2024 IN RETROSPECT

POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS OF 2024 NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN SADC REGION

ESN-SA
ELECTORAL SUPPORT NETWORK OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

SADC Member States

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ACDEG African Charter on Elections Democracy and Governance
ADC Alliance du Changement
ANC African National Congress
AR Affirmative Repositioning
BDP Botswana Democratic Party
BLS Best Loser System
BNP Basotho National Party
BPF Botswana Patriotic Front
CENI Independent National Electoral Commission
CNE National Electoral Commission
CRC Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros
DC Democratic Congress
EBC Elections and Boundaries Commission
ECF-SADC Electoral Commissions Forum of Southern African Development Community
ECN Electoral Commission of Namibia
EMBs Election Management Bodies
EOM Election Observer Missions
ERC Election Resource Centre
FDI Foreign Direct Investment
FPTP First-Past-The-Post
FPU United Patriotic Front
GDP Gross Domestic Product
IEC Independent Electoral Commission
MEC Malawi Electoral Commission
MK Mkhonto weSizwe
MSM Militant Socialist Movement
NEFF Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters
PDM People's Democratic Movement
PEA Political Economy Approach
PEMMO Principles for Election Management, Monitoring, and Observation
PODEMO Partido Optimista pelo Desenvolvimento de Moçambique
PR Proportional Representation
PUDEMO People's United Democratic Movement
RENAMO Resistência Nacional Moçambicana
SADC Southern African Development Community
SADC PF Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum
SEAC Southern Africa Development Community Electoral Advisory Council
SWAPO South West Africa People's Organization
UDP Umbrella for Democratic Change
USD United States Dollar
VMD Voter Management Devices
ZEC Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN Zimbabwe Election Support Network

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Executive Summary

This paper utilises a political economy approach to scrutinise the impact of the 2024 elections on the consolidation of democracy in the 14 countries covered by the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA). All the countries have committed to the protocols, norms and standards that guide elections in the region: the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring, and Observation (PEMMO) and the African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Governance (ACDEG) (2007). International and Domestic Observer Missions observed elections in these seven countries (Botswana, Comoros, Mauritius, Mozambique, Madagascar, Namibia and South Africa) and the other eight countries that had elections before 2024 and made recommendations to improve the integrity of the vote and the overall institutional democratic electoral processes. The outcomes of the 2024 elections caused some unexpected shifts in leadership in some countries that heralds potential change in the SADC region. Two of the countries, Botswana and Mauritius had peaceful political power alternations; South Africa ended up with a coalition government as there was no outright winner; Comoros and Namibia had intense contestations from the opposition parties, and Mozambique erupted into violence that went on for longer than three months after the election. Highlights from the paper are presented below.

- Democracy in the region has been influenced by various factors such as the decolonisation processes and resistance against colonial rule, the inherited political institutions, the economies of the different countries and the influences of founding ideologies after independence. These factors have all shaped the different contemporary political cultures. The region currently presents a mixed picture of democratic progress, with some nations making strides in democratic consolidation while others face significant setbacks. There is a mix of strong democracies like Botswana, Namibia, and Mauritius, that have made significant progress in maintaining democratic principles, with relatively stable political environments that uphold the rule of law. However, challenges continue in some of the countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Eswatini, and Malawi that continue to struggle with democratisation.

- Different electoral systems are used in the region with the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system being used in nine SADC countries, proportional representation (PR) in two, and mixed systems in the remaining three. Electoral reforms are ongoing work as most countries are aware of the deficiencies in their systems that are revealed by Election Observer Missions (EOMs). The electoral systems are heavily contested in many countries and there is ongoing advocacy work across the SADC countries on adjusting them, with many pushing for more inclusive PR in parliaments.

- The level of democracy in a country is not directly related to the electoral system. Angola and Mozambique, and even Lesotho uses PR but have experienced coups after each election except in the most recent one. However, the quality of governance is clearly related to democracy, respect for the electoral system and the consolidation of democracy.

- The SADC region continues to struggle with inclusion of women in elective positions. None of the SADC countries go above 50% representation in parliament. The region has a large youth population, with many countries having over 60% of their population under the age of 30 which makes youth inclusion in governance essential for the region's political stability, social cohesion, and economic growth.

- CSOs presence is helping to build resilient democracies in the region. CSOs advocate changes in electoral laws and policies to ensure that they are inclusive and equitable. The SADC region has CSOs that conduct election observation throughout the electoral cycle, and this helps with transparency, minimising human rights abuses and disenfranchisement. By deploying election observers across polling stations, they help to ensure that elections are free, fair, and credible.

- Botswana's 2024 changed the direction and nature of the country's politics, and this sent signals to the region's dominant ruling parties that have never experienced power alternation. The country's economy had been on a downward trend for some time and opposition parties coalesced to push out the Botswana Democratic Party that had dominated the electoral landscape for 58 years. Mauritius too had an unexpected power alternation that was driven by poor economic performance and the increase in poor governance practices. The power of coalitions was demonstrated in these two cases and in the Zambian (2022) and Malawian (2020) elections that resulted in peaceful changes of government. South Africa's inconclusive election outcome also occasioned the formation of a government of national unity after three decades of dominance by the African National Congress. These developments herald a new era of political maturity and inclusive governance that is led by coalition politics. This increases the chances for consolidation of democracy.

- Comoros's 2024 electoral outcomes confirmed its volatile history of political turmoil, unconstitutional power alternations, and the still evolving electoral system. Power retention by President Azali Assoumani was met with resistance by the opposition parties amid the usual post-election violence skirmishes. Mozambique's long reigning FRELIMO's victory was vehemently and violently opposed by the public and opposition parties with prolonged violence that spilled into 2025. The South West African Peoples Organisation's contested victory in Namibia teetered on the brink of potential violence too. All the problems in these countries were caused by the uneven electoral landscape and the unfair conduct of elections. These pockets of undemocratic management of elections signal a regression in the consolidation of democracy for some countries.

- The other eight countries (Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe) that had elections prior to 2024 equally had electoral management challenges that were flagged out by EOMs. These problems cut across all phases of the electoral cycle with some countries having more issues than others. Voter registration, logistics on polling day, management of election results and the lack of electoral reforms stood out in most of the countries. The pace of implementing EOM recommendations on electoral reforms is very slow throughout the region.

- The failure to implement electoral reforms is stalling democratic consolidation in most countries in the region. Many of the electoral management challenges are more pronounced in the FPTP systems as evidenced by the recommendations given by the EOMs. The holdback is a problem of lack of political will to implement the reforms. These issues in electoral systems stem from a combination of political, social, and economic factors, including weak institutions, political interference, and insufficient electoral laws. Many of these countries have taken steps toward improving their electoral processes, but the challenges remain significant in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections.

- Election violence is a recurring problem in some countries with tensions escalating between the ruling party and opposition, with reports of intimidation, harassment, and violence during campaigns and in the immediate post-election phase. Some countries, (e.g. Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Madagascar and Comoros), continue to experience election violence over political rivalry, disputes over election results, and concerns about the legitimacy of the electoral process in almost every election. The violence has affected voter turnout. Four countries that had elections in 2024 had voter turnout below the SADC average of 59.7%, necessitating scrutiny of the links between conflict and voter turnout. Three of the countries with the highest turnout all had political party alternations, Botswana, Mauritius and Zambia.

- Many SADC countries lack clear regulations and transparency regarding political party funding. This leads to an environment where funds may be misused or are unaccounted for. It also opens the door for corruption, as parties might rely on illicit sources of funding, including donations from foreign governments, corporations, or even criminal enterprises. The lack of full transparency in the funding of political parties and election campaigns has led to concerns over corruption and mistrust in the entire region

- Several countries face challenges related to the autonomy of their Election Management Boards (EMBs). These issues typically revolve around political interference, lack of independence, and the influence of ruling parties. This has led to concerns about the fairness of elections, with opposition parties accusing the commissions of bias and the government exerting undue influence.

- Digital technologies are changing electoral participation across all the SADC countries. Most of the countries have used biometric technologies for voter verification. Social media is increasingly playing a key role in encouraging people to vote, particularly among younger voters who may not traditionally engage with politics. Parties, EMBs, and supporters all created hashtags, shared election-related content, and initiated online campaigns to increase voter turnout.

- Intertwined complex factors like political stability, policy shifts and economic performance all influence the interplay between elections and the economy. The links between economic performance and elections became clearer in the outcomes of the Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa's elections. Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Comoros and Namibia elections equally brought to the fore the public's concerns with economic governance issues. Political stability is crucial for the economy and voters in the region are clearly shifting to prioritising this over other loyalties. This is likely to increase trends in election campaigns that are issue based.

- Opportunities for democratic consolidation in Southern Africa are evident in the move towards a healthier mix of electoral successes and challenges in the last decade. Some countries have continuously conducted relatively peaceful and credible elections (Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius and South Africa), and others like Zimbabwe and Mozambique equally battle contestation of electoral outcomes. The formation of opposition party alliances in 2024, in some countries that held elections is also clearly a panacea for changing the nature of politics in the region while disintegration of opposition politics in countries such as Zimbabwe is a significant setback in the democracy trajectory. Even in Mozambique and Namibia, alliance formation equally demonstrated a shift in the direction the political landscape is evolving. The region's hegemons, the post liberation war countries of Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, continue to hold on to power through their struggle legacy. ANC's failure and ability to form a government of national unity shows a potential lessening of their grip on power and a willingness to share the political space. Both sides of the divide, opposition and ruling parties are utilizing the power of coalitions to stabilise electoral processes and create inclusive governance arenas. Such a trend will undoubtedly change the nature of politics in the region and allow for the development of a deliberative culture of democracy.

- Some significant recommendations across the countries include strengthening civil society to support electoral processes, implementing electoral reforms that level the democratic landscape, addressing governance deficits and upholding the rule of law partly by pursuing inclusion and social equity-gender policies, enhancing election security, conflict prevention and mediation for electoral disputes, promoting media freedoms and digital rights, and embracing relevant technologies that enhance transparency and participation.

Introduction

This position paper covers 14 Southern African countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania are excluded). Seven of the 16 SADC countries had either national or presidential elections in 2024 and 30% of the 20 elections in Africa were in this sub region. Elections in the region are guided by agreed on principles for democratic elections: the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring, and Observation (PEMMO), and the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF). This electoral institutional architecture promotes the democratic conduct of elections across member states, and is aligned to the African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Governance (ACDEG (2007)). The SADC also established two institutions: the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC), formed in 2005, to transform election observation and the prevention of electoral conflicts in the region, and the SEOM, which monitors elections to ensure adherence to democratic standards. An autonomous body, the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries (ECF-SADC), comprised of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) also deploys EOMs in the region to influence the administrative electoral landscape in the region.

In 2024, seven of the 14 countries in the SADC region, Botswana, Comoros, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Madagascar and South Africa held national elections. The outcomes of these elections revealed a seismic shift in leadership which underscored a period of significant political change and challenges within the SADC region. Two of the countries, Botswana and Mauritius had peaceful political power alternations. In October 2024, the ruling BDP, which had governed since the country's independence in 1966, suffered a substantial defeat, securing only four seats in the 61-seat parliament. This outcome led to the formation of a new government by an opposition coalition. The ECF-SADC issued a preliminary statement affirming the credibility of the electoral process. In November 2024, the opposition Alliance du Changement (ADC), led by Navin Ramgoolam, won 62.6% of the vote in Mauritius' general election, securing 60 out of 62 parliamentary seats. This victory granted Ramgoolam a fourth term as prime minister. The ADC's win was attributed to public dissatisfaction with the incumbent government's handling of economic issues and allegations of corruption. South Africa ended up without an outright winner after the election and this development necessitated the formation of a coalition government at the national level. Despite the ANC's reduced majority, the elections were widely regarded as peaceful, transparent, free, and credible. The SEOM commended the political maturity and spirit of tolerance exhibited by the South African populace during the election period. These changes reflect both progress and areas requiring attention in the pursuit of democratic consolidation.

In some of the countries, turmoil prevailed as usual in the 2024 elections. Mozambique's elections were marred by controversy and unrest. The ruling party, Frelimo, claimed victory; however, the opposition contested the results, alleging irregularities such as ballot stuffing. The disputed election led to civil unrest and violence, resulting in scores of deaths. The SADC convened an extraordinary summit in Harare to address the political crisis and seek a resolution. Namibia's elections were also heavily contested though the country elected its first female president, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah of the ruling South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). She received 57% of the vote, succeeding the late President Hage Geingob. Opposition parties disputed the election results, citing technical issues and shortages of ballot papers that extended voting by a day and challenged the results in court.

Incumbent President Azali Assoumani won the Comoros presidential election held on 14 January 2024 with about 57% of the vote. However, the election was marred by allegations of electoral fraud and a notably low voter turnout of about 16%. Opposition parties disputed the results, citing irregularities such as ballot-stuffing and early closure of polling stations. Despite these claims, the Supreme Court validated Assoumani's victory. In January 2025, his ruling party, the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros (CRC), secured 28 out of 33 seats in the parliamentary elections, maintaining its majority. Again, the opposition boycotted the election and rejected the results, alleging electoral fraud and bias. The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) announced the results, which the opposition contested, leading to protests and unrest.

Diagram 1 Elections in SADC in 2024

Country	Type of Election	Date
Comoros	Presidential	January 14
South Africa	General	May 29
Mozambique	Presidential & Legislative	October 9
Botswana	General	October 30
Mauritius	General	November 10
Namibia	Presidential	November 27
Madagascar	Legislative	May 29

This paper presents the issues and challenges the SADC countries face in managing elections as well as proposing potential solutions for addressing them. A general problem in Africa is the failure to implement the many recommendations made by election observers to correct the challenges and consolidate efforts to uphold and protect electoral democracy. The paper thus serves as a resource material for activists, policymakers, academics, and CSOs that work on building democracy and enhancing the conduct of democratic elections. It also aims to promote electoral reforms by serving as a region-wide advocacy repository for tracking successes and milestones on the consolidation of democracy.

The paper utilises an applied Electoral Political Economy Analysis EPEA to identify systemic features in the SADC region's electoral space. Through scrutinising the relevant institutions, key actors and prominent structural features that influence the conduct and outcome of elections (including the political system, demographic, historical, economic and social characteristics of the communities), solutions to enhancing the democratic conduct of elections become relatively easy to identify. Structural factors provide the foundational elements of the context in which all the analysis is grounded, and this includes systemic constraints and possible remedies in each context. Though the focus is on the 2024 elections, the paper refers to the other eight SADC countries that had elections between 2020 and 2023 (Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

A Political, Economic, Social, Technology, Environmental and Legal (PESTEL) analysis of the countries in the region is also utilised as it is a technique within PEA. Emphasis is on the electoral and political factors that shaped electoral behaviours and influenced electoral outcomes; economic issues that impacted on electoral processes and the public; social factors that had a bearing on voter trends; technological issues that relate to electoral activities such as digital voter registration and access to communication platforms; environmental factors that influence voting patterns and other electoral dynamics such as displacement due to climate change disasters, and legal issues like new laws that changed the electoral landscape.

1.1 Regional overview-the state of democracy and the electoral environment

The history of democracy in the SADC region has been shaped by various factors such as colonialism, apartheid, military coups, and the struggle for independence. These factors have all shaped the different political cultures and political institutions across the region. The region currently presents a mixed picture of democratic progress, with some nations making strides in democratic consolidation while others face significant setbacks. There is a mix of strong democracies like Botswana, Namibia, and Mauritius, that have made significant progress in maintaining democratic principles, with relatively peaceful and stable political environments that uphold the rule of law. Challenges continue in countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Eswatini, and Malawi that continue to face serious challenges such as corruption, political repression, and alleged electoral fraud which undermine the democratic process. In some of the countries, regressive trends are noted in democratic backsliding, with increasing authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and shrinking space for political opposition. Recently, there has been more consolidation of democracy in some countries that have experienced not just presidential alternation but political party alternation (Botswana and Mauritius 2024). These peaceful transfers of power, bolstered by judicial independence, and strong civil society, show hope in the overall direction the region is likely to take. Below is a timeline highlighting some key events that have shaped the current state of democracy in the SADC region.

Table 2 Timeline of recent developments in the region (2010s - 2024s)

- **2000s-2010s: Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia under single-party dominance** These countries saw relatively peaceful transitions, but also struggled with corruption, lack of institutional checks, and growing dissatisfaction with political elites. Eswatini (formerly Swaziland until 2018) remained under the absolute monarchy of King Mswati III, with no formal opposition allowed, and political dissent severely repressed.

- **2017: Fall of Mugabe in Zimbabwe:** After 37 years of political and economic turmoil, Zimbabwe's long-standing president Robert Mugabe was ousted in a military-assisted operation in November 2017. Mugabe was replaced by his former deputy, Emmerson Mnangagwa, but the country continues to struggle with political repression, economic hardship, and doubts about democratic reforms.

- **2019: Eswatini Political Unrest:** The absolute monarchy in Eswatini faced significant opposition protests, calling for democracy and greater political freedoms. Despite international pressure, the monarchy continues to maintain control.

- **2020: Continued democratic challenges and COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing political and social problems across the region. In some cases, governments used the pandemic as an excuse to clamp down on opposition and civil rights, while others struggled to address economic hardships.

- **2020s: Political Crises and Economic Struggles Malawi 2020:** A landmark ruling by the Constitutional Court in 2020 annulled the 2019 presidential election results, citing widespread electoral irregularities. A fresh election in June 2020 led to the victory of Lazarus Chakwera, signaling a potential shift towards more transparent democratic governance.

- **Mozambique 2024:** Continues to struggle with armed insurgencies, corruption, and political instability, affecting its democratic progress. Post election violence.

- **2024 Power alternation in Botswana and Mauritius Botswana 2024:** The founding party, the Botswana Democratic Party lost power to the opposition party

  Mauritius 2024: Opposition leader Navin Ramgoolam and the Alliance of Change coalition won 62.60% of the vote ousting Pravind Jugnauth.

  Power shift

  South Africa 2024: The liberating party the ANC loses outright majority for the first time since 1994 and forms a coalition government.

1.2 Political and Electoral Systems

The need to manage diversity and move towards more inclusive electoral arrangements in a particular country largely determines the dynamics in each of the political systems in the region. For instance, South Africa's 1994 Constitution was designed to directly manage the political diversity in the country and contain the racial tensions during the transition to democracy. Angola's 2010 constitution grants all citizens civic and political freedoms, but, as a post-conflict country, the country has grappled to institutionalise some of the democratic provisions. For Zimbabwe, the new 2013 Constitution following the 2008 pre- and post-election violence became a chance to embed a bill of rights and address inclusion issues which had affected previous elections due to the high levels of intolerance of the opposition parties. For instance, amendments were made in 2018 to Mozambique's Constitution adopted in 2004 (came into effect in 2005) and Zambia got its Constitution (Amendment) [No. 2 of 2016- that catered for presidential elections. For most countries, the constitutions are amended to align them with progressive international and regional protocols, norms and standards.

Political circumstances determine the electoral system for each country, often resulting in various combinations of approaches. List Proportional Representation is more preferred as it offers the best opportunity to deliberately include women candidates. The FPTP system is used in nine of the SADC countries, and PR and mixed systems are each used in three countries. Electoral reforms are equally ongoing work as most countries are aware of the deficiencies in their systems that are revealed by EOM groups. Electoral systems are heavily contested in many countries as they are a tool for managing diversity and aiding the inclusion of marginalised communities. There is ongoing advocacy work across the SADC countries on adjusting electoral systems with many pushing for the more inclusive PR in parliament that would result in multiparty systems.

The level of democracy in a country is not directly related to the electoral system as evidenced by the use of PR systems in relatively more rigid post liberation war countries of Angola and Mozambique, and even in Lesotho which uses PR but has experienced coups after each election except in the most recent ones in 2022 . Lesotho's persistent post-election problems can be attributed to inadequate rules and an absence of consistent constitutional practices, and the 2022 elections were inconclusive since no political party received an outright majority to form a government. Countries using FPTP system perform highly across different democracy and governance indices, e.g. Mauritius and Botswana, which indicates that political culture offers a better explanation for the upholding of democratic principles in elections.

Country	V-Dem EDI	V-Dem LDI	V-Dem PDI [4]	Democracy index [5]	Electoral system (1st chamber of parliament)	Mo Ibrahim Index 2023[6]
Angola	0.35	0.17	0.07	4.2	PR/List	36
Botswana	0.56	0.48	0.29	7.7	FPTP	5
Comoros	0.28	0.11	0.20	3	FPTP	40
Eswatini	0.12	0.09	0.08	2.8	FPTP	35
Lesotho	0.64	0.50	0.39	6.1	Mixed	21
Madagascar	0.35	0.22	0.54	5.3	FPTP/list PR	34
Mozambique	0.58	0.22	0.23	3.5	Mixed	28
Malawi	0.47	0.48	0.36	5.8	FPTP	19
Mauritius	0.54	0.36	0.31	8.1	FPTP	2
Namibia	0.65	0.52	0.36	6.5	PR	6
Seychelles	0.74	0.66	0.31	--	FPTP	1
South Africa	0.69	0.58	0.43	7	List PR	4
Zambia	0.52	0.42	0.37	5.8	FPTP	17
Zimbabwe	0.29	0.17	0.20	3	FPTP	31

However, the quality of governance is clearly related to democracy, respect for the electoral system and the consolidation of democracy. Countries that practice good governance are more likely to be more tolerant of the opposition and respect electoral outcomes even if they do not favour them. According to the Mo Ibrahim Governance Index, in 2024, Seychelles overtook Mauritius as the top performer on overall governance in the region. It is the most improved country in the whole continent, gaining an impressive +10.0 points following progress over the decade, starting from 7th rank in 2014. Seychelles peaceful elections in 2022 confirm this hypothesis. The worst performers in the Mo Ibrahim Index in SADC are Eswatini, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe all use the FPTP and have lower rates of participation and are also ranked poorly on governance.

1.3 Inclusion in politics- women and youth

The SADC region continues to struggle with inclusion of women and opening space for their representation in elective positions. The involvement of women in all aspects of political life produces more equitable societies and delivers a stronger and more representative democracy. In 2024 the region experienced an increase in the proportion of women in most public decision-making bodies (Figure 1) and this is mainly attributed to the domestication of international and regional frameworks that advance women's participation in politics. Some electoral systems in the region have integrated gender equality provisions. Other factors such as the increase in women's movements, the adoption of gender quota systems, the increase in educational opportunities, funding from international institutions, global and national gender equality agreements, conventions and commitments have contributed to raising overall women's participation in politics in Africa. However, none of the SADC countries has gone above 50% representation in parliament. The use of gender quotas has made a difference in South Africa and Mozambique where the dominant parties have utilised voluntary quotas.

Figure 1 Women's representation in political positions in the SADC region 2021 vs 2024

Southern Africa
(per cent)
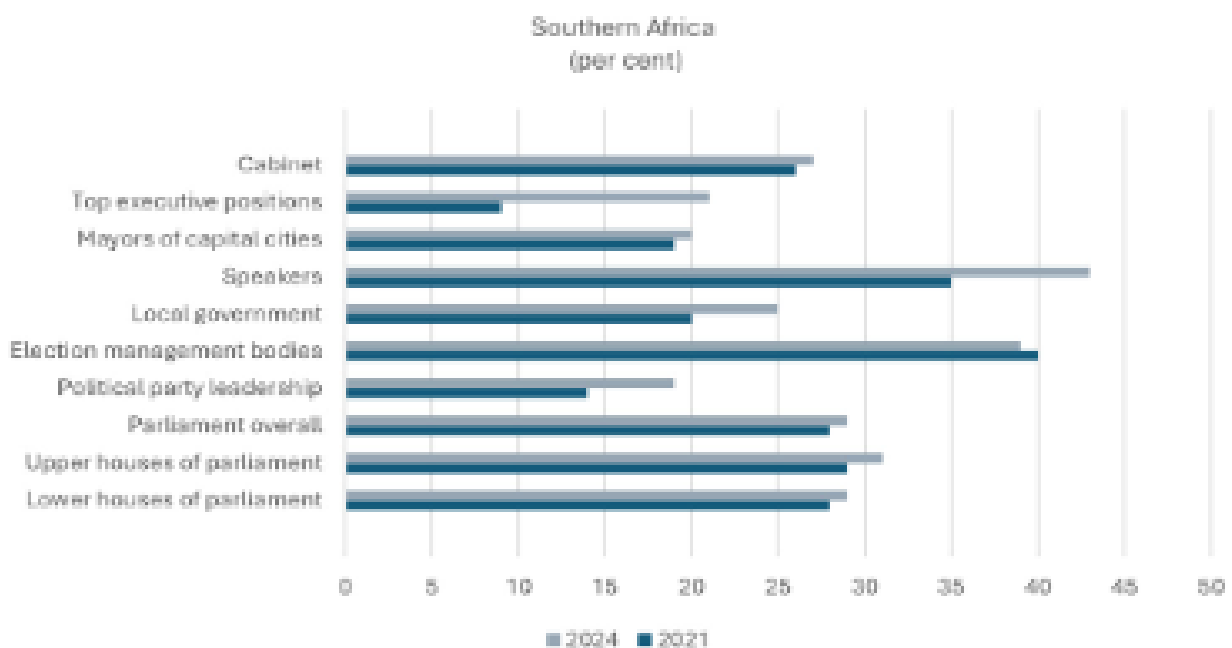
[7] Ballington J., (2008). Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments, Inter Parliamentary Union, Geneva. https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2016-07/equality-in-politics-survey-women-and-men-in-parliaments

Youth in politics

The SADC has a regional framework that promotes youth participation in governance. The SADC Protocol on Youth Development (2006) aims to ensure youth inclusion in decision-making. This is distilled from the African Union's broader framework for youth engagement which operationalises Agenda 2063 that emphasizes the empowerment of youth and their participation in shaping Africa's political and socio-economic future.

The region has a large youth population, with many countries having over 60% of their population under the age of 30. This demographic reality makes youth inclusion in governance essential for the region's political stability, social cohesion, and economic growth. For instance, in 2024, Namibia's youth aged 18-35, made up 42% of the electorate, in Mozambique, approximately 58% of registered voters were aged 35 or under, with 20% being first-time voters and in South Africa, of the 27.67 million registered voters, 17.7% were under the age of 30, a decrease from 21% in the 2019 elections. This makes youth a powerful constituency in democratic processes and development.

Social ills have helped increase vulnerability of the youth as a social group, fueling perceptions that they are generally disengaged from political and civic activities, such as voting and attending community meetings to decide on public affairs. Generally, citizens actively participate in public life when they feel their voices make a difference, and the participation of youth in public decision-making processes, including elections, fundamentally depends on how young people are treated and what roles they occupy in the different facets of public life. The rise of digital technologies and social media platforms provide youth in the SADC region with new opportunities to engage politically since young people are more able to use these tools to organise, advocate, and engage with political processes in ways that were not possible before.

There are still many political, institutional, cultural and societal barriers that inhibit youth access to decision-making positions. These include lack of political representation, and challenges in engaging with existing political structures, traditional and cultural practices that require deference to older generations, education and limited access to Information.

1.4 CSOs role in elections

CSOs played a big role in the nationalist movements that fought for independence in Africa. The trend has continued as this creates effective and sustainable citizen participation, which in turn legitimises institutions and build trust. Vibrant civil society supported by a free press and other independent organisations, support electoral outcomes by ensuring fairness, and compliance, as well as post-electoral follow-through in the form of government accountability, transparency and adherence to rule of law. Its presence and vibrancy show the extent to which political leaders are elected under comprehensive suffrage in free and fair elections, and freedoms of association and expression are guaranteed.

G[8]lobal Security Org, Mozambique -2024 Elections, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/mz-politics-2024.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com#google_vignette

By deploying election observers across polling stations, they help to ensure that elections are free, fair, and credible. They report on electoral violations such as voter intimidation, ballot box stuffing, or electoral fraud, and provide recommendations for improvements. CSOs advocate for changes in electoral laws and policies to ensure that they are inclusive and equitable. This can include advocating reforms such as gender quotas, reforms to improve voter registration processes, or ensuring that elections are accessible for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). The national domestic election observers vary in type across countries. They often operate within coordinating networks that work consistently on elections throughout the electoral cycle. However, a significant number tend to observe elections during the election period only.

1.5 Technology and elections

Across the African region, digital technologies and other online platforms have eased the participation of citizens in electoral processes. These technologies include cell phones, the internet, and various computer-based systems. There has been great variation in the SADC countries with some utilising biometric technology to curb double voting was albeit with no consistency in the use for various reasons across all the countries. A big part of the setback in the use of technology has to do with the fact that just around 50% of the region's residents only have access to electricity.

2.0 Countries that held elections in 2024

BOTSWANA

Botswana has remained one of Africa's most stable democracies since 1966. It has distinguished itself through the conduct of regular, peaceful elections and presidential alternations within the ruling party. The country has always had one of the highest voter turnouts in Africa. The elections are always lauded for their integrity, transparency, and lack of widespread allegations of fraud. Botswana's 2024 General Elections ushered in a new era that ended nearly six decades of uninterrupted rule by the BDP. The opposition coalition, the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC), led by Duma Boko, secured a parliamentary majority (36 out of 61 seats) in parliament. This victory marked a historic transition, as the country's founding party was ousted. The political feud between former president Ian Khama and President Masisi led to the fragmentation of the BDP as the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF) emerged from it. The disagreements were over the assumed control over the party that former president Khama allegedly wanted.

Botswana employs a FPTP electoral system, where candidates with the most votes in each constituency win seats in the National Assembly. While this system is straightforward, it has faced criticism for not accurately reflecting the proportion of votes received by each party. In the 2024 elections, disparities between the percentage of popular votes and the allocation of parliamentary seats underscored the need for electoral reform. The FPTP system has been increasingly criticized as unfair because it fails to equitably translate the will of the people into representation. In the lead up to the 2024 elections, opposition parties raised concerns about the composition of the IEC, warning that the current commissioners' tenure could lead to a constitutional crisis, which could potentially raise legitimacy questions. Legal actions were initiated to address these concerns, with public hearings conducted to ensure the electoral process's integrity. A major concern had to do with funding disparities in election campaigns. In the absence of regulation, the system gives an unfair advantage to wealthier political parties or candidates.

The BDP's defeat can be attributed to economic challenges, notably a downturn in the diamond industry, which is Botswana's economic backbone. Botswana became the fastest-growing economy globally, and by 2005, the World Bank had classified it as an upper-middle-income country as the government invested diamond revenues in infrastructure, education and health care. The global decline in diamond demand led to a sharp economic contraction, with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth plummeting to 1% and unemployment rates rising, particularly among the youth. The 2024 election outcome reflects public dissatisfaction with the BDP's handling of economic issues and a desire for change. The UDC's victory signifies a potential shift in policy direction, with an emphasis on economic diversification and addressing unemployment.

Despite the political stability, Botswana remains one of the world's most unequal societies, with a Gini index score of 53.3, according to the World Bank and it also contends with a poverty rate of 56.6%, which is more pronounced in rural areas where access to services, employment, and infrastructure are limited and a youth unemployment rate of around 26%. This high level of income inequality results from substantial disparities between high-and low-income individuals. Though the country has experienced steady economic growth over the last several decades, largely due to its diamond industry, the benefits have not been evenly distributed. Unemployment rates are high, particularly among the youth (over 30%). Youth unemployment remains a challenge, primarily because the government is the main employer, and various indicators point to their exclusion from economic participation. Many people are employed in the informal sector, which doesn't provide the same level of security or benefits as formal jobs. The need for jobs was a major influential factor in the 2024 election. The country's overall socioeconomic development, as indicated by the 2021 Human Development Index (HDI), falls within the category of Medium HDI countries, with a score of 0.693.

Though the government has a non-discriminatory developmental approach, certain areas still lag in terms of infrastructure and access to services. The government made efforts to achieve gender parity in education and employment, but gender inequality is still a significant issue in Botswana's economy. A 2021/2022 Afrobarometer study revealed that fewer than half of Batswana approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. The Global Gender Gap Report of 2024 positions Botswana at 57 out of 146 countries with a total score of 0.73 and this is confirmed by the fact that as of February 2024, only 11.1% of seats in parliament were held by women. This is worsened by Botswana's traditional governance system that is driven by patriarchal values.

Cleavages have generally been well contained in the country, but during campaigns in the 2024 election, armed police officers interfered in the Kgotla meetings. This was during a political dispute between President Masisi and his predecessor, Ian Khama, who also serves as the paramount chief of the Bangwato tribe.

As of January 2024, approximately 77.3% of Botswana's population, about 2.09 million individuals, were internet users. However, despite the technological advancements in the country, the election process was conducted using traditional methods as the IEC struggles to modernize the electoral system. Social media played a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and political engagement and its influence was notable during the election period, with CSOs actively utilizing these platforms to provide civic and voter education to the public. Political analysts noted that false information had played a significant role in previous elections, and to combat this, CSOs emphasized the need for funding to effectively combat misinformation and promote accurate information.

Botswana is prone to natural disasters, with recurring droughts and low rainfall having a severe impact on the agricultural sector. The country faces a range of environmental issues that are closely linked to governance, as well as challenges regarding the management of its natural resources. Water scarcity is a significant issue. The country is largely dependent on groundwater, and surface water is limited, which puts pressure on both rural and urban areas. Climate change has exacerbated this problem, leading to more unpredictable rainfall patterns. A large portion of Botswana's land is arid or semi-arid, and desertification is a growing concern, particularly in the Kalahari Desert region. Overgrazing, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices contribute to soil erosion and desertification, making it difficult to support agriculture and livestock farming. Botswana has been historically stronger in wildlife conservation, but there are pressures to balance conservation with economic development, such as tourism and mining and the political environment sometimes affects the management of protected areas and implementation of anti-poaching efforts which all cause discontent. Botswana is part of regional climate change agreements but faces challenges in securing the resources needed for effective mitigation and adaptation strategies. Environmental governance issues include policy alignment, investment in renewable infrastructure, and overcoming the fossil fuel dependency.

Republic of Botswana, Botswana Country Report 2024, Thirtieth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/b30_report_botswana_en.pdf

The 2024 elections in Botswana represented a turning point in the country's politics, with the potential to reshape the nation's political and economic landscape. The new government's success will depend on its ability to address economic challenges, implement effective policies, and maintain democratic principles by upholding commitment to transparency and accountability will be vital in restoring public trust and ensuring effective governance.

Key recommendations from the 2024 elections were directed at diversifying the economy to ensure more inclusive growth, policy reforms aimed at improving the electoral framework to enhance fairness and increasing public confidence in the electoral process, improving vote counting transparency by carrying this out at polling stations and using translucent ballot boxes to further increase electoral integrity.

MADAGASCAR

Madagascar's election history reflects its struggles with democratic consolidation, political stability, and efforts to establish a robust electoral process. The country continues to face challenges related to governance, but it has made progress in holding regular elections since its transition to democracy in the 1990s. The series of coups and flirtations with socialism left the country's political system centralized and elections were heavily controlled. Widespread protests forced President Ratsiraka to concede to the creation of a new democratic constitution leading to elections in 1993. The 2001 presidential election was marred by allegations of fraud, leading to a political crisis. Marc Ravalomanana contested the results and claimed victory and a major political crisis occurred when he faced protests led by Andry Rajoelina, the mayor of Antananarivo. The situation escalated, and in March 2009, Ravalomanana was overthrown in a military-backed coup, and Rajoelina took power. This was a controversial event, as Rajoelina's rise to power was seen as unconstitutional. From then Madagascar experienced a period of instability and political tension. A new constitution was adopted in 2013, and presidential elections were held under international supervision, with Hery Rajaonarimampianina emerging as the winner which was a return to civilian rule. However, his tenure was challenged by economic difficulties and protests.

Many elections in Madagascar have been marred by allegations of fraud, manipulation, and disputes over results which often led to political unrest. The country's electoral framework is defined by its 2010 Constitution and subsequent legislation, including the Electoral Code established by Ordonnance N°2010-003. The President of Madagascar is directly elected, and elections are conducted using a two-round system. The National Assembly comprises 163 seats, filled through a parallel voting system, the Single-Member Constituencies' 77 seats are filled by FPTP voting and the 86 Multi-Member Constituencies are allocated in 43 two-member constituencies using closed-list PR with the highest averages method.

Independent candidates also made a significant impact, securing 50 seats. In the 2023 Presidential Election, incumbent President Andry Rajoelina was re-elected with 58.95% of the vote, securing a third term. The election saw a notably low voter turnout of 46.36%, the lowest in the country's history, partly due to a boycott by opposition candidates. This low participation raised concerns about the legitimacy of the electoral process. In the legislative elections held on 29 May 2024, the ruling party, Young Malagasies Determined (IRMAR), led by President Andry Rajoelina secured 84 seats, maintaining its majority. The opposition coalition, Firaisankina, led by former President Marc Ravalomanana, won 25 seats. The elections were marked by opposition boycotts and controversies, including allegations regarding the president's eligibility due to his acquisition of French citizenship.

Madagascar has recently faced significant economic challenges, including high inflation, poverty, and political instability. These economic challenges are compounded by natural disasters and social conditions that have strained national resources. These hardships have intensified social cleavages, with marginalized communities expressing dissatisfaction with the government's handling of economic issues.

Madagascar's society is characterised by ethnic and regional divisions that have historically influenced the political dynamics. These cleavages have contributed to political instability and have been a factor in the country's electoral processes. The opposition raised concerns about the fairness of the election, alleging electoral manipulation and suppression of dissent. These allegations have further deepened social cleavages, with different groups perceiving the electoral process through divergent lenses. The 2023 presidential election in Madagascar highlighted significant social cleavages, including political polarization, economic disparities, ethnic and regional divisions, and allegations of electoral manipulation.

Climate change has been a central issue in Madagascar's political discourse. The country is among the most vulnerable to climate change, experiencing severe droughts and cyclones that have led to food insecurity and environmental degradation. During his previous term, President Rajoelina acknowledged the impact of climate change on food security and pledged to protect Madagascar's biodiversity, which represents 5% of the world's species.

In January 2023, there were approximately 2.95 million social media users in Madagascar, representing about 9.8% of the total population. This digital penetration provided a significant avenue for political communication and engagement during the election period. Traditional media, social media, and public meetings were the primary tools used by candidates to reach voters. Despite the growing influence of social media, concerns about misinformation and its impact on voter behavior persisted. The polarized media environment, characterized by a lack of mainstream independent outlets, heightened voters' susceptibility to misinformation, underscoring the need for media literacy and fact-checking initiatives to ensure informed electoral decisions.

Most recent key observer recommendations noted the need for unequal media coverage for all candidates; inclusive and well-funded adequate voter education campaigns; the transportation of election materials with security escorts and storage in secure facilities; public funding for political parties and transparent campaign expenses

COMOROS

Ahmed Abdallah was Comoros's first president in 1976 when the country became independent from France. From 1975 to early 1990, the country was plagued by political instability and coups. Under military rule the political landscape was dominated by a few powerful figures. The push for democratic reforms started in 1990 and the first multiparty elections were held in 1992. A competitive multi-party-political environment began to emerge slowly amid the instability and tension amongst the islands. Comoros adopted a new federal constitution in 2001, which was designed to decentralize power and reduce tensions between the islands, and a system of rotating the presidency every four years was implemented. Using this method, each of the three main islands—Grande Comore, Mohéli, and Anjouan alternated in taking turns in the presidency who was elected through a direct popular vote. The electoral framework in the Comoros underwent significant changes leading up to the 2024 elections. Prior to the 2018 referendum, the presidency rotated among the country's three main islands. The 2018 constitutional amendment abolished this rotational system, allowing any candidate to run for president, irrespective of their island of origin. The legislative body, the Assembly of the Union, comprises 33 seats: 24 directly elected through a two-round system in single-member constituencies, and 9 indirectly elected by the Island Assemblies, with each electing three members. The Union Assembly, Comoros' legislature, is a unicameral body consisting of 33 seats. Members are elected through PR using a mixed system of direct and indirect elections. A combination of single-member districts and multi-member districts is used.

Comoros has a history of political turmoil, unconstitutional power alternations, and a still evolving electoral system. The political system is still trying to balance power amongst the islands, with elections serving as an important, though often contested, mechanism for political change. Elections in Comoros have thus remained troubled and highlight the fragile political environment and the need for dialogue and reconciliation to address underlying issues.

[10] DataReprtal, Digital 2023- Madgascar, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-madagascar

In the presidential election held on 14 January 2024, incumbent President Azali Assoumani was re-elected with 62.97% of the vote, according to the Independent National Election Commission (CENI). The Supreme Court later revised the results, confirming Assoumani's victory with 57.20% of the vote and a voter turnout of 56%. The presidential elections were marred by allegations of electoral fraud and significant social unrest. His leadership was positively marked by efforts to modernize the country's infrastructure and improve economic conditions, though he was also criticised for cracking down on the opposition. Opposition candidates claimed issues such as irregularities in the lists of precinct members, ballot-stuffing, early closure of polling stations, and disruptions of voting by soldiers. These allegations led to protests and unrest in the capital, Moroni, resulting in at least one fatality and multiple injuries. This was despite international observers proclaiming the election as free and fair. In the aftermath, the Supreme Court of the Comoros validated the election results, confirming Assoumani's victory. President Assoumani recently granted his son, Nour El Fath, significant governmental powers, leading to allegations of preparing for dynastic succession. Opposition parties have criticized these moves, viewing them as attempts to establish authoritarian rule.

After the presidential election, parliamentary elections were held in January 2025. The ruling party, the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros (CRC), secured 28 out of 33 seats. Several opposition parties boycotted the election, citing allegations of electoral fraud. These events highlight ongoing political tensions in the country, with the opposition expressing concerns over the integrity of the electoral process and the potential for authoritarianism.

The Comoros economy has been hindered by several structural issues such as political instability that is evident in the frequent political upheavals that subsequently disrupt economic activities and deter investment. Additionally, weak institutional capacity has impeded effective governance and economic management; the youth face high unemployment, leading to economic hardship and the economy relies heavily on remittances from the diaspora, which makes it vulnerable to external shocks. These factors have contributed to persistent poverty and economic volatility, causing the Comoros to trail behind other small island nations in terms of economic development.

The 2024 elections highlighted deep-seated social cleavages within Comorian society. The political landscape remains characterised by deep seated divisions among the three main islands. The 2018 Constitutional Referendum, which removed presidential term limits, has intensified these divisions, as each island vies for political dominance. This competition has fostered a sense of regionalism, with each island's population often supporting candidates from their own island, leading to heightened tensions and a fragmented national identity. The aftermath of the 2024 elections underscored the fragility of Comoros' democratic institutions. The opposition's allegations of fraud and the subsequent violent protests reflect a profound mistrust in the electoral process and the government's commitment to democratic principles. The government's response, including the imposition of a curfew and the use of force against protesters, exacerbated social tensions and highlighted the challenges in reconciling the diverse social cleavages within the nation. The country faces challenges in achieving political stability and national unity.

Following regional trends, the government implemented biometric voter registration to enhance the accuracy and security of the electoral process prior to the 2024 presidential elections. This initiative aimed to create a more reliable voter registry by capturing unique biometric data, such as fingerprints and facial recognition, to prevent multiple registrations and ensure each eligible voter was accurately recorded.

In January 2024, Comoros had an internet penetration rate of 27.3%, with approximately 235,100 internet users. Social media usage is thus confined to just over a quarter of the population, but it has become a significant tool for political engagement. Activists and citizens utilize these platforms to raise awareness on issues such as social justice, corruption, and government policies. This digital activism enables them to reach a global audience and garner support for their causes. In the 2024 elections, social media played a crucial role in political campaigns and public opinion formation.

The Eastern Africa Standby Force and the African Union deployed EOMs to the country to monitor the presidential and gubernatorial elections. The major recommendations were around creating a culture of deliberative democracy through promoting inclusive dialogue to identify a common ground aimed at enhancing the electoral and political systems. The country clearly needs a structured platform for consultations to effectively address and resolve existing political divisions and disagreements. Comprehensive reforms to the constitution and the electoral code would ensure a more consensual and transparent legal framework for future elections.

MAURITIUS

Mauritius's good governance record has earned it recognition as one of Africa's most resilient democracies with high levels of voter participation. The Labour Party, under Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, formed the first government of independent Mauritius, with Ramgoolam becoming the country's first Prime Minister. Since then, power alternation has occurred smoothly amongst the country's three dominant main parties for a long time. The EMB makes a good effort in administering smooth processes. For instance, voter registration always starts with a 3-to-4-week door-to-door electoral inquiry at the beginning of each year. This complies with the law which stipulates that the voter register must be published annually by 14 August in the election year, and it becomes effective on 16 August irrespective of the election date.

Mauritius lacks diversity in its political parties, with the political landscape is continuously dominated by two major families since independence and they have produced multiple prime ministers, shaping both Mauritius' major political parties and dominating leadership roles. In 2024, 67 parties contested the elections. As in other African countries, these parties emerge suddenly and disappear immediately after the elections.

The ruling Militant Socialist Movement (MSM), a member of the People's Alliance coalition, aimed to retain its hold on power to give the then incumbent Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth a new 5-year term. The Alliance for Change coalition, composed of the Labour Party and the Mauritian Militant Movement, were the main rivals to the MSM. The 2024 election ousted the incumbent with the opposition winning 60 out of the 62 seats. Though the country was experiencing stability and strong economic growth, the vote clearly showed how politically fatigued the voters were. In 2019, about 90% of the citizens voted, but this dropped to 79% in the 2024 general election. Some argue that this is partly because Jugnauth's government had become tainted by some scandals. An example was the aftermath of the 2020 Wakashio oil spill, which resulted in Mauritians protesting the government's incompetence in dealing with the ecological disaster. Another scandal was the cover-up of an alleged killing of one of the prime minister's political agents. Leaked recordings of private telephone conversations of opposition politicians dating back to 2019 in the weeks just before the election triggered allegations of wiretapping. The tapes included phone calls and conversations involving politicians, senior police officers, journalists, and foreign diplomats. There was a backlash online from the public, and the government blocked social media platforms in the lead-up to the election, but the public outcry forced it to lift the ban just 24 hours later. These scandals tainted the country's long history of squeaky-clean governance.

Mauritius has been embroiled in a conflict with the Maldives and the United Kingdom over ownership of the Chagos Archipelago. Mauritius stood by its position that the Chagos Archipelago is part of its territory and that the United Kingdom claim was a violation of the United Nations resolutions adopted on the 22 May 2019, which declared that it was part of Mauritius. The 2024 election was called after the government reached a deal with the United Kingdom to end the dispute.

Mauritius is a welfare state that offers free education, health care and a universal pension scheme to its citizens. The country's high-quality health care and other social and public services, and educational opportunities are attributed to its long history of political stability and strong governance credentials that was buoyed by a 22% increase in per capita income over the past decade. Political parties competed over how to improve service delivery to their constituents making their campaigns issue based. In the 2024 election, opposition parties campaigned against rising prices, even though the economy and tourism had recovered significantly after the pandemic. Youth unemployment also declined in 2023 which favoured the MSM's strong support in rural areas. A major setback was the corruption that is on the rise as evidenced by the Corruption Perception Index 2022, which showed the country had fallen to the 57th position globally by dropping four points. Corruption worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic during the emergency procurement of medical supplies where transparency and accountability were low.

Mauritius is a multi-racial country with different ethnic groups, but French culture is dominant with the lingua franca being Creole. The majority of the population is of Indian and African origin and these various cultural and religious sentiments are respected. Mauritians have a strong sense of belonging to their Mauritian identity but also cling to their ethnic identities and generally tolerate other ethnicities even though some feel they are treated less fairly by government than others. The current system provides political stability but is criticised for failing to ensure proportional fairness between vote share and allocated seats. This was attributed to the FPTP system and the politico-cultural legacy of the country.

Mauritius devised a Best Loser System (BLS) to manage the diversity in the country and assure the inclusion of religious minorities in the parliament and overall political participation.For instance, candidates are mandated to state their religious community on the nomination paper as this information is essential for the calculation of BLS after the counting process. However, BLS has been criticised for ethnicising the electoral system by classifying candidates and electors, which legitimises communalism and inhibits nation building. This is despite the fact that Mauritian governments have generally chosen broad based growth and distributive policies over ethnic preferences and they have all had to form multi-ethnic coalitions to assume and maintain power. Therefore, the BLS encourages political parties to be multi-ethnic in nature, thus minimising the polarisation of political parties on religious or racial lines. A disturbing observation is that Mauritius ranks last in Africa on women's participation and representation in politics. This is attributed to patriarchal values and the reluctance of male decision-makers to include women in political leadership.

The media landscape in the country is quite diverse with some online outlets and private radio stations but there is only one public television broadcasting station, and some online media outlets. However, Internet penetration is high in the country with 75.50% of the public having access and there are many social media users with Facebook being one of the most popular platforms with an estimated 789 000 of the 1 million social media users. Despite the high levels of civic and political freedoms enjoyed in the country, self-censorship is more prevalent among media outlets, journalists and citizens with many avoiding controversial topics to avoid attracting government attention. The media outlet, La Sentinelle, reported experiencing online and physical harassment by the government in 2024.

As a small island prone to vagaries of the weather, Mauritius has been proactive in fulfilling climate change commitments it signed up to. The country is situated in an active tropical cyclone basin, which makes it prone to disasters and climate risks. Other pressing problems are environmental pollution, including waste disposal and transboundary plastic waste – and coastal degradation. More recently, Mauritius has experienced episodes of prolonged droughts, flash floods and cyclones with high intensities comparable to Category-5 hurricanes. The country has introduced many policy initiatives, and the Climate Change Act of 2020 became a pivotal legal framework for making Mauritius a climate-resilient country. However, there is an implementation gap between the policies and actual practice and the country does not have national strategies to guide medium-to-long term mitigation and adaptation actions to tackle climate change. All stakeholders take responsibility for contributing to the environmental development of Mauritius.

Mauritian law is a combination of French and British legal traditions. The current system has served the country since the legislative assembly elections in 1967 and has contributed to political stability. However, nearly 60 years later, some flaws have become outdated. In 2018, a constitutional amendment bill aimed at enhancing fairness to parties and gender representation was tabled by the government. Despite these efforts, no substantial electoral or constitutional reform has ever been enacted. On the eve of general elections, electoral reform remains a pressing issue for Mauritius.

Mauritius stands out as one of the few countries where observation teams identified minimal anomalies during elections. However, the major recommendations reiterated those from 2019 that the government should consider: constitutional or legal quotas to increase the participation of women in line with the African Union Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003); adopt the Political Parties Act to regulate the conduct of political parties before, during and after election; ratify the ACDEG; strengthen the Political Party Finance Act to allow the monitoring of campaign funding to create a level playing field and enact laws to provide for ballot counting at polling centres immediately after voting to uphold the principles of transparency and security of the ballots.

MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique's transition to democracy was influenced by the long and violent independence struggle and the civil war that erupted after the first elections. In 1990, constitutional reforms allowed for a multi-party system and competitive elections. In the first democratic elections, held in 1994, FRELIMO and RENAMO were the main competitors. The 1999 elections saw increased political tension and violence in some regions, but the general trend was toward greater stability compared to the civil war years. Mozambique's electoral processes continue to face criticism over the years regarding issues such as electoral fraud, voter intimidation, violence and lack of transparency. These concerns raise doubts about the fairness of elections and the legitimacy of the result.

The official election results of 9 October 2024 proclaimed presidential candidate Chapo of Frelimo, the winner with 71% of the vote with former radio host Venâncio Mondlane, who had tried running for mayor of Maputo in 2023 getting 20%. Mondlane ran as an independent under the Partido Optimista pelo Desenvolvimento de Moçambique (PODEMO). The main opposition party, Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO), performed badly due to its frailty. Women candidates occupied the top spot in 30% of the party lists for the parliamentary contests, though there were no women among the four presidential candidates. The National Elections Commission (CNE) reported the presidential election voter turnout to be 43.5% (down from 51.8% in 2019) and 43.9% in the parliamentary contest (down from 51.4% in 2019). Frelimo increased its absolute majority in parliament to 195 of 250 seats and retained all the eleven provincial governor positions. Mondlane organised countrywide protests which turned violent and paralysed the city and all business operations for weeks. The government responded harshly with the police chief Bernardino Rafael calling the protest movement urban terrorism.

Fractures within Frelimo in 2019 led to the birth of PODEMO and the party emphasized social justice and good governance. PODEMO morphed from a civil society group that had supported the mayoral candidacy of Samora Machal Jr. after FRELIMO excluded him from the party's mayoral candidate list. This trend of forcing inclusion is growing in the region (e.g. Julius Malema of the Economic Freedom Front (EFF) in South Africa emerged from the ANC). PODEMO thus became an alternative for those seeking more equitable economic opportunities and a change in the governance status quo. Many disenchanted youths from FRELIMO and RENAMO banded together to demand change signaling a shift amongst the younger generation who are increasingly putting their ideological differences aside to pursue political development for all. A positive development on the political landscape prior to the elections was the leaning towards coalition politics as demonstrated by independent presidential candidate Mondlane and PODEMOS who formed an alliance agreement that would have provided Mondlane with parliamentary allies in the event of his election as president. Their focus on good governance and economic development was the basis of this alliance.

Since the early 1990s when Mozambique adopted a multi-party system, elections have been marred by suspicions of fraud and political violence. Frelimo's poor governance practices have contributed to the public's exhaustion with its authoritarian grip on power since 1975. Widespread frustration with Frelimo and a desire for change, especially among urban populations, pushed citizens to organise support around Mondlane, who was social media platform savvy and connected with many across the age divide.

Presidential elections are held every five years, with a two-round system and using the FPTP system (candidates must receive more than 50% of the vote in the first round to win), otherwise, the top two candidates proceed to a second round. The country uses a PR system for the national parliament which has 250 seats. The electoral law in Mozambique has been criticized for having ambiguities, particularly regarding the powers and role of the CNE which has led to confusion and disputes during elections. These problems contribute to a lack of public trust in the electoral system and have led to calls for comprehensive electoral reforms to ensure that future elections in Mozambique are more inclusive, transparent, and fair.

In August 2024, the Mozambican parliament enacted Law 14/2024 to amend the electoral laws governing presidential, parliamentary, and provincial assembly elections. These changes aimed to improve the independence of the CNE, adjusting voter registration procedures, and improving the accessibility of voting stations. To enhance transparency and credibility in the electoral process, the State Council proposed revising the electoral law to promote the nonpartisanship and professionalization of the CNE.

Overall poor economic governance has fueled post-election protests with angry citizens denouncing the cost of living and taking it upon themselves to control unjustified price increases of goods in shops. Mozambique's gross government debt stood at 104.50% of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022, which is more than double the average of low-income developing countries and this pushed the external debt servicing costs estimated to 32.80% of its GDP in 2022. This led to its credit rating to be placed in the substantial risk category. More than two-thirds of the total debt is foreign debt, which bears greater macroeconomic risks than domestic debt due to exchange rate uncertainty, possibility of default and lower credit ratings. The high debt has contributed to the high cost of living which has left the majority trapped in poverty. The incidence of poverty in Mozambique is high, with an estimated 62% of the population considered multidimensionally poor as they experience deprivation across multiple aspects like health, education, and living standards and another 14% is classified as vulnerable. Rural inhabitants are more exposed to poverty than those in urban areas.

Poor economic governance has impoverished the citizens with government officials reportedly linked to corruption. For instance, the two billion USD hidden debt affair from the 'Tuna Bond Scandal' which dried up most foreign investment and led to a sharp depreciation of the national currency in 2016 was engineered by a former finance minister. The country has huge hydrocarbon resources but remains one of the least developed countries in the world, ranking 183 of 193 nations on the UN Human Development Index. Frustration with the ruling party's grip on the state apparatus has incensed the public which is demanding democratic space, accountable government and better prospects for the future to escape the limited social mobility for many. State capture is quite evident in the country with organised crime affecting government contracts and mining concessions that benefit political insiders who are gatekeepers to external private investors.

Various social dynamics factors impacted on elections in Mozambique. These included ethnic identity, geographic location, the youth bulge and the socio-economic divide. There are many different ethnic groups in Mozambique, but the largest are the Makhuwa, Tsonga, Sena, and Shona people. While there is no significant ethnic division in the political system itself, ethnic and regional identities do influence voting patterns, keeping the country fractured along regional and ethnic lines. Since independence, there has been a widespread perception that a corrupt political and economic elite from one corner of the country dominates all of Mozambique.

A large proportion of the population in Mozambique is under 35 and this generation has become more politically active and will likely influence the future of the political landscape. The urban vs rural divide is also aligned to political parties with FRELIMO being historically stronger in urban areas and the southern regions, while RENAMO drew much of its support from the rural and northern areas. Rural citizens struggle with issues related to development such as access to healthcare and educational services and unemployment. The high levels of inequality are exacerbated by the significant gap between urban and rural areas. Economic hardships, especially in rural regions, are a powerful driver of political preferences, as populations seek better governance and resources for development.

These social dynamics in Mozambique will continue to shape the future of elections and the emergence of PODEMO has minimised the importance of the relationship between FRELIMO and RENAMO and its implications for peace and stability. Tensions and violence around elections have increased due to overall governance challenges and the failure to promote free and fair contests. Voter apathy is likely to continue, and the 2023 municipal elections were a telling example, with Frelimo winning 64 of 65 municipalities which sparked accusations of vote rigging. The raging violent conflicts in the northern parts of the country affect elections tremendously. For instance, conflict in Cabo Ligado lowered the voter turnout in Macomia district to just 38%. Despite the ongoing insurgency, Macomia's low turnout reflects a deeper malaise in Mozambique's democracy. The Centre for Public Integrity reported low voter turnout (25% in Zambezia province and 30% in Nampula and Inhambane provinces respectively) in the 2024 election.

Internet penetration in Mozambique was at 23.2% in 2024 with only 7.96 million people having access. There were 3.20 million social media users in January 2024, which is about 9.30% of the total population. About 55% of the total population (26.41) million people did not use the internet in the same period revealing that 76.8 % of the population was offline. This can be attributed to many factors such as lack of connectivity since only around 40% of the population in Mozambique has access to electricity, and many are deterred by the high costs of buying data.

Mozambique uses a biometric voter system in each election cycle, even though allegations are that the system was manipulated in 2024 to make three million more people than previously registered eligible to vote. A large part of the problem is the use of the technology in remote difficult environments that do not have consistent power supply. For example, some voters were denied the right to vote because their names did not appear next to their voter number on the rolls at their polling station even though they had voted at that location during the 2023 municipal elections. On a more positive note, PODEMO and Mondlane were effective in their use of social media to garner support and mobilize their supporters countrywide.

As with other coastal countries, Mozambique is consistently listed as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts due to its geographic location and exposure to natural disasters like cyclones and floods. It has also experienced deadly cyclones in recent years that have left the port city of Beira largely useless and repeatedly destroyed crops belonging to subsistence farmers. The floods and droughts have displaced hundreds of thousands of mostly poor citizens and has contributed to the migration to South Africa by the youth seeking better livelihoods.

Disenchantment in the country is also rife over timber smuggling, which is estimated to be worth 23 million USD a year, from Mozambique's ancient forests to China. This criminal activity in rosewood looting is believed to be helping to fund the Islamist insurgency and other illicit networks in the country. Revenue from these nefarious activities is estimated to amount to $1.9m a month. Natural resource governance challenges lie at the heart of the poverty problem in the country.

Mozambique's recent election was contested throughout, and this was confirmed by both international and regional observer missions, including those from the European Union, the African Union and the SADC, that all queried the integrity of the electoral process. Though the voting day for the presidential election was peaceful, reports of incidences of fraud emerged quickly. Accusations of ballot stuffing, voter intimidation and vote buying were rampant with the European Union's Observation Mission (EUEOM) pointing out the unjustified alteration of election results at polling station and district levels. The poor turnout of 43 per cent revealed the lack of public trust in the electoral process.

NAMIBIA

Namibia's first free and fair election took place in 1989, prior to its independence in 1990. This election was held under the supervision of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), which was tasked with overseeing the transition from apartheid rule to independence. SWAPO secured 57.30% of the vote, allowing it to form the first government of the country and it went on to officially gain independence from South Africa on 21 March 1990. SWAPO has continued its dominance in the National Assembly, though the opposition has been making modest gains overtime.

SWAPO held on to its majority rule with 51 seats in the 2024 election. This was a drop from the 63 seats it got in 2019. SWAPO's popularity has been decreasing steadily. In 2019, Hage Geingob won 56% of the vote, a 20%-point difference from the 76% he got in 2015. The same decline has been observed in provincial and legislative elections where the party has dipped below its two-thirds majority, and opposition parties now control the three most important economic centers of Windhoek, Walvis Bay, and Swakopmund. Twenty-one parties competed for 96 parliament seats and there were 15 presidential candidates. SWAPO has tolerated the opposition parties, many of which are spin-offs from SWAPO.

Namibia's political landscape has changed overtime due to the growing influence of opposition parties such as the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) which won 20 seats and the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) which got six seats in the 2024 elections. These parties pose a significant threat to SWAPO that has dominated the country's politics since independence by focusing on the dissatisfaction of younger urban voters. For the 2024 elections, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), showed evidence of unpreparedness that has been experienced in many countries. The ECN performance was pointed out by over 50% of the citizens who indicated they had no trust in the ECN. The voter turnout in 2024 was 75.68%, up from the 60.4% voters in 2019. However, the high level of disorganisation led to a voting extension (up to 30 November) and there were many claims of electoral irregularities during the period.

Table 4 Namibia's Polling Day problems

- Mobile polling teams leaving points before all people in the queues had cast their votes Poorly prepared polling teams
- Poor queue management
- Inconsistent polling procedures in some stations
- Lack of clear, continuous communication and information on the developing situation
- Mobile polling teams not arriving at some polling points

- Poor polling station planning and allocation per constituencies and regions
- Many polling stations not opening on time
- Long slow-moving queues
- Election material deficiencies and shortages
- Ballot paper shortages
- Internet and election device malfunctioning
- Mobile polling stations opening late

The ECN caused disruptions when it introduced the "vote anywhere" policy, that was designed to improve accessibility, but it instead presented more challenges. The integrated Mobile Voter Registration Systems malfunctioned, ballot papers ran out and some polling stations opened late, delaying the process for many voters. In addition to operational shortcomings, there were allegations of misconduct and breaches of the Electoral Act. Political intolerance was rife with parties accusing each other of spreading false information and unfair practices, which worsened tension and increased public discontent. Campaign language often spewed propaganda over substantive policy issues and some political parties were accused of copying others' manifestos, which confused voters. The outsourcing of ballot production to South Africa was criticised for continued dependence on external suppliers.

Many citizens were dissatisfied with SWAPO's policy achievements and its progress toward social transformation. Significant portions of the population remain marginalized and live in relative or absolute destitution, with an estimated nearly one million people (40% of the population) residing in informal settlements that lack basic infrastructure. Land reform and redistribution remain prominent issues and have contributed to recent escalations in regional-ethnic tensions. Though all citizens enjoy civil liberties, some minority ethnic groups accuse the government of favouring the majority Ovambo ethnic group in allocating public services.

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The main opposition party, the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), has been critical of corruption and the government's inability to negotiate better deals with foreign mining companies, and it used this in its campaign messages. Land reform too was a contentious issue that polarised the nation as unequal distribution of land persists. Around 70% of privately-owned farmland is held by the white minority, representing just 8% of the population. This is a topical issue with opposition parties was the supposedly ongoing land reform programme, which aimed to buy back land from mostly white farm owners to resettle poorer Namibians, that has not worked. White farmers are reluctant to sell land, or sell it at inflated prices, making it difficult for the government to acquire adequate land for resettlement purposes.

Apartheid and violent colonialism left mineral rich Namibia with a Gini-coefficient of 0.58 in 2024 according to Statista. This makes it the second most unequal countries in the region after South Africa. Poverty is endemic with more than 64% of the population living below $5.50 daily. The majority Black Namibian population and minority ethnic groups form the largest category of the poor community. The 2024 drought caused food insecurity with over 48% of the population needing urgent food assistance, and 17% percent of children under five are stunted and about 21% of Namibia's youth are unemployed. This issue compelled SWAPO's presidential candidate, Nandi-Ndaitwah, to pledge to spend about 85 billion Namibian dollars ($4.7billion USD) over the next five years to create more than 500,000 jobs in a move to appeal to the needs of the electorate.

All parties took positions on the policy lapses and overall poor economic performance, and with Leftist parties like the AR movement promising to construct 300,000 houses over five years and Itula's IPC promised to declare a state of emergency on housing. The Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) articulated proposed solutions for expanding economic development by pursuing massive, protected and sustainable industrial development and diversification to create thousands of decent jobs between 2025 and 2029. The NEFF policies sounded very much like South Africa's EFF's nationalism which includes state-led industrialisation, the protection of emerging industries, subsidising production, increased tariffs and state-aided marketing of Namibian products within and beyond the continent.

Namibian identity is not evenly distributed, and not all groups have fully internalised their citizenship with some communities, including the San (Bushmen), Himba, Tjimba and other indigenous groups residing in remote rural areas with limited infrastructure and communication, failing to identify with the concept of a nation-state. They cling more to their ethnic identities and many often lack official birth certificates and identity documents, which are required for formal citizenship status. This disconnection does not augur well for nation building and inclusion and it requires deliberate dialogue for social cohesion.

Namibia boasts of a high 2018 Gender Development Index score of 1.009. Women hold 46 of the 104 (44%) National Assembly seats, 49% serve on local authorities and municipalities, and regional elections feature 19 to 23% women. The country has performed relatively well on gender parity and overall women's inclusion in politics and development. In 2021, the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report ranked Namibia sixth globally for gender equality, out of 156 nations. Election of the new president, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, signaled a positive step towards meaningful representation of women in political leadership in the SADC region.

Namibia had 1.37 million internet users in 2023, when internet penetration stood at 53%. It had 729.2 thousand social media users in January 2023, which was 28.2% of the total population. A total of 2.81 million cellular mobile connections were active in Namibia in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 108.7 percent of the total population of an estimated 3 million. With over one third of the population accessing the internet, the potential to use electronic voting successfully exists in the country. However, after successful electronic voting in 2019, Namibia returned to a ballot paper-based voting system for the 2024 parliamentary and presidential elections. This regression contributed to the climate of ECN distrust and suspicion on the procurement of ballot paper printing services. Use of the controversial company linked to the corruption around Ren Form CC which was involved with Zimbabwe's African National Union-Patriotic Front's (ZANU-PF) procurement scandals fueled suspicions that this was an attempt to rig the Namibian elections. The failure to improve on the 2019 electronic voting challenges raises an alarm on the future of digital technology in voting all over Africa. Unfortunately, the ECN's voter identification and verification devices caused problems in some cases as the tablets that were used often malfunctioned and delayed the process for hours at some polling stations.

The 2024 elections were affected by online disinformation campaigns targeting candidates. The misinformation included false allegations such as Panduleni Itula, the founder and president of the IPC, being labelled a British agent, and footage of an opposition candidate, Bernadus Swartbooi, making tribalist statements towards Itula.

Poor rural communities rely mostly on natural resources for their livelihood especially women, and this has contributed to increasing rates of soil erosion, deforestation and overexploitation of wild plants and animals. Due to lack of arable land in Namibia, there are increasing conflicts between livestock and wildlife over grazing. The country is one of the driest in the world with sparse and erratic rainfall and around 92% of the land area is defined as very-arid, arid, or semi-arid. Like in many other coastal countries, climate change is affecting weather patterns in Namibia and disrupting livelihoods through job losses, food and water insecurity in an already water scarce environment. Fishing is a very important economic activity for food security which supports many livelihoods in the extremely dry, coastal regions of the country. The 2021 'Fishrot' scandal which involved an Iceland company cost the economy over $650 million and exposed the magnitude of corruption steered by politicians in the country and dented the credibility of SWAPO. The extensive web of banks, shell companies, proxies and middle men who looted the country were exposed and several top government officials, including late President Geingob, were implicated after WikiLeaks released files revealing how officials ran schemes to control valuable fishing quotas before diverting them to an Iceland company for kickbacks. These challenges were capitalised on by the political parties during the election with SWAPO's election manifesto promising to undertake to "position Namibia as a key player in the production of green hydrogen and its derivatives." However, this didn't seem to convince the electorate as evidenced by the drop in votes.

Namibia has a comprehensive legal framework that governed the 2024 Presidential and National Assembly elections. This included the Namibian Constitution (Article 94B), Electoral Act No. 5 of 2014 (amended 2024), which prescribes the conduct of electoral processes. The Electoral Act was amended in 2024 to broaden political participation by allowing public servants and members of national, regional councils and local councils to be eligible for election. Other regulatory mechanisms are in place to ensure transparent processes. For instance, the Public Procurement Act No.15 of 2015 prescribes various methods of procuring services and the State Finance Act No.31 of 1991 prescribes the management of the election budget.

Despite SWAPO's dominance of the political landscape for decades, Namibia has generally upheld the rule of law in the conduct of elections. Dropping levels of ECN competence and some desperation to stay in power probably led to some legal violations. For instance, a day prior to the 2024 elections, some party agents discovered that the ECN was issuing original voters' cards from its head office instead of duplicate cards that should have been issued at that time, and not at the ECN headquarters.

Though the legal framework is robust, the ECN's conduct was questioned after it cancelled an open-bidding tender process for the production and printing of ballot papers and hand-picked SA-based entity Ren-Form CC. The lack of transparency has drawn attention to the legality of some electoral processes. After the voting extension, attention was also drawn to electoral justice. The electoral court ordered the ECN to provide all contesting opposition parties with election materials such as the number of votes cast and those counted at each polling station on each day for their scrutiny. Of interest, was the Supreme Court ruling in 2020 that the use of electronic voting machines without a voter verified paper audit trail was unconstitutional, since a paper trail is indispensable to electoral transparency, credibility, and verifiability.

EOMs noted the deficiencies inherent in considering the entire country as one constituency that allows voters to vote anywhere and urged for reforms to lessen the logistical and administrative challenges presented by such a system. This implies the need for a polling station-based registration and voting system. The ECN was encouraged to communicate transparently and to consult the public on major decisions. The voter period extension was one example that points to the need for regular consultations with all stakeholders. The use of digital technologies requires back up plans and the ECN had to ensure that spare voter verification devices and ultraviolet light detection machines ensure smooth running processes on election day.

SOUTH AFRICA

The history of elections in South Africa reflects its struggle for freedom, equality, and democracy, with the first democratic elections in 1994 marking the beginning of a new chapter in its political history when universal suffrage, was extended to all South African citizens over the age of 18 to vote in national, provincial, and municipal elections. The country has developed a relatively stable political system, that has been transitioning from apartheid to democracy since 1994. Its chapter 9 institutions have consistently worked to prevent the erosion of democracy. Unfortunately, the country's strong policy environment has been severely battered by corruption and the Covid-19 pandemic's effects on the economy continue to be felt. The 2024 elections were conducted during a tense atmosphere with rising concerns about the rising cost of living, escalating and extensive systematic and systemic corruption, social inequality, and political unrest. All this contributed to loss in trust and confidence in government institutions since senior party members were involved in almost all the major corrupt activities.

The 2024 elections were contested by 70 political parties, 11 independent candidates and 52 national contestants. There were over 14 903 candidates vying for 887 seats in the National and Provincial Legislatures. The high increase in the number of candidates is partly explained using political office for personal gain by politicians. Voter apathy was visible on 29 May with just over 40% of South Africans over the age of 18 voting. The number of voters dropped below 50% for the first time in 2019. Almost 23 million adults sat on the sidelines clearly disillusioned with the power of the ballot box. For the first time, the ANC, Africa's oldest liberation movement and the party of Nelson Mandela, lost its majority in 30 years, forcing it to lead in the formation of a coalition agreement.

The ANC's poor performance in the elections was attributed to its decline in popularity since 2007. Voter turnout has been declining steadily: in 2024 it was 58.64%, compared to 66% in 2019, 74% in 2014, 77% in 2004 and 2009, and 89% in 1999. The supporters of the ANC and ordinary South Africans feel alienated from the system, and the poor service delivery embodied by rolling electricity blackouts, water shortages and poor maintenance of public utilities has dampened the political mood. Patronage networks and political interference have weakened the security sector, especially the police and secret services, compromising the state's ability to uphold the rule of law and prevent crime.

Table 5 Decline in ANC support overtime

Election Year	ANC Votes %	Seats in Parliament (out of 400)
2009	66	264
2014	66.25	249
2019	57.50	230
2024	40	159 (14% decline from 2019)

The rift in the ANC came to fore in the July 2021 riots following the arrest of Jacob Zuma on corruption charges and this signified the discontent that was being expressed by the largest ethnic group, the Zulus, who felt victimised and marginalised from national politics. This discontent led to a further splintering of the ANC due to the formation of the Jacob Zuma led Mkhonto weSizwe party (MK). The new MK party went on to win 14.59% of the national vote with 58 seats in parliament and became the 3rd biggest party in the country and pushed the EFF to the fourth position. The ANC lost its dominant position and 40% of the vote it got (just over 6.4 million votes) did not give it a mandate to govern. The ANC only retained its outright majority in five out of nine provinces, the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, the Free State, North-West and Mpumalanga, down from the eight it held after the 2019 elections, and it remained in opposition in the Western Cape where the Democratic Alliance maintained its grip at 22%. The ANC losses meant a need for coalition arrangements at all government levels in three provinces, KwaZulu-Natal, the Northern Cape and Gauteng. The first party that shook the ANC's position was the EFF party led by former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema which won 25 seats in parliament within six months of formation in 2014. EFF's populism emphasizes state-provision of basic services including housing, nationalization of mines and other strategic sectors of the economy, and land redistribution. All the political promises made by the ANC prior to 1994 became focal points of the EFF's campaigns. After securing low votes in 2024, the ANC adhered to the spirit of the ACDEG which encourages a democratic political culture that emphasizes inclusion and tolerance and upholds electoral outcomes. These values enabled it to form a government of national unity.

South Africa uses a PR electoral system for its national and provincial elections and its legal framework is composed of the 1994 Constitution, the Electoral Act, Electoral Commission Act, and Political Party Funding Act. On 17 April 2023, President Ramaphosa signed the Electoral Amendment Bill into law which expanded electoral participation and widened the pool of leadership choice for national and provincial elections by allowing for independent candidates to contest elections. The electoral changes were run by an Autonomous Electoral Reform Consultation Panel which invited members of the public, organisations including political parties or prospective independent candidates to make written submissions for its consideration on proposals for an electoral system for the National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures.

The ANC's stranglehold on power since 1994 enabled it to play a key role as a driver in business, forcing labour, and civil society to align themselves to the party's positions on many issues. The party's dominance of South African politics blurred the lines between accountability and leadership as it became the nerve centre of the country's politics. The country's economic strength and political stability make it a key player in the region, with its policies and decisions often shaping the direction of regional development.

Inequality in South Africa continues to widen and it is straining the government's social services. Poverty is on the increase and youth unemployment is high. Over 60% of the 15–24-year-olds are unemployed with most residing in poorly resourced townships and informal settlements where there are no opportunities to earn incomes and by May 2024, South Africa's unemployment rate stood at 32.90%, making it one of the highest in the world. This high rate of unemployment reflects ongoing economic challenges, including slow economic growth, structural issues in the labour market, and persistent inequality. The elevated unemployment levels continue to impact consumer spending, social stability, and overall economic performance in the country.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to South Africa reached a total of USD 173.5 billion, equivalent to 42.8% of its GDP in 2022. Despite this potential, South Africa's performance in attracting FDI remains relatively weak compared to other African countries. These grievances were directed at the ANC during the elections since it has been at the helm for 30 years now.

The "State Capture" scandal exposed the severity and extent of high-level corruption in the country where private interests were able to influence state institutions, leading to the misallocation of resources, the undermining of regulatory bodies, and loss of public confidence. Unfortunately, the high-profile investigations and Commissions of Enquiry did not lead to any arrests.

South Africa's population grew at an alarming rate (0.87% in 2023, a 3.57% increase from 2022) and coupled with immigration, this increased demand for goods and services and puts pressure on infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems. The influx into urban areas by migrants from other countries has been a source of political tension for a long time with the country being accused of having xenophobic tendencies. Due to the migration of people from rural to urban areas in the country, all cities have expanded to accommodate more low-income settlers, causing big challenges like housing shortages, increased demand for public services and fights over limited resources. The tensions between locals and incoming poor foreigners encroaching on their trading turf has often resulted in violence. The presence of undocumented immigrants led to the emergence of vigilante groups with one, Operation Dudula, eventually morphing into a political party. Prior to the elections, there were many disturbing messages that circulated openly on the need to get rid of undocumented foreigners in the country and some campaign messages promised to remove foreigners and undocumented migrants from the country.

There is always an increase in political assassinations during election years in the heavily contested provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), through its South Africa Observatory, recorded at least 10 politically related assassinations between January and April 2024. Political assassinations in the country fall under a form of criminal governance known as collaborative governance, where criminal actors and local politicians and government administrators collude to eliminate rivals due to greed.

Generally, crime rates are high, which forces retailers to invest significantly in security measures, such as hiring additional security personnel, installing advanced surveillance systems, and implementing stricter loss prevention protocols to prevent armed robberies and burglaries. This cost of crime to business through the loss of merchandise or money has pushed up overall security expenses and insurance costs over the years. Crime costs for the economy is estimated to be R700 billion a year, which undermines the country's growth potential and the welfare of its citizens. The impact of crime is greater on smaller businesses. The high levels of crime coupled with relentless severe crimes deter companies from expanding hence they limit their operations. Small companies that have been directly affected by crime equally fail to increase employment and 17 to 22% of businesses reported unwillingness to employ more workers which in turn fuels political discontent. Organised crime poses a real threat to South Africa and to mitigate this, the government enacted the Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018, which provides a vital instrument for the public disclosure of political party funding to mitigate organised crime that can capture elections.

South Africa had an internet penetration rate of 74.7% and 45.34 million internet users, with about 26 million social media users (42.8% of the population) in early 2024. This high penetration enables the use of digital technologies and social media platforms as central platforms for political contestation in South Africa. Twitter was the main medium for most political messages. In 2024, social media influencers played a big role in reaching out to the youth to go and vote and about 42% of registered voters were under the age of 40. For instance, an influencer, Karabo "Kay" Mahapa, a TikTok creator with over 350,000 followers, detoured from his usual content and encouraged people to get out and vote. Still, many citizens have limited access to the internet and electricity and the country' power supply is erratic which limits the use of digital technologies and online processes in both managing and participating in elections. Technology is a desirable route, but the attendant digital gap will widen the vote between the rural and urban inhabitants as well as the rich and poor who cannot afford the high connectivity costs.

The Covid-19 pandemic pushed South Africa to adopt online voter registration and other digital electoral processes for the municipal elections conducted in November 2021. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) managed to register 26,1 million voters though only 12,3 million voted. The IEC wanted to attract more young voters through digital voter registration. Hesitancy in adopting digital technology was evident when the parliament acknowledged the need to embrace new technology but expressed reservations over the legal framework for e-voting in 2021 due to distrust by politicians, and fears of electoral fraud, hacking, and the rigging of election results. The use of technology in 2021 could have worked for parallel e-voting and manual voting processes in 2024 as this was successfully tested out in the municipal elections when the IEC introduced voter management devices (VMDs) to monitor live voting and deter double voting. However, the important point is that the government is cognisant of the need to adopt technology for more efficient and effective outcomes.

Disinformation was rife in the 2024 election and Africa Check, working with several other organisations, published 69 reports of false information during the election period. This was a rise in fake reports compared with the 2019 elections. False quotes were attributed to politicians, including false claims about attendance at rallies and some non-existent party endorsements. Social media users used what are called 'follow trains' (I will follow you if you follow me' type of activity to engage) and 'hashjacking', which is when popular hashtags are hijacked and repurposed to push a particular agenda. This hashjacking and tagging manipulation caught many unsuspecting social media users. Social media was also used by the anti-foreigner nationalist community to fuel the anti-foreigner sentiments through campaigns such as #PutSouthAfricans First/Operation Dudula. In the post-election phase, mega influencers ran campaigns that attacked the make-up of the proposed coalition government and equally attacked the make-up of the resulting government of national unity's inclusion of the Democratic Alliance.

Voting day was characterised by long queuing times across the country. These queues were attributed to technology failures, specifically to the inefficiencies of newly adopted handheld scanners. However, there are widespread perceptions that this issue was due to poor planning by the IEC.

South Africa has been stressed by energy shortfalls and continues to face a tough transition to cleaner energy. The impacts of climate change pose a threat to the country as people often get displaced and their incomes drop which undermines food and water security. All the big parties that contested the elections factored in the need to manage the environmental disasters occurring in the country due to flooding and drought in the past few years. The acknowledgement of the urgency of mitigating the impacts of climate change and advocating for reducing carbon emissions appeared in most party manifestos, and this was an important move in making issue-based campaigns. The KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape provinces continue to experience destruction from floods and the drought prone areas like some parts of Limpopo and the North- Western province found these messages convincing.

Key EOM recommendations emphasized party financing which remains a contentious issue in South Africa, and it is imperative that the IEC specifies and enforces the minimum amounts and disclosure thresholds for private donations; though the country has 40% women's representation in parliament, political parties were encouraged to adopt the "Zebra list" system for party lists to ensure 50-50 gender parity for all elections and cyber bullying during elections clearly requires the government to create a regulatory framework that protects citizens.

2.1 Summary of recommendations for challenges in the other countries in the region

The rest of the countries had elections prior to 2024, but the challenges experienced by the seven countries are prevalent across the region. This is reflected in the recommendations that are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Political parties select key recommendations for the rest of the Southern African countries

Country	Key recommendations
Angola 2022	• Ensure the independence of electoral institutions • Use digital technologies to monitor and report election results in real-time • Ensure a transparent election process • Conduct voter education campaigns to increase voter turnout and ensure informed decision-making • Improvement the overall integrity of the electoral process. • Design inclusive systems to embrace all the diversity
Eswatini 2023	• While fully respecting the Kingdom of Eswatini's sovereignty and existing legal frameworks, perhaps the country should consider engaging in a constructive dialogue on the potential establishment of political parties to ensure democratic representation, accountability, and citizen participation. • Streamline the multiple acts governing the conduct of elections • Implement civic and voter education programs to inform the electorate about electoral processes and recent legal amendments • Ongoing capacity building to enhance its efficient management of the elections.
Lesotho 2022	• Improve procedures for compiling the voter registration to address issues like duplication and the inclusion of deceased persons • Design mechanisms for greater inclusion for all categories of voters • Enhance the IEC's autonomy and capacity • Introduce reasonable limitations on campaign expenditures • Prohibit the use of state resources for campaign purposes
Madagascar	• Equalise media coverage for all candidates • Design inclusive and adequate voter education campaigns • Improve the transportation of election materials with security escorts and storage in secure facilities • Design equitable public funding for political parties and demand transparent campaign expenses

Country	Key recommendations
Malawi 2020	• Overall strengthening of electoral transparency and independent oversight • MEC to work closely with CSOs and independent observers to ensure transparency • Improve transparent vote counting and digitized results reporting • Expand voter education through outreach campaigns • Formulate measures for more inclusion of marginalized groups • Enhance election security Digitize the voter registration and verification processes • Ensure quick resolution of disputes and improving logistical arrangements in delivering election materials to all polling stations
Seychelles 2020	• Implementation of continuous voter education throughout the election cycle to enhance public understanding of the electoral process • Establishment of an advisory or technical committees to assist in reviewing and improving electoral boundaries and voter registration procedures. • Standardizing voting procedures at all polling stations to ensure uniformity and fairness in the voting process. • Strengthening measures to protect voters and ensure a secure voting environment
Zambia 2021	• Legal reforms before the 2026 elections to ensure a level playing field for all participants • Enhancing the legal framework by repealing the Public Order Act • Enact legislation on political parties, and revising laws governing the media and ICT sectors • Promote transparency in the electoral reform process and encourage the inclusion of all stakeholders • Extend the nomination period for presidential, parliamentary, and local government candidates • Reduce nomination fees to encourage broader participation

Country	Key recommendations
Zimbabwe 2023	- Alignment of the Criminal Law and Patriot Act of 2004 is incompatible with the requirements of the Constitution and PEMMO. - Implement comprehensive reforms to align electoral laws with regional and international standards and electoral laws and those impacting political rights - Ensure ZEC operates free from political influence, particularly concerning the appointment of its staff and the removal of governmental approval for its regulations. - Mandate ZEC to provide timely and comprehensive information on electoral preparations and publish disaggregated results by polling station. - Amend the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act to prevent undue restrictions on the right to assemble. - Review judicial appointment procedures to uphold the separation of powers. - Establish mechanisms to protect observers from undue restrictions, pressure, or intimidation. - Enhance the participation of women, youth, and people with disabilities in the electoral process. - Strengthen the administrative processes of elections to boost transparency and efficiency. - Ensure the media provides fair and balanced coverage to all political entities. - Promote a more balanced and equitable environment for all political parties during campaigns. - Enhance transparency and efficiency in polling and counting procedures. - Results Management- Improve the management (voting and counting) and announcement of election results to ensure credibility. - Promote transparency and access to the voters roll for stakeholders in good time. *Implement the comprehensive recommendations from the 2018 elections

NB; Compiled from the most recent elections for these countries

4.1 Impact of the 2024 SADC election outcomes on democratic consolidation

The number of elections in 2024 posed significant challenges and presented opportunities for political stability, governance and democratic consolidation in the SADC region. These are discussed in this section

Electoral Systems

Many countries in the region have challenges with their electoral systems with issues ranging from irregularities in the voting process to lack of trust in electoral commissions, and concerns about transparency and fairness. However, some countries have faced significant electoral processes problems which are more pronounced in the FPTP systems. For instance, Zimbabwe faced multiple challenges with its electoral system, including allegations of voter intimidation, ballot manipulation, and electoral fraud in the 2023 elections. The ZEC has always been accused of bias and inefficiency, undermining confidence in the electoral process. Additionally, the country has faced issues of political violence, restricted access to the media, and a lack of transparency in voter registration and counting. Zambia too experienced electoral challenges, particularly around the transparency of voting processes, media access, and voter registration. Political violence was also during the 2021 general elections. The ECZ has worked on reforms, but there are still concerns about its impartiality and the ability to manage an effective, transparent election process. Malawi faced serious electoral issues in 2019 when the general election results were contested, leading to protests and legal challenges. The MEC was accused of mismanagement and irregularities in the vote counting process. Comoros continues to experience challenges with its electoral system, particularly regarding the fairness of presidential elections and concerns have been raised about the lack of transparency and possible manipulation of the electoral process. Eswatini faces serious criticisms of its traditional governance inclined electoral system, particularly its lack of political pluralism and democratic competition. Lesotho has experienced political instability due to problems with its electoral system, including the lack of effective governance following elections, voter fraud, and issues with coalition governments. The Lesotho Electoral Commission has been criticized for its inability to manage peaceful and credible elections for decades.

These issues in electoral systems often stem from a combination of political, social, and economic factors, including weak institutions, political interference, and insufficient electoral reforms. Many of these countries have taken steps toward improving their electoral processes, but the challenges remain significant in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections.

Election related violence

Election violence has been a recurring problem in Zimbabwe. Tensions often escalate between the ruling party and opposition, with reports of intimidation, harassment, and violence during campaigns and in the immediate post-election phase. Political instability and mistrust have led to election-related violence in Lesotho and there have been concerns about the military's role in politics and its impact on elections. Malawi had its worst experience with election-related violence during the 2019 general elections following allegations of vote-rigging and irregularities in the election process. In Mozambique, elections continue to be marred by violence, especially in areas with strong opposition support.

These countries, among others in the SADC region, face various challenges related to election violence, often stemming from political rivalry, disputes over election results, and concerns about the legitimacy of the electoral process. A disturbing trend is the state sponsored violence that occurs in some countries when the dominant ruling parties win the elections. This demonstrates a lack of tolerance for diversity, and the deliberate cultivation of a culture of fear.

Table 7 Election violence

Country	Type of election/month	Registered voters	Outcome	Voting trend (turnout*)	Violent events increased during elections	Reported political violence trends- post elections
Comoros	Presidential January	339 000	Incumbent retained seat	Incumbent share of votes fell by 3% to 57% (56%)	Yes	No change (Average 1 per week)
South Africa	National & provincial legislatures (& president) May	27.8m	Incumbents lost majority	Incumbent share of votes fell by 17% to 40% (59%)	Yes	Decline in violence (Average 40 per week from 50-60 events before elections)
Madagascar	National legislature May	11.6m	Incumbents' coalition retained majority	Incumbent share of votes fell by 5% to 51.5% (54%)	Yes	Marginal increase (Average has risen from ~13 to 14 events in Sept. before falling)
Mozambique	President, national legislature October	16.6m	Incumbent retained majority, results heavily contested	Incumbent share of votes rose by 3% to 78% (N/A)	Yes	Risen (Average rien from ~10 to >35 events per week)
Botswana	National legislature October	1m	Incumbents lost majority	Incumbent share of seats fell by 60% to 6% (81%)	Yes	Risen (Average up to over 1 per week off zero base)
Mauritius	National legislature November	1m	Incumbents lost majority	Incumbent share of seats fell by 60% to 0% (78%)	Yes	None
Namibia	Presidency, national legislature November	1.36m	Incumbents retained seats	Incumbent share of votes fell by 12% to 53% (76%)	Yes	None

Source: Comoros, Madagascar, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Acled IFES

Voter turnout

In all the seven Southern African countries that had elections in 2024, voters withdrew support for incumbents including those that had stayed in power for decades. Given the general poor economic environment in the region, voters clearly took economic and development factors into account in deciding how to vote. Therefore, citizens may continue to express discontent with political suppression through the vote thereby entrenching democratic changes of government. Four of the countries that had elections in 2024 had voter turnout that was below the SADC average of 59.7%. Three of the countries with the highest turnout had political party alternations, Botswana, Mauritius and Zambia. The anomaly in that group of countries is Zimbabwe which uses blatant violence to suppress the vote and yet it recorded a high turnout of almost 70%. This implies the need to investigate the causality of voter behavior across the region and explain patterns of political and electoral participation.

Figure 2 Voter turnout in the SADC region in the last election
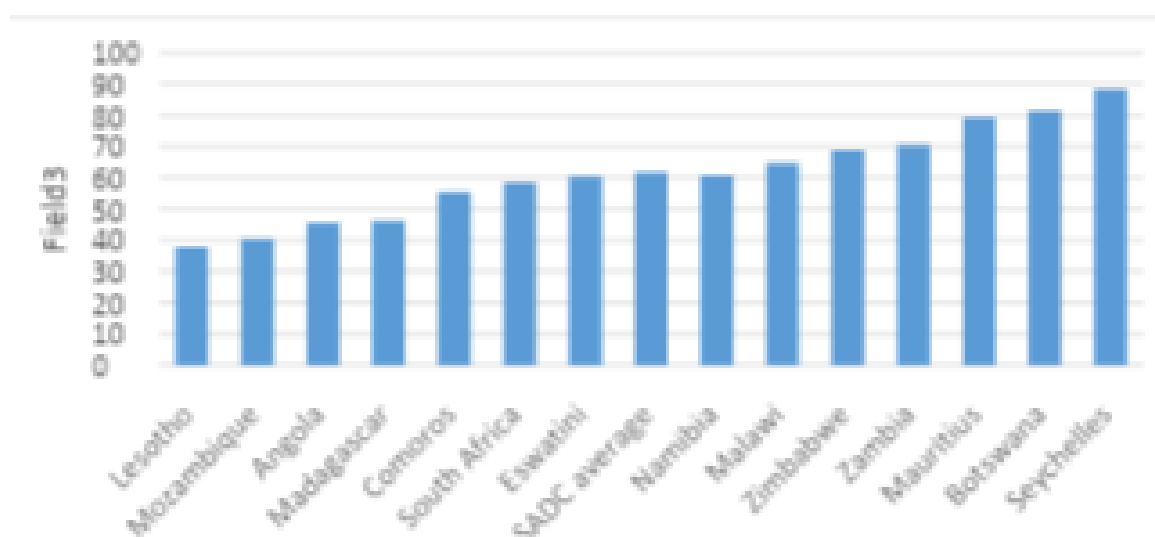
Source: International IDEA, Voter Turnout Database, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/question?question_id=9189&database_theme=293
NB: (i) Comoros figure is for 16.30% for the presidential vote and 39.13% for the national parliament. (ii) The average only included the 14 SADC countries in this paper.

Voter registration

Across all countries in the region, voter registration is clearly problematic with citizens complaining about irregularities. Voter registration processes are cumbersome, inefficient, and even intentionally obstructed in some cases. This often results in large segments of the population being excluded from the voters' roll, especially marginalized groups like rural populations, the elderly, or people with disabilities.

Deliberate manipulation and fraud too also cause problems with political parties or individuals tampering with the voters' rolls to create an unfair advantage by suppressing opposition votes or targeting certain communities. This can include "ghost voters" (false registrations), duplications, or altering details of registered voters. Such fraudulent actions can skew election results and undermine the integrity of the democratic process. Limited access to technology, insufficient resources, or poorly trained staff can lead to errors in the registration process and make it harder to maintain accurate voters' roll.

Zimbabwe has faced challenges with voter registration in every election, and there have been reports of unverified or outdated voter rolls. Mozambique has had issues with the credibility of its voter rolls, with many citizens not being able to register due to the lack of access to registration centers, particularly in rural areas. While Zambia has made strides in electoral reforms, the country still faces challenges with the voter registration process, which can sometimes be incomplete or inaccurate, especially in rural and remote areas. Malawi has had challenges with voter registration, especially in rural areas where people may not have the necessary documentation to register. These challenges undermine public trust in electoral processes and may also contribute to election-related disputes or conflicts.

Finance

Political party finance challenges are prevalent in several countries, they are affected by issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, weak regulatory frameworks, and state capture. Angola's political financing is marked by a lack of transparency and the influence of the ruling party, the MPLA, which controls much of the country's wealth. Zimbabwe continues to struggle with corruption in political financing with state involvement which has undermined democracy. In Mozambique, political finance issues include a lack of transparency in party financing, where the ruling party reportedly uses state resources for electoral purposes. Zambia too has faced issues related to the opacity of political funding. most of these electoral systems rely heavily on wealthy individuals and business interests, which creates opportunities for undue influence and corruption, and the lack of stringent oversight mechanisms allows for political funds to be used improperly. South Africa has better regulations than most countries but still faces significant political finance issues around party donations and the influence of private wealth on political decision-making. The lack of full transparency in the funding of political parties and election campaigns has led to concerns over corruption in the entire region.

Inclusion in politics and governance

The region faces challenges regarding the inclusion of youth, women, and minorities in politics and governance. Some of these challenges include cultural barriers, limited access to education and resources, gender inequality, and political instability. Malawi has struggled with the underrepresentation of women, youth, and ethnic minorities in politics for a long time. Although women have been appointed to key positions in government, their representation in the national legislature remains low. The political parties often fail to prioritize youth and marginalized groups in their candidate selection processes. Ethnic minorities like the Lomwe, and to some extent the Chewa, face marginalization in political representation and decision-making. Zambia has seen modest improvements in women's political participation, but gender disparities remain significant in both politics and governance. Ethnic minorities, such as the Tonga and Lozi people, have faced issues related to access to political power and resources, particularly in rural areas. Zimbabwe's political landscape is highly polarized, and youth and women often face barriers to political participation. Women's representation in government has fluctuated over time, and political violence and intimidation disproportionately affects young people and women. Ethnic minorities, such as the Ndebele, have historically faced discrimination and exclusion from political power, especially in post-independence Zimbabwe.

Women's participation in politics and governance remains low in Mozambique, particularly at local government levels with indigenous groups, such as the Makua and Sena people, experiencing marginalization in the political and economic spheres, and they often lack sufficient representation in higher levels of government. In Lesotho, women are underrepresented in politics, and youth involvement in governance is limited. Though there have been some strides toward gender equality, the political system remains heavily patriarchal. The absolute monarchy in Eswatini restricts democratic participation, and political space is limited for women, youth, and marginalized groups. Ethnic minorities and people of non-Swazi descent face challenges in political participation and access to public office. Women and youth in Angola face significant barriers to political engagement, with traditional gender roles playing a large part in limiting opportunities for women. Youth, in particular, struggle with high unemployment. South Africa has made significant strides in addressing gender inequality and promoting youth participation in politics through mechanisms like quotas and youth policies. However, economic disparities and issues like unemployment make it difficult for many women, youth, and marginalized groups to have meaningful political influence. For Comoros, political instability and a lack of democratic processes have hindered the inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups in governance. Minorities in Comoros, including those from other islands in the archipelago, face challenges in political inclusion.

EMB autonomy

Several countries face challenges related to the autonomy of their EMBs. These issues typically revolve around political interference, lack of public trust, and the influence of ruling parties over election bodies. Some of the countries where such problems have been notable include the ZEC in Zimbabwe that has faced criticism for being heavily influenced by the ruling party, ZANU-PF. This has led to concerns about the fairness and credibility of elections, with opposition parties accusing the commission of bias and the government exerting undue influence. Zambia has made progress in recent years, though there were periods in the past when the ECZ was accused of partiality, particularly during contested elections. Political parties have at times questioned the commission's ability to operate independently, especially when it comes to election results and electoral processes management. The MEC has faced challenges regarding its independence and credibility, particularly following the controversial 2019 Malawi elections. The electoral body has been accused of not effectively managing the election process, with claims of political interference from various actors. The autonomy of EMBs is a recurring issue that threatens the credibility of the electoral process in the region. Many of these countries have undertaken reforms to improve election management, but challenges persist. Ensuring the independence of election management bodies is crucial for strengthening democratic processes in the region.

Technology

A major challenge across the region is the challenging use of technology and social media in connecting to the elections. For example, South Africa experienced several cases of the VMDs malfunctioning which caused massive delays in voting. There were also logistical problems during the Namibian elections when the integrated mobile voter registration systems malfunctioned, coupled with insufficient ballot papers in some voting stations which delayed voters. Moreover, Mauritius attempted to ban social media access and in Zimbabwe reports of slow connectivity were rampant during the election in August 2023.

Across all the SADC countries, social media played a key role in encouraging people to vote, particularly among younger voters who may not traditionally engage with politics. Parties and supporters created hashtags, shared election-related content, and launched online petitions to drive voter turnout. WhatsApp, being a popular messaging platform in Seychelles, was crucial in organizing campaigns and spreading news among communities. It was used by campaign teams to mobilize supporters and share news about rallies or important moments from the campaign. It allowed for more direct communication between political parties and their supporters, helping create a sense of community around certain political causes. After the elections, social media also played a role in expressing public opinion about the results.

The elections and the economy in the region

Political stability is crucial for the economy and elections either enhance or disrupt investor confidence. In times of political uncertainty or contested elections, especially when there are allegations of electoral fraud, economic activities may slow down. For example, political instability after elections can lead to currency depreciation, capital flight, and a loss of confidence in the economy as seen in Zimbabwe during times of economic crisis. Intertwined complex factors like political stability, policy shifts and economic performance all influence the interplay between elections and the economy. Many voters in the region tend to elect governments based on their economic performance. If the economy is thriving with reduced unemployment, inflation, and growing GDP, incumbents may be more likely to win re-election. Conversely, poor economic conditions, high inflation, or unemployment may lead to electoral dissatisfaction and a higher chance of electoral change. For instance, Botswana (2024), South Africa (2024) and Zambia (2022) have witnessed significant political changes tied to economic crises.

Elections often bring in new governments with new policy agendas and these shifts can directly impact the economy. For example, after elections, new leadership may introduce fiscal, monetary, and trade policies that either stimulate or constrain economic activity. For instance, Botswana's commitment to economic diversification was supported by its political leadership, influencing sectors beyond mining. Hence economic reforms tied to elections can be either a reaction to electoral pressure or a proactive decision by a newly elected government. Some governments often introduce economic reforms (e.g., liberalization, privatization, or taxation policies) to address economic challenges or to fulfil election promises and some political parties use the same tactic to win votes.

Elections often involve significant government spending, which can affect the country's fiscal health. Governments may increase public spending, especially on infrastructure or social services, to appeal to voters, which can lead to increased fiscal deficits. In some cases, such spending can lead to short-term economic booms but may have negative long-term impacts if not managed properly. In conclusion, the relationship between elections and the economy in the SADC region is intertwined, with elections influencing economic conditions and vice versa. Economic factors play a major role in the political landscape, and election outcomes can determine the direction of economic policies and the overall stability of the region.

Opportunities for democratic consolidation in Southern Africa

Democratic consolidation in Southern Africa refers to the process of deepening democracy by ensuring stable political systems, rule of law, effective governance, and active participation from citizens. While the region has made significant progress towards democratic governance, several opportunities still exist for further democratic consolidation. Below are some opportunities for democratic consolidation in Southern Africa

- The region has experienced a mix of electoral successes and challenges in the last decade. Some countries have managed to continuously conduct relatively peaceful and credible elections (Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius and South Africa), and others like Zimbabwe and Mozambique equally battle violent contestation of electoral outcomes. In Zambia (2021), Malawi (2020), Botswana (2024) and Mauritius (2024) the elections resulted in political power alternation. In Malawi this was after violent post-election riots that erupted over the rigged elections in the first round.

- The formation of opposition party alliances in the 2024 elections is clearly a panacea for changing the nature of politics in the region. Malawi (2021) and Zambia (2023) managed to demand accountability and bring in new leaders through pulling efforts together. In 2024, the opposition in more countries formed coalitions to improve on their chances of winning the elections, and in Botswana and Mauritius they were successful. Still, in Mozambique and Namibia, alliance formation equally demonstrated a shift in the direction the political landscape is evolving.

- The region's hegemons, the post liberation war countries of Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, continue to hold on to power through the liberating parties. However, the 2024 South African elections ushered in a new era of coalition politics after the dominant party, the ANC failed to win a majority. South Africa's 'regional par excellence' (IEC) failed to live up to its previous standards and faced accusations of rigging the elections. Both sides of the divide, opposition and ruling parties are utilizing the power of coalitions to stabilize electoral processes and be more inclusive in the governance arena. Such a trend will undoubtedly change the nature of politics in the region and allow for the development of a deliberative culture of democracy.

- For the first time, the SEOM departed from the norm of condoning faulty elections as free and fair in Zimbabwe (2023 election) and this shift to what has been traditionally the space of CSOs is likely to push governments to comply with regional norms and standards on the conduct of elections. These regional EOMs have clearly added to the voices of the growing domestic observers' voices.

- Southern Africa has significant opportunities to strengthen and consolidate democracy, but this requires comprehensive reforms, greater citizen engagement, and regional cooperation. Achieving sustainable democracy will depend on continued efforts to promote good governance, inclusivity, economic development, and peace. With the right investments in these areas, Southern Africa can emerge as a model of democratic governance for the African continent

5.0 Recommendations

This section provides suggestions for improving key issues meriting attention in relation to governance, democracy and elections.

- Strengthening Civil Society: CSOs play a pivotal role in promoting democracy by advocating for human rights, electoral integrity, gender equality, and the protection of freedoms. Southern Africa has a vibrant network of domestic and regional CSOs that help in holding governments accountable, promoting transparency, and fostering a culture of civic participation. These are already involved in civic education and raising public awareness to strengthen democratic values, which is essential for building an informed electorate. Due to their expansiveness, CSOs with open space to manoeuvre in, can support marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and rural populations, to have access to the electoral processes, which is essential for broadening political participation. Promoting civic education does encourage active participation and discourages voter apathy.

- Electoral Reforms: Southern Africa has witnessed some of the most competitive elections in Africa, but electoral systems and processes still need to be improved in certain countries to ensure fairness. Many countries are yet to implement reforms recommended by EOM in the last 10 years. The capacity required to work on these reforms is lacking in most governments but bringing in CSOs for oversight and facilitating the drafting of some of the proposed changes could help expedite the process. These reforms include enhancing the independence of the Judiciary which is crucial for upholding the rule of law to prevent political interference and protecting fundamental freedoms and ensures justice. Strengthening the role of legislatures as check-and-balance institutions is critical for holding the executive accountable. Effective parliamentary oversight can prevent abuses of power and corruption.

- Improving Governance and the Rule of Law: Addressing corruption within government institutions is vital for consolidating democracy. Strengthening anti-corruption agencies and ensuring transparency in public procurement, budgeting, and financial management of electoral processes can improve public trust in democratic institutions. Improving governance through better public services (health, education, and infrastructure) strengthens the legitimacy of democratic regimes and improve citizens' quality of life, fostering loyalty and support.

- Inclusion and Social Equity-Gender Equality: While some Southern African countries have made strides in gender equality, much remains to be done to ensure that women are fully represented in politics and decision-making processes. Policies and mechanisms that promote women's participation in political leadership can lead to more inclusive governance and CSOs can lobby for these. Likewise, youth engagement remains important and ensuring that they have access to education, employment opportunities, and political platforms is key. Promoting unity across ethnic, cultural, and religious lines prevents divisions and conflicts. A focus on social integration and the recognition of diversity helps strengthen national identity and cohesion.

- Peer Pressure and Diplomatic Engagement: CSOs can lobby SADC countries to apply diplomatic pressure on one another to uphold democratic principles, human rights, and good governance. Inclusive Economic Growth: Sustainable economic growth that benefits all segments of society is key to supporting democratic consolidation. When people feel that their economic well-being is improving, they are more likely to support democratic institutions.

- Election Security, Conflict Prevention and Mediation: Ensuring peace and security is fundamental for democratic consolidation. Promoting conflict resolution, mediation efforts, and creating dialogue platforms for resolving electoral disputes can ensure stability, particularly in countries facing political or ethnic tensions. Ensuring the security of voters, election officials, and political candidates is paramount. Security forces should be neutral, professional, and well-trained to manage potential unrest during the election period. The protection of polling stations and the transportation of ballots can minimize incidents of violence and intimidation. Ensuring that security forces (police, military) are conforming to EMB guides on election security is critical. This can prevent the use of force to suppress opposition and promote democratic norms.

- Regional Peacekeeping and Mediation: Southern Africa could also benefit from regional peacekeeping forces and mediation efforts when political instability arises as in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

- Promoting Free Press: A free and independent media is essential for holding government to account and providing citizens with information to make informed political decisions. Ensuring the safety of journalists, addressing media censorship, and promoting media literacy are crucial steps for democratic consolidation.

- Technology, Internet and Digital Rights: Implementing electronic voter registration, biometric identification, and secure electronic voting systems can help reduce fraud and enhance the accuracy of electoral rolls. However, there must be thorough vetting and security checks to ensure the technology is secure and resilient against cyberattacks and that it can work in all parts of the country where it is being used to ensure consistency. Again, with the growth of social media and online platforms, ensuring access to information and protecting digital rights will be increasingly important for a thriving democracy and express citizen oversight on all electoral processes.