

Press Release



**South African
Institute of
Race Relations**

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

For immediate release

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Violent protests growing in size and number, but most protests are peaceful

The number of violent gatherings increased between 2007/08 and 2008/09 from 705 to 718. Over the same period the number of peaceful gatherings dropped from 6 431 in 2007/08 to 6 125 in 2008/09, according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published this week by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg.

The data, which was derived from a reply to a parliamentary question, shows that although the number of protests stayed relatively static in the period under review, the average number of participants increased substantially.

For violent gatherings the average number of participants increased from 3 000 to 4 000. The average number of participants in peaceful gatherings increased from 500 to 4 000 between 2007/08 and 2008/09.

A peaceful gathering is defined by the South African Police Service as one where the police only have to monitor a gathering. A violent protest is defined as one where the police have to intervene in order to make arrests, or need to use force when there is a risk to safety or property.

The number of peaceful gatherings dropped in all provinces between 2007/08 and 2008/09, with the exceptions of the Eastern Cape and Gauteng. In the Eastern Cape the number of such gatherings went from 1 026 to 1 656, an increase of 61%. In Gauteng the number of such gatherings went from 1 332 to 1 439, an increase of 8%. KwaZulu-Natal saw the biggest drop in the number of peaceful gatherings, from 364 in 2007/08 to 137 in 2008/09, a decrease of 62%.

Four provinces saw the number of violent gatherings increase between 2007/08 and 2008/09. These were the Eastern Cape, where the number of gatherings went from 191 to 247 (an increase of 29%); KwaZulu-Natal, from seven to 41 (486%); Limpopo, 63 to 74 (18%); and the Northern Cape, 73 to 100 (37%).

The biggest drop in the number of violent gatherings was in North West. There the number of violent gatherings declined from 75 in 2007/08 to 33 in 2008/09, a drop of 56%.

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Peaceful gatherings were generally due to labour demands for increases in salaries or wages, while violent gatherings were generally service delivery protests.

A researcher at the Institute, Marius Roodt, said that the information showed that protests were still widespread in South Africa. 'The figures are not over a long enough period to determine trends, but it is clear that South Africa will remain a society where widespread protest is common,' he said. Although the average number of participants in violent protests had increased substantially, these types of protests accounted for only a fraction of all demonstrations. 'For every violent protest there are about 10 peaceful protests,' Roodt noted. Although the relatively large number of violent protests is a cause for concern, they were far outnumbered by peaceful protests. 'This shows that South Africans take their right to protest seriously, but are generally willing to do it in a peaceful manner,' Roodt said.

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