

POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

THE BUSINESS OF KILLING

ASSASSINATIONS
IN SOUTH AFRICA

Rumbi Matamba

APRIL 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Not a week goes by in South Africa without an assassination. In 2022, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) recorded 141 assassinations in the country, an average of more than two a week. And that is almost undoubtedly an undercount given the limited sources of data. They occur so frequently, the cases and the headlines blur together in the news cycle and are quickly forgotten. Disturbingly, the prominence of the victims appears to be growing. Consider the murder of Muzi Manyathi, an ANC deputy branch chairperson in Mpumalanga, who was shot dead at a petrol station just days after he had spoken publicly about being threatened by a gunman.¹ Then, in January this year, news broke of an apparent attempt to poison former Eskom CEO André de Ruyter.² In February, popular rapper Kiernan Forbes, better known by the stage name AKA, was shot in the head by a hitman outside a Durban restaurant. His friend, celebrity chef Tebello Motsoane, was also killed.³ In March, prominent insolvency lawyer Cloete Murray and his son, Thomas, known for working on cases involving the powerful and the corrupt, were shot by hitmen on the N1 highway near Johannesburg. Both died.⁴ Later that month, a notorious and politically connected Mpumalanga crime boss, Clyde Mnisi, was shot and killed by four balaclava-clad gunmen armed with assault rifles. Mnisi's murder came five months after he was crowned a chief.⁵ Mnisi's widow, Charlene Mathews, was shot dead two days after his funeral.⁶

In South Africa, particularly over the last two decades, violence has become a monetizable commodity that can be bought and sold. Assassinations, also referred to in this report as contract or targeted killings, commissioned for economic, political or personal gain, are one part of this broader commercial market for organized violence and intimidation. Although such targeted killings constitute a small proportion of the country's extraordinarily high murder rate, they have a powerful, resonating impact, in that they send out an unequivocal, threatening message to the victims' communities, colleagues and families. Professional hitmen are in high demand within the taxi industry and organized crime markets, and are also contracted by political and business actors to remove rivals and threats. Assassination has therefore become a strategic tool. Beyond the lethal human harm, assassinations have a profound impact on the state, fuelling intraparty tension within the ANC, corroding the criminal justice system (through the assassination of whistle-blowers, for instance) and undermining democracy in general.⁷

The hired assassins ('hitmen') involved in this market are often recruited from certain segments of South Africa's criminal underworld, including armed gangs in the Western Cape and the minibus-taxi industry (henceforth 'taxi industry'), particularly in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and the Eastern Cape. And, in some cases, perpetrators are hired from law enforcement agencies.⁸ These environments provide a ready supply of the hitmen and firearms needed to make the market for contract killings a viable



Assassinations have a powerful, resonating impact, sending a threatening message to the victims' communities, colleagues and families. © Shaun Swingler

option for ill-intentioned actors ready to pay for violence to secure their aims. The phenomenon of the hired assassin is effectively therefore a form of 'moonlighting', whereby capacity for violence among a pool of well-trained 'muscle' is monetized in a transactional arrangement by a third party to achieve a particular end.

The 2021 Global Organized Crime Index ranks South Africa as one of the highest-scoring countries in the continent in terms of criminality levels and as the highest-scoring in the southern African region.⁹ These high levels of criminality are stoked by endemic gang violence, with groups particularly active in the drug trade and extortion rackets, compounded by accessibility of illicit firearms. The prevalence of targeted killings should be considered as a subset of these violent organized criminal markets in South Africa.

The fact that there is a commercial market for violence has been recognized by the South African state: several commissions of inquiry into violence have been established, including the Moerane Commission of Inquiry into political assassinations in KZN. Several task forces investigating and prosecuting violence have also been established.

However, despite the high levels of targeted killings in the country, and even though there is recognition of this criminal market by the state, there is no dedicated state-level database that disaggregates targeted killings, which are instead grouped under the umbrella category of murder in the police annual crime reports, and there is still no consistent collection of data on the topic. Given this lack of disaggregated data pertaining to targeted killings, the GI-TOC has developed a database quantifying and categorizing assassinations, which records cases since 2000.

This report assesses and analyzes the problem of targeted killings by paid hitmen in South Africa by drawing from the latest iteration of this database, part of the Global Assassination Monitor project.¹⁰ It examines the reasons behind the latest targeted killings, measured between 2021 and 2022, and analyzes their characteristics and the illicit markets in which they occur. The report builds on the

GI-TOC's tracking and analysis of targeted killings in South Africa since 2000 in order to construct the evidence base that can provide a platform for a call to action.

Methodology

For continuity, the methodology remains the same as in previous reports that derive their data from the Assassination Monitor. We drew on the resources of an electronic database, SABINET, a mainstream media database covering local and national news. This was supplemented with searches of electronic news sources. Following the pilot research and subsequent research papers, we tailored our search according to the following four categories: 'contract killing', 'political assassination', 'hitman' and 'taxi killing'. The results generated by each of these search terms were then reviewed to identify specific cases where the circumstances and commentary suggested that the victim or attempted victim had been the subject of a hit. Through this methodology we have created a database of content from 2000 to 2022.

The following criteria needed to be met for an incident to be recorded as a case of an assassination. The first is that the police, criminal justice agencies or, in a limited number of cases, the deceased's family, declared the murder to be a hit (although this also emerged in reporting on later court proceedings in several cases). Secondly, the circumstances must have been such that it is relatively clear from the facts of the case that a hit had taken place. In other words, the incidents had to be identified as targeted at one person or, in a limited number of cases, at groups of people, and a transaction had to be involved. The assassination database records as hits those cases where the victim was killed, those in which the attempts failed (i.e. where the intended target was only injured) and those that were prevented by law enforcement agents.

The resulting data is undoubtedly an undercount because the database records only cases reported in the media that are identified as hits, contract killings, taxi killings or assassinations. Some cases are only identified as hits later – months or even years after the event – through court procedures or investigations and subsequent arrests. Compiling the database is constrained by several factors. For example, some targeted killings are not reported in mainstream local or national media; some places are notorious hotspots for violence, where reporting is scant as a result of reporting fatigue; and in some cases, media houses have a shortage of reporters to cover on stories. Furthermore, information contained in news articles often lacks detail or is incomplete. This has proved particularly limiting in our attempt to map out the locations of killings, such as those associated with taxi route conflicts in the Western Cape in 2021.

A growing concern is the limited follow-up on cases of targeted killings, as several cases have no further reporting or the investigations are suspended due to lack of evidence. Cases often take years to reach the courts, and as a result, some are identified as targeted killings only years after their occurrence. Despite these limitations and challenges, the GI-TOC assassination database is the only consistent repository of data on the topic and the consistency in our methodology allows us to track trends in targeted killings over time.

As for definitions, the terms 'hit', 'contract killing', 'targeted killing' and 'assassination' are used interchangeably in this report. They are defined as an interaction between one or more persons, in which one person solicits another person to have a third person or persons killed for some form of gain, monetary or otherwise.

Summary of findings

- Our database recorded a total of 141 assassinations in 2022, undoubtedly an undercount due to limited data sources.
- Between 2021 and 2022, the trend of targeted killings was mixed, with some categories increasing while others decreased.
- In the sphere of politics, positions for local municipal office are highly contested for economic and personal reasons, and targeted killings have increasingly become a common phenomenon of the South African political economy. Our database recorded a 33% increase in this category, with 30 cases recorded in 2021 and 40 cases recorded in 2022.
- According to the data we have tracked, incidents of taxi-related targeted killings diminished by 19%, with 80 cases recorded in 2021 and 65 cases in 2022. Disputes over highly lucrative routes remain the leading motive for targeted taxi industry killings.
- The recorded organized crime cases have remained consistent over the period under review. Our database recorded only one less case in 2022 (29 cases) than in 2021 (30 cases). However, there have been notable shifts in trajectories in various provinces. For example, a higher number of cases were recorded in KZN in 2021 than in the Western Cape, whereas the opposite was true in previous years and in 2022.
- Incidents identified as personal targeted killings increased from five cases in 2021 to seven in 2022.



TARGETED KILLINGS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The three decades of the post-apartheid period in South Africa have been characterized by high levels of violence. Violence has become endemic within the fabric of political, economic and social life in South Africa. This is often seen in violent clashes between the police and citizens during protests, in political disputes, in economic sectors such as the tobacco and taxi industries, when rangers are killed in national parks, and in the high rates of gender-based violence and other contact crimes. Moreover, violence has become a monetizable criminal market in its own right, one that facilitates other criminal markets within the country's organized crime ecosystem, such as illicit drugs, extortion, organized corruption, organized robbery, illegal mining and others.¹¹ This violence is evidenced by the high murder rate in the country, which has increased over the last 10 years by 62% from 15 554 deaths in 2011/12 to 25 181 in 2021/22.¹² For the 2021/22 period, South Africa had a per capita murder rate of 42 per 100 000 people, projected to rise to 44 per 100 000 for the 2022/23 period.¹³

Although forming a small proportion of the overall murder rate in South Africa, increasingly targeted killings are a concerning subset of the broader violence seen across the country.

Targeted killings carry significant strategic and symbolic weight.¹⁴ They are carried out by criminal groups as a form of criminal governance allowing them to influence political processes and exert and maintain control over communities.¹⁵ This form of criminal governance taints democratic processes and violates the rule of law. Targeted killings also enable criminal actors to gain control over lucrative markets.¹⁶ This can be seen in feuds in the tobacco industry and the taxi industry. Targeted killings compromise the role of accountability that civil society plays within the democratic order when whistle-blowers and journalists are hounded and killed. Impossible to measure and quantify are the loss of human life, destruction of families and communities, and the hollowing-out of key institutions when specialized professionals such as magistrates, detectives and public servants are killed. More recently, there has been an increase in targeted killings in sectors of society where they have not normally been recorded before. These include targeted killings in the music industry and higher education. For example, in February 2023, Professor Sakhela Buhlungu, the University of Fort Hare vice chancellor, who had spoken out against corruption at the university, may have been targeted in an incident in which his bodyguard was shot dead.¹⁷

The GI-TOC Assassination Monitor database shows a steady ebb and flow of cases from 2000 until around 2014, with notable peaks during that period occurring in 2001 and 2007. Both of these were due to increased hits in the taxi industry, which made up 44% and 54% of the hits recorded in those years. From 2014 onwards, however, there has been a marked increase in targeted killings, which peaked in 2018 before a significant decline in 2020 (see Figure 1). The surge in 2018 was attributed to an increase in taxi-related violence and organized crime hits in Gauteng that year.¹⁸ Taxi-related killings made up 60% (127 out of 211) of the cases recorded in that year, followed by organized crime cases, which made up 19% (40 out of the 211). The decline in 2020 can be attributed to the national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which movement was at times greatly restricted by the government.¹⁹ That decline, however, was short-lived as cases started increasing again in 2021, only dropping slightly in 2022.

Taxi-industry-related killings constitute most of the cases recorded in the database (see Figure 2), at 46% of cases over the 22-year period. These are followed by organized crime and politically motivated cases, at 26% and 21%, respectively. Overall, cases related to political motives show a steady increase over time (except for the dip seen in 2020), and cases related to organized crime have also steadily increased.²⁰ In contrast, the number of taxi-related targeted killings has been more volatile, increasing from 2015 to 2017, followed by a marked surge in 2018 (see Figure 1).

These are worrying trends, which are most likely to continue if the failure to conduct investigations into specific clusters of killings carries on and if steps are not taken to address the underlying drivers of targeted killings – namely, the proliferation of illegal firearms and the recruitment pools of hitmen being created in the largely unregulated taxi industries of KZN, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, and in gangs in the Western Cape.

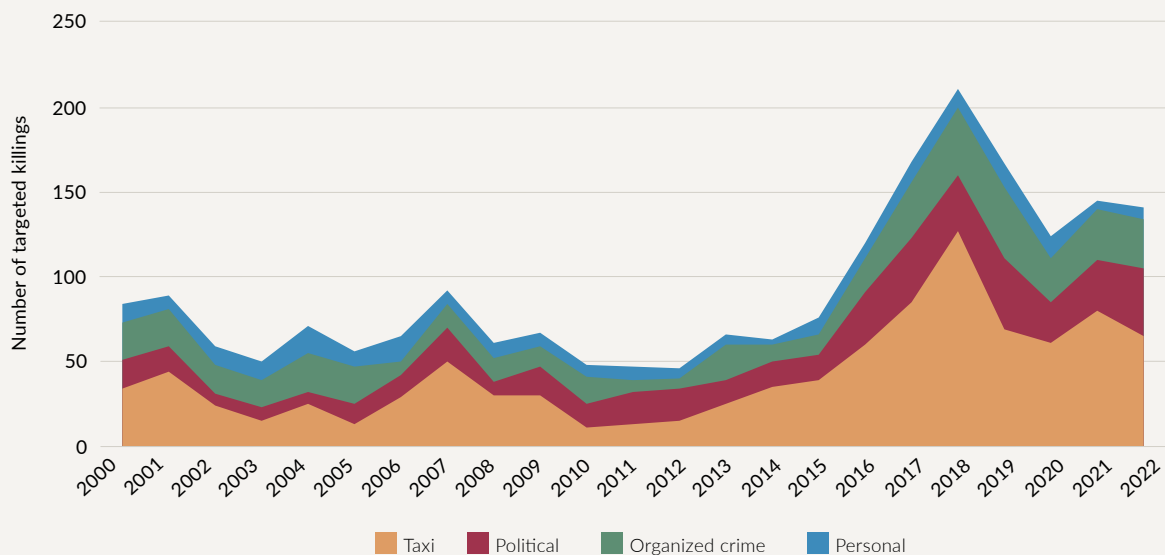


FIGURE 1 Categories of targeted killings, South Africa, 2000–2022.

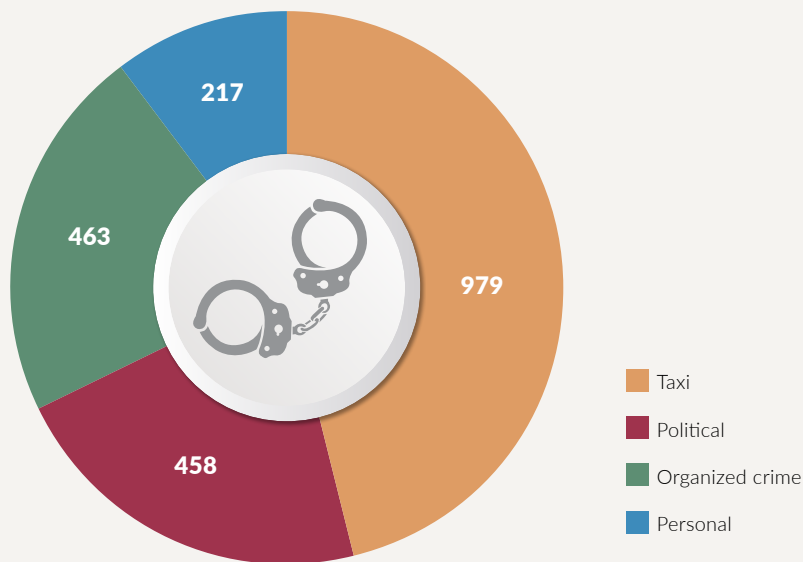


FIGURE 2 Proportion of cases of targeted killings by category, 2000-2022.

The total number of cases recorded in the database for 2022 was 141. This was down by four cases from 2021. While still alarmingly high, the number of cases recorded in 2022 did not reach the pre-COVID levels, which saw 168 cases in 2017, 211 (2018) and 168 (2019).

The breakdown of the 2022 total among the four categories recorded in the database shows that the change in the period under review, between 2021 and 2022, was mixed. Some categories increased while others decreased. These patterns are analyzed in the following section.



TRENDS BY CATEGORY, 2021–2022

Tracking the numbers of targeted killings between 2021 and 2022, the data shows that politically motivated killings and personal killings are on the rise, while taxi-industry-related killings and organized crime cases have gone down, albeit only slightly. Cases of taxi-industry-related targeted killings declined by 19% – from 80 cases recorded in 2021 to 65 in 2022. Political cases went up by 33%, from 30 cases recorded in 2021 to 40 in 2022. Organized crime cases went down slightly from 30 cases in 2021 to 29 recorded in 2022. Personal cases went up from five in 2021 to seven in 2022.

Taxi-related killings

The South African minibus-taxi industry started as a grey-market service providing transport and economic opportunities for black South Africans during the apartheid regime.²¹ It is a largely self-regulated industry.²² The taxi industry determines its own routes and passenger fares, which are regulated by internal regional bodies known as taxi associations, operating under the umbrella of the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO).²³

One of the key findings of the 2020 commission of inquiry into taxi violence in Gauteng, led by Justice Jeremiah Shongwe, was that because taxi associations are not regulated, they often allow taxi operators without operating licences to join their associations.²⁴ This leads to fierce competition between taxi associations over contested and lucrative routes. Consequently, violent disputes over saturated routes flare up among the associations.

Taxi-related violence ranges from shoot-outs at taxi ranks to more professional and targeted hits on influential players in the industry.²⁵ Disputes in the taxi industry often spiral into cycles of violence, as groups enact retaliatory killings.

Taxi violence is not limited to the minibus-taxi industry and often spills over into other transport networks, with local and long-distance bus drivers and bus companies targeted over route and fare disputes as well as competition for customers. For example, the Golden Arrow Bus company and the MyCiti rapid transit service often bear the brunt of mafia-style taxi violence in the Western Cape, while long-distance bus companies such as Intercape are often targeted in the Eastern Cape.²⁶ Media reports in the Western Cape have revealed how minibus-taxi drivers have also threatened public and private school transport drivers, demanding that schoolchildren are transported by their taxis instead, as had been promised by the Western Cape Department of Education.²⁷

The number of taxi hits in 2022 decreased from those recorded in 2021. In terms of the provincial breakdown, the highest number of hits were recorded in KZN, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape (see Figure 3).

KZN has seen a steep increase in taxi-related killings of 87.5% since 2021. Sixteen cases were recorded in 2021, climbing to 30 in 2022. This sharp surge led to the formation of yet another task team by the South African Police Service (SAPS).²⁸ The task team, announced during a consultative meeting between the Minister of Police and representatives from taxi associations in the province, was envisaged to comprise members of SAPS, SANTACO, the South African Revenue Service and the Special Investigating Unit, and was established to deal with the underlying causes of the violence, which had claimed over 20 lives during the first seven months of 2022 alone.²⁹ The killings, however, have continued despite the task team. While they welcomed the formation of the team, crime analysts cautioned that this was a firefighter response in an environment that requires more strategic and long-term intervention.³⁰ Other normative responses to targeted violence in the taxi industry have included road closures and commissions of inquiry, which often lead to a temporary decline in violence, but do not stop the violence altogether because they often do not address the underlying causes or lead to notable arrests or convictions. As discussed below, there has been a cycle of spurts of violence followed by short-term measures. Meanwhile, targeted killings continue.

The number of cases in the Eastern Cape increased in 2021 and 2022 after having declined between 2018 and 2020. The earlier decline can be attributed to route closures in 2018 after an onslaught of violence in the province, together with the impact of national lockdowns on movement in 2020. In 2018, Police Minister Bheki Cele closed the routes between the R61, the road between Mthatha and Port St Johns, and the N2, which constitutes the route between Mthatha and Tsolo, to quell taxi-related targeted killings.³¹ The routes were reopened after the taxi associations operating in the area brokered a 'peace deal'.³² The increase in incidents between 2021 and 2022 could be a sign that potential route closures and government responses in the province are no longer keeping the violence under control, and competition for routes has flared up once again. During the period under review, several taxi bosses in the Eastern Cape were targeted in what some reports claimed to be internal battles within taxi associations.³³

Western Cape taxi violence cases have declined since their peak in 2020/21. The peak recorded in 2021 was mainly linked to a route dispute between the Paarl and Belville taxi ranks (see below).

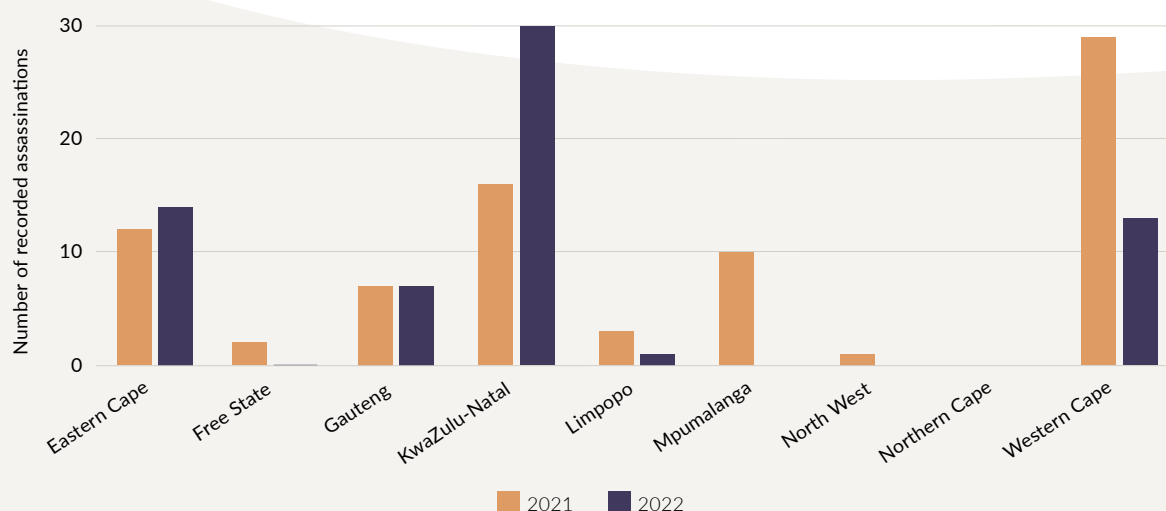


FIGURE 3 Taxi-related targeted killings by province, 2021–2022.

Western Cape tax violence

In 2021, rival taxi associations the Cape Amalgamated Taxi Association (CATA) and the Congress for Democratic Taxi Associations (CODETA) were locked in a dispute over which group had the rights to the B97 route between the Bellville taxi rank and Mbekweni, Paarl. More than 60 people were reportedly killed between January and August 2021 amid accusations of route invasions and extortion. The government suspended the route and forced the disputing parties

into arbitration talks led by the then transport minister, Fikile Mbalula. The B97 route was suspended for two months in July 2021 and then for an additional three months from the end of November 2021.³⁴ This led to a noticeable decrease in taxi killings, but severely disrupted passengers and businesses. Some passengers who were unable to get to work lost their jobs or had to take pay cuts. The route was officially reopened to the taxi associations on 8 December 2022.³⁵

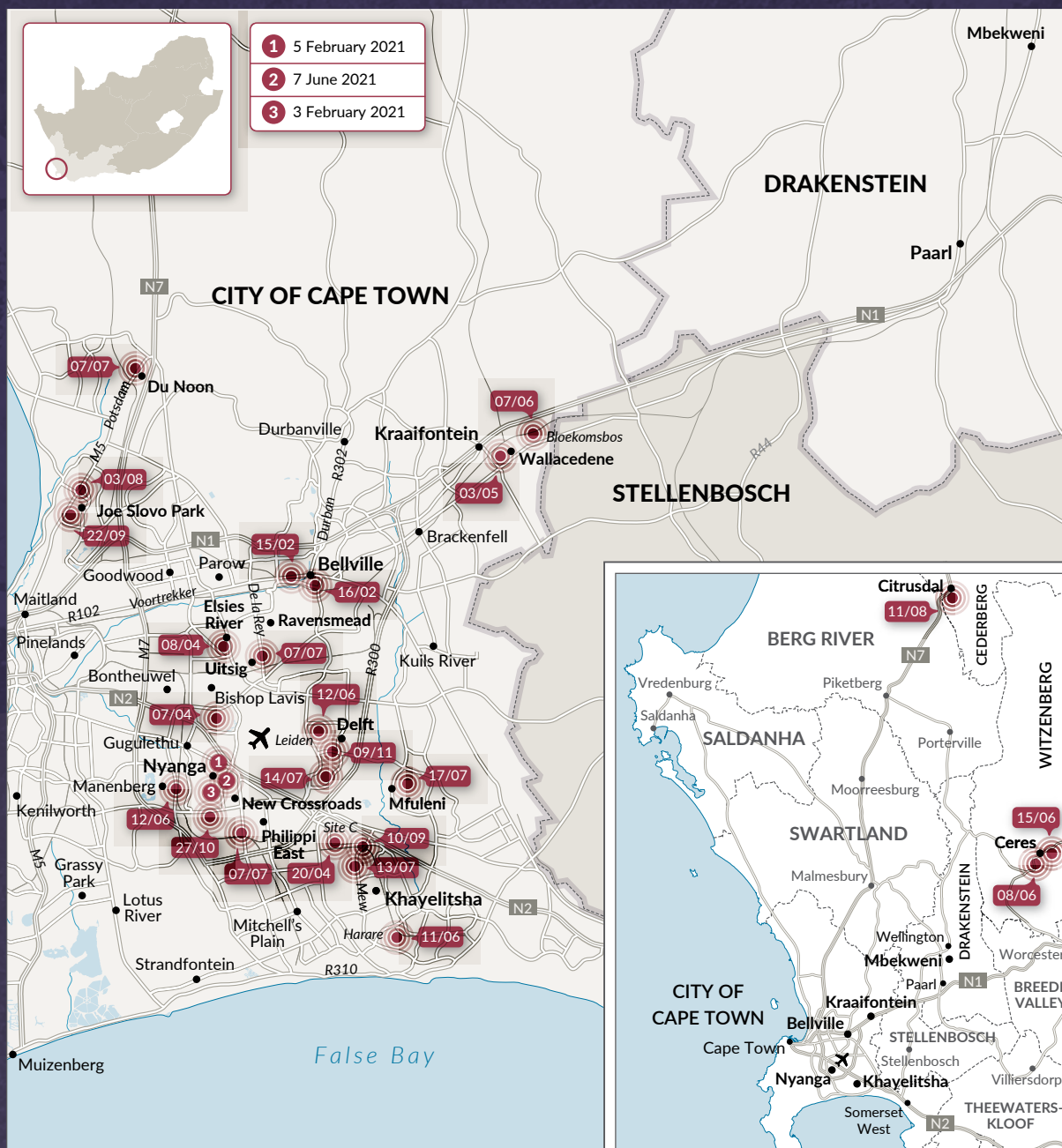


FIGURE 4 Sites and dates of targeted killings in Cape Town during the 2021 B97 taxi route dispute.



Fierce competition takes place between taxi associations over contested routes, which frequently spirals into violence.
© Siphwe Sibeko/Reuters via Alamy Stock Photo

In Gauteng, cases have continued to decline since their 2018 peak, a year in which 48 incidents were recorded during disputes largely attributed to violence involving the Kempton Park Taxi Association.³⁶

In Mpumalanga, there was a dramatic increase in cases from four recorded in the preceding five years to 10 incidents in 2021. While it is not clear what caused the increase, most cases happened between March and April 2021 in the Nkangala District. However, this increase was followed by a sharp decline in 2022 for which the database recorded zero cases in the province. This could mean that the cause of the violence, while still unknown, was resolved.

Organized crime-related killings

The number of organized crime cases recorded in 2022 was almost the same as in 2021 (down by one case since 2021). This follows a trend since 2020, where cases recorded in 2021 only went up slightly (15%) from 2020. Victims in this category include drug dealers, gang leaders and law enforcement officials investigating organized crime cases, including prosecutors, police officers and detectives.

In KZN, 13 cases were recorded in 2021, up from two the previous year. Before the COVID-19 lockdowns, however, 16 cases were recorded in KZN in 2019. Therefore, the lockdowns might explain the dip in reported and recorded cases in 2020. This was followed by a decline in 2022 where five cases were recorded.

While there was a decrease in cases recorded in KZN between 2021 and 2022, our analysis has indicated a shift in KZN organized crime dynamics. There has been an increase in gang- and drug-related hits occurring in KZN compared to earlier years, pointing to a shift in KZN organized crime dynamics in which media reports indicated an increase in turf wars between gangs, sometimes involving schools that are contested territory for the gangs' drug sales.³⁷ The notorious Hard Livings gang, based in Cape Town, has also reportedly been involved in turf wars in Durban.³⁸

Organized crime hits are often difficult to resolve because the victims can be targeted for a myriad of reasons. In addition to turf wars, motives include internal gang disputes over power, revenge killings or suspicions of colluding with law enforcement, as illustrated in our analysis³⁹ of gang leader Rashied Staggy's killing, as well as the 2021 killing of Durban's Simone Jasmin (see the profile below).

Durban's 'Queen of the south'



Photo: Supplied

Simone Jasmin was murdered outside her home on 29 October 2020 as she was getting into an Uber. A gunman fired six shots at her. Jasmin was the leader of the Cartel Gang, which operated in Wentworth, Durban.⁴⁰ She was nicknamed 'the black widow' and 'Queen of the south' (because of the parallels between her story and that of Theresa Mendoza, a fictional character in a Mexican telenovela who outlived her gangster partners and rose to the top of a drug gang). A bagpiper led the funeral procession as mourners wept the passing of a woman who was known to throw birthday parties for poor children in Wentworth.

Her murder remains unsolved to date, although several motives have been put forward for her death. Detectives believe she may have been killed by a family with ties to the taxi industry and allegedly involved in the drug trade in Durban, or in a hit commissioned by rival Hollywood gang or because of an internal mutiny in the Cartel Gang.

Jasmin certainly appeared to have enemies. According to one report, in 2019, a 'taxi guy' came to buy heroin from Jasmin. 'Something went wrong, and her guys shot this guy dead. They dumped his body in a field. When his people found out, they came back to the Barracks [the block of flats where Jasmin's gang operated] and shot up a flat, believing Jasmin and her crew were inside.'⁴¹

A police detective said Jasmin had started dominating the drug trade in Wentworth and this may have angered rivals in other gangs.⁴² A Durban Metro Police officer told the GI-TOC that Jasmin had been involved in a drug price war that undercut her rivals.⁴³

Jasmin was also out on bail at the time of her murder, facing charges of murder, attempted murder and conspiracy to commit murder alongside nine other suspects from her gang. While she was released on bail, the other suspects from her gang remained in custody. It is speculated that she might have been killed by other members of her gang who were suspicious as to why she had received bail while they remained in custody.⁴⁴

SAPS said that her case was still under investigation. The case bears the hallmarks of other decades-old organized crime hits that remain unsolved. ■

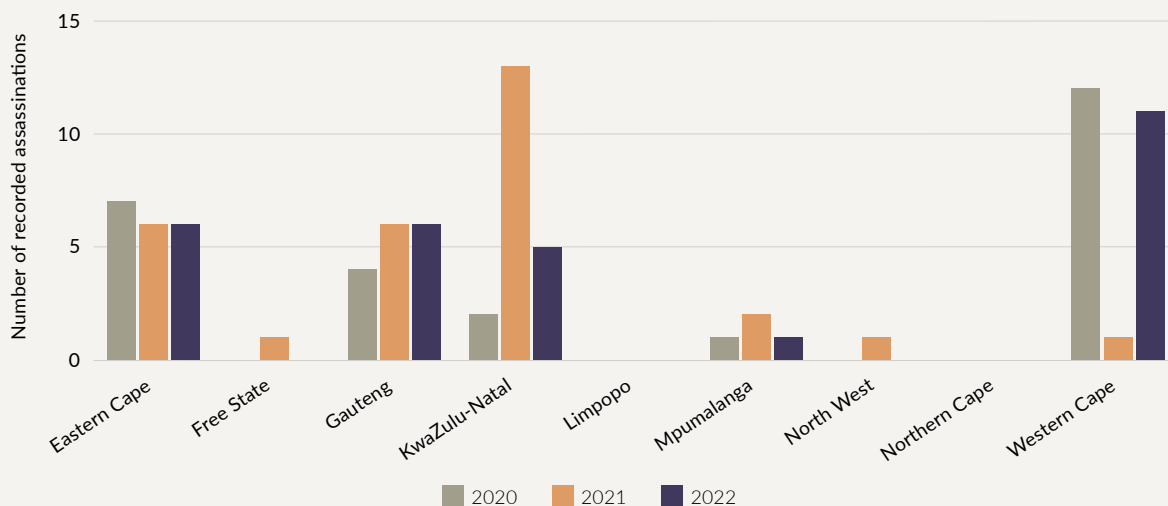


FIGURE 5 Organized crime-related targeted killings per province, 2020–2022.

Our analysis has also established that there has been an increase in organized crime cases in the Western Cape, from only one contract killing recorded in 2021 – down from 12 cases in 2020 – to 11 cases recorded in 2022.

A change in wording used in mainstream media reports might have led to our methodology detecting fewer cases in 2021. The search terms used to identify cases of assassinations could have generated fewer results fitting our criteria. Under our criteria, the circumstances for a hit to be recorded must have been such that it is relatively clear from the facts of the case that a hit had taken place, including that it was clearly targeted at one person or at groups of people, and that it included some form of economic transaction.

The decline could also, however, be a result of shifts in organized crime leadership structures in the Western Cape. Since the high-profile assassinations of gang bosses Ernie ‘Lastig’ Solomon in 2020 and Rashied Staggie in 2019 (Staggie’s son was also killed in a hit in 2022), there have been changes in old-order gang structures, with power and control shifting to new leaders. This may have had the effect of imparting a period of relative ‘peace’ in the province’s gang ecosystem, which may now be over, given the increase recorded in 2022.⁴⁵

Recorded cases in the Eastern Cape show a steady trajectory, with seven cases in 2020, six in 2021 and six in 2022. Gauteng cases are relatively steady but on the increase, with four cases recorded in 2020, six in 2021 and six in 2022. Cases in Gauteng are anticipated to remain on this trajectory because of increasing gang activity in the province and a rise in reports of vigilante groups who target individuals in the criminal underworld within the province.⁴⁶ In Mpumalanga, one case was recorded in 2020, two in 2021 and one in 2022.

Political assassinations

The number of politically connected hits carried out in South Africa has risen steadily since 2020. Cases of politically motivated hits went up from 24 recorded in 2020 to 30 cases in 2021 and 40 in 2022, the second highest number of incidents ever recorded in the database – the highest being in



ANC deputy branch chairperson Muzi Manyathi was killed in November 2022 just days after he had spoken publicly about being threatened. *Photo: Social media*

2019, with 42 cases. Of all the provinces, KZN had the highest number of recorded cases for 2022 (21), which is more than half the country's total number. Meanwhile, cases in the Eastern Cape in 2022 were the second highest in the database, with 10 recorded in that province. This marks a worrying trend because this is the highest number of political hits recorded for the Eastern Cape in the database.

The contested and often violent nature of the political economy in KZN is well documented. Politically motivated killings have – over the period covered by the database – been heavily concentrated in the province, and it is notorious for supplying hitmen to various other provinces and sometimes other countries.⁴⁷

Violence, including assassinations, is more prevalent in specific parts of the province, such as the KZN Midlands and the eThekweni metro. In the case of the latter, no political party has commanded an outright majority in the municipality since the 2021 local government elections. Violence is sometimes a function of decision-making in the council hanging in the balance between the various ideologically opposed political parties elected to the council.⁴⁸

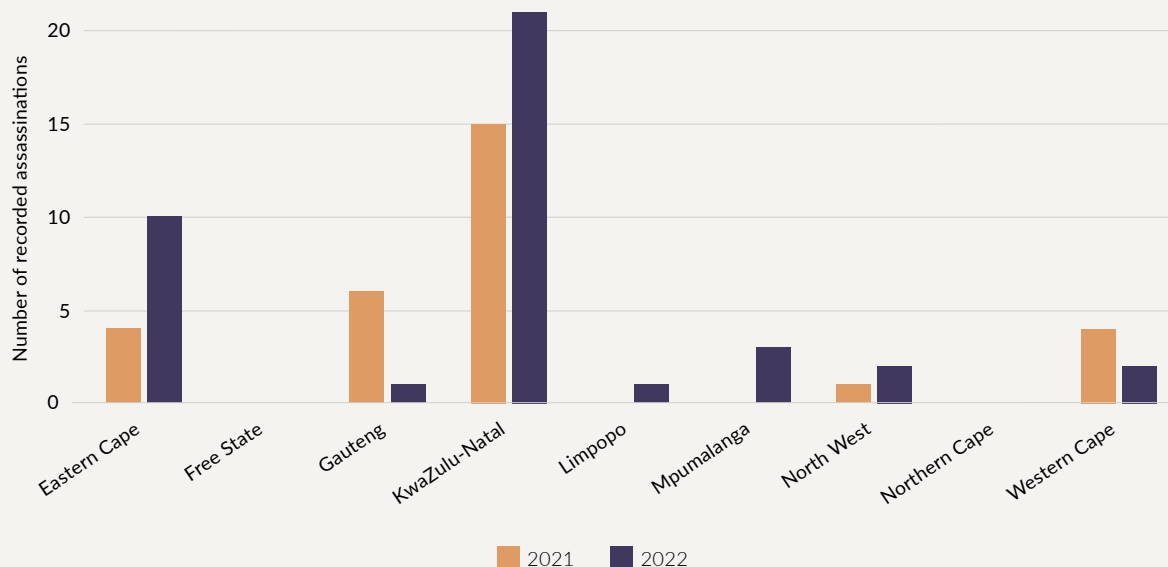
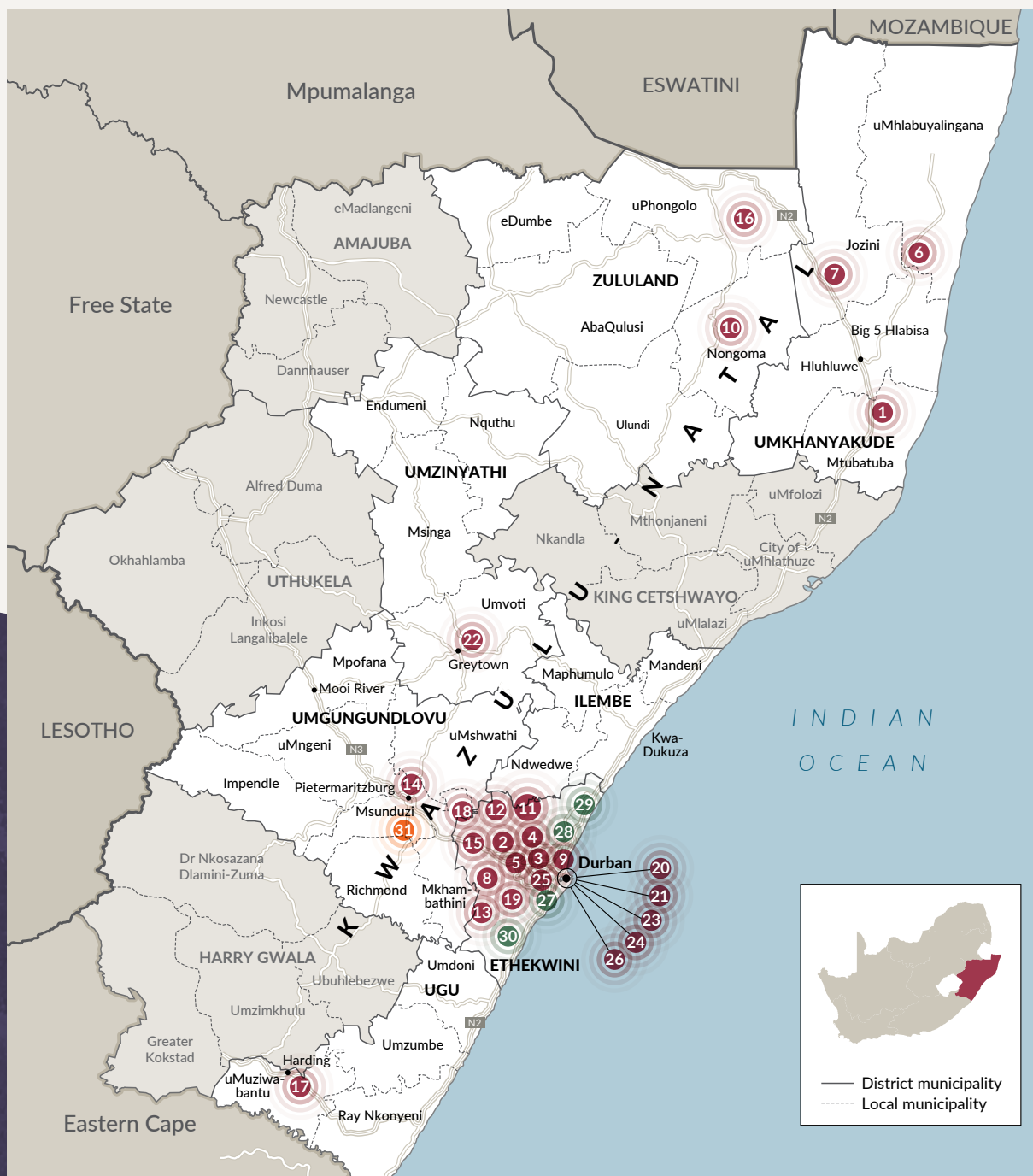


FIGURE 6 Political targeted killings per province, 2021–2022.



Assassinations

- 1 May 2020
- 2 25 May 2020
- 3 25 May 2020
- 4 June 2020
- 5 June 2020
- 6 17 September 2020
- 7 22 October 2020
- 8 November 2020
- 9 August 2021

- 10 September 2021
- 11 10 September 2021
- 12 12 September 2021
- 13 15 October 2021
- 14 17 October 2021
- 15 21 October 2021
- 16 25 October 2021
- 17 13 November 2021
- 18 December 2021

- 19 12 January 2022
- 20 3 February 2022
- 21 20 February 2022
- 22 26 February 2022
- 23 8 March 2022
- 24 18 April 2022
- 25 5 May 2022
- 26 20 August 2022

Assassination attempts

- 27 January 2020
- 28 11 May 2021
- 29 6 June 2021
- 30 21 August 2021

Threats

- 31 15 November 2020

FIGURE 7 KZN municipalities, showing the concentration of cases in the KZN Midlands, 2020–2022.

Political killings in Cato Crest



Mzimuni Ngiba, centre, with security carrying firearms. Photo: Supplied

Mzimuni Ngiba, who has served as a local councillor under the ANC for two terms since 2011, is a feared strongman in KZN's eThekweni metro. In 2021, Ngiba lost an internal ANC contest to Siyabonga Mkhize, who was nominated to replace him as the ANC candidate for the November 2021 local government elections. Mkhize was assassinated in October 2021 but won the elections posthumously. Ngiba, next on the party's list, resecured his old seat and access to power and patronage. Ngiba and three others were arrested in May 2022 for the murder of Mkhize. Ngiba has attended the trial from behind bars after his bail application was dismissed in August 2022.

In March 2022, Ngiba reported surviving an assassination attempt, saying he was attacked by a group of armed men who fired gunshots and ran away.⁴⁹ The incident happened in a voting station for ward committee elections. It is unclear whether Ngiba's security was with him at the time.

A week before Ngiba's arrest, a resident of Cato Crest, in KZN, Sifiso Mhlongo, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment after pleading guilty to obstructing the course of justice. Prosecutors said after Mkhize was shot dead that Mhlongo had 'picked up the cartridge cases expelled from one of the firearms used and removed them from the scene'.⁵⁰ He was arrested after residents tipped off

the police. The cartridges were found in a wardrobe in Mhlongo's house.

Violence in Cato Crest is common. In Durban, two other ANC councillors are facing charges in relation to internal ANC battles. Themba Mnguni is on trial for the murder of three party supporters at an ANC branch meeting in 2021, and Mzwandile Shandu for attempted murder of two people in 2021, in what police say is linked to a power contestation.⁵¹

The violence continues in spite of efforts to rein it in. The Moerane Commission investigating political killings in KZN produced a report on political killings in KZN in 2018, the same year the SAPS established a special task team dedicated to solving political killings in KZN. In February 2022, SAPS said it had investigated 258 dockets, resulting in 289 arrests. Police said the primary motives for killings were intra-political and taxi conflict, echoing the findings of the Moerane Commission. In its recommendations, the Commission urged political parties to educate their members on peaceful internal dispute resolution, and urged the state to depoliticize and professionalize the public-service sector, and tackle political patronage networks. While police say political killings have decreased in the area, violence monitors have contested this. ■

Recorded political hits in 2021 were also higher in other provinces than the previous local government election year (2016). This illustrates how political violence involving ANC contestation among political aspirants and candidates has spread across the country, with less concentration in KZN than in previous years. The waning power of the ANC, partly due to voter apathy and a declining majority in the latest general elections, suggests that ANC candidates are fighting for political positions internally across the different provinces.

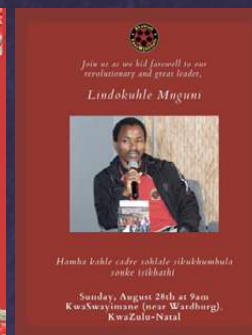
South Africa's 2021 local government elections were marred by political violence, assassinations and instability, as previous analysis had forecasted.⁵² Although in the Eastern Cape a 50% decline in reported cases was recorded in 2021, with four cases, in Gauteng, the number of incidents increased from two cases in 2020 to six in the 2021 database and 10 in 2022.

Incidents involving members of other parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) are few compared to those involving the ANC. An average of two cases per year between 2015 and 2020 was recorded for hits on IFP members, and one case per year targeting DA members. This form of violence therefore would appear to predominantly involve ANC members, and can be described almost entirely as an intra-party problem. Given the high stakes involved in politics, including substantial flows of money and influence, there is a strong likelihood that this kind of violence will continue to increase. This may also be compounded by the evident trend of declining electoral fortunes and the ANC's dwindling majority.

Political killings often target individuals holding political or administrative positions, mostly in the local municipal landscape, such as local councillors. The decentralized procurement system in South African government empowers accounting officers (e.g. director generals, provincial heads of department, municipal managers and chief executive officers of municipal entities) to manage their own tendering processes and resource allocation.⁵³ Therefore, municipal positions are coveted because they provide access to municipal finances, which, as has been shown in the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture report, has in some cases been diverted fraudulently by unscrupulous individuals for personal benefit.⁵⁴

Targeted political killings have also included candidates for local municipal councillor positions, political activists and whistle-blowers speaking out against corruption or threatening to do so. For example, in 2021, Babita Deokaran was assassinated after she lifted the lid on rampant corruption within the Gauteng provincial government's health department involving the fraudulent procurement of COVID-19 personal protective equipment.⁵⁵ The targeting of members of civil society illustrates how space for civil society has significantly declined on the continent since the pandemic.⁵⁶

Abahlali baseMjondolo



Photos: Abahlali baseMjondolo Facebook page

Abahlali baseMjondolo (ABM) is a shack dwellers' movement that organizes land occupations, campaigns against evictions and xenophobia, and lobbies for public housing.⁵⁷ Leaders of ABM have been the targets of assassinations since the inception of the movement. To date, 24 members have been assassinated since the organization was formed in 2005.

In 2022, three ABM leaders were killed within the space of five months. On 8 March 2022, deputy chairperson of ABM in the eKhenana commune, Ayanda Ngila, was killed in a hail of bullets in broad daylight with several witnesses present.⁵⁸ At the time, Ngila was in the company of Lindokuhle Mnguni, another ABM leader, but the two were separated in the chase by the killers hunting them. It is believed that both Ngila and Mnguni were targets, but the hitmen only managed to kill Ngila on that day. Both had received death threats.⁵⁹ These were allegedly reported to law enforcement authorities but no action was taken.⁶⁰

On 5 May 2022, Nokuthula Mabaso was shot dead in her house.⁶¹ Another leader in the eKhenana commune, Mabaso was one of the witnesses to Ngila's murder. She had prepared an affidavit that was to be used in court at the bail hearing of the suspect in Ngila's murder, but she was killed a day before the hearing. She was also the main respondent in an eviction case that was brought by the municipality in eKhenana.

On 20 August 2022, Mnguni was gunned down at his home in Cato Manor.⁶² Mnguni was living in a safe house at the time of his death, after receiving several death threats and having been initially targeted with Ngila at the time of his murder in March 2022.

These 2022 hits on land activists have been linked to court cases where they were either key witnesses or victims. Mnguni, Ngila and another activist, Lando Tshazi, had been arrested and detained for six months in 2021 and later released after the charges against them were dropped.⁶³ In January 2022, they were arrested again on what the movement has classified as baseless charges, only to be released over a month later.

The movement has continually clashed with the City of eThekweni over their occupation of the land where they have established the eKhenana commune. Leaders of the movement have consistently claimed that the source of their repression and victimization is their defiance of the City of eThekweni, which has built an alliance with local ANC members, the taxi industry, the Cato Manor police and a magistrate in the Durban Magistrates' Court.⁶⁴ ABM commands a large following in Cato Crest, an area already troubled by violent political contestation, as discussed above. Members of the movement said ANC heavyweights in the Cato Crest area are linked to taxi hitmen and local businessmen.⁶⁵ Residents cited a number of mafia-type activities in the area. For

example, public land is allegedly illegally allocated in return for a fee; low-cost housing meant to be allocated to the poor in a transparent process is either rented or sold, and there is no public scrutiny of the process; and extortion is rife, with culprits reportedly linked to the ANC demanding protection money from owners of small businesses, like tuck shops, taverns and car wash units.

The targeted killing of members of the movement has prompted a report raising the alarm on this by UN special rapporteur Mary Lawlor at the UN's Human Rights Council.⁶⁶ ABM has also reached out to the South African Human Rights Council, Amnesty International, the office of the National

Director of Public Prosecutions and the Minister of Police for assistance in their continued persecution – to no avail.⁶⁷ They have had to protect themselves and the eKhenana community by installing CCTV cameras, hiring private security, and fencing and electrifying the commune. After the murder of Mnguni, ABM claims that it took Cato Manor police two months to collect the video footage of the murder as evidence. ABM members have little faith that ongoing litigation against the killers of Ngila and Mabaso will lead to the conviction of the perpetrators because witnesses in the former case have been killed and, in the latter, witnesses are afraid to testify out of fear of being targeted. ■

Personal assassinations

Cases of personal contract killings were fairly consistent in terms of numbers of incidents between 2000 and 2020, with an average of nine cases a year. However, this category fluctuated in the period between 2021 and 2022. There was a decrease in cases recorded in 2021, followed by a slight increase in 2022. Five cases were recorded in 2021 (the last time such a low had been recorded was in 2014), followed by seven cases recorded in 2022. One plausible reason for the decline in 2021 may be the large number of court cases involving personal hits reported in the media over the past few years. That increasing numbers of perpetrators of personal hits are being held to account by the courts could well be deterring others. Personal hits are often related to family or romantic disputes or insurance fraud.

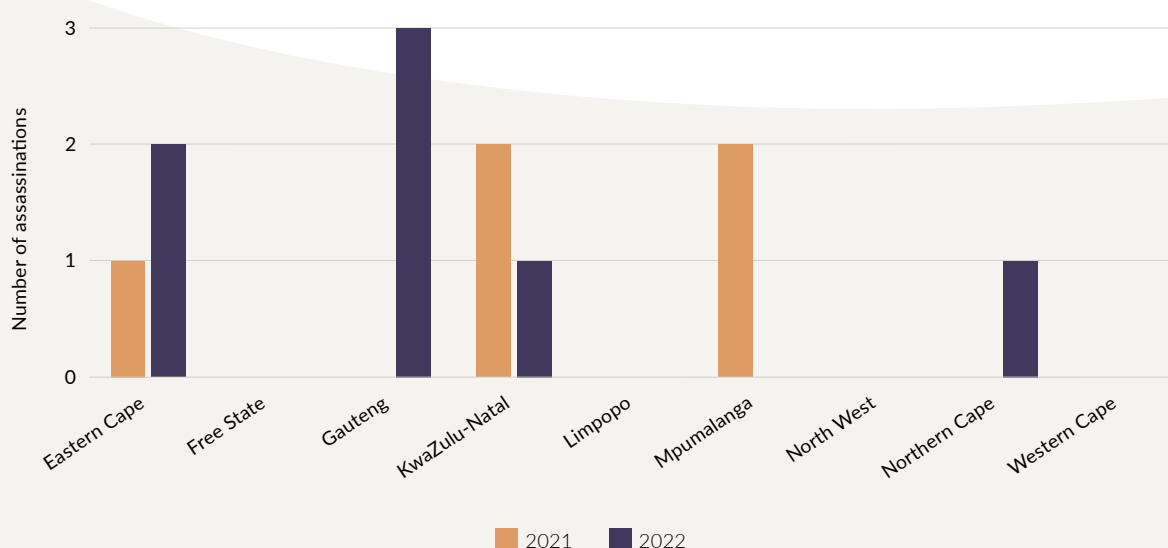


FIGURE 8 Personal targeted killings per province, 2021–2022.

False claims: Rising insurance fraud

Many of the personal hits recorded in the database were perpetrated for the purposes of fraudulent insurance claims.

In 2021, South Africa was shocked by the high-profile court case of Nomia Rosemary Ndlovu, a former police officer who was handed six life sentences for the murder of her partner and five family members in order to claim funeral and life insurance taken out on their lives.

The Association for Savings and Investment South Africa (ASISA)'s life insurance claim statistics for 2021 showed that Ndlovu's case

was not an exception. A significant increase in fraudulent and dishonest claims was recorded by ASISA in 2021, a year in which 4 287 fraudulent claims worth R787.6 million were detected. This is a marked increase from the 2020 figure. Data provided by ASISA shows that funeral insurance attracts the highest incidence of fraud and dishonesty, followed by death cover, disability cover, hospital cash plans and retrenchment benefit cover.⁶⁸ Funeral policies contributed to the highest number of fraudulent claims because they do not require blood tests or medical examinations, and are designed to pay out quickly when an insured person dies.⁶⁹

Hlompho Mohapi

Twenty-five-year-old Hlompho Mohapi was stabbed to death in July 2018 and her body found near Herold's Bay in the Western Cape. She had been lured to her death under the guise of a job interview (a common ruse used by criminals in South Africa) for a position at George Airport. The deception formed part of a scam orchestrated by Melisizwe Monqo (a pastor), his then fiancée, Siphosihle Pamba, and his cousin, Phumlani Qhusheka, in which life insurance policies were taken out in the names of unsuspecting victims.⁷⁰ The accused had previously attempted to scam numerous individuals in the Eastern Cape. Among these was Numfundiso Booï, in whose name a R5.5 million policy was taken out, and on whose life numerous attempts were made soon after.

In the days before Mohapi's murder, life insurance policies worth R3 million and R200 000, and a funeral policy worth R50 000, had been taken out in her name. She had been deceived into providing blood to her killers in the belief



Photo: Supplied

that it was a requirement for the job application. It was instead used to apply for life insurance policies in Mohapi's name.

The three accused were all found guilty of murder in September 2021 by the Western Cape High Court. The pastor and hitman were sentenced to life imprisonment, and the pastor's wife received a 20-year sentence. ■



CONCLUSION

The number of hits recorded in our database during the period under review – 2021 to 2022 – indicates a mixed but steady increase in targeted killings across the four categories – taxi-related, organized crime, political and personal. Assassinations have become more widespread and established over the past five to six years, barring a brief dip seen in the levels of this form of violence in 2020. The reduction in 2020 seems to have been temporary, brought about by the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of great concern is the sheer number of politically motivated hits, particularly because of the effect these kinds of targeted killings have on democratic processes in South Africa. Taxi killings over contested routes have also continued unabated despite various government interventions, such as route closures and enforced peace agreements between associations. The taxi industry also continues to supply a pool of hitmen for hire.

Taxi-related and politically motivated killings have driven government responses in the form of the Moerane Commission and the KZN police task force to investigate politically motivated killings. The recommendations of the Moerane Commission, however, have not been implemented since its report was published in 2018. While the task force has investigated numerous killings, court processes are extremely slow and very few convictions have been secured to date.

The trends explored in this report illustrate the urgent need to collect reliable, granular data on targeted killings, and the need to act proactively to intercept assassination plots, and to investigate and prosecute assassination cases with greater urgency.

Recommendations

■ The need for disaggregated data

The current crime statistics data released annually by the state does not contain disaggregated data on assassinations. Instead, targeted killings are grouped under the umbrella category of murder. The disadvantage is that this does not allow the state and civil society to accurately quantify the problem of targeted killings in South Africa and subsequently develop strategies or policies to address this phenomenon. While there is some level of government recognition and intervention – in the form of commissions of inquiry or police task forces – these are merely firefighter responses normally introduced following bouts of violence, when our database shows that targeted killings are increasing.

■ **Stem the recruitment pool of hitmen**

In its quantification of targeted killings in South Africa, this report also establishes that the taxi industry and KZN province provide reservoirs of hitmen for recruitment. A strategic and concerted effort by law enforcement to disrupt targeted killings and hitmen for hire should be directed at these recruitment pools. This will assist in stemming the source of hitmen willing to be hired for money and help reduce targeted killings across all the categories.

■ **Firearms control**

The majority of killings recorded in our database were committed using firearms. Greater access to firearms has increased violence and led to a commercialization of violence-for-hire, manifesting as hits across the different categories recorded in our database. GI-TOC research has established that illicit firearms often used in targeted killings mostly come from domestic sources, including the private security sector and firearms illegally diverted from state-owned coffers.

■ **Robust investigations and convictions**

There is a need for more robust intelligence gathering and more professional police investigations into threats of violence and targeted killings. Intelligence gathering and investigative capabilities have been crippled by years of mismanagement by the police, political interference, deep-seated corruption and lack of specialist skills. This has been compounded by a mass exodus of specialists, such as forensic and digital experts to the private sector, and failure on the part of the police to conduct targeted investigations, especially into specific clusters of violence. There is an urgent need for specialized intelligence personnel and properly trained police with resources to conduct thorough investigations that are followed through with arrests. Once arrests have been made, speedy convictions of those found guilty of killings need to be secured. Delays in the judicial process result in delayed justice for victims and their families.



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ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 600 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

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