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Stress-Testing South Africa: The Tenuous Foundations of One of Africa's Stable States

by Assis Malaquias

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by Assis Malaquias

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Executive Summary

South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was expected to usher in a new era of peace, stability, and accelerated development. However, despite widespread optimism, political violence has persisted. Although a fraction of that experienced under apartheid, levels of political violence are worsening and indicative of the country's potential fragility. They also map out the fault lines along which South Africa may yet stumble.

Political violence in South Africa is primarily driven by poverty, inequality, and patronage. Limited economic growth, institutional incapacity, and restricted educational opportunities have resulted in a post-apartheid democratic state that has been slow to create jobs or supply housing, water, sanitation, and other services that many South Africans expect. Although overall levels have decreased since 1994, poverty remains both endemic and acute across the country. Simultaneously, and even more problematically for stability, inequality has risen steadily, leaving society deeply divided between a wealthy minority and a poor majority. Within this context, frustration with the slow and uneven pace of service delivery often ignites into violent protest.

While growing poverty and inequality are key sources of discontent, political violence is triggered by competition for financial and political resources available through the state. This competition is further fueled by perceptions of the post-apartheid state as a source of personal enrichment and power. At the elite level, access to the state allows for personal and professional gain through corruption, political favors, and business opportunities secured through ties with strategically placed individuals. Elite competition for such access drives violence within and between competing political parties, usually at the local level using intimidation and assassination to ensure electoral success. Much political violence thus exists in a grey area where the distinction between politics and crime is blurred.

While popular frustration mounts due to unfulfilled expectations regarding the speed of socioeconomic transformation, South Africans still overwhelmingly support the democratic process and view the government as legitimate, providing the state a strong foundation from which it can contain political violence. South Africa's capable though diminished security apparatus, similarly, provides the state the capacity to enforce its authority when needed. Consequently, political violence poses a low to moderate threat to the country in the short term and constitutes a mostly disruptive force rather than one with the potential to seriously jeopardize the state.

In the medium and long term, however, catastrophic political violence may be triggered by a generalized sense that many of the promises of the anti-apartheid struggle remain at least a generation away. This realization – coupled with growing socioeconomic and political gaps between elites and the average citizen – poses the greatest threat to stability and security in South Africa.

To avoid this scenario, fundamental changes to the status quo are needed. Citizens must again come to see tangible evidence that government is interested in the socioeconomic priorities of ordinary citizens. In other words, the South African government must regain public trust. This will require breaking up the current intertwining of political authority and economic opportunity. To do so will entail reducing the patronage value political office currently affords and establishing a more significant and institutionalized role for independent watchdog groups. Rebuilding the public order capacity of the South African Police Service will simultaneously enhance efforts to tamp down on the use of violence for political advantage while improving the state's effectiveness to maintain stability in the face of popular protests.

A Paradox of Rising Influence and Violence

South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world. Comparative global crime statistics regularly place it in the highest quartile for violent crimes, including reported rapes, murders, kidnappings, drug-related crimes, robberies, burglaries, and motor vehicle thefts.¹ In important respects, the crime statistics reflect a society traumatized by various forms of violence – physical and structural – perpetrated over generations by elites who controlled power and wealth: British, Afrikaners and, now, Africans, who, ironically, at the beginning of the 20th century set out to overthrow the inherently violent system of apartheid.

Notwithstanding this violence, South Africa is arguably the most important country in Africa. It is the continent's economic giant. Its formal economy – based on mining, banking, and diversified services and supported by extensive modern infrastructure – is Africa's largest. At \$527.5 billion (2010 purchasing power parity), its GDP is larger and more robust than its nearest rivals on the continent, Egypt (\$500 billion) and Nigeria (\$369 billion). Since the transition to majority rule in 1994, South Africa has also reestablished its political credentials in Africa and has often played – albeit at times reluctantly and not always successfully – a leading role in continental political affairs. Additionally, despite massive military restructuring and downsizing since the end of apartheid, South Africa retains a competent and professional security sector.

These factors have helped give South Africa a relevant position on the wider world stage. It was recently invited to join the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), a group increasingly regarded as one of the most influential in the world. South Africa is also viewed as a strong candidate to represent Africa at the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member, if this global body undergoes its much-expected reorganization. South Africa's stability, accordingly, has profound implications for continental progress. This analysis, based on in-country interviews with over several dozen leading South African military and

intelligence officials, analysts, scholars, and civil society representatives, assesses the depth of stability in this African anchor state.

The Legacy of Politics and Violence

Although South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world, political violence is relatively low and heavily overshadowed by high levels of criminal violence in the country. The nature of political violence that does occur overwhelmingly follows norms forged during years of armed resistance to apartheid.

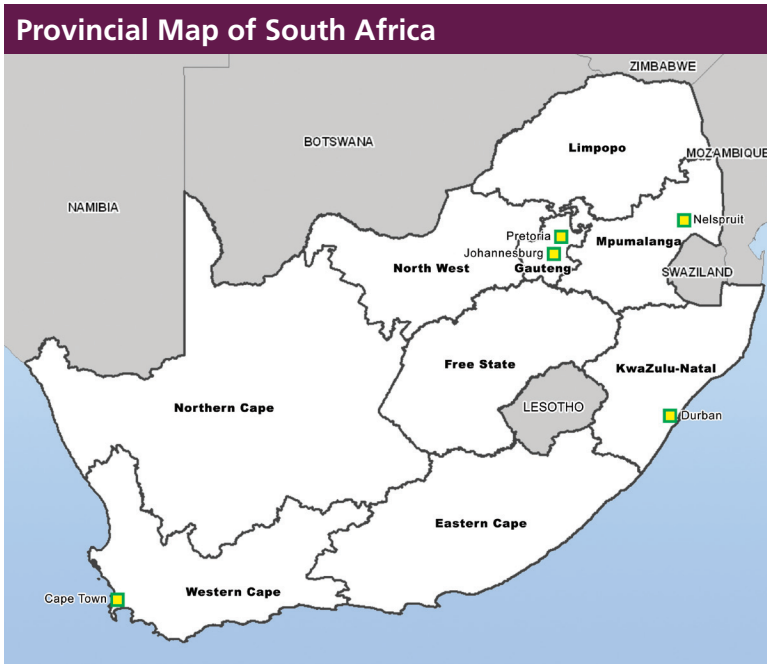
In 1960, the African National Congress (ANC) declared armed struggle against the apartheid state. Along with the South African Communist Party (SACP), it established an underground guerrilla army, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) in 1961. However, without a secure rear base and control of rural areas to sustain an insurgency, effective military action proved problematic. MK's difficulties notwithstanding, in the early to mid-1980s a general effort aimed at making South Africa ungovernable through mass resistance got underway. In 1983, a number of civil society groups came together under the umbrella organization, the United Democratic Front (UDF). Spearheaded by the UDF and trade unions and fanned by poor conditions in schools, rent increases by community councils, rising unemployment, inflation, and poor municipal services, urban revolt against the state ensued in 1984. Rolling, often spontaneous, mass action rather than guerrilla insurgency steadily overwhelmed the apartheid state. A stagnating economy, international sanctions, and increasing white casualties in the Border War with Angola, further contributed to a political and economic crisis for white power. The state was eventually forced to negotiate a transition to majority rule. And so, an enduring culture of protest in South Africa was entrenched.

The struggle against apartheid also established a *tradition of assassination* – a method used both between and within warring sides as a way of dealing with traitors and dissenters. As is widely known, the apartheid security forces used assassination to eliminate ANC and MK

leaders and other opponents of white minority rule. But assassination was also a means to settle power struggles and personal rivalries within ANC and MK leadership. It was not uncommon for those who were critical of, betrayed, or abandoned the ANC to be murdered. For example, when Chris Hani, former MK chief of staff and later head of the SACP, openly criticized the MK leadership in the late 1960s then MK head (and later South Africa's first black Minister of Defense) Johannes Modise ordered his assassination. The assassination failed and Hani was subsequently protected by ANC leader, Oliver Tambo.²

Nonetheless, the pattern persisted. Township leaders and local councilors who opposed the ANC were also targeted, as were those seen to be collaborating with the state, such as black police officers and soldiers. Assassination was also used by both ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) hit squads in their clashes around KwaZulu-Natal Province and the Johannesburg townships in the 1980s. Between 1976 and 1994, approximately 10,700 people were killed in violent clashes and assassinations in KwaZulu-Natal. Ninety percent of these deaths occurred between 1989 and 1994 as a power struggle got underway for control over the province during the post-apartheid transition.³ Intimidation and assassination were used to eliminate competition for government positions, thus setting a violent tone for intra- and inter-party rivalries in the post-apartheid era.

The issue remains particularly prevalent in KwaZulu-Natal Province, with an increase in incidents of political violence also reported in the Mpumalanga and North West Provinces in recent years (see map). Incidents take place at the local level involving wards and municipal councilors, mostly before and during election periods. To be clear, although political violence is distinguished by a political objective or agenda on the part of the perpetrator, many instances of political violence in South Africa heavily blur the line between criminal and political. In short, while political violence in South Africa stands at a fraction of the scale, scope, and intensity during apartheid, it persists nearly two decades later.



Source: Statistics South Africa. Modified by author.

Weakening Legitimacy and Other Drivers of Political Violence

Recent empirical evidence suggests a substantial decline in confidence in public institutions, the judiciary, elected officials, and government as a whole. According to a 2008 survey, roughly 54 percent of South African citizens felt that the country was headed in the wrong direction while only 36 percent believed it was headed in the right direction.⁴ This contrasts sharply with a 2005 survey, which found that 65 percent of South Africans thought the country was headed in a positive direction while 23 percent believed conditions were worsening.⁵

Corruption, incompetence, and a lack of transparency and accountability have left ordinary citizens feeling that elected officials are not interested in the concerns of common people. There is a growing popular feeling that the current system is dysfunctional at the local level

and unable to deliver the benefits promised to the population by the liberators. Fully 72 percent of South Africans believe some, most, or all local government elected officials are involved in corruption.⁶ However, while the failure of local government has resulted in people no longer having faith and trust in their local officials, this has not yet led to a complete loss of faith and trust in national government or the ANC. The vast majority of South Africans still believe that democracy is the preferred and most appropriate form of government.⁷ The ANC is still seen as the party that brought democracy to the country and therefore its support remains high. This partly explains that while citizens express unhappiness with government, most still vote for the ANC.

South Africa is midway between the optimum and the unstable. Its trajectory will largely depend on the government's willingness and ability to address the causes of current discontent over the short to medium future. This entails making tangible progress on core issues to the South African public, like poverty, growing inequality, and patronage politics.

Poverty and Inequality. Democracy in South Africa is understood mainly in terms of social and economic rights. In fact, this is popularly viewed as the cornerstone of the country's post-1994 democracy.⁸ However, the realization of these same rights has been uneven and inadequate. The majority of citizens still struggle to gain access to employment, housing, transportation, clean drinking water, electricity, and quality education. The delivery of basic services is essential in alleviating poverty and inequality. The failure to do so has created the perception that the post-apartheid state lacks the will to deliver. A sense of marginalization and exclusion from the political system has compelled some citizens to take actions outside of these structures, fuelling unrest and violence – from protests over service delivery to xenophobic attacks.

Overall, poverty in South Africa has decreased moderately since 1994 in both absolute and relative terms. The government has attempted much in terms of poverty alleviation. Recipients of social grants increased from 2.5 million persons in 1999 to 12 million in 2007, and more than a

million temporary jobs were created between 2004 and 2007.⁹ However, 93 percent of black South Africans (comprising 79 percent of the population) continue to live on less than R322 (under \$50) a month. In comparison, only one percent of white South Africans (comprising less than 10 percent of the population) live under the poverty line. After more than 15 years of democracy, little has changed for the majority of South Africans. Poverty remains high, with the overall rate standing at 48 percent according to the latest income and expenditure survey conducted by the South African government.

Income inequality in the country has increased significantly since 1994, making South Africa one of the world's most unequal countries. This is reflected in the country's GINI coefficient, which increased from 0.64 to 0.69 (on a scale of 0-1) between 1995 and 2005.¹⁰ Although all South Africans have experienced positive growth in their levels of expenditure since the end of apartheid, including those at the very bottom and at the very top, growth among the wealthy has exceeded that of the poor. Social grants comprised 50 to 60 percent of household income of poor families in 2005. In general, the widening of the state's social security system since 1994 rather than job creation accounts for much of the modest growth in expenditure of poor black South Africans. By comparison, there has been sharp growth in expenditure among individuals at and above the 80th percentile income group, with the highest returns registered for white and mixed-race or "colored" South Africans.¹¹

Although government policy has prioritized high economic growth as a means of reducing poverty, the growth that has taken place has not benefited the poor. Instead, it has induced a significant maldistribution of income. Post transition, the economy experienced one of the longest periods of positive growth in the country's history. However, averaging just 3 percent during the first 10 years, growth was neither robust nor focused enough on poorer South Africans to offset a rise in inequality. Economic policies have generally neglected labor-intensive growth, perpetuating post-apartheid distributional regimes. Although the country's labor market

and welfare policies were deracialized during the late apartheid period, little change was made to the economic growth path. Accordingly, race merely gave way to class as the primary driver of stratification. Economic policies continued to encourage firms to employ fewer but more skilled workers. Wages and profits rose, but so too did unemployment as less-skilled workers were no longer needed and the economy was unable to absorb a large part of the country's work force. This was especially acute in the mining and agricultural sectors, which had traditionally served as major employers of less-skilled people. Compounding the problem, poor public education in black communities has not significantly improved despite greater expenditure since 1994. Thus, despite implementing various progressive policies and initiatives, the post-apartheid state has failed to alter the distributional regime and inequality that emerged in the late apartheid period.

The poverty-inequality mix is becoming steadily more combustible thanks partly to an unresponsive and increasingly dysfunctional civil service. In 1994, the ANC government inherited a civil service structure that was outdated and inefficient, providing limited and discriminatory services to the majority of South Africans. Years of official neglect resulted in serious deficiencies in service provision and major backlogs in terms of housing, water, electricity, and sanitation delivery. Despite new legislation, policy, structures, and an injection of resources following transition, local government capacity to deliver services steadily deteriorated even further – often due to an emphasis on racial diversity over merit and efficiency, and political loyalty over ability.

Reform after apartheid saw local government boundaries redrawn. The ten Bantustans, or black self-governed but marginalized regions, were reintegrated, with their capitals and administrations dismantled. The four provinces became nine, and 843 municipalities were reduced to 284. In the years that followed, whole towns “virtually fell to pieces, with pavements crumbling, sewerage and electricity breakdowns and rubbish uncollected.”¹² Affirmative action saw skilled white civil servants

resign, relieved, or not considered for employment. Key posts were often reassigned to friends and relatives of ANC political figures or remained vacant due to a lack of suitable black candidates to fill them.¹³ Over time, this resulted in a dramatic loss of municipal capacity, soaring personnel costs, and shrunken capital budgets. Local government departments either underspent or were in arrears due to mismanagement. According to a 2009 federal government report on the state of local government, there was an overall vacancy rate of 12 percent for senior managers and a perception that “patronage and nepotism is now so widespread in many municipalities that the formal municipal accountability system is ineffective and inaccessible to many citizens.”¹⁴

By 2005, 203 of the 284 municipalities were unable to provide sanitation for 40 percent or more of their residents. Twenty-five percent of all towns had no garbage removal, residents in more than 50 percent of municipalities were without piped water, and 70 percent of towns did not have flushable toilets. Rent rates and defaults rose and municipal debt soared into the billions, in some cases bankrupting municipalities. Regardless, many municipal managers continued to receive basic salaries higher than that of the president. In 2004-2005, South Africa’s president received a salary of R1.05 million (over \$152,000). At the same time, the highest municipal manager’s salary stood at more than R1.2 million (over \$174,000), in Ehlanzeni in Mpumalanga Province, where 73 percent of residents had no garbage removal, nearly 60 percent no sanitation, and a third no access to water. Many of these managers had neither formal qualifications nor expertise, with 74 of the biggest municipalities in the country lacking a single qualified civil engineer and 36 percent of all municipal managers having no tertiary education. More broadly, only eight percent of government workers or civil servants were highly skilled and 90 percent were considered low skilled or unskilled.¹⁵ While the impact of these shortages has been felt across the country, the hardest hit has been the already poor, outlying, and rural municipalities, especially in the former Bantustans.

The lack of properly functioning local government has not only stifled delivery of basic services but also hindered central government initiatives to address problem areas. This has left citizens with little to no access and even less capacity to demand and realize their rights. There is a growing sense that democracy does not work equally for all citizens. Rather, it benefits the rich and powerful more than the poor and powerless. General frustration has increased and the willingness of citizens to resort to violence has risen. Meanwhile, officials have failed to sufficiently communicate to citizens why expectations have not been realized for the majority. For many average citizens, the sense is that the only way to get the attention of government is by burning tires, barricading roads, and engaging in other forceful displays of frustration. Expectedly, these actions often devolve into violence, sending potent impressions to all citizens regarding the utility of violence. In turn, there has been a significant rise in low-level violence, including political violence across the country.

Patronage. Local South African politics “at the sites of violence is consumed by struggles for state patronage.”¹⁶ Political violence is driven in part by competition for state resources at the local level, which, in turn, is rooted in an understanding of the economy as a consumable good, not unlike a cake that can only feed a determined number of people. This view fuels conflict at both the elite and citizen level as it assumes that access to resources is a zero-sum game.

African political elites have traditionally seen government as a source of personal enrichment. The ruling ANC elite is no exception in that it behaves much like post-colonial African elites elsewhere on the continent since the early 1960s. Notably, ANC leaders are neither a property-owning nor capitalist or entrepreneurial elite. Rather, bureaucratic in inclination, they see politics as the fastest and surest mode of wealth accumulation. This has been encouraged by South Africa’s abundance of natural resources that provides the ruling elite with revenues to distribute. The poor have benefited through the distribution of social welfare grants. But a disproportionately large share has been distributed to the

middle and upper classes through affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) schemes, which include large equity transfers and procurement policies that reserve government and parastatal contracts for black-owned contractors. Those who have benefited from such transfers and contracts are well connected to the ANC and constitute a remarkably small group of individuals, including both elected and non-elected officials.¹⁷ These individuals simultaneously sit on the boards of banks, parastatals, various foundations, and universities, and hold shares and directorships in an array of industries.¹⁸

The ANC's practice of cadre deployment has also created a fertile breeding ground for patronage politics in that it rewards party loyalty with appointments in the state and parastatal sectors. Cadre members then seek to advance their own interests in a manner that is indifferent or even hostile to the needs of citizens. At its most crude level, money, gifts, influence, and favors are used to gain a privileged position that is then used to gain more money, gifts, influence, and favors.

This practice is enabled by South Africa's proportional representation electoral list system in which citizens vote for a party rather than individual candidates. Parties are then able to appoint members of parliament from pre-established slates of candidates in proportion to the percentage of votes received. As party leaders decide which individuals are included on the electoral lists, it is the parties that select which candidates will represent the voters. This has resulted in a strong sense of political and personal allegiance to ANC leaders, which has enabled the party to build and sustain a formidable political machine. However, since party and personal loyalty – not fitness for the position – are the key determining factors for appointments, this has also resulted in dramatic reductions in effectiveness of state institutions at all levels of government.¹⁹ Even in cases where party members are blatantly corrupt or incompetent, they remain in key and lucrative positions, often openly protected by more senior party members. Despite evidence of graft, nepotism, and gross misconduct, few face any consequences. In fact, of nearly 8,000 cases of

corruption forwarded by the National Anti-Corruption Hotline program to relevant government departments for follow-up, only 245 have resulted in direct prosecutions.²⁰ Most often members are merely redeployed to a new position or location. This is especially the case at the local level. Indeed, disciplinary hearings by a municipality in KwaZulu-Natal Province where the wife of South Africa's Minister of State Security worked as the director of health services continued inconclusively for months, even after she received a 12-year sentence for trafficking cocaine into South Africa from Brazil.²¹ She even received her salary for five weeks following the conviction, at which point a suspension went into effect.

Municipal and ward governments are often the primary entities awarding government contracts and allocating public spending. Positions on municipal councils have become part of this wider spoils system and are highly sought. They are enviable in terms of salaries and fringe benefits, as well as the ability to award contracts to local companies so as to benefit their own business interests and those of their friends or families. Violence has ensued as individuals compete for these low-level local positions between and within political parties. Rivals are threatened or murdered, with political competition often being won by the candidate with the most money and muscle. Mob tactics are also used. There is increasing anecdotal evidence that local leaders and political candidates manipulate existing social tensions and mobilize supporters so as to gain political advantage.

Beyond the jostling for political office among elites, there is a wider perception among ordinary citizens that political support and loyalty is something that is acquired by patronage. Apartheid's legislated inequalities of resources and opportunities created a climate in which all forms of social services were highly politicized. Post transition, citizens assumed that the government would prioritize provision of those services – such as welfare benefits, grants, jobs, and land reform – to friends and allies. This consciousness then fuels hostility towards those seen to be benefiting unfairly from state resources via corruption or personal contacts as well

as towards those seen to be prospering with no inherent connections to the state, such as foreign migrants. Violent citizen action is in part an expression of frustration at these inequities.

This sense of elite entitlement is closely related to the character of the country's "pork barrel politics." Local political violence then is a product of this deepening culture in which everyone wants to be a winner no matter the cost or means to get there.

In important ways, then, the ANC is using state power to enrich itself, with the public sector treated as a giant spoils system up for grabs. The abuse of schemes like BEE, or "black elite enrichment" as a former vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town coined it, is illustrative.²² Such activity promotes politics as a source of easy money rather than an avenue for public service. Equally detrimentally, it reinforces the message to all citizens that the path to riches involves access to state resources. Given the limited avenues to access those resources, the incentives for political competition to devolve into violence are high.

Emerging Dynamics of Political Unrest and Violence

Service delivery protests are not new. Between 2004 and 2005, some 881 illegal and 5,085 legal protests against weak service delivery were recorded throughout the country's nine provinces.²³ A growing number have occurred in poor rural communities and are increasingly violent and destructive. Protests often focus on basic services such as housing, water, or sanitation that people believe have not been delivered or been delivered unevenly. Protests are also directed towards local government structures, institutions, or representatives. This usually involves members of the community demanding a local councilor, ward committee, or municipal manager resign due to their perceived failure to deliver services, corruption, nepotism, financial mismanagement, or general aloofness and poor engagement with the community.

While protests are widespread across the country, they remain localized and contained in rural townships and informal settlements on

the margins of towns and cities with unrest rarely spilling over into city centers. Protests are sporadic. Though uncoordinated, demonstrations are sometimes emulated by other communities who feel empowered by what they see happening nearby through the media.

Compounded by worsening living conditions caused by the global economic crisis, protests have escalated in frequency and intensity since 2009. This period coincides with the election of Jacob Zuma as president. After years of increasing centralization under former President Thabo Mbeki, expectations rose at the prospect of a more pro-poor regime under Jacob Zuma. In the run-up to the 2009 elections, the ANC also made extensive promises that all or most service delivery issues would be addressed once the Zuma government was in place. Thus, protests will likely escalate further with the continued absence of concrete measures to address problems around service delivery, inequality, and poor local governance.

Inter- and intra-political party violence has also been common across the country. Such violence involves organizing protests and demonstrations to intimidate political rivals, rally support against rivals, and gain political advantage in a particular community. It also involves verbal and physical threats and attacks on low-level and would-be political leaders. Killings, stabbings, hit-and-runs, vehicles being driven off the road, and petrol bombings of homes and offices by anonymous perpetrators occur sporadically but spike prior to and during elections. Additional police are deployed to monitor and patrol known and possible hotspots for outbreaks of clashes or unrest. Problematically, however, local police are often accused of partisanship and colluding with local political leaders, including intimidation, murder, or selective enforcement and investigation.²⁴

Violence between the Xhosa-dominated ANC and the predominantly Zulu IFP in KwaZulu-Natal has a long history. It came to a head during the 1980s when the apartheid regime fomented tensions and reinforced Zulu nationalism by arming and training members of the IFP from 1985 to fight

and contain the ANC in urban townships in Gauteng Province. Inter-party violence persisted throughout the 1990s, especially during elections, as the two sides struggled to establish dominance over the province.

Following ANC ascendance, the 2004 elections witnessed a significant decline in inter-party violence and the 2009 elections were the most peaceful yet, due in part to the inclusive policies pursued by the ANC government and the rise of Jacob Zuma, a Zulu. Although this violence may subside further over the short to medium term as a result of the conciliatory position held by the president, there is some concern as to how the dynamics in KwaZulu-Natal Province, particularly at the local level, will be affected when Jacob Zuma is no longer president. Should Zulus feel under-represented or sidelined following his departure, there could be a resurgence of Zulu nationalism and IFP support, possibly leading to renewed inter-party tensions and violence in the province. At best, this will remain localized, limited, and centered around election periods. At worst, violence could begin to occur between elections, eventually spilling over into civil strife, destabilizing the province and possibly the nation. The process could see Zulu nationalists seek autonomy or even secession for KwaZulu-Natal, as was done in the past.

Far more significant in recent years has been the increase in intra-party violence within the ANC. This is particularly evident in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and, to a lesser extent, Gauteng and the Western Cape. There is growing concern that weakening party discipline could undermine democracy in those areas.²⁵ Open dissent, disagreement, or contestation for seats within the party is strongly discouraged. Consequently, would-be councilors resort to organizing direct violent action against fellow party members in a bid to gain political or financial advantage.²⁶

Whereas protests and demonstrations are usually used against already unpopular local leaders, more direct intimidation and assassination often target strong or reformist leadership at the local level. Mpumalanga, which has been described as “without doubt the most treacherous province in the country for activists with principles,” is considered to be increasingly

susceptible to these tactics.²⁷ The provincial and local governments there have become paralyzed as a result of violent patronage politics. Currently, the internal affairs office of the South African Police Service are investigating allegations that the police illegally detained and then tortured and intelligence officers interrogated ANC members who openly demonstrated against the Zuma administration.²⁸ Several councilors who have stood between fellow political leaders and business tenders have been murdered, and leaders who have spoken out against the misuse of public funds reportedly fear for their lives.²⁹

No serious outbreaks of race-related violence have occurred since 1994. However, a recent spike in racial tensions in early 2010 when a white farmer and leader of a white supremacist group was hacked to death by two black farm hands suggests that race relations remain fragile. Two months before the murder, the head of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema, led students at a University of Johannesburg rally in singing a song including the lyrics “shoot the boer [farmers], they are rapists.” The controversial incident made its way into the courts, which eventually deemed it hate speech. Just two days before the murder, Malema visited the ZANU-PF political party in Zimbabwe. During a subsequent press conference in which Malema praised ZANU-PF’s policy of seizing land from white farmers, he called a white BBC journalist a “bloody agent” with a “white tendency” and had him removed. In other words, the state of race relations remains such that incidents that are racial or appear racial in nature can spark larger unrest or clashes.

Race also continues to texture land-related violence, and militant action by the white right wing cannot be ruled out entirely over the long term. However, there have been no serious white right wing attacks in recent years and there is no viable, militant organization currently in place in South Africa to carry out such a campaign. The most notable violent group since transition has been the *Boeremag* (Boer/Afrikaner Force), who called for the establishment of an independent Boer republic and used terror as a means of achieving their goals. Comprised of young white men as

well as middle-aged professionals, the group conducted eight simultaneous attacks on Soweto, outside of Johannesburg, targeting commuter railway lines and a mosque in October 2002. The group suffered a serious blow to its capacity after 22 leading members – including three then current mid-level officers in the South African National Defence Forces – were charged with terrorism, sabotage, and high treason following the attacks in 2002.³⁰

More recently, the *Boerevolk Vryheid Stigting* (Boer/Afrikaner Freedom Establishment) claims to have a fair following. While also calling for an independent state, the group has so far advocated only peaceful means. There are also many small white power groups and factions located across the country. However, these concentrate on community defense and reflect the change in mindset within the white right, which seeks to attain its goals via the country's existing political legal system. In general, "there is no organization that has any idea or any intention to overthrow the government."³¹ What militant activity does take place is on the margins and overwhelmingly involves lone operators unaffiliated to any meaningful organization.

Political Violence as a Source of Destabilization

At present, violent protests are motivated by local concerns and are symptomatic of a decline in state legitimacy. Perpetrators are local community members, unconnected to any wider organization, demanding government responsiveness, not revolution. There is no significant leadership at either a provincial or national level spearheading these activities, and, as such, there are few indications that the scale and scope of violence will escalate in the short to medium future. Although incidents of popular unrest are on the rise and occur across the country, the areas in which violence erupt are located on the margins of towns and cities, and are easily contained by the security forces.

In short, citizen violence constitutes more of a disruptive force that is limited in magnitude. At best, protests will remain localized and will see a

steady decline in frequency and intensity of violence as local governments and officials respond to dissatisfaction. However, this could change in the medium to long term should service delivery protests become more organized across communities, violent, and frequent – and the state respond with more forceful measures, including the police and eventually the military, to suppress the unrest. This, in turn, would likely lead to more violence and raises the likelihood of widespread revolt.

The longer the status quo persists – that is, continued poor service delivery, failure to better manage popular expectations, and patronage politics – the less likely people will feel they can participate by constructive and peaceful means. In contrast, should the state implement strong interventions to improve governance, institutional functionality, and capacity, perceptions of legitimacy should improve and incentives for violence ebb.

Should local protests become organized across communities and provinces, then it is conceivable that these could amplify into broader instability at the national level. However, as long as grievances remain localized, citizen violence is unlikely to escalate beyond the control of the state. Current levels of violence may even persist for the foreseeable future, but the state is not in imminent risk of succumbing to it. Moreover, given widespread support for the democratic system, should actors emerge to provide national leadership to the demands of local protesters, there will be pressures on these individuals to achieve resolution through negotiation and compromise.

Alternatively, there is a fair chance that unrest could be triggered by a single incident that gets out of hand, such as the 2008 xenophobic attacks against foreigners. Violent protests in the past easily and quickly mushroomed. What starts in one part of the country soon spills over to other regions. If civilians are killed when police attempt to control such situations, citizens may react violently, setting in motion a chain of events that would be difficult to stop. The “Sharpeville massacre” in 1960, which prompted the ANC to take up arms against the apartheid regime, as well

as the 1976 Soweto uprising provide important historical examples.

Elite-driven violence poses a similar if more direct risk to the state. The persistence of elite violence erodes legitimacy by encapsulating the extremes of corrupt, patronage-driven politics and unaccountable governance. However, while it poses a serious threat to certain municipalities and possibly even some provincial governments, elite violence occurs overwhelmingly at the local level. Accordingly, the risk to the national government at present is limited.

Likely outcomes of elite violence include intensified dysfunction of government and the political system, discontent, and, subsequently, violent protests. Elites are adept at capitalizing on and deliberately manipulating discontent and citizen unrest for their own political advantage. Furthermore, they have the capacity to provide leadership and orchestrate mass citizen violence, from protests to disorder to xenophobic attacks. Although elite violence currently remains local and limited, conditions may take a turn for the worse in the medium to long future if emerging opportunistic and exploitative tendencies are not reversed.

Under a scenario of escalating elite violence, elections will continue to take place but diminish in legitimacy. The country will be characterized by a small, affluent, political elite propped up by mineral revenues, increasingly prepared to use state structures to maintain their hold on power. Security institutions will become more politicized and actively involved in elite-level violence in terms of assassinations and unlawful surveillance of opposition voices, whether they be politicians, members of civil society, or the media. Civil liberties and press freedoms will be encroached upon, the independence of the judiciary and criminal justice system will be progressively compromised, the civil service corrupted, the health and educational services ever more limited, and the vast majority of people increasingly poor and disaffected.³²

Such circumstances provide opportunities for the emergence of more political entrepreneurs like Julius Malema, the controversial populist president of the ANC Youth League who has become a lightning rod

in South African politics by tapping into lingering racial resentment and impatience with the pace of socioeconomic transformation. Such entrepreneurs will seek to mobilize mass support by exploiting longstanding grievances over poverty, inequality, race, and land at the national level in a bid to control assets and resources, and advocate violence as a means by which to do so.³³ These entrepreneurs could come to prominence prior to or following an election, either at the local, provincial, or national level. Should these individuals gain sufficient influence, they may split from the ANC. If successful in a national or provincial level election either from within or apart from the ANC framework, such divisive figures could ultimately lead to a dismantling of the democratic order. Should they lose an election, widespread violence could erupt, perhaps with an ethnic and racial character.

Although possible, there is a sense that most South Africans believe that there is too much at stake to allow any single individual or organization to destabilize the country to such an extent. There is now a pattern of established, vested interests – including among nationalist elements – where everyone wants a piece of the cake too much to risk either political or economic collapse. Were the ANC to become wholly unable to contain and control party members and the differences between them, elite violence could destabilize the nation. While a possibility, given intra-ANC struggles between loyalists of former President Thabo Mbeki and current President Jacob Zuma as well as brewing disagreements between Julius Malema and the Zuma administration, this is unlikely in the medium to long future. The nature of the ANC as an organization is fairly resilient and tensions between members have consistently been contained over many years. If a rift were to open within the ANC, moreover, it would not be the first time, with earlier splits resulting in the creation of the Pan Africanist Congress in 1959 and more recently the Congress of the People in late 2008. Neither split led to instability or violence. Should it happen again, it will not result in catastrophe, and may in fact signify a maturation of South Africa's multiparty system.³⁴

The Security Sector's Capacity to Manage Unrest

The social, economic, and political drivers of citizen violence necessitate multi-sector, civilian-led solutions. Recognizing this, as part of this assessment of the stability of the South African state, a review of the elements of South Africa's security sector is provided.

South African Police Service. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is the primary recourse for the state when responding to political violence. In recent years, the police have made great improvements in terms of force levels and equipment. By mid-2010, total force strength stood at approximately 190,000, up from 130,000 in 2003 with an overall level of 204,000 set to be achieved by 2012. At present there are three South African police officers for every 1,000 citizens, while the international average is two per 1,000. Training in general remains of a fair to good standard, and recent acquisitions in terms of equipment have been sophisticated and on par with international standards.³⁵ Despite these ratios and growing force strength, there are insufficient numbers of officers with the requisite skills and expertise, particularly in management and command and control. This has hampered the efficiency, effectiveness, and performance of the SAPS. Without strong leadership, the force risks evolving into a huge, unwieldy mass of individuals authorized to use weapons but not properly organized or disciplined.

Recruiting policies have adversely impacted efforts to remedy this deficit. Appointments and promotions are heavily subject to affirmative action, as well as political allegiance and affiliation at more senior levels. This has alienated good police officers of all race groups, with many leaving the SAPS feeling that their experience and expertise are better rewarded in the private sector. Key management and technical positions are also left vacant due to a lack of qualified black applicants, which has impacted severely on overall police performance, including the capacity to respond to political violence. For example, a decision was recently made to reequip the police air wing and purchase a fleet of new aircraft.

The police air wing is a key tool when responding to violent protests and unrest. However, an insufficient number of black pilots applied to join the air wing once the aircraft were acquired. Instead of appointing applicants from other race groups, Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa decided in May 2010 to employ only four new pilots and four student pilots, despite there being 120 applications to fill 54 advertised positions.³⁶ The minister decided that to appoint pilots from minority race groups would not enhance diversity and, as a consequence, the posts were left vacant and the newly acquired aircraft effectively grounded.

In spite of these challenges, the police remain well placed to address urban domestic violence with certain specialist units. The SAPS has an organized, experienced, and well-established team of negotiators at both the provincial and national level. Based in Pretoria, Cape Town, and Durban, the SAPS Special Task Force (STF) trains abroad and is widely regarded for its skill and expertise. Complementary to the STF are National Intervention Units (NIUs), which are based in all major urban centers and deal with medium- to high-risk situations. Members are trained in a variety of scenarios, including terror-related incidents, and also train with the STF. Both the STF and NIUs can be moved fairly quickly with the assistance of the air wing or the South African Air Force, which has a formal agreement with the SAPS for rapid deployment of specialized units, especially if those units need to be deployed over a long distance.

More generally, police capacity to address local protests and unrest is mixed. The public order policing units, known as Crime Combat Units (CCUs), are primarily tasked with managing protest marches and unrest as well as performing crime combating functions. Following a restructuring process in 2006, they were reduced in size, resources, and capacity despite a 50 percent increase in the number of protests in the country between 2002 and 2005. Known as Riot Units in the 1980s, the restructuring process reduced manpower from 7,227 members across 43 units to 2,595 members in 23 units. Prior to restructuring, the units' ability to respond

both quickly and effectively to spontaneous incidents and unrest was considered fairly good. However, by the time of the 2008 xenophobic attacks, both the total number of units and the number of members in each unit had been halved, equipment was in disrepair, and vehicles were poorly maintained. Grossly short of manpower, public order units were unable to cope with the unrest once it escalated and the SAPS was forced to request the assistance of the South African Army. In response to the crisis and in anticipation of South Africa's hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the SAPS began rebuilding, re-training, and re-staffing the public order units. By December 2009, CCUs had grown to 5,661 members and 29 units. In 2008, the CCUs received assistance from the French gendarmerie, which trained the units in French techniques and crowd control. The French also helped replace inappropriate and poorly maintained gear and purchase new equipment, including water cannons.

Although the public order units are considered capable of responding quickly and effectively to sudden, localized protests, there remain serious concerns as to the units' capacity to address unrest on a wider scale over a longer duration. Should reinforcements be required, provincial public order capacity can be called upon, as well as the respective NIU, which is also trained in public order policing. Unrest at a provincial level of a medium duration could also be managed with the support of public order units from other provinces and the STF. However, once any violence escalates to a national scale, the SAPS is unlikely to be able to cope for more than three to four days, and the army would have to be called in to assist. There is also some uncertainty as to whether resources, improved levels of training, and equipment acquired ahead of the FIFA Football World Cup will be maintained in the future.

The SAPS' capacity to police any political violence in rural and outlying areas is extremely low, including rural terror, insurgency, or citizen protests and unrest. A rural protection program was in place until 2003, though it was built largely around the South African Army's Area Defence System or commandos, a territorial component of the army. In

2003, President Thabo Mbeki ordered the phasing out of the commandos and by 2009 they had been disbanded. However, a security vacuum subsequently emerged in rural areas and along South Africa's borders. The SAPS units intended to replace the commandos failed to provide sufficient safety and security to local communities, and in many areas were entirely absent. This has resulted in rural communities organizing themselves, often using illegal means and employing private security companies. By 2008, there was a personnel deficiency of 71 percent on the borders alone, rendering border security totally ineffective. In 2009, the government ordered the army to redeploy to the country's borders given the incapacity of the police. Although the SAPS proposed a new Rural Safety Strategy in 2010, the strategy has yet to be implemented, has been heavily criticized, and is expected to only be functional in the coming two to three years. Meanwhile, should any violence break out in rural, outlying or border regions, or a violent political group or movement emerge in such areas, the police would most probably be incapable of responding meaningfully.

South African National Defence Force. The capacity of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to respond to political violence in South Africa rests primarily with that of the Special Forces Brigade and the South African Army. In this, the SANDF acts very much in support of the police or as a backup in cases of extreme unrest, terror, or insurgency. The Air Force and the Military Health Service would deploy mostly in support of the army in this regard.

The army's role in addressing political violence is part of an agreement between the police and the military that allows for the police to request that the army be deployed when the police finds it can no longer cope with a given situation or crisis. Per the Constitution, the president must first authorize its deployment and place the army "in service." As was seen in the response to the xenophobic violence in 2008, once authorized, the army deployed almost immediately to crisis hotspots, less than 24 hours after the president signed the order. Readiness to deploy at short notice is

enabled through the existence of a Joint Operations Intelligence Structure (JOINTS), which enables the military to meet with representatives from both the police and the intelligence services on a monthly basis and obtain an indication as to whether there are any possible threats against which their assistance will be required. Once deployed, joint command structures at the national, provincial, and local level allow for coordination of operations.

The Special Forces Brigade is trained in counterterrorism operations and can be used in support of the police STF in this regard. Reasonably well resourced, the Special Forces Brigade is also the only structure within the military that is formally trained in unconventional or counterinsurgency warfare. All other special operations units involved in counterinsurgency under the apartheid regime were disbanded following the transition to democracy in 1994. There is no real light force capability within the army structure at present, other than paratroopers.

The overwhelming focus of training is on conventional threats and peacekeeping training for deployment in regional and international peace missions in Africa. Given the nature of the operational environments to which the army is deployed in Africa, troops are trained in select rural and urban counterinsurgency-type drills, including crowd control, patrols, observation posts, roadblocks, and cordon-and-search operations. This training renders troops suited and able to assist the police in dealing with unrest on a wide scale over a short to medium duration.

However, these drills are taught in isolation of wider counterinsurgency principles and are generally considered to be insufficient for both current peace operations and for countering a meaningful insurgent threat should it emerge in South Africa. Of greatest concern is the serious decline and loss of skills and expertise around tracking, small unit tactics, intelligence gathering skills by regular troops, map reading and navigation, communication skills, and nighttime operation skills. In addition, leadership at lower levels is

often poor.³⁷ Junior leaders have struggled in operations abroad because they are not well trained to deal with threats and scenarios common in insurgent environments, especially when working in small groups. This is a critical skill in any counterinsurgency operation where low-level leaders are required to show initiative and make decisions constantly, and consequently demand a high level of skill and flexibility.³⁸

The disbanding of the army commandos left a gap in capability for addressing other rural-based dangers. The commandos were lightly armed detachments comprised of members of local communities in rural and outlying areas. The units were charged with the protection of interior assets and landward borders, and were the forces primarily involved in law-and-order tasks in support of the police. The commandos were trained in counterinsurgency and provided the bulk of the SANDF's rear area defense. Each commando had two substructures: area-bound units and non-area-bound units. The former gathered information and tactical intelligence and had a rapid response capacity. The non-area-bound units acted as an auxiliary force to the police, and assisted in crime prevention operations and participated in manning observation posts, patrols, roadblocks, vehicle checkpoints, and cordon-and-search operations.

Domestic Intelligence. Civilian intelligence services are currently undergoing a restructuring process. Until 2009, these services were comprised of the South African Secret Service (SASS), responsible for foreign intelligence, and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) which was responsible for domestic intelligence. Following his election, President Zuma ordered that the two agencies be brought together as the Foreign Branch and the Domestic Branch under the newly created State Security Agency (SSA), which is overseen by the Minister for State Security and a Director General. Also part of this ongoing restructuring is a redefinition and reorientation of roles, functions, and tasks. However, there is very little indication as to how this process will affect domestic intelligence capacity.

Although it is difficult to evaluate performance and capabilities given the nature of the intelligence community, what is certain is that there is a capacity for early warning with regards to possible threats. The National Communications Centre conducts mass communications interception, primarily of foreign origin unless authorized by a judge. Monitoring operations are ongoing, and provincial divisions make use of large numbers of collectors at ground level, observing situations and then passing information up the relevant channels.

Overall, training and tradecraft of intelligence operatives is considered to be poor, analytical skills dubious, and the service subject to a general lack of resources. A great deal of operational capability was lost in 1994, when some 10,000 former intelligence officers were demobilized as the apartheid-era National Intelligence Service (NIS) was downsized and integrated with the intelligence structures of the liberation movement, the then newly-formed NIA, a process fraught with infighting.³⁹ The NIA has also suffered a series of scandals that have severely damaged its reputation, most controversial of which were seemingly politically motivated investigations of politicians and journalists. Integrating the existing intelligence agencies under SSA is intended to address such problems and boost capacity by pooling resources.

In terms of unrest and intra- and inter-party violence, the NIA's function has centered on monitoring and reporting so as to ensure domestic stability. It is not tasked with responding to political violence, but rather to monitor, watch, listen, and develop reports on the status of situations and possible scenarios that could develop. Importantly, it has not been permitted to act at all. Analysis is passed to the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC), comprised of the heads of the intelligence services, representatives from Defence Intelligence, the SAPS' Directorate for Crime Intelligence, and the directors-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency. NICOC then decides how to proceed given the information provided and tasks any action back down to the police. This could change with the new SSA taking on a

more operational role. However, this is as yet uncertain.

Concern has been raised over the NIA's capacity to make the information it gathers more useful in terms of timeliness so as to facilitate possible preventive action. For example, it was monitoring xenophobia in the country for some two years prior to the 2008 violence and the issue had been discussed at the cabinet level for some time. Yet the outbreak of violence and the speed with which it spread still took government and those in the intelligence community by surprise.

Insufficient oversight of the NIA's application of its mandate for counterintelligence and counterterrorism allows the service extreme flexibility to counter subversion, treason, sabotage, and terrorism. Its broad mandate was devised in 1994 and has remained largely unchanged since. Its breadth has opened the NIA to politicization and spying on domestic political opponents. For instance, even a member of the ANC National Executive Committee has been subjected to communications interceptions and harassment by the NIA.⁴⁰ Oversight and guidelines exist but are in general weak and vague.

Although a process is underway to develop a new national security strategy to more narrowly define what constitutes South Africa's national security concerns and the NIA's tasks, it remains unclear as to what its outcome will be or by when it will be complete. In the meantime, the potential for abuse is significant. At worst, instead of subduing political violence, domestic intelligence structures and operations are open to being misused to further elite political violence at the highest level.

Recommendations

There is a degree of unpredictability about political violence in South Africa and where the nation is headed. There is ample reason to be confident in the country's stability and progress – its increasingly modern economy, widespread support for democracy, and relatively capable state institutions suggest a vibrant and dynamic future. Conditions on the ground, however, sometimes paint a different

picture. Counterproductive and frequently violent infighting among opportunistic and exploitative politicians at the local level effectively paralyzes some municipal governments, leaving them unable to serve their communities. With such political channels undermined, citizens turn to other, sometimes violent, means to express their frustrations with persistent poverty, lack of basic social services, and an unresponsive political system. A mounting sense that modest economic growth and opportunities only benefit the rich at the expense of South Africa's millions of poor further fuels grievances and violent unrest. While not discounting the dramatic turning point that 1994 represents, in certain respects the post-apartheid state shares many flaws – albeit in different forms – with the one it replaced. Whereas the former was unwilling to provide social services and economic opportunities to all, the latter has proven unable.

Similarly, security-centered approaches did not reverse political violence during apartheid and will not resolve South Africa's current problems. A reliance on the use of force to address contemporary violence will further alienate communities. Nor would it address any of the drivers of the country's current challenges. Therefore, more fundamental course corrections are needed to steady South Africa's current trajectory and extinguish the slow-burning fuses that threaten long-term stability:

Expand Socioeconomic Opportunities. To build healthier relations between citizens and the state in South Africa, a primary priority for the state should be to facilitate socioeconomic progress. Since 1994, the government's efforts have produced some benefits but these have tended to be shallow and patchy. South Africa's numerous poor, unemployed, and underemployed increasingly depend on social grants and temporary government work programs that produce few sustainable improvements. More fundamental changes are required. Sustained investments in building effective health, education, housing, and sanitation service institutions are vital, especially as South Africa's population becomes more urbanized.

Likewise, private sector job creation must be a more central element of any economic development strategy. Programs and assistance that promote entrepreneurship and innovation are needed to support small and midsized businesses. This includes simplifying and facilitating access to business licenses, credit, and land. A greater focus on fulfilling basic social and infrastructural needs, particularly in townships, semi-urban areas, and rural regions, will free up the productive potential of many South Africans to advance their own and their communities' interests. Similarly, broadening educational opportunities will serve long-term growth and well-being, and continue to muffle those few but sometimes potent voices that still seek to stir racial tensions.

Reduce Patronage Opportunities. Socioeconomic programs, on their own, however, won't counterbalance the political economy drivers of inequality that have favored elites.⁴¹ If citizens see avenues to wealth and advancement restricted to the already well-connected and well-heeled, their anger will be directed at a government they deem complicit. This is a scene many South Africans already perceive. Accordingly, positive state-citizen relations – and, by extension, domestic stability – will depend on the state's ability to intervene strongly, responsibly, and effectively to improve accountability. To do this, the government must eliminate the notion that the state is a spoils system up for grabs. Loyal but incompetent functionaries whose main preoccupation is often to usurp power and use their positions of influence for self-aggrandizement and financial gain are severely harming the image of the state and fuelling resentment. State resources are not “a cake” to be sliced and divided.

The current political culture in South Africa, with the opportunities for wealth and influence that accrue to politicians, attracts candidates more interested in self-enrichment than public service. To reverse this, the nature of political office must be reconceived. The role should be remodeled so that it is not perceived as a wealth-leveraging position. Salaries and benefits for public office should be reduced. Politicians should have highly limited discretionary spending authority. Greater oversight of

the allocation and procurement of government services, especially at local levels, is sorely needed. In other words, there needs to be a separation between political authority and economic opportunity. The Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Bill of 2004 has thus far proven insufficient to achieve its stated ends. Independent (public-private) authorities with investigative powers, involving civil society watchdogs, must also be created. Corrupt behavior should be treated as criminal acts and perpetrators punished accordingly.

End Tolerance for Political Violence. In order to achieve the stability necessary and avoid future violent eruptions with unpredictable consequences, the South African government should institute measures that deter political opportunists from using violence to achieve political ends. Currently, inter- and intra-party violence regularly spikes as local government elections and appointments approach. Electoral competition should be regulated in ways that reduce incentives for such violent competition and decisively intervene when this dynamic emerges. The South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) should review electoral laws and make recommendations that hold parties accountable for violence and intimidation. As in other African countries the IEC should have the authority to direct specialized police forces to prevent such violence, enforce electoral laws, and investigate incidents of such violence.

Reform Electoral Party List System. At present, citizens vote for their preferred political party and party leaders assign officials from a slate of party candidates to a given constituency. While party leaders like this system for the party loyalty it generates, it adds unnecessary layers between citizens and their political leaders – enabling abuses of power and stoking dangerous intra-party rivalries. Instead, citizens should elect their political representatives directly. By knowing precisely for whom they are voting, citizens will be in a stronger position to hold their legislative representative accountable. In other words, politicians will serve the people who elect them rather than those (in the party structures) who

select them. Pressure to eliminate the party list system is unlikely to come from within the ANC or other political parties. Therefore, it will be necessary for civil society groups to take the lead in enacting this change.

Elevate Non-Violent Political Norms. Civil society organizations should also work with all political parties and youth groups to create a more democratic civic culture. This would be a long-term process with an aim of enhancing understanding for the importance of tolerance and a level playing field in a functioning democracy. Particular attention should be given to areas prone to political violence such as KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga Provinces.

A “zero-tolerance” campaign against abuse of office should be combined with a consistent message supporting constructive performance. Positive examples of responsible and effective efforts to serve the public interest at the community and local level should be lauded and rewarded, regardless of political party affiliation. Respected, independent foundations committed to good government in South Africa can highlight exemplary behavior with annual award ceremonies to deserving politicians, akin to the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership.

Invest in Public Order Policing Capacity. While political and economic reforms can address the root drivers of South Africa’s increasing political violence, improvements in the security sector can also enhance deterrence, prevention, and trust and confidence in security institutions and the state. The creation of the SSA and ongoing intelligence reforms are steps in the right direction. Perhaps most importantly, the new service’s mandate should be clarified and focused so as to avoid abuse and politicization. Rebuilding the capacity of the SAPS Crime Combat Units and the South African Army’s Areas Defence System would further support this effort and ensure that the state’s response to unrest is professional and restrained rather than inflammatory. General performance and legitimacy of the security sector will be further boosted if oversight by both civilian government and nongovernmental civil society entities is seen as genuine and credible.

At the community and local level, inequality and patronage-driven violence and corresponding state security responses are undermining trust in the police and security sector at large. From the perspective of many South Africans in townships, semi-urban, and rural areas, the state and police are seen as entangled in partisan disputes while rising crime and safety concerns are seemingly neglected. The increasing degree to which many communities rely on self-help security initiatives is testament to a widening security gap. This need offers a potential opportunity for the security sector to engage communities constructively. South Africa's security sector should network with citizen safety initiatives in extra-urban and rural areas to collaboratively identify security threats and devise methods of response. Such innovative local-level partnerships have shown promise in Nigeria, Uganda, and even some locales in South Africa.⁴²

Conclusion

Although the vast majority of South Africans continue to support the democratic system, there is evidence of a decline in state legitimacy. While not unusual among countries consolidating relatively new democratic institutions and practices, the decline in South Africa is undeniably linked to the government's persistent failure to address the underlying causes of political violence. There is a high probability that if meaningful inroads addressing poverty, inequality, and the delivery of basic services are not made and opportunistic tendencies among political elites are not stifled, state legitimacy will weaken further. People will lose faith in the system and a steady increase in political violence is probable. In this, there is a risk that violence will become more frequent and organized.⁴³ There are still opportunities to address the core problems behind contemporary political violence. However, this will become increasingly difficult the longer the status quo persists. South Africans have shown that they will endure hardships and support potentially disruptive reforms as long as citizens are included in a meaningful way and the process is seen as fair and legitimate.

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About the Author

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