

## AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES AND IMPACT OF SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS ON POLITICAL STABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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*Abstract: Service delivery protests in South African municipalities are common due to governance issues. The ongoing discussions around service delivery protests in South Africa are an indication of a much-needed holistic approach to addressing the needs of the people. The objective of this study is to explore the reasons behind and effects of service delivery protests on political stability with perspectives gained from the ideas of the social contract and relative deprivation. This study explored the individualized experiences, attitudes, and motives of persons engaging in service delivery protests using a qualitative research methodology based on interpretivism. A detailed knowledge of the complex dynamics underpinning these protests was revealed using in-depth interviews, content analysis, and participant observation. The research found that when promises of basic services and socioeconomic growth are not kept, there is a perceived breakdown of the social contract between residents and the government. Additionally, relative deprivation appeared as a major element influencing protest mobilization as people and communities perceived injustice and discontent when they contrasted their socioeconomic situation to others. Protests in the delivery of services have been found to have a variety of effects on political stability. Although they can spur government responsiveness and policy change, they also present stability hazards and the possibility of bloodshed. To reduce the likelihood of protests and support political stability. The study suggests a Cooperative government model to reduce protests and promote stability. This model focuses on protection, participation, and provision to ensure effective decision-making and service delivery that meets the people's needs.*

*Keywords: Service delivery protests, relative deprivation, social contract, service delivery, political stability*

### **Introduction**

Service delivery is important as it satisfies different human needs. In contrast, the South African government has been experiencing an increase in service delivery protests across local communities. These protests in the public service context have become synonymous with a variety of challenges such as a lack of basic services, poor infrastructure, lack of housing, corruption, inadequate job opportunities, allegations of nepotism, fraud against municipal officials, lack of accountability of local councillors, inequality, and a general feeling of alienation from the structures of democracy (Alexander 2010; Jobo 2014; Abraham 2017; Walbrugh 2021). In South Africa, local government is the closest sphere

to the people in which it is provisioned to meet the needs of the citizens. To achieve this the government committed to transforming public services. The White Paper on Local Government (Batho Pele) of 1998 outlines the necessary framework for the local government to sustain primary services to meet the communities' economic, social, and material needs, making it imperative for the local government to deliver on their set of objectives (Carrim 2010). This transformation involves ensuring that the local government provides a “democratic and accountable government to all communities, warranting the sustainable provision of services to communities while encouraging the involvement of communities in the matters of local government” (Akinboade, Mokoena, and Kinfack 2013). Given the history of the South African government which was plagued with divisions amongst the people (i.e., segregation), building on a democratic developmental government was imperative to eradicate past imbalances. In a study by Matebesi and Botes (2017) on service delivery protests between 2005 and 2015 in Port Elizabeth, they found that the most common reasons for service delivery protests are poor quality of basic services such as water and electricity provision and the shortage of housing and the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality is no exception. This is to note the development of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) developed around five key programme areas, which included satisfying basic needs; development of human resources; democratization of the state and society; and the expansion of the economy and implementation of the RDP (Republic of South Africa, 1994). Despite this development, the government still faced shortcomings in providing all with housing (Dunn 2017). In essence, change in most communities was slow, highlighting that the local government has been moving slowly to deliver services to communities. The current public service delivery protests indicate that the local government has only achieved moderate success in promoting the well-being of all citizens of the country. In South Africa, service delivery guides the state-society relationship in all aspects of democracy like responsiveness, participation, accountability, and transparency. This for scholars is what makes an iconic democratic model (Levy, Hirsch, Naidoo, and Nxele, 2021). The ongoing debate surrounding service delivery protests and political stability has attracted significant attention in recent years. Acar (2019) argues that effective governance in developing countries needs political stability. Jankielsohn (2012) suggests managing limited resources to ensure political order. Ndubai, Mbeche, and Pokhariyal (2017) argue that better governance leads to better service delivery, customer satisfaction, and performance, which in turn affects stability. This article adds to the existing literature by analyzing the psychology and sociology of service delivery protests, which are often driven by poverty, unemployment, and exclusion. Citizens' expectations of municipal managers are often not met, creating a gap between what they expect and what they receive. This study was conducted during a period of service delivery issues, causing citizens to doubt political leaders, municipal administration, and elections. This article explored the effect of service delivery protests on political stability. The government's failure to meet community needs has caused more protests.

### **Research Aim and Questions**

The research aimed to investigate the causes and impact of Service delivery protests on political stability with a perspective from the Social Contract and Relative Deprivation. To achieve this, the following questions were addressed:

What are the effects of service delivery protests on political stability?  
What are the factors influencing service delivery protests in local government and how can municipalities achieve it?

### **Materials and Materials**

This exploratory study focused on the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and its community in the Gauteng Province. Reiter (2017) argued that this design allows for further investigation of new questions or issues that arise during the study of service delivery protests in the CoJ. This design also allowed the researcher to actively participate in the process of exploring new explanations of a given reality from a different perspective. This study employed qualitative research, which is suitable for the empirical context. Dawson (2002) states that qualitative research explores experiences, attitudes, and behaviour, and uses interviews to collect data. Kothari (2004) states that qualitative research investigates why people like or dislike something. This paper sought to comprehend how people experience and perceive a phenomenon in their lives. This method attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the participants. This method enabled a thorough understanding of the participant's behaviour, particularly when facing grassroots issues. Thus, their behaviour was well-understood by using this method. To comprehend why residents act as they do (e.g., service delivery protests/ violent protests), this study sampled residents of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality. The sampling frame was comprised of people at the Metro Centre in Braamfontein and around the City of Johannesburg. These locations were chosen as they are key to the community's interaction with the municipality, and where demonstrations and memorandums are held. The study included a population of 25–60-year-olds, male and female, of various races, all full-time CoJ residents for accurate data. To ensure accuracy, the researcher recruited participants from the CoJ. Sources such as diaries, books, articles, speeches, archives, and media releases were consulted in addition to scientific papers such as published articles, conference papers and dissertations focusing on service delivery protests, challenges, and residents' satisfaction and perception. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six CoJ senior officials and four councillors to gain insight into service delivery protests from dissatisfied residents. Three JMPD officials and fourteen CoJ residents discussed service delivery protests and the challenges they face. Participant observations were used to collect data as no other method was available. To make sense of the emerging themes, a thematic analysis process was used to analyze the large amount of data. Additionally, the transcription of the interview audio was done by converting it into text for analysis.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### *Relative Deprivation and the Social Contract*

Relative Deprivation (RD) and Social Contract (SC) theories are central to this article as RD explains why social demonstrations occur, which are often due to unstable local administrations. Smith and Pettigrew (2015) define RD as "a judgement that one or one's ingroup is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent, which triggers feelings of anger, resentment, and entitlement." Townsend (1987) cited in Fu, Exeter, and Anderson (2015) defines RD as an "observable and demonstrable disadvantage relative to the local community or wider society/nation". This definition captures the variables of marginalization, inequality, and oppression. It also questions the government's role in

decision-making to influence deprivation, as RD is used to monitor and compare inequalities among small communities and individuals and allocate resources (Fu et al. 2015). The definition of Social Contract (SC) has changed over time, with "rights" as the common factor. Merriam-Webster defines SC as "an agreement between members of a society or between a community and its ruler that defines and limits the rights and duties of each". The OECD (2009, as quoted by Cloutier et al., 2021) defines a Social Contract (SC) as a "dynamic agreement between state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities". Cloutier et al. (2021) state that this concept includes citizen-state negotiation, social outcomes, and contract resilience. The definition implies that both sides bargain over negotiating positions and powers. Secondly, the definition outlines the agreement's duties and responsibilities. This includes a country's policies, programmes, and laws, which reflect the SC and how resources are distributed in society. Thirdly, the definition acknowledges that the agreement is not fixed and can be renegotiated (Cloutier et al. 2021). Masiya, Davids, and Mangai (2019) argue that RD is seen in communities with inadequate service delivery, leading to protests. Unequal service distribution causes dissatisfaction, while SC is implemented by municipal authorities to protect people's rights and resources (OECD 2008). In South Africa, SC is based on the government's democratic duty to provide citizens with services and citizens' participation in decision-making. The NDP (2012) states that SC was created to address the unequal state-society relationship in service provision and promote government accountability and transparency. SC aims to restore the state-society relationship, yet RD persists. Service delivery protests in the CoJ have increased since the 2000s, despite policies and rebuilding to address past inequalities. Service delivery is still inadequate, and protesters have given various reasons for their protests. Abraham (2017) noted that public involvement in government decision-making is necessary, as well as "poor communication, weak governance, corruption, nepotism, dissatisfaction with municipal services, poor infrastructure, and unfulfilled political promises". Thus, political stability is linked to proper service delivery governance, as demonstrations will not take place in the opposite setting. In urban areas like the CoJ, inequality, and RD are key to understanding why protests occur more than in rural, poorer areas. People will wait for services, but not if it appears others are getting them first. Marginalization and alienation in informal settlements, coupled with the desperate need for services, further fuel protests. Allan and Heese (2011) found that rumours of incompetence, corruption, or nepotism can spark violent protests.

#### *The role of Local Government in the delivery of services; A Legislative Frameworks Perspective*

The 1996 Constitution provides that local government bears the responsibility of providing essential services to its citizens, including but not limited to electricity, water, housing, and social security. Upholding principles of democratic and responsible governance, sustainable service provision, social and economic development, a secure environment, and community inclusion are paramount. Officials must be held accountable for delivering services equitably across all communities as service delivery is of utmost importance. as accentuated in section 152 of the Constitution. It is given that the local government: a) Provide a democratic and responsible local government to local communities b) Provide services sustainably c) Promote social economic development d) Promote a safe and healthy environment, and e) Encourage communities and organizational inclusion in

matters concerning the local government. The WPTPS, or "People First" in Sesotho, was introduced in 1997 to improve government service delivery and prevent social and economic failure. By adhering to its eight principles, local government can put communities first, consult with customers, set service standards, ensure equal access, provide courteous service, offer accurate information, increase transparency, provide redress, and deliver value for money. It was made clear in March 1998 that the government expects local government to provide basic services to citizens, as noted in the White Paper on Local Government. According to Kwangware (2008), the White Paper acknowledges the challenges faced by local government and highlights the need for rectification. Rabothata (2014) states that the Municipal Structures Act followed the White Paper, to regulate internal systems, structures, and office bearers of municipalities. The Act mandates municipalities to establish ward committees to enhance participation in local government democracy. Section 19(3) requires the municipal council to establish mechanisms for consultation with community members and organizations in performing their functions and powers. However, the local government faces challenges in fulfilling this mandate in cases where ward committees are unreliable and fail to fulfill their role. As a result, deliberations on inefficient and ineffective service delivery often lead to protests. The Municipal Systems Act (MSA) outlines how municipalities should provide services to their communities. This means that municipalities must ensure that specific levels of service are provided to the people in a particular community as stipulated in the MSA. To meet these needs, the municipality must work with external organizations to deliver said services. This involves entering into a Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) with relevant agencies (Ntliziywana 2017). This agreement must reflect the municipality's responsibility for providing proper service delivery to the community. External providers, such as utilities, agencies, and corporate entities, are engaged to provide services such as water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management.

### **Service delivery in local government municipalities**

#### *The status of service delivery in local government municipalities*

Despite the essential role of local government municipalities in providing citizens with basic services and enacting legislation, communities in South Africa are often disappointed with the state of service delivery. This is largely due to persistent socio-economic issues that continue to plague grassroots populations. To meet the pressing need for services, local government must prioritize efficient and effective service delivery. Unfortunately, the legacy of past struggles has cast a shadow over service delivery in South Africa, resulting in what is now referred to as historical burdens for public service organizations. This is evidenced by the numerous service delivery protests and complaints that have occurred in municipalities throughout the country. According to Naidoo (2017), it is concerning that the local government responsible for providing municipal services has witnessed such protests in recent years. The Public Servants Association (PSA) (2015) has found that service delivery protests are particularly common in metropolitan municipalities like Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, and Cape Town. Even though the provincial and national governments are well-resourced, vulnerable locations continue to struggle due to issues related to the effective delivery of services, administrative capacity, institutional performance, and successful execution of programs and policies (Koma 2010, cited by Dikotla, Mahlatji, and Makgahlela, 2014). Additionally, there are concerns that the

impending loss of managerial and financial control could lead to the collapse of service delivery mechanisms and structures in the future (Molinyane, 2012).

*The state of basic services in the city of Johannesburg municipality*

Access to essential services is vital for the well-being of communities. Housing, infrastructure, water and sanitation, electricity, and waste management are all crucial factors that impact the quality of life for individuals. The CoJ's Cogta Metro One Plan (2021) notes that the city's water infrastructure is responsible for supplying 1.6 billion liters of potable water daily through a network of 12,288km of water networks. Unfortunately, this infrastructure has deteriorated by nine percent between 2012 and 2019, leading to increased water leakages and blockages. Johannesburg Water is responsible for providing water, sewage, and sanitation services to communities to ensure cleanliness and health. However, residents have expressed concerns about insufficient water availability and high costs, as well as poor sanitation services that lead to illness and death. It's important to note that the Constitution affirms everyone's right to adequate food and water, and municipalities must fulfill these requirements. The CoJ has managed to increase services in the form of water tanks and chemical toilets and provide electricity to approximately 1.6 million households. However, around 133,540 households still lack electricity, with informal settlements and backyard shacks disproportionately impacted (Cogta 2020). Illegal connections, cable theft, and vandalism pose challenges to the city's energy infrastructure, making constant maintenance and upgrading necessary. Waste management also faces financial constraints that lead to transportation challenges, resulting in illegal dumping in rural and informal settlement areas. The city's housing crisis has resulted in informal settlements, overcrowded hostels, unregulated backyard leasing, inner-city overpopulation, and homelessness. Poor road conditions are another pressing issue, with almost 4,000km of roads requiring rehabilitation (CoJ IDP 2020/2021). Housing is one of the most significant problems for communities, with long waiting periods and poor-quality designs and materials leading to small and congested houses. Overall, these infrastructural challenges pose significant obstacles to improving the quality of life for residents.

**Effective service delivery and political stability in local government**

*The relationship between service delivery and political stability*

Political stability plays a crucial role in good governance, and leaders of developing countries should prioritize it to motivate the private sector and benefit their citizens. Creating job opportunities, reducing poverty, and improving welfare, and education can ensure stability while reducing the probability of violence. Azeng and Yogo (2013) found that youth unemployment causes instability, which is a growing concern in South Africa. Providing necessary services to poor communities is crucial to their standard of living, as they tend to participate in service delivery protests. When municipalities provide satisfactory services to the communities, they are less likely to participate in protests, reducing political tensions. Service delivery is challenging in difficult situations, but it is crucial for stabilization (DFID 2019). The legitimacy and trust of the government depend on the relationship between service delivery and the state. McLoughlin (2015) analyzed factors that affect this relationship, such as shifts in expectations, perceived impartiality and distributive justice, relational aspects of delivery, attribution, and sector characteristics.

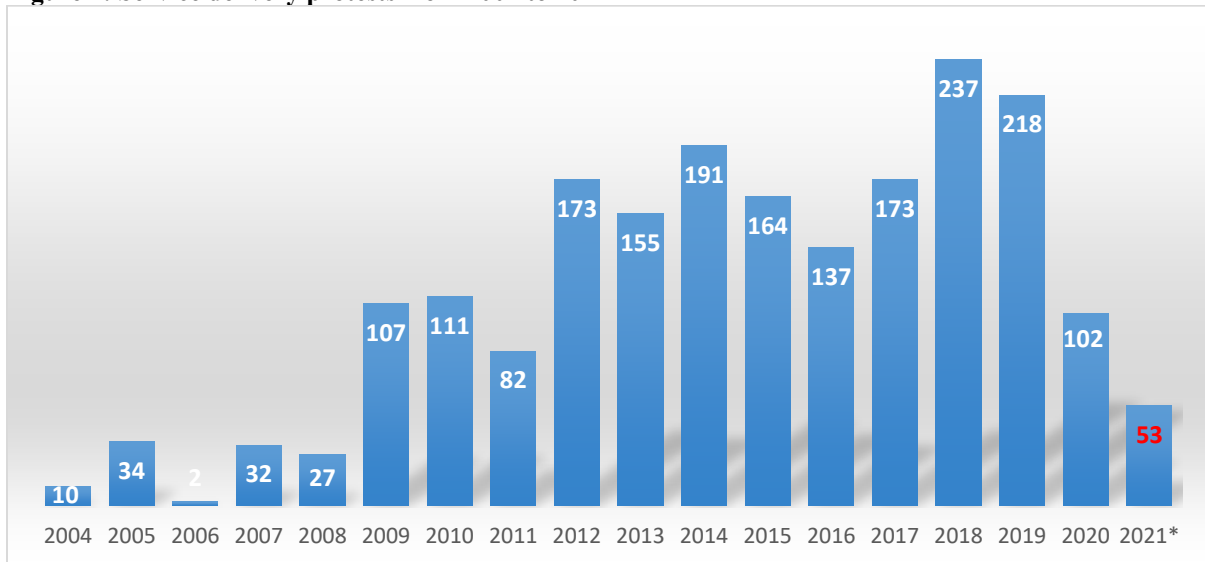
According to DFID (2019), it is the government's responsibility to understand the various forms of service provision, the political economy of service provision, the nature of violence, and the expectations of beneficiaries. Afrobarometer public opinion survey contends that citizens' satisfaction with services depends on the quality of experiences, such as availability of resources, waiting time, and capacity to access them, rather than the mere presence of state infrastructure. Quick upgrades of services in cities or communities can improve trust and support for the government, aligning people's expectations with the state's ability to provide stability. Equality in distributing services is crucial to building trust and belief in the state without creating tensions or inequalities. Policies should address social exclusion, inequality, and challenges that undermine other groups in society through proper service delivery. When it comes to providing services, the government needs to have a reciprocal relationship with its citizens. This means that the process of delivering services should involve a network between the government and its citizens, facilitated by dense social networks in municipalities (Pasquini and Shearing, 2014). Protesters have pointed out that they're not involved enough in decision-making processes, but if services are delivered effectively, they can help bring citizens and the government together in a productive way (McLoughlin, 2015).

### **Service delivery protests in local government municipalities**

#### *Service delivery protests in the South African local government*

Mass protests, demonstrations, and petitions are common characteristics of service delivery protests in South Africa, according to Sebugwawo (2011) as cited by Akinboade et al. (2013). These protests serve as a collective voice for ordinary citizens when the government fails to address community challenges (Akinboade, Mokwena, and Kinfack, 2013). However, these protests have the potential to turn into a revolution or a third force, leading to instability according to scholars such as Hough (2008) and Burger (2009). The people of South Africa had higher expectations from the government, especially after the 1994 campaign manifesto of the ANC, which promised policies and procedures to improve people's living standards and close the gap between the haves and have-nots in society (Jobo, 2014). Despite the implementation of GEAR and RDP, the government faced a great challenge in rectifying socio-economic imbalances and delivering services to historically excluded populations. While former President Thabo Mbeki claimed in 2007 that service delivery was ongoing, scholars such as Alexander (2010) found that service delivery protests began to grow across the country in 2004. According to Kotze and Taylor (2010), the ANC faced protest action due to a lack of service delivery and systematic corruption in local government. Since 2004, many communities have participated in protests, violent riots, and the destruction of underperforming local government councillors' schools, libraries, and houses (Kotze and Taylor, 2010). Service delivery protests emerged after the third democratic election in April 2004 due to the realization that the benefits of decentralization, developmental local government, and IDP had not been forthcoming as expected since their introduction to the Constitution (Mubangizi, 2022).

**Figure 1: Service delivery protests from 2004 to 2021\***



Source: Municipal IQ “Municipal Hotspots Monitor” 2021 (\*Jan and May for 2021)

Based on the information presented, service delivery protests have been a problem in local government since the mid-2000s. This is due to poor service delivery and governance in local government. These protests have spread to various provinces and municipalities. According to Cilliers and Aucoin (2016), service delivery protests in local government coincided with Thabo Mbeki's presidency in 1999. According to Lolwana (2016), the number of service delivery protests increases during election years, as the government fails to provide necessary services to the communities. Communities feel excluded from government processes due to corruption, nepotism, and an unresponsive government, leading to violent protests. Although South Africans have achieved political freedom after decades of apartheid, equal allocation of resources is still far away, as the apartheid regime left a legacy of inequality and lack of access to resources and services (Nnadozie, 2013). Wasserman, Chuma, and Bosch (2018) argue that protests underpin service delivery and should be seen as an expression of disenchantment with the existing democracy.

In essence, marginalized communities protest to have their voices heard, as they feel that the institutions have not assured them that they can influence policymaking (Wasserman et al. 2018). Affluent urban municipalities, which are considered progressive, have the highest rates of protests, accounting for half of the protests in the country (Lolwana, 2016). The high protest action in urban areas highlights the connection between poverty and wealth inequalities (Lolwana, 2016). Allan and Heese (2011) argue that urban areas have different demographics than those where poverty, inequality, and resource distribution are issues that propel communities to protest for services. Protests are more likely to increase during an election year, as was the case in 2021, especially in metro municipalities. This was exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdown, which intensified the issues of inequality in communities (Municipal IQ, 2021). Municipal IQ (2021) predicts that service delivery protests will continue or even increase in the future.

While Covid-19 accentuated inequality, the real issue is that communities still experience service delivery failures and political tensions. The violence that comes with these protests is harmful to municipalities and their communities. Local government is expected to



provide services to communities to combat the challenges they face. Gauteng is still the province most affected by service delivery protests, with Johannesburg experiencing the most protests in the province. In 2017, the province recorded more than a third of all protests in the country (Ndenz Babalo Eyewitness News, 3 April 2019).

*Service delivery protests in the city of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality*

Gauteng has historically been the center of service delivery protests, with the highest number of recorded protests between 2004 and 2018. In Johannesburg, service delivery protests have increased, and there are debates about communities' willingness to pay for services. A study by Maggot et al. (2022) titled "Energy Racism: The Electricity Crisis in South Africa" reveals that black communities are neglected by Eskom and the government in terms of service complaints, maintenance, and response to blackouts. This neglect has led to continued increases in electricity bills, load-shedding, load reduction, inequality, and exclusion in communities like Soweto. The study argues that the occurrence of service delivery protests is exacerbated by racial discrimination, as black communities do not receive the same attention as other communities. People in Soweto owe Eskom R20 billion, and some refuse to pay, claiming they cannot afford it due to unemployment. Many residents feel impoverished due to paying for electricity and dealing with load shedding. The culture of non-payment is not viable in the democratic era, and loss of public confidence in the government has contributed to non-payment. To address the issue, it is necessary to focus on the various aspects that contribute to the problem in communities and government. Lastly, service delivery demonstrations in the CoJ have been on the rise, particularly for energy, water, housing, and decent roads. Social cohesion and participation in these communities are critical, given the inequities and imbalances caused by apartheid spatial design.

**Causes and impact of service delivery protests in local government**

*Relative deprivation reasons and factors influencing service delivery protests.*

According to scholars, various factors contribute to frustration and drive individuals to protest. While issues with service delivery are a primary driver of protests, other factors also play a role in shaping the mental state of protesters and the protests themselves. Poverty, inequality, unemployment, and the violent relationship between the state and citizens are considered root causes of collective violence (Bandieria and Higson-Smith 2011, cited in Mchunu 2012). However, these factors are structural and cannot be eliminated quickly. Medium-term solutions are necessary to address poor service delivery, political conflict, political entrepreneurship, and poor local governance. These factors are perceived by communities as examples of failing municipalities and can also fuel protests. The role of the youth, police, criminals, and political opportunists may not be direct influences but can act as accelerators of protests. Decelerators such as the police and politicians are responsible for maintaining order and law and preventing protests from turning violent. Kruidenier (2015 cited in Tsako 2020) suggests that prolonged periods of unemployment, income inequality, weak law enforcement, gender inequality, alcohol abuse, patriarchal factors of masculinity, and poor parenting are among the factors that contribute to violence. Municipalities must understand their role in solving these

underlying issues and adopt the right procedures to prevent future protests. Temporary measures are not enough, and addressing the root cause is crucial.

*Social contract theory reasons and factors influencing service delivery protests.*

In an ideal society, the government is expected to provide essential services based on the core values established by the SC, which follow the Batho Pele principles. When these services are not provided evenly, protests and conflicts arise in society, especially in predominantly black communities, where the relationship between the government and its citizens is crucial for transformation and overcoming past experiences of colonialism. During the 1994 elections, the South African government promised citizens guaranteed freedoms, including access to housing, education, health, water, sanitation, and land through the RDP. However, the lack of access to these essential services has caused citizens to question the government's commitment to delivering on its promises. Service delivery protests have increased in municipalities and have turned violent, holding the government accountable for its failures. The post-apartheid government has faced challenges in providing access to quality education, water, sanitation, and land. Spatial inequality has also led to historically advantaged white communities receiving better services than poorer communities (Ndinga-Kang, Van der Merwe and Hartford 2020). The SC aims to fulfill the promises made in the agreement and ensure that citizens' rights are realized. However, when citizens feel sidelined due to unfulfilled promises, protests arise, questioning the government's legitimacy and authority. The pressures placed on the SC have resulted in more problems. The #FeesMustFall protest is an example of young people's reaction to financial exclusion and inequality in job opportunities. Protests highlight the government's capacity and willingness to deliver on its citizens' expectations and question the "tacit and common agreements" based on the legitimacy and authority of the government.

## **Main findings**

*The cause and impact of service delivery protests*

The study revealed that the slow pace of service delivery in communities is the primary cause of service delivery protests. As Kotze and Taylor (2010) noted, service delivery protests have been a challenge for the ANC since the democratic dispensation due to the lack of services in communities. The slow pace of service delivery by the municipality causes frustration and anger in communities, leading to violent protests to voice their needs and dissatisfaction. As Allen et al. (2011) pointed out, the influx of migration in urban areas, such as CoJ, creates spaces for frustration because the increasing numbers of informal settlements, poverty, and marginalization contribute to a lack of access to services and an increase in collective action. Research indicates that the violent unrest in CoJ is due to frustration with the government's failure to deliver free basic services as promised, which has led to inequality between rich and poor communities, with the latter suffering from high unemployment rates and limited access to services. The Davies J-Curve and Gurr's value expectations and value capabilities theories suggest that citizens have long been waiting for promised services from the government, and the failure to deliver has led to violent protests in CoJ and other communities since 2004. Respondents have cited the political environment in CoJ as a major contributor to protests, due to power struggles, infighting, and coalitions. The study also found that intergovernmental relations in the

municipality are low, leading to a backlog of petitions and grievances not being addressed, and increasing the number of dissatisfied communities. Observations indicate that the backlog of petitions in the municipality dates to 2009 and that the communities have registered them, but they have not been attended to through inter-departmental coordination. According to the study, communities' resort to violent protests as a means of expressing their grievances due to the lack of response from the municipality and councillors. Organizations like the Soweto Parliament and other CBOs in the CoJ have emerged to address the needs of communities. However, the CoJ's failure to build relationships with such organizations and understand the needs and expectations of communities often leads to collective violence in the city. The lack of participatory democracy in the municipality prevents residents from engaging with politicians, leading to violent protests initiated by the police. To promote political stability, the CoJ needs to empower community members to be agents of change in their communities. Failing to address these issues undermines the rights of residents and exacerbates unemployment, poverty, and inequality. According to Hough (2008), there are two perspectives on violent unrest. The first sees it as a problem that could potentially lead to a revolution, while the second relates it to immediate issues such as unfulfilled promises, growing inequality, deteriorating public services, and crime. Research indicates that the violent unrest in CoJ is due to frustration with the government's failure to deliver free basic services as promised, which has led to inequality between rich and poor communities, with the latter suffering from high unemployment rates and limited access to services. The Davies J-Curve and Gurr's value expectations and value capabilities theories suggest that citizens have long been waiting for promised services from the government, and the failure to deliver has led to violent protests in CoJ and other communities since 2004. According to Hough (2008), there are two perspectives on violent unrest. The first sees it as a problem that could potentially lead to a revolution, while the second relates it to immediate issues such as unfulfilled promises, growing inequality, deteriorating public services, and crime. Research indicates that the violent unrest in CoJ is due to frustration with the government's failure to deliver free basic services as promised, which has led to inequality between rich and poor communities, with the latter suffering from high unemployment rates and limited access to services. The Davies J-Curve and Gurr's value expectations and value capabilities theories suggest that citizens have long been waiting for promised services from the government, and the failure to deliver has led to violent protests in CoJ and other communities since 2004.

#### *The state of service delivery in the municipality*

The quality-of-service delivery in the City of Johannesburg is closely tied to the effective functioning of municipal institutions, with good governance and clean audits being essential. According to one respondent, who sounded frustrated, service delivery is below par. They highlighted issues with water, potholes, electricity, and other services that residents require from the municipality but are not receiving. Another respondent suggested that corruption and theft are responsible for delayed service delivery. The authorities maintain that they are committed to meeting people's needs and providing them with proper services. However, they acknowledge that there is dissatisfaction among the people, and they need to improve the quality of services they deliver. According to the Constitution, municipalities are obligated to provide essential services, which include

sanitation, water, electricity, and infrastructure. The city has also managed to deliver water to most households, but they plan to invest around R2.8 billion in upgrading water services infrastructure in the coming years. The city has recognized the electricity crisis and is working to stabilize the situation through the Members of the Mayoral Committee's sustainable energy plan. The plan involves key stakeholders and partners with independent power producers to reduce the city's dependence on Eskom. One major challenge has been road maintenance, with over 20,000 potholes reported to the JRA in 2022. The CoJ has launched initiatives to restore and preserve the city's infrastructure, bringing together multiple agencies and groups to fix potholes, storm drains, road markings, and other issues. However, overall, the city's service delivery remains inadequate, with issues such as illegal land occupation, illegal connections, population growth, and a backlog of housing and services, including water, sanitation, electricity, and refuse removal. The CoJ needs to continue to work towards providing quality services to meet the needs of all its residents.

#### *The social contract and relative deprivation*

The study revealed that the SC has been weakened due to the increasing number of protests, particularly in the CoJ. These protests demonstrate the imbalance in the relationship between the state and society. All participants agreed that the SC in the municipality is weak, as evidenced by the statistics on service delivery protests. According to the participants, violent protests indicate a breakdown in the relationship between the municipality and the community. Most participants felt that the SC had been broken before the ANC political settlement could be reached. They argue that while the ANC has had successes in South Africa, the challenges that the SC settlement was designed to address have not produced the desired results. The OECD (2008) states that the SC protects human rights through met expectations, government capacity to provide services, political will to allocate state resources to the people, and political processes to ensure effective service delivery. In South Africa, the incompetence of the public service and the lack of provision of services to disadvantaged residents have weakened the SC. As a result, service delivery protests in the municipality have exposed the loss of trust and relationships that lead to protests, leaving the government vulnerable. The findings of this article align with Nleya's (2011) findings that RD exists in underdeveloped areas of CoJ with informal settlements, high poverty levels, unemployment, inequality, and limited access to economic opportunities, especially in communities like Soweto where the spatial planning of apartheid continues to affect the state of communities today.

#### *Service delivery (protests) and political stability*

The impact of service delivery protests on political stability has been revealed through various factors. Firstly, politicians have used the protests to gain support for their parties during elections, which often leads to unfulfilled promises and loss of trust in the government. Secondly, the violence and destruction caused by these protests hurt economic activities and political alignment. Thirdly, the lack of service delivery has resulted in a loss of legitimacy of the current political regime and a decrease in trust in the democratic process. Overall, the causes of political instability include the government's incompetency, corruption, mismanagement, unemployment, poverty, and lack of transparency. The study found that the effectiveness of service delivery is crucial to maintaining political stability. The relationship between service delivery and political stability is dependent on political,

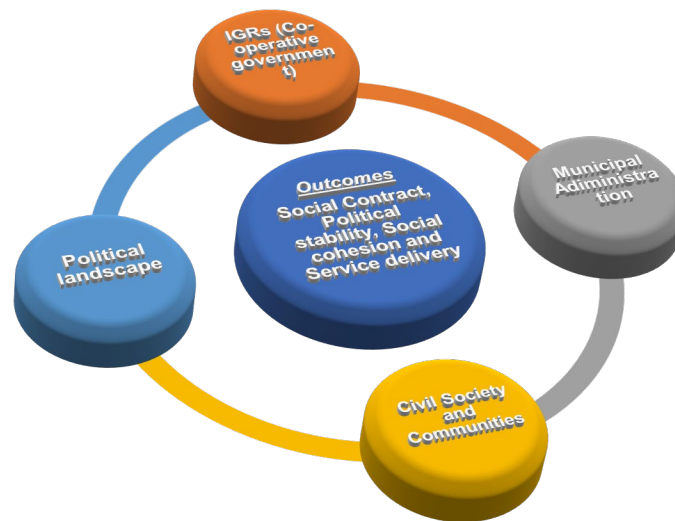
administrative, and legal accountability. Political accountability requires elected officials to fulfill their promises and be accountable to their voters, the rule of law, and the Constitution. Administrative accountability involves adhering to duties and functions in municipalities and passing relevant information to stakeholders. Legal accountability refers to the actions and decisions of the state. When the government fails to fulfill its mandate of service delivery, it must be held accountable and provide answers to the people. In summary, the study concluded that service delivery and political stability are interconnected, and this connection is based on accountability in government. A strong political authority that reassures its environment will eliminate uncertainties for the future, and the promise and adherence to service provision stand out as key factors in the relationship between the people and government.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

It is crucial to offer affordable housing and electricity to residents to elevate their living standards and lessen social exclusion. According to Alexander (2010), the protests occurring in South African local governments have been referred to as "the rebellion of the poor". To prevent these protests from escalating, the municipality and relevant authorities need to understand their causes and address the underlying issues beforehand. It is essential to have policies that focus on the needs of the poor and enable their participation. The SC should be based on the expectations of both society and the government to avoid collective protests and ensure promises such as job creation, education, and improved living standards are met. The problem of corruption and nepotism in public service is affecting the competence of municipalities. It is important to practice good governance in local government, including the deployment policy, which has resulted in incompetent, unskilled, and self-serving officials. To address these challenges, organizations such as the Department of Public Service and Administration and SALGA should assess the tendering systems in municipalities to detect corruption and nepotism. The issues found in informal settlements should be addressed during the election period and taken into consideration to reduce disparities in communities. To address the limited knowledge of consumer public service provision, it is recommended that WCs, CBOs, and other stakeholders facilitate civic education. With regards to question a) What are the effects of service delivery protests on political stability, Protests in the delivery of services have been found to have a variety of effects on political stability. Although they can bring government responsiveness and policy change, they also present stability problems and the possibility of bloodshed. To reduce the likelihood of protests and support political stability b) What are the factors influencing service delivery protests in local government and how can municipalities achieve it?, when promises of basic services and socioeconomic growth are not kept, there is a perceived breakdown of the social contract between residents and the government. Additionally, relative deprivation appeared as a major element influencing protest mobilization as people and communities perceived injustice and discontent when they contrasted their socioeconomic situation to others. This study conducted within the context of RD and SC aimed to analyze the reasons behind protests and their impact. The research unveiled two major challenges faced by the CoJ - lack of responsiveness and sociopolitical instability due to unstable administrations and unrecognized relationships among stakeholders. The occurrence of service delivery protests, if not addressed promptly, can lead to more political conflicts and instability. The study suggests a holistic approach where

various units and sectors of the government operate with mutual trust, transparency, and institutional harmony to solve this issue. The study also highlights the importance of state-society relationships, which involve participation, provision of services, and protection of people's rights. CoJ, as a case study, is crucial in understanding the state-society relationship in South Africa. Based on the findings, the study recommends a model to address the issues identified.

**Figure: Social Contract Relationship Model**



Source: Author (2023)

This study proposes a model of Cooperative government that prioritizes protection, participation, and provision. The aim is to ensure effective decision-making and service delivery across all government levels, focusing on meeting the people's needs. The model involves the government, the political landscape, and civil society working together to manage the municipality's performance. Conflict can be avoided when there is collaboration and participation, which address people's needs. Intergovernmental relations facilitate discussions and identify needs to meet requirements. The political environment allows for involvement, inclusion, and awareness-raising, particularly in marginalized populations. Civil society is responsible for mobilizing and resolving common concerns. The local administration, in collaboration with IGRs, must ensure clear responsibilities and functions in the municipality to maintain stability and expand state capacity. Co-operative government represents the values of the government and requires a partnership among the three spheres of government. The lack of recognition of people's needs results in instability, incompetence, and substandard public services. This has led to increased service delivery protests, conflict, and a loss of faith in the government's ability to deliver services. The danger to political stability and legitimacy in local government is based on the failure to realize people's needs. Establishing a social compact based on trust and compliance

requires a link between the political landscape, administration, and civil society. Councillors, WCs, municipal authorities, and communities are all part of this cycle.

### *Study Limitations*

The ongoing service delivery protests in local government have made it impossible to be engaged through the cycle of events in the municipality in which they turn violent. Due to the qualitative sampling methodology and geographical area of the CoJ, the study chose a small sample of participants at the CoJ and at the events of protests from various regions. To obtain the views and opinions of residents on the effects of service delivery protests on political stability in the CoJ, a sample frame of 14 community members was consulted. Then, the sampling does not generalize to all parts of the CoJ but as a case study, it provides a reference to the CoJ's critical issues of service delivery and protests. The results of this study are distinctive to the CoJ, in any case, the recommendations can be connected for other municipalities as service delivery challenges are experienced by the larger part of local government municipalities.

### *Prospects for further research*

This study could further be advanced and extended to provide a detailed exploration and investigation in which the following area can be explored: The importance of IGRs in facilitating an SC for improved service delivery in local government. The nature of the research advance would provide a better assessment of the SC in government to address service delivery challenges that result in protests in local municipalities through a lens of Co-operative government.

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