



[Event Video](#)
[PowerPoint Presentation](#)
[Fellow's Webpage](#)

“The time has come for South Africa to regulate private donations to political parties in order to curb the high levels of political corruption that are threatening responsible governance and exacerbating inequality in the country. . . . While regulation alone cannot be a panacea, a disclosure framework that is easily enforceable and not unduly onerous on parties can set the rules of the game and help to pave the way toward a democratic system that is open, responsive, and accountable.”

—Judith February
Policy Analyst, South Africa

“The Toxic Mix: Money, Power, and Politics in South Africa”

June 21, 2012

Ethical ambivalence, factionalism, and an increasing lack of transparency within the African National Congress (ANC) are threatening Nelson Mandela’s legacy and jeopardizing democratic consolidation in South Africa. In the absence of regulations governing the size of political donations and donor identity, the moneyed are able to buy political influence, drowning out the voices of the poor and exacerbating already high levels of inequality and poverty. In her presentation, Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow **Judith February** underscored the importance of disclosure as the cornerstone of a transparent political system and called for a regulatory framework that is easily enforceable, accessible to the public, and not unduly burdensome to political parties.

While parties need money to function effectively, a disclosure framework would set the rules of the game and limit the corrupting influence of big donors. To break the direct link between donors and parties, February recommended caps on private contributions and campaign expenditures, as well as the establishment of a National Democracy Fund through which all corporate donations could be channeled. Harnessing support for clean politics by corporate donors, civil society, and political parties will be instrumental in implementing these reforms.

Discussant **Dr. Joel D. Barkan**, senior associate with the Africa program at the Center for International and Strategic Studies, concurred that the ANC’s inability to adequately deliver basic services is, in part, a manifestation of political corruption, especially at the local level. While South Africa has a rising middle class that is increasingly composed of black professionals and businesspersons, limited opportunities for the majority, due mainly to an underperforming K-12 educational system, are heightening dissatisfaction with the current political system.

In response to questions, Ms. February indicated that citizens are beginning to connect the dots between corruption and weak governance and are becoming increasingly active in their pursuit of a more equitable society. The ‘Right to Know’ campaign (www.r2k.org.za) provides a good illustration of civil society working across race and class in support of a more transparent and responsive democratic system.

The Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program enables activists, practitioners, scholars, and journalists from around the world to deepen their understanding of democracy and enhance their ability to promote democratic change. The views expressed in this presentation represent the analysis and opinions of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.