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Land politics, trust relations in government and land reform in South Africa: Experiences from the Western and Northern Cape provinces

Thorvald Gran

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Land politics, trust relations in government and land
reform in South Africa: Experiences from the Western
and Northern Cape provinces

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Contents

1. Land reform and trust relations in government	1
1.1 Governance structures and the slow pace of land reform	1
1.2 Trust in land reform	2
1.3 The land elite in the two provinces	4
2. Findings	6
2.1 Commercial farming is the only way. The state is a retarder, not a facilitator of land reform	6
2.2 The ANC and the DA distrust each other, more so in the Northern than in the Western Cape	8
2.3 Stakeholders in land reform are passive, even destructive	9
2.4 The land elite's competence in land reform: multidimensional support to emerging farmers	11
2.5 Politicians doubt the effectiveness and loyalty of the land bureaucracy	14
2.6 Corporate organisation of public administration: the Northern Cape elite is more positive	17
3. Conclusion: Distrust within the land state hampers land reform	18
Endnotes	22
References	24

1. Land reform and trust relations in government

1.1 Governance structures and the slow pace of land reform

The land question, as it is posed academically in South Africa, is at the cutting edge of the development debate.¹ Should land held by poor peasants, often under some kind of communal tenure, be reorganised as private property and absorbed into the market economy? Should land reform therefore target emerging commercial farmers? Or do communal forms of tenure and the subsistence-oriented modes of multiple livelihoods in rural areas have their own development and change potentials that can be released with support from appropriate infrastructure, despite the often dire and increasing poverty in such communities? (May 2000). The first ‘modern’ option assumes a massive movement of excluded people to the urban areas.² The second option, unconditional support to subsistence livelihoods on communally held lands, and increased integration into markets, can lead to development without such a massive movement. However, the second option can seem irrelevant from an economic point of view. The contribution of financial surplus to the modern economy from subsistence production is limited or negative. The income of

bricoleurs (persons engaged in and searching for use-value oriented, multiple livelihoods, Levi-Strauss 1962) is informal and for a large part not monetised in markets. The first option is modern and 'realistic'. The second option may seem traditional, anachronistic and irrelevant. However, if land is reorganised from within existing rural communities and infrastructure is improved so that livelihoods gradually improve for millions of rural people that would itself be a major improvement, beneficial perhaps for urban and 'modern' developments as well.³

My concern here is to investigate how land politics and governance structures in what I call the land state in South Africa have affected the contents and slow pace of land reform. Many have noticed a change of government focus or government rhetoric in land reform, from support to ordinary livelihood-seeking people in general, to assistance primarily to emerging and commercial farmers (Cousins 2003a). This change is registered in government programmes, from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in the early 1990s, through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (Gear) to the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme. How has that more limited social focus of policy affected the governance system and trust relations within the land state? The land state is the triangular relation between the provincial legislatures, the provincial offices of the Department of Land Affairs (PDLAs) and the provincial departments of agriculture (PDoAs) and the relations those state institutions have to non-governmental stakeholders in land.⁴ Although western South Africa had no apartheid homelands, and black Africans were, in general, kept out of the region through influx control, the two provinces are different. The Northern Cape is a huge area, semi-desert, and has few people mostly engaged in animal husbandry with some commercial farming (along the Orange River) and some major diamond mining activities. The Western Cape is urbanised, has an economically rich coastal area and large expanses of large-scale commercial agriculture. The assumption is that the economic systems in agriculture and the basic structure of the land state are similar in all the provinces of South Africa.

1.2 Trust in land reform

Adam Seligman (1997) argues that trust, both horizontally among people and vertically, to political and administrative state institutions, is necessary for a democratic society to function well. One reason is the degree of differentiation and interdependence of institutions in such a society, making it difficult for any one person to have specific knowledge of the trustworthiness of each institution that he or she has to interact with. Max Weber argued likewise



that an *esprit de corps*, a common understanding of mission and a realisation that that mission is important for the good functioning of modern public bureaucracies (Evans 1997). However, an element of distrust is equally important (Warren 1999; Hardin 1998). The democratic process is driven by differences of interest, by the continuous dynamic between ruling regime and opposition to it (Touraine 1997). If trust is based on the assumption that the trustee has your interest in mind, then democracy is dependent upon distrust. In a conflict of interests there is little reason to assume that the other party has your interest in mind. Rather the opposite. I assume here that both aspects of trust relations are important for sustained democracy: distrust between participating interest formations, be they movements, unions or political parties, and trust between them in the sense that the common arenas for political and other forms of struggle are accepted and respected. A test of that trust is when one interest formation is voted down in such an arena (for example in a national or provincial parliament), the interest group does not exit from the arena, it does not exit from the democratic system (Przeworski 1991). It was this dual level theory of trust relations in democratic states that informed the investigation of land politics and the land state in (western) South Africa that is briefly reported on here.

When you do not have any specific knowledge of the institution you have to enter, then unconditional trust is activated towards the persons you interact with. However, the willingness to consider entering the institution is dependent upon a higher level form of trust, which we might call system confidence. That combination makes for maximum efficiency in interactions or for very low transaction costs. The danger is a collective seduction. Trust can be conditioned, and most often is. Trust can be defined as an interest. A company manager can see employee loyalty and trust as an interest, investing time and energy in acting so that employee loyalty and trust is enhanced. Trust can be conditioned by familiarity. I only trust members of my family, of a specific ethnic group, organisation or political party. Such trust networks can be the only format of cohesion in illegitimate organisations in democratic states (for example, mafia, criminal and terror organisations (Tilly, forthcoming)). Lack of vertical trust relations within an organisation can lead to centralisation of power and to a change from democratic and transparent, to authoritarian and concealed leadership. Unconditional trust between members of distant and antagonistic institutions can lead to a learning process that over time modifies the institutions and brings them closer to each other. In this sense unconditional trusters are important for system building in segregated societies. The question reported on here is the

distribution and character of trust relations within the land state in western South Africa, between its political and administrative sections, between the political parties in the land state, and between the land state and major stakeholders in land in the country.

This paper asks how trust relations within the land state affect the power of the land state in the field of land reform. The land state is those public institutions engaged in the land reform programme, in this study, the national government, the provincial parliaments and the departments of land affairs and agriculture in the Northern and Western Cape. The investigation has been searching for (1) the opinions within the land state on what the land reform programme is about and whom it should benefit. It has attempted to (2) uncover the trust relations between politicians in the two main political parties in both provinces, and among the politicians elected into the provincial legislatures. The investigation has (3) registered how the political and administrative land elite in both provinces viewed the role and engagement of eleven major stakeholders in land, deducting the degree of trust from the pattern of opinions expressed. The investigation attempts (4) to deduct the competence of the land state in land reform from the varied descriptions the members of the public land elite give of the present weaknesses of the land state in the management of land reform and how, through which operations, the implementation of the land reform programme can be improved. We have (5) investigated how the politicians in the land state evaluate the loyalty, competence and efficiency of the provincial land administrations, in effect, the provincial offices of the Department of Land Affairs and the provincial departments of agriculture. Lastly we have looked into (6) how the land bureaucrats viewed a more corporate, competitive and economically independent organising of public services in agriculture.

Sixty-six persons, 27 elected politicians to the two legislatures and 39 leading land bureaucrats in the two departments in both provinces answered a questionnaire on these matters.⁵ Those 66 are variously called the public land elite or the Study Group. The article is based on their responses, collected in 2001–2002, with some 16 bureaucrats in the Department of Land Affairs answering the questionnaire in 2005.

1.3 The land elite in the two provinces

Western South Africa did not have homelands, partly because colonial authorities put restrictions on the immigration of black Africans to the area. Manual labourers were mainly coloured. The two provinces are, however, different. The Western Cape is rich, with a large urban population, modern agriculture and a large number of farm workers. The Northern Cape is poor, has few people scattered



over a vast area, with separate poor rural communities, many descendents of the KhoiSan people, and with modern agriculture (confined to the banks of the Orange River) and diamond mining.

The Western Cape since 1994 has been ruled by the New National Party (NNP), by the Democratic Alliance (DA) and recently (2003) by an NNP/ANC coalition. In 2001, the seats in the provincial legislature were distributed as follows: ANC 18, NNP 18, Democratic Party (later the DA) 6, African Christian Democratic Party 1 and United Democratic Movement 1, making a total of 44.

The Northern Cape has since 1994 been securely in the hands of the ANC, but a substantial part of the white and coloured population have supported the DA. In 2001 the Northern Cape legislature had 30 members, 20 ANC, 8 NNP, 1 from the Freedom Front and 1 from the Democratic Party.

The questionnaire, distributed in December 2001 and in August 2005, was addressed to all the members of the two legislatures and all decision-making bureaucrats in or connected to land reform in the PDoAs and the PDLAs in the two provinces. The group of 'active land reformers' in the two provincial legislatures and the two departments of agriculture can loosely be pegged at some 100 persons, of whom 66 replied.

After discussions with the administrators who distributed and collected the questionnaires, the members of the research team have reason to believe that the 66 are those engaged and informed on land reform politics and administration. In the Northern Cape 35 answered the questionnaire, while in the Western Cape the figure was 31. Ten of the respondents in the Northern Cape were politicians, compared with 17 in the Western Cape (Table 1).

The relatively small number of public servants in the Western Cape elite is due to the fact that only three regional directors in the provincial DLA answered the questionnaire. How representative are the politicians in the Study Group of the distribution of party members in the legislatures? We compared the number of ANC members relative to the total of ANC and DA members. The ANC had 69% of that total in the Northern Cape legislature and 67% of that total (6 of 9) in the Study Group. In the Western Cape legislature, the ANC had 43% of the ANC/DA total (or 18 of 42 members of

Table 1: The provincial land elites

	Northern Cape	Western Cape
Politicians	10	17
Bureaucrats	25	14
	35	31

parliament). The ANC had 40% of the total in the Study Group, or 6 of 15. The Study Group had been close to being perfectly representative of the main parties in the two legislatures.

Gender representation was satisfactory. In the Northern Cape legislature, 30% were females. In the Study Group, 25% were females. In the Western Cape legislature, 20% were females, while females made up 24% of the 17-member Study Group.

Education among the 66 was systematically skewed between the institutions. Put briefly, the level of education increased as we moved from Kimberley in the Northern Cape to Cape Town in the Western Cape, and as we moved from legislatures to land bureaucracies. The Northern Cape legislature had fewer members with university education than did the Western Cape legislature. All the PDoA members of the Study Group had a university education. Nearly 50% of the Study Group had been teachers before they entered the legislatures. In the Northern Cape group of politicians, not one had a business or management background. There were several with such a background among the Western Cape politicians.

2. Findings

2.1 Commercial farming is the only way; the state is a retarder, not a facilitator of land reform

With the dominance of the DA in Western Cape and the ANC in Northern Cape, it was not surprising that the Western Cape politicians were more critical of the ANC national government's land reform programme than politicians in the Northern Cape.

From the questions to the land bureaucrats where they could spell out answers, the following picture of their understanding of land reform emerged. The bureaucrats in both provinces thought the change from RDP to Gear was mainly rhetorical. The government's definition of land reform as a programme for developing black emerging farmers on commercial farms had been in place since 1990. The idea of giving bricoleurs on commonage more secure tenure and investing in infrastructure for economic development within their communities had never been a part of the programme (cf. Pycroft 1996).

Both politicians and bureaucrats agreed that the main bottleneck in the land reform programme was government – the public sector. There was no shared, common vision within and between government institutions on the character of the land reform programme. The decision-making system was fragmented and too complex. In other words, the *esprit de corps* was not in place. The



state was perceived as a large 'black box' of disconnected elements through which all demands for land and relevant infrastructure had to pass. The outcome was seldom in line with local demands. The decision process hampered implementation. It slowed the community processes of change and distorted the consistency between incoming demands and outputs/decisions from government institutions. Corruption sapped the flow of resources from the state to the communities and to land reform projects.

Only one respondent in the Western Cape said that the private sector was the main barrier to successful land reform. In the Northern Cape opinions were not very different. Two of the 12 respondents from the PDoAs said 'the commercial farmers are not involved'. The rest said that it was the public sector, the state that was the weak link in land reform (DLA, the Land Bank and the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights were mentioned). In the Northern Cape office of the DLA, 13 responded. Four saw the private sector as the barrier to land reform (Agri-SA, organised agriculture and NGOs were mentioned). Seven saw government as the barrier (district authorities, municipalities and post-settlement government support were mentioned).

From these descriptions we can detect substantial distrust between the institutions of the land state. It is however, interesting that these criticisms are emerging from the public land elite. This indicates personal independence and a will to tell the truth, both important aspects of a functioning democracy. The focus of land reform on black commercial farming is ironic. The history of European colonialism in South Africa was forceful establishment of white-controlled commercial farming. State ownership and private ownership (tickets of occupation) were also mechanisms used in commonage areas to pry land loose from traditional authority. Rural bricoleur subsistence communities were suppressed and 'modernised' under apartheid. They are not identified as being worthy of support under the present land reform regime. Conditional trust pulls or retracts 'mediators' into the conditioning institution and alienates people 'on the other side of the divide'. The likelihood of increasing distrust in the government land reform programme among people living under communal tenure, outside the formal capital-producing economy, is high. The commercialisation policy will therefore engender opposition in rural communities, except among the few that can become commercial farmers. Major increases in industrial and service employment can reduce opposition. However, with the formal economy in South Africa for the time being creating fewer jobs than the number of people entering the labour market (2002 statistics), opposition to the commercialisation policy is likely to increase, even if the ideals of life and work in the urban capitalist economy attract many.

2.2 The ANC and the DA distrust each other, more so in the Northern than in the Western Cape

Table 2 illustrates how the politicians in the two main political parties, the ANC and the DA, view each other's engagement in land reform. The question was: 'If you are a member of one of the main parties (ANC or DA): How would you describe the role of the other main political party (either ANC or DA) in land reform?'

Criticism and distrust of political opponents is normal in a democracy. Seeing the other party as passive in a policy area is normal in party-political struggle. In the group of politicians as a whole (23 persons), it is not surprising that 30% of them see the other party as passive. However, that 39% of the politicians speak of the other party as 'destructive of land reform' is not normal. Such terminology creates a seemingly large and unbridgeable gap between the parties. Mediation and compromise between parties that see each other as destructive agents is not likely. The data speak to a larger divide between the parties in the Northern Cape than in the Western Cape. In the Northern Cape, 7 of 8 politicians see the other party as passive and/or destructive. In the Western Cape, 9 of 15 see the other party as passive or destructive.

When asked about the other main party in provincial politics, the distrust between the parties increased. In the Northern Cape the percentage who replied 'destructive' rose from 38 to 63. In the Western Cape it rose from 40% to 79%. This shows that the animosity between the main political parties is substantial. Such animosity discourages interaction. ANC members in the Northern Cape legislature expressed disdain for the DA opposition. Some ANC members suggested the provincial level of government should be eliminated, exactly because it was a breeding ground for DA opposition to the ANC.

Animosity makes decision-making difficult. Animosity between parties reduces the respect for those decisions that are made in the legislatures. The land bureaucracy can assume that no one really

Table 2: The views of ANC and DA politicians of the other main party's role in land reform*

	Northern Cape		Western Cape		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Constructive	1	13	6	40	7	30
Passive	4	50	3	20	7	30
Destructive	3	38	6	40	9	39
	8	101	15	100	23	99

* n=23



Table 3. Evaluation of stakeholders in land reform. Percentage of the land elite who see the stakeholder as supportive of land reform*

I Ranking All, NC and WC	II Ranks summed	III Stakeholder	IV		V		VI	
			In Study Group 66 persons		In Northern Cape group 35 persons		In Western Cape group 31 persons	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1 1 6	8 (3)	NGOs	40	61	22	63	18	60
6 9 1	16 (6)	Commercial farmers' organisations	30	46	10	29	20	67
5 8 1	14 (5)	Commercial farmers	31	47	11	31	20	67
3 3 1	7 (2)	Subsistence producers	38	58	18	51	20	67
4 6 1	11 (4)	Farm workers	36	55	16	46	20	67
1 2 1	4 (1)	Farm workers' organisations	40	61	20	57	20	67
6 5 7	18 (7)	Labour unions	30	46	17	49	13	43
9 7 10	26 (9)	International donors	20	30	14	40	6	20
8 3 9	20 (8)	Financial institutions	27	41	18	51	9	30
10 10 8	28 (10)	Industry	17	26	7	20	10	33
111111	33 (11)	Industrial employers' organisations	11	17	6	17	5	17

* Question: Please evaluate the role of the following stakeholders relative to the administration of the land reform process in your province (supportive, passive or destructive).

supports the decisions made. When decisions in legislatures lack legitimacy, it is easier for the land bureaucracy to act on its own (Gran 2005).

2.3 Stakeholders in land reform are passive, even destructive

How did the public land elite see the participation of stakeholders in land in the land reform process? How supportive of land reform were industry, financial institutions and NGOs, and class-specific stakeholders like farmers, bricoleurs and farm workers? The distribution of viewpoints in the land elite as a whole and within each province is presented in Table 3. The ranking of the stakeholder, in the whole land elite and in the elite within each province, is presented in the first column of Table 3.

Table 3 records the number of votes given to each stakeholder as supportive of land reform. In Column IV it registers the total number of votes in the whole land elite (the Study Group), in Column V votes in the Northern Cape land elite and in Column VI votes in the Western Cape land elite. In Column I the ranking of stakeholders in

Table 4: The public land elite's ranking of stakeholders in land reform, ranked according to how many in the elite see the stakeholder as supportive of land reform

Rank	Stakeholder
1	Farm workers' organisations
2	Subsistence producers
3	Non-governmental organisations
4	Farm workers
5	Commercial farmers
6	Commercial farmers' organisations
7	Labour unions
8	Financial institutions
9	International donors
10	Industry
11	Industrial employers' organisations

each of the three voting groups (the whole group, the group in the Northern Cape and the group in the Western Cape) is registered, with the most votes ranked highest. Then in Column II the ranks in Column I are summed. That gives a more precise ranking because the variations in the provincial voting are taken into the index. The numbers in the parentheses in Column II express the most precise ranking of the stakeholders that our data can produce. This most precise ranking ordered from 1 – most supportive of land reform, down to the least supportive stakeholder, is presented in Table 4.

The state elite's ranking of stakeholders can be interpreted as a factual description. The driving force in land reform is an alliance of African workers, subsistence producers and NGOs. The commercial farmers together with labour unions are a middle group, while the representatives of the urban economy, financial institutions, industry and industrial employer organisations and international donors are the least supportive. The ranking can have a normative aspect as well – how the land elite would *like* to see the process. We can interpret the ranking as radical. It is not the urban capitalistic society that is the driving force in land reform. It might well have been, in the sense that commercialisation of the economies of the rural areas might benefit the urban economy (higher demand for industrial products, better educated labour and so on). It is not the commercial farmers that are the main force either. It is the working classes assisted by NGOs that the state elite would like to see as the main force driving land reform.

Returning to Table 3 on supportive stakeholders, there are differences of opinion between the state elites in the two provinces.



While the Western Cape elite (Column VI) would like to see all the rural stakeholders as most supportive, the Northern Cape elite (Column V) ranks the urban stakeholders on top: NGOs, financial institutions, and labour unions. Among rural stakeholders farm workers' organisations and subsistence producers are considered supportive by many members of the Northern Cape elite (57% and 51% respectively).

We suggest that the provincial land reform regimes are different. In the Western Cape, the public land elite is allied to the rural farming sector, including the weakest party, the subsistence producers. The urban industrial and financial sectors are unsupportive. The Northern Cape land reform regime is more connected to the urban sector, NGOs, farm workers' organisations and financial institutions, in addition to the weakest rural element, the subsistence producers.

These findings can support the hypothesis that mediation between institutions creates trust. Because of the strength of the DA/NNP and its historical connection to the white farming community in the Western Cape, there is more mediation and communication between commercial agriculture and provincial government there than in the ANC-dominated Northern Cape. In the Northern Cape, with an ANC majority in the legislature and an ANC Executive Council, the mediation between government and labour unions is more developed. The same is probably the case with government-donor relations – more co-operation in the poorer Northern Cape, and therefore somewhat more trust. The disturbing finding is the overall negative evaluation of industry in land reform, given its status as a motor in the development of the capital-producing South African economy. It can indicate that a divide between agriculture and industry, between commercial and communal agriculture, and/or the perception of industry and finance as 'English' and agriculture as 'Afrikaans' is still in place. In land reform, government and agriculture co-operate, with industry as a non-participant or even a destructive participant.

2.4 The land elite's competence in land reform: multidimensional support to emerging farmers

The politicians in the two provinces under discussion, the political land elite, were asked where the focus in land reform should be. Their answers indicate a mild impatience with the national government and their own political parties, again an indication that politicians speak out; that democracy is in place; that they have a degree of unconditional trust in the political system they are part of. They can speak their mind without fear of sanction.

The views of the public land elite as a whole

We asked all members of the land elite, both politicians and bureaucrats, to specify how the land reform process could be

improved. We asked them to select seven priorities from a list of 14 possibilities, and to rank these in order of preference. Table 5 records how many members of the Study Group chose a specific policy focus as first, second and third policy priority for the improvement of land reform. Sixty Study Group members answered the question. The distribution of the 60 votes is given in Columns I–III. The choice of priorities is summed in Columns IV and V. The percentages are ranked from highest to lowest in Column VI.

The most recent (2002) ANC government land reform policy, LRAD, put focus on commercial farming and black emerging farmers. The politicians and bureaucrats in the two provinces supported that focus. In Table 5, first column, 25 of 60 possible votes were given to ‘commercialisation’ and ‘emerging farmers’. The respondents’ choice of what should be the first priority suggest that the provincial public land elite are in agreement with the national government on commercialisation and emerging farmers in land reform. However, the elite as a whole has a broad, multidimensional understanding

Table 5: Suggested foci for land reform: First, second and third priorities*

	I			IV	V	VI
	First	Second	Third	Sum: Priorities 1+2+3	% of all (180) votes	Ranking (of % in V)
1. Communally-owned land	3	5	3	11	6	7
2. Emerging farmers	21	7	8	36	20	1
3. Commercialisation	4	6	5	15	8	4
4. Farm workers		14	5	19	11	3
5. Rural development	10	3	10	23	13	2
6. Environmental protection		6	4	12	7	6
7. Local participation in politics		2	1	3	2	9
8. District level of government	5	3	7	15	8	4
9. Political parties						
10. Provincial level of government	5			19	11	3
11. Public administration	4	3	1	8	4	8
12. The democratic process	1		2	3	2	9
13. Civil society associations		1		2	1	10
14. Education and research	5		7	14	8	5
Sum	60	60	60	180	101	

* Question: Assume the national government wants your personal counsel on policy/focus priorities for improving the land reform process. You are asked to choose 7 (seven) policy/focus of the following list of 14. Which 7 (seven) would you choose? Give the numbers of the items – in their priority from left to right.



of land reform. The elite are conscious/ knowledgeable of many important aspects of successful land reform.

This is underscored if we include the data in Column 2 for respondents' second priorities. The vote for emerging farmers is reduced to 7 and the vote for farm workers increases from 0 to 14. Environmental protection moves from 2 to 6 votes. Production on communally-held land gets 5 votes. Participation was mentioned by two respondents.

In Column III, the votes for what should be the third priority are spread out evenly. The highest number is 10 votes for 'rural development'.⁶ No respondent chose 'political parties' as a focus. This is perhaps disturbing, given the high level of perceived distrust between them.

The combination of the data reflecting distrust across the industry-agriculture divide and the scant interest in communal subsistence production indicates that important conditions for the implementation of a 'sophisticated' policy of land reform, with special focus on the large numbers of poor people in the rural areas on communally held land, are not in place. The data in Table 3 and 4 indicate that co-operation and trust between the public land institutions and the political parties and their leaders are at a low level. Even if the land elite has a sophisticated understanding of how to implement land reform, the institutional integration and co-operation needed to actually implement land reform is not in place. This could indicate that the number of people willing to mediate between the institutions, that is to leave the field of conditioned trust and enter unconditionally into co-operation in the open spaces between the institutions, is low.

The four foci that got below 2% of the 180 votes were 'local participation', 'the democratic process', 'civil society associations' and 'political parties'. We interpret this as a technocratic bent in the thinking about land reform in the political-bureaucratic land elite.

Did politicians and bureaucrats define land reform differently?

Did the politicians see land reform in welfare terms and did the land bureaucrats see it in terms of commercial production? In other words, were the politicians 'softer' and the bureaucrats 'harder' in their mental models of reality? Were bureaucrats more oriented towards commercialisation and the politicians more toward 'softer' values like production on communal land, favouring farm workers, environmental protection and education and research? Separating politicians from bureaucrats and separating soft from hard priorities, we investigated the question. Thirty-five of the 66 members of the Study Group responded to the question about selected soft and hard foci and the results are presented in Table 6. The expected numbers

Table 6: Politicians and bureaucrats on hard and soft values (priorities)*

	Politicians	Bureaucrats	Total
Soft priorities	1 (3)	9	10
Hard priorities	10	15 (17)	25
Total	11	24	35

* Chi square is 2.983 and Gamma is -0.714. Statistical significance 0.08.

in the table that assume no statistical dependency are between brackets.⁷

These data negate the hypothesis of soft politicians and hard land bureaucrats. The focus on commercialisation was stronger, more present among the politicians than among the land bureaucrats.

2.5 Politicians doubt the effectiveness and loyalty of the land bureaucracy

How did the politicians in the provincial legislatures evaluate the agricultural and land bureaucracies? The Department of Land Affairs has responsibility for land reform, redistribution, restitution and securing tenure. How did the politicians evaluate the strength of the provincial DLA offices in land reform? Table 7 presents the data, expected cell values in parantheses.

Table 7: Politicians' evaluations of the Department of Land Affairs in each province*

	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Total
Strong	4 (3)	3	7
Weak	5	13 (12)	18
Total	9	16	25

* Chi: 2.6, statistical significance 0.17.

As the Chi and significance measures indicate, the statistical relation is not very strong. However, the tendency is demonstrated in the 'total' column. Seven politicians said the provincial DLA is strong, 18 said it was weak. Separating the provinces, the tendency in the Northern Cape is that the politicians support the DLA, in the Western Cape that they are critical or sceptical. However, if we consider the possibility that the selection of the 25 politicians was a random selection, the number critical in the Western Cape is only slightly higher than would be expected, given the marginal distributions.

The provincial department of agriculture is the operative support agent in the land reform process. How was it evaluated by the



politicians? Of 26 politician respondents, six felt it was a strong department at the provincial level and 20 felt it was weak. Table 8 describes the evaluations of the politicians in each province, expected cell values in parenthesis.

	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Total
Strong	4 (2)	2	6
Weak	6	14 (12)	20
Totals	10	16	26

* Chi: 2.6, statistical significance 0.11.

Table 8 indicates that the Northern Cape politicians were more favourable to the PDoA than should be expected if there was no statistical relation. In the Western Cape the politicians were more critical than expected if there was no statistical relation. The significance of the result is low (above 10% chance of the result). Therefore the tendency in Table 8 is weak. It indicates that it is in the Western Cape that the politicians are critical of the PDoA.

We asked all 66 respondents, politicians and land bureaucrats, about co-operation between the two bureaucracies, the PDLA and the PDoA. The results are presented in Table 9.

	Politicians	Bureaucrats	Total	%
Yes, very much	13	21	34	54
Yes, somewhat	11	12	23	37
Their co-operation is okay	1	5	6	9
Totals	25	38	63	100

In Table 9 expected and actual numbers overlap. Therefore we can concentrate on the 'Total' column. Only six of the total public land elite (63 persons in this case) saw the level of co-operation as acceptable – less than 10%. An absolute majority (34 or 54% of the 63) found that major improvements were needed in the co-operation between departments. The land bureaucrats were as critical of the relation between the two department offices as were the politicians. This speaks to a large distance and lack of co-operation between the political and the administrative institutions in the land state. The political leadership does not experience the land

bureaucracy as being attuned to its political leadership. However, it also speaks to a realistic and openly critical bureaucratic elite.

Were there variations between the provinces? Did the political-administrative elites in the land state in the two provinces differ on their view of the PDLA-PDoA co-operation? The data are in Table 10.

Table 10: PDoA-DLA relations, as evaluated by provincial elites (expected values in parentheses)*

	Northern Cape elite	Western Cape elite	Total
In need of much improvement	22 (18)	12 (16)	34
In need of some improvement	10 (12)	13 (11)	23
The co-operation is okay	1 (3)	5 (3)	6
Total	33	30	63

* Chi square 5.87 statistical significance 0.05.

The difference in the evaluations across provinces is statistically significant. The Northern Cape elite is markedly more critical of the relation than the land elite in the Western Cape. The difference may have been reduced somewhat if the DLA office in the Western Cape had supplied information from more of its officers, not only its three directors. The difference may also be explained by the fact that the data from the Northern Cape PDoA are more from bureaucrats working in the regions of the province, while the data from the Western Cape PDoA are more from people working in the central administration at Elsenburg.

However, the data support the impression that the Western Cape land elite is more representative of a middle class management experience than is its Northern Cape counterpart. There are younger people in the Northern Cape land elite (22 of 34 respondents were under the age of 40, compared to 8 of the 31 in the Western Cape elite). The Western Cape elite has more people with experience from middle level management of business and other types of organisations.

The data indicate a large distance between the PDLA offices and the agricultural departments, with few trusted mediators. This distance exacerbates distrust on both sides. Lack of co-operation between the departments explains a major problem in land reform: people can get a small piece of land within a communal arrangement (from the PDLA), but infrastructure, controlled mainly by the PDoA and other sectors of the state, does not materialise. The result is disarray in the management of newly acquired land and reproduction of the poverty setting from the original homestead.



2.6 Corporate organisation of public administration: the Northern Cape elite is more positive

We asked the land bureaucrats in both provinces about their view of the value, or the effect of corporate organisation of the public land administration – the effect of making semi-autonomous corporations of public institutions responsible for their incomes and expenditures on 11 dimensions of activity. We recorded the number of those activities the respondent thought would benefit from corporate organising and calculated what proportion this formed of the 11. The data are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Evaluation of land bureaucrats of the extent to which corporate organisation of public administration benefits land reform

	Below 50% of the 11 dimensions	Above 50% of the 11 dimensions	Total
Northern Cape	9	13	22
Western Cape	10	4	14
Total	19	17	36

In Table 11 we see that Northern Cape land bureaucrats were more positive towards corporate organising of the public administration than were their Western Cape counterparts. This is despite the fact (or perhaps because of the fact) that the Western Cape land bureaucrats were more familiar with the use of corporate forms of organising public services. Ten of 14 respondents were sceptical in the Western Cape, while nine of 22 were sceptical in the Northern Cape. Corporatisation essentially separates politics/central administration from sector-specific service delivery. The latter is commercialised under public oversight. If rural subsistence production is politically recognised, then a corporatised administration under strong government leadership and funding may well deliver infrastructure efficiently to bricoleurs. However, since that condition (the recognition of subsistence production) is unlikely, at least in the short term, then holding on to the classical model of public administration – where the public bureaucracy has both functions, both secretariat for government and responsibility for services – is more likely to give rural bricoleurs some recognition. One reason is that a classical public bureaucracy is more likely to contain bureaucrats with varying ideological orientations and social identifications (cf. Tables 3 and 4 on the evaluation of stakeholders). That kind of administrative pluralism (recognition of commercial farmers, emerging farmers and bricoleurs) is less likely in a

corporatised, commercialised system of administration. Recognising and supporting livelihood activities outside the capital-market circuit is less likely there.

3. Conclusion: Distrust within the land state hampers land reform

In a nutshell, the findings of this investigation are that distrust within the land state and the skewed urban-international attention of government hampers land reform. Democracy was in place in the land state. The ruling regime-opposition relation was active, even if there was a high level of distrust between the main political parties. Both politicians and land bureaucrats were outspoken. Politicians were willing to openly criticise their own party. Land bureaucrats could criticise the department they worked in. These are signs of a functioning democracy. The land state had competence in land reform. It supported the government's emerging farmer focus. At the same time it represented a complex, multidimensional understanding of how to develop agriculture in the rural areas. The space for supporting emerging farmers in the PDoAs was not large, but it was present. However, the idea that the land state should support productive activities on communally held land hardly had any adherents in the PDoAs. That idea was somewhat more present in the PDLAs. The land state was active in transferring land to emerging farmers. The government's ambition of developing infrastructure necessary for productive activities on transferred land was formulated, but hardly implemented. The provincial land state was radically more competent on the complexity of existing social relations and instruments needed for viable rural development than was expressed in the land reform programmes of the national government. The provincial land state did not emerge as the main reason for the relatively slow pace of land reform. The government's rather dogmatic focus on commercialisation and the lack of resources and organisational development of local government appeared to be a more important explanation of the slow pace of reform.

The level of co-operation between the main units of the land state, between the legislatures, the PDLAs and the PDoAs was weak. Distrust of relations both within these units and between them was widespread. There had been very few attempts at working with colleagues across institutional boundaries. Unconditional trust was, in this sense, limited. The idea of trust as interest was also limited. That emerged from the data on mental models of reality.



The idea that improved land reform required more popular and civil society participation in policy making and implementation was not supported by the public land elite in the two provinces. The land elite had a technocratic bent. That orientation indicates that members of the land elite do not consider their trustworthiness in the eyes of common people to be important for successful land reform. In this sense, the land elite did not consider trust as an interest. It is most likely that the land elite just did not think in those terms. This lack of attention to popular trust inside state institutions may have deep roots in South African history.

The status of trust as familiarity is difficult to evaluate from the data in this investigation. The lack of co-operation between political parties, state institutions and stakeholders can indicate that trust as familiarity is strong. You trust members of your own institution, your own 'family' with little trust between them. However, strong trust within institutions of the land state did not emerge from the data. The data indicated that, within each of the institutions, there were people sincerely engaged in trying to breach the isolation, specifically trying to improve the institution's engagement in land reform and to develop co-operation in that regard. Among members of the main parties, ANC and DA, trust as familiarity was strong; somewhat stronger among ANC members than among DA members. Perhaps this is a general phenomenon. We might call it a post-revolutionary trauma. The new power holders, representing an earlier oppressed majority against a minority now in opposition which represents most of the power in the economy, will easily move towards trusting only party members when facing critical opposition pressure. Specifically, the trauma leads to centralisation of power in the new state and Africanism in the ANC. It can lead to a concentration of government power in the economy, and attempts by the opposition to co-opt ruling party members into economic leadership.

Trust theory suggests that it is the institutionalisation of the existing distrust and enmity that is crucial for democracy and for co-operation between people in subsistence-oriented and capital-producing economic activity. The present isolation of the different units of the land state, the technocratic bent in that state and the slow development of land reform does not bode well for the strengthening of democracy and urban-rural co-operation.

It is an irony that only a few years after gaining power in 1994, the ANC abandoned the idea of a strong social democratic state engaged in powerful redistribution of resources and land in South Africa. Instead, it subscribed to the comparative advantage and free trade idea of mainstream Western economics. This model of reality can explain structures in the data of this investigation. It leads to scant government attention to home markets and a lack of willingness

to protect local entrepreneurs in those markets. It leads to a lack of comprehension of the values of subsistence-oriented production on communally-held land. The stance of the provincial land state on rural poverty was different, almost the opposite of the view of the national government. The land state identified with the rural community, saw the commercial farmers and their organisations as only partly supportive of land reform, and identified urban industry as the least supportive of land reform (some even used the term ‘the enemy’). Given the demonstrated competence of the provincial land state, we can suggest the following explanation of the slow pace of land reform.

The combination of the comparative advantage perspective and the idea of a weak state subordinated to the functioning of global markets has led to a lack of attention to land reform. The rather sophisticated knowledge of methods for rural development in the land state is for that reason devalued, if not denigrated. This view outlook and devaluation limits the allocation of resources to land reform. It generates frustrations and relations of distrust in the land state. The welfare orientation of land reform programme up to LRAD in 2000 and the lack of resources to development of local government have the same explanation. The welfare element of the programme has recently (2000–2005) improved rural living conditions, not through job creation, but through increased welfare grants.

This combination of pro-globalisation and the welfare conception of land reform can explain the different land regimes in the Western and Northern Cape provinces. The Western Cape has a strong class of commercial farmers and a strong land bureaucracy. They are integrated and co-operate well. The land reform demands are relatively limited, making the land elite less dependent upon financial institutions and NGOs for implementing land reform. The opposite is the case in the Northern Cape; a small class of commercial farmers and government are highly dependent upon financial institutions and NGOs for implementation of land reform. The ANC regime there supported the government programme. The DA regime in the Western Cape was allied with the rural community.

Bricoleurs – people under multiple-use value-oriented livelihood regimes – seeking subsistence, with limited connections to the formal economy, are hardly seen in government circles and not recognised in national land reform policy. The Department of Land Affairs has the potential freedom to identify bricoleurs on communally-held land as an important group in government land reform policy. As a national department with provincial offices independent of provincial governments, it has the potential to develop methods for economic and social development on communally-held land.



The PDoAs are large operational administrations within provincial government. They have been engaged in support for large-scale commercial agriculture over a long time. To reorient their activities toward bricoleurs is, at best, a long-term project, at worst not possible. The technical, biological and economic knowledge (the knowledge regime) in the Western Cape PDoA is set within a paradigm of state managed large-scale commercial agriculture (Gran 1997). That regime will be refined and developed with the focus on commercial farming.

However, the PDoAs allowed space for RDP offices in the 1990s and for rural development projects on communally-held land and extension services to small-scale emerging farmers. If that space is expanded with training facilities, expansion of local agricultural schools and private sector engagement, the departments may facilitate a fruitful, soft, interaction between rural communities on commonages, markets and capital-producing agriculture.

Some conditions for the development of unconditional trust in the spaces between institutions of land reform and between state and society in South Africa can be discerned in the study. It was when the ANC was insecure about the electorate in the early 1990s that it most clearly spoke of common and poor peoples' interests in land and propagated a strong regulatory government to respond to those interests. At that time, the development of a new democracy was important. It was in a province ruled by the opposition to the ANC – the Western Cape – that the largest number of politicians viewed the other main party as being supportive of land reform. It was in the province with developed agriculture and a high level of agricultural education (the Western Cape) that the commercial farmers were more positive about redistribution of land and the politicians saw commercial farmers as being supportive of land reform.

Trust based in expectations of government delivery to poor people was high in 1994. It has since gone down. As unconditional trust is reduced to 'calculated interest' (within existing administrations) and to familiarity (in the ANC), the power of provincial legislatures has been reduced and the power of markets and bureaucracies have increased. Trust among rural people that a boom in the urban economy will benefit them, is reduced as the ANC directs its attention to the urban and the international economy. The RDP rhetoric on rural development has not been fulfilled by practical measures and real land reform. The devaluation of production on commonages, the devaluation of traditional authority and the devaluation of the professional knowledge on rural development in the provincial land state reduces rural trust in government. The ANC policy regenerates rural peoples' faith in traditional leadership and paternal authority in extended families, 'tribes' and regional ethnic

groups. Unemployment and landlessness increase the feeling of risk, even a feeling of danger of not being able to survive, and forces many to withdraw from the democratic process.

The lack of trust recorded in this study is related to the focus on commercialisation (markets as imperatives) and emerging farmers, excluding bricoleurs. Trust as interest directed towards bricoleurs is limited. Local government receives little support for productive activities and substantial support for welfare grants.

This strategy of overlooking rural subsistence communities and hoping that commercialisation and support to emerging farmers will lead to economic and social improvement in the rural areas may be unrealistic and may be a harbinger of more open conflict. Drawing the millions of rural poor people in South Africa into the democratic process seems to be dependent on an appropriate and diversified infrastructure for multiple livelihood communities being put in place.⁸ It seems important to connect such communities softly, carefully, into the capital-producing market economy.

In the Northern Cape, strong government was in place, but the ANC's distrust of opposition was hampering the democratic process. In the Western Cape the land government was being corporatised, most likely reducing the administrative capacity to absorb demands from the rural subsistence communities and to intervene constructively in these communities. However, because the ruler-opposition relation was more active in the Western Cape in 2001, the democratisation of the political process and the possibility of a rural voice in politics were (relatively) more advanced in the Western Cape.

Endnotes

- 1 A preliminary analysis of trust relations in land reform is presented in Chapter 7 of Askvik & Bak 2005. The viewpoints on land reform expressed here are further elaborated and analysed in the context of state building and trust in South Africa over time in a book manuscript with the working title *Land politics, trust relations and democracy in South Africa*.
- 2 I use 'modern' as a short form for Western-type industrialised societies with markets as 'imperatives' (Wood 1999), as distinct from rural tradition-bound societies. As the term 'modern' has that denotation and at the same time a connotation of 'a society that is organisationally most timely, more up-to-date', it should be scrapped. 'Modern' is often contrasted to 'pre-modern', as if pre-modern societies are 'naturally on their way' to the modern, and that the modern is the only 'real' alternative' – again an idea with strong ideological and ethnocentric bias.



- ³ Steven Robins (no date) argues that the distinction of modern and subsistence, tradition-bound is hardly relevant any more in the analysis of social formations in South Africa, and that the academic interest in trust and social capital is a scapegoat for the neo-liberal, neo-conservative project of withdrawing the state from its social responsibilities. Trust is an alternative mechanism for keeping people in place, despite a withdrawal of public services to middle and lower classes. My position is that the distinction between production within the relation of capital (the capital owner-wage worker relation) and production in other social relations (husband-wife in family, student-teacher in public schools, village chief-family and so on) is valid and important in the development debate. Development is often seen as expansion within the capital relation of production and the absorption of use-value-oriented production into the capital relation. The present interest in privatisation of public activities is an example.
- ⁴ This investigation is located in a broad field of work on rural development and land reform in southern Africa (Lipton et al. 1996; Bruce 1993; Moyo 1995; Bernstein 1996), on management of natural resources (Cousins 2000; Shackleton & Campbell et al. 2001) and political developments (Shivji 1998; Mamdani 1996; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992 and Tilly 1985).
- ⁵ Two questionnaires were distributed, one to politicians in the provincial legislatures and one to land administrators in the provincial departments of agriculture and the provincial offices of the Department of Land Affairs.
- ⁶ I interpret 'rural development' as assistance for building infrastructure for commercial farming in rural areas, with a weak focus on rural multiple livelihoods and the cultural-economy of subsistence. This interpretation is corroborated by the low level of interest in subsistence-oriented production and common ownership of land.
- ⁷ The more difference between real and expected numbers, the more important the differences in the core of the table. The more similar these numbers are, the more we can focus on the differences in the marginal numbers in the table on the dependent variable – the priorities in Table 4.
- ⁸ Ben Cousins (2003b) makes this point: Current agricultural development programmes tend to favour 'emergent' black farmers who see themselves functioning in large-scale commercial farming terms. Through the National African Farmers' Union (NAFU), they have argued that they should receive the same kind of extensive government support that white farmers used to receive from the apartheid state and its predecessors.

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