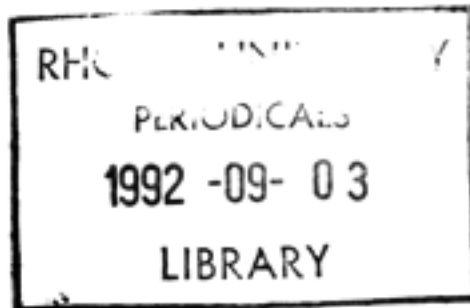




SOUTH AFRICAN
INSTITUTE OF
RACE RELATIONS



FAST FACTS

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PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE

Widely conflicting claims are made about political violence in South Africa.

Some political observers, in monitoring groups and elsewhere, have thus claimed that political violence is controlled and manipulated by the government, and that it is increased or decreased to coincide with major political events. Such claims have been based only on the number of fatalities recorded. The number of incidents of violence, fatal and non-fatal, however, showed a steady increase throughout last year.

Some incidents result in large loss of life, counter attack, etc. These may be influenced by local factors, such as past conflict in the area, competition for resources, or political or ethnic rivalry and are not necessarily influenced or caused by immediate national political events.

The Institute analysed 2 030 incidents of violence which occurred countrywide from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 1991.

Forty eight percent of all incidents occurred in the Transvaal, 29% in Natal, 19% in the Cape, and 4% in the OFS.

The analysis divided the year into three equal periods of four months each in order to identify various trends in violence. Some 29% of incidents occurred in the first period (January to April), 32% in the second (May to August), and 39% in the final period (September to December).

Firearms were used in 27,9% of incidents during the first period, rising to 31,9% of incidents in the

second period and then a very large 46,7% in the last period. In all periods, the use of firearms constituted the largest single method of attack.

The use of incendiary methods (including arson, petrol bombs, explosives and hand grenades) was recorded as 22,2% in the first period, rising to 27,6% in the second but dropping to 16% in the last third of the year.

The use of sharp pointed weapons (including traditional weapons, sharpened sticks, axes and pangas) showed a steady decline throughout the year. Such weapons were used in 17,6% of incidents during the first period, 13,7% in the second period, and in 11% of incidents during the last period.

Assaults with blunt instruments (including common assault, people being thrown off trains and the use of knobkerries) occurred in 5% of incidents in the first period, 2,6% of incidents during the second period and 5% of incidents during the last period.

Necklacing and the burning of people accounted for 3,5% of all incidents in the first period, 2,1% in the second period, and declined to 0,7% in the final period.

The reports of incidents analysed

were obtained from the media, covering the country's linguistic and geographic spectrum, reports of monitoring groups, and the daily unrest reports of the South African Police.

Strict criteria were used to identify aggressors and victims.

For example, where the history of political conflict in a given area would lead one to assume that supporters of certain organisations had been involved in reported clashes, this was not presumed unless specifically verifiable.

Concerning aggressors and agents of attack, the Institute was unable to identify these in 87% of cases.

When looking at victims and targets of attack, the highest category of these were unknown or unidentified (32,7% of all incidents). Attacks on private dwellings formed the highest identifiable category, occurring in 15,4% of incidents. The police came under attack in 14,5% of incidents.

Attacks on various types of commuters and modes of transport varied throughout the year. Thus, attacks on taxis and taxi passengers accounted for 1,6% of incidents in the first period, 2,9% in the second period, and 8,5% in the third period. Attacks on trains and train commuters accounted for 1,7% of incidents in the first period, and 1,2% of incidents in the second period but then rose sharply to account for 7,7% of incidents in the third period.

- Paul Pereira
- Heather Frielinghaus

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