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Principal-Agent Model and SADC's Approach to Zimbabwe, 2000-2013: A Consistent Framework to Account for Inconsistency

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Abstract

The paper argues for the utility of the principal-agent theory in accounting for SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe as from the year 2000 to 2013. It contends that the application of an inappropriate theoretical lens in previous studies is part of the reason why SADC's approach to Zimbabwe's challenges during the period under study remains poorly understood. Therefore, the research perspective unpacks the key tenets of the principal-agent theory and justifies its appropriateness as a framework for understanding SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe. This paper concludes that due to its emphasis on hierarchy, the principal-agent model provides perhaps the most appropriate theoretical lens for explaining the key dynamics behind SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe's issues from 2000 to 2013.

Keywords: Crisis management, hierarchy, inconsistency, principal-agent, SADC, Zimbabwe.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an outpouring of literature on the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) intensely criticised approach to Zimbabwe's various political and economic issues (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010; Dzimiri, 2013, 2017; Nathan, 2010, 2012, 2013). A founding member state of SADC, Zimbabwe has been going through a series of inter-related challenges that include a contested land reform program, western sanctions, allegations of political repression and economic decline amongst other issues (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). In line with the United Nations (UN) Charter (Chapter VIII Article 52-54) which recognises the role of regional arrangements in the maintenance of international peace and security, SADC

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has been forced to respond in one way or another to Zimbabwe's challenges. Known to some as the Zimbabwe crisis, SADC's approach to these issues has been that of non-interference or non-intervention.

Despite the intense academic and media scrutiny over the years, SADC's approach to Zimbabwe remains an enigma to many. Various analysts have been frustrated by SADC's often unpredictable, vexing and desultory approach to Zimbabwe as from the year 2000 onwards (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010; Dzimiri, 2013, 2017; Nathan, 2010, 2012, 2013, Nsibirwa & Mhodi, 2017). When many expected SADC to sanction or at least condemn Zimbabwe over various alleged transgressions of democratic principles and human rights, SADC resolutely stood behind Zimbabwe. Likewise, when largely expected to be intimately involved in managing the 'crisis' in Zimbabwe, SADC was largely non-confrontational in approach opting for quiet diplomacy instead. This approach has left some analysts frustrated and baffled.

Until now attempts to explain SADC's rather inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe do not appear to have unearthed the key dynamics behind SADC inconsistency when responding to issues involving Zimbabwe. Part of the reason for failure to account for the key dynamics behind SADC's inconsistent to Zimbabwe has been the use of a theoretical/conceptual framework whose scope is not broad enough to interrogate all the key variables. A theory of choice for most of these previous studies seeking to account for SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe has been the normative framework.

In the Zimbabwe-SADC situation, the Principal-Agent Theory exposes a notable power imbalance stemming from asymmetric information. This dynamic arises when one party, the principal, requires a service from another party, the agent, but lacks essential information to effectively monitor the agent's performance. This information gap leads to a situation where the agent possesses more or better information, creating a challenge for the principal to ensure compliance. Consequently, issues of moral hazard and adverse selection emerge within their relationship. As Booth (2012) elucidates, this imbalance undermines the principal's ability to maintain control over the agent's actions. Lambsdorff (2005) further highlights how these challenges can manifest in instances of moral hazard and adverse selection.

Notwithstanding its popularity with scholars, the normative framework has not adequately accounted for SADC inconsistency when responding to the Zimbabwe issue(s). The dominant narrative in these studies has been that SADC's solidarity stance with Zimbabwe is shaped by the regional organisation's (RO's) norms of non-interference and disregard for democracy and human rights (Okran, 2014). However, the inconsistency with which SADC approached Zimbabwe as compared to crises in other member states raises some validity doubts over the suitability of the normative framework and normative explanations. Framed around the issue of norms, the normative framework's limited scope has meant that some scholars have not been amenable to interrogating variables other than norms. This is in spite of the fact that SADC's divergent approach to Zimbabwe relative other member states facing similar challenges points to power dynamics being a constraint to the RO's room of manoeuvre. The effect has been a regional approach that is still difficult to understand more than 20 years since the start of Zimbabwe's challenges (Tsvangira, 2016).

SADC member states' preferences regarding trade policy are quite heterogeneous. The 15 members of SADC are characterized by differing levels of development and industrialization. It includes South Africa, an industrialized, upper-middle income country with a well-developed manufacturing sector; Swaziland and Lesotho, two tiny economies heavily dependent on inputs from neighbouring countries; exporters of raw commodities such as the DRC and Angola; and several states reliant on agricultural exports (Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe (Trainer et al., 2016).

In light of the above, this paper argues that the principal-agent theory provides perhaps the most appropriate theoretical lens for understanding the key dynamics behind SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe. This is a theoretical framework that could be of benefit to various analysts who have often failed to understand and or predict SADC's crisis management approach in Zimbabwe and beyond. The paper thus unpacks the principal-agent theory in the context of international organisation (IO) decision-making. In doing so, the paper proffers arguments to justify the utility of principal-agent theory in accounting for SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe. The paper initially explains SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe. A discussion on the key tenets of the principal-agent theory then follows. This leads to a justification of why the principal-agent theory is considered an appropriate theoretical framework

for explaining SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe.

SADC Inconsistency in Zimbabwe

Intensely criticised for being controversial and ineffective, SADC's approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe has been that of non-interference or non-intervention. This is an approach that critics accuse of being inconsistent with not only SADC's principles and guidelines but also its reputation and precedence set in crisis management elsewhere in the region (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010; Dzimiri, 2013, 2017; Nathan, 2010, 2012, 2013; Nsibirwa & Mhodi, 2017).

Allegations of inconsistency have emerged from the fact that despite having what appears to be a robust set of democratic principles, SADC decisions on the Zimbabwe issue have hardly conformed to these principles (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010; Dzimiri, 2013, 2017; Nathan, 2010, 2012, 2013; Nsibirwa & Mhodi 2017). SADC was accused of indifference to alleged human rights, democracy and the rule of law violations by the Robert Mugabe government. Commenting on SADC's approach to Zimbabwe, Sirota (2004, p. 343) highlighted this inconsistency arguing that at the 2003 Dar es Salaam SADC Summit, "SADC leaders urged Western nations to lift sanctions on Zimbabwe while declining to address Mugabe's numerous human rights abuses".

Moreover, SADC's inconsistency has been noted in the disproportionate manner with which the RO has responded to Zimbabwe as compared to other member states that have been in similar situations as Zimbabwe (Cawthra, 2010; Nsibirwa & Mhodi, 2017). It is worth highlighting from the outset that contrary to the non-interference/non-intervention approach that SADC adopted in response to Zimbabwe, SADC actually has a reputation of interference or intervention when managing crises in member states other than Zimbabwe (Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho and Madagascar are all situations almost similar to Zimbabwe where SADC intervened militarily or by way of sanctions (Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010). An important question that emerges from SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe is which key factors or dynamics shaped this approach. This is a question that the normative framework and argument applied in previous studies have not adequately addressed.

Although much research has been conducted on SADC's role in Zimbabwe as from the year 2000 onwards (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010; Dzimiri, 2013, 2017; Nathan, 2010, 2012, 2013), the key dynamics shaping SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe remain poorly understood. This is despite the fact that principal-agent power dynamics appear to be the dominant issue shaping SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe. Few if any studies have however, focused on the influence that these principal-agent power dynamics on SADC's crisis management approach to Zimbabwe. As a result of this oversight, these studies (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010; Cawthra, 2010; Dzimiri, 2013, 2017; Nathan, 2010, 2012, 2013) seem to have majored on the minor. This is because the regional norms cited in some of these previous studies as the key reason behind SADC's inconsistent approach to Zimbabwe are a consequence of the distribution of power in a principal-agent structure.

These previous studies have thus provided insufficient explanations of the key issue(s) shaping SADC's inconsistent stance towards the Zimbabwe crisis because of their failure to pay enough attention to the principal-agent power dynamics in the RO. This is an anomaly that this paper intends to rectify by proffering a more logically and empirically valid theoretical framework to account for the key reason(s) behind SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe.

The Principal-Agent Theory

The principal-agent theory posits that the relationship that exists between member states and the bureaucracy of an IO/RO is one of a principal and an agent (Reinalda & Verbeek, 2004). This is because when states establish IOs/ROs, they delegate but do not surrender authority in some areas to these IOs or ROs (Hawkins et al., 2006). This delegation results in a principal-agent relationship in which the states are the principal(s) and the IO is the agent (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2006). Delegation is thus central to the principal-agent relationship established between the principal who contracts the agent to perform a certain function on the principal's behalf (Kassim & Mennon, 2003).

An important issue to clarify is how and why states become principals in this relationship with IOs. The answer to this question lies in the institution of sovereignty. As explained by Tierney (2008), sovereignty makes states the ultimate "locus of decision-making authority" which they

may opt to delegate to various other entities internationally. Therefore, states are the principals in their relationship with IOs/ROs. In as far as IOs are concerned; Tierney (2008) contends that any actor that has been conditionally granted authority by another actor is an agent regardless of whether or not that agent does what the principal wants them to do with that delegated authority.

The issue of what the agent does with the delegated authority presents perhaps the biggest challenge in a principal-agent relationship at any level. Pollack (2007) notes that, in a principal-agent relationship agents often seek to have greater autonomy from the principal. Furthermore, these agents also strive to have greater authority over their principals (Kassim & Mennon, 2003). The agent's quest for greater room of manoeuvre and leeway in terms of greater decision-making authority more often than not runs into conflict with the principal's preferences and interests (Pollack, 2017; Reinalda & Verbeek, 2004; Verbeek, 2001;).

In response, the principals almost always seek to monitor and control all of the agent's operations so as to ensure that in striving for this room of manoeuvre, the agent's do not threaten or damage the fundamental interests of the principal (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2006; Kassim & Mennon 2003). Verbeek (2001) explains that there is usually a clash between the principal whose desire is to see the agent doing what he has been delegated to do and the agent who tries to either do his own thing or literally perform the principal's task to his own (agent's) discretion. The agent is always trying to carve out as much room for manoeuvre or leeway and independence from the principal as possible.

The principal-agent approach is thus a framework for analysing this "relationship between an actor – the principal – who delegates but does not surrender authority to a certain body – the agent – specifically designed to perform certain tasks" (Reinalda & Verbeek, 2004, p. 21). The principal-agent framework focuses on the inherent conflict that is almost certainly present in all principal-agent relationships (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2006; Pollack, 2007; Pollack, 2017). The principal-agent framework is an approach that can be applied to solve what Meunier (2000) (Reinalda & Verbeek, 2004) called the analytical problem of determining and explaining the agent's room for manoeuvre in a principal-agent relationship. Unlike the normative approach which places greater emphasis on the role played by IOs over that of states, the principal-agent theory is

concerned with the interactions between these two and the challenges arising out of that relationship without necessarily depicting one as playing a superior role than the other (Kassim & Mennon, 2003).

Types of Agency Relationships

Agency relationships have many typologies. Ideally, an agency relationship has one or more principals. A principal can be a single individual or a corporate entity made up of more than one individual. Whenever a single agent has contractual obligations to more than one organisational entity, that agent is said to have a relationship with multiple principals (Tierney, 2008). When applied to the relationship between states and IOs, it is rare to find a principal-agent relationship with only one state acting as the principal (Tierney, 2008). States are usually part of what Tierney (2008) calls a collective principal.

A collective principal is one that is composed of more than one actor. Examples of a collective principal are groups of voters who delegate to politicians and legislators or nation-states that delegate to IOs. These are situations where a group of actors agree amongst themselves and then negotiate a contract with an agent. It is important to note that with a collective principal, no single actor can individually renegotiate another contract with the agent. For that to happen, all the actors who form the collective principal should consent to such a renegotiation (Tierney, 2008). Most member states are usually part of a collective principal with other member states and this is certainly true for SADC where all policy-making and decision-making is by consensus.

Reasons for Delegating Authority

One reason for delegation of authority is for IOs/ROs to "handle the dirty work" for their member states (Verbeek, 2001, p. 7). This has been especially true for ROs such as SADC who have to deflect several issues on behalf of their member states. Some of the so called 'dirty work' that ROs handle for member states such as Zimbabwe who are Western designated pariah states include providing a degree of legitimacy to these states through endorsement of their democracy and human rights record (Aeby, 2017; Alden, 2010). They also defend these member states from criticism and pressure that may come from both internal and external sources (Dzimiri, 2013, 2017). In the case of Zimbabwe, Lockwood (2018) notes that Robert Mugabe was able to limit both international criticism and domestic pressure

by ensuring that SADC an RO that he had power and influence over handled the Zimbabwe situation.

ROs have thus become vital conduits to the survival of member states in the international system. They have often cushioned member states such as Zimbabwe from external and sometimes internal pressure. Commenting specifically on the Robert Mugabe led Zimbabwe government Lockwood (2018) argued that IOs such as SADC provided Mugabe with crucial bargaining chips that made "it possible for Zimbabwe to access financial resources it would otherwise have struggled to obtain."

Agents also play a crucial role in the relations between principals themselves. Thatcher and Sweet (2002) posit that principals engage agents to help them with a number of issues. These issues include resolving commitment problems between principals themselves and between principals and their constituents. Agents do indeed resolve commitment problems between principals such as member states failing to agree on the terms of an agreement or treaty or the government failing to own up to some commitments. In Zimbabwe, SADC is largely regarded as the guarantor of democracy for the facilitation role that it usually plays in times of political disagreements between the government and opposition political parties.

Another important reason why a state would want to delegate authority to an agent is in the area of information asymmetries in technical areas (Thatcher & Sweet, 2002). Agents in this case IOs and/or ROs are likely to develop expertise or employ experts with technical knowledge which the principal may not have. In the case of Zimbabwe, the government has benefited immensely from the expertise coming from SADC in areas such as governance, defence and security, water, climate, health and other such issues.

One of the most crucial reasons why principals would wish to delegate or precisely pool authority is to avoid taking blame for some unpopular decisions (Thatcher & Sweet, 2002). This has been quite apparent in SADC's approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe. When individually pressured by the west to be more critical of Harare, SADC member states used SADC as their excuse for not being critical of Zimbabwe. These individual SADC states simply argued that when it came to Zimbabwe, they were constrained by the SADC position.

Principal Interests and Agent Autonomy in Principal-Agent Relationships

The key tenet of the principal-agent theory as applied to the relationship between states and IOs is the assumption that delegation to IOs is firmly rooted in the interests of the principals who are the most powerful and influential member states. In some cases however, principals have been unable to retain control of the agents and the agents have been willing and able to act autonomously and retain a fair degree of authority over the principals (Kassim & Mennon, 2003).

Thatcher and Sweet (2002) note that principals are indeed aware that agents can develop interests of their own based on the agent's understanding of the environment and these interests may clash with the principal's interests. In order to understand these power and interests dynamics, Verbeek (2001) postulates that the first step in understanding an IO/RO is to try and deal with the question "whether decisions in an international organization can ever differ from the interests of the most important and powerful member states". The question is whether or not an IO can have policy autonomy.

Hawkins et al. (2006) posit that IOs vary in their range of autonomy with some being empowered to the extent of sanctioning member states while others are constrained to adhere to the prescriptions of their most powerful member states. Verbeek (2001) suggests that while it appears as if the strings of IOs are pulled by the powerful member states, freedom of manoeuvre is indeed a genuine possibility for IOs. The asymmetry of information between the agent and the principal is to Verbeek (2001) a source of freedom for the IO.

Still on the same note, Pollack (2007) argues that there are several misconceptions from the critics of the principal-agent approach the majority of which seem to either misunderstand or misrepresent the approach. One such criticism has been the argument that not all IOs are 'agents' as some such as the European Community or the European Court of Justice are not just marionettes of the key principals but have enough autonomy to have their own independent preferences and influence political outcomes in their own right. However, as discussed already, greater autonomy from and/or greater authority over a principal does not negate the agency status of that actor (Tierney, 2008). Agency is defined through an actor's acceptance to

perform certain tasks on behalf of another actor or group of actors. It is by no means defined by that designated entity's expression (or lack thereof) of autonomy and authority. Therefore, once an IO accepts to perform certain tasks on behalf of member states, it becomes an agent regardless of whether or not it is controlled by the member states in its decision-making processes.

As Pollack (2007) explains, the assumption by such critics that the agent in a principal-agent relationship is always controlled by the principal is an error by critics who have failed to comprehend the principal-agent approach and what it represents. Pollack explains that principal-agent approach merely gives us the appropriate concepts that make analysis of the sources and extent of the autonomy and influence that agents have easier. Therefore, assuming that from a principal-agent approach all IOs are always controlled by their most powerful member states is misrepresentation as the level of member state control and IO autonomy differs from case to case and from time to time. In other words, it is contextual.

This aspect brings to the fore another issue of concern for this paper which is the assumption that all IOs/ROs must have the same policy autonomy and authority over member states as the EU for them to be regarded as effective. This is a benchmark that seems to have been applied by most critics of SADC's inconsistent approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe. These critics appear to have ignored the fact that SADC is different from the EU and thus the autonomy and authority that SADC has over member states differs from that of the EU.

Explaining SADC Inconsistency from A Principal-Agent Perspective

It is worth noting that the autonomy and authority that an IO/RO has can differ from one member state to the next. In other words, an agent can have a different type of relationship with various states that are part of its collective principal. This is something that Sarooshi (2005) attests to by postulating that it is quite possible for a RO to have different relationships with different member states. Bradley and Kelley (2008) further buttress this point by arguing that different states can pay different sovereignty costs when they delegate authority to the same IO/RO.

As such, it would be erroneous to expect a RO such as SADC to be consistent in its approach to similar or almost similar cases in different countries. The RO's approach to crises in a member state is likely to be determined more by the type of relationship between SADC and that

specific member state. This perhaps explains the inconsistency in SADC's approach to Zimbabwe relative to Madagascar, DRC and Lesotho. This inconsistency could be a result of the disproportionate principal-agent power relations that SADC has with each of these four member states in question. Why this proposition has not been proven or disproven is due to the use of an inappropriate theoretical/conceptual framework.

Noteworthy is the fact that, the principal-agent theory provides a framework for interrogating how principals can maintain control over their agents ultimately shaping the decisions of these agents. Indeed, member states can have the ability to exert direct and in-direct control over ROs in a principal-agent relationship (Sarooshi, 2005). According to Sarooshi (2005), states engaged in a principal-agent relationship with an IO may seek to make amendments to the terms of a treaty as a means of curbing any actions by the organisation that may infringe upon the interests of the state(s). On the issue of the SADC Tribunal, a regional court that made a ruling that was unfavourable to the Zimbabwe government, Zimbabwe lobbied for amendments to both the SADC Treaty and the Protocol of the Tribunal (Nathan, 2013). These amendments effectively limited the jurisdiction of the Tribunal barring it from hearing cases where individuals can take their state to court (Nathan, 2013). In doing so, Zimbabwe and other member states controlled SADC decision-making effectively shaping SADC's non-interference/non-intervention approach to Zimbabwe.

States also have available to them the option of withdrawing from a treaty that delegates or confers powers upon an IO. Zimbabwe took this route when it formally withdrew from the Commonwealth in 2003. The threat of withdrawal from SADC is a strategy that Robert Mugabe often used to influence SADC decisions on Zimbabwe (Nathan, 2012). Notwithstanding the fact that SADC's non-confrontational approach to Zimbabwe was likely shaped by the structure of the RO in a principal-agent framework, this issue has hardly been discussed in previous studies. Hence, the need for a framework that allows for the interrogation of how these principal-agent power dynamics shaped SADC's approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe.

Principal-Agent Theory: A Befitting Framework for Explaining SADC's Approach to Zimbabwe

The principal-agent approach provides arguably the most appropriate framework for exploring how the power dynamics emerging from the principal-agent relationship between member states and SADC shaped the RO's approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe. As highlighted by Kassim and Mennon (2003), the principal-agent theory is probably the most appropriate framework for understanding the relationship between IOs and sovereignty conscious states such as SADC member states. Similarly, Tierney (2008) posits that there are "clear benefits to studying international delegation and formal institutions within a principal-agent framework, and there are some underappreciated costs when attempting to incorporate soft law, informal rules, and norms into social science explanations" (p. 286).

Tierney (2008) further explains that focusing on informal rules and norms in the study of IO processes is problematic since informal rules and norms are difficult to identify. This appears to have been the case in SADC crisis management where distinguishing exactly what counts as a norm has been an arduous task due to the RO's inconsistent approaches to crisis management (Nsibirwa & Mhodi, 2017). Therefore, if analysts cannot agree on what counts as norms in the first place, it would be difficult to expect them to agree on whether these so called norms can influence and shape behaviour in an international institution. It thus, becomes prudent to concentrate on clearly specified formal rules such as official treaties and agreements when analysing the key dynamics shaping and/or constraining IO behaviour. This is something that a normative framework may not adequately address but a principal-agent framework may be able to.

Moreover, by not focusing on norms and other informal rules, the principal-agent by no means suggests that norms are of no significance in IO processes or do not shape IO behaviour or the behaviour of member states. Norms are indeed important and IOs as well as their member states have behaved in certain ways as a response to global norms or third parties who are not necessarily their principals (Tierney, 2008). However, in most cases such change in behaviour is 'implied' to have been caused by a response to a norm.

Importantly, there is very little if any empirical evidence to support this notion that norms were the cause of change or lack thereof in behaviour. As

a result, analysts try to fit IO or member state behaviour into a certain normative framework that is implied which raises validity and reliability doubts. However, this is not necessarily the case with the principal-agent framework which relies on specified formal rather than implied rules. Unlike the normative framework which currently dominates previous studies on SADC's approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe, the principal-agent framework draws empirical extrapolations of how specified formal rules shape and/or constrain SADC and Member States' behaviour.

In recent years, principal-agent models have been able to successfully account for various behaviour and outcomes in domestic politics particularly in American political science. Despite this success and the apparent similarities between domestic and international politics, the principal-agent model has hardly been applied to international politics (Tierney, 2008). Why scholars have shied away from this framework is one big mystery. This is especially true for ROs such as SADC where there is little if any evidence of behaviour or outcomes being shaped by external influences such as global norms or external powers. These are ROs where member states literally call all the shots. Moreover, Tierney (2008) posits that "scholars should ensure that their theoretical models fit the empirical questions and political domains they seek to explain." (p. 285). As such, behaviour and outcomes of SADC are best studied from a principal-agent perspective which is more reflective of the dynamics in SADC than the normative framework.

Conclusion

This paper contends that the power dynamics emerging from the principal-agent relationship between member states (principals) and SADC (agent) is the key factor shaping SADC's approach to crisis management in Zimbabwe and beyond. These principal-agent power dynamics enable member states to control SADC decision-making. This is particularly true for those member states that comprise the centre of power in SADC such as South Africa and Zimbabwe. The principal-agent relationship where SADC is an agent with limited delegated authority from the principals appears to constrain SADC's room of manoeuvre when deciding on issues concerning Zimbabwe.

Despite offering readymade and appropriate concepts to understand the relationship between IOs and member states, the principal-agent framework

has scarcely been applied in the study of the relationship between SADC and its member states especially the relatively influential member states such as Zimbabwe. As highlighted in previous sections, most studies have opted for a normative conceptual framework that depicts SADC as being an autonomous body with equal authority over member states. These previous studies have thus been highly critical of SADC's non-confrontational stance towards the Zimbabwe crisis without necessarily paying attention to the power dynamics between SADC and Zimbabwe and their influence on SADC decision-making (Moyo, 2013)

The distribution of power in the principal-agent relationship between Member States and SADC is according to this paper the key reason behind SADC's non-confrontational approach to Zimbabwe (Chitsove, 2018). Thus, any criticism of SADC's stance on Zimbabwe should by necessity, be based on the contextual realities in SADC and Zimbabwe. These contextual realities include the power distribution or power relationship between SADC and its member states. This paper posits that the principal-agent power dynamics constrain SADC when deciding on issues concerning Zimbabwe. Moreover, the paper presupposes that these principal-agent power dynamics also enable Zimbabwe a key principal and influential member state to directly and indirectly control SADC decisions through a variety of mechanisms that range from persuasion to threats.

Given the fact that the relationship between member states and SADC is typically principal-agent in orientation, the principal-agent theory appears to be the appropriate framework for understanding SADC behaviour. In this relationship, the principals delegate authority to an agent but also equally seek to control the agent to ensure that they do not threaten or injure their (member states') interests. The agent (SADC) on the other hand, seems to be under substantial internal and external pressure to exercise greater autonomy and authority over the principals. This sets the two (SADC and Member States) on a collision course.

What is quite apparent from the foregoing discussion is that no matter which lens one decides to adopt in the study of IOs/ROs, it is difficult to ignore the fact that IOs are structurally instruments of their member states (Verbeek, 2001). Therefore, the principal-agent framework provides the perhaps the best theoretical lens to account for SADC behaviour and outcomes.

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