

## RAMIFICATIONS OF VIOLENT PROTEST ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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Volume: 4

Number: 3

Page: 652 - 663

### Article History:

Received: 2023-01-27

Revised: 2023-03-13

Accepted: 2023-05-17

### Abstract:

South Africa has been repeatedly ranked as one of the world's most dangerous countries due to its high level of violence. The country is currently facing a surge of violent protests, which is largely due to a lack of service delivery in communities. The frustration of citizens with the government's unfulfilled promises is a common reason for such protests. University students are also not immune to such violent protests, which often disrupt academic activities. These protests lead to injuries and damage to government buildings, causing harm to both the community and institutions. Additionally, violent protests have disastrous environmental repercussions affecting air quality, aquatic and marine ecosystems. To address this issue, the study suggests that environmental education should be intensified to sensitize the public about the effects of violent protests on the environment. Using the theoretical lens of frustration-aggression theory, the study explored the effects of violent protests in South Africa. The findings highlight the need for urgent action to address the root causes of violent protests, such as inadequate service delivery. The study also emphasizes the importance of raising awareness of the environmental impact of violent protests, and the need for environmental education to be prioritized in the country. By addressing these issues, it is hoped that violent protests will be reduced and a more peaceful and sustainable future can be achieved for South Africa.

**Keywords:** Environmental Education, Community, University students, Violent protest, South Africa

Cite this as: DAMOAH, B. (2023). "Ramifications of Violent Protest on the Environment." *International Journal of Environmental, Sustainability, and Social Sciences*, 4 (3), 652 - 663.



## INTRODUCTION

South African communities have gained notoriety in violent protest due to the historical antecedence of the marginalization of black communities during the apartheid regime. The trajectory of violent protests in South Africa is overwhelming. It has made the country unglorified an accolade as the world's number one hotspot for violent public protest. The spate of violent protests dates to the 1970s (Du Toit & Manganyi, 2016). The tenacity of these protests took a dramatic shift from 2004 to 2005 when the nation recorded an unprecedented 6000 protests on the streets of South Africa. At least fifteen protests were recorded daily during this period (Bond & Mottiar, 2013). The eruption of violent public protest cuts through the spines of the country's nine provinces. Millions of South African citizens use violent protest as a weapon to express their displeasure. Informal settlements or townships are more prone to violent protests than their suburban counterparts (Crush, 2014).

The violent protests under the pretext of demanding better services from the government and university authorities have somewhat worsened the plight of most indigene-poor

settlements and universities. It is argued that protestation, a constitutional right, has become an overly radical and destructive means to communicate with the government. Service delivery has been the trumpet card for burning national roads, torching shopping malls, and vandalizing state infrastructures. Most violent protests are politically motivated and engineered by opposition parties, trade unions, civil society organizations, student organizations, and community influencers (Modiba, 2021).

According to Municipal IQ over the previous ten years, there have been 1,685 demonstrations of service delivery. As of the end of June, 53 of those were in 2021 alone. In 2021 the wave of violent protests in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces was triggered by the incarceration of former president Jacob Zuma. South Africa witnessed the worst public violent protest in the history of the country. This civil unrest claimed over 354 lives and the devastating blow to the environment cannot be quantified (Soko, 2021).

South African Property Owners' Association (SAPOA) averred that the total cost of the damage to the country was R50 billion because of the violent protest (Iqani & Kenny, 2022). The KZN province lost R20 billion, while firms in Durban alone lost R1.5 billion worth of goods. Targeted and impacted primarily were supermarket groupings and wholesalers. Shoprite Group Stores reported that 200 Shoprite Group Stores – including 69 Shoprite supermarkets, 54 Shoprite Liquor Shop outlets, 44 Usave stores, 35 furniture stores, six Checkers supermarkets, one Checkers Hyper, and one Fresh Mark Distribution Centre were looted, vandalized, or set on fire in KZN and Gauteng. According to Massmart Holdings Limited, four facilities were burned and destroyed, and 41 stores were looted throughout KZN and Gauteng. As a result, the impacted provinces experienced food shortages and a lack of essential goods supply. Cities and townships that suffered the brunt of these violent protests in 2021 are still grappling with the environmental effects of these actions (Vhumbunu, 2021).

The severity of these spontaneous protests leaves most of the Central Business Districts (CBD) and institutions polluted, which has dire consequences on the environment (Amisi et al., 2011). Due to the violent protest, two factories in Umhlanga were set on fire in 2021, spewing chemical smoke and filthy fluid plumes into the neighborhoods. Brig-Ortiz (2021) intimated that arsonists were part of a bigger protest wave that swept KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng regions from 13th to 14th July 2021. The environmental consequences of the demonstrations have an unavoidable impact on daily life. The atmosphere is polluted with poisonous fumes, and smoke crept through the windows and doors of households because of the violent protest witnessed in KZN.

The frustrations of the citizenry due to the utter lack of essential services, exorbitant living expenses, and unfulfilled government promises give credence to community aggression, as alluded to in Dollard et al. (1939) frustration and aggression theory (FAT). Community members and Students resort to aggression to express their frustrations, often resulting in violent demonstrations. Citizens believe peaceful demonstrations will not force the government and educational institutions to address their demands and that it is thus preferable to use force to ensure that their needs are met. During violent protests, major streets and highways are often barricaded with tires burning (Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, violent demonstrations interrupt business, endanger human life, employment, security, and property, and cause mayhem in the workplace. Most significantly, amid a clarion call for climate change mitigation, actions that will derail this effort should be curtailed. Therefore, this conceptual paper seeks to unveil the environmental impact of violent protests in Communities and Institutions of Higher learning.

Based on the explanation above, the following research objective was developed as a guide for the study to solve the research problem based on the justifications offered above. This study then establishes the effect of violent protests on the environment.

Dollard et al. (1939) Frustration-Aggression theory (FAT) is the framework that underpinned this study. The FAT argues that violence is frequently the consequence of frustration. FAT is a psychological element that stems from violence, with the aggressiveness induced by frustration produced by unmet government aspirations. Frustration becomes aggression when something sparks it, such as when citizens run out of patience.

The communities believe the government strips them of their entitlement to basic social amenities. Community protests are essential to democracy, but the type and extent of recent violent protests in South Africa are inimical to environmental health. The FAT explains the violence that frequently follows the expression of dissatisfaction. Aggression is more likely to occur when frustration is severe and continuous. As a result, it is argued that frustration-aggression is the main source of the human propensity for violence and further contends that the degree and extent of relative deprivation dictate the likelihood of collective violence (Burger, 2010).

Dlamini et al. (2011) agree that frustrations and stress motivate individuals to behave forcefully, mobilizing and protesting. Frustration might cause one to seek a reaction, and the consequence, in most circumstances, is aggressiveness; hence, any violent behavior is typically the result of frustration (Breuer & Elson, 2017). The culture of violent demonstrations in South Africa emanates from the apartheid period, during which the Black majority was forced to demonstrate violently for everything, eventually culminating in the fall of the government of the day. The Sharpeville tragedy and June 16, 1976, revolt remind people that for the government to respond favorably, there must be violent measures.

It is one of the tragic facts of the apartheid era; it taught South Africans that violence produces specific purposes and consequences, and so it is a method of getting the attention of people they had voted to lead them. Protests in the mid-1980s destroyed government facilities and the homes of persons believed to support apartheid practices. Dlamini et al. (2011) connect present community violent protest to the apartheid regime. The penchant for violent serial protests has left traces of environmental protection breaches in most communities. Violent protests and the burning of schools and other state property indicate the community's and students' utmost level of discontent and the seriousness of the crisis. However, this level of aggression triggered by dissatisfaction has woefully affected the environment. In most cases, citizens resort to pollution of the environment through burning tires and littering around the streets. The demonstration of aggression because of frustrations ends up causing irreparable damage to our ecosystems.

**The Causes of Violent Protests in Communities.** The African National Congress (ANC) led government has been plagued by unrest, which has manifested itself in protests that are getting more serious at the local level, where problems with service delivery are critical. These problems result from the government's failure to provide adequate services. Many concerns in townships and institutions contribute to violent protests. The collapse of the economy, the multiple strains of a recessionary climate, and increased unemployment have all been connected to increased service delivery protests (Ngcambu, 2019).

One of the causes of violent protests in our communities is the high prevalence of unemployment. It is exacerbated when work opportunities exist in the townships, but community people should be prioritized. They frequently go on strike to be engaged in those contracts and often destroy the infrastructure associated with the project. According to Ngcambu

(2019), there is a lack of academic published data on protest service delivery in South Africa, and the information that is currently accessible is anecdotal and influenced by popular media rather than concepts based on fact. It is happening as Municipal IQ (2019) reveals that in 2018, service delivery protests peaked at a 24% higher level than the previous record-holder from 2014. From 2004 to 2008, the Gauteng province was the dominant destination, accounting for 24% of all service delivery protests in 2004 and 36% in 2017. In 2018, the Eastern Cape province led in violent protest, followed by the Western Cape (17%) and Gauteng (16%), a marked change from 2017.

The above figures indicate the provinces with the greatest rate of violent protest due to a lack of municipal service delivery. According to the data, the Eastern Cape is the top province since it has more rural regions and townships than metropolitan areas. As a result, as evidenced by statistics, it takes longer for the Eastern Cape to receive quality government services. Communities that engage in harmful protest tactics, such as refusing to pay for local taxes and services; municipalities that lack the infrastructure to provide essential services; a lack of responsiveness and accountability on the part of local government; a failure by local governments to adequately involve communities in their development; a lack of communication resources (people, technology, equipment, and processes); and a lack of accountability for how and when municipalities engage in harmful protest tactics. The core causes appear congruent with the results of the Eastern Cape's major newspaper, which revealed that irate ratepayers were increasingly utilizing rate boycotts to protest the low quality of services caused by political inquisitiveness and cronyism the province (Sheidi, 2013).

The common root of violent protest has already been identified as a lack of communication. The municipality's overpriced tariffs are another source of contention in the Eastern Cape townships. Residents are ignorant of how much they must pay for water and energy. Regarding housing, Breakfast, Bradshaw, and Nomarwayi (2019) believe protests are more likely to intensify in informal settlements where poverty and unemployment are highest. Because of their closeness to the suburban zone, residents in the informal regions are more likely to seek comparably underfunded essential services. People who live across the street (for example, in Walmer Township and its neighboring districts, such as Walmer Heights in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro) are virtually lacking the essential amenities that township residents need. However, people who live in suburban areas are typically happier. Local councilors left some homeowners behind while the government-built RDP houses in rural and suburban regions were delivered. The mechanism used to assign citizens who qualify for RDP houses is not the same system the national government utilizes. Therefore, locals end up protesting.

The number of demonstrations and violent service delivery increased between 2009 and 2010. This number fell by 108 in the African Journal of Public Affairs 2011, even though these events mostly happened in Gauteng and the Western Cape, indicating a significant movement away from rural towns. It is commonly stated that a loss of technical ability and a lack of managerial skills are the primary reasons for poor service delivery and the resulting complaints (Breakfast, Bradshaw & Nomarwayi, 2019). One of the causes of a lack of service delivery in our communities is a lack of technical abilities. Residents in our townships and rural regions lack appropriate skills for today's world, resulting in high unemployment.

Lastly, one of the reasons for violent protests is claims of widespread nepotism and graft within local government systems. Some demonstrators attribute poor service delivery to the ANC's 'comrades' being placed in jobs for which they are unqualified. Speaking to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) in East London, Minister for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs acknowledged that many municipalities are in inertia and

disarray. Municipal councils are considered ineffective, fragmented, and driven by greed and gross incompetence (Burger, 2010).

Protesters believe that only disruptive and violent protests are addressed by authorities. Many South Africans' socioeconomic conditions are a driving factor in service delivery protests and related crimes. The causes of service delivery protests and related crimes include inequality, poor service delivery to marginalized communities in townships and informal settlements, corruption, unemployment, poverty, poor governance, leadership, and the reality and conditions of living in South Africa. The consequences of violent protests frequently result in weak governance, poverty, and high crime rates in our communities. These effects lead to overcrowding and the government's inability to serve all citizens in each location. Residents make illegal connections to electrical wires due to a lack of service delivery. When power technicians address the issue, they strike against the supply of services. It is more common in townships surrounding urban centers. The consequences of illegal connection put children at risk of colliding with power lines on the road, resulting in a high fatality rate from Izinyoka (illegal connection) (Mokhomole, Khosa & Olutola, 2022).

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Mokhomole, Khosa, and Olutola, 2022 intimated that South Africa is well known for its violent protests, which began with the country's battle against apartheid. The troubling part is that most service delivery protests are now accompanied by criminal behaviour and altercations between demonstrators and police. According to the South African Police Union (SAPU), the current service delivery demonstrations and accompanying crimes demonstrate a lack of police in South Africa (Skommere, 2014). Given the foregoing, violent protestors now have the potential to steal while criticizing service delivery. They rob stores and other government facilities. As a result, they are being convicted of crimes other than the original intention of service delivery. Sometimes a community's inhabitants lack the tools to communicate their concerns without infringing on their neighbours' rights. The police and the State Security Agency have undertaken futile and ineffectual efforts to apprehend people who use authorized protests as a cover for illicit behaviour such as burning and store robbery.

According to Saul (2021), protests over service delivery are caused by, among other things, political indifferences and arguing at the cost of the general population, a lack of accountability and improper use of public funds, widespread corruption, and nepotism at the local government level. Managa (2012) emphasized that overpromises made by politicians during campaigns that were not delivered due to a lack of financing, corruption, and inadequate resource management by local municipalities are some of the elements which trigger violent protestation. Corruption by public officials, poor governance within public sector institutions and municipalities, a lack of

public consultation about municipal and administrative services, and public representatives' disengagement from their constituents all contributed to service delivery protests directed at the government. Poor services in public institutions such as government clinics, for example, provoke community anger. Residents angrily protest the absence of service delivery at local clinics.

According to Aphiri (2016), low economic development resulted in less tax collection, resulting in budget cuts across the board. Budget cuts stifle economic growth and make it more difficult for the government to offer essential services to the public. Poor economic development leads to less employment and lower earnings for the poor, fuelling conflict over service delivery and other crimes. The country is in a recession, necessitating budget cuts for various government services. Universities have experienced sporadic student unrest due to students' disagreements with authorities. It has often caused havoc to the government properties. Students mainly express their displeasure by burning tires on campuses, which ripples the environment. The infamous Fees Must Fall protest has left unprintable violent footprints in most institutions of higher learning (Kujeke, 2016; Mavunga, 2019).

**The Effect of Violent Protest on the Environment.** Although an increase in service delivery protests is perceived as a sign that local government is failing, studies have shown that the opposite is frequently true (Samuel et al., 2021). According to a 2017 Statistics South Africa survey, 84% of the population had better sanitation, 88% had access to water, and 84% had access to electricity (Afro Barometer, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2017). Some researchers argue, however, that the amount of violence and other outbursts associated with service delivery and other problems in South Africa is not directly tied to the efficacy of service delivery there. Instead, they asserted that the current civic responses directly result from the patronizing, notwithstanding occasionally irrational, promises made by politicians during the anti-apartheid movements that are now crumbling in the face of practical circumstances.

Recently, there has been an increase in aggressive violence in UKZN, which has occasionally resulted in injuries. Sibanyoni (2022) argues that the tragedy of student protest violence frequently occurs in previously underprivileged areas that rely on the resources that are frequently destroyed in the violence to keep them out of poverty and other social problems.



Source: REUTERS/Rogan Ward

**Figure 1.** Supporters of Jacob Zuma block the freeway with burning tyres during a protest in Peacevale, South Africa (9 July 2021).

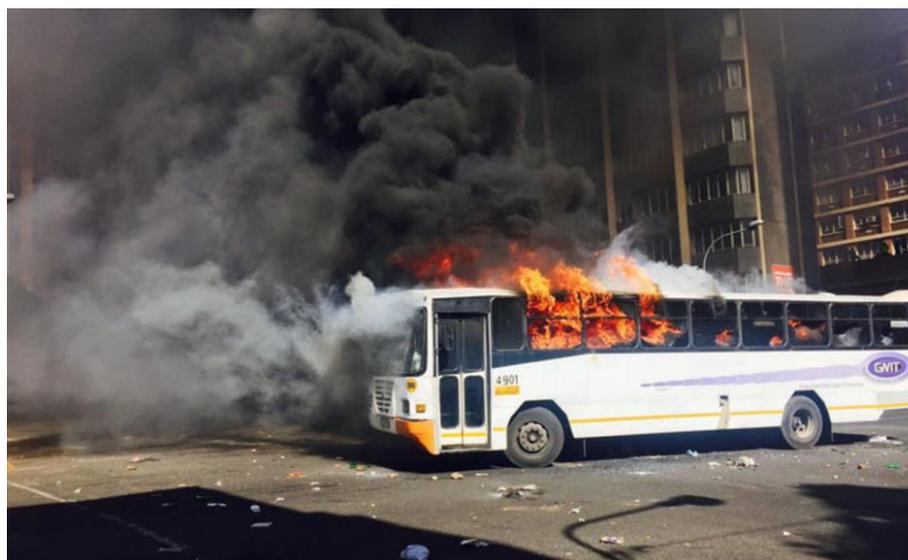
Students rioted in all major cities during the #FeesMustFall student protests, striking key downtown districts that township protests often do not reach. It impacts the environment as a whole; at some point, they burn tires and other materials, contributing to global warming. Kujeke (2016) and Mavunga (2019) asserted that students engaged in violence during the #FeesMustFall protest. During this violent protest, students set fire to a light public infrastructures and University facilities. Students blocked various vantage areas of university campuses. Some students were imprisoned during the "fees must fall" campaign as they fought for the reduction of fees by the institutions of higher learning.



Source: Gallo Images / Sharon Seretlo

**Figure 2.** University of Witwatersrand students protest over financial exclusion on 15 March 2021

UKZN property has repeatedly been vandalized and set on fire in protest. The burning of tyres and torching of buildings were the norm during this period. It has grievous environmental consequences because of the poisonous fumes from this protestation.



Source: Ziyanda Ngcobo/EWN.

**Figure 3.** JOHANNESBURG - A bus has been set alight by protesting Wits University students in Braamfontein, during Fees Must Fall protests (10 October 2016).



Source: REUTERS/Rogan Ward

**Figure 4.** Protesters torched warehouses in Durban, South Africa (9 July 2021).

The environmental destruction left by KZN's violent protest is still visible in the air, on the ground, and along the beaches. The environmental effects of the demonstrations were most obvious on the beaches. The chemical sludge from the industrial fires in Umhlanga was said to have drained into the area's storm sewers and then been dumped onto the beaches and tidal pools. Fish, crabs, crayfish, and even some octopi were found all over the beaches from Umhlanga to Umdloti in the following days. Umhlanga Lagoon changed color to a sinister turquoise. Other fluids can leave the town, similarly, creating a trail of environmental problems because the sewers' outfalls are situated in the walls of seaside promenades to direct runoff out of the town into the ocean (Brig-Ortiz, 2021).



**Figure 5.** Members of a hazardous waste clean-up crew collect dead fish after chemicals entered the water system from a warehouse that was burned during days of looting following the imprisonment of former South African President Jacob Zuma, in Durban, July 17, 2021.

The aftermath effect of violent protests on the environment is irreversible. Soon after the KZN violence, the South African environmental department sent a team of experts to visit Durban Coastal beaches. The quality of air and water was polluted and compromised due to an agrochemical plant set alight by angry protesters. This plant produces poisonous chemicals which are environmentally unfriendly. These chemicals found their way into drains which ended up in the sea. The environmental impact of this aggression affected the aquatic and marine ecosystems. Many dead fish were washed offshore due to chemical contamination of the sea, which affected marine life.



**Figure 6.** Members of a hazardous waste clean-up crew collect dead fish after chemicals entered the water system from a warehouse that was burned during days of looting following the imprisonment of former South African President Jacob Zuma, in Durban, July 17, 2021.

Waste disposal is a major concern during violent protests. Angry protesters vandalize and block streets in communities and campuses. Protesters usually litter the streets with trash. This waste ends up blocking storm drains which causes floods on rainy days. The magnitude of pollution during a violent protest is worrisome. Most streets often remain filthy for weeks, polluting the air quality in such communities.



**Figure 7.** Supporters of Jacob Zuma block the freeway with burning tyres during a protest in Peacevale, South Africa (9 July 2021).

From the phenomena described above, the researcher intends to reveal how violent protests in South Africa, caused by the lack of service delivery in communities and the frustration of citizens with the government's unfulfilled promises. So researcher conducted a study entitled "Ramifications Of Violent Protest On The Environment"

**METHODS**

This paper is based on the interpretivism paradigm. The interpretive paradigm seeks to understand the subjective dimension of human experience. Creswell and Poth (2017) and Cohen et al. (2018) intimated that interpretive researchers strive to uncover respondents' perspectives, views, opinions, understandings, and meanings of social phenomena. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) and Creswell (2017) argue that this paradigm requires the researcher to rely on the respondent's perspective on the situation under investigation. Respondents' lived experiences are the major source of information for the researcher (Damoah, 2021). This paradigm assisted the researcher in perusing through occurrences of violent protest, which has exacerbated the environmental crisis in communities. The paper then relied on secondary data from multiple sources to navigate through the lived experiences of respondents, which have transcended into violent protests. These violent protests are perpetrated by aggrieved members of the communities and students because of frustrations that have dire consequences for the ecosystems. Philosophical assumptions of interpretivism could be linked to the frustration-aggression theory.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

To handle protests, local government and police personnel need more crowd control training. Considering this, clashes between protestors and the police regularly erupt in violence, looting, stone-throwing, tire-burning, tear gas deployment, and stun grenades. Police brutality also endangers the infrastructure, including buildings, streets, clinics, schools, and other public

services. Police should be measured in the handling of protesters. Hardhandedness often leads to more destructive actions from the protesters, affecting environmental health.

Service delivery protest is a sign of socio-political instability. It would be reasonable to conclude that if this scenario persists for a long time, it may spread and grow into a full-fledged uprising. Because of this, even while the police must order and execute the law, the problem cannot be solved by policing alone but by swiftly addressing the socioeconomic issues prevalent in many neighborhoods. Interventions must be made quickly to address the issues that prevent towns from operating and providing services effectively. Politicians must be more accountable for their commitments and the hopes they raise, particularly those confident they will be assigned to public offices following elections.

There are several things that the government ought to undertake to combat the consequences of socioeconomic problems. Current problems in townships include unemployment and a need for more service delivery. Rural areas lack sanitary facilities and water, much as townships. Poor conditions exist in clinics and schools. Because of these considerations, locals strike and wreck the infrastructure and amenities already in place. These actions unavoidably have dire consequences on environmental health.

## CONCLUSION

Environmental education should be intensified in communities, institutions, local radios, and social media platforms. Community members and students should be well informed about the rippling effect of violent protests on the environment. Universities should support campus environmental activism to educate students on the impact of burning tyres and littering during protests. Ward councilors should play a central role in educating community members on the devastating effect of violent protests on the environment. The councilors should create appropriate communication channels for citizens to voice their grievances without resorting to violence and aggression, which have dire consequences for the environment.

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