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The Political Economy of Youth Unemployment and Its Implications on Violent Service Delivery Protests in Democratic South Africa

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is a global issue, with rates higher among young people than the general population. The literature highlights that politics, the economy, and different social factors influence the high unemployment rates among young people. In South Africa, the democratic government has struggled with persistently high youth unemployment, contributing to inequalities, political instability, and structural poverty. This has further increased dependence on government social services such as water, sanitation, and housing. When these

services fall short, dissatisfaction often escalates into violent service delivery protests, especially in the local sphere of government. The paper uses qualitative secondary analysis and Berkowitz's frustration-aggression theory to explore the political economy of youth unemployment and its link to these protests in post-1994 South Africa. Based on the frustration-aggression theory, the findings from the literature suggest that while high youth unemployment contributes to a heightened sense of frustration, it does not directly cause violent protests. However, instant triggers, such as abrupt disconnections of utilities like electricity or the demolition of informal settlements, trigger violent protests to express their anger and demand services.

Keywords: Berkowitz frustration-aggression theory, Service delivery poverty protests, Youth unemployment.

Introduction and Background

Unemployment is a contested term globally (see Feng et al., 2024; Hegelund & Taalbi, 2023; Amiri, 2022). However, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) attempts to regulate and standardise measures of unemployment to facilitate accurate and comparable labour market statistics worldwide. Furthermore, according to the ILO (2018), unemployment is when individuals are unemployed, currently available, and actively seek work. Unemployment is economically harmful and has social, political, and psychological effects (Amiri, 2022). It has become a global dilemma as unemployment rises unprecedentedly (Feng et al., 2024). The ILO (2024) predicts that 2024 unemployment will continue to increase worldwide by at least 2 million, pushing the global unemployment rate from 5.1% in 2023 to 5.2% in 2024. This excessive rise in unemployment is expected to have severe and long-term consequences on people's purchasing power and ability to afford their basic needs and improve their standard of living (Hegelund & Taalbi, 2023). Rising unemployment has a significant impact on young people during the current economic crisis (Mseleku & Tshishonga, 2019) due to factors such as the job market's inability to absorb them and lack of work experience (O'Higgins, 2017). Various studies (see Njifen, 2024; Lambovska et al., 2021; Hasan & Sasana, 2020) indicate that youth unemployment remains high. Youth unemployment varies across cultures and remains debated (see Thusi et al., 2023; De Lannoy et al., 2020). However, for this paper, youth unemployment is defined in alignment with the prevailing understanding in much of Southern Africa,

referring to individuals aged between 18 and 35 actively seeking work but remaining unemployed.

Mseleku and Tshishonga (2019) and O'Higgins (2017) highlight that globally, young people face economic and social uncertainties because they lack access to productive and decent jobs that match their qualifications and aspirations. Ibrahim and Mahyuddin (2017) maintain that youth unemployment at the global level is approximately three times higher than that of adults and more than twice the overall global unemployment rate. This translates to over 70 million young individuals worldwide struggling to secure meaningful employment opportunities. According to the ILO (2024), youth unemployment was 13.6% in 2023, closely mirroring the global average of 13.3%, with projections indicating a slight increase by 2025. Scholarly writers such as Padilla (2024) and Ekanem (2022) also emphasise this issue. Shirazi (2022) and De Lannoy et al. (2020), among others, assert that unemployment among young people is a "ticking time bomb." This is because it poses serious long-term socioeconomic challenges and political risks, including the possibility of increased structural poverty, loss of a productive generation, and social unrest (De Lannoy et al., 2018; O'Higgins, 2017). Furthermore, the ILO (2024) maintains that globally, youth unemployment stifles individual growth and development and threatens broader societal cohesion and economic and political stability. South Africa has not been immune to youth unemployment and its social, financial, and political consequences (see Mseleku & Tshishonga, 2019).

Recent statistics demonstrate that South Africa has a youthful population. For instance, of the 62 million total population, 63.3% (more than 20 million) are young people aged between 15 and 34 and continue to bear the burden of the high unemployment rate (IQbusiness, 2022). Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2024) indicates that in the first quarter of 2024, the national unemployment rate is approximately 33%; of this, 45.5% are young people between the ages of 15-34. Despite significant investment in different labour market programs across the government, private, and civil society sectors, youth unemployment continues to be a concern in South Africa (De Lannoy et al., 2020). Thus, most young people grapple with poverty because of youth unemployment, exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities, and their inability to break the vicious cycle of poverty (Thusi et al., 2023). As a result, most young people rely on the government's ability to provide essential services, such as clean running water, proper sanitation, housing, etc., so their dissatisfaction with these, among other services, is countered by protest (Samkange et al., 2018). Thusi et al. (2022, p.135) highlight that "protests

against poor service delivery are sparked by the difficulties experienced by women and youth." Bonga (2021) argues that, among other issues, the high unemployment rate, especially among young people, is one of the reasons for the prevailing violent protests in South Africa.

Studies have been conducted on unemployment and service delivery protests (see Thus et al., 2022; Mujere, 2020). Notable, a relatively dated study by Banjo & Jili (2013) focused on youth and service delivery protests. This study discovered that 70% of the respondents participated in the protests because of unemployment. Despite the popularity of service delivery protests involving youth, to the best of our knowledge, inadequate research has been conducted in South Africa. There is a gap in the literature on how government policies, labour market structures, economic conditions, and social inequalities (political economy) contribute to youth unemployment and its relationship to protests related to service delivery. Hence, this paper is written to address this literature gap and demonstrates the need for new research that focuses on the relationship between youth unemployment and violent service delivery protests. It explores the secondary research method used following this introduction and background. After that, the paper explains the frustration-aggression theory adopted as a theoretical lens. The paper then explores the literature on youth unemployment and violent service delivery protests. Then, the paper discusses the emerging findings from the literature through the lens of the adopted theoretical framework. The paper concludes with recommendations and a brief synopsis of the key points discussed in the main text.

Research Methodology

Qualitative secondary analysis was adopted as the approach for this paper. Accordingly, this approach utilises existing literature initially collected for other purposes to address the current research question or objectives (Cheong et al., 2023; Pederson et al., 2020). This method was selected for its ability to save resources (such as time and money) and to access in-depth data from participants who may be difficult to reach or to gather data on controversial or uncomfortable topics, thereby reducing the burden on participants (Chatfield, 2020, p. 835). Despite relying on existing literature, qualitative secondary analysis needs to be conducted promptly but follows systematic guidelines (see Irvine, 2023; Cheong et al., 2023; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). In this paper, we followed the steps proposed by Cheong et al. (2023) because they offer a practical, precise, and comprehensive approach to qualitative secondary research.

Therefore, we executed the following steps: First, we defined the research objectives as "exploring the interconnectedness between youth unemployment and service delivery protests in post-1994 South Africa." Second, we conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify the gap in the existing body of literature. To gather reliable data sources, we conducted our literature search on reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. To ensure the relevance of our data sources, we used a combination of relevant search terms such as 'youth,' 'unemployment,' 'service delivery,' and 'protest.' It is also worth mentioning that we used search filters to source studies published post-1994, particularly the most recent publications. Our search outcome showed that limited studies were conducted on how youth unemployment is connected to service delivery protests in South Africa. After that, we identified and filtered relevant online data sources addressing the research objective from various search engines, including Google Scholar, Science Direct, Research Gate, and government websites. The data was organised and managed using qualitative analysis methods, as Clarke and Braun (2017) advocated. Furthermore, to ensure data quality, information was triangulated through cross-checking findings, comparing data from multiple online sources, and integrating perspectives from existing literature to enhance credibility and robustness.

Theoretical Framework

Berkowitz's (1978) Reformulated Frustration-Aggression Theory

Frustration-aggression theory was first developed by researchers (led by John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O. H. Mowrer, and Robert Sears) from the Yale University Institute of Human Relations in 1939 (Berkowitz, 1978). Initially, the theory highlighted a direct link and the relationship between frustration and aggression—that frustration leads to aggression (see Breuer & Elson, 2017). Miller et al. (1949) revised the theory and highlighted that frustration could lead to an urge for aggression and provoke other types of responses (Breuer & Elson, 2017). Berkowitz further developed the theory and moved beyond the monolithic explanation of aggression to a multiphase process (Berkowitz, 1978). Hence, this paper adopts Berkowitz's reformulated Frustration-Aggression Theory, highlighting that while frustration can lead to aggressive behaviours; it is not a direct or automatic response (Lewis & Bucher, 1992; Berkowitz, 1978). Conversely, Berkowitz (1989) argues

that frustration gives rise to aggressive inclinations but does not necessarily lead to aggression or aggressive behaviour. Accordingly, "unexpected interference is more apt to provoke an aggressive reaction than frustration because the former is usually much more unpleasant" (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 69). Aggression or aggressive behaviour, including displaced aggression, stems from the negative effect, especially when combined with an aversive condition (Berkowitz, 1978). This theory is adopted because of its ability to explain how aggression, even displaced aggression, emanates. Therefore, from this context, the theory explains the nexus and interplay between youth unemployment and violent protests related to service delivery in post-1994 South Africa.

Literature Review

Factors Contributing to Youth Unemployment

The paper acknowledged the broad consensus that youth unemployment in South Africa is a complex and multi-dimensional issue. This section examines the political and economic factors contributing to the persistent youth unemployment crisis, drawing on a diverse range of literature from various disciplines. The section discusses micro-level factors, such as a lack of work experience, that pertain to individual job seekers. After that, it delves into macro-level factors involving structural elements, such as the economic growth rate.

Youth unemployment is increasingly recognised as a developmental challenge in South Africa. This socio-economic problem can be attributed to several factors based on existing literature. Several studies, including Mseleku and Ntshiza (2022), suggest that more skills are needed to ensure young people access the labour market in South Africa. Habiyaremye et al. (2022) highlight the importance of providing employability skills to address the growing issue of youth unemployment in the country. This aligns with the South African government's efforts to increase the number of young people engaged in education, employment, or training, although achieving this objective has proven difficult (Matli & Ngoepe, 2021). Most South African youth lack access to education or training opportunities (De Lannoy & Mudiriza, 2019), partially explaining why the country continues to face skills shortages. Consistent with the issue of inadequate skills is the skills mismatch identified in several studies as a barrier to youth accessing employment opportunities in South Africa (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Jubane, 2020). Skill mismatch refers to the discrepancy between the skills

possessed by job seekers and those required in the labour market by employers, which has prevented many young South Africans from entering the labour market (Mayombe, 2021). A study conducted among the youth in the Limpopo province of South Africa also emphasises the importance of a relevant skill set, which needs to be improved in most unemployed young South Africans (Dagume & Gyekye, 2016). As the literature suggests, without appropriate skills and expertise that meet the needs of the labour market, many young South Africans remain vulnerable to unemployment due to a 'skills mismatch.' Similar results were observed in a recent study conducted by Osunde (2023), highlighting the discrepancies between the skills possessed by young graduates and the demands of the labour market. This literature evidence concerns a country like South Africa, which has a pronounced demand for skilled labour and significant investments in education and training. In the subsection, on macro-level factors contributing to youth unemployment, we address South Africa's education system as one of the issues.

In democratic South Africa, characterised by high levels of general unemployment and worsening youth unemployment, coupled with growing graduate unemployment, work experience is one of the main requirements for landing a job. However, the growing body of literature on unemployment suggests that young people are considered unemployable due to a lack of work experience (De Lannoy et al., 2020). At the same time, it is evident that most job seekers generally need work experience, which can be gained through programs like internships (Mseleku, 2022). Several previous studies (for example, Bernstein, 2014; Mlatsheni & Ranchhod, 2017; Seekings, 2012) concurrently indicate that the transition of experienced job seekers to the labour market is relatively smooth. This evidence highlights the importance of work experience in obtaining employment. In South Africa, where access to the labour market is highly competitive, accessing relevant information for career opportunities is crucial. This includes career guidance, information about education or training options, and job opportunities. A study conducted by Pillay (2020) reveals that many communities in South Africa still need more career guidance. Therefore, a significant number of young people end up acquiring qualifications that are not in demand, contributing to youth unemployment in the country (Farao & du Plessis, 2024). Despite the clear issues of graduate unemployment in South Africa (Buthelezi et al., 2024; Van Lill & Bakker, 2022), education and training are still pivotal for employability (Mvunabandi et al., 2023; Pitan & Muller, 2020). Therefore, access to education and training information remains crucial

for improving employability. However, some studies (De Lannoy et al., 2020) indicate that young people, particularly those in remote areas, need more information about training and education opportunities.

Another area for improvement is the need for more information about job opportunities, which hinders youth from finding employment and is linked to a deficiency in job search skills (Mseleku, 2022). Young job seekers from rural areas and low-income families are particularly affected, as they generally have limited access to information and poor social networks (De Lannoy et al., 2020). Consequently, South African youth face the challenge of high job search costs and need more information about available opportunities (Graham et al., 2019). Despite the massification of education, notably higher education in South Africa (Pillay, 2020), South Africa's education system has been criticised based on efficiency and overall contribution to employability (Spaull, 2015). Undoubtedly, South Africa's education system continues to encounter numerous challenges, manifested in poverty, inequality, and unemployment, mainly experienced by the youth (Barnes, 2021). While access to quality education in South Africa remains unequal between the rich and the poor, a situation that exacerbates inequalities (Spaull, 2015), inadequate and irrelevant education curricula are characteristic at different levels (Rivombo & Motseke, 2022). The literature shows that the poor education quality in South Africa is due to several issues. For instance, a study conducted by Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) shows that many public schools in South Africa are poorly resourced. Hence, most young people produced by the public school system are found incompetent to pursue higher education or to secure jobs. Similar results were found by Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), which show that poor quality education, particularly in rural public schools, is partially due to a lack of essential resources such as water, electricity, and classrooms, among other things.

South Africa's higher education system faces many challenges, ranging from a lack of financial resources to poor staffing (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2021). For instance, a study recently conducted with leaders in various higher education institutions in South Africa found that lack of resources, poor curriculum, and bureaucracy are among the factors undermining the quality of higher education (Pramjeeth et al., 2023). This literature evidence provides a disturbing perspective on how poor education, owing to various issues, undermines the employability of youth. One of the significant determinants of youth unemployment is the state of the economy, where high unemployment rates generally characterise poor economies (Pramjeeth et al., 2023). Likewise, South

Africa's youth unemployment situation is mainly structural, implying an economy's inability to provide jobs for the total or potential labour force (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2021). While economic growth and employment are two sides of the same coin, several studies, including Mseleku (2022), have indicated that a poor economy is directly associated with limited labour demand, a phenomenon not exclusive to South Africa. Youth unemployment is an outcome of the poor economy and a contributor to the poor economy (De Lannoy et al., 2018). Youth unemployment is generally high in the context of low to poor economic growth. In this regard, we note that during the years (2003-2008) when South Africa had relatively good economic development, youth unemployment rates were relatively low (De Lannoy et al., 2018). Since 2008, youth unemployment has steadily increased due to a decreasing economic growth rate. As Mahadea and Kaseeram (2018) observed, low economic growth rates in South Africa directly influence high youth unemployment rates.

Finally, it is noted from the literature that the post-1994 South African policies (past and present) have failed and cannot address the youth unemployment problem, which is a structural issue. Although apartheid policies contributed to the unemployment of Black South Africans in particular (De Lannoy & Langa, 2021), some post-apartheid policies have worsened the unemployment situation, especially among young people. For instance, the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR), an economic policy implemented by the South African government in 1996, significantly lost job opportunities (Mseleku, 2023). As a neoliberal policy, GEAR increased unemployment and meant the majority of the poor unaffordability of services such as education and health (Streak, 2004). Hence, most low-income people needed help to attend or finish schooling, which would help them develop the skills necessary to secure employment (Sibanda, 2023). While the scope of this paper does not allow for a lengthy discussion on the policy effects, it is essential to point out that most policy-informed interventions are unsuccessful in addressing youth unemployment. For instance, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) has been criticised for failing to provide the youth with proper training for transitioning to decent jobs (Sibanda, 2023). Similarly, policies on higher education have successfully improved youth's access to higher education, but throughput and quality remain a challenge (Khauoe & Fore, 2020). Therefore, the fact that South Africa continues to experience increasing youth unemployment rates despite implementing numerous policy instruments is of significant concern.

Youth Unemployment and Social Unrest in the Post-1994 Era

Unlike in the pre-1994, where any form of social gathering, including protests, was prohibited, the post-1994 non-racial and democratic government, through the Gatherings Act (RGA) 205 of 1993, has legalised a right to assemble freely without any intimidation (Ngcamu, 2019; Yende, 2021; Alexander, 2010). This right has made it equally important for the country's citizens to engage in any civil action and participate in political affairs (Lancaster, 2018; 2016; Nomarwayi et al., 2020). Furthermore, through this right, citizens' participation in social movements, marches, petitions, social action, or unrest is not limited to being within the organised political or social formation or any other structures (Finn, 2021; Tivaringe & Kirshner, 2021). Hence, everyone, regardless of age, gender, or any other classification, has a right to engage in "peaceful and unarmed protests, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket, and to present petitions", while enjoying protection from the state while doing so (Gatherings Act (RGA) 205 of 1993). In the post-1994, especially since the early 2000s, South Africa has seen a rise in the occurrence of protests, mainly turning violent, ranging from poor working conditions, poor service delivery, unceasing university fee increments, etc. (Yende, 2022; Ives & Lewis, 2020; De Juan & Wegner, 2019; Ngcamu, 2019; Lancaster, 2018). Writers such as Breakfast et al. (2019, p. 115) stipulate that South Africa experiences an "occurring roughly at a rate of a protest every second day." Hence, South Africa has been widely identified in the literature as a protest capital of the world (Bekker, 2022; Brown, 2017; Reddy, 2016).

However, the literature shows that protests, even those led by young people in South Africa, are not a new phenomenon; they can be traced to pre-democratic South Africa, where they became fundamental to the fall of the apartheid era (see Acton, 2022; Kucera, 2022; Kanyane et al., 2021; Yende, 2021; Nomarwayi et al., 2020; Kadivar, 2018; Chikulo, 2016; Alexander, 2010). The reviewed literature demonstrates that in these prominent protests witnessed in post-1994 South Africa, young people have been seen to dominate these protests, if not at the centre or leading these gatherings (Maganga, 2020; Ledwaba, 2019; Bosch, 2017). However, this is not surprising, as Manyaka (2018, p. 56) stipulated that if the severely poor living conditions of the youth remain unchanged, "the youth will lead uprisings against the incumbent government." Subsequently, as South Africa's economic system continues to deteriorate, failing to absorb young people into the industry, protests led by young people have increased (Lolwana, 2017). Furthermore, Ngcamu

(2019), and Alexander (2010) highlight that the critical feature of these protests, especially related to service delivery, is the widespread involvement of a new cohort of activists, particularly unemployed youth and university students. With the latter, Martin (2022) demonstrates that in the 2010s, there has been a rise in protests or boycotts led by the youth, which have been more conspicuous in South African universities over lack of access to and unceasing university fee increments, etc. Lolwana (2017) further suggests that the prevailing violent service delivery protests emanate from young people not being preoccupied with employment or development opportunities and skills programmes. Hence, they can be used by those of the political class for their hidden agendas.

Evidently in South Africa, just like many other countries, charismatic radical leaders and organisations play a significant role in the mobilisation of youth outside the formal political, social, and economic environment (Mazwi, 2020). Such leaders and organisations not only influence youth to participate actively in political affairs but also influence vulnerable youth to violently fight socio-economic ills (e.g., youth unemployment) under incapable political leadership (Masinga, 2021). While the former South African president, Mr Jacob Zuma, is known for his charismatic leadership style, Mr Julius Malema, the leader of Economic Freedom Fighters, has emerged as a very influential leader in the South African political landscape. A study conducted by Mazwi (2020) shows that Malema's leadership style has not only inspired the youth to actively participate in the country's political affairs, but it has also raised their sense of responsibility towards engaging in actions to address issues the country faces, one of those being unemployment. Different scholarly writers such as Ledwaba (2019), Mago (2018), and Lolwana (2017), among others, claim that frustrations over youth unemployment and the quality of governance fuelled a wave of violent service delivery protests in different local municipalities. In their study, Akinboade et al. (2014) claim that unemployed youth were at the centre of violent service delivery protests in Sedibeng District. Similarly, Chikulo (2016) demonstrates that youth unemployment in South Africa has been ascending as the reality of delivery changes direction sharply to the downward spiral, which has been at the centre of violent protests, including those related to service delivery.

The excessive increase in youth participation in violent service delivery protests can be attributed to frustration over unemployment and exclusion in the economic system, among other issues (Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021; Mazwi, 2020). Furthermore, the high unemployment

rates, especially among youth, foster feelings of exclusion, disenfranchisement, and economic desperation (Lolwana, 2017). The lack of employment opportunities and economic exclusion negatively affect young people's ability to afford essential services, making them increasingly reliant on government provisions for basic needs such as water, electricity, and housing (Martin, 2022). When these services are inadequately provided or disrupted, the frustration and desperation stemming from their economic vulnerability can drive them to participate in violent protests to demand better service delivery and hold authorities accountable (Backeberg & Tholen, 2018). Therefore, the lack of formal employment opportunities drives young people to organise and participate in protests to voice their grievances (Ngcamu, 2019). The feeling of exclusion translates into anger toward the government's inability to provide essential services and economic opportunities that are important for their well-being (Ledwaba, 2019). Also, the absence of constructive outlets for their energy and aspirations can escalate peaceful protests into violent confrontations, especially when met with inadequate or repressive responses from authorities (Mago, 2018).

Discussion of Findings

The paper explores the political economy of youth unemployment and its implications for service delivery protests in South Africa. The findings from the literature highlight and identify youth unemployment as a complex political and structural issue that is both an outcome of the poor economy and a contributor to the poor economy. This means the high youth unemployment rate emanates from the weak economic system and political instability, substantially exacerbating economic stagnation. This further reduces youth purchasing power, financial spending, and economic productivity, perpetuating a cycle of ratchet poverty, structural inequalities, and the inability to afford essential services, including housing, clean running water, and proper sanitation. Furthermore, this increases their dependence on the government's social welfare, service delivery programs, and social relief services while exacerbating prolonged frustration. According to Berkowitz (1989), who reformulated the frustration-aggression theory, it is essential to note that these poor living conditions, political instability, etc., in South Africa do not necessarily lead to frustration but perpetuate the existing frustrations. This reflects the notion raised by Vhumbunu (2021), Tarisayi and Manik (2020), Carman (2020), Manyaka (2018), and Reddy (2016) that democratic South Africa is a frustrated nation grappling with structural

socio-economic inequalities. These, among other conditions, intensify existing frustrations embedded in the historical inequalities of the apartheid system and the unmet expectations of the post-1994 democratic promises. Hence, many people in South Africa, especially youths, are disenfranchised and disillusioned by the slow pace of progress because of the government's inability to address fundamental issues such as landlessness, ratchet poverty, and inequalities in all forms (Reddy, 2016).

The severe living conditions among the youth worsen the feeling of frustration or create prolonged frustration, which further ignites what Berkowitz (1989) called "aggressive inclinations" —a fertile ground for violent behaviour or violence to emanate. From this, the "unexpected interference" usually triggers violent behaviour or provokes an aggressive reaction, significantly when the incident hinders specific goals or outcomes (Breuer & Elson, 2017; Berkowitz, 1989, 1987). Ragolane (2024, p. 61) further articulated this, stressing that "deep-rooted and acute socio-economic challenges faced by poor and marginalised citizens, particularly in townships, provided a breeding ground for social unrest." This indicates that persisting challenges of youth unemployment and unemployability, among other issues, create conditions that are conducive to violent social unrest. Therefore, within the context of South Africa, various factors trigger violent reactions or violent behaviour in the form of service delivery protests. For example, in the aggressive inclination phase, factors such as cutting illegal electricity or water connections can trigger violent protests under the banner of "service delivery" (Nomarwayi et al., 2020). According to Berkowitz's (1989) theory, it can be argued that issues with increased rates of youth unemployment and other socioeconomic conditions do not directly lead to violent service delivery protests. However, these issues consistently and persistently contribute to prolonged frustration, which creates fertile ground for aggression when specific triggering events occur. Instant events such as sudden increases in service fees, abrupt disconnections of utilities like water and electricity, or the demolition of informal settlements, etc. trigger violent protests to express their anger and demand accountability.

Study Limitations

This research has methodological limitations. It relied primarily on desktop research to elicit data from secondary sources. We acknowledge this as a factor that restricted the data pool and potentially undermined

the comprehensiveness of our conclusions. Nevertheless, we have followed a rigorous process in selecting reliable data sources from multiple reputable databases to address the purpose of this study. This study provides critical insights into scholarship by synthesising extensive literature from various sources. It presents extensive evidence that can guide relevant policy and project formulation to address the problem in question. Given the limitations of this study, we therefore recommend future empirical research on the intersection between youth unemployment and participation in service delivery protests that applies both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the political economy of youth unemployment and its impact on service delivery protests using Berkowitz's reformulated Frustration-Aggression Theory. From this perspective, the main argument is that the current poor living conditions experienced by South Africa's youth do not directly cause violent service delivery protests. However, these conditions exacerbate feelings of frustration, creating a volatile environment in which violent behaviour can occur. Violent service delivery protests occur when something unexpected intensifies existing frustrations. Sudden and significant triggering events escalate the situation and elicit violent reactions. For instance, demolishing illegally constructed shacks can trigger violent demonstrations demanding better service provision. Additionally, the high levels of youth unemployment in South Africa, coupled with inappropriate appointments at the municipal level, can trigger violent protests related to service delivery in local communities. Based on the findings, this paper recommends:

- Civic education targets the youth on diverse strategies to hold the government accountable, such as participation in planning instead of violent protests. Such civic education can also focus on how youth can effectively use media to promote government accountability.
- This paper positioned unemployment as a factor exacerbating frustration among the youth. It therefore recommends a critical evaluation of the existing job creation strategies and policies that seem to fail in addressing youth unemployment.
- Considering the limited current research on youth unemployment and participation in violent service delivery protests, this paper recommends both quantitative and qualitative future research across the South African provinces.

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