



## **SITUATIONAL AND STRATEGIC ADVISORY ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA: JULY 2021**

**Authors:** Jerome Amir Singh, David McQuoid Mason, Glenda Gray, Basil Pillay, Marizvikuru Manjoro, Adeyemi Aremu, Keagan Pokpas, Sershen Naidoo, Pradeep Kumar, Aliza Le Roux, Anthony Pillay

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### **Background**

On 29 June 2021, South Africa's Constitutional Court ruled that South Africa's former President, Jacob Zuma, was guilty of contempt of court for refusing to appear before the Secretary of the *Judicial Commission of inquiry into Allegation of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector*. The Constitutional Court sentenced Mr Zuma to 15 months imprisonment for his contempt. In the aftermath of Mr Zuma's imprisonment on the evening of 8 July 2021, civil unrest and looting unfolded in various parts of the country, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

SAGE classifies the civil unrest and looting unfolding in various parts of South Africa as an emergency situation. In the opinion of SAGE, the current situation also meets the definition of a 'disaster', as defined in South Africa's Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002: "natural or human-caused occurrence which (a) causes or threatens to cause – (i) death, injury or disease; (ii) damage to property, infrastructure or the environment, (iii) disruption of the life of a community; (b) is of a magnitude that exceeds the ability of those affected by the disaster to cope with its effects using only their own resources".

This Advisory aims to provide a Situational and Strategic Assessment of the current emergency. We recommend the following actions at this critical juncture.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. SAFETY, SECURITY, JUSTICE, CORRECTIONAL SERVICES, INTELLIGENCE:**

- a. Government should consider declaring affected parts of the country *Disaster Management Areas* in terms of the Disaster Management Act. This will enable the time-sensitive dedication of additional resources to affected regions.
- b. The deployment of 2,500 members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to support the South African Police Services (SAPS) is wholly inadequate. SAGE recommends a significant deployment of the SANDF and SAPS to quell acts of violence, intimidation, and destruction of infrastructure and property. Visible law enforcement could deter acts of violence, threats, intimidation, vandalism, and vigilantism. This will entail drawing on Reserve Force members and close coordination with members of Community Police Forums and the private security sector.



- c. To ensure continuity of operations, wherever possible, authorities must secure national and strategic key-points and critical infrastructure such as power stations, substations, airports, ports, water reservoirs, cell phone communication towers, hospitals, and clinics.
- d. Authorities should institute road blocks to stop and search vehicles for weapons and bomb-making material.
- e. SAPS escorts should be provided for fire fighters attending burning infrastructure, industrial sites, shopping malls, and other buildings.
- f. Government should introduce and enforce a dawn-to-dusk curfew with exemptions for persons engaged in bona fide occupations.
- g. Authorities should engage with civil society organisations and transport representatives from minibus taxi and private bus associations to secure their cooperation in reducing the movement of violent protesters and looters.
- h. Relevant authorities should assume the responsibility of coordinating safety and security activities with the private sector, emergency response services (such as firefighting and ambulance services), community policing forums, and neighbourhood watch forums.
- i. The crime intelligence cluster needs to immediately prioritise the identification of instigators of unrest and those who incite acts of violence, and must liaise closely with law enforcement authorities to ensure their arrest. Law enforcement authorities need to liaise closely with prosecuting authorities to ensure the successful prosecution of all offenders.
- j. Authorities should closely monitor and enhance the security of Correctional Services facilities, especially those facilities where arrested individuals will be incarcerated.
- k. Members of the security cluster should be advised to take all precautions against COVID-19, including mask-wearing and hand sanitiser use. Where possible, security forces should make use of noise amplifiers instead of screaming. Personal Protective Equipment should be provided to all members of the security cluster to enable them to carry out their duties safely.
- l. Correctional Services needs to take additional infection control measures to ensure that incoming detainees who may be infected with COVID-19 do not spread COVID-19 to prison personnel and uninfected incarcerated detainees. This may entail close liaison with health officials, the private sector, and relevant civil society actors.
- m. Threats and weaknesses in the country's crime intelligence services that may have resulted in the current unrest not being flagged for urgent prospective action or the risk being underestimated, need to be urgently identified and addressed.
- n. Unaffected provinces should take proactive measures as a matter of urgency to deter and prevent the emergence of threats, intimidation, violence, looting, and vandalism.



## 2. Transport and logistics

- a. As a result of protest action and civil unrest, trucks and passenger vehicles have come under attack on major roads. This has led to road closures. As a result, many logistics companies have suspended operations. Officials from all levels of government need to urgently devise an effective strategy to secure transport routes and to prevent the logistics industry from coming under attack.
- b. Obstacles on transport routes need to be urgently removed to establish safe corridors/routes to facilitate the movement of security services, emergency services and other critical supply chain role-players. Doing so will enable these parties to carry out their duties safely, effectively, and efficiently.
- c. Road traffic officials and local government police forces, where applicable, need to provide regular visible patrols along roads that have been targeted by violent protesters.
- d. Public transport operations have been suspended in many parts of the country. Authorities need to closely engage with local government and private operators (especially the minibus taxi industry and private bus operators) to restore services as soon as reasonably possible, subject to advisory 1.g, above.

## 3. Energy

- a. Prioritise fuel security. Without fuel, the transport sector will be crippled. This will have a knock-on effect on all sectors of the economy, especially food security and health.
- b. Provide security force escorts for fuel tankers.
- c. Prioritise the security of critical infrastructure such as power stations and sub-stations. Where feasible, critical infrastructure should be subject to camera surveillance. Where possible, members of the SANDF should be deployed to protect critical energy infrastructure from attacks.

## 4. Food and hygiene

- a. Prioritise food security. Food retailers, suppliers, and distributors have been subject to large-scale looting. As a result, supply and distribution networks have been significantly affected.
- b. Ensure that strategic and major food storage and distribution centres are under armed protection and camera surveillance. Where possible, the military should be deployed to protect such facilities from attack.
- c. In particular, prioritise the security and supply of basic essentials such as bread, milk, flour, baby food, and toiletries.
- d. Feeding schemes for vulnerable groups, such the aged and indigent, need to be urgently prioritised.



## 5. Health

- a. Prioritise the security of emergency response services, blood banks, and health facilities.
- b. Ensure critical supply chain continuity. Prioritise the supply of oxygen, blood services, and other essential supplies to hospitals.
- c. Prioritise getting the country's COVID vaccination campaign back on track as soon as possible. Many COVID-19 vaccination sites have been shut down as a result of social unrest and violence. This may necessitate the accelerated accreditation of additional private sector vaccination sites, such as private family pharmacies and general medical practitioners, and by extending week-end vaccination times.
- d. Prioritise the immediate supply of chronic medications for those in urgent need thereof.
- e. Prioritise the immediate provision of mental health support systems. People who are traumatised, distressed and anxious and who have been affected by political and social upheavals will require time-sensitive mental health support. Such support systems should be established as a matter of priority by the state and private sectors.
- f. Mental health sequelae to the unfolding crisis is likely to manifest in due course (for example, depressive and anxiety disorders and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder). These conditions are often not identified immediately and affected individuals, their families and/or their communities will likely have to deal with such conditions in time. Support services established in the short term should be designed to continue after the current emergency. Moreover, a monitoring programme should be established to identify and track such mental health problems. The unfolding instability may trigger cognitive processes and behaviours, such as racial/ ethnic distrust/suspicion/ paranoia. Government must address these issues in an open and clear way, publicly denounce any ethnic/ racial prejudices, and model tolerant, appropriate behaviours. Community resources should be put in place to strengthen communication and relationships between various ethnic groups.
- g. Prioritise the security of critical research infrastructure.

## 6. Community engagement

- a. Political leaders need to be urgently deployed to 'hotspot' regions to engage with community leaders (political, traditional, religious, civil society). All such leaderships structures should collaborate to restore calm and order as soon as possible. Gangsterism, mob violence, looting, and vigilantism should be strongly discouraged.
- b. Crises bring people together if they have a common goal. Government should therefore devise common goals for groups to address the current emergency. Not doing so as a matter of priority risks disparate groups turning against each other.



## 7. Media and communications

- a. Press freedom is critical to South Africa's democracy. Government needs to take urgent action to ensure the safety of members of the media. This should include explicitly denouncing violence and intimidation against members of the media.
- b. Government, the private sector, and civil society need to take urgent measures to stem the proliferation and circulation of 'fake news'. Such reports have the potential of spreading fear, anxiety, and animosity, and fomenting further unrest and acts of vigilantism.
- c. Social media platforms should suspend the accounts of users who propagate fake news and/or incite and instigate violence.
- d. Social media group moderators and users should verify sensationalised reports before circulating them.
- e. Social media personalities and social media 'influencers' should use their influence to appeal for calm and order.
- f. Multi-media communications should be produced in all official languages and in simple, accessible lexicon, to explain the reasons for Jacob Zuma's prosecutions and imprisonment, as well as what he is alleged to have done but refused to clarify before the Judicial Commission of inquiry into Allegation of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud In the Public Sector.
- g. Multi-media communications should be produced in all official languages and in simple, accessible lexicon, to explain the social and economic implications of ongoing unrest, violence, and lootings.
- h. The current emergency speaks to the need for authorities to provide regular updates and information to the public. Such information should be conveyed in plain, simple language, and presented honestly. Updates should not be labelled 'official media briefings' and government officials who present at such events should not be defensive. The public is more likely to forgive errors and shortcomings of those perceived to be genuine and honest.

## Conclusion

South Africa is currently facing an unprecedented social and political emergency in the midst of a rapidly evolving public health emergency. Unless the above interventions are urgently instituted, the country's social, economic, and health fabrics could be irreparably damaged. Everyone in South Africa needs to act with haste to avert this potential disaster.

**About SAGE:** The Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) is housed within the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and is steered by members of ASSAf and the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS). SAGE aims to provide rapid, independent, multi-disciplinary science advice to relevant stakeholders on emergency issues that require strategic attention. SAGE also aims to undertake engagement with relevant stakeholders to create awareness and facilitate resilience in relation to emergencies. In the context of SAGE activities, an "emergency" denotes a serious,



unexpected, and potentially dangerous situation that has either already caused loss of life, health detriments, property damage, or environmental damage, or has a high probability of escalating to cause immediate danger to life, health, property, or the environment. SAGE is supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa, the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), the United Kingdom (UK) Department for International Development (DFID), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Newton Fund, South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), and Fonds de Recherche du Québec (FRQ).

Website: <https://www.assaf.org.za/index.php/2-uncategorised/847-scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies-sage>

Contact: [SAGE@assaf.org.za](mailto:SAGE@assaf.org.za)

**About ASSAf:** ASSAf is the official national Academy of Science of South Africa. ASSAf's mandate encompasses all fields of scientific enquiry and it includes the full diversity of South Africa's distinguished scientists. The Parliament of South Africa passed the Academy of Science of South Africa Act (Act 67 of 2001), as amended, which came into operation in May 2002.

Website: <https://www.assaf.org.za/>

## **MEMBERS OF THE SAGE SITUATIONAL AND STRATEGIC ADVISORY ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA: JULY 2021**

Jerome Amir Singh (SAGE/ASSAf and University of KwaZulu-Natal):

[jerome.singh@assaf.org.za](mailto:jerome.singh@assaf.org.za)

David McQuoid Mason (University of KwaZulu-Natal): [mcquoidm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mcquoidm@ukzn.ac.za)

Glenda Gray (South African Medical Research Council): [glenda.gray@mrc.ac.za](mailto:glenda.gray@mrc.ac.za)

Basil Pillay (University of KwaZulu-Natal): [PILLAYB@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:PILLAYB@ukzn.ac.za)

Marizvikuru Manjoro (University of Venda): [Marizvikuru.Manjoro@univen.ac.za](mailto:Marizvikuru.Manjoro@univen.ac.za)

Adeyemi Aremu (North-West University): [Oladapo.Aremu@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Oladapo.Aremu@nwu.ac.za)

Keagan Pokpas (University of Western Cape): [kpokpas@uwc.ac.za](mailto:kpokpas@uwc.ac.za)

Sershen Naidoo (Institute of Natural Resources): [snaidoo@inr.org.za](mailto:snaidoo@inr.org.za)

Pradeep Kumar (University of Witwatersrand): [pradeep.kumar@wits.ac.za](mailto:pradeep.kumar@wits.ac.za)

Aliza Le Roux (University of Free State): [LeRouxA3@ufs.ac.za](mailto:LeRouxA3@ufs.ac.za)

Anthony Pillay (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health): [Anthony.Pillay@kznhealth.gov.za](mailto:Anthony.Pillay@kznhealth.gov.za)

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