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Nation building in post-conflict settings

Evidence from South Africa

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Abstract: How do states rebuild nations after a major conflict? Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have emerged as one of the most common interventions to achieve this objective. Despite their popularity, little is known about their efficacy to foster reconciliation and nation building. We fill this gap by studying the seminal TRC established in South Africa after the end of the Apartheid. To measure exposure to TRC across South African municipalities, we leverage quasi-random variation in media coverage of the TRC message. South African municipalities with higher historical exposure to TRC on media have lower levels of violence today. This effect is driven by improved nation building and higher trust towards post-Apartheid institutions. Exploiting daily variation in TRC hearings and mediatic exposure in the short run, we bolster our interpretation that our long-run results are forged in the years of TRC activity. The same evidence suggests that our results are driven by the coverage of TRC on media as opposed to generic media exposure.

Key words: nation building, post-conflict reconciliation, trust, South Africa, Truth and Reconciliation Commission

JEL classification: D74, F63, O55

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1   Introduction

Democratizing states ridden with systemic oppression and violence poses many challenges at once. Among others, these states face low levels of legitimacy, which in turn are associated with weak state capacity, low economic security, and the risk of relapse into violence (Besley and Torsten 2011). To overcome these challenges, practitioners reckon that a crucial step involves the reconciliation of former oppressors and victims (ICTJ 2014). The ability to move past old cleavages is the watershed between sustained democratic development and the backslide into illiberal and oppressive regimes.

Since the 1970s, one of the most influential interventions to foster reconciliation has been the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs). TRCs are a form of restorative justice built to 'pave the way for victims to heal and former combatants to reintegrate into society' (ICTJ 2014). They do so by establishing facts, offering different groups an opportunity to tell their stories, and presenting a shared narrative of the past. In the last decades, more than 40 countries have implemented TRCs to deal with their past—from post-conflict societies to established democracies.[1] However, critics have questioned the efficacy of TRCs despite how widespread they have become. Indeed, some scholars argue that the reconciliation they foster is only cosmetic, whereas others contend that they could be even detrimental to former victims (Stein et al. 2008; Stanley 2001). Understanding the short- and long-run effects of TRCs on reconciliation, nation building, and development is key to settle the debate on one of the most ubiquitous reconciliation interventions in use. Yet, systematic empirical evidence on TRCs is scarce.

We fill this gap by studying the iconic TRC instituted in South Africa after the end of Apartheid, a regime that lasted from 1948 to 1994. Apartheid was founded on systemic racial segregation, where the Afrikaans minority systematically oppressed non-white South Africans. During this period, non-white citizens suffered extreme violence, mass evictions, and severe restrictions on their freedom. Following the end of the Apartheid regime in 1994 and the democratic transition steered by Nelson Mandela, a TRC was instituted in 1995 to work towards reconciliation and lay the foundations for an inclusive South African national identity. The work of the TRC lasted until 2000, was heavily mediatized, and was largely followed in South Africa and across the globe.

The main obstacles to study TRCs is selection into treatment and the lack of systematic data on the individuals involved in the trials. We overcome these obstacles by exploiting the large media coverage that followed the TRC in South Africa. Simultaneously to the work of the commission, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) aired a TV program and a radio program aimed at divulging the activities of the TRC to the wider population. The SABC programs covering the TRC instantly became some of the most followed programs in Africa's history (Verdoolaege 2005). We construct quasi-exogenous variation in signal strength of the SABC programs carrying information on the TRC across South African municipalities. Using several data sources, at the individual and the municipality level, we are able to study short- and long-run effects of the media exposure to the TRC on violence, nation building, and economic development.

We find that historical SABC media coverage helps in reducing the intensity of violence. Starting in 2010, South Africa experienced a swift increase in insecurity and violence. We compare South African municipalities that, for idiosyncratic reasons, received good media coverage of the programs divulging the TRC to those that had poor media coverage during the years of the TRC. One standard deviation increase in SABC signal strength is associated with a reduction in total violence by 0.7 episodes per thousand capita, approximately 20 per cent of a standard deviation. While our results display a signif-

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[1] For example, the United States and Canada chose to institute a TRC to investigate human rights violations against descendants of Native Americans, while Sierra Leone also established a TRC in 1999 following an 11-year-long civil war.

icant effect on average, we uncover strong heterogeneity depending on the racial composition of South African municipalities. We construct a measure of racial fragmentation that proxies the degree of inter-racial contact within a municipality at the baseline year (1996). Using this measure, we find that racially homogeneous areas drive the effect of SABC media coverage on violence. In contrast, SABC coverage has no effect on racially fragmented municipalities.

We provide evidence consistent with a causal interpretation of our results. First, conceptually, our identification strategy relies on idiosyncratic variation related to topography (Olken 2009; Durante et al. 2019). We account for the direct effect of geography at the receiving location, the distance to the stations, and the rest of the observables of the transmitting antennas. The excess variation we exploit is driven by the mix of topography between the antennas and the receivers. Second, we show that our identifying variation is orthogonal to a host of pre-determined characteristics at the baseline year. We scrutinize variables measuring demographics (including race and ethnic languages), income, education, basic public goods provision, and night lights. Out of almost 30 point estimates, none are statistically different from zero at standard significance levels.

In the rest of the analysis, we carry out three exercises to understand mechanisms behind our results on violence. First, we rule out the presence of a pure economic channel. Indeed, we find no relationship between SABC media exposure and night lights, unemployment, or the provision of basic services to households. Second, we dig deeper into a nation-building channel and find empirical support for it. Finally, we examine contemporaneous effects of the TRC during the years of the trials. We confirm that exposure to the TRC decreases violence and spurs nation building. Moreover, this allows us to establish that the effects we observe are driven by the TRC itself and not by a generalized media effect (Hara 2023).

Employing data from Afrobarometer, we look at the effect of TRCs on nation building and trust in the decade following the end of the trials. Overall, we document that SABC media coverage positively affected these outcomes, though with opposite patterns by race. Black individuals felt that being South African became more salient than their own ethnicity but do not show higher trust towards the institutions of the new state. White respondents do not feel more South African but do show higher trust for key institutions such as the Parliament, the President, or the Electoral Commission. We interpret these results as evidence that TRC worked in the respectively *right* dimension for each race: on one hand, black South Africans, historically at the margin of South African society, have higher sense of national identity. On the other hand, whites are persuaded that the new state, now almost entirely headed by black South Africans, can be trusted.

We repeat our heterogeneity analysis along racial fragmentation on our nation-building outcomes and find a pattern that helps explain our long-run results on violence. While black respondents feel more South African independently of the racial fragmentation in their municipality, white respondents display heterogeneous response to the TRC message. In particular, white South Africans living in racially fragmented municipalities have no higher trust for institutions and feel less South African. On the contrary, white individuals living in more racially homogeneous areas show higher trust and a higher sense of national identity. These results help us rationalize the shape of the TRC's efficacy in the context of rising violence. While TRC works well for both races in racially homogeneous areas, it fails to positively affect, or even deteriorates, the beliefs of white South Africans concerning the post-Apartheid state.

In our last empirical exercise, we examine violence and nation building during the years of the TRC activity. With this analysis, we shed light on the salience of a TRC for South Africans who apprehensively followed the work of the TRC through media. Crucially, this exercise also helps us bolster our interpretation that our results are not driven by generic media exposure but by specific exposure to TRC-related content.

We carry out this exercise by focusing on the exposure to Radio 2000 stations, the SABC radio stations dedicated to disseminating the activity of the TRC hearings live. We implement a two-way fixed effects model exploiting daily variation in the presence of hearings and the geographic coverage of Radio 2000 across wards. In this empirical framework, we exploit two types of outcomes that vary by day and by ward: episodes of violence and the Afrobarometer survey in the last year of the trials (2000). Our short-run results align well with what we uncover in the long run: first, we show that exposure to TRC content decreased violence. Areas with access to Radio 2000 on hearing days have 30 per cent fewer outbreaks of violence relative to the mean. Second, higher exposure to the TRC boosted positive perceptions about the commission's work among black South Africans. On the contrary, other South Africans seemed more hesitant about the role of the TRC in overcoming the Apartheid past. We interpret these results as evidence that our long- and medium-run results were forged during the days of the TRC activity through the intense and dedicated coverage that the media devoted to the trials.

Taken together, these results highlight that media exposure to the TRC had an important impact on South African society in the short and in the long run. While we find that the TRC reduced violence and spurred nation building in aggregate, we also show that areas where reconciliation might have been more important—racially mixed municipalities—show no positive effect of the TRC. In particular, our results suggest that TRC exposure on media had zero or negative effects on nation building and trust on the white minority in racially mixed areas. Investigating attitudes in the years of the trials, we find that white South Africans did not approve the work of the TRC, a result consistent with what we find in the rest of the study. Our results suggest that reconciliation interventions like TRCs might have limited impact on the part of the society that is most closely related to the former oppressors. This is an important cautionary tale in settings where the wealth, human capital, and resources of the country are disproportionately in the hands of the minority that does not participate in the reconciliation process.

This project relates to at least three strands of literature. First, we contribute to the literature on nation building. While diversity is often seen as detrimental to the well functioning of societies (Alesina and La Ferrara 2005), a growing body of the literature investigates how ethnic cleavages can be overcome. However, most of the policies that have been shown to promote nation building require established state capacity to be implemented effectively—something that is lacking in many transitioning and post-conflict countries.[2] Notable exceptions include studies that document the promises and pitfalls of propaganda (Blouin and Mukand 2018; Esposito et al. 2021) and shared experience (Depetris-Chauvin et al. 2020) in promoting national unity. We add to this literature by studying the effects of a TRC, an institution that has been widely promoted in settings with lacking state capacity.

Second, our study speaks to the literature on post-conflict interventions and peace building. Closely related to this work is the quantitative literature that evaluates the effectiveness of different restorative justice policies.[3] Existing works have shown how reconciliation and trust in the government can be enhanced by museums (Balcells et al. 2022) and symbolic politics (Rahnama 2022). However, such policies also entail the risk of a political backlash (Villamil and Balcells 2021; Rozenas and Vlasenko 2022; Kitagawa and Chu 2021) and can have negative consequences on mental health (Brounéus 2010). Most closely related to this work, Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi (2016) show that interventions similar to TRCs can have a positive effect on community-level reconciliation at the expense of negative effects on mental health. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to study the short- and long-run effects of a widely run TRC on the population at large. A sizable part of our contribution to this literature is to relate the TRC intervention to outcomes in real life such as violence.

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[2] For a review, see Rohner and Zhuravskaya (2023).

[3] See Section 5 of Rohner and Thoenig (2021) for a broader literature review on the effects of policy interventions on peace building.

In addition to the studies cited above, this project relates to the vast literature on media, in particular those contributions looking at the impact of media on ethnic violence, discrimination, and extremism (Della Vigna et al. 2014; DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007; Enikolopov et al. 2011; Adena et al. 2015).[4] Closely related to our study is the work by Hara (2023), who investigates the impact of the South African media in the early 2000s for language choice and political outcomes. Different from Hara's article, we focus on the programs that specifically spread the message of the TRC and link it to nation building, violence, and reconciliation. We also contribute to a growing literature investigating how media can be used to enlarge the efficacy of policies or interventions (Besley et al. 2021). Our work highlights the salience of media in spreading the message of the TRC and its importance for the South African reconciliation process.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the institutional background; Section 3 describes our data sources; Section 4 presents our empirical strategy; and Section 5 describes our results. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2   Institutional context

2.1   The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

TRCs are now standard post-conflict institutions that are put in place to investigate unresolved cases arising from past human rights violations and provide restorative justice through acknowledging the truth and accountability. In the last years, more than 30 countries have made use of this tool to transit to democracies and to guarantee reparation and no repetition (Wilson et al. 2001).

The South African TRC has been one of the most influential milestones in the history of restorative justice. Created in July 1995 by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, the TRC was tasked to provide a complete picture of the motivations, causes, and dimensions of the human rights violations committed during apartheid. This process included the presumed perpetrators' and victims' motives and perspectives. The ultimate objective of the commission was to bring reconciliation, unity, and prevention of gross human right violation through truth seeking.

The work of the TRC lasted from December 1995 until the presentation in 2002 of the last volume of its final report to the president. The commission started its work by inviting victims of human rights abuses to make statements about their sufferings in the past. More than 21,000 people came forward to talk about their experiences under apartheid, and about 10 per cent were then invited to tell their stories in public hearings. The victims' hearings started on 15 April 1996 and lasted for about two years. At these hearings, a great deal of truth about the past was revealed, which was one of the major contributions of the TRC to the future of the country (Verdoolaege 2005).

Unlike preexisting truth commissions, the South African TRC was the first one with the power to grant amnesty to individual perpetrators who made full disclosure of the truth and essential facts associated with a political objective. The commission received more than 7,000 amnesty applications from former fighters of the security forces, liberation movement, and extreme right. The commission held over 2,500 amnesty hearings and granted amnesty to 849 individuals. Due to the high number of applications, the amnesty hearings finished in 2000 (Tutu et al. 2003).

Notably, the commission's activities were a very public act, a feature that distinguished it from all previous commissions. From the beginning, the commissioners agreed that for the TRC to heal the

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[4] For a review see DellaVigna and Gentzkow (2010).

nation as a whole successfully, its hearings should be made public. Indeed, the objective was not only to render justice to the victims of the apartheid but also to openly discuss South Africa's past after decades of state propaganda and censorship. For this reason, all the hearings took place in public places such as town halls, churches, or civic centres and were accessible to all. In addition, local and international media closely followed the development of the TRC activity, recording all the hearings and playing a pivotal role in advertising the commission's message.

During its mission, the TRC actively promoted a message of national unity and reconciliation. As such, the TRC distanced itself from a purely legalistic and proceduralist approach such as the ones used during the Nuremberg trial. For example, victims were frequently asked at the end of their testimony by the commission's chair whether they forgave the perpetrator. Desmond Tutu, the chair of the commission, frequently insisted on the importance of forgiveness, and religion and prayers were an integral part of the process.

While the commission was supposed to construct a shared narrative of the past, its conclusion has failed to convince all South African society's actors. For example, a large proportion of the White population questioned the sincerity and veracity of the commission's work—many of them thought that the accusations made by the victims during the hearings were exaggerated (Hamber 1998). Among the Black population, many questioned the acceptance of amnesty in exchange for the truth, as illustrated by the fact that several of the granted amnesties would later be challenged in front of the constitutional court (Andrieu 2010). More generally, debates persist on how the TRC defined who the victims and perpetrators were. By focusing on the relationship between victims and perpetrators of human rights abuses, the TRC ignored the even higher number of victims of structural violence during the apartheid period and that many Whites directly benefited from the set of institutions in place during that period, even if they did not commit gross human rights violations (Lanegran 2005).

2.2 Media covergage of the TRC

The considerable influence that the TRC had in South Africa is largely due to the extensive media coverage it received. Its coverage was disseminated through various media outlets, including print, radio, and television. The TRC quickly became 'one of the most mediated events ever taking place in Africa' (Verdoolaege 2005). This extensive coverage of TRC's work was feasible because most hearings and testimonies were held publicly and recorded. Yet, according to the TRC Final Report, radio and TV proved to be the most efficient outlets for reaching millions of South Africans (Tutu et al. 1998), many of whom discovered the truth about the apartheid years for the first time thanks to the TRC after decades of censorship in the media. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was an essential ally during this mediatization process. In the following paragraphs, we explore in greater detail two central pieces in the coverage of the TRC: the *Special Report*, a TV show that provided a weekly summary of TRC's work, and Radio 2000, a radio station that broadcasted daily live broadcasts of the hearings.

Special Report

The most prominent coverage of the TRC on television was the *Special Report*. As the flagship program of the SABC on the work of the TRC, the show quickly became immensely popular and proved key to reaching a broad audience. Aired every Sunday at peak time between 21 April 1996 and 29 March 1998, the duration of the program soon increased from 30 minutes to about one hour. In 1996, the program reached an average viewership of 1.2M and 'had the biggest audience of any televised current affairs program ever broadcasted in South Africa' (Verdoolaege 2005). The *Special Report* showed highlights of what had happened during the TRC in the preceding week. On top of showing hearings and testimonies, journalists would contextualize these interventions, interview other persons (such as

family members), and do additional investigative work. In 1996, the program won a special award from the Foreign Correspondents' Association.

As any media covering the work of the TRC, the *Special Report* was more than merely a means by which the population at large would learn about the TRC. While both voices supporting and disagreeing with the broad reconciliation message of the TRC were represented by the program, the former largely outnumbered the latter (Anderson 2020). As such, the TRC *Special Report* editorial line was largely in phase with the commission's conception that truth was necessary for reconciliation. It became an essential means through which the commission could diffuse its core reconciliation message (Verdoolaege 2005). SABC broadcasted *Special Report* on their first channel—SABC 1—for most of the TRC activity, and no other South African TV channel offered anything similar to *Special Report*.

Radio 2000

Besides television, radio also played a crucial role in promoting and diffusing the message of the TRC to the population at large. According to the Final Report (Tutu et al. 1998), radio was considered the most efficient medium to reach the vastest number of people. Radio broadcasts penetrated all corners of the country in the home languages of most South Africans. Notably, while urban areas learned about TRC from TV, radio proved key for South Africans living in rural areas (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency of media outlet use

(a) Rural   (b) Urban
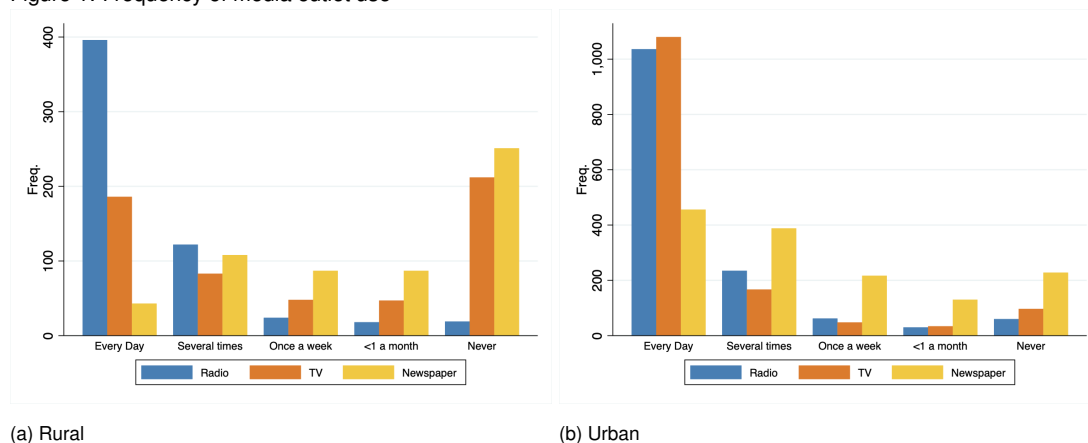
Note: this graph shows the frequency of use of different media. The data come from the first round (2000) of the Afrobarometer.
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources...?
Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

Among all radio stations, Radio 2000 live broadcasted TRC hearings, offering a different type of media coverage of the TRC. While *Special Reports* was crafted and contextualized by SABC journalists, Radio 2000 broadcasted the hearings, presenting an unfiltered version of the TRC message.

3   Data

This section describes our data sources and the construction of the variables used in the analysis. Depending on the exercise we carry out, our unit of analysis is either the municipality or the ward. We have data on 445 South African municipalities and 4,392 wards.

3.1 SABC and Radio 2000 coverage

We obtained data on the location of all TV and radio antennas active in 1996 from the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa. For each antenna, we extract information on their exact location, height, wattage, and frequency of operation. We impute missing information on antennas' height using the average height in the country. From all the antennas active at the time, we focus on SABC antennas transmitting at least one of the two programs educating South Africans about the TRC activity: the TV channel SABC 1 and the radio station Radio 2000, both belonging to SABC. We end up with 363 SABC TV antennas and 68 Radio 2000 antennas (many locations shared the same transmitter). Figure 2 shows the location of the antennas active in the period of interest across South Africa.

Figure 2: Location and wattage of SABC transmitters
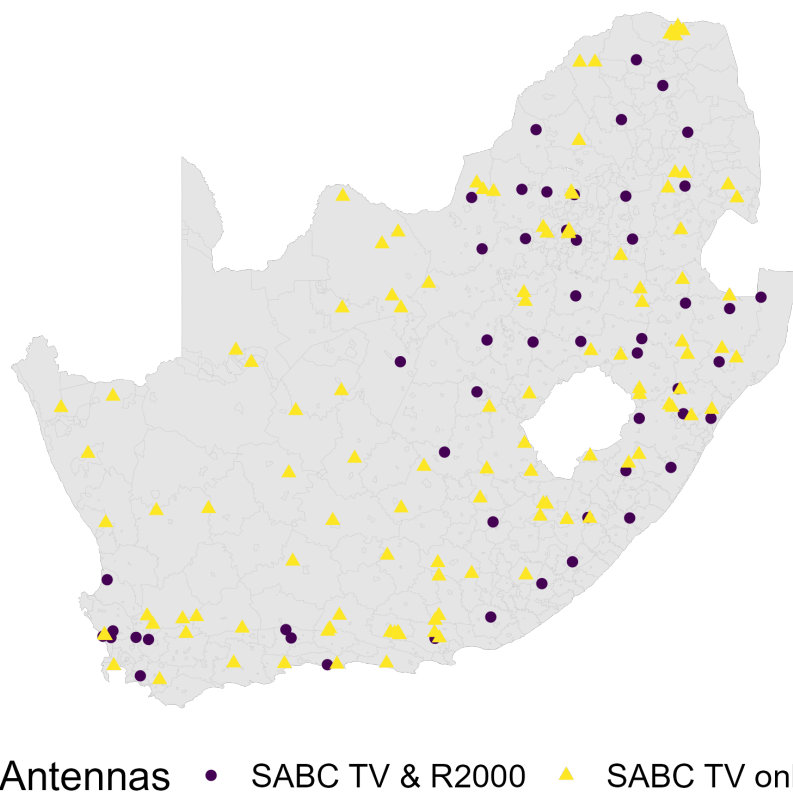
Note: map of all SABC antennas airing programs in 1996. Antennas depicted in lighter colors have higher wattage and antennas in darker colors vice-versa.

Source: authors' compilation based on data.

We employ a standard signal propagation model to compute TV and radio signal strength at the municipality or ward level. The propagation model is the Longley-Rice Irregular Terrain Model (ITM) (Hufford 2002). The ITM's main inputs are the antenna's power and frequency, the distance between transmitter and receiver, and the topography (especially the orography) between transmitter and receiver.

We compute two treatments based on signal strength using the ITM. First, we construct municipality-level SABC coverage by taking the maximum signal strength from all the stations broadcasting TRC-related media. We use this variable as our primary independent variable in the long-run analysis, and we refer to this as the SABC media exposure. Then, we repeat the same exercise but focus on the subset of radio stations broadcasting Radio 2000. We use this variation in the short-run exercise and refer to it as Radio 2000 exposure. We can aggregate radio coverage at the ward level for this subset of radio stations.

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The exact relationship between signal strength and reception quality is hard to define as it depends on many factors, some of which we do not observe. Data on listeners or surveys on the reception quality are unfortunately unavailable to the best of our knowledge. Hence, we follow a standard approach in the literature and rely on continuous variation in signal strength throughout the analysis (e.g., Yanagizawa-Drott 2014). All variables measuring signal strength are expressed in standard deviations to simplify the interpretation of the results.

3.2 Violence and nation building

Violence

We use data from ACLED to measure violence at the local level. The data set contains all violent events that occurred in the country from 1997 until 2021 and provides multiple characteristics that we exploit. Most importantly, all events are geocoded, allowing us to construct measures of conflict intensity at the municipality level. Our primary measure of violence is a municipality's total number of violent events per capita in 1996. We further categorize the events into four main categories: (non-violent) protests, violent events, organized violence, and state violence towards civilians. Finally, the ACLED data also specify the specific date on which an event occurred. In the short-run analysis, we exploit this data feature to study how violence evolved at the local level in the days that immediately followed the broadcasting of a hearing.

Nation building

We further use six geocoded waves of the South African Afrobarometer surveys to measure how exposure to the TRC influenced nation building. The surveys were held in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011. Each wave collected data from 1,600 to 2,400 respondents. We use these data to derive several measures of trust towards institutions and nation building.

First, we focus on trust towards institutions. All of the waves we are using have questions about trust towards the president of the country, the parliament, and the police. We use these questions to construct dummy variables that take a value of 1 if respondents declare trusting the institutions mentioned above and 0 otherwise. For robustness, we also present results using questions referring to alternative institutions: the electoral commission, local councils, the ruling party, the opposition party, the army, and the courts.

Second, we study nation building by focusing on a question that was asked in all the waves except the one run in the year 2000: *Feeling South African.* We first use a question where respondents are asked how much they feel South African relative to a member of their own identity group.[5] We construct a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent declares feeling more South African than a member of their identity group. We use this variable as a first measure for nation building.

The 2000 wave of the Afrobarometer survey contains additional questions about the meaning of reconciliation in the aftermath of the apartheid and the role of the TRC. In particular, respondents are asked whether they believe that any of the following is required for reconciliation: material reconciliation, understanding one another, forgiving one another, forgetting the past, and healing memories. We use answers to these questions to test whether the TRC had its intended effect on the population. Respondents were also asked whether TRC was important for building a united South African nation. In addition, respondents were asked whether the government was effective at making reparations to people identified

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[5] The precise question is: Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a South African and being a [respondent's identity group]. Which of these two groups do you feel most strongly attached to?

as victims by the TRC. For all of these questions, we build a dummy variable, taking a value of 0 if the respondent disagrees with the statement and a value of 1 otherwise.

3.3   Economic outcomes

We use three different data sources for economic outcomes. First, we use the 2016 wave of the South African Demographic and Health Survey. The DHS is a geocoded household survey covering more than 11,000 households. Because of its sampling, we only use the individual records (whose focus is on female respondents). On top of a range of demographic characteristics such as age, sex, or education, it also contains the employment status of a respondent. Moreover, it contains information on access to water and electricity.[6] Second, we complement these survey-based economic development measures and access to necessary goods with 2011 census data. We use them to observe the unemployment rate in 2011 and the source of drinking water and access to electricity. Finally, to proxy for aggregate economic development, we use night lights from 2013 (VIIRS).

3.4   Other data sources

We use the 1996 census to construct controls and pre-determined outcomes. We obtain information on several municipality-level characteristics, such as population, the share of Blacks/Whites, or employment rate. Figure 4 describes the complete set of controls we are using from the 1996 census. We also construct a racial fragmentation index, using the share of Blacks and Whites at the 1996 enumeration area level within each municipality. We use this measure of fragmentation to test whether the effects of being exposed to the work of the TRC depend on the ability of respondents to have frequent interactions with individuals from other groups.

We collect geographic characteristics and aggregate them at the municipality level. We use pre-determined measures of average precipitation, land suitability, ruggedness, and night lights as controls throughout the paper.

4   Empirical strategy

In this section, we describe the empirical relationships we aim to estimate and introduce the source of variation that allows us to do it. We first explain how we identify our long-run results using cross-sectional data from all SABC stations broadcasting the activities of the TRC. Then, we present the empirical strategy we employ for our short-run analysis, where we pair SABC variation with daily variation in exposure to TRC hearings.

4.1   Long-term analysis

In our long-run exercise, we are interested in the relationship between violence and historical variation in SABC media exposure. Exploring this relationship in a naive OLS model is prone to several concerns. For example, higher intensity of media coverage in a municipality depends on many factors such as urbanization and economic development. These factors correlate not only with media coverage but also with the intensity of violence. Hence, we need a source of exogenous variation in the exposure to media.

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[6] For access to water, we construct a dummy variable taking a value of 1 if the source of drinking water is piped water into the dwelling or to the yard/plot.

To build such identifying variation, we leverage local topography as a quasi-random determinant of signal strength and use it to derive the causal effect of SABC media on our outcomes of interest (Olken 2009; Durante et al. 2019; Wang 2021). We implement this strategy in three steps. First, we reconstruct the actual SABC signal strength, taking into account the existing topography, using the ITM propagation model described above in the data section. Second, we simulate the same SABC signal strength in the free space, which is in the absence of any topographical disturbance. When constructing this hypothetical signal strength in the free space, we keep the rest of the parameters identical to the first step. Finally, we regress our outcomes of interest on actual SABC signal strength variation ($SABC_m$) conditional on the hypothetical signal strength in the free space ($SABC_m^{free}$). Given this setup, the residual variation exploited in the actual signal strength is determined by the topography the signal encounters on its way to the receiver. Equation 1 formalizes our cross-sectional empirical specification.

$$y_{i,m,d} = \beta SABC_{m,d} + \gamma SABC_{m,d}^{free} + \theta X_{i,m,d} + \varphi W_{m,d} + \delta_d + _{i,m,d} \tag{1}$$

$y_{i,m,d}$ represents an outcome for individual i living in municipality m and district d. The main explanatory variable of interest is $SABC_{m,d}$, which represents the signal strength of SABC stations transmitting TRC content in 1996 in municipality m and district d, whereas $SABC_{m,d}^{free}$ is the signal strength in the free space. We include individual-level controls $X_{i,m,d}$ such as age and age square, gender, race, and educational attainment.

To further strengthen the identification strategy, we build and control for local geographic characteristics and their square terms. The matrix $W_{m,d}$ includes these controls. These controls are included in the term $W_{m,d}$.[7] This allows us to absorb the possible direct effects of local features, ensuring that the mix of topography between antennas and receivers drives the residual variation we exploit.

From the 1996 census, we extract a host of socioeconomic characteristics of the municipality and include them in the term $W_{m,d}$. We also use these controls at baseline to test for the balancedness of our treatment. We provide a thorough list of these variables there. Finally, each regression includes district fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the district level, of which there are 43.

Panel (a) in Figure 3 shows municipality-level SABC signal strength in 1996. Unsurprisingly, the SABC signal is stronger in municipalities where antennas are located and closer to urban areas. Signal reception after partialling out the signal in the free space is shown in Panel (b) of Figure 3. The residualized SABC variation in Panel B does not exhibit clustering around large cities. Its geographic distribution looks idiosyncratic, suggesting it might be as good as randomly assigned across South African municipalities.

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[7] The geographic controls include average temperature, average rainfall, average elevation, average ruggedness, distance to closest coast, distance to closest river, distance to closest lake, and average potential agricultural productivity.

Figure 3: SABC signal strength in 1996, actual and residual

(a) SABC coverage

(b) SABC residual coverage
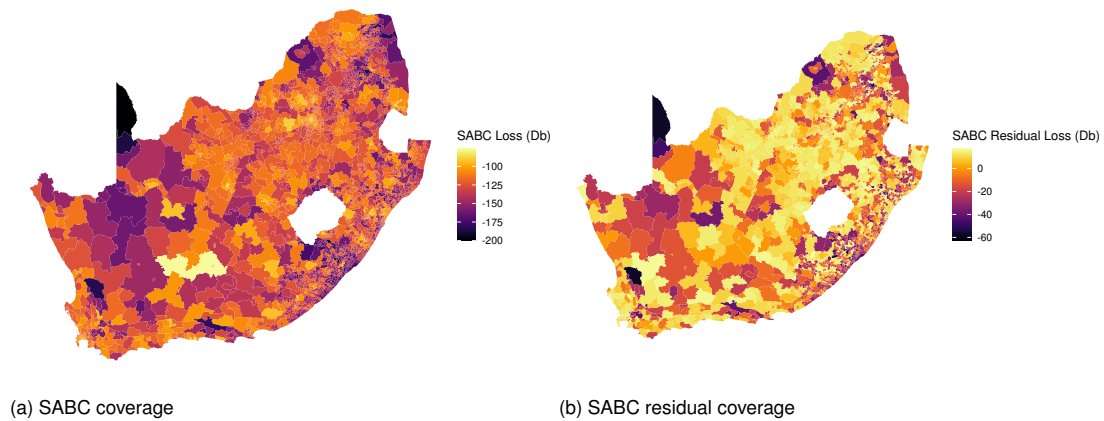
Note: SABC signal strength calculated using the Irregular Terrain Model (Hufford 2002) taking into account terrain topography and antenna specifications. Wards with a lighter color (yellow) receive a stronger signal, while darker wards (purple) receive a weaker signal.

Source: authors' compilation based on data.

We test the soundness of our empirical strategy by checking that our treatment is balanced on the pre-determined socioeconomic characteristics we collect. To do so, we estimate equation 1 at the municipality level. Except for the log population, we omit the set of socioeconomic controls from $W_{m,d}$ and put them on the LHS. The results of this balance test are displayed in Figure 4. The outcomes of these separate regressions can be read on the y-axis. Both dependent and independent variables are standardized so that coefficients can be directly compared. None of the estimated coefficients is statistically different from zero using standard 95 per cent confidence intervals. This exhibit bolsters our assumption that the coverage variation we reconstruct is orthogonal to relevant characteristics of South African municipalities and, as such, is a valid source of identifying variation.

Figure 4: SABC media coverage is balanced on pre-determined characteristics
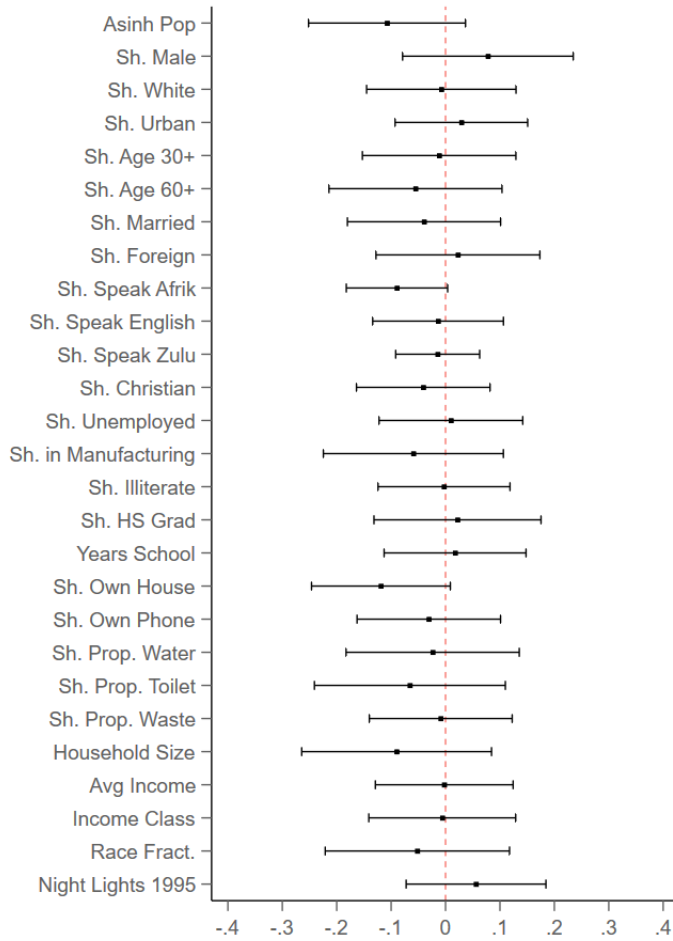
Note: estimated effect of SABC Special Reports on 1996 pre-determined municipality-level characteristics. Each coefficient comes from a separate regression of a 1996 municipality-level outcome on SABC signal strength, the SABC signal in the free space, 1920 log pop, geographic characteristics, and district fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the district level. Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

4.2   Short-term analysis

In addition to long-run outcomes, we are also interested in the immediate effects that the broadcasting of TRC content had on violence and attitudes towards the commission's work. To explore these short-term effects, we focus on a subset of SABC media sources that were live-broadcasting hearings: Radio 2000 radio stations. In particular, we implement a two-way fixed effects design exploiting two sources of variation: geographic variation in the signal strength of Radio 2000 and daily variation in the presence of hearings. In this exercise, we can exploit geographic variation at the ward level, within the municipality boundaries. Equation 2 presents our short-run specification.

$$y_{i,w,t} = \beta Radio2000_w \times Hearing_t + \lambda X_{i,w} + \gamma_t + \gamma_w + _{i,w,t} \tag{2}$$

where $y_{i,w,t}$ is the outcome of individual i in ward w in day t. $Radio2000_w$ is the time-invariant measure of signal reception of Radio 2000 in ward w. We construct this variable using the ITM just like we do above. $Hearing_t$ is a dummy variable if the event/interview occurred during a hearing day. $X_{i,w}$ is a vector of individual characteristics. Day fixed effects γ_t account for common shocks on hearing days, while ward fixed effects γ_w absorb time-invariant characteristics at the ward level. Importantly, γ_w accounts for all those municipality-level characteristics we explicitly control for in the long-run exercise, in particular for the signal strength in the free space.

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The main coefficient of interest is β. Given our set of fixed effects, β represents the differential effect of Radio 2000 on a hearing day compared to the effect of Radio 2000 on any other day. Because of the wide coverage that Radio 2000 would dedicate to the TRC activity throughout the day, we interpret this marginal effect as the effect of exposure to the TRC.

5   Results

In this section, we present the main results of the paper. We first establish the efficacy of SABC media exposure in the long run using data on violence, nation building, and economic development. Then, we go back to the short-term impact of TRC-related media. Exploiting daily variation in exposure to the TRC hearings through radio, we validate our interpretation that our effects are driven by the exposure to TRC through media and not just generic media exposure.

5.1   Long-run efficacy of SABC media exposure

This section presents the paper's main result: historical SABC media coverage helps reduce levels of violence in the 2010s. We document that these effects are driven by racially homogeneous municipalities and disappear in racially fragmented areas. We then investigate why we observe this pattern of TRC efficacy and turn to possible mediating factors. Using data covering the early 2000s, we show that SABC exposure likely helps to contain violence in the 2010s through a channel of nation building and trust rather than other economic channels.

SABC media coverage and long-run violence

The most prominent goal of TRCs is to 'promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past' (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995). Hence, we evaluate the long-run efficacy of a TRC based on its ability to reduce levels of violence. Our results in Table 1 show that, on average, municipalities exposed to higher coverage of SABC in the late 1990s had lower levels of violence per thousand capita during the 2010s. In column (1), the estimated coefficient points to a reduction of 0.45 episodes of violence for every thousand persons. This coefficient is estimated using a specification that controls only for district FEs and log population at baseline and without any of the controls needed for identification. In column (2), we add the signal strength in the free space, in column (3) the rest of the municipality-level socioeconomic variables, and in column (4) the geographic characteristics of the municipality. As soon as we include our measure of signal strength in the free space, the coefficient stabilizes around a 0.6 reduction in violence per thousand capita. The inclusion of the rest of the controls leaves the point estimate unchanged. The magnitude of this reduction is meaningful: one standard deviation increase in signal strength explains 20 per cent of a standard deviation (3.6) in long-run violence or about 30 per cent of the average violence observed.

Table 1: Effect of SABC exposure on levels of violence in the 2010s

	Episodes per thousand capita (2010s)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
TRC exposure (1sd)	−0.461*	−0.644**	−0.665**	−0.697**
	(0.259)	(0.283)	(0.300)	(0.315)
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free signal		✓	✓	✓
Muni-level ctrls			✓	✓
Geographic ctrls				✓
Mean of dep. var.	2.09	2.09	2.09	2.09
Adj R^2	0.24	0.24	0.25	0.25
Observations	432	432	432	432

Note: this table shows estimates for the relationship between exposure to SABC and episodes of violence per thousand capita. The unit of observation is the municipality. Column 1 does not include any controls except for district fixed effects. In column 2, we control for the hypothetic SABC signal free of topographic obstacles. Column 3 includes municipality-level controls from the 1996 census, while column 4 adds geographic controls. Standard errors are clustered at the district level.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

In Table 2, we ask what kind of violence the TRC helps reduce the most. We look at four types of violence following the categories used in our data source (ACLED). For comparison purposes, in column 1, we report the effect of TRC exposure on total violence from the last column of Table 1. We use the same specification as in column 1 in the rest of the table (our most saturated regression). From columns 2–5, we break down total violence into four types: non-violent protests (column 2), violent protests without premeditation (column 3), violence with premeditation (column 4), and violence towards civilians from the state (column 5).

We find that the effect of SABC is concentrated in the reduction of both protests and violent protests. The coefficient associated with these two types of violence makes up all of the reduction we see in aggregate, respectively 0.25 and 0.37 episodes per thousand capita. Premeditated violence and violence from the state show no decrease due to TRC exposure.

Table 2: Effect of SABC exposure on 2010s violence by type of perpetrators involved

| Type/perpetrator:	Episodes per thousand capita (2010s)				
	Total	Protests	Violent	Organized	State
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
TRC exposure (1sd)	−0.697**	−0.255**	−0.369**	−0.012	−0.021
	(0.315)	(0.122)	(0.158)	(0.046)	(0.029)
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free signal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Muni-level ctrls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic ctrls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dep. var.	2.09	0.78	0.83	0.24	0.16
Adj R^2	0.25	0.19	0.19	0.24	0.31
Observations	432	432	432	432	432

Note: this table presents the effect of exposure to SABC media on different types of violent events. The specifications are the same as in the last column of Table 1. Standard errors are clustered at the district level.

  * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

South Africa is one of the most segregated countries in the world, and as such, we expect that the effect of SABC might have had differential effects depending on the degree of racial interaction. Therefore, we investigate how our result on violence varies along the dimension of racial fragmentation, one important proxy of inter-racial integration. In Figure 5 we plot the result of our preferred specification (column (4) of Table 1) interacted with a measure of racial fragmentation centred at the mean level of fragmentation in the country.[8] Importantly, we measure fragmentation at baseline in 1996, before TRC might have affected the racial composition of South African municipalities.

Figure 5: The effect of SABC exposure on violence by racial fragmentation
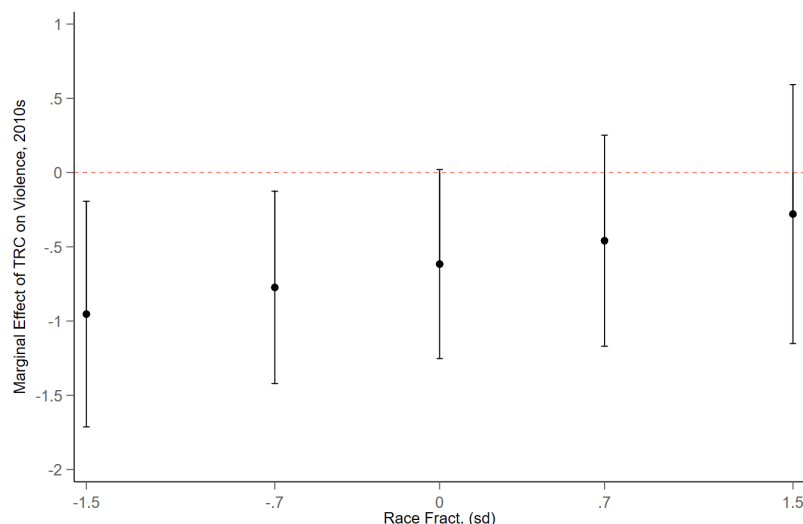
Note: estimated effect of SABC media coverage in 1996 on 2010s violence by racial fragmentation.

Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

We uncover strong heterogeneity along the racial fragmentation dimension. Our main results are driven by racially homogeneous municipalities, whereas South African municipalities with high levels of racial

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[8] Racial fragmentation in a given municipality composed of G different racial groups is defined as $F = 1 - \sum_{g=1}^{G} p_g^2$. The measure represents the probability that two individuals randomly selected from m's population belong to different racial groups.

fragmentation show no effect of SABC exposure on violence. Interestingly, these same patterns of heterogeneity are not there if we look at ethnic fragmentation or the share of White persons in the population.[9]

Given the racial composition of the South African population, our measure of racial fragmentation is the lowest in areas where virtually only Black South Africans live. In 1996, White people represented only 14 per cent of the South African population, and the maximum percentage of White people in a municipality is 78 per cent. Hence, the areas where our effects disappear seem to be characterized by the highest concentration of White people in the country living together with Black, Coloured, and other races. This could hint that the set of White people in contact with other races essentially did not respond well to the TRC message. In the following subsection, we try to understand better why we observe this pattern in the efficacy of SABC coverage by looking at some channels by race in the decade following the end of the TRC activity.

Mechanisms

Why did SABC media coverage reduce violence but only in racially homogeneous areas? In this subsection, we highlight possible channels that might help us explain our results on violence. We show that SABC exposure increased nation building and trust in the early 2000s, but it did not alter economic development measures. We then run the same heterogeneous analysis as we did for violence and find that White people in racially fragmented areas exhibit a backlash in terms of beliefs consistent with the null result on violence.

Economic channels

We start by examining the economic channel. Using data from the South African census, DHS, and night lights, we investigate the direct impact of SABC media exposure on the provision of public goods and economic development. We rule out that either of these channels is at play.

In Table 3, we look at the availability of electricity and clean water at the individual and municipality level. We report estimated coefficients from our most saturated specification. None of these coefficients is different from zero in magnitude and statistical sense.

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[9] Results available upon request.

Table 3: Effect of SABC exposure on public good delivery

Outcome:	Municipality level		Individual level	
	Electricity	Water	Electricity	Water
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
TRC exposure (1sd)	0.009	0.011	0.032	0.018
	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.030)	(0.043)
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Muni-level ctrls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic ctrls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual ctrls			✓	✓
Mean of dep. var.	0.73	0.83	0.90	0.67
Adj R^2	0.79	0.49	0.19	0.38
Observations	424	424	6,189	6,176

Note: this table reports estimates for the effect of SABC exposure on access to electricity and water. Columns 1 and 2 are at the municipality level, and the outcomes are from the 2011 census. In column 1, the outcome variable is the share of the population that has access to electricity, while in column 2 the outcome variable is the share of the population that has access to piped water. The last two columns are at the individual level and use data from the Demographic and Health Survey. The outcome variables are defined in the same way as in the first two columns. These regressions include individual controls. Standard errors clustered at the district level.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculation based on data.

We also investigate the relationship between SABC media exposure and two measures of broader economic development: night lights and unemployment. However, none of the coefficients are significantly different from zero. Table 4 displays the results. We conclude that it is unlikely that TRC-related media coverage reduced violence by increasing its opportunity cost through an increase in economic development or the delivery of better public goods.[10]

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[10] We investigate the heterogeneous effects of SABC coverage by racial fragmentation, but we do not find any gradient.

Table 4: Effect of SABC media exposure on economic development

| Outcome: | Municipality level | | Individual level |
	NLT 2013	% unemployment, 2011	Not working
	(1)	(2)	(3)
TRC exposure (1sd)	−0.074	−0.006	−0.027
	(0.065)	(0.007)	(0.024)
District FE	✓	✓	✓
Muni-level ctrls	✓	✓	✓
Geographic ctrls	✓	✓	✓
Individual ctrls			✓
Mean of dep. var.	2.52	0.26	0.59
Adj R^2	0.89	0.64	0.13
Observations	432	424	5,597

Note: this table explores the relationship between SABC media exposure and economic development. Columns 1 and 2 are municipality-level regressions, using the same specification as in column 4 of Table 1. Column 3 is an individual-level regression using the same specification as in the last two columns of Table 3. Standard errors clustered at the district level.

   * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculation based on data.

Nation building and trust

Having ruled out an economic effect of SABC media exposure, we focus on outcomes of nation building and trust towards institutions. We exploit data from Afrobarometer, pulling together waves from the early 2000s, and present our results separately by race in Table 5. We find evidence supporting a rise in a sentiment of nation building for Blacks, whereas Whites had higher trust in the new South African institutions. In line with the historical background and the transition, we interpret these changes as the TRC working in the right direction for each race. While Black citizens had to be convinced to be South Africans, White citizens needed to be reassured of the trustworthiness of the new institutions. In Panel A we present our results on Black South Africans and in Panel B those on White South Africans.

Table 5: Effect of SABC exposure on nation building and trust towards the institutions

	Feel SA	Trust towards			
		President	Parliament	E. commission	Army
	Panel A: Black sample				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
TRC exposure (1sd)	0.167**	0.017	−0.015	−0.034	−0.148**
	(0.073)	(0.086)	(0.047)	(0.061)	(0.060)
Mean of dep. var.	0.48	0.58	0.54	0.57	0.49
Adj R^2	0.08	0.04	0.03	0.06	0.05
Observations	4,065	4,133	4,023	4,005	2,927
	Panel B: White sample				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
TRC exposure (1sd)	0.063	0.304	0.606***	0.498**	0.072
	(0.313)	(0.310)	(0.215)	(0.182)	(0.125)
Mean of dep. var.	0.47	0.32	0.31	0.36	0.29
Adj R^2	0.18	0.07	0.09	0.10	0.20
Observations	778	793	857	838	553

Note: this table presents estimates for the effect of SABC exposure on nation building and different measures of trust towards institutions. All of the outcome variables come from the Afrobarometer surveys. The unit of observation is an individual. Panel A includes only Black respondents, while Panel B focuses on White respondents. All specifications include the full set of controls (including individual controls). Standard errors clustered at the district level.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

Column (1) shows the effect of SABC media exposure on feeling South African over the feeling of belonging to one's own ethnicity of origin.[11] Black respondents exposed to a standard deviation higher SABC coverage are 16 p.p. more likely to declare they felt South African. The effect's magniture is sizeable and represents 35 per cent of a standard deviation in the variation of the outcome variable. The same analysis on the White sub-sample produces a null result. Indeed, the estimated coefficient presented in column (1) of Panel B is positive but small and statistically insignificant.

Columns (2)–(5) of Table 5 exhibit the estimated effect of SABC media exposure on trust towards South African institutions. We look at four institutions that had an important role in the transition from the end of apartheid to democracy: the president, the parliament, the electoral commission, and the army. Panel A shows that SABC coverage did not positively affect trust towards the institutions for Black South Africans. While we find no significant effect for the first three institutions, we uncover a negative effect on the trust towards the army. A standard deviation increase in TRC-related media coverage decreases trust in the army by about 15 p.p. We explain this result in light of the misdeeds that TRC uncovered over the activity of the Black ops, an extremist body of the South African army active during the apartheid.

Unlike Black South Africans, White people trust South African institutions more. Following the apartheid period, it was the first time Black South Africans held the country's most influential positions. We find that SABC media coverage helped White people in the country have higher trust in their institutions, especially the parliament and the electoral commission. We find a positive effect on the president, al-

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[11] The precise question formulates: 'Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a South African and being a [respondent's identity group]. Which of these two groups do you feel most strongly attached to?'

though this is imprecisely estimated, and a null effect on the army. The size of the positive effects is large. One standard deviation increase in TRC exposure generates 60 and 50 p.p. higher trust for the parliament and the electoral commission. This increase explains about one standard deviation in the variation of the outcome variables.

The changes in nation building and trust induced by the SABC exposure can help us understand why on average the same South African municipalities experienced lower levels of violence in the long run. What is left to explain is why we observe this reduction only in racially homogeneous municipalities. To shed light on that, we perform the same heterogeneous analysis along racial fragmentation on the outcomes of nation building and trust.

Figure 6 visually presents the output of our analysis. In the interest of space, we focus on two outcomes per race: the likelihood of feeling South African and trust towards the parliament. The top two panels of Figure 6 show no heterogeneous effect along racial fragmentation for Black individuals.

In the bottom panels, we instead look at White South Africans and uncover strong heterogeneous effects. We see a pattern consistent with zero average treatment effect for both outcomes due to two opposite effects in high and low racially fragmented municipalities. Consistent with our results on violence, we find that SABC media exposure had a positive effect only in racially homogeneous municipalities. In fact, we observe a decrease in the likelihood of feeling South African in those municipalities.

Figure 6: The effect of TRC exposure on trust in institutions by racial fragmentation
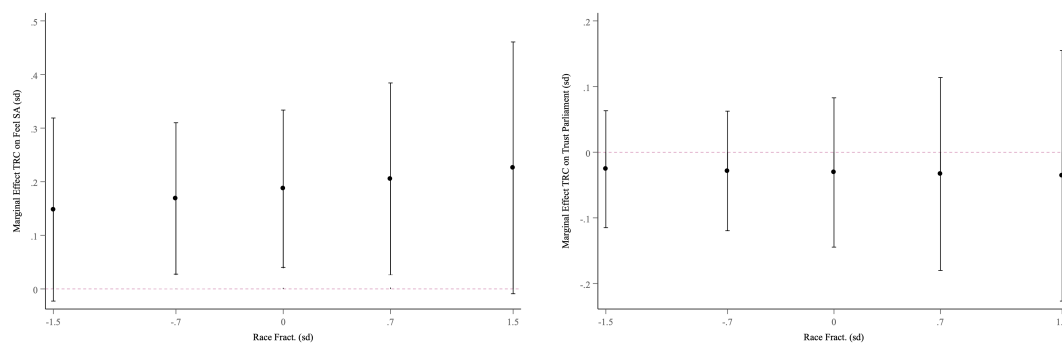
(a) Feel SA: Black respondents

(b) Trust in parliament: Black respondents
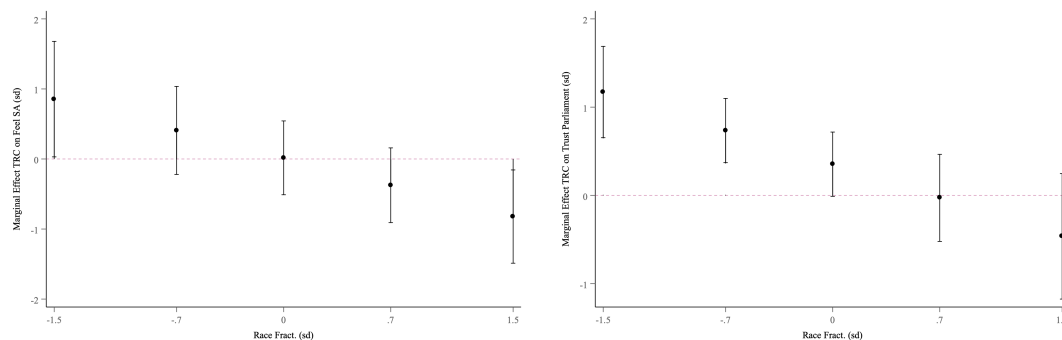
(c) Feel SA: White respondents

(d) Trust in parliament: White respondents

Note: this figure shows estimated effects of SABC media coverage by racial fragmentation. Upper panels focus on Black respondents, while bottom panels focus on White respondents. The outcome variable in panels (a) and (c) is the probability of feeling South African. The outcome variable in panels (b) and (d) is trust in the parliament.
Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

The heterogeneous effects on nation building and trust align well with what we find in the long run for violence and highlight that the message of TRC on SABC media did not work well on White people living in mixed areas. While it is hard to pin down the exact reason(s) why this was the case, it is consistent with many cases of states transitioning into democracy where the persistence of beliefs de facto undermines the rise of the new de jure system.

5.2 Short-run efficacy of TRC media exposure: Radio 2000

Our long-run analysis uses cross-sectional exposure in SABC as a proxy for exposure to the TRC message. While large segments of SABC were devoted to the coverage of TRC, we cannot rule out a broader effect driven by the media overall. In this section, we focus on the effect of a subset of SABC stations—Radio 2000—that covered TRC hearings live in the early 2000s. Using this variation, we show that Radio 2000 coverage on the day of a hearing reduced violence on the same day, much like our long-run results. Moreover, we characterize how media exposure to the TRC influenced South Africans' opinions on the role of the TRC and reconciliation while the TRC was still in progress. These results are broadly consistent with our long-run analysis, bolstering our interpretation that TRC media exposure drives our long-run results rather than sole generic media exposure.

Effect of TRC exposure on violent events

We start by confirming that exposure to the TRC significantly decreased the number of violent events per capita and that a decrease in the number of protests drives this result. Table 6 presents the results from

a two-way fixed effect regression where the independent variable of interest is the interaction between Radio 2000 signal strength and a dummy variable taking a value of 1 if there was a TRC hearing on a given day.

As shown in column (1), exposure to the TRC leads to a significant decline in total violence. An increase of one standard deviation in signal strength on a hearing day led to a decrease of 0.005 standard deviation in the number of violent events the same day relative to the mean. The same as with the long-term results, the reduction in violence is exclusively due to a decline in protests (column 2). Conversely, exposure to the TRC did not have any significant effects on the number of spontaneous violent protests (column 3), organized violent protests (column 4), and violence towards civilians from the state (column 5).

These results align well with our findings in the long-term analysis: exposure to TRC content curbs violent events. We recognize that a likely interpretation of this result is that individuals spent their time listening to the radio instead of going to the streets. Nonetheless, it highlights how salient TRC was during transition years. On hearing days, South Africans put off protesting to tune in and learn about the activity of TRC on the radio. This suggests how listening to TRC was a mass-shared experience for the country and, as such, it might have profoundly affected its collective memory.

Table 6: Effect of TRC exposure on conflict events from 1997–2002

	Dep. var.: Conflict events 1997–2002 (1sd)				
	Total	Protests	Violent	Organized	State
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
TRC radio $\times$ Hearing	-0.0048^{***}	-0.0040^{**}	-0.0006	-0.0023	0.0007
	(0.0018)	(0.0017)	(0.0019)	(0.0019)	(0.0017)
Ward FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Day FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of Dep. Var.	3.020×10^{-04}	1.496×10^{-05}	4.544×10^{-05}	4.544×10^{-05}	5.580×10^{-05}
Adj R^2	0.0616	0.0563	0.0081	0.0005	0.0047
Observations	1738440	1738440	1738440	1738440	1738440

Note: this table presents estimates of a two-way fixed effects regression for the effect of the TRC on the number of violent events. The unit of observation is the ward on a given day. All regressions include ward fixed effects and day fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality-year level.

   * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

Attitudes on TRC and reconciliation

To better understand how the TRC influenced the views of South Africans, we finally exploit the fact that the 2000 wave of the Afrobarometer survey contained several questions about attitudes towards the TRC and reconciliation. The TRC partially succeeded in convincing South Africans of its usefulness, and the commission also managed to share part of its philosophy with the population at large.

Table 7 presents results for how exposure to the TRC influenced attitudes towards the TRC. While Black respondents exposed to the TRC become more likely to think that the TRC helps the nation-building process, the inverse is true for White respondents (column 1). The negative perception of TRC as a tool to build the nation among White respondents could plausibly be interpreted as an adverse reaction to being confronted with one in-group's harmful activities, as the most echoed crimes were committed by White South Africans or conducted in their name. Similarly, Black respondents exposed to the TRC also become more likely to think that reparations were successful. In contrast, there is no effect on the groups of Coloured/Indians and Whites (column 2).[12]

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[12] Importantly, at that stage, reparations were only symbolic and not monetary.

The TRC also had heterogeneous effects along racial lines regarding the importance of amnesty for reconciliation (column 3). While exposure to the TRC did not significantly affect the opinion of Black respondents on this topic, Coloured/Indians and Whites became significantly less likely to consider that amnesty is needed for reconciliation. This last result suggests that hearings helped convince Whites of the necessity to prosecute perpetrators—for example, due to hearings about their brutality. However, this result could also stem from the fact that most of the amnesty applications were from individuals close to the ANC. The realization that the primary beneficiaries of amnesties might be ANC members could have led some White respondents to revise their support for this policy.

Table 7: Effect of TRC on perceptions about TRC

Dep. var.:	Opinions on TRC		
	Nation building (1)	Successful reparations (2)	Amnesty (3)
TRC radio × hearing	0.102***	0.099**	0.036
	(0.034)	(0.044)	(0.061)
TRC radio × hearing ×			
Coloured/Indian	−0.127*	−0.106	−0.200**
	(0.070)	(0.106)	(0.097)
White	−0.222***	−0.069	−0.182*
	(0.083)	(0.089)	(0.106)
Ward FE	✓	✓	✓
Day FE	✓	✓	✓
Individual ctrls	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dep. var.	0.71	0.55	0.66
Adj R^2	0.26	0.26	0.21
Observations	2,023	1,945	2,004

Note: this table presents estimates of a two-way fixed effects regression for the effect of the TRC on perceptions about TRC's work. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. All regressions include: ward fixed effects, day fixed effects, gender, educational level, age, and age squared.

  * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

Table 8 shows the effect of hearings on perceptions about what is required to achieve reconciliation. The questions are on whether reconciliation requires: material compensation (1), understanding one another (2), forgiving one another (3), forgetting the past (4), and healing memories (5). First, in line with the TRC not offering monetary compensation, we see little impact in column (1). However, the TRC seems to have achieved one of its proclaimed goals since it helped foster a better understanding of the other for the Black population (column 2), even if this did not translate into an increase in the belief that forgiveness is needed for reconciliation, especially for White respondents (column 3). Column (4) shows that Indian/Coloured and White respondents find forgetting the past less critical for reconciliation. This might reflect that the TRC hearings helped them to reconcile with the actions of the apartheid government. Finally, there is little evidence that exposure to a TRC hearing increased responses, stating that healing memories are required for reconciliation.

Table 8: Effect of TRC on perceptions about reconciliation

	Dep. var.: Reconciliation requires				
	Material compensation (1)	Understand one another (2)	Forgive one another (3)	Forget the past (4)	Healing memories (5)
TRC radio × hearing	−0.005	0.074***	−0.053	0.074	0.033
	(0.066)	(0.025)	(0.041)	(0.076)	(0.031)
TRC radio × hearing ×					
Coloured/Indian	0.069	−0.103	0.010	−0.165*	−0.049
	(0.073)	(0.075)	(0.056)	(0.093)	(0.061)
White	−0.006	−0.104**	−0.081*	−0.168**	−0.138
	(0.092)	(0.042)	(0.047)	(0.079)	(0.086)
Ward FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Day FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual ctrls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of dep. var.	0.64	0.78	0.82	0.70	0.75
Adj R^2	0.25	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.17
Observations	2,034	2,082	2,079	2,071	2,070

Note: this table presents estimates of a two-way fixed effects regression for the effect of the TRC on perceptions about reconciliation. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. All regressions include: ward fixed effects, day fixed effects, gender, educational level, age, and age squared.

  * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' own calculations based on data.

The results presented in Table 7 and Table 8 suggest that exposure to the TRC had a complex impact on attitudes towards reconciliation during the public hearings. While the commission had at least partial success in achieving several of its stated goals (e.g., in convincing the Black population of the importance of understanding one another), not all of its objectives were fulfilled, and important differences emerge along the racial line.

6   Conclusion

This paper studies the impact of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the making of the post-apartheid state. As one of South Africa's most widely mediatized events, we exploit exogenous topographic variation in SABC signal reception, which covered 'TRC Special Reports'—one of the most important TV programs covering the TRC's activities—and Radio 2000—the radio station in charge of the live broadcast of the public hearings. We find that municipalities exposed to higher coverage of SABC in the late 1990s had lower levels of violence during the 2010s. Interestingly, this effect is driven by less racially fragmented municipalities, i.e. mainly inhabited by Black South Africans.

We find that nation building was essential to achieve this reduction in violence. We observe that higher exposure to SABC coverage increases the likelihood of feeling South African over any other identity group. However, this effect is found only among the Black population. Despite this, we also find that TRC affects Whites in other domains: higher exposure to SABC increased trust in key institutions such as the parliament and the electoral commission. Lastly, we rule out that TRC reduced violence by increasing its opportunity cost using data on economic development and public goods delivery.

The exposure to TRC-related content, and not generic media exposure, drives our results. We exploit radio coverage of Radio 2000, the SABC station covering the activity of the TRC live during the public hearings. We implement a two-way fixed effects design exploiting daily variation in hearings, and the geographic variation of signal reception of Radio 2000. In line with the long-run results, we find that

TRC content decreased outbreaks of violence. We also observe that the exposure to TRC content positively affected perceptions about reconciliation and the work of the commission itself—however, only for Black South Africans. The polarization around TRC's work seems consistent with the individuals struggling to face harsh truths and unpleasant stories. Yet, facing these issues has formed a collective memory that turned out to be partially valuable in the long run.

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