



# Transforming Civil Society in South Africa

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# Outline

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Objectives of the study

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Methodology

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South African civil society: The political space

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Civil society dynamics: A cursory glance

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Gender dynamics in South African civil society

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Conclusion and Recommendations

# Objectives of the Study

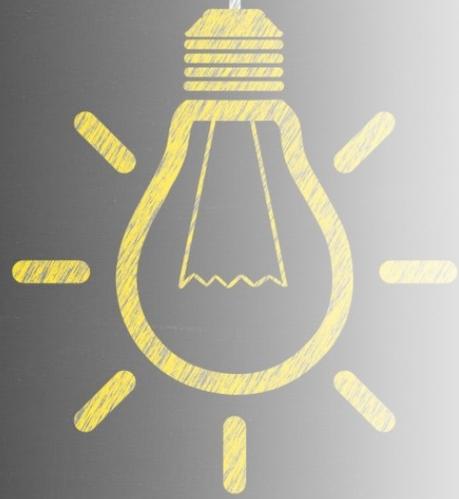
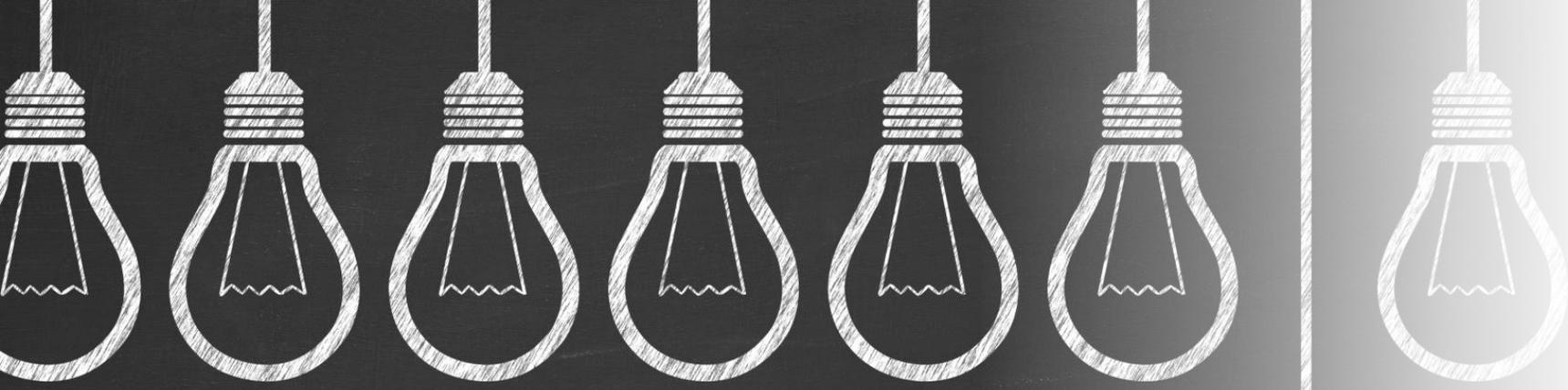
Provide a context of transformation in the civil society sector in South Africa. What are the requirements for the sector to transform itself? What are current impediments affecting transformation of the sector?

Provide research-based guidance to the civil society sector on how to engage with itself on processes and requirements for the sector to have effective engagements on its transformative agenda and participation of the sector as whole.

Provide best examples of global perspectives on how civil society has approached the transformative process including engagements and role played by the state.

Provide areas of transformation of the sector that need to be addressed by the sector to ensure that the outcomes of its transformation project is acceptable to all members and organisations operating in the sector.

Provide concrete recommendations on how the sector and the state can assist each other to address transformation of the sector for the benefit of the public.



Research  
methodology



Research  
methodology

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Literature review: Transformative  
dynamics in a global perspective

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Key expert interviews

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Secondary analysis of V-DEM data  
on South African civil society

# Social and political context of South African civil society

How do we conceptualise civil society?

Gramscian perspective

- Civil society is a space of contestation and challenge

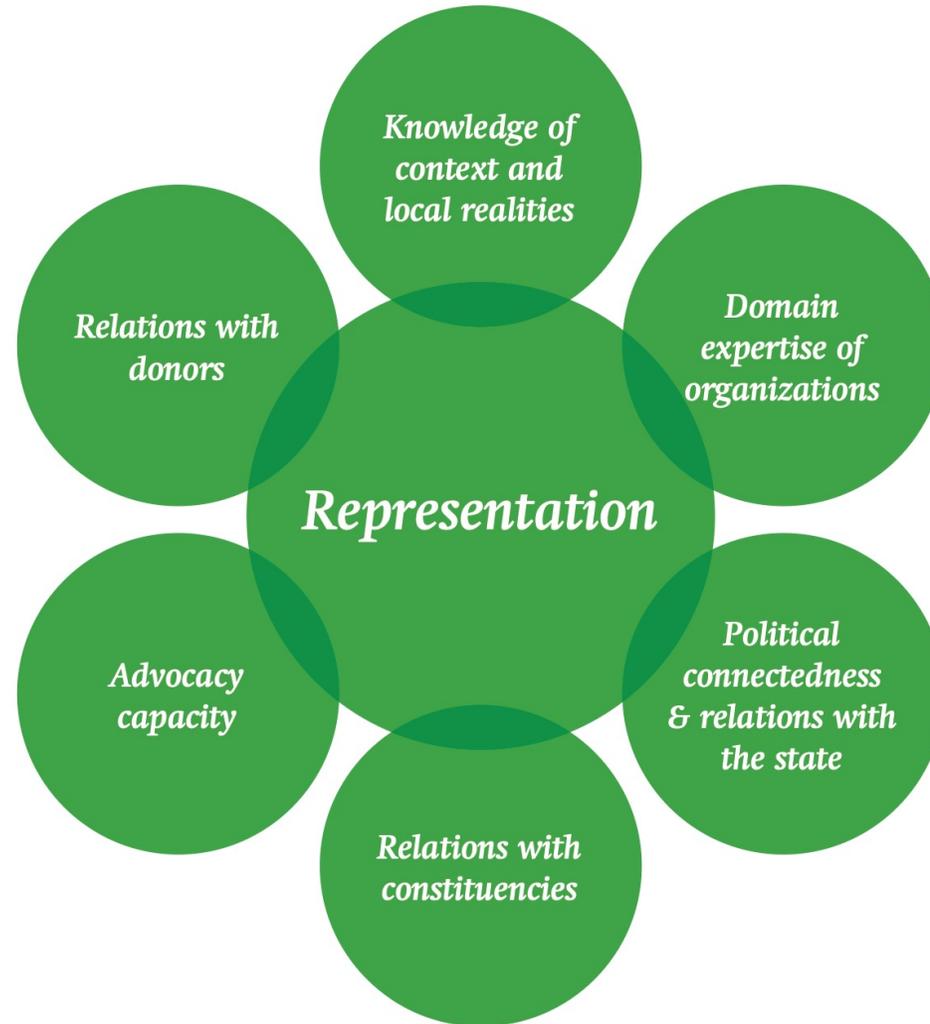
Tocquevillian construct

- Civil society is space for dialogue and collaboration

Constructing civil society in South Africa is complex

- Variety of political cultures
- Party dominant political context
- Community-based mobilization built on the tradition of the UDF
- Legislative frame of participatory and deliberative democracy with a focus on citizen-centred governance

# Analysing civil society dynamics



# Analysing civil society dynamics

Representation within civil society is determined by the context in which civil society operates

Questions of political connectedness and relations with state and donors

Representation and negotiated positions

- Navigate various relational and contextual dynamics for voice and agency
- See Van Wessel *et al* (2019)

# Analysing civil society dynamics

## Gender representivity

- Male dominance of leadership positions in CSOs and other similar organisations
- Due to gendered norms, attitudes and practices of individuals within them.
- One significant consequence of this is that this leads to the privileging of male/masculine interests over female/feminine interests.

## Gender Mainstreaming

- Just because women sit at the table does not mean they have active and empowered voice and agency to participate

# South African Civil Society: The Political Context

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Historically civic space in apartheid South Africa was severely restrictive

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At the dawn of the South African democracy, the South African civic space was reimagined to be one of collaboration and engagement

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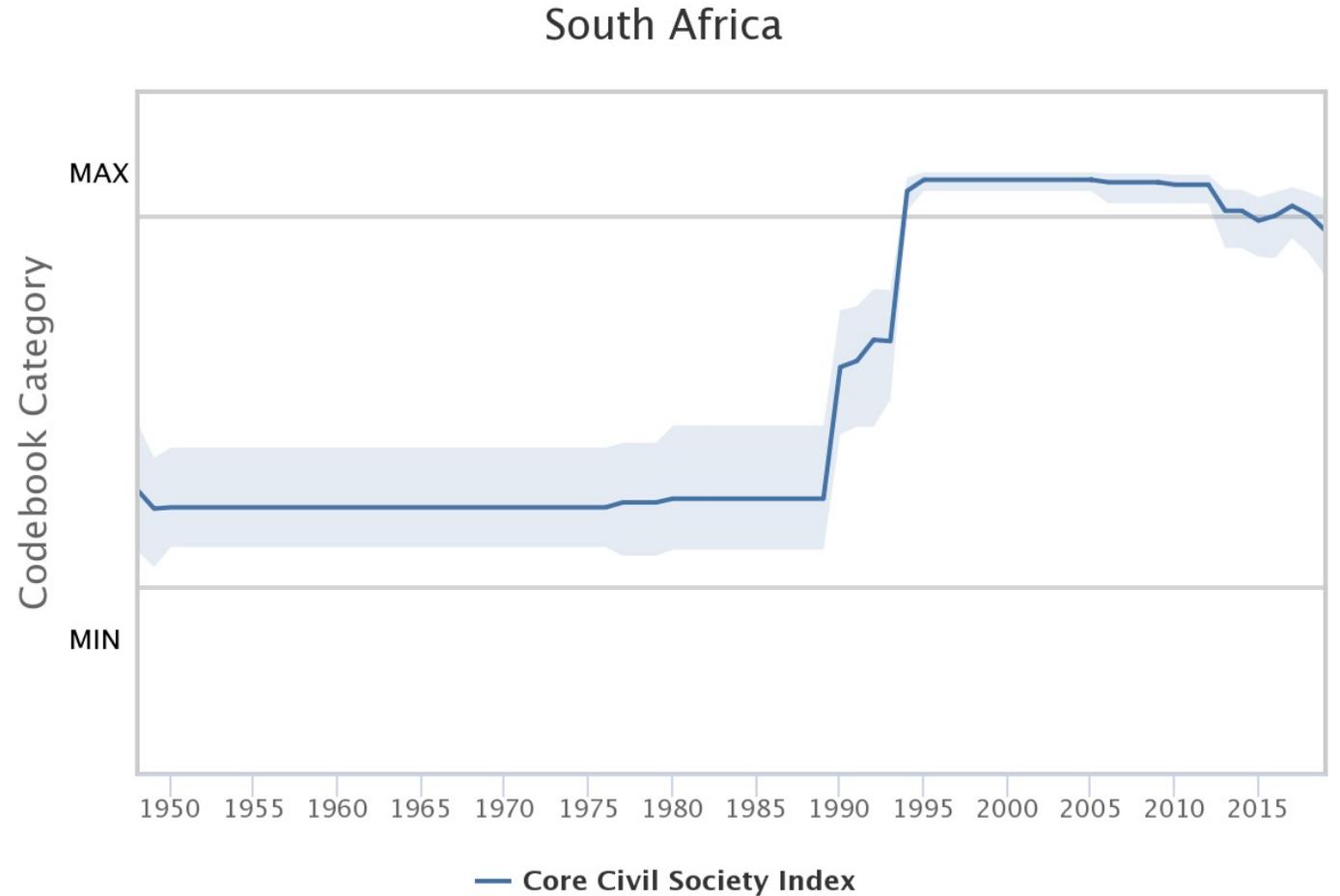
Thus, drawing on the Tocquevillian tradition of civil society.

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This reconceptualization of civil society was in contradiction with the more Gramscian nature of civil society that characterized the apartheid years where the relationship between state and civil society was one of contestation and reshaping power dynamics.

South African  
civil society:  
The political  
context:

V-Dem Civil  
Society Core  
Index 2020



# South African civil society: The Political Context

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2013 onwards we note a constriction of South Africa's civic space.

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This period aligns with the Zuma administration and an increasing autocratic approach towards South African civil society.

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A key example is the the infamous Protection of State Information Bill of 2011, commonly known as the Secrecy Bill

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Also noted a decrease in media freedom and freedom of expression

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In 2011 Freedom House's Media Freedom Index downgraded South Africa from Free to Partly Free due to increased harassment of journalists

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In 2012, South Africa's score for press freedom further declined.



## South African civil society: The political context

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The general decline in press freedom

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Increased measures to curb accountability for state capture during the Zuma administration

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Subversion political institutions for personal protection and gain

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Saw an increasing climate of autocratisation emerge in South Africa.

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Also globally we note a concern with autocratisation and a decline in democracy

Expert  
Views: The  
political  
context of  
South  
African civil  
society

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Experts agree that the institutional and constitutional structure facilitates agency as part of citizens' rights

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Concern with a constricting South African civic space

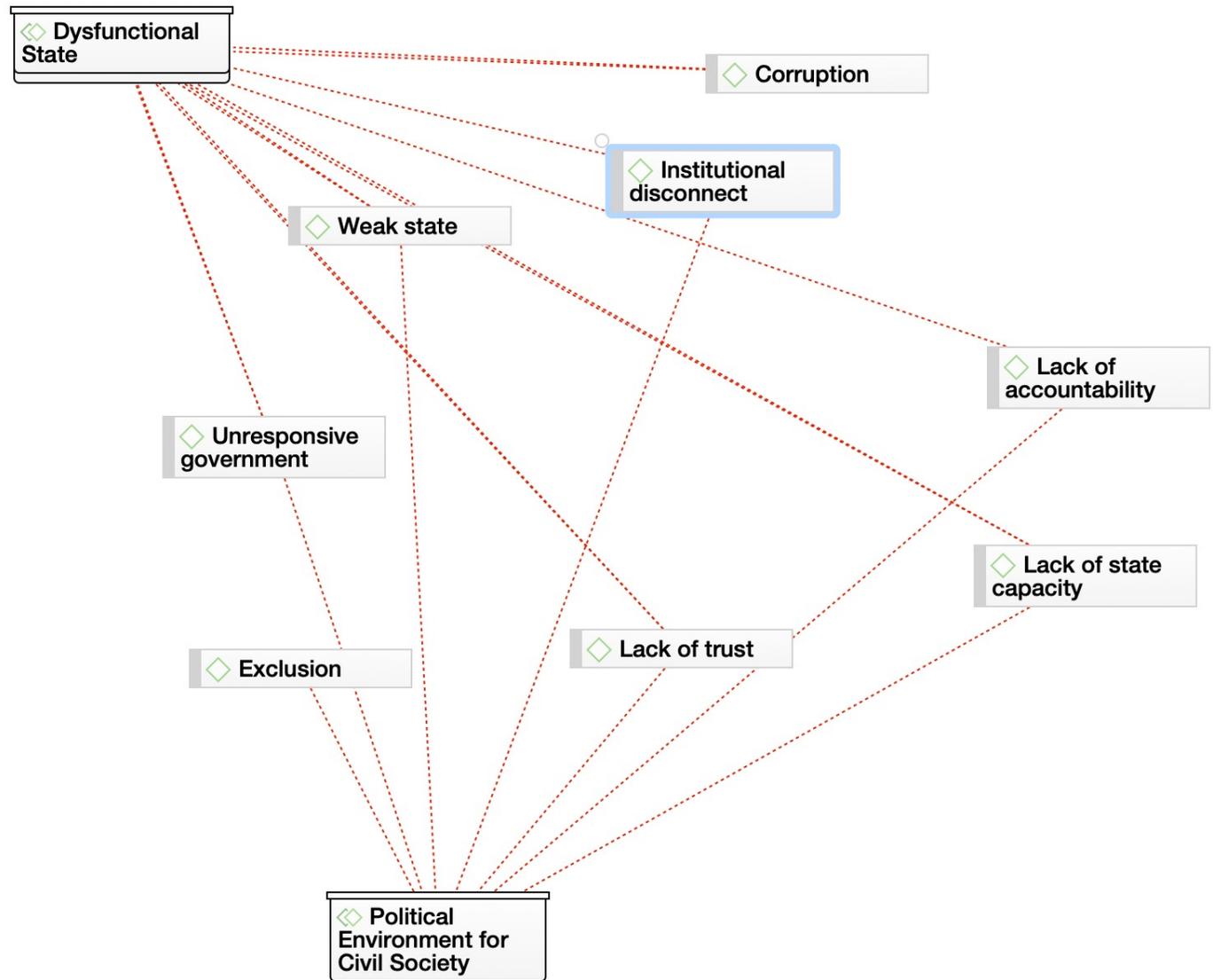
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Demonstrated with an increased strong and adversarial response from the state.

# Expert Views: Political context of South African civil society

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- “The civil society space is pretty open in the sense that you can say more or less anything you want, and that people are quite free to organize and mobilize and do, but the state is becoming increasingly weak. And as it weakens, particularly, the security becomes less responsive... in particular the security forces become more arbitrary and their response to things. So, if you do march, for example, if you do protest like most people do because you have no other means of accessing and getting the state to come to you, the only way to do it is through to do it is to protest...it seems to me that the state has become more and more unpredictable and arbitrary as the quality of the policing has deteriorated...So, it's the sense that it's still a lot of political freedom, but the state is becoming less and less predictable and more and more generally less responsive and more and more part of the unpredictability is that it can respond arbitrarily and violently and especially in poor areas. I think people know if you protest you take you take a chance because if the state comes it can often respond to that way (NDA-1-14-10-2020)”.

Expert views:  
The political  
context of  
South African  
civil society

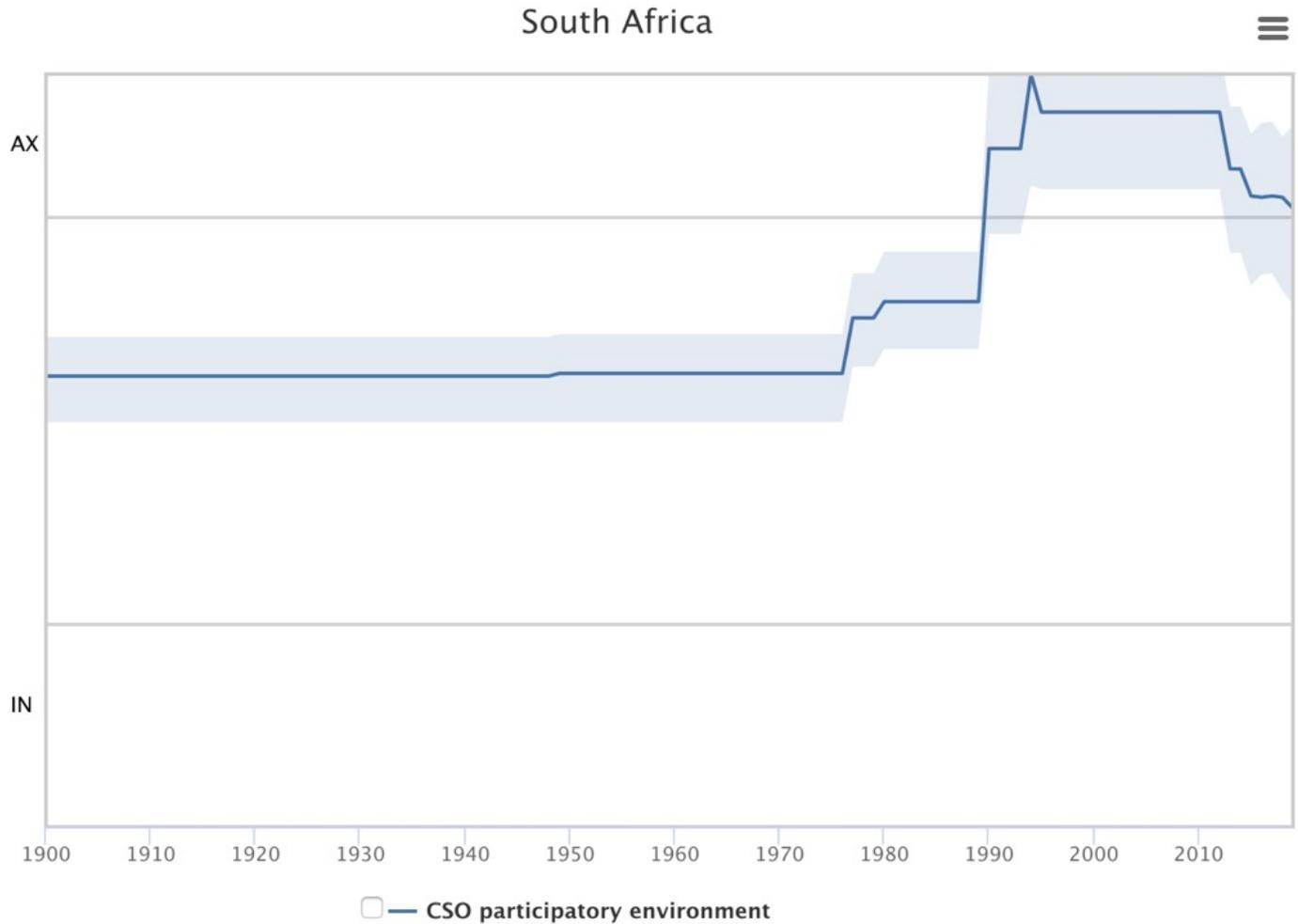


# Expert views: The political context of South African civil society

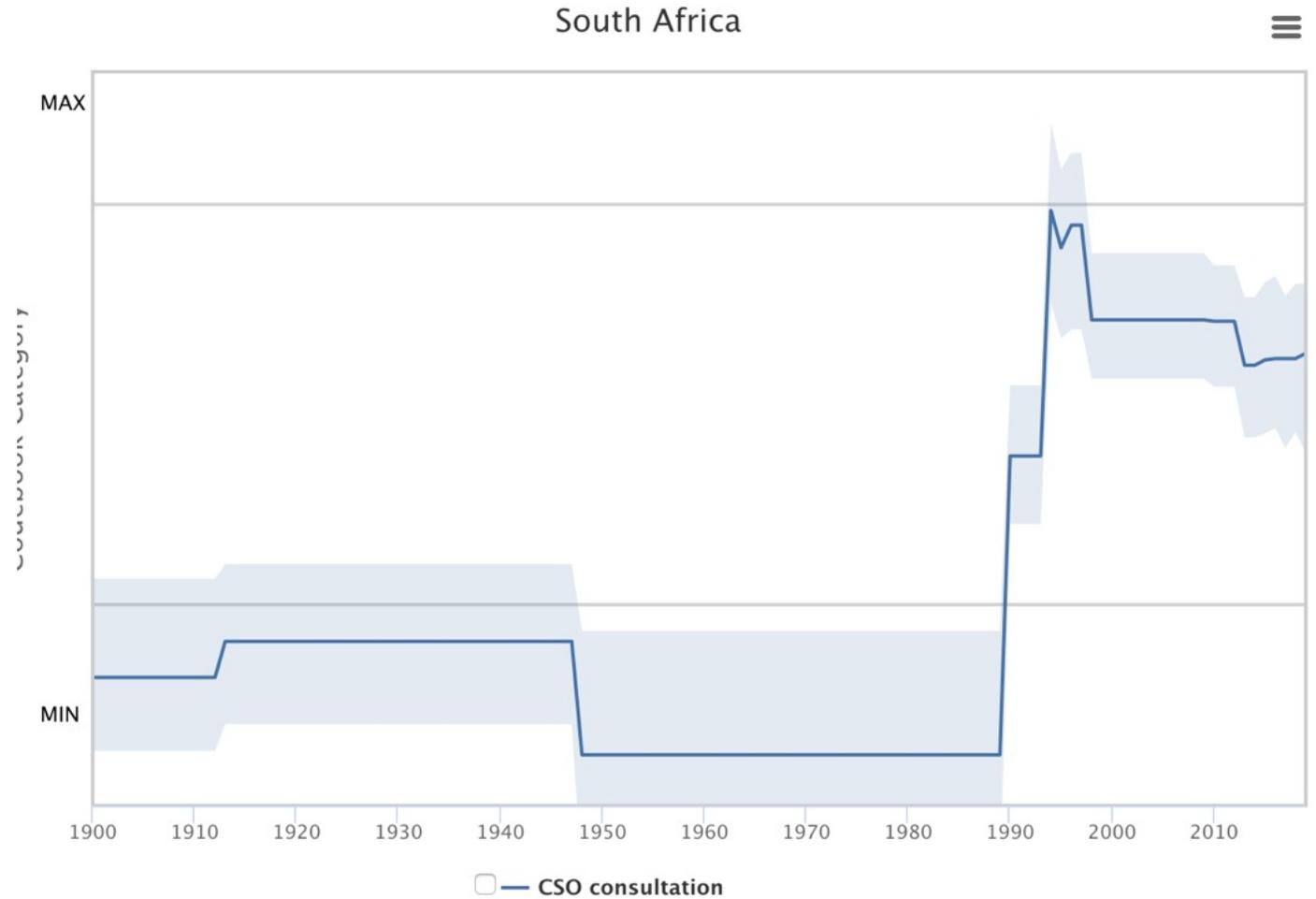
- Experts highlighted a number of factors that impact on the political environment for civil society
- State dysfunctionality is a key theme
- Corruption and state capture and lack of accountability lay the foundation for a weak state, unresponsive government and lack of state capacity
- Creates a sense of exclusion, lack of political trust and overall marginalisation for ordinary citizens and civil society organisations
- Institutional disconnect
  - Lack of consistency in how government at all levels engage with civil society
  - Varied and diverse experiences of CSOs when engaging government

# South African Civil Society: The political context:

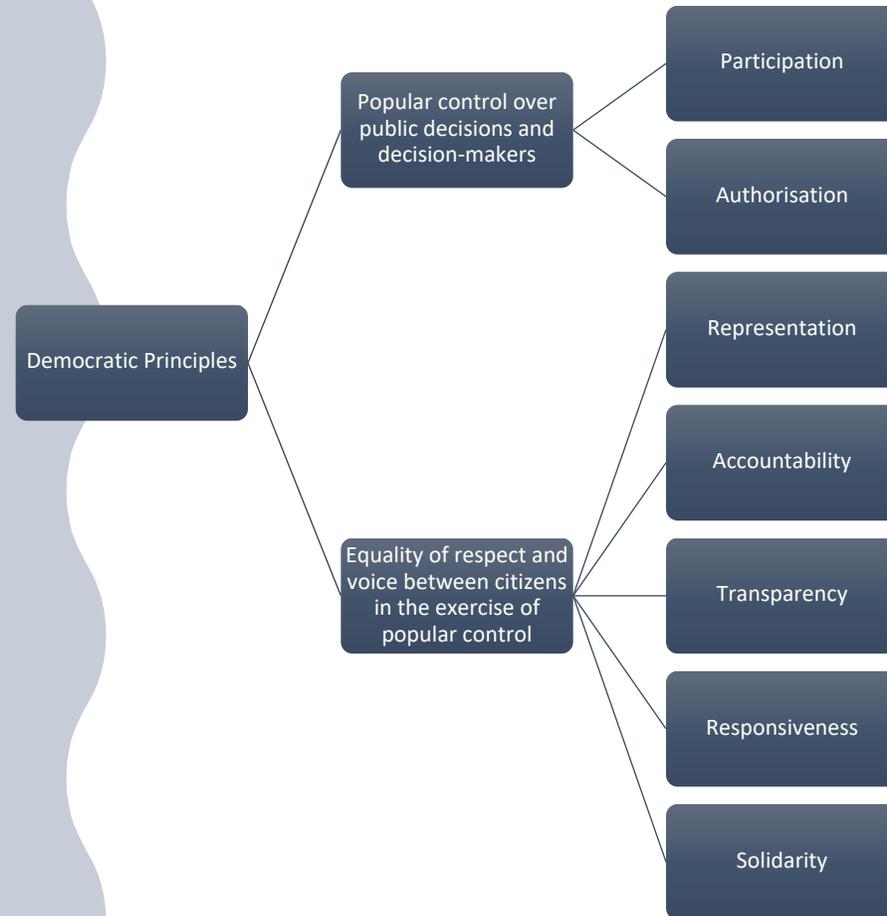
CSO Participatory Environment: South Africa (V-Dem, 2020).



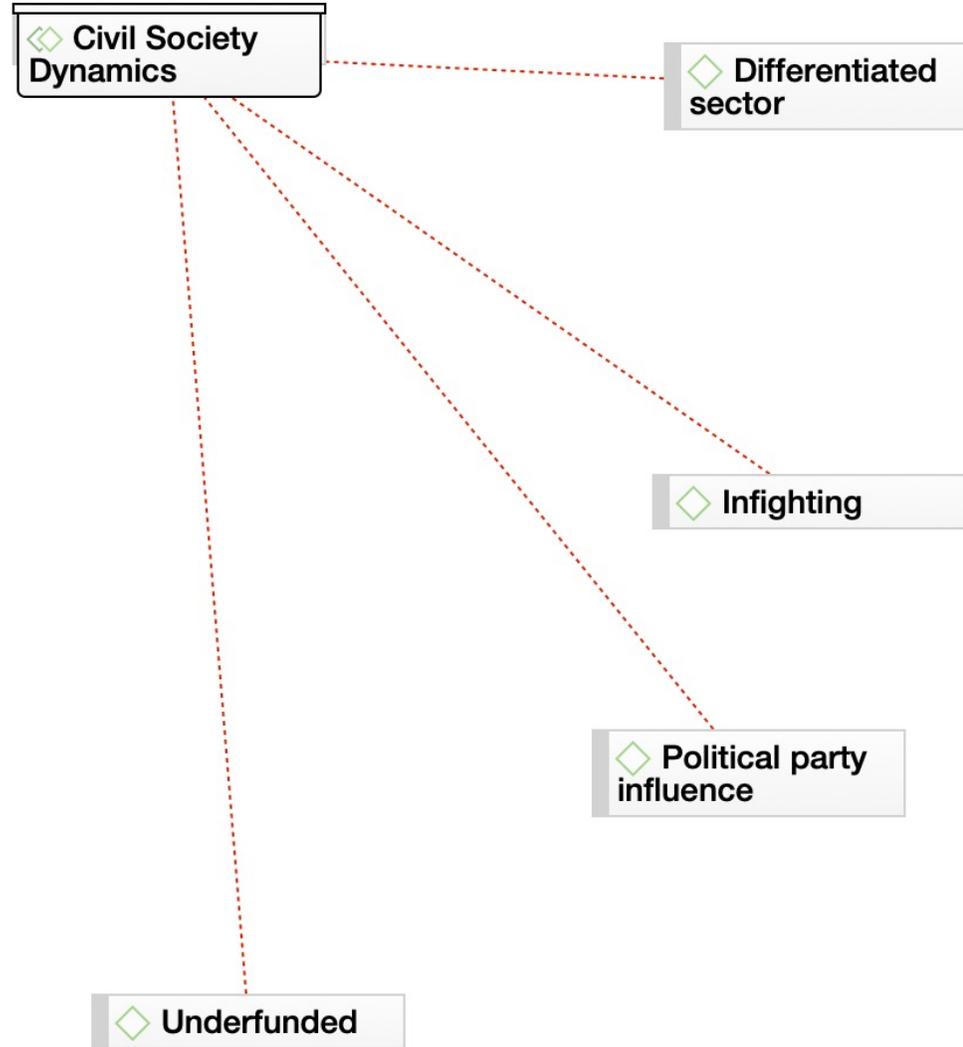
South African  
civil society: The  
political context  
CSO  
Consultation V-  
DEM (2020)



# Expert views: The political context of South African civil society



# Civil Society dynamics: A cursory glance



# Civil society dynamics: A cursory glance

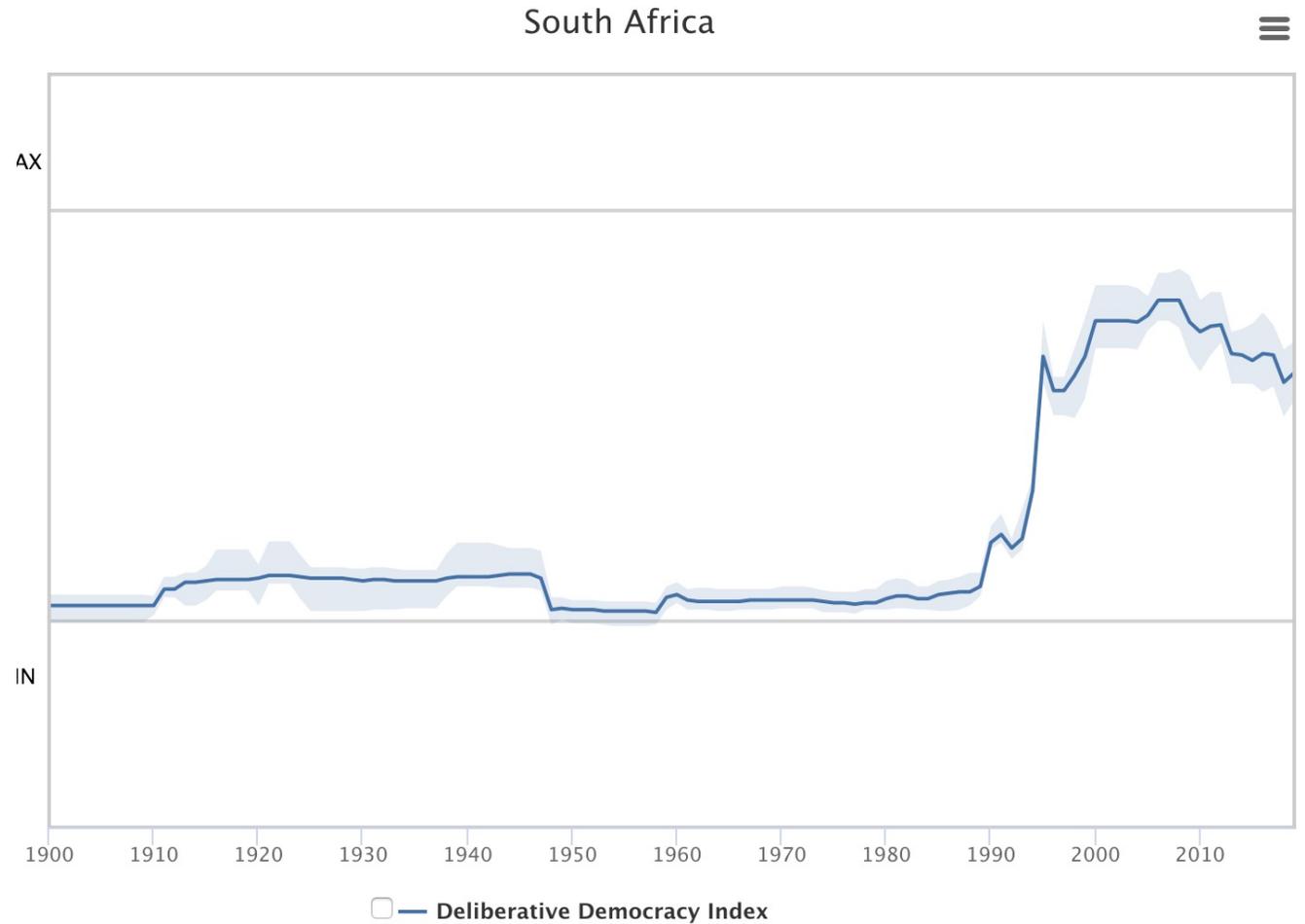
- Expert views on key factors that shape civil society dynamics flagged
- Issues of infighting
- Underfunding of CSOs
- Political party influence
- A high degree of differentiation within the civil society sector.
  - Interviewees highlighted that when looking at South Africa's civic space one needs to distinguish what is conceptualized as the professionalized NGO sector, community-based organisations, and a more localized and politicalised type of organization that compete for political influence within communities.

# Civil society dynamics: A cursory glance

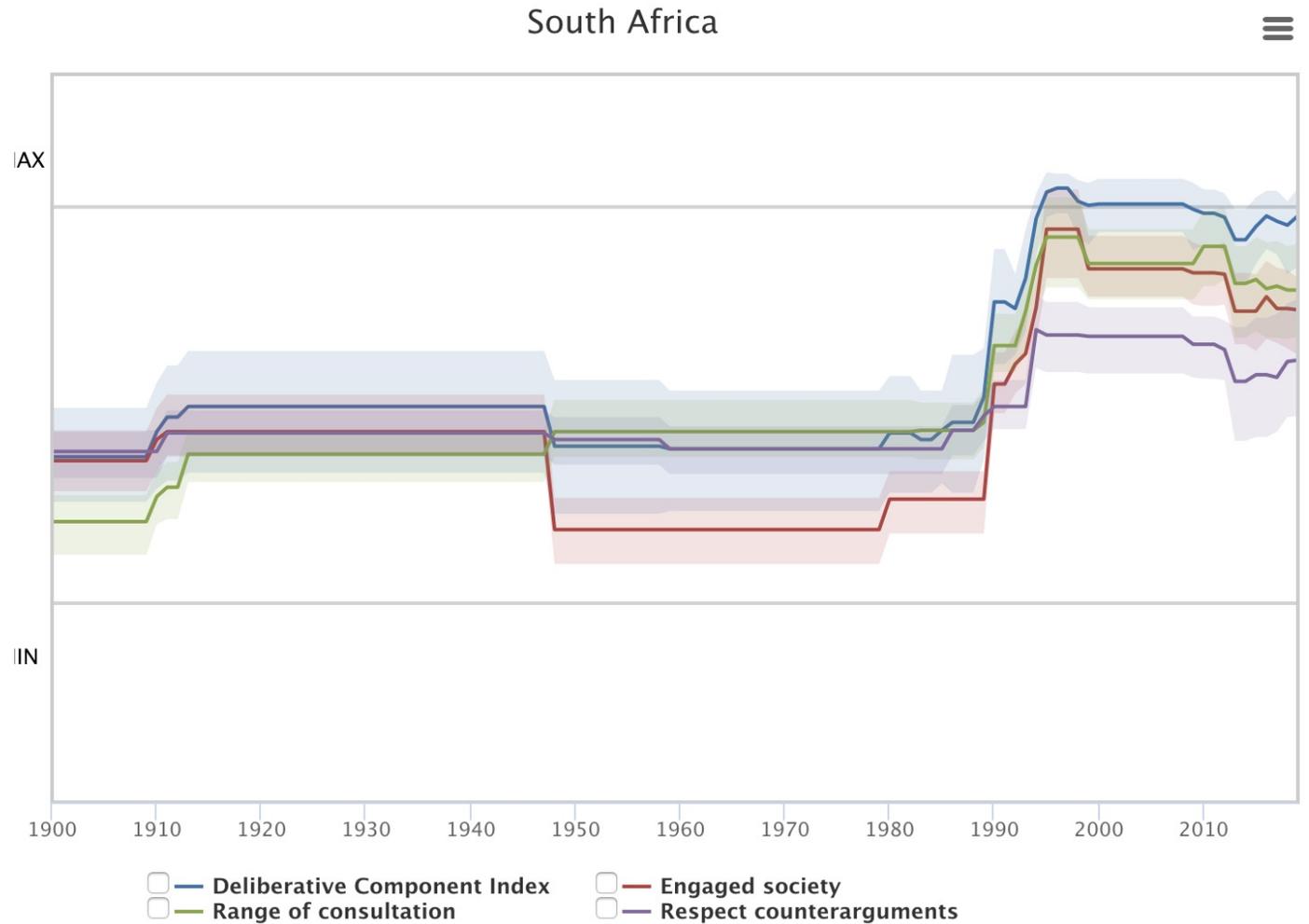
- Internal civil society dynamics are characterized by a number of caveats that may impact on civil society effectiveness.
  - Questions of representation
  - Access, ability to successfully engage the state
  - The nature of engagement (collaborative or contentious)
- Key to understanding civil society dynamics would be to distinguish between the type and level of civil society organization the state will engage.
- Highlights the need for a more consistent approach in engagements and values of engagement that shape state-civil society relationships

# Civil society dynamics: A cursory glance

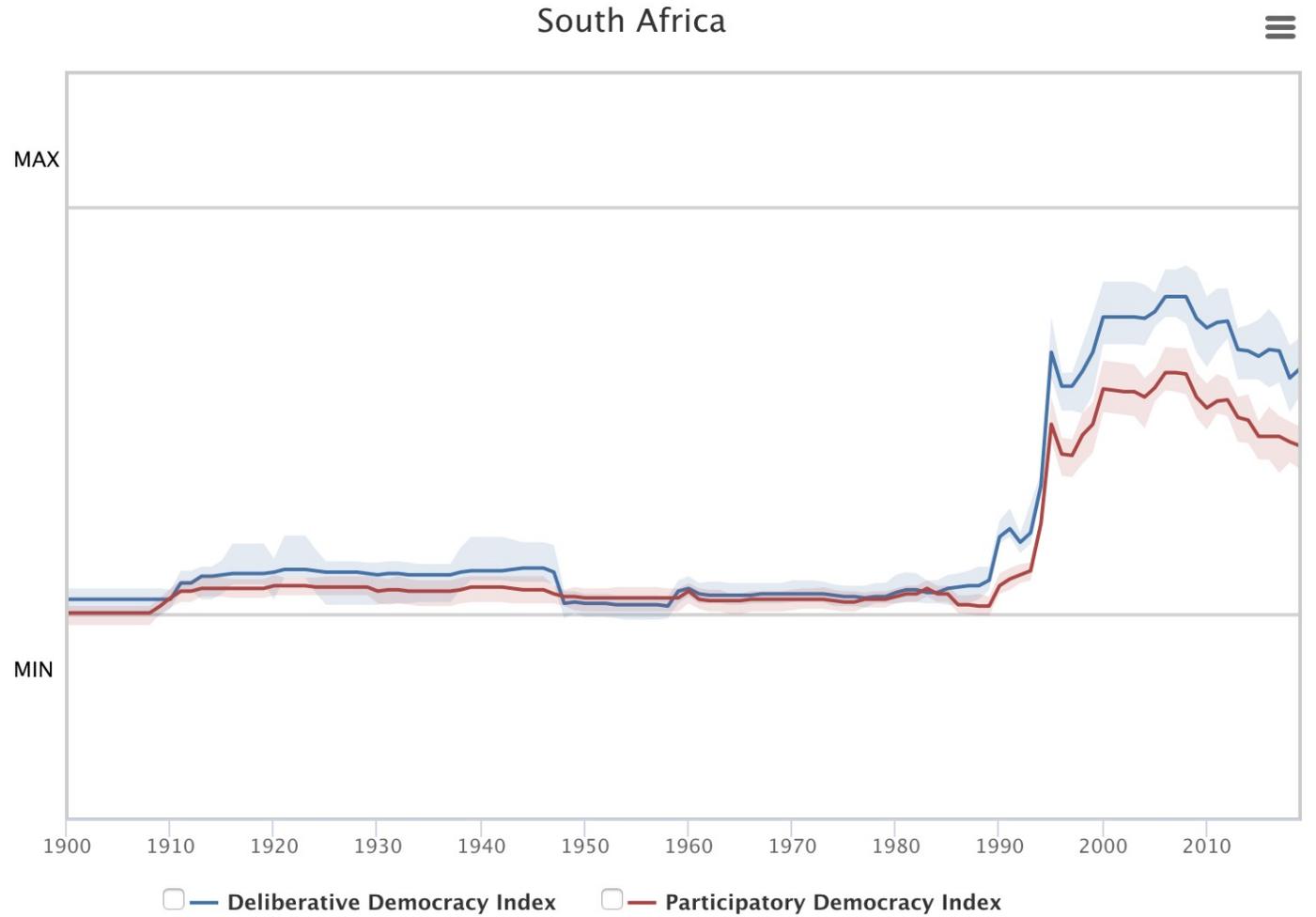
- V-Dem Deliberative Democracy Index (2020)



Civil society dynamics: A cursory glance



Civil society dynamics: A cursory glance



# Gender dynamics in South African civil society: Representation and Voice

- Civil society is a key space to facilitate and include the voices of women as critical issues that affect them have to be placed on the political agenda for transformation.

# Gender dynamics in South African civil society: Representation and Voice

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Women's political empowerment, civil liberties and freedom of expression has declined from around 2009 in South Africa.

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From 2019, we also noted the narrative of a “war on women” or “Shadow Pandemic” (UNWomen, 2020) highlighting an embedded culture of patriarchy and chauvinism that finds expression in a “structural problem of violence against women” (Moos, 2019).

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South Africa has one of the highest rates of femicide globally where one woman is murdered every three hours (Khumalo, 2019).

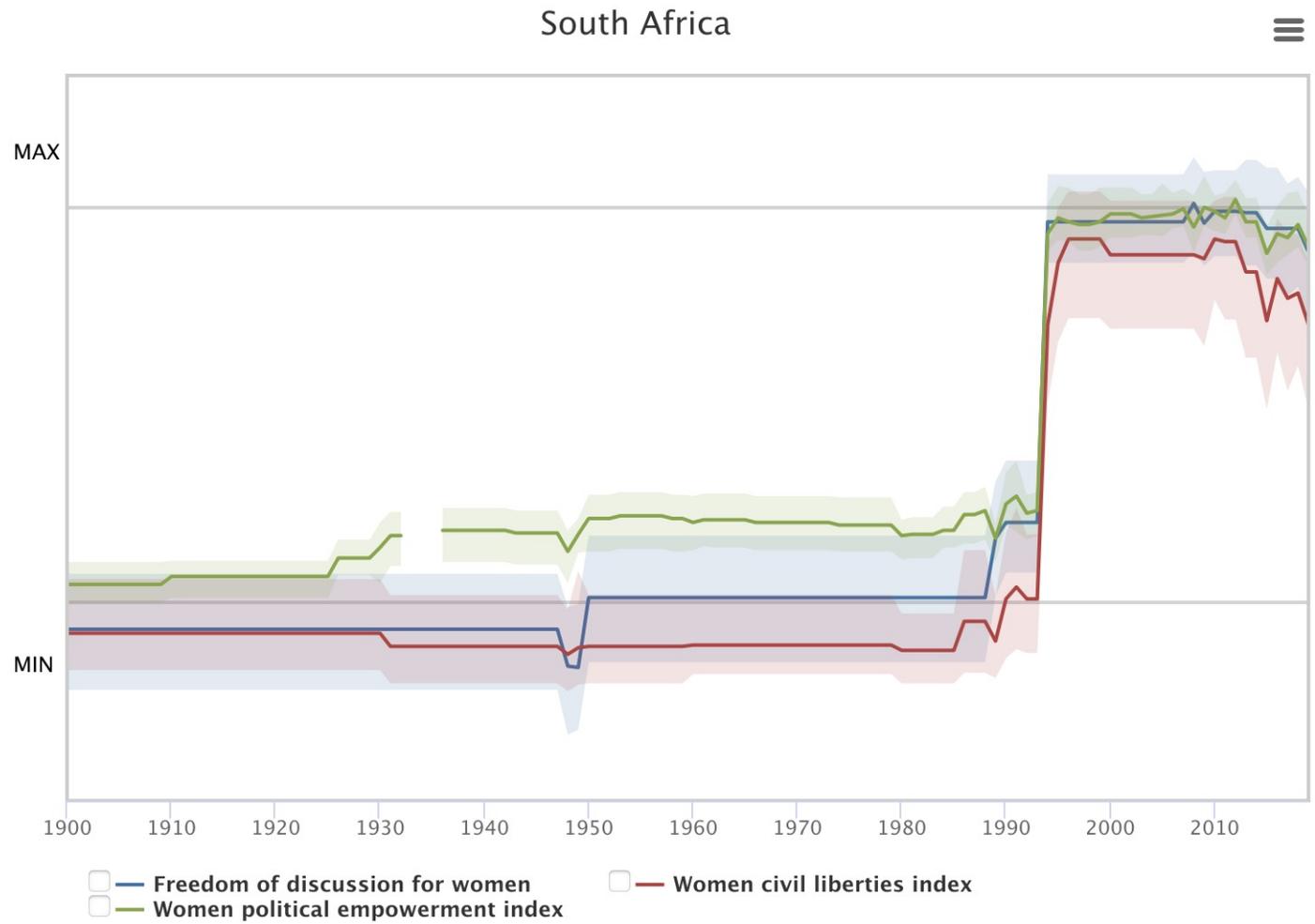
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This is not surprising given that an enduring legacy of apartheid is inequality, not just racially, but based on gender as well.

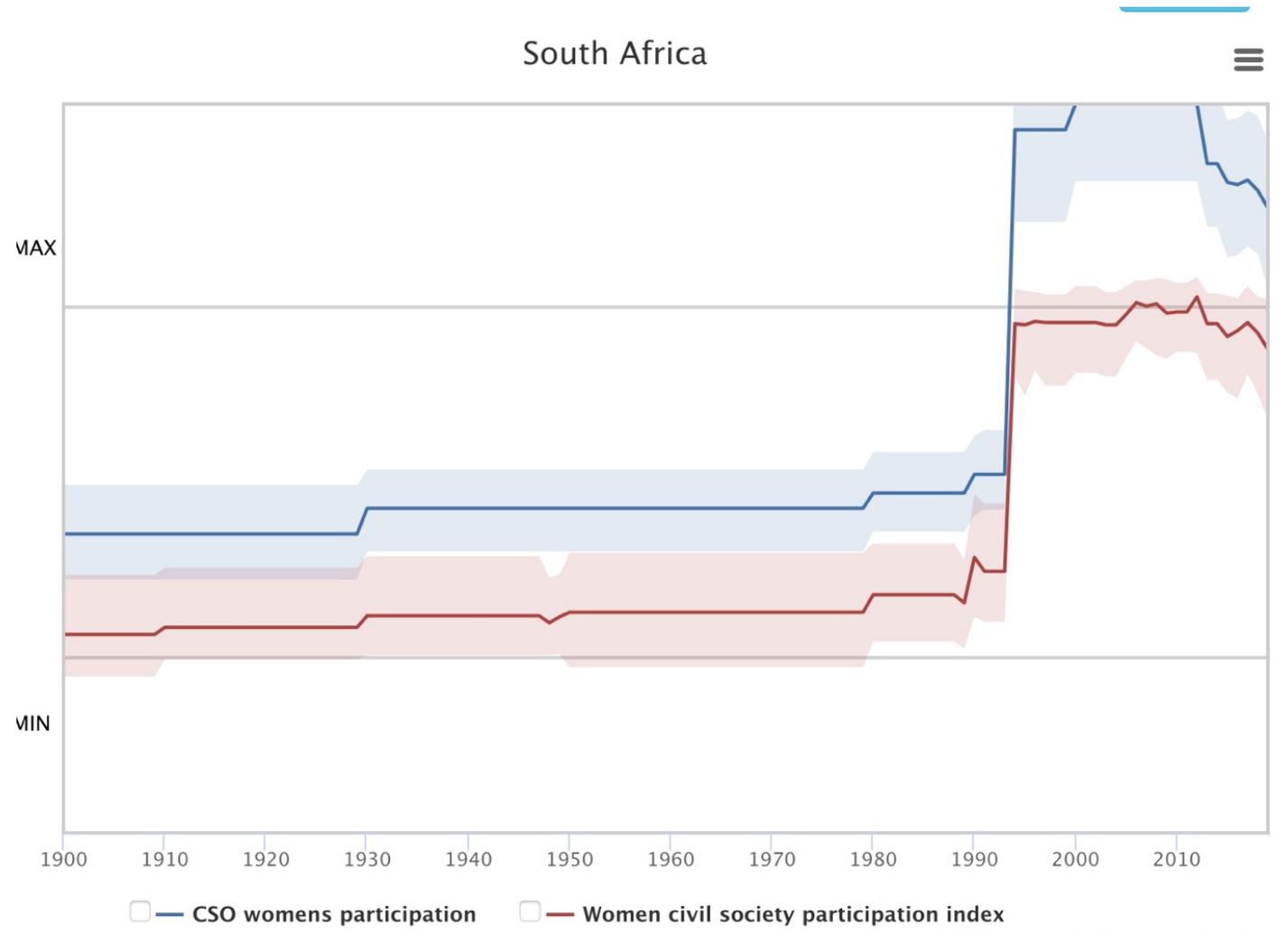
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#AmINext? #MeToo? #IamHer

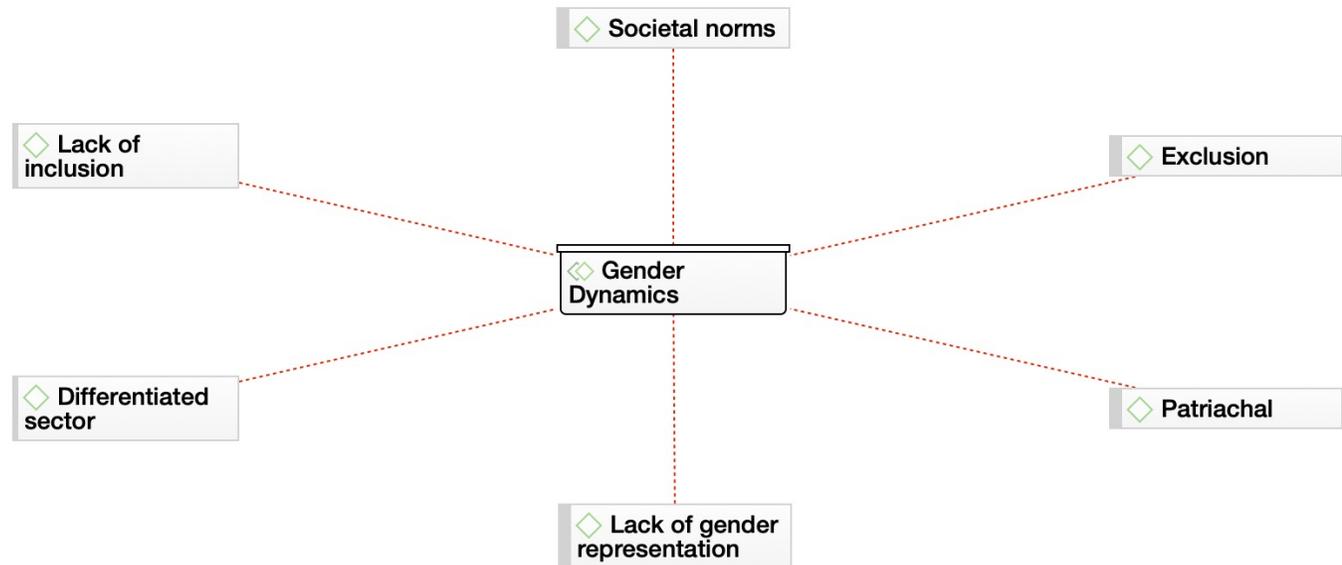
Gender dynamics in South African civil society: Representation and voice



Gender dynamics in South African civil society: Representation and Voice



# Gender dynamics in South African Civil Society: Representation and Voice



# Gender Dynamics in South African Civil Society: Representation and Voice

- Experts flagged key challenges to gender inclusivity in South African civil society
  - Patriarchal societal norms
  - General Exclusion
  - Lack of representation
  - Differences in the sector

# Gender Dynamics in South African Civil Society: Representation and Voice

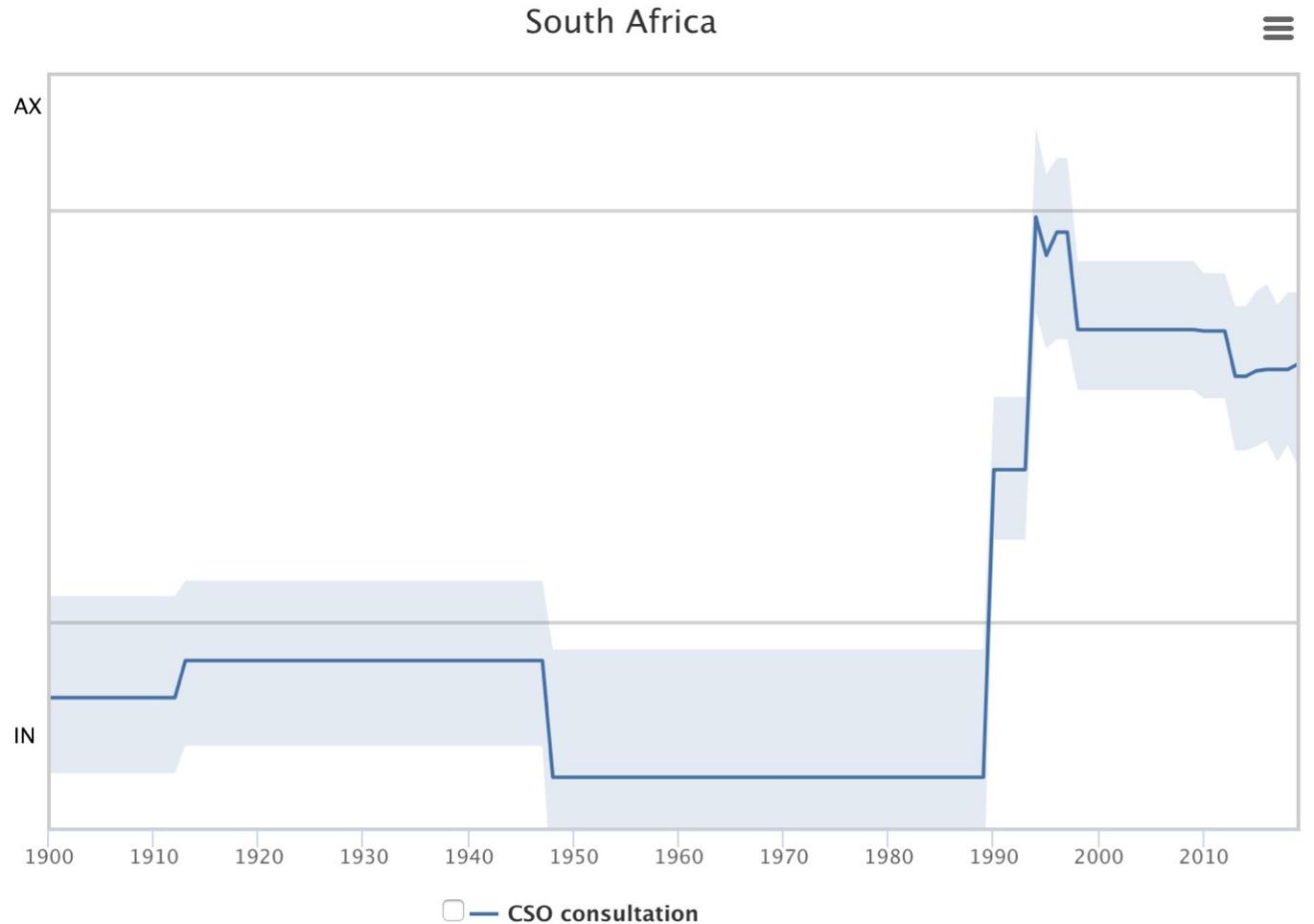
- An interesting phenomenon that emerges from the interview data related to community care workers
- As they are predominantly female, we note a continued traditional gender construct
- Women are generally constructed as caring and nurturing, as opposed to women going out and claiming land, which could be interpreted as a more masculine role.
- However, it is also important to note that within younger generations, those traditional gender roles are increasingly being questioned and challenged
  - “I think there are some aspects of those gender roles which are being questioned more in a younger generation. Not to say that it is all fixed, and much better, but there is maybe less rigid than with older adults or elders or people who are more invested in those delusions... there's definitely I think a lot of pressure coming from young people in terms of lots of areas but also gender norms. (NDA-22-09-2020-02).
- Societal norms may shift towards a more gender just society, but that may take some time.
- There is a need to engage in community awareness on gender justice in order to facilitate a transformed society underpinned by a commitment to gender justice, equality of voice, and representation, not just of traditional gender identities such as male and female, but also marginalised gender identities within the LGBTQI community.

# Conclusions and Recommendations



# CSO Consultation

- Transform how CSO consultation happens and the principles that drive CSO consultation



# Questions of Co- governance

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Determine how co-governance between state and civil society is conceptualised

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To facilitate the inclusion of marginalised groups.

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State effectiveness

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Quality of governance

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Government Responsive

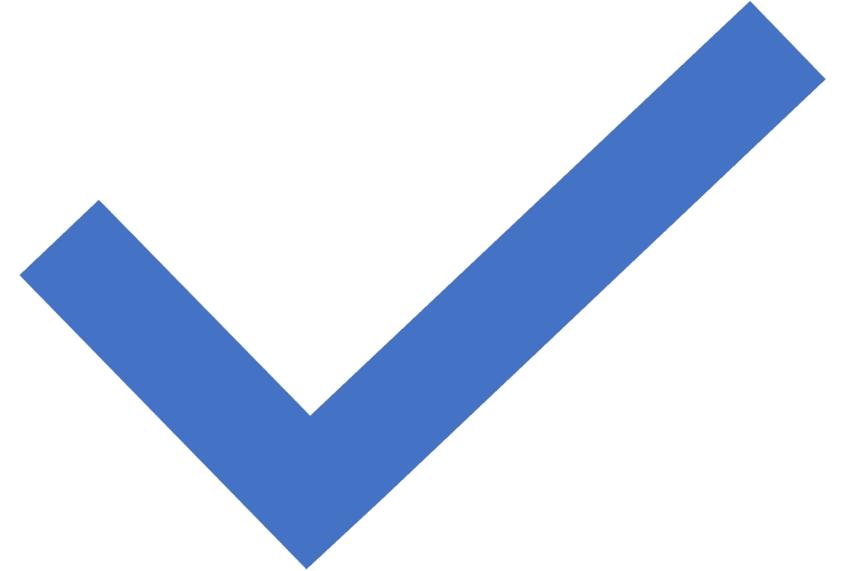
# Improved state capacity

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[Apolitical] [Arbitrary state action] [Consultative] [Corruption] **[Differentiated sector]**  
**Disconnect] [Dysfunctional]** [Exclusion] [Freedom of Association] [Freedom of Speech] [Infighting] [Institutional  
disconnect] **[Lack of accountability]** [Lack of gender representation] [Lack of inclusion] [Lack of quality  
participation] [Lack of state capacity] [Lack of trust] [Open] **[Patriachal] [Patronage]** [Political party  
influence] [Representation] [Restrictive environment] **[Societal norms] [Structural**  
**flaws]** [Tick-box exercise] [Underfunded] [Unresponsive government] **[Weak state]**

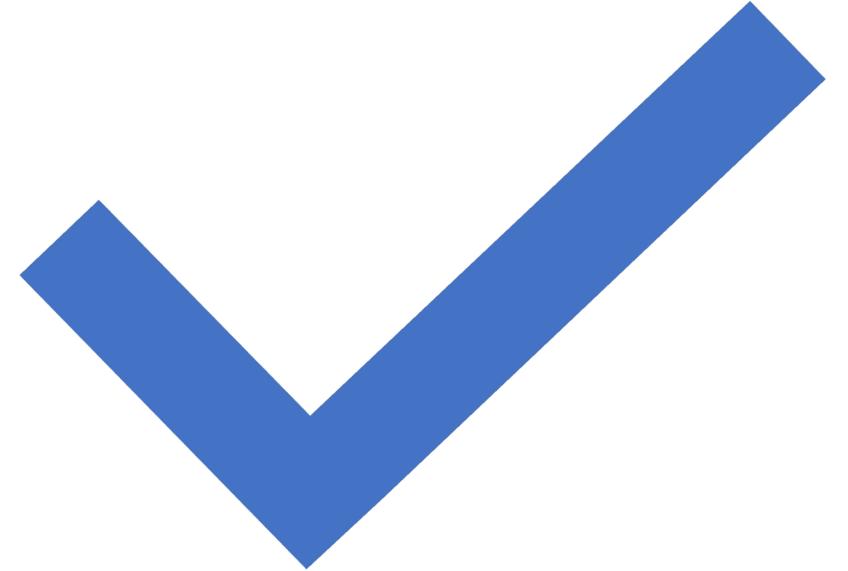
# Recommendations

- Development of a national code of conduct for government at all levels to structure their engagement with civil society to meet the requirements of participatory and deliberative democracy. This will be essential to ensure that there is consistency in how government interacts with CSOs as well as establish a code of conduct based on the constitutional principles of deliberative and participatory democracy.



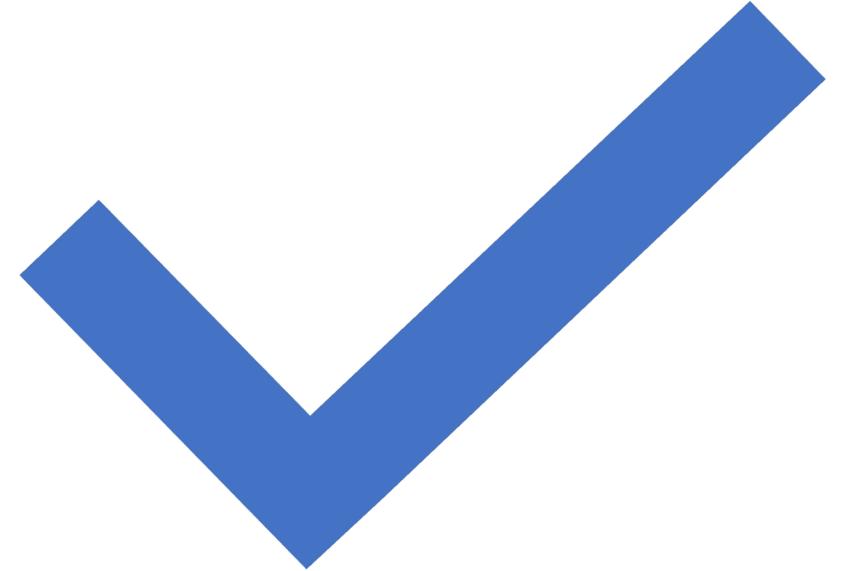
# Recommendations

- Establish specific engagement offices and advisory support committees to facilitate co-governance across key social and economic departments. Critical public offices would include health, local government, the presidency, and other key departments in the administration that deal with critical issues around transformation of South African broader society. A dedicated office to engage with key CSOs could establish a structure to facilitate a more nuanced and streamlined approach to state-civil society engagement.



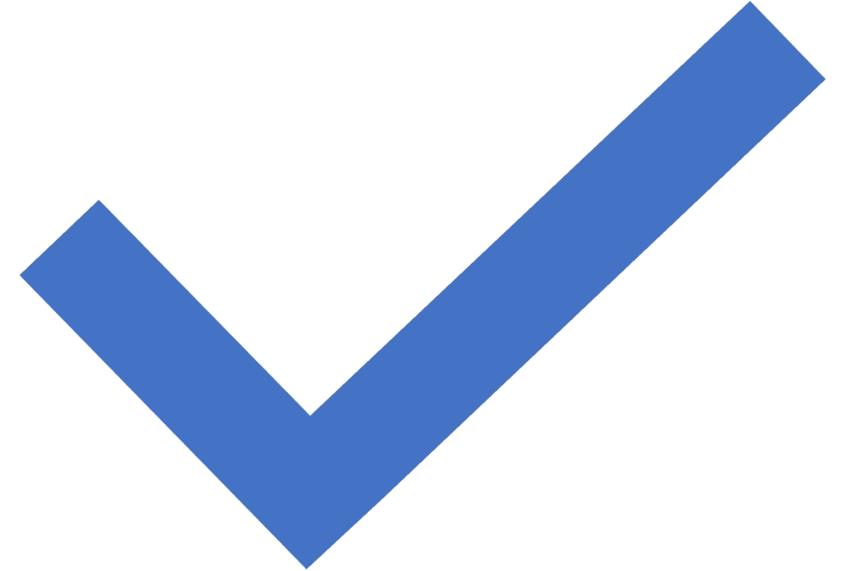
# Recommendations

- Develop, in consultation with CSOs across various sectors, a code of conduct to facilitate co-governance and collaboration. A possible intervention is to call for a national conference where CSOs can develop and agree to a code of conduct to ensure representivity, voice, and inclusion, especially of marginalised groups.



# Recommendations

- Provide training focused on the principles of participatory and deliberative democracy in a South African context and quality deliberations for public officials in their engagement with civil society. Key personnel that engage CSOs may need to undergo training with a focus on softer skills for civil society engagement to facilitate co-governance and collaboration, as well as to build quality deliberations with civil society.



# Recommendations

- Provide training across the spectrum of civil society organisations on the participatory mechanisms for civil society engagement. Given the differentiation and diversity within the CSO sector, there may be a need to provide training for CSOs on South Africa's participatory mechanisms.

