

Economics, governance and instability in South Africa

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Summary

This paper examines the economic and social underpinnings of rising political instability in South Africa such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. The paper then reviews the patterns of violence across different categories before concluding with a brief analysis of the extent to which corruption, poor governance and lacklustre leadership exacerbate social turbulence. In this way, it presents the context for a separate paper, *South African scenarios 2024*, and a subsequent set of policy recommendations *Rainbow at risk* that set out the prospects and requirements for change.

FORTY YEARS AGO a combination of frustration against local government, the enforcement of Afrikaans language policy, trade-union activism and the politicising impact of the black consciousness movement culminated in the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976. In the weeks and months that followed, tens of thousands of South Africans from townships across the country took to the streets in a violent confrontation with the apartheid state. Although the National Party government was eventually able to restore a semblance of order by force of arms, several thousand young South Africans fled the country, largely to join the Pan Africanist Congress, then moving on to the African National Congress (ANC) when the former proved absent to fight apartheid. These events – combined with international activism, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and internal revolt within the governing National Party – would eventually force a historical compromise when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990 and, in 1994, elected president of South Africa.

Beyond on-going and detailed reports and monitoring of the South African security context, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) has published a number of forecasts that look to South Africa's current and future economic and political prospects. The first forecast was to 2030 (the time horizon of the National Development Plan) and introduced three scenarios around which to weave alternative future pathways: Mandela Magic (desired pathway), Bafana Bafana (current path) and Nation Divided (downside scenario).

An updated forecast to 2035 followed in 2015, as did work on various other dimensions of the country's future, such as water and electricity.¹

In the run-up to the August 2016 local government elections, this paper provides a big picture analysis of recent trends in violence and the economic fundamentals that underpin the recent spike in social turbulence. A separate publication, *South African scenarios 2024*, revisits the economic and political prospects for the country (still using the Mandela Magic, Bafana Bafana and Nation Divided framing) with a time horizon to 2024. That paper includes the possible outcomes of the national/provincial elections in 2019 and 2024 and the likely events that could follow the decision by the ANC in December 2017, on a new president for the organisation and for the country. A shorter policy brief, *Rainbow at risk*, presents more broadly the policy recommendations that flow from our work.

In sum, our analysis suggests that South Africa may be approaching a political turning point, depending on the outcome of the public struggle for power between two main factions within the ANC. This is, in the words of the 2016 *State of the Nation* edited volume, because government is being 'tested by mounting demands, but falls short in its response...'² When government is absent, distracted or incompetent, other agencies and actors move in to fill the associated void, and new political dynamics emerge.

In the sections that follow we first examine the economic and social underpinnings of political instability in South Africa, particularly the economic and social fundamentals such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. The second section reviews patterns of violence across different categories before concluding with a brief analysis of the extent to which corruption, poor governance and lacklustre leadership drive rising levels of violence. This paper thus sets the stage for a separate paper on scenarios to 2024 and an accompanying policy brief of recommendations.

Poverty and unemployment in South Africa

A study carried out by the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town indicates that South Africa has experienced strong declines in multidimensional poverty since 1993 as well as significant improvements in ownership or access to private assets such as a stove, a fridge, a television, a vehicle and so on.³ Many of these gains have been thanks to the ANC's commitment to roll out various services, and, until recently, steady economic growth.

Since 1994, the response of the South African government to underdevelopment, poverty and inequality of the majority black

population occurred in two broad and overlapping phases. In the early 1990s, it provided housing, potable water, electricity and immunisation coverage to most households with a degree of free services. Achievements in these areas were rapid and demonstrable. Since 1994, an estimated 3.4 million homes have been built, and potable water access rose from 58% in 1994 to 91% in 2009.⁴

The late 1990s saw the beginning of a second phase of development characterised by the provision of various cash grants, such as the Child Support Grant. By 2015, 16.9 million South Africans were receiving social grants, compared to 4 million in 1994. Social security transfers rose to 3.5% of GDP, which is relatively high by international comparative standards.⁵ While costly, such grants have alleviated deep-seated poverty.⁶ They have also had limited impacts on reducing inequality, but none on unemployment, arguably the biggest challenge facing post-apartheid South Africa.⁷

By 2015, 16.9 million South Africans were receiving social grants

Despite widespread debate on poverty levels in South Africa, there is general agreement on the income level below which people are classified as living in extreme poverty: about R15 per person per day. The official figure, from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), is that approximately 10.2 million people lived in extreme poverty in 2011¹⁰ and 53% of the country, or 28 million people are "poor" – defined as income below R779 per person per month in 2011 rand value (also known as the upper-bound poverty line)¹¹ or 63%, using R1 042 per person per month.¹²

There are stark limitations to the current economic model. South Africa has most likely run out of the fiscal space to continue with its current efforts at poverty alleviation unless it can find a way to grow the economy much more rapidly and to provide many more jobs. While an estimated 1.6 million jobs were created between 2003 and 2007, 800 000 were lost in 2008, when the global financial crisis started to impact upon South Africa.⁸ In 2010/2011 only an estimated 350 000 jobs were recreated when the economy sluggishly started to recover from the global shocks.⁹

Inequality and labour

The inequality ratio of the top 10% of South Africans to the bottom 10% is 55:1. For comparison purposes, the inequality ratio of Brazil, another high-middle income country with a comparable degree of social instability, is 42:1.¹³ Blacks make up the vast majority of the unemployed and social grant recipients in South Africa, although the share of the black

workforce with higher education almost doubled between 1995 and 2011, and the number of blacks graduating from higher education institutions every year now exceeds that of whites.¹⁴ Still, the poorest four income deciles (i.e. the bottom 40% of income earners) are unemployed, and the majority are based in rural areas, areas previously designated as homelands or informal settlements around towns and cities, and are predominantly black.¹⁵

Youth unemployment in South Africa is particularly high. The International Labour Organization estimates that youth unemployment (those aged between 15 and 24) in South Africa is 52% – more than four times the rate for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁶ Recent publications by Stats SA confirm these alarming findings.¹⁷

Inequality in the middle 40% of the income distribution reveals ‘a startling cliff between higher and lower earners’¹⁸ that is significantly worse than that of comparable countries such as Turkey, Brazil, Mexico and Thailand. In the words of Levy et al. (2015) ‘the rate at which opportunities for entering the economic elite have opened up has lagged the pace of political change.’¹⁹ While the public media emphasise attention on defining income in racial terms, where the majority of the white population continues to maintain substantial economic privilege, much less attention is focused on the large wage disparities within the lower income groups. Additionally, because there is a correlation between lower average per capita incomes and larger households, the low income of earners at the bottom of the income curve are shared with more people.

Relative to other middle-income countries, South African households are thus either (relatively) affluent or poor, with a limited stepladder for moving incrementally from one economic stratum to another. Among many other subsequent afflictions, these developments have set the stage for increased levels of local-level patronage and for so-called tenderpreneurs (individuals skilled at obtaining government contracts through political contacts) that work their way around the procurement processes and the law to access economic opportunity.²⁰ These tendencies have become rife within the ANC at every level but are most pronounced in local government.

While the public media emphasise defining income in racial terms, there is less attention on the large wage disparities within the lower income groups

The patterns of distance and exclusion are also evident in the distinction between unskilled and formal labour. The South African labour market is increasingly segmented between insider and outsider groups, probably best reflected in the change in composition of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), now dominated by skilled, white-collar rather than poorer workers. The majority of COSATU members are in public service, therefore dependent upon the ANC government, who readily buckles under demands for above-inflation wage increases for the burgeoning number of civil servants. In response, newly emerging rival unions (in this case, the Association of Miners and Construction Union), which are generally more radical and populist, represent unskilled labour (such as in the mining sector). Highly skilled workers, public servants and professionals in South Africa make good money (on a comparative basis), while there are very few jobs in the middle range of earnings.²¹

This missing mid-range of earnings is linked to, according to Levy et al. (2015), ‘low labour productivity per unit of capital (which is, in turn, a consequence of chronic and



historical underinvestment in human capital in the country's black population); path dependence of a capital-intensive industrial structure (another legacy of apartheid); and conflict-ridden industrial relations, which enable some unionised workers to lift themselves up from the lower parts of the distributional cliff – but raise the cost (in terms of both earnings and conflict) of employing workers, and thereby contribute to undercutting economic dynamism in the mid-range of the labour market.²²

In sum, relative to other middle-income countries, 'South Africa has an unusually small fraction of the population that gains directly from sustained economic growth.'²³ The result is huge pressure from those at the bottom of the distributional cliff to improve their economic circumstances through informal income, political connections and collective action within the fold of the governing tripartite alliance.²⁴

Despite government claims to the contrary, the benefits of growth are not trickling down sufficiently, even when South Africa was growing rapidly. The absolute number of unemployed is growing – although it is important to recognise that employment is also growing in absolute numbers.²⁵ In addition, South Africa is experiencing a demographic dividend, i.e. the size of its working age population (aged 15 to 64 years of age) is expanding as a proportion of its total population. Thus, in 2015, the labour force grew by 20 000 more South Africans from the previous year.²⁶

South Africa has an unusually small fraction of the population that gains directly from sustained economic growth

At an estimated GDP growth rate of 0.8% for 2016, the Quarterly Labour Force Survey from Stats SA (to December 2015) presents a clear picture of a labour market under pressure. Instead of creating employment in the formal sector, job creation has shifted to the informal sector. Of a notable 505 000 jobs created in 2015, almost half (236 000) were in the informal sector, where the compensation wage levels are typically survivalist. Next came 269 000 jobs created in the formal sector, 118 000 agricultural jobs and 75 000 in private households. Most jobs were lost in the manufacturing, utilities and construction industries in the last quarter of 2015.

²⁷ Low growth facilitates job creation in the less productive informal sector, as job seekers struggle to survive and make ends meet.

Adding to the labour and unemployment challenge are on-going electricity supply inefficiencies, a minimum wage debate (that could, if implemented at too high a level, constrain employment) and the threat of a full downgrade to so-called junk or sub-investment status that would increase borrowing costs and limit access to international finance.

Economics and stability

Unemployment, inequality, poverty and poor governance in South Africa impact upon social stability in complex ways. At the individual level, living in conditions of poverty significantly exacerbates one's risk of engaging in violence due to increased exposure to violent subcultures, substance abuse and the availability of crime as a means to 'redress the exclusion felt through not having material goods that define social inclusion.'²⁸ That said, being poor does not increase an individual's likelihood of being violent. Rather it is the degree and sense of inequality between and across



0.8%

THE RATE AT WHICH
THE RESERVE BANK
ESTIMATES SOUTH AFRICA
WILL GROW IN 2016

segments of society – the degree of relative deprivation and the gap between the richest and poorest – that is much more likely to fuel violence and social unrest.²⁹ Furthermore, members of politically excluded groups are more likely to mobilise after a change in their relative position of power.³⁰ This is important for South Africa, which is now generally considered to be the most unequal country in the world where extreme displays of consumerism and wealth co-exist with widespread poverty. This relationship between bling consumerism and poverty is further conditioned by the country's particularly violent history.

Moreover, being unemployed (often a characteristic of poverty) means that local citizens are available for mobilisation and participation in protests, political meetings and demonstrations, particularly if these are accompanied by gifts of food hampers, T-shirts and other incentives. These dynamics were, for example, evident during the launch of the various party manifestoes in April 2016, when the populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) were able to attract a larger audience than any other party, in part due to the offer of such material incentives to its largely poor and unemployed electorate (many of whom, incidentally, are likely to be unregistered voters).

Economics and poverty have important gender dimensions also. The apartheid system created immense difficulty for blacks to obtain and retain meaningful positions of power in their economic and social status, often leading males to demonstrate dominance in other ways. According to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), the economic conditions of apartheid for black males 'increased the likelihood of finding masculine affirmation in homosocial (sometimes criminal) settings and in their relations with black women.'³¹ In the same vein, the previous system of compulsory military service among white males had similar impacts.³² The result is a patriarchal society where socialisation grew to be exceptionally violent and characterised by extremely high levels of rape and domestic violence.

South Africa is trapped at growth levels that are likely to increase social turbulence at least until 2019/2020. The Reserve Bank estimates that without major structural reform, South Africa is expected to grow at a rate of 1.8% annually, significantly below the levels required to reduce unemployment. Furthermore, South Africa's fiscal deficit and debt indicators signal that there is limited scope to spend more to achieve greater redistribution, meaning current social welfare spending may prove to be unsustainable if borrowing costs were to rise (such as could happen following a junk status downgrade).³³

Clearly the 1990–1994 political revolution has not been accompanied by sufficient changes in the country's economic configuration, which remains capital intensive with high levels of structural unemployment, low growth, poor savings and

low productivity – efforts that were compounded by policy experimentation and bad management in the education sector for almost two decades. Many in government use this conclusion to argue in favour of greater redistribution, implying greater regulation and distortion of the market instead of seeing the importance of changing the structure of the economy to allow for more opportunity and inclusive growth. As a result, cartels in the wheat, poultry and pharmaceutical sectors collude to artificially raise the retail prices of essential goods³⁴, construction companies collude in tendering for large scale infrastructure projects (such as during the preparations for the World Cup in 2010)³⁵ and efforts at black economic empowerment distort value for money competition, deter investment and inhibit all sectors, particularly small and medium sized enterprises. Critics such as the political economist Moeletsi Mbeki argue that instead of empowering ordinary people, black economic empowerment ends up benefiting a small group of politically connected families, distorts the market and demands never-ending levels of red tape that stifles the economy and deters foreign investment.³⁶ Instead of simply reducing the hurdles to small business as indeed recommended in the National Development Plan 2030, government's response was to establish yet another ministry in an already bloated cabinet without any measurable impact.

Economics and poverty have important gender dimensions in South Africa

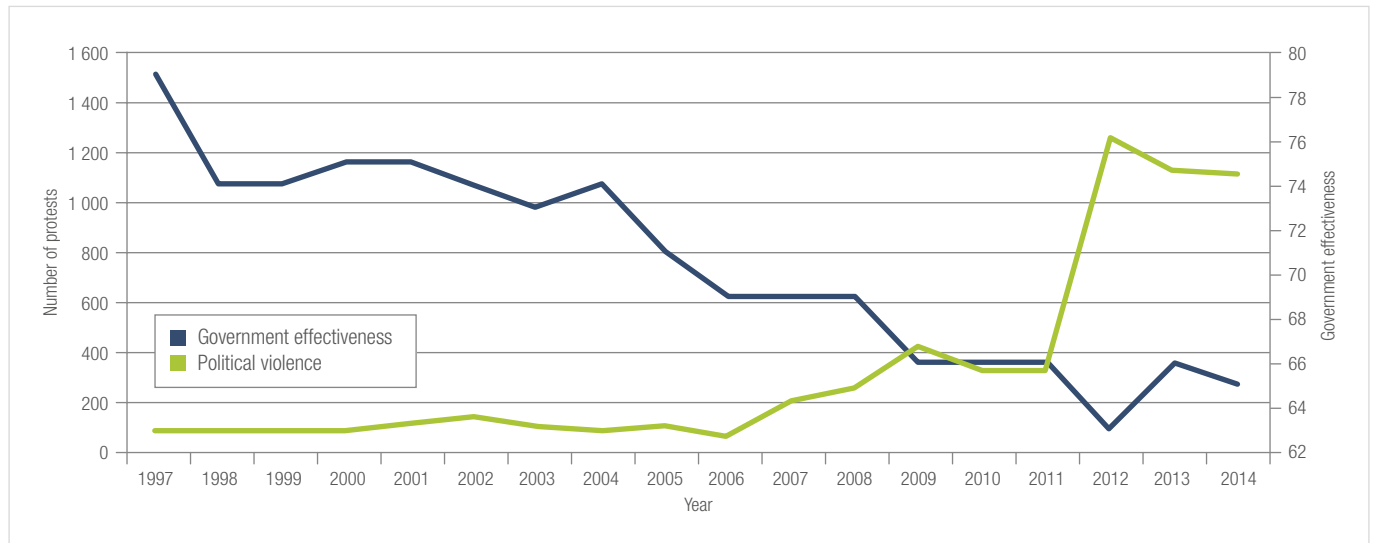
At this rate South Africans are getting poorer with each passing year, unemployment is increasing, as is frustration with the ruling party, as many South Africans witness the extent to which an increasingly multiracial employed elite continue an excessive consumerist binge while the rest of the population are left even more marginalised.

Politics, governance and growth

The World Bank's global governance indicators show a steady decline in South Africa's rank of governance effectiveness and control of corruption since 1996. The rank for governance effectiveness fell from a measure of 79 in 1996 to 65 in 2014 and from 78 to 54 in the ranking for control of corruption in the same period.³⁷

South Africa has a number of important post-apartheid institutions such as its independent constitutional court, public protector and a free media. Under President Jacob Zuma the integrity and effectiveness of these institutions has been subject to unprecedented levels of political interference, particularly in the choice of unsuited and inadequate leaders that are

Figure 1: South Africa's governance indicators and riots and protests, 1997–2014



Sources: Worldwide Governance Indicators, World Bank, ACLED data 1997–2015

parachuted in as part of the ANC policy of cadre deployment (the systematic appointment of party loyalists into key positions of power) or, more recently, personal loyalty to the president, who has the legal mandate to make senior appointments. As a result, corruption and patronage have compromised the strength of many institutions and resulted in declining international confidence in the country's potential.

Our 2015 paper on South Africa's future draws on the study by Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson entitled *Why Nations Fail*, which argues that political inclusion is a pre requisite for sustained long-term economic growth.³⁸ We argue that South Africa is in the midst of an incomplete transition to inclusive politics and an incomplete transition towards inclusive economics. Alongside the challenge of patrimonialism, this situation translates into declining social stability and limited prospects for future prosperity.³⁹

Simultaneously, a growing domestic protest movement is calling for change in service provision, labour issues and unemployment, university fees and staffing, and most recently and possibly most importantly, for the resignation of President Jacob Zuma.

South Africa has entered uncharted waters, as support for the governing ANC is on a sustained downward trajectory and the party is set to potentially lose its majority in due course. The prospects for intensified electoral violence will likely increase in the future as political competition intensifies while rising unemployment and poverty amplify the effects. The relationship between governance indicators and the number of riots and protests recorded by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is presented in Figure 1.

Declining ANC electoral support coincides with the rising number of protests and demonstrations, given that the majority of them are related to governance challenges, as the following section will illustrate (see Figure 2).

While politics and the economy impact social instability, it plays a key role in driving away foreign and domestic investment, disenfranchising and polarising the voting public, reducing social cohesion, paving the way for more populist policies and isolation from the international community. Social instability thus affects economic growth, while economic growth impacts societies' vulnerability to social instability. And this is not just an African or South African problem: in conflict-affected countries in Latin America, an estimated 5.65% of GDP is lost annually due to the costs of violence to the job market and healthcare systems.⁴¹

Social instability affects economic growth, while economic growth impacts societies' vulnerability to social instability

In the same vein, bad policy choices and inconsistent governance exacerbate economic decline, thereby increasing conditions for social instability. A 2011 study across Africa by Aisen and Veiga shows that with every additional government cabinet change per year, the annual growth rate of African countries decreases by 2.39 percentage points.⁴² Since assuming the presidency in 2009 President Zuma has reshuffled his cabinet six times (excluding the mandatory new cabinet when his second term started). The most recent (yet short-lived)

Figure 2: ANC public support⁴⁰ and protest levels



Sources: ACLED 1997–2015; Afrobarometer, Round 6, 2016

appointment of an obscure backbencher (David van Rooyen) as minister of finance caused public outcry and subsequently was hastily changed with the (re)appointment of Pravin Gordhan, making it technically the seventh reshuffle.

And while efforts are currently being made to address some of the major economic challenges described in the previous section, such as the establishment of a central procurement office under Treasury, the nub is essentially political and ideological. Political in that the president, his family and business connections are often associated or implicated in these travails, and ideological in the sense that two of the three alliance partners (the South African Communist Party, SACP and COSATU) effectively frame discussions on economic choices within a narrow lexicon of statism and socialism, not to mention the impact of their weakened relations on the already struggling labour market. Whereas COSATU previously served as social sponge that could absorb social tension and pressures, its shift to represent public sector workers and associated dependency on the ANC has severely weakened the federation.

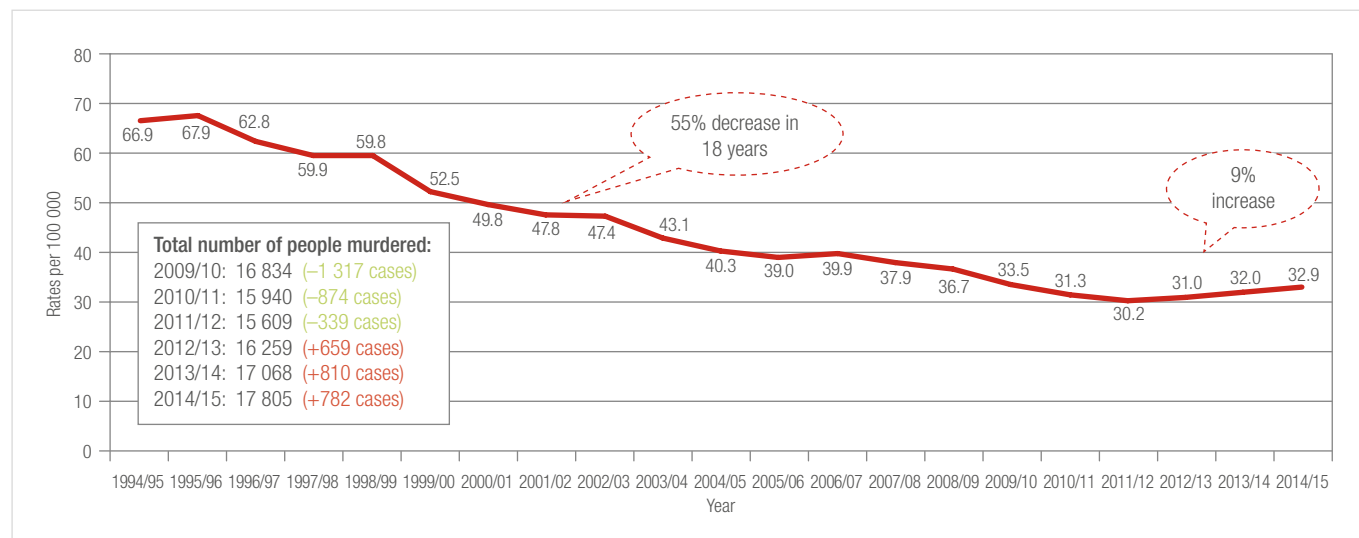
The link between politics and economics is also evident with the performance of the rand, which has been seen to strengthen with positive political developments, such as the election of Mandela in 1994, and depreciate in response to worrying political events, such as Zuma's firing of finance minister Nhlanhla Nene in December 2015 and the April 2016 ruling by the Constitutional Court that the president had not upheld his oath of office in seeking to avoid payment for additions to his private residence in Nkandla.⁴³

The confluence of governance and economics as a driver of social instability is discussed in the following section and forms the basis of the future projections laid out in the second paper in this series, *South African scenarios 2024*, as well as the subsequent separate set of policy recommendations.

Key trends in social instability in South Africa

Economic inequality, frequency of protests and trust in government are but some of the drivers of South Africa's rising social instability. While all violence is technically social as it is carried out in and by society, political aspirations and motivation are what makes violence political or public – i.e. violent protests against local government and

Figure 3: Murder rates in South Africa, per 100 000



Sources: Population data: Stats SA; crime rates: annual crime statistics released by the South African Police Service (SAPS); rate calculation: ISS

political assignments and xenophobic attacks. Murder and other types of violent crime are, by definition, forms of social or interpersonal violence. Public violence is of key concern to overall stability, particularly when it may have revolutionary potential.

Apartheid was a form of state-sponsored structural violence, but despite events such as the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, South Africa only experienced sustained and on-going high levels of public violence from 1976 with the events in Soweto on 16 June of that year and their aftermath. After a brief respite, violent resistance to apartheid gained momentum in 1979, culminating in a partial (then national) state of emergency in 1985/6. Global and national events coincided to offer South Africa an exit from its destructive path, and the eventual release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 set in motion a prolonged and often bloody process of negotiations that lasted until the first democratic elections in 1994. The nature of violence changed in this period, given extensive mobilisation by the National Party government, the Inkatha Freedom Party, the ANC and some of the homeland leaders. A renewed spike accompanied the 1994 election negotiations, with particularly high levels of violence experienced between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

Immediately after the introduction of democracy in 1994, the number of violent incidents dropped dramatically while the economy strengthened (with an all-time high of 5.6% annual growth in 2006 compared to a long-term average rate of 3.4%) until the global economic crisis of 2008/9.

In the sections that follow we comment on key trends in violent crime, vigilantism and xenophobic violence and end with an assessment of one of the most concerning (and growing) types of public violence in South Africa: violent demonstration. It concludes with a brief discussion of the inadequacy of state response to insecurity and, in this vein, the risk of heightened election related violence in the upcoming municipal elections and other key political events of the years to come.

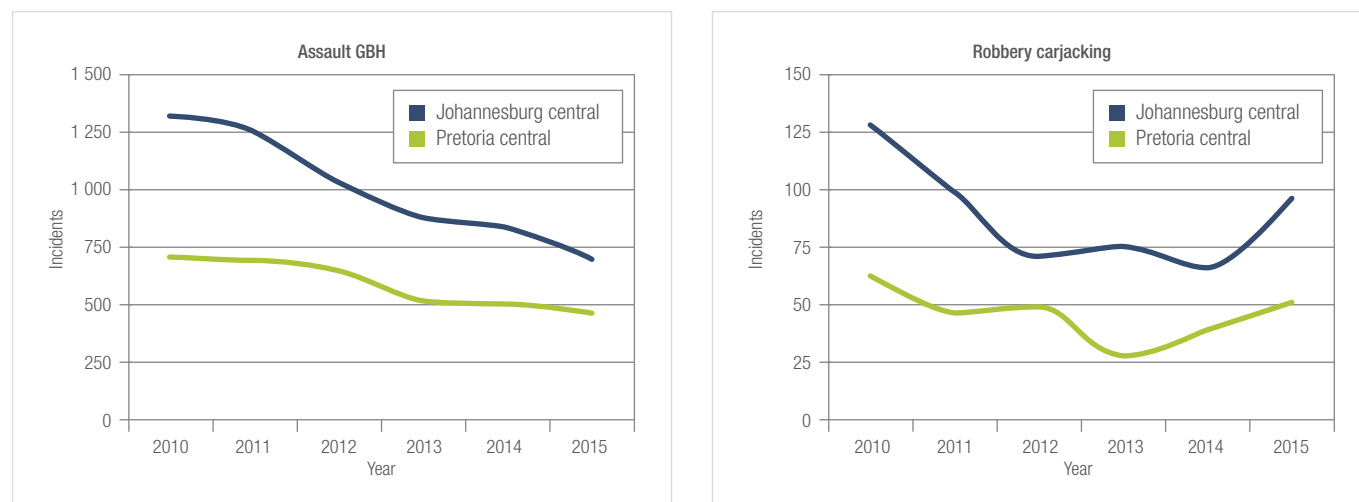
Violent crime

The analysis of violent crime trends in post-apartheid South Africa is complicated by the amalgamation of the nominally independent homelands into South Africa from 1994

47th

SOUTH AFRICA'S POSITION
ON THE MO IBRAHIM INDEX
WHICH INDICATE CITIZENS
OF 52 AFRICAN COUNTRIES'
REPORTED SENSE OF
PERSONAL SAFETY

Figure 4: Gauteng (Johannesburg and Pretoria) – assault with the intent to cause grave bodily harm (GBH) and carjacking, five-year period 2010–2015



Source: ISS CrimeHub

and the disruptions that accompanied the subsequent data collection and verification efforts. That said, indications are that violent crime peaked in 2003/4, whereafter the trends have seen a general decrease, with the lowest level of murder, a common yet problematic proxy for overall violent crime levels, occurring in the 2012/2013 period – see Figure 3.

Despite a 55% decrease in the murder rate in the first 18 years of democracy, the country experienced increases from 2011/2012 to 2014/2015 of close to 9%.⁴⁴ The three provinces with the highest murder rates (as recorded in 2014/2015) are the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. All forms of aggravated robbery – including street robbery, residential robbery, carjacking and kidnapping – have increased (see Figure 4). There have, however, been declines in the total number of arson attacks and motor vehicle theft.⁴⁵

According to the police an average 55 000 rapes are reported each year, and given that only an estimated one in 25 incidents is recorded in this manner, rape, sexual assault and domestic abuse in South Africa is generally far more prevalent than police statistics report.⁴⁶

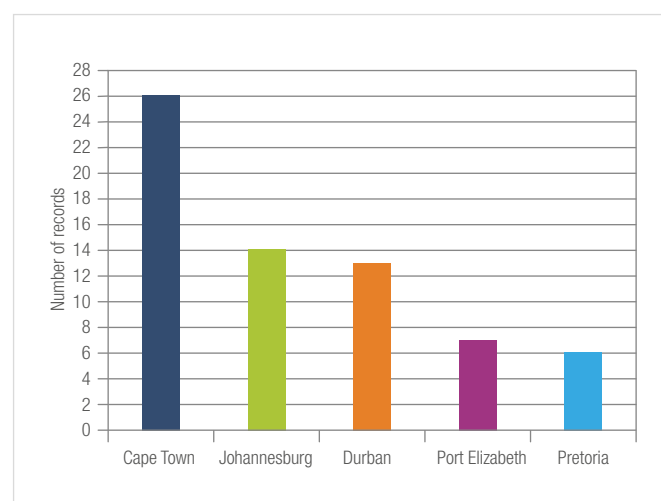
Perceptions of security serve as an important measure of societal violence and add a human dimension to the crime incident data. According to the Mo Ibrahim Index, South Africa ranks 45th out of 52 African countries on citizens' reported sense of personal safety, a figure that dropped by 3% since 2011,⁴⁷ which suggests that for the average South African, the overall sense of safety is declining from already low levels. These trends are also consistent with the SA Victims of Crime Survey that is conducted by Stats SA.

Vigilantism

Vigilantism or so-called mob justice in South Africa sporadically erupts in communities where participants take the law into their own hands.⁴⁸ According to ISS Public Violence Monitor data, vigilante incidents are the third most common act of public violence since 2013 with a total of 199 events (as recorded in the media), 98% of which were violent. The townships and informal settlements that fall within the greater Cape Town metropolitan area are host to the most incidents in the country, with Johannesburg in second place – see Figure 5.

The roots and cultural context for this type of violence are complex. Some aspects of vigilantism can be traced to

Figure 5: Number of vigilantism events in major cities, January 2013–April 2016



Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor

apartheid, where the police and criminal justice system were primarily used to oppress black South Africans rather than address crime. As a result, communities had to rely on their own methods to assert local control. High crime rates, practical failings by the police and the criminal justice system and lack of trust between the police and communities can partially explain the rationale behind wanton acts of vigilantism, which have their roots in acts of “self help” where local community members occupy the spaces where policing is non-existent, and the lines between illegal and legal justice are often blurred.⁴⁹

Similarly, gang related violence has its roots in this complicated local expressions of territorial control. According to the SAPS, in 2013, 12% of total murders in Cape Town were gang related, which represented an 86% increase from 2012. Gangs have a long history in South Africa, with some of the deepest roots in so-called coloured townships in Cape Town and in some of the city's first illicit drug markets.⁵⁰ As these markets became more lucrative, and the individuals and groups associated with them increased their power and influence, violence became a means to maintain territorial security and control.

Such attitudes and approaches to security and personal survival take a long time to reverse. Compounding this, recent incidents have increasingly been motivated by a lack of trust in police and growing threats of crime and gang warfare in the face of a security apparatus that is widely perceived as corrupt and incapable.

This is a worrying situation, although it is important to remember that the majority of marginalised communities do not resort to violence or vigilantism to obtain justice and have to deal with stigmatisation of their neighbourhoods and/or social groupings.

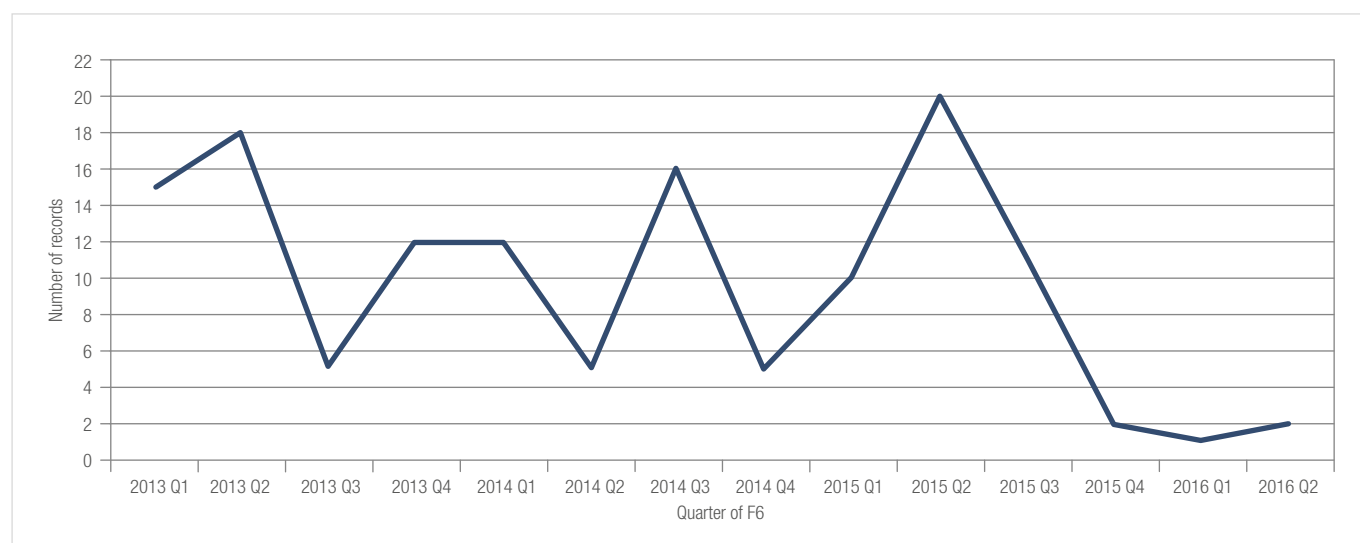
Xenophobic protest and attacks

Xenophobic attacks and protests in South Africa are largely incidents against African foreigner migrant communities, motivated by ‘the hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers’⁵¹ and more specifically the belief that foreign nationals “take jobs” from South Africans.⁵² One of the worst incidents of widespread xenophobic attacks occurred during 2008, initially in the Gauteng Province; 62 people were killed and 30 000 people were displaced in May that year.⁵³ Since 2008, overall levels of xenophobia have witnessed a decrease, but recent data shows that the first and second quarter of 2015 were characterised by an increase in such attacks – see Figure 6.

Where policing is non-existent, the lines between illegal and legal justice are often blurred

A 2011 study by Von Holdt et al. on community protest and xenophobic attacks in seven different locations across the country found that most xenophobic attacks were secondary or adjunct to community protest activity. Incidents were largely about citizenship and occurred against a backdrop of the growing gap between the post-apartheid elite (both black and white) and the large underclass of unemployed.⁵⁴ Another study carried out in 2010 by the Southern African Migration Project found that South Africans are less tolerant of migrants from further away (such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia) than those from neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe and Lesotho.⁵⁵ This is undoubtedly influenced by

Figure 6: Xenophobic attacks, January 2013–April 2016



Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor

the migrant labour system, which has seen mining companies recruiting workers from these countries, as well as the steady influx of job seekers from Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe to South Africa over many decades. Whereas migrants from these countries are known and apparently more acceptable, the influx of Africans from further afield seems to have elicited greater reaction.

Protest and violent demonstration

Public data on political violence points to a steady incline in the total number of social instability events in South Africa since 1997, of which “riots and protests” are the most frequent in type.⁵⁶ Protest activity increased at the turn of 2009, at the height of the global economic crisis coinciding with the first inauguration of Jacob Zuma as president. The five-fold increase in the number of protest incidents since 2010, as depicted in in Figure 7, is alarming.

South Africans are less tolerant of migrants from further away, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, than those from neighbouring countries

South Africa has a long history of grassroots mobilisation and community level justice and peace initiatives. Mass democratic movements calling for the end of apartheid, spearheaded internally by the United Democratic Front, dominated the 1980s. By contrast, current protest movements – the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Concerned Citizens Group and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, to name a few – are often characterised as new social movements in that they have been some of the first political structures in South Africa to criticise the ANC.⁵⁷ Similarly, many service delivery protests have been referred to as “popcorn protests” for their short-lived nature and relatively small size when compared to early democracy movements.⁵⁸

Some of the most common and historical protest activities in South Africa, as described by Peter Alexander (2010), are mass meetings, drafting of memoranda,

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IN 2013,

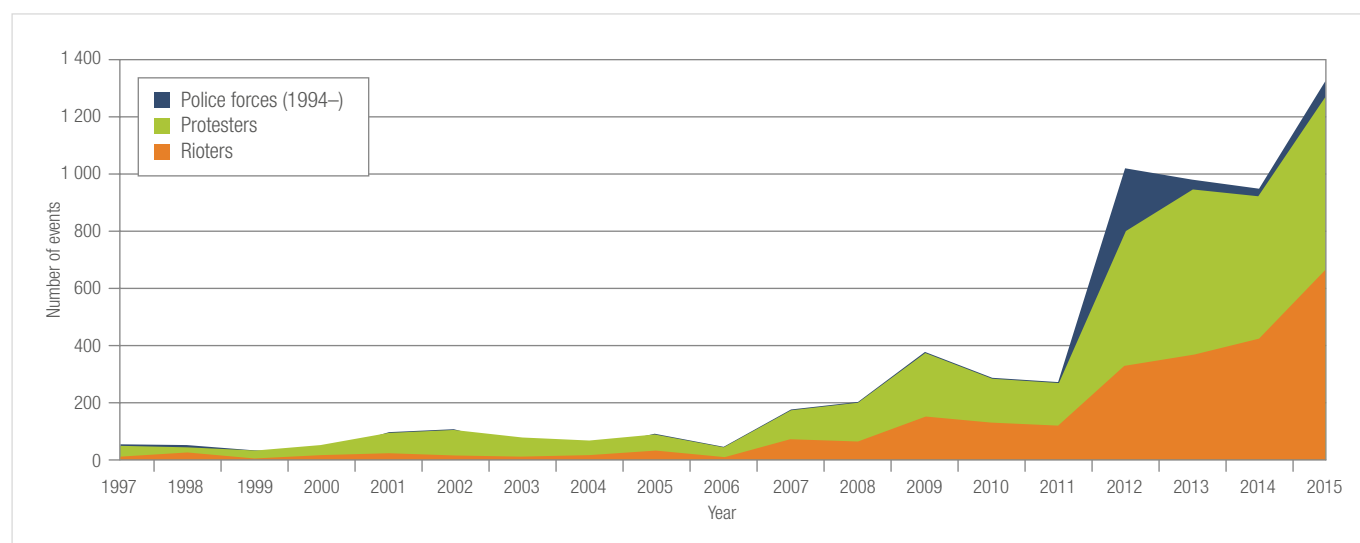
12%

OF TOTAL MURDERS IN
THE WESTERN CAPE WERE
GANG RELATED, WHICH
REPRESENTED AN

86% increase

FROM 2012

Figure 7: Top three incident perpetrators: 1997–2015



Source: ACLED data 1997–2015

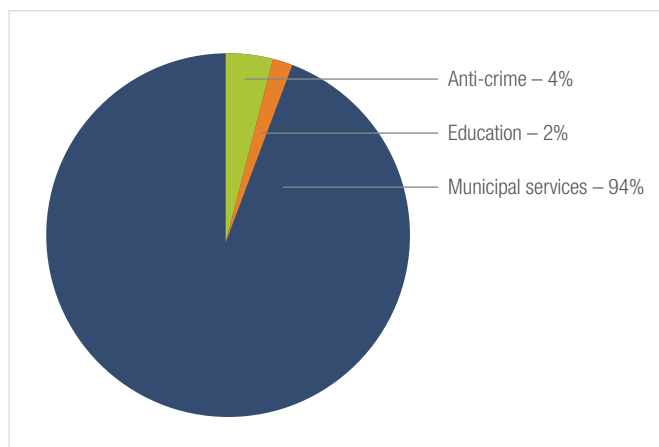
petitions, toyi-toying (a protest dance), processions, stay-aways, election boycotts, blockading of roads, construction of barricades, burning of tyres, looting, destruction of buildings, chasing individuals out of townships, confrontations with police and forced resignation of elected officials.⁵⁹

Who makes up the broad basket of protesters depends on the type of demonstration, but it mainly tends to be students and workers, residents of townships and informal shack settlements, civil society organisations and members and/or supporters of political parties. Although apartheid has left South Africa relatively violent, both among privileged and exploited communities, in rural and urban areas young males from lower socioeconomic areas with poor education are both the core perpetrators and victims of all types of violence, including violent demonstration.

Service delivery protests

An analysis of data from the ISS Public Violence Monitor indicates that in the last three years the vast majority of all protests have been motivated by frustrations with inadequate local government service delivery such as no or poor access to water and electricity, labour dispute matters and education. Figure 8 shows the dominance of municipal services as an issue for protestors.

Figure 8: Public violent events by main grievance/motivation



Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor, January 2013–March 2016

The recent surge in service delivery protests coincides with the start of Thabo Mbeki's presidency in 1999. In the eyes of the protestors, violence is a tool through which to communicate frustration with service delivery and force a response from the government. Many instances of violent protests have followed protracted efforts at engaging with government using legitimate and non-violent methods (e.g. requests for meetings, petitions, writing letters, peaceful marches, etc.).

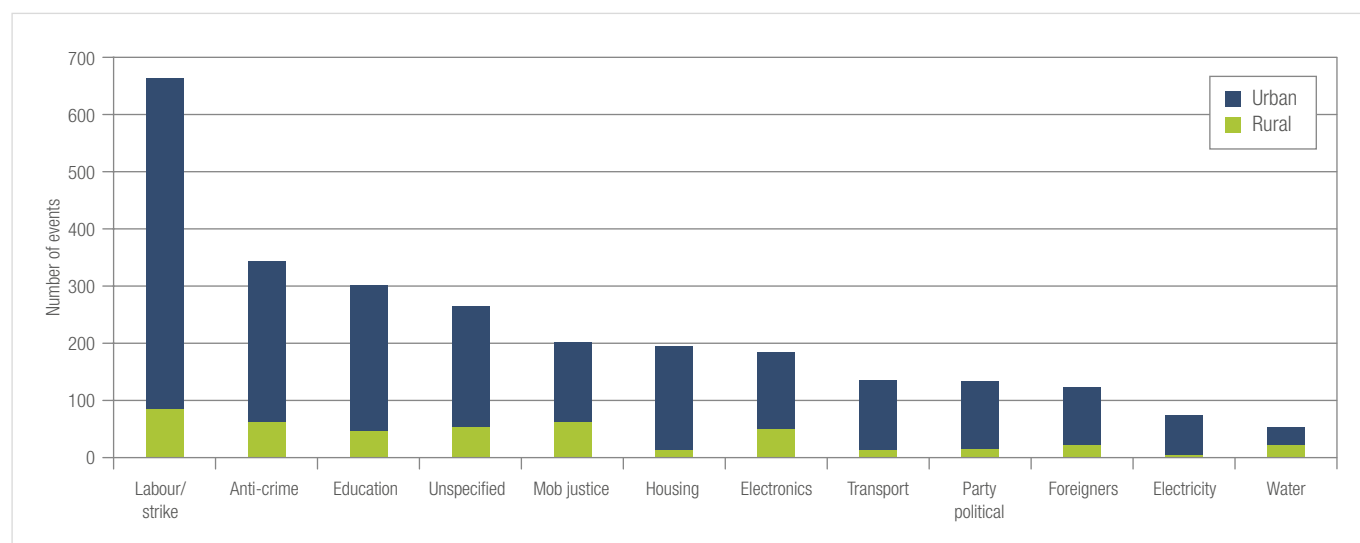
There is inevitably a large variation in how protest is perceived to impact on the political process. In a study on service delivery protests in two pockets of Durban, Lodge and Mottiar (2015) found that Cato Manor residents were far more active protestors and more prone to the use of confrontational protest tactics than survey respondents in South Durban.⁶⁰ Cato Manor residents believed that protest "got attention" and triggered the dialogue with local leaders they desired. In South Durban, protest was far less frequent, and communities reported to be even less engaged in ward meetings and other political events than their Cato Manor peers. Protesters in this area found protest was ineffective to garner the required attention from political representatives, partially because they believed their largely Indian-populated neighbourhoods were not a priority for the ruling ANC.

16% of corruption-related incidents reported to Corruption Watch in 2015 occurred at the local governance level

Adding to the frustration, despite decentralisation and the local level wards and *izimbizos* (local meetings) service delivery protests created, there exist few effective and open platforms for public participation in local political issues. Local elected officials are seen to lack capacity, willingness or concern to engage with citizens, in part because they are often in their positions because of their political loyalty rather than their abilities to be responsive civil servants. In fact, the Von Holdt et al. (2011) study suggests a key motivation of community members' engagement in protest is to "oust leaders" and take positions of power for themselves. This tendency was particularly evident as the ANC selected its candidates for the local government elections at the end of May 2016 with the number of local politicians being killed, ostensibly for the positions, growing. KwaZulu-Natal has consistently seen more political murders than in other provinces.⁶¹

From the government's perspective, service delivery protests are a reactionary response of local communities with rising expectations due to the success in service provision, a sentiment President Zuma himself has expressed.⁶² Yet in many local governments bodies, performance has indeed dropped, and the quality of services has dwindled. A 2010 ad hoc committee on coordinated oversight on service delivery documented the weakness of local government in service delivery confirming that many communities had levels of service provision deemed unacceptable. Furthermore, over 75% of local municipalities do not receive clean audits, nor

Figure 9: Public violence main grievance type by rural/urban divide: January 2013–April 2016



Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor

do they have qualified people serving as their chief financial officers. Consequently, mismanagement, maladministration and corruption are rife.

Highlighting the overlaps between governance and instability, inadequate public sector productivity adversely affects the poor, deepens impoverishment and exacerbates social frustration, given this social class' disproportional dependence on public sector services, fuelled by a lack of means to source alternatives for state provided water, security, education, etc. In the same vein, while the state may be credited for providing monthly welfare payments to the most needy, it is this segment of society that bear the majority of the costs in the form of inefficient and poor public services.

In rural and urban areas, young males from lower socioeconomic areas with poor education are both the core perpetrators and victims of all types of violence

Another type of violence that falls between the categories of vigilantism and service delivery protest are acts of organised vandalism or organised destruction of public property. Such attacks, for example the burning of 24⁶³ schools in Limpopo province in May 2016, are characteristically violent and destructive. The recent incidents in Vuwani and Lebuvu are reportedly motivated by a high court ruling that the schools now fall under the remit of the newly created Malamulele municipality, a move resisted by affected local politicians (and less by the residents of the Makhado municipality), who are reportedly actively aiding and abetting the subsequent violence.⁶⁴

So while the 2009 Local Government Turnaround Strategy blames public protest for exacerbating poor local government performance, the independent body Corruption Watch shows that 16% of corruption-related incidents reported to it in 2015 occurred at the local governance level.⁶⁵ Moreover, even though protests and uprisings are more likely to occur in contexts that have experienced relative prosperity or growth followed by a sudden decline or reversal, the increasing volume of service delivery

THE NUMBER OF WORKING
DAYS LOST DUE TO LABOUR
STRIKES INCREASED BY

608%

BETWEEN 2013 AND 2014
AND ACTION BY WORKERS
IN THE MINING SECTOR
ACCOUNTED FOR

94% of the total

protests points to widespread anger and growing impatience with local government and the current political trajectory.

Labour protests

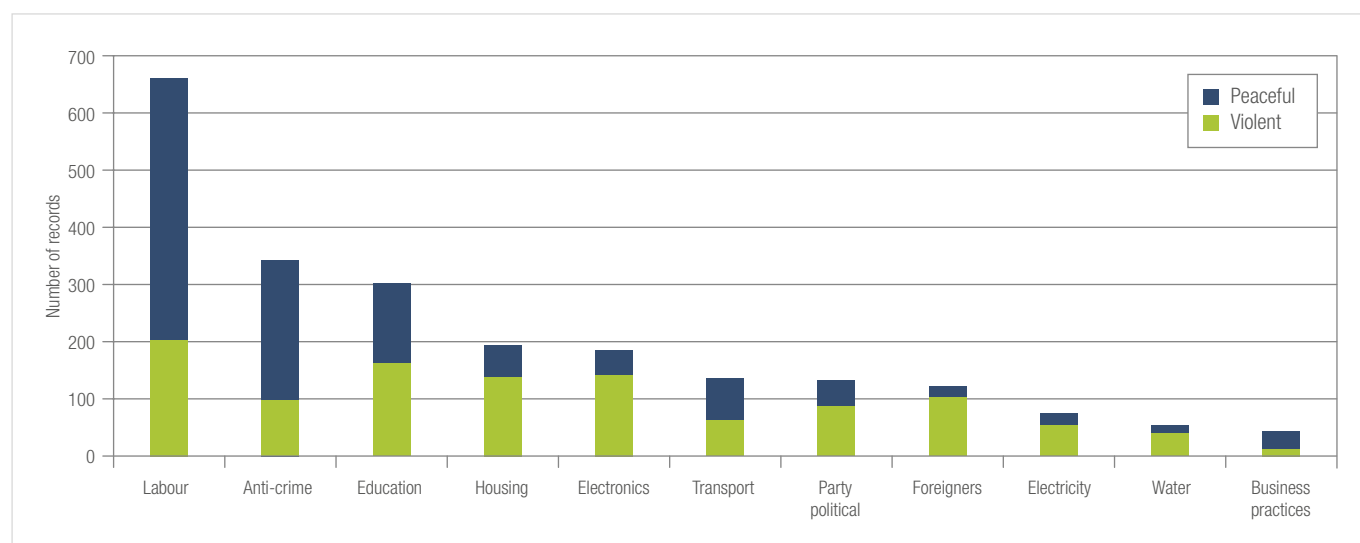
Labour related strikes are the most common form of incidents recorded by the ISS since 2013. These incidents are predominantly non-violent and are more common in the country's largest cities. According to the Department of Labour, the number of working days lost due to labour strikes increased by 608% between 2013 and 2014 and action by workers in the mining sector accounted for 94% of the total.⁶⁶ Union members are among the most active strikers, with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa as some of the most active.⁶⁷ The current internal crisis in the country's largest trade union, COSATU, is further antagonising the situation. Tension within and between unions is on the increase. The once dominant ANC-aligned COSATU group has lost significant support even as its character has changed, today representing largely public sector members as a number of new formations have emerged.

Data from Afrobarometer released in April 2016 suggests that employers are perceived to be more racist than courts or landlords

The core issues labour protestors call attention to are wages and salary structures, maltreatment or abuse, and unlawful dismissal. Interestingly, data from Afrobarometer released in April 2016 suggests that employers are perceived to be more racist than courts or landlords.⁶⁸

In a related vein, labour protests/strikes have many overlaps with xenophobic protest and attacks, particularly when the stated motivation of the mobilisation is to demonstrate frustration over non-nationals "taking jobs from locals" Protests where

Figure 10: Type of protest motivation and proportion violent and non-violent, January 2013–April 2016



Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor

the core issue/motivation is “foreigners” – see Figure 10 – are typically more violent than general labour strikes.

Student protests

The Fees Must Fall and the Rhodes Must Fall campaigns emerged in 2015 in response to rising student fees, university staffing issues, student accommodation, and the culture of what many have deemed an untransformed higher education system.⁶⁹ Some of the most active campuses have been the Universities of Cape Town, Western Cape and Pretoria, with wide variation in the nature of the grievances and the degrees of violence exhibited at each. Both are also large online campaigns.

Accusations of the involvement and politicisation of the student protests by opposition parties are also widespread

A publication by protestors from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) argues that the nature of the Fees Must Fall protests are indistinguishable in their motivation from the continuous service delivery protests across the country. It further states that like the service delivery protests, student action calls on the ANC to deliver on its promises: ‘21 years of democracy should have been enough for the ANC to fulfil these [free education, housing, land] promises...’⁷⁰

Although there has been a display of tolerance on both sides, violent tactics in a number of student protest locations have also

been met with violent responses from police and private security companies (the heavy weaponry detailed in the UWC report) as well as mutual smear tactics to downplay the validity and credibility of students’ grievances and the actions of all parties. Accusations of the direct involvement and politicisation of the student protests by opposition parties, particularly the EFF, are also widespread.⁷¹

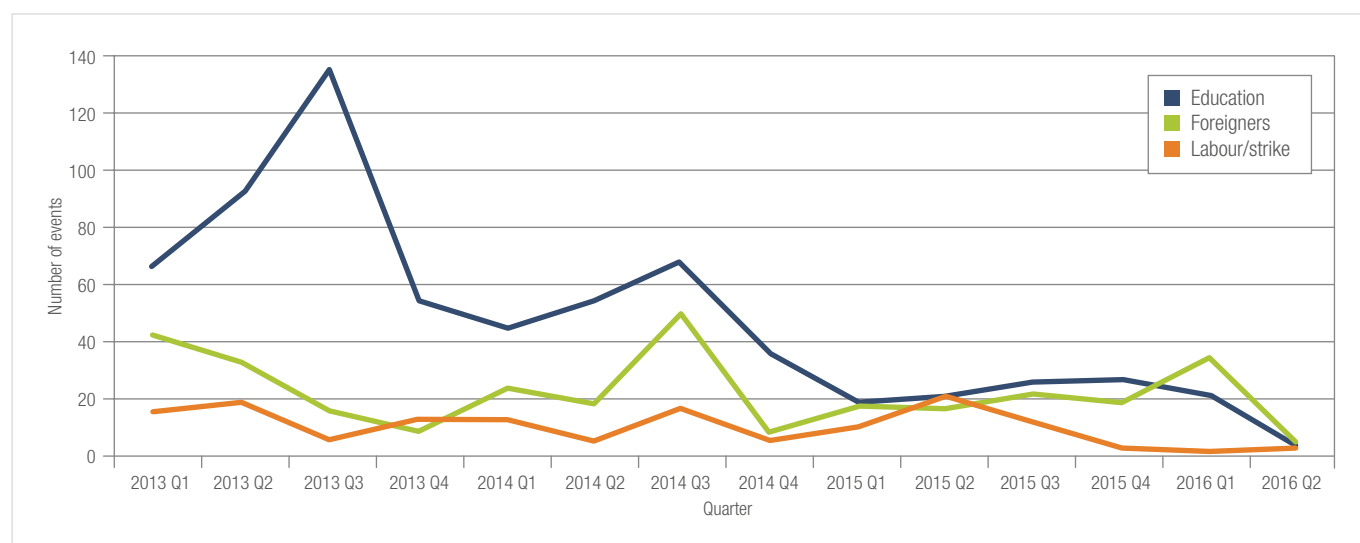
Anti-Zuma protests

In September 2015 a demonstration of an estimated 10 000 people occurred in Pretoria calling for the resignation of President Zuma. Since then the campaign adopted the popular slogan and hashtag #ZumaMustFall, an adaptation of the #FeesMustFall campaign and with it reached over 100 000 users on Twitter alone towards the end of 2015.⁷² Such efforts have intensified in frequency in the first quarter of 2016 and are unlikely to subside while Zuma remains president, as opposition groups target the ANC in what is set to be a bitter and likely violent local government election campaign scheduled for 3 August 2016. In urban areas where the mainstream media is more widely consumed, the campaign is fed by successive court cases and revelations that unravel the cocoon of obfuscation and legal delays that previously protected President Zuma from prosecution.

Violence, policing and state response

South Africa’s protest climate is varied but with clear anti-government grievances running across the different types of manifestation. Such an environment is potentially very worrisome in the run-up to the August 2016 elections and beyond, as declining public confidence, coupled with growing

Figure 11: Protests motivated by education, “foreigners”/xenophobia, and labour issues, January 2013–April 2016



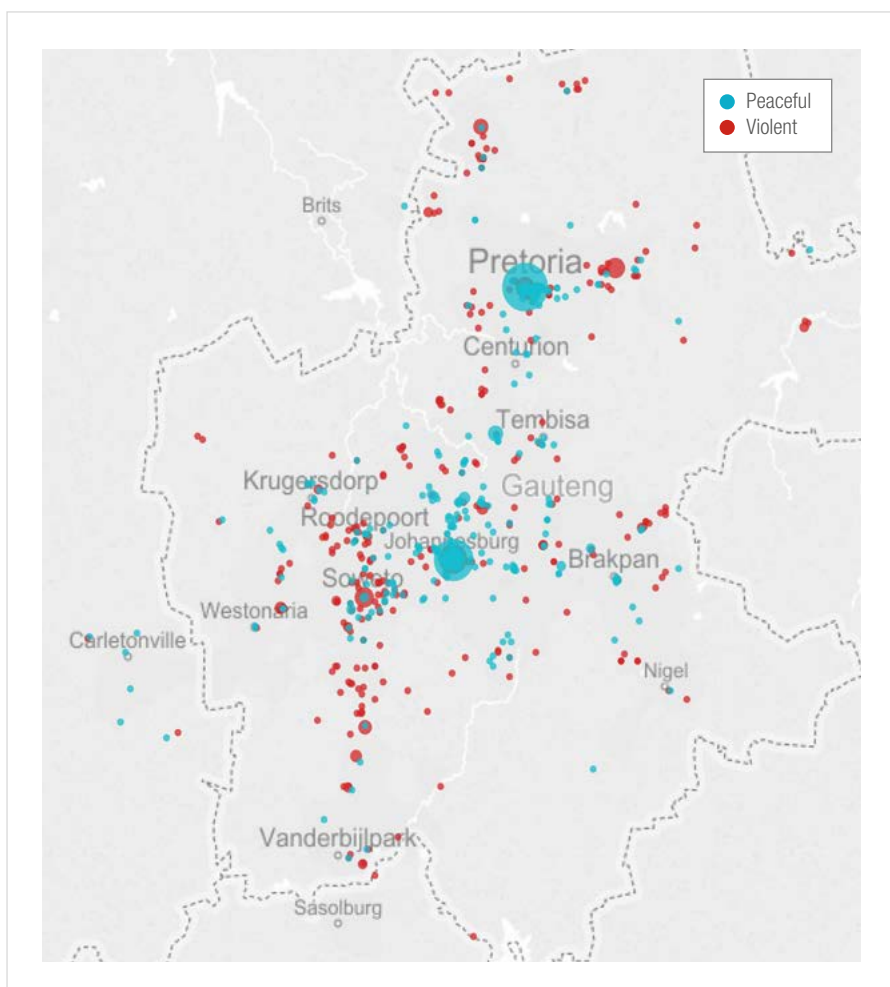
Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor

economic uncertainty and the security sector's dismal track record in responding, could culminate in the highest levels of political violence since the end of apartheid.

Protest and violent demonstration do not occur without instigation and some organisation and leadership. Political actors often serve as mobilisers, organisers or aggravators of popular protests, with variation across type of protest and geographic location. A recent example of the impact of leadership on violence being Zulu monarch Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu's hand in stirring up the xenophobic attacks of early 2015 by using polarising rhetoric.⁷³ Opposition parties also play a role in fuelling mobilisation, such as with the EFF's direct engagement and support of the Fees Must Fall protests and some of the inciting statements made by the party's leader, Julius Malema.

The response to the growing instability is shaped by the state's capacity to control violence, judicially sanction perpetrators, and ensure law and order.⁷⁴ Beyond unemployment and lack of opportunity, we have argued that South Africa's budding protest movement is increasingly motivated by dissatisfaction with the ruling elite and governance performance. Unsurprisingly, much of the literature on the question of how and why protest in South Africa escalates into violence addresses the timing

Figure 12: Public violence – violent and non-violent, Gauteng province, January 2013–April 2016



Source: ISS Public Violence Monitor

THE CAMPAIGN ADOPTED
THE POPULAR HASHTAG

#ZumaMustFall,
AND REACHED OVER

100 000

USERS ON TWITTER ALONE
TOWARDS THE END OF 2015

and tactics of police engagement, with the debate pendulating over what comes first: violence by protestors or by the police.

An analysis of the ISS Public Violence Monitor data reveals that 55% of total incidents since January 2013 were violent, but this could be partially explained by the sourcing of the data – media – that are often biased in their reporting towards more violence.

Between 2011 and 2015, satisfaction with the police declined from 64.7% to 57%.⁷⁵ Looking at the claims against the SAPS between 2008 and 2015, an average of 80% of annual claims fell into the categories of “assault”, “police actions”, and “shooting incidents”.⁷⁶ According to John Burger from the ISS, the number of reports of police brutality increased by 300% between 2001 and 2010.⁷⁷ Also noteworthy, the civil claims paid out by the police between 2011/12 and 2013/14 on order of the courts increased by 137%.

South African security institutions suffer from constant shifting policy direction, poor management and political compromise

While “rioters and protesters” are the most common actors in the ACLED data on South Africa, they are not associated with the highest number of fatalities. It is rather the category of unidentified groups, followed by the police and vigilante militias that have resulted in the most deaths in South Africa’s recent history. The high level of police corruption is the largest concern in police-social relations. Von Holdt et al. (2011) note that police were either absent or present and provocative in their response to community protests and xenophobic violence.⁷⁸

Independent watchdog organisations often question the independence (and competence) of the police. The dismantling of the special investigations unit of SAPS is just one example of the eroding of the police’s investigative capacity,⁷⁹ as is a continuous shift back to military style ranks, uniforms and approaches to policing. After yet another national commissioner was eventually forced to step down through public pressure and court action, the organisation is now headed by an acting national commissioner doing his best to hold things together pending the announcement of another political appointment to parachute in to protect the president. Meanwhile, both the National Prosecuting Authority and the Hawks (the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation within the police) are embroiled in factional politics.⁸⁰ The leadership of these institutions is torn between its constitutional mandate and the political imperative to deliver appropriate findings that could stay prosecutions aligned to the president and his faction.

The intelligence systems are not working (since they appear to be incompetent and primarily focused on factionalism within the ruling party). The military is in such a state of disrepair due to poor funding and the release of a comprehensively inappropriate defence review that the minister recently lamented (during her 2016/17 budget vote) that it is time for the country to decide if it wants a military.

In sum, all of the South African security institutions – across the range of police, defence force and intelligence departments – suffer from constant shifting policy direction, poor management and political compromise. The result is a state that is

300%

THE INCREASE IN REPORTS OF
POLICE BRUTALITY BETWEEN
2001 and 2010

unable to secure public property (such as schools and universities) against destruction, even when provided with ample precedence and warning.

It is therefore no coincidence that South Africa is host to one of the world's largest private security sectors, used by households and businesses that can afford them.⁸¹ It is often this industry rather than the police who provide order and safety in much of middle and upper class suburbia, while local vigilantes enforce community justice in squatter and informal areas, leaving an embattled police patrolling the rest.

Conclusion

The analysis set out in this paper would indicate that the types of violence people fear the most, such as robbery and murder, have increased in South Africa in recent years. Additionally, the growing frequency of demonstrations, the student protest movements, combined with the economic crisis, paint a worrying picture in the months ahead. In August 2016 the ANC will likely face a vocal challenge from both the EFF and the Democratic Alliance, and the separate paper on *South African scenarios 2024* will examine, in detail, the more likely alternative options that may unfold, while a separate policy brief summarises key recommendations.⁸²

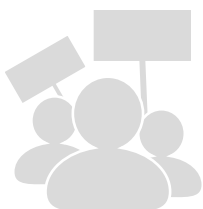
All of the South African security institutions suffer from constant shifting policy direction, poor management and political compromise

The vicious infighting that culminated in the removal of President Mbeki from office and eventually the appointment of Jacob Zuma to the presidency (where we begin to see an uptick in the levels of protest) distracted the ANC government from its previous pro-growth path, which was compounded by a lack of policy certainty and lacklustre implementation. Then came the electricity crisis (itself a stunning demonstration of the lack of planning and foresight, but one that largely predates the Zuma administration). In summary, growth prospects are mediocre for several years into the future.

The results of the August 2016 local government elections will, in turn, give a good inkling of what to expect when the ANC, in December 2017, elects a new president and enters the period leading up to the 2019 general elections as violent competition across many communities potentially ushers in an era of unpredictable coalition politics.

The remarkably peaceful and stable election history in South Africa is undoubtedly due to confidence in the integrity and independence of the Independent Electoral Commission, South Africans' confidence in the democratic system put in place in 1994, and the transparency with which election related processes have occurred in the past. But declining public support for the ANC, growing anti-government demonstration movements and the inadequacies of the state's security apparatus, as well as the political and economic climate, set the scene for interesting years ahead as the follow-on paper will examine.

It is, however, important to retain balance and scale when considering the situation in which South Africa finds itself in 2016. The country does not face anything comparable to the violent events that unfolded during the Soweto protests of 1976 and their aftermath, although recent trends are alarming. Since 2012 violent crime, labour and service delivery related protests have increased, as have the



THE GROWING FREQUENCY OF DEMONSTRATIONS AND STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENTS, COMBINED WITH THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, PAINT A WORRYING PICTURE IN THE MONTHS AHEAD

frequency and intensity of student protests and, most recently, demonstrations demanding the resignation of President Jacob Zuma. Political assassinations and factional violence within the ANC are also on an upward trend, as the ruling party struggles to cope with a host of challenges ranging from corruption, allegations of state capture, leadership and ethical issues, as well as the weakening of its key ally, COSATU.⁸³

These developments occur against the backdrop of economic stagnation and extreme levels of inequality that follow from chronic structural unemployment.

A weaker economy is likely to further incentivise the recourse to violence

The previous ISS forecast on South Africa's future to 2035 concluded that:

South Africa does not necessarily face a crisis. High levels of crime, unemployment and inequality have been characteristic of South African society for decades, and the analysis presented here would indicate that they are likely to remain characteristic of the country for decades to come [...] But the challenge is that things can easily go wrong because the margin for error has become slim. The greatest threat to South Africa is undoubtedly an ANC leadership that responds to populist politics in kind – leading to a position where South Africa finds itself sliding down a Zimbabwe-style slippery slope of elite accumulation, political populism and eventually a shrinking economy. This would be a reversal of the prospects for greater pluralism and non-racialism – the emergence of a narrow new black elite who step into the shoes of the narrow white elite who previously ran the country.⁸⁴

Inequality will continue to fuel the divide between those with limited capacity to influence the patrimonial political system (poor, unemployed, uneducated) and those who can afford to manipulate it while simultaneously insulating themselves from its service delivery and policing inadequacies by, for example, employing private security guards, enrolling their children in private education, using private health care and living in gated communities. Meanwhile, an even weaker economy is likely to further incentivise the recourse to violence, widen the gap between the haves and have-nots and play into the sentiment that to obtain personal security and well-being in South Africa, it's every man and woman for themselves – and that violence gets attention.

Without drastic reform to the current economic and political and security systems, more than half of the population will remain unemployed, uneducated, poor and thus vulnerable to political manipulation and coercion while witness to the extent to which violence has become an acceptable currency of communication with the government and among communities.

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Acknowledgements



This paper was made possible with support from the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The Institute for Security Studies is also grateful for support from the following members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

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