

Social Protest in South Africa

*Shauna Mottiar¹ and Patrick Bond²
Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal*

Abstract

Social protests in South Africa are frequent: an average of more than 8000 ‘Gatherings Act’ incidents per year since the mid-2000s, according to the South African Police Service (SAPS). This rate is one of the highest in the world, per person. But much more detail is required about the grievances behind what are sometimes termed ‘service delivery protests.’ Using the Centre for Civil Society’s Social Protest Observatory, which relies mainly upon media accounts and hence can be considered a limited (and biased) sample, this paper attempts to highlight trends regarding reasons for protest, methods of protest, and the profile of protesters and their numbers. Durban is not typical, but a reflection of media reporting is illustrative. The paper also seeks to understand South African unrest in the light of studies conducted in Latin America and India regarding cultural traditions and repertoires of local-level protest.

Introduction

The high levels of popular demonstrations in South African communities – often termed ‘service delivery protests’ – suggest a significant amount of social discontent, even if the rise of a protest ‘movement’ with similar norms, values, strategies and tactics has not generated a transformational political agenda so far. Indeed some protests turn xenophobic, suggesting a backward looking localism rather than a liberatory insurrection. Reasons for protest often include lack of access to water, sanitation, electricity, housing and employment, discontent over a lack of political accountability, and specific grievances associated with student and worker strikes. In addition to students and workers, protesters include residents of townships and informal shack settlements, civil society organizations and members of political parties. This paper utilizes two samples of protests drawn from the Centre for Civil Society’s Social Protest Observatory, in order to highlight trends in social protests, the main methods of protest and the profile and numbers of protesters. It focuses specifically on protest activity in Durban from 2009-2011 as a reflection of varied grievances and expressions. It is useful, too, to consider the literature from Latin America and India, which gives priority to cultural traditions and repertoires of protest, invoking their role as political participation mechanisms at local levels.

Methods and limitations³

¹ Shauna Mottiar, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa – mottiar@ukzn.ac.za

² Patrick Bond, Director, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa - pbond@mail.ngo.za

³ Acknowledgements to Chantal Munthree, School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal and John Devenish, Centre for Civil Society Social Protest Observatory Manager.

The two samples of protests this paper is based on are drawn from the Centre for Civil Society Social Protest Observatory.⁴ The Social Protest Observatory comprises a collection of articles relating to social protest in South Africa since 2009 compiled from mainstream newspaper reports and press releases by civil society organizations and trade unions. It does not include reports from the vernacular or from other sources cataloguing social protest in South Africa. It is therefore limited insofar as journalist bias (or mere non-newsworthiness) and editorial discretion by major corporate-owned newspapers dictates the extent of coverage. Reader interest also ebbs and flows as much as does the movement itself.

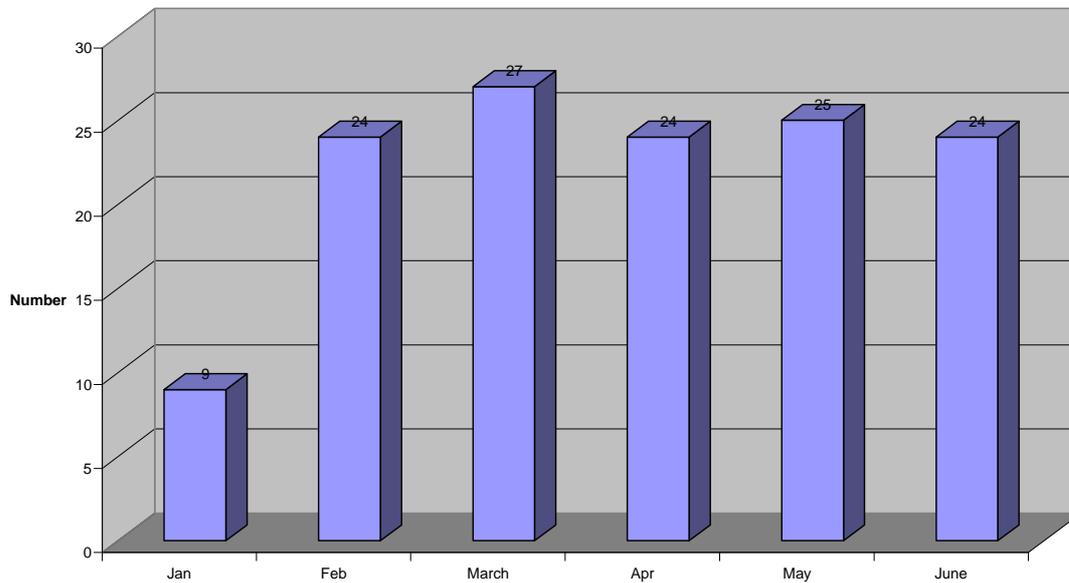
Protest reports for the period 1 January – 30 June 2011 form the basis of the first sample of data. Articles reporting ongoing or completed protest were favored over those covering proposed protest. Formal outcomes of protest and police reactions to protest were not captured. In some cases the researchers exercised discretion regarding articles relating to violence and crime as opposed to protest – the only exception being reports alleging xenophobia. The 1 January – 30 June 2011 sample comprises 133 protests which were analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS package frequencies and cross tabulations features. There was also a qualitative aspect to analyzing this sample in terms of the content of the 133 articles. The second sample of data comprises seventy Durban based protest reports for the period 2009 -2011 which were analyzed qualitatively.

Social protest in South Africa

Social protest in South Africa has reached extremely high levels and since 2005 is estimated at an average of more than 8000 'Gatherings Act' incidents per year (Bond, 2010:1). The varied nature of these local gatherings taking the form of protests makes them difficult to quantify, resulting in vast differences between the Incident Registration Information System (IRIS) maintained by the South African Police Service (SAPS) when the Gatherings Act (applicable to protests of 15 people or more) is relevant, and the far less frequent 'Hotspots Monitor' records gathered by Municipal IQ, a private research company (Alexander 2010). The sample of protests this paper is based on, from the media, averages just over twenty incidents per month.

⁴ The Centre for Civil Society Social Protest Observatory is available at:
<http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/default.asp?2,27.3.1858>

Social protest January - June 2011



Trevor Ngwane (2010a) has identified three distinct phases of the 'protest movement' in the post apartheid era. The first phase occurred in the mid- and late-1990s and was related to discontent over municipal services, housing and the lack of infrastructure. These protests included the one day anti-privatization strikes by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), but most organizations formerly associated with the Mass Democratic Movement protested the new government of Nelson Mandela after only a brief honeymoon (Bond, 2000: 217-223). Even Mandela felt compelled to warn in his opening of Parliament in 1995:

Let it be clear to all that the battle against the forces of anarchy and chaos has been joined ... Some have misread freedom to mean license, popular participation to mean the ability to impose chaos... Let me make abundantly clear that the small minority in our midst which wears the mask of anarchy will meet its match in the government we lead ... The government literally does not have the money to meet the demands that are being advanced ... We must rid ourselves of the culture of entitlement which leads to the expectation that the government must promptly deliver whatever it is that we demand (cited in Bond, 2000: 223).

The second phase of protest took hold in the early 2000s and is linked with the rise of the new social movements such as the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF), the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). An original site of the new urban movements was Durban's Chatsworth township, where the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF) began pioneering a new class politics (Desai, 2002). The new social movements were characterized as a diverse set of organizations with the objective of organizing and mobilizing the poor and marginalized to contest and engage the state around the failure or lack of policy that would effect social change (Habib, 2005). The third phase of protest refers to current protest actions, which according to Ngwane (2010a),

include local community uprisings and militant national strikes but which do not exhibit sustained ideological tendencies of either the 1990s Mass Democratic Movement or the 2000s new social movements. Peter Alexander (2010) describes protest in South Africa since 2004 a 'rebellion of the poor,' although all such community unrest since the end of apartheid can be readily characterized in class terms.

To identify a common thread across the periodisation of protests, many draw upon the Polanyian 'double-movement' tradition to suggest that social protests reflect the distorted character of 'growth' that South Africa witnessed after adopting neoliberal macroeconomic and microdevelopment policies following the demise of apartheid in 1994; such policies date, after all, to the late 1980s and informed many of the early 1990s community protests of the SA National Civic Organization, for example (Bond, 2000). This general urban uprising has included resistance to the commodification of life – e.g. commercialization of municipal services – and to rising poverty and inequality (Bond, 2010: 1). Indeed in most provinces, the majority of the Gatherings Act protest incidents (with upwards of 15 demonstrators) concerned rising costs of (or even gaining basic access to) water, sanitation and electricity. Even after 'Free Basic Services' – typically a tokenistic 6000 liters of water and 50 kWh of electricity per household per month – were provided, the sharply convex shape of water/electricity tariffs meant the rise in the second block of consumption had the impact of raising the entire amount, resulting in higher non-payment rates, higher disconnection levels (affecting 1.5 million people/year for water, according to officials) and lower consumption levels by poor people, such as in Durban where the doubling of real water prices led the poorest third of residents to drop consumption from 22,000 to 15,000 liters per month from 1998-2004 (Bond & Dugard, 2008). Of Eskom's four million customers, fully one million registered zero consumption, reflecting their disconnection from the grid – although many if not most would have illegally reconnected (Bond, 2010: 1).

It has been suggested that there are strong similarities between the Mbeki-era and Zuma-era protests with the latter linked to a belief that demands framed in protest action would be more likely addressed under the new African National Congress (ANC) administration (Alexander, 2010). The implication is therefore that protest activity may be seen as a form of political participation. Susan Booysen (2009) has shown that public participation in South Africa comprises assembled layers of participatory actions among which is 'protest participation'. She argues that protest participation as a form of direct action features in the context of a latent post-1990 culture of protest. This is in keeping with studies of social protest in Latin America suggesting that protest action is affected by local cultural traditions (Eckstein, 1989: 3). Luke Sinwell has distinguished between 'invited' and 'invented' spaces of popular participation. The former refers to formal channels of participatory democracy and the latter to those of 'self activity' citizens create for themselves and of which direct action is an example (Sinwell, 2010). The challenges of formal channels for participation at local levels have been noted with regards the functioning of the ward committee and ward councilor systems. Ward committees, for example, have been criticized for failing to remain non-partisan and independent of political parties (Oldfield, 2008) while ward councilors have been dismissed as subordinating constituent accountability to party accountability (Pithouse, 2007). By

contrast the impact of 'self activity' for example in the form of social movements has been described as a way that the interests of the poor and marginalized have claimed a degree of power and influence over the state (Ballard et al, 2006: 413). This follows findings of social protest studies in India which reveal a specific repertoire of protest forms ranging from the 'institutional' to the 'radical' which are viewed as a normal part of politics (Mitra, 1992: 9).

Debates over structure and agency

The study of social movements typically employs three aspects of analysis (McAdam et al, 1996). The first considers political opportunities, wherein movements are understood within the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the context in which they are placed. The second considers mobilizing structures, i.e. those formal and informal collective vehicles through which people mobilize and engage in collective action. The third considers framing processes which essentially account for collective action: – it is argued that 'at a minimum people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem' (McAdam et al, 1996: 5). Frames therefore include both structural injustice and political agency components. It has been pointed out that in many studies, framing is limited to activism by the efforts of established movement organizations and neglects informal processes that precede the formations of movement organizations or that take place outside of them (Polletta, 1998:138). Equating movements with movement organizations is problematic in that it consigns forms of political unrest to 'the shadowy realms of social problems and deviant behavior' (Piven & Cloward, 1977: 5). Understandings of protest within Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow and Charles Tilly's contentious politics is useful in that they employ a definition of contentious politics as public collective action which is episodic, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests and brings in government as mediator, target or claimant (McAdam et al, 2001: 5).

This paper understands social protest in the context of theories put forward by Frances Piven and Richard Cloward who argued that insurgency is the only strategy available to the poor for compelling social and economic progress of their interests (Albritton, 1979: 1003). Piven and Cloward showed how mass disruption and defiance achieved notable gains in the United States for poor and working-class people, especially racial minorities. Examples of this include relief support and recognition of the cause of unemployed workers in the 1930s following mob looting and rent riots as well as significant expansion of the welfare rolls in the 1960s following mass rioting (Albritton, 1979:1003). This thesis was also reflected in the outcomes of protests in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1970s and 1980s precipitated by economic policies urged by the International Monetary Fund and known as the 'IMF Riots'. The effects of the protests were that governments frequently rescinded the policy in question, restored subsidies, cancelled rate hikes and granted compensatory wage increases. In some cases the policy was retained but other compensations provided such as jobs, wage increases and food stamps (Walton, 1989: 321). Still, most IMF riots failed to give rise to sustained movement building in the way in which Bolivia, the most advanced case of protest-as-politics, social movement activism against prevailing state and business activities in fields such as water and natural gas led to

a political movement that from 2000-2005 rose to not only non-violently push a neoliberal government out, but indeed elected their own. A recent Centre for Economic Policy Research discussion paper (Ponticelli & Voth, 2011: 25) concludes that government austerity measures are often avoided for fear of instability and unrest linked to riots, demonstrations and general strikes.

A related debate is between those who understand the protests in terms of structure, in the form of neoliberal policies (e.g. fiscal austerity and cost-recovery) and systems of exploitation and marginalization, versus those who emphasize municipal state agency, particularly the well-recognized problems of corruption, lack of capacity, and political party manipulation of the electorate. In September 2010, a Parliamentary committee – the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight on Service Delivery (2010) – reported based on its mandate ‘to specifically investigate the underlying reasons for the often violent protests for services.’

According to the structuralist line of argument, Members of Parliament who prepared the report accepted a biased explanation about the causes of protest – mainly malgovernance – without considering the two deeper roots of the problem: inadequate finance and neoliberal public policy. Dating to the time service delivery protests began in earnest, when Mbeki became president in 1999, a common refrain from politicians was policy-denialism: avoid blaming the national executive (where policies are made) and the legislature (where they should be vetted and oversight provided). Instead, it is politically easier to claim that provincial and municipal government officials simply refuse to properly implement the central state’s otherwise laudable policies, programmes and projects. Thus the Committee (2010: 4) concluded in explaining South Africa’s world-leading protest rate: ‘The interface of politics and administration, the quality and frequency of public participation, [and] responsiveness to citizens override all other factors.’

This is subjective, of course, and permits the neoliberal orientation of the state – including funding cuts and decentralized ‘unfunded mandates’ for municipalities – to be disguised. The restrictive fiscal policy imposed by Trevor Manuel when he was finance minister (1996-2009) and maintained by Pravin Gordhan goes unquestioned. With this bias, the Parliamentary Committee could not record the fact that state policy stresses ‘cost recovery’ and refuses to transfer adequate funding for infrastructure and services required by poor people. The Committee is not entirely wrong, because naturally, malgovernance accompanies neoliberalism. More precisely, crony capitalism replaced the social democracy promised by the ANC in the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme. As the Committee (2010: 51) put it, ‘The tender system in municipalities needs to be tightened to close gaps that allow corruption to flourish.’ One city where these gaps are widest is Durban, yet the Committee’s (2010: 50) parachute tour allowed only a positive top-down view of Durban management, which is allegedly ‘performing well in service delivery including housing, long-planning, building partnerships with the private sector to provide services and build catalysts for development’ [sic]. Durban social protesters would disagree, judging by the past decade’s worth of major protests.

The case of Durban

Chatsworth is the site most often named as the epicenter of post-apartheid mass democratic community unrest. Recall that Fatima Meer's Concerned Citizens Forum arrived there to promote the ANC in the 2000 municipal elections. Soon realizing that ANC officials worsened not lessened the socio-economic problems of both Indian and African 'poors', Meer switched sides to civil society and a new, critical way of relating to government was born (Desai, 2002). Since then, Durban service delivery protests have regularly broken out against various state departments for a range of reasons. The seventy documented from 2009-2011 in the Centre for Civil Society's Social Protest Observatory represent only a fraction of the anger, but are illustrative.

State-failure and anti-government protest in Durban, 2009-2011

- Housing and services: Hammarsdale, innercity, Kennedy Road, KwaMashu, Lamontville, Lindelani, Marianhill, Marrianridge, Mayville, Ntuzuma, Siyanda, Umlazi community, Umlazi hostel-dwellers, Wentworth, Clare Estate, Chatsworth
- Land: Qadi people displaced from Inanda Dam
- Food: SA Unemployed People's Movement
- Students: Durban University of Technology (DUT), Mangosuthu University of Technology, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)
- Environment: Chatsworth's toxic BulBul dump, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) against climate change, petro-chemical regulation and World Bank loan to Eskom
- Transport: city-wide bus commuters, Clairwood residents v trucks , KwaDukuza commuters
- Police violence: Umlazi
- Informal trading: Warwick Junction Early Morning Market, Verulam
- Healthcare: Phoenix victims of Gandhi Memorial Hospital
- Anti-FIFA: Durban Social Forum
- Home Affairs: Movement for Democratic Change, anti-xenophobia network
- Labour: Mabhida Stadium building contractors, Durban bus drivers, SA Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), Communications Workers Union against Post Office, Telkom workers, social workers in provincial government, SA Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) v Transnet, Stallion Security v FIFA
- Municipal elections: Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), National Freedom Party (NFP), ANC
- Restrictions on fishing: Durban fisher folk

Seen in chronological terms, in January 2009, the Qadi people at Inanda Dam revolted over their uncompensated land claim, and were denied permission to protest at the Dusi Canoe Marathon. DUT staff and students went on strike over salary and fee grievances. In February, DUT was joined by UKZN students, while there were municipal service protests in Ntuzuma and protests against police violence in Umlazi. In March the DUT students protested again, as did bus commuters and the SDCEA, angry at lack of state regulation of the oil industry. In April, community activists tackled inadequate housing in KwaMashu

and Lamontville, while traders at the Warwick Junction Early Morning Market put the city on notice that a shopping mall would not displace their century-old institution. In May there were protests against forced removals and inadequate housing in Siyanda, Marianhill and Lamontville, while SDCEA tackled Shell Oil, and Warwick traders continued their protests. In June, there were demonstrations by victims of electricity disconnections and shack fires at Kennedy Road and of substandard housing in Lindelani, as well as conflicts over conditions in the Umlazi hostels. The local chapter of Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change protested at Home Affairs and won concessions.

In June-July 2009, the Early Morning Market protests grew more intense, until finally victory was won. Public sector doctors were on strike. And National Union of Mineworkers members fought for higher wages from Mabhida Stadium building contractors, as did Durban bus drivers who demanded the retention of routes that the failed privatization threatened to close. Residents joined the bus drivers protesting Durban transport in July, and SA Municipal Workers Union struck the municipality. Hungry, the SA Unemployed People's Movement protested in two major downtown food stores, eating while sitting-in, suffering more than 100 arrests but making a visceral point. In August, Warwick traders continued their struggle against eviction. Other public sector workers on strike included the Communications Workers Union against the Post Office, Telkom workers versus Telkom, and social workers against the provincial government. There were protests by Lamontville residents against poor housing, while nearby, Clairwood and Bluff residents protested truckers. In September, Durban's tow truck drivers protested Johannesburg competitors in the context of weak regulation. In October, the Abahlali base Mjondolo movement – evicted from Kennedy Road the previous month – won a court victory over the provincial Slums Act. In Chatsworth, communities protested the toxic BulBul dump, eventually leading to prosecution of the corporation running the landfill and ultimately winning closure in 2010. Mangosuthu University of Technology students protested fees, and ratepayers associations complained about electricity price increases. In November, residents of Wentworth and other South Durban communities marched in central Durban against low-quality, high-priced service delivery, while residents of Hammarsdale and Mayville also demonstrated for better services. Marrianridge activists demanded housing, and Phoenix residents were in up in arms over poor treatment at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital. UKZN workers began regular protests against labour broking.

In 2010 protests were even more intense, given labour unrest mainly over wages and outsourcing. In January, Mangosuthu Tech and DUT students demanded lower tuition fees. South Durban residents protested municipal regulation of truckers, while Umlazi hostel residents demanded urgent upgrading. In February the students continued demonstrating. In Verulam, traders attacked the municipality over rental policy. In the south, SDCEA began national protests against the \$3.75 billion World Bank loan to Eskom. Inner-city flat dwellers and bus commuters also protested municipal policies. In March, there were outsourced labour protests against UKZN security and transport operations and against food prices at the DUT, as well as by Abahlali baseMjondolo against state repression. In April these were joined by UKZN students demanding better accommodation and an end to financial-based exclusions, while SAMWU embarked on a strike and the South African Communist Party (SACP) marched against rampant state corruption. In May SATAWU had a

successful strike that paralysed the harbour, leaving hundreds of boats at sea, unable to unload. In June, there were two protests against the World Cup: by Stallion Security companies over pay at the first match held in the R3.4 billion Mabhida Stadium, and then by Durban communities against the white elephant stadium. In July, communities gathered to protest xenophobia (and its causes in state and business policies) and fisher folk were arrested after being denied access to the main piers. In August, the massive public sector strike began, affecting especially health facilities and schools, as well as Home Affairs. There were also protests against sweatshops in the vicinity of Durban, and in Umlazi there were service delivery protests. In September, UKZN accommodation protests were followed by South Durban environment demonstrations in November and December, the latter as part of the '1000 Cancuns' called by Via Campesina.

Student protests over fees and exclusions began the 2011 year in Durban, compelling a DUT shutdown in early February – repeated in July-August – and ongoing protests at several UKZN campuses. By late March, police action against students (tear gas and rubber bullets) led to scores of injuries, and the escalation continued for another week. In April, water cannons and rubber bullets were also used against Mangosuthu University of Technology students in Umlazi. In March-June, numerous mass protests were registered in relation to the May municipal elections, including the IFP against the breakaway NFP and ANC, as well as internecine African National Congress battles. In June, KwaDukuza was the site of major protests by – and repression of – commuters angered by rising transport price hikes. There were 155 arrests and police killed one protester. In July, hundreds of fisher folk protested against municipal and provincial restrictions on fishing, and thousands of metalworkers and Congress of SA Trade Union (COSATU) activists marched against police brutality and workplace exploitation in Pinetown and central Durban. In July-August, not only were there SAMWU wage-related strikes and marches characterized by spilled rubbish bins, protests over municipal disconnections of electricity occurred at Sea Cow Lake near the N2 highway (leaving one municipal subcontractor dead), at Kennedy Road in Clare Estate (with police shootings), and in Chatsworth where Westcliff flat dwellers succeeded in reversing a downgrading of electricity from 60 to 40 amps.

Noticing just one of these protests, in Wentworth over the Barracks housing, the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee (2010: 48) recorded how the 'community was furious about the condition of the new housing development because there was clear poor workmanship which the Metro and residents should have resolved amicably by forcing the contractor to fix the defects. It was clear that the municipal leadership was not aware of the frustration and concerns of residents.' *The Mercury* had extensive coverage of this site of struggle over several years.

Most of the problems raised in these protests could easily be fixed with increased funding untainted by corruption. To prove this, when Durban's water department raised prices so high on consumers during the late 1990s and early 2000s (doubling the real water price within six years), the lowest-income third of Durban residents cut back their consumption by 30 percent. Then, recognizing that such neoliberal water policy caused debilitating protests and lawsuits in Johannesburg, Durban officials remedied their mistake in 2008 with a 50 percent increase in the amount of free water, a 9 kl/household monthly 'lifeline'.

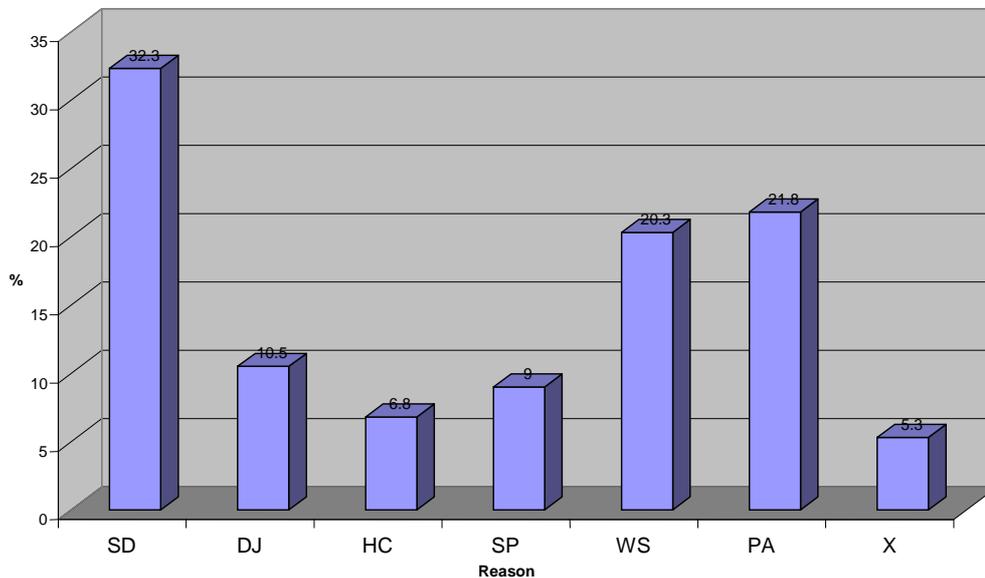
The visiting MPs never once recognize this obvious strategy, even when the Committee (2010: 25) report observed that Durban 'opposition parties complain that senior administrators are pursuing their own agendas and deprive them of information.' But instead of honing in on the problem associated with so many services (unaffordability) and the solution (more subsidies), the Committee only remarked upon the 'need to strengthen communication between councilors and communities.' This is the ultimate, banal way of claiming that there is no structural problem, only an agency problem. And it means the many underlying reasons for protest won't be addressed.

Reasons for social protest

The ANC government's neoliberal economic policies have amplified poverty and inequality (Bond, 2010). It is no surprise that protest activity has mainly emanated from shack settlements and townships rather than the better resourced suburbs (Alexander, 2010). Inadequate service delivery and lack of accountability by local councilors (Alexander 2010, Ngwane, 2010a, Booysen 2009) are nearly ubiquitous as justifications for protest, leading some to distinguish between 'service delivery' and 'public service' (Friedman, 2009). This distinction downplays the delivery of services already decided on by politicians and advocates suggesting instead a more meaningful incorporation of citizens needs, so that a 'service delivery myth' (Pithouse 2011) no longer masks complexities of local political power.

Regardless of whether (structural) problems such as finance and water/electricity/housing policies are mainly responsible, or whether a deeper (agency) crisis of state-citizen relationships is of primary importance, there is no doubt from the Social Protest Observatory's sample of protests that the majority were related to both service delivery and political non-accountability. Worker strikes and student protest also featured prominently as did protest relating to demands for justice, highlighting a cause – and on occasion the protesters (or some section thereof) could be specifically called 'xenophobic,' since they displaced other problems (low wages, unaffordable scarce housing, township retail market overtrading) by attacking immigrants seen as contributing to their socio-economic stress.

Reason for social protest



- SD Service Delivery
- DJ Demanding Justice
- HC Highlighting a Cause
- SP Student Protest
- WS Worker Strike
- PA Political Accountability
- X Xenophobia

Articles relating to service delivery protest usually referred to complaints about a lack of water, sanitation, electricity, housing and infrastructure in general. Protest of this nature also included a focus on a lack of response by local authorities, billing issues, the lack of employment and business opportunities and high crime rates. Frustrations of urban township residents were captured in a protest placard during a march by township residents from Gugulethu to Khayelitsha Site B, Cape Town in April which read *'Welcome to hell: SA townships'* (Meyer 24 April 2011) and as a protester in Ficksburg, Free State (where protest leader Andres Tatane was killed on 13 April 2011) put it *'Ons is gatvol'* (Grobler 15 April 2011). Protest related to demands for improved service delivery also highlight the lack of dignity suffered by the urban poor. A march organized by the Social Justice Coalition involving 2000 Khayelitsha residents in April incorporated a bucket reading *'Dignity in our lifetime'* a reference to a lack of access to sanitation (Nicholson 28 April 2011). During earlier protests in Khayelitsha E Section regarding evictions for defaulting payment, a protesting resident asked the practical question of a family who had been evicted from their home, *'Where must Nomachino's family sleep tonight?'* (Hartley 14 April 2011). Mitchells Plain backyarders occupying land in Tafelsig, Cape Town in May *claimed 'They don't do anything for us but they want our vote'* (Prince 16 May 2011). Protesters in Schubert Park, Tshwane in January argued *'Residents are used to the fact that if they don't do anything violent they will never get joy from the city'* (Gatvol 1 January 2011).

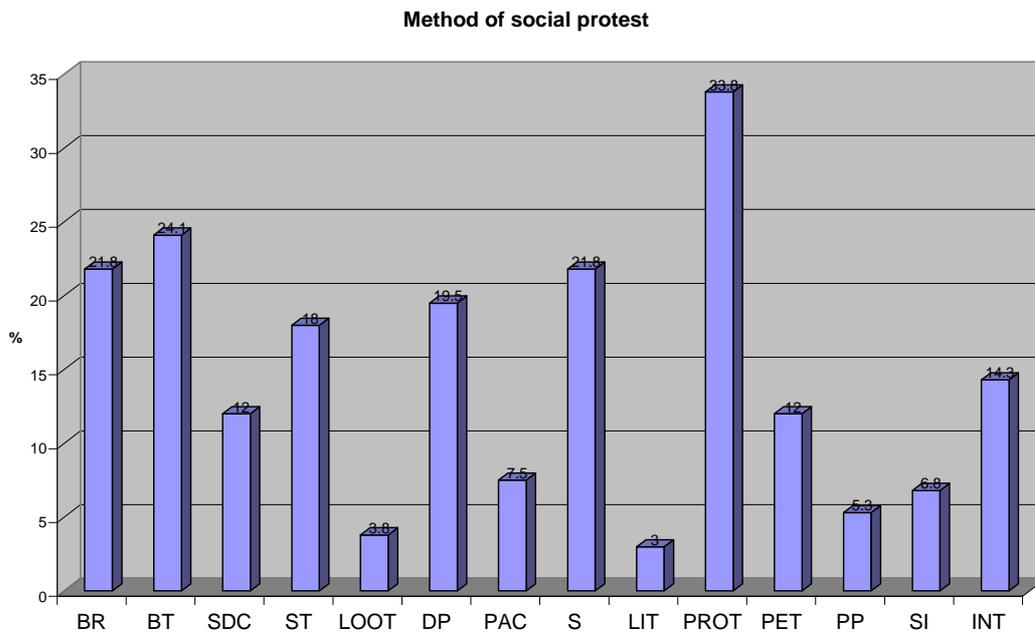
Protest against lack of political accountability further reflects local frustrations and anger. A 1000-strong protest in Pietermaritzburg and a protest at the community hall in Danielskuil, Northern Cape in June evoked claims by protesters that they would make the municipality 'ungovernable' (IOL News, Mokoena 20 June 2011). Articles relating to political accountability protest included complaints about political corruption, mismanagement, the appointment process and election candidate lists. The call to 'ungovernability' harks back to the apartheid era and especially the 1980s when the Black Local Authorities system was opposed by urban township residents. This opposition took the form of boycotting local elections of Black Local Authorities deemed illegitimate, and included physical assaults on those who stood for these elections (Shubane, 1991). Current protest conceptualized as making the system 'ungovernable' lends support to the theory that protest is affected by local cultural traditions and also that, as revealed by studies of social protest in Latin America, the same socio-economic classes tend to express grievances in roughly similar ways under both democratic and non-democratic regimes. For example political grievances are often expressed through the ballot as an instrument of defiance in the region. In Argentina citizens oppose political options by casting blank votes such as in 1960 when the Peronistas opposed the outlawing of their party and in Peru in the early 1980s peasants cast blank votes in defiance of their political options (Eckstein, 1989: 28).

Besides protest related to service delivery and political accountability, protest relating to worker and student strikes centered on demands for better working/learning conditions. Protest related to community justice often involved citizens seeking out alleged thieves, rapists, muti killers and perpetrators within their communities and taking it upon themselves to hand out punishment. While community-based restorative justice mechanisms are often laudable, some turn into vigilantism. Some remind of the legacy of often violent political resistance deployed to make townships ungovernable during apartheid, resulting in 'a culture tolerant of citizens taking the law into their own hands' (Monaghan, 2008:84). There are also protests relating to attempts by civil society to highlight a cause, such as environmental problems, homophobia, support for pro democracy protest in Egypt, mining contracts, decriminalization of sex work, and campaigns against drug dealing and rape. Protest where xenophobia was alleged illustrates ways in which South Africans are reacting to the material problems they face, by blaming the 'Other' (Amisi et al, 2011). These protest reports included aggression towards Somali shop owners in Ermelo and Motherwell (IOL 15 February 2011, IOL 13 May 2011), 'foreign nationals' in Ficksburg (SAPA 23 March 2011), and Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali business owners in Soweto (IOL 11 May 2011). The fact that xenophobia was alleged often within protests relating to service delivery suggests that xenophobia is a result of structural and human crisis affecting low income citizens namely, unemployment, a tight housing market, retail business competition and lack of access to services (Amisi et al, 2011: 3).

Methods of social protest

Alexander (2010: 26) lays out the various methods of protest common to South Africa which include mass meetings, drafting of memoranda, petitions, toyi-toying, processions, stay-aways, election boycotts, blockading of roads, construction of barricades, burning of tyres, looting, destruction of buildings, chasing unpopular individuals out of townships, confrontations with police and forced resignation of elected officials. This variety of protest parallels studies of social protest in India which are seen as complementary forms of action to normal channels of political participation (Mitra, 1991) and which include, for example, 'hartal' –cessation of all public activity, 'dharna' – refusal to clear an area, 'gherao' – encirclement of managerial staff, 'jail bhara' – violation of laws / courting arrest and 'rasta roko'- blocking of traffic (Mitra, 1992: 9).

The sample of protests this paper is based on reveals a number of methods of protest undertaken regularly. The methods most frequently utilized were marching, demonstrating, picketing and rallying with or without placards. Striking, boycotting and downing tools also feature prominently. Other methods used frequently are barricading roads and burning tyres. The significance of burning tyres is difficult to ignore in the light of traditions of burning in South Africa, especially during the apartheid era where those believed to be involved in corruption or informants of the apartheid state i.e. traitors or betrayers were sometimes subject to 'necklace' burning (a tyre set alight around the neck; in 1990 it was estimated there had been 428 necklacings since 1985) (Ball, 1994:3). Latin American social protest studies have also shown how traditions of protest tactics endure and evolve. An example is the way the banging of pots and pans has been added to the symbolic repertoire of protest in Chile. Opponents of Pinochet's military government banged them at designated times - this method was first used by middle class housewives opposing the socialist government of Allende (Eckstein, 1989: 11).

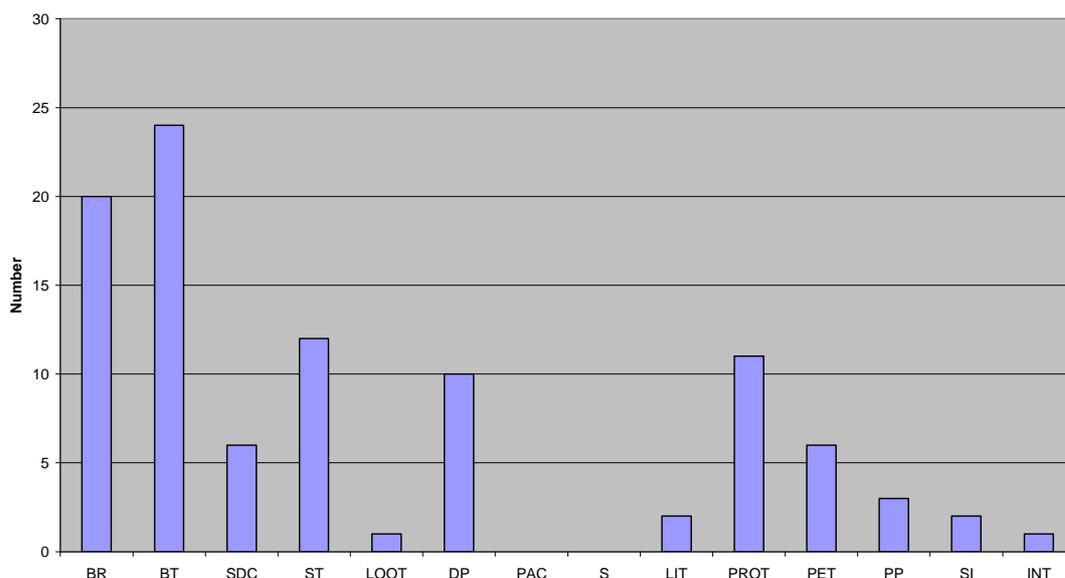


BR Barricading Roads

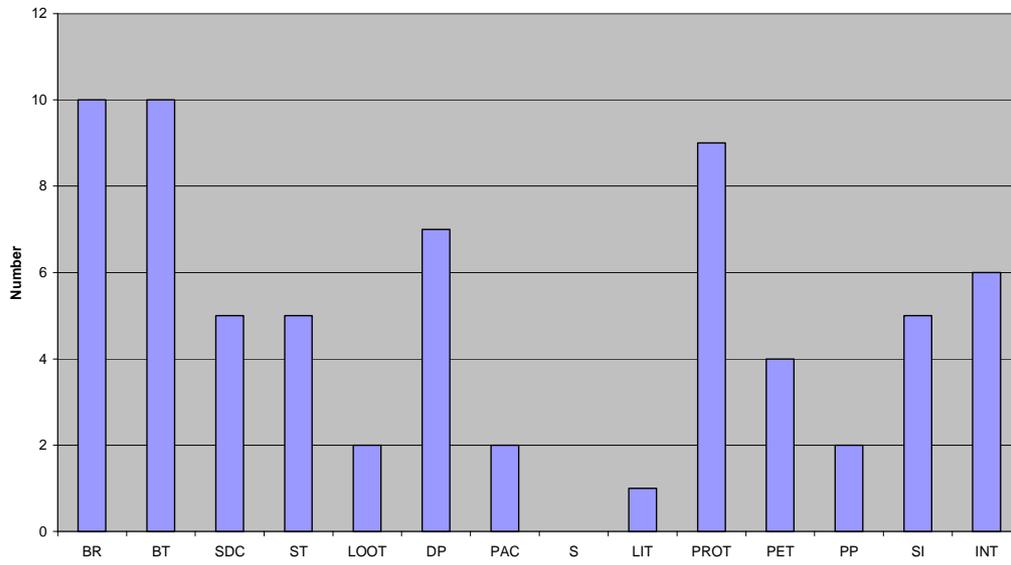
- BT Burning Tyres
- SDC Singing, Dancing, Chanting, Toyitoying
- ST Stone Throwing
- Loot Looting
- DP Destruction of Property, Vandalising
- PAC Physical Assault, Chasing
- S Striking
- LIT Littering
- PROT Marching, Demonstrating, Picketing
- PET Petition, Memorandum, Ultimatum
- PP Peaceful Protest
- SI Sit-In, Occupation, Hostage Holding
- INT Intimidation, Threats, Threatening Behaviour, Disruption, Use of Weapons

The sample of articles reviewed suggest that certain protest tactics are favoured for specific protest reasons. In the case of protest related to service delivery and political accountability, burning tyres and barricading roads seemed to be the most favoured methods of protest. Protest by workers favoured the method of strike action, marching, demonstrating and picketing. Likewise student protest utilised tactics of strike and boycott, as well as marching, demonstrating and picketing but also included destroying property and vandalism, as well as intimidation and disruptions. The most common methods used in protest relating to highlighting a cause were marching, demonstrating and picketing, including the use of petitions and memoranda. With respect to demanding justice, the preference of protest method was sometimes physical assault against perceived perpetrators and the chasing of perceived perpetrators from their homes. Protest in the form of xenophobic attacks included higher levels of looting, property destruction and vandalism.

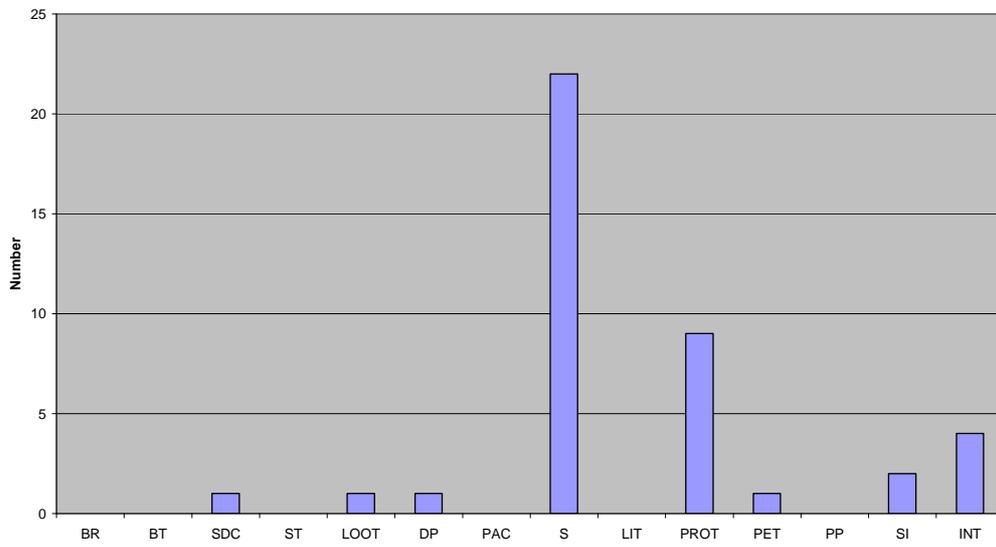
Methods used for service delivery protest



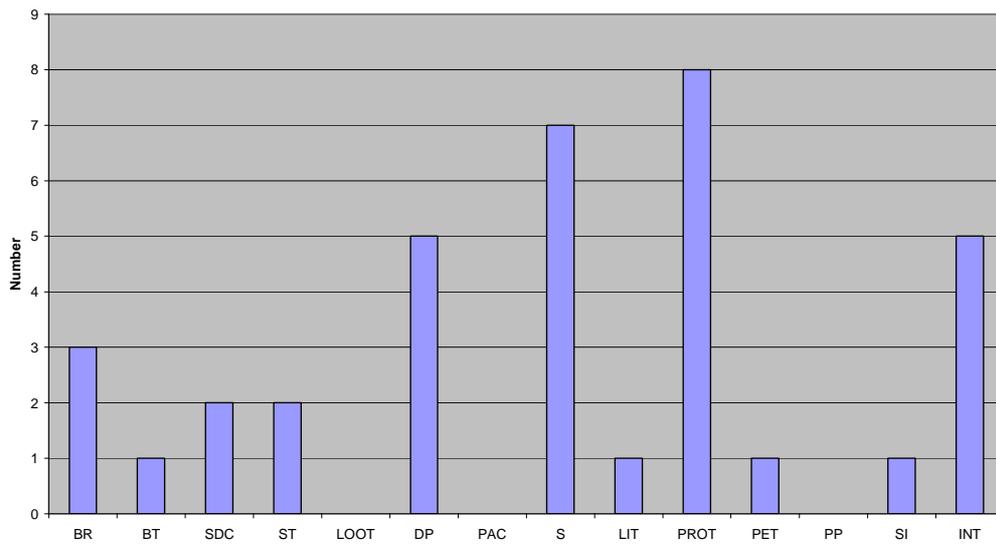
Methods used in political accountability protest



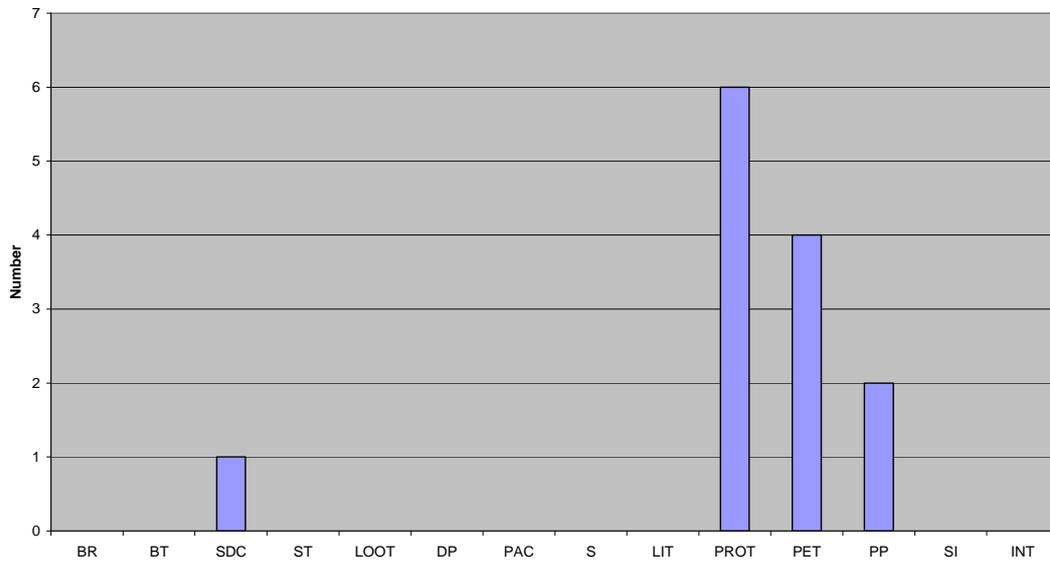
Methods used in worker strikes



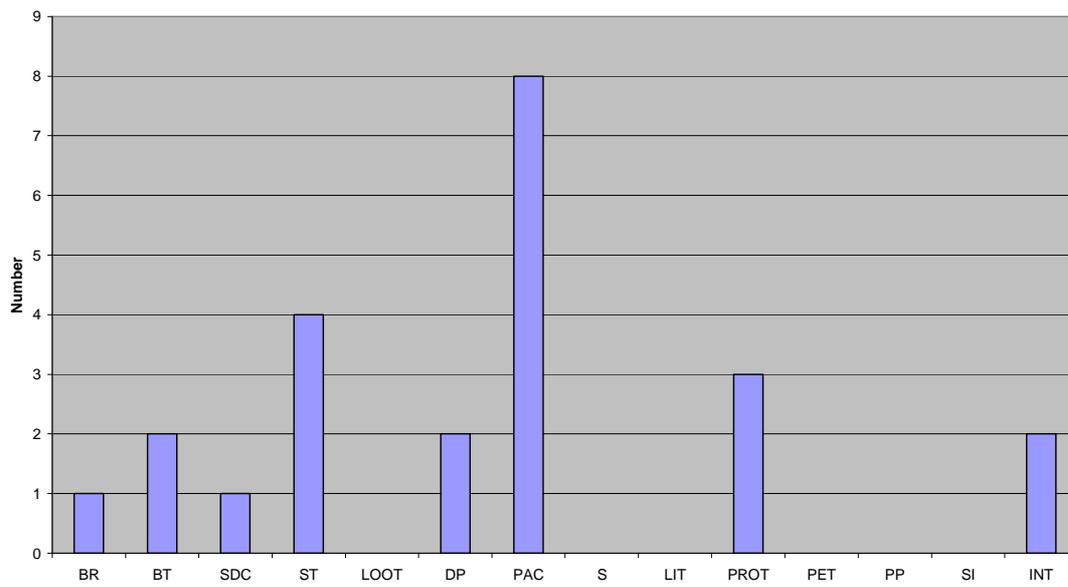
Methods used for student protest

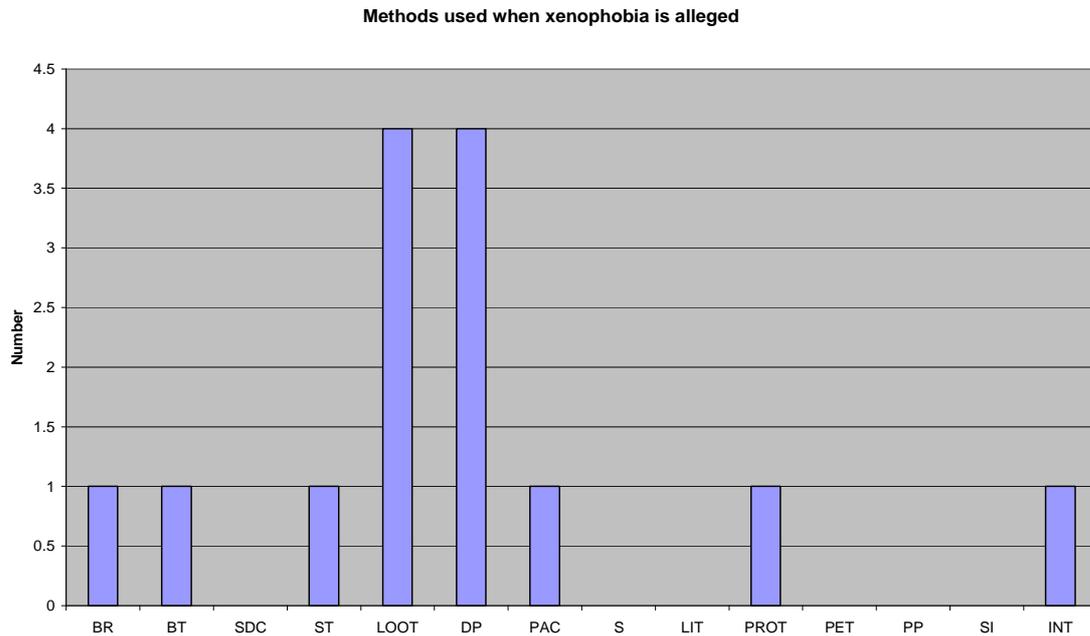


Methods used for highlighting a cause protest



Methods used for demanding justice protest



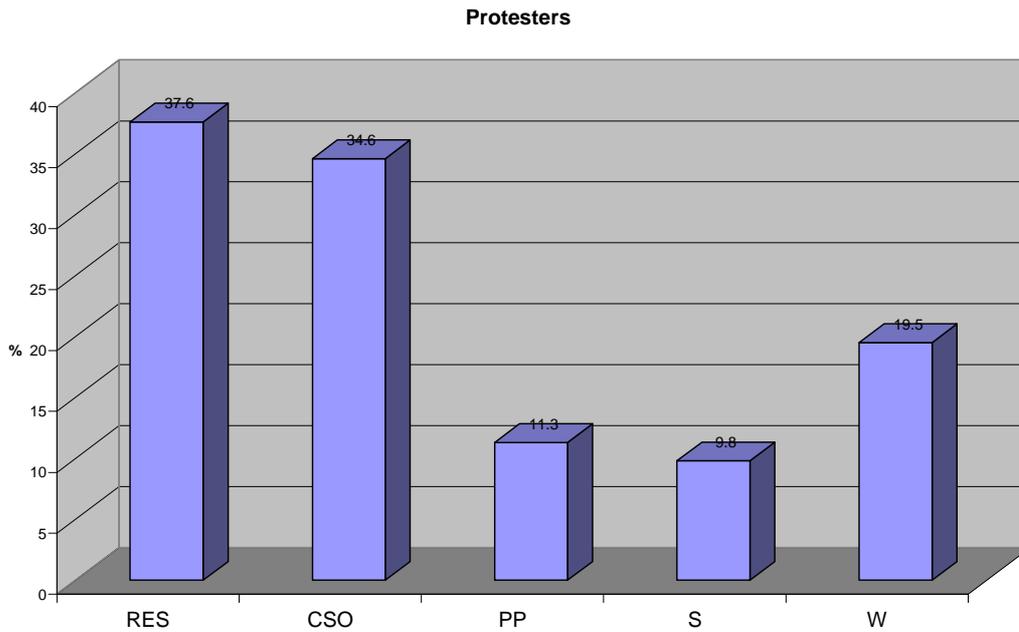


A repertoire of protest methods has developed which is varied according to militancy, and which is linked to the kinds of protests and their demands. Social protest repertoires in India have a similar gradation, whereby ‘hartal’ is used to put pressure on a public or private entity to concede to demands, ‘dharna’ is more coercive and used to draw attention to a cause, ‘gherao’ is used to achieve ‘quick justice’ and ‘jail bhara’ and ‘rasta roko’ are used to clog the wheels of law and order (Mitra, 1992: 9). In India this repertoire of social protest is widely accepted as part of normal politics and viewed as a way of contacting politicians and bureaucrats.

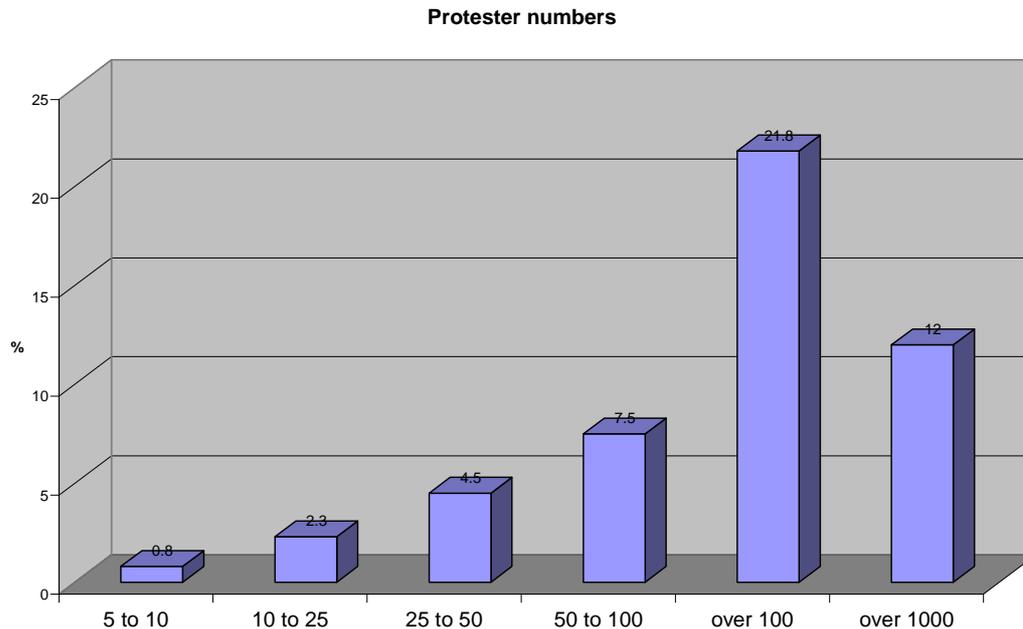
In South Africa, however, protest repertoires are yet to be viewed as complementary to normal channels of political participation. This is evident in both the Local Government Turn Around Strategy and the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight on Service Delivery which are both specific government responses to protest in South Africa. The Local Government Turn Around Strategy identifies ‘communities engaging in destructive forms of protest including withholding of payment for local taxes and services’ as one of the root causes of municipal failure, even though many would consider it a symptom (Local Government Turn Around Strategy, 2009:19). Likewise the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight on Service Delivery argues that a lack of municipal community interface is what causes communities to ‘take to the streets and protest’ and recommends that the ward committee model be refined to give effect to participatory democracy in communities (Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight on Service Delivery, 2010:47, 12).

Profile and numbers of protesters

The profile of protesters, according to this sample, indicates that local residents or community members are the most likely to protest, followed by civil society organizations, unions and private as well as public sector organizations. Students and workers also protest regularly as do members of political parties. In terms of numbers, the sample shows that groups of protesters tend to number more than one hundred, over one thousand also featuring from time to time.



RES Residents Community Members
CSO Civil Society Organisations Unions Private Public
PP Political Parties Political Party Members
S Students
W Workers



The findings in relation to local residents are in keeping with qualitative studies of protests, which often have broad support and involve a large section of the community (Ngwane, 2010a: 6). ‘Community uprisings’ led by these protesters were also sometimes described as ‘spontaneous’, as they were not linked with a specific organization or leader, although qualitative research suggests that the protests have an element of organization and leadership (Ngwane, 2010b: 7). Some who are described as ‘community leaders’ had a good command of strategy and tactics (Alexander, 2010: 33).

Yet scholars of social movements might object to the idea that the vast number of individualized protests in South Africa constitute a formal movement. The protests are not coordinated or demands formulated in ways that bring together the various sporadic outbursts despite sparking off other protests (Ngwane, 2010a: 5). Nor are community protests linked with general student protest or worker strikes. A recent qualitative study carried out by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (Van Holdt et al, 2011) revealed that relationships between protest leaders and protesters are complicated and involve protest as an opportunity to oust political opponents and so reconfigure ANC power relations. Sometimes protests are associated with opportunities to access lucrative council business, and one protester interviewed claimed, *‘It is not service delivery, but people are just fighting for tenders, but using the community to do so’* (Van Holdt et al, 2011: 9-12). Political party dissatisfaction with the ANC, according to the sample of protests, also reveals more transparent methods of protest carried out openly against the ANC by the party’s own members, especially with regards political appointments and the formulating of election candidate lists. In Durban for example, grievances associated with election lists were the main cause for the murder of ANC leader Sibusiso Sibiyi in July 2011, and there are many other cases of political and community leaders being assassinated or killed in the course of their work in Durban (Bond & Meth, 2009).

Conclusion

If social protest is taking hold as a way for aggrieved poor and working-class South Africans to articulate and enforce their interests, then a range of understandings of this phenomenon should be considered. The Social Protest Observatory's sample of articles is biased by the reliance upon both (urban-based, middle-class) journalists and well-organized civil society groups, and that means high-profile activism associated with the disruption of daily life, or well-articulated media spin, tend to dominate. Daily forms of resistance, including informal sabotage of state systems (e.g. illegal reconnections of water and electricity, said to be ubiquitous in many townships), are not given due coverage but also represent protest.

Sometimes such protests are 'social' insofar as local organizations are responsible for encouraging dissent and law-breaking. Sometimes the rationale for protest follows decades-old cultural traditions of protest, which like during the apartheid era, reflect an inadequate opportunity for local political participation. On the one hand these might be seen, as in India, as complementary to formal channels of participation such as ward councilors and ward committees. On the other hand, the protests are sometimes the first stage in full-fledged delegitimation of the local state, as happened in some high-profile protests such as the Khutsong border demarcation dispute.

Future research will need to ascertain whether protest is achieving notable gains or instead, more repression and hopelessness. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation report (Van Holdt et al, 2011: 9), for example, notes that in some cases there are highly visible responses from senior ANC political figures which include the suspension of municipalities, probes into alleged corruption by municipal employees and concrete initiatives to improve service delivery. In other cases, however, there is no reaction whatsoever.

Finally, there is the matter of whether linkage is possible between what currently appear as 'popcorn protests' – so named because they rise to giddy heights but fall back quickly, and if the wind blows rightward in a xenophobic way, so too are protesters without ideological background and political training, drawn to attack immigrants as proximate causes for their socio-economic grievances. The question of whether a movement can emerge from the proliferation of South African protests remains for leading oppositional civil society strategists to pose. But at this stage, without a political orientation to movement-building, this study of selected South African social protests suggests that atomization and silo-based activism will continue to prevent a broader advance for socio-economic progress, no matter the militancy and frequency of protests.

References

Albritton, R. B. 1979. Social amelioration through mass insurgency? A re-examination of the Piven and Cloward thesis. *American Political Science Review*, 73 (4), 1003-1011.

- Alexander, P. 2010. Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis. *Review of African Political Economy*, 37 (123), 25-40.
- Amisi, B. Bond, P. Cele, N. Ngwane, T. 2011. Xenophobia and civil society: Durban's structured social divisions. *Politikon*, 38(1), 59-83.
- Ball, J. 1994. The ritual of the necklace. Research Report, *Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation*, March 1994.
- Ballard, R. Habib, A. Valodia, I. 2006. *Voices of protest: Social movements in post apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Bond, P. 2000. *Elite transition: From apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Bond, P. Dugard, J. 2008. The case of Johannesburg Water. *Law, Democracy and Development*, 12 (1), 1-28.
- Bond, P. Meth, O. 2009. Dying for the cause in Durban. *ZNet Commentary*, 9 April, <http://www.zcommunications.org/dying-for-the-cause-in-durban-by-patrick-bond>
- Bond, P. 2010. South Africa's financial bubble and boiling social protest. *Monthly Review*, June, 17-28. .
- Booyesen, S. 2009. Public participation in democratic South Africa: From popular mobilization to structured co-optation and protest. *Politeria*, 28 (1), 1-27.
- Desai, A. 2002. *We are the poors: Community struggles in post apartheid South Africa*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Eckstein, S. 1989. Power and popular protest in Latin America in Eckstein, S. (ed). *Power and popular protest: Latin American social movements*. London: University of California Press.
- Friedman, S. 2009. People are demanding public service not service delivery. *Business Day*, 29 July.
- Gatvol. 2011. Schubert Park residents promise more violent protests. *IOL*, 20 June.
- Grobler, A. 2011. Ficksburg service delivery talks begin. *IOL*, 15 April.
- Habib, A. 2005. State – civil society relations in post apartheid South Africa. *Social Research*, 72 (3), 671-692.
- Hartley, A. 2011. Evictions spark violence. *Cape Times*, 14 April.
- Local Government Turn Around Strategy, Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Republic of South Africa, November 2009.
- IOL*, 15 February 2011. Protesters turn on Somali shop owners.
- IOL*, 11 May 2011. Foreign traders threatened.
- IOL*, 13 May 2011. Somali shops looted in Motherwell.
- IOL*, 20 June 2011. Threat to make city ungovernable.
- McAdam, D. McCarthy, J, D. Zald, M, N. 1996. Opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes: toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements in McAdam, D. McCarthy, J, D. Zald, M, N. (eds). *Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures and cultural framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McAdam, D. Tarrow, S. Tilly. C. 2001. *Dynamics of contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, W. 2011. ANC DA clash at Easter march. *Weekend Argus*, 24 April.
- Mitra, S, K. 1991. Room to maneuver in the middle: Local elites, political action and the state in India. *World Politics*, 43 (3), 390-413.

- Mitra, S, K. 1992. *Power, protest and participation: Local elites and the politics of development in India*. London: Routledge.
- Monaghan, R. 2008. Community based justice in Northern Ireland and South Africa. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 18 (1), 83-105.
- Mokoena, M. 2011. Minister and MEC run for cover. *IOL*, 20 June.
- Nicholson, Z. 2011. Residents march to demand toilets. *IOL*, 28 April.
- Ngwane, T. 2010a. Civil society protests in South Africa: The need for a vision of alternatives. Paper presented at a Centre for Civil Society Seminar, Durban, 9 March.
- Ngwane, T. 2010b. Ideologies, strategies and tactics of township protest in Maharaj, B. Desai, A. Bond, P. (eds). *Zuma's own goal: Losing South Africa's 'war on poverty'*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Oldfield, S. 2008. Participatory mechanisms and community politics: Building consensus and conflict in Van Donk, M. Swilling, M. Pieterse, E. Parnell, S. (eds). *Consolidating developmental local government: Lessons from the South African experience*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Pithouse, R. 2007. The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. *Voices of Resistance from Occupied London, Issue 2*.
- Pithouse, R. 2011. The service delivery myth. *Dispatch Online*, 3 February, *Pambazuka News* 110209.
- Piven, F, F. Cloward, R, A. 1977. *Poor people's movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Prince, N. 2011. Bricks, bullets fly in land grab. *Cape Argus*, 16 May.
- Ponticelli, J. Voth, H,J. 2011. Austerity and anarchy: Budget cuts and social unrest in Europe 1919-2009. *Centre for Economic Policy Research. August 2011*. London.
- Polletta, F. 1998. 'It was like a fever' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest. *Social Problems*, 45 (2), 137-159.
- Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight on Service Delivery, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 8 September 2010.
- SAPA*, 23 March 2011. Eighteen arrested in Free State protest.
- Shubane, K.1991. Black Local Authorities: A contraption of control in Swilling, M. Humphries, R, Shubane, K. *Apartheid City in Transition*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Sinwell, L. 2010. Conceptualizing direct action as a form of participation in development: A South Africa case. *Politikon*, 37 (1), 67-83.
- Van Holdt, K. Langa, M. Molapo, S. Mogapi, N. Ngubeni, K. Dlamini, J. Kirsten, A. 2011. The smoke that calls: Insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa. *Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. July 2011*. Johannesburg.
- Walton, J. 1989. Debt, protest and the state in Latin America in Eckstein, S. (ed). *Power and popular protest: Latin American social movements*. London: University of California Press.