

Opportunities for violent collective action can *decrease*, even under conditions of environmental scarcity, when the power of potential challenger groups is diffused by vigorous horizontal interaction within society and vertical interaction between civil society and the state. However, if poor socio-economic conditions persist, grievances will remain. These grievances will probably be expressed through an increase in deviant activity such as crime. Unless they are addressed, the legitimacy of the government will decrease, society will once again become segmented, and opportunities for violent collective action will correspondingly increase.

## THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA

Although South Africa experienced a relatively stable transition to democratic rule, violence within the black South African community has escalated steadily since the 1980s. This violence increased at precisely the same time that many anticipated the transition to a more peaceful society — upon the release of Nelson Mandela, the end of the ban on political activity, and the official end to apartheid. Conflict became more intense and spread throughout the country. Analysts have overlooked the role of environmental problems as a contributor to social instability in South Africa. Environmental scarcity is not the sole cause of the country's recent turmoil. But policy makers and social analysts who ignore environmental problems risk missing a factor that powerfully contributes to the violence.

Figure one presents the impact of environmental scarcities in South Africa's rural areas. Apartheid created homelands in areas with few natural resources. Resources were also inequitably distributed within the homelands themselves, as elites controlled access to productive agriculture and grazing land. Populations sustained themselves through subsistence agriculture with added remittances from family members working in industry and mines outside the homelands. Homeland agricultural producers suffered from a chronic lack of investment capital, were denied access to markets, and lacked knowledge of appropriate land-use management techniques — a product of discriminatory education and agricultural extension services. Opportunities to move into urban areas were restricted by influx control; these restrictions combined with high fertility rates to increase population densities. Soils were fragile and susceptible to erosion. Inadequate supplies of electricity and fossil fuels forced people to use fuelwood, which became more scarce. Rural poverty escalated as agricultural and grazing productivity declined from land degradation, and daily water and energy needs became evermore difficult to satisfy.

This rising scarcity of vital environmental resources boosted incentives for powerful groups within the homelands to secure access to remaining stocks — a process known as resource capture. Land rights were traded for political favours in the homelands' highly corrupt system of political rule. The combination of overpopulation, depleted resources, and unequal resource access resulted in ecological marginalization: to survive, people migrated first to marginal lands within the homelands — hillsides, river valleys, and easily eroded sweet veld; then, as the Apartheid system began to show signs of limited reform in