Technical Note: Civic Protests Barometer[*]

I. Brief Summary

This research study presents information on the frequency and the nature of civic (service delivery protests) throughout South Africa. The study as a whole draws on different methods for three periods. The first period dates from the inception of the study in 2007 until the end of 2011. A new method, currently still being used, was adopted for the period after 2011. Once gain the method was changed in 2016. The initial component derived protest records from the media reports of community protests contained in the Community Protest Monitor in the South African Local Government Briefings Report[1] and Lexis Nexis[2] online database. Data was collected monthly from 2007 until August 2012 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.[3]

II. Explanation of Source Material

The method used relies on media reports and not, for example, incident reports gathered by the SA Police Service (SAPS). SAPS routinely records incidents of public disturbances made by police officials. While these reports do reflect what the police observe in terms of protest action the data published by the SAPS is not sufficiently detailed to be of meaningful use. Police report protest activity and invariably several, if not dozens, of reports are associated with any single protest. The lack of detail provided by SAPS prevents protest activity being linked to particular protest actions, communities or grievances. SAPS routinely refer to a number of protests an order of magnitude greater than recorded by other observers.

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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.

3 The media reports themselves are obtained from a variety of sources including the on-line versions of the following publications: Abahlali baseMjondolo, Alberton Record, Alex News, All Africa, All ZA News, Bedfordview & Edenvale News, Benoni City Times, Berea Mail, Biznews, Brakpan Herald, Business Day, Cape Argus, City Press, Die Burger, Durban Daily News, Estcourt and Midland News, Eye Witness News, Germiston City News, Google SA, iAfrica.com, IOL News, Isolezwe, Kempton Express, Krugersdorp News, Ladysmith Gazette, looklocal.co.za, Mail & Guardian, News24, Northeastern Tribune, PE Herald, Phoenix Sun, Pretoria East Record, Randburg Sun, Rapport, Roodepoort Record, SABC News, South Coast Herald, Southlands Sun, Springs Advertiser, Standerton Advertiser, The Cape Times, The Citizen, The Highvelder, The Mercury, The New Age, The Sowetan, The Star, The Tembisan, Times Online, Witbank News and Zulu Land Observer. Using a simple keyword search, "protests and service delivery," and correlating these keywords in the database, we were able to access hundreds of articles from these media houses.

The method adopted by the Civic Protests Barometer relies on accessing media reports of all types of protest action. Obviously this presents difficulties of its own. For example media reports are summaries of complex events and routinely omit key information. Additionally, it is likely that not all service delivery protests receive media coverage. Media reports do however provide a consistent method of data collection over an extended period of time. Maintaining such consistency as the method used changes is essential for tracking trends.

Regardless of the medium used, news reports have a level of factual legitimacy, as articles tend to relay an unbiased account of events and attempt 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 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 rested on on-line news aggregators rather than Lexis-Nexis and the Local Government Briefings[4]. Important news aggregators include UKZN's Social Protest Observatory[5].

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 text content. This process reduces the data manually entered by analysts to pre-defined values and categories which are stored as codes.

One advantage of media reports is that the full text of the report becomes available. The text of the report is then incorporated into the database and an initial classification of date, geographic location, issues, violence etc. is made. The initial classification is largely automated and is based on the presence of key words and combinations of words in the full text report. Although this new method lends itself to automation the classifications used still rest with the analyst and not the algorithms.

The approach now allows for additional digital resources to be leveraged and to ensure ever more comprehensive coverage. As this 'scraping' is automated and, unfortunately, the results have to be examined to identify if any incidents have been duplicated. To the extent that the media fail to report any protest action the adopted method may result in an underestimate of the level of

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4 To a large extent Lexi-Nexis and the Local Government Briefings are themselves just news aggregators.
5 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 Highvelder, The Tembisan, Ladysmith Gazette, South Coast Herald, Biznews, Estcourt and Midland News, Brakpan Herald, and Alberton Record.

protests. However, the chances of underestimation of levels of protests are slim given that protesting communities are usually at pains to ensure that their actions are noted as well as the due to the fact that media houses are often attracted by protests action.

III. Arranging the Data into Barometers

The CPB is organised 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, CPB aggregates the data into four different fact sheets that highlight the various trends discovered from the analysis of the dataset. A range of issues affecting local government is discussed under the following groupings, each of which form separate barometers.

- Barometer 1: National distribution of protests by year and time of the year (season).

- Barometer 2: Geographical distribution of protests by year.

- Barometer 3: Count and proportion of protests that are violent

- Barometer 4: profile of grievances cited by protesters

First, data on protest activity is presented yearly, then broken down by season, and lastly divided monthly for the entire period – 2007 to July 2016. Geographically, we analyzed our data aggregately, by province, by district, and by local municipality. Where possible the location of the protests has been identified at the level of street or suburb. A new category of geographical aggregation is generally used. Under this classification all local governments are combined with metropolitan municipalities. This results in a hybrid of local and district municipalities (metropolitan municipalities) which cover the entire country without any overlap in jurisdiction. Secondly, we analyzed the percentage of overall protests that were deemed violent in nature (as will be discussed below). Finally, as will be discussed in Section VII, we created a key to categorize the total 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

Initially data drawn from the *MunicipalIQ Hotspots Monitor* provided a measure of analytical comparison to substantiate initial conclusions. It is important to note that the statistical data put forth by this study and the data from MunicipalIQ[6] Hotspots Monitor was not identical. Differences between the figures reported by MunicipalIQ and our reported figures are attributable to differing

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

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 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.

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 violent[7] (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 complaining about the same thing or even about grievances 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 may focus on local government for redress on issues that are not local government "competencies" is an important trend in the data and these are included in the analysis.

As a consequence of differing methodologies, numerical disparities arise between our data and the MunicipalIQ reports. For instance, as of July 2012, MunicipalIQ reports 133 major protests. The sample data we analyzed using the broader definition of community protests reports 182 community protests by that date. Protest figures reported by SAPS are much higher than both

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

measures as a result of broader definitions and a more comprehensive reporting capacity. SAPS reports protests as "Crowd Management Incidents" which may be characterized as "peaceful" or "unrest". SAPS reported 11, 033 incidents for 2011/12; 1, 091 of which were recorded as "unrest".

A further distinguishing factor of the ACSL (formerly MLGI) database is the exclusion of protests arising from civil disobedience campaigns. Civil disobedience campaigns are usually centred around widely held grievances rather than issues specific to particular communities. As a result, the locus of the protest is routinely displaced from the aggrieved community. For example, protest organised about the "Rondebosch Commons" campaign usually take place at that venue but may involve protesters from varied backgrounds and from a wide area. The displacement of the protest action from the aggrieved is also a feature of protests against provincial and national government. For example, despite the fact that the protests are geographically concentrated those participating in protests against university fee hikes, the "#feesmustfall", do not necessarily live in or near the protest sites. Moreover education is not a local government competency and these grievances cannot be addressed by city officials. Protests directed against higher tiers of government are excluded from the definition of 'civic protests' on the grounds that they, like civil disobedience campaigns, tend to be held by broad socio-economic sectors and the protest activity does not necessarily reflect anything about the local community.

The database thus 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 is not included even 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 despite local government having no jurisdiction over the matter.

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 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 analyze 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 maxim 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 analyze 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, some protesters allegedly invoke grievance about services as a pretext for engaging in 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 aggregate those grievances into micro-level categories and macro-level categories[8].

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

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

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 cluster "socio-economic".

VIII. 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' misallocation or waste of revenue and

grants. To this end various additional indices like the municipal audit consistency barometer (MAC-B) and the Just Cities for Women Bulletin 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 by way of the PostGIS link is used.