

CALL FOR PAPERS

South African Association of Political Studies (SAAPS) 15th Biennial Conference

CONFERENCE THEME:

RETHINKING POLITICS IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Venue: Virtual Conference hosted by Rhodes University

Dates: 26–28 August 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused all kinds of economic, social and political upheaval. Economically, there are reports that we may be in the worst global recession since the time of the Great Depression. Socially, the ways in which we interact at workplaces, educational institutions, religious and social gatherings have all been fundamentally altered. Politically, governments have introduced lockdowns and other restrictions to freedoms that many had come to take for granted, but have also cooperated to prevent the further spread of the virus. As scholars of political and international studies, how do we respond to this rapidly changing world?

While the most obvious current crisis relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, prior to its outbreak there were other kinds of crises placing our political systems under strain. In South Africa, the notion of state capture has been the subject of much political discussion. A key question is whether President Cyril Ramaphosa's government will be able to secure a less corrupt way forward and to improve the efficiency of the South African state. Concerns about the state are not particular to South Africa. The change of power in Zimbabwe from Robert Mugabe to Emmerson Mnangagwa has provoked questions about the limits of democratic transformation of the state following entrenched militarisation of institutions of governance. The end of Omar-al Bashir's thirty year rule in Sudan and the violence that has characterised the transition from his rule, invites questions about the extent to which violence characterises the state-making project in Africa. How should we understand the role of the state in the 21st century? How has it changed and what are its prospects?

Faith in the idea of democracy, and in particular liberal democracy seems fractured at present. Freedom House reports that respect for civil rights and political freedom has been in decline for more than a decade. How are we to understand what seems like a crisis of democracy? What is at the root of the rise of right-wing populism in the West and Latin America? What is the extent of populism in Africa? There is plenty of evidence of that shadowy social media actors and big data companies have influenced elections. What has been the influence of social media on politics and

democratic citizenship? How are these mediums transforming raced, gendered and classed experiences of citizenship?

The decline of the liberal international order is a long-standing topic of discussion among international relations scholars. The growing strength of China, the rise of populism, Brexit, the presidency of Donald Trump are all factors that suggest that the end of the liberal order is imminent. Are we indeed nearing the end of the liberal order? What might arise in its place? What does the decline of the West and the rise of the 'rest', as Fareed Zakaria calls it, portend for international relations? Is greater regional integration a likely outcome of a fading liberal order and if so what are the implications for free trade, human rights, peacekeeping, etc? Moreover, what does a more decentred world portend for problems that need global solutions? Might Africa play a more influential role in a post-Western world? Is the historic signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Person in Africa signalling a new era for African integration and Pan-Africanism?

We welcome papers related to the above themes and questions as well as papers in other areas of political studies and international relations.

FORMAT

The 2021 SAAPS conference will be held online – attendees can join us from wherever they are, although we will organise events in line with the South African time zone. More details will be shared on registration.

SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACTS AND PANEL PROPOSALS

Abstracts and panel proposals should be emailed to saapsconference@ru.ac.za by **16 April 2021**. Please include:

- Title of paper
- Name(s) of author(s)
- Affiliation(s)
- Email address(es)
- 200–300 word abstract

Proposals for panels, workshops or other activities can also be sent to saapsconference@ru.ac.za by **16 April 2021**. We are very open to ideas for various kinds of activities to be included on the programme. Please include all the relevant details and indicate a contact person and contact email address. Notifications of acceptance of abstracts and panels/workshops will go out by the end of May 2021.

If you submitted an abstract or panel proposal last year and would like us to consider that submission for this conference, please indicate this by email and we will gladly do so.

REGISTRATION

Registration will be available from June 2021. Details about the registration process and fees will be provided on acceptance of abstracts.

QUERIES

All queries can be directed to the conference email address (saapsconference@ru.ac.za).

ORGANISERS

The local organising committee (LOC) consists of Sally Matthews, Mandisi Majavu, Eduard Jordaan and Bongani Nyoka, all from Rhodes University. The broader organising committee also includes Valery Ferim (University of Fort Hare), Chris Allsobrook (University of Fort Hare) and Giovanni Poggi (Nelson Mandela University).