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## Building Anticipatory Governance in SADC: Post-COVID-19 Governance Outlook

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African perspectives  
Global insights

# Abstract

The paper argues that existing governance systems in the region generally fall short of the adaptive capacity required to navigate complex and volatile problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A combination of factors such as endemic corruption, weak state-society relations, and the stubborn legacies of the colonial project in the region has left a number of SADC member states in a condition of fragility. Over the years, many SADC states have experienced a decline in the capacity for accountable and developmental governance. As the region's response to the coronavirus pandemic has revealed, these trends and the traditional models of governance and politics that underpin them make the region ill-prepared to deal with the rapid changes and strategic surprises that are characteristic of the current age. To position the SADC region to better cope with the shocks and uncertain fluidity of our times, the paper proposes a shift towards anticipatory governance underpinned by a process of far-reaching social and institutional engineering designed to undo the legacies and structures of oppression, exclusion and discord in which societies and states in the region are entangled.

## Introduction

In a few short years, the Southern African state of Mozambique was hit by two successive cyclones, plunged into a full-scale armed insurgency in Cabo Delgado in the north, and like the rest of world, is currently battling with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19 for short). Likewise, for its north-western neighbour, Zimbabwe, the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic was just the latest episode in a complex and protracted drama of political upheaval, economic decline and social misery. The situation in many of the other countries, which make up the SADC bloc, is different only in scale and intensity, underscoring a region caught in the throes of complex and often intractable socio-ecological challenges. As the global scale of COVID-19 attests, these challenges are not unique to the SADC region, but are indicative of a worldwide process of socio-technical transformation that breeds complexity, uncertainty and accelerated change. This process, and its associated challenges, has also increasingly tested and called into question the governance capacity of societies across the world – if by governance we mean the structures and processes through which public affairs are managed in the interests of an inclusive, fair and prosperous society.

This occasional paper uses a complexity<sup>1</sup> lens to explore and analyse the governance implications of uncertainty and accelerated change in the SADC region. The analysis is undertaken against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic that embodies all the

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1 Complex systems, according to Paul Cilliers, are defined by the dynamic and non-linear interaction of a large number of elements and their environment. The interactions in complex systems usually have a fairly short range, and often result in new features. Complexity is also marked by the potential for small causes in the system to have large effects, and vice versa. See Paul Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1998). A complexity lens thus allows for greater attention and insight into the dynamics, interactions and consequences inherent in complex systems.

characteristics of complex adaptive systems and the associated unpredictable social problems. Drawing theoretical and conceptual insights from the academic discourse on governance in times of complexity and uncertainty, this paper argues that existing governance systems in the region generally fall short of the adaptive capacity required to navigate complex and volatile problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To position the SADC region to better cope with the shocks and uncertainties of these times, the paper proposes a shift towards anticipatory governance. Undoing the legacies and structures of oppression, exclusion and discord in the region's societies and states requires a process of social and institutional engineering, which underpins anticipatory governance.

The argument is developed in five parts. It begins by locating the analysis in the conceptual discourse on the challenges of governance in the context of complexity, before reviewing some of the key governance issues, trends and challenges observed in the SADC region in recent decades. The discussion in this section also includes a critical reflection on the roots and drivers of these dynamics, interspersed with country examples drawn from across the region. In the third section, the paper examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the governance landscape in the region, with a view to highlighting the opportunities, challenges and risks associated with growing instability and uncertainty. The fourth section borrows from the anticipatory governance framework to discuss the governance outlook of the region and reflect on the preconditions for developing the requisite adaptive capacity for managing complexity and turbulence. The paper concludes by reinforcing its central thesis and making policy recommendations.

## Public governance in a changing world

Lee Kuan Yew, the man considered to be the founding father of Singapore and who is credited with transforming the city-state into a world class economy, once remarked that: 'The past was not pre-ordained. Nor is the future. There are as many unexpected problems ahead, as there were in the past.'<sup>2</sup> This insight aptly captures the spirit of the times. To say that the world today is characterised by great uncertainty and unpredictability is perhaps a trite statement. But it is also an acknowledgement of an inescapable reality that has imposed itself as the dominant frame for making sense of the current trajectory of human development and the corresponding attempts to organise political, social and economic life across world. Various concepts have been developed to try to capture the origins, essence and significance of these transformations for human society, including in the area of public governance. For some, the world is experiencing the cumulative consequences of an evolutionary period of deep transitions, defined as 'the coordinated change of many socio-technical systems in the same direction, over a period of time, which result in large-scale

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2 Peter Ho, "The Challenges of Governance in a Complex World Lecture I: Hunting Black Swans and Taming Black Elephants: Governance in a Complex World", IPS-Nathan Lectures, Singapore, April 5, 2017, 7.

social and economic impact, transforming the nature of world societies'.<sup>3</sup> Proponents of this notion, such as Johan Schot and Laur Kanger, believe that deep transitions generally lead to accumulated social and ecological outcomes, which can only be overcome through radical change in both the prevailing socio-technical systems and the meta-rules that underpin them.<sup>4</sup> Put differently, the aggregate consequences of one deep transition can only be dealt with decisively by ushering in a new deep transition, and it is in this transitional period that the world currently finds itself. In the words of the Italian political theorist and activist, Antonio Gramsci, 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'.<sup>5</sup>

The morbid symptoms of the interregnum between the first and second deep transitions have taken the form of complex socio-economic, political and ecological challenges, which have come to define contemporary human societies. These include climate change, rising levels of poverty and inequality, protracted social conflicts, mass migration, food and water insecurity, narrow nationalism, pandemics, as well as demographic shifts. These so-called 'wicked problems' have the common traits of overlapping with one another, defying national borders, and have proven to be extremely difficult to navigate. More importantly, together with unprecedented technological innovations, these highly synchronous and global challenges have resulted in increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, underscored by the growing salience of complexity thinking. The complexity lens reveals the nature, pace and magnitude of social change, as well as the disruptions and other unintended consequences that have come with innovation and progress. Consider, for example, the transformative effects, both of a positive and negative nature, which social media and other digital technologies have had on democratic processes over a relatively short period of time. Added to this volatility is the increasing unpredictability of events, which in itself is a direct result of the complex nature of contemporary challenges. This makes it extremely difficult to grasp their underlying causes and drivers, or map out their contours and trajectories. It has been said that 'Information about the past and present is less and less useful in anticipating the future'.<sup>6</sup> The complexity paradigm also speaks to the ambiguity that flows from rapidly changing situations, which defy neat analytical categories, and appear to have no precedents. In this context, conspiracy theories quickly gain currency, and it becomes difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

This context has also given rise to a new form of politics that is shifting the relationships of power and redefining the parameters and mechanisms for accountability. This unruly politics, exemplified by recent events, such as the popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, or the Occupy movements in Europe and North America, speak to widespread

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3 University of Sussex, Science Policy Research Unity, "Deep Transitions: Learning from History to Imagine the Future", <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/spru/research/projects/deeptransitions>.

4 Johan Schot and Laur Kanger, "Deep Transitions: Emergence, Acceleration, Stabilization and Directionality", *Research Policy* 47 (2018): 1045-1059.

5 Susan Ratcliffe (ed.), "Antonio Gramsci 1891-1937: Italian Political Theorist and Activist", *Oxford Essential Quotations* (4 ed.), Oxford University Press, 2016.

6 Russ Linder, "The Dilemmas of Leading in a VUCA World", *Governing: The Future of States and Localities*, December 3, 2013, <https://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-leadership-vuca-world-volatility-uncertainty-complexity-ambiguity.html>.

dissatisfaction with traditional institutions and processes of politics. As Akshay Khanna and his colleagues correctly point out:<sup>7</sup>

Unruly politics exposes the fact that people are finding alternative spaces to engage politically because political and civil societies no longer provide the means to express citizens' voices. Whether this be 'the streets' or social media such as Facebook, unruly politics is about the recasting of these spaces as political spaces.

This desire on the part of citizens across the world to redefine the language and rules of politics brings into sharp relief the deepening socio-political fault lines that underpin our increasingly complex and globalised world.

The implications of these megatrends for public governance and leadership have attracted significant academic and policy reflection over the past few decades, giving rise to a set of concepts through which contemporary governance issues and challenges can be analysed, understood and navigated. Among these is the notion of 'turbulent governance',<sup>8</sup> which seeks to capture the essence of public governance in times of complex and dynamic interactive change. Turbulence is used in this context to portray a public domain that is complete with disruptive technological changes, pluricentric, volatile and polarising politics, as well as public policy problems that are complex, multi-dimensional, and prone to value conflict. The turbulent environment is one in which 'events, demands, and support interact and change in highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable ways', thereby transforming the object of governance into a cacophony of speed, complexity and conflict.<sup>9</sup> Borrowing from the more developed literature on managing turbulence in the private sector, there are four interrelated dilemmas that public institutions are called upon to manage in the context of turbulent governance. First, public institutions must balance the imperative to stabilise their operations in the face of rapid change with the equally compelling need to adapt to changing conditions to avoid a mismatch between their operations and their environment. Second, a trade-off would have to be made between anticipating the future and developing resilience, bearing in mind the difficulties entailed in anticipating and planning for the future in a turbulent environment. Third, turbulent governance also comes with the dilemma of whether to adopt a coupling or decoupling strategy to deal with turbulence. The latter denotes a situation where components of a governance system respond to turbulence by isolating themselves from the source of turbulence with a view to avoiding or limiting contagion. For its part, coupling entails managing turbulence by tightening control over the source of turbulence. The fourth dilemma speaks to the need to reconcile the opposing pressures of responding to turbulence through integration or differentiation, with integration corresponding to the centralisation of public governance while differentiation aligns more with the impulse

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7 Akshay Khanna et al., "The Changing Faces of Citizen Action: A Mapping Study through an 'Unruly' Lens", *Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Working Paper*, volume 2013, no 423, June 2013, 15.

8 Christopher Ansell and Jarle Trondal, "Governing Turbulence: An Organizational-Institutional Agenda", *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance* 1, no.1 (March 2018), 43-57.

9 Ansell and Trondal, "Governing Turbulence", 2-7.

towards greater decentralisation and the establishment of specialised government agencies.<sup>10</sup>

Effective and efficient governance systems are, therefore, those that see turbulence as a critical condition of contemporary governance to which public institutions must adapt, and not as a dysfunction that should be resisted. This requires a shift from a framework of static resilience to one of dynamic resilience characterised by the adoption of a 'wider variety of strategies often of a hybrid nature, acting in a more improvisational and experimental fashion, favouring flexible structures and decentralized initiatives, and developing informal networks and other interstitial arrangements to achieve coordination in rapidly evolving situations'.<sup>11</sup>

Other scholars, such as Duit and Galaz, have sought to theorise about governance in a complex, rapidly changing and unpredictable world by adopting a complex adaptive systems (CAS) framework, which has become synonymous with the complexity paradigm. Complex adaptive systems are defined by their incorporation of dynamics and phenomena that are strongly interconnected and non-linear, tend to be unpredictable and prone to abrupt change, and generally have threshold, surprise and cascading effects. Originally conceived in the context of the natural sciences, the CAS framework has become relevant in the social sciences against the backdrop of growing social, political and economic complexity that has challenged the capacity of modern governance systems. According to its advocates, the analytical value of the CAS framework resides in its ability to help us understand not only the capacity of various modes of governance to manage complexity, but also how governance systems are able to respond to the threshold, surprise and cascading effects that are unique to CAS.<sup>12</sup>

From a CAS perspective, two key concepts are central to understanding the prospects for managing complex adaptive systems. The first resonates with the idea of multi-level governance and is born out of the recognition that in reality governance systems are nested within each other and interact across a variety of geographical and organisation scales. The second idea builds on the first to suggest that the adaptive capacity of any governance system is tied to its interaction with other systems on multiple levels. For its part, the concept of adaptive capacity of governance systems presupposes a trade-off between the ability of a system to extract benefits from existing forms of collective action (exploitation) and its capacity to experiment, innovate and learn from changing circumstances, otherwise referred to as exploration.<sup>13</sup>

The interplay between the dual institutional need for stability and change generally gives rise to four ideal governance systems distinguished by their degree of adaptive capacity, that

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10 Ansell and Trondal, "Governing Turbulence", 15–30.

11 Ansell and Trondal, "Governing Turbulence", 35.

12 Andreas Duit and Victor Galaz, "Governance and Complexity—Emerging Issues for Governance Theory", *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 21, no. 3 (July 2008): 311–318.

13 Duit and Galaz, "Governance and Complexity", 318–320.

is, how well they are able to govern in the context of complexity and unpredictability. On the one extreme are so-called rigid forms of governance that maximise stability at the expense of the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. Governance systems in this category tend to display high levels of efficiency in stable conditions (slow pace of change and high predictability) but are ill-equipped to deal with the surprises and shocks that come with CAS. On the other extreme is the flexible governance system that has well-developed capacity for exploration but lacks the capacity to transform the gains of exploration into objects of exploitation. A major advantage of the rigid, state-dominated model of governance over its flexible, network-based counterpart is that the former can leverage the constitutional powers, as well as the domestic and external legitimacy of the institution of the state, to better manage conditions of rapid change and high unpredictability.

Then there is the fragile governance system, characterised by weak capacities for both exploration and exploitation. The governance type that is most desirable in the context of complex adaptive systems are referred to as the 'robust governance system', which 'combines a high capacity for exploration with an equally high level of capacity for exploitation and is thus well equipped for handling steady state governance, long-term transformation processes, and sudden changes alike'.<sup>14</sup> However, there are also arguments that the adaptive capacity of different governance systems operating at multiple spatial and temporal scales, but which are nested within each other, can be amplified, buffered and even transformed as a result of the multi-scalar interaction of these systems.<sup>15</sup>

Similar conceptualisations of governance in the context of complexity and volatility have also highlighted the need for a radically new mindset, as well as the necessity for a future-oriented approach to governance. For example, suggesting that contemporary social problems, or what has been characterised as a 'perfect storm of policy challenges [...] portends a catastrophic collapse of modern systems', Hartley and his colleagues make the case for a paradigm shift from the current technocratic problem-solving approach to policymaking, to a new predicament-thinking policy paradigm.<sup>16</sup> The latter embodies the recognition that today's 'wicked' problems cannot be tamed or solved, but require the development of an appropriate public policy capacity to adapt to these problems and manage their impact. Without discounting the importance of operational and implementation competencies, the authors identify, in particular, strong analytical and political capacities as key to guaranteeing the preparedness of public policy to deal with 'wicked' problems.

On the one hand, strong analytical capacities at the individual, organisational and systemic levels are indispensable if policymakers are to gain deep, unbiased and up-to-date insight into complex and unpredictable problems and situations. This may require, for example, strengthening the capacity of public institutions for horizon scanning and strategic

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14 Duit and Galaz, "Governance and Complexity", 321-326.

15 Duit and Galaz, "Governance and Complexity", 326-328.

16 Kris Hartley, Glen Kuecker and Jun Jie Woo, "Practicing Public Policy in an Age of Disruption", *Policy Design and Practice* 2, no. 2 (2019): 164.

foresight, or empowering policy practitioners with the skills ‘to identify and critically assess information, sources, and epistemological biases that attend analysis and research’.<sup>17</sup> The concept of anticipatory governance is also salient here. According to a key pioneer of the concept, ‘Anticipatory governance is a system of institutions, rules, and norms that provides a way to use foresight, networks, and feedback for the purpose of reducing risk and increasing capacity to respond to events at earlier rather than later stages of development’.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is an approach to governance that neither overlooks nor seeks to tame uncertainty, but instead ‘explores uncertainty and its implications for current and future decision-making’. As elaborated later in the paper, central to the anticipatory governance framework is the capacity for visualising alternative futures and integrating this foresight into policy processes.<sup>19</sup>

At the systemic level, strengthening the analytical capacity for addressing ‘wicked’ problems may take the form of putting in place effective mechanisms for information-sharing and collaboration to define problems.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, strong political capacities are necessary to generate the social capital and state-society trust that is needed to manage ‘wicked’ problems, given the generally politicised nature of the process of defining and responding to these problems. This calls for, among other interventions, genuine processes of public consultation and stakeholder dialogue, which allow for problem-framing from multiple perspectives and helps build the social trust and commitment needed for collective action. Political competencies could also be strengthened by ensuring the independence and transparency of public institutions to prevent them from being captured by power brokers, political factions and elite interests.<sup>21</sup>

Torfin and Ansell take this theme further by exploring the kind of political leadership that is required for policy innovation in the face of wicked and unruly problems. Similar to Hartley and his colleagues, they argue that contemporary public policy problems can only be addressed through innovative out-of-the-box solutions that can break the trade-offs between conflicting goals and externalities. However, they note that politicians who are supposed to champion this policy innovation are usually locked in a mindset and mode of operation that insulates them from fresh ideas.<sup>22</sup> To overcome this impediment, they argue for a collaborative governance approach, which allows the political leadership to initiate, drive and lead policy innovation while benefitting from the knowledge and resources of other actors in society. As they put it, ‘Collaborative policy innovation facilitates the participation of a wide set of public and private actors who can perturb existing assumptions and paradigms and contribute to new change theories, and differences are constructively managed in the pursuit of innovation’.<sup>23</sup>

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17 Hartley, Kuecker and Woo, “Practicing Public Policy”, 170.

18 Leon Fuerth, “Operationalizing Anticipatory Governance”, *Prism* 2, no. 4 (2011): 36.

19 Ray Quay, “Anticipatory Governance: A Tool for Climate Change Adaption”, *Journal of the American Planning Association* 76, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 496.

20 Hartley, Kuecker and Woo, “Practicing Public Policy”, 170-171.

21 Hartley, Kuecker and Woo, “Practicing Public Policy”, 171-172.

22 Jacob Torfin and Christopher Ansell, “Strengthening Political Leadership and Policy Innovation Through the Expansion of Collaborative Forms of Governance”, *Public Management Review* 19, no. 1 (2017): 37.

23 Torfin and Ansell, “Strengthening Political Leadership”, 50-51.

Against the backdrop of these conceptual insights, the next sections of the paper examine the governance landscape in the SADC region before and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Emergent governance trends, issues and challenges in the SADC region

The Southern African region represents a quintessential case study of the contemporary global reality in which the gathering of a perfect storm of wicked problems correlates negatively with the predisposition to develop the requisite governance capacity for navigating the storm and mitigating its adverse effects on society. A tour d'horizon of the socio-economic and political landscape of the countries that make up the SADC bloc suggests a region in deep crisis heading for a precipice.

For example, Mozambique was hit by two successive cyclones in March and April 2019, which killed over 1 000 people. Since March 2020, barely a year later, this natural disaster-prone country has been thrown into a full-blown armed insurgency that has destabilised the northern part of the country. Although the first manifestations of violence were recorded only in 2017, the insurgency is believed to have been in the making since 1998.<sup>24</sup> Zimbabwe has been sleepwalking from one political crisis to another, which has devastated its economy and left a good proportion of its citizens at the mercy and magnanimity of other countries in the region. The November 2017 military coup, which ended the more than 37-year rule of Robert Mugabe, was celebrated by the people of Zimbabwe despite the fact that it was an undemocratic process. Zimbabwe continued on the downward slope of socio-political and economic decline under the stewardship of a recalcitrant politico-military regime. This underscores the enormity and precariousness of the Zimbabwe problem.<sup>25</sup>

Countries such as Lesotho and eSwatini may be small demographically and economically, but they are no less contributors to the region's fragility. If anything, these two mountainous kingdoms, which are wholly or partially nested within South Africa, continue to demonstrate the potential to generate turbulence that could contaminate the rest of the region. In recent years, Lesotho's reputation as the regional laboratory for government instability and overt military interference in politics has been rivalled only by the avaricious and self-serving disposition of a small ruling elite, who appear to be numb to the plight of an increasingly impoverished population.<sup>26</sup> Since independence, Lesotho has witnessed

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24 Evan Centanni and Djordje Djukic, "Islamic State' in Mozambique? Control Map and Timeline of the Insurgency", *Political Geography Now*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.polgeonow.com/2020/08/northern-mozambique-isis-crisis-control-map-2020.html>.

25 Enock Ndawana, "When Militarisation Endangered Both Human and State Security: The Zimbabwean Experience, 2000-2008", *African Security Review*, September 28, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1802312>.

26 Roger Southall, "Lesotho's New Leader Faces Enormous Hurdles Ensuring Peace and Political Stability", *The Conversation*, May 26, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/lesothos-new-leader-faces-enormous-hurdles-ensuring-peace-and-political-stability-139320>.

no less than six coup attempts.<sup>27</sup> Despite the veneer of a peaceful kingdom held together by shared cultural values, eSwatini is not without its own problems, mostly associated with the political and financial excesses of King Mswati III. The monarch has recently come under attack for living a lavish lifestyle at the expense of his impoverished kingdom. In the middle of a drought in eSwatini in 2019, the king is believed to have sponsored his family's trip to Disneyland while also purchasing a set of luxury cars for himself and his family worth around \$4 million.<sup>28</sup> Recent violent protests in its capital, Mbabane, are a stark reminder of the instability that can flow from the cumulative impact of King Mswati's absolute monarchy on the psychosocial well-being of the people of eSwatini.<sup>29</sup>

However, it is South Africa that arguably embodies the greatest source of turbulence in the region. On the one hand, this assessment reflects the growing convergence of a complex set of historical and contemporary problems that increasingly threaten the stability of the polity. On the other hand, it is a recognition of the large-scale regional contagion that is possible should these problems not be managed effectively, given South Africa's centrality in the political economy of the region. From the vexing land question to unresolved racial tensions that become more and more intense as the economy falters and the wealth gap increases, South Africa is hardly a house at peace with itself. Add to this the high levels of violence perpetrated mostly against women and children or growing youth unemployment to get a full sense of the complexity of the challenges the country is facing. About 58 people are killed in South Africa every day.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, with an economy that has been contracting for some time now, the unemployment rate in the country reached 30.1% just before the outbreak of COVID-19 and youth unemployment is above 50%.<sup>31</sup>

These country-specific challenges are made even more complex by an array of cross-cutting and transnational regional problems. These include rapid urbanisation and its attendant urban sprawl and poverty; the growing incidence of drought in the face of a changing climate, which exacerbates threats to food and water security in the region; as well as the consequences of regional migration, which in the case of South Africa continues to stoke a sporadic cycle of violent conflict between foreign nationals and their host communities over scarce resources and opportunities. Another potential source of turbulence in the region is the over-indebtedness of countries such as Angola, Mozambique and Zambia (see Table 1), all of which depend heavily on the export of natural resources. As a 2019 report by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa observed, these countries face a high risk

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27 Everisto Benyera, "Towards an Explanation of the Recurrence of Military Coups in Lesotho", *Air and Space Power Journal – Africa and Franchophonie* 8, no. 3 (2017), 56–73.

28 Peter Fabricius, "Swazi Palace Lashes out at US Ambassador for Rebuking King Mswati", *Daily Maverick*, July 29, 2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-29-swazi-palace-lashes-out-at-us-ambassador-for-rebuking-king-mswati/>.

29 "Chaos in eSwatini as Anti-monarchy Protests Turn Violent", *The Citizen*, September 25, 2019, <https://citizen.co.za/news/news-africa/2183523/chaos-in-eswatini-as-anti-monarchy-protests-turn-violent/>.

30 "South Africa Crime Stats 2020: Everything You Need to Know", *BusinessTech*, July 31, 2020, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/421424/south-africa-crime-stats-2020-everything-you-need-to-know/>.

31 "South Africa's Unemployment Rate Climbs to 30.1%", *BusinessTech*, June 23, 2020, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/409897/south-africas-unemployment-rate-climbs-to-30-1/>.

of implosion under the burden of debt in the context of fluctuations in global commodity prices.<sup>32</sup>

TABLE 1 GOVERNMENT DEBT AS % OF GDP RATIO OF SADC MEMBER STATES		
Country	2020	2021
Angola	120.3	107.5
Botswana	20.6	24.0
Comoros	30.4	32.4
DRC	16.1	13.4
eSwatini	47.9	49.9
Lesotho	47.2	45.8
Madagascar	42.2	45
Malawi	70.7	75.1
Mauritius	85.7	84.2
Mozambique	121.3	123.5
Namibia	67.6	68.2
Seychelles	88.6	85.0
South Africa	78.8	82.8
Tanzania	38.5	39.2
Zambia	120.0	119.6
Zimbabwe	2.4	2.2
SACU	74.9	78.8
SADC	71.3	72.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	56.6	57.8

Source: IMF Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa, October 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/SSA/Issues/2020/10/22/regional-economic-outlook-sub-saharan-africa>

## Declining governance capacity in an increasingly troubled region

While the SADC region, like the rest of the world, is beset with mounting socio-ecological problems, the governance capacity to manage these complex problems has been declining considerably in the region. Southern Africa has historically not enjoyed the reputation of a well-governed region, owing in part to the unique colonial conditions that the region was subjected to. The so-called ‘colonialism of a special type’, which saw a settler white minority attempting to maintain the colonial project by ruling over the indigenous black majority population in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia created conditions that would impact negatively on governance dynamics in the region right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The end of formal apartheid and related racially structured regimes in the

<sup>32</sup> Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, “Southern Africa’s Debt Conundrum”, Conference report (Johannesburg, July 2-3, 2019) <https://osisa.org/product/conference-report-southern-africas-debt-conundrum/>.

region was not accompanied by any meaningful attempt to reconstruct and repurpose state institutions from serving the colonial project to driving the process of inclusive social progress. For the most part, state organs became sites for negotiating power and influence between the white minority elite and the new black African leadership.

This exercise in political convenience left two main legacies that would have long lasting effects on the governance trajectory in countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe. First, it directed attention away from the key task of building the requisite human and institutional capacity for inclusive and developmental governance, instead prioritising measures directed at securing the elite pact between the erstwhile rulers and their new comrades in government. Second, even in countries such as South Africa where the nature of the transition dictated the establishment of institutions to safeguard the democratic aspirations of the people, the integrity and effectiveness of these institutions, like those of the broader state machinery, would in the coming decades be compromised by the failure to transform the colonial political economy. The contemporary governance capacity and trajectory in countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia can therefore not be analysed adequately outside the context of the history of state capture by a small but dominant economic class, and the corresponding attempts to challenge this capture or simply to redefine its beneficiaries. For example, since the apartheid days, income inequality has remained stubbornly high in South Africa. Currently the top 10% of the country's population holds 51% of its income, while the bottom 20% accounts for only 3% of the country's income.<sup>33</sup> Even in countries such as Lesotho, which did not experience directly attempts at white minority rule, the broader colonial experience was not insignificant in shaping their future governance trajectory. Lesotho's fragile political and governance system, characterised by incessant attempts at military coups and an inordinately high turnover in elected governments, has its roots in the legacy of the British colonial project in Southern Africa.<sup>34</sup> As the former British protectorate of Basotholand, Lesotho was designed mainly as a labour reserve for the colonial economy. Thus, despite acquiring the trappings of a nation-state at independence, it has largely remained unable to assume the functions expected of a modern state.

This historical context is insufficient but useful in appreciating the nature and sources of contemporary governance dynamics in the region, which have been as varied as they have been complex. For example, it provides a critical perspective for making sense of the weak governance capacity associated with the challenge of state fragility in some SADC member states. Many of these states are inherited colonial machineries and as such have struggled to transform the legacy of weak administrative and political capacity, circumscribed political authority, as well as limited internal legitimacy. This has left them in a perpetual state of fragility, which has in turn continuously eroded their capacity for effective governance. A classic example is that of Lesotho, which has been plagued by recurrent political instability since independence. This has compromised the ability of key state

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33 International Monetary Fund, *South Africa: IMF Country Report No. 20/33*, January 2020, 4.

34 Siphamandla Zondi, "Lesotho on the Brink: Battling Embedded Fragility", *Global Insight*, Issue 110, August 2014.

institutions, such as the judiciary, police and military, to execute their functions effectively. In other SADC member states, such as Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), attempts to navigate the weaknesses of the inherited colonial state by monopolising the levers of power only produced a vicious cycle of armed conflict that deepened the fragility of the state and destroyed key governance institutions and systems. Since the early 2000s, the DRC has embarked on a process of post-war reconstruction, as discussed later in the paper, but these measures have proven inadequate in dealing with the sources of fragility and the governance capacity deficit that flows from it. This lingering incapacity is most evident in the inability of the Congolese state to extend its authority to and secure the eastern part of the country from marauding rebel groups.

In recent years, state fragility – as an indication of deteriorating governance and a source of reduced capacity for functional governance – has not been confined to historically unstable states but has increasingly been identified with countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa. Once considered the breadbasket of Southern Africa, with an education system that was the envy of the region, Zimbabwe today exhibits the characteristics of a state that lacks the authority, legitimacy and capacity to function. Attempts by the liberation elite to unilaterally rewrite the terms of the colonial transitional pact and reconfigure control over the economic base of state power unleashed a complex turn of events that have eroded the legitimacy of the Zimbabwean state and its capacity to provide basic functions and guarantee the security and well-being of its citizens. Compared to other countries in the region, South Africa has historically been considered a relatively stable state. While this characterisation may still hold true in relative terms, it belies deep problems that have gained prominence in the polity over the past decade, and which have moved the country closer and closer to the status of fragility. Mounting socio-political and economic problems have progressively undermined South Africa's stability, making it a latently fragile state. In this context, the functional capacity of key state institutions such as the South African Police Service has increasingly been eroded.<sup>35</sup> About 4,500 disciplinary cases are reported against police officers annually, while 'an estimated R1.5 billion has been paid out by the South African Police Services in civil claims for wrongful arrests over the past five years'.<sup>36</sup>

For many countries in the SADC region, the challenge of state fragility and its associated effects on governance capacity is intricately tied to endemic corruption, understood in this context as the abuse of state power or resources for private gain. The 2018 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows that of the 15 countries in the SADC bloc, only Botswana, Mauritius, and Seychelles are above the average CPI score of 50 (see Table 2). As a phenomenon that manifests itself at the intersection of public and private power, corruption is often targeted at the resources and privileges inherent in the authority of the state. Thus, besides redirecting public resources for private benefit, it also has the effect of eroding the ethical, intellectual and institutional foundations of

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35 Edward Mienie, *Security, Governance, and State Fragility in South Africa* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

36 Edwin Naidu, "Big Payouts, Little Sanction in SAPS Wrongful Arrest Cases", *Sunday Independent*, October 18, 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/news/big-payouts-little-sanction-in-saps-wrongful-arrest-cases-09b45ef6-df6c-44bb-a5f0-360a92a7450e>.

any effective governance system. This in turn forecloses the possibilities for accountable, efficient, transparent and inclusive governance. In South Africa, for example, runaway corruption over the past decades has not only undermined public trust and confidence in critical government departments such as home affairs but has also started compromising the accountability and oversight role of parliament, as a central pillar of democratic governance. The case of Mozambique illustrates that the scale and scope of corruption in the region is itself a symptom of serious deficiencies in domestic governance frameworks. The absence of an independent legislature and judiciary, a free press and a strong civil society sector means that the country's governance framework is devoid of effective institutions and systems that provide checks and balances, as well as promote transparency and accountability.<sup>37</sup> While the relatively strong presence of these countervailing institutions in countries such as South Africa has not been sufficient in taming corruption, it has nonetheless contributed to putting it on the national agenda.

<b>Country</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Angola	19	165
Botswana	61	34
Comoros	27	144
DRC	20	161
eSwatini	38	89
Lesotho	41	78
Madagascar	25	152
Malawi	32	120
Mauritius	51	56
Mozambique	23	158
Namibia	53	52
Seychelles	66	28
South Africa	43	73
Tanzania	36	99
Zambia	35	105
Zimbabwe	22	160

Note: Lower score indicates less corruption/higher ranking indicates more corruption

Source: Transparency International, 2018, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2018>

In this regard, recent anti-corruption campaigns – which reflect an apparent determination by newly elected leaders in some countries to enact governance reforms after periods

<sup>37</sup> Dennis Jett, "Mozambique Is a Failed State. The West Isn't Helping It", *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/07/mozambique-is-a-failed-state-the-west-isnt-helping-it/>.

of perceived breakdown in transparent, accountable and democratic governance – also deserve some scrutiny as they demonstrate useful insight into the future trajectory of governance in the region. The examples of Angola, Botswana and South Africa illustrate this trend. Since coming to power in 2017, João Lourenço has launched an anti-corruption campaign that has, in a sense, challenged the traditional workings of Angolan politics, even if only because it has ended what is believed to have been the capture of the Angolan state by the family and associates of his predecessor, Eduardo Dos Santos. In Botswana, President Mokgweetsi Masisi, who has been in power since 2018, vowed to arrest the corruption and mismanagement that was beginning to taint the country's reputation as a beacon of democratic governance in Africa. Masisi's predecessor, Ian Khama, is said to have presided over 10 years of unprecedented corruption and abuse of authority, which further weakened Botswana's oversight institutions.<sup>38</sup> For his part, President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa has set out to rebuild and restore public confidence in state institutions that were the target of what has come to be known controversially as South Africa's nine wasted years (2009-2018) under President Jacob Zuma. It was during this time that unbridled corruption and abuse of state power – facilitated by an assault on regulatory and oversight institutions, and the undue fusion of private and public power – would precipitate a host of economic and governance woes for the country. Not only was South Africa downgraded to junk status by ratings agencies, but it has since also witnessed steady economic decline and growing levels of unemployment. The Zuma years also threatened the doctrine of separation of powers, to the extent that courts became the last resort for checking the abuse of state power.<sup>39</sup>

The commitment of these three leaders to reforming the broken governance systems of their countries is hardly in doubt, even if this may be motivated partly by the desire to secure their respective political bases. However, the extent to which they are able to bring about deep governance reform is questionable, not least because they preside over political parties that are a fundamental part of the problem they seek to address. In Angola, Lourenço's institutional reforms come up against a hegemonic ruling party (the MPLA), whose elite are entangled in corruption.<sup>40</sup> The role of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party as a vehicle for elite corruption has been well documented,<sup>41</sup> and is arguably the reason why Masisi has been accused of failing to walk the corruption talk.<sup>42</sup> The case of South Africa is even more revealing of the threat that hegemonic ruling parties – entangled in corruption – pose to attempts at meaningful institutional reform. As the president himself

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38 B Seabo, "Personal Rule in Africa: The Case of Botswana Under General Ian Khama", *3rd Annual International Conference on Public Administration and Development Alternatives* (Saldanha Bay, July 4-6, 2018); Siphosami Malunga, "Botswana Unravels: Unmasking Africa's Democracy Poster Child", *The Africa Report*, August 29, 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/16645/botswana-unravels-unmasking-africas-democracy-poster-child/>.

39 Mbekezeli Mkhize, Kongko Makau and Phathutshedzo Madumi, "Good Governance under Zuma Administration: Fad or Reality?", in John Idriss and Hele Ware, eds, *Governance and Societal Adaptation in Fragile States* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 171-188.

40 Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Angola: Real Change, or Just Old Wine in New Wineskins?", August 23, 2017, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/angola-real-change-just-old-wine-new-wineskins/>; Peter Fabricius, "Luanda Leaks and the Politics of Anti-corruption," *ISS Today*, January 31, 2020, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/luanda-leaks-and-the-politics-of-anti-corruption>.

41 Monageng Mogalakwe and Francis Nyamnjoh, "Botswana at 50: Democratic Deficit, Elite Corruption and Poverty in the Midst of Plenty", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, no. 1 (2017): 1-14.

42 Phillimon Mmeso, "Critics Warn: Look in Your Office Masisi's War Against Corruption", *The Patriot*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.the-patriot.co.bw/news/item/6909-critics-warn-look-in-your-office-masisi%E2%80%99s-war-against-corruption.html>.

acknowledged in a letter to the ruling party, the ANC is at the centre of the country's corruption woes that have contributed to its increasing fragility. Coupled with factional divisions within the party, the inability of the ANC to transform itself even in the face of declining electoral fortunes means that the pace and depth of Ramaphosa's reform agenda has, for the most part, been determined by the balance of power within the ANC rather than by any considerations of effective and efficient governance.

These examples of the nexus between dominant political parties, corruption and the difficulties of institutional reform are symptomatic of a broader trend that is impacting negatively on the governance capacity of the region. This relates to the governance consequences of the growing legitimacy crisis of the region's liberation movements. Once considered to be engines of social and political change, liberation movements such as the ANC, ZANU-PF, and Frelimo have struggled to reinvent themselves after taking over the responsibility of government. As governing parties, Southern Africa's former liberation movements have become obstacles to accountable and ethical governance, owing both to a sense of entitlement to rule as well as an untransformed leadership mindset that is still locked in the liberation struggle culture. The tendency for liberation movements-turned-ruling parties to undermine established norms of accountable governance is not limited to national jurisdictions but is also a contributing factor to faltering regional governance under the auspices of SADC.<sup>43</sup>

In recent years, SADC as an organisation has sought to position itself as a vehicle for transformative democratic governance, mainly due to pressures from external donors and national non-state actors who see supranationalism as a way of augmenting domestic capacities to govern growing turbulence and complexity in the region. The elaboration and updating of regional instruments and frameworks, such as the Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ,<sup>44</sup> SADC's Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, or the establishment of the SADC Electoral Advisory Council, all speak to a recognition of the possibilities of strengthening the region's capacity for democratic governance through collective regional action. However, the absence of shared political values and reliable regional champions has left the implementation of most of these initiatives uninspiring.<sup>45</sup> As the 2011 decision to disband the SADC Tribunal (when its rulings went against Zimbabwe's government on land reform issues) suggests, considerations of regime solidarity and an inordinate recourse to the discourse of state sovereignty continue to trump the imperatives for accountable and people-centred governance that could bring the region closer to its aspirations for a security community. It is also in this context that SADC's election observation practices have increasingly served to legitimise and rubber-stamp dubious electoral processes and unpopular governments in countries such as the

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43 Paul Nantulya, "The Troubled Democratic Transitions of African Liberation Movements", December 14, 2017, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/troubled-democratic-transitions-african-liberation-movements/>.

44 The Organ for Politics, Defence and Security (Organ) was launched in June 1996 as a formal institution of SADC with the mandate to promote peace and security in the region.

45 Laurie Nathan, "Synopsis of Community of Insecurity: SADC's Struggle for Peace and Security in Southern Africa", *African Security Review* 22, no. 3 (2013), 181-189.; Elling N. Tjønneland, "Making Sense of the Southern African Development Community", *African Security Review* 22, no. 3 (2013), 190-196.

DRC, Malawi and Zimbabwe, rather than contribute to promoting the principles and values of democratic governance.<sup>46</sup>

In the context of faltering supranational efforts to catalyse the transformation of the governance landscape, it is not surprising that there has been a shrinking of democratic space and a corresponding trend to curtail civil and political liberties in the region. A 2019 report by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition details the some of the main features of this trend in very stark terms. The report notes the ascendancy of authoritarian tendencies and a clamp down on human rights activists in countries such as Zimbabwe, eSwatini and Zambia. Importantly, it highlights what appears to be a shift away from ‘using primitive and crude tactics of violence and naked brutality’ to a more sophisticated approach to controlling the civic space through the use of draconian laws that monitor and constrain the activities of NGOs and other civil society actors. This is in addition to a rising incidence of electoral malpractices that have often created a mismatch between governance processes and the will of the people (see also Table 3).<sup>47</sup>

Lingering challenges in the politics and governance of elections in the SADC region are significant not only because of the growing reputation of elections as a source of violence and instability in Africa, but also from the perspective of elections as a tool for governmental accountability. The brazen attempts at manipulating electoral processes and outcomes in recent polls in Mozambique and the DRC point to reversals in the gains of democratic consolidation in many countries in the region, as well as to highlight the presence of deeply entrenched forces fighting to maintain the status quo. Although the phenomenon of ‘third termism’ has dogged other parts of the continent in recent years, it has not taken the form of amendments to constitutional term limits in the region.<sup>48</sup> It nonetheless remains very much alive in the region through acts of electoral engineering and manipulation. In the case of the DRC, electoral fraud allowed Joseph Kabila and his ruling clique to continue to have a strong influence in the running of the country, and in the process forestall attempts at meaningful governance reforms by the Felix Tshisekedi administration.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, in other countries, electoral manipulation or, more broadly, ill-suited electoral systems have entrenched dominant party systems that have in no small measure contributed to eroding the foundations for efficient, accountable and democratic governance. Consider the case of South Africa where – despite the contributions of the country’s proportional representation system in checking the overwhelming dominance of the ANC – the closed party list system at the national and provincial levels makes it difficult for the electorate to hold their elected

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46 Ringisai Chikohomero, “Principle or Brotherhood? Making Elections More Credible in SADC”, *ISS Today*, July 19, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/principle-or-brotherhood-making-elections-more-credible-in-sadc>.

47 Crisis Coalition of Zimbabwe, “Democracy Under Threat in SADC: Shrinking of Democratic Space in SADC”, December 15, 2019, <http://kubatana.net/2019/12/15/democracy-under-threat-shrinking-of-democratic-space-in-sadc/>, 1-2.

48 The exception here is that of President Edgar Lungu of Zambia, who in 2018 benefited from a loophole in the country’s constitution to receive clearance from the Constitutional Court to run for a third term in 2021. Similar attempts in Zambia and Malawi in the early 2000s were resisted by civil society activism. See Boniface Dulani, “Democracy Movements as Bulwarks against Presidential Usurpation of Power: Lessons from the Third-Term Bids in Malawi, Namibia, Uganda and Zambia”, *Vienna Journal of African Studies* 20, no. 11 (2001), 115–139.

49 Pierre Englebert, “Congo, One Year Later”, *Atlantic Council*, January 14, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/congo-one-year-later/>.

representatives accountable. The breakdown in institutional processes of accountability has given rise to extra-institutional forms of political actions in the shape of violent protests, while also engendering political passivity particularly among the youth.<sup>50</sup> As Table 4 suggests, community protests against the poor performance of municipal governments has become a major feature of South Africa's political landscape. Meanwhile, despite South Africa's youthful population, only 21% of registered voters in the 2019 polls were under the age of 30. This represents a 47% decrease in the number of people aged between 18 and 19 who registered to vote for the elections.<sup>51</sup>

**Figure 1** Service delivery protests in South Africa from 2014 to 2019



Source: Municipal IQ, January 30, 2020, [https://www.municipaliq.co.za/index.php?site\\_page=press.php](https://www.municipaliq.co.za/index.php?site_page=press.php)

Over the years, these governance trends and challenges have been underscored in the assessments of both the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG). Most SADC member states have signed up to the APRM, with six of these (South Africa, Mozambique, Mauritius, Tanzania, Zambia, and Lesotho) having voluntarily subjected themselves to at least one review under the mechanism. Across all six countries, the APRM review identified endemic corruption, an overbearing executive and a general culture of public unaccountability as threats to the consolidation of democratic governance. APRM reviews also raised concerns in Lesotho, Mozambique and Zambia about non-adherence to the doctrine of separation of powers. This is facilitated by the blurring of lines between the party, state and government, as well as weak legislatures and judiciaries that are incapable of providing effective checks and balances over the power of

50 William Gumedde, "South Africa Needs Electoral System Overhaul", *Democracy Works Foundation Policy Brief* 35, August 20, 2020.

51 Cayley Clifford, "Quick Read: South Africa's 2019 Election in Numbers", *Africa Check*, May 27, 2019, <https://africacheck.org/reports/quick-read-south-africas-2019-election-in-numbers/>; see also Nancy Hakizimana and Grant Masterson, "2019 Elections: Where Did The Youth Go?", *EISA Election Resource Center*, no. 7, May 22, 2019.

the executive.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the excerpts of the 2020 IIAG (reflected in Table 4) suggests that although the region features some of the best-governed countries on the continent, its overall governance performance has shown some worrying signs over the years. Increasing deterioration in countries such as South Africa, Lesotho and Mauritius is matched only by warning signs in others such as Botswana, Tanzania and Namibia.

Country	2019 Score/100	2019 Rank/54	Trend 2010–2019	Trend Classification
Angola	40.0	43	+5.4	Slowing improvement
Botswana	66.9	5	+0.8	Warning signs
Comoros	43.2	38	-2.6	Increasing deterioration
DRC	31.7	49	-2.8	Increasing deterioration
ESwatini	43.8	36	+2.5	Slowing improvement
Lesotho	52.3	20	-0.5	Increasing deterioration
Madagascar	44.4	35	+1.7	Slowing improvement
Malawi	51.5	23	-1.3	Increasing deterioration
Mauritius	77.2	1	-0.5	Increasing deterioration
Mozambique	49.0	26	-0.2	Increasing deterioration
Namibia	65.1	7	+3.4	Warning Signs
Seychelles	72.3	3	+7.8	Increasing improvement
South Africa	65.8	6	-0.9	Increasing deterioration
Tanzania	53	19	+0.2	Warning signs
Zambia	52	21	-0.8	Increasing deterioration
Zimbabwe	46.1	33	+7.4	Slowing improvement

Note: Higher score indicates better performance

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2020, <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag>

## Forces of hope? The governance role of civil society, the judiciary and digital technologies

Despite the evident declining capacity to govern turbulence and complexity in Southern Africa, the region is by no means without catalysts for change. In fact, even in the midst of the challenges and negative trends discussed in the previous section, there has been remarkable demonstration of the potential for effective, inclusive, resilient and future-oriented governance systems in the region. This positive trend is driven by at least three main dynamics.

First, in the face of executive dominance and overreach, and the corresponding muzzling of national legislatures, the judiciary in some SADC countries has become a major force for

52 See APRM Country Review Reports at: <https://www.aprm-au.org/map-areas/>.

democratic and accountable governance, effectively rising up to the challenge of checking the abuse of state power and the flaunting of democratic principles. In this regard, the example of South Africa is exemplary. Supported by other fairly independent oversight institutions such as the Public Protector and the Office of the Auditor-General, the court system has demonstrated the resilience and potential to safeguard the public good in the face of declining ethical leadership in other institutions of governance. The landmark decision by Malawi's Constitutional Court to annul the country's 2019 presidential elections won by the incumbent Peter Mutharika, which was subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court, further illustrates the potential of the judiciary as both a guardian and catalyst for democratic governance and the rule of law.

Second, civil society activism has remained a bulwark against the erosion of democratic values both at the domestic and regional levels, using various mechanisms to hold governments to account and defend the democratic space. The region is even witnessing an evolution towards participatory regional governance thanks to the advocacy of civil society around SADC.<sup>53</sup> Civil society and the private sector have also been a source of governance innovation and dynamism, often playing a major role in augmenting the technical and intellectual capacity of government institutions. For example, the cross-border governance of the banking and telecommunications sectors has benefitted from the innovative ideas and initiatives of major banks and telecommunications companies in the region.<sup>54</sup> The potential of civil society and the private sector as engines for robust and democratic governance systems, however, needs to be qualified. Besides the problem of weak linkages among various civil society formations in the region, the most visible and well-resourced of these organisations are urban and elitist in nature, and often lack broad-based grassroots constituencies, to the effect that their agendas and priorities are not always in sync with the needs and concerns of large parts of the regional population. Moreover, civil society organisations have been accused of corruption, lack of accountability and unethical leadership, as much as they are reputed for fighting these ills in government.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the private sector has demonstrated the potential to be as much an obstacle as a catalyst for accountable and innovative governance. Across the region, the public sector corruption that has undermined accountability and regulatory systems has been facilitated by a complex network of ties involving politicians, senior public officials and representatives of big corporates.<sup>56</sup> It is also in this context that, in countries such as South Africa, 'the extensive reliance on tendering and outsourcing to deliver public goods has not demonstrably improved service, but it has created opportunities for fraud and corruption'.<sup>57</sup>

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53 Andréas Godsäter, "Civil Society and Regional Governance: Knowledge Production and Issue-Framing around SADC", *Journal of Civil Society* 11, no. 1 (2015), 100-116.

54 Talitha Bertelsmann-Scott, *The Private Sector as a Driver of Regional Integration* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs [SAIIA]; Maastricht: ECDPM, 2013).

55 Velaphi Mamba, "Civil Society and Corruption: A Time for Self-introspection", *Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa*, October 29, 2019, <https://osisa.org/civil-society-and-corruption-a-time-for-self-introspection/>.

56 Malunga, "Botswana unravels".

57 Chris Tapscott, "South Africa in the Twenty-First Century: Governance Challenges in the Struggle for Social Equity and Economic Growth", *Chinese Political Science Review* 2 (2017), 81.

Civil society organisations and the private sector in SADC need to undergo a process of critical self-reflection on their agendas and activities to find a common purpose and to establish mechanisms to guard against tendencies that undermine the social transformative role expected of them.

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A third trend that appears to augur well for building effective and resilient governance systems in the SADC region relates to the increasing significance of digital technologies and how these are contributing to inspire and empower a new generation of young people to become politically conscious and active. Much work still needs to be done to translate social media activism into sustained political action. However, the 2015 ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ and ‘Fees Must Fall’ student protests in South Africa, which linked student struggles with those of broader society and succeeded in extracting major concessions from both government and universities, are reminders that young people are revolutionising governance and politics in the region through their absence from traditional institutional processes.<sup>58</sup>

These and other positive trends underscore the opportunities and potential for building governance systems that are resilient to complex and unpredictable events. However, as the analysis of the regional response to the coronavirus pandemic in the next section suggests, these opportunities and potential are yet to be transformed into resources and capabilities for governing complexity and wicked problems.

## COVID-19 and the governance challenge in Southern Africa

The coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over one million people worldwide and infected many more, is emblematic of the strategic surprises and emergencies that have become a part of our complex and unpredictable reality, and which, as discussed in an earlier section of this paper, requires governance models that are flexible, resilient and future-oriented. The pandemic has not spared the SADC region. If anything, the existence

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58 Sedireng Lerakong, “Youth Could Surprise Us All”, *Sunday Independent*, May 15, 2016, <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/youth-could-surprise-us-all-2021750>.

of already dire socio-economic and political conditions (as depicted above) means that, despite the relatively low number of infections in most SADC countries (see Table 5), the pandemic has quickly turned into one of those wicked problems that has tested, and in the process exposed major shortcomings in the region's capacity to navigate complex emergencies. At both the national and regional levels, responses to the outbreak of COVID-19 brought into sharp focus not only the extreme inequalities and vulnerability of the region to socio-ecological problems, but also the governance challenges and missed opportunities that were highlighted in the previous section of this paper.

**TABLE 5 SADC MEMBER STATES COVID-19 STATISTICS AS AT 16 NOVEMBER 2020**

Country	Confirmed cases	Deaths	Recovered
Angola	13374	322	6345
Botswana	8225	27	5559
Comoros	579	7	549
DRC	11789	319	11086
eSwatini	6095	119	5779
Lesotho	2041	44	1056
Madagascar	17310	250	16592
Malawi	5965	185	5399
Mauritius	470	10	428
Mozambique	14448	113	12505
Namibia	13508	138	12680
Seychelles	160	0	157
South Africa	751024	20241	693467
Tanzania	509	21	183
Zambia	17123	353	16137
Zimbabwe	8829	257	8096

Source: SADC Region: COVID-19 Status Update, 2020, <https://www.sadc.int/issues/covid-19/>

Across the region, governments responded reasonably swiftly to the outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020 by marshalling their constitutional powers to declare states of emergency or states of disaster, imposing national lockdowns and closing international borders. This was all in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its effect on society, having learnt valuable lessons from the damaging effects of the sluggish response to the pandemic in Europe and the US. In countries such as South Africa, the leadership demonstrated by the president and his health minister, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, was inspiring and near impeccable.<sup>59</sup> The governments in the region also demonstrated an astute understanding of the pandemic and the measures to contain

59 Lungisile Ntsebeza, "COVID-19 and Its Implications for South Africa's Democracy", *African Studies Center Leiden*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/ascl-blogs/covid-19-and-its-implications-south-africas-democracy>.

it as not just a public health challenge, but also as a more complex socio-economic problem. This led to the adoption of a raft of relief measures to help societies cope with the unfolding emergency. Another area where the response to the pandemic demonstrated an approximation of a collaborative governance approach,<sup>60</sup> was in the various attempts by governments in the region to tap into the scientific knowledge base, distribution systems, management expertise and resources of the academic community, private sector and the broader civil society. For example, in South Africa a Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 served as the primary vehicle for the government to draw on the expertise of a cross-section of scientists and researchers. Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe, the government partnered with local universities to produce personal protective equipment and other material needed to fight the virus.<sup>61</sup>

At the regional level, SADC institutions such as the Secretariat and the Ministerial Committee of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation sought to engineer a collective approach to dealing with the pandemic by invoking and reminding member states of existing protocols and measures, while also developing new guidelines such as those relating to the conduct of elections observation under conditions of public health emergencies.

However, this seemingly laudable demonstration of governance capacity in the face of a complex and volatile public health emergency belies the true reality of the regional response to the coronavirus pandemic. For all intents and purposes, it points to a region that is as unprepared to manage turbulence and complex emergencies as it is fragile. Perhaps most symptomatic of this condition is the quick descent into a heavy-handed and, in some instances, an outright militarised approach that has been observed in the way many governments have managed the pandemic. While the recourse to emergency laws may have been necessary in most instances, it has been the inability to enforce these laws within the bounds of what is constitutionally permissible and morally defensible that exposed the fragile nature of state power in the region, and the penchant for abusing this authority on the part of those who wield it. In Zimbabwe, for example, COVID-19 appears to have provided an opportunity for the government to continue with its clamp-down on the opposition and human rights activists, this time under the cover of measures to contain the spread of the virus.<sup>62</sup> In South Africa, it took an order of the high court to force the government to put in place measures to check the brutality of security forces tasked with enforcing lockdown regulations.<sup>63</sup> Similar abuses and excesses that served to expose the shaky foundations of democratic governance and the rule of law were reported in

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60 Torfing and Ansell, "Strengthening Political Leadership".

61 Tonderayi Mukeredzi, "Government Ropes in Universities to Fight COVID-19", *University World News*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200406073439527>.

62 Owen Gagare, "C-19: Zimbabwe and the Rule of Law", *Good Governance Africa*, July 7, 2020, <https://gga.org/c-19-zimbabwe-and-the-rule-of-law/>; Miranda Rivers and Precious Ndlovu, "COVID Raises the Stakes for Zimbabwe's Civil Society Movement", United States Institute of Peace, June 24, 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/06/covid-raises-stakes-zimbabwes-civil-society-movement>.

63 Mia Swart, "South Africa Court Issues Orders to End Police Brutality During Lockdown", *Aljazeera*, May 17, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/17/s-africa-court-issues-orders-to-end-police-abuse-during-lockdown>.

other SADC countries such as the DRC and Zambia.<sup>64</sup> What all these cases speak to is the continued dominance of a state and, in some instances, regime security paradigm, and the corresponding frailty and inflexibility of existing institutions and processes to cope with the growing human security threats that the region is experiencing.

What all these cases speak to is the continued dominance of a state and, in some instances, regime security paradigm, and the corresponding frailty and inflexibility of existing institutions and processes to cope with the growing human security threats that the region is experiencing

A related governance challenge that has been brought to the fore by COVID-19 is the strong desire on the part of governments in the region to police the internet as a way of managing the increased scrutiny and criticism of public policy and officials that has come with the growing use of digital technologies. With all its possibilities for enhancing transparent, accountable and deliberative governance, the advent of digital technologies has gradually transformed the balance of power between the governed and the governors by upending the traditional information gate-keeping role of the latter. In this context, rather than exploring ways to harness the power of technology to improve governance process, the preoccupation of many governments in the region has been on devising measures to curtail the free flow of information and debate in the digital space. The criminalisation of the spread of false information on the pandemic and the official response through so-called 'fake news' law has revealed a strong penchant on the part of governments to muzzle the internet as a default response to public pressure and scrutiny. In countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and eSwatini, this has happened with little regard for the consequences of violating the digital rights of citizens and stifling the discursive space.

As a test of the governance capacity of the region to manage complex emergencies, COVID-19 has also exposed weaknesses in state-society relations that undermine the deployment of a whole-of-nation approach to governing our complex reality and the strategic surprises it produces.<sup>65</sup> Despite limited attempts to tap into the expertise and resources of non-state actors (especially the scientific community), the dominant response to the pandemic in the region has been anchored in the traditional state-led paternalistic model of governance with all its inflexibilities and insensitivities. In the case of South Africa, a key missing link in the response of the state to the pandemic has been the ability and willingness of the government to mobilise and create space for the broader society to

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64 Andrew Green, "Across Africa, Pandemic Lockdowns Risk Violating Human Rights", *World Politics Review*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/28676/across-africa-pandemic-lockdowns-risk-violating-human-rights>.

65 Ho, "The Challenges of Governance".

become co-constructors of the discourses and policies of the emergency response.<sup>66</sup> This is the case even though the history of South Africa and the region at large is one replete with success stories of the transformative agency of social movements and community organisations. The limitations of this state-led approach were evident not only in the difficulties in eliciting compliance with measures that were evidently out of sync with the lived experiences of local communities – such as social distancing – but also in how some of the measures that formed part of the official response to the pandemic served to aggravate already dire socio-economic conditions, while deepening the existing trust deficit between the state and local communities. Over-reliance on the controlling and coercive power of the state means that evidence-based policymaking has also been in short supply in government interventions across the region. For example, in South Africa the imposition of a ban on the sale of tobacco was judged by many to be inconsistent with scientific knowledge of the emotional and physiological impact of smoking.<sup>67</sup>

An additional consequence of the paternalistic state-led model of governance deployed to manage the COVID-19 pandemic is how it has facilitated corruption and the abuse of public resources in various government interventions. In this regard, COVID-19 has also demonstrated both the endemic nature of corruption in many countries in the region, as well as its continued threat to the ability of governments and societies to respond in a comprehensive manner to complex emergencies and challenges. Amnesty International has documented instances in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Angola where social protection measures adopted by governments to cushion vulnerable communities from the socio-economic effects of the pandemic and associated lockdowns were hijacked by politicians to further their own parochial interests. In particular, the distribution of food aid became a political tool for rewarding supporters while punishing opponents. In some cases, food meant for local communities was simply diverted for personal use.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile in South Africa and Zimbabwe, the pandemic also served as a reminder of the deteriorating levels of efficiency, transparency and accountability around government procurement processes, which is a direct result of years of entanglement of these processes in corrupt networks made up of ruling party politicians, private businesses and senior administrators. As pointed out by the late South African Auditor-General, Kimi Makwetu, existing governance deficiencies in the form of ‘poor financial management controls, a disregard for supply chain management legislation, an inability to effectively manage projects, and a lack of accountability’ meant that few government sectors had the capacity to respond to the emergency in an efficient, cost-effective and corrupt-free manner.<sup>69</sup> For example, a report

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66 Andries du Toit and Diana Mitlin, “COVID-19: The State Cannot Save Us”, *African Arguments*, June 9, 2020, <https://africanarguments.org/2020/06/09/covid-19-the-state-cannot-save-us/>; Ntsebeza, “COVID-19”.

67 African News Agency, “Tobacco Sales Ban is Cruel, Unworkable and Unscientific”, June 10, 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/tobacco-sales-ban-is-cruel-unworkable-and-unscientific-49205124>.

68 Amnesty International, “Southern Africa: Governments Must Move Beyond Politics in Distribution of COVID-19 Food Aid,” May 6, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/southern-africa-governments-must-move-beyond-politics-in-distribution-of-covid19-food-aid/>.

69 Lizeka Tandwa, “Bad Situation Made Worse: AG says Government Deficiencies Compromised Covid-19 Tenders,” *News24*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/bad-situation-made-worse-ag-says-govt-deficiencies-compromised-covid-19-tenders-20200902>; see also Gagare, “Zimbabwe and the Rule of Law”.

by the Auditor-General into COVID-19-related corruption found that seven of the nine provinces ordered personal protective equipment at prices in excess of the maximum prices prescribed by National Treasury. Among other irregularities, it also established that 53 individuals below the legal age of employment of 15 years were paid a total amount of ZAR 224,677 by the Unemployment Insurance Fund.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, COVID-19 has also highlighted the enduring gap between the developmental and human security aspirations underpinning the rhetoric of ‘The SADC We Want’ on the one hand, and the institutional and governance capacity to deliver on this vision on the other. To its credit, the SADC Secretariat took a number of initiatives to engender a collective and coordinated regional response to the pandemic, including adopting guidelines for harmonising and facilitating cross-border transport operations, as well as encouraging member states to make use of SADC’s Pooled Procurement Services for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. However, because the SADC Secretariat is not vested with supranational authority, these initiatives have fallen short of engendering a coordinated regional response to the public health emergency and its associated socio-economic impacts. The individual actions of SADC member states in response to the pandemic have been arbitrary and largely inconsistent with what one would expect from a region with already high levels of socio-economic integration.<sup>71</sup> Little consideration appears to have been given to the regional implications of national measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus – a situation that would have been avoided had the institutional make up of SADC been aligned with its developmental and human security agenda. Consider, for example, the inefficiencies and delays at border posts across the region, and the ensuing disruption in the delivery of vital supplies, as a result of the lack of harmonisation of cross-border transport control measures despite guidelines issued by the SADC Secretariat to this effect.

## Towards anticipatory governance in the SADC region

In Southern Africa, as in other parts of the world, the governance implications of the COVID-19 pandemic – as an example of contemporary wicked problems – go beyond its contribution to unmasking the deficiencies in existing governance models and systems as analysed above. Perhaps more importantly, the pandemic also stands to transform the very landscape of governance in the region, for better and for worse. Drawing on the dynamics and trends analysed in previous sections of this paper, as well as insights from other parts of the world on the effects of the pandemic, some key trends can be delineated that will shape the outlook for governance in the region in the era of COVID-19.

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70 Auditor-General of South Africa, “First Special Report on the Financial Management of Government’s Covid-19 Initiatives”, [https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Special-report-interactive-\\_final.pdf](https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Special-report-interactive-_final.pdf). ZAR is the currency code for South African Rand.

71 Gerhard Erasmus and Trudi Hartzenberg, “Governance in Abnormal Times – Dealing with COVID-19: A Regional Perspective from South Africa,” *Tralac Working Paper*, no. US20WP01/2020.

First, the unprecedented uptake of digital technologies that allowed various sectors of society to continue operating in the context of national lockdowns will be a defining feature of the organisation of social and political life in most countries in the region, offering both opportunities and challenges for governance. There have already been instances where COVID-19 has inspired innovation around the use of digital technologies to strengthen deliberative democracy, as well as transparency and accountability in governance processes. A good example is the initiative by the legislature of South Africa's Northern Cape Province, in partnership with the Democracy Works Foundation and the Westminster Foundation of Democracy, which seeks to harness online platforms for public participation in the work of the legislature.<sup>72</sup> However, the growing salience of these technologies in the region also poses a governance challenge, as this trend could be a new source of social and political instability if governments do not respond to it with tact and foresight.

Second, the coronavirus pandemic has created conditions that pose major challenges to the conduct of elections as a cornerstone of democratic governance. The need for social distancing is inimical to the very nature of elections as an activity that hinges on social contact, in the form of campaigning, voting, or the observation of polls. In a region where the mismanagement and manipulation of elections already pose major threats to accountable governance and political stability, responding to the new challenges imposed by COVID-19 will be a key governance test for many countries and SADC as an organisation. Balancing public health interests and the imperative to safeguard the integrity of democratic processes will require innovation, foresight and consensus-building. However, this new environment also presents opportunities for strengthening electoral processes in the region. For example, the need for social distancing may very well suggest that it is time for the region to explore the electronic voting option (as Namibia has done), despite the legitimate apprehensions around this. Equally, the likely scaling back of international elections observation presents an opportunity for strengthening and raising the profile of domestic observers, who, arguably have an untapped potential to bring greater transparency and legitimacy to electoral processes than international observers.

In this regard, the SADC Secretariat should work alongside the region's election management bodies and relevant civil society organisations to strengthen domestic election observation as an alternative to international elections observation.

Third, in the era of COVID-19, governance in most SADC countries will have to contend with deepening distrust in state-society relations. As discussed earlier, years of authoritarian rule, broken promises, corruption, human rights abuses and degenerating socio-economic conditions have left many citizens distrustful of, and hostile towards, their governments. Governments have in turn often resorted to a coercive approach to governance thereby alienating large parts of society. The socio-economic hardships induced by COVID-19 as well

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72 Democracy Works Foundation, "Northern Cape Provincial Legislature Goes Online to Strengthen Public Participation During Covid-19," May 27, 2020, <https://democracyworks.org.za/northern-cape-provincial-legislature-goes-online-to-strengthen-public-participation-during-covid-19/>.

as social discontent over the handling by governments of the pandemic will most likely exacerbate the rift in state-society relations, with strong prospects for increased citizen disengagement from political and institutional processes at best, or social uprisings against governments at worst.

## The SADC Secretariat should work alongside the region's election management bodies and relevant civil society organisations to strengthen domestic election observation as an alternative to international elections observation

Fourth, the coronavirus pandemic may also serve to dampen the impetus for much-needed political and institutional reforms in countries such as Angola, Zimbabwe and South Africa, as governments become tempted to hold onto the legacies of emergency rule in the form of authoritarianism, weakened rule of law and limited oversight over the exercise of executive power.

Fifth, and lastly, COVID-19 has allowed the state, as a socio-political organisation, to reassert itself vis-à-vis other actors in a manner that may not have been deemed possible a few years ago. By deploying its sovereign authority to reorganise society through border closures, lockdowns or other forms of control measures, the state has demonstrated its continued relevance as an organising principle of world affairs. This has in turn exposed the vulnerability of global value chains and the broader globalisation project. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted the myth of African states as self-reliant and self-sufficient economies, thereby creating renewed opportunities and incentives for regional integration.

This unfolding landscape also calls for a new governance model that will enable the region to better navigate the added complexity and fluidity induced by the coronavirus pandemic. In recent decades, the anticipatory governance framework has gained traction as a suitable governance model under conditions of complex and accelerated change. As noted earlier, anticipatory governance is built on the understanding that complexity and uncertainty cannot be managed but can be better navigated through a systems approach that combines capacities for forecasting, visioning, as well as collaborative and participatory processes, to anticipate and respond to the challenges that come with rapid and unpredictable change. There are four main components to the anticipatory governance model. These include the following: a foresight system for analysing and visualising alternative futures; a networked system of governance that allows for the integration of foresight into policy processes; a feedback system to gauge performance and manage institutional knowledge; as well as an open-minded institutional culture.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Leon Fuerth, "Foresight and Anticipatory Governance," *Foresight* 11, no. 4 (2009): 20.

Operationalising this governance model in the SADC region cannot follow a one-size-fits-all approach, given the diverse socio-economic and political settings in the region. The exact design of an anticipatory governance framework would have to be adapted to the specificities of different social, economic and governance sectors. Even so, from both a national and regional perspective, certain pre-conditions are necessary for a shift towards adoption of anticipatory governance in Southern Africa.

First, an anticipatory governance framework requires strong synergy between the state and various sectors of society to not only strengthen the ability to discern threats and opportunities, but to also engender the common purpose that is needed to mainstream foresight in policy and practice. In this regard, building healthy state-society relations would be just one component of a broader project of social reconstruction aimed at decisively confronting the legacies and structures of discrimination, exclusion and oppression, which continue to polarise societies across the region, and alienate the state and its institutions from large parts of society.

Many of the states in the SADC region such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, the DRC, eSwatini and even Lesotho could benefit from inclusive national dialogues, as mechanisms for frank and open debate intended to deal decisively with the vexing issues that continue to undermine social and political transformation, and map out new trajectories for these societies. No society is able to navigate complexity and uncertainty in an effective and efficient manner with the levels of discord, polarisation and distrust observed in most of the countries in the region. The APRM can be leveraged as a platform to facilitate these national dialogues.

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There is equally an urgent need to prioritise the democratic transformation of the political economy of SADC member states to break the historical monopoly of a few over government and the economy. This is critical for disentangling debates and measures to fight corruption and restore accountability and the rule of law in the public space from questions of socio-economic justice.

Second, because anticipatory governance presupposes agility, flexibility and responsiveness in policy processes, it demands a different kind of politics than what is currently on offer in the SADC region. Political processes built around self-serving relationships of patronage and

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corruption, and which insulate political representatives from public opinion and scrutiny, are inimical to evidence-based and foresight policymaking, not least because they foreclose opportunities for constructive engagement, learning and policy innovation. Efforts towards an anticipatory governance model in Southern Africa must therefore be underpinned by a new politics and ethics of accountability, openness and critical engagement.

To this end, member states of SADC should review their electoral systems and processes to bring them in line with the requirements for a whole-of-nation approach to governance in times of uncertainties and emergencies. Electoral reforms should consider the need for greater accountability on the part of elected representatives, as well as the imperative for inclusive and participatory political institutions and processes.

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The third prerequisite for the successful operationalisation of the anticipatory governance framework in the SADC region relates to the imperative for a professional, skilled and ethical public service that is also scaled down to a reasonable size. Decades of misappropriation of state power, corruption and nepotism means that the public service in most SADC countries is generally bloated, unaccountable and aloof, with limited capacity for innovation and foresight. Reimagining and reconstructing the public service thus becomes a necessary condition for strengthening the adaptive capacity of the state and society to navigate complexity and rapid change.

There is therefore a need to transform and repurpose the public administrations in SADC member states into caring, capable and innovative systems that can help societies in the region to better adapt to, and navigate, complex challenges. This would require

prioritising merit-based appointments into the public service, as well as programmes for the continuous upskilling of public administrators, including through greater partnerships with research and academic institutions. Such partnerships could also be used to develop capabilities in complexity and futures thinking, as well as foster anticipatory systems and futures literacy.

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Finally, a multi-scalar and multi-spatial approach to governance is also a necessity if the notion of anticipatory governance is to take root in the SADC region. As noted above, few countries in the region can boast of governance systems with the capacity to adapt to uncertainty. Further, high levels of regional interdependence means that turbulence in one country can quickly have a contagion effect across the region, putting the governance systems in other countries under stress. Conversely, a strong governance system at the regional level has the potential to transform positively the adaptive capacity of weak states. In the case of Southern Africa, this would require the transformation of SADC, as a supranational organisation, into an effective governance system with a catalytic effect on the adaptive capacity of governance systems at the national, subnational and local scales.

In order to unlock the region's multi-scalar and multi-spatial adaptive governance capacity, South Africa, as the regional hegemon, should assume a proactive leadership role in SADC. Pretoria's obsessive sensitivity to perceptions of its leadership role on the continent is outmoded. It is also a fallacy to believe that South Africa is able to develop an adaptive capacity to cope with contemporary socio-ecological challenges without a firm control over the sources of turbulence in the rest of the region. It is therefore as much in its interest as it is in the regional interest for South Africa to re-embrace the Mbeki-era mission of constructing common regional norms and institutions as part of its own regeneration and in preparation for the next strategic surprise. For example, partnering with the SADC

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Secretariat and relevant academic and social institutions in the region, South Africa's Centre for Public Service Innovation could, through an anticipatory governance working group, take the lead in fostering complexity thinking and futures literacy capabilities in the region.

## Conclusion

As societies across the world begin to adjust to the new reality imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, there is an increasing realisation that this is not an isolated event. If anything, the unfolding public health crisis has become the latest wake-up call to the complex and unpredictable challenges that are symptomatic of the period of socio-ecological transformation that the world has entered into, and which have been present for some time now. It is also becoming evident, at least to the alert, that navigating this turbulent future requires new thinking, a different set of skills, and alternative principles for organising political and socio-economic life at multiple scales. It also calls for a new governance paradigm that empowers societies with the capacity and foresight to manage and adapt to complex and accelerated change. As the analysis in this paper suggests, while the SADC region, like the rest of the world, is deeply in the throes of these challenges, for the most part, it remains wedded to traditional models of governance and politics. These, as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, are ill-suited to responding to the rapid changes and strategic surprises that are characteristic of our age. The anticipatory governance framework suggested here can provide a much-needed paradigm shift for managing complexity and uncertainty in the region, but only to the extent that it is buttressed by corresponding efforts to reimagine and reconstruct the deeply troubled and polarised societies in most SADC countries.

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