consensus is fracturing to reflect an approach to politics as the pursuit of power based on both principle and instrumentality, self interest and public interest, in which people and interest groups are beginning to coalesce and associate to pursue what is in their own rational interests. This seems anachronistic to South Africans, who post 1994, grew accustomed to a more consensus seeking approach to politics and governance, rather than the current contestation and occasional conflict that appears to be increasingly fractious and tendentious. This apparent anachronism has led to a greater degree of uncertainty than was hitherto the case, with the uncertainty serving as a fertile base for possible instability – should the terms of the political debate and contestation not remain responsibly discursive. Already the ruling party has had to face a series of rather serious incidences of violence at party meetings and congresses. Perceptions of governance and stability are never immunised from these broader political currents as there is an inextricable link between politics and governance. Public Governance is both a product, and function of Politics. The first task then of political leaders turned protagonists and antagonists in this period is to display responsibility and care in the nature of the political discourse and rhetoric. The second is to ensure that the political contestation does not spill over into the governance and administration of society. The third is to endeavour to understand the nature, character, cultures and practices of the society that it seeks to govern – which requires a presence and penetration in society which is dependent on legitimacy and credibility. A policy platform and political programme that seems to accord with the values, wishes and aspirations of a large middle ground in society are key to promoting certainty and stability – and these are ultimately dependent on policy being

instrumentalised through the State. State capacity thus matters. Undergirding of all of these is the question of trust – trust in institutions of government, trust in other people and trust in political leaders.

## 4. Trust: Inter-personal and institutional

### 4.1. Familiarity breeds contempt! Or does it?

In South Africa there are moderate (though declining) levels of institutional trust, and while much lower, at least significant degrees of interpersonal trust. People in South Africa on the whole, do not trust the general community around them to the same extent that they might trust their neighbours. This provides at least some indication that a degree of acquaintance, familiarity and intimacy breeds higher levels of trust. Thus, at least for social and inter personal trust to flourish in order to promote a level of social capital and social cohesion, fluidity of social interaction is necessary. In general however, trust in institutions generally, has exceeded trust in other people, whether it be people in the wider community, or the people that staff public institutions – indicating that on the whole, levels of state legitimacy and credibility are relatively high, which has important implications for the way in which the state may extract compliance to rules that it creates, and in the sanction of its use of coercive power in instances of the breach of those rules. This points also to the greater degree that institutions may have taken root in society, greater at least to the extent that social interaction has taken place across races and other social cleavages. But this is changing as levels of trust in institutions have declined over the past two years. At the same time, South Africans do not know each other very well. This is most markedly felt in the manner in which social cleavage and the enduring separation (and suspicions) spawned by Apartheid has been more enduring than anticipated. However, South Africans trust each other more than people in other countries do. Of people surveyed on this matter, on average, 40,7% of South Africans believe that most people can be trusted while 58,7% believe that one cannot be too careful of other people, suggesting a degree of mistrust. In comparison to levels of inter-personal trust in other societies, as the data in table 1 below suggests, trust amongst people in South Africa is higher than in Britain but less than that of social democratic Sweden. Levels of trust in South Africa are higher than in Russia and Poland. Both societies underwent social and political transitions from authoritarianism to some form of democracy. In Northern Ireland a society characterised by levels of conflict similar to that experienced in South Africa, levels of trust are similar. In pure capitalist societies or those breeding the culture of new capitalism (as in Russia and Poland) levels of distrust are extremely high. In social democratic Sweden distrust is lower than in all other societies.

**Table 1: Levels of social and interpersonal trust in selected countries**

Country	Most people can be trusted	Cannot be too careful
Britain	29,8%	70,2%
Northern Ireland	39,5%	60,5%
Sweden	66,3%	33,7%
Poland	18,9%	81,1%
Russia	23,7%	76,3%

Source: Table compiled by author aggregating data from a study conducted by the Centre for Policy Studies for the National Prosecuting Authority of the Republic of South Africa. Ebrahim Fakir and Shaun Mackay, 'Civic Morality, A conceptual exploration and data analysis', Centre for Policy Studies and National Prosecuting Authority, 18 May 2005.

At base, it seems as if in most societies people are cynical and uninterested in cooperating with each other suggesting that the problem now, is less about how to build democratic, regulatory, economic and cultural public institutions, but how to strengthen the belief that they actually have a role. If trust is not given to them and to other people in society, the risk of social disintegration becomes real.

### **But why should this matter?**

A major component of building social capital is engagement in social relations or involvement in social networks. The more socially involved people are, the greater the opportunity to build reciprocal relationships and to generate interpersonal trust. Trust is not only necessary to get involved in networks of social engagement, but is also necessary to continue social relationships. Social relations die out if not maintained, expectations and obligations wither over time. The creation of social norms and codes depend on regular communication and interaction. Social relations constitute the capital asset of an individual that is a resource that once accumulated, can be drawn upon or accessed as needed. In other words social networks are regarded as a kind of prerequisite to build social capital. The basic notion of social capital is that people spend their resources on others and that people invest in each other so that the resources of others can be mobilised for a greater social good. Therefore, there is an expectation amongst people that others will behave in reciprocal ways, leading to a network of reciprocal relationships that provide stability in society. But is this the case in a country such as South Africa? Apartheid's most parochial element, that of the separation of races, appears to be its most enduring legacy, with new and surprising contours of division and cleavage emergent between people of the same race, but also between the rich and the poor, people of different ages and so on. Whilst data on levels of inter personal trust between people of different races or demographics is scant, some focus group work from 2003, though tangentially related, may prove of use and interest here.

## 4.2. The riddle of race and redress, South Africa's curse

Whilst it is true that both white and black South Africans of all income groups conform to the rational choice model that posits that people are motivated entirely by economic welfare, personal benefit or incremental advantage, on some issues of public policy, it appears that racial solidarities are important not just in the way economic and welfare benefits are distributed, but also in the degree to which people trust people of other races. This was evident from focus group research conducted on compliance behaviour in 2003. Post-transition South African governments introduced certain measures to provide stability in the labour market and address the vulnerability of (largely) black workers. In addition, certain measures were introduced in order to achieve necessary redistributive justice goals in service sectors where large numbers of black workers are located. In the focus groups in question, the focus was on the registration of domestic workers and the creation of an unemployment insurance fund and minimum wage regulatory regime for domestic workers, who previously enjoyed no such social protections. This example is cited here since the introduction of a minimum wage together with regulations that required the registration of domestic workers for Unemployment Insurance, shares many features with the overall governance system. For one it requires compliance with a set of regulations which involve dealing with an administrative process and a government bureaucracy (by registering a domestic worker with the Department of Labour and regularising a contract of employment). It further requires that employers contribute a portion of funds together with a deduction from an employee's salary towards an Unemployment Insurance Fund. The most significant feature of these regulations is that it contributes to the construction of elements of a redistributive regime to achieve social equity for otherwise marginalised (mainly black) workers, and therefore forms a part of the governments broader redistribution and economic justice agenda. Compliance to this kind of obligation features deliberative calculations entered into by citizens as demonstrated in the focus group narrative reproduced below. That is, tendencies towards compliance with this regulatory framework are hinged on the following factors (especially in the case of white citizens):

- That compliance must be personally or commonly beneficial to all in that social group (or for society generally for the black and upper income white group).
- That compliance must be easy and convenient. This implies that the regulatory authority acts in ways that are perceived to be certain, fair and equal, that its behaviour is not arbitrary and that its administration is perceived to be efficient, reliable, consistent and predictable.
- Where the risk of being caught for non-compliance is perceived as an actual and real threat, and when deterrence in the form of the threat of punishment is high. Implicit here would be the perception that the public authority in question has the capacity to detect non-compliance, and is sufficiently able to apprehend non-compliers, prosecute them and punish them for wrong doing.
- When the overall burden of compliance (financial or otherwise) is low.

### 4.3 Victims and villains

It emerged that for middle income white South Africans compliance to this obligation was seen as overly onerous as the procedural requirements proved too burdensome for them. In addition the facilitation and administration of the process of registering domestic workers was seen to be far too clumsily, ineffectively and inefficiently handled by the authority responsible, in this case the Department of Labour in the executive arm of Government. It also emerges from the focus group narrative that underlying these complaints, was a deeper structural dissatisfaction with the introduction of these regulations. Not only were they perceived to be burdensome, they seemed to be of benefit to other people and people in another social group, not themselves personally, nor their immediate or proximate social group. White middle and lower income groups simply ignored the issues of redistribution, equity gains or economic justice, implied in the newly introduced regulatory framework, which was either perceived as unfair on employers or was deemed inappropriate as an instrument to ensure economic security for others, that could be better sought they argued through market mechanisms, and certainly through less state regulation and intervention. Some white South African employers in the respondent group did indeed register their workers in compliance with this regulation, though even in those instances, complaints were evident. Altogether, it points to the fact that the principle of reciprocity towards people of a difference race based on a policy of redress of an historical injustice, and arresting a trend of continuing marginalisation in a particular social group, is a long way from being an accepted norm, amongst white South Africans.

Black South Africans, on the other hand were unanimously in favour of these regulations, across all income groups, despite perceived levels of inefficiency in the bureaucratic system, which black respondents ascribed to the teething problems of newly incepted policy in an arena where reliable data and statistics are hard to come by.

Text box 1 contains excerpts from the focus groups, each clearly identified on the basis on which they were stratified:

### 4.4 Trust in Institutions... but just a little bit

Trust in institutions is the second major component of overall social stability in times of uncertainty. This is related to the fact that if people perceive institutions to be trustworthy, then they will abide by the rules established by those institutions. In South Africa trust and confidence in public institutions have ebbed and flowed. There is a marked decline of trust in the past two years 'beyond what would be expected as an effect of the cycle of electoral politics. This decline in trust affects national and provincial government, local government, political parties, The Presidency and Parliament. Particularly troubling are pointers to reduced public confidence in the judicial system.' (GCIS, 2008: 12) Research conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council bears out these assertions.

**Text box 1: Excerpts from focus group interviews, 2003**

**Some time ago we were told that our domestic workers should be registered for UIF, please tell me more about this?**

**That makes me very angry**

*I think it is a total waste of time. The maid that works for me has worked for me since 1986 and she is about to go on pension. So if she goes on pension she cannot claim any money, so what is the point of paying in?*

**Did you register her?**

*No, I'd rather pay her extra and put the money in to a special fund.*

**Philip tell me about your maid**

*Actually my gardener is from Malawi but he is here legally but I still didn't register him, even though he is legal, because he only comes twice a month only in Summer. I don't owe it to him to register him. I pay him for what he does.*

**And the rest of you how do you feel about the rule?**

*I also thought on the one hand it was a pity, but I thought I'd do it. When I tried to do it was a complete disaster. They gave me the wrong number and I had endless problems but I did register my domestic because I felt she is young and she works for three people myself and three others and she is very good and I thought well, why not. It is not a lot of money and it was one transfer every month, so I didn't really have a problem with it. Although I did find in trying to register on the web was a problem. Then I realised that it was just a huge disaster. They don't number it that properly. They are disorganised and that is all and that becomes another place for corruption.*

**a. [Focus Group: White – Middle Income - Johannesburg]**

**Registration of the domestic workers UIF have you complied with that?**

*It is a shambles. I went to register and every month I deposited the money in the account I never received a receipt or anything. It is like throwing money into a pit.*

**If we get back to the rules issue, the UIF for your domestics?**

*That is ridiculous it is not going to work.*

*And a minimum salary. I think more unemployment was caused by that than anything else.*

*She would rather want to work for R300 than getting nothing.*

*I have a domestic that have been working for us for years and I wanted to have a contract with her and she said no she doesn't want it. We decided to pay the unemployment for her she doesn't pay her portion and she is very happy with the arrangement.*

**b. [Focus Group: White – High Income: – Johannesburg, Northern Suburbs]**

**Did you know that they have to register? Did you do it or not?**

*No I haven't yet. We didn't have a problem with our arrangement. If I registered her I would have had to pay her a minimum wage. So she just goes on working as it always was. Suits me fine, suits her fine. I said to mine I couldn't afford her anymore because of the minimum wage. I told her government wanted the minimum wage, guess what, she didn't want it. She said she rather work for what I pay her than be out of a job.*

*I fired mine, so where is she going to work now?*

**c. [Focus Group : White – Middle Income:– Polokwane, Limpopo Province]**

**What is the feeling towards the registration of domestic workers?**

*It is positive. It is about time that they get a recognition they deserve.*

**Do we all agree?**

*Yes.*

**We had some people who were saying what then when it is a temp who comes twice a week?**

*The law has a criterion. The law also says that if the person is working at my place say Monday, Wednesday and Friday I will have to club together with her other employer for her UIF.*

**d. [Focus Group : Black –Low Income – Johannesburg, Soweto]**

**What about the registration of domestic UIF?**

*It is the kind of rule I would obey.*

**How do you feel about that rule?**

*It is good. It still needs to be looked at and explored and expanded even more.*

**e. [Focus Group: Black – Middle Income – Khatlehong]**

**What about registration of your domestic worker?**

*These are the people I was talking about. It just shows that government intervention can make a difference in some individuals' lives. See how much difference the contribution is making in their lives. It helps that Government creates a minimum wage for domestic workers as well. It must be frustrating for the government not to know how many labourers there are in a particular industry. Now when they plan they can cater for everybody as well*

**f. [Focus Group: Black – High Income – Johannesburg]**

**Table 2: Trust in Institutions,\* 1998-2007 (ranked in descending order by levels of trust in 2006) (%)**

Trust in	1998	1999	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Churches	82	81	74	81	84	81	81	82	82
The SABC	–	–	–	–	75	73	71	75	–
The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	–	54	49	63	63	69	65	68	–
National Government	47	60	43	52	57	69	64	59	52
Big business	56	55	39	43	57	55	53	56	–
Parliament	–	–	–	–	57	65	59	55	46
Your provincial government	41	50	34	–	52	63	59	54	–
Courts	42	45	37	45	50	58	56	52	49
Defence Force	48	–	45	49	62	56	59	49	–
Your local government	37	48	32	38	45	55	48	44	34
The police	42	47	39	40	42	46	45	39	39
Political parties	30	39	29	27	–	–	42	37	27
Average (all items)	47	53	42	49	53	63	59	56	47
Sample size	2182	2672	2611	2530	4980	5580	5733	5843	3163

Sources: HSRC EPOP SURVEY 1996-2001; HSRC SASAS 2003-2007

Note: Data for 2002 is not available in the sources

\*Percentage saying that they 'strongly trust' or 'trust' in each of the following institutions in South Africa at present.

**Table 3: Changes in institutional trust between 1998 and 2007 (percentage point differences)**

Institution	Percentage point change		
	2004–2006	2004–2007	1998–2007
Your local government	-11	-20	-3
National Government	-11	-18	+11
Parliament	-10	-19	n.a.
Political parties	-6**	-16**	-4
Courts	-6	-9	+10
Your provincial government	-9	n.a.	+14*
Defence Force	-8	n.a.	0*
The police	-7	-6	-3
The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	-1	n.a.	+14
The SABC	-1	n.a.	n.a.
Churches	+1	+1	0
Big business	+2	n.a.	0*
Average (all items)	-5	-13	+4

Sources: HSRC EPOP Survey 1998; HSRC SASAS 2006, 2007

Note: n.a. = not applicable, due to lack of available data

- \*Reflects changes between 1998 and 2006
- \*\*Reflects change since 2005

## 5. The trust nexus: The interpersonal, the political, the institutional

What then are we to make of low levels of trust in politicians as opposed to moderate levels of trust (though in decline) in public institutions and relatively high levels of inter-personal trust within communities of the same race, together with lower levels of trust in people of a different one ?

Declining levels of public trust in institutions it goes without saying, is dangerous for both democracy and development, and may in fact indict societal leaders both, political and in the public service for their leadership, or lack thereof, of institutions. It also suggests that institutions are perceived not to deliver on the mandate that they have, or at least suggests a mismatch between the mandates of institutions and the mismatched and/or (un)realistic expectations of citizens. One way or the other, it is a matter of concern. In the context of declining levels of trust in public institutions, and the lowest ever recorded levels of politicians, interpersonal trust, social capital and cohesion become important glues for society and social stability. Other than promoting levels of inter-dependence and social solidarity, levels of trust among people supplements the perceived deficits of public institutions, representative and executive. But if interpersonal trust levels (especially across social cleavages) are lower and levels of trust in institutions are declining, our assumptions regarding state penetration and institutions rootedness in society may be overestimated. The same would be true with respect to constructing a more equal and equitable cosmopolitan, non racial society. The data and focus group attitudes suggest eroding levels of trust and confidence in institutions and amongst people, and therefore, potentially decreasing levels of legitimacy and credibility for institutions and the policies they promote, imperilling in the long run the project of mutuality and a diverse but united society.

More generalised evidence from the focus group research reported earlier is instructive in this regard.

The 'they' is a reference to the post apartheid public service, and the discourse belies the sense of alienation felt from the post apartheid government and the post apartheid public service in general. This sense of alienation is most tellingly spelt out in the following phrase, which incidentally also captures the suspicion and distrust white South Africans have of their black counter parts and clearly demonstrates the sense of grievance at being unequally treated by government, who they argue, allow a lawless and free-riding black population to get away with not playing by the rules:

*'Its a huge disaster. They are just disorganised. That is all.'*

**a. [Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Johannesburg]**

*'We are not in a position where you can just move onto a piece of ground and move into a house that you get given by the government and you just stay without paying. There again a black person can refuse to pay and he can get away with it*

**What will happen if black people decide not to pay?**

*They will get away with it.*

**a. [Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Johannesburg]**

**How do you feel about people that don't pay for their services?**

*Claim their houses and sell it.*

*Absolutely*

*Why must others benefit even though they're not paying and you just have to pay more? That is discrimination.*

*They are very quick to cut your water if you are 3 days late.*

*And what about the other people? Their lights and water does not get cut. They steal. If you drive in the black areas, and there is a big thing going on in the Mbombela City Council there are thousands of people who are not paying their bills, you will see how many of the supposedly poor have a DStv dish and each one in the house has a cell phone but they don't want to pay R30 or R50 for water or electricity. But he has enough money for a DStv, Mnet and a cellphone.*

**g. [Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Mpumalanga]**

These phrases become an indicator of two things, firstly the low levels of trust that this group have, that other people will abide by the same rules that they have to. The other people in this case, refer not only to other people in general, but explicitly to blacks, Africans in particular. This has a bearing only on how included or excluded one feels from government, and from other races or communities in society, not on whether white South Africans feel more or less inclined to comply to the rules established by them. But this does point to a more serious concern. That is that middle income white South Africans perceive themselves to be treated differently and unequally by Government. Most seriously yet, is that the perception and concern raised is that the enforcement of the law or of rules in a society are arbitrarily and unequally applied, with white South Africans bearing the brunt of the unequal application of the rules. This is further exacerbated by perceptions that the redistributive effects arising from the question of cross subsidisation for services, particularly from wealthy previous white areas to poorer neighbouring black townships, leads to an acute sense of unfairness:

*'Someone has to pay for it, and we are paying for it. People who do pay their rates and taxes are the ones who have to pay for those who are not paying, that's why the rates and taxes are going up. Sandton pays for all Alexandra's debts including their electricity and water'*

**a. [Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Johannesburg]**

Much of what has been reported here with regard to behavioural propensities that are compliance specific has valuable lessons for other areas of public life in which the co-operation of citizens with each other and the consent of citizens to being regulated is required, where trust between citizens and trust in institutions can be fostered. After all, why an institution's rules and regulations are obeyed or disobeyed is an extremely important question for regulatory agencies. Understanding this is critical to implementing responsive regulation.

### 5.1 Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

In the absence of trust in institutions, increased interpersonal trust however, may be one part of an approach to increasing overall trust in society by promoting associational power to hold leaders to account. The density of interpersonal trust can serve to promote the connectivity between people to forge a consensus about the role they envisage where in the sharing of similar expectations they can come together to act as democratic check on leaders and institutions which are perceived to be unresponsive. Interpersonal trust also matters in times of crisis, and matters more, when there is a perceived crisis of leadership or at least ambiguity in relation to leadership. Interpersonal trust matters for leadership, because in part, the quality of leadership that a society enjoys is dependent on the quality of followers available to that leadership. So, far from being peripheral to democratic leadership and institutional saliency to society, levels of interpersonal trust may be part of a society's arsenal in saving its institutions. In times of uncertainty and instability when institutions seem to be failing, or at least when trust in them is in decline, reliance on each other is critical. Interpersonal trust is also crucial to make up for perceived leadership deficits and if not for that, then at least to promote a strong sense of associational life, social resources and interdependent intellectual and social capital that together, is willing and able to engage with its purported leadership, and serve to act as a democratic check on leaders when they are unresponsive, or who refuse to subject themselves to the democratic choices of a society that may not want them in leadership anymore. Interpersonal trust is thus necessary to promote, inculcate, nurture, and if necessary, change leadership. Far from being peripheral to leadership, interpersonal social trust is a critical contributor to the making (or unmaking) of it. In the case of constructing trust across different races and identities, a clear and unequivocal commitment from white South Africans regarding the acceptance of positive discrimination is required. Equally a more acute understanding of the process of colonial dispossession and apartheid oppression and marginalisation and the effect this has on society as a whole is required. Most importantly though, a clear commitment may be required from white South Africans (and wealthier black South Africans) about what it is they are prepared to do in order to ensure that the society is transformed to being more equal, equitable and socially just.

Given that it is discernable from the focus group narrative and data presented, that black South Africans are prepared to tackle the question of social transformation through structural designs and policy dispensations in the governance system, a cautionary word may be in order, and that is to guard against a reliance on policy and structural interventions alone for redress and transformation. This may de-emphasise the fact that despite higher levels of interpersonal trust amongst blacks, its erosion over time may prove detrimental not just to interpersonal trust, but to the store of social capital whose density serves society well in periods of crisis. In any event, declining levels of trust in institutions clearly suggests why enhancing interpersonal trust within groups and between groups, matters so much.

At the same time, representative institutions and elected politicians need to hold up their end of a bargain with society, to be seen to be working in the public interest, rather than solely for incremental advantage.

## 6. Conceptual conundrums: A few preliminary conclusions

Current levels of institutional trust are a matter of concern, as they relate to government and the State. The State is an entity in perpetuity, which outlasts the longevity of politicians, and given the inextricable link between politics and governance, governance and institutions may require some insulation from the broader political currents that may render institutions susceptible to the impact of changing political winds. One way out of this dilemma may be to insulate governance and administration processes from politics. In a vigorous democracy, and a society in the making, this is neither possible nor desirable. To do so, would be to de-politicise what is essentially 'political' and would detract from the notion that politics is in the end, about a combination of consensus seeking, co-operation, competition, contestation and conflict, and about the mediation of policy choices within these forms of politics. Governance on the other hand, is about the establishment of the regulatory framework and the rational logic of systematising providing for and institutionalising the organising principles by which consensus seeking, co-operation, competition, contestation and conflict operate. Governance in addition is also about the executive mandate for the administration, execution and instrumentalisation of policy in order to deliver development. To allow for consensus seeking, co-operation, competition, contestation and conflict and to systematise, institutionalise and organise them, a society requires a State that has the regulatory capacity to manage and enforce the laws and contracts that protect property rights and citizen socio-economic rights through the presence of a well functioning and effective judiciary whose functions and decisions are respected and enforced. In the absence of this function, the collusion of particularist special interests that conduct politics on the basis of self-interest through consensus and co-operation amongst only themselves takes root. For instance cartels [and monopolies] involved in bread and medicine price fixing at the cost of the poor, as has been the case in South Africa. The absence of state regulatory and oversight capacity allows for these predatory interests to take root. Coercion and enforcement is also required in instances when citizens do not voluntarily give their consent to be governed. The legitimate use of state power to extract

citizen compliance and to enforce rules and laws in society is necessary when the conduct of politics occurs through competition and contestation which may have the potential to set off conflict and thus cause instability in society. It is the responsibility, primarily of leaders, to strike the delicate balance between obtaining the consent of citizens to be governed and deploying the coercive power of the state. For leadership, both legitimacy and credibility is required. In the absence of legitimacy, voluntary consent may be hard to come by, and in the long run, the use of coercive mechanisms in order to govern may come at too high a cost for society in terms of resources as an opportunity cost taking away development spend, and in terms of the societal goodwill that democracies strive for.

Society and the State are at stake when leadership is absent in troubled times. The logic is that if leaders behave in ways which are suggestive of rational actors pursuing their own advantage, then social trust and the trust between citizens will erode very soon after the erosion of trust in the political and governmental leadership. Societal actors start to think in ways suggestive of the well known prisoner's dilemma – that if you cannot trust your fellow prisoner not to betray you, then betray them first. This dilemma gets to the centrality of the question of trust in modern society.

Leaders are required to understand and demonstrate that freedom rooted in historical liberties (the freedoms enshrined in the Bill of Rights, in South Africa's Constitution and protected by Law) is what generates the excitement of social protection, mobility and opportunity - in short progress. At the same time, this is dependent on the notion of 'public service'. The language of these obligations, from the supply side (liberties as rights in law supplied and guaranteed by the State) and the supply and demand side (public service as supplied and expected by a citizenry in the sense of being in service to the public through associational life) appears to be expressed in a language that is outdated – but it is in the end, what makes for viable societies. It implies Leadership's rediscovery of society and community, 'community' located in society – blurring therefore the artificial distinction between political society, civil society and economic society. It also implies that the pursuit of politics is about public service rather than simply, about the pursuit of power and interest, and at the very least requires the impression, that the pursuit of power and interest is a legitimate political expectation, but that its pursuit does not come at the cost of service to the public.

Given that the social and political conditions that pertain in South Africa are characterised by internal cleavages and stratifications along the divides of race, economic and employment status [or a form of class], ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability (health status regarding HIV status has now entered this discourse) leaders need to understand the increasing diversity of society on the basis of a multi-ethnic, multiracial, multi-class society characterised by poverty, inequality and informality. It requires that leaders are sensitive to the re-imagining of a new South African, post the transition social contract.

The past few years were characterised by cutting back the supply of 'government'. In a time when society is faced with fractured families and a weakening civil society, people inevitably turn increasingly to government, and so even a government that may wish to do less will in fact

be faced with an increased demand to do more. Leadership in government can't be passive when there is manifestly so much to do. There is a way out of these dilemmas. Government leadership needs to show that it understands the notion of community, and the public service as a civil service, not a political service racked in the factional battles of power politics. Government also has to demonstrate that it will act and behave in ways that are predictable, certain, consistent and responsive. With any of these elements missing, confidence in government and in the leadership of society declines, trust erodes. Concomitantly the resort to short-term measures driven by rational actor behaviour that seeks to maximise its own utility and advantage at any cost, may culturalise and institutionalise a social and political culture that is predatory and capricious.

To give effect to both politics and governance, a participatory democracy and participatory governance particularly, leadership that is principled and secure, unthreatened by the political agency of citizens and which is secure in its influence over political structure, is required at two levels. It is required at the apex of the public service (inside of government and in societal institutions of civil society), which require a combination of professionalism with a political commitment to a set of political values and principles. And second, it is required 'that political leaders are invested at one and the same time with the exercise of ruling and the common tasks of society' (Therborn, 1978: 48).

## 7. Leadership in the service of public

In this regard, the theorist of bureaucracy, Max Weber identified three types of leadership, which correspond to different forms of authority. Charismatic leaders lead by virtue of the extraordinary powers attributed to them by their followers. Traditional leaders lead by custom and practice – because a certain family or class has always led. Legal leadership is based on expertise and implemented according to formal rules, typically found in public administration and modern business and enterprise (Abercrombie et al, 1988). Modern management represents the exercise of leadership on the basis of technical or professional competence. Recent thinking however, questions the assumption that leadership roles must be legitimated by subordinates, and emphasise power rather than leadership, focusing on the structural conditions that allow some to exercise power over others. In modern societies the problem of legitimacy relates to political representation and consent. The issue of political legitimacy emerges with the disappearance of direct political relationships in small scale societies; the modern problem thus centres on which individuals are legitimately entitled to act as representatives of political power (Therborn, 2008). Legitimacy is consequently bound up with the nature of the political relationship. In classical civilisation there was no essential difference between 'lawfulness' and 'legitimacy'. Legitimate power was simply lawful power. In modern discussions of political legitimacy, law and morality have been partially separated. The positivist definition of the law treats law as a command supported by appropriate sanctions, and the moral content of the law becomes secondary. Governments can have legal authority without being morally just governments. As has been demonstrated earlier, perceptions of this kind of artificial separation between law and morality and the moral application and subjectivity to the law drives declining levels of trust in leaders and in public Institutions.

Legal rational authority is the characteristic of authority in modernity. Consequently, within bureaucracies, directives are held to be legitimate and authoritative if they have been issued from the correct office, under the appropriate regulations and according to appropriate procedures. The authority of officials depends not on tradition or charisma, but on a consensus as to the validity of rules of procedure which are perceived as rational, fair and impartial. This is important in the administration of society and more so for the delivery of development. But is it conducive to a democratic ethic, devoid as it would be of moral content?

Efficient and effective bureaucracies are important in the modern state to provide organisational design and administrative form and to give effect to both development and democracy.

Development requires a bureaucracy comprised of the various elements ranging from high degrees of specialisation and a clearly defined division of labour, with distributed tasks, responsibilities and official duties, defined areas of responsibility, decision making, supervision and reporting, a formal body of rules in order to direct the operation of the institution/organisation, and recruitment of personnel on the basis of technical knowledge and skill. These are some of the elements Goran Therborn refers to as the 'formal rationality of managerial technology' (Therborn, 2008: 54). But this 'rationality' has through modernity come to be bifurcated to mean something a little more than what it may originally (bureaucracy as the epitome and maximisation of technical efficiency) have meant. A second important emergent sense in which this rationality has implications for governance is in the sense that in a democracy the bureaucracy needs to be a system of moral authority, social control and authority that is accepted by members of the society because it is accepted as a form of rule and administration that is not only effective, fair, rational and impartial - but also socially just. The major advantage of bureaucracy is that it is predictable; however, its other attributes are less secure. Bureaucratic organisations can prove to be inefficient in unanticipated ways. It can be inflexible because of its structure and tight organisation and adherence to the rational rules and modes of decision making is often derived from adherence as ritual. It can be unresponsive to changing conditions, circumstances and contexts – social dynamism and fluidity can render it redundant.

Rules, modes and orders of behaviour are adhered to, even if they may prove to be misguided and the technical specialisation required for efficiency and effectiveness can foster an outlook on society that is narrow and inflexible in shifting contexts. In an influential study conducted as far back as 1964, Crozier demonstrated that bureaucracies embody decreasing levels of efficiency and effectiveness in which groups of people maximise their own freedom by displaying behaviour that pays only lip service to rules and orders guiding the functioning of organisations, ignoring the spirit behind them, and bending them when possible (Crozier, 1964). They are in positions of power that allow them to distort and withhold critical information and when higher authority realises this, it responds to the situation by devising and imposing even more rules to regulate functional aspects of the organisation which in turn rigidifies the organisation but fails to curb errant behaviour. Often governments through their bureaucracies are required to respond to unpredictable social,

economic and political phenomena for which standardised rules may prove inadequate and inappropriate. Thus leadership in a society that aims to be democratic and developmental, inclusive and equitable, requires different types and forms of leadership, bifurcated in two streams, the one as management, the other as leadership, each delivering different outcomes as demonstrated in Table 4. Underpinning this however, is the fact that political leadership must conduct a politics of ideas since 'policy choices are ultimately driven by leaders not simply as a gate keepers, but as active crafters of policy' (Shubane, 2005).

**Table 4: The outcomes of management and leadership**

Management	Leadership
Planning detailed planning and allocating resources	Establishing direction Developing a vision and strategies
Organising structure, staffing, policies and procedures	Aligning people Communicating the vision, creating teams and coalitions
Controlling and problem solving Monitoring and evaluating results, identifying deviations from the plan, organising to solve problems	Motivating and inspiring Energising people to overcome barriers
Supervision and oversight Maintaining internal supervision and oversight for organisational coherence and reporting to leadership	Oversight and accountability Maintains oversight over the organisation as a whole, and is accountable to democratic institutions and society as a whole
Produces Predictability and order	Produces Transformation and change
Social and political impact Credibility and confidence	Social and political impact Legitimacy and trust

What kind of leadership both in government and in society is required, given the context of an objective condition of society (poverty, inequality, declining institutional integrity and trust in leaders), and the subjective affective attitudes of its citizens (rational actors maximising what is in their subjective interests, racism, division and cleavage)?

## 7.1 Enter the dragon: The return of the Mandarin

A committed political and bureaucratic leadership that combines the attributes of a leader and a manager is required, so that a democratic polity can conduct its politics on the basis of consensus seeking, cooperation, competition, contestation or conflict, safe in the knowledge that a rational logic of organising principles will systematise and institutionalise them, whilst at the same time ensuring that executive and administrative efficiency for the delivery of developmental goods will not be held to ransom by an unprofessional bureaucracy, nor that rights, privileges and obligations that accrue to citizenship will be abrogated.

In a balanced constitutional, parliamentary and executive system such as South Africa's, the mandarin tends to moderate tendencies toward demagoguery and special interests, and strives to defend the rights of all in society at times of crisis, rather than the interests of a few special interest communities.

Throughout post-enlightenment modern history, mandarins both in government and outside of it, played the role of being a check on the elective monarchy of democratic executives (excessive executive dominance or the recent trend towards presidentialism as monarchy), and the majority 'tyranny' of elected legislatures (unchecked majoritarianism), both of whom are wont to populist rhetoric and worse, populist interventions at times of social uncertainty and crisis (Lind, 2005).

Why is the mandarin important – and what role does the mandarin play in society? More importantly, what is the mandarin and, what is its source of legitimacy and social authority and how do we cultivate it? The mandarin sought its legitimacy through a secular humanist tradition, one that allowed it to apprehend a principled dedication to civic mindedness that sought the common ground of the public interest, rather than serve the ideological and political incumbency of the day. This is not to suggest that mandarinism is the pursuit of an apolitical, de-ideologised service orientation. It is simply to argue that this orientation seeks to serve the power of the public interest beyond the narrow positivism of ideology, which seeks to expose or reinforce power relations in an ideological system, or in magnifying policy and political differences between different political formations. Whilst ideology is in fact desirable, necessary and vital in the pursuit of power and its instrumentalisation through policy, at crucial moments in the construction of a social common interest, ideology may be crucial but less critical than assumed.

Mandarinism is anathema to professionalism, in which education is conceived of as vocational and specialised, where the professional's claim to public authority rests on mastery of technical and scientific knowledge, driving towards an ever increasing technocraticism. The mandarin on the other hand is a generalist, viewed by the 'professional' as an incompetent dilettante, an amateur (Lind, 2005). It is this amateur, who from a generalist orientation is best able to be adaptable and to provide leadership in times of social crisis, since times of social crisis reveal an erosion of the conceptual logic of the edifice of a system that establishes and underpins a society. At present, a global financial crisis, market instability and uncertainty and the attendant consequences of rising food, fuel and finance prices together with the realignment of political power and political forces, introduces not only social instability and uncertainty – but a political and bureaucratic leadership that is unable to provide the certainty and stability required through the turmoil, to satisfy an increasingly uncertain citizenry. In this context, the professional with his/her specialised technical mastery of the system, embedded in political projects of past incumbents as they are, are of no use – immersed in the system and implicated in its establishment, the professional knows no more or no better than the very system that is at risk of collapse. Historically, all societies that flourished at one time or another, or which passed through moments of crisis with relative stability, were underpinned by a public service in and out of government, were managed by professionals and led by Mandarins.

Unlike the populists of the left and the right that emerged in the 18th century as an enlightenment project that sought to structure society on the basis of a pseudo-scientific ideology, mandarins rose in the 19th century in reaction to this (Lind, 2005). Culture and tradition, central as it is to secular mandarins, eschews and avoids the systemic orientation of a positivist ideology which tends to imprint a 'system' on society and when that system, as is currently the case, comes into crisis, a new system has to be reinvented. In the interregnum between the invention and or imposition of 'systems', the notion of the State, the people and society 'in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with the stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals' (Arnold, 1869, republished 1993:83), declines. Democratic mandarinism is rejected by the populist right and the populist left. The populist right is as anti-elitist as the populist left, they both reject not only the idea of culture and tradition but reject the very idea that norms inform culture and tradition. After all the question of whose culture and tradition in a cleaved and fractured society is ever present. The rejection by populists is thus not so much a rejection of either culture or tradition, but more a rejection of norms and principles. Norms anchor societies, and a rejection of norms in favour of 'systems' exacerbates times of crisis rather than assuages through them.

Times of uncertainty therefore require not only 'professionals' but 'mandarins' too, to facilitate the identification of a South African commons, based on redefined and appropriately contextualised norms, the establishment of traditions, the bridging of divides and reconciling the contradictions and complexities in which the clamour is for the protection of the rights of minorities and the privileged, in the context of effecting redress and promoting the rights of the majority and social justice for the disadvantaged.

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## Evidence based references

### Table 2 and 3

- Roberts, B, 2008. Between trust and skepticism. Public confidence in institutions, *HSRC Review*, Volume 6 - No. 1 - March 2008, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria

### Focus Group Respondents

- Focus Groups prepared for Ebrahim Fakir at the Centre for Policy Studies for a compliance study in association with and supported by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Focus Groups prepared by Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd.

## List of focus groups

- Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Johannesburg, 14 July 2003; 18:00
- Focus Group: White – High Income: – Johannesburg, Northern Suburbs, 15 July 2003; 18:00
- Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Polokwane, Limpopo Province, 12 July 2003; 15:00
- Focus Group: Black – Low Income – Johannesburg, Soweto, 10 July 2003; 18h00
- Focus Group: Black – Middle Income – Khatlehong, 9 July 2003; 18h00
- Focus Group: Black – High Income – Johannesburg, 16 July 2003; 18:00
- Focus Group: White – Middle Income – Mpumalanga 11 July 2003; 15:00





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