Trade Unions and Democracy in South Africa: Union Organizational Challenges and Solidarities in a Time of Transformation

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Abstract

Based on a nationwide survey, this article focuses on the perceptions of COSATU members on two of the central issues that have dominated debates on the South African labour movement: the advisability of COSATU's Alliance with the ANC and the extent of internal union democracy. The survey revealed that the ANC-Alliance continues to enjoy mass support, whilst internal democracy remains robust. At the same time, the federation faces the challenges of coping with – and contesting - neo-liberal reforms, retaining and reenergizing rank and file in the post-apartheid era, and in reaching out to potential members in the informal sector and other areas of insecure work.

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The South African labour movement has been a source of inspiration to unions worldwide. South Africa's largest and most active union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has retained high levels of penetration in the private sector, and made concerted inroads into the public sector. At the same time, the federation has faced the challenges of coping with – and contesting - neo-liberal reforms, retaining and reenergizing rank and file in the post-apartheid era, and in reaching out to potential members in the informal sector and other areas of insecure work.

There are many ways of explaining union effectiveness and potential: these could include comparisons of legal contexts, and broad analyses of membership trends, bargaining outcomes and the incidence of industrial disputes (Godard 2004; Rigby et al. 2004). However, central to understanding union strength – and indeed, industrial relations more generally – are the orientations of workers, how they conceptualize their interests, and the manner in which this is reflected in organizational culture and structure (Kelly 1998: 23; Kelly and Frege 2004: 182-183; Gall 2003: 2). Whilst there is a considerable body of literature on unions in South Africa (c.f. Bramble and

Barciesi 2003; Donnelly and Dunn 2006; Baskin 1991; Von Holdt 2002), most of this work has focused on an analysis of general trends, or on detailed case study based research. In contrast, based on a nationwide survey, this article focuses on the perceptions of COSATU members on two of the central concerns that have dominated debates on the South African labour movement: the advisability of COSATU's alliance with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the extent of internal union democracy[i] (Barchiesi and Bramble 2003; Donnelly and Dunn 2006; Baskin 1991; Von Holdt 2002; Buhlungu 2006b; Hlatswayo 2005). These two issues are related to each other in that the ANC-Alliance will only be sustained if the rank and file support it and/or if the latter are disempowered within union structures (ibid.). Any engagement with political parties by unions invariably leads to compromises, which may necessitate unions reigning in rank and file and/or grassroots pressures that will contest – and potentially break – any centralized deals (Harcourt and Wood 2002; Von Holdt 2002; Buhlungu 2006b; c.f. Olson 1982). These issues will, in turn, affect the extent to which the unions can impact on national level policy, and the degree to which they can attract and retain members, and effectively

represent their interests (Hlatswayo 2005; Von Holdt 2002; Barciesi and Bramble 2003; c.f. Gall 2003: 2).

Background: The Rise of COSATU

The history of South African trade unions prior to 1973 is one of exclusive unionism, punctuated by periodic attempts to promote more broadly based alternatives and to build a common unity. South Africa's first unions were organized by immigrant white craft workers. An early tradition of militancy culminated in the 1922 Rand Rebellion, with white miners seizing central Johannesburg, only to face an outright military assault including aerial bombing. A political backlash led to a historic compromise between white workers, state and business being forged, whereby the former traded off militancy in return for job protection on race lines (Simons and Simons 1969). This compromise was embodied in the 1924 *Industrial Conciliation Act*, which provided for centralized industry level bargaining, but excluded Africans (as they were not defined as employees in terms of the Act): whilst centralized bargaining had many benefits, this made for complacency, and a neglect of workplace organization (Webster 1986). This was backed up by the proliferation of statutory racial job reservation,

with white workers relying on their political clout to secure their privilege on the grounds of race (Wilson 1972).

Yet, this only constitutes one strand of South African labour history. There were numerous attempts made to specifically organize black workers. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) of the 1920s made impressive gains, albeit among a wide category of workers, including farm workers and peasants (Bonner 1978). It centred on the personality of a single individual; attempts to broaden the leadership and organizational base led to destructive leadership squabbles (Bonner 1978). By the late 1920s, it had experienced an equally rapid decline in its fortunes; attempts to relaunch the union made only limited headway (Bonner 1978).

If the lessons of the ICU were to avoid an over-reliance on a single charismatic personality, and to concentrate on core factory workers, communist initiated unionization attempts in the 1930s highlighted the difficulties of broadening leadership beyond a small coterie of dedicated activists and overcoming concerted opposition from employers. Hence, whilst the Federation of Non-European

Trade Unions of the 1930s, and its successor, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), proved somewhat more stable, they never succeeded in establishing a meaningful presence beyond a handful of workplaces (c.f. Simons and Simons 1969). The politically more pragmatic South African Trades and Labour Council provided a brief and fragile umbrella for all unions in South Africa, white and black, but split apart in 1947 on racial issues (Lewis 1984: 1). The formation in 1955 of the South African Congress of Trade Unions brought together the remnants of the CNETU unions, some of the more progressive former SATLC unions, and a few small unaffiliated unions. As such, it represented an attempt to revitalize the idea of non-racial trade unionism, but, had a very narrow base in the factories, and was over-reliant on leadership. Again, it highlighted the limitations of national level campaigning at the expense of factory level organization, the challenges of broadening leadership, and the difficulties in overcoming concerted state and employer resistance (Lambert 1988; Feit 1975). In the early 1960s, it was forced into exile by the apartheid government (Lambert 1988; Feit 1975). This left African workers largely unorganized, with most organized white, coloured and Indian

workers being divided between unions that were bureaucratic and quiescent and those that were fiercely racist.

In the early 1970s, a number of new independent worker service organizations sprung up, run by a combination of academics, students and former trade union officials; these soon developed into trade unions focusing their attentions on the largely unorganized African majority (Maree 1987: 3). In attempting to remobilize workers, these activists were informed by the experience of previous organizational failures: hence, a strong premium was placed on shopfloor organization and democracy, as a means of overcoming the problems that earlier unions faced with over-centralization and in linking national concerns with the day to day grievances of workers (Maree 1987: 3; Friedman 1987: 87-90). The shopfloor democracy practiced in the 1970s was different to its present manifestation in that shopstewards then had no legal protection, and, hence could be readily victimized by employers (and indeed, could face arrest and detention without trial by the authorities). In turn, this meant that organizational structures were kept as flat as possible (to avoid the easy elimination of a small strata of leaders), with strong a emphasis being placed on worker

education to train future leaders (Cooper 1995; Ruskin College 1972).

These unions could be divided into three broad strands. Firstly, there were those unions that were particularly orientated to shopfloor issues and were cautious in dealing with national political issues (the ‘workerist’ unions) (Maree 1986). Secondly, there were unions which focused specifically on organizing black workers (‘black consciousness’ unions). Thirdly, ‘populist’ unions drew in members by linking workplace injustices with wider political campaigns against apartheid, increasingly in line with the political tradition of the then exiled ANC. By the early 1980s, limitations with all these approaches came apparent. The ‘workerist’ unions proved best-equipped to deal with state repression and employer resistance, but they were not immune to arbitrary action by the authorities, and faced growing pressures by members to articulate their political concerns (Maree 1986; Friedman 1987; Baskin 1991). The revival of the ANC’s non-racial agenda in the early 1980s eclipsed the ‘black consciousness’ movement, leaving most unions in this tradition with a choice between marginalization or shifting to one of the two other alternatives (ibid.). Finally,

whilst the ‘populist’ unions accurately reflected the political sentiments of rank and file, a neglect of factory organizing made them particularly vulnerable to state repression (c.f. Roux 1984). All this put the different strands of unionism in a mood for compromise, making for a unionism that emphasized both grassroots democracy and a need to engage with wider political issues (Friedman 1987). Hence, most of the unions in these traditions banded together to form COSATU in 1985 (Baskin 1991: 66-67; COSATU 1985: 43-44). The independent unions recorded an impressive growth through most of the 1970s and 1980s, despite occasional setbacks, most notably as a result of the post Soweto uprising (1976) wave of repression, and the defeat of the 1987 miners’ strike (Baskin 1991: 224-240; c.f. Markham and Mothibeli 1987: 58-95). COSATU unions rapidly penetrated the public sector in the late 1980s and 1990s, and have retained impressive penetration rates in large areas of the service and manufacturing sectors, despite the shock of large scale job losses in the latter following the scaling back of protective tariffs in the early 1990s.

Figure 1 provides details on changes in union density[ii]: it can be seen that, despite significant drops in some areas such as transport, union density rates in COSATU’s

heartlands – mining, manufacturing and services – remain high, and indeed, appear to have stabilized in the former two areas after, in the case of manufacturing, some years of decline. However, overall union membership has dropped in mining: by some 15% since 2001 (NALEDI 2006).

Figure 1: Trade Union Density in South Africa

{* insert figure 1 about here}

Within COSATU, there are 21 unions, with an overall membership of 1.8 million (c.f. COSATU 2007). In addition to broad industrial unions spanning the above sectors, it has some very small affiliates, covering areas diverse as football players and actors; the medical doctor's professional association, the South African Medical Association (SAMA) is also a COSATU affiliate. Some 30% of COSATU's members are women, although they are under-represented in leadership (NALEDI 2006: 40). Only 15% of COSATU members are below 35, reflecting high levels of youth unemployment; 70% of members are Africans (ibid.:40).

The Legal Context

As noted earlier, as early as the 1920s, South African labour law made provision for centralized collective bargaining; however, Africans were excluded up until 1979 (Friedman 1987: 149-179). Faced by the challenge of the independent unions, and the increasing costliness of an arbitrary racial division of labour, the then apartheid government attempted to deracialize a large component of the legislation governing industrial relations (see Wiehahn Commission 1979). Under the *Wiehahn reforms*[iii], embodied in the 1979 *Industrial Conciliation (Amendment) Act* and the 1981 *Labour Relations Act,* trade unions with black workers were for the first time allowed to register and participate in the industry-wide bargaining structures (Thompson 1989). The establishment of an Industrial Court provided a forum for arbitrating industrial disputes; a subsequent series of progressive court decisions confirmed, inter alia, the right to strike and the duty of employers to bargain with representative trade unions (Thompson 1989). An initial reluctance of the unions to register, and hence participate in official bargaining structures, was soon abandoned, as it came clear that the benefits – in terms of entrenching the role of the unions in individual workplaces and securing bargaining rights – outweighed the risks from

participating in official structures during the apartheid era (Baskin 1991; Friedman 1987).

Meanwhile, the apartheid government's hopes of draining away factory level militancy through opening up centralized bargaining, in the same manner as the 1924 reforms did for white unions, proved unrealistic (c.f. Jouvelis 1982). The reasons for this were simple: whilst after 1924 white workers could further the interests of their members through supporting specific political parties, and championing racial job reservation, in the 1980s, blacks continued to be denied meaningful political rights, whilst widespread petty workplace racism underscored the link between political and workplace injustice (Webster 1987). Quite simply, the government failed to politically incorporate the unions (Webster 1987). Members' shared experience of collective injustice and internal democracy impelled union leadership towards more explicitly promoting socio-political change (Hirschsohn 2001: 442; Webster 1987). Heavy handed police repression in efforts to put down mass strikes in the mines, post office and railways further alienated the unions, as did an attempt to limit the scope the Industrial Court and to make the unions liable for punitive damages in the event of secondary

strike action through the *Labour Relations Amendment Act* (no. 83) of 1988. The temporary incapacitation and forced resignation of the hardline PW Botha in an internal power struggle within the ruling National Party led to the more pragmatic FW De Klerk becoming President. Goaded by a severe economic crisis, and the fact that covert talks with the exiled African National Congress (ANC) had revealed that a political settlement was possible, De Klerk unbanned the ANC, its junior partner, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and a plethora of other organizations, and initiated a process of national negotiations.

This, in turn, led to COSATU entering into a formal Alliance with the ANC and the SACP. The National Party underestimated the Alliance as a negotiating partner: events such as the collapse of the bantustans impelled major concessions, leading to a political settlement, with democratic elections being held in 1994. Meanwhile, COSATU entered into talks of its own with employers and other stakeholders to reverse the 1988 Act, and agree on a new labour relations act that would have greater legitimacy: this led to the 1995 Labour Relations Act (LRA). COSATU was happy to back up its demands at both these sets of negotiations with nationwide community and workplace

protests: hence, COSATU followed a strategy of strategic engagement with the continued use of collective action (Hirschohn 2001: 444).

This engagement continues to operate at two levels, in addition to workplace and industrial level collective bargaining. Firstly, at the national political level, the Alliance persists between the unions and its political partners: it gives COSATU unions representation at ANC Congresses and the opportunity to nominate a proportion of the ANC's parliamentary candidates list (McKinley 2002). Secondly, the National Economic, Development, and Labour Advisory Council (NEDLAC), was established in 1995; this provides a forum for negotiation between business, state, and unions. Although it was intended that this body play a broadly corporatist role, it has failed to live up to expectations in recent years; the attendance of key players at NEDLAC meetings has tailed off (Mail and Guardian 29/5/2005). This probably is due to the fact that robust economic growth and political stability have reduced the need for major compromises by business and the state (Harcourt and Wood 2002; c.f. Naidoo 2003). This process of engagement with employers and political parties has not led to an institutionalized process of regular dialogue,

negotiation and deal making as is commonly associated with corporatist countries: agreements between state, labour and unions remain ad hoc and episodic, with many new government policies simply being imposed (Nedlac 2006: 5; c.f. Harcourt and Wood 2002; McKinley 2002). In turn, this makes the potential for the unions to impact directly on government policy via the Alliance even more important.

Crisis and Decline?

Current debates on the tactics and effectiveness of the independent unions centre on three broad areas. Firstly, there is the advisability of the tripartite alliance per se[iv] (Habib and Taylor 1999; Barchiesi and Bramble 2003; McKinley 2002; Von Holdt 2002; Buhlungu 2006b; Hlatswayo 2005). Secondly, there is the durability of shopfloor democracy given inevitable oligarchic tendencies, and the day-to-day compromises made by shopfloor leadership (Ratchleff 2001: 156-157; Barchiesi and Bramble 2003; Hlatswayo 2005; Cooper 2005). Many of the critics of the Alliance directly link it to an apparent crisis of shopfloor democracy (Barchiesi and Bramble 2003;; Hlatswayo 2005; Rachleff 2001; Habib and Taylor 1999; McKinley 2002). A third area concern, the federation's inability to make

headway in areas other than among full time permanent employees in the formal sector (Buhlungu 2006b: 9; Webster 2006: 38), is beyond the scope of this article. However, it should be noted that formal employment constitutes a diminishing proportion of the South African labour market. Moreover, wholesale job shedding in the private sector following on the cutting back of protective tariffs has greatly reduced the pool of potential union members, and caused drops in overall union membership levels in many areas (Webster 2006: 21-23).

The Crisis of the Alliance?

South African labour legislation is highly progressive, making provision for centralized bargaining, and a system of dispute resolution that enjoys a high degree of legitimacy. The centerpiece of South African labour legislation is the 1995 LRA, which extended existing labour legislation; it retained industry specific Bargaining Councils, a system of mediation-centered dispute resolution (via the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration {CCMA}), and a works council system (known as workplace forums), albeit that the latter only had limited impact (Wood and Mahabir 2001). Progressive features of the system include organizational and bargaining rights for

unions (including legal recognition of the role of the shop steward), and rights to adjudication via the Labour Court (which, in turn, has further expanded worker rights via case law). It is worth noting the COSATU ranks promulgation of the LRA as amongst its greatest achievements (COSATU 2007). The CCMA has dealt with 400 000 cases since its inception, handling an average of 414 cases per day (South Africa Info 2007). Not only does COSATU fully support the Bargaining Council system, but favours its extension to sectors that are not covered by them (Vavi 2007). Finally, the Labour Court has expanded worker rights through case law.

The system incorporates strong elements of voluntarism – inter alia, the maintainence of centralized bargaining in a specific industry is contingent on the support of the principal unions and employer associations - and has had little effect on employers in the small business and informal sectors (Appollis 1995: 48). More generally-speaking, employers retain a relatively free hand to make redundancies. However, despite pressures from conservative sections of business and the opposition Democratic Alliance, the ANC has resisted demands for radical labour market deregulation. Indeed, earlier a number of loopholes

in the 1995 Labour Relations Act, which, inter alia, allowed employers to escape the Act's provisions by classing workers as independent contractors (see Donnelly and Dunn 2006) have now been closed. Again, the process of privatization has been cautious and incremental – in part due to the problems experienced in attempting to privatize the telecommunications utility, Telkom, but also due to sustained union opposition - in sharp contrast to the radical measures introduced in many other emerging markets (Southall 2007: 214; Buhlungu 2004: 1-27). Both the maintainence – and expansion – of progressive labour legislation and the restraints on privatization represent, at least in part, the efforts of the ANC's alliance partners (Southall 2007: 215; Buhlungu 2004; Buhlungu 2006).

However, the Alliance has not brought benefits to the unions in other areas (Habib and Taylor 1999). Following on the ANC's victory in the 1994, it replaced its neo-Keynsian Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in favour of the more-overtly neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Restribution (GEAR) policy (Burawoy 2004). Reforms include the phasing out of protective tariffs, a less active industrial policy, and the introduction of New Public

Management practices in the public sector. Finally, despite impressive GDP growth figures (up to 5% in recent years), unemployment remains extremely high (some estimates place it at over 40%) (EIU 2007); the ANC's inability to make serious progress on the latter front remains an abiding challenge and (see Donnelly and Dunn 2006) and a residual source of tension with union leaders and community based grassroots organizations (Desai 2002).

What threatened to be a major showdown between the unions and the ANC, a major public sector strike over wages and working conditions in June 2007 ended, after protracted talks, in the unions accepting the government's final 7.5% pay offer (Business Day 21/6/2007). COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi summed up the unions' position as: '…no strike has ever been entirely successful…it is the view of (Cosatu's) national office bearers that the draft agreement in its totality represents some progress and gains' (quoted in ibid.).

This experience underscored both the challenges the unions faced in sustaining large scale collective action, but also demonstrated the unwillingness – and, perhaps, inability –

of the ANC to firmly break with the unions. Interestingly, the strike also involved several non-COSATU white-dominated unions, perhaps a harbinger of an emerging non-racial class solidarity.

The unions were instrumental in the non-reelection of Thabo Mbeki as ANC leader (but not national President) in 2007, primarily on account of his poor performance on the job creation front, his open espousal of neo-liberal policy solutions, and his handling of the Aids issue. However, his replacement, Jacob Zuma, has made many promises to different constituencies, including business (Mail and Guardian 14/12/2007); there is little reason to believe that he will be any more labour friendly than his predecessor, demonstrating both the paucity of leadership alternatives at national political level and the extent to which the unions remain wedded to the existing Alliance.

The Crisis of Shopfloor Democracy?

A second critique leveled against COSATU is that strong oligarchic tendencies have emasculated the internal participatory democracy within its affiliates (Hlatswayo 2005; Rachleff 2002).

Management are under increasing pressure – inter alia, in terms of Employment Equity[v] legislation – to be seen to be advancing blacks into management; meanwhile the ending of apartheid has opened up new careers in government and the public sector. Both these phenomena have created a serious 'brain drain', with the position of shop steward becoming a good stepping stone to management or government (c.f. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2007: 246; Ndala 2002: 76). In sectors such as mining, the position of a full-time shop (shaft) steward is not only a route into management, but also a well paid position in its own right: this serves as a residual source of tension for those left behind (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2007: 251). More broadly speaking, there many former part time positions in the labour movement are now full time and paid, changing the ethos of serving the union (Roskam 2002: 10-11). Less attention is paid to 'learning by organizing and struggle' worker education than in the 1970s, with union educational efforts being more directed to human resource development, with an underlying ethos promoting a 'competitive individualism…depoliticized and stripped of its class identity' (Cooper 2005: 2; c.f. Hlatswayo 2005: 16-18). However, there is no accurate numerical information as to the precise extent of the 'brain drain', or of the effects

of changes in worker education, and their consequences have been contested by union sources (c.f. COSATU 2000; Mabyana 1999).

Secondly, many COSATU unions have had to contend with internal struggles. In the 2000 Volkswagen and 2001 Engen strikes, workers challenged agreements made between the leadership of the union and management, electing new shop stewards to represent the rank-and-file better (Hlatswayo 2005: 17; Rachleff 2001: 165; Desai 2000). Whilst the Volkswagen strike led to a defeat for rebel union members, in other sectors, radical breakaway unions have emerged, such as the Oil, Gas, and Chemical Workers Union. It has been argued that shopfloor structures for democracy and recall have become so unresponsive that the only meaningful option is exit (Rachleff 2001: 166; Desai 2000; Hlatswayo 2005). Others have pointed to deep cleavages amongst members, inter alia on gender lines, and between urban dwellers and migrant workers (Von Holdt 2002; 2003). Again, Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2007: 246-251) point to the extent to which new opportunities for upward mobility have eroded internal solidarity in the labour movement. Hence, it has been argued that at a time when unions have the greatest potential to impact on society, their internal

organizational democracy been challenged (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2007: 246-251).

Statement of Hypotheses

Given the above, two ‘pessimistic’ hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 1

Worker participation in shopfloor democracy is low, and with inadequate structures for accountability and recall.

And

Hypothesis 2

Most COSATU members have reservations regarding the tripartite alliance in general and the ANC in particular.

Method

The *Taking Democracy Seriously* surveys represent the only regularly conducted and nationwide surveys of members of what is by far South Africa’s largest and most effective

union federation, COSATU. Previous surveys were conducted in 1994 (see Ginsburg et al. 1995) and 1998 (see Wood and Psoulis 2001); the survey that forms the basis of this article was conducted in 2004 (see Buhlungu 2006b: 1-4). A full discussion of the history of these surveys, and further details on the survey methodology may be found in Buhlungu (2006b). The 1994 survey revealed high levels of internal democracy both within long-standing affiliates in the manufacturing and mining sector and more recent affiliates in the public sector, and a solidification of political support behind the ANC in the run-up to South Africa's first ever democratic elections (Ginsburg et al. 1995). The 1998 survey revealed the persistence of both internal democracy and existing political loyalties in the immediate post-transition period (Wood and Psoulis 2001).

As with the previous surveys, the 2004 survey focused on members of COSATU countrywide. In all, 655 union members were interviewed in 2004 (see Buhlungu 2004: 4). However, the 2004 encompassed very much large numbers of public sector workers (35% of the sample) reflecting the expansion of the unions into this area (Buhlungu 2004: 4). Other sectors covered included mining (7.8%), manufacturing 16.5%), catering and retail (8.3%), transport and

communication (2.2%), chemicals (1.7%), clothing and textiles (13.3%), food (4.4%), and banking (0.5%).

The support of COSATU nationally was obtained, and this information communicated to COSATU affiliates' regional offices. Interviews were conducted at workplace level. Area sampling was used. Firstly, this was done at the level of five geographical regions (the country's five principal provinces, where most of the population and industry are located). Secondly, within these areas, individual unionized workplaces were randomly selected, within specific sectors (see Wood and Psoulis 2001: 299-301; Buhlungu 2006b: 4). In 1994, a list of organizations was compiled from directory information supplied by Telkom, the South African parastatal telecommunications utility, on sectoral lines; this listing of firms was updated in 1998 and 2004, to take account of entries and exits (Telkom make available electronically {in 1994 this was on floppy disks} listings of firms compiled for directory purposes). This listing would exclude very small businesses in the informal sector that lacked telephones; at the same time, such businesses would be most unlikely to have a union presence at all. Companies were then randomly selected within each sector, and contacted to see if they were unionized by a

COSATU affiliate; where this was not the case, they were discarded and substituted by another randomly selected organization, and the same check performed.

Employers were then consulted to organize access to the workplace. The final level of sampling was done at individual workplace level, on a systematic basis, with the number of workers selected being proportional to workplace size. As we did not have access to accurate union membership lists, systematic selection of respondents enabled us to compile the sample during the interview process (Bailey 1982: 93-94). Almost all workers approached indicated that they were happy to be interviewed; the high degree of homogeneity of views of respondents in individual workplaces helped ensure the representivity of the sample. However, it is recognized that, as the survey depended on the goodwill of management and union leaders, it is possible that workers who were consistently hostile to both could have been excluded from the survey.

The multi-layered nature of the survey methodology may be difficult to justify on strictly technical grounds:

however, it represented the most feasible option under the circumstances (Wood and Psoulis 2001).

It was not possible for the 1994, 1998 and 2004 surveys to constitute a panel study owing to the large numbers of redundancies, and, indeed, the high exit rate of firms in a number of industries, such as textiles, where the dropping of protective tariffs has proved severely detrimental; the problem of 'panel mortality' would have proven insurmountable (Bailey 1982: 110). Instead, the consecutive surveys constitute trend studies (Babbie 1995: 96; Bailey 1982: 110). It is recognized that trend studies do have limitations, in that it is not possible to compensate for the consequences of different sets of workplace dynamics in different workplaces selected over time. However, a chi-squared analysis of the effects of changes over time revealed in most areas, changes in worker attitudes and were slight (only a few percentage points), and can probably be ascribed to sampling errors (see Buhlungu 2006a: 227-248); at the same time, the high degree of similarity in responses in most areas over time would seem to vindicate the sampling process. More significant changes occurred in a small number of areas[vi]. Appendix 1

provides a breakdown of the age race, gender and skill composition of the 2004 sample.

Measuring Participatory Democracy in Unions

As Morris and Fosh (2000: 96) notes, there are four alternative perspectives on participatory democracy in unions. Firstly, there are *Liberal Pluralist* approaches. These suggest that the extent of participatory democracy reflects whether or not a union has a democratic constitution (all COSATU unions have to, as a condition of affiliation), voting mechanisms (Stepan-Norris 1997: 476-477), the degree of membership participation in elections (Morris and Fosh 2000: 96), and/or meetings in general (Seidman 1953: 222). Parks et al (1995: 536) argue that a temporal dimension is necessary (e.g. when last did a member participate in an election or attend a meeting).

Lipset (1952: 61) argues that members are likely to be able to impact on union policy when there are clear alternative positions and camps within a particular union that members may choose to opt for: institutionalized opposition ‘permits a degree of direct membership influence on organization policy through their ability to overturn a

union government' (Lipset 1952: 61; a similar point is made by Taft 1944: 248). In turn, this may be reflect by whether, how often, and how closely elections are contested (Stepan-Norris 1997: 477- 480; Seidman 1953: 223).

A second viewpoint, the *Consumer Trade Union* one considers members as consumers of union services (Morris and Fosh 2000:97). Members need not be involved in decisions for it to be democratic, as long as leaders know what members want. Where membership is voluntary, it may be assessed as to how successful it is in getting or retaining them (Morris and Fosh 2000: 97). As can be seen from figure 1, most COSATU unions have been highly effective in recruiting and retaining members through most of the 1990s and 2000s. However, most accounts would suggest that active participation is a behavioural manifestation of union commitment, rather than membership retention per se (Parks et al. 1995: 535).

Thirdly, *Grassroots Activism* approaches look at how active members are in decision making, in seeking to actively control their officials and delegates, and in participating in union affairs (Morris and Fosh 2000: 97; Fairbrother 1983: 24); in other words, the extent to which rank and

file actively seek to directly determine policy (Seidman 1957: 35).

Finally, as Morris and Fosh (2000: 98) note, conservative *individual accountability* views hold that the rank and file are inevitably more moderate than leaders (Morris and Fosh 2000: 98); a lack of interest in union affair may mask climate of intimidation (Taft 1944: 251). Hence, the degree of democracy is dependent on mechanisms such as secret ballots (Morris and Fosh 2000: 98).

These categories are not exclusive: there is much overlap between them, and through taking account of these different perspectives, it is possible to develop a composite measure of participatory union democracy (Morris and Fosh 2000: 112-113). Key issues emerging from the above include levels of attendance at union meetings, the regularity of elections, the degree of membership participation in elections, the use of secret ballots, and grassroots demands for accountability and recall.

A Mokken scale was estimated using each individual's responses to these 9 key questions as follows:

Item 1 Is there a shop steward in the workplace?

Item 2 Are shop stewards elected by the workers?

Item 3 Are they elected at least annually?

Item 4 Have you actually voted in an election within last 2 years?

Item 5 Is the election by secret ballot?

Item 6 Do you expect that shop stewards must consult with workers on all, or at least important, issues?

Item 7 Do you expect that shop stewards must report back to workers?

Item 8 Do you believe that you have the right to remove shop stewards if they do not do what the workers want?

Item 9 Do you attend union meetings at least on a monthly basis?

This scale is constructed using Mokken's non-parametric model for one dimensional cumulative scaling (Sijtsma and Molenaar 2002). A Mokken scale is used since the majority of the questions have dichotomous responses. The other items have a range of responses dependent upon the frequency of that particular event. Unfortunately it is impossible to include both types of responses within a consistent scale, hence the remaining items are reduced to binary responses and a Mokken scale adopted. This generates

a scale ranging from 100 for those respondents recording ‘yes’ for all nine items, zero for those recording all ‘no’ answers and a position somewhere in between for the vast majority of respondents with a mix of answers. Their relative position in the scale is then determined by their number of positive responses and the relative scarcity of positive responses to each of those survey questions, (Gooderham et al 2006). Therefore each respondent is placed in the scale on the basis of whether they have shop stewards in their workplace, how the shop steward gained their position and how long for, how the respondent expects the shop steward to discharge his/her responsibilities, as well as whether the individual respondent regularly attends union meetings. There are other aspects of participatory democracy, for example having access to union materials and literature, and informal open ended participation in union related issues (Parks et al. 1995: 536), as well as being able to act on that information, but unfortunately there were no questions relating to this in the survey[vii].

Once the scale was calculated, it was then used as the dependent variable and a regression model estimated using ordinary least squares on a vector of explanatory variables covering union, gender, age, province, occupational status,

security of tenure, education and mother tongue. Of these the only continuous variable is age, all of the other categories are controlled for using a set of dummy variables, with each one recorded below in Table 1. For each group the reference category is highlighted in bold type.

{* insert table 1 about here}

It needs to be noted that the union variables also act as a proxy for industrial sector, since the COSATU policy of promoting industry unions means that membership of most of these unions implies working in a particular industry.

In order to formally test the second hypothesis, i.e. gauge the level of support for the tripatite alliance and the ANC respectively, a similar method is adopted. Firstly, a Mokken scale of support for the alliance is constructed using the following terms;

Item 1 Should COSATU and its affiliates send representatives to the national parliament?

Item 2 Should COSATU and its affiliates send representatives to the provincial parliament?

Item 3 Should COSATU and its affiliates send representatives to local government?

Item 4 COSATU has entered into an alliance with the ANC and the SACP to contest the 2004 elections. Do you think it is the best way of serving workers' interests?

Item 5 Do you think the alliance should continue for future elections beyond 2004?

Item 6 Are you going to vote for the ANC in the forthcoming (2004) national elections?

Secondly a similar scale is created for ANC support using these items;

Item 1 Are you going to vote for the ANC in the forthcoming (2004) national elections?

Item 2 Are you going to vote for the ANC in the forthcoming (2004) provincial elections?

Item 3 Do you think that the alliance, at least with the ANC should continue for future elections beyond 2004?

The resultant scales are then used as the dependent variables in OLS regressions on the same explanatory variables as the earlier model, thus they are estimated as

a function of union, gender, age, province, occupation, security of tenure, education and mother tongue. Appendix 2 gives the survey questions utilized and responses.

Findings

The results from estimating a Mokken scale of empowerment are recorded below in Table 2. The first test of the validity of the scale is Loevinger's H-coefficient of homogeneity, (H_{wgt}), which is recorded for each individual item as well as for the overall scale. The minimum acceptance criterion is an H-value of at least 0.3 (Sijtsma and Molenaar, 2002). In the initial estimation of the scale item 5, election by secret ballot, falls below this criterion, hence this item is omitted and the scale re-estimated. Once this is done all of the remaining items satisfy this and the H-value for the overall scale of 0.42 indicates that the scale is robust in terms of scalability. It is also important to test for the reliability of the indicators; as the Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 is comfortably above the standard minimum of 0.7, there is no reason to doubt the reliability of the scale (Sijtsma and Molenaar, 2002).

{* insert table 2 about here}

Table 3 records the results from estimating the second scale measuring the level of support for the COSATU, ANC and SACP alliance. This comfortably satisfies both the scalability and reliability criteria: hence the scale can be accepted as a valid measure. It is interesting to note that there is very strong support for the alliance by union members with in the region of 2/3rds of the respondents believing that the alliance should continue and that it best serves their interests.

{* insert table 3 about here}

Finally, Table 4 reports the results from estimating the support for the ANC scale and once again this satisfies the scalability and reliability criteria. There are also indicators of strong support for the ANC within union members, 2/3rds intending to vote for the ANC at national level, with even more intending to at the provincial level and supporting a continuing alliance at least with the ANC.

{* insert table 4 about here}

As all three scales are acceptable in terms of scalability and reliability they are included as dependent variables and the three models are estimated as outlined in the

previous section. The results from estimating these regression models using ordinary least squares are reproduced below in Table 5.

{* insert table 5 about here}

As the explanatory variables are the same in each case the results from all 3 models are included in Table 5. The coefficients and t-ratios are recorded firstly for the participatory democracy model, then for the alliance scale model and finally for the ANC scale model. The final column reports the means of the explanatory variables. In all three cases the reference category is a Xhosa speaking skilled male NUMSA member in Gauteng with a permanent full-time contract and educated up to Std 9-10.

The results suggest that to a large extent the level of participatory democracy for COSATU members is unaffected by the explanatory variables, with only 14% of the variation in the scale being explained by these variables. Generally, levels of participation in union affairs remain high, with 70% of respondents attending union meetings at least monthly and over 90% believing that their union representatives must consult the members. Why is participation in union affairs so high? The most likely

explanation would be the ‘virtuous circle’ one: people are more likely to participate if they feel their input has impact, and that structures for the election of representatives, and avenues for their recall are functional, and less so if this is not the case (Burnell 2003b: 13-18). This does not mean that internal democracy can be taken for granted; indeed, research conducted at community level in South Africa has highlighted a propensity for individuals to retain a belief in participative democracy, whilst becoming increasingly disillusioned with their elected representatives and their structures, opening the way for ‘growing cynicism and political demobilization’ (Southall 2003: 151).

In terms of the different categories of variable, firstly, being in a different union is relatively unimportant with only CWU (Communication Workers' Union), SATAWU (South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union) and POPCRU (Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union) reaching any level of significance. All of these unions having significantly higher levels of participatory democracy when compared to the NUMSA base group.

Province is also largely unimportant with only members in KZN experiencing levels of participatory democracy below those of other provinces; this echoes the findings of earlier surveys, and could reflect the difficulties the unions have encountered in the face of sustained hostility by the conservative Inkhatha Freedom Party (although those within the union movement in that province remained overwhelmingly supportive of the Alliance). Thirdly, age, mother tongue and gender are generally insignificant, indicating they are largely irrelevant to the level of participatory democracy. Occupation also has very little impact upon the extent of participation in union affairs with only clerical workers being significantly different from the skilled worker base group and experiencing less democracy in the workplace.

Fourthly, tenure has very little impact, although fixed term full-time is negative and significant and permanent part-time is positive and significant, these only cover about 7% of the sample with the vast majority being on permanent full-time contracts. Finally education becomes important for those at the highest levels, with those holding technical diplomas or university degrees being likely to be employed within a more democratic environment.

Whilst members of COSATU affiliates are mostly semi-skilled or skilled workers, they do have significant pockets of support amongst workers with tertiary education in finance, transport and medicine: shopfloor democracy in such sectors is relatively new, as it is amongst highly skilled workers in general in South Africa; it is a relatively under-investigated phenomenon, and deserves closer examination in future.

Admittedly some of the participatory democracy scale is either subjective or reflects factors that the individual member is unable to influence. Consequently it is plausible that Item 4, voting in shop steward elections, and item 9, regularly attending union meetings, are much stronger indicators of commitment to the union since it requires the member to carry out a particular action. In response to this possibility the empirical analysis was repeated, this time using Item 4 and Item 9 individually and respectively as the dependent variable in the model. The findings were entirely consistent with those from the participatory democracy scale model; strong levels of commitment are shown across the board with hardly any of the control variables having a significant impact.

There is fairly broad satisfaction with the alliance, as reported in Table 3 almost 2/3rds of respondents express clear support for the alliance and their wish for it to continue. Turning to the regression results, again the explanatory variables are relatively unimportant, with the level of support being largely unaffected by age, gender, province, occupation, tenure and education. What is significant though is that the level of support is even higher amongst NEHAWU (National Health and Allied Workers Union) and NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) members. The NUM in particular has traditionally been amongst the strongest proponents of the alliance and this is confirmed here. In addition the level of support for the alliance is significantly lower amongst Afrikaans speakers and, in particular, English speakers; this would reflect the very much lower support for the ANC-Alliance among South Africa’s non-African population.

Finally, turning to the analysis of support for the ANC, Table 4 has already revealed that there is strong and solid support present. The regression results indicate that the level of support is consistent across, province, tenure and education. However the ANC does have lower levels of support amongst women, English speakers and Afrikaans

speakers, the latter two being consistent with the level of support for the alliance highlighted earlier. At the same time the level of support is significantly higher amongst semi-skilled workers, SACTWU (South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union), NEHAWU and NUM members, once again the last two concur with the level of support shown for the alliance.

The survey revealed both the persistence of high levels of participation in union life, and loyalty to the ANC-Alliance. As Morris and Fosh (2000:111: 112) note, effective participatory democracy is a complex phenomenon, encompassing involvement in union affairs and elections, regularity of elections and electoral procedures, and an active desire by members to be involved in decision making and policy setting, and through holding their representatives to account. It is likely that at least part of the success of the COSATU unions in retaining a large numerical following can be ascribed to their ability to combine these features in a manner that would be conducive to encouraging future participation and involvement in union affairs (c.f. Hammer and Wazeter 1993: 302; Burnell 2003b: 13-18; Kelly and Heery 1994). Democratic constitutions and secret ballots can make participation

more meaningful; high levels of attendance at union meetings and regular elections make for frequent opportunities to exercise these rights. Exercising these rights is, in turn, more meaningful in an environment where there are general expectations of grassroots input, accountability and recall (c.f. Fairbrother 1983: 24).

Conclusions

The survey revealed that the ANC-Alliance continues to enjoy mass support, whilst internal democracy remains robust. Based on the survey, we cannot conclude that the Alliance has been sustained by disempowering members, or that a vibrant culture of internal democracy and recall has not persisted (c.f. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2007: 246-254). But, why is participatory democracy so important for determining the future of organized labour in South Africa? Especially since other factors, such as the dearth of credible political leadership alternatives, the continued hegemony of neo-liberalism, stubbornly high unemployment, and difficulties in outreach to the informal sector all pose long term challenges for unions? It can be argued that grassroots participatory democracy has been central to the identity of the independent unions since their

inception (Naledi 2006; Baskin 1991; Wood and Psoulis 2001; Maree 1986). It is this that enabled them to overcome apartheid-era repression, to mobilize mass support behind the ANC Alliance in successive elections, and to cope with high levels of leadership turnover as positions in management and government have opened up to union activists. Quite simply, the independent unions would not be what they are without grassroots participatory democracy: a crisis of the latter would represent a discontinuity from an inspiring tradition, and, indeed, undermine one of the few mechanisms that has the potential to counterbalance the authoritarian tendencies inherent in dominant partyism and neo-liberalism.

Can we then conclude that the South African labour movement is ‘doing just fine’? Regretably, the truth is more complex. Firstly, market reforms have weakened the state’s ability to actively manage the economy, and have, as noted above, resulted in large-scale job shedding, undermining the base of union membership (Southall 2003: 148). In South Africa, unemployment stands at about 39%, an increase of almost 7% since the end of apartheid (Kingdon and Knight 2006). Not only has the pool of potential union members got smaller, but so has the ability of the state to promote

social inclusion (c.f. ibid.). In a dominant party system, the most realistic option may be working through – and within – the ruling party, a realism which appears to be shared by most COSATU members. However, this will inevitably result in competition and trade offs with other constituencies; a relatively small political leadership elite makes for a lack of meaningful alternatives to the present, reducing the chance of a radical recasting of government policy. Secondly, whilst internal democracy within the unions may be relatively vibrant, there are a number of challenges to be faced. Traditional activist education and training has given way to managerialist HRD (Cooper 2005); this will result in changes in the portfolio of skills and leadership style of office bearers. Regular internal elections may reflect not just a viable democratic culture, but the effects of high turnover, making skills portfolios of potential leaders critical. The survey also revealed that women were less active in union affairs, explaining their under-representation in leadership. Again, an ability to retain – and to effectively represent existing members – has not been matched by an ability to reach out to those in the informal sector, and the jobless (c.f. Desai 2002).

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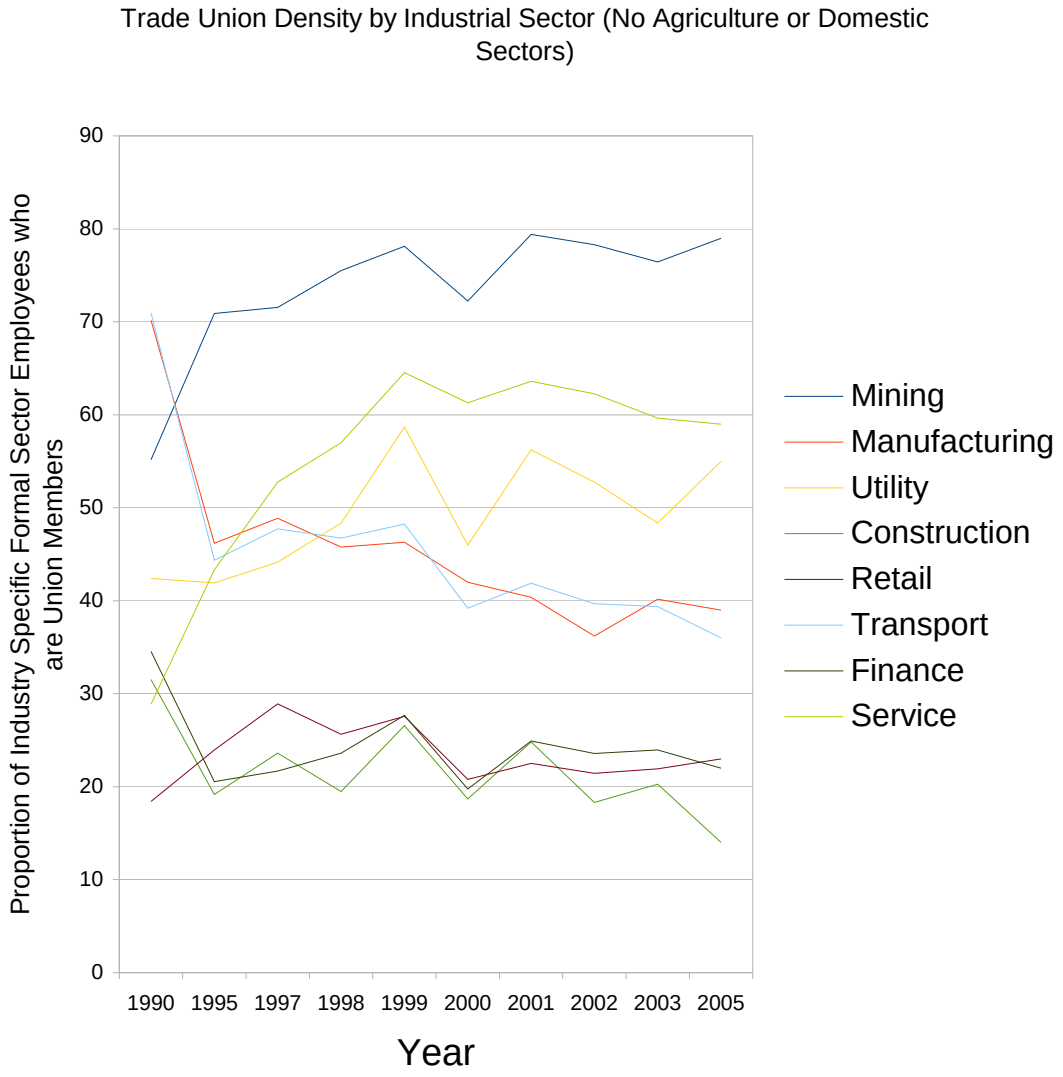
Figure 1



(Sources - Dibben, Hinks and Wood 2007: 11, computed based on October Household Surveys and September Labour Force Surveys; Naledi 2006: 40; the authors).

Table 1: Dummy Explanatory Variables

Variable	Categories
Union	Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPWAWU), Communication Workers Union (CWU), Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), Health Care Union (HOSPERSA), National Teaching Union (NATU), (NEHAWU), National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), **National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA),** Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU), South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU), Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union(SACTWU), South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU)
Gender	**Male**, Female
Province	**Gauteng**, North West Province, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape Western Cape
Occupational Category	Unskilled, Semi-skilled, **Skilled**, Supervisor, Clerical
Security of Tenure	Fixed term and part-time, Fixed term and full-time, Permanent and part-time, **Permanent and full-time**
Educational Level	No formal education, Std 2 or lower, Std 3-5, Std 6-8, **Std 9-10**, Technical diploma, University degree, Other qualification
Mother Tongue	IsiZulu, SeSotho, **IsiXhosa**, IsiNdebele, SePedi, SeTswana, Tsonga, IsiSwati, Venda, English, Afrikaans

Table 2: Participatory Democracy Scale

		Mean	H_{wgt}	Corr.
Scale	Overall calculative scale, 8 items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82)		0.42	0.3
Item 3	Elections at least annually	0.26	0.45	0.23
Item 4	Voted in elections within last 2 years	0.58	0.45	0.4
Item 9	Regularly attend union meetings	0.7	0.31	0.29
Item 7	Shop Stewards must report back	0.79	0.31	0.3
Item 2	Elected Shop Stewards	0.88	0.48	0.47
Item 8	Right to remove Shop Stewards	0.92	0.36	0.32
Item 6	Shop Stewards must consult	0.94	0.61	0.52
Item 1	Shop Stewards in the workplace	0.95	0.59	0.49

Table 3: Support for Alliance Scale

		Mean	H_{wgt}	Corr.
Scale	Overall calculative scale, 6 items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78)		0.52	0.35
Item 5	Alliance should continue	0.63	0.52	0.52
Item 4	Does alliance best serve workers' interests?	0.64	0.54	0.53
Item 6	Voting for ANC in national elections	0.71	0.4	0.2
Item 2	Should COSATU send reps to the provincial parliament?	0.85	0.56	0.73
Item 3	Should COSATU send reps to the local parliament?	0.85	0.55	0.68
Item 1	Should COSATU send reps to the national parliament?	0.86	0.62	0.71

Table 4: Support for ANC Scale

		Mean	H_{wgt}	Corr.
Scale	Overall calculative scale, 3 items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82)		0.65	0.52
Item 1	Voting for ANC in national elections	0.67	0.47	0.43
Item 2	Voting for ANC in provincial elections	0.71	0.74	0.83
Item 3	Alliance, at least with the ANC, should continue	0.71	0.74	0.81

Table 5: OLS Models of Participatory Democracy, Alliance and ANC Support

Variable	Coeff.	T-ratio	Coeff.	T-ratio	Coeff.	T-ratio	Mean
Constant	50.32***	7.2	71.56***	8.7	56.74***	5.7	
Age	0.10	0.8	-0.03	-0.2	0.21	1.2	38.83
Union							
CEPPWAWU	-3.13	-0.6	8.52	1.4	10.30	1.4	0.05
CWU	16.56***	3.0	-5.29	-0.8	-1.60	-0.2	0.05
FAWU	7.81*	1.6	-2.58	-0.4	-9.94	-1.4	0.07
HOSPERSA	9.78	0.9	-10.02	-0.8	-10.01	-0.7	0.01
NATU	3.09	0.3	-15.92	-1.2	-21.08	-1.3	0.01
NEHAWU	-3.05	-0.6	17.11***	3.0	22.87***	3.3	0.07
NUM	0.12	0.0	23.64***	2.5	26.68***	2.4	0.08
POPCRU	14.14***	3.6	2.71	0.6	7.84	1.4	0.13
SACCAWU	0.12	0.0	11.17*	1.8	12.28*	1.7	0.06
SACTWU	2.98	0.7	6.98	1.4	14.70***	2.5	0.12
SADTU	1.93	0.3	6.87	1.1	7.37	0.9	0.07
SAMWU	2.82	0.6	6.27	1.1	12.64*	1.9	0.07
SATAWU	15.70***	2.5	10.52	1.4	17.32*	1.9	0.03
Gender							
Female	-3.58	-1.5	-1.11	-0.4	-7.19**	-2.1	0.35
Province							
North West Province	4.34	0.5	-4.98	-0.5	1.39	0.1	0.07
KwaZulu-Natal	-12.18***	-3.0	-6.78	-1.4	-7.40	-1.3	0.14
Eastern Cape	-2.97	-0.7	2.87	0.6	3.51	0.6	0.20
Western Cape	1.98	0.5	-0.65	-0.1	0.33	0.1	0.22
Occupation							
Unskilled	-2.10	-0.6	2.56	0.6	4.16	0.8	0.13
Semi-skilled	2.86	1.0	4.99	1.5	7.68**	2.0	0.25
Supervisor	-1.51	-0.4	0.63	0.1	-0.75	-0.1	0.09
Clerical	-9.52***	-2.4	-4.23	-0.9	-6.33	-1.1	0.08
Security of Tenure							
Fixed term and part-time	-10.89	-1.2	-17.33*	-1.7	-19.20	-1.5	0.01
Fixed term and full-time	-12.35***	-2.5	3.39	0.6	-1.28	-0.2	0.05
Permanent and part-time	17.64**	2.2	12.85	1.3	22.10*	1.9	0.02
Education							
No formal education	-4.57	-0.3	-2.95	-0.2	-13.00	-0.6	0.00
Std 2 or lower	-5.95	-0.8	-11.10	-1.2	-9.20	-0.9	0.02
Std 3-5	-5.51	-1.1	0.82	0.1	-6.62	-1.0	0.06
Std 6-8	-0.95	-0.3	1.50	0.5	3.03	0.8	0.28
Technical diploma	6.28*	1.8	2.62	0.6	3.40	0.7	0.13
University degree	10.08**	2.0	5.84	1.0	10.59	1.5	0.07
Other qualification	0.82	0.2	2.80	0.5	3.11	0.5	0.06
Mother Tongue							
IsiZulu	2.30	0.5	0.37	0.1	4.56	0.7	0.22
SeSotho	0.12	0.0	-7.35	-1.3	-0.31	0.0	0.08
IsiNdebele	11.59	1.0	-4.24	-0.3	5.43	0.3	0.01
SePedi	-2.00	-0.4	0.09	0.0	5.51	0.7	0.07
SeTswana	-2.41	-0.5	-9.80*	-1.6	1.84	0.2	0.06
Tsonga	8.78	1.2	0.17	0.0	4.27	0.4	0.02
IsiSwati	9.02	0.6	-10.88	-0.6	-9.79	-0.5	0.00
Venda	6.67	0.6	-15.44	-1.1	-32.15*	-1.9	0.01
English	-4.12	-0.9	-21.79***	-4.2	-35.39***	-5.7	0.08
Afrikaans	1.72	0.4	-12.07***	-2.6	-18.96***	-3.4	0.13
Dependent Variable	Democracy		Alliance Scale		ANC Scale		
Mean	55.89		73.01		70.59		
Number of Observations	628		628		628		
R-squared	0.14		0.14		0.22		

*, ** and *** denotes significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Appendix 1: Gender, Age, Skill and Home Language of 2004 Sample

GENDER

YEAR **GENDER**	2004
Male	430
Female	225

AGE

YEAR **AGE**	2004
18-25	37 *6*
26-35	198 *30*
36-45	259 *40*
46-55	130 *20*
56-65	29 *4*
65+	2 *0*

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY AS DEFINED BY COMPANY

YEAR **OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY**	2004
Unskilled	81 *12*
Semi-skilled	169 *26*
Skilled	275 *42*
Supervisor	61 *9*
Clerical	55 *8*
Other	13 *2*

MOTHER TONGUE (HOME LANGUAGE)

YEAR **HOME LANGUAGE**	2004
IsiZulu	150 *23*
SeSotho	52 *8*
IsiXhosa	203 *31*
IsiNdebele	7 *1*
SePedi	44 *7*
SeTswana	39 *6*
Tsonga	15 *2*
IsiSwati	3 *1*
Venda	6 *1*
English*	54 *8*
Afrikaans*	80 *12*
Other	2 *0*

* Indo-European languages are the mother tongue of South Africa's non-African ethnic minorities (whites, coloureds and Indians).

APPENDIX 2: Survey Questions and Responses

(FIGURES IN ITALICS REPRESENT PERCENTAGES ROUNDED OFF TO THE NEAREST DECIMAL PLACE)

DO YOU HAVE SHOP STEWARDS IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

YEAR **HAVE SHOP STEWARDS**	2004
Yes	627 *96*
No	16 *3*

IF YES, WERE THEY ELECTED?

YEAR **METHOD OF ELECTION**	2004
Elected by workers	574 *92*
Other Appointed by union officials	53 *8*

IF ELECTED, HOW OFTEN ARE ELECTIONS FOR SHOP STEWARDS HELD?

YEAR **HOW OFTEN**	2004
Once a year	172 *28*
Less than once a year/ cannot remember	447 *72*

WHEN LAST DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN ELECTING YOUR SHOP STEWARD? – WITHIN LAST 2 YEARS

YEAR **WHEN LAST**	2004
Within Last 2 years	383 *67*
More than 2 years ago/never	186 *33*

IF YOU ELECTED SHOP STEWARDS, HOW DID YOU ELECT THEM?

YEAR **HOW ELECTED**	2004
Show of hands	295 *50*
Secret ballot	294 *50*

WHEN YOU ELECT A SHOP STEWARD (ON AT LEAST IMPORTANT ISSUES…

YEAR	2004
…s/he must consult you from time to time on important issues	625 *99*
…s/he does not have to consult you because s/he is elected to represent your interests	8 *1*

DO YOU EXPECT THAT SHOP STEWARDS MUST REPORT BACK TO WORKERS EVERY TIME S/HE ACTS ON THEIR BEHALF?

	2004
Yes	531 *83*
No	109 *17*

IF A SHOP STEWARD DOES NOT DO WHAT WORKERS WANT, THE WORKERS SHOULD HAVE A RIGHT TO REMOVE HER/HIM.

YEAR	2004
Yes	610 *96*
No	25 *4*

HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND UNION MEETINGS? (AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH

YEAR **FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE**	2004
At least once a month	465 *74*
Less than once a month	163 26

SHOULD COSATU AND ITS AFFILIATES SEND REPRESENTATIVES TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENT?

YEAR	2004
Agree	571 *92*
Disagree	57 *8*

SHOULD COSATU SEND ITS REPRESENTATIVES TO PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT/LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT	Provincial Parliament	Local Government
Agree	562 *90*	561 *90*
Disagree	64 *10*	64 *10*

COSATU HAS ENTERED INTO AN ALLIANCE WITH THE ANC AND SACP TO CONTEST THE 2004/1998/1994 ELECTIONS. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS ARRANGEMENT?

YEAR	2004
It is the best way of serving workers interests in parliament	427 *69*
Not the best way	190 *31*

DO YOU THINK THE ALLIANCE SHOULD CONTINUE AND CONTEST THE ELECTION AFTER 2004

YEAR	2004
Yes	417 *69*
No	191 *31*

WHICH PARTY ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE FOR IN THE FORTHCOMING (2004) NATIONAL ELECTIONS?

YEAR	2004
ANC	472 *92*
Other	42 *8*

WHICH PARTY ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE FOR IN THE FORTHCOMING (2004) PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS?

YEAR	2004
ANC	468 *91*
Other	46 *9*

Endnotes

[i] A third major concern – on the relative ability of unions to reach out to those employed in the informal sector and the unemployed – falls beyond the scope of this article (c.f. Webster 2006; Desai 2002).

[ii] Although closed shop agreements are legal when two-thirds of employees have voted in favour of them, in most cases, union membership is voluntary; even in the case of a closed shop agreement, individual employees are permitted to refuse to join on conscientious grounds (Department of Labour 2007a: 1).

[iii] Named after the Wiehan Commission of Enquiry.

[iv] Whilst often referred to as the 'ultra left', critics of the Alliance and the perceived unresponsiveness of COSATU leadership to the rank and file, include both activists and intellectuals working within sections of the labour movement and the South African Communist Party, orthodox Trotskyists and unaligned thinkers. A grouping of scholars associated or linked with the University of Witwatersrand's Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP) have been closely identified both with the unions and with work defending COSATU's policies and structure (Habib 2007: 12-13). However, whilst placing a strong emphasis on empirical rigour (c.f. Webster 1997), SWOP-based research has not been uncritical, pointing to both internal divisions in the unions (Von Holdt 2002) and the problems the unions are experiencing in outreach (Webster 2004).

[v] The 1998 Employment Equity Act requires designated employers (those with 50 or more workers), and the public sector (excluding security services) to provide equal employment opportunities and to take 'reasonable' measures to ensure equitable representation at all levels (Department of Labour 2007b).

[vi] Most notably in the following areas:

- In 1994, 76% of respondents felt that shopstewards should consult very time they acted on behalf of workers; by 2004, this was down to 63%. This could reflect a greater 'trust' in the structures of representative democracy (c.f. Burnell 2003a: 255).
- Attendance at union meetings: by 2004, workers were less likely to attend union meetings weekly, but fewer workers never attended meetings than was the case in 1997. However, overall attendance levels remained generally high. For logistical reasons, we excluded COSATU's smallest affiliates and SAMA.

We used close ended questions (except in a few instances, the results of which were not used for this paper), with the responses being recorded by the interviewer in the relevant box for later data capture. The survey was funded by SANPAD *(*South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development).

[vii] Respondents were also asked whether they had served as shopsteward. 26% had, a roughly similar figure to the 1998 survey. We also asked respondents if they had been involved in local government, community development, or participatory initiatives beyond the workplace as a union delegate – 8% had.