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The politics and governance of  
basic education:

**A tale of two South African provinces**

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# The politics and governance of basic education:

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### Abstract

This paper synthesises the findings of research on the politics and governance in South Africa, undertaken at multiple levels, and using multiple methods. The research explored two core questions: how politics and background institutions influence educational bureaucracies; and the relative merits of hierarchical and horizontal governance. South Africa's institutional arrangements provide a 'natural experiment' for analysing these questions. While policymaking, the regulatory framework and resourcing are uniform nationally, responsibility for implementation is delegated to the country's nine provinces, which differ substantially from one another, both politically and institutionally. The Western Cape emerges as a strong performer relative to other South African provinces. However, econometric analysis confirms that, notwithstanding strong bureaucracy and abundant resources, its outcomes were below those achieved in Kenya.

The institutional arrangements also assign substantial responsibilities 'horizontally' to school governing bodies, where parents are in the majority. School-level case studies detail how in the Western Cape a combination of strong bureaucracy and weak horizontal governance can result in unstable patterns of internal governance, and sometimes a low-level equilibrium of mediocrity. In the Eastern Cape, pro-active engagement on the part of communities and parents sometimes serves as a partial institutional substitute – supporting school-level performance even where the broader governance environment is dysfunctional.

**Keywords:** South Africa, education, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, institutions

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## I: Introduction

The world over, economic inclusion has risen to the top of the development discourse. A well-performing education system is central to achieving inclusive development – but the challenge of improving educational outcomes has proven to be unexpectedly difficult. The vast majority of countries around the world met the 2000 Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015; as of 2015, 91 percent of children in the relevant age cohort in developing countries were enrolled in primary schools, up from 83 percent in 2000. But 2008 results from the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) found that more than half of developing-country students who took the test scored below the 'low' threshold benchmark set for the test. In South Africa, universal enrolment of the relevant age cohort in primary education had already been achieved by the early 1990s. The secondary school enrolment rate rose from 51 percent in 1985 to 91 percent by 2007. However, a consequence of South Africa's apartheid legacy was that only a very small minority of the country's students have had access to a quality education. Overall, South African students scored lowest among 26 low-middle and middle-income countries for which Pritchett (2013) reports comparable data from international standardised tests.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons for the difficulties in improving educational outcomes are many. They include the difficult socio-economic context in which many children live; the lack of resources to provide teachers, facilities or schoolbooks; and shortfalls in teacher training. But there is also a more general underlying issue, namely the extent to which the human, financial and physical resources available for educating children are used effectively.

This leads to a consideration of governance, the focus of the research project synthesised here. The research is part of the large-scale, multi-country and multi-sector *Effective States and Inclusive Development*

(ESID) programme, funded by DFID and anchored at The University of Manchester. An overarching aim of the ESID programme is to understand better the interactions between politics, institutions and the quality of public service provision. The programme includes a multi-country effort (also including, along with South Africa, Bangladesh, Ghana, Rwanda and Uganda) to explore the political and institutional underpinnings of the provision of basic education. The aims of these country analyses are both to understand better some of the governance-related constraints to improving the effectiveness of education service provision – and, on the basis of that understanding, to suggest how the constraints might more effectively be addressed.

Debates on how education systems should be governed have been contentious. Schools can come in many forms: public schools; private schools; religious schools; secular schools; and hybrids that combine the above: charter schools; not-for-profit schools run by private foundations; voucher-financed schools. The ESID South Africa research programme focused on public schools – that is, schools financed by the public sector, and operated under public auspices. In most countries, public schools remain the predominant mode for the provision of education, including in South Africa where, as of 2015, close to 95 percent of schoolchildren were in public schools.

The research was undertaken at multiple levels, and used multiple methods. Political and organisational analyses were conducted at national level by Cameron and Naidoo (2016); at provincial level in the Western Cape by Cameron and Levy (2016), and in the Eastern Cape by Kota, Hendricks, Matambo and Naidoo (2016); research also is underway district levels. Wills, Shepherd and Koze (2016) used econometric techniques to explore the relationship between bureaucratic capability and educational outcomes, comparatively assessing the performance of the Western Cape relative to other South African provinces, and other African countries. Hoadley, Levy, Shumane and Wilburn (2016) and Shumane and Levy (2016) used 'small-n' case study methodology to drill down into school-level patterns of governance. The multi-level and multi-method findings were mutually reinforcing, adding to the overall robustness of the results.

<sup>1</sup> For detailed global data, see Pritchett (2013) pp. 15-18; 39-47. The South African data are from RSA, Dept of Education, *Trends in Education Macro Indicators Report, 2009*. See also <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml>

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Even as each individual study is self-contained, the institutional arrangements put in place in the 1990s (in the immediate aftermath of apartheid) to govern South Africa's education system make it an unusually attractive locale for a comparative analysis that addresses some core questions in the education discourse:

- While responsibility for policymaking, for setting the overall regulatory framework and for resourcing the system was retained at the national level, responsibility for implementation was delegated to the country's nine provinces, which differed substantially from one another, both politically and institutionally. This makes for a natural experiment, where (with policy, regulation and financing automatically controlled for) the focus can be on the impact of politics and institutions on the operation of the hierarchical provincial<sup>2</sup> education bureaucracies responsible for policy implementation.
- The institutional arrangements assigned substantial school-level responsibilities (including the recruitment of the school principal and senior teachers) to school governing bodies (SGBs), in which parents are required to be in the majority. This provides an excellent opportunity for exploring the interactions between education hierarchies, and more 'horizontal' school-level governance arrangements – with the focus here on lower-income communities with limited prior experience in school-level governance.

Our comparative analysis focuses on the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, two provinces where the differences in politics and institutions are especially stark. The individual provincial-level and school-level papers drill into the specifics, and the interested reader should refer to them for in-depth empirical detail and discussion of methodology. The present paper focuses comparatively on how the political differences between the provinces translate into divergent patterns of bureaucratic operation, school-level governance and educational outcomes – and also how

the policy reform options for improving vary across these divergent contexts.<sup>3</sup>

The paper proceeds as follows. Section II lays out the research questions and analytical framework. Sections III and IV review the research findings as to the relation between politics and the performance of the education bureaucracy in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces. Section V reports on the results of an in-depth econometric effort to identify (controlling for other effects) the influence of bureaucratic capability on educational outcomes. Section VI summarises the results of school-level case studies conducted in the two provinces. Section VII summarises and suggests some possible implications of the findings for policy.

## II: Research questions and analytical framework

### The issues

In discussion of public school systems, a major controversy worldwide concerns the appropriate balance between hierarchical (top-down, bureaucratic) governance, and more 'horizontal' approaches, which delegate resources and responsibility closer to the schools themselves. Certainly, a better performing public hierarchy is more desirable than a weakly performing one: The allocation of scarce public funds across the system, the assignment of personnel to the places where they are most needed, building the capabilities of the teachers and other employees who work within the system, monitoring and managing the results achieved by staff, the construction and management of infrastructure, and the provision of furniture, textbooks and other teaching materials

<sup>2</sup> In South Africa's constitutional framework, local governments play no role in the provision of basic education.

<sup>3</sup> South African scholars increasingly have focused on governance as a key constraint to improving educational outcomes; Gustafsson and Taylor (2016); Spaul (2016); and van der Berg, Spaul, Wills, Gustafsson and Kotze (2016) are three recent examples. However, this literature is generally quantitative, and conflates governance with bureaucratic capacity and accountability. The research described here aimed to push the frontier forwards by drilling down into the micro details of both hierarchical/bureaucratic and horizontal governance, and also by exploring some interactions between politics and governance.

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are quintessentially bureaucratic tasks. A school system will surely work better when they are done well than when they are done badly. But there are two fundamental reasons why a narrow focus on improving hierarchical public administration systems might be too limited.

A first limitation of framing the challenges of improving public performance in narrowly managerial terms is that it ignores politics. Since the 1980s, a managerialist focus has been pervasive, in education and elsewhere, under the rubric of 'New Public Management'. But, as World Bank (2004), Levy (2014) and Yanguas (2016) explore in depth, this managerial framing ignores the ways in which bureaucracies are embedded in politics.<sup>4</sup> Political principals set the goals which bureaucracies should pursue – and politicians are more successful in some settings than in others in reconciling their multiple competing interests and objectives in ways that provide clarity of purpose to public officials. Political principals (plus other arms-length check and balance institutions) are charged with the task of overseeing bureaucracies, and holding them accountable for performance – and, again, there is substantial variation across settings in the extent to which they take on this responsibility or, conversely, try and use public resources and organisations for political patronage or even private purposes.

Over the past three decades, one response in many countries to the political challenges associated with setting clear goals, managing complex public organisations, monitoring effectively, and resisting patronage and other political pressures has been to try and shift responsibility for delivering (public) education from national to subnational and school levels.<sup>5</sup> As Grindle (2004) details for Latin America, in many countries the reform of historically centralised systems has been difficult to achieve politically.

In contrast to Latin America, the 1996 South Africa Schools Act (promulgated two years after the advent of democracy, at a moment of unusual political cohesion) located very substantial responsibility for delivering basic education at the provincial level (with policymaking and financing continuing to be national-level responsibilities). As noted, this combination of strong delegation to provincial levels, and large differences in provincial-level political dynamics – including between the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, the two provinces that are the focus of the present effort -- creates an ideal opportunity for exploring comparatively the influence of politics on bureaucratic performance.

A second reason why a narrow focus on hierarchical public administration systems is too limited is that some tasks are intrinsically better suited to top-down, hierarchical bureaucratic management than others; for the latter set of tasks, a case can be made for adopting more horizontal approaches to governance. Wilson (1989) and Israel (1987) focus principally on the content of the tasks themselves, highlighting how, for some tasks, differentiated, adaptive behaviour is necessary to achieve results. The emphasis of other authors is more on some inherent challenges of governing far-flung bureaucracies – motivating front-line employees, engaging local stakeholders, and monitoring effectively what actually happens at local levels. Among education researchers, Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011) focus largely on evidence as to whether school-based-management and related other reforms improve accountability for performance. Pritchett (2013) takes a broader view, with a detailed depiction of how a networked education ecosystem might provide an improved platform for performance.

The exploration of horizontal governance in the present study focuses largely on the school level. Horizontal governance arrangements might be hypothesised to improve governance and performance at the school level through three distinct channels:

- By improving motivation – with the 'zone of autonomy' at the service provision front-line hypothesised to provide the opportunity for internal leaders to motivate their teams effectively, including by fostering an environment of continuing learning

4 In its influential contribution, the World Bank's (2004) *World Development Report* framed the relationship between politics and bureaucracy as a 'long route' of accountability – a hierarchical chain linking citizens (as principals) to politicians, politicians (as principals) to policymakers, and policymakers (as principals) to the bureaucracy. Key additional contributions include Hood (1991), Hughes (2003) and Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011).

5 For detailed reviews, see McGinn and Welsh (1999); also Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011).

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on the part of staff as well as students.<sup>6</sup> This is a classic argument for improving the effectiveness of schools, as well as other ‘street-level’ bureaucracies which operate at a distance from organisational hierarchies (Wilson, 1989; Lipsky, 2010).

- By empowering developmentally-oriented local stakeholders (including professionally committed teaching staff) to hold all those involved in the school accountable for making their best effort – with a necessary condition for this to be effective being that these ‘developmentally-oriented’ stakeholders indeed have sufficient influence to be able to ‘trump’ predatory actors seeking to capture school-level resources (teaching and administrative positions; contracts; other discretionary resources) for private purposes (Levy, 2014).
- By creating scope for the utilisation of local-level information of a kind to which higher-level hierarchical authorities lack access – and thereby enhancing processes for the selection of good quality staff and leaders, and the efficacy of efforts to hold staff and leaders accountable for their performance. [Sah and Stiglitz (1986), North (1990), and Aghion and Tirole (1997) explore the informational dimensions of organisational governance and decentralisation in general terms.] Note that these hypothesised informational benefits only become relevant if the ‘trumping’ condition laid out above is met.

The Western Cape and Eastern Cape studies provide an opportunity for exploring across two divergent political and institutional settings how these hypothesised advantages of horizontal governance play out in practice.

### Analytical framework

The research takes as its point of departure the analytical framework developed collectively by the core ESID research team<sup>7</sup> to explore the interactions between political settlements, public bureaucracies, and the quality of public service provision. Political settlements are defined in terms of three broad variables:

- The extent of elite cohesion. Where elite cohesion is high, institutional arrangements can be organised around hierarchical, vertical relationships between principals and agents. Where elite cohesion is low, horizontal principal-principal (peer-to-peer) negotiated arrangements prevail.
- The institutional legacy (specifically the ‘strength’ of inherited institutional arrangements) – that is, whether rulemaking, monitoring and enforcement arrangements exist that are capable of supporting ‘impersonal’ rules of the game (that is, rules which apply and are enforced equally among all who have standing) or whether agreements are ‘personalised’ (that is, apply only to specific individuals and groups).
- The ways in which non-elites are incorporated into the political settlement – the balance in the political settlement between inclusion and repression, and between broad-based, ‘programmatic’ service provision versus clientelistic modes of incorporation.

One major category of political settlement comprises ‘dominant’ settlements with high levels of elite cohesion and concentrated authority – which can be used for either developmental or predatory purposes. A second comprises competitive settlements, where elite cohesion is relatively low, and contestation is anchored in multi-party elections – but with a major distinction between those settings where democratic processes are underpinned by strong, impersonal institutions and programmatic service provision, and those where the background institutions are more personalised and clientelism more central.

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<sup>6</sup> But note that instructional issues, concerned with curriculum and pedagogy (including whether and how a curriculum might be adapted to fit local, school-level conditions) fall entirely outside the scope of the present effort.

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<sup>7</sup> Key contributors and inputs include: Hickey and Sen (2016); Levy and Kelsall (2016); Levy and Walton (2013).

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The framework can be applied at multiple levels – with each level functioning within a context provided by the more overarching level within which it is embedded. As Levy and Walton (2013) explore, the approach lends itself to an exploration of ‘good fit’. ‘Good fit’, they hypothesise, can be framed in terms of the alignment between the configurations of the variables which prevail at a higher level, and the arrangements which prevail at levels beneath that:

- Where the higher- and lower-level configurations are aligned, we can say we have a ‘good fit’ – and thus potentially the best feasible outcome.
- Where they are misaligned, we can say we have a ‘poor fit’ – there exists the possibility of improving the development outcome by realigning lower-level institutional arrangements to align better with the prevailing political settlement.

This approach to analysing ‘good fit’ can be applied directly to the central question explored in this paper: what should be the appropriate balance between hierarchical and horizontal arrangements in the governance of education? ‘It depends’ is, of course, the right answer. But on what? A ‘good fit’ perspective directs attention to the interaction between the character of political settlements, on the one hand, and the operation of bureaucracies, on the other.

As was detailed by Max Weber (1922), a well-functioning bureaucracy operates on the basis of hierarchy – it comprises a set of nested principal-agent relationships, with political control at the apex of the hierarchy. Its effective operation thus requires either relatively high top-down cohesion among elites (via authoritarian rule, for example) or patterns of electoral inter-elite contestation, in which the losers are willing to respect the outcome and the winners, upon assuming the reins of political power, are capable of operating hierarchically. Note the converse hypothesis: in settings where the political conditions are not supportive of bureaucratic functioning, then alternative, non-hierarchical institutional arrangements – institutional substitutes – may be better suited to improving educational outcomes.

**Figure 1: Governance of South African education – a multi-level framework**

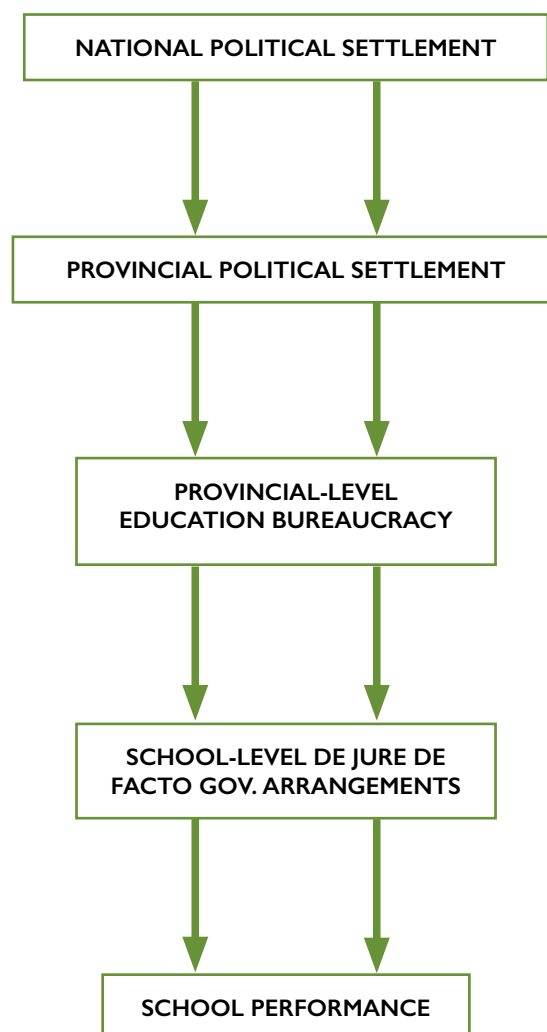


Figure 1 illustrates, using the example of South African basic education. At the peak level is the country’s national political settlement. The national-level is not, however, the focus of the present paper.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the focus is on the subnational levels: the provincial-level political settlements; the ways in which the provincial-level settlements affect the operation of provincial education bureaucracies – and how all of this cascades down to the school level, and thence to educational outcomes.

8 Levy, Hirsch and Woolard (2015) use the ESID framework to evaluate South Africa’s political settlement. Cameron and Naidoo (2016) explore the interaction between South Africa’s national settlement and education policymaking.

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Figure 2 lays out the heuristic framework used throughout the research project for characterising governance arrangements at different levels. Each of the four cells in the figure comprises a distinctive combination of high versus low elite cohesion, and personalised versus impersonal institutions – four distinct ‘ideal type’ governance platforms, each involving distinctive incentives, distinctive constraints and risks, and distinctive frontier challenges:

- The top right cell (i) delineates the classic impersonal and hierarchical mode of ‘Weberian’ bureaucratic organisation delineated by Max Weber.
- The top left cell (ii) delineates a mode of organisation which is also hierarchical, and thus governed via nested principal-agent relationships, but is one where compliance on the part of agents follows from the personalised authority of the leadership, rather than a system of rules.
- The bottom right cell (iii) comprises a pattern where multiple stakeholders, each with significant independent authority, agree on how they will work together, and codify these agreements in formal, enforceable rules.
- In the bottom left cell (iv), neither formal rules nor a well-defined hierarchy of authority is in place. Stakeholders may or may not reach agreement as to whether and how to co-operate. Insofar as they do, such agreements are dependent on the shared understandings of the specific parties involved.

In practice, as is explored in detail in the study, any specific governance arrangement is likely to be a hybrid combination of the four ideal types defined by the cells, with the relative weight varying from setting to setting. How, at each level, the specific governance arrangements emerge out of their (higher-level) contexts, and how they are related to education sector performance, comprise the central research questions explored in this paper.

The institutional diversity suggested by Figure 2 can be an asset rather than an obstacle to improving educational outcomes, insofar as bureaucracies work better in some settings than in others (and, irrespective of setting, do some things better than others) -- with other arrangements potentially adding value as substitutes (and complements) to bureaucracy. But this is getting ahead of the discussion. Before getting to substitutes and complements, we need first to describe and explain variations in bureaucratic quality. For this purpose, comparative analysis of the performance of the education bureaucracies of South Africa’s Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces provides an ideal opportunity.

As Table 1 summarises, using data from periodic Management Performance Assessment Tests (MPATs) conducted by South Africa’s presidency, as of 2012-13 the Western Cape education bureaucracy was rated as the best managed of the country’s nine provinces (Gauteng rated second). The Eastern Cape rated the worst (the Northern Cape rated second worst). Sections III and IV will drill down into what lies behind these results.

**Figure 2: Patterns of governance of public organisations**

<b>Extent of elite cohesion</b>	High: hierarchical	(ii)	(i)
	Low: negotiated	(iv)	(iii)
		Personalised	Impersonal
		<b>Inherited institutional legacy</b>	



**Table I. MPAT assessments of South Africa's Education Departments**

(selected provinces 2012/13; distribution of scores, by level for assessed key performance areas)<sup>9</sup>

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Western Cape	0	21	34	45
Gauteng	14	21	31	34
National average, all provinces	24	31	31	15
Northern Cape	28	41	28	3
Eastern Cape	59	17	17	7

Source: *The presidency, 2013*.

<sup>9</sup> For each key performance area, the MPAT rates performance according to four levels: Level 1 – non-compliance with legal/regulatory requirements; Level 2 – partial compliance with legal/regulatory requirements; Level 3 – full compliance with legal/regulatory requirements; Level 4 – full compliance, and doing this smartly.

### III: Two contrasting political settlements<sup>10</sup>

The Western Cape and the Eastern Cape differed starkly from one another vis-à-vis the core ESID political settlement variables – the inherited institutional legacies, and the patterns of political contestation, including both contestation between elites and the ways in which non-elites are incorporated into the political settlement.

#### Inherited institutional legacies

Consider first the inherited institutional legacies. South Africa's 1994<sup>11</sup> democratic settlement established a sub-national sphere of government, with nine provinces. Formally, all the provinces took on identical institutional arrangements, legislated nationally. But in practice there was very wide variation – with the variation rooted in the bewilderingly broad array of distinctive institutional arrangements created by the pre-1994 apartheid regime, along both ethnic

categories and geographic locales. The institutional inheritances that resulted were starkly different in the Eastern and Western Cape.

In the Eastern Cape, the challenge of integrating former Bantustans was central to the task of building provincial governance arrangements. Two-thirds of the Eastern Cape's total 2015 population of 6.9 million reside in areas which formerly had been part of either the Transkei or Ciskei bantustans. Both the Transkei and Ciskei had nominally been independent (recognised as such only by the apartheid South African government); both had been organised around personalised, patronage interests.<sup>12</sup> Integrating these two distinct polities and bureaucracies – plus the eastern rump of the former Cape Provincial Administration (whose head office had been located in Cape Town in the Western Cape) – was an institutional challenge of the highest order, as will become starkly evident later in this section.

The Western Cape, by contrast, did not have to contend with any legacy Bantustan bureaucracies. To be sure, in the Western Cape, as elsewhere, the apartheid bureaucracy was organised along racial lines. Here, though, the relevant institutional innovation

<sup>10</sup> This section builds on the political economy analyses of Cameron and Levy (2016) for the Western Cape, and Kota, Hendricks, Matombo and Naidoo (2016) for the Eastern Cape.

<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking, South Africa's settlement had three landmark milestones: agreement on an interim constitution in 1993; the first democratic election in 1994; and promulgation of a 'final' constitution through the elected parliament in 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Streek and Wickstead (1981)

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was not a quasi-independent Bantustan, but a parallel 'parliament' and bureaucracy, the ('coloured') House of Representatives (HoR).

The 'white' civil service and the HoR bureaucracy together were responsible for the provision of services (including education services) to the large majority of the Western Cape population. There have been a number of studies of the organisational culture of the white public service which suggested that the South African public service was steeped in traditional public administration, albeit with an apartheid bent. This culture has been described as bureaucratic, hierarchical and unresponsive, aimed more at controlling rather than developing the citizens of the country (Schwella, 2000, McLennan and Fitzgerald, 2002; Fitzgerald, McLennan and Munslow 1997). But, for the most part, within the universe of its staff catchment (predominantly white Afrikaners) it operated on impersonal and hierarchical (that is 'Weberian') lines.

By and large, the HoR bureaucracy and its predecessor, the Department of Coloured Affairs, adopted the rule-bound compliance culture of South Africa's public service. It formally was part of the service; some senior managers in the HoR bureaucracy (including its Department of Education and Culture) had transferred from the service's 'white' core. There was also a common language (Afrikaans) and culture among white and 'coloured' staff. While patronage was part of the way in which the HoR operated, it was on the margins of what might be termed 'good enough Weberianism' (Cameron, 1991). In sum, relative to other provinces in the country, the Western Cape's legacy was of a disproportionately impersonal bureaucracy.

### Extent of elite cohesion

Across most of South Africa, electoral politics since 1994 has been dominated by the African National Congress (ANC), which enjoyed large electoral majorities. The Eastern Cape conforms to this pattern. In 1994, the ANC won 84 percent of the vote in the province; this has declined subsequently, but as of 2015 had not fallen below 70 percent. But the province also highlights how electoral dominance is not the same thing as elite cohesion. Already by the latter 1990s it

was evident that the Eastern Cape ANC comprised an overall umbrella, under which inter-elite conflict was endemic.

Part of the problem lay in the very large number of ANC members (and leaders) of convenience, who joined the party in the wake of the dissolution of the Transkei and Ciskei bantustans, and their political structures. Additionally, however, as Kota, Hendricks, Matambo and Naidoo (2016) detail, unfolding political conflicts within the province's political leadership had roots that went beyond the bantustan legacy:

- In the decision as to who would be the province's first premier, ANC regional interests in each of the former Eastern Cape, Border and Transkei regions fervently promoted their status as the birthplace of the liberation movement; the successful candidate, Raymond Mhlaba, was a compromise choice, satisfying none.
- Upon becoming national president in 1999, Thabo Mbeki insisted that the then provincial premier (Makhenkesi Stofile, successor to Mhlaba) purge his cabinet of 'ultra-leftists'. Stofile subsequently became embroiled in numerous corruption-related controversies.
- In 2004 (following a new round of elections), Stofile was replaced by an Mbeki loyalist, Nosimo Balindlela, who quickly replaced remaining Stofile supporters in both the provincial cabinet and the bureaucracy – and was accused by rivals of using an anti-corruption inquiry to discredit earlier appointments.
- Balindlela was, in turn, replaced by a compromise premier (Mbulelo Sogoni) in 2007, immediately following Thabo Mbeki's loss of control of the ANC and his (forced) resignation – with Sogoni replaced in turn in 2009 by a Jacob Zuma loyalist (and strong unionist), Noxolo Kiviet, and Kiviet succeeded in 2014 by Phumulo Masualle.

As Section IV will detail, in practice it was the reality of fragmentation – rather than the seeming dominance of the ANC – which shaped the operation of the Eastern Cape bureaucracy, both in general and vis-à-vis education.

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In the Western Cape, paralleling the distinctiveness of its institutional legacy, electoral politics has been characterised by robust inter-party political competition. As Table 2 details, over the past two decades there have been seven different political parties/coalitions controlling the province. In 1994, the Western Cape was the only province where there was no change in political power. Between 1999 and 2009, power alternated among a variety of coalitions, with sole leadership by the ANC between 2005 and 2009. In recent years, the Western Cape vote increasingly has shifted to the Democratic Alliance (DA), which in 2009 became the province's majority party, with 51.5 percent of the vote – and was re-elected in 2014 with a larger majority (59.44 percent).

**Table 2: Political control of the Western Cape provincial government:**

#### 1994-2014

New NP/African National Congress Government of Provincial Unity	1994-98
New NP	1998-99
New NP/Democratic Party Coalition	1999-2000
Democratic Alliance	2000-01
African National Congress/New NP Coalition	2001-05
African National Congress	2005-09
Democratic Alliance	2009

Underlying the Western Cape's distinctive electoral politics are distinct patterns of elite contestation, and of electoral allegiances more broadly. In most of South Africa, a clear distinction could be drawn between the (predominantly 'white') political and economic elites of the apartheid era and the black majority – with the leadership among the latter comprising principally the 'struggle' heroes of the fight against apartheid (including organised labour). In the Western Cape, too, these political lines are evident. As elsewhere in the country, the leadership elite of the Western Cape ANC has been built on allegiance to regional (and trade union) heroes of the liberation struggle. The DA's elite<sup>13</sup> comprises those in the upper tiers of business, the professions and the bureaucracy within the province. But there is an added, ethnic, dimension to the Western Cape pattern.

Ethnically, the distribution of the Western Cape's population is different from that of the rest of the country. As Table 3 shows, in 1996 over three-quarters of South Africa's population was Black/African; countrywide, the overwhelming majority of the Black/African vote consistently has gone to the ANC. But this group comprised only 21 percent of the Western Cape's 1996 population of 4 million. (As of 2011, the province's population had risen to 5.8 million, with the Black/African share comprising 33 percent.) The Western Cape majority comprised people of mixed race ('Coloureds' in the South African lexicon), for the majority of whom Afrikaans was the home language.

<sup>13</sup> Cohesion did not come naturally to the DA elite. At the dawn of democracy, there was a clear split between those with historical allegiance to the apartheid National Party, and those aligned with more liberal (but not revolutionary) 'white' opposition parties. Over subsequent decades, these two factions largely merged – and were joined by smaller, independent (non-ANC) parties, whose allegiance was generally not 'white', and who historically had been very active in the struggle against apartheid.

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**Table 3: Population distribution, by ethnic background: 1996 Census**

	Western Cape		National	
	Numbers (000s)	Percent	Numbers (000s)	Percent
<b>Black/ African</b>	827	20.9	31,128	76.7
<b>Mixed race ('Coloured')</b>	2,146	54.2	3,600	8.9
<b>Indian/Asian</b>	40	1.0	1,046	2.6
<b>White</b>	822	20.8	4,435	10.9
<b>Unspecified/other</b>	122	3.1	375	0.9

*Source: Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2006.*

In the last two decades of apartheid, there were sustained efforts by South Africa's ruling party to create institutions aimed at fostering a distinctive 'coloured' political and bureaucratic elite. These efforts were a partial failure insofar as the Western Cape was a major locus of opposition to apartheid. But they did imply that among at least part of the 'Coloured' elites, loyalty to the ANC was not necessarily unequivocal – and insofar as the ANC framed the basis for its allegiance in narrowly 'African nationalist' terms, rather than an inclusive non-racialism, there was ample scope for shifting allegiances, and thus of voting patterns.

#### **Incorporation of non-elites**

In democratic societies, the pattern of incorporation of non-elites can be located along a spectrum from, on the one hand, programmatic (i.e. based on a political party's political platform, on the presumption that it will indeed follow through and deliver on its promises), to, on the other, patronage (i.e. personalised alignment with power brokers embedded in vertical networks that reach down into local communities). As Keefer and Khemani (2005) underscore, how a specific locale locates along this spectrum depends importantly on the extent to which a broader institutional platform is in place which is capable of supporting 'impersonal' competition among political parties.

As the next section will detail, in the Western Cape the combination of electoral competition and a legacy of relatively strong impersonal institutions resulted in a progressive strengthening of the education bureaucracy, irrespective of which political party was in power. In the Eastern Cape, by contrast, there appears to have been a downward spiral – with intra-ANC politics having become progressively more personalised and fragmented, and with deepening patronage in the operation of institutions, especially including within the education bureaucracy.

#### **IV: Two contrasting education bureaucracies in action**

The divergent political settlements described in Section III translate into divergent patterns of performance of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape education bureaucracies. To be sure, as Levy and Walton (2013) detail, pockets of effectiveness can emerge even in weak bureaucracies and, conversely, parts of generally strong bureaucracies can prove resistant to improvement. Overall, though, the competitive, programmatic politics of the Western Cape was mirrored in the performance of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) -- and the personalised, patronage politics of the Eastern Cape cascaded through the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE).

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### The Western Cape – building on a relatively solid administrative foundation<sup>14</sup>

The Western Cape's post-1994 education bureaucracy was built on the foundation provided by both the formerly 'white' and the HoR education bureaucracies. Formerly 'white' schools had long been performance-oriented – a legacy (for some schools) of the British colonial inheritance, of the post-1948 'white Afrikaner' developmental mission of the National Party government, and of the increasingly high-income globalised living standards and expectations of apartheid South Africa's white citizens. As Fiske and Ladd (2004:75-76) describe, during the 1994–95 period, when the power and responsibilities of the provinces were still being established at the national level, the erstwhile provincial bureaucracy that had provided education for white students was still able to exert significant power. Subsequently, the majority of administrative expertise came from the former HoR bureaucracy.

In part for reasons explored above, prior to 1994 schools governed under the HoR system also were run largely on a professional basis. The organisational culture among teaching staff had a strong professional orientation. Chisholm (1991: 15-25) details the marriage of academic excellence and political awareness in Teachers League South Africa (TLSA) schools through 1976. Schools that were considered TLSA strongholds were known for high standards and political teachings. Older, more conservative teacher organisations which had participated in racially divided departments of education described themselves as 'professionals', rather than activists. According to interviewees, this commitment to the educational mission also was evident among significant portions of the bureaucracy.

As Table 4 illustrates, continuity in administration persisted even as (as per Table 2) political alternation accelerated. The bureaucracy largely was insulated

from the rapid turnover of the provincial-cabinet-level appointments of political heads (i.e. the provincial ministers of education). Indeed, over the past two decades, the WCED has effectively been led by three Superintendents General – Brian O'Connell, Ron Swartz, and Penny Vinjevold. This degree of stability in bureaucratic leadership has been a major asset in underpinning performance.

**Table 4: Superintendent generals:WCED 1994-2014**

F Knoetze (acting, 1994-95)
Brian O'Connell (1995-2001)
Johan Fourie (acting, 2001)
Ron Swartz (2002-09)
Brian Schreuder (acting, 2009)
Penny Vinjevold (2009-16)

Throughout the two decades of democratic government, the WCED has endeavoured to put in place results-oriented approaches to performance management. In the first 15 years, these efforts took a lead from an ongoing stream of systems-building efforts promoted by the national-level Department of Basic Education. These included a Development Appraisal System (DAS), individual performance management, Whole School Evaluations (WSE), and an 'Integrated Quality Management System' (the IQMS, which aimed to encompass all the other systems). These initiatives have often been intensive in bureaucratic processes, but light on results-based follow through. For all of the limitations of these initiatives, the Western Cape bureaucracy consistently put systems in place to implement them at provincial level.

When the DA took control of the province in 2009, it complemented these nationally-prescribed programmes with a series of more home-grown initiatives. At its centre is the Directorate of Business, Strategy and Stakeholder Management, a planning and monitoring unit strategically located in the office of the head of the

<sup>14</sup> This section summarises the detailed analysis in Cameron and Levy (2016).

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WCED, the superintendent general – and established in 2007 (i.e. predating DA rule). As of 2015, the directorate had in place a fully functional, sophisticated online tracking system, which included the following:

- An 'individual learner tracking system' – which tracks the progress and performance of individual learners throughout their time within the WCED.
- Online school improvement plans (SIPs) for each of the 1,500 schools in the systems. The SIPs incorporate in an integrated, streamlined fashion, that is accessible to each school:
  - aggregated school-level summaries of the results of the individual learner tracking exercises;
  - the results of whole school evaluations (which as of 2015 had been completed for about half the WCED's schools, with 120 additional schools evaluated each year);
  - the school-level results of standardised 'systemic' tests of learning outcomes;
  - academic performance plans, completed for each school;
  - a rolling, three-year planning cycle, incorporated into each SIP, progress in the implementation of which can be monitored systematically.
- School-level budget and staffing planning and execution tools – capable of monitoring for each school across the system whether and how budgets were being spent, and including tools for ordering supplies (notably including textbooks, where problems of availability have bedevilled schools throughout South Africa) online, and tracking whether orders have been placed in a timely manner;
- School improvement monitoring – undertaken quarterly, with a specific focus on underperforming schools; and

- District improvement plans, which track trends in performance at higher levels of system aggregation than the schools themselves

Complementing this sophisticated top-down tracking system (and consistent with the logic of 'New Public Management'), the DA also sought to add some operational flexibility. Districts (and the circuit management teams within each district) are the front-line of promoting performance, the 'eyes and ears' of the WCED; they were identified as the nodes of service delivery that would drive performance, with district directors to be given more autonomy to run their areas of jurisdiction. Additionally, the DA-led WCED intensified its efforts to assure that competent principals were selected to lead schools; worked to ensure that every child had a textbook for every subject; and managed the budget to ensure that teacher salaries did not exceed 75 percent of total available budgetary resources, thereby assuring budgetary flexibility for the system as a whole to function.

### Eastern Cape – a tale of patronage, capture and fragmentation<sup>15</sup>

As Grindle (2004) details, one of the problems of education in Latin America has been the short tenure of ministers of education. This has also been the case in the Eastern Cape. As Table 5 details, notwithstanding the fact that the ANC has been the governing party throughout, subsequent to 1994 the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) has experienced repeated leadership turnover and a general flouting of centralised authority. Between 2002 and 2011 there had been at least five provincial education ministers (MECs) in the ECDoE. The top-level post within the bureaucracy, superintendent general, has seen eight incumbents in as many years in various acting and permanent appointments since 2008.

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<sup>15</sup> This section summarises the detailed analysis in Kota, Hendricks, Matombo and Naidoo (2016).

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**Table 5: Turnover in senior positions in the ECDoE**

Period	MEC	Superintendent general
1994 to 1997	Nosimo Balindlela	(appointment date unknown) Dr Ronnie van Wyk (resigned 1997, left 1998)
1998 to 1999	Professor Shepherd Mayatula	Jonathan Godden (acting) (February/March 1998- Sept 2000)
1999/2000 to 2002	Stone Sizani	Modidima Mannya (Oct 2000-mid 2001)  Philip Qokweni (acting) (mid 2001-Feb 2003)
2002/2003	(November 2002) Nomsa Jajula	Reverend Lulamile Mbetse
2004 to 2007	Mkhangeli Matomela  Johnny Makgato (dates of appointment and resignation unclear)	Bea Hackula (acting, Jan-March 2004)  2005/2006 unclear  Nomlamli Mahanjana
2008	Mahlubandile Qwase	Nomlamli Mahanjana (ousted after union protest)
2009	Mahlubandile Qwase (redeployed to OTP)	Ron Swartz (acting; ousted after union protest); Harry Nengwekhulu
2010	Mandla Makupula (2010 till present)	Harry Nengwekhulu (ousted after union protest) (8 November 2010); Modidima Mannya
2011		Advocate Modidima Mannya (ousted in 2011 after union protest and national Cabinet-led intervention)
2012		Mathanzima Mveli (acting; secondment from national Department of Basic Education)
2013		(March) Mthunywa Ngonzo
2014/2015		(January 2014) Mthunywa Ngonzo (suspended after allegations of maladministration) (July 2015) Ray Tywakadi (acting) (November 2015) Sizakele Netshilaphala (acting)

The origins of the ECDoE in fragmented bureaucracies left it vulnerable to the transplantation of what Ngoma (2009) refers to as 'coalitional networks', marked by divergent and competing regional interests, organisational cultures, and patronage ties, which seems to have consistently defied centralised control. A variety of studies have documented the pattern:

- An empirical study of legislative oversight over the ECDoE, Obiyo (2013) found that 'political deployment' was cited by current and former members of the Eastern Cape provincial legislature's committee for education as contributing to a "lack of teeth" in performing oversight over the department. MECs and their senior officials were deployees who belonged to different subgroups of the party, with "some officials

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outrank[ing] the MECs within the ANC”, making vertical accountability difficult (Obiyo 2013: 107). Senior officials in the ECDoE were running businesses associated with the work of the department and being protected by political heads.

Lodge (2005: 747) cites the efforts of former ECDoE Superintendent-General Modidima Manny to turnaround the department in 2000, in which Manny was said to have received death threats following his suspension of ten departmental managers, including some with close political connections.

Ngoma (2009: 213) similarly recounted how turnover of MECs in the ECDoE at times “perpetuated internal battles for power and control”, prompting officials to re-assert clientelistic ties to incoming political principals that displaced more senior officials. One episode involved a deputy director-general, who, in an interview, described how he was essentially outmanoeuvred and displaced (‘expelled’) by lower-level officials who re-asserted their regional ties with a new MEC, seemingly re-igniting the coalitional networks described earlier by Ngoma.

The obstacles to enforcing management control and sustaining leadership continuity in the ECDoE have contributed to chronic financial impropriety. In October 2009, the Eastern Cape-based Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) called on MEC Mahlubandile Qwase to institute disciplinary action against senior officials in the ECDoE against whom the auditor-general (AG) cited breaches of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (Luyt, 2009). The AG found that the ECDoE had failed to disclose irregular expenditure of at least R1.5 billion in contravention of section 40(3) (b) of the PFMA and understated fruitless and wasteful expenditure by at least R46 million. The AG further noted that senior management in the ECDoE did not implement plans recommended by his office to address financial management problems. Issues included an inability to maintain effective and efficient systems of financial management and internal control, resulting in irregular expenditure of at least R730 million. In addition, Luyt (2009) noted a recurring laissez-faire attitude towards disciplinary action against officials contravening the provisions of the PFMA and the Division of Revenue Act, despite calls by the Eastern Cape Legislature and MEC Masualle.

Weak management control has resulted in a failure of ‘post provisioning’ – the allocation of teachers across schools on the basis of the (continually changing) distribution of pupils. Some schools were chronically understaffed, while others had too many teachers relative to the size of the student body. Schools filled vacant posts with temporary teachers; about 4,000 were on the books, but were not systematically paid by the ECDoE.

The provisioning and budget crises came to a head at the start of the 2011 school year, when it became apparent that the ECDoE had overspent its budget by close to R2 billion (i.e. in excess of \$200 million). When the superintendent general, Modidima Manny, attempted to address the crisis through redeployment of teachers from overstaffed to understaffed schools, the South African Democratic Teacher Union (SADTU) called for his dismissal. In March 2011, national government intervened, and temporarily took over administration of the ECDoE. But this did not stem the crisis; by 2013, personnel expenditures had ballooned to 90 percent of the ECDoE’s operational budget (Kota, 2013). That same year, the central government scaled back its intervention (although as of 2016 it formally remained in effect).

### Two contrasting patterns

Considered together, Sections III and IV illustrate vividly that how bureaucracies function is dependent on politics. In the Western Cape, the combination of robust competition among elites and a supportive institutional legacy resulted in a political settlement in which parties competed on the basis of programmatic promises to provide better public services. In the Eastern Cape, by contrast, the political settlement was disproportionately personalised and fragmented, and these patterns cascaded through the education bureaucracy.

But for all of the starkness of the differences, it is not the case that the Western Cape bureaucracy is wholly impersonal and hierarchical, nor that the Eastern Cape is wholly personalised; the relevant variables are continuous, with actual bureaucracies characterised by a variety of patterns of operation. Table 6, building on the Figure 2 framework, introduces an heuristic device that helps



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capture these ‘shades of grey’,<sup>16</sup> while still underscoring the distinctions between the provinces. Insofar as any actual bureaucracy is a weighted combination of the four sub-types, it can be characterised by allocating 100 percentage points across the four cells. In the left-hand side of Table 6, which characterises the Western Cape bureaucracy, 60-65 of the 100 points are allocated to the top right quadrant, signalling that bureaucracy’s predominantly impersonal and hierarchical character. The right-hand side of the table characterises the contrasting Eastern Cape pattern by allocating about two-thirds of the percentage points to the personalised column, and (mirroring the fragmentation of the bureaucracy) the bulk of these in the negotiated rather than hierarchical cell.

Note a seemingly troubling implication of the analysis thus far: insofar as bureaucracies are embedded in politics, the prospects of significantly improving the performance of the Eastern Cape’s education bureaucracy seem limited, as evidenced by the limited impact of the administrative intervention by central government. But do bureaucratic weaknesses doom Eastern Cape schools to poor performance? Or might there be other governance-related entry points for improving educational outcomes that are less hostage to bureaucracy and its politics? The econometric and case study analyses help us address these questions.

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<sup>16</sup> Ranges are used to remind the reader of the heuristic nature of the allocation across cells.

**Table 6: Characterising education bureaucracies – two contrasting patterns**

Western Cape		
<b>Hierarchical</b>	15-20%	60-65%
<b>Negotiated</b>	5-10%	5-15%
	<b>Personalised</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>
Eastern Cape		
<b>Hierarchical</b>	20-25%	5-15%
<b>Negotiated</b>	40-50%	20-25%
	<b>Personalised</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>

### **V: Bureaucratic capabilities and educational outcomes – statistical analysis**

This section assesses statistically whether the strong management systems of the WCED translate into superior educational outcomes relative to other comparators, both within South Africa and beyond. Standardised tests administered in 2007 to a large sample of sixth graders in 15 countries by the independent Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) comprised the primary basis for comparison across provinces and across countries. (The South African SACMEQ sample comprised 9,083 students drawn from 392 schools; sample size per province ranged from 900 to 1,500 observations.)

As Table 7 shows, the Western Cape scored highest among South Africa’s provinces, with Gauteng a close second – and with the remaining seven lagging significantly behind. The relative ranking of provinces is broadly similar whether one takes the median score, the score for learners at the 75th percentile of socio-economic distribution, or the score for learners at the lower, 25th percentile, socio-economic tier.

**Table 7: The Western Cape’s SACMEQ scores in comparative perspective** (average mathematics and home language)

	50th percentile (median)	25th percentile	75th percentile
Western Cape	560	496	636
Gauteng	548	483	610
Northwest/Northern Cape	483	439	548
Free State	483	439	535
Kwazulu-Natal	469	424	535
Mpumalanga	469	425	522
Eastern Cape	454	408	509
Limpopo	439	408	483
South Africa (overall)	495	446	579
Mauritius	623	554	719
Kenya	557	541	596
Tanzania (mainland)	553	540	579
Botswana	521	479	553

**Note:** achievement in grade 6 mathematics and home language by province, 2007.  
Source: SACMEQ data files (2007). RSA, DBE ( 2010).

However, the Western Cape does not rate as favourably when its SACMEQ results are compared with those of some other African countries. As the table shows, the Western Cape’s median sixth grader scored below the equivalent learner in Mauritius and, similarly, to learners in Kenya and the Tanzanian mainland. At the 25th percentile (i.e., the lower SES tier), the Western Cape scored below all the comparator countries, other than Botswana.

Of course, focusing only on outcome measures is misleading. Outcomes depend in important part on the socio-economic profile of a system’s learners. Consequently, if one is to use outcome-based indicators to rigorously benchmark the quality of an education system’s management, it is necessary to control for demographic variations in the student population. Further, school systems vary in their resource endowments, in the qualifications and experience of teachers, and in many other non-governance-related dimensions, which also need to be controlled for.

To assess whether the seeming Western Cape paradox – of strong public management of the education system, but relatively weak performance when compared with other African countries – was indeed robust, Wills, Shepherd and Kotze (2016),<sup>17</sup> took the SACMEQ scores as the dependent variable, and used econometric techniques to control for a variety of other, non-management-related determinants of educational outcomes.<sup>18</sup> The econometric strategy was to isolate a ‘Western Cape effect’ on educational outcomes (in the form of the coefficient of a dummy variable for the province) once other influences were controlled for – home background, socio-economic

<sup>17</sup> A paper commissioned as part of this project.

<sup>18</sup> The principal control variables are: the home background of test-takers; their socio-economic status; the scores of teachers on the SACMEQ tests; teacher age, qualification and experience; and classroom factors (teaching time, homework, assessment, and textbook availability).

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status, teacher qualifications, other teacher/classroom characteristics, plus a subset of governance indicators.<sup>19</sup> Wills et al. (2016) comprehensively describe the data, the research methods, and the econometric findings. Table 8 below reports a small subset of their results.

The coefficients for the Western Cape dummy variable in pooled regressions with (separately) the Eastern Cape and Gauteng add to confidence that bureaucratic quality indeed matters for educational outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Each of these are composite measures, built on very detailed student, parent and school-specific information collected in the SACMEQ survey. Wills, Shepherd and Kotze (2016), Tables 3-5, detail each of the underlying data points, including average scores for each in each of the locales they analyse.

<sup>20</sup> Gustafsson and Taylor (2016) demonstrate the impact of bureaucratic quality on educational outcomes in South Africa by leveraging for statistical analysis a natural experiment in which 158 schools were transferred from one provincial jurisdiction to another.

**Table 8: Grade 6 mathematics SACMEQ scores – The ‘Western Cape’ effect**  
(coefficient on Western Cape dummy variable)

Comparison country/region:	1	2	3	4
Kenya (Nairobi and Central)	-0.375*** (0.18)	-0.373** (0.17)	-0.376** (0.16)	-0.434** (0.16)
R-squared	0.398	0.453	0.462	0.471
Mauritius	-0.259*** (0.09)	-0.232** (0.11)	-0.300** (0.15)	-0.251 (0.17)
R-squared	0.399	0.424	0.436	0.450
Eastern Cape	0.490*** (0.13)	0.488*** (0.11)	0.492*** (0.11)	0.890*** (0.16)
R-squared	0.284	0.384	0.409	0.457
Gauteng	0.320*** (0.08)	0.296*** (0.07)	0.354*** (0.08)	0.408*** (0.07)
R-squared	0.500	0.555	0.562	0.590
Other controls:				
Home background	X	X	X	X
Socio-economic status	X	X	X	X
Teacher test scores		X	X	X
Teacher/classroom characteristics		X	X	X
“Governance” indicators			X	X
Parents contribute to school building and teaching materials				X

**Notes:** Teacher and classroom characteristics include: teacher education, teacher age, teacher experience, weekly teaching time (hours), textbook availability, class size, pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), frequency and discussion of homework and frequency of classroom assessment. Due to lack of overlap in teacher characteristics between the Western Cape and Tanzania or Kenya, only textbook availability, class size and frequency of assessment are controlled for. Standard errors clustered at the school level are shown in parentheses. \*\*\* significance at 1% level \*\* significance at 5% level \* significance at 10% level.

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The Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Gauteng operate under an identical national framework, including (since public education is funded nationally) identical fiscal support per child in the system. The regression results control further for differences in the socio-economic (SES) characteristics of pupils,<sup>21</sup> and for teacher and classroom characteristics.<sup>22</sup> With all of these features controlled for, the coefficient of the Western Cape dummy variable in regression (4) can be interpreted as being, in significant part, a 'management effect'. Relative to both Gauteng and the Eastern Cape, this Western Cape effect is significant and positive. (Though not shown in Table 8, Wills et al. also find that, in a more disaggregated comparison with Gauteng, this positive Western Cape effect turns out to be especially large and significant at the lowest SES quartile, suggesting that the Western Cape's management advantage is especially beneficial for low-income communities.)

The comparisons with Kenya<sup>23</sup> and Mauritius, however, are more sobering – both education systems systematically outperform the Western Cape, even after controlling for SES, teacher and classroom characteristics. The performance gap is especially noteworthy vis-à-vis Kenya, which, with a per capita income less than a quarter that of South Africa's, has substantially fewer resources per pupil (with not all of these differences captured in the explanatory variables). As Wills et al. detail, the Kenya advantage is evident across all four distributional quartiles, and indeed (notwithstanding the advantaged access to high-quality services enjoyed by European elites in the apartheid era) is greatest in the most affluent quartile.

Given the evident robustness of the Western Cape bureaucracy, and the well-known unevenness of Kenya's public management systems, it is highly unlikely that this difference can be explained by superior hierarchical management on the part of Kenya. Rather, with so many other possible causal drivers controlled for statistically, the results point to the possibility that Kenya has an advantage over the Western Cape in the 'softer' side of the governance of education – perhaps motivation on the part of teachers and other stakeholders, perhaps the patterns of participatory, horizontal governance. In depth, qualitative comparisons, going beyond the scope of the present effort, will be needed to pin down more precisely which kinds of 'soft governance' (or what other variables not included in the regression analysis) might account for the Kenya advantage.<sup>24</sup>

A closer look at the results for the Eastern Cape offers an intriguing added pointer as to the relevance of the softer side of governance. The inclusion of 'parental contribution to school building and teaching materials' as an explanatory variable in regression 4 of Table 8 has a large effect on the magnitude of the 'Western Cape effect' on educational outcomes. Why? Wills et al. include SACMEQ data which show that 57 percent of Eastern Cape parents (but only 13 percent of Western Cape parents) assist with school building – and 65 percent (but only 18 percent in the Western Cape) with school maintenance. The econometric results are thus consistent with the hypothesis that parental participation (proxied by parents' contribution to school building and teaching materials) serves as a partial institutional substitute for weaknesses in the Eastern Cape bureaucracy – with the true proportions of the costs imposed on Eastern Cape children by weaknesses in the ECDoE only evident once the parental role is accounted for. The school-level case studies summarised below begin to suggest what might be some causal mechanisms that link parental involvement in low-income communities to educational outcomes.

21 Home background characteristics identified by SACMEQ, and included in the composite variable, include: marital status of parents; education of parents; language at home; number of siblings; distance from school.

22 Teacher and classroom characteristics identified by SACMEQ and included in the composite variable include: teacher scores on SACMEQ tests; teacher age, qualifications and experience; textbook availability; teacher time in classroom. Also, as governance measures, teacher absenteeism; school visits by inspectors; strike action.

23 The comparison is specifically with results for Kenya's Nairobi and Central provinces. As Wills et al. detail, these provinces are reasonably similar in their SES demographic to the Western Cape. The statistical procedures break down when SES differences across the populations are too large. This is the reason why Table 8 does not include Tanzania as one of the comparator countries.

24 It is worth noting that Kenya's education system has strong roots in the country's *harambee* ('self-help') movement in the wake of independence, suggestive perhaps of the role of participatory governance in accounting for the outcomes.

However (as with the findings vis-à-vis Kenya) given the complexity of the causal mechanisms involved, additional research is called for.

In sum, the econometric results advance the analysis in this paper in two ways. First, the results provide some support to the argument that, viewed within a South African context, the WCED is relatively well managed, and that this contributes to superior education outcomes – with (as Section III details) these advantages rooted in a more propitious background political context. But, second, the results also suggest that bureaucracy is not destiny – that there are other dimensions of the governance of education systems which can (as with the Eastern Cape) be partial institutional substitutes for relatively weak hierarchical bureaucratic capability, or (as seems likely in Kenya) be complements, adding to the overall efficacy of the system. To better understand what these softer sides of governance might be, we turn to the findings of the school-level case studies.

## **VI: Patterns of school-level governance**

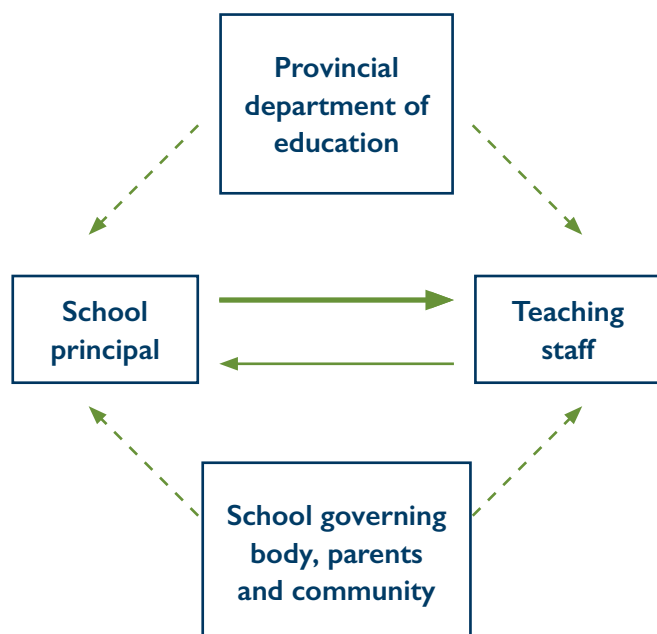
System-wide averages conceal, as well as reveal. On average, as Section V has shown, the Western Cape system performs far better than that of the Eastern Cape, even once the differences in socio-economic characteristics between the two provinces are controlled for. However, within both systems (again, controlling for socio-economic characteristics), there are substantial variations in performance across schools. Hoadley et al. (2016) used in-depth school-level case studies to explore for the Western Cape whether and how these variations can be explained by differences in school-level patterns of governance. Shumane and Levy (2016) conducted parallel research in the Eastern Cape. This section summarises and synthesises their findings.

At the school level, as voluminous studies have emphasised, the principal is (proximately) crucial in managing the teaching staff and thereby influencing school performance.<sup>25</sup> However, as Figure 3 underscores, the principal and staff do not function in isolation, but rather are embedded in a complex net of hierarchical, horizontal and bottom-up relationships. (As noted earlier, in South Africa the horizontal/bottom-up<sup>26</sup> relationships are in part formalised through the assignment of responsibility to school governing bodies, SGBs.) The case studies explored how interactions among this multiplicity of stakeholders influenced school-level performance. The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and other teachers' unions comprise an additional set of actors – not shown explicitly in Figure 3, but (as both the provincial-level and school-level case studies detail) also part of the governance dynamic.

25 Key contributions in the global literature include Hallinger and Heck (1996); Leithwood, Pattern and Jantzi (2010), and Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008). The point has also been extensively documented in the South African literature, including by Bush (2007), Bush Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011), Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009); Taylor et al. (2013) and Wills (2016).

26 For convenience, the discussion that follows uses the term 'horizontal' to cover the range of governance arrangements involving SGBs, parents, communities and the teachers' unions.

Figure 3: Governance interactions at school level



### The sample schools

The research focused on eight schools – four in the Western Cape and four in the Eastern Cape. The research methodology was one of process tracing – an approach to conducting case study analysis which focuses on case-specific sequential processes with the aim of “tracing the links between possible causes and observed outcomes ... to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes is in fact evident”.<sup>27</sup> Data collection on these sequential processes took the form of in-depth interviews with key informants.<sup>28</sup>

27 George and Bennet (2005: 4, 6).

28 For all schools, interviews were conducted with at least three informants – and results compared, to identify, and clarify with

To control for the influence on performance of socio-economic conditions, the initial plan was to target matched pairs of successful and less successful schools within the same community. While the eight schools indeed comprised four sets of geographically contiguous matched pairs, the patterns of success and weakness turned out to be more complex than initially had been expected – varying not only (as per the initial research design) across schools, but also over time for over half of the schools. As Table 9 summarises, all eight schools had gone through a change in principal over the relevant period; the within-school variations in performance were strongly associated with changes in principal.

For the Western Cape, success was measured using the results of robust annual systemic tests of school-level performance conducted by the WCED for third grade for both mathematics and reading. Each of the schools in the two geographically contiguous matched pairs were selected on the basis of performance over the 2002-06 period – one relatively successful, the other relatively weak. One matched pair was in Brandonville,<sup>29</sup> the other in Khayelitsha. The population of both settlements is low-income; in the former, over 80 percent of the population is Afrikaans-speaking (‘Coloured’ in the South African discourse); in the latter, close to 99 percent speak isiXhosa as a first language. As Table 10 shows, both of the schools selected as successful subsequently experienced substantial declines in performance; and one of the two schools selected as weak subsequently experienced a significant improvement in performance.

the informants any seeming inconsistencies. Interview notes are available upon request.

29 Brandonville is a pseudonym for a settlement of approximately 25,000 residents about 30km outside of Cape Town.

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**Table 9: Governance episodes across eight schools, early 2000s-2015** (*pseudonym principal names*)

	Earlier period	Change in principal	Later period
<b>A: Western Cape</b>			
School 1	Relatively strong performance <b>Smit</b>	2010	Declining performance <b>Jooste</b>
School A	Relatively weak performance <b>Arendse</b>	2006-08	Continuing low-level equilibrium <b>Poole</b>
School 2	Relatively strong performance <b>Komape</b>	2007-10; 2011	Declining performance <b>Various</b>
School B	Mixed performance <b>Somana</b>	2009-11	Average performance <b>Rala</b>
<b>B: Eastern Cape</b>			
School A1	Relatively strong – <b>Mrs Mbala</b>	2004 (smooth)	Relatively strong – <b>Mr Zondi</b>
School A2	Relatively weak performance – <b>Mrs Kunta</b>	2012-13 (contested)	Relatively weak performance (possibly with some initial turnaround) – <b>Mr Makhatini</b>
School B1	Weak performance – <b>Mrs Dinga</b>	2009-11 (contested)	Improving performance – <b>Mr Nkosi</b>
School B2	Good reputation to 2008; then rapid decline – <b>Mr Kramer</b>	2010-12 (contested)	Ongoing efforts at turnaround – <b>Mr Risha</b>

Source: Hoadley et al. (2016); Shumane and Levy (2016, forthcoming).

**Table 10: Systemic test results for four Western Cape schools** (*percentage of cohort that meets the grade 3 proficiency standard, averaging across literacy and numeracy*)

	Brandonville		Khayelitsha	
	School 1	School A	School 2	School B
2002	66	41	44	31
2004	60	39	54	33
2006	61	47	50	47
2008	61	53	55	45
2011	61	36	53	46
2012	62	36	33	44
2013	49	28	27	45

In the Eastern Cape, all four of the case study schools were located in a small, low-income, semi-rural town of about 40,000 inhabitants. Province-wide, no reliable school-level tests of performance were available.<sup>30</sup> However, parents had flexibility

<sup>30</sup> A nationwide test, the Annual National Assessment (ANA), was introduced in 2012. Published ANA results have been contested in the academic community due to the discrepancy between self-reported school results and independently moderated school results. A significant discrepancy exists – especially for the Eastern Cape – between the results reported by schools and the verified results. For example, for the Eastern Cape as a whole, in 2013 the percentage of Grade 3 students with a score of 50 percent or more was self-reported for numeracy as 54.9 percent, but adjusted downward after external verification to 42.2 percent; for literacy, the self-reported score was 50.2 percent, and the adjusted score was 27.0 percent. Additionally, owing to the level of record keeping in the Butterworth District, ANA results for the schools used in the sample could not be obtained – neither from schools, nor the district office. These scores were also not calculated as the class average, but the average for a sample of learners who obtained the highest, middle and lowest scores.

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as to where to enrol their children, and thus could 'vote with their feet'. As a performance proxy, Shumane and Levy (2016) thus used data on trends in the number of children enrolled in each school.<sup>31</sup> As Table 11 shows, one of the geographically contiguous matched pairs (Schools A1 and A2) showed consistent enrolment over the entire period – high enrolment in one school, low and declining enrolment in the other. Performance within the other matched pair was more unstable: School B1 witnessed a decline in enrolment, from close to 1,000 pupils in the early 1990s to a low of 341 in 2011, and then a turnaround. School B2, prior to 2008, had a reputation of being a 'good' school, mirrored in its 2008 enrolment of 1,200 pupils; but subsequently, as the enrolment data signal (and for reasons described in depth in by Shumane and Levy), performance and enrolment collapsed.

**Table 11: Trends in learner enrolment, 2008-15, in four schools in an Eastern Cape town (number of learners)**

	School A1	School A2	School B1	School B2
2008	1048	650	611	1200
2009	1145	616	611	1031
2010	1022	639	521	777
2011	907	521	347	784
2012	950	455	433	758
2013	1030	489	464	720
2014	949	542	502	669
2015	1041	575	547	690

Source: Butterworth District Education Management Information System, 2015.

31 Perception feedback on school performance also was provided by local ECDoE officials. Additionally, Shumane and Levy (2016) explore the relationship between the enrolment trends and informant information provided in the course of the process tracing analysis. The evidence from these multiple sources adds to confidence that the enrolment data in Table 11 reflect real trends in performance, as perceived by parents and the community.

There are obvious limits to the generalisability of case study research. With only four schools within each province, drawn from a narrow geographic base, no claims can be made as to the relative importance within each province of each of the patterns observed in the cases. There are also almost surely additional patterns of school-level governance, beyond those documented in the eight cases (both within the provinces studied, and in other provinces). Even so, given the consistency of the processes of change identified in the case studies with the provincial-level patterns summarised in Sections III and IV, and with lessons from other literatures (in South Africa and globally) as to the inter-relations between governance and school performance, the findings potentially are of broad relevance.

### Western Cape<sup>32</sup>

The Western Cape case studies illustrate vividly three key aspects of the causal mechanisms illustrated in Figure 3 that link actors to outcomes: that a committed developmentally-oriented principal is associated with success; that a well-functioning bureaucracy can support success; but that there are limits to the ability even of well-functioning bureaucracies to shape what happens at the school level. Considered comparatively with the Eastern Cape case studies, the Western Cape case studies are also suggestive of a fourth aspect, namely that even where bureaucracies work relatively well, the presence or absence of engaged parents and communities can be key to sustained strong performance.

The first and second patterns are evident in the two unequivocal episodes of success among the schools (i.e. Schools 1 and 2 in their earlier period). Both schools were led by charismatic principals, who put in place strong education-oriented and rule-bound processes of school-level governance -- and determinedly resisted moves to use school resources for personalised, patronage and predatory purposes. Both principals were backstopped in their efforts by a WCED that was supportive of their rule orientation.

32 This section summarises parts of the detailed analysis in Hoadley et al. (2016).



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How the principal of School 2 managed the recruitment process for a senior teacher position (one for which the successful candidate would be required to teach music) illustrates the potential for synergies between school and bureaucracy. The position drew the interest of a branch chairperson of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). The branch chairperson was escorted to his interview by his vice chairperson. The union observer selected by the candidate to be part of the interview panel was the SADTU branch treasurer. In anticipation of political pressure, the principal had the interview committee (which included parent representatives from the SGB) include in the interview process a requirement that the candidate play the melodica and 'teach' the panel a musical piece. The branch chairperson could neither play the instrument nor read the music piece, and ended up singing the piece (incorrectly). Since the criteria were carefully established, the non-appointment of the SADTU candidate was not contested.

However, the case studies also suggested that, even with a well-functioning bureaucracy such as the WCED, top-down visibility as to what actually happens at the school level is limited. In all four of the cases, the management functions expected of the bureaucracy were well taken care of. All four schools were adequately staffed; absenteeism was low; textbooks and other supplies were available. But this was not true only for the high-performing schools. For example, to visitors Brandonville School A gave the appearance of being a well-functioning school: it was tidy; records were well-kept; learning materials were posted on classroom walls. Yet the school had become locked into a low-level equilibrium of compliance without effort and commitment – one in which the principal, teachers, and local (circuit-level) bureaucracy all were complicit, despite a change in leadership midway through the process-traced period.

This combination of the centrality of the school principal and the limited visibility of the bureaucracy highlights a key school-level vulnerability: though in the short term, success or failure might be ascribed (proximately) to an incumbent principal, at some point, the time comes for succession. If succession turns out badly, then an opportunity for turnaround will be lost

(as happened with Brandonville School A) or, worse, there will be reversal of earlier gains (as occurred in Schools 1 and 2). Why did principal succession play out the way it did in the Western Cape schools?

Formally, the process involved the bureaucracy and the SGB acting in partnership, with the former vetting the qualifications of candidates, and the latter deciding (subject to a final potential veto from the bureaucracy) which candidate was preferred. But notwithstanding the bureaucracy's formal role and its evident strengths, in the cases where the selection process went sour it was characterised by a depressing litany of lobbying of the SGB by internal candidates, including offers of perks, and pervasive conflict among competing factions of teachers and parents. Selection processes became protracted, with repeated rounds of failure to agree on any one candidate. The bureaucracy proved unable to override the dysfunction. On the contrary, in the two Brandonville schools, the field research found strong evidence that the local-level bureaucracy was complicit in fostering informal processes through which favoured insiders were selected as principals – and subsequently presided over poor performance -- even though other, better-qualified candidates had applied for the position.

Missing from all three of the schools where the principal selection process turned out badly was a track record of effective horizontal governance, of a culture of collaboration inclusive of teachers, the SGB, and parents and community more broadly. In Brandonville School A, the lacuna reflected a long-standing low-level equilibrium of capture. By contrast, Schools 1 and 2 had been initial period successes – but in both cases the platform of success was built around the willingness of principals with forceful personalities (backed by the WCED) to insist on the systematic application of impersonal, hierarchical rules. When these principals exited, things fell apart. Of the four schools studied, only in Khayelitsha School B had the initial principal established a culture of participatory horizontal governance.<sup>33</sup> Interviewees signalled that

<sup>33</sup> Interviewees signalled that close relationships between the principal and the community were key to the rapid improvement in the school's systemic test results between 2004 and 2006 (evident in Table 10) in response to the shock of the low levels of school achievement in the early years of the test.

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close relationships between the principal and the community were key to the rapid improvement in the school's systemic test results between 2004 and 2006, evident in Table 10, in response to the shock of the low levels of school achievement in the early years of the test. Indeed, Khayelitsha School B was the only one of the four Western Cape case study schools where the principal transition successfully proceeded 'by the book', with close collaboration between SGB and the WCED, and the selection of an effective successor.

### Eastern Cape<sup>34</sup>

Paralleling the Western Cape research, the Eastern Cape case studies also offered insights into the interactions between school leadership, the bureaucracy and horizontal governance. By contrast to the Western Cape, the Eastern Cape cases found no evidence of effective support by the bureaucracy for the educational mission of the schools. On the contrary, the most striking aspect of the ECDoE's role, as perceived from the school level, was its absence. Its only visible role, evident in two of the four schools, was to intervene to try and protect poorly-performing staff from dismissal when, after years of frustration, parents finally took matters into their own hands.

But the Eastern Cape case study findings were not all bleak. Recall the suggestion earlier that horizontal, participatory governance potentially might function as an institutional substitute in settings where hierarchical governance was weak. At least two of the four Eastern Cape case studies (schools A1 and B1) offered evidence of such a pattern.

Consider, first, the contrast between School A1 and geographically contiguous School A2 (less than two kilometres distant from School A1). Throughout the period for which information was available, School A2 had consistently been subjected to capture and dysfunction: infrastructure was crumbling; teachers were disinterested; the parent community was disengaged. By contrast, School A1 was the only one of the eight case study schools (across both

provinces) that consistently was able to sustain positive performance throughout the process-traced period.

School A1's performance was anchored in strong, participatory leadership – put in place by one principal, and then sustained by her successor. The institutional culture of the school was one where all stakeholders – teachers, the SGB, the extended community – felt included. (Even with the ECDoE, which was carefully kept at arm's length, relationships remained cordial.) This inclusive culture supported a smooth process of principal succession. The successor principal, an internal candidate from within the teaching staff, had been mentored by the initial principal, enjoyed the support of the SGB and, once appointed, continued along the path that had been established. One interviewee illustrated how this participatory culture operated with the example of how new staff are inducted into the school's organisational culture:

"The principal will call newly appointed staff to a meeting and introduce them to everyone. At this meeting the principal will welcome the new staff member to the team and inform them on school culture ... he will often say 'Mr. or Ms. so and so, at this school we are a family and if we have problems we deal with them openly. If there is unrest, we will know it is you because it has never happened before!'"

School B1 is a more ambiguous case – the school confronted enormous difficulties, but subsequently turned things around.<sup>35</sup> Mrs Dinga, the principal who set in motion School B1's long decline, was appointed about a decade after the school's 1978 start-up, and remained in the post for almost 25 years. But from the later-1990s onwards she was, for much of the time, an absentee principal. According to an interviewee who had a long-time association with the school, "she would be absent for periods of about two to three months". This continued for about a decade (!). Mrs Dinga would produce doctor's notes and apply for sick leave,

34 This section summarises parts of the detailed analysis in Shumane and Levy (2016).

35 Shumane and Levy suggest that School B2 also is an example of turnaround – and also via the use of participatory mechanisms – but the time elapsed since the turnaround perhaps began is shorter, and the evidence of turnaround is somewhat ambiguous, so it is not discussed further in this paper.

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but her colleagues in school management believed that there was another reason for her absence – in the latter 1990s, she had purchased and moved to a home in a coastal town 100km away from the location of the school. The school went into a downward spiral. The number of students fell from close to 1,000 in the early 1990s, to a low of 341 in 2011.

Teachers took advantage of Mrs Dinga's absence to tend to other business during school hours – some attended school only for specific periods when they were scheduled to teach, and others stayed away completely. Attendance by students was sporadic. According to an interview:

“Students would arrive at the school just to be marked for attendance – by the time the break came, you would see many of the students walking around the community in their uniforms.”

In 2009, frustration at the principal's continuing absence finally boiled over. A group of parents and

some SGB members met, and jointly reached the view that MrsDinga should not continue as school principal. At the group's urging, the SGB took their decision to the ECDoE district office, which did not respond well. “The district office did not accept this”, said one interviewee. In response, the parent community staged a protest, preventing the principal from accessing the school. The district office kept her on as a displaced teacher, reporting to the district office, until her retirement in 2010. In time, the SGB selected as principal an internal candidate who had shown a commitment to try and make the school work during the grim period in its history. Subsequently the new principal, the SGB and the community worked together to try and turn things around. A 60 percent increase between 2011 and 2015 in the number of pupils in the school – from 347 to 547 – suggests that a turnaround was indeed underway.

One final point emerges from the school-level case studies in both provinces. Going into the research, the expectation was that the largest teachers' union, SADTU, would play a significant role in shaping

**Table 12: Patterns of school-level governance**

### Pattern A: Intertwined, hierarchical governance

High: hierarchical	70%	
Low: negotiated	10%	20%
	Personalised	Impersonal
	Inherited institutional legacy	

### Pattern B: Collaborative governance

10%	30%	5-10%
15-30%	15-30%	0%
Personalised	Impersonal	Impersonal
	school-level rules	department-level rules

### Pattern C: Personalised governance

High: hierarchical	50%	10%
Low: negotiated	40%	
	Personalised	Impersonal
	Inherited institutional legacy	

### Pattern D: Bottom-up governance

0-40%		5%
60-95%		0%
Personalised	Impersonal	Impersonal
	school-level rules	department-level rules

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school-level dynamics, using its power to influence appointments, and assert control more generally. We also expected to see evidence of political parties using the power of appointment for patronage purposes. In practice, we found that in both provinces hyper-local school-level dynamics were decisive; generally, these were at most loosely linked to these broader forces. For the Western Cape, this probably reflected the relatively robust role played by the WCED's industrial relations department, which engaged unions in a collaborative, rather than top-down, manner. For the Eastern Cape, it was perhaps more a symptom of the generalised fragmentation of the province's politics. Though surprising, this finding is consistent with the observation of a seasoned scholar/practitioner of South African education, Nick Taylor (quoted in Jansen, 2015) that:

“When I entered NEEDU, I thought SADTU was a huge problem ... But the more I got into the data ... I began to realise that there is a bigger problem. The biggest problem is the poor management in many parts of the system. Where management is weak, unions do what they do ....”

### Diverse possibilities – and risks

Consistent with the analytical framework laid out in Figure 3, the case studies identified a wide variety of patterns of school-level governance, with no single pattern emerging as either necessary or sufficient for success. Table 12 distils from the case studies four distinct heuristic<sup>36</sup> patterns, (allocating 100 percentage points across the four cells).

Cells A and B depict governance patterns that are anchored to a significant degree in impersonal rules. In cell A, the rules support hierarchy. As depicted in the cell (and consistent with the Western Cape

cases), personalised leadership by the principal and recourse to rules were thoroughly intertwined with one another. In cell B, the rules are more supportive of multi-stakeholder engagement – and (as in the Eastern Cape example of School A1) impersonal rules largely are self-imposed, rather than dependent on backing from the bureaucracy.

As the case studies showed, hierarchical rule-boundedness along the lines of pattern A can support success, but seems especially vulnerable to reversal when leadership changes, given the relatively weak commitment of stakeholders. More broadly, there is no necessary association between rule-boundedness and success. Indeed, as Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews (2010) explore, and as was evident in Western Cape School A2, rule-boundedness can be a reflection of ‘isomorphic mimicry’ – of an effort to signal seeming compliance to external actors, even as the internal dynamics reproduce a low-level equilibrium.

The governance arrangements depicted in cells C and D are more personalised than those in cells A and B – with a stronger role for school leaders in cell C, and for participation by bottom-up stakeholders in cell D. As was evident in the case studies, personalised governance arrangements bring with them a higher risk of capture – perhaps orchestrated by the school principal, perhaps by multiple stakeholders pursuing personal rather than developmental agendas. But the case studies also pointed to instances where personalised action by stakeholders taking matters into their own hands – rebellion by parents, communities and some SGB members against sustained dysfunction; a new principal pressing to unlock a low-level equilibrium – was key to turning around dysfunction.

At first sight, especially when viewed from the narrow perspective of bureaucracies and their processes, the multiplicity of governance patterns and outcomes might seem frustrating – it adds to the complexity of the challenge of improving educational outcomes. But from a broader perspective, the opposite is the case. As the final section of this paper will argue, with variety comes the possibility of opening up the search for improving educational outcomes (in South Africa and elsewhere) in new, underexplored directions.

36 As per the text, patterns similar to each of those in the table were evident for at least one of the case study schools – but rather than defend the precise allocation of points as capturing some specific school, it is more useful to think of each pattern as a distinctive ‘type’ which the individual schools approximate, as Hoadley et al. (2016) and Shumane and Levy (2016) detail.

## VII: Conclusions and implications

The world over, access to education has increased radically but quality remains low, with weaknesses in governance comprising an important part of the explanation. The conclusion that governance matters has, of course, become commonplace. Viewed through the lens of the 'good fit' approach of this paper, the frontier challenge is to probe *how* governance matters: to identify a variety of distinct governance patterns; to examine the links between each pattern and the broader political and institutional context; to explore the relationship between the distinct patterns and educational outcomes; and, building on these results, to suggest how workable approaches to improving the governance of public education might vary with context. Addressing these questions, and thereby giving concreteness to 'good fit', has been a principal purpose of the research programme synthesised here.

As noted in the introduction, South Africa's institutional arrangements provided a 'natural experiment' opportunity to explore comparatively two core questions concerning the governance of education: how politics and background institutions influence educational bureaucracies; and the relative merits, across different contexts, of hierarchical and horizontal governance.

For the first question, the results are unequivocal. The observed patterns of bureaucratic performance in the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape systems of public education are shaped by underlying political and institutional drivers. The political and institutional history of the Western Cape was supportive of programmatic politics and a bureaucracy oriented towards public service provision; the Eastern Cape, by contrast, provided a strikingly unpropitious political and institutional context for the consolidation of a results-oriented bureaucracy. In-depth organisational analyses underscored the stark differences in performance between the Western and Eastern Cape educational bureaucracies. The WCED does well (but the ECDoE poorly) the core tasks of a bureaucracy: managing resources; assigning personnel to where they are most needed; monitoring and managing on the basis

of performance. As the econometric analysis suggests, these differences, rather than demographic or resource differences between the two provinces, appear to account for the Western Cape's superior educational outcomes.

Turning to the second question, it is hardly surprising that a well-functioning bureaucracy (as in the Western Cape) turns out to be a valuable asset. But, paradoxically, it need not follow that where bureaucracy is weak reformers should focus on strengthening hierarchical rather than horizontal governance systems. For one thing, political constraints may render bureaucratic improvement infeasible -- evident in the limited gains that resulted from efforts by South Africa's national government to turn around the ECDoE by putting it under 'administration' from the centre). In such settings, there may be better returns from efforts that aim to strengthen horizontal governance. We return to this issue below.

Even where bureaucracies work well, however, the evidence from the Western Cape suggests that they may not provide a sufficient governance platform to achieve good educational outcomes. The Western Cape school-level case studies show how, all too easily, the result of a combination of strong, top-down bureaucracy and weak horizontal governance can be 'isomorphic mimicry'<sup>37</sup> – in which a school that is seemingly compliant with formal processes is in practice locked into a low-level equilibrium of mediocrity. The comparison with Kenya is instructive in this regard. Notwithstanding strong top-down management, and significant resource advantages, the Western Cape underperforms Kenya.

The econometric comparison of the Western Cape and Kenya controls for a wide variety of contextual factors, including socio-economic differences and variations in teacher competence and experience. Further, beyond the control variables, the Western Cape education system has substantially more fiscal

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37 The term is used in this way by Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012).

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resources than that of Kenya. Given all these controls, differences in 'soft governance' – in motivation on the part of teachers and other stakeholders, and in the (non-formal-training-related) efficacy of their efforts – emerge as a plausible explanation for this unexplained variation. Though a definitive explanation must await more careful investigation of the Kenyan system, it is noteworthy that these 'soft governance' aspects are the ones where, as per the discussion in the introduction to this paper, the theoretical literature suggests that horizontal governance arrangements potentially can add significant value. 'Soft governance' is also the area where the school-level case studies suggest that the Western Cape is relatively weak.

Figure 4 below (which, it is perhaps worth noting explicitly, is *not* another variant of the Figure 2 framework) suggests one way of framing the puzzle of how to improve educational outcomes in difficult contexts. The horizontal axis distinguishes between settings (such as the Western Cape) where hierarchical governance is relatively strong, and settings (such as the Eastern Cape) where it is weak. The vertical axis distinguishes between settings where school governing body and community engagement is developmental, and those where it is weak or predatory. The barrier along the horizontal axis signals that the potential to strengthen hierarchy is limited in contexts where politics and institutions are personalised, patronage-oriented and fragmented.

In these latter settings, characterised by chronically weak hierarchical governance, might it be possible to improve educational outcomes by moving from quadrant A towards quadrant B in Figure 4 – with horizontal governance serving as a (partial) institutional substitute? On this score, the findings from the research are somewhat encouraging – both the strong, significant effect of including the 'parental contribution' variable in the Eastern Cape regression, and the case study evidence of how pro-active engagement on the part of SGBs and parents helped sustain and turn around school-level performance. But participation is no panacea; the case studies also uncovered instances of capture by predatory interests.

**Figure 4: Institutional options for improving school outcomes**

Horizontal governance: Quality of SGB and community engagement	Developmental	▲ B	▲ D
	Weak or predatory	A	C
		Weak	Strong
		Bureaucratic quality	

What of those settings (of which the Western Cape is an example) where hierarchical governance is relatively strong, horizontal governance is weak, and educational outcomes are disappointing? In such settings, one possibility is to try and strengthen hierarchy further – not in an undifferentiated way (a general doubling-down on performance management in an already relatively solid bureaucracy is likely to have limited impact), but by focusing on specific weaknesses which could both be addressed hierarchically and could contribute to improved performance. The case studies suggest that strengthening the principal selection process might be one potentially high return entry point. Indeed, in recent years, the WCED has introduced psychometric competency assessments for candidates for principal, used early retirement options to encourage principals in poorly performing schools to retire, and ensured (informally) that successor principals in poorly performing schools come from outside the school.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Of course, it should go without saying that efforts to use strengthened hierarchy (and a correspondingly reduced role for SGBs) to improve the principal selection are likely to add value only in settings where hierarchy works relatively well – else the consequence could simply be to replace the risk of school-level capture with patronage-oriented decision-making upstream in the bureaucracy. But it cannot go without saying: a 2016 draft report commissioned by the National Department of Basic Education in response to allegations in the media of capture in the provision of posts, specifically proposed abolishing a role for SGBs in the principal selection process.

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Another possibility might be to complement hierarchical initiatives with efforts to strengthen horizontal governance – that is, to try and move from quadrant C to quadrant D in Figure 4. The logic here is that horizontal governance can serve as a complement to hierarchy – adding to the ability to govern at the ‘street level’, where bureaucracy may be limited in its ability to ‘see’. Among the Western Cape cases, Khayelitsha School B offers some limited evidence that complementarity along these lines can support both improvements in educational outcomes and an effective principal selection process.

Insofar as stronger horizontal governance can indeed improve educational outcomes, how can it be strengthened? There is strikingly little to be learned on this score from within South Africa, where, despite the central role given to SGBs in the 1996 South African Schools Act, there have been exceedingly few efforts aimed at strengthening their performance.<sup>39</sup> But there have been systematic evaluations of efforts to improve horizontal governance in other developing countries. Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2013) offer rich detail on dozens of carefully evaluated horizontal reforms the world over, including reforms to improve school-based management, to use enhance information transparency, and to make teachers more accountable for performance. They find considerable variations in impact; some interventions turn out to make a significant positive difference, others have been ineffective. Mansuri and Rao (2012) report a similar pattern of variation.

A plausible explanation for the mixed results is that whether or not such efforts are successful probably depends not only on ‘capacity building’ (which is technically straightforward) but on power – whether intervention is able to tilt the balance between developmental and predatory school-level forces in

favour of the former. This interpretation is consistent with the finding in Kingdon et al. (2014: 2) that,

“while decentralization is a widely advocated reform, many of its supposed benefits do not accrue in practice because in poor rural areas the local elite closes up the spaces for wider community representation and participation in school affairs”.

Indeed, in the final analysis, stakeholder dynamics (that is, politics and power) are key to governance reform of both the hierarchical and horizontal variety. For hierarchical governance, incremental reforms to improve public management may perhaps make some (modest) difference – but far-reaching improvements in bureaucratic performance will be dependent on difficult-to-achieve supportive political circumstances. For horizontal reforms, the Eastern Cape school-level case studies suggest that, contra Kingdon et al.’s (2014) pessimism, at least in the South African context, insofar as stakeholder dynamics at school level are hyper-local, there may be scope for interventions (either by government or by non-governmental organisations) that tilt the balance in at least some schools in a developmental direction.<sup>40</sup>

Those seeking a ‘magic bullet’ – one right way to turn around schools – will doubtless be frustrated by the conclusion that there are multiple possible governance entry points for improving educational outcomes, and that the efficacy of any of them depends as much on politics and power as on the technocratic expertise of reformers. But there is an alternative interpretation, namely that uncovering institutional diversity and its political drivers expands opportunity – clarifying what might work across different settings, and thereby adding to possibilities for improving educational outcomes, even in contexts where governance is difficult.

<sup>39</sup> This conclusion is based on multiple interviews, plus a preliminary desk review conducted as part of the research Project. Given this limited effort, the question naturally arises why SGBs were given such a prominent place by the 1996 legislation. The answer appears to be that their immediate political purpose, as part of the broader constitutional negotiations, was to provide autonomy for elite (historically white) schools. The expansion to schools in poorer communities followed logically, but was not a priority for any of the political principals.

<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that the ESID education school-level case studies in Bangladesh (Hossein et al., 2015), Ghana (Ampratwum, Awal and Oduro, 2016), Uganda (Kjaer and Muwanga 2016) and Rwanda (Williams 2016) also identified a strong association at school level between the quality of parental and community engagement and educational outcomes.

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