

Linking service delivery and protest in South Africa: an exploration of evidence from Khayelitsha



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Abstract

The notion of service delivery protests in South Africa has perhaps become a cliché in South Africa. While there was a lull in protest activity (excluding industrial action) in the first decade of democracy, the second decade has been characterised by increased militancy reminiscent of the anti-apartheid struggle days, with many of these diagnosed as so-called service delivery protests. To be sure, service delivery issues are often mentioned as part of a blend of issues that have caused the different communities to protest in media reports. The role of service delivery in the generation of these protests however has so far not been investigated directly. This article reports the results of a quantitative study using path analysis to investigate the strength of the claim of the link between service delivery and protests in Khayelitsha, one of the protest prone townships in Cape Town. The article concludes that that service delivery affects protests directly and indirectly through its impact on perceptions of service delivery, perception of condition of life and the attendance of meetings.

Keywords: Cape Town, Khayelitsha, path, participation analysis, protest, service delivery

1 INTRODUCTION

The protest wave in poor urban areas that is generally recognised to have started in 2004 has been attributed to failures in service delivery (Booyesen, 2007, 2009; Marais et al., 2008; Alexander, 2010; Habib, 2010). Whereas the exact configuration of grievances has varied from protest to protest and community to community, invariably, issues linked to deficits in service delivery – housing, water, sanitation and electricity – have featured prominently (Booyesen, 2007; Marais et al., 2008). Other grievances have included dissatisfaction with local councils and administrations – these are accused of being unresponsive to citizen needs with councillors in particular standing accused of, among other things, corruption and nepotism. In addition, inequality and unemployment especially among the youth have also featured prominently (Atkinson, 2007; Booyesen, 2007; Alexander, 2010). The prominence of the service delivery hypothesis as an explanatory variable for protest has, however, not been explored empirically. Alexander (2010:25) remarks that previous studies all sidestepped explicitly engaging the

role of service delivery in the protests aside from making references to such a relationship. In fact, Booyesen (2007:24) remarks that 'it is sometimes disputed whether there is a direct causal link between services deficits ... and protests'. Atkinson (2007) and Marais et al. (2008) have provided some qualitative analyses on the causes of protest and both studies reported that inadequate service delivery is at the core of protest in South Africa. In this article, I investigate using quantitative methods as the link between service delivery and protest and describe the form of relationship.

Elsewhere though, particularly in the industrial democracies, many scholars have explored the causes of protest activity in varying levels of detail and produced a rich body of literature. In the developing countries, the literature has focused mostly on explaining the reasons for certain contentious events (Dalton et al., 2010). These literatures have emphasised the important role played by existing political and economic conditions in the generation of protest. Gurr (1970) emphasises the role of relative deprivation as the key driver of protest; he argues that poverty, economic want and poor living conditions rouse feelings of resentment that are responsible for the protest generation. Gurr's theory has been subject to considerable critique. On the one hand, considerable deprivation has not always been followed by protest. On the other hand, many protests, particularly in industrial democracies, show considerable association with privilege. Consequently, alternative accounts of protest, most notably the resources model, have emerged with McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) and Tilly (1975) providing early elucidation. The resources model argues that protest is facilitated by the existence of skills and resources that are crucial in the organising protest. Among the most important resources held by individuals that are essential for protests are income, education and organisational memberships. Although the resources model has been the subject of multiple reconfigurations, it largely retains currency and is generally more robust as an explanatory model for protest. It is important to note that the relative deprivation approach shows weak association with protest particularly in developed countries but performs better in low income countries (Dalton, 2010).

The link between service delivery and protests has perhaps been overstated. Thompson and Nleya (2010a, b) demonstrate that protests are associated with a number of other factors beyond service delivery, for example, multiple memberships of organisations operating both within and without of the local contexts, higher interpersonal trust, higher trust in national institutions. The article is restricted to describing relationships emanating from service delivery as the starting point and culminating in protest.

2 EXPLORING SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROTEST – A PRIMER

In this section, the aim is not to describe service delivery and protest in South Africa, but to problematise the two concepts as they are commonly used in South Africa. I believe that only with such a rubric will I be able to proceed with the aims of the article.

Regarding service delivery, I note that there has been tendency by academics, politicians and media practitioners alike to use the term 'service delivery protests' causally to describe the local protests that have occurred across the length and breadth of South Africa. The mere use of the phrase 'service delivery protest' implies the existence of a relationship between the protest and

service delivery. In addition, the term ‘service delivery’ in itself is not neutral. Harber (2009) for example points out that ‘sometimes one word or phrase captures a time and an issue. Often, it is a phrase one uses so often and with such ease that one no longer hears the meanings hidden in it’. For him the phrase ‘service delivery’ needs to be taken apart in order to understand its hidden meanings. He notes that:

It contains a host of assumptions, policies, attitudes and promises – which are starting to haunt a government which has built its promise entirely on the notion of improving service delivery. They did not promise better opportunities, better access or better support in getting services, as these did not making ringing election slogans. They promised delivery, simple and straightforward. (Harber, 2009)

Harber (2009) sees the use of the phrase as part of a ‘technocratic’ description of the relationship between citizens and the government. Thus, the government delivers while citizens receive. For Harber the term has become part of a major linguistic and conceptual conundrum.

Yet, it would be misleading to say that the phrase is a South African invention or monopoly. For example, in its 2004 World Development Report, the World Bank uses the phrase time and again (World Bank, 2003). While the report recognises that there exists no template³ for successful service delivery, it still places the overall responsibility of ‘making services work for poor people’ on the state (World Bank, 2003). Given the capital intensity which leads to monopolistic behaviour in the production of basic services for the poor and the externalities associated with their provision, government involvement is often crucial in financing, regulation and overseeing these services.

Harber’s (2009) exposition is still relevant as technocratic ‘service delivery’ sidelines citizen input and undermines the possibility of citizens understanding the inherent intricate balancing acts of public policy formulation and implementation. Public policy inherently involves value maximisation within constraints and decision makers in services provision would have to decide on what constitutes an acceptable level of access, quantity and quality, and ascribe a different weight to each of these three different components of the service delivery matrix. Citizen involvement at that level of decision making increases buy in into government policies and ensures that citizens understand the constraints within which service delivery occurs.

Whereas government statistics in ‘service delivery’ since 1994 are impressive and have been supplemented by a number of pro-poor policies, such as free basic water and free basic electricity, demographic changes have undermined the improvement in conditions of the poor (Alexander, 2010). Rural-urban migration and declining family sizes have compounded the large services backlogs in poor areas across the country (Pillay et al., 2006; Nleya, 2008). Pillay et al. (2006) report that, for example, the population of South African cities grew at more than double the national growth rate while the household size declined from 4.47 to 4 between the 1996 and 2001 censuses. This has not escaped executive levels of government, for example, keenly aware of the importance of ‘delivery’, President Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation Address 2011 remarked: ‘Compatriots, while many South Africans celebrate the delivery of houses, electricity and water, there are yet many others who are still waiting (Zuma, 2011). Not surprisingly, he promised that the government would make service delivery move faster.

Thus far, I have introduced the key objective of this article, that is, to describe the relationship between service delivery and protest in South Africa. I have focussed on the meaning of service delivery in order to clarify the relationship between service delivery and participation – including protest. It would seem that protest, as discussed elsewhere, forms part of a continuum of action in terms of participatory strategies. I investigate this further in the following sections.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives and questions

The main research objective of this paper is to investigate the relationship between service delivery and protests in Khayelitsha. I use the term ‘service delivery’ cautiously acknowledging the complexities raised by Harber (2009). I seek to find evidence of higher protests in areas with poorer services in order to confirm the link between protests and service delivery. The following questions guide the research process.

1. Are there higher participation rates in protests in informal settlements than in formal settlements?
2. If the link exists, how are service delivery issues linked to protest?

3.2 Variables used in the analysis

Attendance of protests: I measured protest as attendance by the respondent in the past 12 months. I asked the questions shown in table 1 in the survey undertaken in the five selected sites of Khayelitsha to measure attendance of protests:

Table 1: Survey question on attendance of protests

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these during the past year. [If yes read out options 2-4] If not, would you do this if you had a chance?[For no read out options 0-1]						
	Yes			No		Don't Know
	Often	Several times	Once or twice	Would do if had a chance	Would never do this	
A.						
B.						
C. Attended a demonstration or protest march	4	3	2	1	0	0
D.						

It was possible, therefore, to separate attendees and non-attendees using the yes/no part of the question. The second part of the question allowed the researcher to separate respondents by frequency of attendance for attendees and support for protest activity for non attendees. Using provided in Dalton (2004) protest goes beyond demonstrations but includes activities such as signing petitions, joining boycotts, and occupying buildings. The question could be viewed focussed on demonstrations rather than the fuller account of protest. Since demonstrations and protest marches are the most visible form of protest, I found the question to be adequate for my purposes.

3.3 The sample

The study utilised data from a survey carried out by researchers in the African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (ACCEDE) in 2008/09. A sample of 300 interviewees was selected from five areas of Khayelitsha. Two of the areas selected in the sample are formal settlements; a further two are informal settlements; and the fifth is a mixed area consisting of both informal and formal dwellings. The sample proportion between informal settlement dwellers and formal settlement dwellers was designed to mirror the split between the informal settlement populations of Khayelitsha.

3.4 Analysis

In order to answer the first question of the study, that is, to discover whether there are higher participation rates in protests in informal settlements than in formal settlements in Khayelitsha, I used frequency analysis of the SPSS software package. For the second part of the question, I used SPSS Amos to perform path analysis. Path analysis is a statistical technique used to examine causal relationships between two or more variables (Olobatuyi, 2006:4). Rather than testing if a linear relationship exists between variables, path analysis has the advantage of testing a specific theory. I hypothesised that if service delivery is a cause for local protests, there would be relatively robust links between service delivery variables and protest. These relationships would be both direct and indirect, in the latter case operating through intermediary variables, such as perception of service delivery and perception of personal living conditions.

4 PROTEST PARTICIPATION RATES IN INFORMAL AND FORMAL SETTLEMENTS

In this section, I seek to answer the first question posed in this study: Are there higher participation rates in protests in informal settlements than in formal settlements? The question anticipated that if poor service delivery is indeed a cause of protest, then there would be higher levels of protest in informal settlements than in formal settlements. A caveat is important at this point – those informal settlements in Khayelitsha (and perhaps elsewhere) are also sites of higher levels of unemployment and poverty (CCT, 2005). This is an important consideration to be factored into the analysis, for both unemployment and poverty could ultimately be drivers of protest in themselves. The coincidence of the three – poor service delivery, unemployment and poverty – may actually compound the feelings of deprivation experienced by those living in informal settlements and thus distort the effect of service delivery in itself.

Table 2 shows differences in attendance of protests between residents of informal settlements and those of formal settlements. The attendance of protests was higher at 50 per cent for informal settlements than 36 per cent for formal houses. This indicates higher propensities to protest in informal settlements than in formal settlements. In fact, the place of residence is a good predictor of protest (Spearman correlation coefficient $r = 0.188$, $p = 0.001$). Thus far I have found some evidence to support the hypothesis that service delivery failure is the cause of protests. As I have indicated above, such correlation should be taken as indicative given the coincidence of unemployment, poverty and informality.

Table 2: Differential attendance of protests in formal and informal settlements

	Percentage attending protest	Percentage not attending protest
Informal settlement	50	50
Formal brick house	36	64
Khayelitsha	45	55

5 MODELLING SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROTEST

In this section, I use path analysis to specify the relationship between service delivery and protest. I have opted for a simplified model with six variables, namely: type of dwelling, perception of service delivery, perception of condition of life, attendance of meetings, interest in public affairs and attendance of protest. I have already explained how the variable protest was measured in the methodology section. As a prelude to specifying the model, I clarify each of the above stated variables below.

Type of dwelling: This variable describes the dwelling that the household of the respondent occupies. In the questionnaire the question was asked as follows: *Which of the following types best describes the main dwelling that this household occupies?* The options that could be selected were as follows: house brick structure, flat in block of flats, town/cluster/semi detached house, house/flat in back yard, informal dwelling in backyard, informal dwelling in informal settlement, room/ flat not in backyard but shared property, caravan/tent or workers hostel. In my analysis, I found that type of housing was a good predictor of other types of services each household has access to. For example, informal settlements dwellers use communal water facilities, have either no toilets or use communal toilets, and may or may not have access to electricity; while occupants of formal brick houses have access to internal or yard taps, and internal or yard toilets, and have access to electricity. Since the service type and quality vary between informal and formal settlements, the type of dwelling is a good proxy for service delivery as it encapsulates multiple services. Henceforth, the type of dwelling is used synonymously with level of service delivery.

Attendance of community meetings: This variable relates to the attendance of community meetings by the respondent. Clearly, community meetings are bedevilled by issues of the meanings of community as well as technical aspects of what constitutes a meeting and what does not. McComas et al. (2006:673) define public meetings as ‘organised social gatherings with three

or more people in attendance and open to anyone to attend'. Public meetings can serve many purposes, formal and informal, and are organised by government bodies, religious organisations, citizen groups, neighbourhood organisations or anyone else. In the questionnaire the question about attendance of public meetings was asked as follows:

Table 3: Attendance of a public meeting

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have [attended a community meeting] during the past year. [If yes read out options 2-4] If not, would you do this if you had a chance? [For no read out options 0-1]						
	Yes			No		
	Often	Several times	Once or twice	Would do if had a chance	Would never do this	Don't Know
Attended a community meeting						

Interest in public affairs: I define interest in public affairs as curiosity in, and the inquisitiveness to exercise some control over those matters that affect members of a community. I measured the variable interest in public affairs by asking the question: *How interested are you in public affairs?* The choice of responses was as follows: *very interested, somewhat interested, very interested and not at all interested.*

The question on living conditions was asked in order to elicit subjective perceptions of respondent's conditions of life. The question was posed as follows: *In general how would you describe your own present living conditions?* The following responses were proffered to the interviewee: *very good, fairly good, neither good nor bad, fairly bad and very bad.* Conditions of life are expected to vary with economic aspects such as financial situation; their employment situation; relational aspects such as family life; social life; their neighbourhood; their home and personal safety; their own health; their country's health care system. In general, satisfaction hinges most on the degree of satisfaction with the individual's financial situation (Alber & Fahey, 2004). I postulated that the level and quality of service delivery would be an important determinant of quality of life, especially in informal settlements.

Perception of service delivery: This variable was composed by adding together the perception of housing service delivery, perception of water supply service delivery, perception of sanitation delivery and perception of electricity delivery. I used a combination variable since I believe it likely to be more stable and reflect the underlying trend of service delivery perceptions. While the formation of perceptions of satisfaction or the lack thereof is a rather complicated process, as shown by Ghobadian et al. (1994), I assumed that actual service delivery outcomes play an important role in the formation of such perceptions. Ghobadian et al. (1994) specify that customer satisfaction is the difference between prior expectations (PE) and perceptions actual service outcomes (PAO): $PAO > PE$ is the ideal, while if $PAO < PE$, then dissatisfaction occurs, while $PAO = PE$ results in satisfaction.

Figure 1 below is a path diagram showing the link between service delivery and protest. A number of observations from the figure can be made. The level of civic engagement as indicated by interest in public affairs and attendance of community meetings are relatively better at predicting protest activity than is service delivery issues. The effect of service delivery in the model operates through both direct and indirect effects. The direct effect has a standardised β coefficient of -0.12 (much less when compared to direct the effect of interest in public affairs, $\beta = 0.22$). The total indirect effects of service delivery on protest is $\beta = -0.10$, thus the total effect of service delivery is $\beta = -0.22$. As service delivery improves, protest declines.

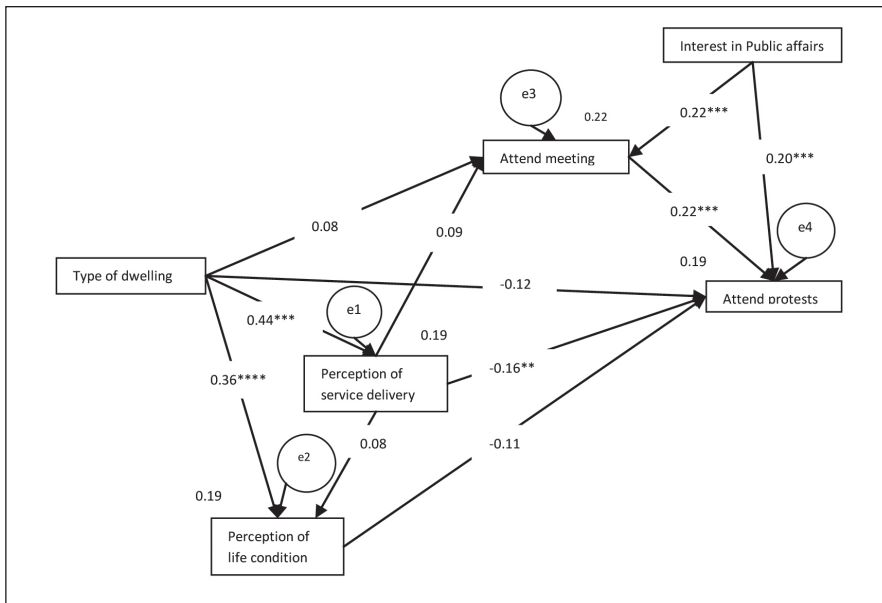


Figure 1: Simple Path Model specifying the link between service delivery and protest

What is also important to describe in that relationship are the intermediate relationships. For example, there is a very strong relationship between the level of service delivery experienced typified by type of housing and service delivery perceptions, $\beta = 0.44$. Similarly, there is a strong relationship between service delivery and perception of living conditions. Both perceptions of service delivery and condition of life affect the decision to protest $\beta = -0.16$ and $\beta = -0.11$ respectively. This means that as perceptions of service delivery improve and when conditions of life improve, protest declines.

It is clear from the diagram that the degree of participation as represented by attendance of community meetings plays a more important role in generation of protest activity, $\beta = 0.22$. Similarly, interest in public affairs plays an important role in generation of protest than service delivery grievances, $\beta = 0.20$ in the direct path and $\beta = 0.05$ in the indirect path through meetings, meaning that it is the most important determining variable in this model with a total effect of 0.25 standard deviations.

6 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in sections 4 and 5 above provides important insights into protest participation in Khayelitsha. I was able to show that participation in protests is relatively higher in informal settlements than in formal settlements with attendance rates of 50 per cent in informal settlements and 36 per cent in formal settlements. With regard to informal settlements, protests about service delivery are likely to be centred on the roll out of services as opposed to quality issues in formal settlements. Yet, it needs to be borne in mind that informal settlements are also sites of higher poverty and unemployment, which could in themselves be responsible for higher protests.

In the path analysis, I showed that service delivery affects protests directly and indirectly through its impact on perceptions of service delivery, perception of condition of life and the attendance of meetings. Perceptions of service delivery were found to be more important in generation of protest than the objective service delivery situation typified by the type of dwelling occupied by the respondent. I found that informal settlement dwellers are more likely to be unhappy with service delivery and report unsatisfactory conditions of life. This part of the analysis therefore was able to show that service delivery is an important component of social protest in South Africa and lends credence to the application of the relative deprivation theory.

The findings show that interest in public affairs and the participation of communal meetings are important variables in the generation of social protest. Having defined interest in public affairs as the inquisitiveness to exercise some control over those matters that affect members of a community, I noted that it is precisely those individuals with a keen interest in exercising such control that participated in protest. Such exercise of control in community affairs can be exercised in a number of ways - for example the attendance of community meetings and attendance of protest. Viewed in this way, social protest is part of an ensemble of repertoires of contention available to citizens to utilise (Tilly, 1993, 1995). For Tilly (1993, 1995), these limited sets of routines are acted out through a deliberate process if choice. He argues further that these repertoires are learned, yet most learning occurs within the boundaries of existing routines. Atkinson's (2007) evocation of anti-apartheid protest cycles in the post 2004 protests is therefore spot on.

Service delivery remains a central, real and symbolic part of actualisation of a meaningful life in poor urban areas. Improved services are linked to increasing the dignity of an urban poor systematically denied legitimate space and decent living conditions under apartheid. I note that the democratic government has over the past 17 years of its existence, played an important part in ameliorating conditions of the poor. While I have shown evidence of a link between service delivery and protest, I have shown that other factors are instrumental in the generation of protest. These factors, such as a general sense of improvement in the quality of life of the urban poor, and effective channels of grievance resolution and representation in forms of local governance are in a sense as important as the lack of services themselves. This lies at the heart of resolving service delivery grievances.

NOTES

- 1 Ndodana Nleya is a Researcher and PhD Candidate at African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy located in the School of Government, University of the Western Cape (UWC)
- 2 For example, Habib (2010) and Alexander (2010) use the term, while Marais et al. (2008) prefer 'service related unrest' instead.
- 3 The report points out that throughout history a number of institutional arrangements have been tried with mixed results. For example, these could be conceived as existing in the following continuums: centralised government delivery – decentralised local government delivery, on the one hand, and public provision to private sector provision, on the other hand.

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