
Persistent Collective Violence and Early Warning Systems: The Case of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

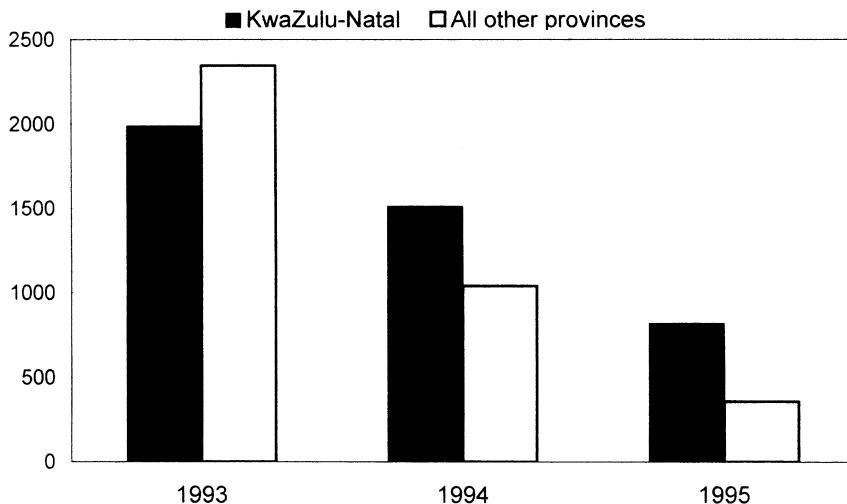
ALDO A. BENINI, ANTHONY V. MINNAAR, and SAM PRETORIUS

South Africa's transition to democracy is considered important for the future not only of this large and diverse country, but for the whole of southern Africa. The orderly demise of the old apartheid regime was far from certain; until mid-1994 the country struggled with dangerously high levels of political violence and, in the run-up to the first democratic elections in April 1994, the threat of civil war loomed large. However, the broad consensus in which the political transition was negotiated was favorable to the creation of a variety of conflict management mechanisms. Some of these mechanisms were devoted to monitoring the hazards unsettling the charted course of change, notably the evolution of collective violence. The liberation of the media with the end of the state of emergency in June 1990 and the work of numerous human rights activists at

ALDO A. BENINI, formerly a delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross in South Africa, is currently a Visiting Research Scientist with California Polytechnic State University. His interests include conflict analysis, disaster management, and humanitarian action. Address for correspondence: California Polytechnic State University, Social Sciences Department, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407.

ANTHONY V. MINNAAR, formerly with the Centre for Socio-Political Analysis at the Human Science Research Council in Pretoria, is working as a researcher on illegal immigration with the South African Police Service. He was the editor of *Patterns of Violence: Case Studies of Conflict in Natal*, 1992, and has published numerous works on communal violence in South Africa. Address for correspondence: South African Police Service, Private Bag X94, Pretoria 0001, Republic of South Africa.

SAM PRETORIUS was a researcher at the Centre for Socio-Political Analysis at the Human Science Research Council in Pretoria and now works for a private company. Address for correspondence: Centre for Sociopolitical Analysis, Human Science Research Council, Private Bag X41, Pretoria 0001, Republic of South Africa.

Figure 1**Deaths from political violence**

local, provincial, and national levels were responsible for close and continuous violence monitoring. The detail, timeliness, and accessibility to outsiders of this information has probably been matched by very few other countries in transition. As a result, public debate in South Africa was well-informed on issues of national security even though much of the violence took place in areas and among groups that apartheid had widely segregated from the centers of power.

Since the April 1994 elections, collective violence has subsided in most regions of South Africa, although some regions have followed this trend less completely. Notably, the province of KwaZulu-Natal has remained home to persistent violence that goes back many years. Notorious rivalry between political parties, chiefly the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC), interlocked with less well-known conflicts over the control of land, services, and other resources, such as transport routes for the minibus taxis and control of land allocation by traditional leaders. In 1995, more than two-out-of-three persons killed in political violence in South Africa lived in KwaZulu-Natal (Figure 1). Of a national population of 42 million, 7.5 million persons lived in this province. Political violence rates were thus over ten times the average of the rest of the country. If violence rebounded dramatically in

KwaZulu-Natal, it would lead to a situation compromising South Africa's economic growth and sociopolitical progress. KwaZulu-Natal, therefore, remained under close political observation for more than just local motives.

In response to the violence, local elections in this province were postponed three times before they were held at the end of June 1996. (Local elections, with the exception of KwaZulu-Natal and the Cape Town Metropolitan Region, were in fact held for the rest of South Africa on 1 November 1995.) Analyses of massacres, taxi-related violence, and the use of weapons that two of us (Minnaar and Pretorius) produced and disseminated between 1994 and 1996¹ were contributing elements in the government's decisions to postpone the elections. The objective of the present article is a reanalysis of the risk of explosive violence in 1995. We look at the entire set of politically motivated violent incidents in KwaZulu-Natal between 1993 and 1995 with a view to detecting behavior changes in the main perpetrators of political violence and in the communities that suffered it. Our aim is to evaluate information on violence in KwaZulu-Natal for possible lessons to the builders of early warning systems of internal conflict.

We first provide a minimum of background on the complexities of the situation in KwaZulu-Natal that underpinned the dynamics driving the violence in this province, and then describe the basic monitoring structures that gathered and collated the information on political violence. (The fact that most of the monitors were part of a popular movement, and not from academic institutions, has had methodological consequences that limit the scope of the subsequent analysis of the underlying dynamics.) We then look into changes in the violent behavior of the two main political protagonists and show that the causal patterns differed sharply for the periods before and after the April 1994 national election. A town-level analysis follows that estimates the effects of several factors on the local levels of violence experienced in the second half of 1995, the period in which the risk assessment for the postponement of the local elections began. Finally, we draw conclusions from the substantive findings on the spread of violence as well as from methodological issues of the monitoring and risk assessment stages of an early warning system.

Political Violence in KwaZulu-Natal

On 2 February 1990, a speech by President De Klerk ushered in the era of political liberalization in South Africa. Between then and Decem-

ber 1995, an estimated 15,500 people (this figure relates only to the unrest and politically motivated incidents and not to criminal activities) died in the violence wracked parts of South Africa, particularly the KwaZulu-Natal region. That figure compares with an estimated 3,500 fatalities in the period from September 1984 to the end of 1989. Of the 15,500 victims in 1990–1995, approximately 8,500 people were killed in KwaZulu-Natal alone.

Over time a number of changes occurred in terms of the scope and intensity of this conflict, as well as in the forms it took and the areas in which it manifested itself. It moved from the urban areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg and into a number of rural areas. In recent years the conflict in KwaZulu-Natal has been described as a low-intensity civil war; it is more complex than that since there are a number of different elements to the violence.

In the early 1990s the players stretched from the liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), their armed wings Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian Peoples' Liberation Army (APLA), to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the KwaZulu government, and the KwaZulu Police (KZP). Other players included the South African government and security forces—the South African Police (SAP) and the South African Defence Force (SADF). There was also a large diversity of other groups with influence, including the *civics* (administrative structures among groups opposed to the regime), traditional leaders (*amakhosi* and *indunas*, i.e., chiefs and headmen), the so-called comrades (politicized youth known as *amaqabane*), *comtsotsitsa* (criminals hiding their activities behind political slogans), migrant worker hostel dwellers and so-called “warlords” or “strongmen,” especially in the informal squatter settlements, and various other vigilante elements. The conflict in KwaZulu-Natal on one level was a struggle for power and control of structures and resources, but much of the conflict had roots in local conditions and disputes. Its manifestations ranged from large-scale intimidation and forced mobilization and preemptive and retaliatory attacks by armed supporters to indiscriminate massacres and political assassinations.

The level of conflict was particularly high during January, February, and March of 1994, attributed largely to the tensions surrounding the refusal of the IFP to participate in the elections. Death tolls in KwaZulu-Natal from unrest-related incidents for the months of March (302 deaths) and April (328) were unprecedented—double the 1993 monthly average. Starting in April 1994, two new trends became manifest. First, the violence shifted in intensity from Durban and the northern

KwaZulu-Natal areas to the north and south coastal areas and, to a lesser degree, the Midlands. The authorities gained better control over the violence in the Greater Durban area, but it was more difficult to contain in isolated rural areas. In the months after the elections, there was a fairly steady decline in deaths in politically-motivated incidents, but in November 1994 the number of deaths began once again to rise. The following year was one of strong fluctuations in the number of political fatalities, with two peak months for the whole province doubling deaths over those of previous months, and with numerous local eruptions. Tensions were fueled by several issues, including the constitutional place of the king of the Zulus, traditional leaders and democracy, control of local authorities, land reform, and the operations of the KwaZulu Police. The style of political fighting, hitsquad activity, and political assassination of leadership cadres was not fundamentally changed, but was preserved by efforts of the two main parties—IFP and ANC—to establish their hegemony over structures and areas. No-go areas with their concomitant political intolerance also proliferated in 1995. The strongest contention, however, was over the local elections, where it was the traditional leaders who stood to lose if all parties were allowed to campaign freely; and who did their best, in varying local alliances, to thwart or manipulate the elections. While the issues were common for the entire province, the degree to which tensions translated into violence varied from place to place.

Internal Conflict and Early Warning in South Africa

South Africa holds a special place in the development of early warning systems in internal conflict, inasmuch as the political authorities during the critical transition themselves felt the need for such systems. The end of apartheid had thrown wide open the public debate on issues of violence. Particularly in late 1993 and early 1994, when fears of major disturbances were at their highest, the political leadership actively sought the expertise of the research community on the likely course of political violence. For example, the Independent Electoral Commission mandated a study to identify high-conflict areas in which the orderly conduct of elections would be difficult to ensure. Similarly, government funding for the publication of the regular conflict supplement of the *Indicator South Africa* and for the monitoring studies that filled it was relatively generous until recent fiscal stringencies. Critical decisions in the process of democratic transition, such as the declaration of a state of emergency in KwaZulu-Natal and the accommodation of the Inkatha Freedom Party in

the agreed-upon election results, were made by a government that had, in addition to its own intelligence, detailed and public reports on trends and spatial distributions of the violence. This interest continued as KwaZulu-Natal approached local elections in the first half of 1996. For example, in February, when the government was deliberating the second postponement of local elections, the National Task Team on Violence in KwaZulu-Natal (set up by President Mandela after the massacre on Christmas 1995) invited two of us at the Human Science Research Council in Pretoria (HSRC) to present an updated analysis. Such reports were then widely disseminated by the National Intelligence Co-ordinating Committee and the Commissioner of Police.

The collection and processing of the information that was at the base of such reports took place in three types of institutions. As in many other countries, the security forces reacted to public violence, and the informational aspect of their activities produced criminal statistics and a variety of reports, both public and classified. Second, the violence of both the ordinary criminal and the political types was widely covered by the media. The coverage was focused on spectacular events such as massacres followed by frontliners, but there was also considerable media demand for background analyses from specialized organizations. A third riverbed for the flow of news of violence formed when the walls of secrecy crumbled at the end of the state of emergency; a multitude of human rights committees, peace structures, and community organizations took to actively monitoring communities, political parties, and security forces for violent acts and to networking the information across regions and administrative tiers.

The structures were very heterogeneous on several counts—social background of its members, original mandates, and organizational cohesiveness. In KwaZulu-Natal, a black community organization, the Black Sash, networked with church organizations and legal resource centers in Durban, the Midlands, and the South Coast. In other areas, information was gathered by peripheral organizations that would report only on certain kinds of violence, such as those related to tenant eviction and land reform. One of the most important independent networks had its base in academia and in the Democratic Party. Later, the National Peace Accord created, in the shape of local peace committees, monitoring structures with an official status. In the lead-up to the 1994 elections, several non-governmental organizations and peace committees combined to form the Network of Independent Monitors to improve the collection of information on conflict and violence.

The link between the national and the regional levels was provided by an organization with yet another background. The Human Rights Committee (HRC)

an independent organization . . . came into existence in September 1988, seven months after the banning of a number of anti-apartheid organizations and restricting of others, including the Detainees Parents' Support Committee (DPSC). Among other functions, such as providing counseling for released detainees and lawyers and advice for detainees' families, the DPSC had been monitoring human rights violations, especially detentions. Its restriction created an information vacuum, only partially filled by regional monitoring projects and the Democratic Party's violence monitoring group. The HRC took up the slack.²

Monitors in KwaZulu-Natal started feeding into the HRC in the 1990s.

The national head office of the HRC systematized the information from various regions of the country. But it is hardly surprising that organizational form had a determining effect on the process and quality of the reporting. The participating groups formed a loose network rather than a hierarchical organization and sent reports, "as things happened," through HRC regional committees as collection points. Reports were therefore not periodical and did not closely respect administrative-territorial definitions. In addition to reports from the affiliate groups, the police and the media were also important sources for the HRC. For each distinct violent event reported, the head office would open a record in a free-text database, and reports on a given event were compared and the most likely version ascertained.

The HRC used the data to produce reports of its own, but would also share it with other institutions, such as the government-sponsored Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in Pretoria, which was equipped to perform more advanced analyses. The Human Rights Committee endeavored to publish crude monthly figures with minimum delay; these quick reports were more or less limited to the numbers of persons killed in the various regions. The preparation of the full data to be shared with others usually took between one and three months. In 1995, delays became even longer because a number of collaborators found employment elsewhere. Both in donor-funding policies and in the motivation of volunteers, social development took precedence over human rights issues; this was less pronounced in KwaZulu-Natal, where many local structures continued to be absorbed in the management of violent conflict. In early 1996, changes occurred in the management of both the HRC and the HSRC, with the result that the supply of violence data ceased.

The monitoring arrangement had its strengths and its weaknesses. On the one hand, the nongovernmental sector in human rights monitoring contributed critical information that the security forces, trying to cope with their own apartheid legacy, could not freely supply, and groups relying on violence were increasingly pulled into the open. On the other hand, the quality of the HRC reporting was open to question. Its strength lay in the multiple sources against which the majority of event reports were checked, but completeness and neutrality were more difficult to assess. Whenever participating groups did not contribute reports during a given period, it could have been either that no violent event was heard of in their area or that they did not function properly. Travel restrictions due to lack of security were a frequent impediment to grassroots report collection, and the social composition of the groups also impinged on the reporting. Most of their members were well educated and familiar with modern organization; many were drawn to the ANC and less often found in traditional milieus dominated by the IFP.

The free-text reports received by the HRC made it difficult to correlate violence information with socioeconomic variables. There was no standard set of towns and districts, and the localities reported on were sometimes small settlements virtually impossible to locate on a map or neighborhoods of larger towns known only to the report originators. Moreover, the system evolved from an immediate concern for peace and the safety of detainees, without a capacity to capture much data on other related domains such as socioeconomic deprivation. Even among the effects of violence, only the final ones—deaths—were reported with an acceptable degree of accuracy and completeness. Injuries and arrests remained underreported, and other, more complex, effects of the conflict—such as population displacements—were scarcely reported or, when reported at all, not included in specific data fields.

All in all, the HRC-centered monitoring had more the character of a social movement than a research enterprise. Spontaneous networking that outfoxed security agencies in the closing years of apartheid, high motivation of volunteers, and corroboration of reports by use of multiple sources empowered a nongovernmental system of surprising complexity and credibility. Shifting agendas of the nongovernmental sector (notably because the movement was successful), lack of control over definitions and completeness, and suspected bias in reporting the attacks of the two major antagonistic political parties limited the quality of the data on which analyses such as ours should be based.

Dynamics of Violence

Data and Methods

This study uses data on KwaZulu-Natal for the period from 1993 through 1995. The geographical limitation is justified by a substantive concern: we wished to understand the dynamics of the conflict that prompted warnings of uncontrollable violence in the context of the local elections in this province. The limitation in time is motivated by a focus on what happened after the national elections and by the assumption that the 1993 data validly capture the important variable "age of conflict." The HSRC database includes 10,585 records of violent incidents (involving 8,069 deaths) that took place in the entire of South Africa during the three-year period. KwaZulu-Natal accounts for 4,087 of the incidents (4,324 deaths). This is our observation base.

The records contain information on the date and location of the incident, a free-text field with descriptive accounts, sources of reports, the number of persons killed, injured, and arrested, the affiliation or social group of the attackers and victims, and the types of weapons used and the type of conflict. For statistical analysis, only the data on dates, location, source, and number of persons killed are reasonably complete. In the fewer than twenty instances in which the date was known only by the month or several days, we coded for the earliest possible date, generally the first of the month. The HRC did not provide missing values for any variables; however, it is reasonable to expect that in most of the reported incidents, if any were indeed killed, their number was known and noted. We therefore coded an empty field for persons killed as zero. Location information does not refer to the administrative districts, but to the five collection areas the HRC was using: Durban, Midlands, North Coast, North KZN, and South Coast.

The dependent variable of interest is the number of persons killed in a given month and location, but analysis is complicated by the fact that HRC coding did not use districts, and therefore rates relative to population are not available, a serious impediment for town-level analyses. A town that reports very few incidents may either be a relatively peaceful larger town, a tiny settlement with a pronounced conflict, or a neighborhood in a town for which some incidents were reported instead of a larger town that appeared in other reports. Methodological consequences are not detailed here, but essentially restrict us to time-series analyses of global data (all KwaZulu-Natal), as well as to relatively simple area and town-level

analyses that sacrifice considerable information. For both, we use OLS regression models.

Spread of the Violence

A total of 1,989 persons died in 1,719 separate incidents of political violence in KwaZulu-Natal in 1993, in 1994, there were 1,514 deaths in 1,502 incidents, and in 1995, 821 deaths and 866 incidents. After an all-time high of 328 persons killed in the election month of April 1994, the death toll settled to a monthly average of 70 persons. But the apparent stability disguises important regional and local changes. The Greater Durban area and the North Coast saw their death tolls fall through 1995, and reports from northern KwaZulu-Natal have been few and mild ever since May 1994. However, the South Coast, where monthly fluctuations were particularly strong, and the Midlands, more consistently in the second semester of 1995, experienced more violence.

Throughout, the ability of the Durban area, which embraces the political and economic center of the province, to reduce political violence was the key result for stability, and also released attention for what was going on in other areas. In the second half of 1995, the relative shares of violence in the South Coast and Midlands areas went up dramatically; this was apparent in the wide—national and international—news coverage given the massacre that killed nineteen in Izingolweni, South Coast, on Christmas Day 1995.

However, beneath the image of areas with dangerous levels of violence, events remained highly volatile and erratic from town to town. Those gripped by violence in one month might have a let-up the next; for others, the calm proved temporary. Then, over a period of several months, communities often worked out resolutions and reverted to a state of complete or near peace. While this suggests a learning process at the individual community level, unfortunately, more detailed regression analysis shows that it is not the case. Overall, levels of violence remained positively correlated with the violence of the preceding time period.

Interaction between the Two Antagonists

Most of the violence pitted the two main political parties, the IFP and ANC, against each other. However, the pattern of their interlocked cycles of violence changed after the 1994 elections. To understand how that happened, it is important to know the extent to which the parties' behavior was influenced by three basic orientations: 1) the relative influence of

Table 1**Number of Persons Killed in Political Violence by Area and Six Month Period, 1995**

Months	Durban	Midlands	North Coast	North KZN	South Coast
January-June	130	49	181	24	83
July-December	53	107	69	13	112
Total	183	156	250	37	195

tradition (policy inertia, “actors keep doing the same things they themselves have been doing in the past”); 2) the strength of reciprocity, which is the tendency to respond to one’s opponent’s current behavior; and 3) rational expectations, which create deviations from established patterns only when the rival’s behavior deviates from expected patterns. To investigate relative strength, we used the system of action-reaction equations reported by Moore for analyzing time-series data on two conflict opponents:³

$$X_t = a_1 + b_{11}X_{t-1} + b_{12}Y_t + e_{1t}$$

$$Y_t = a_2 + b_{21}Y_{t-1} + b_{22}X_t + e_{2t}$$

The *bs* of the lagged variables represent the force of past action by the same party, the strength of traditions, and policy inertia. The coefficients before the opposite, but simultaneous, variables express the importance for reciprocity, tit-for-tat in its immediacy. Moreover, if both parties understand their interaction well, only the deviations—the residual *es*—have high enough novelty value to provoke initiatives beyond the ordinary in the next step. This expresses the rational expectations side of the model, which predicts high correlations between the residuals.

In this case, the incidents blamed on the IFP, resp. ANC, are the *Xs* and *Ys* of the model. Their interrelationship is estimated separately for the two periods (Jan 93–Apr 94 vs. May 94–Dec 95) before and after the elections that took place in late April 1994.

Results are summarized in Table 2. The relationships manifestly changed over time. Prior to the *national* elections, the protagonists used political violence in ways that were consistent for each of them, as the high *R*²s show (.56 and .70). The ANC responded more from its own set line, interpreted as the sum of its behaviors in previous months, than to its

Table 2**Determinants of Violence before and after the April 1994 Elections**

Predictors	Period and Political Party			
	Before Elections (January 1993–April 1994)		After Elections (May 1994–December 1995)	
	IFP	ANC	IFP	ANC
Policy Inertia				
Beta	.27	.75**	.41	.31
Sig. T	(.26)	(.02)	(.11)	(.20)
Reciprocity				
Beta	.59**	.13	.07	.24
Sig. T	(.02)	(.62)	(.76)	(.31)
Rational Expectations				
res. corr.		-.47*		-.19
p (2-tailed)		(.08)		(.44)
R ² adj.	.56	.70	.11	.05

Note: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$.

opponent's immediate violence or accommodation (β_{21} is a high .75). The significant negative correlation between the residuals (−.47) and the noted strong coefficient for the ANC's inertial behavior reflect the fact that this party exercised restraint during the months when the IFP was scaling up its violent campaign. The IFP's behavior is characterized by overproportional reciprocity (a high $\beta_{12} = .59$).

After April 1994, as KwaZulu-Natal moved towards *local* elections, the behavior of both parties became less determined by any policy lines that they may have had for the entire province (the R²'s are small). To a small degree, the ANC moved towards a more immediately dictated reciprocity, while the IFP was more inclined to follow its past month's levels of violence. Rationality, seen as the capacity to respond consistently to the unexpected initiatives of one's opponent, also decreased (the correlation coefficient between the residuals is a mere −.19), which means that the system began to fluctuate more widely over the short term. The fluctuations could be in both directions, violence and peacefulness. A hefty disturbance, imported from outside, would be magnified locally, but probably only for a short time. Weak regression coefficients also imply that party leadership was less in a position to "switch on the violence" in order

to exert coordinated pressure, but also less capable of switching it off once they perceived the continuation of violent policies as no longer serving their interests. In other words, the situation grew less predictable.

Town Level Analysis

In 1995, the HRC and HSCR continued to publicize violence profiles based on the broad HRC report collection areas. As violence patterns became more determined by local situations, the need for analysis at the town level grew. Data limitations at this level of magnification were severe, and we could not successfully run any models at this level during 1995. Rather than the more demanding action-reaction model (e.g., between towns controlled by opposing parties), we settled for a model retrospectively testing the influence of three factors on levels of violence in the second half of 1995. These were the level of recent local violence, the strength of the local violent tradition, and the area as a political context. Because population figures were not available, we ended up studying changes in the levels of violence relative to the violence of a long base period (July 1993 to December 1994). For reasons of space, the methodology of violence rate formation, case retention, and weightage in regressions is not described here.

Two models were run. The first pooled all towns retained (220 out of the 373), defining a dummy variable for four out of the five collection areas. In the second, regressions were done separately for each of the five areas (203 towns). Both models yielded results (Table 3) that concurred on the significance of recent violent experience for the rate of ongoing violence. The only exception was the Greater Durban area, where the strength of violent traditions is more influential. Durban also has an irreducible base rate of ongoing violence (seen in the significant intercept of the unstandardized coefficients). A significant influence of the recent violence was found for the North Coast and for North KZN, areas with decreasing violence in the second half of 1995, which means that complete peace returned to communities with low violence much faster than to those badly scarred.

The most interesting areas, however, were the Midlands and the South Coast. Both areas suffered growing violence, but with different patterns of causation. For the Midlands, our model produced significant coefficients for recent violence and (weakly; $p = .26$) for tradition, as well as a significant intercept, which is consonant with the significant area coefficient in the pooled-observation model. In the South Coast, however, only

Table 3**Models of Town-Level Violence, July–December 1995
(beta coefficients)**

Predictors	Pooled Model	Area Models				
		Durban	Midlands	North Coast	North KZN	South Coast
Recent Violence	.35***	.05	.29*	.25**	.61***	.48**
Tradition of Violence	.02		.22**	.21	-.02	n.a.
Area						
Durban	.00					
Midlands		.13 *				
North Coast			-.06			
South Coast			-.09			
Intercept	n.s.	pos.**	pos.**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
R ² adj.	.13	.03	.04	.03	.35	.19
N	220	31	38	62	33	39

Note: * $p<.20$; ** $p<.10$; *** $p<.01$.

the levels of violence in the first semester of 1995 matter. If we write out the significant terms in the unstandardized equations, the difference becomes clearly visible:

Midlands: RATE95_2 = .65* RATE95_1 + .43*RATE93_1 + .11, and

South Coast: RATE95_2 = 1.48* RATE95_1

where RATE95_2 stands for the rate of violence in the second semester of 1995, and so on.

That means that the communities in the two areas experienced even greater differentiation in terms of violence. In the Midlands, the threat was diffuse: moderate tendency to continue recent levels of violence ($\beta = .29$) was to an extent exacerbated by the influence of violent traditions and by bad ambience in general. In the South Coast, the pattern was relatively straightforward; communities that had retained their levels of

violence from the reference period into the first half of 1995 were likely to see considerably more violence in the second half ($\beta = .48$). This should in principle have facilitated the planning of the security forces but, in fact, after the Izingolweni Christmas massacre, peace activists accused the police of not heeding warnings that they had repeated for weeks and weeks. That the violence prevention was not more effective until 1996 speaks to the difference between analysis and effective warning.

Conclusions

Our analysis is based on data gathered not by academic researchers but by different types of institutions, among them a host of groups with close grassroots ties in violent areas. These formed a network of like-minded activists keen on the progress of democracy and the elimination of violence. Their reports were circulated and condensed by the Human Rights Committee and were also analyzed by academic institutions such as the Human Science Research Council. The violence monitors contributed greatly to the self-analysis of a society in difficult transition. Political actors who negotiated the transition and who had to make difficult decisions that accommodated opposing interests reportedly used this channel, particularly in planning for the elections in 1994 and again for the postponement of the 1995 local elections in KwaZulu-Natal.

The number of incident reports handled through the network is amazing. Statistics based on this wealth of information have in the past been mainly descriptive: users were interested in the trends of key indicators of violence, and the HRC delivered them. That the quality of the data did not always match academic standards was secondary; attempting to introduce better designs may not have worked in a networked community (as opposed to a hierarchical organization) and probably would have slowed down collection and analysis or discouraged volunteers. However, the inability of the HSRC to engage in a dialogue with the data providers undoubtedly decreased quality; with a little extra effort, it should have been possible to identify the districts to which incident towns belonged, which would have allowed analysis of other causes of the political violence, notably in socioeconomic factors. As our analysis shows, academic institutions can contribute insights into the dynamics of collective action that go beyond the descriptive summaries that human rights activists produce. That, however, requires a two-way dialogue between activists and researchers from early on in the monitoring effort.

This criticism, however, does not deny the fact that it is essentially the number and quality of the grassroots antennae that provides the political system and the public with the raw material for informed early conflict warnings. The presence of monitors on the ground—plus their harnessing to appropriate transmission belts—is more decisive than the refinement of analysis in upstream institutions. But it is important that those charged with risk assessment and giving warnings have a constructive influence on the way monitors work. They have a responsibility, as Adelman and Sahrke point out in their evaluation of early warning systems in the Rwanda genocide, for “fitting human rights monitoring within a larger information and analytic structure that can process the information in terms of complex social conflict.”⁴

In terms of retrospective risk assessment—“postdicting” the pattern of political violence in the second half of 1995 with the help of earlier developments—several findings stand out. Most important is the evidence that the main political antagonists—the ANC and IFP—lost control to a significant degree over the violent behavior of their local members. Despite a backdrop of common issues that rallied forces in the entire province, violent behaviors became more localized and less amenable to central party direction. This fact seems to be a mini-illustration of post-Cold War events: when the major confrontation comes to an end, a multitude of local conflicts take on a life of their own. The traditional leaders, less often challenged in the days of apartheid, now found themselves assailed by different opposition groupings. Various local conflicts were then being brought back into common focus by the prospect of local elections that might oust many of the old leaders, which clearly poised the two areas for greater violence. The postponement of the elections bought time for the various parties to these conflicts to disarm some of the tensions.

Loss of control by the ANC and the IFP also meant that the violence was more volatile. However, the seeming tendency for violence to migrate between areas and towns in a haphazard manner is less confusing when the figures are disaggregated. Two important differences appear: *Within* areas (with the exception of Durban), communities with significant levels of violence in early 1995 were most likely to see an increase in the second half of the year. This differentiated them on the basis of recent violence and, therefore, recent information well known to the authorities (notably through the HRC and HSRC reports), which in turn facilitated the positioning of security reinforcements after the Christmas massacre that scandalized the nation. *Between* areas, differences in the levels of violence and in the likely causal pattern, are significant. That the Midlands and the South Coast were the most violent areas in KwaZulu-Natal

by the end of 1995 was common knowledge and hardly needed a reminder from researchers. The underlying causal mesh is less trivial. Simply looking at the almost monotonous decline of fatalities in the Greater Durban area, one is tempted to think that the low level of violence here was essentially self-stabilizing. Surprisingly, town-level analysis suggests that differences in the age of local conflicts were more decisive in this area. Conversely, in the rural areas, despite the importance of violence some years back, the recency of local violence apparently had a stronger influence than tradition. These findings, however, are to be taken with methodological caveats. While several of the regression coefficients are statistically significant, the models performed too poorly to predict the number of fatalities that individual towns suffered from political violence in the second half of 1995. This weakness is part of the "lack of an ability to forecast" that Adelman and Schmeidl have found for academic research on early warning in general.⁵

Politically, the virtual disappearance—it declined by a factor of 15 between the 1994 election and December 1995—of political violence in the Greater Durban area was the most significant development, and Durban thus came to enjoy the tranquillity of the other metropolitan areas, Johannesburg and Cape Town. With a modicum of cynicism, one may speculate that it was the stability of the urban areas that allowed changes of agenda for the rural ones. Thus, after three postponements—informulated, *inter alia*, by our violence warnings—local elections were held in the entire province of KwaZulu-Natal at the end of June 1996. Very few incidents were noted. Many of the former monitoring structures have by now been deserted by their former activists, who have found new challenges in social service and rural development. In the business of early warning, self-destroying prophesies can be beautiful.

Notes

1. Among others; Anthony V. Minnaar, ed., *Patterns of Violence: Case Studies of Conflict in Natal* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1992); Anthony V. Minnaar, *An Overview of Political Violence & Conflict Trends in South Africa with Specific Reference to the Period: January–June 1994* (Submission to ESKOM security scenarios '94) (Pretoria: Centre for Socio-political Analysis, Human Sciences Research Council, July 1994); Anthony V. Minnaar, *Review of Conflict & Violence Trends, Sociopolitical Perceptions, Transition & Protest Events in South Africa with Specific Reference to the Period January 1994–April 1995* (Submission to ESKOM Security Scenarios '95). (Pretoria: Centre for Sociopolitical Analysis, Human Sciences Research Council, July 1995); Anthony V. Minnaar, *A Year of Living Dangerously:*

Hitmen, Corruption, Competition, Conflict, and Violence in the Taxi Industry during 1994 (Praetoria: Centre for Sociopolitical Analysis, Human Sciences Research Council, February [updated August] 1995).

2. *Weekly Mail & Guardian's A to Z of South African Politics: The Essential Handbook* (Johannesburg, 1994).
3. Will H. Moore, "Action-Reaction or Rational Expectations? Reciprocity and the Domestic-International Conflict Nexus during the Rhodesia Problem," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39 (1, 1995): 129-167.
4. Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience. Study 2: Early Warning and Conflict Management* (Copenhagen: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996).
5. Howard Adelman, Susanne Schmeidl, and Michael Lund, Revised Proposal towards the Development of an Early Warning/Response Network [EWNET], 7 June 1996 (Internet, List EWNET-L@YORKU.CA, 1996).