



Technical Note

Civic Protests Barometer 2007-2014

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I. Brief Summary

This research study presents information on the frequency and the nature of service delivery protests throughout South Africa. The study as a whole draws on different methods for two periods. The first period dates from the inception of the study in 2007 until the end of 2011. During this phase the barometer was known and the *Municipal Service Delivery Protest Barometer*. A new method, now referred to as the *Civic Protest Barometer* was adopted after 2011. The initial component derived protest records from media reports of community protests contained in the *Community Protest Monitor* of the South African Local Government Briefings Report¹ and the *Lexis Nexis*² online database. From February 2007 until August 2012 data was collected from these resources and displayed in a series of barometers that analyze overarching trends and patterns in protest activity over the period. After 2011 the method changed to rely on on-line news aggregators and social media reports rather than Lexis-Nexis and the Local Government Briefings. Consequently for the period January 2011 to September both methods were in use. This period provided an opportunity to ensure that the new method was fully consistent with that used earlier.

II. The Source Material

Relying on media reports of community protests creates inherent limitations in the dataset, as the reports are summaries of complex events and may omit key information. Additionally, it is likely that not all service delivery protests receive media coverage. A key strength, however, lies in the consistency of the reporting over the time period under analysis. Maintaining consistency as the methodology changed was thus essential. Regardless of the medium used, news reports have a level of factual legitimacy as articles tend to relay an unbiased account of events and attempts are made by journalists to limit conjecture. Furthermore, sourcing articles from a variety of sources make fact checking relatively convenient, especially as most information is now archived online.

During the first period the various classification categories were defined. Once these definitions had been established (see below) continuity came to rely less on using the same data sources and more on consistently applying the established definitions to a comprehensive collation of reports. Consequently in the post 2011 period data collection came to rest on on-line news aggregators rather than Lexis-Nexis and the Local Government Briefings³. Despite the changing method comparability between the two periods was ensured. Important news aggregators now used include UKZN's Social Protest Observatory⁴.

1 The SA Local Government Research Centre publishes the South African Local Government Briefing monthly.

2 Lexis Nexis is an online legal database with archived news reports from hundreds of countries. Using a simple keyword search, "protests and service delivery," and correlating these keywords in the database, we were able to access hundreds of articles in the following newspapers: Cape Argus, Citizen, Daily Dispatch, Diamond Fields Advertiser, Eastern Province Herald, Pretoria News, Star, Sunday Times, The New Age, Weekend, Cape Times, Daily News, Sowetan, Times.

3 To a large extent Lexis-Nexis and the Local Government Briefings are themselves just news aggregators.

4 The Social Protest Observatory aggregates news on protests, strikes and other political action from the following sources: IOL News, The Mercury, looklocal.co.za, Mail & Guardian, All za News, News24, iAfrica.com, Times Online, Die Burger, The Sowetan, Eye Witness News, SABC News, Google SA, The Star, City Press, The New Age, Cape Argus, The Cape Times, Rapport, Durban Daily News, PE Herald, All Africa, Business Day, Isolezwe, RoodePoort Record, Abahlali baseMjondolo, Berea Mail, Witbank News, Bedfordview & Edenvale News, Benoni City Times, Southlands Sun, Krugersdorp News, The Citizen, Randburg Sun, Phoenix Sun, Alex News, Kempton Express, The Highveld, The Tembisan, Ladysmith Gazette, South Coast Herald, Biznews, Estcourt and Midland News, Brakpan Herald, Alberton Record

Every effort has been made to automate the data collection process. While automation reduces the amount of effort required its primary benefit is through improving the consistency of data. Currently the automation is based on a spreadsheet where extensive use is made of drop-down menus, filters and the classification of cell text content⁵. This limits data entered by analysts to pre-defined values and categories which are then stored as codes. Despite this a number of entries on the spreadsheet have to be manually. These variables are listed below.

Variable	Content	Note
Date of protest	Date in predefined format	date value is derived automatically
Description	Brief description/ news into line heading	pasted from record
Number of days of protest	Analyst derives the value after identifying continuation of protest over time period.	
service delivery protest	Analyst classifies whether or not record should be included in database at all	
Province	Analyst identifies province and select code from drop down menu	
Municipality	Analyst identifies municipality and selects StatsSA code from drop down menu	
Name of suburb/ settlement	Analyst records the most precise location of protest available	GIS geocoding of protest location
Alternate place name	Analyst records any other name by which the precise protest location may be known	GIS geocoding of protest location
Organiser of protest	Analyst records name of the organisers of the protests when available.	Useful for, inter alia, categorising civil disobedience protests
Source	Full URL of media record	
Size of protest	If an indication of the size of the protests is given this is recorded.	If a range is given the median value is entered
Description of issue (cause)	Full text of the media record is entered (pasted) here.	Text used for automated classifications

One advantage of using on-line aggregators is that the full text of the news report becomes available and it is now routinely incorporated into the database along with the date, location etc. An initial categorisation of the protest into the major groups (violent, civil disobedience etc.) is automatically made based on the presence of key words and combinations of words/stems in the full text entry.

The primary words, word stems and combinations thereof used in the automated classification are listed below (the list exclusion negation terms).

“poor service deliver”, “ANC”, “DA”, “disrupt”, “EFF”, “faec”, “IEC”, “IFP”, “ignore”, “illegal”, “jobs”, “kill”, “loot”, “march”, “NFP”, “permission”, “poo”, “rock”, “rounds”, “ston”, “Trade union”, “waste”, “witch”, “alight”, “alternative route”, “AMCU”, “arrest”, “arson”, “assault”, “attack”, “barric”, “block”, “building”, “building damaged”, “buildings damaged”, “built”, “burn”, “cannon”, “center”, “community hall”, “corrup”, “COSATU”, “councilor”, “crime”, “damage”, “demarc”, “destroy”, “divert traffic”, “education”, “electr”, “employ”, “etoll”, “evict”, “faeces”, “Farmworkers”, “foreign”, “general services”, “governanc”, “grievanc”, “hawk”, “hostag”, “hous”, “in custody”, “infrastruc”, “injur”, “intervention unit”, “land”, “latrine”, “Marikana”, “marshal”, “memo”, “middle of the road”, “municipal”, “National Union”, “nepotis”, “no inju”, “no one was injur”, “no permit”, “no reports of inju”, “not apply”, “NUM”, “NUMSA”, “office”, “own munici”, “party”, “permit”, “petition”, “picket”, “plunder”, “polic”, “police”, “premises”, “promis”, “promise”, “public order”, “ransack”, “red ant”, “remove”, “riot”, “rubber”,

⁵ The current spreadsheet is “all_template.ods”.

"salar", "SAMWU", "sanit", "SAPS", "SASCO", "scholar", "school", "service delivery prote", "service protest", "services", "Seskhona", "socio", "Somali", "SRC", "standstill", "strike", "strike", "student", "tearg", "technikon", "threat", "toilet", "torch", "trade", "tyre", "university", "vandal", "water", "xeno"

Although the new approach lends itself to automation responsibility for the categorisations adopted rest with the analyst and not the algorithm. The automated classification simply assists the analyst in making these categorisations.

The new approach allows for additional digital resources to be leveraged and so ensure ever more comprehensive coverage of protests. To further ensure that all reports of protest are identified traffic reports and twitter feeds that reference protests and public marches were also scraped from the internet. This scraping is also automated and the results are examined to identify if any protest incidents were missed by the news aggregators.

Various methods have been developed to consistently extract records of protests action from social media. These include the routine and automated scraping on websites using small standalone IT devices. The use of such dedicated (and low costs devices⁶) ensure sustainability of the approach and long term continuity in data extraction.

The current approach records details of all protests and thus includes protests that are not “civic protests”. The first step in the process of analysing civic protests is to exclude those events that do not qualify for inclusion in the database. An ancillary impact of the new approach is the development of a database of protests that are not civic protests. This ancillary database increasingly reflects activities of the labour movement and civil disobedience campaigns.

III. Arranging the Data into Barometers

We’ve compiled the data into a series of barometers that reflect the current public discourse on protest activity in South Africa: (1) when the protests occur, (2) where the protests are located, (3) whether the protests are violent and (4) what grievances motivate protest activity.

Thus, we’ve aggregated the data into four different fact sheets that highlight the various trends discovered from the analyzing the dataset. A range of issues affecting local government is discussed under the following groups, each of which form separate barometers.

1. Barometer 1: National distribution of protests by year and time of the year (season).
2. Barometer 2: Geographical distribution of protests by year.
3. Barometer 3: Count and proportion of protests that are violent
4. Barometer 4: profile of grievances cited by protesters

In the first barometer, data on protest activity was presented yearly to trends over time. The data is then further broken down by season, and lastly disaggregated monthly for the entire period February 2007 to December 2014. Geographically, we analyzed our data aggregated, by province, by district, and local municipality. Where possible the location of the protests has been identified at the level of street or suburb. A new primary category of geographical aggregation is now generally used. Under this classification all local governments are combined with those of metropolitan municipalities. This results in a hybrid of local and district municipalities (metropolitan

⁶ Currently use if made of Raspberry PI computers with Debian OS. A crontab routinely scrapes twitter for protest news and News24 traffic reports for road closures and hazards. The scraped data is then filtered and reports are automatically emailed to the administrator.

municipalities) which cover the country without any overlap of jurisdictions. In the third barometer we analyzed the percentage of overall protests that were deemed violent in nature (as discussed below). Finally, as expanded below we categorize the grievances cited by protesters in the media as the “cause” of the protests. This classification allows the identification of, for example, the extent to which grievances are related to the delivery of municipal services.

IV. Definition of ‘Community Protests’ and Comparative Analytical Models

When the *Municipal Service Delivery Protest Barometer* started data was drawn from the *MunicipalIQ Hotspots Monitor* to provide something against which the initial conclusions could be compared. It is important to note that the statistical data put forth by this study and the data from MunicipalIQ⁷ Hotspots Monitor was not identical. Initial differences between the figures reported by MunicipalIQ and us are attributable to differing criteria used to define a “community protest.” As far as we understand, MunicipalIQ identifies a community protest as any “major” municipal service delivery protest where communities oppose the pace or quality of service delivery by their municipalities. Our definition of community protest qualifies their definition to include *any complaint or issue cited by protesters in reports, whether related to the delivery of municipal services or not, over which citizens decide to and actually engage in organized public protest activity.*

We also distinguish an ongoing protest as a protest where either (1) protests over the same or similar grievances are stretched out over a period of days or weeks; (2) protest activity continues in the same settlement or location over a period of time; or (3) protesters employ the same tactics (e.g. marching outside municipal offices, calling for the attention of municipal officials) over a number of days. Furthermore, a protest is considered ongoing if any of these criteria are met, regardless of whether protesters cease protesting for a day or two and then resume protesting at a later date. A single protest can thus span an extensive time period.

Protests are thus counted separately if, for example, (1) two or more protests are reported within the same local municipality but in different settlements; (2) the protesters cite different grievances in a span of a few days or weeks; (3) protests die down for a period of time and then resume over a new grievance(s); or (4) the nature of protesters’ tactics change or become violent⁸ (e.g. protesters peaceably deliver a memo to the mayor which, having gone unanswered for a week, sparks a subsequent violent protest over ignored grievances).

This expanded definition of a ‘community protest’ has been chosen for two reasons. First, there are empirical difficulties in defining precisely what concerns motivate a group of protesters. As discussed previously, media reports are not conclusive, seeing as the volatile size and spontaneous nature of the protests leaves open the possibility that not all protesters are aggrieved about the same thing or even about issues related specifically to service delivery. Therefore, a broader definition of community protest creates a dataset that includes protest activity not specifically targeted at local municipalities or explicitly motivated by inadequate service delivery grievances. Secondly, expanding the definition of community protest gives us a larger analytical picture of what grievances motivate protest activity. Using this methodology, we’ve been able to distinguish between protests in which the grievances cited by protesters targeted issues that local municipalities are legally accountable for and protests that concerned grievances that fall outside the responsibility of local government. Nevertheless, the fact that citizens are motivated to protest about grievances

⁷ Municipal IQ is an organization that monitors the socio-economic performance of South African municipalities

⁸ A definition of a violent protest will be explained in a subsequent section.

unrelated to local government authority is an important trend in the data and was not excluded from our analysis.

As a consequence of differing methodologies, numerical disparities arose between our data and the MunicipalIQ reports. For instance, as of July 2012, MunicipalIQ reports 133 major protests. The sample data we analysed using the broader definition of community protests reports 182 community protests over the same period. Far greater differences are apparent when comparisons are made between our data and those of the SA Police Service. Protest figures reported by SAPS are much higher than both our and MunicipalIQ's figures. SAPS reports protests as "Crowd Management Incidents" which are characterized as "peaceful" or "unrest". In the 2011/12 financial year SAPS reported 11, 033 incidents of which 1, 091 of which were recorded as "unrest". However SAPS records incidents and not events. As a result any single protest (as defined by MunicipalIQ or ourselves) can give rise to SAPS enumerating dozens of incidents. It is important to note that there are discrepancies within SAPS reports, namely that the reported numbers for "unrest related" activities does not always match the number of "public violence" cases opened by the police⁹.

Despite the methodological differences, all 3 datasets tend to point to the same overall trend. For example all 3 show that 2012 has surpassed the tally of previous years and had the highest yield of protest activity over the period between 2007 and 2012. They also all show an interim spike in protests for 2009, making it the second highest year for protest activities.

A further distinguishing factor of the MLGI database is the exclusion (from 2011) of protests arising from civil disobedience campaigns. Among the reasons for us distinguishing civil disobedience from civic protest is the absence of an empirical relationship between where the civil disobedience campaign protest takes place and that local community. Examples of this include the 2014 "poo protests" in the Western Cape. Many of these protests took place at key venues like Cape Town City Hall and the international airport. The local residents in these areas may have little role to play in the protest activity. A key feature of civil disobedience campaigns like the "poo protest", the anti-eToll campaigns and those that took place at Rondebosch Commons is that the nexus between the site of the protest and the local community is broken.

Our database also excludes protests directed at national or provincial authorities or at non-state agents and institutions (like private businesses). In this vein strike action is treated as an issue between private entities and are not included. This holds even when protests are directed against municipalities when local government is involved in its capacity as an employer. Finally, in those instances where local government is treated as a proxy for provincial and national government the protests are, despite the misdirection, included. Examples of the latter are evident when protests about the performance of local school principals and police are directed at municipal officers. Local government has no jurisdiction over these competencies and they are usually not "legitimate" targets of protests.

V. The 'Violent' Protest Phenomenon: Explanations and Definitions

In this study violent protests have been defined as those protests where some or all of the participants have engaged in actions that create a clear and imminent threat of, or actually result in, harm to persons or damage to property. Thus, in addition to the more obvious indications of a violent protest (the intentional injuring of police, foreigners, government officials, the burning

9 "Public protest and violence: what we need to know," Politicsweb, September 28, 2012.
<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=329283&sn=Marketingweb+detail>

down of houses or municipal buildings, looting shops), instances where police disperse protesters with tear gas, rubber bullets or water cannons, rocks are thrown at passing motorists, or tires are burned to blockade roads are classified as “violent”.

Conversely, instances of protesters only submitting a petition or memorandum, organizing marches outside government buildings, or assembling peaceably in public areas are considered non-violent protests. Admittedly, this methodology requires subjective assessments as to whether particular events are substantive enough to constitute a “violent” protest, such as reports of property damage or traffic disruptions that, although minor, are done intentionally. It also fails to account for what proportion of the participants at a given protest actually engage in violent acts, a piece of information that is difficult to extract from media reports that are sometimes inconclusive about the magnitude of the violence. Therefore, given the volatile and often erratic nature of protest activity, we’ve included an additional indicator that protests with the potential to cause “clear and imminent” harm are also classified as violent with the observation that material threats of violence are likely to result in actual harm. In instances where protesters make threats that are unlikely to result in, or do not actually result in, violent actions, the protests are deemed to be non-violent.

Nonetheless, labelling a protest as violent in nature fails to distinguish between those protests that were violent initially from those that became violent after aggressive responses by police (such as dispersing crowds with rubber bullets and tear gas). This said, we aim to analyse the objective harm of the protests, not necessarily its genesis (how the violence began or why it escalated). Therefore, we have classified violent protests as those that “result in” substantial harm to persons or damage to property, regardless of whether responsibility for the violence falls on protesters or law enforcement agents.

VI. Analyzing the Size of Community Protests

Most media reports failed to include information about the size of community protests and those that did often relied on inexact estimates. Typically news reports would cite some observer who provided an estimate of the maximum number of participants. Frequently this would be cited as a range reflecting the maximum number of participants/ observers at any point in time. Protests inevitably involve some degree of churning as individual protesters move on and yet others join. Consequently the maximum number of people involved at the peak of the protest is lower than the number of people who took part in the protest at any stage.

It is consequently, difficult to draw clear conclusions about trends in the size of protests over time, or whether the size of protests are influenced by the level of violence associated with that protest. Even accurate estimates about the number of people present at a protest will imperfectly distinguish between those that are participating from those that were merely present. Thus, our examination of the relative sizes of protests hesitates to draw any strong conclusions from the data. When figures are cited as a range in the maximum number of participants the midpoint of that range is recorded.

VII. Grievances: Definitions and Comparative Analysis

The study also seeks to analyse the frequency with which participants in community protests were aggrieved over any specific issue prompting their decision to engage in protest activity. Attempting to precisely identify the motivation behind a particular protest is largely dependent on the information within media reports. However, often times those writing media reports do not have the opportunity to engage with the protesters themselves or must rely on their own evaluations of what

is motivating the protesters in a particular instance. Even when opportunities for dialogue are available, reports on protests often feature only the perspective of a small number of those involved - individuals whose perspectives may or may not reflect the views of the group as a whole.

Finally, as some local government officials have alleged, some protesters may invoke pretexts for engaging in acts of civil unrest as a way of concealing political or criminal motivations. Nevertheless, our study documents any mention of a grievance, whether from the protesters' recollection of events, reporters' interpretation of events, information submitted by memorandum to local officials, or any mention of party political motivations underlying protest activity. Further, all of the grievances cited by protesters are mutually exclusive in that, if during one protest participants demand the provision of water, housing and electricity simultaneously, these concerns would be counted as three separate grievances.

Tracking the grievances cited by protesters is critical to differentiate protests in which residents express concerns related to municipal services from those protests in which the grievances fall outside the umbrella of municipal responsibility. In order to measure this difference, we developed a series of indicators that count each specific grievance and then aggregates those grievances into micro-level categories and macro-level categories¹⁰.

First, we tallied 52 separate grievances and grouped them into 20 micro-clusters. For example, grievances expressing concerns about ending the bucket toilet system, implementing a better refuse collection service, or fixing inadequate pipes and sewage drains would all be separate grievances that fall under a "sanitation and waste" micro-cluster. Thereafter, we grouped each micro-cluster into five separate macro-clusters depending on what jurisdiction the issue was classified under. Using the same example, grievances falling under the "sanitation and waste" micro-cluster would be counted under the "municipal services" macro-cluster, as those grievances fall under the jurisdiction of municipal government. Where the media reports were unclear or protesters were not specific about what services were poorly or inadequately delivered, we grouped instances of "poor service delivery generally" as a separate macro-cluster to account for any ambiguity in the data.

However, after finding that not all grievances fall under the "municipal services" jurisdiction, we created four other macro-clusters, including (1) non-municipal services; (2) party political grievances; (3) poor municipal governance; and (4) socio-economic grievances. First, the "non-municipal services" macro-category aims to incorporate grievances related to social services that do not directly fall within the responsibility of local municipalities. For example, grievances concerning evictions and forced removals, slow delivery of RDP houses, or lack of social services and built environment (e.g. lack of clinics, local facilities, schools, or transportation services) would all be counted as micro-cluster grievances under the "non-municipal services" macro-cluster.

Secondly, if participants called for the resignation or removal of a government official, expressed discontent following elections, or accused parties of manipulating candidate lists, these grievances fall under the jurisdiction of the "party political" macro-cluster. We separated grievances related to "poor municipal governance" from party political concerns, as complaints of nepotism, corruption, lack of transparency, or ignored memoranda and broken electoral promises reflect discontent over matters of governance, even if these grievances have political undercurrents. Finally, sometimes protesters voiced grievances unrelated to municipal governance or service delivery. These grievances included those reflecting citizens' poor quality of life or high cost of living, such as poverty, poor health, crime, unemployment, price increases, and arrears. Thus, these grievances were grouped under the "socio-economic" macro-cluster in the study.

¹⁰ Overall, we have created 52 individual indicators that have been combined into 20 micro-clusters and further reduced into 5 macro categories

Contextualising protests

The barometers merely summarise the trend in protests while the aim is to better understand how and when they arise and, presumably, what they mean for affected communities and society at large. To do this the protest data is linked to a large database detailing aspects of local conditions. At last count the database links the protest data to approximately 2 000 other variables detailing aspects of local government, as well as socio-economic conditions and political contexts at community level. The variables in the database include:

1. details of the municipality's finances, ,
2. results of previous elections (to voting district level),
3. details of state audits of local government,
4. information of its governance model,
5. census results at small area level,
6. specifics on public service infrastructure data (schools, clinics, police stations etc)
7. crime profiles,
8. whether senior municipal appointees like the CFO and Municipal Manager have been appointed in an acting or permanent positions,
9. records of state interventions in local and provincial government in term of, inter alia, s139 of the constitution.

Additional data is routinely being incorporated into the database and several datasets are incomplete. Incomplete datasets may reflect data pivotal to understanding why protests flare up. These include whether or not the municipal CFO meets the minimum qualification criteria set by treasury. This data is being improved as opportunity arises.

The database lends context to protest and contributes to the analysis of when and where they take place. Of particular value is the placement of protest within the context of municipalities' mis-allocation or waste of revenue and grants. To this end various additional indices like the municipal audit consistency barometer (MAC-B) have been developed. Additional indices reflecting the compliance, performance and capacity of local government are being completed.

Access to the data requires constant maintenance and development. However the complexity of the data base (and the means by which access is gained) requires the use of a spatially enabled relational database if the location of protests is to be placed within its specific economic, political and geographic contexts. In this instance PostgreSQL via Postgis is used.