



# Democracy in the Making

Reflections on a Year of Contestation  
and Civic Possibility



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# 1 What does it mean to deepen democracy?

**Minhaj Jeenah**  
Executive Director

Over the past year, our work unfolded under the shadow of genocide. The Israeli occupation escalated its barbaric assault against the Palestinian civilian population—starving children; executing aid seekers, murdering journalists, and reducing hospitals, schools, UN installations, religious sites, and homes to rubble. What is under attack in Palestine is not only the people’s right to life, but their right to self-determination. Yet, the genocide against Palestinians carries even broader implications. As Colombian president Gustavo Petro put it, “Gaza is an experiment by the mega-rich trying to show all the peoples of the world how to respond to a rebellion of humanity; they plan to bomb us all.” Petro’s warning is sobering: the genocide is not only an assault on Palestinians, it is also a stark reminder to us all of the fragility of democracy, and of the violence that powerful political and economic elites are willing to unleash to expand their dominance.

In the USA, the world’s self-appointed custodian of democracy, the ruling class’s desperate campaign to cling to



*“Gaza is an experiment by the mega-rich trying to show all the peoples of the world how to respond to a rebellion of humanity; they plan to bomb us all.” Gustavo Petro*

global military and economic dominance has laid bare the hollowness of Western claims to virtue. While funding and arming a genocide, the US has gutted public services and expanded repression at home - deploying masked militarised agents to abduct student activists, tearing migrant children from their families, and stripping designated people of their right to vote. Globally, we saw the rise of authoritarianism, built on the same pillars: the repression of marginalised communities, the criminalisation of dissent, and the suppression of solidarity through state violence.

For My Vote Counts, this global reality is not distant. It reminds us that democracy is not secure and cannot be taken for granted, that it can be emptied of meaning even where formal institutions remain intact. It is a warning that democratic rights on paper mean little without organised, mobilised people able to defend them. In this sense, the fate of democracy in South Africa is bound up with the struggles of people everywhere — against authoritarianism, against monied interests, and for dignity.

This is why we've sought to position our work — from convening to litigation — not just as technocratic fixes, but as part of a broader struggle to deepen democracy from below.

### **A new political reality**

Back home, as we marked 30 years of democracy, the failures of our political project remain stark. Three decades of neo-liberal policies, austerity and corruption have left millions excluded from adequate housing, quality education, reliable access to water and healthcare, and dignified work. Patronage has become entrenched in the state, while public goods are being commodified, cities are decaying, and ordinary people are left to face daily violence, neglect and crime.

In the 2024 elections, these realities led to a historical shift, with voters fragmenting electoral power by withdrawing support for the dominant ANC and stripping it of its parliamentary majority. In response, the ANC's national executive committee sought to salvage its authority by inviting other parties into a coalition that it branded a "government of national unity". This was less a call for democratic renewal than a narrow elite pact among political power brokers. As part of this arrangement, the governing coalition pledged to convene an "all-inclusive National Dialogue" to forge a new "social compact".



*Democratic rights on paper  
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able to defend them.*

The elections also brought forward a new political reality where no single party dominates, and the fluidity of political power opens up opportunities for bargaining and contestation. The key question for us is whether this fragmentation of power can be a lever for people-led democracy, or merely reshuffles the terms of elite negotiation.

At his inauguration, President Cyril Ramaphosa revived the call for a new social compact through a National Dialogue process - promising participation from all sectors of society and, in the end, people-led outcomes. But "the people" are far too often replaced by a hollowed-out "civil society". This dilemma was at the centre of our 30 Years of Democracy Gathering last year: can civil society meaningfully serve as a tribune for popular power, or has it become a proxy that speaks in place of voices that are otherwise silenced?

### **A crisis of demobilisation**

The President's call for dialogue must be understood as an admission that the distance between people and those elected to represent them has never been greater. For communities, workers and the impoverished, that distance has been apparent and has only grown since 1994.

At our 30 Years of Democracy Gathering, speakers traced how the concentration of power and neoliberal policies had hollowed out mass participation, and movement organisers reflected on the urgent need to rebuild democratic life from below.

In the early 1990s, through an elite pact, the ANC submitted to the pressures of global capital and the demands of domestic big business, abandoning its redistributive vision. Government's orientation shifted towards appeasing the market—prioritising “investor confidence”, advancing privatisation, enforcing austerity, and embracing economic liberalisation. This meant steering democracy away from a bottom-up approach and handing greater power to those who dominate the economy.

This embrace of neoliberalism did more than deepen inequality and erode democracy; it narrowed our horizons, stripped away our political imagination, and laid the groundwork for the crisis of demobilisation.

Trade unions, which were the backbone of popular struggle, got largely co-opted into the elite pact, blunting their capacity for independent mobilisation and bottom-up bargaining. Many community-based movements were absorbed into structures of the governing party; the United Democratic Front (UDF), a broad anti-apartheid coalition that mobilised millions, was disbanded, and we lost independent political space for mass mobilisation outside the ANC.

Since then, neoliberal policies have suffocated worker and civic movements – squeezing the air out of collective struggle and throwing us deeper into a crisis of demobilisation. Already losing touch with people, civil society itself underwent NGO-isation. Mass-based organisations were pushed aside to make way for professionalised institutions structured to satisfy donor demands for technocratic reports, log frames and theories of change.



*President Cyril Ramaphosa called for a new social compact through a National Dialogue process. We question whether civil society meaningfully serve as a tribune for popular power.*

NGOs increasingly turned to litigation, claiming to speak for the marginalised while remaining detached from grassroots organising. In the absence of mass movements, the voice of civil society came instead from NGOs with funding, access and elite respectability. The NGO-isation of civil society has, further, hollowed out a democracy from below, and left society less capable of confronting state and capital power. MVC, itself an NGO, has had to wrestle with this contradiction. We've chosen to use our institutional capacity not as a substitute for movements, but as a resource alongside them — litigating when needed, but also convening and supporting movements in ways that strengthen their autonomy.

The new political reality opens space for a different kind of bargaining with power – one that could push us closer to a democracy from below. But that will collapse if NGOs continue to sidestep the crisis of demobilisation instead of placing it at the heart of our strategies and tactics.

This report documents and celebrates our tiny contribution to addressing these realities. Concretely, this included a Constitutional Court victory that closed a loophole that allowed for capital to buy more influence over our politics; our role in convening the Civil Society Electoral Reform Panel towards broad democratic reform; and workshops with movements that explore the democratic tools to build people's power. Each of these interventions highlights MVC's method: to combine legal challenges, convening, and campaigning in ways that deepen democracy from below. The 30 Years of Democracy Gathering was a key moment in this work — not just as a commemoration, but as a rare forum where civil society could self-reflect, confront uncomfortable truths about our democratic settlement and imagine alternative futures.

Even through the period of demobilisation, the possibility of a more just, democratic future continues to be imagined and fought for. The sparks of defiance we have seen, from Abahlali baseMjondolo's grassroots organising to Equal Education's learner-led internal democracy, and in the global solidarity that carried South Africa to The Hague, remind us that democracy is never finished, but always contested; and that unless fought for, it is always at risk of being wrested away.

For MVC, another lesson of the past year is that our role is not to supplant movements, but to contribute to creating conditions where people's power can grow: by challenging the influence of capital in politics, by campaigning for broad democratic reforms, and by convening spaces where strategies can be tested and alliances forged.

At this moment, our challenge is to ensure that South Africa's democratic cracks become openings for people's power rather than sites of elite reshuffling.



**Minhaj Jeenah**  
Executive Director  
My Vote Counts

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# 2

# Symposium

*The map below traces Constitution Hill, in central Johannesburg. Formerly the site of the Old Fort - a notorious prison complex - it now houses South Africa's Constitutional Court.*

**Don't  
mourn,  
organise!**

Joel Bregman  
Project Lead  
Money In Politics

**Imagining  
alternatives**

Boikanyo Moloto  
Project Lead  
Political Systems

**Building lasting  
democratic  
capacity**

Keamogetswe  
Seipato  
Project Lead  
Campaigns

**In defence  
of civil  
society**

Elisha Kunene  
Participatory  
Democracy





# Don't mourn, organise!

**Joel Bregman**

Project Lead  
Money In Politics

*The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) showed us just how powerful and effective the difficult work of political organising, mobilisation, and education can be.*

South Africa's democracy is experienced in vastly different ways. While apartheid separated along racial lines, the impact of which is still brutally evident, today's South Africa is further stratified by wealth, class, and connections. At the one end of the spectrum are people who have access to the best schools, private healthcare, safe areas to live, and access to political power and influence. At the other end of the spectrum are people who must struggle daily for access to the most basic of human rights, such as clean water, sanitation, food, and safety.

As of 2025, we are the most unequal country in the world measured by the Gini coefficient, a measure of economic inequality and wealth distribution. Our Constitution, often lauded for its progressive, people- and rights-centric focus, remains elusive and an illusion for millions. If we have free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and courts that are independent, but huge portions of our people go to bed hungry, or live in constant fear of violence, what bearing does this have

on the state of our democracy? Can we even call ourselves a true democracy when so many of its promises remain unrealised?

Despite the often fragile and contradictory nature of the South African existence, now is not the time for despair or disengagement. History is full of examples, in our own country, regionally, and globally, of people taking back their power and advocating for their rights through an informed and active citizenry. Yes, we are living in a context of extreme levels of wealth and power that are highly concentrated and can exert enormous, often corrupt influence against the public good. But we don't need to look too far into our own country's history to find inspiration for what can be done.

Twenty years ago, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) showed us just how powerful and effective the difficult work of political organising, mobilisation, and education can be. The TAC's sustained strategies turned the tide on HIV/AIDS and forced government to act.

The TAC did not invent this approach; it built on previous traditions of social organising and community action. Yes, context shifts and dynamics change, but we have a blueprint that we know can work.

If we are to deepen democracy in South Africa, we need to protect the progress that has been made as we continue to struggle for a more equal society, one in which rights are truly cherished, and not just used as political slogans. We need to adapt, to make use of technology, be innovative in our strategizing and campaigning. Change is often slow, realised progressively as we like to say.



*We need to protect the progress that has been made as we continue to struggle for a more equal society.*

But just because it is difficult to see progress, we cannot sit back and let the forces of money and power dictate our future.

We must organise, mobilise, and educate ourselves because we are most powerful as a collective.



**Joel Bregman**

Project Lead  
Money In Politics

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# Imagining alternatives

**Boikanyo Moloto**

Project Lead  
Political Systems

*South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice signalled a new dawn on the global stage.*

There is a lot we can draw from an analysis of the current state of democracies globally, and their contradictions. Much of it shows us how resilient and fragile democracy is. We cannot deny the USA's demonstrated disdain for democracy, from funding and supporting the Palestinian genocide, to the intentional democratic backsliding taking place in the country, as well as using tariffs to assert its dominance over countries that oppose their stance. On the positive side, South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice signalled a new dawn on the global stage - one in which developing democracies can hold established ones accountable, that their democratic legitimacy is not absolute.

South Africa's violent history remains vivid in public memory, with a 33,1% youth population, most of us are the first in our families to grow up in post-apartheid South Africa. The individual and collective experiences of that time echo in private and public spaces. They continue to impact lived realities today.

While the project of democracy in South Africa has been far from 'perfect', the current global reality presents a sobering realisation – that democracy can be performed to benefit the elite at the expense of the majority, that rights can be gradually stripped away in ways that eventually render citizens immobilised. As such, it would be unwise to endeavour to do the work of strengthening democracy in South Africa, without looking at it from a global perspective.

Thirty years of democracy, wins and losses, gave us an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned and imagine the future. The corruption, unemployment, growing inequality and minimal accountability from the political elite is central to the conversation. Over the years numerous commissions have been formed to investigate various forms of unethical and/or fraudulent conduct by public representatives. What is important to note is that most of these bodies would recommend electoral reform as a vehicle towards deeper accountability.

In June 2020, the Concourt declared the Electoral Act 73 of 1998, unconstitutional. Thus, opening the door to changes in the electoral system. Subsequently, the Electoral Amendment Act 1 of 2023 contained a review clause that has led us into the current electoral reform process.

Taking into account the above context; the period of demobilisation as well as the new political reality, MVC sought to contribute to the process in a collaborative manner. In the past year, the political systems programme's primary focus has been on broad democratic reform, by convening the Civil Society Electoral Reform Panel. With a shared vision of tomorrow's democracy, eight organisations formed part of the panel - namely; Equal Education (EE), Afesis, Abahlali baseMjondolo, MVC, Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC), Defend our Democracy, Institute of Election Management Services in Africa (IEMSA), and Zabalaza Pathways Institute.

*The Civil Society Electoral Reform Panel finds alternative ways of collective action and contribution, an attempt at wrestling with new ways of being in an evolving, exclusionary political landscape.*

The work of the panel included engaging and participating in the State's process, developing a civil society position on electoral reform and broader democracy, and ensuring that the process remains in the public consciousness.

The contradictions we find ourselves in are not lost on us as civil society, and this project is a testament to an effort to finding alternative ways of collective action and contribution, an attempt at wrestling with new ways of being in an evolving, exclusionary political landscape. Nonetheless, we cannot allow ourselves to be paralysed by the challenges we face, it is our duty to honour the lives lost to get us here by continuing to fight for the democracy we seek.

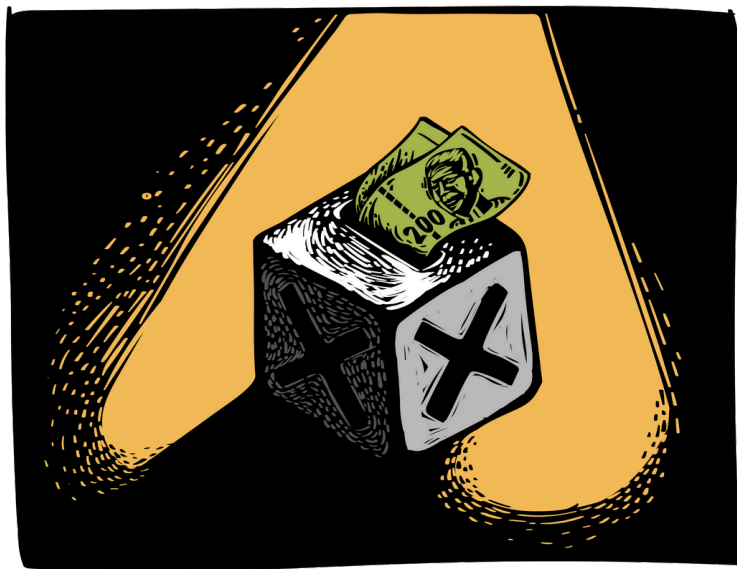


**Boikanyo Moloto**

Project Lead,  
Political Systems

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*Illustration by Jess Jardim-Wedepohl*

# Building lasting democratic capacity

Keamogetswe Seipato

Project Lead  
Campaigns

Political fragmentation and its consequences aren't new, but last year it felt particularly acute. The journey toward the general election felt like riding a conveyor belt on sand - everything shifting beneath our feet. This was meant to be a defining election because South African democracy was turning 30, and for most post-colonial or post-independence states, that's often a so-called watershed moment. This romantic and politically heavy moment was unfolding not only as global elites reconfigured themselves through violence, but alongside major elections in other big democracies worldwide.

All this excitement in the air brought new and interesting developments in South Africa's political landscape. At My Vote Counts, we knew this and felt it deeply. For Democracy from Below, it became critical to think: how do we deepen democracy at a time when it feels so far removed from people?

We focused on taking the tools of democracy to people and creating space for people to grapple together



*The 30 Years of Democracy Gathering ... provided the space for movements and organisations to ... reflect honestly on what we'd learned about democracy over three decades.*

and bring out their ideas and demands. This meant exploring concepts like the strategic vote with AbM, not as abstract theory, but as practical organising tools. We examined how movements could use the demands of coalition agreements as power-building instruments rather than simply waiting to see what deals elites would strike.

As part of bringing out the ideas and demands of people we decided to embark on a sectoral collaboration that saw us collaborating with Equal Education, the Basic Income Grant coalition, NU, AIDC and others to develop the People's Analysis on Manifestos (PAM).

PAM was about ensuring that the demands of people are not lost in the sea and waves of promises made by political parties that often do not fulfil.

It was about comparing what is promised with what movements and people's formations have demanded for decades now, it was about creating a tool that people can use to compare and hold political parties accountable once they take power.

The process identified six key demands that movements have been fighting for: Jobs for All through government as employer of last resort, Universal Basic Income Grant, Equal Quality Education, ending gender-based violence and femicide, Land and Housing for All, and ending loadshedding through public renewable energy.

These weren't new demands emerging from the election cycle - they represent the consistent organizing priorities that communities have been advancing for years, now crystallized as benchmarks against which party promises, and eventual governance could be measured.



*The 30 Years of Democracy Gathering ... [provided space to] step back from the election frenzy and reflect honestly on what we'd learned about democracy.*

The 30 Years of Democracy Gathering was crucial in deepening all this work. It provided the space for movements and organisations to step back from the election frenzy and reflect honestly on what we'd learned about democracy over three decades. More importantly, it allowed us to strategise together about the tools and approaches we'd need going forward - not just to navigate this particular political moment, but to potentially build lasting democratic capacity from below with others.



**Keamogetswe Seipato**

Project Lead  
Campaigns

[Return to map](#) ►





*Illustration by Jess Jardim-Wedepohl*



*This tiny youthful outfit [has the] potential of expanding political spaces and deepening freedom and dignity.*

# In defence of civil society

**Elisha Kunene**

Project Lead  
Participatory Democracy

Reading Minhaj’s letter, I was struck by the sweep of the politics it maps—the weight of history pressing down on this moment, and the call for civil society to confront the crisis of demobilisation and neoliberal systems of subjugation. That vantage point is necessary. But what I have valued most in working with Minhaj is how he connects that large picture to the organisation’s day-to-day efforts.

When I first joined MVC, I was aware of its strong litigation legacy, but what stood out for me was the clarity and earnest self-reflection with which Minhaj articulated his substantive political vision for a more substantial Democracy and the organisation’s need for self-reflection and ongoing transformation to advance its causes. Whilst it is true that certain dominant personalities and lavishly funded NGO leaders (the Braamfontein mafia) have earned the poor reputation of cannibalising or colonising what we often call ‘civil society.’ But contrast MVC’s own development, one where it survived the precariousness of being a nebulous “campaign” and grown into a

reputable, professional, and sustainable institution advancing the progressive interests of society. That was not an abandonment or displacement of movement politics—it was a recognition that professionalisation, done differently, could serve mobilisation rather than hollow it out.

The foundation is a willingness to confront organisational uncertainty and continuously reimagine its role. MVC has navigated avoiding becoming just another low-impact academic research institute; or a detached operations consultancy for social movements. It has insisted that defending democracy means more than playing watchdog over election regulation and enjoying democracy must mean more than periodic voting. As Minhaj told me in our first meeting, such a focus on “formal electoralism is itself demobilising.”

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*Professionalisation, done differently, [can] serve mobilisation rather than hollow it out.*

Instead, MVC has positioned and entrenched itself as a bona fide *social justice organisation* invested in convening, strengthening, and learning from movements.

This shift has been visible in how MVC has engaged beyond its own projects—supporting partners, resisting donor capture, and furthering the efforts to give political meaning and practical substance to the goals progressive activists must fight for.

In a year defined by volatility and the reconfiguration of political power, MVC has been a small but steady node of civic action, drawing lessons from struggles elsewhere while grounding itself in the needs of movements at home. Rooted in a recognition that democracy cannot be defended only in Parliament or the courts, but in the fragile spaces where organisations, movements, and communities try to act together.

I was thus surprised by Minhaj’s framing of the professionalisation of civil society as a characteristic of demobilisation. That is inconsistent with what I have seen his politics and practice to be. It’s also an ahistorical account.

When we imagine the peak of civil society we model our North Star as the UDF movement. That was replete with professional services supporting mass politics; in a model that is in the present day most closely (or perhaps solely) approximated by the Equal Education movement. But it was also buffered by an elite cadre of resistance working underground, in exile or in funded professional service organisations and the labour movement.

My previous employer, a private lawyer who represents disenfranchised communities, got his training and introduction to politics in law firms that were closely allied with the UDM leadership, the Organised Labour and the defence of political persecution. On a long drive after leading a workshop at AMCU’s Annual Congress, he recalled to me with more than a hint of grief:

“We were, plenty of us, part of a workers in a large, well-funded, interconnected and well-funded anti-apartheid Resistance Industry. Then elections came, the funding dried up, people got important jobs and titles, almost instantly the entire industry disappeared like mist before the morning sun.”

Whatever we call civil society today, it is almost impossible to join. Because of demobilisation. As a young person who never wanted to work in the neoliberal capitalist private sector that destroyed my home and the lives of my family, and had no ties to the ANC government that cannibalised and then decapitated political action nationwide, while crippling the state’s capacity to solve society’s urgent and obvious problems, I have often felt like a leaf in the storm. South Africa has a massive deficit of human-rights defenders and civil society has no abundance of meaningful productive capacity or technical proficiency.

”

*MVC has been a small but steady node of civic action, drawing lessons from struggles elsewhere while grounding itself in the needs of movements at home.*

I was willing to shelve my profession, and uproot my life, when I got the opportunity to work with MVC. Throughout the year people are always shocked to hear the total staff contingent is less than 10 people, due to its outsized footprint in advancing a progressive cause. When all you have is an education, My Vote Counts is one of the very few places you can earn an honest living and hope to make a positive difference in transforming a young South Africa – because this tiny youthful outfit has been crafted robustly and capacitated carefully to be an instrument with the potential of expanding political spaces and deepening freedom and dignity. It was an honour to be part of this important work this past year.



*Mam' Emily Tjale (National Co-ordinator for the Land Access Movement of South Africa) addresses participants at the 30 Years of Democracy Gathering.*



**Elisha Kunene**

Project Lead  
Participatory  
Democracy

# 3

# Democracy After Liberation A Reckoning at Thirty

*The map below traces an area around Khayelitsha police station. A 2014 Commission of Inquiry found that this area had nine times less police-per-civilians as compared to wealthy areas of the city.*



# Democracy After Liberation: A Reckoning at Thirty



William Shoki

Editor  
Africa Is a Country

*“Democracy became something that was administered, not built. People were told their voices mattered, but only within channels that insulated decision-making from disruption.”*

*At a landmark gathering hosted by My Vote Counts, activists, scholars, and organisers confronted the broken promises of post-apartheid democracy—and considered how power might still be reclaimed from below.*

In October 2024, just months after South Africa’s watershed national elections, over a hundred activists, trade unionists, academics, and organisers gathered at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg to mark a difficult milestone: thirty years of democracy. Hosted by My Vote Counts, the three-day event was not a celebration. It was a reckoning.

For many in the room, the 2024 elections—the first in which the African National Congress failed to secure a majority—did not represent a renewal of democratic life, but a deepening of its crisis. The hastily formed Government of National Unity, brokered between the ANC and the Democratic Alliance, was described by several participants as a “pact between elites,” formed without a popular mandate, and justified in the name of national stability and market confidence.

In the gathering’s plenaries and breakaway sessions, what emerged was a shared sense that the post-apartheid democratic model had exhausted itself—not because the people had failed democracy, but because democracy had failed to serve the people.

“We were told we were free,” one participant said. “But we don’t get to decide anything.”

That feeling—of powerlessness amidst formal freedom—ran like a current through the gathering’s discussions. In its early years, South African democracy was defined by the symbolic grandeur of 1994: the peaceful transition, the universal franchise, the hope of constitutional justice. But the assumption that political rights would organically produce economic and social transformation quickly proved false. The project of democracy was reduced to periodic voting, elite mediation, and technocratic governance. For a time, this model held. But thirty years later, it is clear that democracy has been hollowed out.

That hollowing was not accidental. As several speakers noted, the transition to democracy in South Africa was shaped by a “passive revolution”—a concept drawn from Gramscian theory, describing a process by which ruling elites absorb dissent without altering the fundamental structure of power. In the South African case, this meant the incorporation of trade unions into state structures, the professionalisation of civil society, and the demobilisation of popular movements. Democracy became something that was administered, not built. People were told their voices mattered, but only within channels that insulated decision-making from disruption.

This democratic crisis has been deepened by the economic model adopted in the post-apartheid period. South Africa’s ruling bloc chose liberalisation, deregulation, and austerity. These were not inevitable policy choices. But they did set the terms for a society in which inequality was normalised, poverty racialised, and public participation marginalised. In the decades since, the terrain of civil society has become fragmented and donor-driven, while democratic institutions have grown distant, even indifferent, to the people they claim to represent.



*Democracy in South Africa was shaped by a “passive revolution” ... a process by which ruling elites absorb dissent without altering the fundamental structure of power.*

The cost of this model has been steep: rising xenophobia, localised authoritarianism, deepening distrust in elections and public institutions, and the steady erosion of collective imagination. Across the country, people are exhausted—by exclusion, by hunger, by broken promises. Many no longer believe democracy can deliver anything at all.

And yet, that disbelief is itself a political fact. It must be understood not as apathy, but as the product of a system that has routinely failed to make participation meaningful. As one participant put it during the gathering, “We vote, but we vanish.”

My Vote Counts, in convening the 30 Years of Democracy Gathering, did not aim to provide answers. Instead, the organisation created space for honest reflection—on how democracy has been constructed in post-apartheid South Africa, and how it might still be reclaimed. The framing was clear: democracy is not simply a set of rules or institutions. It is a question of power. Who holds it? Who can contest it? Who is allowed to shape the decisions that shape their lives?

In the discussions that followed, a common refrain emerged: democracy must be rebuilt from below. This idea, central to MVC’s theory of change, insists that meaningful democracy cannot be handed down from elite pacts or courtrooms. It must be made real through struggle, through organisation, and through collective action. It means seeing the vote not as a final act, but as a tactic.

It means treating transparency, public financing, and political accountability not as technical reforms, but as sites of political contestation. It means resisting the narrowing of democratic imagination to what is palatable to markets or digestible to donors. And it means rooting political practice in the lived realities of working-class and marginalised communities—not in abstractions about governance.

One of the most powerful contributions to the gathering came from Professor Steven Friedman, a veteran political analyst who has long warned against mistaking institutional stability for democratic vitality. For decades, Friedman has written against the grain of elite consensus, insisting that South African democracy remains shallow precisely because the public has so little power to shape it. In a panel titled *Carving the Tools to Deepen Democracy*, he challenged the audience to think beyond proceduralism and asked what it would take to build a democracy defined by participation, rather than performance.



*Civil society ... must act: not to defend democracy as it is, but to demand democracy as it should be.*

The interview that follows builds on that challenge. In conversation with My Vote Counts, Friedman reflects on the contradictions of the 1994 settlement, the dangers of elite-led politics, and the possibility of reclaiming democracy from below. He speaks to the gap between formal freedom and substantive power, and to the urgent need to restore collective political life—especially in a moment when the very idea of democracy is under threat.

As South Africa enters its fourth democratic decade, there are no guarantees. The crisis is real. But so is the capacity for reinvention. What 2024 revealed is that the old political centre cannot hold. What comes next is still undecided. That's where civil society—and movements like MVC—must act: not to defend democracy as it is, but to demand democracy as it should be.



**William Shoki**

Editor  
Africa is a Country





*Photos from the "30 Years of Democracy Gathering" held in October 2024*

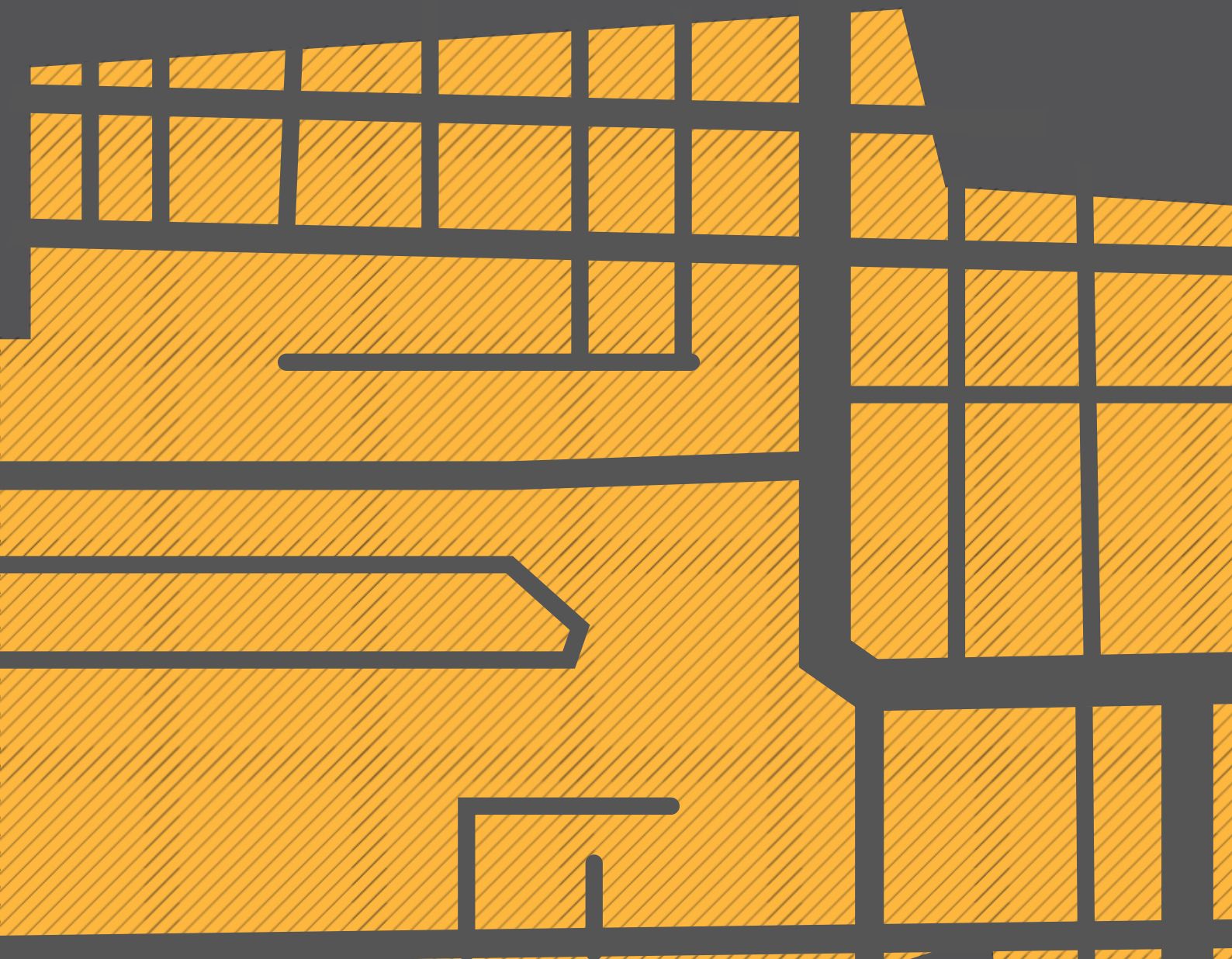


*MVC photos marking occasions over the year.*

# 4

# Meet the team

*The map below centres on South Africa's parliamentary buildings which sit in the centre of Cape Town. The South African Constitution was drafted and adopted here.*



# My Vote Counts team



**Minhaj Jeenah**  
Executive Director



**Boikanyo Moloto**  
Project Lead  
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**Joel Bregman**  
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**Elisha Kunene**  
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# My Vote Counts board

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**Amanda Rinquest**



**Zukiswa Kota**



**Dr Trevor Ngwane**



**Khaya Sithole**



**Tyronne McCrindle**



**Dr Kudrat Virk**



**Prof Halton Cheadle**



**Fatima Hassan**

# 5

# Core workflows

*The map below traces an area around the mines of Marikana where, in 2012, 34 miners were killed by South African police during a strike. This constituted the most lethal use of force by South African security forces against civilians since the Soweto uprising in 1976*

## **Towards People's Democracy**

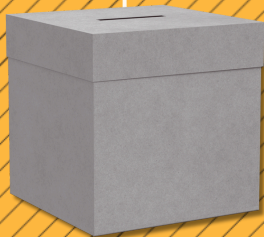
Democracy from  
Below  
programme

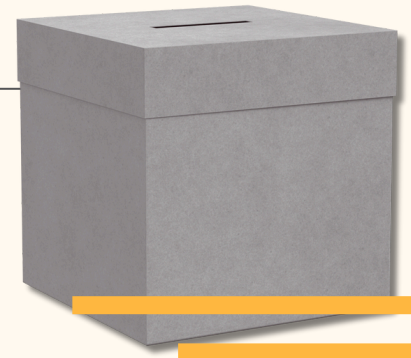
## **Reclaiming the Rules**

Political Systems  
programme

## **Building a Culture of Disclosure, Accountability & Public Power**

Money in Politics  
programme





# Towards People's Democracy

*Democracy does not live or die at the ballot box. It lives in the movements that organise before and after it.*

What does it mean to deepen democracy in a political system designed to contain it? At MVC, we believe the answer must come from below. Not from party manifestos or parliamentary performances, but from the collective action of people whose daily lives are shaped by a state that ignores them.

The Democracy From Below workstream is MVC's most direct response to the democratic crisis of our time. It confronts the widening gap between popular aspiration and institutional responsiveness. It challenges the scripted rituals of voting and consultation. And it asks: What would it take to build real political power—not every five years, but every day?

In 2025, this work became more urgent and more ambitious. Following the 2024 general elections and the rise of a Government of National Unity (GNU), formal politics increasingly became a game of elite musical chairs. Meanwhile, people on the ground continued to organise against water

shortages, housing evictions, failing infrastructure, and state violence. Our programme did not treat these as separate domains. It saw them as connected. It treated electoral moments, community struggles, and public education as part of a longer process of movement convergence and democratic renewal.

## **30 Years of Democracy Gathering: Where do we build from here?**

In October 2024, MVC co-convened the 30 Years of Democracy Gathering—a multi-day political forum in Johannesburg that brought together activists, researchers, trade unionists, community organisers, and progressive faith-based actors. Across plenaries, breakaway sessions, and evening caucuses, participants wrestled with a hard truth: our democratic system is in decline, but it is not yet dead. What we do now will shape what comes next.



*Illustration by Jess Jardim-Wedepohl*

One of the gathering's most consequential moments came in a closed-door Movement Caucus, where various civic formations deliberated on the state of popular organisation. Participants surfaced frustrations around NGO capture, siloed advocacy, and electoral opportunism. Yet there was also a shared clarity: people are organising—just not always under the banner of “civil society.”

This political clarity seeded the ground for MVC's 2025 strategy. Rather than chasing seats or slogans, we doubled down on the slow, careful work of politicising democracy from below. As one caucus participant put it: “We can't just demand accountability—we have to build a base that can enforce it.”

### **Tactical Voting: Naming the choices we're given**

MVC entered the 2024 election cycle not to endorse parties, but to confront the limits of what was on offer. Through our People's Convening process, popular education workshops, and the production of voter-facing materials, we worked to shift the terrain of electoral engagement.



*We are not voting with hope. We are voting with anger and organisation.*

*Abahlali baseMjondolo*

One key intervention was our People's Analysis of Political Party Manifestos, which broke down the major parties' policy platforms and revealed their silences—especially around land justice, gender-based violence, climate transition, and participatory governance. This effort helped politicise the act of voting itself: What are we being asked to choose between? And what isn't even on the table?

In the lead-up to the election, MVC also hosted informal workshops with various grassroots and housing movements, including Abahlali baseMjondolo (ABM) and Cape Town-based housing justice organisations. These gatherings didn't ask “Who should we vote for?” but rather: “What do we want? What leverage do we have? And how do we make the vote serve our struggle, not the other way around?”

Nowhere was this approach clearer than in the public stance taken by ABM. In a nationally discussed intervention, the movement laid out 20 demands and challenged political parties to respond. Only the EFF engaged seriously. In response, ABM announced a tactical vote—not an endorsement, but a calculated attempt to extract recognition, shift pressure, and reassert the demands of the poor. MVC stood in solidarity with this decision. In an op-ed for the Mail & Guardian, our executive director argued that tactical voting is not voter apathy—it's democratic imagination. It reframes elections as sites of struggle, not allegiance. As ABM put it: “We are not voting with hope. We are voting with anger and organisation.”

This approach underpinned all our voter-facing work in 2024. Our People’s Analysis of Political Party Manifestos laid bare the thinness of party platforms. Our Democracy Dialogues surfaced new political tactics.

This analysis informed our public communications, community assemblies, and educational zines. It also shaped our internal posture: the point is not just to demand better manifestos, but to challenge the conditions under which parties campaign without consequence. The message was clear: Democracy does not live or die at the ballot box. It lives in the movements that organise before and after it.

### **Democracy Dialogues: Building a new political commons**

From Sterkspruit to Soweto, MVC hosted Democracy Dialogues in 2025 that asked communities to reflect on their own experiences of governance, participation, and power. These town hall-style forums were rooted in people’s lived reality—not the abstract categories of civics education.

Participants spoke of ghost councillors and empty ward committees. Of party politics turning neighbours into enemies.



*From Sterkspruit to Soweto, MVC hosted Democracy Dialogues in 2025 that asked communities to reflect on their own experiences of governance, participation, and power.*

Of voting without consequence. But they also spoke of solidarity, local organising, and the desire to build something better.

These dialogues were not simply moments of venting or critique. They seeded campaigns, built relationships, and opened up political questions: What would accountability look like here? Who actually holds power in our ward? What’s stopping us from organising differently?

### **The Right to Recall: A demand for consequence**

Out of the Democracy Dialogues came a tactical insight: people want the power to remove representatives who fail them. In 2025, MVC launched the Right to Recall Campaign—not as a legal petition, but as a political project.

Led by Keamogetswe Seipato and grounded in community partnerships, the campaign builds awareness of recall as a constitutional and democratic principle. It challenges the current system where elected officials are insulated from consequence until the next election—if at all.

Work in 2025 included:

- Community workshops to surface local examples of unaccountable leadership
- Political education tools explaining how recall has worked elsewhere
- Movement building with CBOs, housing forums, and youth organisers

More than a procedural fix, Right to Recall is a strategic wedge: it opens up a broader conversation about who holds power, who decides, and how we change that.

### **Toward a democratic future worth fighting for**

The Democracy From Below workstream does not offer a blueprint. It offers a compass: toward greater alignment, deeper base-building, and a democracy that means something to the majority.

In a moment when liberal institutions are hollowed out, MVC is helping to reanimate democracy—not as a slogan or performance, but as a struggle over who decides, who benefits, and who belongs.

Thirty years after the first democratic vote, the work of democracy has only just begun.





# Reclaiming the Rules:

## Civil Society and the Struggle for Electoral Reform

*Electoral reform ... is about who is visible in a political system, and who is structurally silenced*

South Africa's political system is in a moment of deep disrepair. Confidence in democratic institutions is at an all-time low, electoral participation is declining, and political parties increasingly function as vehicles for elite competition rather than instruments of popular will. These are not incidental failures—they are structural outcomes of how power is organised, exercised, and reproduced.

For years, South Africa's electoral system has remained largely untouched, despite growing evidence that it no longer reflects the needs of a maturing democracy. The proportional representation (PR) system that helped facilitate a peaceful transition in 1994 has since ossified into a model that centralises power in party leadership, weakens constituency accountability, and marginalises independent or community-based actors.



*For years, South Africa's electoral system has remained largely untouched ... [but] it no longer reflects the needs of a maturing democracy.*

Voters cast ballots, but feel no connection to outcomes. In this context, electoral reform is not a technical matter. It is a political struggle. It is about reclaiming the very rules that structure our political imagination. And it is about who gets to shape those rules: the state, or the people.

### **From Closed Doors to Civic Ownership**

When Parliament passed the Electoral Amendment Act in April 2023—following a Constitutional Court ruling that found the previous Electoral Act unconstitutional for excluding independents—it presented both a moment of possibility and a familiar warning. The Act promised broader reform, including a ministerial Electoral Reform Consultation Panel. But the process was closed, unrepresentative, and politically compromised. The Minister handpicked an advisory panel, and later rejected the majority of its recommendations. Public participation was minimal. Two legal challenges to the Act are currently pending.

HISTORICALLY PROGRAMMED TO BELIEVE  
DEMOCRACY IS JUST THE VOTE BY  
THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT

STABILITY TRANSPARENCY \* ACCOUNTABILITY  
↓  
[NOT ENOUGH OF THESE]

GNU NOT WORKING?

PEOPLE FEEL THAT THE STATE IS A DICTATORSHIP

OFFICIALS NEED TO HAVE TERTIARY EDUCATION  
DO AWAY WITH CADRE - DEPLOYMENT

Ø NEPOTISM

WE ARE ASKING FOR A MIXED MEMBER SYSTEM

OPEN PARTY LISTS

This reflected a longer pattern: those in power will not voluntarily support a reform process that threatens their hold on it.

In response, MVC made a strategic and political decision. If electoral reform was going to be treated as a matter of public interest, it had to be reclaimed as such. This meant breaking with the logic of technical consultation and instead convening a civil society-led process—one grounded in popular sovereignty, democratic deliberation, and institutional imagination.

### **The Civil Society Electoral Reform Panel (CSERP)**

In May 2024, MVC launched the Civil Society Electoral Reform Panel (CSERP)—an independent, public-facing initiative to rethink South Africa’s political system from below. CSERP is not a commission of experts operating behind closed doors. It is a participatory platform, co-designed with civil society organisations, researchers, and movement actors across the country. Its aim is simple but radical: to produce a people’s blueprint for electoral reform, rooted in democratic values, accountability, and justice.

Over the course of the year, the panel engaged in public consultations, thematic workshops, and expert hearings. It convened around shared principles:

- That representation must be meaningful, not procedural.
- That local government must be a site of democratic power, not patronage.

- That political systems must enable accountability, not shield elites.

Importantly, CSERP was not just about producing a report. It was about modelling a different kind of politics—where civil society doesn’t just comment on policy, but helps shape it.

### **Civil Society, Oversight, and Electoral Reform: Grounding Reform in Civic Power**

Electoral reform is not only about ballots and quotas—it is about who is visible in a political system, and who is structurally silenced. That’s why the Civil Society Electoral Reform Panel has taken seriously the task of building a shared position through deliberation, disagreement, and listening.

Rather than defer to state-appointed experts, CSERP created a forum where diverse actors—legal reformers, movement organisers, political educators, and community representatives—could map the terrain of reform together. This meant making space for tension. For example: should South Africa adopt a constituency-based model that risks entrenching local elites? Or should it double down on proportionality, even if it distances voters from their representatives? These are not merely design questions. They are political ones. And they must be resolved through collective imagination.

In mid-2025, this work took on a new rhythm. On 15 July, MVC hosted a Cape Town civil society consultation, following earlier sessions in East London (with Afesis) and Makhanda (with Equal Education). These were not passive feedback sessions. They were political education events—grounded in movement-building traditions and attentive to the realities of ward-based exclusion, party discipline, and voter disillusionment.

Participants reflected on the shape of representative power, the role of political parties, and the structural barriers to participation for young people, independent candidates, and grassroots organisers. They rejected the idea that technocratic reform could substitute for moral legitimacy. And they pushed the panel to think beyond electoral engineering and toward democratic renovation.

A draft position paper now synthesises these engagements and lays out a menu of reform options—from recall mechanisms and public funding to new ward boundary designs and the regulation of political parties. The paper will be finalised alongside CSERP’s Alternative Electoral Reform Report in early 2026.



*We need to awaken the sleeping giant of the citizenry.*

*Matshepiso  
July 2025 consultation*

## **Institutional Oversight as a Political Task**

MVC’s commitment to democratic reform doesn’t end with system design. It extends to the institutions that govern our elections. In 2022, when the term of IEC Chairperson Glen Mashinini came to an end, we intervened in the appointment process for a new commissioner.

We viewed this not as a closed administrative procedure, but as a site of public interest. The IEC, as the primary guardian of electoral integrity, must itself be subject to accountability. MVC, alongside CASAC, submitted a formal letter to the Office of the Chief Justice (OCJ) requesting:

- An extension to the public nominations deadline, and
- Permission to observe the commissioner interviews.

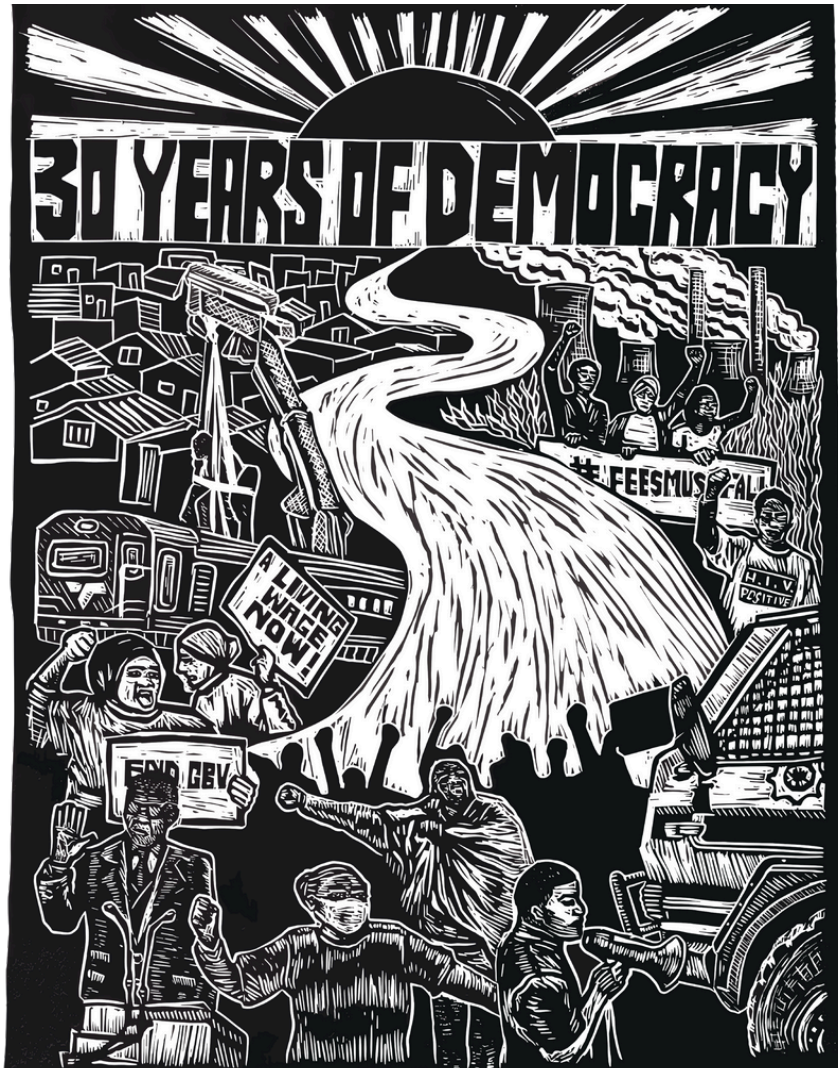
We argued that transparency builds trust—and that elections are only credible if the public has confidence not just in outcomes, but in the institutions and individuals responsible for delivering them. Our interventions contributed to a more open process and affirmed a basic democratic principle: watching the watchers is part of the work.

### **What we're building**

Taken together, these efforts—CSERP, the civil society consultations, and our oversight interventions—reflect a broader strategy. MVC is not just advocating for reforms. We are helping to build the infrastructure of democratic reform itself. That means:

- **Convening spaces where civil society defines its own position,**
- **Opening institutional processes to civic scrutiny,**
- **And treating the design of the political system as an ongoing struggle, not a settled fact.**

This is what we mean by democracy from below. Not consultation. Not elite brokerage. But democratic power rooted in people's lived realities, political education, and the willingness to demand more.





## Building a Culture of Disclosure, Accountability, and Public Power

*The regulation of private money in politics is not a technical matter. It's a question of sovereignty.*

South Africa's democracy is being quietly auctioned. While the public debates policy, votes in elections, and participates in civic life, the most consequential decisions about political direction often happen behind closed doors—brokered through donations, patronage, and elite networks. In this context, the regulation of private money in politics is not a technical matter. It's a question of sovereignty: who holds power in a democracy, and how is it exercised?

My Vote Counts (MVC) has long argued that democracy cannot be deepened without confronting the corrosive role of money in our political system. In a time of increasing disillusionment and demobilisation, we are working to build a culture of accountability and public ownership over political life—where ordinary people, not donors, shape the future of the country.



*Democracy cannot be deepened without confronting the corrosive role of money in our political system.*

### From Legal Reform to Political Imagination

In 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that Parliament must regulate political party funding. This judgment led to the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA), which came into force on 1 April 2021. For the first time, political parties were legally required to disclose donations above R100,000.

While the Act was a significant step forward, it quickly became clear that it was not enough. The quarterly donor disclosures published by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) are technically public, but structurally inaccessible: no groupings, no cumulative summaries, no links to sectoral interests or political timelines. The data was inert, and its democratic value untapped. That gap inspired the creation of *Whose Vote Counts?*—a campaign and dashboard designed to transform raw disclosure data into a shared resource for democratic accountability.

Launched in early 2024 and co-developed with civic tech partner OpenUp, the dashboard brings the PPFA to life. It enables users to explore donation trends across parties, sectors, and election cycles; to compare corporate interests and their patterns of giving; and to trace the persistent dominance of a small circle of donors in shaping the political landscape. But the tool is not just informational. It is political. Through Whose Vote Counts?, MVC has helped catalyse public conversation around the meaning of money in politics—not as a niche issue, but as a structural threat to democracy itself.

### **2024–2025: A Year of Pushback and Persistence**

As South Africa approached its most competitive national elections since 1994, political parties escalated their fundraising efforts—and many sought to avoid public scrutiny. In response, MVC launched a multi-pronged push to defend and deepen transparency.

In early 2024, we filed dozens of Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) requests targeting nearly all major political parties. These requests served both to test compliance with the law and to expose patterns of secrecy. At the same time, we monitored IEC disclosures and published real-time analysis of anomalies, gaps, and trends.



*MVC launched a multi-pronged push to defend and deepen transparency.*

But the most serious threat came not from parties' behaviour, but from Parliament itself. In April 2025, the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs voted to double the disclosure threshold from R100,000 to R200,000, and to increase the annual donation cap from R15 million to R30 million.

These changes were pushed through despite strong evidence from the Parliamentary Budget Office that South Africa's thresholds already exceeded global norms. In May, the National Assembly adopted the changes without amendment. The message was clear: the state was now a willing participant in the rollback of its own transparency reforms.

MVC responded by coordinating civil society resistance. We issued joint statements, mobilised media commentary, and demanded that the President reject the proposals. We also released our own analysis, showing how these shifts would erase over 90 of the donations disclosed since the PPFA's inception. In the public sphere, we argued that this was not a technical reform—it was a retreat from democratic accountability.



*Illustration by Jess Jardim-Wedepohl*

## Closing the Loopholes

In 2023, MVC launched a constitutional challenge to address key weaknesses in the Political Party Funding Act (PPFA). Our application sought to:

- require full disclosure of all private donations, regardless of amount;
- introduce caps on cumulative giving by related entities;
- mandate transparency not only over income, but expenditure; and
- challenge the President’s wide discretion to set thresholds without clear legislative limits.

In May 2024, after Parliament passed the *Electoral Matters Amendment Act*—which repealed the fixed R100,000 disclosure threshold and R15 million donation cap—we filed an urgent application to prevent a legal vacuum. The court granted interim relief, reinstating the previous thresholds while the case proceeded.

But in August 2025, the Western Cape High Court dismissed our application. The full bench found that some elements of our challenge had become moot due to the amendments, while others did not meet the threshold for constitutional invalidity.

Even in defeat, the case clarified the political terrain. It confirmed what our work has long demonstrated: that meaningful transparency cannot be left to the discretion of those it seeks to regulate. If public oversight is to be real, it must be structurally embedded—not vulnerable to political convenience or elite self-interest.



*If public oversight is to be real, it must be structurally embedded—not vulnerable to political convenience or elite self-interest.*

This is why we continue to press for deeper reforms: tighter regulations, robust enforcement, and a new model of public funding that shifts power away from private wealth and toward the democratic collective.

## Whose Vote Counts?

Throughout this turbulent year, Whose Vote Counts? remained the linchpin of our public education and political narrative work. The dashboard is now used by journalists, researchers, and activists as a core reference. It allows the public to trace how power moves—not through speeches or manifestos, but through cheques and transactions.

We have expanded the platform with curated explainers, multilingual resources, video walkthroughs, and data visualisations. We’ve also used it as a jumping-off point for community workshops and civic education events—tools not just for decoding democracy, but for reimagining it.

As parties embraced in-kind donations, third-party campaign vehicles, and evasive “other income” categories, Whose Vote Counts? helped keep the spotlight on how money flows through the system. With each new quarter of data, the campaign has helped expand a simple idea: that the public has both the right and the capacity to follow the money.

## The Question of Public Funding

In June 2025, the IEC released its third annual report on political funding. While the report summarises key disclosures and audits, it leaves much unexamined—particularly the blurry edges of private income and the lack of detailed expenditure reporting.

In response, MVC is preparing a shadow report to contextualise and critique the IEC’s findings. Our analysis will show how public funds remain dwarfed by elite private donations, and how political parties use vague income streams to mask influence.

These findings also feed into the next phase of our work: developing a position paper on the future of political funding. If private capital continues to dominate political life, it will be impossible to achieve substantive equality in our democracy. We are now advancing the argument that political parties are public entities, and that their financing should reflect public—not private—priorities.

## Looking Forward

As we move into a new political cycle, MVC will deepen its Money in Politics work on three fronts:

- **Enforcement and litigation**  
Holding parties accountable for non-disclosure and pressuring the IEC to build robust enforcement capacity.
- **Campaign expansion**  
Updating and scaling *Whose Vote Counts?*, improving its accessibility, reach, and political impact.
- **Democratic imagination**  
Moving beyond defensive transparency work to articulate a new model of public funding that affirms democratic equality and mass participation.

In a country where so much of public life feels hollowed out, MVC’s work is about rebuilding something essential: trust, clarity, and the belief that democracy can still be a shared project. *Whose Vote Counts?* reminds us that behind every donation is a deal—and behind every disclosure, a demand: that our politics serve the people, not the powerful.

# A six-step guide to using our *Whose Vote Counts* tool

*Note: In 2026, MVC will expand this tool to include all money flows to political parties*

The *Whose Vote Counts* tool allows members of the public to easily explore data on who is funding political parties in South Africa.

### What does the data include?

This tool includes data on private funding of politics in South Africa, as regulated by the Political Funding Act (PFA). It contains the *disclosed* donations from *private* sources to political parties and independents. The PFA compels political parties and independents to declare private donations, whether cash or in-kind, over the amount of R100 000 per financial year.

### Where is this data from?

This data is published by the Electoral Commission every quarter. This tool allows us to better understand, visualise and explore this important information.

### What does the data *not* include?

The data is limited to disclosed *private* donations under the Political Funding Act (for example, it does not show the income that parties receive from public funding). The data here does not show private donations received under the R100 000 disclosure threshold, membership fees, or loans.

1

## Visit the site

Visit [www.myvotecounts.org.za/whose-vote-counts](http://www.myvotecounts.org.za/whose-vote-counts) or scan the QR code below. Here, you will find the *Whose Vote Counts* tool. (Here you will also find a tutorial video which explains how to navigate the tool.)



2

### Choose your filters

At the top, you will see that you can filter the data according to your interests - or you can explore the full data set without a filter.



Total amount of private donations that political parties have received since PFA.

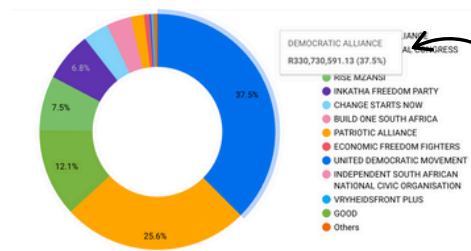
At any time, press 'reset filters' to return to all data.

Here, you can filter the data by political party, donation types (money or in-kind such as paying for gala dinners) and by donor's name.

3

### Find out how much each party has received

The first pie chart shows how much each private funding each represented political party has received in private donations since PFA.



Hover over a segment to see the exact amount that the party has received in private donations.



*Whose Vote Counts reminds us that behind every donation is a deal—and behind every disclosure, a demand: that our politics serve the people, not the powerful.*

4

### Explore who is donating to which party

The *Whose Vote Counts* tool displays a list of individual donors' details: who they have donated to, what kind of donation it was, when it was made, and how much it was.

The table below shows all disclosed donations as line items. You can reorder and filter the items by party, donor, donor type, date, amount, and quarter.

Party	Donor	Donor type	Date	Amount	Quarter	Vote
INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY	NICHOLAS FRANK OPPENHEIMER	Individual	25 Apr 2024	R15,000,000	Q1	Quarter
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	UNITED MANGANESE OF KALAHARI	Private company	25 Nov 2022	R15,000,000	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	FYNBOS KAPITAAL PROPRIETARY LIMITED	Investment holding company	24 Jun 2025	R15,000,000	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	FYNBOS KAPITAAL (PTY) LTD	Private company	17 Apr 2024	R15,000,000	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	FYNBOS KAPITAAL PROPRIETARY LIMITED	Investment holding company	25 Jul 2022	R15,000,000	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	BATHO BATHO TRUST	Investment holding company	20 Oct 2022	R15,000,000	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	FYNBOS KAPITAAL (PTY) LTD	Private company	9 Jun 2023	R15,000,000	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	FYNBOS KAPITAAL PROPRIETARY LIMITED	Investment holding company	17 Apr 2024	R15,000,000	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	MARTIN MOSHAL	Individual	22 Sept 2021	R15,000,000	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	MS MARY SLACK	Individual	14 May 2021	R15,000,000	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	

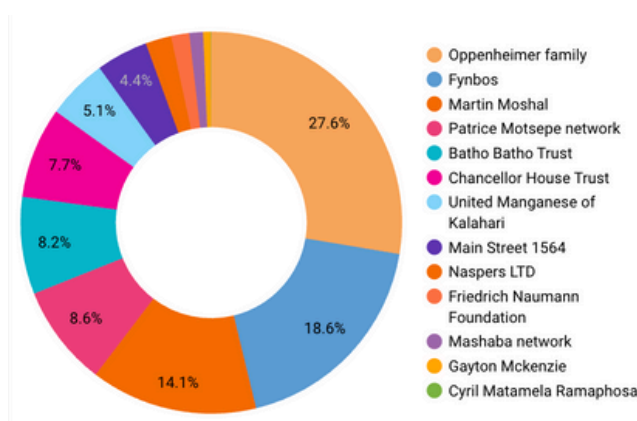
Filter the data by clicking on the heading of your choice.

5

### Better understand the power of 'donor clusters'

Individual donors may not give more than R15m to a single party in a financial year. However, donors are able to legally sidestep this provision by donating through different companies.

Some donors are closely linked through similar company directors, family ties, or areas of interest - clusters. The data shows that several donors and groups of donors are responsible for a disproportionately high percentage of all private funding.



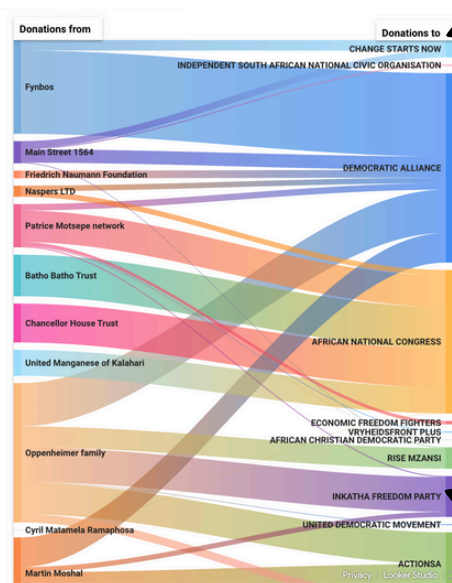
Hover over a segment to reveal the actual amount donated.

6

### Visualise money flows from individuals to parties

Lastly, the Whose Vote Counts tool visualises the flow of money from individuals to different parties.

Here, you can see financial flows from major donors such as Martin Moshal, members of the Oppenheimer family, and companies linked to or controlled by Michiel le Roux and Patrice Motsepe, respectively.



On the left, you can see who the donation is coming from. On the right, you can see where the donation is going to.

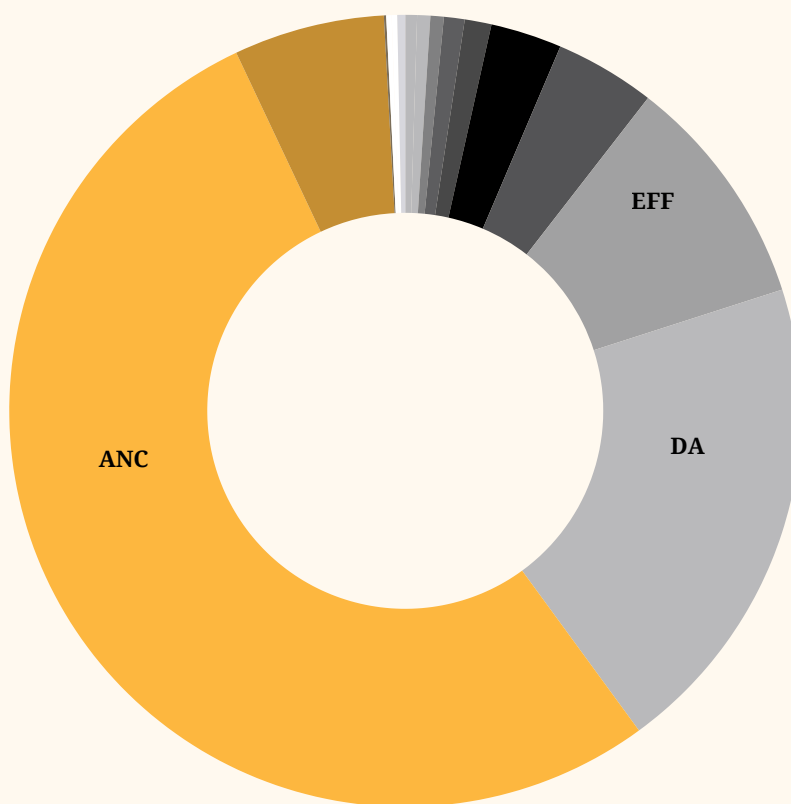
As the chart shows, major donors often donate to more than one political party.



*This dashboard is used by journalists, researchers, and activists as a core reference. It allows the public to trace how power moves—not through speeches or manifestos, but through cheques and transactions.*

[Return to map](#) ►

**Total Public and Private Funding per Party  
(Financial Year 2023/2024)\***



<b>Political party</b>	<b>Amount recieved</b>
African National Congress	R 1,718,035,292
Democratic Alliance	R 644,821,812
Economic Freedom Fighters	R 309,206,197
Other	R 199,458,386
Inkatha Freedom Party	R 132,768,895
Freedom Front Plus	R 94,214,133
African Christian Democratic Party	R 35,439,637
African Transformation Movement	R 27,404,809
United Democratic Movement	R 17,613,863
Al Jama-ah Political Party	R 17,381,882
GOOD	R 15,490,665
Pan Africanist Congress	R 10,433,136
National Freedom Party	R 7,283,513
Minority Front	R 7,157,624
African Independent Congress	R 3,044,064

*Source: Analysis of the IEC’s Annual Political Party Funding Report for FY2023/2024  
(My Vote Counts).*

# 6

# Who funds MVC?

*The map below traces the area around the Western Cape High Court where, in February 2025, My Vote Counts' case sought to challenge the constitutionality of the Political Funding Act.*





# Who funds MVC?

From time to time, MVC finds itself the subject of a familiar curiosity: questions about where our money comes from, who exactly is behind us, and whether our commitment to transparency hides something more dramatic.

The assumptions are often more entertaining than accurate, but the impulse itself is fair enough. In a political environment marked by secrecy and suspicion, people want to know how organisations like ours are sustained.

There is nothing mysterious here. Our funding comes from a handful of institutional partners who support our work on political transparency and democratic reform, and our financial management follows the same rules we advocate for publicly. The numbers that follow simply show how that support was used over the past year — what it cost to run campaigns, take cases to court, publish research, and keep the organisation steady. It's not a revelation, and it's not meant to be. It's just an honest account of the resources behind the work.

See the *My Vote Counts Funding Policy*, [here](#).



**Detailed Income Statement**

My Vote Counts NPC

Registration Number: 2014/046956/08

Annual Financial Statement for the year ended 28/02/2025

<b>Income</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Grants and donations received</b>	R 5,591,731	R 4,263,345
<b>Other income</b>		
Sundry income	R 14,333	R 2,490
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
Accounting fees	R 24,249	R 21,313
Auditors remuneration	R 34,500	R 22,080
Bank charges	R 8,754	R 10,347
Computer expenses	R 31,914	R 54,919
Consulting and professional fees	R 115,000	R 115,205
Depreciation	R 19,814	R 22,714
Employee costs	R 3, 272,874	R 2,909,117
Events logistics	R 756,714	R 304,036
General expenses	R 2,520	R 2,021
Insurance	R 4,609	R 4,432
Lease rentals on operating lease	R 207,070	R 41,518
Loss on sale of assets and liabilities	-	R 313
Office supplies	R 16,107	R 26,120
Printing and stationery	R 43,145	R 8,592
Staff welfare	R 36,616	R 87,188
Strategy Workshop expenses	R 7,238	-
Subscriptions	R 34,421	R 33,401
Telephone and fax	R 277,917	R 43,419
Travel - local	R 1665,464	R 799,330
	<b>R 6,558,926</b>	<b>R 4,506,065</b>
<b>Operating deficit</b>	<b>R 952,862</b>	<b>R 240,230</b>
Investment income	R 124,512	R 142,073
Finance costs	-	R 16,998
	<b>R 124,512</b>	<b>R 125,075</b>
<b>Deficit for the year</b>	<b>R 828,350</b>	<b>R 115,155</b>

# 7

# Afterword

*The map below traces an area of Kwa-Zulu Natal where a political assassination of an ANC ward councillor took place. According to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime, 418 political hits were recorded nationwide between 2000 and 2021 - the majority of them in KZN.*



# Afterword

William Shoki

This isn't how an annual report usually reads. Most reports in the civic space follow a format for good reason: they're written with accountability in mind, and are often designed to meet the demands of monitoring, evaluation, and institutional memory. That kind of clarity is important. But when I came on board to help write and edit this report, I wanted to try something a little different.

My background is in writing and editing political commentary. I spend most of my time working on essays, interviews, and public reflections—pieces that try to situate events within wider systems, contradictions, and histories. So when I sat with MVC's 2025 material—court cases, campaign notes, workshop photos, transcripts from movement caucuses—it didn't feel right to flatten that work into a purely administrative record.

Instead, I tried to approach this report more like a magazine than a logbook: something reflective, layered, and alive to the tone of the moment. I wanted it to carry voice, atmosphere,

and the sense that this work happens inside of a real and difficult political context. I'm grateful to the MVC team for encouraging that approach—for giving me the space to experiment with tone, and to hold contradiction without rushing to resolve it. There is a story here—about how an organisation like MVC works to make democracy more than a formal structure. But it's also a story about the limits of that effort. And that's what makes it worth telling.

## **Design is political, too**

One of the unexpected pleasures of this project was working with Lotte, the designer behind the visual direction of the report. From the outset, we shared a sense that design wasn't something to be applied after the fact, once the writing was done. It was part of the thinking. Part of the politics.

There's a kind of visual culture that dominates the NGO world—clean, professional, but often generic. In some cases, that's what's needed.

But this report sits at the edge of something else. It's trying to name a political conjuncture. It's trying to hold contradiction and texture. It's trying to communicate uncertainty without falling into despair. And so we had to ask: What does that feel like on the page?

Lotte and I went back and forth on this—how to signal political seriousness without sliding into gloom; how to let the design breathe while keeping it grounded. She brought a sense of mood and restraint to the layouts that gave the writing space to land. But more than that, she shares a belief that form is political: that how something is presented shapes how it's understood. She was willing to experiment, to sit with ambiguity, to let the report feel like a living document rather than a polished artifact. In a report so preoccupied with what democracy feels like at the end of its symbolic arc, the design didn't try to fix that feeling. It held it. And I'm really grateful for that.

I'm also grateful to the MVC team, who met this approach with generosity and openness. From the beginning, Minhaj encouraged a different kind of report—one that didn't just say what happened, but tried to say what it meant. That posture ran through the whole team: Boikanyo, Joel, Kea, Nosipho, Aarifa, Lauren, Elisha—everyone offered feedback, context, and critical reflection without ever retreating into defensiveness. That's rare. It made the process not just collaborative, but politically meaningful.

## **Writing from inside the contradictions**

Despite the creativity of the team and the richness of the material, writing this report was not straightforward. The difficulty wasn't technical—it was tonal.

How do you write about democratic practice at a moment when democracy feels increasingly emptied out? How do you reflect the ambition and clarity of an organisation like MVC without losing sight of the context in which it operates—one marked by widespread disenchantment, elite realignment, and the narrowing of political possibility?

I found myself circling this tension throughout the drafting process. The fear was that if we spoke too clearly, it would sound like propaganda. But if we leaned too heavily into critique, it would feel like despair. And neither of those options felt true to the work. What made it possible to keep writing was MVC's own posture—one that doesn't flinch from the difficulties of this moment, but also doesn't surrender to them. There's something steadying about that: an organisation that takes itself seriously enough to be self-critical, and believes enough in democracy to ask whether it's still working.

That balance—between clarity and discomfort, between commitment and contradiction—is ultimately what shaped the tone of this report. We didn't try to solve the problem of democracy in thirty pages. We tried to write from inside it.

## What can an NGO do?

The more time I spent immersed in this report, the more I found myself returning to a basic, difficult question: *What is the role of an organisation like My Vote Counts in a time like this?*

On the one hand, the answer is clear. MVC is one of the few organisations in the country with an explicitly transformative democratic agenda—not simply calling for better service delivery or improved governance, but for public power to be returned to those most excluded from it. It works in solidarity with movements. It doesn't condescend to the poor. It uses the law strategically without fetishising legality. It cares about consequence.

That kind of orientation matters—especially in a political culture where NGOs are often trapped between technocratic reformism on one side and movement romanticism on the other. MVC tries to walk that line carefully. It does the work: litigating, educating, convening, challenging. It names the problem, and then it acts.

But part of me also wonders whether the very form of the NGO is fatally compromised. Is the professionalisation of struggle inevitable once it moves into an organisational register? Is some degree of depoliticisation baked into the structure—into the funding cycles, the project metrics, the soft language of stakeholder engagement?

These aren't accusations. They're real questions. And what impressed me about MVC throughout this process is that it asks those questions of itself.

It doesn't pretend to exist outside the contradictions it diagnoses. It tries to inhabit them openly. That, in itself, is rare.

Maybe the point isn't to resolve the ambivalence, but to keep it visible. To refuse the comfort of cynicism or the safety of institutional self-congratulation. To say, yes, we are an NGO—but that doesn't mean we have to act like one.

## Modesty as a form of courage

In the end, what I admire most about MVC isn't just what it does. It's how it moves.

This is an organisation that takes its political commitments seriously, but not performatively. It opens space for dissent. It practices reflection, not just in strategy sessions, but in the way it holds itself accountable to the people it claims to serve. It doesn't posture as the vanguard of anything. It tries to be useful, principled, and clear.



*[MVC] works in solidarity with movements. It doesn't condescend to the poor. It uses the law strategically without fetishising legality. It cares about consequence.*

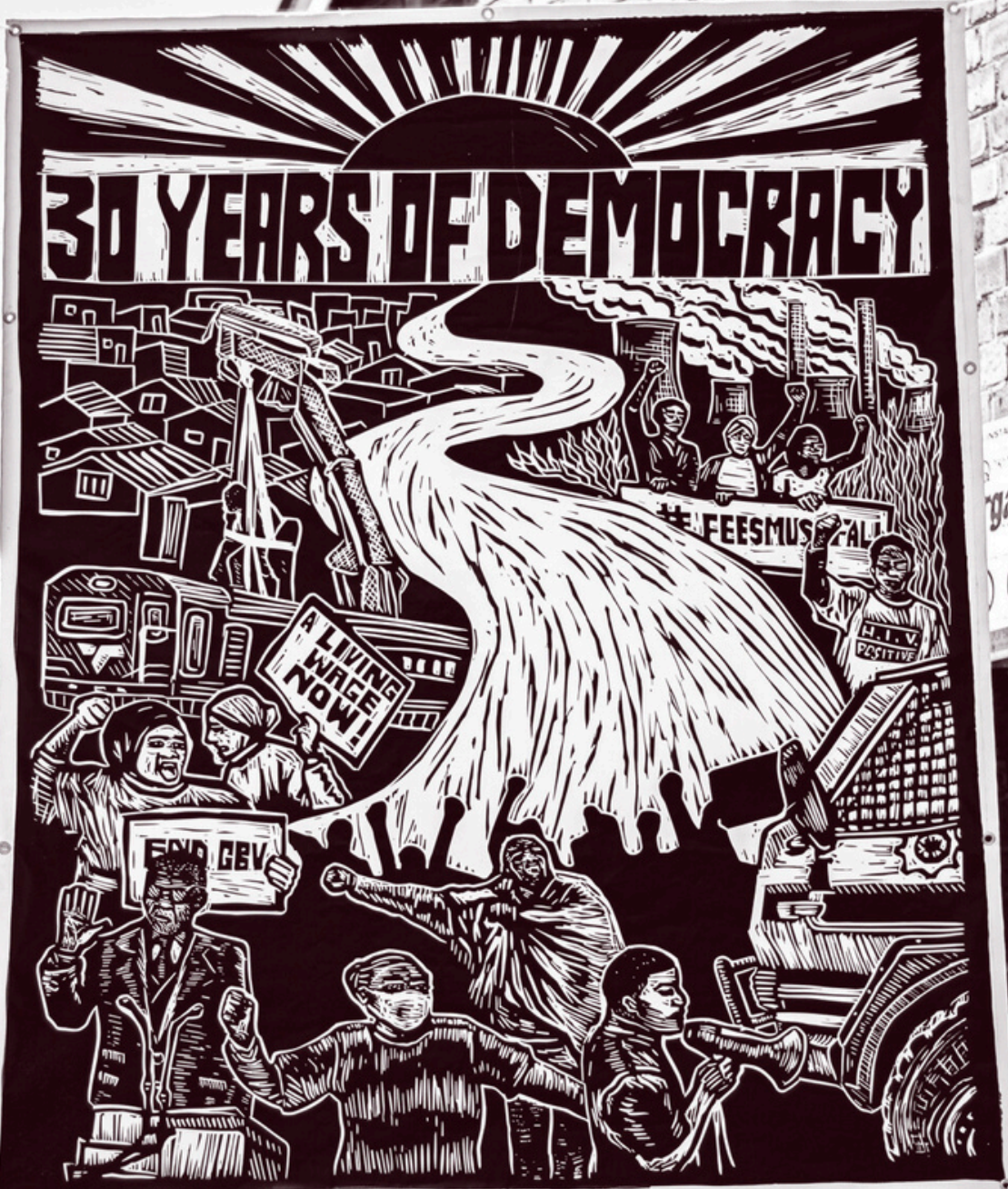
There's a kind of integrity in that—a willingness to stay close to the ground, to think with movements rather than speak for them, and to use the tools it has without mistaking them for the solution. MVC isn't pretending that transparency laws or electoral reforms will remake the country. But it is trying to defend the conditions under which a more just, more accountable political culture might still be possible.

That might sound modest. But in a country where cynicism has become common sense—and where even the language of democracy can feel worn out—modesty is sometimes a form of courage.

This report is a record of work done. But it's also a wager: that democracy, however broken, is still worth defending. Not in the abstract, and not as an end in itself—but as a terrain of struggle. One where the people who've been written out of the official story still insist on showing up. Still insist on fighting. Still insist on deciding for themselves.

If that's not worth writing about, I don't know what is.

*William Shoki*  
November 2025





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