

# Party identification and service delivery protests in the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape, South Africa

**Sethulego Matebesi**

*Department of Sociology  
University of the Free State  
Email: matebsz@ufs.ac.za*

*and*

**Lucius Botes**

*Faculty of the Humanities  
University of the Free State  
Email: boteslj@ufs.ac.za*

## Abstract

*Service delivery protests against municipalities in South Africa have become common. This article discusses the relationship between party identification and these protests. It presents an in-depth analysis of two qualitative case studies: one in the Eastern Cape Province, where protests have mainly been about the shortage and poor quality of housing, and one in the Northern Cape, where protests were mainly aimed at getting the mayor to resign. A widely held view in the social movement literature is that the stronger the identification with the ruling party the less likely people are to protest, even when they have cause to do so. In South Africa, the connection between party affiliation and social movement is blurred. We found that partisan protesters were consequently able to navigate successfully between the party and concerned residents' groups. There is a pressing need to consider what norms and values these protests will transmit to future generations.*

**Key Words:** *service delivery protest, partisanship, identity, political action, South Africa*

## Résumé

*Les manifestations de prestation de services contre les municipalités d'Afrique du Sud sont devenues courantes. Cet article traite de la relation entre l'identification des partis et ces protestations. Il présente une analyse approfondie de deux études de cas qualitatives: une dans la province du Cap oriental, où les manifestations ont principalement porté sur la pénurie et la mauvaise qualité des logements, et une autre dans le Northern Cape, où les manifestations visaient principalement à obtenir le maire démissionner. Une opinion largement répandue dans la littérature sur le mouvement social est que plus l'identification avec le parti au pouvoir*

*est forte, moins les gens sont susceptibles de protester, même quand ils ont des raisons de le faire. En Afrique du Sud, le lien entre l'appartenance à un parti et le mouvement social est flou. Nous avons constaté que les manifestants partisans étaient en mesure de naviguer avec succès entre le parti et les groupes de résidents concernés. Il est urgent de réfléchir aux normes et aux valeurs que ces manifestations transmettront aux générations futures.*

**Mots clés:** *protestation de prestation de services, partisanerie, identité, action politique, Afrique du Sud*

## Introduction

Studies of South African civic life, both during and after apartheid, reveal a rich history of an active civil society (Von Holdt *et al.*, 2011; Makino 2009; Marais *et al.*, 2008). From 1994, civil society organisations that had previously led protests against the apartheid government began to support – and even form alliances with – the ruling African National Congress (ANC) (Kabane 2011; Odendaal 2011). South Africa has witnessed, since then, a dramatic increase in the number of community protests, with some 14,740 being reported in 2015 (Mbeki 2016). In discussing recent service delivery protests, this paper reflects on the role of South Africa's civil society in relation to national political institutions and their reciprocal roles in facilitating community development.

By 'service delivery protests' we mean collective action by a group of community members against a local municipality because of poor or inadequate provision of basic services, as well as a wider spectrum of concerns including government corruption, rampant crime and unemployment. The causes of the protests are varied and complex, ranging from systemic or structural factors to problems pertaining directly to governance (Matebesi & Botes 2011; Ngwane 2011). The protests may reflect the extent to which formal institutional channels for citizen engagement with the state have failed (Runciman 2014; Tapscott 2010), but conversely they may reflect the freedom of expression that South African citizens enjoy in the post-apartheid era (Bond 2010). What remains generally undisputed, though, is that the increasingly violent nature of the protests has weakened local government capacity and hindered basic service delivery.

International scholarly interest in protests has grown, and the upsurge in service delivery protests in South Africa has stimulated research (Alexander 2010; Karamoko & Jain 2010; Booysen 2009; Friedman 2006). Many of the studies are of single cases (Bernstein & Johnston 2007), focusing primarily on the frequency and nature of the protests (Karamoko & Jain 2010), or relying on media reports and 'rapid response' research designs (Alexander 2010). Taking a different slant, we explore the relationship between party identification – the extent to which one identifies with a political party – and service delivery protests. We base our discussion on two case studies involving South African local community groups, one an urban community from Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, South Africa's fifth largest metropole, and the other a rural community

from Olifantshoek, a small town in the Northern Cape. The studies were done between 2007 and 2014, using an interpretive qualitative approach based on fieldwork consisting of in-depth interviews with representatives and members of the two community groups and purposively sampled councillors, community members, and a scan of all media reports about these protests (consisting of over 60 newspaper clippings). The two case studies could help to determine the extent to which Lowrance's (2006: 167) claim that 'the closer one identifies with the state, the less likely one is to protest, even when significant grievances exist' is applicable in South Africa.

In this paper we attempt to answer two questions: Does party identification in South Africa deter service delivery protests? and: Why do communities in South Africa mobilise against their local municipalities despite the availability of several democratic institutions? Note that in asking our first question we are looking specifically at the extent to which membership and support of the ruling ANC discourages people from embarking on service delivery protests or, contrary to the findings of the literature, encourages them to do so. We agree with the view widely held in the social movement literature that identity or identification – one's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with an entity – is an important determinant of protest behaviour (Opp 2009; Poletta & Jasper 2001; Melucci 1988). However, we disagree with the view that close identification with a political party makes one less likely to take part in protests, even when one has serious grievances (Lowrance 2006). If this view is correct, that makes it hard to find a plausible reason why many South African communities who support the ANC continue to protest against that same party. Our suggestion is that, given the current democratic deficit that exists in participatory governance structures in South Africa, communities see any push in the direction of further concentration of power in the hands of unresponsive office-bearers at local government level as dangerous.

## **Party identification perspectives and their application to South Africa**

Here we explain the central assumptions of the theory of collective identity and consider how applicable they are to South Africa, which is currently experiencing the conflicted group identities and loyalties that are typical of communities grappling with strong undercurrents of instability. Studies of partisanship make important contributions to the literature on collective identity theory and consequently party identification. Partisanship, according to Lodge (2000: 98) 'involves the factional exercise of rhetorical manipulation or raw power'. The term 'partisanship' is often incorrectly equated with 'party identification'. The latter is a narrower term, meaning a person's self-identification with a political party. 'Partisanship' is a broader concept, involving developmental learning and intergenerational transmission, 'including a complex transition to general consistency in an individual's loyalty to a party, political preferences, and expectations' (Smirnov *et al.* 2010). Party identification is more short-lived than partisanship: it

depends on one's social and political experience, and party identification may not always converge with one's core values, beliefs and preferences.

Collective identity theories provide a rich analytical foundation for the study of service delivery protests. Models of collective identity are diverse, representing attempts to capture different kinds of problems (Ostrom & Ahn 2009). There is, however, a degree of consensus that identity is one of the important social explanations for collective action (Opp 2009; Van Zomeren *et al.* 2008). Lowrance (2006: 168) defines identity as a 'complex, evolving, multilayered, and situational relationship between an individual and a group or number of groups'. The concept became attractive to scholars in the quest to answer three questions: 'why collective actors come into being when they do' (identity explains why interest tends to emerge); what motivates people to act (collective identity provides a more complete explanation of 'the pleasures and obligations that actually persuade people to mobilise' (Polleta & Jasper 2001: 284); and what the reasons are for a movement's strategic choices (protest tactics are also influenced by collective identity) (Polleta & Jasper 2001).

Identity is not the only important determinant of protest behaviour. Other factors that make people mobilise, according to theories of collective action, are strong discontent, personal influence and social incentives (Olson 1965). Klandermans (2014) argues that identity (membership of a group), instrumentality (participating in political protest to change one's circumstance), and ideology (views or beliefs) are the three fundamental reasons why people participate in political protests. It has also been found that participation in protests was particularly high when people had acquaintances who were critical of the state or had previously participated in protests (Tapscott 2010).

According to Opp's (2009) influential interpretation based on the works of several scholars, most definitions of collective identity or identification with a group refer to selective incentives. Those who identify with a group find it rewarding when they act in the interest of the group and costly when they do not. Opp (2009: 110) notes that 'if somebody is strongly attached to a group, this means she or he is interested in the welfare of the group'. In another variant of this proposition, Polleta and Jasper (2001: 168) claim that:

The key to ethnic protest is the identity that one holds. Those who identify as 'Israeli', that is, those Israeli Palestinians who identify with the Israeli state, are less likely to engage in system-challenging protest activity than those who do not, irrespective of the level of grievances held.

In other words, identification with the state is an important stabilising factor and although grievances are an important motivator of any political action, their impact can be weakened by party identification.

Historically, studies in long-standing democracies postulate that party identification is a dynamic psychological phenomenon that is influenced by short-term political forces.

These forces could spring from short-term evaluations of the parties, the president and the economy. In America, for example, individual-level party identification changes over time to ensure correspondence with views about the role the government should play in the economy and society of the country (Montgomery *et al.* 2015). In another example, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2014) show how partisanship in Brazil is responsive to government performance in the short term. They attribute the wave of massive protests in Brazil in June 2013 to the decline in support for the governing Worker's Party. This party's affiliation decreased by 4% between May and July of the same year. In contrast, scandals, recessions, and landslide elections do not greatly affect party identification. Large shifts in party attachments occur only when a party's social image changes, as for example when African Americans became part of the Democratic Party in the South after the Voting Rights Act was passed (Green *et al.* 2002). Similarly, while economic studies of voting have diverse findings, they tend to agree that the economy is a significant predictor of vote choice (Lewis-Beck *et al.* 2008).

In contrast to the view of protest politics as seditious radicalism, the surge in protest activity has also been linked to the normalisation of contentious politics in countries like Argentina and Bolivia. Adherents of this view claim that individuals who protest are generally strongly interested in politics and likely to engage in community activities, and that protest is a supplement to traditional forms of participation, such as elections. Interestingly, the difference in protests between Argentina and Bolivia has been ascribed to the degree to which actors within government (the governing political party, the MAS) and in Argentina by non-government actors (the piquetero movement and various trade unions) lead demonstrations in Bolivia (Moseley & Moreno 2010). Arce and Mangomet (2012) highlight the complex nature of movement of individuals between parties and social movements. They show that activists move between the two spaces to advance their goals, engaging in protest because they assume it will be instrumental in attaining a particular goal, but also because they find protest rewarding *per se*.

In studying partisan identity and protests in South Africa, we find no shortage of motivators, or what Lowrance (2006: 169) calls 'lightning-rod issues', for aberrations like service delivery protests. Faced with the reality that the state is generally unresponsive to demands raised through formal institutional channels, disaffected citizens and the organisations that represent them have increasingly sought alternative means to express their grievances. Pieterse (2003: 118) puts it plainly:

Organizations that act outside of constitutional and legal frameworks will continue to flourish and find community support as long as the government remains incapable of fulfilling crucial ... functions. As long as the government remains deficient in capability and resources (exacerbated in a context of fiscal conservatism), alternative, informal and democratically ambiguous formations will emerge to fill the vacuum.

The foregoing discussion explains much of the collective behaviour of South African citizens outside of politics. Why then do people who identify with the ruling ANC continue to participate in protests against the ANC government? One explanation offered by South African scholars is that it has to do with the dual nature of protests: factional struggles on the part of protest leaders to shift power within the local ANC, and the struggle of the masses to obtain socioeconomic rights (Twala 2014). However, dissatisfaction with service delivery and the way that important people in the ruling party reacted to protests about this may also have contributed to the factional struggles in the ANC. Furthermore, the ANC has a long history of anti-democratic conduct of its own internal affairs and in relation to South African society as a whole. And the party has been struggling to deal with the sources of the party's structural decline, the erosion of trust in the party, recurrent internal party controversies, hostile intra-party leadership factions, internecine strife and countless corruption scandals (Hamil 2014). We contend that the decrease in electoral support for the ANC, which was most evident in Gauteng during the 2014 national elections (Greffrath & Duvenhage 2014), was largely a result of the ruling party ignoring the widespread call by numerous socio-economic and political forces, including party members, to abandon e-tolls (electronic road tolling system) in the province (Motale 2015). An interesting finding from Table 1 is that the ANC has lost more than 20% of its support in Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth's municipality) and this in just 10 years (from 2006 to 2016).

**Table 1:** General voter turnout and local government election results for ANC (%)

Municipality	2000		2006		2011		2016	
	Turnout	Result	Turnout	Result	Turnout	Result	Turnout	Result
Port Elizabeth (Nelson Mandela Bay)	61.86	65.73	56.13	66.53	64.65	51.91	63.86	40.92
Olifantshoek (Gamagara)	54.31	64.34	47.95	69.24	54.62	63.45	57.18	48.68

*Source: Compiled from various reports on local government and national and provincial election results (Electoral Commission of South Africa)*

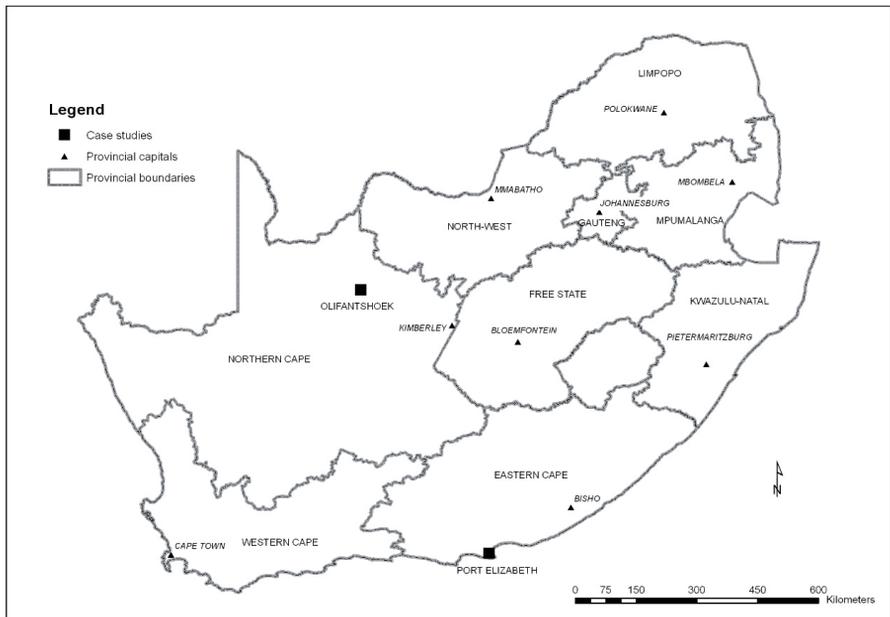
Although ANC electoral support has been decreasing since the country's first national elections in 1994, those who identify closely with the party are more likely than the non-affiliated to be primed by partisan considerations when evaluating party performance. Such partisans are normally more resistant to any negative information about the party (and the state, in the case of ruling parties). This sense of partisan identity was evident in the COSATU Workers' Survey of 2008 (Buhlungu & Tshoamedi 2012), which showed

a general decline in satisfaction with service delivery among COSATU members. However, COSATU members, unlike other ANC supporters, remain generally reluctant to participate in service delivery protests because, among other things, of their ‘continued faith in the ANC to deliver’ (Mosoetsa 2012: 163).

### The cases and context

We chose the communities of Port Elizabeth and Olifantshoek and their struggles with their local municipalities for our empirical study. Port Elizabeth is part of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa’s fifth largest city, with an estimated population of over 1.5 million. It is the centre of the motor vehicle manufacturing industry in South Africa. The surrounding areas are heavily industrialised and intensively farmed. According to the 2011 Census data, the municipality has an unemployment rate of 36.6% and a dependency rate of 46% (Statistics South Africa 2011). Olifantshoek, the second largest of the five towns that form part of the Gamagara Local Municipality, is largely a farming area. The iron ore mine at Sishen drives its development. Like most black and coloured residential areas in South Africa, the townships of Olifantshoek are under-served and residents are still living in abject poverty. Unemployment is high, with 46.9% of the population being unemployed and approximately 40% relying on social grants. This translates to a dependency rate of 58.4% (Statistics South Africa 2011).

**Figure 1:** Map of case study areas



## Findings and discussion

In this section we consider three broad themes: the protestors' identity, their main grievances, and their strategies and tactics.

### Who are the protestors?

While partisanship implies a close relationship with one political party, partisans often have a multitude of relations with or connections to other external groups. A number of interviewees in Port Elizabeth confirmed that the main protagonists in the protests were members of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), including municipal officials. For example, a former councillor said 'this whole fracas started as a result of the internal rift between the local ANC and its alliance partners, especially the SACP', and also asserted that key Metro municipal officials, who were SACP members, had instigated the unrest while ostensibly working for the Council (interview, Former Councillor A, 18 April 2007). Another study also confirmed the role of the SACP in mobilising the community of Khutsong (Gauteng Province) to protests against the failed attempt to incorporate the area into another province (Matebesi & Botes 2011).

Another interviewee, the Director of the Urban Services Group, regarded both ANC and SACP members as responsible for promoting the unrest agenda at the time (interview, 18 April 2007). Several councillors also asserted that the protests had been led by the ANC against itself – for example, one councillor said: 'It started with us, the leaders. If we did not agree on certain issues at council or ANC meetings, some leaders would leave meetings to go and mobilise the community. The attitude and behaviour of some political leaders actually indicated that conflict [was] looming' (interview, Councillor B, 19 April 2007). In the same vein, another councillor said that 'certain ANC comrades' had 'influenced the public to resent other comrades' and that the unrest was 'primarily a manifestation of the nomination process of the local ANC branch' particularly in the Kleinskool area (interview, Councillor C, 19 April 2007). Table 2 gives an overview of the protests in Port Elizabeth.

**Table 2:** Summary of protests in Port Elizabeth, 2005–2015

Area	Organisers	Main grievances	Duration
Kwadesi	ANC members	Poor municipal service delivery and lack of housing	1–16 May 2005
Kwazakhele	ANC members	Poor housing delivery	02 Feb 2012
Walmer	ANC members	Poor service delivery	12 Aug 2012
Walmer	Walmer Steering Committee	Failure of Nelson Mandela Metro Municipality to fulfil promises to build RDP houses and improve road infrastructure	31 Oct 2012
Walmer	Walmer Steering Committee	Lack of housing, electricity and proper sanitation	29–30 May 2012
Walmer	ANC members	Lack of housing, electricity and proper sanitation	2 July 2012
Missionvale	Coloured community	Slow rate of housing delivery and other services	18 Oct 2013
Walmer	Walmer Steering Committee	Lack of consultation on the removal of illegal electricity cables	15–16 May 2014
Joe Slovo and Kwadesi	Secretary of the Branch Executive Committee	Municipality giving away community's sites to people from other areas	22 Sept 2014
Motherwell	Community members	Eviction from illegally occupied newly built houses	19 June 2015
Walmer	Walmer Steering Committee	Shortage of teachers at local schools	26 July 2015
Walmer	Walmer Steering Committee	Unresolved matters between community and Nelson Mandela Metro Municipality on service delivery	12–13 Aug 2015
Motherwell	Community members	Eviction from illegally occupied newly built houses	7 Nov 2015

*Source: Authors' compilation*

**Note:** RDP houses are those built under the post-apartheid Reconstruction and Development Policy, now called the Housing Subsidy Programme (Venter *et al.* 2015; Rust & Rubenstein 1996)

The Olifantshoek Concerned Residents (OCR) association was formed in 2009 by five active members of the local ANC Youth League (ANCYL). To emphasise the association's allegiance to the ANC, one protest leader said its members had been raised within the ANC and had 'always voted for it' (interview, Chairperson of ANCYL and OCR Forum member, 01 March 2013). This illustrates the divided loyalties that characterise community protests in South Africa (Langa & Von Holdt 2012). For instance, another ANCYL member said, 'Yes, we remain loyal to the organisation – in fact, we will vote again for the ANC in 2014 [with reference to the General Elections that took place in May 2014] – but we want to get rid of the rotten dogs within the party' (interview, Member A of ANCYL and OCR Forum member, 01 March 2013). Table 3 shows the Olifantshoek protests.

**Table 3:** Summary of protests in Olifantshoek

Area	Organisers	Main grievance	Duration
Olifantshoek	Local ANC members	Service tariff increases by the local Council led by the Postmasburg-Olifantshoek Residents Association (Posra)	Feb–March 2001
Olifantshoek	Disgruntled members of local ANC branch and ANC Youth League members	Corruption claims, and calls for the removal of the now late Mayor Maria Diniza	May–Sept 2012

*Source: Nkosi (2012)*

Studies in South Africa show the significance of civil society organisations in providing communities with a non-institutional space (Dawson & Sinwell 2012) or a fluid space (Langa & Von Holdt 2012) outside of the state. This enables activists to move regularly back and forth between institutional (or party) and non-institutional spaces to air their collective grievances (Steyn 2012).

### **The protestors' main grievances: evidence of factionalism within the ANC**

The most common grievances mentioned by the protestors in Port Elizabeth and Olifantshoek were the poor quality of basic services such as water and electricity provision and the shortage of housing. During nine years of sporadic outbreaks of service delivery protests in Port Elizabeth (2005–2014), failure to provide houses has been the most pervasive grievance (SABC, 2014; SAPA 2012; Matyu 2005). At the time of our 2007 interviews, the municipality accused the province of excessive bureaucratisation and failing to release allocated housing subsidies timeously. In turn, the provincial leaders berated the municipality for its limited capacity for sustained delivery of good quality housing (Matavire 2005). The former Mayor's views on the problem were insightful:

In respect of the housing problem, the Provincial Government communicated only with the local Department of Housing on issues related to housing. Not all politicians are informed about the complex issues around the allocation and building of houses... The Provincial Government is much to blame for this. For example, they will only inform us at a very late stage that we should take note of new amendments and directives made in the allocation of housing subsidies, which are in contrast to what we have been sharing over months with the local community. Unfortunately, people on the ground do not understand these complex issues. How do you go back to people and say, 'Sorry, all the information that we have been sharing with you for the past six months has changed'? (Interview, former Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, 2 May 2007)

The grounds for the protests in Olifantshoek were laid in 2009 when the OCR complained about local ANC members being exploited by ANC leaders for personal gain during elections and about alleged corruption in a community development trust. The protest about the trust was led by the chairperson of the local ANC branch. Going beyond these original concerns, the OCR's central grievance in 2012 was about the Mayor of Gamagara Municipality, whose resignation it demanded. The Mayor was accused of displaying disrespect for the community, and making empty promises about jobs, bursaries and infrastructural projects (focus group discussion with OCR leaders, 01 March 2013).

The final precipitating factor that led to violent protests and the closing down of schools for more than eight months in 2012 was the request to OCR leaders to provide evidence to corroborate the allegations they had made (Public Protector of South Africa 2012). In a turn of events that would become a sad episode in the history of protest behaviour in South Africa, the community forcibly shut down schools in Olifantshoek. The same protest tactic of closing schools would later be used in several areas in the Northern Cape, resulting in the closure of over 60 schools and affecting more than 16,000 learners (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2012).

Our argument is that in addition to the 'genuine concerns' about basic services, another, hidden, factor fuelled the protests in both cases: factional fights within the local ANC. Several scholars have convincingly shown how factions that lose out on leadership positions and local business opportunities (and thus power and money) use service delivery protests as a means to settle scores (Langa & Von Holdt 2012). A Port Elizabeth resident, for example, said that 'some councillors are perceived to be "anti-development" and tend not to be supportive of any local development project that they are not directly involved in' (interview, Councillor B, 9 April 2007). In this regard, a councillor in Port Elizabeth said:

Other factors apart from the perceived lack of service provision also contributed to the unrest. Mainly disenchanting ANC members who were not on the nomination lists mobilised the community. They were frustrated because they were positioning themselves for the forthcoming elections. (Interview, Councillor C, 9 April 2007)

A further analysis of the factors that fuelled the protest points to lack of transparency in internal party processes. For example, when the OCR leaders were asked why they had targeted the Mayor, they responded that she was the head of administration and therefore had to take responsibility for the municipality's failure to deliver services. She was also accused of using the municipality and the mines to settle internal ANC party disagreements, repressing dissent, side-lining outspoken residents and rewarding those who were close to her (interview with community member, 01 March 2013). Amid calls

for her resignation, the Mayor insisted that she had been 'appointed by the ANC' and would not resign 'unless asked to do so by the party' (*NoordKaap Gazette* 2013).

The foregoing accounts must be understood against the background of a state confronted with the latent and embedded political and historical pressures of apartheid, and a citizenry who believe they are entitled to demand better services from the government. Forums and mechanisms of political representation and accountability in South Africa have proliferated, but their effectiveness and inclusiveness have lagged behind (Matebesi & Botes 2011). Communities are therefore challenging the existing, legally enforced power balance between citizens and the state (Runciman 2014). In this regard, Von Holdt (2013) argues that while the new economic and political elites have grown stronger and stronger, citizens have been increasingly marginalized, and the protests are the manifestation of communities' real grievances and of ANC members' infighting to secure lucrative positions and tenders. Our study's findings largely supported the grievances as a cause of the protests and to a lesser extent the infighting.

## **The protestors' strategies and tactics**

We analysed the strategies and tactics the protestors used to sustain mobilisation against local municipalities. Scholars have described partisan activists' ability to move between the party and civil society organisations (Moseley & Moreno 2010). We found a paper trail of evidence in both our case studies showing that the protestors had tried on several occasions to engage their local municipality. We found evidence that the more traditional forms of protest followed such attempts: holding public meetings, mounting demonstrations, presenting petitions, and so on. The protest leaders' mobilisation strategies were centred on scapegoating. A councillor in Port Elizabeth said: 'Some of my colleagues and municipal officials were quick to run and share sensitive council information with other members of the ANC or community leaders.' Similarly, an OCR leader described how their complaints about the mayor were ignored: 'There is one public tap for about 300 people and one toilet shared by five families. But the brother of the mayor has a tap in his yard. [Would] this not anger you?'

By blaming their grievances on an intransigent and unresponsive local municipal system, rather than on party political infighting, protest leaders were able to undermine the efforts of local municipal and political leaders to respond to the residents' initial demands. This tactic has enabled protest leaders throughout South Africa to mobilise and sustain their protests against local municipalities. According to DeNardo (1985), groups may use both intimidation and violence to multiply the disruptive capacity of activists. This perhaps explains why the sporadic service delivery protests in Port Elizabeth since 2005 have been marred by violence.

In Olifantshoek, most interviewees said they supported peaceful protests, but were against

the closure of schools and the destruction of private property and public facilities. The residents claimed there were high levels of intimidation: anyone who spoke out against the closure of the schools ran the risk of having their house torched (interview with community member, Olifantshoek, 01 March 2013) An unfortunate consequence of all this was that most matriculants and other pupils were forced to repeat their grades in 2013, when schools reopened after the intervention of the Public Protector (*City Press* 2012). The protest leaders also change tactics as they deem necessary. The Chairperson of the OCR said:

We never planned any violent strategy, but we were led by decisions taken by the community. The public spaces of dialogue were failing us and we had no choice but to implement the suggestions made by the community. In the absence of strong legitimate and functional participatory structures, communities in South Africa will continue to use violence. This is the only language our government understands. (Interview, 1 March 2013)

Further comments can be made about the strategies of partisan protest activists. First, it is evident that partisan activists exploit the sporadic and fragmented nature of community forums by both engaging and eschewing partisanship. They accomplish this through successful movement between the party and the noninstitutionalised space created by protestors. Chen and Goren (2014: 5) note that party identification acts like a 'running tally' whereby citizens 'adjust their partisan attachments to ensure correspondence with their stands on political issues'. Thus partisan activists can have agency by engaging in the realms of both the party and the community forums.

Second, the Olifantshoek case serves as a prime example of patronage politics. Patronage and contentious collective action (such as service delivery protests) are distinct strategies that sometimes overlap to address grievances and resolve problems (Auyero *et al.* 2009). The OCR leaders first adopted intimidation and violence as their strategies, but swiftly changed tack or refused to accept responsibility when asked why they were using schools as bargaining power.

Third, the Port Elizabeth case reveals another side to partisan protest leaders: their underhand tactical operations. While OCR leaders were open about their involvement in the protests, and at one stage lived on a farm on the outskirts of Olifantshoek in compliance with their bail conditions, community members in Port Elizabeth complained that some protest leaders would mobilise the community through meetings, but would 'never show up during the day of protests' (interview, Community member B, 18 April 2007). In arranging these meetings, the activists' mobilisation tactic was to publicly express the collective grievances of the community and thus attract attention. Hodder (2014: 12) describes such tactics as 'instrumental, personalistic, and self-centred behaviour'. This supports Smirnov *et al.*'s view (2010) that people faced with a social

dilemma may engage in partisan activity because it offers benefits that compensate for the costs of participation. In the case of the no-shows, the aim was to avoid exposure of their involvement in the protests, for fear of victimisation.

## Conclusions

The cases of Olifantshoek and Port Elizabeth shed light on the way partisan protest activists move between the party and the community. The findings enhance our knowledge of the fluid space occupied by partisan activists and help us understand the strategies that service delivery protesters use in South Africa. Our study offers three important insights.

First, the conventional view sees social movements as distinct from and in contrast to the party. It is not surprising, then, that the central proposition of studies on identity is that people who identify with a party are loyal to it. This would mean that people who identify with the ANC would be less likely to engage in service delivery protests. But we found that, far from this being the case, it was ANC members who led the service delivery protests in our two cases. However, this finding should be approached with caution since the social identities of a party member and a member of a civil society organisation are often intertwined and inseparable from each other in South Africa.

Second, while the distinction between the party and non-institutionalised tactics such as protests is useful for analysing how social movements often make demands on the state, it is less useful for understanding the ways activists work both inside and outside the party realms to promote civil society organisations' goals. Our study shows that the struggle for political power and thus for the control of the party authority structures first proceeds through party internal structures. And if unresolved, these party struggles are likely to become more intense and hostile (Tyoden 2013). This view is consistent with the instrumentalist view that partisanship drives collective action among those who are motivated to defend their own interests, ideology and issues.

Third, previous research has shown how partisan activists may exacerbate peoples' discontent in order to stimulate higher levels of participation in the protests. And, as this study showed, since political parties are clearly stronger and more influential than individual partisan activists, these activists sometimes operate covertly to reduce exposure and thus survive in patronage networks. The fundamental struggle of partisan activists is not only about communities' grievances but also for recognition and legitimacy.

Generally, the study showed the usefulness of protest politics as a legitimate means of political expression, but also that the interaction between local municipalities and communities is critical for managing strained relations. For example, the trauma that parents and children suffered because of the intimidation involved in the school closures in Olifantshoek must not be understated. The children suffer the most. A

recent UNICEF report found that children in such situations are at risk of truancy and repeating grades and tend to have lower educational aspirations and achievement levels than children who have not been exposed to violence. And there may also be long-term economic consequences, such as increased rates of unemployment in adulthood and a greater likelihood of living below the poverty line (UNICEF 2014).

Exposure to violence in childhood can lead to aggression, social withdrawal and difficulty in relating to others. Future behavioural problems may include an increased risk of perpetrating violence against others, including physical fights with peers, dating violence and bullying (Vagi *et al.*, 2013). There are crucial questions to be asked: Irrespective of the extent to which communities identify with the state, does the perceived poor quality of service delivery warrant the burning of public facilities and the closure of schools? Are these the norms and values that South Africa wants to instil in future generations?

## References

- Alexander, P. (2010). Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis. *Review of African Political Economy*, 37(123), 25–40.
- Arce, M., & Mangomet, J. (2012). Competitiveness, partisanship, and subnational protest in Argentina. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(8), 895–919.
- Auyero, J., Lapegna, P., & Poma, F. P. (2009). Patronage politics and contentious collective action: a recursive relationship. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 51(3), 1–31. doi: 10.1111/j.1548-2456.2009.00054
- Bernstein, A., & Johnston, S. (2007). Voices of anger: protest and conflict in two municipalities. Centre for Development and Enterprise, Johannesburg. Retrieved from [www.cde.org.za/voices-of-anger-phumelela-and-khutsong-protest-and-conflict-in-two-municipalities/](http://www.cde.org.za/voices-of-anger-phumelela-and-khutsong-protest-and-conflict-in-two-municipalities/)
- Bond, P. (2010). South Africa's bubble meets boiling urban protest. *New Left Review*, June 2010. Retrieved from <https://monthlyreview.org/2010/06/01/south-africas-bubble-meets-boiling-urban-social-protest/>
- Booyesen, S. (2009). Public participation in democratic South Africa: from popular mobilisation to structured co-optation and protest. *Politeia*, 28(1), 1–27.
- Buhlungu, S., & Tshoedi, M (Eds.). (2012). *COSATU's contested legacy*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Chen, P., & Goren, P. (2014). What moves the 'unmoved mover'? Operational ideology and party identification. APSA 2014 Annual Meeting Paper, (August 2014). Retrieved from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2451876> *City Press*. (2012). Pupils stay away from three N. Cape schools, 8 October.

- Dawson, M. C., & Sinwell, L. (2012). Transforming scholarship: soberly reflecting on the politics of resistance. In M. C. Dawson & L. Sinwell (Eds.). *Contesting transformation. Popular resistance in twenty-first-century South Africa* (pp. 1–22). London: Pluto.
- DeNardo, J. (1985). *Power in numbers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Friedman, S. (2006). *Participatory governance and citizen action in post-apartheid South Africa*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation.
- Green, D, Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2002). *Partisan hearts and minds. Political parties and the social identities of voters*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Greffrath, W., & Duvenhage, A. (2014). South Africa and the 2014 national election: a shift to the left? *Journal/Joernaal*, 39(2), 196–224.
- Hamil, J. (2014). South Africa's 2014 Election could be next step in ANC's steady decline. *World Politics Review*, February. Retrieved from [www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13562/south-africa-s-2014-election-could-be-next-step-in-anc-s-steady-decline](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13562/south-africa-s-2014-election-could-be-next-step-in-anc-s-steady-decline)
- Hodder, R. (2014). *High-level political appointments in the Philippines. Patronage, emotion and democracy*. London: Springer.
- Kabane, N. (2011). An emerging funding crisis for South African civil society. *NGO Pulse*, 12 January. Retrieved from [www.ngopulse.org/article/emerging-funding-crisis-south-african-civil-society](http://www.ngopulse.org/article/emerging-funding-crisis-south-african-civil-society)
- Karamoko, J., & Jain, H. (2010). Community protests in South Africa: trends, analysis and explanations. Local Government Working Paper Series No. 1, August, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape.
- Klandermans, P. G. (2014). Identity politics and politicized identities: identity processes and the dynamics of protest. *Political Psychology*, 35(1), 1–22. doi: 10.1111/pops.12167
- Langa, M., & Von Holdt, K. (2012). Insurgent citizenship, class formation and the dual nature of a community protest: a case study of 'Kungcatsha'. In M. C. Dawson & Sinwell, L. (Eds.). *Contesting transformation. Popular resistance in twenty-first century South Africa* (pp. 80–100). London: Pluto Press.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., Nadeau, R., & Elias, A. (2008). Economics, party, and the vote: causality issues and panel data. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(1), 84–95.
- Lodge, A. G. (2000). Deliberative democracy and the limits of partisan politics: between Athens and Philadelphia. In E. B. Portis, A. G. Gundersen & R. L. Shively (Eds.), *Political theory and partisan politics* (pp. 97–116). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Lowrance, S. (2006). Identity, grievances, and political action: recent evidence from the Palestinian community in Israel. *International Political Science Review*, 27(2), 167–190.

- Makino, K. (2009). Institutional conditions for social movements to change formal politics: the case of AIDS activism in post-apartheid South Africa. In S. Shigetomi & K. Makino (Eds.), *Protest and social movements in the developing world* (pp. 110–133). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Marais, L., Matebesi, S.Z., Mthombeni, M., Botes, L., & Grieshaber, D. (2008). Municipal unrest in the Free State (South Africa): a new form of social movement? *Politeia*, 27(1), 51–69.
- Matavire, M. (2005). Metro seeks to improve on poor housing record. *The Herald*, 22 August, p. 5.
- Matebesi, S.Z., & Botes, L. (2011). Khutsong cross-boundary protests: the triumph and failure of participatory local governance? *Politeia*, 30(1), 4–21.
- Matyu, J. (2005). Protestors get new promise from Faku. *The Herald*, 17 May.
- Mbeki, M. (2016). SA on the brink: how can the slide be reversed? Public lecture, 16 March 2016, Bloemfontein, University of the Free State.
- Melucci, A. (1988). Getting involved: identity and mobilization in social movements. In B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi & S. Tarrow (Eds.), *International Social Movement Research* Volume 1 (pp.329–348). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Montgomery, J. M., Smith, S. S., & Tucker, P. D. (2015). Moving the unmoved mover? The origins and limitations of systematic individual-level change in party identification (unpublished paper). Washington University, St Louis. Retrieved from [https://graduate.artsci.wustl.edu/files/graduatepages-/imce/ptucker/mst\\_spsa\\_2016.pdf](https://graduate.artsci.wustl.edu/files/graduatepages-/imce/ptucker/mst_spsa_2016.pdf)
- Moseley, M., & Moreno, D. (2010). The normalization of protest in Latin America, *AmericasBarometer Insights Series*, 42. Retrieved from [www.americasbarometer.org/](http://www.americasbarometer.org/)
- Mosoetsa, S. (2012). What would you do if the government fails to deliver? COSATU members' attitudes towards service delivery. In S. Buhlungu & M. Tshoamedi (Eds.), *COSATU's contested legacy* (p. 163). Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Motale, P. (2015). E-tolls on the brink of collapse. Retrieved from <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/e-tolls-on-brink-of-collapse-1928063>
- Ngwane, T. (2011). Ideology and agency in protest politics: service delivery struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. Unpublished Master of Arts dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. Retrieved from <http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/Ngwane%202012%20masters%20-thesis%20at%20UKZN%20CCS.pdf>
- Nkosi, B. (2012). Political woes fuel school protests. *Mail & Guardian*, 28 September 2012. Retrieved from <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-09-28-political-woes-fuel-school-protests>
- NoordKaap Gazette*. (2013). Gamagara mourns death of Mayor. 20 September.
- Ondaal, P. (2011). An architecture for building peace at the local level: a comparative study of local peace committees. UNDP. Retrieved from [www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/pdfs/UNDP\\_Local%20Peace%20Committees\\_Summary\\_2011.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/pdfs/UNDP_Local%20Peace%20Committees_Summary_2011.pdf)

- Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Opp, K. (2009). *Theories of political protest and social movements. A multidisciplinary introduction, critique, and synthesis*. New York: Routledge.
- Ostrom, E., & Ahn, T. K. (2009). The meaning of social capital and its link to collective action. In G. T. Svendsen & G. L. H. Svendsen (Eds.), *Handbook of social capital. The troika of sociology, political science and economics* (pp. 17–35). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group. (2012). Report of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on an oversight visit to Kuruman, Northern Cape, 20 November. Retrieved from <https://pmg.org.za/taled-committee-report/1851/>
- Pieterse, E. (2003). Rhythms, patterning and articulations of social formations in South Africa. In D. Everatt, & V. Maphai (Eds.), *The (real) state of the nation. South Africa after 1990* (pp. 101–136). Johannesburg: Interfund.
- Polleta, F., & Jasper, J. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(2001), 283–305. doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.283
- Public Protector of South Africa. (2012). The children shall pay: report of a systemic investigation into the allegations of lack of service delivery and maladministration by the Gamagara Local Municipality which led to community protests. Report no. 16 of 2013/2014. Retrieved from [www.pprotect.org/library/investigation\\_report/2013-14/children%20shall%20pay.pdf](http://www.pprotect.org/library/investigation_report/2013-14/children%20shall%20pay.pdf)
- Runciman, C. (2014). Mobilising insurgent citizenship: forging local authority and everyday policing in Protea Court. *South African Review of Sociology*, 45(1), 27–44, doi: 10.1080/21528586.2014.887913
- Rust, K., & Rubenstein, S. (1996). A mandate to build: developing consensus around a National Housing Policy in South Africa. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- SABC. (2014). Electricity cuts prompt PE protests. Retrieved from [www.sabc.co.za/wps/portal/news/main/tag?tag=Walmer township](http://www.sabc.co.za/wps/portal/news/main/tag?tag=Walmer+township)
- SAPA. (2012). 7 arrested in PE protests. IOL News, 16 August. Retrieved from [www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/7-arrested-in-pe-protests-1363837](http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/7-arrested-in-pe-protests-1363837)
- Smirnov, O., Dawes, C. T., Fowler, J. H., Johnson, T., & McElreath, R. (2010). The behavioral logic of collective action: partisans cooperate and punish more than nonpartisans. *Political Psychology*, 31(4), 595–616.
- Statistics South Africa. (2011). Census 2011. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Steyn, I. (2012). The state and social movements: autonomy and its pitfalls. *Politikon*, 39(3), 331–351.
- Tapscott, C. (2010). Social mobilization in Cape Town: a tale of two communities. In L. Thompson & C. Tapscott (Eds.), *Citizenship and social movements. Perspectives from the Global South* (pp. 260–275). London: Zed Books.

- Twala, T. (2014). The causes and socio-political impact of the service delivery protests on the South African citizenry: a real public discourse. *Journal of Social Science*, 39(2), 159–167.
- Tyoden, S. G. (2013). Inter and intra-party relations: Towards a more stable party system for Nigeria. *The Constitution*, 3 (April 2013). Retrieved from <http://cencod.com/?p=28>
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). (2014). *Hidden in plain sight. A statistical analysis of violence against children*. New York: UNICEF. Retrieved from [www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_74865.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_74865.html)
- Vagi, K. J., Rothman, E., Latzman, N. E., Tharp, A. T., Hall, D. M., & Breiding, M. J. (2013). Beyond correlates: a review of risk and protective factors for adolescent dating violence perpetration. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(4), 633–649.
- Van Zomeren, M., Spears, R., & Leach, C. W. (2008). Exploring psychological mechanisms of collective action: does relevance of group identity influence how people cope with collective disadvantage? *Journal of Social Psychology*, 47(2), 353–372. doi: 10.1348/014466607X231091
- Venter, A., Marais, L., Hoekstra, J., & Cloete, J. (2015). Reinterpreting South African Housing Policy through welfare state theory. *Theory and Society*, 32(3), 346–366. doi: 10.1080/\_14036096.2015.1048895
- Von Holdt, K. (2013). South Africa: the transition to violent democracy. *Review of African Political Economy*, 40(138), 589–604.
- Von Holdt, K., Langa, M., Molapo, S., Mogapi, N., Ngubeni, K., Dlamini, J., & Kirsten, A. (2011). The smoke that calls: Insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa. Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence. Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation/Society, Work and Development Institute. Retrieved from <http://csvr.org.za/docs/thesmokethatcalls.pdf>
- Winters, M. S., & Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2014). Nonpartisan protests in Brazil. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 6(1), 137–150. Retrieved from <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jpla/article/view/733/731>