# REPORTING VIOLENT CONFLICT IN KWAZULU-NATAL

## AN ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED SOURCES FOR CONFLICT RESEARCH

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The main aim of this study was to investigate which factors are likely to affect the probability that events of violent collective action are reported by the press in KwaZulu-Natal. The study hypothesised that the likelihood of violent conflict events being reported by the press is affected by certain characteristics of the events themselves, such as their intensity and size, and by the environment in which events occur, such as their physical location and the prevailing political context.

The study was limited to the KwaZulu-Natal province where levels of violent collective action have been the highest in the country over the past decade. This province is also home to many violence monitoring agencies, which constituted an important alternative source of information against which the reporting trends of the newspapers in the province could be compared.

The main source of information used in this study was the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project's database of collective action events, which comprises events reported by both the press and the monitoring agencies. Data on a total of 3 990 violent conflict events was analysed during 1987, 1990 and 1994, in the form of comparisons between the reporting tendencies of the press and the monitors. Interviews were also conducted with reporters and editors of the daily newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as with selected monitoring agency staff members. These interviews provided valuable information about how these media operate, and the factors which constrain their violence reporting activities.

The most support was found for the argument that the political context influences violence reporting by the press. Analyses suggested that in all three years studied, the press contribution to the database decreased as monthly levels of violent conflict increased. This was explained in relation to the prevailing political context. The results also showed that reporting trends changed over time. In the earlier years, the press did not appear to be more inclined to report events of larger size and intensity, or events which were close to the newspapers' base. In 1994, however, this trend was reversed.

There also was no clear evidence that the States of Emergency impacted negatively on press reporting of violence in terms of the variables studied. In addition, the study concluded that both the press and the monitoring agencies had made important separate contributions to the database on violent collective action. It is, therefore, vital that systematic studies of violent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal make use of multiple sources of data.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER ONE
# STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

## 1. Introduction

The study of collective action and violent collective action in particular, has occupied scholars of political science and sociology throughout this century. In the 1960s, protest events such as the race riots and student activities in both the United States and Europe provided a new impetus for research into the field of conflict activity. As interest increased, so new and competing paradigms developed which tried to explain the causes for these events. Researchers also became more sophisticated in the methodologies they applied in their work (Olivier and Louw, 1995).

One method of researching conflict involved quantifying events of collective action and recording information on a variety of event characteristics such as the location, sequence and timing of events, and the type of participants. Most of this type of research was carried out in the United States and some in Europe. One such study has been completed in South Africa and others are underway.[1] For many of these researchers, including those in South Africa, public documents and especially newspapers, were often the only source of data on collective action events which were readily available. Much collective action research has consequently used newspapers, since official documents such as police records, are rarely accessible to researchers.[2]

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[1] The research which was done abroad was by Tilly et al (1975), Tilly (1978), Jenkins and Perrow (1977), McAdam (1982), Tarrow (1989) and Olzak (1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1992). South African work is that of Olivier (1990, 1991). Louw and Bekker (1992) used this methodology, and research using this methodology continues at the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project at the University of Natal, Durban, and HSRC in Pretoria.

[2] Studies in which newspapers were used include those by Chermesh (1982), Danzger (1975), Snyder and Kelly (1977), Spilerman (1970), Tarrow (1989, 1994), Tilly et al (1975), Olivier (1990, 1991), Olzak (1987, 1989a, 1992) and Olzak and Olivier (1995).

The reliance on newspapers as a data source means that the reliability of the press reporting itself becomes a matter of crucial concern. Indeed, various international scholars have criticised research methods which rely on the media and especially newspapers for information (Danzger, 1975; Franzosi, 1987; Molotoch and Lester, 1974; Snyder and Kelly, 1977). The most common criticism is that using the press means there may be systematic biases in the data. This may be in the form of selection bias - the media may be biased in its selection of events to be reported, description bias - the media may be biased in how it describes events which are reported, and lastly, researcher bias - mistakes made by the researcher affect the reliability of the data (Franzosi, 1987; Olzak, 1989b; McCarthy et al, 1995).

Of these, selection and description biases are the most difficult to deal with because they affect the sources, and cannot as a result be controlled by the researcher. These biases will, therefore, have the greatest impact on the nature of the research results.

While research in South Africa which relies on the press as a data source has not been subjected to a systematic assessment regarding the internal reliability and validity of the data, researchers here have criticised the way in which the press reports collective action, and particularly violent action. Conclusions similar to those described above were reached. These criticisms point mainly to political and racial reporting bias, underreporting of the number of events and the details about events, and publishing rumours.

The extensive States of Emergency and other restrictive laws which were most severe during the final years of apartheid, also limited media reporting of violence. In addition, these laws distorted the flow of public information at the time, and undermined journalism generally. Since the election of a new government in 1994, and the protection of media freedom in the Interim Constitution, these laws are no longer a threat. But many problems still prevail despite this protection and the relaxation of most repressive laws. The press in South Africa has also had to deal with intimidation and 'censorship' emanating from civil society.

Political developments in South Africa during the 1980s such as the States of Emergency coupled with increased levels of conflict and violence, resulted in the development of other sources which were used by researchers.[3] These are the independent monitoring agencies (which mushroomed in KwaZulu-Natal), and the daily Unrest Reports issued nationally by the South African Police to the media. These sources provided information on violent collective action, but did not diminish researchers' reliance on the newspapers, since the former were not as regular and accessible as the press. Some monitoring agencies only existed for a few months, others a few years, and some did not document their information regularly. The quality of information recorded by both the monitoring agencies and the police's daily Unrest Reports has been questioned. These issues will be discussed later in this chapter.

The findings of foreign and local researchers, and the nature of South Africa's political history, suggest that for local researchers especially, the way in which newspapers and other sources report collective action and violence can be problematic. This means that scholars using these media for research must continuously evaluate their sources in order to determine what effect their choice of sources may have on research findings. This is precisely the motivation and the task of the present study.

This study is concerned with investigating selected sources which report violence in KwaZulu-Natal, and is particularly concerned with the issue of selection bias in the press. The question which this study seeks to answer is the following: **What factors are likely to affect the probability that events of violent collective action are reported by the press?**

There is a paucity of literature which can be drawn on to answer this question. Very few foreign studies have evaluated the sources used for collective action research, let alone the extent of selection bias present in the press. Locally, it would appear

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[3] Examples of collective action and violence research using monitoring agency information is that by Louw and Bekker (1992) and Aitchison (1993). The Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project at the University of Natal uses the monitors' information on an ongoing basis.

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that this will be the first attempt to systematically and empirically analyse the newspapers' violence reporting tendencies.

The few studies that have identified factors which affect the likelihood that events will be reported by the press, were carried out in the United States. The social, economic and political environment in that country differ markedly from those in South Africa, but because these studies present the only comparable information on the subject, their findings must be taken into account. In addition, many of their conclusions were independently substantiated by local journalists and editors who were interviewed as part of this study.

The work of Snyder and Kelly (1977), Franzosi (1987) and McCarthy et al (1993 and 1995), showed that different forms of conflict have different probabilities of being reported by the press. More intense events, measured by their participant size and the numbers of people killed and injured per event were more likely to be reported. In addition, they found that press reporting was sensitive to the environment in which events occurred. The date that events happened, in terms of the prevailing political context, and the location of events, affected reporting probability. Events occurring in close proximity to the media headquarters were more likely to be reported than those further away.

Following from this, the hypothesis of this study is: **the likelihood that events of violent collective action will be reported by the press is affected by certain characteristics of the events themselves (namely event intensity and size), and by the environment in which events occur (namely the political context and physical location of events).**

The fact that there is often an absence of alternative data which reflects what 'really' happened, makes testing this hypothesis difficult. If we had information about all events of violence which occurred over a period of time, this could be compared with the events reported by the newspapers. The conditions under which events are more likely to be reported by the press, could then be identified.

Although such records do not exist for violent collective action, information recorded by the monitoring agencies in KwaZulu-Natal, although not complete, presents a useful basis for comparisons with press reports. The origin, aims and functioning of the monitors are very different from the press. This means that the reporting biases which may exist in the newspaper industry would not apply to the monitoring agencies.

Collective action is defined here as collective behaviour (involving two or more participants) in which a conflict of interests is expressed by groups protesting in public, in a peaceful or violent manner, about a given set of grievances. Collective action may be initiated by a variety of interest groups who mobilise around a wide range of concerns such as political differences, housing, access to land, ethnic or racial solidarity, women's rights, and so forth.

The hypothesis presented above will be tested using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative, open-ended interviews with reporters and editors of the daily newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal and the South African Press Association (SAPA), as well as with staff members of selected monitoring agencies will provide essential information about the processes which drive these sources. These interviews are important since little secondary information exists about these sources.

The hypothesis will also be tested empirically, using statistical records of events of violent collective action recorded by the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project, located at the University of Natal. These analyses will establish the existence of any relationships between the events which occurred and the sources which reported them. Having access to a record of events and to a record of which sources reported those events, facilitates an assessment of some of the criticisms which have been made of these sources.

The main aim of this study is to contribute to what is presently a small body of literature on the validity and reliability of the press as a source for collective action research. In addition, it also hopes to comment on the type of information which

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has been made available by sources of violence reporting in KwaZulu-Natal. The political history of the country and of KwaZulu-Natal in particular, inspired this study and also lent relevance to the subject.

The recent political history of KwaZulu-Natal has been characterised by intense violence and restrictions on the media. In addition, there have been criticisms of the way in which the press, the monitoring agencies and the police Unrest Reports have reported this ongoing violence. These political conditions have affected the flow of public information about violence, and this study can contribute towards fostering a better understanding of the nature of violence reporting in KwaZulu-Natal.

## 2. The importance of this study for South Africa and for KwaZulu-Natal

Two features of KwaZulu-Natal's political history over the past decade make this study important, over and above the contribution which it will make to the literature on the subject. The first is the extreme violence which is ongoing, and which has surpassed levels in any other area of the country. This is reflected in the statistics: from 1985 to June 1995, 12 053 deaths occurred in KwaZulu-Natal. More people died here than in the entire remainder of the country, where 11 220 people have died in violent conflict over this decade (Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project and Race Relations Surveys).

Political developments in the country since the first democratic election in 1994 have not solved the violent political conflict in this province. Indeed, tensions between leading parties seem to have become worse. These developments will briefly be outlined below.

The second feature of the province's recent history which makes this study important and which was not restricted to KwaZulu-Natal, was the implementation of the States of Emergency and other laws restricting the media and especially the

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reporting on violence during the 1980s. These laws were in place for five of the ten years during which violence has continued in KwaZulu-Natal, and it is the effects of these restrictions which are important for this study.

Conflict, in the form of both peaceful and violent collective action, characterised the past four decades of apartheid in South Africa, and has continued since the first democratic election in 1994. The conflict has been dynamic, changing in nature over time.

Three phases in the recent history of the country can be distinguished: the opposition to apartheid phase from the mid-1970s to the beginning of 1990, the transformation phase from 1990 to April 1994, and the consolidation phase from April 1994 to the present. Throughout each of these phases, conflict in KwaZulu-Natal has continued, with its own intensity and distinctive characteristics. In the next section, a very brief sketch will be given of the salient features of each phase.

### i) The opposition to apartheid phase

During the opposition to apartheid phase, both violent and peaceful protest actions, undertaken for the most part by black people, were directed against the government and its agencies, particularly the security forces. In 1983 the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed, uniting hundreds of community organisations and trade unions opposed to the government and the proposed Tricameral Parliament. Tensions boiled over in 1984 when the government instituted the Tricameral Parliament, which attempted to coopt the coloured and Indian population into accepting a secondary role in government, to the exclusion of the African community.

A wave of protest and violence ensued, fuelled by the African National Congress's (ANC's) (then in exile) strategies to destroy apartheid through rendering black communities ungovernable. This was to be done by targeting people labelled 'collaborators' (such as black town councillors and policemen). The youth also

played an important role by disrupting education in black schools as part of the liberation strategy.

In KwaZulu-Natal, this collective action had repercussions quite different from those experienced in the rest of the country. Conflict here was more extensive and more violent. From 1985 to the end of 1989, 3 212 people lost their lives in this province alone, compared with 2 871 fatalities in the rest of the country during the same period (Race Relations Survey, 1990/1; Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project). This conflict also occurred mostly between black political groups rather than between liberation groups and government forces.[4] This was largely due to the existence at the time of Inkatha, the strong, single ruling party of the former KwaZulu homeland. There is much disagreement about both the role of Inkatha and the UDF in KwaZulu-Natal during this time.

Inkatha maintained that its non-violent anti-apartheid strategy clashed with that of the UDF, who wanted to destroy all alternative black parties in the liberation process. The 'liberation' groups argued that Inkatha collaborated with the government to destroy the UDF, contending that Inkatha sought complete control over the province (Louw, 1995). These antagonisms unleashed cycles of violence which increased steadily from 1986 to 1990, while in other areas of the country, violent collective action subsided.

The government responded to this collective action by unleashing severe repression in the form of a nationwide State of Emergency in 1985 which continued until 1990. The subsequent measures were far reaching, brutal and seemingly effective outside of KwaZulu-Natal, as death tolls dropped from 1 352 in 1986 to 706 in 1987. In KwaZulu-Natal, however, events were characteristically different. Here the violence claimed more rather than less victims over this period, with fatalities increasing from 171 in 1986 to 644 one year later (Race Relations Survey, 1990/1; Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project).

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[4] It has, however, since been proved that there were links between the government at the time and Inkatha, in the form of paramilitary training and finance. These joint activities were aimed at destroying the United Democratic Front (UDF) and other ANC affiliates in the province.

For the purposes of this study, however, the restrictions on the flow of information are important. The media and those concerned about the conflict had to rely on the limited and biased police Unrest Reports issued by the government's Bureau for Information. Through these reports, the government controlled the definition, recording and dissemination of all information relating to political conflict.

Newspapers were forced to reduce violence coverage, journalists were harassed, newspapers and reporters were forced to register for official records, and information was centralised by promoting an official 'news culture' and monitoring media coverage (Tomaselli, 1988). During this time, and as a result of the severe restrictions on news about the conflict, monitoring agencies were formed in KwaZulu-Natal  - the province where violence levels were most serious.

## ii) The transformation phase

The transformation phase began in 1990 when, in February of that year, political parties such as the ANC were unbanned, and Nelson Mandela was released from prison. The State of Emergency was lifted, although not in KwaZulu-Natal until October that year, because violence levels were severe in that province. The launch of the political transition process in 1990 and the prospects of a democratic election unleashed a violent competition for support between the main contenders for the vote of black South Africans - Inkatha and the ANC. During this phase, the death toll in KwaZulu-Natal increased even further.

Clashes between Inkatha and ANC supporting groups continued unabated in KwaZulu-Natal. In mid-1990 this conflict spread to the Gauteng region, where violence claimed hundreds of lives between 1990 and 1994. This despite the signing of the National Peace Accord between the major political parties in September 1991. More people lost their lives in violent conflict in these two regions during this period than during any other comparable time period in the country's history. Over 7 000 people died in KwaZulu-Natal from the beginning of 1990 to April 1994. Fractionally fewer lives were lost in the rest of the country, bringing the

country's death toll to 14 511 over this period (Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project; Human Rights Committee).

While supporters clashed on the ground, antagonism between political leaders flared throughout the complex process which began in December 1991, of drawing up an interim constitution and preparing for the first election. The mistrust between the National Party (NP) government and the ANC reached breaking point when the ANC withdrew from the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) in June 1992 in protest against a massacre in Boipatong township, alleging that the police were involved.

When the NP and the ANC signed a bilateral agreement in an effort to restart negotiations, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) withdrew from Codesa in protest, claiming the agreement secured the interests of the two parties concerned only. The ongoing violence in KwaZulu-Natal added to tensions and was a constant source of hostility between the IFP and the ANC.

Constitutional talks resumed in March 1993, but the gains that were made since the breakdown in June the previous year were dealt a blow after the date for the election was eventually set. Delegations from the Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and KwaZulu homeland governments, along with the Conservative Party and the IFP who had expressed their dissatisfaction with Codesa in 1992, left the process for the last time. Proceedings continued without these parties, and the Transitional Executive Council (TEC), which would govern the country until the new government took over, was proclaimed in November 1993. The exclusion of certain parties from the TEC was to become a source of tension.

The transformation phase and the violence associated with it, created a climate of uncertainty and suspicion, in which propaganda and rumour mongering flourished. The increased politicisation of violent conflict was fuelled by leaders of political organisations making allegations and inflammatory statements about their rivals in public. This is reflected in a Goldstone Commission of Inquiry into Public Violence and Intimidation report on violence in the East Rand in 1991 and early 1992, which

stated that: "At least some of the rumour is deliberately initiated as part of the power struggle and as a cover or to raise the level of suspicion and hence of polarisation..." (Pereira, 1993a).[5]

Although restrictions on the media no longer existed, the complexity and extent of the violence during this period made accurate reporting of the conflict difficult.[6] Reporters were no longer harassed by security forces, but increasingly, members of civil society and especially political party supporters threatened and attacked journalists. Witnesses of violence were silenced by the fear, intimidation and despair associated with years of violence.

At another level, newspapers increasingly turned their attention away from violence to cover other important political events in the country. As a result of these developments, information about violence was not always considered reliable and comprehensive. This is significant, since the intense violence of this period became a threat to national peace and development and was recognised as one of the country's most pressing problems.

### iii) The consolidation phase

The final phase of consolidation began with the first democratic election in April 1994. The months prior to the election were very tense. The IFP boycotted the process until eight days before the due date. At the last moment the party joined after laying down several conditions which were agreed upon by the ANC and National Party. Other homeland governments and right-wing political parties also rejected the transformation process.

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[5] The Goldstone Commission of Inquiry into Public Violence and Intimidation became known simply as the Goldstone Commission.

[6] The complexity of the violence is illustrated by the various and overlapping explanations which have been given for the KwaZulu-Natal conflict. See Aitchison (1991), Louw and Bekker (1992), Bell (1990, 1993), Booth (1988), Kentridge (1990), Olivier (1992), and Zulu and Stavrou (1990).

In Bophuthatswana, the resistance of the homeland government to reincorporation with South Africa culminated in anti-government riots a month before the election. The 'assistance' provided to the homeland government by its right-wing allies escalated the violence, and the TEC eventually had to stabilise the situation by ousting President Mangope. The TEC's actions fuelled tensions in KwaZulu-Natal. The homeland government, which was still outside the process at that stage, threatened to resist any similar actions in KwaZulu.

The election nevertheless proceeded remarkably peacefully and successfully under the circumstances, with the ANC winning the vast majority of national votes. Tensions between political parties were diffused to the extent that violence levels decreased dramatically in the Gauteng region. In KwaZulu-Natal however, violence decreased less dramatically. However, the death toll did come down from the peak it had reached before the election.

The IFP's election victory in KwaZulu-Natal did not, however, reduce conflict between that party and the ANC. At leadership level in fact, tensions have escalated since the election, fuelled by continuing violent clashes between supporters (Louw, 1995). The political situation in KwaZulu-Natal is the most tenuous of any province in the country, and this instability coupled with the potential for renewed, large scale violence, threatens the security of the whole country.

The next major challenge in this consolidation phase will be the local government elections. In most parts of the country these took place in November 1995. In KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape provinces however, elections have been postponed due to political conflicts which have frustrated the process of drawing council boundaries. The local elections in KwaZulu-Natal may also be jeopardised by the IFP's threats to withdraw from the Government of National Unity if the conditions in terms of which they agreed to participate in the 1994 general election are not met as promised.

The greatest threat to future elections in this province, however, remains the high levels of intimidation and violence. Although fewer people are dying than before 1994, political intolerance is rife and there is little freedom of speech, movement and association for many people in KwaZulu-Natal.

Extensive progress has been made during the consolidation phase with the drawing up of the Interim Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But violent political conflict still threatens the country's economy, its prospects for development and reconciliation and thus its security. These conditions must be addressed if South Africa's new democracy is to survive. The fact that sentiments expressed by Graham in 1990 are still applicable, shows that progress has been slow in regard to ending violence:

> *"The rebuilding of a civil society with a growing economy and a respect for the institutions of democracy such as the rule of law, a free press, the right to associate and move freely, and the fundamental right to life - are dependent not only on managing the violence but on ending it and creating the conditions under which its recurrence is not possible"* (Graham, 1990: 2).

South Africa's transition to democracy has been, and may continue to be retarded by violence. KwaZulu-Natal has been the most troubled province in the country, and tensions between the ANC and IFP mounted throughout the three phases outlined above. Finding long term solutions is crucial. This requires an understanding of the problem, which in turn depends on a good supply of reliable public information.

Freedom of speech and information are essential for any democracy to succeed. Information enables the public to make informed decisions in their own best interests, and to monitor abuses of power by the state and other institutions in positions of power. Among other things, it thus enables the resolution of conflicts in a peaceful manner, which this discussion has showed is much needed in this country. The media is one of the central mechanisms for distributing information.

Steyn (1989: 6) makes this point well: "The three recognised pillars of a modern democracy are the executive, the legislature (Parliament, Congress) and the courts. To these must be added the fourth estate, the media. The media's traditional role is that of public informant and watch-dog over abuses of power in the other three estates".

The role of the media, and other sources of public information about conflict, like the monitoring agencies and the police Unrest Reports, are therefore crucial. By examining these sources, this study will contribute towards these debates about their effectiveness. These sources and the criticisms which have been made of their reporting will be introduced here. It is after all, these very problems which inspired this study and illustrate its relevance in the South African context.

## 3. The sources of violence reporting in KwaZulu-Natal

### i) The press

The comments in this section apply to the daily English language newspapers published in KwaZulu-Natal, namely <u>The Natal Witness</u>, <u>The Mercury</u> and <u>Daily News</u>.

These newspapers have made a valuable contribution to enabling communication between citizens, but they have been criticised for the way in which they report violence. The main criticisms cover four broad areas, namely: reporting bias, poor coverage of the extent of the violence, poor coverage of the context and details of the violence, and the reporting of rumours about the conflict.

### Bias

Bias here refers to both the unbalanced coverage of white and black politics as well as the way in which the press reflected the political groups involved in the conflict. The press has been accused of not taking the conflict seriously enough to

warrant more staff and larger budgets to cover the subject consistently and extensively (Association of Democratic Journalists press release, 1990). It has been argued that these problems stem not only from restrictions imposed by the government, but also from the ideological stance and priorities of the newspaper owners and editors.

Accusations of political bias include the criticisms by leaders of both the ANC, and its affiliates, and of Inkatha. The Association of Democratic Journalists (ADJ) alleged that the Daily News and The Mercury were partisan in their favourable reporting of Inkatha and its leader in the 1980s, since they portrayed Minister Buthelezi as a moderate Christian leader (ADJ press release, 1990).

The extra-parliamentary groups had always struggled to ensure that their role and their views of the conflict were accurately published in the press. This was partly due to the Emergency regulations but also, according to the ADJ, due to the political bias of the white owned commercial press which, until 1990, had effectively ignored the ANC aligned UDF and Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

The KwaZulu-Natal press was always accused of apportioning equal amounts of blame to each side in the conflict. In 1990, that changed as the ANC alliance began to attain the political high ground (Emdon, 1990). Simultaneously, the perceived dwindling political support of the IFP, reports of political intolerance in former KwaZulu, links with security forces and a determination to remain at centre stage in national politics, damaged the IFP's credibility (Bell, 1990).

Gavin Woods, then director of the Inkatha Institute, claimed the whole press had become anti-Inkatha and that the monitoring groups which supplied information to the press were "all inside the ANC-UDF-COSATU camp" (Emdon, 1991: 193). Inkatha also contended that the monitors used the press to deliberately destroy the credibility of the IFP, by labelling Inkatha a "violent organisation" and portraying Buthelezi as a "megalomaniac directing the campaign of violence" (Smith, 1991).

## Coverage of the extent of the violence

Studies have shown that coverage varies, but that generally the conflict has not been fully reported by the press. An ADJ study (press release, 1990) and an analysis of the KwaZulu-Natal newspapers by Emdon (1991) showed that the Sunday Tribune, The Post and The Natal Witness published more complete, informed reports than other provincial newspapers.

The ADJ accused the KwaZulu-Natal press of failing to adequately report the region's conflict (ADJ press release, 1990). Some journalists estimated that over the past few years about 60% of what was happening in the country (not only violence) did not reach the press (Executive summary, SAIRR, 1991).

## Coverage of the context of the violence

The most common criticism of the press has been that reports often failed to publish details about incidents, let alone their causes. The lack of investigative reporting and a concomitant reliance on press statements and the simplistic, politically charged South African Police (SAP) Unrest Reports was a major part of the problem. Critics claimed that investigative journalism was not undertaken by the press and that too much reliance was placed on statements issued by police and political parties (ADJ press release, 1990; Emdon, 1991; Mkhize, 1990).

This was aggravated by the use of simplistic and often misleading terms like 'black-on-black' violence. Many agreed that this description depoliticised conflict, reducing it to faction fighting (Emdon, 1991; Mkhize, 1990; Fair and Astroff, 1991). According to Mkhize (1990), even in 1990, when the State of Emergency was lifted, the commercial media increasingly reported conflict in terms of race and ethnicity.

The SAP used terms like 'cultural weapons' which were uncritically adopted by the press. The SAP eventually stopped using such categories, but the newspapers still

carried headlines and reports about 'Zulus', 'impis' and 'kraals' in mid-1994. This stereotyping meant that the press failed to cover elements of the conflict like forced recruitment drives and the attitudes of rebellious UDF aligned youths (Emdon, 1991). Most newspapers also ignored the role of the security forces in general (ADJ press release, 1990).

The press effectively reduced an ongoing conflict to a series of unrelated incidents based on information from police. In doing so, the newspapers also failed to deal with ambiguities and contradictions in the conflict, settling instead for simplified explanations aimed at allaying the fears of readers (ADJ press release, 1990).

The effects of the conflict were also not well covered, which further obscured the seriousness of violence in the region. The psychological and economic effects, the fate of the school going youth, the collapse of the legal system with the loss of faith in security forces and the court process, and the countless refugees left stranded by the ongoing conflict have been neglected (Emdon, 1991; ADJ press release, 1990).

### Publishing rumours

When allegations about the causes of the violence are made and political battles are fought through the media, the facts are often uncovered too late if at all. According to Pereira (1993b), the allocation of culpability is often levelled before investigations occur. These may be inaccurate and if the rumours which result receive wide coverage, they can be accepted as fact and provoke tension and violence.

A Goldstone Commission report about violence near Mooi River in December 1991 between ANC and Inkatha supporters stated that "inaccurate and unchecked information and rumours were disseminated by both ANC and IFP spokespersons. This was regularly reported in the newspapers. The commission recommends that political and other organisations take cognisance that inaccurate reports of violence in themselves frequently result in an escalation of violence" (Pereira, 1993a).

## ii) **The monitoring agencies**

The monitoring agencies were created in the mid-1980s by academics, church people and political representatives in response to the soaring violence and the lack of public information about the emergent crisis. The monitors rely on various sources for information such as newspapers, police Unrest Reports, accounts from witnesses and victims of political violence and their relatives, reports from organisations and individuals such as lawyers, trade unionists, clergy and political activists, research publications, and affidavits.

The four monitoring agencies which Tomaselli (1988) surveyed believed their data was much more representative than that published by official sources. The monitors' concentration on violence and their interventionist strategies suggest that their data may be more detailed and comprehensive than that of the press. Monitors are in the unique position to obtain first hand accounts of violence from victims and witnesses through established contacts and relationships of trust (Tomaselli, 1988).

Monitors have, however, been criticised. The major criticism is that they are biased towards particular political organisations. In 1991 a workshop on monitoring and research into political violence was convened as a result of "a concern about the antagonism and perception of bias between various research/monitoring groupings. An investigation conducted among seven Natal groupings towards the end of 1990 confirmed a polarisation along ideological lines" (Report, 1991: 2).

The most ardent criticism of monitoring agencies have been made by the IFP, who for example, labelled a report by the Natal Monitor as "nothing less than an attempt to give credence to ANC strategies and propaganda in Natal/KwaZulu" (Hodgson, 1992). Inkatha has always been at odds with monitoring agencies which were largely aligned to the liberation movements before 1990. The effects of these perceptions are important.

The origins of many monitoring agencies link them to particular political positions, and while some have evolved away from these over the years, their networks in communities and their reputations have, to a large extent, remained. While funding of these agencies can impact on their political direction, the IFP believed the composition of management boards, where these exist, has had a greater impact on bias.

The IFP have drawn attention on many occasions to the ANC alignment of monitors' boards (Smith, 1992). Ironically, the chairman of the Inkatha Institute research centre's board of management was Chief Minister Buthelezi, leader of the IFP. These factors have important implications for the type of information which reaches the public, decision makers and researchers.

### iii) Official government sources

In South Africa, official sources of conflict information have not been considered reliable and usually provide fewer incidents of violence, or less detail about events, than do the press and monitors. In addition, obtaining police Unrest Reports for research purposes was difficult until 1994, and efforts to gain access to other documentation from the police have been fruitless.[7] For these reasons, government sources are not part of this study. Some brief comments will illustrate these problems.

During the States of Emergency, the government provided information on violence through the Bureau for Information and police Unrest Reports. The Bureau was established in 1985 to liaise with the media and maintain the Directorates of

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[7] Researchers from the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project made several unsuccessful attempts, as have colleagues at the HSRC's Centre for Socio-Political Analysis. Access seems to have been denied to most of the organisations and individuals comprising the network established by these projects. Since the election of a new government in April 1994, however, the situation has changed. Police information is now easier to obtain. The freedom of information clause in the Interim Constitution should also ensure better access to official sources of information.

Research and Publications. The aims of the Bureau were to monitor the national States of Emergency, undertake research and disseminate information. Despite these aims, very little was passed on to the public, and the publications were found to be poor sources of information (Tomaselli, 1988).

The Unrest Reports were disseminated from the first State of Emergency in 1985 by the Bureau for Information. From May 1987, the Police Division of Public Relations provided the reports, syndicated through the South African Press Association (SAPA) until 1993 when the reports were no longer produced. The problems which these reports presented for those monitoring and researching violence were that they provided very little detail about events, they were often obscure, and were found to be inaccurate when compared with eye-witness reports (Tomaselli, 1988).

A typical example of an official Unrest Report published in the press reads as follows:

> "A woman burned to death and another person was seriously injured when their house was petrol-bombed at Imbali in the Pietermaritzburg area yesterday. According to the daily police Unrest Report, a group of blacks attacked the house and then hurled petrol-bombs" (Daily News, 25 March 1989).

The Unrest Reports were also phrased to obscure any compassion by readers. 'Boys' or 'children', for example, were rarely reported as victims - rather they were described as 'men' or 'people' (Mkhize, 1990). The shortfalls of the Unrest Reports were more pronounced with regard to events in which deaths and serious injuries did not occur. In September 1987, The Natal Witness published a comment by a police spokesman in this regard: "We obviously do not report on every stone throwing because we do not want to give these people unnecessary publicity. We simply say it was between groups or factions."

The Unrest Reports also underreported fatalities, and in 1987 the Minister of Law and Order actually refused to provide statistics on deaths and injuries. These problems stemmed from the fact that data disseminated by official sources during the Emergency years in particular, was carefully screened to fit the state's constructed "narrative of unrest" and was therefore not impartial (Tomaselli, 1988).

The information provided by the former SAP and Bureau for Information during the States of Emergency impacted greatly on the way in which the press reported violence. The restrictions on the flow of information meant that these official sources were the only sources during this period. The same did not apply for the monitoring agencies, which were formed largely to deal with this channelling of selected information by the government. The press currently relies extensively on information from the police as do some of the monitors. Police reports are now less politically charged, and provide more details such as the names and ages of victims.

This discussion shows that the reporting of violence in KwaZulu-Natal by the press in particular, has been constrained by the political history and dynamics of the time. This makes it especially important that researchers using the press assess this source in order to better understand the reporting biases which may exist, as well as whether any information has been overlooked.

This study is a preliminary investigation into a field which is not well researched in South Africa. The findings can therefore only be described as tentative, and will hopefully suggest directions for further research. The study will be structured in the following way.

## 4. Thesis outline

**Chapter Two** extends the discussion of the 'statement of the problem' as outlined in Chapter One. It examines in more depth why information and freedom of speech are important for democracy, arguing that these are vital for democracies of all

kinds. In discussing the various models of democracy, this chapter also shows the congruence between the various theories of the media and the models of democracy. Chapter Two confirms the importance of this study, particularly for South Africa which faces the challenge of sustaining its new democracy.

**Chapter Three** discusses the methodology for this study. This thesis is based on the use of two types of data. The first source of data is interviews conducted with journalists and editors of KwaZulu-Natal daily newspapers and with the staff of selected monitoring agencies. This data provided vital contextual information about how these sources operate, the constraints they face in reporting violence and their response to the criticisms of their violence reporting.

The second source of information for this study is the empirical data on violence drawn from the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project, located at the Centre for Social and Development Studies at the University of Natal. This chapter includes a full account of the methodology employed by this project. This chapter outlines how, using this empirical data, the reporting patterns of newspapers and monitoring agencies will be compared in order to determine whether the factors outline in the hypothesis affected the probability that violence would be reported by the press. The findings of the international research which contributed to the formulation of the hypothesis will also be outlined in this chapter.

**Chapter Four** presents the results of the interviews with the newspaper reporters and editors. Their opinions are contextualised within a more detailed discussion of the restrictions on press reporting of violence as outlined in this, the first chapter. Chapter Four concludes with some comments about the validity of the criticisms of press reporting of violence, based on the interview results.

**Chapter Five** discusses the results of the interviews with the monitoring agencies. There is very little secondary information available about the violence monitoring process. For this reason, the interview results form the basis of this chapter's discussion on the origins, functioning, constraints and criticisms of these agencies'

activities. This chapter also includes concluding comments about the monitors' role as disseminators of violence information.

**Chapter Six** reports the findings of the statistical analyses which compare reporting patterns of the newspapers and monitoring agencies. This chapter is central to this thesis, as it provides important empirical evidence for assessing how the press has fared in terms of reporting violence.

**Chapter Seven** concludes the study. In this chapter, the aims of the study are revisited. The chapter then reports the most important findings of the analyses of reporting trends discussed in Chapter Six. The suitability of the press for quantitative violent conflict research is also discussed, as are the implications of this study's findings for future research. These latter discussions draw on the information gathered in the interviews with journalists and monitoring agency staff, which were discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

# CHAPTER TWO

# DEMOCRACY AND THE PRESS

## 1. Aims of this chapter

The discussion in the first chapter pointed out why this study is relevant. One aspect of this was that freedom of speech and information are essential for democracy. The aim of this chapter is to deepen that argument through a brief discussion of democratic theory.

The relationship between free speech and democracy is widely recognised as important, but the ways in which it is so are not obvious. This relationship is important for this study which is largely motivated by questions about the way in which the press reports violence, and the impact this has for South Africa's fledgling democracy. Violence is a problem which affects many ordinary people and government, and has the potential to derail this country's new democracy. A free flow of information about violent conflict is therefore vital.

Free speech has two functions in a democracy. The first is to provide individuals with self-expression, autonomy and avenues for communication. The second is to enable participation in governing procedures through various mechanisms, most importantly, the media.

Through a vigorous exchange of ideas and the pursuit of truth, government is made accountable to the electorate who are placed in a position to monitor its performance and to guard against abuses of power. Information enables the public to make informed decisions in their own best interests and to monitor abuses of power. Among other things, this facilitates the peaceful resolution of violent conflict - the lack of which has been the primary motivation for this study.

The media, such as newspapers, radio or television, is the main vehicle for communicating information among citizens, and between citizens and government, and is therefore essential for democracy. But the manner in which the media, and in this case the press, fulfils this task is critical. One feature of this critical role was discussed in Chapter One. Studying the press is, therefore, important not only to understand particular reporting tendencies, as is the case here with violence reporting, but also because the press has a responsibility towards democracy.

The point of this chapter is to illustrate why freedom of speech and freedom of the press are important for democracy. This will be done by briefly discussing the various models of democracy, the implications of each for the press, and why freedom of speech is important in each. Several debates about the way the media works which can be linked to the debates about democracy, will also be discussed.

It is important to stress at the outset that this study is not about which models of democracy are better than others. This study also does not intend to debate which models of democracy the media could make the best contribution towards. It is thus not the intention of this chapter to provide a comprehensive discussion of models of democracy or theories of the media.

Instead, the aim of this chapter is to show that, despite major differences, theorists supporting the various models of democracy stress the importance of freedom of speech. Since the press is one of the most important vehicles for enabling free speech, its role is vital. That theories of democracy can differ as much as they do, yet still regard freedom of speech as paramount, illustrates just how important the press is for democracy.

## 2. Introduction

The models of democracy are many and varied. For the purposes of this chapter, the models are distinguished into two main categories. The first category consists of those theorists advocating the liberal representative models. These argue that

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democracy is achieved when citizens participate in periodic elections for leaders from an elite group. The winners then govern on behalf of their electorates. The second category consists of the participative models of democracy, whose supporters believe that good government depends on direct participation by the people in the affairs of government, rather than participation through periodic elections for leaders.

These two categories have been chosen because they represent the main division in democratic theory that is between representation and participation. This distinction is important for the present study, because despite their substantial differences, theorists of contrasting models acknowledge that a decrease in participation increases the need for free speech and communication, and thus for a free press.

As the various models of democracy are outlined in this chapter, this inverse relationship between participation on the one hand, and the need for freedom of the press on the other, will be pointed out.

Given the links between democracy and the media, it is perhaps inevitable that there should be similarities in the debates between the models of democracy on the one hand, and debates about the media on the other. The media debates consider whether the press is a competent vehicle for delivering freedom of speech in the pursuit of democracy. Assuming that it is in principle, further questions arise about the proper relationship between the press and the government of the day.

Theorists differ about which models of democracy are preferable, and thus about the nature of the government of the day. Debates about the relationship between the press and the government will therefore be shaped by the type of democracy which characterises the government in question.

## 3. Models of democracy

One definition of democracy is 'rule by the people', which suggests that people participate in the governing of their lives. The nature and extent of this governance has been debated. Another definition of democracy is rule by elected leaders who represent the people. Held (1987) contends that these different positions derive partly from fundamental philosophical differences between theorists of democracy . For some, democracy should be a whole way of life. For others, it is simply a system of governing which best protects individual rights.

Before discussing the liberal representative and participative models, Athenian democracy will be introduced. The political system of ancient Athens does not fit exclusively into one of the two categories which will be discussed, since it is widely believed to be the type of government upon which later models of democracy were based. For this reason, it is discussed separately, before the other models.

### i) Athenian democracy

The Athenian city state is important not only because it shows the special conditions under which the concept of democracy began, but also because some theorists refer to democracy 'as a way of life', and in doing so, aspire to the values presented by democracy in this, its most original form.

Democracy in Athens was centred on citizens' commitment to sustaining the 'common good'. To be a citizen was to participate directly in the functioning of the state. The individual was not important, and was defined in terms of the community, unlike later models of liberal democracy which define the community in terms of the individual (Parekh, 1993). Democracy was thus an end in itself - a way of life rather than just a system of good government.[1]

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[1] Athenian democracy was not without its flaws. Certain features of the Athenian city state such as restrictions of citizenship to exclude foreigners, women and slaves, and the existence of the slave economy, facilitated this kind of democracy.

In terms of the implications for the press in this type of democracy, the fact that there was no separation between the state and civil society, no universal claims to human rights, and that there was direct participation in governing, meant there was little need for a press which could function as communicator between the government and citizens.

## ii) **Liberal representative democracy**

### Republican and early representative models

Like Athenian democracy, citizenship in these early models involved participation in public affairs (Held, 1993). These models are distinct from Athenian democracy, however, in that participation was not advocated for its own sake. It was understood as a means for dealing with a more fundamental problem. Many Republican theorists were worried that leaders, or the majority of citizens, could become corrupt. Good government thus became the vital requirement for achieving the "good state", rather than just the participation of all citizens in the political process (Held, 1987).

Fear of 'the many' characterised the Republican model, and participation was consequently limited to choosing leaders. Later proponents of the early representative model were motivated more by a fear of 'the few' (that is, the leaders). These concerns led to the separation of government powers into the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and the separation of state and ordinary citizens, or civil society (Dahl, 1989).

Within this tradition, government came to be seen as a potential threat to individuals. This gave rise to ideas about individual rights, freedom and autonomy. Citizenship now meant that people not only had responsibilities to government, but rights, powers and liberties as well, which could be exercised against the government (Held, 1987). Locke, writing in the Seventeenth Century, pioneered these concepts, laying the foundations for liberalism.

Representative democracy was essentially a mechanism to protect individual rights, and the doctrine of liberalism played an important role in defining this model. Beetham (1993) points out that certain assumptions of liberalism, such as freedom of expression, movement, and association are vital for democracy in the nation-states of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

In the subsequent development of the liberal tradition, the notion of equality came to prominence. The development of the international free market economy based on private ownership of property and free enterprise, resulted in inequalities of wealth between people. Theorists of the early representative models of democracy like Madison, Bentham and James Mill, believed that conflicts during this time were related to this unequal distribution of property. Democracy, these theorists believed, could keep this conflict under control by ensuring that government was accountable to all - both wealthy and poor - through the ballot (Held, 1987). It provided a mechanism for some measure of redistribution in order to alleviate the effects of inequality.

The implications of these models for the press must be considered. Republican and early representative models of democracy represented theorists' first calls for limited participation in government by ordinary citizens. As participation decreased, the need to find ways to keep people informed and aware of government's activities, increased. The press's role in facilitating this communication was important. These models also marked the separation of the state and civil society and the development of liberalism. Freedom of information is one of the central aspects of liberalism, without which people cannot exercise their rights. The role of the press in providing information is crucial. The press was, therefore, already important for the early models of representative democracy.

## Contemporary liberal representative models

As liberal representative models of democracy evolved, tensions developed as theorists tried to balance democracy, liberalism and equality. The realities of

modern political behaviour meant that participation in government - which is the essence of democracy - was limited to the choice of leaders from elite sectors of society. The rights of individuals enshrined by liberalism meant that, legally, citizens had power over government. But this power was diminished by the inequalities of the market economy, which could potentially hamper poorer people's attempts to exercise their rights and freedoms. Although all citizens could vote, they were restricted in their ability to exercise their rights which were essential to make their votes meaningful. In essence, therefore, their participation in government was limited.

Schumpeter, whose theory has been highly influential in democratic thought since World War Two, sought a model which took these realities of modern democracies into consideration. He, like Weber before him, believed that the intellectual capacities of the average citizens were poor, and their interest in politics limited (Held, 1987). Schumpeter was consequently against the idea of increased participation by the average citizen, since this could upset the stability of the political system (Pateman, 1970). He believed that increased participation would result in irrational mass action.

This represents a shift from writers sharing the liberal tradition. Locke believed people are free and equal because they are capable of reason. J. S. Mill believed that representative government was important not only for the protection of liberty, but also as a means of insuring rational policy. He had faith in the intellectual abilities of citizens, which he believed democracy would enhance. Liberalism on this view is fundamentally anti-paternalistic (Beetham, 1993). Schumpeter did not share these views, basing his opinions on empirical observations of Western countries.

Democracy for Schumpeter was a method for making political decisions. Democratic participation was confined to the right to choose leaders from an elite group by means of elections. This required a "considerable amount of freedom of discussion for all", which meant both freedom of speech and of the press (Held, 1987: 177). The implications of Schumpeter's democracy for the press are similar

to other models of democracy in which participation was limited. Although Schumpeter preferred as little public participation in governing as possible, the task of choosing the best leaders required that the public be informed. The press could play a central role in this regard.

Another important point relating to the press which this chapter seeks to point out, is that as theories of democracy were debated, from the Republican and early representative models, to the contemporary models such as that proposed by Schumpeter, advocates increasingly called for less participation in government by ordinary people. And, as citizens were removed further from the business of governing, so more reliance is placed on the press as a means for citizens to exert some influence over how their lives are governed.

### Pluralism and Neo-Pluralism

The pluralist model differs substantially from the previous models, in that pluralists believed that organised interest groups, rather than individuals or elites, played the most important role in the democratic process. These interest groups made up many centres of power which competed regularly for the electorate's vote. This, pluralists believed, would inhibit the development of powerful factions and an unresponsive government. Despite the differences between this model and previous models, Schumpeter's influence is nevertheless evident, in that pluralists like Dahl and Truman agreed that democracy is a method for selecting leaders from an elite who are better able to run the country than the apathetic and ignorant electorate (Held, 1987).

One difficulty with classical pluralism is that theorists did not deal with the problem of equality in democracy. As noted earlier, tensions developed as liberal theorists tried to balance the requirements of democracy, equality and liberty. Pluralists did not pay attention to the possibility that certain interest groups might not have had access to the resources with which to compete effectively. Dahl and other pluralists accepted the criticisms that modern "corporate capitalism" produces social and economic inequalities which severely limit political equality, and thus the

democratic process (Held, 1987: 202). All interest groups might not, therefore, have equal influence over government. Also, with the links between governments and the private sector, the state could not be regarded as a neutral arbiter among all interests.

The neo-pluralist model was developed in response to these criticisms. The central issue for neo-pluralists was that up to this point, most theorists of liberal representative democracy had envisaged the democratic process as a means for protecting the interests of citizens and providing stability. Dahl, an advocate of neo-pluralism, emphasised the need for political equality in this process. He expanded the notion of the democratic process to include several criteria which, if satisfied, would provide more equality. These criteria included effective participation, voting equality and the inclusion of practically all adults (Dahl, 1989). The most important criterion in the process, for the purposes of this discussion, was enlightened understanding. This required that people be educated and informed enough to make the best decision when voting. The role of the press for communication and for educating the public was, therefore, considered vital by neo-pluralists (Dahl, 1989).

The implications for the press in the pluralist and neo-pluralist models are far reaching. Although the pluralist conception of democracy differs markedly from previous representative models, this does not diminish the important contribution which a free press could make. Communication remained essential for democracy to succeed, although in this case it would be between individuals, interest groups and government.

Neo-pluralists' call for 'enlightened understanding' as an important requirement of the democratic political process. This implies a central role for the press. The need for education could, under different circumstances, be met through direct participation in government, as occurred in ancient Athens. Because of the constraints of size in modern pluralist democracies, however, this role is best suited to the media. The neo-pluralists' concern with political equality also has implications for the press. The press has the ability to provide education and a

means of communication to all citizens in an environment in which inequalities of wealth may disadvantage some people over others.

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### The New Right model

This model differed from pluralist models in that advocates called for less involvement by interest groups in the governing process, and less emphasis on safeguarding equality through the democratic process. Supporters believed this had resulted in the growth of an expensive welfare interventionist state with an outsized bureaucracy.

The New Right model, also referred to as Neo-liberalism or 'legal democracy' essentially harked back to the classical liberal representative models. Theorists of both the latter and former models believed that individual freedom and rights were paramount. Majority rule was seen as the process which best protected individuals from abuses of power by government.

Key to this protection was minimal state intervention in civil and private life, and a free market economy. Proponents believed that it was only through the market that collective choices could be determined on an individual basis (Held, 1987). Political participation and equality were regarded as secondary to liberalism, and government involvement in the economy to promote equality was strongly opposed.

Hayek (1984) developed the concept of legal democracy, in which the law was the central mechanism for curbing the power of the state and protecting the liberty of individuals (Held, 1987). The press was central to New Right theorists because they regarded participation as secondary to liberalism, which meant that a mechanism was needed to keep people informed and involved, from a distance.

The importance of liberalism for advocates of this model meant that the press also provided a vital means for checking the activities of government. New Right

theorists were determined moreover, that freedom of the press could only be achieved if the press was privately owned, with no interference by government.

The models of liberal representative democracy discussed above differ from one another, but all depend on a well functioning press sector which enables participation at a distance, education and good communication between government and citizens, and between citizens themselves.

One of the most important aspects of liberal democracy for the press is that theorists prioritised individual liberty, and the rights which protect that liberty. Democracy was thus the political process which guarded these rights against abuses from government. The success of the democratic process in protecting rights requires a clear separation between citizens and the government.

This separation provides the space in which mechanisms can be developed which check state abuse of power, such as: an "impersonal" structure of public power, a constitution to protect rights, and a diversity of power centres inside and outside the state (Held, 1993: 24). A free press is one of these power centres in the public sphere which provide people with the ability to monitor government activity.

The other important aspect of the liberal tradition which has implications for the press is the belief that civil society should dominate over the state (Gillwald, 1993). Liberals believe that this can be achieved through the free market. The market is the major institution of civil society because it is the one institution which all ordinary citizens have access to, and which can be independent from government.

This means that for liberals, the market, rather than the state, is the preferred regulator of society's information needs. Liberals therefore believe that the press must be privately owned, and that any attempts by government to interfere would constitute an infringement on freedom of association, property and expression (Kelley and Donway, 1990).

This aspect of the liberal tradition is important because it represents the major point of difference from proponents of participatory models of democracy, in their thoughts about how the press works.


### iii) **Participatory democracy**


#### Classical participative models


In the Eighteenth Century, Rousseau revived the principles of democracy as practised in the Athenian city state. In the Nineteenth Century J. S. Mill, who actually favoured representative democracy, developed Rousseau's ideas, giving participative democracy its most liberal expression.


For the purposes of this chapter, the most important element of Rousseau's city state model is that democracy meant active participation by individuals in government in order to secure the 'common good'. Advocates of liberal models by comparison, believed that individual autonomy was the greatest good. For Rousseau, the system of self-rule was an end in itself. He believed participation had a fundamental psychological effect which ensured a constant interrelationship between the opinions of individuals and the institutions in society (Pateman, 1970). The main aim of participation was to educate people to enable responsible action in the political sphere. Participation also gave individuals a sense of freedom because they had some control over their lives (Pateman, 1970).


The implications for the press of Rousseau's model are similar to those of Athenian democracy described earlier. In Rousseau's model, the direct participation by citizens in the legislative process provides communication and education, as well as a means of monitoring how government manages its executive function. In liberal representative models of democracy, by contrast, the press was the main vehicle for facilitating communication between people, for providing education, and for monitoring government abuses of power. It is thus conceivable that the political system, as envisaged by Rousseau, could work quite well without the press,

(although this does not suggest that a press would not thrive in Rousseau's state). The same does not hold true for representative democracies in which participation was limited, and a free press was therefore, essential.

John Stuart Mill's ideas were built on earlier ideas about liberal representative democracy and on Rousseau's model of democracy. Mill favoured representative democracy, but believed participation was equally vital for the development of individual's intellectual capacity and morals (Held, 1987). His movement away from justifying democracy in terms of the security it provided for individuals, common to representative theorists, is evident in his belief that political institutions should be judged by the extent to which they promote the general mental advancement of the community (Pateman, 1970).

Mill did not, however, share Rousseau's belief that political equality was vital for meaningful participation. He was critical of vast inequalities of wealth and power, but supported a free market economy, and favoured a well educated elite to lead government (Held, 1987; Pateman, 1970). This had implications for the press quite different from those of Rousseau's model. The press was important to ensure the accountability of the elected elite to the electorate, which was especially important to Mill. It not only kept the government in check, but furthered the education and participation of citizens in the political process of a large country. As such, the press would have the same effects for Mill's democracy as direct participation had for Rousseau's model.

## The New Left: Contemporary participative models ✳

Advocates of these models recognised that institutions central to liberal democracy like competitive parties and periodic elections, are necessary in a modern, industrialised participatory society (Held, 1987). But their justification for participatory democracy was similar to that of Rousseau: the self development and education of the citizenry. This, supporters believed, could only be achieved in a society in which people have political influence, and are concerned about collective problems. Citizens should therefore, be interested in, and knowledgeable about,

the governing process. Participation in this process, they thought, should extend to all institutions of society, including the workplace and the community.

The notion that individuals need to be involved in all institutions rather than just government, was based on a rejection of the liberal conception of a clear separation between state and civil society. Advocates of participatory democracy argued, in the Marxist tradition, that the state is linked to capital and thus to the maintenance and reproduction of the inequalities in society. This means that citizens will not be treated as free and equal, and periodic national elections are inadequate to ensure the accountability of government. Participation must, therefore, be extended to all areas of life where power is exercised.

The two crucial requirements for contemporary participative models have important implications for the press. These are meaningful political equality and an open information system. Participatory theorists argued that in modern liberal democracies, inequalities of class, sex and race limit the extent to which individuals are free and equal (Held, 1987). Good communication and information are essential for the development and education of people, and also promote equality. Gillwald (1993) stated that if social arrangements deprive sectors of society from making decisions, there cannot be political equality. An open and accessible media is vital for dealing with this inequality by making the same information available to all citizens, thus enhancing their capacity for equal participation.

This chapter has argued that although models of democracy differ vastly, most theorists emphasised the role of the media and also of the press in a democracy. The exceptions are the Athenian and Roussean accounts, which are not really applicable to vast modern polities. This chapter also pointed out that as direct participation by the public in government decreased, so the importance of the press increased. Advocates of contemporary participative democracy acknowledged the role of political parties and periodic elections in modern democracies, even though these do not provide the greater participation which they believe is important. These theorists believed that as a result, the press is central for enabling the increased participation which they advocate.

Supporters of participatory democracy also stressed the importance of political equality, and believed the press could help achieve this also. These theorists were not, however, always satisfied with the press's contribution in this regard. They criticised the nature of the press in liberal democracies, particularly because liberals favour a privately owned media. Like Marxists, advocates of participatory democracy believed that the structural powers of the market limit the media's functions in a democracy. These criticisms of the liberal approach to the media, and the implications of the structural powers of the market for the press and democracy will be considered in the following section.

## iv) Criticisms of the liberal approach to the media, and implications of the structural powers of the market for the press and democracy

Critics of liberal media theory are divided in their approaches, and this section will attempt to indicate in broad outline, the major features of such approaches as they relate to the press.

The criticisms of liberal theories of the media are based on Marxist criticisms of the media in liberal democracies. Indeed, Marxist critiques have largely shaped these debates, and will therefore be introduced briefly. Some Marxists see the press as an instrument of the capitalist class which reflects the interests of that class above others (Murdock, 1980). Structuralists like Althusser (1977) and Poulantzas (1969) emphasised the role of the state in the political economy. Agencies of the state, they believed, would intervene to ensure that the dominant capitalist ideology was adhered to by the media. Other structuralists developed the "political economy approach" (Murdock, 1980), arguing that this kind of intervention in the functioning of the media was not necessary, because the market would ensure that the product supported their interests.

Thus, while liberals see the market as a mechanism for protection against state abuses of power, and thus the provider of liberty, Marxists see the market as the

very institution which enslaves individuals. Marxists would argue that under the control of the market, the press does not fulfil the requirements of democracy. This is because the ideals of equal accessibility and independence are often sacrificed for profits and advertising revenue.

The liberal theory of the media is criticised because it misses the vital point that private power is as great a threat to liberty as public power (Holmes, 1990). Holmes (1990) points out that Locke conceived of rights not only as protection against government interference, but also against harm by third parties, or private oppressors. The formal rights of individuals to participate in collective decision making and to influence leaders is meaningless unless avenues for considering all the options and partaking in debates, are open.

Liberals have responded to this criticism from the perspective of pluralist democracy as discussed above. Accounting for the way they operate, people in the British newspaper industry have argued that capital ownership is just one of the sources of power among the many independent interest groups competing for influence over the policy making process (Murdock, 1980). While this is an important power base, it is not considered dominant over others. Proponents argue that financial independence from the state and from political parties, and an absence of direct government control, guarantees the press autonomy from the interests of the state.

Critics, however, maintain that being autonomous from state influence does not necessarily protect the press from the structural powers of the market. The effects of the market on the press are diverse, but critics believe all erode the press's role as one of the central guarantors of democracy. The privately owned media, they believe, do not distribute information equally, and are not equally accessible to all, as democracy requires. Instead, the media operates according to the demands and cycles of the market.

The main problems that have been identified concern the concentration of ownership of news organisations, and the effect of the market on news content.

Sparks (1988, 1992) believed that the press market leads to a concentration of ownership, as does Lichtenburg (1990), who stated that this has had a deciding effect on the formation of public opinion. According to Lichtenburg (1990), most people receive the majority of news from a few large agencies, the extent and power of which enables the agencies to shape readers' worldviews and how they act politically.

The other implication of the market relates to news content. Sparks (1988, 1992) argued that the media's function is not restricted to providing political information, although this is the vital role required for democracy. He explained that the press market consists of readers and more notably, of advertisers who want to reach people with disposable incomes and decision making power (Sparks, 1992). Newspapers with a more affluent readership can charge more for advertising, which means a greater revenue, and probably better coverage of political issues. The more down market press raises more of its income through the cover price, and a wide circulation is therefore vital. This could mean that political reporting is diminished in favour of entertainment and other news.

Some liberals might, however, argue that the issue of news content need not automatically be considered a problem for democracies. They argue that readers are not passive fools and can choose which newspapers they want to read and whether they want to be involved in the political process at all. The fact that readers choose the popular press cannot be blamed on the media, liberals might suggest.

Sparks (1988, 1992) believed that while this is true, it does not change the facts about the nature of the popular press, or that this press plays an important role in political life. Sparks added that there are such social regularities in readership distribution that it is difficult to suggest that this is a product of individual choice. Readership patterns in fact relate to social stratification (Sparks, 1992).

Participatory theorists who criticise liberal approaches to the media do not deny that in advanced democracies most people choose not to be well informed about

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political and economic activities (Sparks, 1988). They argue instead that this says more about the social and political life in stable, liberal democracies, than about the nature of the press. For participatory theorists, this suggests that political and economic power is so far removed from most people that they have lost interest in monitoring how this power is managed. Ultimately, then, the nature of the modern popular press is derived from the structural features of the capitalist state (Sparks, 1988).

The structural power of the market outlined above has important implications for the press in democracies. It suggests that the functioning of the press is not shaped by the requirements of modern democracies, but by the market forces in which the press operates. This does not change the fact that all theorists of democracy support a free press. Instead it suggests that advocates of democracy do not always believe that the press is fulfilling its role in the democratic process in the ways they envisaged it would.

## 4. Conclusion

The aim of this discussion has been to show that freedom of speech is vital for all kinds of democracy, no matter how vastly they may differ. The outline of the various models of democracy illustrates that as participation in the political process became less feasible or less desirable, the need for other avenues of participation arose. Simultaneously, the need to safeguard citizens from abuses of power also became central. The press is therefore crucial for democracy, as it can facilitate both participation at a distance and the monitoring of government abuses of power.

This chapter also aimed to draw attention to some of the debates about whether the press actually fulfils the role required by democracies. The debates stem from perceptions that in liberal democracies, the press does not guarantee freedom of speech and expression according to the democratic requirements noted above.[2]

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[2] This is not a recent concern. Sparks (1988) notes that Habermas, looking back to the last century, argued that the commercialisation of the press around 1830 was a problem. Sparks continues that there is a long history of complaints that the press is becoming

Models of democracy try to balance state power, citizens' power and the power of capital within a democratic framework. Liberalism protects individuals' rights against infringements by the state and other individuals, but not against the effects of market forces. The question for theorists debating the role of the media, is how far the state can be allowed to intervene to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens to participate in the democratic process, without infringing on other rights. Those who oppose the government regulating the press, stress that this amounts to interference in individual rights and limits the valuable watchdog function of the media. These are the kinds of arguments made by theorists of the neo-liberal or New Right school.

Those who believe some kind of regulation or corrective action is necessary, believe state excesses are not the only danger to individual rights, but that private excesses may pose a greater threat. These proponents call for the extension of the domain over which democratic government has control. They have a conception of a press uncontrolled by market forces. These are the kinds of arguments made by proponents of the New Left or participatory democracy school.

These links between the debates about democracy and the role of the press illustrate how fundamentally these concepts are related. Any discussions of the press in a democratic society must have as a starting point some more or less detailed theory of democracy.

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trivialised, from the 1890s in the United States press and from the 1930s in the British press. The problem has worsened in recent years with the increased concentration of media owners, the boom of the broadcasting industry and related economic pressures on the media industry as a whole.

# CHAPTER THREE
# METHODOLOGY

## 1. Aims of this chapter

Having discussed the relevance of this study in the preceding chapter, this chapter outlines the methodology this study will use in answering the research question: what factors are likely to affect the probability that events of violent collective action are reported by the press? The research design will first be described, including the area and the time period which will be studied. This is followed by a discussion of the sources of information used to answer the question above, and to test the hypothesis.

The data used for both the dependent variable (the reported events of collective action) and the independent variables (the source which reported the events, and the intensity, size, location and timing of events of collective action) will be discussed in this chapter. This chapter will also briefly discuss some of the material which was used to select the independent variables. The selection of these variables was based on:

- The findings of international studies which have investigated the sources for collective action research.
- The information gathered in interviews with journalists and editors of newspapers in South Africa, and more specifically in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Secondary sources which discuss reporting of violence in South Africa.

This chapter will outline the findings of some international studies, since they made an important contribution to the selection of the independent variables. The findings of these studies were also part of the motivation for this study. Although the social, economic and political environment where the international studies were carried out differ markedly from those in South Africa, their research constituted the only

studies which have assessed the press as a source for systematic conflict research.

These findings were also considered relevant because this study is concerned more about methodologies for collective action research, than about the political dynamics surrounding the collective action. The fact that many of their conclusions were independently substantiated by South African journalists and editors, reduces the potential problems with using this data.

## 2. Research design

### i) The area studied

The area which this study will examine is the KwaZulu-Natal province. This province was selected for a number of reasons. First, the discussion in Chapter One showed that levels of conflict, and particularly violent conflict, have been higher here since 1986 than in any other region of the country. Because this study is concerned with the reporting of conflict, this province was an obvious choice.

Second, the vast majority of monitoring agencies existed (and some continue to operate) in this province. These agencies have operated for much longer than their few counterparts which now exist in the rest of the country. The monitors' data is vital for this study, because without this alternative source of information about conflict, an assessment of press reports would have been difficult. Chapter One described problems encountered with the police reports on conflict, and why these were not used in this study for comparisons with newspaper reports.

Thirdly, the availability of secondary information about violence reporting by the press also influenced the choice of study area. The South African work (such as Emdon, 1990 and 1991; Mkhize, 1990; Association for Democratic Journalists press release, 1990; Smith, 1991) on press reporting of violence, was carried out in KwaZulu-Natal, and referred to the newspapers located here.

## ii) The time period studied

The reporting trends of the press and monitoring agencies in KwaZulu-Natal will be compared during the years 1987, 1990 and 1994. These years were chosen for three reasons. First, they best enable a comparison of reporting during and after the States of Emergency were in place. The Emergency was declared in 1986 and was lifted in KwaZulu-Natal in October 1990. This choice of time period is important for this study because violence reporting was severely curtailed during the Emergency.

Second, the literature as well as the interviews conducted with members of the press, suggested that the time period during which conflict occurs can affect the likelihood that events will be reported. The political context is, therefore, important. For this reason, the years 1990 and 1994 are particularly appropriate, since landmark events in the political history of this country occurred during these years. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released, the ANC and other organisations were unbanned, and the State of Emergency was lifted. The year 1994 marked the country's first democratic election, which brought the ANC government led by President Mandela into power.

Thirdly, monitoring agency material was most readily available during these years. The monitors started their activities at different times, and many closed down over the years. Material was also produced sporadically by some organisations. This meant that the contribution of the monitors was not consistent, and because their input was vital for this study, the years selected are those in which monitoring agencies' contribution were greatest.

## iii) The research process

The research for this study was conducted in two parts, one qualitative and one quantitative.

## The qualitative process

The qualitative process included collecting relevant information from secondary sources about the press and monitoring agencies' reporting of violence. This information complimented the interviews which form the main body of this part of the research. The history of South African newspapers and the legislation which curbed press freedom before and during the States of Emergency is well documented. There is, however, much less information available on the subject of violence reporting in particular, and few studies could be located which assessed press reporting of violence in South Africa. In addition, there is little secondary information about how the monitoring agencies operate.

The interviews therefore made an important contribution to this section of the research process. Interviews were conducted throughout 1994 and the beginning of 1995, and provided the body of the information about how the press and the monitoring agencies operate. The monitors chosen were some of the main contributors to the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal database, namely the Human Rights Committee (HRC), the Natal Monitor, the Inkatha Institute and the Unrest Monitoring Project. Although the Democratic Party's Unrest Monitoring Action Group and the Black Sash Repression Monitoring Group also supplied extensive data, these monitors no longer operated at the time of this study, and interviewees were hard to locate.

Interviews with the press were conducted with a political reporter and an editor from each of the three daily newspapers in the province, namely The Natal Witness, the Daily News and The Mercury. The former head of the South African Press Association (SAPA) in Durban was also interviewed, as SAPA supplies the other newspapers, as well as the most frequently used monitor, the HRC, with information about violence.

The interviews were conducted for the purpose of gathering qualitative information, and were, therefore, all open-ended, based on a structured set of questions. The interviews were extensive, lasting between one and two hours. The press and the

monitors were asked questions about how their organisations went about reporting conflict, the difficulties they faced in performing this activity, and their perceptions about the criticisms of both the newspapers' and monitors' reporting of violence.

The selection of only one reporter from each newspaper was a function of two factors. First, the interviews did not constitute the only primary research for this thesis, but rather the background information to the problem being studied. Also, the newspapers generally only had one senior political reporter who was experienced enough to comment on these issues.[1] The only other possible interviewees were the crime reporters, but since this study focuses on violent collective action which excludes events carried out for purely criminal reasons, this source was not pursued.

These interviews provided important information about how these media operate, the difficulties they encounter, and their responses to criticisms of their violence reporting activities. Given the paucity of secondary information on the reporting processes of the press in South Africa, and of the monitoring agencies, the interviews enabled a better understanding of these media. This is necessary for assessing their reporting tendencies. The results also lent credibility to the choice of independent variables. The results of these interviews and relevant information gathered from secondary sources are documented in Chapters Four and Five.

### The quantitative process

The quantitative part of the research process will consist of statistical analyses using the data collected by the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project. Details of this project and its methodology follow in the next section of this chapter. These analyses will compare the way the newspapers and monitoring agencies reported events which differed in terms of their size, intensity, location and timing in 1987, 1990 and 1994. These results are documented in Chapter Six.

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[1] This I was told by the reporters I spoke to, on asking if there was anyone else at the newspaper I should interview.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the data used in the quantitative part of the research process. These include the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project, which provided the data on both the reported events of collective action, and on the factors which, according to the hypothesis, will affect the probability that events will be reported. This is followed by a discussion of the research findings of international studies which influenced the selection of the above variables.

## 3. Source of data on events of violent collective action

Data used for measuring the dependent variable, namely the reported events of collective action, as well as the factors which might affect reporting tendencies, were obtained from the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project. This project, which the author of this thesis has been working on for five years, records events of collective action reported by the newspapers and the monitoring agencies. It is important to understand the methodology and aims of the Conflict Trends project, since data from this project formed the basis of this research.

### i) The Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project

The project was started at the Centre for Social and Development Studies (CSDS) at the University of Natal Durban in 1991. It is a collaborative venture with the Centre for Socio-Political Analysis at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in Pretoria and the Indicator South Africa at the University of Natal in Durban.

The project was initiated as part of a wider study being undertaken at the HSRC which deals with collective action countrywide, as well as an international comparative project, researching ethnic collective action in the United States and South Africa. The various projects use the same methodology, and the databases can be merged and trends in the different areas compared.

The aim of the project is to contribute to analyses about the causes of collective action. The advantages of the project are that trends of conflict can be established over a long period of time, and the changing rates of collective action can thus be measured. This systematic approach enables the data to be tested against a wide range of variables which are believed to affect the rates of conflict. Examples of these variables are demographic data, the movement or migration of people, income distribution, employment levels and where measurable, actions taken by the police (see Olivier et al, 1995).

Using this methodology, Olivier (1990 and 1991) tested the effect of the following variables on the rate of ethnic collective action in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region from 1970 to 1984: changing rates of internal migration; economic expansion; an increase in resources to the disadvantaged such as income, education and organisational advantages linked to strike behaviour; and acts of state repression.

## The scope of study

The area covered by the study is the KwaZulu-Natal province. When violence began in South Africa in the mid-1970s, it was located mainly in the PWV area. This was to change dramatically in 1987, when violence escalated in KwaZulu-Natal on a scale unprecedented in the rest of the country. High levels of conflict continued until April 1994 in this province, and since the election, political violence continues to be a major problem for KwaZulu-Natal..

The violence in this province requires special attention because the dynamics are different in this region, as the discussion in Chapter One illustrated. In addition to elements present in conflict in other parts of the country, this violence has been driven by clashes between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the United Democratic Front (and later the ANC) and its affiliates.

Data was recorded on collective action from 1986. The project is an ongoing one, as levels of conflict increased up to mid-1994, and have continued up to the

present. Since the election, violence has decreased, but stability has not been secured and violence may escalate again. In KwaZulu-Natal particularly, with its legacy of clashes between the ANC and IFP, the future is unclear. This is one of only two provinces in the country where the ANC lost the national election, and a violent rivalry between the two parties continues.

## The subject of study and the sources

The dependent variable of the Conflict Trends project is the changing level of collective action over time. In order to analyse and explain this, it is important to have information on the timing and sequence of events of collective action. Olivier et al (1995) argued that simply aggregating the number of events that occur, as Tilly et al (1975) did, would not provide information on the timing and sequence of events but only on their occurrence. The event-history method is therefore used.

This method of collecting information on events over an extended period of time means that events occurring before and after a major upheaval are recorded, instead of focusing on the uprising only. This is useful for studying how conflict spreads geographically and over time, as well as for examining cycles of conflict. This method also allows for the measurement and comparison of diverse forms of collective action. More information about the dynamics of the activity is recorded using this method than studies which examine specific social movements or upheavals.

Event analysis also enables the use of statistical models which have been used in other studies (Olzak, 1992; Olzak and Olivier, 1995). This ability to test hypotheses is particularly useful in South Africa, where most studies of conflict have taken the case study format. Case studies provide detail and historical background, but little systematic evidence which can be used for testing theories about the causes of violence. In capturing information over a time period not defined by particular events, event analysis avoids sample selection bias, by including areas and towns where conflict has not occurred.

Data about events of collective action are collected from a variety of newspapers and monitoring agencies. The newspapers used most often are the provincial daily newspapers, namely The Mercury and the Daily News from Durban, and The Natal Witness from Pietermaritzburg. The alternative Durban weekly newspaper, New African, was used in 1990 and 1991, and the Sunday Tribune is also used occasionally. In recent years, some use has been made of small newspapers such as the Zululand Observer and the Estcourt Midlands News. Events have on occasion been obtained from newspapers from other parts of the country like the Cape Times, Sowetan, Star, Sunday Times and Business Day.

Data from a range of monitoring agencies has also been used. The monitors used most often include the Human Rights Committee, the Black Sash Monitoring Group, the Democratic Party Unrest Monitoring Action Group, the Natal Monitor, the Inkatha Institute, the Midlands Crisis Relief Committee's reports, the Unrest Monitoring Project at the University of Natal and the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA).

The monitors operated at different times and did not always produce accessible information on a regular basis. Information from these sources could not, therefore, be used consistently. By 1994 the only monitoring agency source still supplying regular information to the Conflict Trends project was the Human Rights Committee.

## Data collection and processing

The unit of analysis for the study is the event of collective action, rather than the actual reports collected from the sources. Collective action is defined here as collective behaviour (involving two or more participants) in which a conflict of interests is expressed by groups protesting in public, in a peaceful or violent manner, about a given set of grievances. Collective action may be initiated by a variety of interest groups who mobilise around a wide range of concerns such as political differences, housing, access to land, ethnic or racial solidarity, women's rights, and so forth.

To be recorded, events must: be collective; occur in public, which means events in police or prison cells or regular scheduled meetings of organisations are not recorded; and events carried out for clearly criminal motivations are not recorded.

Another important feature of events relates to their duration. Based on the work of Tilly (1978) and Olzak and West (1987), Olivier (1990) took events in the same location, involving the same group and expressing the same grievances, with gaps of less than twenty four hours between them, as one event. Some events therefore last for quite a long time. If the activity resumed after a break of twenty four hours, the action was recorded as a new event.[2]

Also following Olzak and West (1987), collective action events are divided into two types, namely conflict and protest events. Conflict events are those in which there is a violent clash of interests between parties. The group which is targeted may be only symbolically present, as often occurs when property belonging to a particular group is attacked or destroyed.

Events in which the threat of violence is used, such as intimidation, are also considered conflict events. Examples of these are attacks on houses or other property, attacks on people, clashes between the security forces and civilians, assassinations, attacks on taxis and buses transporting passengers, and ambushes of vehicles. Protest events are those in which a group of people gather in a public place to air a grievance or make a statement. There is no clash of interests between parties as in the case of conflict events, and these events are non-violent. Examples of protest events are protest marches, rallies, boycotts, sit-ins and stayaways.

For every event recorded, a range of details about the event are noted, such as: the duration of events; the type of events; the numbers and type of participants; the

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[2] This is important if the data is compared with that of other sources, such as official police statistics. These official figures would, for example, record six episodes of stone-throwing in the same residential block over the period of one hour, as six separate incidents. The Conflict Trends project would record these as one event lasting one hour.

affiliation of participants to any organisation or ethnic group if applicable; the race group of participants as far as possible; the reasons for events; the types of weapons used; the extent of property damage; the numbers killed and injured; the type of security force activity; and the source of information for the event.

These details are recorded in a narrative form which tells the 'story' about each event. This information is then given numerical codes and entered into a computer for statistical analysis.

## 4. Review of studies which assessed the press as a source for collective action research

The studies reviewed below investigated different types of conflict activity in different areas. Nevertheless, these studies are referred to because they are among the few which assess the press as a source for systematic research on conflict. Moreover, the approach of Snyder and Kelly (1977) - the only study which is described in any detail - in assessing newspapers has guided that of this thesis: in that study the authors focused on the probability that events would be reported, rather than on the accuracy of the printed information.

Also, their study hypothesised that the characteristics of events would affect the reporting probability, as would the broader political dynamics occurring at the same time as conflict.

### i) Studies which identified problems with the press as a source

Chapter One introduced the discussion about the problems which have been identified with the press as a data source. These will be addressed here in more detail.

Olzak (1992) reported that international studies of events of collective action have relied on sources such as official archival records which include police and municipal records (Tilly et al, 1975), annual newspaper indexes (Spilerman, 1970; McAdam, 1982; Burstein, 1985; Jenkins and Eckert, 1986), daily newspaper reports (Paige, 1975), published listings of events compiled from various newspapers such as strike data in the United States Bureau of the Census, 1975, and secondary historical accounts.

Olzak's own work and other systematic studies in this field, both locally and internationally, have relied heavily on press reports as the sources for their research. According to Olzak (1992) this is because these sources can be followed as time proceeds, and because some researchers have found that newspapers provide the most complete record of events covering the widest sample over time and geographical space. For South African studies, the lack of adequate alternate sources can be added to this list.

Internationally, the suitability of newspapers as a source for conflict research has been questioned because the data is believed to have systematic biases (Chermesh, 1982; Danzger, 1975; Franzosi, 1987).

These include selection bias, which means the media may be biased in its selection of events to be reported. Description bias means the media might be biased in the descriptions of the events they select to report, and lastly, researcher bias, which implies that the validity and reliability of data is compromised as a result of mistakes made by the researcher (Franzosi, 1987; Olzak, 1989b).

Selection and description bias are the most difficult to deal with since they affect the data sources and cannot be controlled by the researcher. These biases can therefore, have the most significant impact on the validity of research results.

Researchers using newspapers as a data source usually assume that any biases that do exist in data sources are not systematic (McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1989). The absence of alternative data sources makes it difficult to determine the extent to

which such an assumption is correct or to assess the extent to which selection and description bias exist.[3]

Several critics maintain that the press is not a valid source (Danzger, 1975; Franzosi, 1987; Molotoch and Lester, 1974; Snyder and Kelly, 1977), particularly for multiple indicator analyses of conflict.[4]

Little attention has, however, been paid to these problems and Franzosi (1987; 1990) is one of the few researchers who has addressed this issue directly. Franzosi (1987: 5) stated that most quantitative research on collective action and violence has been based on data collected from newspapers, yet problems of"data measurement" have received little consideration.[5]

Danzger (1975) also believed that although extensive work has been done on the problems concerning the validity of news reports, researchers on conflict have ignored this. Franzosi (1987) stated that there is a widespread belief among researchers that there is nothing they can do to overcome the effects of newspapers' reporting bias, and consequently testing the validity of sources for research projects is often neglected.

Franzosi (1987) did state, however, that not all events are equally likely to be affected by reporting bias. He believed that newspapers generally report accurately

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[3] Recent research by McCarthy et al (1993), however, represents the first systematic attempt to address this problem. Their study in Washington DC suggested that only about 10% of all permitted demonstrations were reported in the printed media. Nevertheless, the determinants for selection by the media were constant over time and across sources. The authors concluded that "The tip of the national print media iceberg, then, provides an amazingly stable portrait of a churning mix of protest forms, purposes and contexts ...." (McCarthy et al. 1993: 36-37).

[4] These are studies which do not focus on a particular type of activity (such as strikes, for example), but analyse events of varying types and intensity, sometimes across different countries. The Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal is such a project. These analyses assume that there is an underlying dimension to their study, which can loosely be described as 'conflict'. The motivation for using this method is that conflict relevant for other theoretical variables will be captured (Snyder and Kelly, 1977).

[5] 'Measurement' for Franzosi (1987) refers to issues of validity, sample selection bias and the coding scheme design and inter-coding reliability.

on the type of event, its location and date, the general identity of participants, and whether people were arrested, injured or killed. Reporting of the reasons for events, or which groups were responsible for certain actions, is less likely to be consistent. When events are interpreted and discussed in editorials and perhaps include elements of 'hard' facts, bias is most likely to be a problem (Franzosi, 1987).

## ii) A study which examined the press as a source

Snyder and Kelly (1977) investigated the characteristics of events to establish whether the probability that conflict will be reported increased for certain kinds of events. They focused on the probability that conflict events in general would be reported, and their assessments of newspapers arose from a concern about the quality of the source data.

Snyder and Kelly's (1977) model for assessing the validity of press reports as a source was based on the argument that intense events were more likely to be reported. Intensity was measured according to size (the number of participants at the event), violence (the degree of physical damage to people and property) and the duration of the event.

Their model did not, however, depend only on the characteristics of events. For Snyder and Kelly (1977), validity depends on the interaction between the intensity of conflict events and the sensitivity of the media reporting the events. Media sensitivity to conflict behaviour is determined by the "political climate" and contextual characteristics of conflict events (Snyder and Kelly, 1977: 113). The characteristics they refer to are those features of events which do not reflect intensity, such as the nature of their participants, their locational visibility vis-à-vis media sources, and the frequency of the event. These concepts will be briefly explained.

An example of the "political climate" would be the climate brought about by government legislation which suppresses the media. Indirectly, this "climate" may cause a single event to catch the public's interest even though this event is part of many similar events. Another example is the holding of important elections, as occurred in South Africa in April 1994. The election shaped the "political climate", which might have an affect on press reporting of conflict. In a certain "political climate" therefore, the probability proposed by this model that intense events will be reported, may not apply.[6]

Snyder and Kelly (1977) also believed the contextual characteristics of conflict events determine media sensitivity. The nature of the participants is one such characteristic. For example, the media are more likely to report events where coercive forces are involved or where the participants are public figures. The locational proximity of events to the media networks and to the wire services also increases the likelihood that events will be reported.

Finally, with regard to the frequency of events, Snyder and Kelly (1977) believed that the more frequently an event occurs, the less likely it is to be reported by the media. Examples they cited are that small town newspapers are likely to report fistfights in a bar, whereas those in large cities are not. Also, industrial strike activity becomes less newsworthy as it occurs more frequently and becomes routinised. With racial disorders, underreporting is more likely in cities with past experiences of such conflict.

In determining data validity, Snyder and Kelly (1977) thus looked at both the nature of the events themselves and the nature of the media which might report the event. The probability that an event will be reported increases with its intensity, while the more sensitive the media sources are, the more likely they are to report a wider range of conflict activity. The findings of Snyder and Kelly's (1977) research using this model indicated that the characteristics of events are important determinants of validity, and that conflict events are likely to be reported according to their intensity.

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[6] Snyder and Kelly (1977) add, however, that with few exceptions, they doubt that events of relatively low intensity will remain newsworthy for long periods.

Also relevant for this study are Snyder and Kelly's (1977) findings on how geographic and temporal patterns of conflict events may be distorted by the press. They believed the locational proximity of events to the media networks and the wire services increases the likelihood that events will be reported. These authors found that few protests occurring in the Western cities of the United States were reported by the New York Times. This illustrates that coverage of national events by one particular newspaper may be biased, showing the importance of spatial factors in reporting conflict.

Franzosi (1987) also stated that available evidence suggests that temporal and spatial trends of newspaper reporting do not reflect the actual patterns occurring in reality. He referred to the conflicting findings of Danzger (1975) and Snyder and Kelly (1977) on the effects of previous experiences of racial disorders on the reporting of conflict by the press.

Danzger (1975) argued that the probability that conflict is reported is higher in cities with past disorder experience, while Snyder and Kelly (1977) argued the opposite. Despite these conflicting theories, this indicates that the geographic distribution of events may be distorted by newspaper reporting. Franzosi (1987: 8) also cited Tilly (1969), who found that on comparing events reported in newspaper and other sources, the press reported the highest number of events, and that the main bias was toward overreporting of incidents in big cities.

## 5. The relevance of these studies for KwaZulu-Natal

This discussion provides valuable methodological insights into the problem which motivates this study. These methods and findings must, however, be considered in the South African context, and more specifically with reference to KwaZulu-Natal which is the province covered by this study.

The literature summarised above reaffirms the motivation for this study. Many of the authors do not regard the press as a valid source for quantitative research due to the existence of systematic bias in newspaper reports. According to Franzosi (1987) and Snyder and Kelly (1977), this is particularly so in the case of multiple indicator analyses of conflict.

The criticisms which these authors make of the press deal with the problem of systematic bias. For Danzger (1975) this concept includes inaccuracies and distortion of facts, claims of bias towards a particular 'side', and suppression of information. While the reasons for these criticisms may differ, they are similar to those levelled at the press regarding violence reporting in this country. The criticisms of the KwaZulu-Natal press included the problem of bias, the poor coverage of the extent and the context of the violence and reporting rumours.

Inadequate coverage of the extent and context of violence can be likened to the suppression of news, while inaccuracies of fact are the product of problems such as bias and reporting rumours. Danzger (1975), however, believed that of these, the only valid criticism was that information was suppressed. He did add, however, that inaccuracies of facts were likely to arise in two particular situations. These are where access to the event is limited or dangerous, and where the activity is so spread out or unpredictable that it cannot be adequately covered everywhere by several reporters.

Both these conditions are common in KwaZulu-Natal, and pertain to conflict in both the violent urban areas and remote rural areas of the province. Insufficient reporting of details was a problem during the States of Emergency when the only source supplying information was the police, and even since the Emergency, this still occurs. Possible reasons for this state of affairs are discussed in the next chapter.

The main theme of Snyder and Kelly's (1977) work is that different types of events are dealt with in varying ways by the press, and are reported with varying frequency. There is little reason why this should not also apply for South African

newspapers given that similar problems have been identified with reporting patterns. Snyder and Kelly (1977) argue that more intense events have a greater likelihood of being reported than less intense ones. Intense events are characterised by their size, degree of violence and their duration.

Snyder and Kelly's (1977) concept of "media sensitivity" is relevant in the South African context. According to the authors this "sensitivity" is affected by the "political climate", and a local example is the legislation implemented under the States of Emergency.

In terms of more indirect effects of the political climate, an example can be taken from events in the build up to the election in April 1994. During this time, reporting violence became a priority to newspapers, as this conflict was interpreted as "election related violence", even in cases where the origins of the conflict preceded the politics of elections, or were totally unrelated.[7] This is an example of how events can catch the public's interest even though many similar events have occurred before, which Snyder and Kelly (1977) refer to as an indirect manifestation of the political climate.

The contextual characteristics of conflict events which, according to Snyder and Kelly (1977) also affect the sensitivity of the media to reporting conflict, are also relevant here. The nature of participants, the locational proximity of events to media networks and the frequency of events (which can sensitise readers to violence) can all be applied to the conflict in KwaZulu-Natal. Journalists interviewed believe that events involving important public figures are more likely to be reported.

Also, events occurring far from the newspaper's base are less likely to be covered in detail due to a lack of staff and resources. Reporters and editors of newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal also stated that readers were tired of reading about the local

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[7] This issue was raised during an interview conducted with the assistant editor of The Natal Witness, on 1 July 1994 in Pietermaritzburg.

violence, and consequently these events were not reported as frequently, or in as much detail, as when violence levels were lower.[8]

The findings of these studies can be very generally applied to South Africa. In this country, the reporting of conflict is unique due to the effects of the States of Emergency and other government legislation on newspapers. The criticisms of press reporting of violence discussed in Chapter Four deal with the effects of the Emergency. Since the Emergency was lifted, problems have persisted, and while some of these may be remnants of this era, others may be the result of the news production process in general. This consideration of the studies by Snyder and Kelly (1977) and others, suggests that the problems facing South African newspapers are not completely different from those abroad, and that the States of Emergency here probably added to these problems, rather than changed them.

## 6. Conclusion

The aims of this chapter have firstly been to outline the methodology used by this study to test the hypothesis that the likelihood that events of violent collective action will be reported by the press will be affected by characteristics of the events and by the environment in which events occur. Secondly, this chapter also sought to discuss the data used for testing this hypothesis.

The methodology used by this study is divided into two parts. The first is qualitative, and reports the conclusions of secondary sources which discuss violence reporting by the press and monitors. The second and main contribution to this part, comes from interviews conducted with relevant people from newspapers and monitoring agencies in KwaZulu-Natal. The results of this qualitative part of the research process are reported in the next chapter and in Chapter Five.

_hypothesis_

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[8] These views were recorded in interviews with five political reporters and editors of the Daily News, The Natal Witness and The Mercury in 1994 and 1995.

The second part of the methodology for this study is quantitative. Statistical analyses are used to compare, over time, how the press and monitors' reported events which differed in terms of their size, location, intensity and timing. The results of these analyses are reported in Chapter Six.

Data for both the dependent and independent variables was obtained from the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project. The methodology of this project was explained in detail in this chapter. International studies which have assessed the effects of press reporting on conflict data were also referred to. The problems identified by these studies were part of the motivation for this study, and made an important contribution to the selection of the independent variables used to test the hypothesis.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# REPORTING VIOLENT CONFLICT: THE PRESS

## 1. Aims of this chapter

This chapter is one of the first which presents some of the results of this study. The aim of this chapter is to attempt to understand the way in which the press in KwaZulu-Natal reports violent conflict. Chapter One outlined some of the difficulties which researchers have encountered with the manner in which the press reports violent conflict in this province. This chapter will discuss and assess these criticisms, based on the results of interviews conducted with political reporters and editors of local newspapers. These opinions are framed within a discussion of the factors which affect and restrict violence reporting by the press. A very brief history of the English language press introduces this discussion.

The previous chapter argued that freedom of speech is vital for democracies of all kinds. South Africa is no exception, particularly since violence in parts of the country threatens our new democracy. Freedom of speech is especially important in a climate of political violence for two reasons. Firstly, information about violence is prone to suppression, manipulation and misinterpretation. Secondly, information is the essential ingredient without which long term solutions to violent conflict cannot be found.

The press can make an important contribution towards understanding violence, but the extent to which the press in KwaZulu-Natal fulfils this role has been questioned. Understanding the nature of the material about violence which the press disseminates is crucial for researchers using the press as a source of information. This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of how the press goes about reporting violent conflict, and about the factors which have affected, and continue to affect this reporting. These factors are:

- The legislative restrictions imposed by the previous government, particularly during the States of Emergency.
- Daily journalistic practices and the functioning of the newsroom.
- The demands of market forces and the influence of newspaper ownership.
- The reporting environment outside the newsroom.

Before discussing these factors, some background to the debates about the reporting history of the English language press will be considered. This discussion does not offer a comprehensive commentary on the history of the press in South Africa.[1] Many of the comments about reporting in general apply to violence reporting as well, and serve to contextualise the problems which are currently experienced.

## 2. The English language press

Historically the English press has been described as the voice of British capital and mining interests and until recently, the ownership of these newspapers reflected this legacy (Pollack, 1981). Up to 1994, two powerful groups had a monopoly of ownership over the English press. These were Argus Holdings and Times Media Limited, companies which are linked by shareholdings and contracts, and which are effectively owned by the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa and the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company (JCI) (Heard, 1991).

In 1994 the situation changed when the Irish Independent Newspaper Company bought majority shares in Argus Holdings, thereby gaining control over most of the country's English dailies and some weekly newspapers. The Natal Witness and to an extent the Daily Dispatch remain the only independent daily newspapers in the country. Before these changes in ownership, the press in KwaZulu-Natal was faced not only with a monopoly of ownership, but with a situation where one company, Natal Newspapers Limited, dominated the publishing and printing of most

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[1] This has been carried out in depth by various authors, such as Hachten and Giffard (1984), Pollack (1981), Potter (1975), and Tomaselli et al (eds.) (1987).

newspapers in the province.[2]

The ownership structure of the English press has been an important factor in debates about the quality of their reporting. These newspapers have been regarded by some as the mainstream liberal press in South Africa, actively opposed to apartheid. For others, however, the fact that the English press has historically been a commercial venture, backed by financial, commercial and mining concerns limited its rejection of apartheid (Potter, 1975). The latter have described the English press's opposition to apartheid as a role attained by default rather than by ideology (Potter, 1975; Tomaselli et al, 1987). These critics argue that the 'black' press could not articulate the views of apartheid's opponents due to government restrictions, and the Afrikaans language press promoted exclusive Afrikaner culture and the politics of the ruling National Party. The English press was the least hostile towards black people and thus became perceived as the anti-apartheid voice.

The position put forward by Tomaselli et al (1987) and to a lesser extent Potter (1975), corresponds with the neo-Marxist critique of the liberal press. This critique disputes two claims about these newspapers. The first is that they displayed a strong opposition to apartheid, and the second is that the liberal press is in principle a neutral reporter of important events, with commentary and opinions limited to the editorial pages (Phelan, 1987).

Tomaselli et al (1987) examined the political economy of the press in South Africa, and argued that the mass media, despite the English press's anti-apartheid stance, articulated the ideology of apartheid. Apartheid, these authors believed, was not an irrational ideology based on racial and cultural distinctions, but an expression of the class struggle in a capitalist society historically divided by race. The English press, being owned by 'white' capital, was consequently limited in its opposition to apartheid. (The only exception is the Rand Daily Mail, which was considered the

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[2] Natal Newspapers runs the Sunday Tribune, Daily News, The Mercury, The Post, Zululand Observer and eight suburban newspapers. Mandla-Matla Publishing Company owns Ilanga. Natal Witness Pty Ltd owns The Natal Witness. UmAfrika and New African are/were small independently owned newspapers.

most liberal English newspaper.) Given its ideological position, the English press could not present a serious threat to social and economic relations in South Africa, but its resistance to government policy nevertheless engendered severe repression.

A similar argument has been made by members of the 'black' press. These critics did not distinguish between the English press as 'oppositionist' and the Afrikaans as 'establishment', as is usually the case. Instead both were regarded as lacking credibility and were viewed as one industry serving the interests of the ruling classes. The English press was perceived to have accepted the status quo without questioning the political system as a whole (Phelan, 1987). In doing so, these newspapers served white interests exclusively, as opposition to government policy was only voiced to the extent that it did not threaten the advantaged position of white South Africans (Qwelane, 1992).

A statement by P.W. Botha shortly after becoming Prime Minister in 1979 is revealing. Botha announced to the country that there was a"'Marxist drive which aims at controlling the subcontinent', [and] he needed the assistance of the private sector to fully support the government in establishing national security" (Phelan, 1987: 44). The role of the press in this regard was crucial, and resulted in the Steyn Commission of Inquiry.

There are strong arguments which opposed these critics, arguing that the English press defied apartheid actively and with determination. The government regulations on the media were perceived as having had the greatest impact on the publication of news by the liberal press. The Nationalist Government imposed curbs on the English press as early as 1948 whereafter these newspapers were never allowed to undermine the control and policy of this government. Pollack (1981: 2) for example, stated that "more than any powerful force in the country [the English language] newspapers stand almost alone between the Afrikaner government and totalitarian darkness". He agreed that the financial concerns of the English press owners limit newspapers' political expression, but does not regarded this as significant.

Whatever ideological or commercial position newspapers may have adhered to, there can be little doubt that the States of Emergency regulations of the 1980s severely constrained the flow of information regarding civil unrest in the black townships. Even Potter (1975) and Tomaselli et al (1987) conceded that despite the vested interest of the English press in maintaining the status quo, opposition to the government was consistent.

Phelan (1987) also believed the neo-Marxist critique is flawed. He proposed that both the mainstream and alternative press were opposed to apartheid, although the latter criticised apartheid not only from a racist perspective, but also as an element of the capitalist exploitation of labour. The most serious limitation facing the mainstream media according to Phelan (1987) is a technical one. In order to manage the costs of advanced technology, greater outputs, higher ratings and broader readerships are needed. Objectivity in this context is not an ethical ideal but rather a tool which extends the readership beyond that of a more partial press by not offending large groups of readers.

Phelan (1987: 81) warned that this demand for a broader spread of readership means focused community issues are sacrificed for an artificially created set of "media community issues and people". Under these conditions news becomes a highly artificial commodity, supplying information which bears little relation to reality. Phelan (1987) suggested that the problem facing the mainstream press arises out of financial constraints which are the product of modern technology.

Phelan (1987) further argued that some actions of the large newspaper companies cannot be dismissed as merely a pursuit of the profit motive. The determination of the Argus Publishing Company to continue publishing very critical papers staffed by black journalists who the government sought to silence, illustrates this point. "Critical articles and scathing editorials certainly cause more trouble than they generate sales, where sex-sin-soccer have worked just fine" (Phelan, 1987: 73). He stated that this proves that at some level these newspapers sought to maintain a free press in the interests of democracy.

This broad discussion shows some of the issues in the debate about the position of the English language press in reporting events, particularly of a political nature. This background is important for understanding not only the effect of government restrictions, but also other factors which affect reporting, and the extent to which these might influence coverage of violence. The problems of the South African press, particularly relating to violence reporting, are usually explained in terms of the restrictive legislation. This would suggest that since the lifting of the States of Emergency and the decline in prosecutions in terms of the remaining laws, violence reporting will have improved accordingly.

## 3. Restrictions on the press

The lack of press freedom in South African was an extension of the lack of democracy in the country in general under the previous government. Any newspaper will be shaped by the market forces in which it operates and the related financial considerations. In this country, however, the press has also had to deal with extensive laws which sought to suppress opposition to the government and promote a favourable image of South Africa to its white citizens, and to those countries abroad which provided foreign investment. In 1990, the route to democracy was cleared, and in April 1994 the first democratic elections were held.

The climate of continued violence and intolerance, however, threaten the prospects of achieving genuine democracy. One of the victims of this political climate has been the media, which until the elections, had to operate in an environment characterised by intimidation and threats. This environment affected violence reporting most severely. In the sections which follow, the factors which impede a free media will be discussed. These are legislative restrictions, the newsroom process, the demands of the market on commercial newspapers, and the effects of the reporting environment on violence coverage.

## i) Legislative restrictions

Opposition to the English press by the Nationalist Government has a long history which has been traced back to the formation of the Purified Nationalist party in 1934 (Hepple, 1974). Accusations against the press ranged from publishing lies, hatred of the Afrikaners, and incitement of blacks, to defaming the country abroad. In 1949, Dr Malan described the English press as the most undisciplined in the world, and called for a register of all journalists so that their conduct could be controlled. The government's dissatisfaction with the press since then escalated, culminating in the over one hundred laws, most of which can still today be invoked to restrict the media (Stander, 1991/2).[3] The purpose of the legislation will be considered before reviewing the laws themselves as they were implemented from the 1950s.

Some of the laws were designed to subtly force the mainstream press into self-censorship, rather than openly censoring the political content of newspapers. This enabled the government to maintain an appearance of press freedom, necessary for international credibility (Potter, 1975). That laws posed a threat to journalists but were not always fully invoked, illustrates this point. Their most significant purpose, however, was to achieve the larger political goals of the government, namely to limit the activities of black groups opposed to the state, and stop the dissemination of information about political conflict (Tomaselli et al, 1987).

To do this, communication had to be suppressed at three levels: the spread of news overseas regarding the popular uprising from 1984 and the officially sanctioned police brutality which this unleashed, the spread of ideas and goals of the oppressed and the alternative organisations to all sectors of society, and the links between organisations which maintained the liberation movement (Merrett, 1990). The increased suppression of the alternative media in the mid-1980s suggests that the perceived threat to the white oligarchy in South Africa came not from the white electorate but from the "rising militancy of the voteless black

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[3] Article 15 (1) of the Interim Constitution does, however, protect freedom of the press, and actions perceived to be infringing on this right could be contested in the Constitutional Court.

masses", who were supported by most of the international world (Hepple, 1974: 6). The government needed a press which would present apartheid as a favourable system.

After the 1976 uprisings, infamous laws restricting the press such as the Internal Security Act were passed, which paved the way for the imposition of the nation-wide State of Emergency in 1986. Many restraining laws were, however, instituted before 1976. The regulations sought either to suppress criticism of the government or to restrict the sources of information about opposition movements, or both. The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) served both functions in its aim to control the spread of communism and prevent the publication of statements of banned people. This Act could be used against any political opinion which opposed government. The Riotous Assembly Act (1956) also served both purposes. Publications which the government thought could instil racial hostilities could be banned according to this Act. People could also be banned and prohibited from attending public gatherings.

The following acts aimed to crush opposition to the government. The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1953) prohibited criticism of laws in case this encouraged someone else (such as a reader) to break the law. The Public Safety Act (1953) enabled the government to declare a State of Emergency in times of unrest, which allowed for the publishing and dissemination of any material considered subversive to be banned (Potter, 1975). The Prisons Act (1959) restricted the publication of pictures and stories relating to prisoners, prisons and their administration. When the Rand Daily Mail published a series on prison conditions in 1965, the editor and journalist responsible had their passports revoked and were given a small fine and suspended sentence respectively. The legal costs, however, were very high.

The Official Secrets Amendment Act (1965) and Defence Amendment Act (1967) similarly prohibited the publication or possession of any information relating to official secrets, defence and police, and atomic energy. By 1968 there had, however, been no convictions under the first act (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991).

The establishment of the Press Board and Press Code of Conduct aimed to subtly suppress censure of government by forcing the press to discipline itself. The Newspaper Press Union (NPU), formed in 1882, established a Press Board of Reference and an internal code of conduct in order to avoid the 1963 Publications and Entertainment Act. After further threats by government, the NPU then transformed the Press Board into a Press Council in order to delay the creation of a statutory press council by the government (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991). In 1977, of the 253 complaints filed with the Press Council, only ten were ultimately placed before the council for hearing and the most severe penalty imposed on a paper was a reprimand (Pollack, 1981).

Legislation which targeted the sources of information included the Criminal Procedures Act (1955) which forced witnesses to provide information if requested to do so by the police. Journalists similarly could be forced to reveal their sources. Although this law was not often used and journalists were not held for long, it is still being invoked (Potter, 1975). From September 1990 to 1992, nine subpoenas were issued against journalists in terms of Section 205, two of which resulted in prison sentences (Stander, 1991/2). This Section was used thirteen times against journalists in 1992 (Angamuthu, 1993). The General Law Amendment Act (1962) also restricted sources, by disallowing the publication of speeches and comments of banned people.

After 1976, the government had to deal with a declining economy and the resurgence of popular resistance. The state tried to buy into the English language press (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991) to control news from the inside, but this proved unsuccessful. The Citizen was formed instead, in opposition to the Rand Daily Mail. More coercive tactics followed which sought to stop the spread of information about unlawful activities by government agents.

The Police Amendment Act (1978) prevented the press from publishing any information about the police that was untrue, and the onus fell on the journalist to prove that the report was accurate. There have, however, been relatively few convictions in terms of this Act. The Eastern Province Herald was the only paper to

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be prosecuted, although cases against other newspapers were investigated. In January 1992, the relevant section of the Act was scrapped amid moves by the government to lift restrictions on press freedom (The Mercury, 15 January 1992). The Advocates General Bill (1979) passed after the Information Scandal, performed a similar function as it prohibit the reporting of matters under formal investigation by the Advocate General (Tomaselli et al, 1987).

The findings of the Steyn Commission (a state enquiry into the mass media in 1981) also limited journalists' access to the Commissioner of Police to discuss 'sensitive' issues (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991). Police could not only chose which journalists to talk to, but editors and the NPU were furthermore being co-opted by the government to monitor reporters. This pressure on the media to perform self-censorship became a trend of government repression which began with the formation of the Press Council in the 1960s (as discussed above). In the early 1980s, the Minister of Interior threatened to institute a statutory Press Council, with a register of all journalists with the power to fine and ban reporters.

The second Steyn Cornmission supported these proposals which were attempts to restrict the free flow of information and essentially the publication of the truth (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991). The NPU set up a Media Council which replaced the Press Council to counteract these proposals. Although the Press Council was created in order to maintain press freedom, subtle cooption and exploitation meant that freedom was in no way secured (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991). Even in the late 1980s when restrictions were most severe, the government did not appear to directly interfere with the press. Instead it sought to increase tensions between management and editorial sections of the commercial newspapers. Under the circumstances, management chose self-censorship which was in line with government intentions (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

For most of the 1980s the government appeared more determined to control the establishment media than the left-wing media, as the former reached the government's white support base. The findings of the Steyn Commission indicated that this was to change. While the Commission acknowledged the need for political

tolerance and expression of black grievances it accused the black press (such as Sowetan) of "fomenting discontent and lacking loyalty" (Phelan, 1987: 64). The restrictive press legislation imposed during this time was felt more by black journalists than by any others.[4] The Newspapers Amendment Bill (1980) was a direct attack on the alternative media, as it made provision for all newspapers to pay a deposit of R40 000 to the government. The alternative press lacked major capital funds and struggled to meet this demand, often failing to meet it at all.

The perceived internal war and the 'total strategy' adopted by the government in response to the crisis of the 1980s resulted in more stringent restrictions on the flow of information. The media was identified as an important site of the struggle against apartheid with the potential to cause a revolution. The Internal Security Act reintroduced in 1982, made it illegal to circulate and publish matters relating to alternative social, political and economic policies for South Africa (Tomaselli et al, 1987). The State President could close newspapers which contravened the Act without explanation and several were silenced in this manner.

The Bureau of Information was formed in 1985 and its principle aim was to control the flow of information. The Bureau became the only commentator on South African issues, particularly the violence, and sought to propagate an "official news culture" enabling the government to monitor the presentation of political news by the media (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991: 84). The publication of official police Unrest Reports on a daily basis was part of this "news culture". Despite these restrictions, resistance to the apartheid state increased in the 1980s.

The national State of Emergency in 1986 was the government's answer to this increased resistance. The government's concern shifted during this time from the mainstream to the alternative press possibly because the former had imposed self-

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[4] Up to 1987, no Afrikaner journalist had ever been detained. From 1976 to 1981 there were less than 250 mainstream black journalists and 3 500 white journalists. During this period, fifty black journalists were detained for up to 500 days, ten were detained more than once, ten were banned and one was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison. In the same period one white journalist was detained, one banned and one sentenced to six years in prison (Phelan, 1987).

censorship and had consistently adopted a conservative and cautious approach as the government hoped it would (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991). The alternative media had also expanded despite state attempts to eliminate it, and although the state vowed it would crush the alternative press, serious action was not subsequently taken (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

By 1987 it became clear that any left-wing press was considered 'subversive', but as the government had no clear definition of this category, all opposition was rejected. Many regulations restricting press freedom were obscure, which complicated the journalists' task even more. The government defined as revolutionary "any attempt to change South Africa away from a racially ordered society and any call for a more equitable distribution of wealth..." (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991: 181). This meant that opposition to capitalism was also illegal and demonstrated the links between apartheid and capital in South Africa's government.

After 1987, restricting the press became a totally subjective affair, punishable by closure and/or censorship. The Registration of Newspapers Amendment Bill was invoked on the New African when it opened in 1989 in the form of a R20 000 deposit. The newspaper was given a warning even before its first edition, and the state's threat to retain this deposit enabled extensive control over what was published. By September 1989, twenty four cases were being heard regarding this issue, illustrating that the courts were increasingly being used as censorship tools (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991). Harassment of this nature was common, and was accompanied by intimidation of reporters through arrests and seizure of footage throughout 1989.

## ii) Effects of legislation on violence reporting

The States of Emergency and the preceding regulations were aimed directly at controlling news about conflict and violence in South Africa. Violence was a direct expression of opposition to the state by the liberation movements and the

government wished to restrict this information. The role of the security forces in the violence on the side of the government, and the state support of black groups against the extra-parliamentary movements are also issues which the government wanted to conceal. This had far reaching effects on violence reporting.

The most obvious implication of the laws is that they obstructed reporting on violence, let alone the other normal activities of reporters. Journalists were prevented from:

- Gaining access to affected areas.
- Adequately checking the facts of their stories particularly if this required verification from the authorities.
- Quoting the opinions of people involved if these contravened Emergency regulations or if the people themselves were banned.
- Commenting on action taken by security forces (Robbins, 1988).

The press restrictions assaulted the most vital aspects of reporting, namely access to information and to sources. Not only the normal reporting routine was affected, however. The journalists themselves had to deal with constant confusion about legislation as well as personal danger.[5]

Journalists faced detention, banning, assault, disrupted meetings, they suffered attacks on their premises, and were increasingly forced to reveal their sources in court. Newspapers were threatened with suspension and some were forced to stop publication. As time passed, the Emergency restrictions became more comprehensive, to the extent that it was "de facto illegal for journalists to concern themselves with that which is normally newsworthy!" (Louw and Tomaselli, 1991: 87). The definition of a 'publication' and of 'subversive' material was expanded, and the press could only publish stories which were compatible with official reports.

These reporting conditions had three broad effects on journalism in South Africa and on the reporting of violence:

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[5] See Mkhize (1988) for an informative account of these issues.

## Lack of sources

The lack of access to sources and the subsequent reliance on the state Bureau of Information had implications for reporting. During interviews, the political reporters at The Natal Witness and The Mercury said that the State of Emergency laws made journalists lazy as they became accustomed to the police "handouts" in the form of the Unrest Reports. The assistant editor of The Natal Witness confirmed this, saying that the Emergency suppressed the investigative culture of reporters and elevated the police to the position of journalists. This problem still prevails according to these sources, with reporters doing their jobs using the telephone rather than speaking to people on the ground.[6]

The lack of access to sources and reliance on the Bureau of Information also meant the term 'black-on-black' was widely used by the local and foreign news media to describe and explain the violence in South Africa. This simplification of the violence depoliticised the problem, totally obscuring the central role of the government and apartheid in the conflict. Apartheid was limited to the "quaint traditional customs of the Afrikaners" (Fair and Astroff, 1991: 72). Mkhize (1990) criticised the press for adopting the Bureau's terminology and for reporting the conflict as racial and ethnic. He pointed out that these shallow distortions of events have affected international perceptions of the violence. These problems gave rise to the criticism of the press referred to in the introduction, that the causes and consequences of the violence was not accurately covered.

According to the political reporter at The Natal Witness, the problem of editors using ethnic terminology still exists. The assistant editor confirmed this, adding that one of his tasks is to rid the newspaper of these tendencies. Reporters at The Mercury and Daily News also said the use of this kind of language still occurs, although with more black staff in the newsroom, this is changing.[7]

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[6] Interviews with the political reporter and assistant editor of The Natal Witness in July 1994, and the political reporter from The Mercury in February 1994.

[7] Interview with the Daily News political reporter, February 1994.

## Self-censorship

The second effect of the restrictions was that journalists were forced to protect their interests, which they did by limiting their rights and options. Reporters became too cautious and self-censorship was encouraged (Armour, 1987; Emdon, 1990). These practices, once established, are not easily shaken off. Ken Owen, editor of the Sunday Times, commented that "The virtual destruction of South African journalism - the terrible loss of skills - is now exacting its toll" (Heard, 1992).

This caution was exercised particularly when dealing with the political activity of extra-parliamentary movements (Armour, 1987; Hepple, 1974). The press could not easily get access to leaders of banned organisations and their views, and these groups received poor publicity during the Emergency as a result. This created the perception that the mainstream media was biased against these groups. This has been cited as the reason for the press in KwaZulu-Natal giving Minister Buthelezi and Inkatha extensive coverage in the 1980s. After the other political groups were unbanned in 1990 this changed. Bias is one of the criticisms levelled at the press which was mentioned in the introduction to this study.

Only two of the political reporters interviewed agreed that self-censorship still occurs as a result of the State of Emergency legislation. The SAPA reporter said that being detained during the Emergency had made him reluctant to venture out to obtain new information, adding that reporters are sometimes still reluctant to confront policemen at the scene of violence.

The Mercury editor believed that self-censorship might still be occurring, but that the situation is now far better than it was during the mid-1980s. His counterpart in the Daily News agreed that the problem is still a factor. These comments suggest that the current situation among KwaZulu-Natal newspapers is somewhat better than that described above.[8]

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[8] Interviews with the SAPA reporter in July 1994 and the editors of The Mercury and Daily News in March 1995.

## The extent and intensity of violence was not reported

The third implication of the press restrictions was that the ongoing violence was removed from the public sphere as a result of the daily difficulties in disseminating news and the limitations mentioned above (Phelan, 1987). The extent and intensity of the conflict was concealed from all those not residing in the black townships where the violence was occurring. (This inspired one of the major criticisms of the press coverage of violence referred to in the introduction, namely that the extent of the violence was not well reported.) The township residents developed an intense dislike for the press, for not reporting the violence in their communities. The implications of the Emergency regulations on the press were not always fully understood, and the newspapers were consequently blamed for restrictions which originated with the government and police.

Many daily experiences of people went unrecorded and large portions of our history remain unknown. A study in the United States (US) found that when the Emergency began in 1985, US networks ran sixty stories in August on the daily news. By November this was down to twenty and later none at all. Thus for the international world and more so for South Africans, the continuing incidents "might as well not have happened" (Phelan, 1987: 37). Throughout the decades of apartheid, the media failed to disseminate news about the activities of black people.

While the Emergency shielded the realities of apartheid from those who benefited from the system and concealed the truths about the methods used to sustain apartheid, this had always been the practice in South Africa (Merrett, 1991). When asked how many events could not be published due to the Emergency restrictions in 1987, then news editor of The Mercury, Joe Mulraney said "The Mercury never was a great crusading newspaper for black rights as say, the Rand Daily Mail. So quite probably there is a lot of copy which we wouldn't have used anyway" (Armour, 1987).

One positive implication of the Emergency regulations according to Merrett (1991), is that some journalists were forced to challenge the law and conquer restrictions on press freedom. Loopholes in the Emergency had to be discovered (and were), and reporters had to find alternate sources of information about restricted subjects such as security force activity. The severity of the Emergency increased the skills of journalists and their determination to achieve freedom of expression. These qualities could prove useful for the future in South Africa.

### iii) Restrictions related to the newsroom process

The newsroom process, which is often shaped by the demands of the market and the daily production schedule of the newspaper, also affects violence reporting. This process will be discussed, drawing largely on information obtained during interviews with political reporters and editors from KwaZulu-Natal's daily newspapers.

The newsroom process is driven largely by the decisions taken by editors and reporters about what issues will be covered and by whom, which are reported on, and the form of the final product for publication. Emdon (1991) believed these issues are relevant to the way the press deals with violence in KwaZulu-Natal because the commercial press is dominated by white males with few black journalists being trained or hired.[9]

In the case of the alternative newspapers, the staff were dominated by younger black males. These exclusive groups make almost all the decisions about which news will reach the public. Emdon (1991) also contended that newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal have adopted their practices from the Fleet Street tradition of British newspapers with few modifications to suit the local circumstances.

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[9] Emdon (1991) put his material together in 1990. By 1994 when this study was being researched, the number of young black reporters had increased dramatically. This was in turn, perceived as a problem because many lacked the necessary skills. Amongst the editors and managers, however, there were still very few black staff members.

The activities in the newsroom include the editors, and to some extent the reporters, deciding what constitutes news, how this news will be interpreted and thus what the public should be informed about. More specifically, the news editors in consultation with the editors, decide what reporters should focus on and which reporter should cover the story. The reporters then gather and select the material which they believe is appropriate. The copy tasters decide whether the report should be used and how long and on which page it will appear.

The news editors, chief sub-editors and editors may at any point in this process change the focus or position of the news item (Emdon, 1991). This process can be influenced by many factors such as: the ideological position of the reporters, editors and newspaper owners; the resources available to the newspaper; the demands of producing the publication by the end of the day; and obstacles to obtaining and publishing information.

As a result, many theories have been developed which try to explain the determinants of this process and its manifestations. Some theories suggest that certain events are more newsworthy than others, or that a happening is only newsworthy when it becomes an event. Other explanations focus on how the newsroom is organised and what determines how reporters and editors make their decisions. Still other theories examine how information is filtered in the process, which is also known as 'gatekeeping'.

The theory of 'consensual bias' by contrast, argues that the whole process of news selection is shaped by a prevailing ideology which is never articulated, but is learned through the relationships in the newsroom (Tomaselli et al, 1987). Whatever the causes, it has been argued that this newsroom process affects violence reporting, not only in terms of deciding what is newsworthy, but also with regard to information about events being omitted or altered in the editorial process and the choice of headlines and terminology.

The opinions of journalists from KwaZulu-Natal newspapers about the ways in which journalistic practices influence reporting will be considered. Although these

are the views of a small group of people in the newspaper business, their opinions are relevant because this study used only these newspapers as sources. The roles of reporters and editors in deciding who will cover violence stories, which topics to cover and what constitutes newsworthiness, and the sources of information and how this information is handled, will be discussed. In addition, the perceived limitations to violence reporting as a result of resource and time constraints and the 'gatekeeping' process, will also be covered.

## The roles of reporters and editors in the newsroom process

The daily task of violence reporting is fairly standardised, resting with the crime reporter in all three newspapers, namely The Natal Witness, Daily News and The Mercury. All the newspapers had, during times of widespread conflict, appointed a special 'unrest reporter', but this position has since fallen away. The political reporters (who were the subjects of the interviews) only become involved in violence reporting if a background article or an investigative piece is to be done. The Daily News reporter said that if violence becomes extreme, any reporter can be used to cover events.

The editors have little direct interaction with the crime reporter in terms of the latter's violence reporting task. Editors generally are concerned with planning the daily contents of the newspaper, discussing the headline and lead stories and their placing in the newspaper, and the editorial sections. All this is done in consultation with staff in other editorial positions. Both editors of the Daily News and The Mercury pointed out that since the takeover of the Independent Newspaper Company, their roles include taking more responsibility for the commercial success of their newspapers than before.

Responding to the question of influence by the newspaper owners and managers over their activities, the Daily News editor was adamant that any interference on editorial issues is offensive, and that this never happened. The Mercury editor agreed, saying the owners are more involved in the marketing position of the newspaper, deciding what kind of newspaper to publish, the relevant target market,

and how much advertising space the newspaper will need to remain profitable. Once these decisions are taken and an appropriate editor is employed, there is no further editorial interference. Despite the editors' opinions, these kinds of 'market' based decisions by owners could be interpreted as determining the general scope of topics covered, and the way in which the newspaper covers them.

Decision making and 'gatekeeping'

Decisions about who will undertake investigative reports on violence are made either by the news editor alone, or in consultation with the relevant reporter. The news editor in turn reports directly to the managing editor whose task it is to inspire the news editor, who should, in turn inspire his/her staff of reporters. The Mercury reporter noted that this process is not systematic and depends on constraints of time, space and resources. The SAPA reporter and the assistant editor of The Natal Witness pointed out that the news editors are often not particularly concerned with violence and do not encourage reporters to investigate further, being satisfied with telephone journalism and body counts.

Gatekeeping refers to editors' decisions about articles submitted by reporters. Most reporters were dissatisfied with the performance of sub-editors in particular. The assistant editor of The Natal Witness also believed that the sub-editors are the most powerful people in the newspaper because they adhere to a "subs culture" (which advocates "responsible" reporting, for example) which is often difficult to change, and which often causes problems for reporters. Reporters pointed out that most sub-editors are white, middle-aged men who are largely conservative, and who perform important tasks such as writing headlines and deciding on the length and placement of articles. The Mercury reporter said that bias is often worse at this level because the "subs" are not overseen by anyone, as are reporters by the news editors.

The editors of the Daily News and The Mercury argued that while subs are largely white, middle-aged men they tend to be the more experienced journalists. The Mercury editor acknowledged that subs tended to be politically more conservative

than reporters, but that they were discouraged from making political statements in their choice of headlines. He acknowledged that the problems with sub-editors might affect violence reporting in particular because it is hard to persuade sub-editors who believe that no one wants to read about violence, that violence is actually important. Both The Mercury and Daily News editors stated that there is friction between reporters and sub-editors in newspapers throughout the world. The latter also believed that the presence of white middle-aged men in editorial roles is also common throughout the world, and that this is an issue rather than a problem for newspapers.

The journalists at The Natal Witness were more concerned with the news editor's role as opposed to that of the sub-editor, and raised some points which none of the other interviewees mentioned. The news editors are still largely white and both the reporter and assistant editor said these editors relate more easily to a white farmer being murdered, than for example, to black people dying in the townships. They felt that black people are seen as inferior by news editors, who are detached from these communities. This has a negative impact on violence reporting, because although news editors do not stop a reporter covering political violence, they do not encourage it.

The reporter said that the major limitation for violence reporting is that management and editors believe black journalists are all politically aligned, and consequently do not believe some of the stories they write. As a result, the reporters chose not to cover certain events, particularly if the events concern the political party the reporter is believed to support. The reporter did believe, however, that The Natal Witness is a better newspaper than the other provincial dailies since senior reporters attend the main management meetings where they can challenge most of the decisions that are taken.

## What constitutes newsworthiness

Reporters' and editors' opinions about which events are chosen for reporting or follow-up investigations, and thus what constitutes news and newsworthiness,

differed. There was, however, some consensus about conventional understandings of newsworthiness. Reporters from all the dailies and from SAPA said "news value" is characterised by large numbers of people being killed or injured in events, the involvement of women and children, the presence of well known people, the broader political climate at the time of the event, and generally any events which are new or different from the normal trends. Reporters' personal opinions about how they decided which events to write about or investigate, differed.

The Natal Witness reporter said that curiosity or a hunch often indicates which events to follow up. The assistant editor echoed this, saying he encourages this sort of reporting to counteract the conventional newsworthy requirements. The reporter did not believe that the public are tired of reading about violence as a subject, but instead they are tired of the manner in which violence is reported. The assistant editor however, was of the opinion that readers, both white and black, want to read about other issues. The "headcount" reports of conflict events continue to be published, he said, because the news desk feels obliged to inform the public.

The Daily News editor shared some of his counterpart's sentiments. He said that while the issue of newsworthiness is an ongoing debate in his newspaper, journalists are tired of the violence and are not eager to cover its course. He was adamant, however, that news cannot be manipulated and that all events of violence which can be verified are reported, although it is unlikely that such reports would be a focus or a lead story. He acknowledged that newsworthiness is the main influence on what is reported, but that this often translates into a difference in emphasis rather than exclusion. He noted that news value is a perception often leading to decisions made according to a "gut feel" under extreme pressure to produce three editions a day.

The Daily News reporter also commented that newsworthiness is important, and that it is often subjective decision making. She added that in previous years when violence levels were higher, events with just two deaths would automatically be investigated, but now these events receive small mentions.

The Mercury editor had different thoughts about the issue. He said that newsworthiness depends on the position adopted by the newspaper and on its readership. The Mercury's new direction is that of an "upmarket" newspaper, and consequently it has a different focus to the Daily News which is now a more "middle market" publication. This means that The Mercury focuses on "issues", and one murder is therefore unlikely to receive much attention. The Mercury has to differentiate itself from the Daily News to remain in business, and this requirement has the greatest effect on what is newsworthy.

Sources and their reliability

The newspapers generally rely on similar sources for regular information about violence, namely the South African Police Service (SAPS) and political party spokespersons. All the newspapers and SAPA are in daily telephone communication with the SAPS and in some cases the KwaZulu Police (KZP), or receive a daily fax listing events. Other sources include, with varying regularity, political parties, monitoring agencies and contacts in communities. The Mercury reporter noted that the newspaper does not have a good network of sources in the black communities where most of the violence occurs. Both The Mercury and Daily News editors identified the issue of sources, and in particular their accuracy, as an important problem for violence reporting.

Thoughts on the reliability of these sources differed. The Natal Witness and SAPA reporters found the police information unreliable and both said they often hear about events before the police do. The SAPA reporter said that channels of communication with the police ought to be more professional and established. The Natal Witness reporter preferred to approach political parties for comments after events, as opposed to obtaining new information from them, as they are also not very reliable. These two reporters also seemed more proactive in gaining information, citing local residents, civic committees and community structures as sources.

For The Mercury and the Daily News, the police are the most regular source of information (although the police are also not considered particularly accurate), followed by political party spokespersons. Although all interviewees mentioned the monitoring agencies, it does not appear that monitor's information is regularly used. Most reporters said the events have usually been published by the time the monitors' reports are received.

All reporters agreed that the verification of events is vital before they can be published. Allegations of political parties committing crimes can only be reported along with the response of the other party. According to The Mercury reporter, all reports from political parties or people on the ground have to be confirmed by the police, despite the fact that police reports themselves are of a poor quality and often have to be checked against political party statements. He considered the monitoring agency reports to generally be more accurate than those of the police.

At the Daily News a similar process was followed, except the reporter said that events are only verified if the reporter or the news editor thinks the details are problematic. The reporter thought the sources are generally accurate, but the editor described their sources as "dicey", explaining that there is a problem confirming some events, particularly from monitors with political leanings, and sometimes from the police.

On the same issue, The Natal Witness reporter said that information supplied by reliable contacts is used without verification. Unknown individual's reports have to be confirmed with other sources in the relevant area before publication. At the time of the interview, police reports were being printed unchecked because violence levels were low, although in the past, the crime and political reporters and news editor would meet daily to decide which police items needed to be substantiated with other sources. SAPA also said that unverified reports are used if the source is considered reliable, although a note would be published that police cannot confirm the details. A problem expressed only by The Natal Witness reporter is that of editors not believing reporter's sources and subsequently not using their stories.

## Resource constraints

The problem of limited resources, in the form of money, staff, vehicles and computers was raised by all the journalists interviewed. According to The Natal Witness reporter, these limitations mean that events in far off places such as Zululand, are not well covered because The Natal Witness does not circulate in this area. There is thus a reluctance to spend money on events here.

The Mercury and Daily News reporters also believed that rural areas are not well covered, attributing this to a lack of resources and to newspaper sources which generally are more accurate about urban violence (including the police). The editors confirmed that the costs, in terms of money and staff, of reporting on these areas outweigh the gains, especially since their readerships do not extend to many of these areas. The Daily News reporter did add, however, that if violence flares up in a remote area, a reporter might be assigned to that area, as occurred in 1991 when violence soared in the Richmond area.

The Mercury reporter mentioned the shortages of vehicles and computers in particular. At the time, two reporters were sharing one computer. All the reporters said that the staff shortages encouraged telephone journalism, as investigative reporting and follow-ups are impossible under the circumstances. This means that often the details and context of events are not reported. The Mercury editor also stressed the problem of staff shortages, particularly since his newspaper had experienced drastic cuts after the Independent Newspaper Company takeover. The Daily News editor was more accepting of the problem, saying that staff shortages is a universal newspaper problem, and that topics for coverage have to be prioritised as a result.

## Time constraints

The target of producing one newspaper (or more) a day imposes constraints on reporting practices. The Natal Witness reporter said that this also limits the reporting of events in distant locations, because to complete a story on the same

day that it occurs is difficult, and if they wait too long the news quickly becomes "old". This type of constraint, in conjunction with resource limitations, results in telephone journalism, and means that the extent and full context of the violence is not well covered. The editors of the <u>Daily News</u> and <u>The Mercury</u> confirmed this, although the former did not think it was a major problem. <u>The Mercury</u> and SAPA reporters added interesting comments, saying that to complete a full story about violence requires a lot of time, and the final product is often less newsworthy than other less time consuming stories. As a result it might not be prioritised.

## iv) <u>Restrictions related to market dynamics and the ownership of newspapers</u>

Most commercial newspapers operate according to the demands of the market. This has advantages and disadvantages. Those relying on grants or donations, such as the alternative press in this country, can never be fully independent in the way that commercial newspaper are, and constantly face the threat of withdrawal of funding. These newspapers cannot afford the advanced infrastructure used by commercially viable newspapers, and competition is therefore difficult.

Yet the commercial press in turn faces limitations which escape the non-profit newspapers. The editors and staff work under varying degrees of direction from the newspaper owners and managers who may adopt particular positions which constrain normal journalistic activity. In addition, the constant battle to attract advertising and expand the newspaper's readership imposes more restraints.[10] Newspaper articles must avoid alienating large groups of readers and must also reflect issues which the public like to read about.

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[10] These restraints were also discussed in the preceding chapter on democracy and the press. The main criticism which supporters of participative democracy make of the way the press works deals with this issue. The market place distorts the operations and product of newspapers, which means the media do not properly fulfil their role of enabling equal participation in the democratic process.

In South Africa, the overconcentration of newspaper ownership by white-owned companies in the mainstream press is a well known and widely debated issue. Only two daily provincial newspapers and six alternative weeklies are presently not owned by some of the five newspaper and magazine companies or the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The monopoly of ownership also extends to the distribution and printing business, and has affected both the mainstream and alternative press.

The dangers of monopolies in the newspaper business are similar to the problems inherent in any monopoly. The lack of competition affects the quality of the product, and there is little variation between available products. The newspaper monopoly may result in several newspapers having the same reporting style and editorial outlook, which may limit the publication of alternative views, favour certain types of news over others, neglect the activities of certain groups of people, and result in 'grey' reporting. The mainstream press in this country has in particular, been the subject of these criticisms, as the discussion at the start of this chapter illustrated.

In addition to the issue of who owns the press, there are other economic considerations which affect reporting tendencies. These are often related to ownership patterns, since the very high costs of setting up and running a newspaper limit owners to wealthy, established business concerns and also limit the number of owners in the industry. Most newspapers are commercial, which means they operate, like any other business, according to the demands of the market. For the commercial press, revenue is derived from the sale of newspapers and advertising space, in varying proportions for different newspapers.

The more popular and in some cases, tabloid newspapers derive most of their income from the sales of their publications, which tend to be more affordable. This formula is based on the assumption that the spending power of these readers is lower, and thus companies are less willing to pay large amounts to advertise in these newspapers. The converse is true for the more upmarket, 'issues' newspapers, which tend to be more expensive, and whose revenue largely comes from selling advertising space. Operating in a market environment means that the

work of reporters and editors is constantly affected by the resources available to the newspaper, the demands of expanding the readership base in order to attract advertising and sales, pressure to avoid alienating existing readers and of simply producing a newspaper each day.

## v) **The implications of these issues for reporting: the journalists' opinions**

According to Karon (1991) the lack of competition as a result of the ownership monopoly makes newspapers "grey and dull". Fewer opinions are published in the mainstream press, and there is a greater inclination towards control and internal censorship and the manipulation of information. Emdon (1991) added that editors, who determine newsroom and production procedures, are hired and fired to the extent that they conform to the value system of the company.

In addition, the popular perception that the English press serves mainly white interests is aggravated by the lack of diversity among newspaper owners. The mainstream press has to evolve to reflect the interests of the whole population, but economic constraints will slow down these efforts. Most of these newspapers rely extensively for advertising revenue on a white readership who cannot be immediately replaced by those from other groups whose environments are characterised by unemployment, poor education and in some cases, radical politicisation (Patten, 1991).

The closure of the Rand Daily Mail illustrates how central these issues are to a newspaper's survival. Tomaselli et al (1987) believed the newspaper had financial and managerial problems and had lost market appeal. Owen (1993) stated that the Rand Daily Mail alienated its advertisers and white readers as the editorial policy was "too radical".

The deputy editor of the Rand Daily Mail argued that the newspaper had lost credibility due to unbalanced reporting, which alienated readers from across the spectrum. In order to increase advertising and change the newspaper's financial

position, the readership had to be maintained, and the paper had to have a good reputation. This meant changes in editorial policy, which the Rand Daily Mail would not undertake and subsequently was closed. This shows that a newspaper must be marketable in order to survive. According to Owen (1993) the mainstream press has neglected its social and political functions since witnessing the Rand Daily Mail's demise in its determination to make profits.

According to all the journalists interviewed, the monopoly of newspaper owners affects reporting, but not of violence in particular. The Natal Witness reporter had never felt pressure from the newspaper owners with regard to violence reporting, but believed that quality is affected by a lack of diversity. In addition, having only one news agency (SAPA) was thought to exacerbate the problem as the same stories are used by different newspapers and have a similar format and content. The Mercury reporter said that while he can generally write about anything as long as he has evidence to support his work, a "middle-of-the-road, moderate, liberal theme" prevails in the newspaper.

Editors agreed that owners have an effect on newspapers in so far as they select the editors, who are thus likely to be of the same ilk, and who will probably produce newspapers of a similar kind. They were adamant, however, that management and owners never interfere with editorial policy, although with the Independent Newspaper Company takeover, the message was that newspapers either operate at a profit or close down. The Mercury editor believed this policy has "massive" implications for the newspaper, which has run at a loss for many years, being sustained by the other newspapers at Natal Newspapers.

One indication that the monopoly does affect violence reporting was The Mercury editor's comments about the coverage of violence in outlying areas. He explained that one of the reasons why his newspaper does not cover events in these areas well, is because the lack of competition means there is no threat of another newspaper covering the story before The Mercury does. The Daily News editor had a more positive view of the monopoly issue, saying that this tendency in South Africa is changing and will continue to change in the future. He added, however,

that the highly capital intensive nature of the newspaper business means there will never be large numbers of owners in the mainstream media.

Moving to the implications of market demands, all journalists interviewed thought the issue of advertising is crucial. This is not only because of the pressures to attract advertisers, but also because adverts take up valuable space which could contain news articles. The editor of The Mercury attributed the closure of the Rand Daily Mail to that newspaper's attempts to shift its readership, which caused the advertisers to drop off as they did not favour the paper's new angle. He added that because substantial revenue comes from advertising, newspapers cannot afford to annoy advertisers who are very powerful in the industry.

Related to the question of advertising is the debate about covering issues which customers wish to read about in order to sell the newspaper. This concerned all the journalists interviewed, particularly the fact that the readership of all three newspapers is overwhelmingly white, which some believed does influence reporting.

Journalists acknowledged that the commercial viability of newspapers is linked to the readership, and that this cannot be ignored. The Mercury editor pointed out that his attempts to broaden the focus of the newspaper to include all race groups and religions did not alter the fact that the staff and the public still perceive the readership to be white.

The question of newsworthiness was also raised by reporters and editors, who said that if readers (and even reporters themselves) are tired of reading and covering violence, this has to be taken into account. As a result, in the Daily News, events of violence are documented, but more time and space cannot be spent on the subject. The Daily News and The Natal Witness editors nevertheless stressed that although readers' preferences are important, they cannot be applied narrowly, and news cannot be manipulated.

## vi) Restrictions related to the reporting environment and 'unofficial censorship'

The reporting environment refers to factors other than government restrictions and market constraints. The press has been constrained in its reporting of violence by physical factors such as the poor standard of roads, the absence of telephones and of press networks, and in some areas the distance of the events from the newspaper base. These problems apply particularly to coverage in rural areas. This means that many incidents go unreported and that by the time they are reported and investigated, they have lost their newsworthiness.

'Unofficial censorship' describes the situation whereby violence and intimidation make the victims and witnesses of violence, as well as reporters, reluctant to talk and write through fear of reprisals (Robbins, 1988). This unofficial censorship affects coverage of violence in particular. The rise in indiscriminate violence and criminal activities puts the lives of reporters in increasing danger. The difference between a journalist being hit by a stray bullet and actually being targeted for attack is significant, and has serious implications for conflict reporting. This is not a problem specific to South Africa. The year 1991 was marked as the worst year of violence against journalists by the International Federation of Journalists, who noted with grave concern the increased attacks directed at press members (The Journalist, March 1992).

What has been described as "probably the most under reported story in South Africa" (Williams, 1991) is the intimidation and harassment of the press by "unofficial sources". This began in the mid-1980s and takes the form of death threats, arson and assault, and has been regarded as the media's most pressing problem (Laurence, 1993). The harassment experienced during the States of Emergency is no longer a problem, and intimidation now stems more commonly from elements in white and black communities. These risks for reporters increased from 1990 to the April 1994 elections. Indications are that this problem is no longer as serious.

## The role of political organisations and political affiliation

Intimidation has been perpetrated by parties from across the political spectrum. Some senior black journalists have contended that this intimidation and censorship comes from left-wing activists (Mazwai, 1991). Kaizer Nyatsumba (1991) of The Star said that censorship from the 'left' is much worse than from the government, since government pressures are overt, while intimidation from the left is concealed and the censors remain unknown. According to him, the consequence of these pressures on journalists is that news published in the press is about 40-50% accurate, with the remaining 50% consisting of propaganda.

Mathiane (1990) recalls how since 1987 she along with other black colleagues, constantly remained silent about the abuses and murderous activities of the liberation movements in their own communities. Injustices committed by white people were reported with ease, and journalists were prepared to be imprisoned as a result. The fear of being 'necklaced' as enemies of 'the people', however, kept them silent about the atrocities which were destroying the fabric of their own societies. She states that this has not changed in recent times and that:

> "Blacks are once more silent and sitting on the fence, dependent on their white colleagues to expose abuses of power. And the liberation movements turn around and accuse black journalists of being inefficient and lazy. Now that's a strange irony if ever there was one" (Mathiane, 1990: 31).

Journalists in the alternative and mainstream press in KwaZulu-Natal have identified similar problems with regards to Inkatha. Reporters were threatened if they sought access to Inkatha sources, and at Inkatha press conferences, journalists from UmAfrika were insulted and abused (Emdon, 1990; Williams, 1990). In 1992 three journalists from The Natal Witness were intimidated, verbally abused and had their car stoned by a group of youths carrying an IFP flag. This incident happened shortly after a senior IFP leader stated that ANC supporting journalists should identify themselves as such, "so that they can be attacked and shot if necessary" (The Natal Witness, 8 April 1992). Unofficial censorship is not

restricted to any particular party, and whoever uses it demonstrates a contempt for press freedom and human rights - two of the pillars of democracy.

The South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ) observed an increase in the number of threats of violence and actual violence exercised against members of the media, and particularly black journalists (Heard, 1992). In July 1992, the SAUJ held a seminar on the problem which resulted in a pledge by representatives of the ANC, Democratic Party, IFP, NP, South African Communist Party (SACP), Cosatu and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) to "respect and promote the physical safety of journalists" (Stander, 1992).

The Afrikaner Weerstands Beweging (AWB) and Conservative Party (CP) declined to attend, and the Azanian Peoples Organisation (Azapo), who attended the seminar, did not endorse the pledge as the group believed it was unnecessary. If the intolerance of freedom of speech stems from supporters of political groups, the pledge had little effect, as fifty nine journalists were attacked in the country over the first four months of 1993, according to figures released by the SAUJ. These can be compared with forty six attacks in the whole of 1992 and thirteen in 1991 (Daily News, 28 April 1993).[11]

The view has been expressed that journalists are not altogether innocent in this process of unofficial censorship. According to Qwelane (1992), journalists have identified with political organisations or parties in the past, and this has been a direct cause of harassment. This encourages people to believe that members of the press are part of the political process and can therefore be intimidated into serving a specific purpose (Qwelane, 1992). The SAUJ cautions that journalists, like other citizens, have the right of political association but that these beliefs should under no circumstances be allowed to affect professional conduct (Stander, 1991/2).

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[11] For an in-depth account of such events see Stander (1991/2) and The Journalist, November 1990. A list of forty five incidents since June 1990 is provided, documenting cases of verbal abuse, intimidation, assault and murder of press members by people from across the political spectrum, including the police.

<u>Intolerance the root cause</u>

The origins of the problem point to some of the limitations which will face press freedom in the future and which will continue to impact on the use of the press as a source for violence research.

The lack of tolerance which the attacks on journalists suggest, has historical roots in South Africa. Four decades of apartheid and repression, and the poverty and poor education which accompanied it, have not engendered respect for other points of view. The social and political violence which grew out of these conditions has become routinised and the total lack of tolerance of different political opinions is a problem afflicting all political organisations. It has, nevertheless, been argued that intolerance is directly linked with the period between 1984 to 1986 when the ANC started the culture of 'people's war'. This meant that everyone had to be seen as ideologically homogeneous, which discouraged differences of opinion (Kane-Berman, 1993; Molusi, 1991).

At the grassroots level, press freedom is disregarded by some activists from both the left- and right-wing because they believe it is unnecessary or simply a luxury sought by privileged groups. Freedom of expression is not a deciding factor in the right-wing's battle for white power. On the left, activists see press freedom as unimportant when compared with the imbalances between white and black media generally, not to mention the poor education and literacy levels in black communities (Stander, 1991/2).

The press is not innocent in this process, however. The black community does not perceive the mainstream media as reflecting their society, as they have always been cut off from the media. Instead the press is seen as working against the black community (Stander, 1992). At the other end of the spectrum, the press has been accused of being sympathetic towards the liberation movements for many years, and these groups are consequently unaccustomed to harsh criticism.

The press in the new South Africa thus has to deal with intolerance borne from the legacy of apartheid which finds expression both in political movements and in styles of press reporting itself. In addition, some leaders of political groups have yet to show their full commitment to press freedom. Their lack of tolerance encourages intolerance among supporters across the political spectrum. While legislative restrictions are infrequently invoked against the media, other obstacles now facing the press are equally daunting.

### The journalists' opinions

This problem of intimidation and "unofficial censorship" seems to have subsided, and the views of reporters and editors support this. This does not, however, detract from the fact that this problem had severe effects for violence coverage up to the 1994 elections, with implications for violence research based on press information during this period. All the journalists interviewed agreed that intimidation has at some time been a serious problem for them in their coverage of violence and politics.

At The Natal Witness this was a serious difficulty up to 1990, when armed perpetrators of violence and their supporters would invade the newsroom and threaten journalists. Now that people understand the reporting process better, this is no longer a problem. In the past, intimidation had the effect of forcing reporters to censor themselves, or write a story which would not upset the political groups involved. The assistant editor, however, commented that the general ethos of intolerance and the cheapness of life is the greatest constraint on violence reporting.

Reporters at the Daily News and The Mercury thought intimidation a serious problem which has increased since 1990. In the violent months before the elections in 1994, reporters were promised bullet-proof vests, car telephones and safety courses in order to safeguard against attacks. The problem at the time of the interview for the Daily News reporter was so severe that she was unable to cover events organised by a certain political party because her life would be in danger.

The reporters agreed that this situation causes insecurity amongst reporters and self-censorship. The editors of these newspapers, interviewed some time after the reporters, did not think intimidation is still a problem, although The Mercury editor did note that it could resurface again.


# 4. The journalists' assessment of the criticisms of press reporting of violent conflict

The issues discussed here, namely legislative restrictions, the newsroom process, the demands of the market on commercial newspapers, the monopoly of newspaper ownership, and the reporting environment, affect newspapers' reporting of violence to varying degrees. These are also the issues which have led to the kinds of criticisms of the press referred to in Chapter One of this study. These criticisms of bias, of failing to cover the extent and context of the violence, and of publishing rumours must be considered against the background of how newspapers operate. The opinions of reporters and editors about these criticisms of press coverage of violence are also important. These opinions will be discussed first.

## i) The perceived importance of violence reporting

Interviewees were asked how important they thought violence reporting was for their newspaper and what role, if any, newspapers should have in this regard. The various editors responded quite differently to the latter question. The assistant editor of The Natal Witness believed that it is the press's role to investigate the sources of the conflict. He added that newspapers have a mediatory role and should therefore inform the public in a balanced way and correct misperceptions about the violence. He did not think that the press's role is to provide body counts of those killed and injured, explaining that newspapers do this because they feel obliged to print something about the conflict.

By contrast, the other two editors did not believe that the press has any formal role in reporting violence. The Daily News editor said that newspapers should be driven by news, rather than by particular stakeholders. He stressed that newspapers are under no obligation to report anything, and that in terms of social responsibility, journalists are usually motivated by their desire to report social problems. He said that while publicly owned media may have responsibilities to the public, the commercial press does not.

In his response, The Mercury editor suggested that the commercial press does not have an obligation to the taxpayer, but that it does have a duty to the market, which is to make money. He said that different newspapers have different reasons for being in the business, and in the case of the commercial press, this is to make a profit. This aim governs how the newspaper operates, what type of reader it targets and thus what type of news it will report. He did say, however, that he believed his job is to reflect what happens in society, whether it is "nice" or not.

Notwithstanding these views, it is interesting to note that all those interviewed thought that violence reporting is important for their newspapers and should not be ignored. They said that the requirement that stories be newsworthy often diminishes this importance. Some also mentioned that the importance of violence reporting has changed over time, and that since the elections in April 1994, the emphasis and interest is no longer on the politics of force and violence, but on negotiation and reconstruction.

The Natal Witness reporter said that violence was not important enough for that newspaper, whereas it had been in the past. She attributed this to the issue of newsworthiness. The SAPA reporter also said that the media has an important role in reporting violence in order to encourage problem solving. The Mercury reporter said that newspapers feel they have a social responsibility to report violence, but that newsworthiness is an obstacle because readers are bored with the endless statistics.

The editor of <u>The Mercury</u> echoed this, saying that the subject is important, but that it is very hard to sustain because it has continued for so long. He added that the priorities of the newspaper have changed over time. During the Emergency, more daily events were reported because at that time it was a new phenomenon and a central issue in the country's politics. Now that there is dialogue between political leaders, those still using violence are regarded as renegades.

The <u>Daily News</u> reporter expressed similar thoughts to those above, saying that violence is important as long as it is newsworthy. At the time of the interview, violence levels were high, and therefore an automatic part of the newspaper's routine calls. She added that the judgement of news value is subjective and depends on who covers the events.

The <u>Daily News</u> editor, like his colleague in <u>The Mercury</u>, said the salience of violence has diminished over the years, which he attributed to a weariness on the part of reporters and readers. He cautioned, however, that no policy was taken in this regard. He also mentioned the changed political situation which had resulted in a shift in focus away from violence.

## ii) **The accuracy of newspaper coverage of the extent and details of the conflict**

The majority of those interviewed did not think the press accurately represents the conflict in the province, although many added that this is not necessarily the newspaper's fault. Rather, reporters believed it was the result of a shortage of resources and the consequent need to prioritise news items. <u>The Mercury</u> reporter expressed this opinion, explaining that the lack of experienced staff, the inability to do investigative reporting, and time constraints are all contributing factors. He did, however, say that the extent of the violence, in terms of figures, is well presented, even if this consists only of body counts.

The Mercury editor shared these thoughts, adding that the constraints mean that reporters' rely on secondary sources, and often the newspaper do not have the resources to validate these sources' information. He mentioned again the problem that readers' preferences cannot be ignored, and consequently violence receives less priority, which adds to the problems already mentioned. Although he conceded that his newspaper may be guilty of neglecting violence, he stressed that while this has been attributed to racism by critics, underreporting is not a racial issue, but occurs for commercial reasons.

The Daily News reporter did not think any newspaper can present an accurate picture of the conflict due to the difficulties in obtaining appropriate information. She did, however, believe that the reporting is as accurate as it can be, and that the extent of the violence in terms of the numbers is well covered and a vast improvement on previous years. The Daily News editor also mentioned problems with sources, saying that news about violence is often received a day late, or reporters cannot reach the scene on time. Both editors felt the situation was bad, but did not know what could be done to rectify it.

The Natal Witness reporter was more critical of that newspaper's position than the other journalists were. She said that an accurate picture is not presented, since much violence is not covered, and that this even applied to reporting tendencies a few years ago when violence was more prevalent. She added that stories that are investigated are accurate, but that these are few and far between. She suggested that this lack of interest by the newspaper may be due to racism, as the victims are mostly black, while the readers are largely white.

### iii) The problem of bias in violence reporting

All the journalists consulted believed that it is unrealistic to expect anyone to be objective, and that fairness and balance are preferable values. Most did not think that their newspapers or their own reporting is biased in favour of a particular

political party. Several, like The Natal Witness reporter, stressed that a lack of information often contributes to impressions of partial reporting.

She said that reporters often struggle to find information of equal intensity about all sides in the conflict, and that stories are sometimes not published as a result. This is unsatisfactory because events are omitted and because all groups do not always deserve equal coverage. The assistant editor was more fatalistic about the issue, saying that newspapers reflect cultural realities, and that consequently a divided society is bound to encourage bias.

All the reporters said that accusations of bias are subjective judgements made by political parties because newspapers publish stories which offend them. The Daily News reporter said that this reaction is borne out of the culture of intolerance. Reporters also mentioned the problem of sources.

The Mercury reporter explained that when the IFP was the only representative, unbanned and thus accessible black organisation, it received much coverage, and the IFP consequently supported the newspapers wholeheartedly. When the political situation changed, and more information was available, the IFP became dissatisfied and accused the newspapers of bias. The SAPA reporter also related that at times, especially in the past, there was often no alternative information to balance news stories against.

## iv) Publishing rumours about violence

Journalists associated this criticism with their attempts to appear unbiased and with problems of source reliability. The Natal Witness reporter said that this criticism stems from the use of political party spokespersons in an attempt to appear impartial. She explained that reporters are pressurised to publish statements which are often not factual, inaccurate and are simply rumours. At one time, she said, the newspaper was receiving five statements per day from each political party, and there would not always be time to check these, particularly as some arrived at

16h00. The Mercury reporter expressed similar sentiments, saying that rumours are sometimes used if there is no alternative reliable sources. He believed, however, that violence is more the result of society's intolerance that of the press's publication of rumours.

The assistant editor of The Natal Witness by contrast, did think that rumours can cause violence, but that such stories can also pre-empt clashes. He said that if reporters publish a rumour that an attack is imminent, all the ensuing publicity may prevent it from happening. Both the Daily News and SAPA reporters believed that rumours should only be reported if it is in the public's interest to do so. They added that such stories should be sourced and the status of the report made clear.

The most serious type of limitation for press reporting of violent conflict, namely the legislative restrictions, along with restrictions presented by the reporting environment, no longer affect the press as much as they did in the past. Many of the criticisms of the way the newspapers report conflict were made when these restrictions affected reporting most severely. In recent years, however, the press has been criticised for reporting as though these restrictions still apply. Although these limitations no longer concern the newspapers, the effects thereof, as well as other factors like the newsroom process and the demands of the market, could still shape violence reporting. Reporters and editors were asked what they thought the future might hold for reporting violent conflict.

## 5. Obstacles and opportunities ahead: the journalists' views

South African editors agreed that the press is freer than before. Newspapers can no longer be banned under the Internal Security Act, and need not register under the Newspaper Registration and Imprint Act. Sections relating to the press have also been removed from The Police Act and Prisons Act. Many regulations, however, remain on the statute book, and section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act which forces journalists to reveal their sources of information has been invoked in recent years (Heard, 1992).

The reporters interviewed were guardedly optimistic about the future of the media under the new Government. The Natal Witness reporter expressed confidence in media freedom in the future, adding wryly that the new Government will not have to curb journalists because "they have become so lazy". For the other reporters, the acknowledgement that the situation has improved was qualified by the knowledge that any government is theoretically a threat to the press, particularly because a vigorous and active press should offend the government. The editors noted that all the laws restricting the press are still on the statute books. They believed that the media is presently experiencing a period of unprecedented freedom which will not last, as resistance to criticism and attempts to control society inclines governments to control the media.

These sentiments are not unfounded because the press is still affected by more subtle pressures such as threats of legal action from government departments. Since 1990, a media union official and a radio announcer have been detained, newspaper premises have been searched and material removed (Stander, 1991/2). The unofficial censorship discussed above is perceived as one of the most serious problems now facing the press.

Despite the lifting of the Emergency and the relaxation of laws restricting press freedom, the state of the media since 1990 has been described as "appalling" (Kockott, 1991; Karon, 1991). The press has often been criticised for reporting as though the restrictions were still in place. Ken Owen, editor of the Sunday Times commented that "The space for journalists has widened faster than their capacity to use it. We still report in the dogged, defensive style of the past; reporters lack aggression; we all lack the flair" (Heard, 1992). For some, the media has not changed much since official restrictions were lifted and in this 'pre-post-apartheid' era, news is still partisan and obscure.

When asked about reporting since 1990 when the State of Emergency was lifted, journalists from KwaZulu-Natal newspapers agreed with some of these comments. The Natal Witness reporter noted that the Emergency made violence unimportant,

and that this impression still prevails among newspaper management and the news desk.

In addition, the self-censorship inherited from the Emergency days remains a problem for individual reporters. The assistant editor of The Natal Witness added that the desk-bound, telephonic type of journalism which began during this period still prevails, and shows reporters' lack of commitment.

The Mercury reporter believed that violence reporting has not changed since 1990, although he and the SAPA reporter noted that the police are now more approachable and easier to work with. Echoing the words of Ken Owen above, the Daily News reporter said there is now much more space in which to operate, which most journalists have yet to take advantage of.

The Mercury editor thought that once journalists develop a style of writing this style is hard to break, but that reporters should be far more confrontational than they are presently. The Daily News editor was more positive, saying there is some truth in the accusation that press reporting has changed little since 1990. He added, however, that journalists have not been beaten into submission by the Emergency, even though these years of restrictions took their toll.

The future of the press in South Africa is not certain. The media face potential challenges to freedom of expression from both civil society and government. Journalists themselves will actively have to ensure that freedom of expression and reporting the truth is upheld in the future. Although the first step towards a democratic society has been taken, press freedom is not guaranteed. There are few indicators that the majority of South Africans do not see freedom of expression as a political priority or as a fundamental requirement of democracy.

Freedom of expression and of the media must be accepted as desirable norms and must be constitutionally guaranteed if a culture of political tolerance is to be fostered (Stander, 1991/2). While the Interim Constitution does protect freedom of speech, it has, however, been difficult for the press to contribute towards this

process while journalists were the very target of the intolerance which threatens society.

Leaders of political parties which Laurence (1993: 48) calls the "New Nats", the ANC, PAC and IFP, condemned the restrictions of the former government and declared the virtues of press freedom, while unofficial censorship continued. Before coming to power, the ANC stated that their government would defend the press's right to criticise the organisation, and that media rights and independence should be entrenched in a Bill of Rights (Minnie, 1992). This holds promise for the press in the future, but the experiences of other African countries has shown that Bills of Rights alone are no guarantee of press freedom.

In the past, the National Party government always declared its belief in a free press while restricting this very freedom with numerous regulations and threats. According to Heard (1992), editors of local newspapers are pessimistic about a free press in the future, and about the adequacy of constitutional guarantees alone. Indications are that journalists and society as a whole will continuously have to fight to ensure that these rights are upheld. Suggestions for securing press freedom include instilling tolerance in what has been an intolerant society, uniting journalists in order to increase their influence, entrenching freedom of expression in the constitution, and receiving support from the international press community (Heard, 1992). Members of the media and of society will have to be more vigilant than ever with regard to their rights to free expression, now that a new government is in place.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this chapter regarding the factors which affect violence reporting will briefly be recapped. Legislative restrictions undoubtedly affected what newspapers published and also limited the press's sources of information about conflict. This was acknowledged by those interviewed, as were the long term effects, which suppress the investigative culture, encourage telephone journalism,

limit the coverage of the extent of the conflict, encourage self-censorship by journalists, and lead to a simplification of conflict 'story'. The latter two outcomes are probably less of a factor now than they were in previous years.

These problems explain to a degree, the accusations that newspapers are biased in their coverage of violence, and that their reporting of the details, the full extent and the broader context, is limited. Reporters and editors said that perceptions of bias are often the result of a lack of information and the use of unreliable sources. These factors, they said, also contribute to the poor coverage of extent and details.

Many of the problems related to the newsroom process are valid. Decisions about what constitutes news are made by the editors and reporters, as are decisions about the final printed product. This is how the newsroom operates, and cannot be criticised in itself. The quality of the final product is, however, affected in varying degrees by: the ideological position of reporters and editors, the resources of the newspaper, the demands of daily production in terms of time constraints, the pressure to publish newsworthy material, and problems of sources and obtaining reliable information. Interviews indicated that these problems are the central reasons for the poor coverage of events of violence and of the details surrounding these events.

These criticisms should be made with circumspection, however. Interviews revealed that while some editors did not believe newspapers are obliged to report conflict, all respondents believed violence is an important subject which should not be ignored by the media. They believed that several features of the newspaper industry make full reporting difficult. It seems unlikely that details of violence are purposefully omitted due to racism or bias on the part of reporters or editors, or due to editorial policy. Instead, the lack of resources, demands of production and of newsworthiness, which affect all subjects and indeed most newspapers, are more likely causes.

No evidence could be found that owners or management directly interfered with editorial decisions regarding violence reporting. Indirectly, however, management's

decisions regarding the newspaper's position in the market, its target readership, and the consequent budget and staff allocations, do affect violence reporting. Shortages of staff and resources, in addition to the limited time period in which to produce a daily newspaper, were often attributed to the poor quality of violence reporting by those interviewed.

While a monopoly of ownership affects reporting in general, it does not seem to have implications for violence reporting in particular. The demands of the market on commercial newspapers, by contrast, appear to have important implications for violence coverage. In practical terms, advertisements limit the space available for articles. More importantly, the pressure to attract advertising and readers shapes the criteria for newsworthiness. The requirement that events be newsworthy affects violence coverage to a great extent. Both reporters and readers are allegedly tired of the subject, and it consequently receives less priority from editors and reporters, and as a result, fewer resources and less time are dedicated to violence coverage.

In terms of the effects of the reporting environment, intimidation of journalists had important implications for violence reporting prior to the elections in April 1994, after which it seems to have subsided. However, intolerance, which was identified by reporters as the cause for intimidation, is still widespread. This means that threats and attacks on reporters could resume under changed circumstances.

The most important conclusions which can be drawn from this analysis of the factors which affect violence reporting are that our press is undoubtedly operating with the baggage of legal restrictions from the past. In addition, newspapers face all the pressures of the newsroom process and market demands common to newspapers throughout the world. In this period of transformation and economic strain, it seems the most pressure will come from the requirement that newspapers remain commercially viable and produce newspapers which people want to read, and which advertisers wish to sponsor. This has had, and will continue to have, important implications for violence reporting.

In addition, the reporters, editors and the public are reportedly tired of violence. Violent conflict is also no longer a central factor in the country's political repertoire, and is therefore, less newsworthy. Already, violence reporting is largely limited to short 'headcounts' with no clues as to the causes of events, let alone investigative reporting. It is likely that the press does not report all events of violence, but certainly, newspapers do not provide the details and analyses of the violence which are essential for understanding the problem. Researchers using the press as a source for violence studies must, therefore, do so bearing in mind these limitations and the gaps in the information.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# REPORTING VIOLENT CONFLICT: THE MONITORING AGENCIES

## 1. Aims of this chapter

This chapter, like the preceding one, will present and discuss some of this study's findings. The general format of this chapter is similar to that of the previous chapter. The aim is to understand the way in which selected monitoring agencies go about collecting and presenting data about violence in KwaZulu-Natal. As yet, there is very little secondary information available about violence monitoring. For this reason, the results of interviews with people working for these organisations form the core of this chapter's discussion on the origins, functioning, constraints and criticisms of the monitoring agencies' activities.

The monitoring agencies publicise and disseminate the information which they gather, but are not under as clear cut obligations as the press is, to keep the public informed and provide channels for communication and participation in public life. Consequently, the monitoring agencies are not affected by the same constraints as the newspapers are. These constraints were the subject of discussion in the previous chapter. Although they do not publicise news on the scale of newspapers, the monitors have the potential to make an important contribution to knowledge about violence through their supply of information to the press, to researchers, to policy makers and to the public.

Apart from their general importance, the monitoring agencies are significant for this study because the information from selected monitors in KwaZulu-Natal will be used for comparing reporting tendencies with those of the press. The way in which these agencies have carried out their operations have, however, not escaped censure, and have resulted in accusations of political bias. Like the previous

chapter, this chapter aims to understand more about the monitoring process, and to assess these criticisms.

The monitoring agencies which will be discussed in this chapter are those which made the most significant contribution to the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal project (which is the source of the statistical data which is analysed in Chapter Six of this study). These monitors are: the Natal Monitor, the Human Rights Committee (HRC) (KwaZulu-Natal branch), the Unrest Monitoring Project (UMP) at the Centre for Adult Education at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, and the Inkatha Institute.[1]

This chapter will begin by considering the history of the monitors, followed by their aims and functions. This section also includes a discussion of workshops which have been convened by monitoring agencies to debate their methodologies and activities. The chapter then covers the process of collecting data, the limitations facing the monitors, and how these affect the information they record. The responses of the monitors to the criticisms of their activities will also be presented.

## 2. Origins, structure and methodology of monitoring agencies

The reasons for monitoring violence have determined the type of information which is collected and the methodology which is used. The term 'monitoring' has been used to describe a variety of activities. These activities include observing events in the field, mediating conflict in the field, recording and analysing data, legal work, mediation and negotiation. Some monitors undertake more than one of these functions, although it would be impossible for one monitor to perform all these activities.

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[1] Of these four monitoring agencies, the UMP and Inkatha Institute no longer operate. The Natal Monitor is still active in the field, but its monthly reports are no longer regularly disseminated. The HRC's monthly bulletins are still produced and disseminated every month.

Monitors in KwaZulu-Natal were set up at different times, with varying resources at their disposal. The Natal Monitor and UMP began in the late 1980s. The HRC was monitoring human rights abuses in the country from its inception in 1988, but the KwaZulu-Natal office was only established in 1992. The HRC took over the database on violence in KwaZulu-Natal set up by the Black Sash in 1991. The Inkatha Institute included monitoring in its research activities in 1990, and data was sporadically made available from 1991.

The types of operations set up by these monitors were determined by the resources available and the independence of the units. The Natal Monitor and UMP can probably be considered the most independent of any controlling body and also the most under-funded. Both were set up within universities by individual academics. There was no formal funding, and money came in sporadically from the university and from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The monitors were each staffed on a part-time, voluntary basis by about three members or less.

The Inkatha Institute by comparison, had direct links to Inkatha and the KwaZulu government. The Chief Minister of former KwaZulu, leader of Inkatha, and currently a member of the Government of National Unity's cabinet, Minister Buthelezi, chaired the Institute's board. The violence monitoring was steered to a large extent by Inkatha's Information Centre. The Institute's funding changed over time, and included money from foreign organisations, the business sector, the IFP, and during the last years of its existence, the former KwaZulu government. The Institute had more staff at its disposal for violence monitoring than the other monitors, with at least three full-time employees and backup staff for emergencies. Before its closure, however, the Institute had a total of only eighteen staff, down from forty in 1989.

The HRC's KwaZulu-Natal branch maintains a fair amount of independence from its head office. Its major responsibility is to deliver fortnightly reports to the head office. The activities of the branch are overseen by commissioners and a management committee. Funding is obtained from foreign organisations and governments, and the KwaZulu-Natal office is staffed by two full-time employees.

The aim of monitoring in general is to reduce violence, and monitors have agreed that their activities are necessary for reasons similar to those of most research: information gathering and recording; making sense of events by establishing the facts; and facilitating change through analysis and disseminating the information (Education Policy Unit and Career Information Centre, 1988). The aims of violence monitoring in KwaZulu-Natal relate closely to the political climate which has prevailed in the region since the mid-1980s. Five reasons for pursing this activity can be drawn from those cited by the four monitors who were interviewed for this study:

- The violence escalated rapidly in KwaZulu-Natal from 1986. All the monitors realised that a crisis was looming and that action needed to be taken. The HRC for example, had the very broad aim of eradicating apartheid, and the violence throughout the country and particularly in KwaZulu-Natal was perceived as a product of the apartheid state.

- To provide information for the public through recording and disseminating details about violence. The Natal Monitor and the HRC were particularly concerned about the information vacuum created by the States of Emergency from 1986 to 1990, and the effects this had on press coverage of violence.[2] All the monitors believed the press coverage of violence was problematic, although in varying degrees and for different reasons. The Inkatha Institute's formal monitoring, as opposed to its research, began in response to a perceived lack of information in the press about Inkatha victims. There were also fears that a propaganda war was being waged against the party by the media and the other monitoring agencies.

- To intervene in the conflict in order to end the violence. For most of the monitors, documenting and publicising their information in itself was an important step in this direction. Interventions to save lives, assisting with

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[2] Various authors on violence monitoring also refer to this, namely Collins (1988), Sutcliffe (1988), and Sitas (1988).

humanitarian and legal aid, and pressurising the police to act were not necessarily stated aims, but monitors were often called upon to take such action in times of need. In the case of the Natal Monitor and UMP, those involved had prior connections with NGOs, community organisations and individuals. These connections motivated the monitors to intervene, and gave them assistance in their work.

- For the UMP and Natal Monitor, the presence of academic staff encouraged monitoring for academic and research purposes. While not academic, the Inkatha Institute's violence monitoring activities developed out of its violence research which began in 1985.

Monitoring agencies in general are not homogeneous in nature and their activities do not follow set procedures. It is therefore, difficult to describe the methodology or process of monitoring in a generalised fashion. Aitchison (1993: 29) believes that few monitoring agencies have been explicit about their methods, probably because the circumstances under which monitoring occurs are "not exactly conducive to carefully planned research". The subject of methodology has been raised on several occasions by people in the field.

In 1988, the Education Projects Unit and Career Information Centre at the University of Natal hosted a talkshop on how to conduct monitoring research, attended by thirty organisations. The aim was to bring together various organisations, individuals and units to share expertise on monitoring research and methodology, and develop more efficient methods for the future. In addition to violence monitoring, the talkshop also dealt with monitoring of issues pertaining to labour and the state.

Also, in June 1991, the Centre for Intergroup Studies in Cape Town hosted a workshop in Pietermaritzburg on the monitoring and research of political violence. The workshop arose out of "a concern about the antagonism and perception of bias between various research/monitoring groups". A study conducted at the end of 1990 among seven KwaZulu-Natal monitoring organisations had confirmed a

polarisation along ideological lines. The workshop aimed to discuss and evaluate methodological issues, information sharing and ways to cooperate, as well as how to deal with bias.[3]

In 1992 there were two more attempts to encourage cooperation and to improve monitoring capacity in the country.[4] These, according to Aitchison (1993), were partly in response to the government's recognition that international monitors in the country were necessary. These initiatives resulted in the formation of the Network of Independent Monitors (NIM) and the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa (EMPSA). Both had stated objectives and codes of conduct which members were to use as guidelines. When the Network of Independent Monitors (NIM) was finally constituted, it consisted of fifty organisations from across the country, fifteen of which are located in KwaZulu-Natal.

NIM's aims reflected not only the objectives expressed above, but also a recognition of the problems which faced many monitors by 1992. NIM's objectives, cited in Aitchison (1993: 19) are as follows:

- To improve the effectiveness of independent monitoring through strengthening the recognition, identity and status of monitoring.
- To heighten awareness and understanding of violence. To uncover the truth and to generate and encourage effective investigation that will result in the prosecution of the perpetrators of violence.

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[3] The workshop was not considered a great success. Many of those invited did not attend, most notably the Inkatha Institute, which sent an observer instead. Other important parties in violence monitoring and research which did not participate were the HRC, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Participants also disagreed on the proceedings, given the different types of the groups present with their differing aims and methods of collecting and acting upon information about violence.

[4] These included: the Norwegian Government/Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA) initiative that resulted in the formation of the Network of Independent Monitors (NIM); and the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa (EMPSA) sponsored by the South African Council of Churches/South African Catholic Bishops' Conference/World Council of Churches/Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace.

- To build capacity of monitors by assisting in the provision of required resources and services.
- To harness existing experience and resources.
- To establish an effective communication network between monitors.
- To encourage coordination of information.
- To collect and disseminate resource information needed by monitors.
- To liaise with the international community and their monitors and refer information and cases to the relevant commissions/groups, etc.
- To identify sites of violence and to attempt to have these monitored.
- To assist in building the capacity of community based monitors.

The monitors which are discussed in this chapter began their activities some time before these objectives were formulated by the Network of Independent Monitors. In several cases, their day-to-day monitoring was shaped largely by the resources at their disposal, rather than by goals such as those laid out by NIM above. These processes are discussed in the next section.

## 3. The monitoring process

### i) The type of information recorded

Generally, the monitors recorded information on 'political' violence. This concept is problematic, as opinions about which events are indeed 'political' vary. This definitional question has resulted in sometimes substantial differences in violence statistics between monitoring agencies. Since the April 1994 election particularly, the distinction between political and other types of violence has become harder to make. The police have tended to describe many events as criminal, and in some cases, people on the ground de-emphasised political aspects of incidents.

With the exception of the UMP, exact definitions of the type of information recorded was not provided by the monitors. Generally, their records included activities relating to political parties or the government, as well as conflict which becomes

political or is related to political dynamics. The HRC adhered closely to party political issues, while the Natal Monitor interpreted 'political' in its broadest sense, to include most faction fights, people's courts and taxi feuds, for example. These represent incidents which result from the general breakdown in the criminal justice system, which is, in turn, a product of this country's political history.

The following definition delimited the events which the UMP monitored:

*"All acts of political violence and intimidation that would be generally accepted as illegal in most societies, whether performed by the state, its supporters or its opponents, whether organised by groups and parties or by individuals. 'Unrest' therefore includes illegal acts performed by the police and army...Also, acts clearly contrary to the regulations of the 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 State of Emergency declarations (such as 'illegal gatherings')" (Aitchison, 1993: 7).*

Criminal acts are excluded by all monitors, although they agreed that the distinction between criminal and political violence has become increasingly difficult to make. More queries relate to this distinction than to broader definitional issues. The Inkatha Institute's database of assassinated leaders, for example, has frequently been criticised by other monitors for including many people killed under non-political circumstances.[5]

When the UMP and Natal Monitor began their activities, their monitoring covered specific geographical regions. Coverage was restricted by resource limitations, but in both cases, the researchers were familiar with their areas of focus before monitoring began. Up to that point, violence had also occurred mostly in the areas covered by these two units. Inkatha Institute, with its more substantial resources, could cover the whole of KwaZulu-Natal. In 1990, violence began to spread, which meant an accurate portrayal of the conflict would have to include the entire region.

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[5] Interview with John Aitchison from the UMP on July 5, 1994 and Mary de Haas from the Natal Monitor on February 22, 1994.

The Natal Monitor broadened its scope accordingly, and when the HRC began monitoring in 1992, a regional focus was also adopted.

All the monitors agreed that rural areas were not covered adequately, although having contacts in these areas diminished the problem. Monitoring an area the size of KwaZulu-Natal was described as difficult, given the small staff numbers. A high reliance was consequently placed on contacts and sources throughout the region. Monitors sometimes experienced problems with these contacts even in the more urban areas. Along the North Coast, for example, certain police stations and political party contacts were found to be unreliable or uncooperative.[6] The Natal Monitor found that many good contacts were forced to flee their areas as a result of violence, with detrimental consequences for coverage of those regions.

## ii) Sources of information

The monitors draw on a variety of sources. The feature which distinguishes these organisations, and which makes their work both valuable and controversial, is their contact with individuals and groups in conflict-ridden communities. Good community links and the credibility of the organisation in the eyes of the community, have been identified as vital for monitoring in a violent situation (Aitchison and Leeb, 1988).

Both the UMP and Natal Monitor's staff had extensive personal networks in black communities, and considered themselves experienced researchers with a good knowledge of the areas covered. Along with personal contacts, other sources included political parties, other monitoring agencies, peace committees and National Peace Accord structures, church members and organisations, lawyers, human rights groups, newspapers, radio broadcasts and reports from the SAPS and KwaZulu Police (KZP).

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[6] Interview with Gavin Woods from the Inkatha Institute on February 22, 1994 and Linda Mclean and Sarah Kearney from the HRC on February 11, 1994.

The monitors used information from some of these sources in different ways, and placed more or less emphasis on certain sources. The HRC was the only monitor which had parameters on the use of sources, in that information provided by an individual could not be included unless that person was speaking on behalf of an organisation.

As well as having their own contacts, the HRC and UMP used the press and police reports more than the other monitors, while the Inkatha Institute and Natal Monitor relied more on contacts in communities.[7] According to the latter two monitors, these contacts in communities were often politically active. Inkatha Institute, being clearly linked to the IFP, gained access to individuals largely through this affiliation.

## iii) **Processing the information**

Unlike the other monitors whose staff were occupied by other full-time activities, the HRC focused exclusively on monitoring violence. This organisation consequently had the most structured system of data collection and processing. The Inkatha Institute, with their full-time staff and the necessary resources, also maintained a daily routine in terms of accessing data. The UMP had a routine for two years when finances allowed for the employment of a part-time person to scan and enter press reports into the unit's computerised database.

The daily routine for these monitors involved scanning the press and listening to radio broadcasts to find out where violence had occurred. These would then be cross-checked and collated with reports from the police, which came in on a daily basis. The events reported by these sources were then followed up by telephoning or visiting contacts and relevant organisations in the areas concerned. The HRC had a list of contacts throughout the region who they telephoned twice a week to ascertain if any violence had occurred in that area. Where time and resources

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[7] Gavin Woods of Inkatha Institute stated that 90% of their information came from "the ground" (interview on February 22, 1994).

allowed, monitors visited violent areas themselves. In some cases, people contacted the monitors to volunteer information.

The Natal Monitor operated on a more ad hoc basis, using the press and police to a lesser degree than the other monitors. Most of this monitor's information came from contacts who related details of events over the telephone. When time allowed, contacts were phoned for updates on the situation in their areas. Once this information had been gathered, extensive follow-ups would be conducted with the police. This process was identified as the most time consuming for the Natal Monitor. For the UMP similarly, the "cross-checking, editing and 'cleaning-up' of the database was a time consuming and skilled job" (Aitchison, 1993: 23).

All the monitors emphasised the importance of verifying reports received from the press, the police and personal contacts. This process often depended, however, on the availability of time and staff. Monitors had a sense of which sources were reliable, although even these sometimes provided inaccurate information. Assessing the reliability of information was largely guided by experience in detecting untruths or exaggerations.

The Natal Monitor and HRC were inclined to seek information from more than one source about a particular event, although both said this depended on the reliability of the source providing the information. Sources such as investigating police officers and senior representatives of organisations were described as "usually reliable", although no definite rules could be applied.

The Inkatha Institute and HRC entered information firstly on incident reports which was then transferred to a computerised database. All the monitors interviewed had access to computers for recording information. The HRC, Natal Monitor and Inkatha Institute aimed to produce monthly violence reports, although the HRC has proved the most reliable in this regard. The Inkatha Institute's report was produced sporadically and was not freely available to the public. The UMP did not have the capacity and resources to deliver a regular bulletin, although a useful resource

document was complied, which listed all the events from the database from 1987 to 1989.

## 4. Constraints on violence monitoring

Two issues represent broadly, the problems faced by monitors, and were mentioned by all those monitors who were interviewed. These are a shortage of resources and the problem of the reliability of sources.

### i) Resources

Insufficient resources, which essentially means finances, limited the number of staff and the infrastructural capacity of these organisations. One of the biggest problems stemming from this was the lack of time available to investigate reports of violence adequately, and to visit areas to speak to the people involved.

The geographical area which could be covered was also limited by the availability of staff and money. The quality and reliability of the monitors' data were adversely affected by these constraints. Also, as in the case of the UMP, this meant that the information collected could not be disseminated on a regular basis in the form of monthly bulletins, for example.

The Natal Monitor had a different perspective on this issue, as a lack of funding was not the central problem for this monitor. Extensive energy was not devoted to raising money, and the preference was to keep the staff numbers down. This, the interviewee believed, would ensure a small, trustworthy and competent group of people who had established ties with communities, which new members could not easily acquire. The lack of time for monitoring was perceived as the major drawback for the Natal Monitor, particularly as this limited the capacity to follow-up and cross-check events. For this monitor, increasing staff numbers was not, however, the best solution to this problem.

## ii) Reliability of sources

All the monitors interviewed expressed a great sensitivity to, and awareness of, the problem of the reliability of their sources. In terms of personal contacts, monitors were constantly alert to the possibility of rumours and the exaggeration of events, even by contacts they considered reliable. If contacts were politically active, it was acknowledged that the information they supplied would be 'their' side of the story, and efforts were made to find other versions. The Natal Monitor said it placed the most reliance on information from non-political, first hand accounts. Most monitors stressed their attempts to validate and cross-check information. The UMP, after checking the information from its non-press sources, found that they were reliable and could be believed (Aitchison, 1993).

In terms of contacts being affiliated largely to one political group, the HRC, UMP and Natal Monitor acknowledged that most of their sources did not include Inkatha supporters. The Inkatha Institute, in turn, had mainly IFP sources. This one-sidedness was considered most problematic by the HRC and the Inkatha Institute. The Inkatha Institute and Natal Monitor both said they had nevertheless established some contact with people from the ANC and IFP respectively.

The UMP did not believe that this problem affected their records of fatalities, but perhaps the detail surrounding deaths of Inkatha people. The UMP believed there were few Inkatha supporters in the area which it monitored at the time. The UMP also felt that the police reports covered most events which included Inkatha casualties, and that in 1987 and 1988 comparisons with Inkatha's figures showed that the UMP had actually recorded more Inkatha deaths than Inkatha itself had.

On the whole, the monitors seemed unsatisfied with the reliability of the secondary sources which they used. The police reports were found to be unreliable, devoid of detail and were often inaccurate regarding the names of people and the location of events, for example. The UMP found that police Unrest Reports were most

problematic in relation to events in which deaths and serious injuries did not occur (Aitchison, 1993). These problems were heightened during the States of Emergency, and police reports have improved somewhat over the years. The Inkatha Institute thought that the recent police information was reliable, and the HRC also said the police were cooperative and generally helpful when contacted for information about events.

The HRC, Natal Monitor and UMP also drew attention to the difficulty of accessing reports from, and sharing information with, the Inkatha Institute. In most cases, the Institute would not make their data available to these organisations. The UMP and Natal Monitor in any event, believed the Inkatha Institute's publicly available data was inaccurate and misleading. This problem has a long history of political rivalries and perceptions of bias, and was one of the main reasons for holding the workshop on violence monitoring and research in 1991. These issues are elaborated below.

Most of the monitors concurred with the criticisms of press reporting of violence discussed in Chapter Four. The UMP experienced the least problems with the newspaper it used, namely The Natal Witness. This was probably because The Natal Witness was considered to have maintained high standards particularly during the Emergency years (Aitchison, 1993). Because newspapers relied on the police Unrest Reports and SAPA reports, the difficulties associated with the latter were often transferred to the press.

Aitchison believed that The Natal Witness was "quite good" from 1987 to 1990. Since then, however, problems have developed such as the use of ethnic terminology, and more recently, the downplaying of violence.[8] The Inkatha Institute believed the press had improved significantly in the last two years, since it was reporting violence in a more politically balanced, sensitive way. Monitors also acknowledged that the public were no longer interested in the violence, which impacts on the extent of press coverage.

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[8] Interview with Aitchison from the UMP on July 5, 1994.

Apart from the UMP, the monitors were critical of the press. They explained that reporters did little fieldwork, and relied on incoming news which could be damaging, since political party press statements were often inaccurate. Monitors also believed that the newspapers reported events in isolation without any context or background, which prevented readers from understanding the dynamics of the conflict. In the past, monitors said, the press assigned blame for events too hastily and were biased.[9]

The press was also accused of using information provided by the monitors badly or not at all.[10] Monitors stated that reporters and management in the press are still mainly white, which distanced them from circumstances in which violence occurs, and shaped the standard of reporting, which they believed was generally bad.

In conclusion, the Natal Monitor and UMP expressed the most confidence in their sources and in their own ability to assess the honesty and reliability of these. For the Natal Monitor, it was methodologically important to understand the general local level dynamics, in order to assess the accuracy of a source's information. The HRC was satisfied with its sources, although they believed securing reliable contacts depended on forming extensive networks, which required more time than was available to them. For the Inkatha Institute, the very nature of the work made the quality and reliability of contacts questionable, and the Institute was consequently least satisfied with its contacts, especially because they largely reported attacks on IFP supporters only.

The reliability of sources proved the crucial factor in monitors' assessments of whether their data provided an accurate picture of the conflict. The Natal Monitor and UMP were confident that their data was accurate. The HRC's satisfaction was

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[9] The Inkatha Institute believed the press were until recently, biased towards the ANC, and that they gave monitors affiliated to the ANC far more coverage (interview with Gavin Woods on February 22, 1994).

[10] According to Gavin Woods, studies undertaken by the Inkatha Institute in the past showed that the press used about 10% of the information which the Institute supplied them with.

qualified by the knowledge that they could not always adequately cover all the violence in KwaZulu-Natal.

The Inkatha Institute did not believe its data accurately reflected the conflict, although it was better than the majority of other information available. Nevertheless, the Institute felt it had contributed to the creation of a more balanced public perception about violence. It maintained that public perceptions had been one-sided up until three years ago, during which time the ANC was always represented as the main victim of violence.

## 5. Criticisms of the monitoring agencies and their responses

There has been little discussion about the monitoring agencies with regard to their methodology and the reliability of their data. This is probably because most monitoring exercises began as humanitarian responses to crisis situations, rather than as planned and structured projects. In addition, monitors have filled an information vacuum brought about by the States of Emergency. Their contribution to violence research has been invaluable.

In the politically volatile and sensitive times before the 1994 election, it was not surprising that the criticisms which were levelled at the monitoring agencies focused on the issue of bias. This may be a valid comment, but the nature of the accusation is such that the accusers sometimes become victims of their own criticisms. Rather than contributing to an understanding of the monitoring process, these accusations heightened tensions and further polarised those involved.

The motives for the criticisms may vary, but they stem from a concern about the way in which such information affects the public's understanding of the issues. This is also a concern of this study, and the allegations of bias against the monitors will be reviewed along with the responses of the monitors to these. Some methodological issues will also be considered.

## i) Allegations of bias

There is a history of accusations of partiality between the Inkatha Institute and the IFP on the one hand, and several monitors on the other. In particular, the UMP and Natal Monitor have clashed with the Inkatha Institute. The Inkatha argument is summarised in an extract taken from a Goldstone Commission Submission on violence in KwaZulu-Natal in 1992. Smith (1992) suggested that most monitors cover only that violence which boosts the position and image of the political organisation which the monitor covertly supports, to the discredit of political opponents. This allegiance, he maintained, is however, never revealed. This is because monitors require an impartial reputation in order that their information be accepted as reliable by the media and the public.

Smith (1992) stated that much monitoring "entails the cynical manipulation of information in what really amounts to a propaganda war" (Smith, 1992: 14). Inkatha contend that monitors have used the press deliberately to destroy the political credibility of the IFP and its leader. This has been achieved through: blaming the IFP for most of the violence; omitting ANC-instigated incidents of violence; and labelling the conflict as a political battle between the IFP and ANC, while ignoring other diverse causes.

The Inkatha Institute has not been accused of bias with the same intensity. This is probably because the Institute acknowledged that it is closely linked to the IFP, shares staff members with that political party, and operates in the interests of the party. As pointed out in the section on monitoring constraints above, the monitors' criticisms of the Inkatha Institute centred around the antagonistic and hostile stance of the Institute towards other monitors, and the quality and accuracy of its data which monitors have managed to access.

A second source of criticism of bias was made by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), after Jeffery (1992) studied reports released by three organisations: Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, and

the HRC. Jeffery's discussion with regards to the HRC is relevant here.[11] The critique focused on a particular report of the HRC: Special Briefing on Massacres and the Area Repression Report for April 1992. Jeffery's findings have been questioned, but her critique is worth considering since it was motivated by one of the problems which also motivates this study. She stated that:

"The manner in which political violence in South Africa is being reported is assuming critical importance. In the volatile situation which exists in the country, reports on the violence play a crucial role in either defusing tensions or exacerbating confrontation" (Jeffery, 1992: 1).

The aim of Jeffery's (1992) report was to gauge the accuracy of allegations made in the documents, given that the HRC has extensive credibility as a monitor of human rights abuses both locally and abroad. The study began by stating that the reports of the three organisations in question were "one-sided and simplistic [and] at worst they amount to disinformation - deliberate attempts to mislead" (Jeffery, 1992: 7). This assertion was based on the finding that the methodologies used by the organisations in question involved the suppression of information, the elevation of untested allegation to fact, and a "consistent disregard" of the perspectives of other parties involved (Jeffery, 1992: 7).

Jeffery's (1992) report has been criticised from various quarters, including the SAIRR itself, for several reasons.[12] One is that, as stated in the SAIRR's critique of

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[11] It is worth noting that subsequent to the report being released, the SAIRR apologised to the HRC on the basis that the author was more guilty of showing bias than the HRC was (interview with Linda Mclean and Sarah Kearney from the HRC on February 11, 1994).

[12] A number of the SAIRR's staff produced the 'Critique of Spotlight on Disinformation about Violence in South Africa by Dr Anthea Jeffery' (pre-publication copy), 1992, Johannesburg. It concluded that:

"Firstly, it is clear that Dr Jeffery does not apply the same rigid criteria to information which she uses to support her argument as she demands of the organisations she criticises. She ignores information which does not support her argument and she elevates to fact information which may not be reliable. Secondly, she makes damning judgements of these organisations, assigning underhand motives to them without bothering to get their point of view. Thirdly, her argument in many cases is unsound. It is based on insufficient and unreliable

her report, the assessment of the accuracy of the organisations' reports was conducted without consulting those involved. This is, ironically, one of the criticisms which Jeffery (1992) made of the monitoring groups in her own report. Her report is nevertheless, an important document because it was motivated by an important problem, and made some useful conclusions. For example, the category used by the HRC to describe certain types of events, namely "vigilante related action" was found to be very problematic, as it could be used to lay the blame for events in which the ANC (or any other group) was probably the aggressor, at the door of the IFP. The use of this category by the HRC has since been discontinued.

In addition, the report was the first of its kind to draw attention to the fact that very little information about the ANC's involvement in the violence ever reached the public. To illustrate this, the report referred to events in which ANC supporters perpetrated violence against IFP supporters. However, why some of this data about the ANC's activities should be considered reliable, when according to Jeffery (1992) that used in the reports of the three organisations, is unreliable, is not spelt out.

This created the impression that Jeffery's (1992) critique was attempting to bolster the IFP rather than simply point out the one-sidedness of the reports she studied. This distracted readers from the issue at hand, drawing attention to the SAIRR, rather than the subject under discussion. Consequently, important conclusions such as the caution that unsubstantiated allegations should be treated very carefully, and that all sides of the story should be canvassed rather than only one party's version of events, lost some of their impact.

## ii) **Methodology**

At the workshop on monitoring research methodology in 1988, several suggestions were made regarding data collection and how to ensure the collection of accurate

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*information. It decontextualises events and policies and makes unfounded leaps of judgement" (Quoted in Aitchison, 1993: 31).*

information. The recommendations for descriptive monitoring, which applies to the organisations being studied here, will be reviewed.

Collins (1988) and Sutcliffe (1988) pointed to possible areas which may affect the accuracy of data. These apply to most research situations, and include the representativeness, reliability and validity of data, and the effects of researcher's own bias on the situation being studied.

In terms of representativeness and reliability, they recommended techniques like random sampling, the use of triangulation in research design,[13] identifying both majority and minority views, and gathering information which represents the whole community under study rather than just the affected portion. Sutcliffe (1988) cautioned that meeting all these criteria was limited by the highly politicised context in which violence occurs, as well as the control of information resulting from the Emergency. He stated that under these conditions "the interpretations and accounts of events often depends on who is telling the story" (Sutcliffe, 1988: 31). This made finding explanations for political violence difficult.

Referring to conditions during the Emergency, Tomaselli (1988: 21) also noted "the sheer impossibility of reflecting the complete truth (even in a statistical, let alone interpretative manner) under circumstances in which it is in the state's interest to disguise much of what is happening around us".

Bias stemming from the effects of the researcher on the research situation could be minimised by using unobtrusive techniques, such as: participant observation; developing relationships of trust before and during data collection; and getting an outsider to report on the researcher's influence on the situation. The situation being studied might also bias the researcher, especially when working with victims of

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[13] Collins (1988: 21-22) describes 'triangulation' as one of the most useful techniques for descriptive monitoring. The concept is based on the premise that a social situation will be most accurately described if multiple points of reference are used. Thus monitoring should strive to: cover different levels of data; different groups of people; different points in time; more than one place; use multiple observers of the same situation; use different methods; and use different theoretical perspectives in relation to the same issue.

violence. This could be overcome by keeping research aims in mind at all times, and by obtaining the help of an outside researcher who may identify where the researcher is being misled, or is becoming biased (Collins, 1988).

Again, Collins (1988) warned that achieving these ideals was hampered when monitoring political violence. Monitors pointed out that in a war situation distinct sides are drawn, and gaining access to one side often means supporters of the other side will resist meetings and refuse to supply information.[14]

The contributions by Sutcliffe (1988) and Muller (1988), as well as some of the discussions at the workshop, touched on the issue of the relationship between monitors, democratic organisations and "community organisations" (Muller, 1988: 43). It is uncertain how widely shared these views were, but they shed light on some of the perceptions about monitoring at the time.

One of the objectives of the Unrest Monitoring Project which Sutcliffe coordinated (not the same as the UMP referred to in this study), was to "publish occasional reports which would be of use to progressive organisations" (Sutcliffe, 1988: 27). This was part of a wider aim to empower and strengthen community organisations through training and action research. Sutcliffe (1988: 32) states that "Clearly, such research projects need to work towards structuring their relationship with the mass democratic organisations. In particular, monitoring research needs to be broadly accountable to the mass democratic movement...".

This suggested that there was nothing wrong with monitors being directly aligned to one of the parties in the conflict, and that this was preferable for the mass democratic organisations. Sutcliffe (1988) was keenly aware of the requirements for good research as illustrated above, and his view outlined here was apparently based on the assumption that all academic research is in some way politically aligned, and that the objectivity of academics is not guaranteed by their distance from political parties on the ground (Aitchison, 1993).

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[14] Interviews with the HRC on February 11, 1994 and with John Aitchison from the UMP on July 5, 1994.

There is little evidence from the document of the workshop that this concept was considered problematic. Muller (1988: 46) did, however, pose a question about the relationship between research carried out by "non-aligned" academics, and that by academics specifically to meet the needs of community organisations and activists, and which is more valid, or "true". The conclusion was that this question was problematic, and neither researchers or community organisations were clear about it.

### iii) The monitoring agencies' response to these criticisms

The monitoring agencies were asked about the problem of bias, and if this affected their work and the monitoring process in general. The discussions of each monitor will be considered separately.

The UMP was clear about the fact that its primary sources did not include Inkatha structures, and the potential for bias which this implied (Aitchison, 1993). The ability to acknowledge this was considered the first step in dealing with the problem, as attempts could then be made to correct it. Aitchison (1993) also emphasised the difficulties the UMP faced in monitoring violence, in addition to those which all social researchers face:

> "Reconstructing a picture of what happened through the pinhole lens of the official police Unrest Report or by listening to the gut wrenching yet often tendentious testimony of a victim or bereaved relative is not a precise scientific activity nor politically neutral. We enter such activity with pre-existing mind-factored templates and assumptions" (Aitchison, 1993: 32).

These problems have not, according to the UMP, had a significant impact on the reliability of data, and the empirical findings of the UMP have never been challenged (Aitchison, 1993). The allegation that monitors are biased is invalid according to the UMP. Aitchison (1993) argued that while the influence of a

person's beliefs could never be discounted, there was little evidence which proved that the monitor's data was inaccurate, and therefore biased. Aitchison (1993: 14) believed that perceptions of objectivity have been subject to changes over time and that some organisations "did not like" the UMP's findings. As a result, various Inkatha and Inkatha Institute spokesmen claimed the UMP or Aitchison himself, were biased.

The Inkatha Institute believed that the other monitors had improved somewhat in terms of bias over the years. While personal sympathies were still believed to affect monitoring, there was no longer the manipulation of data to generate certain messages. In terms of the Institute's own data, the interviewee recognised that most sources were within IFP structures and that events in which ANC supporters were victims, was not well covered. The Institute did have some ANC sources, but incidents involving ANC supporters were not included in the Institute's monthly reports. The Inkatha Institute expressed the most concern of all the monitors about the effects of bias on its own work, and particularly on the monthly bulletins which were sporadically circulated.

The HRC thought the problem and perceptions of bias were rooted in the fact that most monitors evolved within UDF structures. Since the unbanning of the ANC, some monitors struggled to distance themselves from this identity, according to the HRC. The HRC believed the antagonistic stance of the IFP had retarded this process and probably entrenched divisions. The HRC did not believe their own work was biased, and the criticisms made by Jeffery (1992) were not taken seriously, since the SAIRR apologised to the HRC for the allegations made in Jeffery's (1992) report.

The researchers were also conscious of where the HRC's weaknesses lay, and were committed to being objective. They warned that monitors have to control how close they allow themselves to become to particular people or political parties. Working with victims of violence, they said, made this difficult because relationships could become personal, and the desire to help these people could cloud objectivity.

The Natal Monitor believed that objectivity is an unrealistic goal because everyone has political sympathies of some sort, and that being aware of these puts a researcher in a better position to deal with them. Being a member of a political party does not automatically translate into bias, because political preferences are not exclusive to members only. The Natal Monitor acknowledged that a predominance of sources from one particular group would affect data. The Natal Monitor believed this problem was balanced by scanning the press and Inkatha's information when this was available, and drawing on the Monitor's few sources within Inkatha. The lack of information about Inkatha victims was, according to the Monitor, an inadequacy which could not be helped. The Monitor emphasised that information about Inkatha was not deliberately left out.

Comments by the IFP that the Natal Monitor was "nothing less than an attempt to give credence to ANC strategies and propaganda in Natal/KwaZulu" (Hodgson, 1992) were not taken seriously by that monitor. The interviewee argued that Inkatha was notorious for having the stance that "anybody who is not for them is against them". The Natal Monitor was confident about its methodology and the reliability of its information, and believed the academic background of its researchers was advantageous for data collection and for dealing with criticism.

## 6. Conclusion

It is not the intention of this study to pass sentence on any of the monitoring agencies, but rather to consider some methodological issues which shape the information which they disseminate. Certain factors mitigate against violence monitors adopting scientific methods of data collection, and their data therefore is not easily subjected to such an assessment. These factors are:

- Most monitoring exercises did not develop as planned research projects based on structured proposals which spelt out data gathering techniques and funding arrangements. Concomitantly, monitoring processes were not always subject to

the rigours of peer scrutiny, reports and assessments, as are most research projects carried out in a research or academic environment. This, along with the often limited resources, are probably largely the reasons why the preferable methods such as those described by Collins (1988) and Sutcliffe (1988) above, were not always used. While monitors themselves mostly have confidence in their data, these shortcomings have affected the perceived legitimacy of their work.

- The environment which monitors work in is one which makes detachment and objectivity harder to maintain than in most situations. Good monitoring means establishing trust with people in communities, which under any circumstances is the basis for forming relationships. In cases where contacts become victims, or where monitors work directly with victims of violence, maintaining a measure of objective judgement must be extremely difficult.

This chapter has identified some important issues to consider when using the monitoring agency data. While data gathering techniques vary between monitors, these are not always systematic, and depend to a large extent on the availability of time, staff and ultimately resources. This may detract from the reliability of the data. The HRC has the most systematic process, probably because this is the only monitor discussed here whose staff concentrate exclusively on monitoring violence.

The sources used by the monitors are extensive and vary in type (for example, between primary and secondary data) which is valuable for cross-checking and ensuring the reliability of data. This is one of the monitors' greatest strengths. The biggest drawback, however, is that in all cases, most primary sources were affiliated in some way to a particular political group, or data largely excluded victims of a particular group. Although the monitors themselves did not all perceive this as a problem, those using this material inevitably feel they are not getting the whole picture. Also, despite the monitors' belief that their data is reliable and representative, this situation fuels accusations of political bias. These accusations

antagonise parties, which hinders cooperation and data sharing, thus making the resolution of the problem more difficult.

Monitors mostly did not regard bias as an important problem for their activity. It was not apparent that measures to lessen these perceptions and to widen the net of primary sources were prioritised. Monitors seemed to rely on established contacts in communities, rather than surveying opinions of randomly selected people in these areas. Admittedly, this is a difficult task in a violence stricken region. A technique such as that suggested by Collins (1988) of employing an outside researcher to assess the impartiality of data was also not mentioned by the monitors in the interviews. The HRC and to some extent the Inkatha Institute had their data checked by someone not involved in the collection process, although they were part of the said organisations, rather than outsiders.

An encouraging fact is that all the monitors acknowledged the potential problems of having sources largely from one political group, and the possible bias arising from this and from the monitoring process in general. This suggests that, being open to public scrutiny, the monitors must have confidence in their work and in their ability to defend their methods. Indeed the Natal Monitor and UMP welcomed such scrutiny. There was also no evidence that monitors deliberately excluded data about certain political groups.[15] Sporadic attempts were also made to access data from those sources which were lacking. In many cases, monitors had given up this quest, after numerous unsuccessful attempts, humiliating encounters and a loss of faith in the reliability of certain data.

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[15] In the case of the Inkatha Institute, the monthly bulletin was produced on request of the IFP Information Centre, for party political purposes. Consequently, information on ANC victims was deliberately excluded. This was not, however, in keeping with the aims of the Inkatha Institute's violence research unit.

# CHAPTER SIX

# ANALYSIS OF REPORTING TRENDS

## 1. Aims of this chapter

Having discussed the contextual issues surrounding violence reporting by the press and monitoring agencies, this chapter reports the results of statistical analyses which compare reporting trends of these media in KwaZulu-Natal during the years 1987, 1990 and 1994. These years were chosen for two reasons.

First, they best enable a comparison of reporting during and after the States of Emergency were in place. This is important because violence reporting was severely curtailed during the Emergency. The State of Emergency was lifted in February 1990 in the rest of the country, but in KwaZulu-Natal it was only repealed in October that year. Nevertheless, with the simultaneous unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations, and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990, it is unlikely that the reporting restrictions were enforced as before.

The second reason for choosing to study these years is that monitoring agency material was most readily available during these years, and this information is necessary for a good comparison between monitor and press reporting.

The interviews conducted for this study with journalists and editors about their work procedures (discussed in Chapter Four), along with findings of international research (Snyder and Kelly, 1977; McCarthy et al, 1993) revealed that the following factors might affect the likelihood that events are reported by the press. These are:

- The distance of the event from the location of the newspaper. The likelihood of reporting decreases as the distance from the press base increases.

- The intensity of events, measured by the numbers of people killed and injured per event. More intense events have a greater likelihood of being reported by the press.

- The time or date at which events occurred - in other words, the political context. This factor may lead to both an increase or a decrease in the likelihood of reporting. For example, whether or not violence would mar the country's first democratic election became an important issue for the media. Thus events of violence just before the election in April 1994 became sought after news items, which increased the likelihood that violence would be reported during this time period.

- The size of events, measured by the number of participants. The more participants in an event, the greater the chance that the incident will be reported.

Apart from the distance of the events from the source of information, these factors should not affect press and monitoring agency reporting in the same way. Chapter Five reported that the main limitations for monitors was a shortage of staff and resources, and to an extent sources of information. These might affect recording of events in distant locations, but would not incline monitors to report more intense events, or events with more participants, or alter their recording patterns in accordance with a changing political environment. This makes the nature of reporting by the monitors useful for comparisons with press reporting.

An analysis of the influence of these factors on reporting will illustrate how the press and monitors contribute to the database. In doing so, the intention is that some of the following questions will be answered: In what way did the sources contribute to the data set? How did the size and intensity of events affect the probability that they would be reported by the different sources? How did the location of events influence their selection by the press and monitors? Did the time period in which events occurred have any impact on reporting trends?

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Answering these questions will not enable conclusions to be drawn about the extent of selection bias, since there is no 'correct' record of the events which actually occurred, against which to measure what the sources reported. However, it will be possible to comment on the type of contribution which the sources made, and the implications for the data set.

This chapter will do the following:

- Explain how the various newspapers and monitoring agencies have been grouped to measure their contribution to the database.
- Describe the distribution of information reported by the sources in 1987, 1990 and 1994.
- Discuss the effects of each of the factors outlined above on reporting by the press and the monitoring agencies in each of the three years.
- Draw conclusions about the type of contribution to the database made by the sources.

## 2. How the sources were grouped for analysis

Data on 3 996 events of violent collective action in KwaZulu-Natal during 1987, 1990 and 1994 were used. The majority of these events occurred in 1990 (1 674 events), followed by 1 190 incidents in 1994 and 1 132 in 1987.

Twenty six different sources contributed to the data set over the three years (Appendix 1). Where sources are named individually, the number of events reflected was reported by this source *alone*. The category 'combination press' refers to events which were reported by more than one newspaper. 'Combination monitors' refers to those events reported by several monitoring agencies, while 'combination monitors and press' includes events reported by both monitors and newspapers.

Because this study is concerned with the reporting patterns of the press and monitors in general, the sources listed in Appendix 1 were grouped into three categories for analysis (Table 1). Events reported by newspapers only, are captured in the 'press' category. Events reported by monitoring agencies only are labelled 'monitors', and those incidents reported by both monitors and newspapers fall into the same 'combination' category as that mentioned above.[1]

| Table 1: Reporting Patterns in KwaZulu-Natal | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | 1987 | | 1990 | | 1994 | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 666 | 58,9 | 975 | 58,2 | 293 | 24,7 |
| Monitors | 360 | 31,9 | 586 | 35,0 | 539 | 45,4 |
| Combination | 104 | 9,2 | 113 | 6,8 | 354 | 29,8 |
| Total | 1 130 | 100,0 | 1 674 | 100,0 | 1 186 | 100,0 |

The 'combination' category presents some challenges for analysis. When assessing what proportion of events was reported by the press for example, not only the events in the 'press' category must be considered, but also those in the 'combination' category, since events in this latter group were also reported by the press. Also, the greater the proportion of events reported by a combination of sources, the harder a comparison between press and monitor reporting becomes. While a large proportion of events reported by a combination of sources may frustrate analysis, the fact that separate sources reported the same events is a positive sign.

The 'combination' category is important because it allows a distinction to be made between events which are reported by a collective of source types (ie. the monitors *and* the press), and those reported by one source type only (ie. the monitors *or* the press). The 'collective source type' events are those captured in the 'combination' category. The more there are of these events, the better for researchers, because if information from one of the source types cannot be

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[1] It is important to note that the Human Rights Committee (HRC), a major source of information, uses the press in its own data collection process. This presents a potential problem, namely that events which originated in the press are recorded in the data set as being reported by monitors, since the information stems from the HRC. This problem was overcome by coding such events in the 'press' category, even though they were physically obtained from the HRC.

obtained, the researcher can rest assured that the other set of sources will report the incidents.

The 'single source type' events are those reported by one category of sources only. If there are many 'single source' events, researchers need to consider their choice of source types carefully, because omitting the information from one category of sources would mean that a significant amount of events would not be recorded.

In cases where the proportion of events in the 'combination' category are small, few events were reported by both press and monitors. This could be for several reasons. It may be the result of reporting bias by either source along the lines of the variables which will be analysed in this chapter. The press and monitors could also cover different geographical areas, with the result that few events are reported by both sources. Alternatively, certain types of events may fall outside the monitors' area of concern.

## 3. The proportion of events reported by the sources in 1987, 1990, 1994

In order to consider reporting trends more generally, the proportion of events reported by the sources will first be considered for the three year period as a whole. The proportions in each year will then be discussed individually.

If data for the three years being studied are added together, the largest contribution to the database by a single source was made by a newspaper. The Natal Witness reported 20,8% of events over the three year period which were not also reported by other sources. The Human Rights Committee monitoring agency reported 13,5% of all events over the same period (Appendix 1).

With regard to the categories of sources, the press reported 48,2% of events which were not also recorded by the monitors. The monitors reported 37,5% of

events not covered by the press over the three year period. Fourteen percent of events in 1987, 1990 and 1994 were reported by both the monitors and the newspapers (Figure 1). This illustrates that both the press and the monitors have made important separate contributions to the database during this time.

**Figure 1: Total Events Reported**
Proportion of events 1987+1990+1994

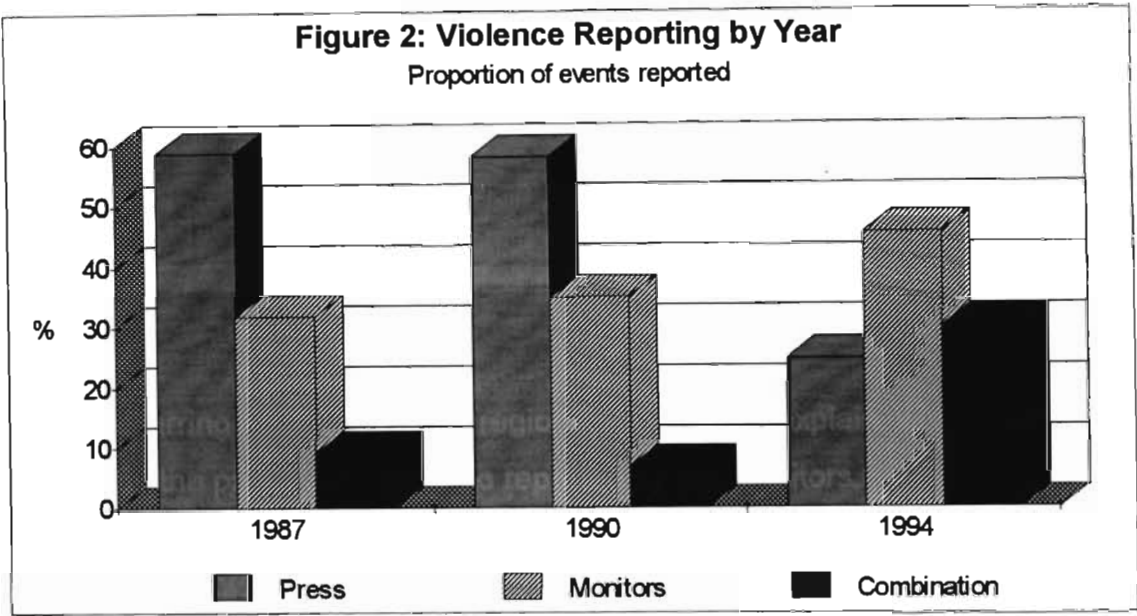

Combination (14.2%)

Press (48.2%)
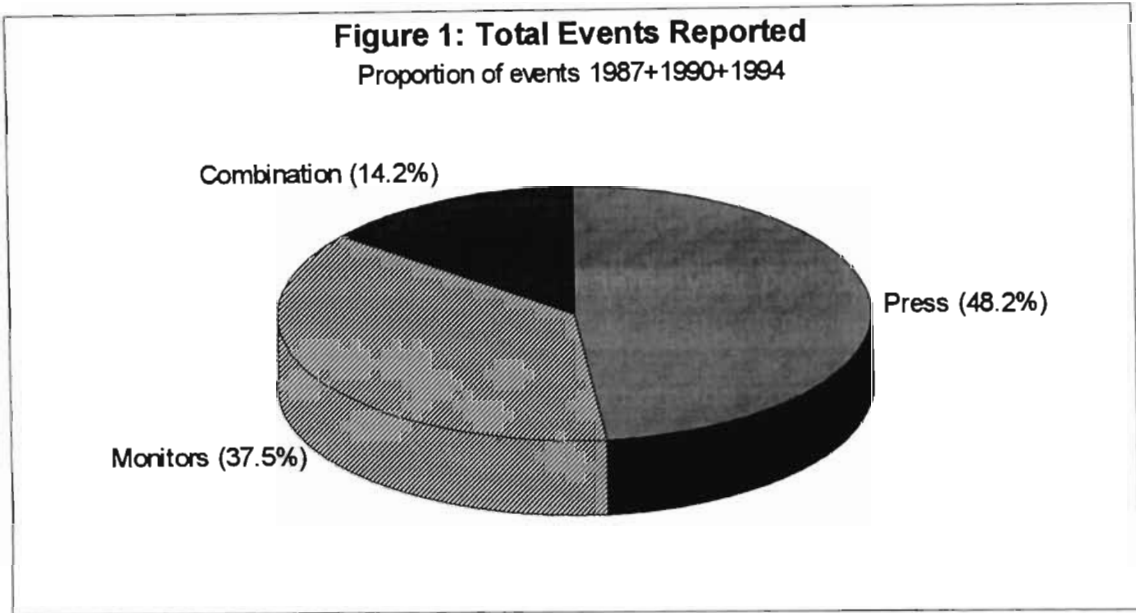
Monitors (37.5%)

These proportions have not, however, been consistent over the three year period. In 1987, the press alone, reported well over half the total events in that year (Figure 2), with monitors reporting substantially fewer.

Reporting trends of individual sources rather than categories of sources in 1987, reveal that The Natal Witness and the Unrest Monitoring Project (UMP), both Pietermaritzburg based sources, reported the most events (Appendix 1). This is probably the case because 77,6% of conflict events in 1987 occurred in the Midlands region of the province which includes the town of Pietermaritzburg (Figure 3).[2]

The predominance of the press category of sources in 1987 may be the result of the UMP monitoring only the Midlands area of the province. While The Natal Witness is also based in the Midlands, it would nevertheless, have covered

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[2] The breakdown of these regions will be explained below in the section which deals with the effects of the location of events on reporting patterns.
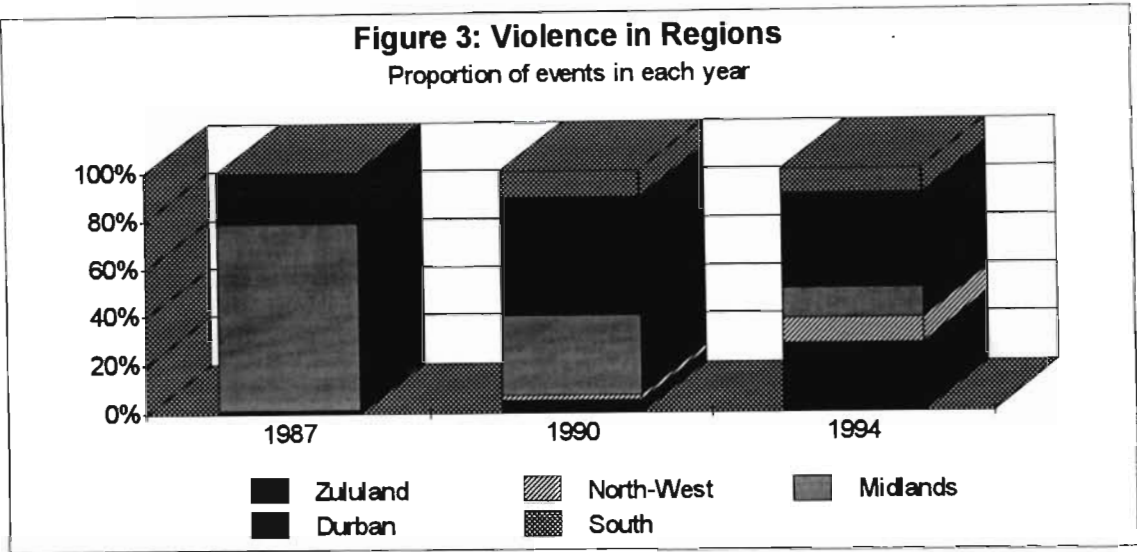
events occurring in the Durban region. This would explain why many events reported by the press were not also reported by the monitors.



**Figure 2: Violence Reporting by Year**
Proportion of events reported

In 1990, the reporting patterns were similar to those in 1987 (Figure 2). The press reported nearly two thirds of all events in this year, while the monitors reported just over one third. The amount of events which both reported ('combination') remained low in 1987 and 1990. Despite the fact that four separate monitoring agencies' material was used in 1990, the main contributors of information which was not also reported by other sources remained The Natal Witness (22,8%) and The Mercury (20,8%) (Appendix 1).

One possible reason for this may again be that these monitoring agencies limited their scope of violence monitoring to the Midlands and Durban regions. This is significant because in 1990 conflict spread from the Pietermaritzburg and Durban metropolitan areas where it had previously been located, to the rural areas of the province.

A comparison between data in Figure 3 illustrates that in 1990, 11,1% of events occurred in the South region, as opposed to 0,4% in 1987. A similar trend is evident in the Zululand and North West regions.

**Figure 3: Violence in Regions**
Proportion of events in each year

Legend: Zululand, North-West, Midlands, Durban, South

In 1994, the reporting patterns were markedly different from those in the previous years (Figure 2). The monitors rather than the press, reported the majority of events in that year - nearly one half. The other outstanding feature in this year was the substantial increase in the contribution made by the 'combination' category. This suggests that nearly one third of events were reported by both the press and monitors in 1994.

The substantial percentage of these 'collective source type' events is encouraging because should one group of sources not be used, the other would still report these events. A closer examination of individual sources' contributions shows that the reporting of events not covered by any other sources by <u>The Natal Witness</u> and <u>The Mercury</u>, dropped dramatically in 1994 from previous years (Appendix 1). Instead, the Human Rights Committee (HRC) made the largest contribution of any single source.

The HRC, unlike monitoring agencies used in previous years, monitors violence across the whole of KwaZulu-Natal, and by 1994 violence was occurring throughout the province (Figure 3). This may explain the high proportion of events covered by both the press and monitors in 1994. Whatever the reasons for these reporting trends, this analysis shows that without the monitors' contribution, nearly half the events in 1994 would not have been captured. This means that a larger proportion of events than before were not reported by the press.

# 4. Factors affecting reporting patterns

## i) The location of events as a determinant of reporting frequency

To analyse how the location of events affects reporting patterns, two measures were developed. For the first measure, the KwaZulu-Natal province was divided into five regions based largely on the Joint Services Board boundaries. These boundaries were selected because they are familiar to many people in the province, and because they correspond with the generalised location of much of the conflict (see the Map in Appendix 2).[3]

For the second measure, a variable was created which distinguishes simply between locations which are close to, and far from, the newspapers. All the newspapers used are located either in Durban or Pietermaritzburg. Based on journalists' and editors' comments about which areas they considered too far away to cover, it was estimated that a 100 km radius around these two towns would form an adequate boundary. Events within the 100 km radius around Pietermaritzburg and Durban were labelled 'near', while those beyond this radius were labelled 'far'. The results of the analyses of these two measures will be discussed separately.

### Reporting trends in the five regions of KwaZulu-Natal

The results in Figure 4 show that in 1987, the press reported nearly all the events in the largely rural Zululand, North-West and South regions. This is contrary to the hypothesis which states that because these regions are situated far from the newspapers' bases in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, the press should be less likely to report events here. In addition, the readership of The Natal Witness and

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[3] When conflict trends in the province are discussed, reference is usually made to distinct areas such as 'Zululand' and the 'South Coast' which, although not strictly the same as the JSB boundaries, refer to the same areas. Different trends in the conflict can also be distinguished in these separate areas. Apart from the Midlands region, where conflicts with somewhat different dynamics have occurred in the metropolitan and rural areas, the JSB boundaries present a division of the province which suits the general trends.

The Mercury does not extend to many of these areas, which according to interviews with reporters and editors, should further diminish the newspapers' obligation to report these events.

**Figure 4: Reporting in Regions in 1987**
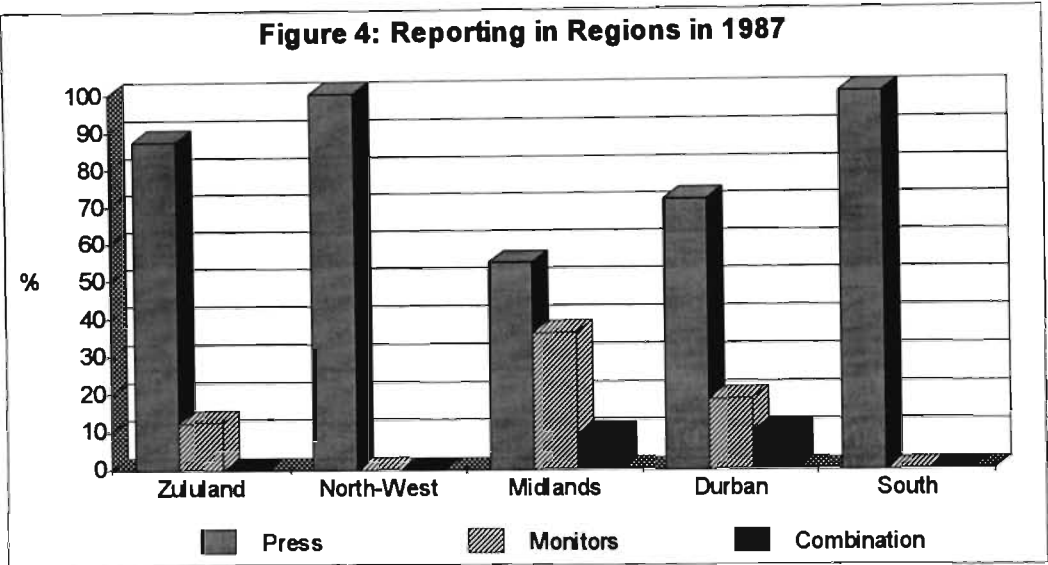


The predominance of the press as a source in 1987 may be explained by the fact that the Unrest Monitoring Project, the agency which contributed the most information in 1987, confined its monitoring to the Pietermaritzburg area. For this reason, monitors would have made little contribution to the database outside this metropolitan region. These results do not suggest that the monitors are less important for research purposes than the press. Instead they show that the press, despite criticisms by commentators on press reporting of violence, made a vital contribution to the database in 1987 by covering events throughout the region.

**Figure 5: Reporting in Regions in 1990**
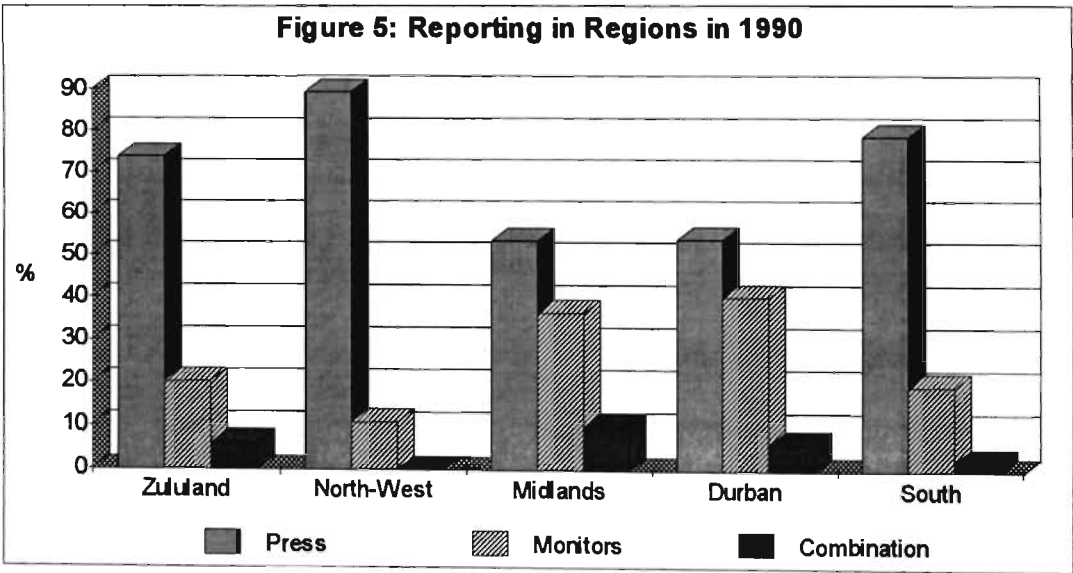
In 1990 the trends changed only slightly from those in 1987. Events reported by the press alone, were still by far the majority in all five regions (Figure 5). It is evident, however, that the monitors' contribution increased in the outlying regions from that in 1987.

A dramatic change in reporting patterns occurred in 1994 (Figure 6). The monitors were the single most important source for reporting violence in the distant regions of Zululand, North West and South. They reported 65,5%, 44% and 49,2% of events respectively. By contrast, the largest proportion reported by the press in any of the five regions was recorded in the Midlands and the Durban regions - regions which include the towns where the newspapers are based. These reporting patterns are in direct contrast to those in Figures 4 and 5, and seem to fit the hypothesis that the press sources focus more on the areas in which they are based.



Figure 6: Reporting in Regions in 1994
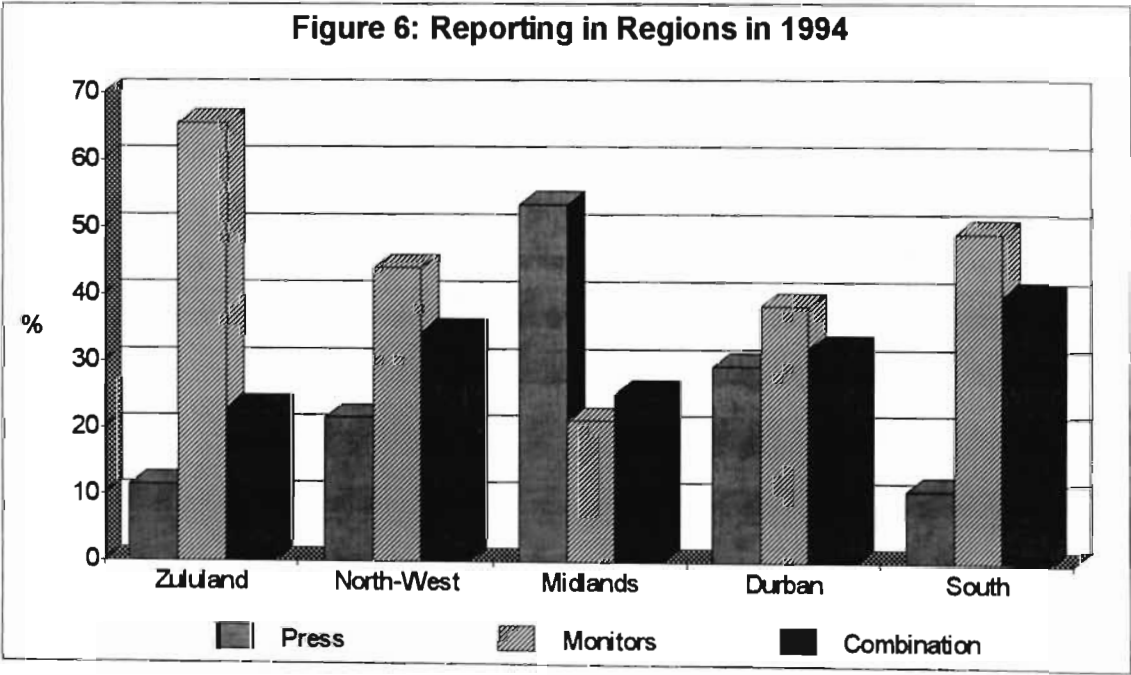
The discussion in Chapter Four indicated that the States of Emergency made violence reporting more difficult for the press. These results do not, however, suggest that the Emergency increased the likelihood that events in distant

locations would not be reported. The Emergency laws were in place in 1987, yet the press alone, reported the few events which occurred in outlying areas.

The State of Emergency was lifted in October 1990 in KwaZulu-Natal, but restrictions were probably not enforced as of February that year, when the ANC was unbanned and Nelson Mandela was released from prison. The Emergency may not, therefore, have restricted the press as much during 1990 as previous years, which may explain the large proportion of press reports on violence during this time. However, in 1990 more monitors were covering violence in the province than ever before, yet the press still reported the majority of events in all regions.

In 1994, the Emergency restrictions had been absent for four years, and could certainly have had no immediate effect on the reporting of violence. However, despite the fact that the press was free to report all incidents of conflict, for the first time in the period studied here, newspapers seemed to focus more on the urban areas where their headquarters are located.

## Distance from newspaper headquarters as a determinant of reporting frequency

Figure 7 illustrates similar reporting trends to those discussed above. In 1987, the press reported not only the majority of events close to their headquarters, but also the vast majority of events far away. The same applies for 1990, although by then the monitors recorded 18,4% of events in 'far' areas in that year which were not reported by the newspapers. In 1994 the trend is quite different, however. Monitors, rather than the press, were more inclined to record events in 'far' areas.

The proportion of events reported by a combination of press and monitors is substantial for events both 'far' and 'near' to the press bases in 1994. This is encouraging, since it indicates that many events are being reported by both groups of sources. However, the press reported far fewer events in distant areas than those close by. This means that without the monitors' information, 57,1% of events occurring far from Durban and Pietermaritzburg which are currently part of the database, would not have been recorded.

**Figure 7: Reporting Near and Far Events**
Proportion reported in 1987, 1990, 1994
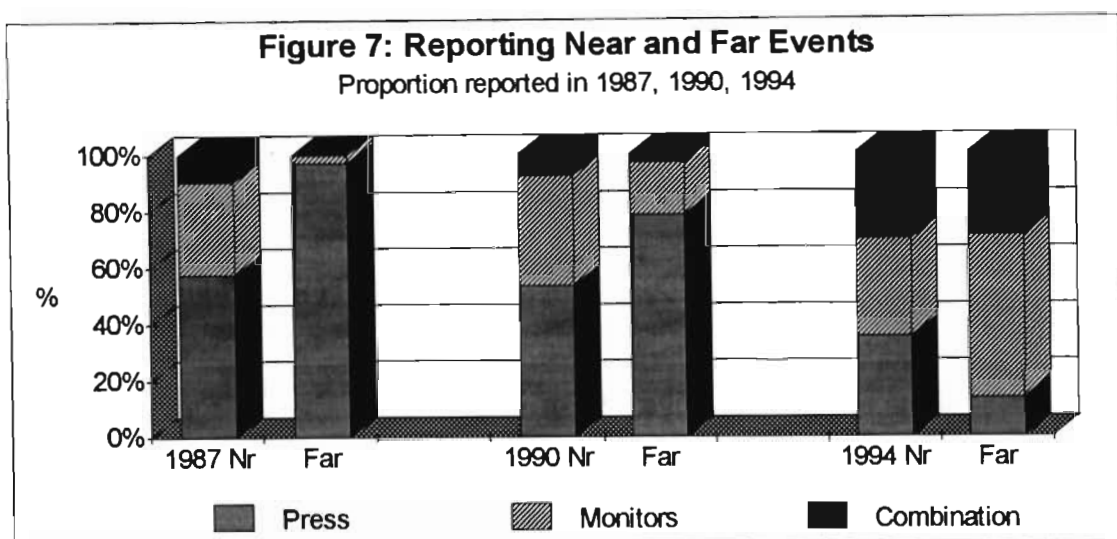
All these results indicate that contrary to expectations, the press reported many events in locations distant from their own. In recent times, however, it would appear that the monitors report much of the violence in far off areas which the newspapers do not cover.

This trend is important for researchers who may consider using only the press for violence research in KwaZulu-Natal in the future. The results nevertheless, show that the press and monitoring agencies have both made important individual contributions to the database, at different points in time.

## ii) The intensity of events as a determinant of reporting frequency

Analyses considered whether the intensity of events had any affect on reporting patterns by various sources. A distinction was made between events of a high, medium and low intensity, based on the following criteria:

- Violent events in which no deaths or injuries occurred are least intense ('low').
- Events in which between one to four deaths and/or injuries took place are of medium intensity.
- Events with five or more deaths and/or injuries have a high intensity.

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**Figure 8: Reporting Intensity in 1987**

Proportion events reported by sources
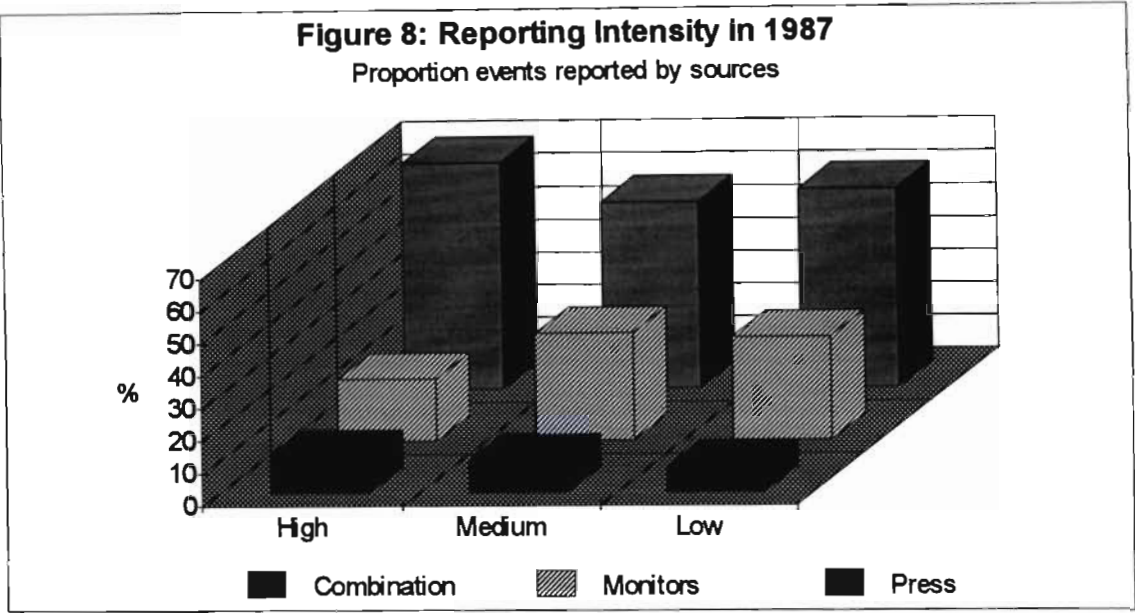


The results in Figure 8 show that in 1987, the press reported by far the majority of high intensity events, which fits the hypothesis that the press are likely to focus more attention on the most intense events.

This analyses also shows, however, that the press reported nearly two thirds of the low intensity events. This precludes drawing the conclusion that the newspapers' priority was intense events in 1987.

**Figure 9: Reporting Intensity in 1990**

Proportion events reported by sources
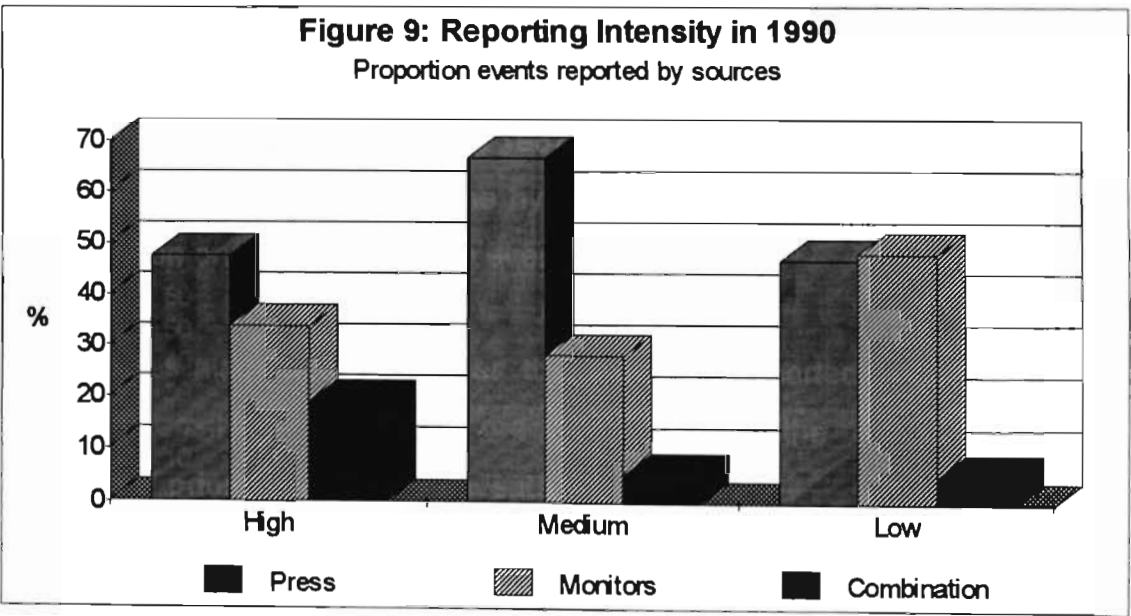
In 1990, the reporting trends changed slightly from those in 1987 (Figure 9). The press still reported the majority of the most intense events (47,5%), although this is a smaller majority than in 1987, as the monitors' coverage of intense events increased in 1990.

With regard to the least intense events, monitors' recorded far more of these than was the case in 1987. This is more in line with expectations that newspapers would not devote as much time and space to these events, and that monitors would be more likely to record these incidents.

The results in Figure 10 indicate, as did those in the analyses of other factors above, that reporting patterns in 1994 differed substantially from those in 1987 and 1990. In this case, the greatest proportion of high intensity events was reported by a 'combination' of sources. This means that these events are likely to be reported by both press and monitors, which fits the hypothesis that the press is likely to report events with many deaths and injuries.

The press and monitors reported about an equal number of different events in which no deaths and injuries occurred (the least intense events). This means that although both sources were likely to report intense events, they nevertheless made equally important contributions with respect to the low intensity incidents. However, nearly half of all medium intensity events came from monitor sources only.

These results do not conclusively show that the press is more likely to report intense events. Although findings in 1990 and 1994 show signs of this trend, the fact that the press consistently reported a substantial proportion of the least intense events, which were not covered by the monitors, reduces the strength of the argument.

**Figure 10: Reporting Intensity in 1994**
Proportion events reported by sources
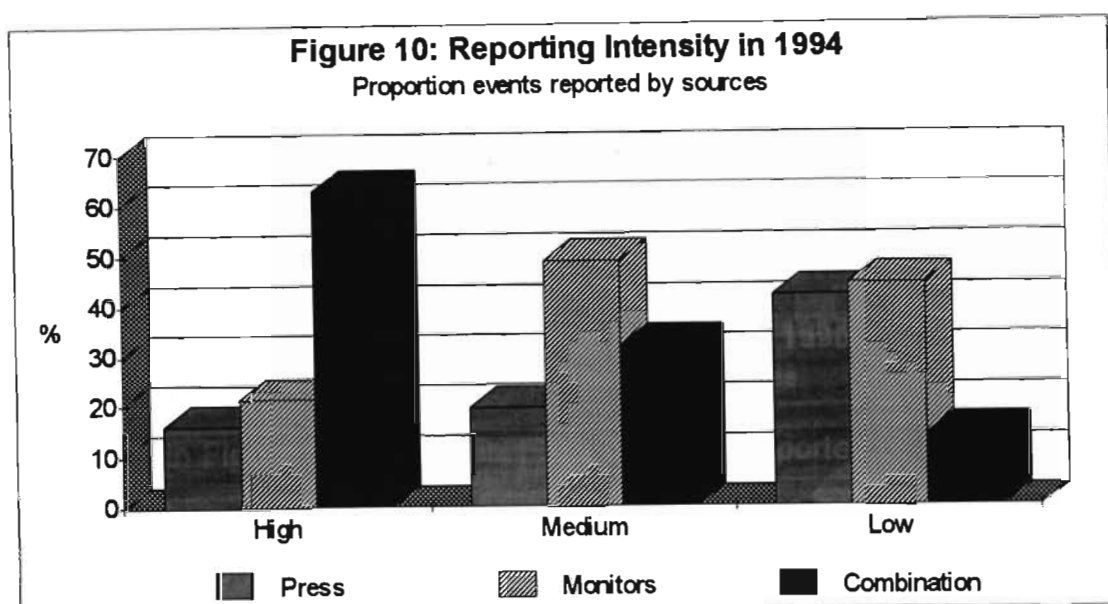
It is worth noting that several other measures for intensity were developed, but produced results so similar to those presented here that an analysis thereof would not have contributed to the argument. This is, however, in itself a finding for discussion.

One variable, similar to that used above, sought to examine 'massacres'. These were defined as events in which ten or more deaths and/or injuries occurred. The rationale was that these events might be even more intense than those in which five or more fatalities and injuries were recorded. The results, however, closely resembled those already discussed (see the tables in Appendix 3). This shows that with regard to deaths and injuries, the number 'five' as opposed to 'ten', more accurately reflects perceptions of the more serious or intense events. This means that five deaths and injuries per event are as newsworthy as ten are.

Another variable was developed which sought to investigate whether the inclusion of injuries in the intensity measure affected reporting patterns. Measures similar to those described above, based on five and ten deaths per event were developed, excluding injuries. Results showed little difference to those in Figures 8 to 10, which suggests that injuries are not a determining factor in the identification of intense events, whether there were five or ten injuries per event (see the tables in Appendix 3). Thus, the occurrence of injuries in events of violence does not appear to make events more or less newsworthy.

## iii) The number of participants in events as a determinant of reporting frequency

Arguments in the literature (Snyder and Kelly, 1977; McCarthy et al, 1993) suggest that the size of events, measured by the number of participants, affects the likelihood that events will be reported by the press. The hypothesis is that the larger events are, the greater the probability of coverage.

To determine how the press and monitoring agencies' contribution was influenced by event size, events were grouped into four categories. Small events refer to incidents with less than ten participants. Medium, large and very large events include those with ten to forty nine, 50-499, and 500 and more participants, respectively.



Figure 11: Reporting Event Size in 1987
Proportion reported by sources
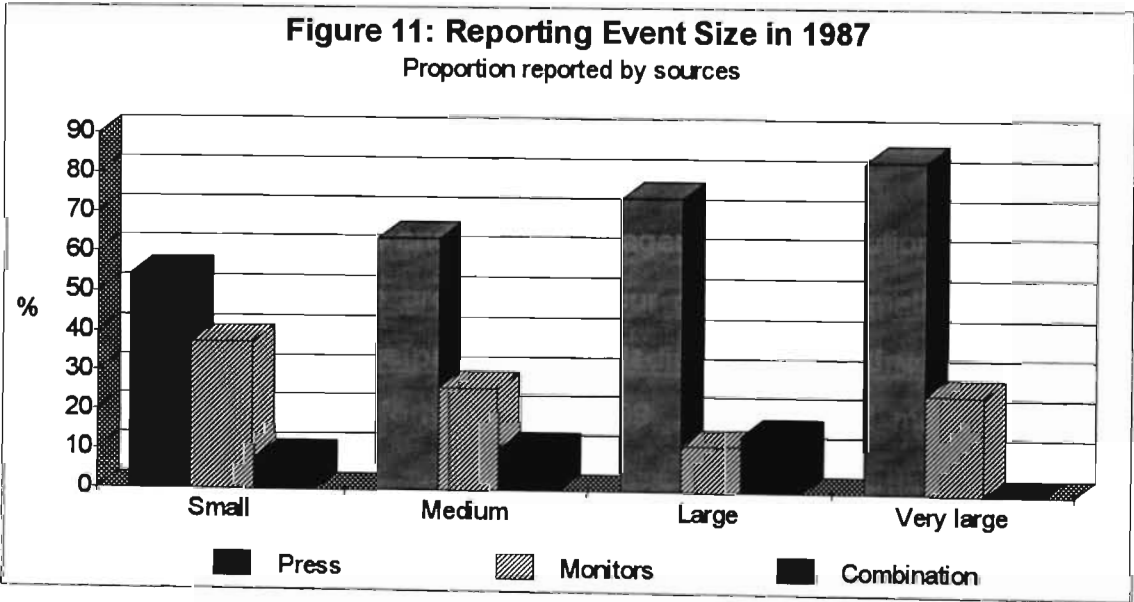
Figure 11 shows that over half of all events in 1987 (54,5%) which were small in size were reported by the press only. The newspapers also reported by far the majority of medium and large events. These latter results confirm the hypothesis that the press is inclined to report events with more participants. But the fact that the newspapers reported the majority of small events also, suggests that the press does not necessarily neglect events with fewer participants.

If the types of events which the press did not pick up are considered, however, the argument could be made that of these events, most were small in size. The greatest contribution by the monitors was in the reporting of small events, in which over a third of events reported by these agencies were not picked up by the press. This suggests, in line with the hypothesis, that the largest proportion of events which were not published in the newspapers, were small in size.

Reporting trends in 1990 are similar to those in 1987 (Figure 12). The press again reported the majority of small, medium and large events. The monitors did, however, contribute far more to the medium and large categories in 1990 than in 1987.

An interesting contrast with reporting tendencies in 1987 is that monitors reported over half (52%) of all events which were very large in size. A significant proportion of these events were reported by a 'combination' of sources, which indicates that the press did also report many of these events. However, these results suggest that without the monitors' contribution, over half these events would not have been captured.

The very large events are not many in number, and it is possible that this trend reflects the patterns of the violence reporting in the Pietermaritzburg area in early 1990. This violence, which has been called the 'Seven Days War', was characterised by organised attacks carried out by large groups of people on the residents of several townships. This intense violence which lasted nearly a month in total, was covered extensively by the monitors. In fact, one of the monitors used during this time was set up specifically to aid victims of these attacks.[4] This might explain the predominance of very large events reported by monitors in 1990.

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[4] The Midlands Crisis Relief Committee was set up and run by volunteers in Pietermaritzburg in March 1990 to assist victims of violence and record the events of violence in the process. This group operated only while this spate of attacks lasted, and produced a lengthy publication documenting the details of the violence.

## Figure 12: Reporting Event Size in 1990
### Proportion reported by sources
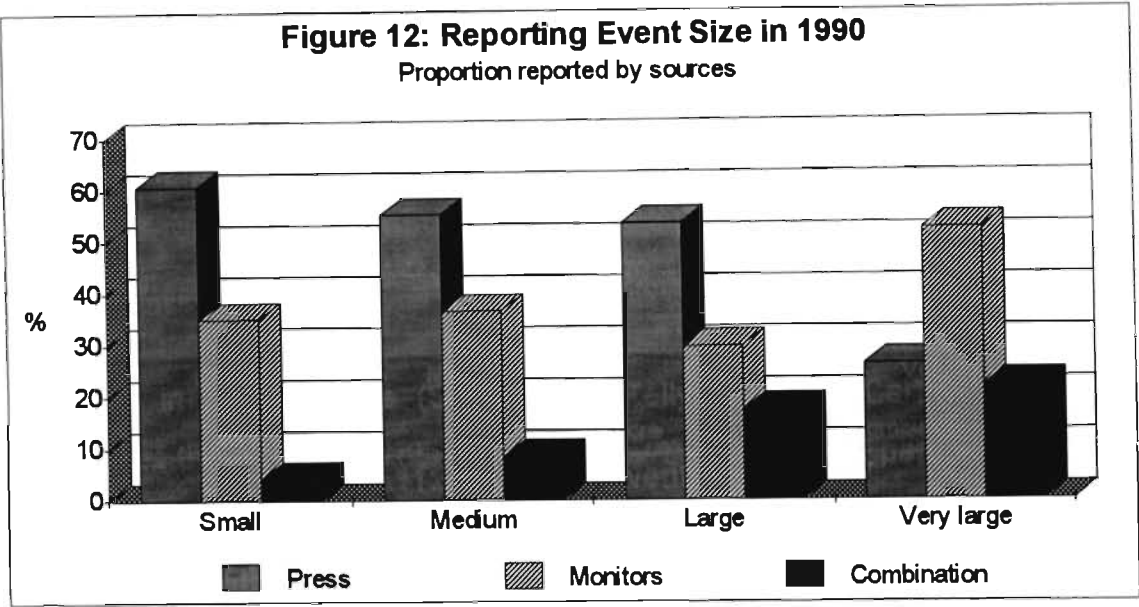


The analysis of reporting patterns in 1994 shows trends quite different from those in 1987 and 1990, as has been the case with other variables studied here. Figure 13 shows that the majority of small events in 1994, constituting nearly half of all these events (48,8%), were reported by the monitors only.

This directly opposes trends in 1987 and 1990, in which the majority of small events were reported by the newspapers. Reporting of medium sized events was more equal, with each group of sources contributing about one third of events to the database. The newspapers reported the majority of the large events (46,3%), with monitors reporting only 14,6% of these incidents.

These results support the hypothesis that the likelihood of events being reported in the press increases with size. In addition, these findings suggest, as have others presented here, that reporting patterns may be changing over time. It should, however, be noted that the Human Rights Committee, the main monitor used in 1994, does not record faction fights. This type of event typically involves large groups of people, and may account for the reporting patterns of large and very large events.

**Figure 13: Reporting Event Size in 1994**
Proportion reported by sources
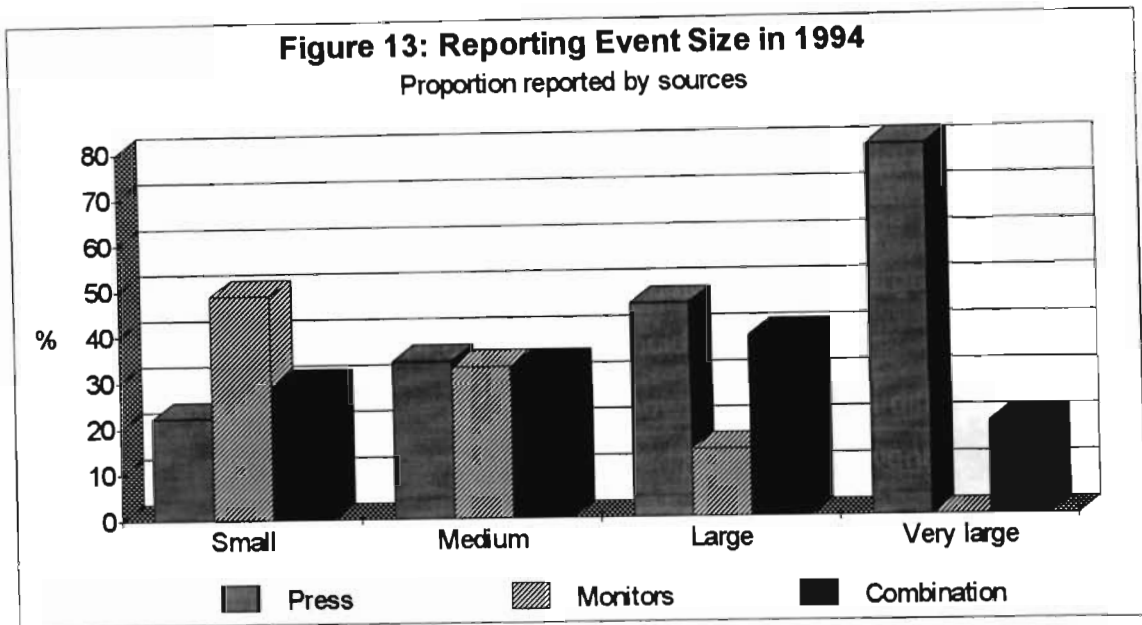
The results nevertheless, suggest that size has had some affect on press reporting of violence, particularly in more recent times, and specifically in 1994. Without the monitors' contribution, over one third of the small events in the data set would not have been recorded in 1987 and 1990. Nearly one half would not have been captured in 1994, which suggests that the press devote less space to these kinds of events.

## iv) The political context or timing of events as a determinant of reporting frequency

In trying to determine whether reporting patterns are related to the broader political context, the press and monitors' reporting patterns were analysed by month in 1987, 1990 and 1994. Figure 14 shows that for the first six months of 1987 the press reported the vast majority of events, although the monitors' contribution was on the increase. In July, however, this changed dramatically, with the monitors reporting slightly more events than the newspapers. This trend reoccurred in October, after which the press again reported more than 60% of the province's violence.

**Figure 14: Reporting in 1987**
Proportion of events reported monthly
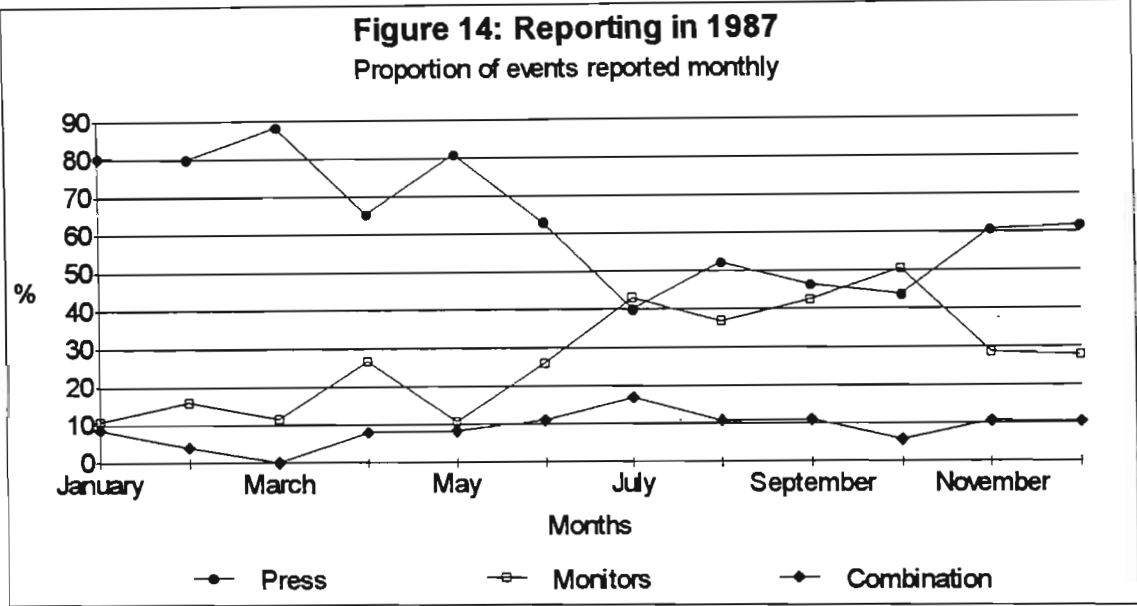
In order to determine whether the political context had any affect on these reporting trends, the situation in KwaZulu-Natal during this time will briefly be considered. During the five month period from September 1987 to January 1988 there was a major increase in the frequency of conflict (Figure 15). During this time, the average monthly number of events was 172 - a significant increase from sixty seven events in August 1987 (Louw and Bekker, 1992). Most of these events occurred in the Pietermaritzburg area.

Judging from Figure 15, it would seem that as violence increased in 1987, the press contribution decreased and the monitors reported more events instead. This is contrary to expectations, since an upsurge of violence, particularly in 1987 when such severe violence in KwaZulu-Natal was uncommon, should have been considered newsworthy by the press.

This supposition is supported by the opinions of reporters and editors of the province's daily newspapers, who said that "newsworthiness" depended largely on events or happenings being "new", or different from the norm.

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**Figure 15: Violent Events in 1987**
Number of events by month
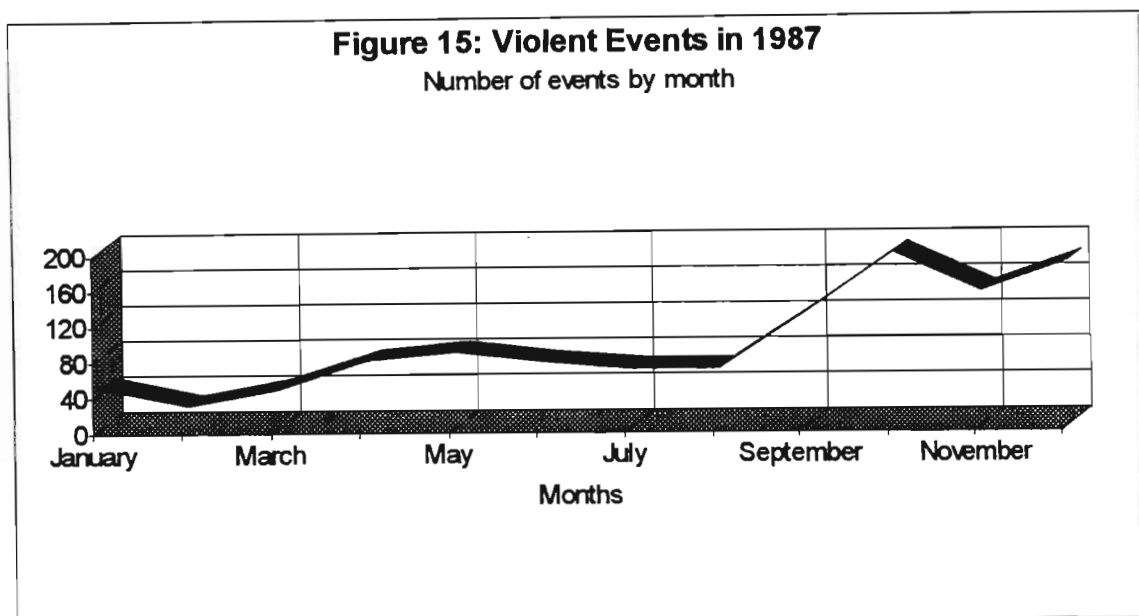


Interviewed in 1995, the editor of The Mercury said that although violence is an important issue for his newspaper, this importance has become difficult to sustain because the conflict has continued for so many years. He added that "a very violent incident over one weekend eight years ago would have got a very big story, but this thing gets repeated almost every weekend".[5] Since newsworthiness does not seem to have been responsible for the decrease in press reporting, it is possible that the States of Emergency had some impact on these trends.

A question raised by Louw and Bekker (1992) about violence levels in 1987 is revealing with regard to the political context: In June 1986 a national State of Emergency was declared, and comparative data shows that this succeeded in substantially reducing what had been high conflict levels in the rest of the country (Bennett and Quin, 1989).

In KwaZulu-Natal, however, violence levels surged, and this period has come to mark the start of the province's long history of violent conflict. The question was thus why the government, with its extensive Emergency regulations and security forces, was unable to control violence in this province and particularly in the Pietermaritzburg area?

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[5] Interview with John Patten, The Mercury editor, on March 28, 1995.

The answer to this question is not as important here as what this might have meant for reporting at the time. Whatever the reasons for the rising conflict levels in KwaZulu-Natal, it is highly likely that the government would have wanted to suppress information about the conflict situation - a central aim of the many press restrictions and Emergency laws.

This may be the reason why press reporting decreased as conflict levels increased, in which case it could be concluded that the political context does have an effect on violence reporting by the press. This analysis also shows that although the States of Emergency may have suppressed press reporting of violence, the press remained an important source in 1987.

Throughout the months of 1990 the press reported more violence than the monitors, except for April and May when the monitors reported slightly more events (Figure 16). In December also, the newspapers' and monitors' reporting of separate events was more equal, at 51,1% and 46,7% respectively.



Figure 16: Reporting in 1990
Proportion of events reported monthly
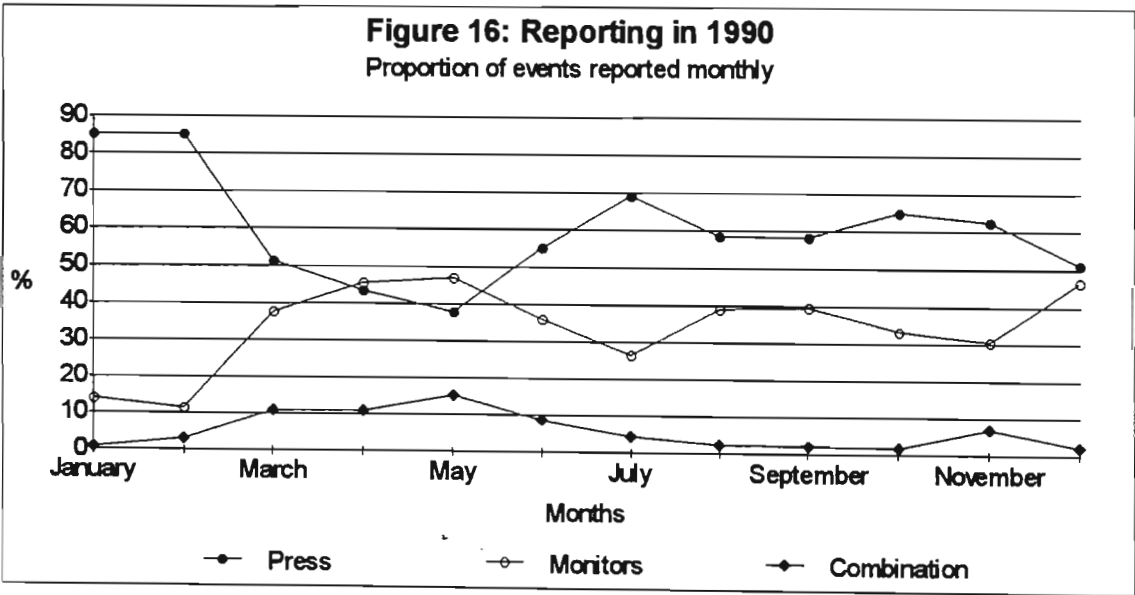
If the frequency of conflict events in 1990 is considered in conjunction with the reporting trends during that year, a pattern similar to that in 1987 is evident. In March and April 1990, violence levels increased dramatically (Figure 17). During these same months, Figure 16 shows that the proportion of events reported by

newspapers dropped from around 85% to 43,5% in April and 37,9% in May. Thus, as occurred in 1987, the press contribution to the database dropped as violence increased.



Figure 17: Violent Events in 1990
Number of events by month
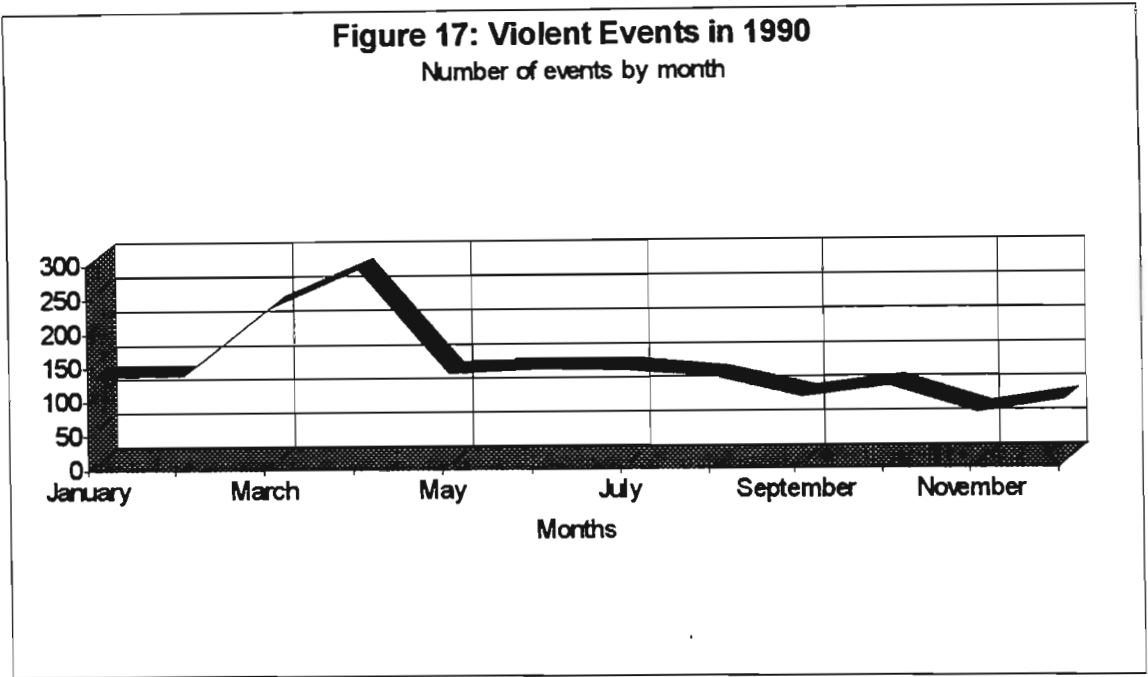
Possible reasons for these reporting trends differ from those in 1987. The State of Emergency was lifted in February 1990 in the rest of the country, but in KwaZulu-Natal it was only repealed in October that year. Nevertheless, with the simultaneous unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations, and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February, it is unlikely that the reporting restrictions were enforced as before. It is therefore less likely that the drop in press reporting over this period was a result of Emergency restrictions.

Instead, the media probably devoted more time and space to the other historic events which took place during these months, resulting in a decrease of violence reports in the newspapers. This trend did not continue throughout the year, however. Press reports dominated the database again from June 1990, which can also be partly attributed to the political context.

It is likely that violence remained an important, newsworthy story for the press throughout the year. The unbanning of the ANC and other organisations meant

these political groups could freely organise and mobilise. The launch of a transition process assured all political parties of a role in national negotiations for a new political system, which heightened competition between organisations.

This competition was keenly felt in KwaZulu-Natal, where ANC aligned organisations had been in violent conflict with Inkatha for four years already. Figure 14 shows that violence levels were high throughout 1990. The escalation of ANC-IFP conflicts in the rural areas of the province confirmed this fierce rivalry. After the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was established in July 1990, extensive recruitment drives began in the townships around Johannesburg. Subsequent conflicts resulted in years of violent confrontations in that area, and massive loss of life. All these developments in the political landscape would have been considered very newsworthy.

Thus the political context during 1990 increased the probability that violence would be reported, and Figure 16 confirms this, since for most of 1990, the press reported about two thirds of all events. These results support the argument that press reporting of conflict is influenced by the timing of events. In addition, these analyses also show the importance of using alternative sources which are not affected by the political context in the same way as the press is. Without these, the fact that violence levels almost doubled from January to April 1990, would have been lost.

In 1994, the monthly reporting patterns differed vastly from those in 1987 and 1990, as has been the general trend throughout these analyses. The monitors alone, reported a higher proportion of events than the press in each month except for November and December (Figure 18). The combination of press and monitor sources - much higher than previous years - made a significant contribution to the database in 1994. This means that for several months of the year, the newspapers and monitors were covering largely the same events.

**Figure 18: Reporting in 1994**
Proportion of events reported monthly
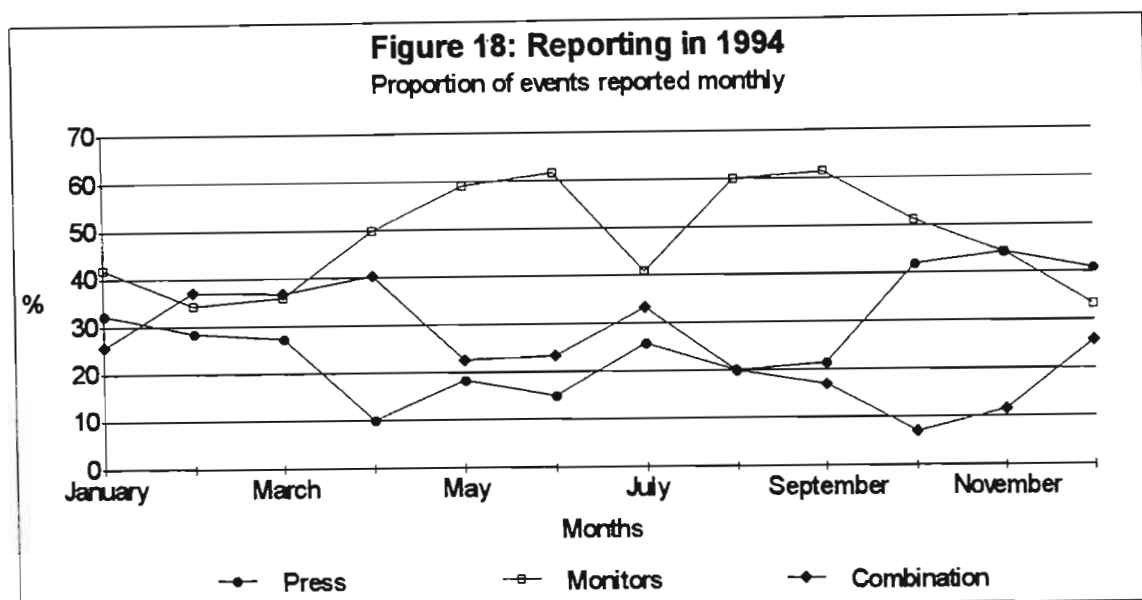
Figure 19 shows that violence levels during 1994 increased sharply in March and April, after which they fell to some of the lowest levels recorded in the province in years. From April, the newspapers' contribution declined dramatically while the monitors provided more information than ever before. This trend corresponds with those noted in 1987 and 1990.

A new pattern in 1994, however, is that once violence levels had dropped after their upward surge, the monitors' contribution continued to increase, reaching a high of 61,7% in June 1994. The significant contribution made by the monitors throughout 1994 may have been influenced by monitoring agencies having received substantial financial assistance during this period from the international community. The first democratic elections in South Africa attracted and encouraged violence monitoring, particularly from abroad.

In terms of the political context, 1994 like 1990, saw some of the most significant developments in the country's history. The first democratic election was held in April 1994, and although the actual days of voting were among the most peaceful ever recorded, the months preceding the election were the most violent in KwaZulu-Natal.

As the election drew nearer, the decision by the IFP to boycott the process heightened tensions and fears of violence. On the ground there were attempts by the IFP to discourage people from voting and even the disruption of ANC rallies less than a month before election day. The prospect that violence would mar the country's first election made violence during this period very newsworthy.

This was reiterated during interviews with journalists and editors of KwaZulu-Natal's newspapers. The <u>Daily News</u> political reporter said that the political climate has an important effect on newsworthiness. The example given was that two people killed during the election month would be "bigger news" than two people dying two months before the election.[6]

These opinions are supported by the results presented here, namely the large proportion of events in the 'combination' category and the press's contribution of just less than one third of all events until March (Figure 18). The decline in press reports to 10% of the total in April 1994, and the importance of the monitors in this month, is probably a result of the sheer volume of events at the time, and a lack of space in the newspapers due to the increase in other important election related news.



Figure 19: Violent Events in 1994
Number of events by month

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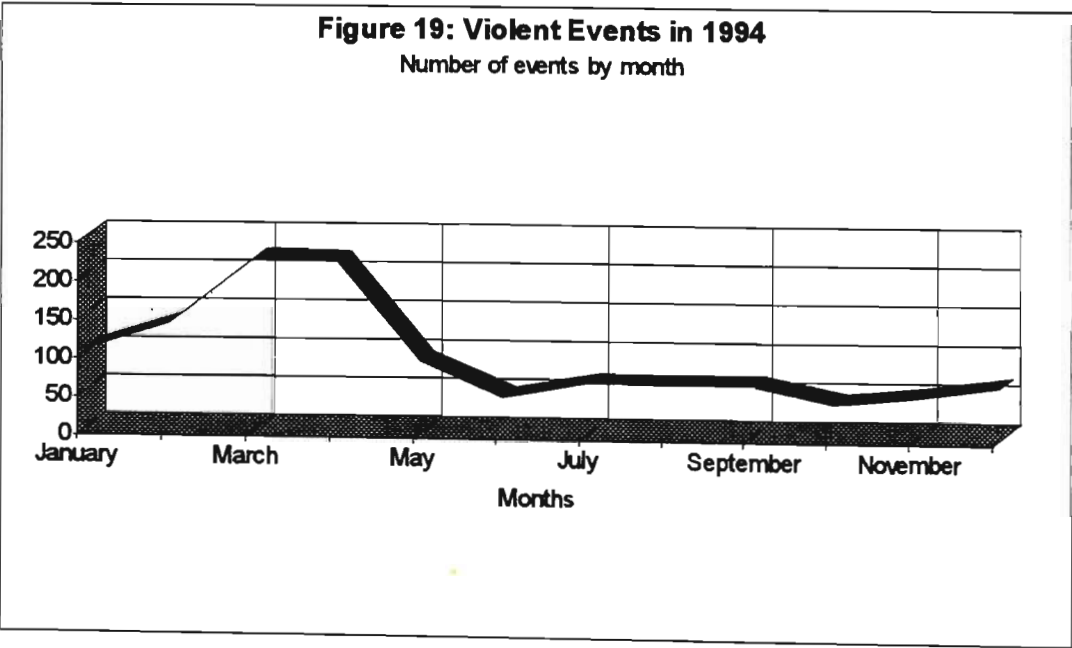
[6] Interview with <u>Daily News</u> political reporter, on February 18, 1994.

The prominence of the monitors' contributions after the elections could be attributed to the significant drop in violence levels. This may have inclined the press to regard conflict as less newsworthy items for coverage.

This did not, however, seem to be the case in 1987 and 1990. In these years, when violence levels dropped after sudden increases, press reports remained an important part of the data set, which suggests that a decrease in violence in itself, is not necessarily an explanation for less press coverage.

Instead, it is more likely that the new democracy which was born in April 1994 ended any legitimacy which violent conflict may have had in the past, when peaceful means of resolving political disputes were unavailable. The new political context was one of reconciliation and democratic problem solving, and attention has increasingly turned to developing the country along these lines.

In this context, it is likely that the press's attention shifted in similar directions, and hence the predominance of the monitors' reports in 1994. The thoughts of The Mercury editor support this argument:

> "During the days of the Emergency, all newspapers were reporting what was going on in a more blow-by-blow way than they are today, because it was a new phenomenon at that stage. And it was very central to what was going on in the politics of the country. It was the political issue of the day.

> "Now that has changed. The violence has to do with political battling for control between the IFP and ANC in Natal, but the leaders are actually talking to each other, and it's almost as if these are renegade people [fighting] down below. So we tend to report the top discussions as more important than the little fights on the ground".[7]

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[7] Interview with John Patten, The Mercury editor, on March 28, 1995.

These results again confirm that the political context during which events occur does affect the likelihood that they will be reported by the press. This is probably because the very act of reporting in certain contexts and in certain ways is itself a political act. Analyses of the effects of the political context are also the first (of those undertaken in this section) to provide evidence that the States of Emergency suppressed press reporting of violence.

This section has also clearly showed that the press does not always report more violence when violence levels actually increase. Instead, the opposite seems to be true. This finding confirms the importance of alternative sources of information for violence research.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to assess the data sources used for collecting information on violent collective action in KwaZulu-Natal. Since newspapers are often the only source available to researchers for gathering event data, and given the problems which have been raised about newspapers' reporting of violence, it is important to continuously assess the use of these sources.

Given these difficulties with press data, the monitoring agencies provide a good source against which to compare press reporting patterns. To fulfil the aims of this chapter, analyses compared reporting by the press and monitors over three years to determine the influence of several factors on reporting, and how the different sources contributed to the database.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results:

- Over the three years studied here, both the press and the monitoring agencies made important separate contributions to the database at different times.

Without the monitors, significant information would not have been collected. The same can, however, be said of the newspapers.

- Reporting patterns changed over time. In 1987 and 1990 the contributions of the sources were similar, with the press reporting more events than the monitors. In 1994 this pattern was reversed, as the monitors made the most significant input to the data set.

  This means that the sources' reporting tendencies have not been consistent over the years, and the analyses of the several factors illustrate these inconsistencies. One cannot, therefore, conclude from these results that for the entire three year period, either the press or the monitors showed specific reporting biases.

- The largest proportion of events reported by the 'combination' category was recorded in 1994, and the smallest in 1987. This suggests that with time, the sources have increasingly covered the same events, which is encouraging for researchers using either source, since this indicates that fewer events are being left out. This also suggests that reporting bias as a result of the area covered, or the type of events covered, has declined since 1987.

- The results showed that the press is not always more inclined to report violence which occurs near the newspapers' own location. In 1987 and 1990 the press dominated reporting in distant areas of the province. In 1994 however, the monitors clearly reported far more events in outlying areas than did the press, which may suggest that the press's previous reporting pattern is changing.

- There is also no conclusive evidence that the press is more likely to report more intense events over less intense ones. While the data showed that the newspapers did report the majority of very intense incidents in 1987, the press also reported many of the least intense events in that year. This tendency did, however, change over time. In 1990 and 1994 the press reported fewer of the

least intense events, which were increasingly covered by the monitors. This also suggests that past reporting patterns of the press may be changing.

- Analyses over the three years studied do not show conclusively, as was hypothesised, that the press is more likely to report events which involve many participants and are therefore, large in size. The press reported both the majority of large and small events in 1987 and 1990. As was the case with the reporting patterns for intense events, the reporting tendency changed dramatically over time. In 1994, most small events were covered by the monitors, while the press reported the majority of large events. This suggests that trends may be changing with regard to the reporting of events of varying size.

- Both the press and the monitors are affected by the political context during which violence events occurred, but in different ways. In the three years studied, the newspapers' contribution decreased and the monitors' increased when violence levels escalated. Because the political environment was different during these years, the possible explanations for these reporting trends differed.

Common perceptions are that the press only really report violence when there is an upsurge in incidents. These results, however, show that the newspapers do not necessarily only focus on violence when levels are high. This is probably because their focus is often on other important political changes at these times.

- These results did not provide clear evidence that the States of Emergency impacted on the factors chosen for analysis. Except for the analysis of the effects of the timing of events on the probability that they would be reported, the Emergency did not appear to have adversely affected reporting of the events in distant locations, or events which were small in size.

These analyses present many questions about reporting trends of the press and the monitors. There are clear signs that reporting patterns changed in 1994 from those of previous years, and further analyses over time would reveal whether there are any consistencies in these trends. Another important finding is that the press does not necessarily report more violent conflict when actual levels increase. On the contrary, these analyses suggest the opposite: the proportion of events reported by the press has tended to decline when violence levels increase.

For researchers gathering information for event-analysis of conflict, it is clear that both groups of sources made important individual contributions to the database. For this reason, if information about conflict in specific areas or about specific types of events is sought, it is advisable to test the reporting patterns before choosing sources, in order to establish where the gaps or reporting biases lie.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# CONCLUSION

## 1. The aims of this study revisited

This study has attempted to understand what factors are likely to affect the probability that events of violent conflict are reported by the press. In doing so, the intention is to contribute to what is presently a small body of literature on the validity of the press as a data source for conflict research.

This question is relevant for three related reasons:

- Quantitative research into conflict relies heavily on the press as one of the few accessible, regular sources of information. Researchers have, however, criticised the use of the press as a data source for conflict research. The way in which the press report violent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, has been criticised by researchers, academics, violence monitoring agencies, and even some journalists. This suggests that the press must be used with caution for this kind of research.

- Over the past decade, KwaZulu-Natal has been characterised by intense violence. This violent conflict has resulted in extensive loss of life and destruction of property. While levels of violence have decreased in recent months, the conflict continues, threatening political stability and indeed, democracy in the province.

A peaceful resolution of this conflict is now crucial, and one way in which this can be facilitated is through keeping citizens and government informed about the situation. The press has an important role to play in this regard. This leads to the third reason why this research question is important.

- Freedom of speech and of information are vital for democracies of all kinds to succeed. The press is one of the main vehicles for ensuring that these freedoms can be exercised in a democracy. Until 1990, these freedoms were severely curtailed in this country by numerous laws, coupled with five years of repressive States of Emergency. These measures were focused particularly on those media which disseminated information about conflict and violence.

While the Interim Constitution now protects freedom of speech, the body of knowledge about the conflict before 1990 may have been affected, and the legacy of decades of media restrictions may have future implications for the media, and thus for our new democracy.

The independent variables used for analysing the reporting trends, namely the size, intensity and location of violent conflict events and the political environment in which they occur, were selected based on the findings of international studies which have examined the press as a data source for systematic conflict research, as well as on interviews with journalists in South Africa.

The work of Snyder and Kelly (1977), Franzosi (1987) and McCarthy et al (1993 and 1995) showed that different forms of conflict have different probabilities of being reported by the press. According to Snyder and Kelly (1977), intense events, measured by their participant size and the numbers of people killed and injured per event, were more likely to be reported than those of a lower intensity.

In addition, Snyder and Kelly (1977) also found that media reporting was sensitive to the environment in which events occurred. The time at which events happened, in terms of the prevailing political context and the location of events, affected reporting probability.

The selection of these determining factors was confirmed by the views of local reporters and editors. Reporters interviewed from all the daily newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal and from the South African Press Association (SAPA) said that 'newsworthy' events included, among others, those in which large numbers of people were killed or injured. The broader political climate at the time of the event

was also identified as an important influence on 'news value'. Reporters also said that a shortage of resources and staff, and a lack of sources, meant that events in far off places were not well covered.

Since the studies which examined the factors affecting reporting probabilities were carried out abroad, this thesis also sought to examine whether the same dynamics apply to South Africa. As the first study of this kind in South Africa, the results will contribute not only to the literature on the subject, but also to an understanding of how the press go about reporting violent conflict in this country, and particularly in KwaZulu-Natal.

The statistical analyses were carried out by comparing the relevant reporting trends of the press with those of selected violence monitoring agencies in KwaZulu-Natal. Interviews with reporters and editors from selected newspapers and monitoring agencies in the province provided valuable qualitative, background information about how these media operate, and the constraints which they face in reporting violence. This information was crucial for a better understanding of reporting trends, and in order to comment about the validity of the press as a data source for conflict research.

## 2. Conclusions drawn from the analyses of reporting trends

The most important general finding of the analyses was that reporting trends over most of the period covered, did not support the study's hypotheses. Reporting patterns did, however, change over time, and in 1994 certain reporting patterns did verify the hypotheses.

The results also suggested that reporting by both the press and the monitoring agencies is most affected by the political environment during which events of violent conflict occurred. These findings will be reviewed.

## i) The location of events as a determining factor

Previous research and the opinions of journalists indicated that the press is more likely to report events which occurred in close proximity to the newspaper base. Results of this study showed, contrary to the hypothesis, that in 1987 and 1990, the press reported nearly all events in the regions most distant from the newspaper bases.

In 1994, however, this trend was reversed. The monitoring agencies reported a majority of violent conflict events in these same distant regions. In that year, the newspapers made the greatest contribution to the database in the regions where the newspapers are based. These results confirm the hypothesis and suggest that reporting trends may be changing over time.

## ii) The intensity of events as a determining factor

According to the hypothesis, the press is more likely to report intense events, defined for the purposes of this study as those in which five or more people were killed and/or injured per event. The results of the analyses supported the hypothesis to an extent. In 1987 and 1990, the press did report the majority of the most intense events. In 1994, however, the press did not report the majority of intense events. Instead, a combination of press and monitoring agency sources reported the majority of these events. This nevertheless, still supports the hypothesis because it indicates that both the press and the monitors gave significant coverage of the most intense events.

However, in all the years studied, the newspapers also reported a large proportion of the least intense events. In 1994, the greatest contribution by the press of events not covered by any other source, was in the category of the least intense events. It is not possible, therefore, to conclude that during these years, the press prioritised intense events at the expense of less intense events.

### iii) **The number of participants as a determining factor**

Arguments in the literature suggested that conflict events which are greater in size, measured by the number of participants, are more likely to be reported by the press. The results of this study showed, contrary to the hypothesis, that in 1987 and 1990 the press reported the majority of all types of events, where size is the distinguishing factor. By contrast, analyses of trends in 1994 supported the hypothesis.

In 1994, nearly half of all events which were small in size were reported by the monitoring agencies only. This means that if the press was the only source used, half of all events in which few people participated, would not have been recorded. This is significant because in 1994, 82% of all violent conflict events were 'small'. In addition, by far the largest newspaper contribution was recorded in the category of 'large' and 'very large' events. These results support the hypothesis. They also support the argument that reporting trends have changed over time. It would appear that more recent reporting trends tend to corroborate the hypotheses, while reporting patterns in 1987 and 1990 do not support the hypothesis.

### iv) **The political environment and timing of events as determining factors**

The analyses of reporting patterns against the background of political events and the levels of violence in KwaZulu-Natal, showed that the political context did affect reporting, as the hypothesis suggested it would.

In 1987, 1990 and 1994, the most significant result of the analyses was that as monthly violence levels (measured by the numbers of events per month) increased, the press contribution to the database decreased. During these periods, the monitors reported more events than the newspapers. This is an important finding, because it suggests that an upsurge of violence, which could be

considered newsworthy, does not necessarily mean that newspapers' reporting of that violence will increase.

Possible explanations for this trend in each year, differ. In 1987, the drop in press reporting when violence levels surged may have been the result of a stricter enforcement of State of Emergency regulations at that time. In 1990, this argument does not apply, since the Emergency measures affecting the media were no longer exercised after February of that year. Instead, it is possible that the press devoted more time and space to the other historic events which occurred in the same months during which violence levels were highest. These events were the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations in February 1990.

Monthly reporting patterns in 1994 differed from those in previous years, in that the monitoring agencies reported a higher proportion of events than the press in all except two months. There was, nevertheless, one similarity with trends in 1987 and 1990: during the months in which violence levels surged, in this case March and April 1994, the proportion of events reported by the press decreased. A possible explanation for this trend in 1990 also applies for 1994: the drop in press reporting may have occurred because the newspapers were more concerned with one of the most important events in South Africa's history: the first democratic elections on April 27, 1994.

This suggests that the political environment in which violent conflict occurs does affect the likelihood that events are reported by the press. Another result of this analysis also supports this hypothesis. Contrary to patterns in previous years, the proportion of events reported by the press in 1994 remained low, once violence levels decreased after having reached a peak. This suggests that it is not the amount of violence at any one time which determines reporting trends. Instead, it is more likely to depend on events in the broader political environment at the time that violence occurs.

Press reporting of violence after April 1994 probably remained low because the democratic elections ended any legitimacy which violent conflict may have had in the past, when democratic means of resolving political disputes were unavailable to the majority of South Africans. The new political context was one of reconciliation and democratic problem solving, and the media's attention also turned in this direction. This argument was verified by some reporters and editors who were interviewed as part of this study. Moreover, reporters and editors interviewed in 1994 also said that, after nearly a decade of ongoing conflict, readers had tired of reading about the political violence. As a result, events of violent conflict were not reported as frequently, or in as much detail, as during other periods when violence levels may have been lower.

The aim of this study has been to determine which factors are likely to affect the probability that events of violent conflict are reported by the press. The results of the analyses of reporting patterns suggest that the political environment in which events occur - in other words, their timing - is likely to have the greatest impact on reporting probability. This means that if other events of political significance occur simultaneously with violent conflict, this may diminish the press coverage of the conflict. The same may apply if violence has persisted for a long time, since some journalists believe that this reduces the newsworthiness of the subject, particularly in the minds of readers.

Restrictions on violence reporting, such as those imposed under the States of Emergency, would also form part of the political context. An important finding of this study is, however, that there is no clear evidence that the States of Emergency impacted negatively on press reporting of violence in terms of the variables studied here. The only exception is the suggestion that the Emergency restrictions may have resulted in the decrease of press reporting of events, when violence levels increased in 1987.

A tentative conclusion regarding the States of Emergency is that while these measures were in place, more violent conflict was reported by the newspapers than in recent years. This study has established that the political context has an

important influence on reporting. In the light of this, it is possible that the political context at that time of the Emergency may have contributed to violence being perceived as a more newsworthy and relevant subject than it is at present. The remarks of The Mercury's editor, interviewed in March 1995, support this:

> *"During the days of the Emergency, all newspapers were reporting what was going on in a more blow-by-blow way than they are today, because it was a new phenomenon at that stage. And it was very central to what was going on in the politics of the country. It was the political issue of the day."*

The fact that reporting on violence was subject to strict controls meant that reporters were forced to challenge the law and find loopholes to circumvent the restrictions (Merrett, 1991). There was also more emphasis on finding alternate sources of information. The results of these analyses suggest, furthermore, that press reporting was hardly affected by the intensity, size and location of events during the Emergency years. Instead, it is in more recent times that reporting is affected by these variables. This may imply that during the Emergency years, the political context had the most influence on reporting. This situation so inclined journalists to prioritise violence, that factors which have affected conflict reporting in other parts of the world, did not apply here at the time.

## 3. The suitability of the press as a source for quantitative research on violent conflict

The analyses of reporting patterns suggested that the political environment has an important effect on violence reporting, and that in recent years, certain characteristics of events may have influenced reporting probabilities. It is nevertheless, difficult to conclude from these results that systematic biases exist in press reporting of violence, particularly since trends vary over the time period studied.

In addition, an important finding which was not linked to the hypothesis of this study, emerged in the course of the analyses. As categories of sources, both the press and the monitors made important separate contributions to the database at different times. Without one or the other of these source groups, a significant amount of information about events of violent conflict would not have been recorded. This suggests that systematic studies of violent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal should make use of multiple sources of data, rather than any one particular source. This finding has significant implications for future research in this field. It may also have policy implications for the media and for regional government.

The secondary information on press reporting of violence, and the opinions of journalists and editors from the newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal corroborate this conclusion that there is a need for alternative sources of information. The discussion of the various restrictions on violence reporting suggested that the press still operate with the legacy of legal restrictions. The Emergency regulations, according to journalists, encouraged telephone journalism, self censorship, and a simplification of the dynamics of the conflict. In addition, investigative journalism was suppressed and sources of information were limited by the restrictive measures.

Interviews also confirmed that the local newspapers face all the pressures of the newsroom process and market demands common to newspapers throughout the world. In the current period of economic difficulties, it appears that the most pressure on press reporting will emanate from the requirements that newspapers are commercially viable, and that they produce material which the public want to read, and which the advertisers wish to sponsor.

Journalists believed that the effects on their work of the demands of the newsroom and of the market, were the central reasons for criticisms that coverage of the violence was poor and lacking in detail. In particular, they identified a shortage of staff and resources, of reliable sources on violence, and the conditions that stories be newsworthy, as the most significant constraints for better violence reporting. Interviewees explained that reporters and editors are tired of covering and

investigating violence, and that readers also no longer have an interest in the subject.

These interview results suggest that it is unlikely that in recent years the press reported all events of violence, or the details and analyses thereof which are essential for understanding the problem. The analyses of reporting trends showed that the press has nevertheless, made an important contribution to the database on violent conflict. While the interview findings do not negate the statistical results, they suggest that researchers using the press as a source for studying violent conflict should also make use of alternate sources.

The interviews with the monitoring agencies about their modes of operation and the restrictions which they face in recording violent conflict, also substantiate this conclusion. Most monitors rejected the major criticism levelled at them that their work was biased. They were also open to public scrutiny, and had confidence in their methods. There was also no evidence that monitors deliberately excluded data about certain political groups, as some criticisms alleged.

Nevertheless, interviews also revealed that data gathering techniques varied between monitors, and were not always systematic. These techniques depended largely on the availability of time, staff and resources. This could, potentially, affect the reliability of their data. In addition, at the time of the interviews, most of the monitors' primary sources were affiliated in some way to a particular political group, or alternatively, monitors experienced difficulties obtaining data from victims of a particular organisation. This suggests that despite the monitors' confidence in their work, there may be gaps in the monitors' information about violent conflict.

The statistical analyses which compared press and monitoring agency reporting trends, support this conclusion, since, particularly in 1987 and 1990, the newspapers reported certain types of information which the monitors did not. This implies that the use of the monitoring agencies as a source for the study of violent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal should also be supplemented with alternative sources.

## 4. Implications for democracy in South Africa

This study has argued that freedom of speech and information are essential in all kinds of democracy. This relationship is particularly important for South Africa which has a recent history of extensive restrictions on freedom of speech and information, which were instituted during a period of intense violence. While the media restrictions were lifted in 1990, the violence continues in KwaZulu-Natal. A free flow of information about the violence is important for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The resolution of this conflict in turn, is important for democracy and stability in KwaZulu-Natal.

The results of the analyses of reporting trends suggest that, particularly in recent times, the press has reported violence selectively. Press reporting was found to be especially sensitive to the political context during which events of violence occurred. These analyses did not provide conclusive evidence that the States of Emergency had a decisive effect on violence reporting by the press. Instead, this study tentatively concluded that given the significant affect of the political context on reporting trends, violence may have been more likely to be reported during the States of Emergency than since, because at that time, political conflict was particularly newsworthy.

The findings also indicated that the monitoring agencies have made an important contribution towards recording and disseminating information about violence. Without the monitors' contribution, a significant proportion of information about the conflict, especially during 1994, would not have been recorded.

The monitors played an important role in disseminating information about violent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal under an undemocratic government. The analyses suggest, however, that even after a democratic government was elected in April 1994, and freedom of speech was safeguarded in the Interim Constitution, the monitors have continued to report many violent events which the press have

ornitted. This has been the trend despite the fact that many monitors have discontinued their operations in the province.

These results have implications for democracy in KwaZulu-Natal and in South Africa as a whole. South Africans should not be satisfied that the press will keep them adequately informed about the violent conflict in KwaZulu-Natal, now that legislative restrictions no longer apply, and freedom of speech is protected by the Interim Constitution. This study suggests that press reporting of violence is currently most influenced by the demands of the market and the newsroom process, which require that published information is newsworthy, current, in tune with the demands of the readership, and attractive to advertisers. Given these requirements, it is understandable that the political context has the greatest influence on the selection of events of violence by the press for publication.

The role of free speech and information in a democracy is to facilitate a vigorous exchange of ideas, the pursuit of truth, informed decision making by the public, and the monitoring of government's activities. The results of this study suggest, however, that the public cannot rely on the press to fulfil these goals with regard to the subject of violent political conflict. In the interests of a free flow of information and democracy, it is important, therefore, that alternative sources which cover the conflict are supported in their activities, and are regularly consulted.

This is especially important given the type of democracy which is developing in South Africa. In Chapter Two of this study, two main categories were identified which distinguish the various models of democracy, namely liberal representative and participatory democracy. This distinction is important because as participation by citizens in the affairs of government decreases, so the need for free speech and information increases.

South Africa seems likely to follow in the liberal representative tradition, in which participation is largely limited to periodic elections for leaders from an elite group, who govern on behalf of their electorates. This means that in this country, the need for good communication between government and the citizens is especially

important. This in turn, means that the press has a vital role as the facilitator of this communication. Having established that the press in KwaZulu-Natal reports news about violent political conflict selectively, it is important that South Africans take the responsibility for ensuring that they are informed, if they are to make any decisions which are influenced by this conflict.

In addition, given this country's violent and repressive past, it is important that South Africans themselves learn the value of tolerance and freedom of speech. The failure of the citizens of this country to appreciate these rights poses the greatest threat to freedom of the press and to democracy, now that freedom of speech is protected by the Interim Constitution.


## 5. Implications for future research

One important implication for future research emanating from this study has already been discussed above. It has been shown that both the press and the monitoring agencies made significant separate contributions to the database studied here. This suggests that multiple sources of information are important for studies of violent conflict which adopt a systematic, quantitative methodology.

A further implication for future research in this field is that there are signs from these analyses that reporting patterns have changed over time. It will therefore, be important to continue comparing these trends in order to establish more conclusively which factors affect violence reporting by the press, in order to reveal systematic biases in reporting. For the same reason, it would be beneficial to examine the extent to which these reporting tendencies apply to the rest of the country.

# APPENDIX 1

| Table of Sources Used by the Conflict Trends in KwaZulu-Natal Project | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | 1987 | | 1990 | | 1994 | | Total | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Natal Witness | 359 | 31.7 | 381 | 22.8 | 93 | 7.8 | 833 | 20.8 |
| Combination of press and monitors | 104 | 9.2 | 113 | 6.8 | 354 | 29.7 | 571 | 14.3 |
| Human Rights Committee (HRC) | - | - | - | - | 538 | 45.2 | 538 | 13.5 |
| The Mercury | 14 | 1.2 | 348 | 20.8 | 42 | 3.5 | 404 | 10.1 |
| Combination press | 156 | 13.8 | 85 | 5.1 | 111 | 9.3 | 352 | 8.8 |
| Unrest Monitoring Project (UMP) | 324 | 28.6 | 23 | 1.4 | - | - | 347 | 8.7 |
| Black Sash RMG | - | - | 241 | 14.4 | - | - | 241 | 6.0 |
| Midlands Crisis Relief Committee | - | - | 191 | 11.4 | - | - | 191 | 4.8 |
| DP Unrest Monitoring Group | 20 | 1.8 | 118 | 7 | - | - | 138 | 3.5 |
| Daily News | 27 | 2.4 | 64 | 3.8 | 15 | 1.3 | 106 | 2.7 |
| New African | - | - | 68 | 4.1 | - | - | 68 | 1.7 |
| Cape Times | 43 | 3.8 | - | - | - | - | 43 | 1.1 |
| Sunday Tribune | 6 | 0.5 | 28 | 1.7 | 5 | 0.4 | 39 | 1.0 |
| Combination of monitoring agencies | 16 | 1.4 | 13 | 0.8 | 1 | 0.1 | 30 | 0.8 |
| The Star | 28 | 2.5 | - | - | - | - | 28 | 0.7 |
| Eastern Province Herald | 16 | 1.4 | - | - | - | - | 16 | 0.4 |
| Business Day | 10 | 0.9 | - | - | 1 | 0.1 | 11 | 0.3 |
| SAPA | - | - | - | - | 7 | 0.6 | 7 | 0.2 |
| Estcourt Midlands News | - | - | - | - | 7 | 0.6 | 7 | 0.2 |
| Sowetan | 6 | 0.5 | - | - | - | - | 6 | 0.2 |
| Natal on Saturday | - | - | - | - | 5 | 0.4 | 5 | 0.1 |
| Zululand Observer | - | - | - | - | 3 | 0.3 | 3 | 0.1 |
| Evening Post | 1 | 0.1 | - | - | 1 | 0.1 | 2 | 0.1 |
| Sunday Times | - | - | - | - | 2 | 0.2 | 2 | 0.1 |
| Zululand Observer | - | - | - | - | 2 | 0.2 | 2 | 0.1 |
| IDASA | - | - | - | - | 2 | 0.2 | 2 | 0.1 |
| Indicator SA | 1 | 0.1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.0 |
| Ilanga | 1 | 0.1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.0 |
| Weekly Mail | - | - | 1 | 0.1 | - | - | 1 | 0.0 |
| Total | 1 132 | 28.3 | 1 674 | 41.9 | 1 190 | 29.8 | 3 996 | 100.0 |

# APPENDIX 2
## THE FIVE REGIONS OF KWAZULU-NATAL
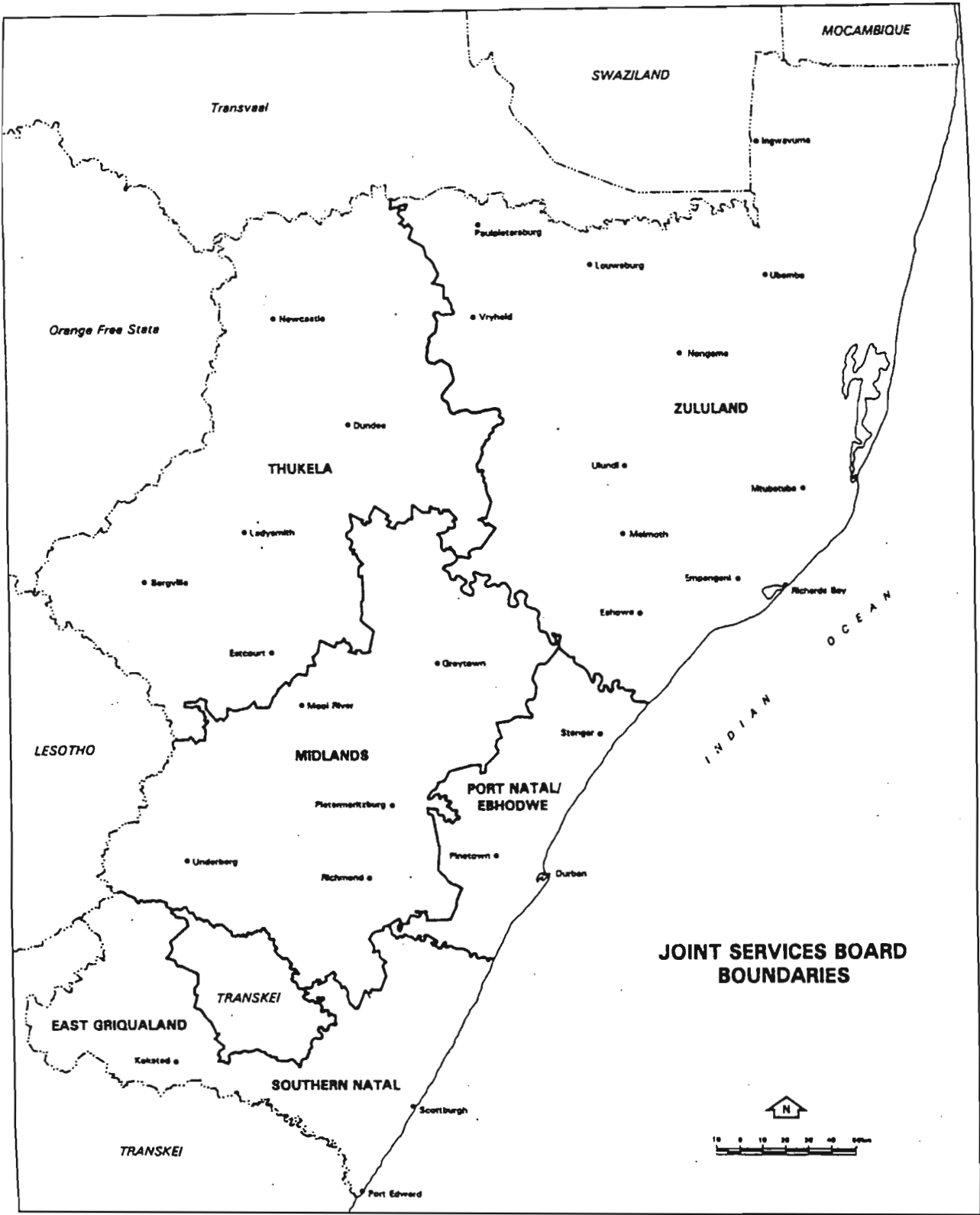


* Port Natal/Ebhodwe is referred to in the text as 'Durban'
* Southern Natal and East Griqualand are referred to in the text as 'South'
* Thukela is referred to in the text as 'North West'

# APPENDIX 3

| Table 1: Intense Events: Massacres Reported by the Press and Monitors in 1987 | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | ≥ 10 deaths and injuries | | < 10 deaths and injuries | | No deaths and injuries | | Total | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 14 | 66.7 | 402 | 57.7 | 250 | 60.7 | 666 | 58.9 |
| Monitors | 2 | 9.5 | 228 | 32.7 | 130 | 31.6 | 360 | 31.9 |
| Combination | 5 | 23.8 | 67 | 9.6 | 32 | 7.8 | 104 | 9.2 |
| Total | 21 | 100.0 | 697 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 | 1 130 | 100.0 |

| Table 2: Intense Events: Massacres Reported by the Press and Monitors in 1990 | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | ≥ 10 deaths and injuries | | < 10 deaths and injuries | | No deaths and injuries | | Total | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 36 | 56.3 | 689 | 64.1 | 250 | 46.7 | 975 | 58.2 |
| Monitors | 10 | 15.6 | 319 | 29.7 | 257 | 48.0 | 586 | 35.0 |
| Combination | 18 | 28.1 | 67 | 6.2 | 28 | 5.2 | 113 | 6.8 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 | 1 075 | 100.0 | 535 | 100.0 | 1 674 | 100.0 |

| Table 3: Intense Events: Massacres Reported by the Press and Monitors in 1994 | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | ≥ 10 deaths and injuries | | < 10 deaths and injuries | | No deaths and injuries | | Total | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 3 | 13.6 | 168 | 19.3 | 122 | 41.8 | 293 | 24.7 |
| Monitors | 3 | 13.6 | 407 | 46.7 | 129 | 44.2 | 539 | 45.4 |
| Combination | 16 | 72.7 | 297 | 34.1 | 41 | 14.0 | 354 | 29.8 |
| Total | 22 | 100.0 | 872 | 100.0 | 292 | 100.0 | 1 186 | 100.0 |

**Table 4: Measuring Intensity Using Deaths Only: Events Reported by the Press and Monitors in 1987**

| Source | ≥ 5 deaths | | < 5 deaths | | No deaths | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 11 | 68.8 | 243 | 60.8 | 412 | 57.7 | 666 | 58.9 |
| Monitors | 2 | 12.5 | 116 | 29.0 | 242 | 33.9 | 360 | 31.9 |
| Combination | 3 | 18.8 | 41 | 10.3 | 60 | 8.4 | 104 | 9.2 |
| Total | 16 | 100.0 | 400 | 100.0 | 714 | 100.0 | 1 130 | 100.0 |

**Table 5: Measuring Intensity Using Deaths Only: Events Reported by the Press and Monitors in 1990**

| Source | ≥ 5 deaths | | < 5 deaths | | No deaths | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 37 | 45.1 | 484 | 65.7 | 454 | 53.1 | 975 | 58.2 |
| Monitors | 25 | 30.5 | 203 | 27.5 | 358 | 41.9 | 586 | 35.0 |
| Combination | 20 | 24.4 | 50 | 6.8 | 43 | 5.0 | 113 | 6.8 |
| Total | 82 | 100.0 | 737 | 100.0 | 855 | 100.0 | 1 674 | 100.0 |

**Table 6: Measuring Intensity Using Deaths Only: Events Reported by the Press and Monitors in 1994**

| Source | ≥ 5 deaths | | < 5 deaths | | No deaths | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Press | 3 | 8.8 | 118 | 17.2 | 172 | 36.8 | 293 | 24.7 |
| Monitors | 6 | 17.6 | 316 | 46.1 | 217 | 46.5 | 539 | 45.4 |
| Combination | 25 | 73.5 | 251 | 36.6 | 78 | 16.7 | 354 | 29.8 |
| Total | 34 | 100.0 | 685 | 100.0 | 467 | 100.0 | 1 186 | 100.0 |

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