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Deprivation, Delivery and Union Mobilisation: The Case of the Congress of South African Trade Unions

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ABSTRACT

This article is a study of union effectiveness in an emerging market context. Mobilisation theory suggests that trade union power is based on rank-and-file notions of relative deprivation. Based on a survey of membership perceptions, we found that many of the concerns of COSATU's rank and file mirror those of the unemployed and the otherwise socially excluded. At the same time, those members who feel such concerns are also those who more frequently engage in strike action. In turn, this implies that unions are likely to be at the forefront of any new round of challenges to the status quo. However, the apparent durability of the present dominant partyism means that such challenges are likely to again take the form of struggles within the ANC Alliance, rather than through the development of an alternative political movement.

INTRODUCTION

The unseating of Thabo Mbeki as ANC (African National Congress) leader in December 2007 underscored the nature of tensions within South Africa's ruling ANC Alliance (a political alliance that unites the ANC political party, the Congress of South African Trade Unions

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and the South African Communist Party) and the uneven nature of South Africa's economic performance since the democratic transition (Gumede, 2008). More specifically, it highlighted the continued clout of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), who were instrumental in his downfall. Whilst the economy has enjoyed solid growth throughout the 2000s, this has been at the expense of jobs (Barchiesi and Kenny, 2002; von Holdt, 2005); moreover, the principal beneficiaries of the boom have been a relatively small elite, with little material improvement in the quality of life of large numbers of the poor (Southall, 2007). The succession struggle has also revealed the extent to which tensions surrounding persistent poverty and worsening social inequality have been played out within the ruling Alliance, rather than through the emergence of new political alternatives; whilst independent grassroots community organisations critical of the government's performance proliferated in the early 2000s, in more recent years they have battled to make much headway and many are fragmented and divided (Buhlungu and Atkinson, 2007).

Central to the opposition to Mbeki's continued tenure as ANC leader has been the Congress of South African Trade Unions. Yet, how effective are the unions? Mobilisation theory views union effectiveness as a product of rank-and-file notions of relative deprivation and the extent to which they blame the status quo for their condition (Kelly, 1998). Relative deprivation can be simply defined as the gap between an individual's – or group's – present position and what they feel is their due and is attainable (Davies, 1978). This article explores COSATU members' perceptions regarding the ANC's performance, how these concerns centre on particular aspects of service delivery, and whether this is related to ongoing high levels of participation and mobilisation in the labour movement. Such linkages may affect both COSATU's effectiveness and its future strategy.

THE ANC, NEO-LIBERALISM AND DELIVERY

In order to understand the nature and extent of relative deprivation, it is necessary to provide an overview of the nature of the South African context, and how this has made for a persistent aspirations gap. In a 1980s study, Saul and Gelb pointed to a double crisis of capital accumulation: persistent recession and the thwarted lives

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(both in terms of a lack of social mobility and general impoverishment) of the masses, challenging political stability (Saul and Gelb, 1981; see also Freund, 2007). The gradual relaxation of racial divisions of labour at the workplace opened the prospects for change, but continued racism at the wider societal level and a general economic decline prevented social progression for many. Whilst democratisation in 1994 led to a resumption of economic growth, with the latter reaching some 6 per cent by the close of 2006, social inequality has worsened (Freund, 2007). As Kingdon and Knight (2007) note, the government has tended to follow a neo-liberal agenda; owing to the nature of South Africa's transition and external economic pressures it has had little political and economic room for manoeuvre. Whilst the growth outcomes have been generally successful, the labour market outcomes have not been so (Kingdon and Knight, 2007). Microservice delivery in terms of social expenditure has similarly been disappointing (Ajam and Aron, 2007). There has been a dearth of management capacity for delivery, and mediocre improvement in the quality and scope of delivery, against a backdrop of persistent poverty and inequality. Whilst the number of households in absolute poverty fell from 4.1 million (out of a total 11.2 million) to 3.6 million between 1990 and 2003, it is worth noting that according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index, South Africa's global ranking fell from 85 (out of 174 countries) to 120 (out of 177 countries) in the same time period (Southall, 2007).

As Freund (2007) notes, state policies have not followed the role of a developmental state; rather, the state has done much to create a class of closely aligned black capitalists. On the one hand, the radical and grassroots tradition of the liberation movement makes mass poverty difficult to ignore (Freund, 2007). On the other hand, the government has shown a continued preference towards promoting shareholder value rather than broader social inclusion.

Although the government has implemented a broad policy for Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), critics have charged that this has helped to legitimise the neo-liberal order: job creation remains low and up-skilling has reduced the number of unskilled jobs (Ponte et al., 2007). Hence, in 2004, 39 per cent of South Africans, but 74 per cent of blacks, earned less than R2,500 per month (UK£140; €154)

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(Ponte et al., 2007). The development of 'Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment' (involving firms working towards affirmative action targets and the involvement of small enterprises) has done little to challenge this (Freund, 2007). Whilst such policy interventions and the general climate of economic growth may have opened the prospect for progress, general improvements in material conditions have been very uneven.

The early 2000s saw a proliferation of new social and community movements of the poor, putting pressure on the ANC to deliver (Naidoo, 2007). Poor communities mounted protests around issues such as the payment of market-driven prices for social services, drawing on the culture of payments boycotts under apartheid (Naidoo, 2007). These movements, acting independently of the COSATU unions or the ANC Alliance generally, aimed at putting pressure on the latter to serve its base better (Naidoo, 2007; Desai, 2002). On the one hand, the COSATU federation was particularly vulnerable to pressure to more openly challenge the status quo (Naidoo, 2007). On the other hand, the new independent grassroots movements failed to make much headway, with the ANC continuing to dominate electoral politics (Southall, 2007). However, revolts by ANC branches in support of preferred local candidates in the 2006 local government elections revealed divisions in the ANC between the centre and the rank and file. A plethora of breakaway splinter unions revealed the growing rank-and-file dissatisfaction with leadership that appeared closer to the political elite than the rank-and-file concerns of workers. The new leader of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, has appealed to African values and has positioned himself 'as the candidate who would return the ANC to the people' (Southall, 2007: 15). COSATU used its March 2005 conference to provide a platform for Zuma to launch his fight-back campaign against President Mbeki.

Zuma was adopted as COSATU's preferred candidate for the December 2007 ANC leadership elections, both on account of his not being directly associated with neo-liberal policies and given Mbeki's antagonism toward him (Buhlungu and Atkinson, 2007). Zuma unseated Mbeki at the ANC's 2007 conference, becoming ANC leader and being named as the ANC's presidential candidate in the 2009 elections, which the ANC won despite realignments among opposition parties. Thus issues of deprivation have been influential in

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determining the election of political leaders. In order to mobilise members effectively, and to recruit additional members, the unions must, of necessity, centre on issues of deprivation. This article evaluates the specific nature of rank-and-file demands, and the relationship between these and union power. Based on a survey of members of South Africa's largest federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, we explore workers' perceptions of improvements in material conditions in the post-apartheid era, and test the relationship between dissatisfaction with material and social conditions and participation in union affairs.

SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS: MOBILISATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Up until the 1970s, attempts made to organise black workers, from the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of the 1920s, to the South African Congress of Trade Unions in the 1950s, were all defeated due to internal weaknesses and hard-line action by government and employers. A new era of unionisation began in the early 1970s as a result of the activities of a small number of former union activists, academics and students (Friedman, 1987; Maree, 1987). Central to these efforts was the placing of a strong emphasis on building shopfloor organisations (Maree, 1986). This, and a desire to avoid state repression, resulted in most of the new 'independent' unions initially shunning political alliances, or being involved in community struggles (Maree, 1986; Maree, 1987). In response, explicitly political unions, most notably the South African Allied Workers Union, emerged and made rapid gains; however, a higher political profile and fewer resources being devoted to building factory-level organisation made it vulnerable to state action (Roux, 1984). As the mass insurrection of the 1980s gained momentum, all of the independent unions were forced to take a more explicitly political stance (Friedman, 1987). In 1985, most of the independent unions banded together under the umbrella of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU, 1985). This was followed by a process of mergers under its 'one union one industry' policy. A final burst of state repression forced COSATU into the role of the principal internal opponent of the apartheid regime in the late 1980s. Wider social injustice, increasingly desperate state repression and the complicity

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of owners and managers in the shoring up of apartheid ensured the persistence of workplace militancy; in the closing years of apartheid the union movement played a central role in forcing political change through both workplace and community struggles (Baskin, 1991).

South Africa's first-ever democratic elections were held in 1994, with the previously outlawed African National Congress (ANC) winning a clear majority. In the run-up to the elections, COSATU had entered into a formal alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party, giving the federation an unprecedented level of political influence. On the one hand, the Alliance has failed to prevent the ANC's conversion to neo-liberal macroeconomic policies; unions have instead been weakened by large-scale job losses (Barchiesi and Kenny, 2002; Makgetla and Seidman, 2005). Between 1999 and 2009, union membership had fallen from around 45 per cent to 25 per cent of total employment, with total membership figures for COSATU falling to around 1.9 million (Cohen, 2009). On the other hand, the promulgation and gradual expansion of a highly progressive body of labour legislation has guaranteed a range of key organisational rights. Moreover, the ANC has deferred many of its most ambitious privatisation plans, at least partially in response to pressure by its Alliance partners, but also in response to union activity (von Holdt, 2005). Democratisation greatly facilitated union organisational drives in the public sector, more than offsetting membership losses as a result of large-scale redundancies in some areas of the private sector.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that many injustices have continued. The majority of South Africans remain impoverished. In 2009 the unemployment level for the white population group was 4.6 per cent, compared to 27.9 per cent for black Africans (Statistics South Africa, 2009); and although there has been additional spending on health and education, services are often inferior in rural areas (Seekings, 2007). Moreover, the economy remains dominated by the capital-intensive and predominantly white-owned mining and manufacturing sectors. Hence, whilst the injustices of statutory racial segregation have ended, South Africa remains an unequal society. These persistent injustices could form a durable basis for mobilisation, either through continued active participation in union structures, providing for a virtuous circle of participation, or through

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mobilisation and struggle, and the driving of progressive alternatives (Wood and Psoulis, 2001).

MOBILISATION THEORY: INJUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY

Mobilisation theory holds that injustice represents the core organising principle, ensuring that unions attract and retain committed and active members (Johnson and Jarley, 2004; Kelly, 1998). Whilst the causes of injustice may lie beyond the workplace, workers should place at least part of the blame for their misfortunes on the shoulders of management for the organisational momentum to be channelled into the labour movement (Kelly, 1998). Injustices should be morally indefensible (Johnson and Jarley, 2004) and change should seem possible. Hence, the participation of members in union affairs might be the result of perceived workplace injustices and rely on the assumption that unions have the potential to redress such unfairness (Johnson and Jarley, 2004). In post-transition South Africa, a key question is the extent to which union members constitute an 'aristocracy of labour' with concerns far removed from the genuinely poor, or whether they still identify with the interests of those working in the informal sector and the unemployed. Will unions increasingly seek to mobilise their members around issues such as job security and low wages or instead turn their attention to overall economic growth that may ignore the concerns of the oppressed?

In this paper, we test whether perceptions of a lack of improvement in workplace concerns such as wages coincides with a perceived lack of progress in the provision of social services at community level since the ending of apartheid. We then test whether those who are dissatisfied are more likely to be active in union affairs, through regular attendance at union meetings, removal of shop stewards, or engaging in strike action. Having sought to determine potential groupings/factors of response, we then compare these groupings with a range of independent demographic variables; of particular importance is whether there is any cleavage between the 'struggle' and post-apartheid generations, and whether historically marginalised groupings such as women are more or less likely to be discontented. Finally, we assess the propensity of categories of workers who are particularly dissatisfied to participate in union affairs and engage in collective action.

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METHOD

This paper draws on a nationwide survey of members of COSATU – South Africa's largest and most effective union federation – in 2004. Previous rounds of this survey were conducted in 1994 (see Ginsburg et al., 1995) and 1998 (see Wood and Psoulis, 2001). More details on the history and methods used in these surveys can be found in Buhlungu (2006). Support for the survey was obtained from the COSATU federation at national level.

All three surveys drew respondents from across the country and in 2004, 655 COSATU members were interviewed. Sectors included the public sector (35 per cent of the sample), mining (7.8 per cent), manufacturing (16.5 per cent), catering and retail (8.3 per cent), transport and communication (2.2 per cent), chemicals (1.7 per cent), clothing and textiles (13.3 per cent), food (4.4 per cent) and banking (0.5 per cent). Interviews were conducted at workplace level and area sampling was used. Five geographical regions were selected based on high levels of population and industry, and then individual unionised workplaces were randomly selected within these areas (see Wood and Psoulis, 2001; Buhlungu, 2006). The list of organisations, categorised according to sector, was compiled from directory information supplied by Telkom, the South African parastatal telecommunications utility. Organisations were randomly selected within each sector and contacted in order to check that their union was affiliated with COSATU. If not, then another randomly selected organisation was chosen. After this, access was achieved through employers and then workers were sampled proportional to workplace size, with almost all of those approached consenting to take part in the survey. The sampling strategy was thus multi-layered, as this was the most feasible option under the circumstances. The research study can also be described as a trend study (Babbie, 1995). A panel study was not possible due to the massive restructuring and job losses that have taken place in South Africa over recent years.

In order to analyse the data we used factor analysis, a basic technique for synthesising large amounts of data; if respondents respond in a similar way to a particular set of questions, this would suggest that the emerging factor taps a specific dimension of respondent attitudes (Bailey, 1987). It is unlikely that all items in a questionnaire will constitute a single unidimensional scale as respondents are likely

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to have similar attitudes regarding a particular set of issues and concerns, and others in other areas. It should be noted that factor analysis is an explanatory and descriptive technique, not an inferential one, and as such simply summarises what respondents felt in a particular area (Bailey, 1987). However, it was arguably the best method for understanding if and how members' opinions could be grouped together. The next stage involved regression analysis, in order to assess whether the groupings could be predicted by independent variables such as gender, language, educational level, job tenure and age.

FINDINGS

The first question that we addressed is union members' level of satisfaction with service delivery. Using a simple yes/no response, members were asked whether a range of services had improved since the 1998 elections. The results are shown in Table 1; more than one response was possible.

As can be seen, more than 80 per cent of respondents considered that services had improved in areas such as access to clean water, electricity and a telephone. These are basic social services where there has been concerted government attention, and where visible progress proved relatively easy in core urban areas. However, the figures are much lower in the area of wages and access to land, nutritional food, better health care, jobs and the provision of HIV/AIDS treatment, education and support. The phasing back of protective tariffs and direct industrial development incentives has meant that many firms have faced an acute crisis of competitiveness; this has precluded wage rises in many areas and, indeed, has resulted in large-scale job cutbacks. Whilst the performance of the South African economy has been robust in recent years – growth in 2005 reached an estimated 6 per cent – this has been without significant new job creation. Education and health care consume a relatively large proportion of the South African budget, but constrained by the agenda of international financial organisations such as the IMF, the government has little room for manoeuvre in these areas, short of mounting a full-on challenge to the global neo-liberal agenda, with far-reaching political and economic knock-on effects.

Factor analysis was next employed in order to examine whether there are groupings of factors, this time including other questions

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from the survey relating to internal democracy and industrial action. From Table 1, it appears that there are six principal component factors to emerge from the questions regarding delivery in the 2004 survey. The variables that correlate closest with the respective factors are highlighted in bold; a 0.5 (when rounded off) cut-off point was deployed, a commonly used standard (Morris et al., 2001).

Table 1 highlights six factors (or groupings of concerns). Factor 1 includes important issues such as health care, health and safety, a

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix

Improvements have taken place in the following areas since 1999	% of Respondents	Component					
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
Better housing	61	0.263	0.332	0.232	0.158	0.311	-0.259
Higher wages	37	0.272	0.116	0.423	0.196	0.366	-0.181
Access to land	58	0.320	0.252	0.178	0.143	0.377	-0.179
Access to clean water	87	0.124	**0.783**	0.066	0.039	0.086	-0.058
Access to electricity	87	0.140	**0.828**	0.065	0.020	0.080	-0.026
Access to a telephone	82	0.230	**0.726**	0.038	-0.071	-0.060	0.094
Better public transport	62	0.464	0.304	0.022	-0.012	-0.262	0.053
Enough nutritional food	54	**0.693**	0.067	0.157	-0.062	-0.134	-0.013
Access to better health care	58	**0.678**	0.147	0.131	0.011	0.015	-0.011
Access to education and training	68	**0.682**	0.154	0.128	0.003	0.185	0.002
A clean and healthy living and working environment	63	**0.639**	0.117	0.091	-0.007	0.172	-0.050
Jobs	17	0.225	-0.019	**0.724**	0.066	-0.027	-0.079
HIV/AIDS treatment, education and support	49	0.193	0.190	**0.620**	-0.184	0.042	0.161
Attendance at union meetings – once a month; less than once a month	82	-0.066	0.070	0.057	**0.753**	-0.020	0.078
Industrial action in the last five years	47	-0.180	0.036	0.356	0.052	-0.035	**0.679**
Shop stewards in the workplace?	98	0.021	-0.061	-0.071	**0.752**	-0.005	0.039
Shop steward removed by workers?	29	0.154	-0.022	-0.270	0.140	0.159	**0.680**
Election of shop stewards, by ballot/show of hands	50	0.061	0.004	0.053	0.130	**-0.807**	-0.210

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balanced diet, and education and training, while Factor 2 includes clean water, electricity and a telephone – all basic social services where the government has placed a strong emphasis on delivery since 1999. However, there have also been episodic pressures to marketise these services. Factor 3 concerns jobs and HIV/AIDS, both pertaining to employment contracts. Factor 4 concerns participation in union affairs: having workplace representatives in place and proclivity to attend union meetings. The latter would not be possible, of course, without representatives in the first place, whilst having a functional system of shopfloor representation would make participation in union affairs more attractive. Factor 5 relates to the election of shop stewards, while Factor 6 highlights the correlation between participation in industrial action and having ejected shop stewards from office (generally owing to being seen as too close to management) (Wood and Psoulis, 2001). Employment equity pressures have prompted many employers to advance shop stewards into positions in management; this has understandably created pressures regarding possible conflicts of interest; these issues are likely to come to the forefront in cases of industrial action, especially in the cases of wildcat unofficial strikes that have become more prominent in recent years (see also Wood and Dibben, 2008; Wood and Psoulis, 2001).

Table 1 reveals that satisfaction with the ANC government's performance in a range of areas – and a lack of improvement in job provision and HIV/AIDS treatment and education – does not seem to be correlated with a greater or lesser tendency to participate in union affairs or engage in industrial action. On the one hand, this suggests that the unions do not constitute a coalition of the new South Africa's discontents. This would reflect both a degree of satisfaction with the ANC's progress in delivering a range of social services in urban areas and, possibly, the extent to which there has been a reduction in perceived injustice at the workplace and community level. Whilst most black South Africans remain poor, there have been unprecedented opportunities for upward mobility in the workplace, albeit that this is mitigated by a far greater tendency by employers to make use of redundancies. However, the findings could also reflect perceptions that unions are ineffective in voicing and dealing with material concerns in a range of areas.

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At the same time, there does not seem to be evidence that union members are necessarily contented: most remained unhappy with wages and job provision, and a sizable minority was dissatisfied with the government's ability to deliver a number of important social services. However, this discontent does not seem to have translated into a greater willingness to actively participate in union life or collective action at the workplace. This could reflect the availability of a range of forums – community and civic groupings, and ad hoc service crisis committees – for alternative action at community level, and/or a pragmatic realisation as to what is immediately attainable.

The next stage of the analysis was to examine whether particular worker characteristics were predictors of (dis)satisfaction with service delivery or of engagement in trade unions through democratic means or industrial action. To do this, Table 2 shows the independent variables that were used.

Table 2: Independent Variables Used in Regression Analysis

Variable Name	Description
Gender	1 if male; 0 otherwise
Language	1 if Indo-European; 0 if indigenous (African)
Education	1 if basic education; 0 if not
Job tenure	1 if permanent; 0 if temporary
Age	1 if over 35 years old; 0 if otherwise

For many years, the persistence of patriarchal values amongst male workers and the tendency for men to dominate leadership positions has been an issue of concern to COSATU activists, while women tend to have participated less in union activities (Brookes et al., 2004; Wood and Dibben, 2008). As noted earlier, there persist great imbalances in income and access to employment along racial lines: blacks remain disproportionately poor and jobless. Hence, we look at the effects of a proxy, variable language (almost all Africans speak an indigenous language, whilst the white, coloured – mixed racial origin – and Indian communities almost all speak Indo-European languages), given that this was an item included within the questionnaire, rather than one that specifically asked for racial origin – a sensitive question given the forced classifications under apartheid.

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Given that the mode of COSATU members are now relatively well educated, it is further possible that the federation increasingly represents an 'aristocracy' of workers; hence, the question emerges as to whether less educated workers have different concerns and a more limited propensity to participate in union affairs. Again, workers in insecure contracts may have different interests to those in more secure jobs. Finally, age allows us to explore any cleavages between those who have spent a significant proportion of their working life under apartheid and those who have not.

Using regression analysis we firstly sought to assess the importance of each of the independent variables in predicting Factor 1, which included health care, health and safety, a balanced diet, and education and training. Using the enter method, we found that a significant model did not emerge ($F\ 5, 42 = 1.186$, $p > 0.05$, adjusted R square = 0.002): gender, age, job tenure, language and educational levels were not found to be significant predictors of the Factor 1 category. Similar results occurred for Factor 2, which included access to clean water, electricity and a telephone ($F\ 5, 473 = 0.790$, $p > 0.05$, adjusted R square = -0.002) and for Factor 3, which included jobs and HIV/AIDS treatment and education ($F\ 5, 473 = 0.901$, $p > 0.05$, adjusted R square = -0.001).

The lack of statistically significant differences between groupings might seem to reflect the progress made by South Africa's first democratic government in ensuring the provision of basic social services amongst disadvantaged communities (particularly in urban areas, where there are fewer logistical constraints). However, unemployment remains very much higher amongst the African majority; the unions have proved powerless in stopping the wholesale job shedding by firms in pursuit of international competitiveness. Moreover, median wages are also very much lower amongst Africans and access to land more of a concern. Whilst the government has delivered increasing numbers of low-cost houses in urban areas, the rate of delivery has not been fast enough to meet pent-up demand. Thus, the lack of statistical difference according to the characteristics of workers is somewhat surprising. Nevertheless, the lack of difference here should not prevent an understanding of the overall picture, which still reveals a large majority of workers who are dissatisfied with fundamental aspects such as wages and jobs.

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Is discontent associated with a demobilisation of union members? Or have unfulfilled expectations contributed to a continuation of high levels of mobilisation in mainstream union structures? Have temporary accommodations with state and capital been at the expense of traditional union collectivism? The factor analysis indicated that there is neither a positive nor a negative correlation between the propensity to actively participate in unions and relative satisfaction regarding delivery – in short, the discontented are neither more nor less likely to participate. This would either suggest a residual loyalty to the labour movement, as a result of the historic role the latter played in the run-up to democratisation, *or* that individual workers see unions as only partially effective, with participation only being worthwhile in pursuit of certain issues. The latter could reflect a sophisticated understanding of the limits and possibilities of collective action in an environment of wholesale job shedding and where industries have battled to attain international competitiveness. In other words, mobilisation under the auspices of unions is the pursuit of the possible, with alternative community groupings providing a forum for the pursuit of a more radical agenda.

As explained above, Factor 4 was based around attendance at union meetings and the existence of shop stewards within the workplace – signifiers of internal democracy. When evaluating the influence of potential predictors of this factor, a significant model emerged ($F\ 5, 473 = 9.513$, $p < 0.005$, adjusted R square = 0.082). The significant variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Significant Variables for Factor 4

Predictor Variable	Beta	*p*
Gender	0.196	0.000
Language	-0.203	0.000

Being male and having an African home language were significant predictors of the grouping of responses around attendance at union meetings and having shop stewards in the workplace. More specifically, although overall levels of participation remain extremely high, women and those whose home language was Indo-European were

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somewhat less likely to be involved in union affairs or be employed in workplaces where there was functional union democracy. This could reflect the extent to which certain categories of labour tend to be concentrated in occupations that are more difficult to unionise. However, it could also reflect continuing tendencies, such as the persistence of male dominance within many unions (see Baskin, 1991). Turning to Factor 5, concerning the election of shop stewards, again a significant model appeared ($F\ 5, 473 = 4.530$, $p < 0.005$, adjusted R square = 0.036). Significant variables are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Significant Variables for Factor 5

Predictor Variable	Beta	*p*
Language	-0.144	0.002
Age	0.150	0.002

Speaking a home language of African origin and also being over 35 years of age and in the workplace during the apartheid era appear to be significant predictors of the use of secret ballots for the election of shop stewards. This finding may potentially be due to the exposure of such workers to discriminatory practices during the apartheid period and a resultant adherence to the principles of democracy. Finally, for Factor 6, which consisted of the variables relating to removal of shop stewards and taking industrial action, a significant model also emerged ($F\ 5, 473 = 2.646$, $p < 0.05$, adjusted R square = 0.017). In this case, significant variables are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Significant Variables for Factor 6

Predictor Variable	Beta	*p*
Gender	0.131	0.005
Job tenure	0.090	0.048

This final stage of the analysis revealed that women and those with insecure job tenure were less likely to participate in the removal of shop stewards or to strike than those who might be arguably more

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secure within the workplace. Although they may have more grievances than other workers, this does not appear to have translated into the taking of action. This finding might have implications for how these groups of workers are organised in the future.

CONCLUSION

The survey revealed that discontent with delivery and related material conditions was not associated with a greater or lesser willingness to become involved in union affairs. Most respondents felt that the democratic government has made visible progress in improving the quality of life in a range of areas at community level. This would at least partially explain COSATU's continued commitment to its formal alliance with the ANC, in contrast to the increasing restiveness of highly marginalised communities in informal settlements and on the rural periphery; a mixed strategy of accommodation and traditional collectivism has yielded some material benefits. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of respondents were unhappy with progress regarding job creation and improvements in wage levels, cutting across gender, age, educational level, language and job tenure. Given abiding rank-and-file discontent regarding certain aspects of delivery, particularly in areas falling directly under the employment contract, these tensions may result in incremental demobilisation, a possible rupture between accommodationist and more radical elements within the labour movement or in a renewed concentration on militant collectivism. The fact that many of the concerns of COSATU's rank and file mirror those of the marginalised means that the unions are likely to be at the forefront of progressive challenges to the status quo. The significance of language as a predictor of participation in union affairs reflects the persistence of racial divisions over fifteen years since apartheid's demise.

The lack of association between discontent with the present condition and willingness to engage in union affairs and, in turn, to engage in collective action, appears contrary to the predictions of mobilisation theory. In part, this may reflect the limited nature of political alternatives in South Africa. However, this would not suggest that the basis of mobilisation has completely eroded. The unions retain a mass following owing to both effectiveness at the collective

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bargaining table and a residual historical loyalty, dating back to the struggle against apartheid (Brookes et al., 2004; Buhlungu and Atkinson, 2007). On the other hand, although COSATU has articulated a policy agenda around the need to protect jobs and promote job creation, it has struggled to be effective within a climate of wholesale job shedding, with many employers struggling to compete on world markets (Donnelly and Dunn, 2006). It also reflects the compromises necessitated by the ANC Alliance, an alliance which has resulted in gains in many areas, including the development of a highly progressive body of labour legislation governing collective bargaining and other rights.

The apparent durability of the present dominant partyism means, however, that such challenges are likely to take the form of ongoing struggles within the ANC Alliance, rather than through the development of an alternative political movement. Since the survey, a split within the ANC led to the formation of a new breakaway party, the Congress of the People (COPE). However, the latter only made limited headway in the 2009 elections, whilst the bulk of union leadership remained firmly within the ANC camp. Nevertheless, it would be wise for the leadership within the ANC to take the concerns of union members seriously; the unions remain a powerful pressure group both within the ANC Alliance and on the streets. Whilst mobilisation theory clearly has limited predictive power, its underlying fundamental assumptions regarding the relationship between social inequality and the possibilities for progress and union mobilisation remain relevant.

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