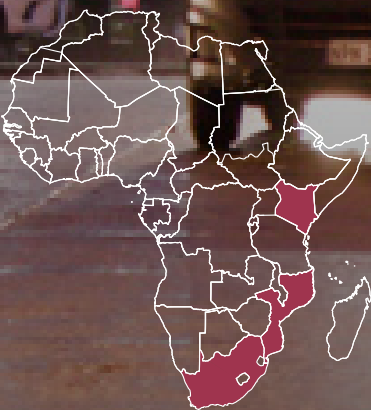


**GLOBAL  
INITIATIVE**  
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME

# MURDER BY CONTRACT

Targeted killings  
in eastern and  
southern Africa



KIM THOMAS

SEPTEMBER 2021





# MURDER BY CONTRACT

*Targeted killings in eastern and southern Africa*

Kim Thomas

September 2021

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Cover: Members of a private security company on patrol at a taxi rank in Durban, South Africa, 2020. © *Shaun Swingler*  
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# CONTENTS


<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Defining targeted killings .....	4
Why monitor targeted killings? .....	4
Methodology .....	6
Key findings and recommendations .....	8
 <b>Targeted killings by country .....</b>	 <b>9</b>
South Africa .....	10
Kenya .....	24
Mozambique .....	34
 <b>Characteristics of targeted killing in the region .....</b>	 <b>41</b>
Method of assassination .....	42
Location of assassinations.....	43
Fatality rates.....	44
The price tag of a hit.....	45
 <b>Conclusion .....</b>	 <b>47</b>
Recommendations .....	49
 Notes .....	 51



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contract killings remain an unexplored phenomenon in east and southern Africa.

© Alon Skuy/The Times



**T**argeted killings instil fear, silence activists and whistle-blowers, corrode democracies, and assist criminal actors in achieving their goals. The criminal economies of Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa are marked by these killings for social, political or economic gain. Yet, their nature and extent remain underexplored. We have chosen these three countries for analysis for several reasons. South Africa has a long history of targeted violence in various sectors of society, and our established database on the country provided a methodological framework for expanding the study. Kenya was chosen, as it has struggled not only with political violence, but also organized crime and gang culture, all of which, based on our South African research, provide a foundation for assassinations. Its fairly extensive media coverage also provided a good framework for the study. Although Mozambique's media coverage is limited and less free, Mozambique was included in the study because our ongoing fieldwork there has revealed that targeted killings are prevalent in the country, particularly in manipulating political outcomes.

The sociopolitical landscape of these three countries, although different from one another, all have commonalities that are conducive to targeted killings. South Africa has a long-standing history of violence deployed to achieve various political or economic outcomes, as was seen during the apartheid government's administration and in the various post-democratic political party struggles. Violence in the mass-transit minibus-taxi industry<sup>1</sup> as well as interpersonal violence are not new to the country. However, the use of targeted violence, by means of contracting a third party, to achieve political, economic or personal gain is something that has increased over the past two decades. Previous research on assassinations in South Africa by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) has revealed that targeted violence increased from 2000 to 2017 and that there were particularly high rates of assassinations in the KwaZulu-Natal province, owing to both political motives and the taxi industry's power struggles and conflict over routes.<sup>2</sup> The research further revealed that, nationally, the taxi industry made up over 40% of the assassinations during that data period. Continued data collection and analysis up to 2020 seeks to determine if these trends are continuing or if there have been any significant changes in the targeted-killing landscape.



Kenya, although not as violent as South Africa, also has a history of political struggles and interconnectedness of the state and organized crime.<sup>3</sup> This relationship is particularly evident in the deployment of gangs by politicians to intimidate the opposition and rally support for their campaigns. Kenya's *matatu* industry,<sup>4</sup> much like South Africa's taxi industry, is also deeply criminalized. The industry experiences high levels of extortion, intimidation and corruption.<sup>5</sup> Kenya has also experienced various land disputes over the years, which have led to violence and assassinations. It is in light of all these factors and their similarities with the South African landscape for assassinations, that the Kenyan database was compiled to determine the extent of these assassinations and their impact in Kenya.

Mozambique has long been afflicted with political instability and violence. The current insurgency in the northern province of Cabo Delgado is one of many examples of the violence that has plagued the country. Although our research picked up some assassinations related to terrorism in the region, they were generally excluded from our database, as they were not linked to organized crime and did not fit within our methodological criteria. This is consistent with our field research in the country that has shown that the Islamic militants

are in fact not profiteering from the illicit economy.<sup>6</sup> The GI-TOC's ongoing research in the country, as well as our network of local journalists, has revealed that assassinations, particularly politically motivated ones, are having a profound impact on Mozambican society and democracy. This was first documented in a short GI-TOC data collection and article on the problem titled 'Mozambique's quiet assassination epidemic'.<sup>7</sup> It is in light of this research that we decided to expand the database to better understand this phenomenon.

As a result of the contexts in these countries, and their histories of violence, there are sources of violence available to those who have historically deployed it. This experience, coupled with dire social circumstances and limited economic opportunities, as seen in the context of Kenyan and South African gangs, creates reservoirs of violence that fuel targeted killings.<sup>8</sup> Once involved in the business of targeted killings, the hired hitmen become vulnerable themselves. Interviews with hitmen in Cape Town gangs revealed that they were often as vulnerable as those whom they killed. In the gang context particularly, hitmen often exist outside of the formal gang structure and as a result do not have protection from gangs. However, they are still beholden to the gang bosses.<sup>9</sup>

**Law enforcement officers at a protest against police brutality in Nairobi, Kenya. The country has a history of political struggles and organized crime infiltration. © Dennis Sigwe/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images**



Compounding the problem is high levels of corruption and inefficiency in the police services in all three countries analyzed here. Attempts at following up on cases revealed that police were frequently either intimidated into not investigating cases or bribed to sideline them. Extrajudicial killings by police in Kenya, although not generally recorded in our database because they are not motivated by organized crime, speak to the nature of the relationship between Kenyan police and the communities they are meant to protect.<sup>10</sup> Targeted killings by police where there is a clear organized crime motivation – for example, police working with specific gangs to take out the competition – have been included. In such cases, high levels of impunity often mean the police are seen as a viable option to eliminate competition or ‘solve a problem’.

## Defining targeted killings

Although academic literature differentiates between targeted killings, hits and assassinations,<sup>11</sup> we use the three terms interchangeably in this report and define targeted killings as murders committed for economic, political or personal gain. Although these killings are often outsourced to hitmen, they can also be undertaken by individuals within political or organized crime groups.

We defined the following criteria to decide on the inclusion of a case in our database. First, the killing had to target a specific person or be associated with a clear attempt or plot. Second, a clear economic, political or personal motivation had to be evident (for a personally motivated targeted killing, a hired hitman was a required criterion for inclusion). Third, state-sanctioned or terrorist killings were disregarded unless also linked to organized crime. Finally, we also considered the circumstances around the event, such as the method, location and the social profile of the victim, to determine whether the murder could be classified as a targeted killing.

## Why monitor targeted killings?

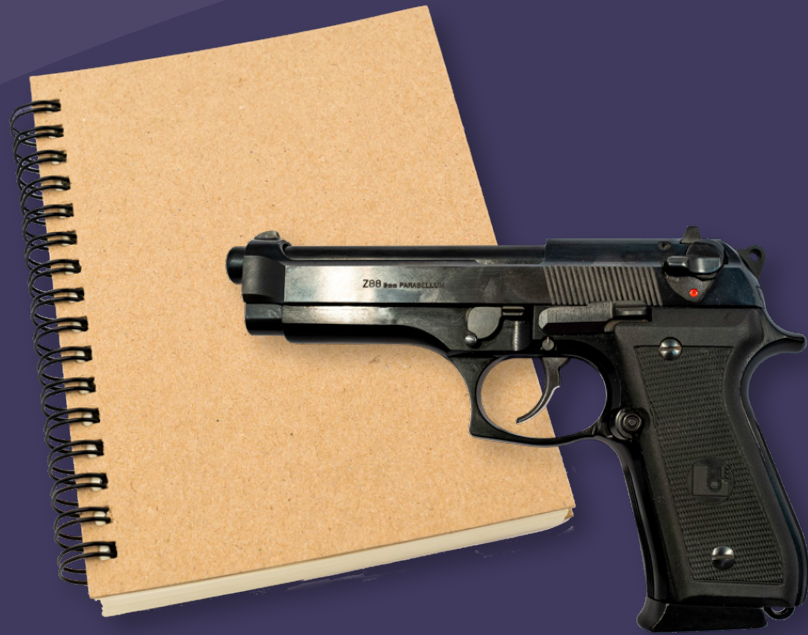
Targeted killings have far-reaching effects, threatening the political, economic and social security of a country. Hits (or the threat of violence) distort political and economic dynamics by replacing a sense of trust between individuals with the sense of violence. When hits are used to intimidate and create fear in a public place, bystanders often get caught in the crossfire.

Political killings affect and delegitimize political processes, which ultimately undermine a democratic society as political positions are assigned through the violent removal of political rivals. Transparency may be reduced owing to fearmongering directed at municipal officials during the tender processes for contracts. Targeted hits also pose a threat to the country's judicial system by fostering a culture of fear and silencing. Assassinations (or attempted assassinations) of attorneys, magistrates, prosecutors, judges and witnesses are likely to result in inaccurate (if any) testimonies.

Hits related to business disputes and economic outcomes threaten the notions of fair economic competition. This is particularly evident in the South African taxi industry and in Kenyan land disputes. Socially, hits may affect the victim's immediate community, and more so economically if the individual was a breadwinner. The threat of violence also has the potential to limit or eradicate transparency and accountability in cases where journalists or whistle-blowers are killed.

## Hit lists

Hit lists are essentially written lists of the names of assassination targets. They are fairly common, particularly in South Africa, and are powerful tools in creating crippling fear. Although hit lists are predominantly used in the underworld to threaten or eliminate rivals, they are also used to silence people who oppose or speak up against criminals. The fear created by hit lists effectively silences activists, witnesses, journalists, politicians and businessmen. Hit lists have also become common in politics, with political-party candidate lists being used to create hit lists to eliminate the competition.<sup>12</sup>



Hit lists aim to silence those engaged in fighting organized crime. © Julian Rademeyer

Studies on violence related to targeted killings have focused on a number of aspects over the years. Data sets focused on political violence typically categorize incidents by location, consequences, cause, type of violence, and the party responsible.<sup>12</sup> Such data sets include the Global Terrorism Database, the Worldwide Incidents Tracking System, the South Asia Terrorism Portal, and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. In one study, a historiometric approach was used to analyze the association between leadership type and the vulnerability to assassination,<sup>13</sup> whereas studies in Mexico looked at the assassination of organized-crime leaders and the impact on long-term violence.<sup>14</sup> Other research recommended that a database be created to track incidents of homicide, particularly those that are classified as revenge murders, witness elimination, organized crime, and contract or gang killings.<sup>15</sup> Monitoring terrorism events also contributes to a better understanding of assassinations.<sup>16</sup> A South African monitor focusing on politically linked violence in KwaZulu-Natal provides a holistic understanding of the dynamics of violence in the province.<sup>17</sup>

Noting the value of gathering data on types of violence and their impact, the GI-TOC has generated a database on targeted killings in South Africa, Kenya and Mozambique to shed light on the criminal economy of targeted killings in these countries. Although homicide statistics are generally available in these countries, there is no disaggregated data on contract killings, and low conviction rates make it difficult to know the motives for these killings and the manner in which they take place. Additional data collection is, therefore, necessary to determine the scope of targeted killings in these countries.

Collecting data on assassinations in South Africa, Kenya and Mozambique not only provides insight into the nature and extent of targeted killings but also identifies the industries in which hits are likely to take place and allows for a profile of typical victims to be created. The number of victims and the categories of hits also illustrate the extent of the impact of targeted killings. Through mapping the hits, hotspots can be identified, which, in turn, contribute to regional analysis and approaches to address these crimes. As has been noted by a number of academics, little is known about contract killings and further research is required to better understand and address this phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Tracking these incidents and bringing them to public attention therefore helps to inform policy solutions.

## Methodology

Although limited in its analytical ability, the methodology used in this research provides insight into the nature of targeted killings, which tends to be left unexplored at the quantitative level.

For South Africa, the methodology followed on from previous GI-TOC research and focused on building a database of hits (including attempted hits) in the country for the period 2015–2019.<sup>19</sup> We used a content analysis approach and applied it quantitatively by coding and counting the occurrences of assassinations. Media reports on assassinations were drawn mainly from an electronic database, Sabinet, which provides access to local, regional and national news content published in print. Online news searches provided supplementary sources, and information and trends were also cross-checked against data collected by local activists working in hotspot areas.

For Kenya and Mozambique, we used Lexis Nexis Advance, which has an extensive global news database.<sup>20</sup> News articles were reviewed to identify cases where the circumstances and the associated commentary (by the police, court proceedings, the community or family of victims) suggested an assassination (or attempted assassination). For Mozambique, data from news sources was supplemented with data collected by the GI-TOC's network of journalists.

Incidents identified as targeted killings were categorized as related to political, organized-crime or personal gain. Cases that fall within the political category generally targeted individuals designated as holding political or administrative office,

almost always in local government. We categorized cases related to organized crime as those that clearly used targeted violence to influence a certain economic outcome; these often occurred in the criminal economy. In the personal category, we included cases that involved infidelity or perceived infidelity (love triangles), attempts to obtain life-insurance payouts and children arranging for their parents to be killed.

For the South African data set, we included an extra category for the minibus-taxi industry, because of the sheer number of murder cases in this industry and because it is an industry segment that has long been characterized by the prevalence of targeted killings. These include hits targeting taxi bosses,<sup>21</sup> taxi drivers and members of taxi association committees. Such murders are usually connected to disputes over route allocations and power struggles within the lucrative taxi associations.

Compiling our database was constrained by several limitations and weaknesses. Determining feasible search terms proved difficult, as we wanted to ensure a sufficiently wide search yet with an appropriately narrow focus so as to make the project manageable. It was also challenging to maintain consistency in identifying and coding the cases.

Owing to the nature of the data collection method and the strict classification criteria, which were designed to prevent incorrectly classifying ordinary murders as assassinations, hits that had been covered up or not reported on are not included in the database.<sup>22</sup> The data, therefore, has an underrepresentation of professional hits, hits described as robberies, hits masked as an accident, hits that were covered up by authorities, and hits that did not get any media attention or those which the media was pressured not to report on. Gang-related hits (particularly in South Africa) were often not identified by the media as assassinations and therefore rarely came up in our search. Given the underrepresentation and the hidden nature of hits, we assume that our data is an undercount of reality.

Information provided by news articles was often incomplete or lacking in detail. For example, not all the articles mentioned the location of the hit; sometimes the area was not even mentioned and we could, at most, pin it down to a province. This limited the study's ability to draw definitive conclusions regarding the variables associated with assassinations.

A further limitation – and subsequently an opportunity for further research – relates to case follow-up. A considerable number of cases have limited information available, as there has been either no further reporting on the case or the investigation has reached a dead end. Cases that do reach court often only do so after a number of years. As a result, we are likely to know more about the cases in our data collection period (2015–2019) only in a few years' time. This is important to keep in mind for future research on follow-up.



## Key findings and recommendations

The different sizes of the data sets in the three countries prevent numerical comparisons between them, and therefore the countries are analyzed individually. However, key clusters of cases were identified in each country, which allows for some contextual analysis. The data also provides an opportunity to compare the methods, location, fatality rate and price of targeted killings across the region. South Africa has the biggest and most extensive data set, owing to the prevalence of targeted killings in the country and partly also to the extensive coverage of cases by South African media. From the Kenyan data set, which is smaller than that of South African cases, several motivations for targeted killings could be identified as well as geographic hotspots. The Mozambican data set, which is the smallest of the three, includes mainly political assassinations.

In all three countries, politically motivated hits are evident and make up a significant portion of the database. They generally relate to abuses of power and the elimination of competition. Organized crime hits are also present in all three countries, and this category generally relates to disputes in the illicit economy and the silencing of whistle-blowers, witnesses and activists. Interestingly, the *matatu* industry in Kenya, although criminal in nature and not free from violence, has not made use of targeted killings to regulate the industry, which is in stark contrast to South Africa's minibus-taxi industry.

A general decline in targeted killings was seen in all three countries over the last few years, with the lowest numbers being recorded in 2020. This is in part the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns, which began that year. Owing to the pandemic and the lockdowns, 2020 saw a dramatic global constraint on freedom of movement. These measures were enforced to varying effects in the three countries, with South Africa experiencing a year of strict lockdowns, whereas Mozambique and Kenya had fewer restrictions on freedom of movement. Although data showed a decrease in targeted killings in the region in 2020, it was not as significant as would have been expected given the strict restrictions on movement. This observation suggests that targeted killings are ruthless acts, performed by professional criminal actors who operate with impunity. In addition, national lockdowns most likely made the conditions for criminal operations more difficult and contested, which could have led to an increase in competition among rivals and therefore created more reason to forcefully eliminate competitors. Our field research specifically showed that when the lockdown in South Africa was at its highest level and people were forced to stay home under an imposed curfew, conditions were more conducive to targeted killings, likely because targets' movements were limited.<sup>23</sup>

As a result of the continuous problem of targeted killings in the region under study, it is recommended that civil society monitoring be increased and that local law enforcement should focus on specific assassination clusters, supported by investigations. Reservoirs of violence should be addressed through social and economic interventions. Finally, there is a need to improve firearm control across the region.

A photograph of a man in a white long-sleeved shirt pointing his right index finger at several bullet holes in the green door of a vehicle. The vehicle appears to be a bus or a large van. The background is slightly blurred, showing some structural elements of the vehicle. A large, stylized white graphic of a compass rose or a similar geometric design is overlaid on the image, with its center near the man's hand.

# TARGETED KILLINGS BY COUNTRY

Bullet holes in the car of a murdered poll observer in Mozambique, ahead of national elections. Political assassinations are rife in South Africa, Kenya and Mozambique.

© Gianluigi Guercia/AFP via Getty Images



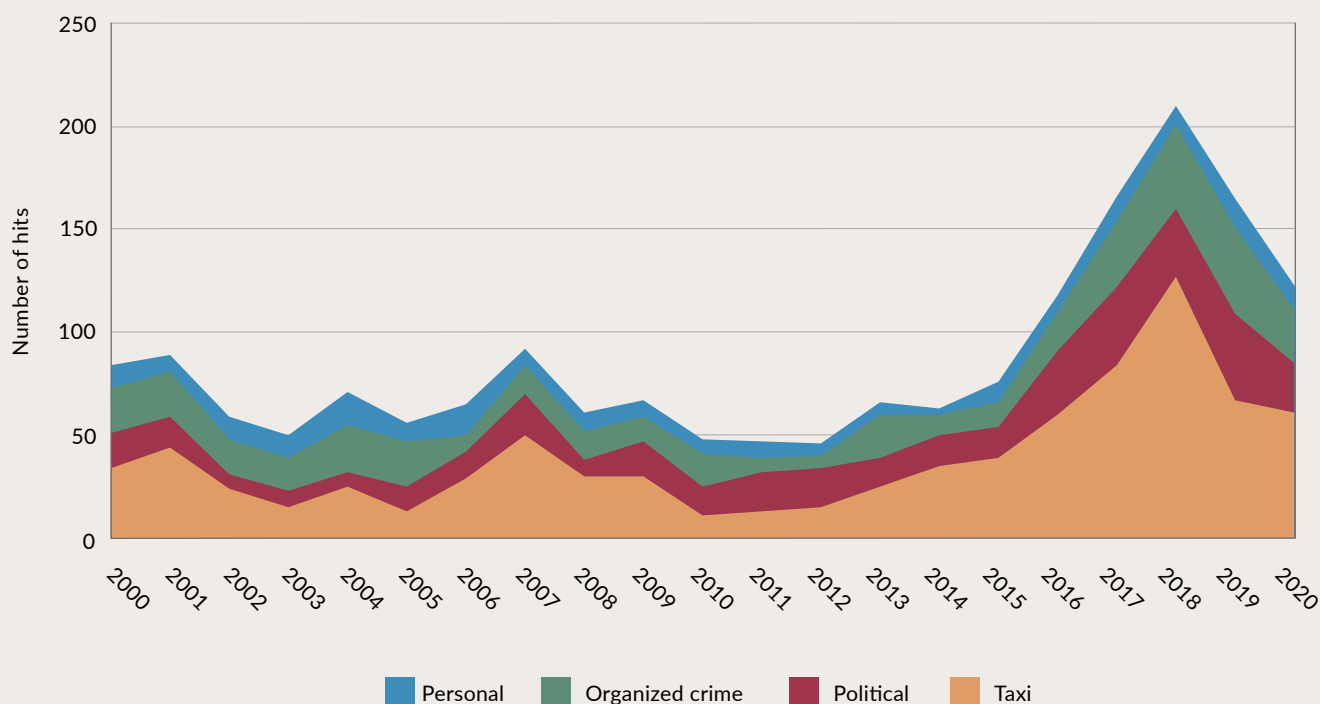
## South Africa

South Africa, with an estimated population of 59.6 million,<sup>24</sup> is regarded as Africa's most developed economy.<sup>25</sup> Violent crimes are common and in 2020 the murder rate was reported as 36.4 per 100 000.<sup>26</sup> Although there have been attempts to disaggregate some of the homicide statistics in South Africa, there is still no data available on targeted killings.

In 2018, the GI-TOC report 'The rule of the gun: Hits and assassinations in South Africa',<sup>27</sup> presented an analysis of hits in South Africa between 2000 and 2017. It highlighted considerable increases in targeted killings between 2014 and late 2017, the prevalence of hits in the taxi industry and how the province of KwaZulu-Natal contributed to the overall number of assassinations. The GI-TOC has continued to monitor targeted hits in South Africa over the last two years, and the analysis reported in this report focuses on data from 2015 to 2020.

### Targeted killings in South Africa between 2015 and 2020

Although the analysis in the current study focused on data for the period 2015–2020, the South African database builds on the context provided by previous GI-TOC research.<sup>28</sup> A total of 1 822 cases were recorded for the period between 2000 and 2020, of which 858 occurred between 2015 and 2020; that means that the last six years of the 21-year data set accounted for 47% of the total number of hits. As can be seen in Figure 1, the number of cases steadily increased from 2015, with a notable peak in 2018, followed by a decline in 2019 and 2020. The graph also shows that the number of hits classified as political, organized-crime related and personal have remained fairly stable through the 21-year period, whereas hits in the taxi industry show notable peaks and troughs.



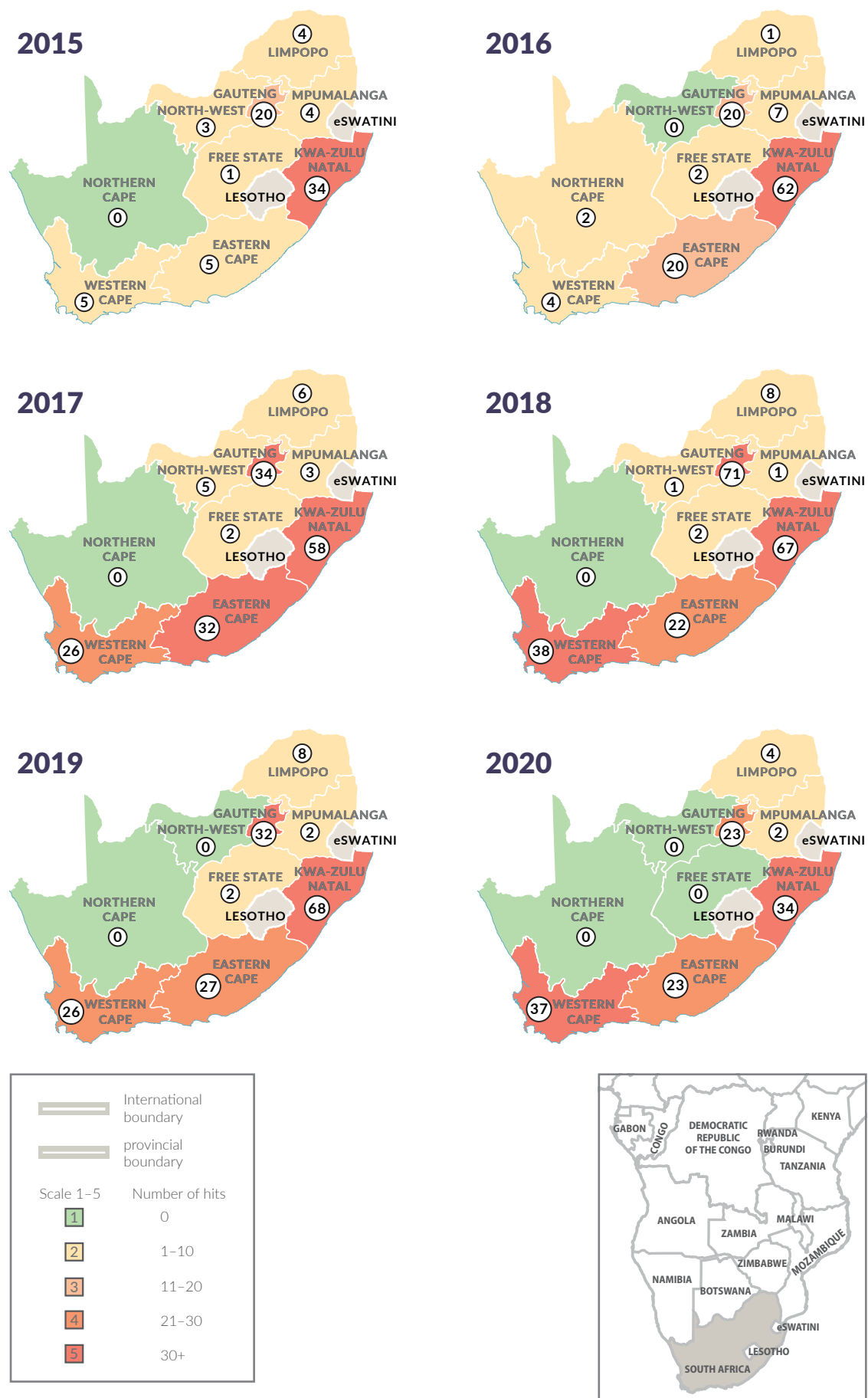
**FIGURE 1** Number of assassinations in South Africa, 2000–2020.

### Provincial trends

KwaZulu-Natal has consistently seen the most cases of assassinations during this period (38%; 323 cases), and is the largest contributor to the national trend. This is followed by Gauteng (23%; 200 cases), the Western Cape (16%; 136 cases) and the Eastern Cape (15%; 129 cases). Cases in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Free State contributed to a limited extent (<8% combined).

Cases in Gauteng and the Western Cape appear to have increased over time, particularly from 2017 onwards. In 2018, 71 hits were recorded in Gauteng, more than the 67 hits recorded for KwaZulu-Natal in that year. This was also the first time in the 21-year data set that another province recorded more hits than KwaZulu-Natal. This was due to an increase in taxi-related violence and organized-crime hits in Gauteng in 2018.

Trends over the current analysis period (2015–2020) can be better understood by organizing cases according to category.



**FIGURE 2** Occurrence of hits by province, 2015–2020.



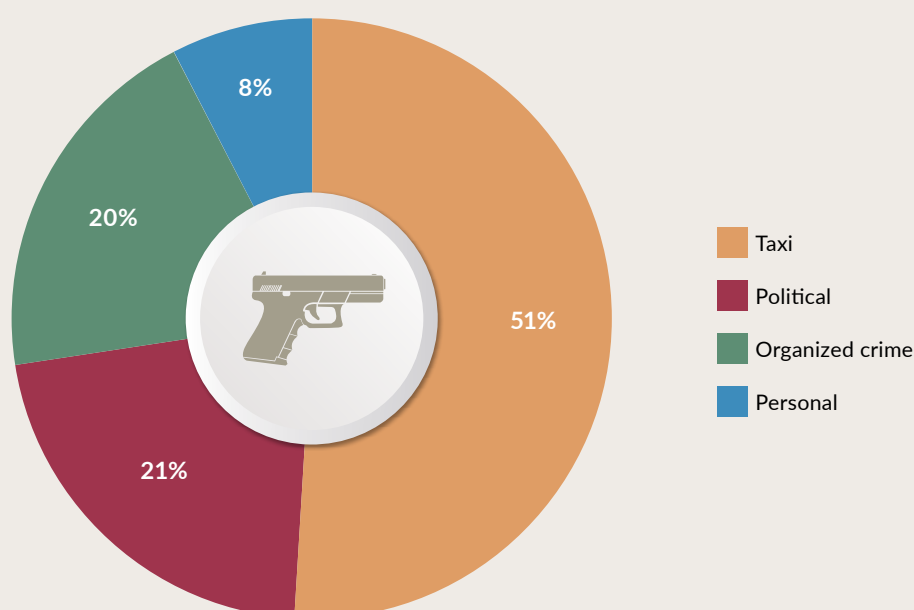
Members of the South African Communist Party attend the funeral of Mhlengi Khumalo, one of the party's secretaries, shot dead in 2019. © Rajesh Jantilal/AFP via Getty Images

### Breakdown according to category

Trends over the current analysis period (2015–2020) can be better understood by organizing cases according to category, as shown in Figure 3.

Consistent with earlier trends, hits in the taxi industry were still the biggest contributor (51%) to the total number of assassinations in South Africa (Figure 3). Hits associated with political motives and organized crime contributed to a similar extent (21% and 20%, respectively), whereas hits for personal gain remained the smallest contributor (8%).

When looking at the breakdown of hits by category, as seen in Figure 1, cases related to political motives and organized crime show a slight but steady increase over time (barring a decline in 2020), while cases related to personal gain remain consistently low. In contrast, the number of cases in the taxi industry increased from 2015 to 2017, with a sharp increase specifically in 2018. This was likely due to increases specifically in Gauteng and the Western Cape, as will be discussed later. The minor decrease seen in 2020 may have been linked to the national lockdown periods in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



**FIGURE 3** Relative contribution to total number of assassinations in South Africa according to category.

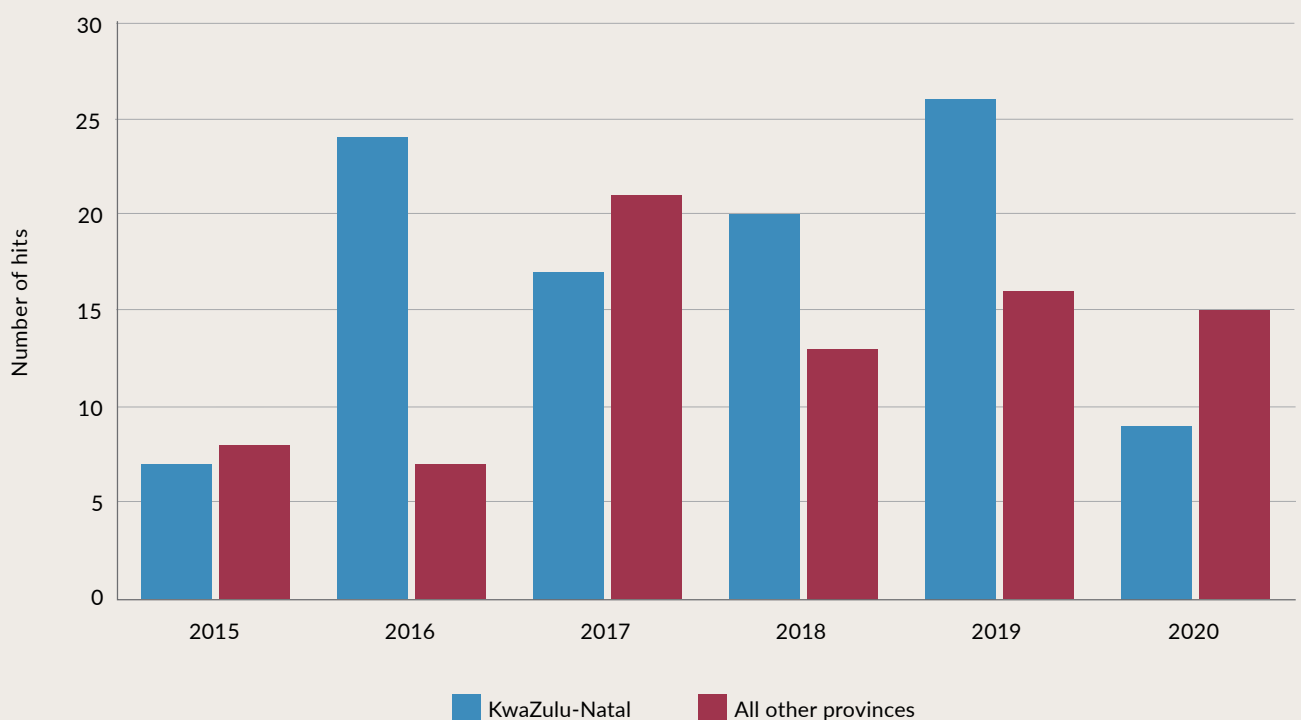


## Political hits, 2015–2020

Similar to trends shown by earlier data,<sup>29</sup> political assassinations were concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal during the current data period (Figure 4). Of the total number of political hits in this period, 103 (56%) occurred in KwaZulu-Natal. This was followed by 22 cases (12%) in Gauteng, 20 cases (11%) in the Eastern Cape and 15 cases (8%) in the Western Cape. Although political hits were also recorded in other provinces, they were more isolated and not of the same magnitude and effect as those in KwaZulu-Natal.

Data from 2016 and 2019 show two localized peaks during this study period. Both years were election years: 2016 saw municipal elections in August and national elections were held in 2019. In 2020, a contextually drastic decrease in political hits were noticed in KwaZulu-Natal. This was likely due, in part, to the national COVID-19 lockdown, which meant that political branch meetings and conferences, which are frequently accompanied by violence, did not take place as usual. The decline in political hits in KwaZulu-Natal is likely a temporary pause in violence rather than the start of a long-term declining trend.

As high as these numbers are, it is important to note that they are likely an underrepresentation of reality. Data collected by our field researchers in the province suggest that the media picks up only a portion of the cases (about 60–70%), and our database therefore does not reflect the full magnitude of political killings in the province. However, the general trends are in line with the data collected on the ground and therefore can be regarded as a useful barometer of the situation.



**FIGURE 4** Trends in political hits, 2015–2020.

The reason for the extent of political hits in the province begs further exploration. The province has a long-standing history of political violence, both during apartheid and in the transition to democracy.<sup>30</sup> Previously, violence was largely related to interparty conflict between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party, and mostly linked to political ideology.<sup>31</sup> However, the trend now seems to be that violence results from intraparty conflict particularly within the ANC; targeted killings particularly seem to be fuelled by power struggles and competition for lucrative government tenders.<sup>32</sup> The magnitude of political violence in the province resulted in an official government-appointed inquiry being established in 2016, headed by Advocate Marumo Moerane.

The Moerane Commission's report, released in 2018 and based on testimony from 63 witnesses, including police, activists, academics and violence monitors,<sup>33</sup> found that that 'there was overwhelming evidence from the majority of witnesses that access to resources through the tender system is the main root cause of the murder of politicians.'<sup>34</sup> The Commission further found that 'criminal elements are recruited by politicians to achieve political ends, resulting in a complex matrix of criminal and political associations that also lead to the murder of politicians.'<sup>35</sup> Councillors have also allegedly been killed because of vocal criticism about corruption.<sup>36</sup> The report made valuable findings and it is hoped that the recommendations will lead to a long-term decrease in political violence in the province.

The assassination of Sibusiso 'S'bu' Maphumulo in 2018, a local councillor, pertinently illustrates the interconnected nature of politics and targeted killings in KwaZulu-Natal.

Political assassinations in South Africa have peaked during election years. Here, African National Congress supporters gather at a rally in Pietermaritzburg prior to municipal elections in 2016. © Khaya Ngwenya/City Press/Gallo Images/Getty Images





## The 'gangster' councillor: Sibusiso 'S'bu' Maphumulo

Sibusiso 'S'bu' Maphumulo was not popular among the constituents in Ward 88 of Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal. In July 2017 he was arrested<sup>37</sup> for possession of an unlicensed firearm after threatening leaders of the shack dwellers movement Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), who alleged he regularly brought heavily armed hitmen and police officers to disrupt their meetings. They said he was unknown as a local leader, did not engage with them and already had a criminal record when elected in 2016. AbM called on the ANC to 'investigate whether a gangster like Maphumulo should really be a leader that can be trusted by our community and our country'.<sup>38</sup>

On 18 October 2018, residents and community-based organizations marched on Maphumulo's office to demand answers about funds meant for a local housing project, which they said had disappeared.<sup>39</sup> The protest was heated but dispersed at around 14.00. At 21.45 that night, gunmen pulled up next to Maphumulo's stationary vehicle as he arrived home from a meeting, shot him in the head several times, and sped off. Police minister Bheki Cele later announced that the hit seemed to have been well planned as nearby CCTV cameras had been tampered with.<sup>40</sup>

ANC insiders suggested<sup>41</sup> some party leaders were using the community's grievances as a 'red herring' to deflect police scrutiny from finding Maphumulo's real killers. They claimed Maphumulo's assassination came in the wake of an earlier dispute between then mayor and ANC regional chairperson, Zandile Gumede, and Delangokubona Business Forum leaders. As rabid proponents of the ANC faction that advocates for 'radical economic transformation' – of which Gumede is a self-avowed champion – Delangokubona gained nationwide notoriety for reportedly using 'mafia style' extortion tactics to intimidate government contractors.<sup>42</sup>

On 19 December 2018, Sandile Mvelase and the brothers Nkosingiphile and Phumlani Nojiyeza were arrested for Maphumulo's murder.<sup>43</sup> Another Nojiyeza brother, Mthokozisi, also an Umlazi ward councillor, was arrested just over a week later. ANC sources at the time alleged that Nojiyeza was among Delangokubona's top brass and a loyal Gumede supporter.<sup>44</sup> He was refused bail and the docket was taken over by the Hawks task team that had been established specifically to investigate KwaZulu-Natal's political killings.

It was later revealed that the Hawks had questioned Gumede's political adviser about Maphumulo's murder on the day of Nojiyeza's arrest<sup>45</sup>. Gumede declared that there were 'forces conniving in dark corners' to unseat her because she was the city's first black female leader and initiator of 'radical economic transformation'.<sup>46</sup>

Nomagugu Simelane-Zulu announced that the ANC was very 'embarrassed' by these developments and had thus implemented 'a programme of serious introspection'.<sup>47</sup>

Over 1 000 community members from Ward 88 later protested against Nojiyeza's reinstatement and demanded a by-election.<sup>48</sup> One protest leader reportedly said: 'We are scared of being led by a leader who has been accused of plotting the murder of another leader. We understand that the court set him free because there was not sufficient evidence linking him to the case. But we are also mindful that the court never said he was innocent.'<sup>49</sup>

After the 2016 local government elections that swept Gumede to power, community members complained that Nojiyeza had been 'imposed' on them.<sup>50</sup> In August 2019, Gumede was replaced as mayor and 10 other councillors were suspended, among them Nojiyeza, for leading violent pro-Gumede marches across the city.<sup>51</sup>

The Hawks' political killings task team has been widely criticized for withdrawing charges against other high-profile murder accused.<sup>52</sup> Maphumulo's family claimed the task team was politically 'compromised'<sup>53</sup> and demanded a reopening of the case under different detectives. Although almost three years have passed, the police have yet to uncover the truth about Maphumulo's murder, as is the case with many other political killings in KwaZulu-Natal.

Although the ANC claimed in 2020 that it had 'moved away from the political killing and revenge narrative',<sup>54</sup> yet another Umlazi ANC ward councillor, Bhekithemba Phungula, was gunned down in his home only a week before.<sup>55</sup> This is believed to have been the ninth political assassination in the first half of 2020.<sup>56</sup> It is speculated that on the day he was killed, Phungula – a Gumede supporter – had begun rolling out a community 'project' that had previously been opposed by a local 'business forum'.<sup>57</sup>

At Phungula's funeral Gumede said,<sup>58</sup> 'I have been to many funerals of councillors who died through the barrel of a gun. Councillors are under siege ... because we are closer to elections.'

## Hits related to organized crime, 2015–2020

Hits related to organized crime generally refer to economically motivated hits, such as the targeted killings of gang members and business people. They also include hits aimed at the actors in the judicial system, such as witnesses, lawyers and judges.

Hits relating to organized crime made up 20% of cases for the period 2015–2020 (see Figure 3). When the data is broken down according to province (Figure 5), most cases were recorded in the Western Cape (47 cases; 27%), KwaZulu-Natal (45 cases; 26%), Gauteng (41 cases; 24%) and the Eastern Cape (27 cases; 16%). An increase in hits in this category was seen in all four provinces over the study period, despite isolated decreases in some years.

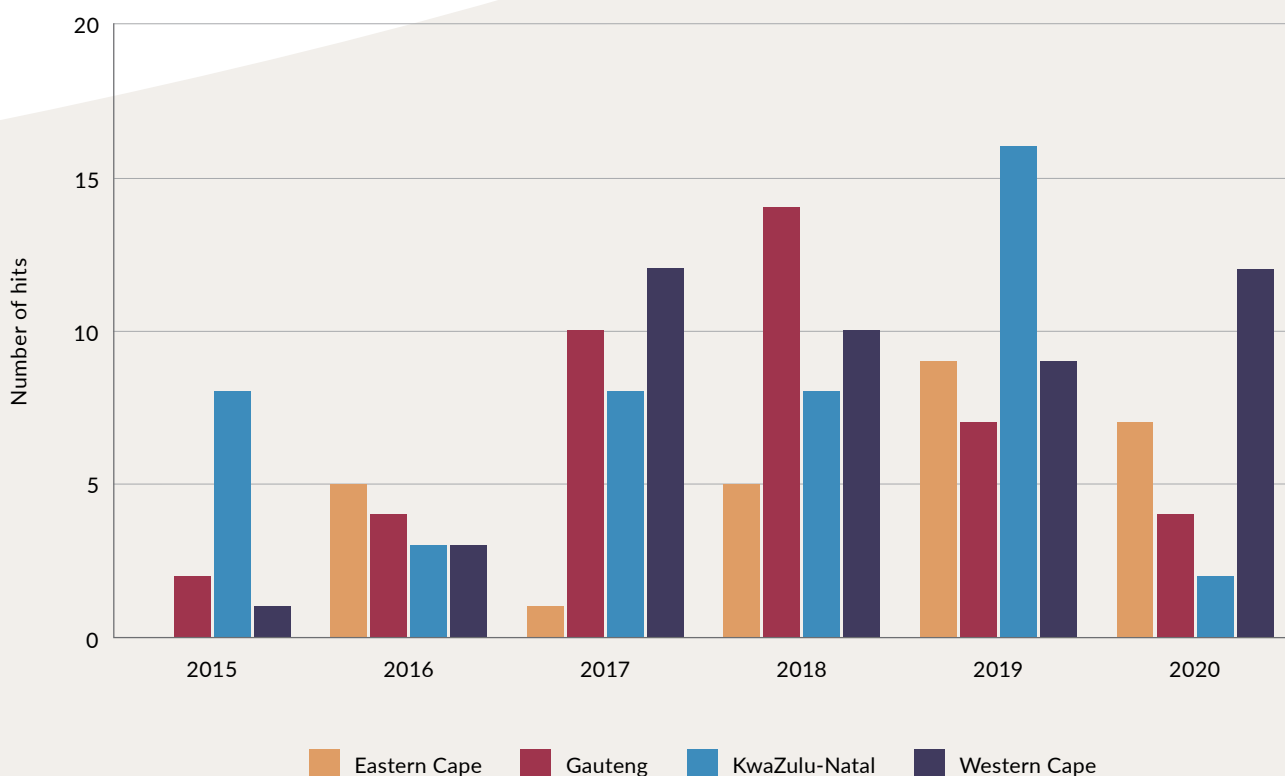
The peak in cases (Figure 1) seen in Gauteng in 2018 does not relate only to an increase in taxi violence but also to an increase in hits aimed at businessmen, people in the law enforcement or judicial system and those involved in illegal mining.

The Eastern Cape saw an increase in cases since 2018, a trend that was also highlighted in field research on gangs in the Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan area.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, our data shows that, as for political killings in KwaZulu-Natal, the numbers reported in our database are likely an under-representation; however, the general trends hold.

A slight increase in cases were seen in the Western Cape in 2020, whereas decreases were noted in the other three provinces highlighted by our research. The increase in the Western Cape is attributed to an increase in gang-related incidents as well as a few cases that involved prominent gang leaders, lawyers and police. This increase in cases – when one would expect a decrease due to restricted movement imposed by the national COVID-19 lockdown – is likely due to the increased competition in criminal markets among the Western Cape gangs during this time.

A problem seen predominantly in Cape Town is the assassination of defence lawyers who represent gang leaders and prominent organized-crime figures. The reason behind these assassinations is usually connected to their 'knowing too much' or representing opposing criminal factions. The most notorious of these cases and one of the most expensive hits in our database is the assassination of advocate Pete Mihalik.



**FIGURE 5** Number of organized hits in South Africa according to province, 2015–2020.

## The criminal lawyer: Pete Mihalik

On 30 October 2018, at 07.30, advocate Pete Mihalik was dropping his children off at Reddam House Atlantic Seaboard school in Green Point. A gunman, shadowed by an accomplice, approached Mihalik's SUV and fired shots at close range. Mihalik was hit in the head and the bullet ricocheted from the impact and lodged in his son's jaw.<sup>60</sup>

The motives for the assassination are unclear. Mihalik was known for representing many underworld figures, and had become deeply involved in standoffs between groups.<sup>61</sup> Starting in 2016, an intense rivalry emerged in Cape Town between a fairly established gang linked to businessman Mark Lifman and a new faction headed by Nafiz Modack.<sup>62</sup>

The swing vote between the factions had fallen to two brothers, Colin and Jerome 'Donkie' Booysen, who themselves became divided: Colin siding with Modack, and Booysen with Lifman.<sup>63</sup> Unsurprisingly, the gang war resulted in numerous tit-for-tat shootings, as well as both attempted and successful assassinations.

Prior to his death, Mihalik presented himself as a mediator to both sides, reportedly holding meetings and coordinating payments between the factions in an effort to steady an uneasy truce, according to a South African police officer's testimony. 'Pete Mihalik, acting as a facilitator in his chambers, brought in the business owners, making them believe he had no link with Modack or Booysen, and negotiated payments of R100 000<sup>64</sup> a month for protection,' the officer claimed. 'This was done with Booysen, Modack and another person in the group, Mark Louw. The money was then paid into Louw's account and he transferred that money in Modack's account.'<sup>65</sup>

Although these allegations against Mihalik were never proven, the defence attorney's ongoing associations with senior figures in South Africa's underworld suggested that he was a key participant in negotiations between the criminal factions. As a result of his position in defending underworld leaders from charges involving illicit activities, Mihalik, and criminal defendants like him, wield power because of their status in the judicial system yet simultaneously remain vulnerable to threats from organized crime.

Sources reported that, prior to his death, there was a price of nearly R5 million (about £250 000) on Mihalik's head.<sup>66</sup> In the process of placing himself in a powerful position as an interlocutor between the warring groups, the advocate had created multiple enemies on all sides of the conflict. 'He was talking with too many people,' one underworld source explained. 'He knew too much.'<sup>67</sup>

Because Mihalik was set to represent Modack in an upcoming extortion trial, it may have appeared he had chosen sides.<sup>68</sup> Although the advocate was prepared to argue that Modack had been subjected to police brutality – a defence he had successfully pleaded in prior gang trials and which had resulted in acquittal of alleged criminals – Mihalik died before the matter was presented.

Residents reported hearing a couple of shots, which were heard up to a kilometre away. According to a news report, a witness who saw the hitman said 'he was calm and carried a "big silver gun" that almost looked like a toy gun. She said the shooter seemed to hide his gun behind a briefcase as he walked quickly away from the scene and got into a vehicle.'<sup>69</sup>

The assassination's aftermath reverberated throughout the country. In the years since the assassination, Mihalik's son's jaw healed and he now appears to be out of danger; however, the court case against the accused is yet to be finalized.



Crime scene of the murder of advocate Pete Mihalik, 2018, Cape Town. © Gallo Images/Netwerk24/Adrian de Kock



### Hits related to the taxi industry

The South African minibus-taxi industry started as a grey-market service providing transport and economic opportunities to black South Africans during the apartheid regime.<sup>70</sup> It has operated as an informal and unregulated industry, rooted primarily in the black townships. Since the beginning of the democratic dispensation, the government has tried to enforce regulations to address exploitation in the sector and to formalize an operational plan for the industry.<sup>71</sup> However, attempts at regulation and state interference have been met with much resistance by taxi owners. Consequently, the taxi industry is largely self-regulated and issues pertaining to routes and payment fees are determined by internal regional bodies, which all operate under the South African National Taxi Association.

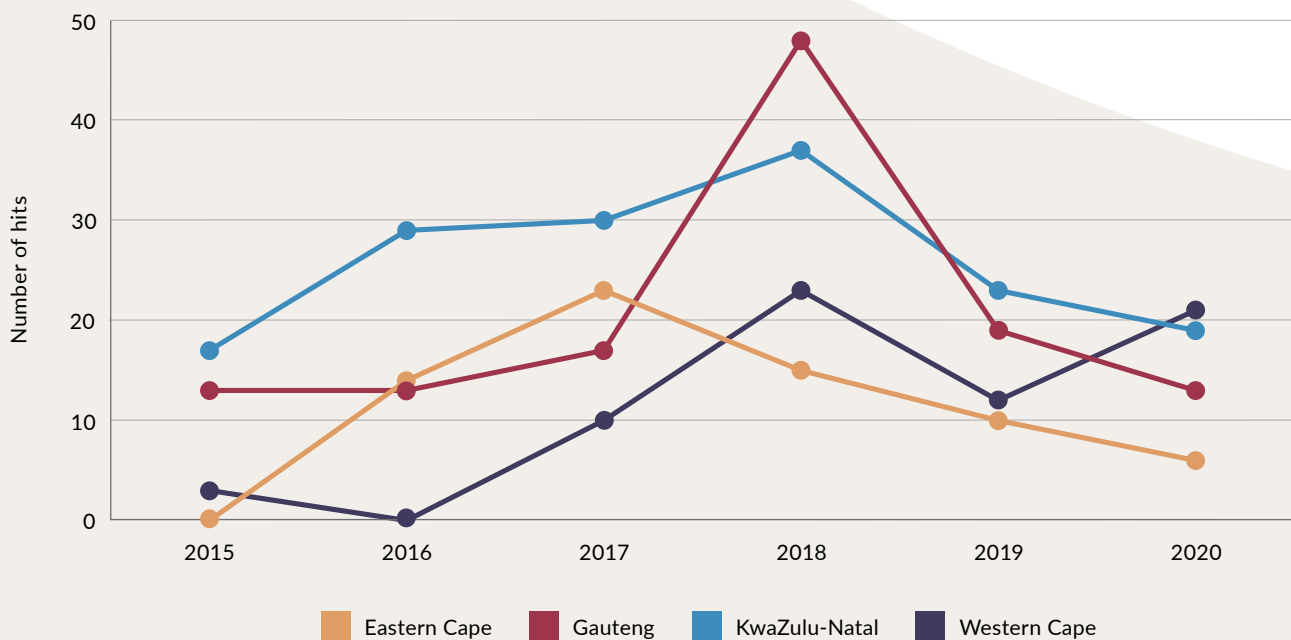
The taxi industry is notoriously violent, partly owing to the lack of regulation. Taxi-related violence can range from shoot-outs at taxi ranks to more professional and targeted hits on presumably important figures within the industry.<sup>72</sup> Such incidents are understood to typically stem from competition between taxi associations over routes or to relate to conflict arising from leadership competition within the associations.<sup>73</sup>

The minibus-taxi industry in South Africa is notoriously violent, and hits related to the industry make up the biggest portion of incidents in the country. © Shaun Swingler

As previously shown (Figure 3), hits in the taxi industry make up the biggest portion of incidents in our data set for South Africa (438 cases; 51%). The most cases were recorded in KwaZulu-Natal (155 cases; 35%), followed by incidents in Gauteng (123 cases; 28%), the Western Cape (69 cases; 16%) and the Eastern Cape (68 cases; 16%).

As shown in Figure 6, cases generally increased from 2015 to 2017. The Eastern Cape experienced a notable peak in 2017, relating to a dispute over long-distance routes between multiple taxi associations, and the minister of police subsequently closed the disputed routes. The number of hits in the province steadily decreased in the following years, even after the routes were reopened.<sup>74</sup>

Notable peaks were also seen in 2018 in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The dramatic increase in Gauteng is largely attributed to violence surrounding the Kempton Park Taxi Association, as is illustrated by the case study on the assassination of Johnson Mdaka.



**FIGURE 6** Hits in the taxi industry according to province, 2015–2020.



## The taxi boss: Johnson Mdaka

'I don't know who my enemies are and when they will come to finish me off,' says a young man, his uncontrolled sobbing audible over the crackling telephone line.<sup>75</sup>

In hiding in a secure, undisclosed location, this man – Vuyo<sup>76</sup> – admits that being in the Gauteng taxi industry has been a wilder ride than he ever imagined. It is too dangerous to disclose his real name.

'It's honestly the worst industry to go into. It is dangerous and cursed. I wouldn't advise anyone to buy a taxi; I would advise them to try something else because here you will die. The industry is ruled by ruthless people who only care about money and they will not hesitate to kill you,' says Vuyo.<sup>77</sup>

He knows what he's talking about. His idol – an older man he looked up to as a father figure – was gunned down in a hail of bullets on 15 May 2018. He was the 63-year-old Johnson Mdaka. He was shot 29 times in his driveway upon returning home from shopping with his wife and daughter. Photographs from the scene reveal a bullet-riddled car.

Mdaka's wife, Kelebone, pretended to be dead, hoping the assassins would leave the scene; she had sustained a bullet wound herself. Speaking to *The Sowetan* newspaper just days after the assassination, she relived the ordeal: 'They fired bullets until the gun was empty. His upper

body was riddled with bullets. You could just see the holes ... I tried to wake him. I opened his mouth to help him breathe but he was gone. I have never seen a person killed in such a cruel manner. The word pain cannot describe how I feel right now.'<sup>78</sup>

Mdaka's death cannot be viewed in isolation. Taxi violence in Gauteng is often rooted in disputes over routes – or territory – and the turf war that tore apart the Kempton Park Taxi Association (KETA) is at the heart of the decade-long feud that cost Johnson his life.

Historically, KETA's domain was the route from the bustling Tembisa township north of Johannesburg to the suburb of Kempton Park, about 15 kilometres to the south. But as Tembisa grew, so too did the demand for taxis to provide transport to destinations further afield, such as Pretoria, the Johannesburg Central Business District and Randburg.

Sibusiso,<sup>79</sup> a leader in the Gauteng taxi industry, says KETA jumped to supply new routes when there was demand. However, the dispute arose because the KETA executive allowed only certain members to operate these new routes; others were sidelined and had to operate the 'old' route. 'These new routes were very lucrative. People who operated these routes, they started to make money,' says Sibusiso.<sup>80</sup>



Taxi violence in South Africa is often rooted in disputes over routes or territory. Here, one of the main taxi ranks in Johannesburg.

© Gallo Images/Fani Mahuntsi

Those operating the 'old' township-based route approached the KETA executive and suggested a rotation-based system, which would allow everyone in the association to share in the new-found riches of the new routes. The executives allegedly dismissed this proposal.

'Then it was a fight,' says Sibusiso, ominously.<sup>81</sup> He knows how volatile the industry can get and is personally flanked by eight bodyguards whenever he sets foot outside his home. He spends around R150 000 per month on this security, which is a necessary precaution, he says.

The association split into two defined factions from this point. The 'old route' was dubbed 'Mbombela'; the 'new route' was known as 'Shosholozu'. The Mbombela camp, led by Mdaka, decided that if they were barred from driving their taxis on the new routes, they would retaliate by forcibly removing any of the Shosholozu camp's taxis that were still operating along the old route.

At the time, KETA was led by Elias Masinga, who is described as a man who does things by the book, not through violence. But when Masinga was replaced by his deputy, Mandlakhe Mtshali, tensions flared once again.

Violence escalated In 2018. Men in Mdaka's camp are reported to being killed systematically. 'They started to wipe out the whole Mbombela group, the "Concerned" group. Every time, three or four members were killed,' remembers Sibusiso. The hits continued. 'It kept going on like that up until they also hit Johnson [Mdaka],' says Sibusiso.<sup>82</sup>

Mdaka's assassination had a devastating effect on his allies. 'I'm still heartbroken. He didn't deserve to die like that. He also preached against the killing of others. I also gave up all hope when he died, I knew it was over,' says an anguished Vuyo.<sup>83</sup>

Sibusiso shares his sentiment: 'They knew if they remove[d] Johnson, everyone will just fall back.'<sup>84</sup>

According to Sibusiso, removing the head of a faction is a symbolic act meant to send ripples down the ranks. 'We are under siege here in Gauteng,' he reminds us, candidly.<sup>85</sup>

Despite rumours to the contrary, Mtshali portrays himself as a peacemaker. 'We've got so many people who passed on over this issue,' he laments. He says he has lost count of all the dead bodies.<sup>86</sup>

When asked to respond to allegations that violence escalated under his leadership, he deflects: 'That point where you put your finger to me and said under my leadership what was happening? Everywhere where you are leading people, there are stories. But if I can turn another eye on you, I would say under my leadership, because this thing never started under my leadership, it was starting [in] 2007. Under my leadership, I'm the one who stopped the taxi violence in my association. You can go to the City of Ekurhuleni government, they'll tell you I'm the one who is the chairperson trying to resolve the problem.'<sup>87</sup>

Vuyo says Mtshali wasted no time after Mdaka's death in dismantling the infrastructure that the Concerned members – those operating the old route – had built. Immediately after [Johnson] Mdaka was killed, Mtshali came to our office, escorted by police, and took all the files and paperwork in the office. He also took all the court documents from the case where he and Mdaka had battled in court. He wanted to get rid of the fact that Mdaka had defeated him in court. Mtshali also instructed all of us that our office now reported to his office and all the monies should be paid to him.'<sup>88</sup>

During this time, those loyal to Mdaka felt like they had targets on their backs. Many fled Johannesburg, fearing for their lives.

Vuyo is pained that Mdaka and many others have lost their lives because of this feud over routes and money collection. 'I think it's the most senseless reason to die,' he concludes.<sup>89</sup>





### Hits with personal motives

Personal hits make up the smallest proportion of the total number of hits in South Africa, and seem to remain fairly consistent. The highest number of personal hits in the data collection period were recorded in KwaZulu-Natal (20 cases; 31%). This was followed by the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, with 14 cases (21%) each.

Assassinations in South Africa have steadily increased over the last five years, reaching a notable peak in 2018 due to taxi-related violence and organized-crime hits. © Felix Dlangamandla

## Kenya

Kenya is East Africa's biggest economy and has a population of approximately 51 million people. Although Kenya has a problem with gangs and various illicit economies, it is a considerably less violent country than South Africa, with a murder rate of 5 per 100 000.<sup>90</sup> Kenya's gang problem is highly interconnected with political patronage. Gangs are funded by political candidates, who, in turn, use violence and intimidation to help candidates get into office.<sup>91</sup> Kenya's *matatu* industry is also deeply affected by gangs and organized crime. Notably fewer hits were recorded in Kenya than in South Africa during the data collection period, although this may also be a result of the limitations in the methodology, specifically as Kenya's media coverage is less extensive than South Africa's.





A *matatu* conductor in Nairobi, Kenya. The *matatu* industry in the country is infiltrated by gangs and organized crime.  
© Andrew Renneisen/Getty Images

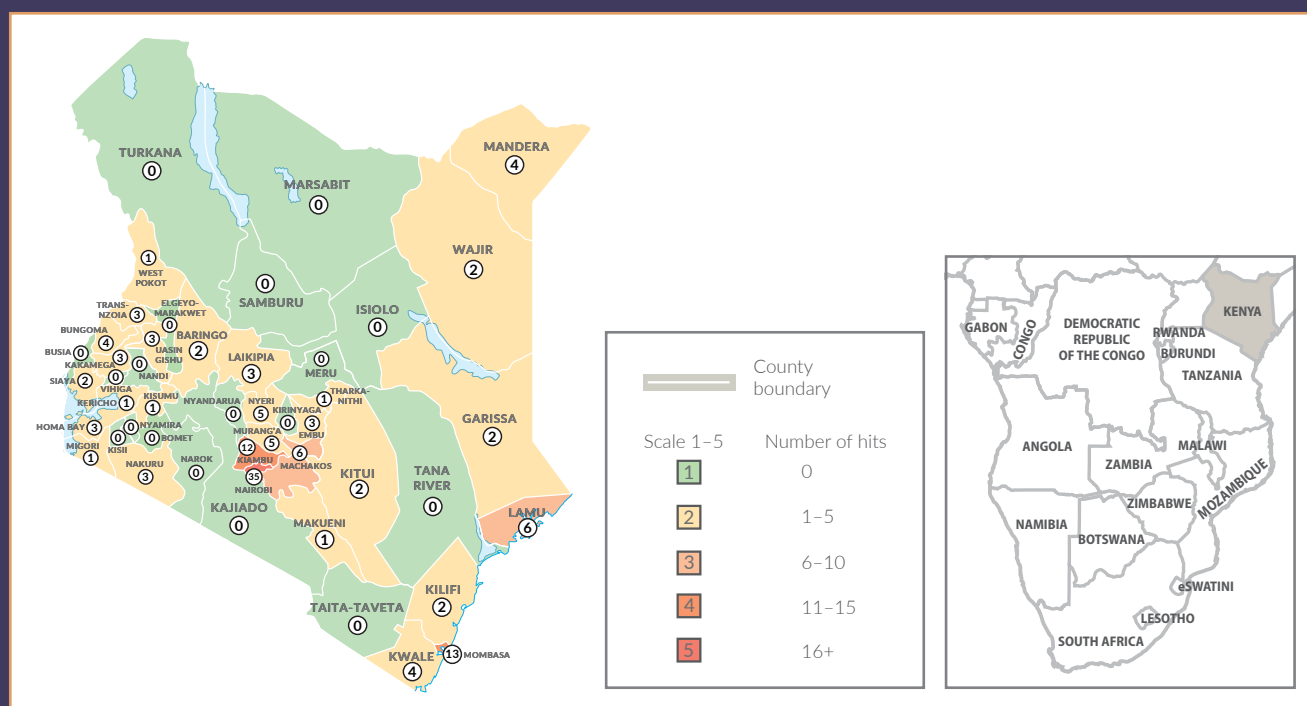
## Targeted killings in Kenya, 2015–2020

### Hits by county, 2015–2020

Data shows that hits occur throughout Kenya's 47 counties, in both bigger cities and smaller towns. As shown in Figure 7, the Nairobi county experienced the most hits for the data collection period (26%), with the number of hits ranging between 3 and 11 per year.

The county with the second highest number of hits was Mombasa, with 10% of the total number of hits being recorded here. Most of these cases were recorded in 2015, and notably fewer hits were recorded in subsequent years.

The county of Kiambu accounted for the third highest number of cases (9%), most of which also occurred in 2015. These appear to have been linked to land disputes in the area.



**FIGURE 7** Occurrence of hits in Kenya by county, 2015–2020.



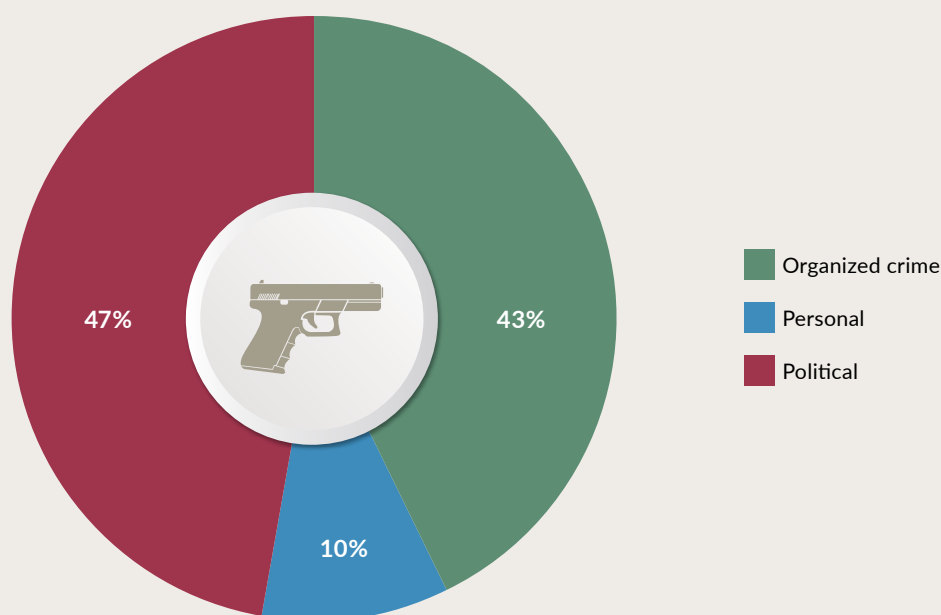
Post-election violence flares up near Nairobi, October 2017.

© Fredrik Lerneryd/AFP via Getty Images

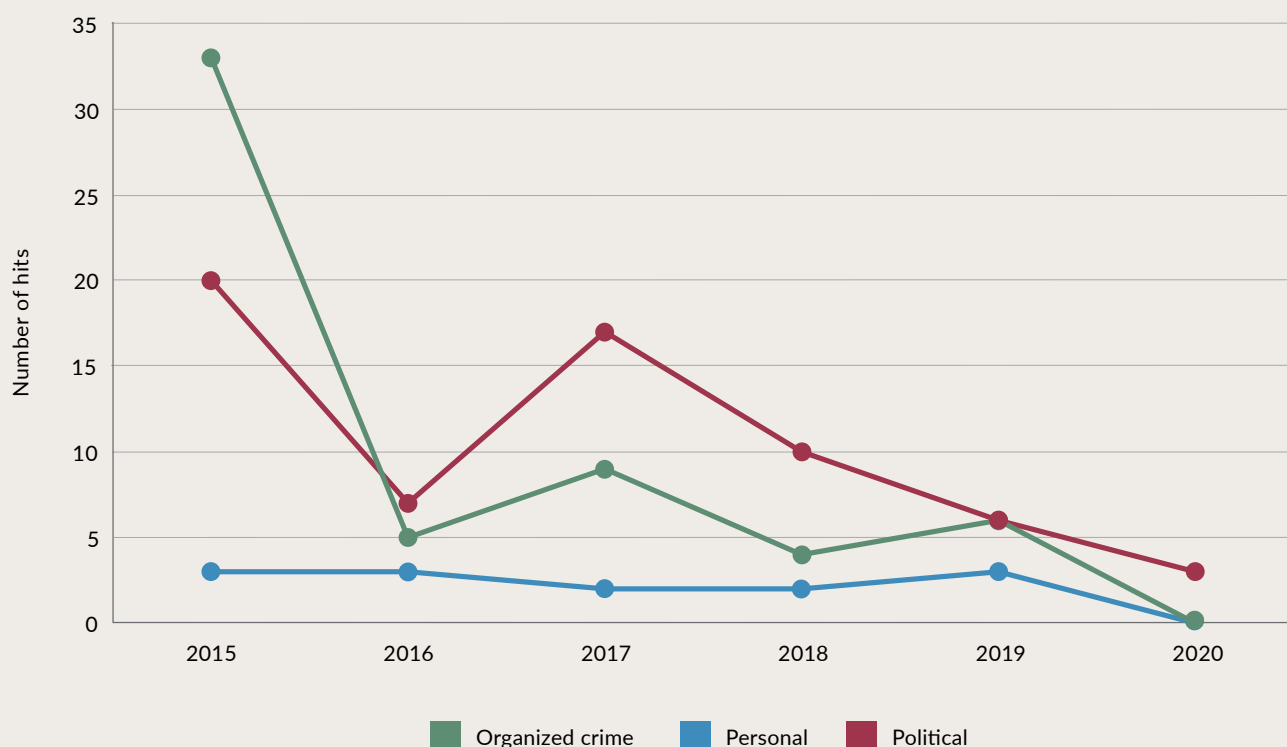
### Hits breakdown by category, 2015–2020

A total of 133 hits were recorded in Kenya in the data collection period. As shown in Figure 8, political hits made up the largest portion (63 cases; 47%), followed by hits related to organized crime (57 cases; 43%). Personal hits (13 cases) accounted for 10% of the total. This is a remarkably similar distribution to the South African data set (excluding taxi-related hits), with targeted killings related to political motivations and organized crime also making up a similar portion (21% and 20%, respectively) and personal hits accounting for the smallest percentage.

A fairly consistent decline in the number of hits was seen since 2017 (Figure 9), and no personally motivated hits or cases related to organized crime were recorded in 2020. The decline in 2020 may also be attributed to the national COVID-19-associated lockdown in Kenya.



**FIGURE 8** Hits according to category, Kenya, 2015–2020.



**FIGURE 9** Trends in assassinations per category, Kenya, 2015–2020.

### Hits related to organized crime, 2015–2020

A high number of hits related to organized crime were recorded in 2015. For the rest of the data period, a relatively low number of hits were recorded, and these related to a variety of motives, including the targeted killing of students, lawyers, activists, witnesses, businessmen and organized crime affiliates. The majority of these cases involved the silencing of voices who were speaking out against illegal or corrupt activities. There were also a few cases of ‘taking out the competition’. Unlike South Africa, where the majority of organized crime hits related to gang violence and drug turf wars or business disputes, in Kenya the 2015 peak of hits in this category appear to have been caused by a surge in disputes over land rights. Compared to other countries with gang problems, there are fewer targeted hits relating to disputes over drug turf in Kenya. GI-TOC research in the country has revealed that the large drug trafficking networks have not relied on local gangs for protection but have rather procured it from high levels of the state, and as a result have kept the violence to a minimum.<sup>92</sup>

The violence around land rights particularly impacted Kiambu County.<sup>93</sup> The Kiambu County assassinations spanned more than a decade but drastically escalated in 2015 and reached such a state that it was addressed by the president and cases have since declined. These cases involved rival companies and illegal land deals, and are further elaborated on in the case study below.

## Blood-soaked soil: The Kihui Mwiri Farmers Company Limited

Since 2015, 16 directors of the Kihui Mwiri Farmers Company Limited have died under mysterious circumstances in what seems to be a mafia-like score settling.<sup>94</sup> The firm, whose name loosely translates to hot blooded, was founded in 1971 by a group of farmers seeking to buy land from white settlers.

The company had been a theatre of vicious confrontations, yet boasted 6 200 bona fide shareholders and 1 300 acres of land<sup>95</sup> before people appointed as the heads of the company ended up dead or disappeared without a trace. Trouble hit home after two rival groups started splinter groups, namely Ward Four and Kula na Kumaliza (under the umbrella of the Kihui Mwiri Company). Competing forces wrestled to control the organizations, which resulted in numerous cases of fraud in the share register.

The assassinations started in 2001, when a director, Benson Gumbi, was fatally shot in a coffee plantation while on his way to company meeting.<sup>96</sup> In 2014, three directors, Newton Muhoro, Job Mwangi and James Kimaru, were reported missing after men who purported to be police officers picked them up from a hotel in Thika.<sup>97</sup>

Incidents surged in 2015. Wilfred Gichana, a company director, was murdered in January 2015 in his house. On 10 May 2015, the company's vice chair, Peter Kuria, was murdered grisly at his home in Grey Stone. In July, two other company directors, Chrispas Wanyoike and Chege Mwangi, died in a hail of bullets fired by a gang on motorbikes near Kabati in the Muranga county.<sup>98</sup> More deaths followed. Assassins who fled on a motorbike killed Paul Kaharu in Majengo, Thika, and company chairman Paul Kariuki was abducted in July 2015, his car found razed in Limuru.

A group of 16 people were later charged with the murders, but were eventually acquitted by Judge Joel Ngugi of the Kiambu High Court for lack of sufficient evidence. In his ruling, the judge pointed out the lack of key prosecution witnesses testifying before the court.<sup>99</sup> The judge described the trial as 'no more than a window-dressing exercise'. In his judgement, he noted: 'There are other senior people who got bigger plots than typical shareholders. There are also rich people who bought parcels using fake certificates ... There is definitely

much to be said about a plausible theory of the murders which was seemingly neglected by the investigators: that the members of the Ministry of Interior working in the region; senior police officers; and senior government officials were heavily involved, and, indeed, may have funded the death and destruction that reigned in Kihui Mwiri for almost a decade.'

The judge's sentiments were echoed by aggrieved shareholders, who felt that influential government officials (who were non-shareholders) were benefiting from illegal land deals. Key figures mentioned during court proceedings were the current Muranga governor, Mwangi wa Iria and the Transport Cabinet Secretary, Joseph Macharia, who initially served as the cabinet secretary for land affairs. They were reportedly getting tracts of land yet were not bona fide shareholders in the company. According to Kiambu court proceedings in September 2019, Macharia was linked to a company whose contested purchase of land in Kihui Mwiri fuelled violence intended to silence opposition to the alleged illegal acquisition of part of the 1 288 acres owned by the Kihui Mwiri Farmers Company. Governor Mwangi wa Iria was also named as an alleged beneficiary of parcels in the expansive farm.<sup>100</sup>

In a bid to stop the bloodshed, President Uhuru Kenyatta disbanded the firm in 2015, ordering a halt of the registration of subdividing and titling of the land, and promised the issue of 15 000 title deeds at a public event in Murang'a. Members still describe Uhuru's move as a government attempt at hoodwinking them with the promise of title deeds, claiming 12 000 of the documents are yet to be released to the benefactors.

In an interview with the *Business Daily*, Harun Njoroge, the chairman of the Kihui Mwiri Titling Project, said that of the 15 000 title deeds Uhuru promised, only 3 000 had been issued. Njoroge claims the president was misled by government officials and administration officers to believe the shareholders' problems had been resolved.<sup>101</sup> 'Powerful forces including senior government officers, politicians and businessmen continue to grab land,' he said. Murang'a County Commissioner, Mohammed Barre, said that his lands office has only 300 uncollected titles, pointing out that Kihui Mwiri titles have been processed and distributed at the headquarters in Nairobi.



The assassination victims' families, who sought anonymity, claimed that despite handing over spent cartridges and some bullets, the items were not subjected to ballistic examination and tabled as evidence tabled in court.<sup>102</sup> According to a report in *The Standard* on 4 September 2019, police did not treat the killing of Kuria with the urgency or seriousness it deserved, a notion that was also captured in Judge Ngugi's ruling. One of the witnesses recounted: 'Two police officers who came appeared (so) drunk that we had to chase them away. Another group came later to collect the body and the bullets found.'<sup>103</sup>

Families of the slain directors keep demanding answers. 'My wish is that the Government helps us get justice,' said Joyce Bitutu, whose husband, Chege, was killed a few metres from their house.<sup>104</sup>



The Kihiu Mwiri Farmers Company Limited, a land-ownership company whose directors have been the target of multiple assassinations. © Twitter

Targeted killings of students emerged as another type of hit related to organized crime in our study. Although these cases seem more blurry and varied in their motives, they instil fear in students, silencing their voices and involvement in student groups and activism. When students speak out against corruption or crime in their area, they are vulnerable to being targeted by criminal groups. Similarly, when students have been involved in human rights and activism work, they become targets for drawing attention to the issues they raised. However, the cases are not always clear-cut and students have also been alleged to be involved in extortion rings. An example of a student leader assassination in which the motive is unclear is that of Samuel Mogaka Ragira. This complex case study shows the interconnected nature of organized criminal groups and student leaders.

## Targeted killing of student leaders in Kenya: Samuel Mogaka Ragira

On 14 March 2019, Samuel Mogaka Ragira died in a hail of bullets in the vicinity of Club 36, near the University of Nairobi, under unclear circumstances.<sup>105</sup>

Mogaka, popularly known as 'OCS' (Officer Commanding Students), reportedly told local authorities that his life was in danger two days before the fatal shooting.<sup>106</sup>

The murder led to a 15-hour protest by fellow students, who claimed that Ragira was gunned down for fighting for their welfare and that of traders at Club 36, a vibrant market close to the university.

Ronny Otieno, an eyewitness to Ragira's killing, claimed that he was shot by a man in a black suit who got out of a Toyota Premio. The vehicle, he said, then sped towards Lower State House Road. 'OCS fell and a man jumped from the car and shot him. He then took his phone and shoes and got into the car before it sped away,' he said. Police officers say it is not their bullet that killed him.<sup>107</sup>

However, traders at Club 36 claimed that Ragira belonged to a gang that terrorized traders, demanding tax from them. Failure to pay would result in their losing their property. He reportedly led a flashy life and drove expensive cars. According to a report in the *Kenyan Digest*, 'he regularly alternated cars, between a grey Mercedes Benz, a grey Toyota Mark X and a Nissan Patrol. Few people knew what he did for a living. Traders at Club 36 claim Mr Ragira was part of an extortion gang. His Mercedes Benz was regularly spotted at the market. Traders say he would show up to protect a gang that collects money from them, failure to which traders are harassed.'<sup>108</sup> It was also reported that OCS had made claims that the Club 36 market was due for grabbing, which, it is alluded, could have warranted his death.

The University of Nairobi moved in earnest to defend the institution, claiming that Ragira was a former student. A tweet by Vice Chancellor Mbithi sparked outrage when he distanced the university from the former student and the attack. The tweet stated: 'Please note, Club 36 is not University of Nairobi [UoN] property. It is run by people

who are not UoN staff or students. Former students are not UoN students. Goons are not UoN students. Expelled students are not UoN students. Club 36 is a dangerous place, avoid. #RIPOCSRagira.'<sup>109</sup>

Francis Ndegwa, the communication officer of the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders–Kenya (NCHRD-K), alleged that Ragira had raised concerns that students were being harassed and robbed of their valuables at Club 36, where students typically go to buy affordable meals. The rights group claimed that he reported the matter to the local authorities but no action was taken; instead Ragira was threatened with a 'panga' by the said 'goons'.<sup>110</sup>

By August 2020, there had been no updates on the investigation into his murder.

In a similar case, in 2009, Oscar Kamau Kingara and John Paul Oulo were killed in a suspected assassination by security agents. The former students, who were shot dead in their car, had been involved in human rights work.<sup>111</sup>



Samuel Mogaka Ragira, a student leader at the University of Nairobi, was gunned down in 2019. © Social media

## Political hits, 2015–2020

Kenyan politicians rely on gangs to rally support and intimidate rivals. In return, the gangs are funded by politicians.<sup>112</sup> In a context of high youth unemployment, there are young men readily available for hire by these politician funded gangs. Although politicians have publicly condemned the use of gangs in electoral campaigns, it was reported that the majority of leading politicians still made use of gangs leading up to the 2017 elections.<sup>113</sup> Although not all electoral violence is perpetrated by gangs (a significant portion involves local police), gangs do play a key role in executing the targeted killing of competition, as was seen in the 2017 surge in political hits.

Political hits in Kenya were high in 2015, dropped drastically in 2016, and then increased again the following year (Figure 9). The 2015 peak was due to an increase in cases in Mombasa and Nairobi, and the 2017 increase was mostly due to cases in Nairobi and Kiambu in the lead-up to the elections in August that year.

These political hits target not only local politicians, but also those in the electoral process, as can be seen in the assassination of senior electoral official Chris Msando.

## Targeting election officials: Christopher Chege Msando

Christopher Chege Msando, a high-profile electoral official in Kenya, went missing on a Friday night, shortly after appearing in a live interview on KTN, a local TV station. As information and communications technology (ICT) director for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), Msando repeated his pledge to Kenyans that the 2017 general elections would not be rigged.<sup>114</sup> ‘Everything is set in a way that only one person has the password that controls the entire streaming of results,’ he added.

That was the last time the 45-year-old was seen alive in public. His badly mutilated body, which bore strangulation marks and deep scratches and cuts on his back and hands, according to the chief government pathologist, Johansen Oduor, proved that his assailants tortured him to death before leaving him only in his underwear.<sup>115</sup>

Police discovered his body dumped in the Muguga forest, approximately 19 kilometres from Nairobi. The body of Caroline Ngumbu, a 21-year-old medical student who was last seen with him, was discovered about a kilometre away.

His controversial death came at a time when the IEBC was introducing the Kenya Integrated Elections Management System (KIEMS), an important component of the system that handled voter registration and identification, and transmission of the election results, which have been a source of controversy in previous elections.





Kenyan election official Christopher Chege Msando was murdered ahead of Kenya's 2017 general election. © Social media

Despite dozens of leads, the Kenyan police dismissed the murder as a crime of passion. His family raised concern that his body was too clean for a man found in a thicket, expressing concern that the washing of his body was an attempt to hide evidence of his murder. George Musomali, a local security expert, added that the lack of identification of the body and the mishandling of the crime scene suggested a cover-up.<sup>116</sup> Five people, including a teenager whose phone was believed to have sent threatening messages to Msando, were arrested.<sup>117</sup> Msando's landlord, Andrew Rono, ended up spending 19 days behind bars in connection with the murder before all charges were dismissed for lack of evidence.<sup>118</sup>

Msando became a prominent political figure after he was appointed as the IEBC's acting director of ICT in May 2017. This was after the previous director, James Muhati, was put on compulsory leave for refusing to cooperate with the commission's audit department. However, he was quietly reinstated in his position weeks before the election.<sup>119</sup> So bad was the feud that Muhati was chased by Msando's kin when he accompanied IEBC officials in viewing Msando's body at the morgue. A mourner, who accused Muhati as being part of the problems that Msando faced at his workplace, tried to attack him but she was restrained. Three other mourners confronted him, but he ran to where IEBC commissioners and other staff were standing and was rescued by plainclothes police officers.<sup>120</sup>

IEBC chair Wafula Chebukati, who helped identify Msando's body, described the killing as brutal and called for increased security for his staff. 'We are demanding the government provide security to all IEBC [electoral commission] staff.'<sup>121</sup>

Msando's death sparked controversy between the ruling Jubilee party and the main opposition, the National Super Alliance (NASA), with counter-accusations of both parties having had a hand in his death. Gatundu North Member of Parliament (MP), Moses Kuria, one of the most outspoken Jubilee leaders, became a person of interest after he posted

an image of Msando's car at Roysambu on his Facebook account: 'So this is Chris Msando's vehicle right now here at Roysambu. The idiot is enjoying sweet time with a woman. And the story was that he is privy to "rigging" and he can't be found. Verily, verily I say unto you Raila. You will not burn this country. Not when I am alive,' read the post.<sup>122</sup>

He deleted the post a day later, and continues to deny any links to Msando's death. In July 2020, Kuria threatened to take legal action against anyone who suggest his involvement in Msando's death.<sup>123</sup> 'I have had to live with a barrage of innuendos and accusations over the death of Msando for more than two years now,' he said at a press conference.

Bungoma senator, Moses Wetangula, a principal in NASA, is on record as sensationally linking the government with the murder. At a public rally at Uhuru Park, Wetangula claimed that the government's rejection of an offer by the FBI and Scotland Yard to investigate Msando's murder was suspect. He is quoted to have said: 'President Uhuru Kenyatta's government remains the principal suspect in this murder.'<sup>124</sup> He further stated that the government intended to 'steal a password' from the slain Msando to ease stealing of votes.<sup>125</sup>

The then Inspector-General of Police, Joseph Boinnet, admitted that, before his death, Msando had informed the Central Police Station of death threats in 2016.<sup>126</sup> Boinnet said Msando had received abusive and threatening text messages from several unknown people.

In a public rally in May 2020, Kapseret MP Oscar Sudi threatened to release information on the perpetrators of Msando's death in case his counterparts, Elgeyo Marakwet senator Kipchumba Murkomen and Kikuyu MP Kimani Ichung'wa, were arrested.<sup>127</sup> He was later arrested for the inciting remarks.

Msando's family remains with more questions than answers following his murder. 'I would love to see the person who killed Chris with my own eyes before I die. The only question I can ask Uhuru if I meet him today is who killed my son. If I meet Cheloba and Chebukati I would ask them who killed my son. I want them to arrest Chris' killers so that I can see them with my own eyes,' said his mother, Maria Msando.<sup>128</sup>

## Personal hits, 2015–2020

Personally motivated hits make up only a small portion of the total cases in Kenya, and the number has remained fairly consistent over the data-collection period. No specific hotspots were identified. Most cases related to the hiring of hitmen to kill spouses. Other cases included family disputes and 'love quadrangles'.



## Mozambique

Mozambique has a long history of political violence and tension between the ruling and opposition parties, namely the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO)<sup>129</sup> and the Mozambican National Resistance movement (RENAMO).<sup>130</sup> The assassination of Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane (the founding president of FRELIMO) in 1969 is only one of the many political assassinations to plague the country. This political violence is also reflected in Mozambique's assassinations cases.

Supporters of Mozambique's main opposition party, RENAMO, gather at their former leader's memorial service in the coastal city of Beira. © Adrien Barbier/AFP via Getty Images

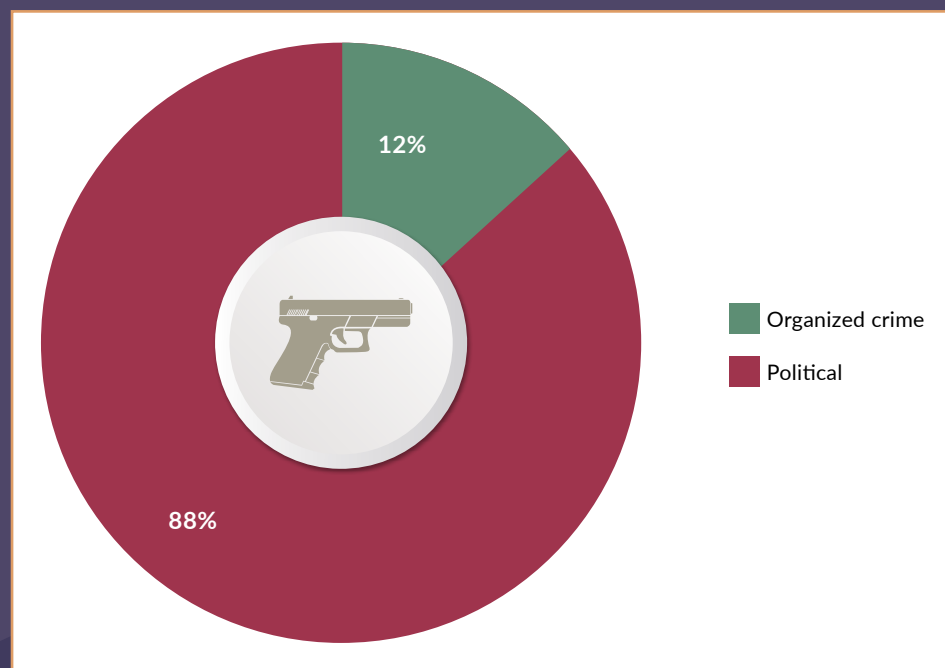
### Targeted killings in Mozambique, 2015–2020

Data collection from media reviews was particularly challenging in Mozambique. This was due largely to the censorship of local media. We therefore also relied on a network of local journalists for information of targeted killings that occurred in the data period. A small data set could subsequently be put together for the period 2015–2020.

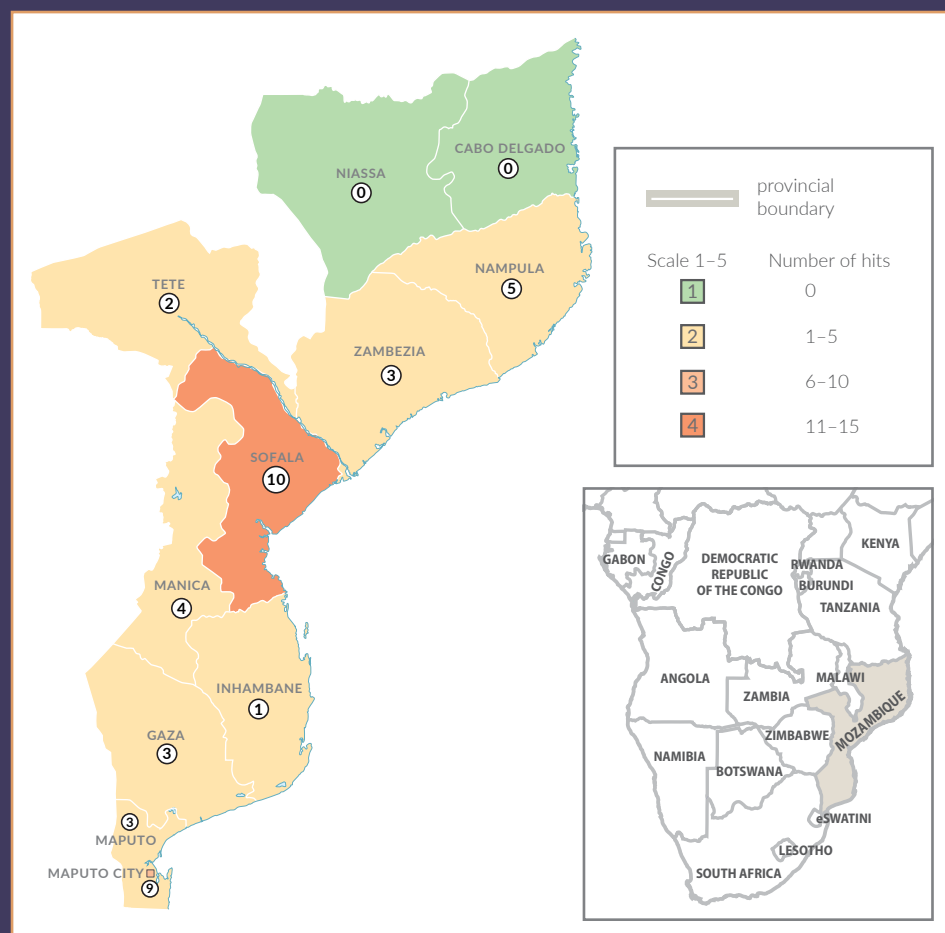
#### Targeted killings by category, 2015–2020

As shown in Figure 10, political hits made up the majority of cases (35; 88%), with hits related to organized crime (5 cases) accounted for only 12% of the incidents during this period. Although the total number of cases is too low to support definitive conclusions, the data does shed some light on the nature and location of assassinations in Mozambique.





**FIGURE 10** Targeted killings according to category, Mozambique, 2015–2020.



**FIGURE 11** Occurrence of hits according to province, Mozambique, 2015–2020.

### Targeted killings by province, 2015-2019

As shown in Figure 11, mapping assassinations during the current data collection period shows that the most cases were recorded in the Sofala province (25%). These cases mostly involved murders of RENAMO affiliates. The second highest number of hits (23%) were recorded in Maputo City, and included both political hits and cases related to organized crime.

### Political hits, 2015-2020

After the country's independence from Portugal in 1975, FRELIMO and RENAMO fought a protracted civil war, which ended with a negotiated settlement in the early 1990s. However, peace has been far from sustainable since then. Following a series of RENAMO attacks on governments sites in 2013, the government conducted an assault on the RENAMO base, where former leader Afonso Dhlakama was located.<sup>131</sup> The attack led the opposition leader to announce the end of the peace agreement.<sup>132</sup>

The political-military conflicts that erupted in the aftermath of the Rome Peace Agreement had a detrimental effect on Mozambique's economy and security. An atmosphere of fear and instability affected tourism and investors that were willing to put money in the region withdrew, which led to millions of Mozambicans demonstrating in the streets of Maputo against the violence and the surge of kidnappings that occurred in that period.<sup>133</sup>

The conflict escalated after FRELIMO's victory in the October 2014 elections. The two main political parties in Mozambique could not reach an agreement, as RENAMO rejected FRELIMO's victory under allegations of fraud and demanded to govern six provinces where it claims to have been victorious.

During this period, assassinations seem to have become routine in Mozambique:<sup>134</sup> from October 2014 to 2018, numerous assassinations or attempted assassinations occurred,<sup>135</sup> pertinently illustrated by the assassination of a prominent RENAMO politician, José Almeida Murevete (see the case study).

Mozambique has been marred by political and military conflicts, which escalated in 2014. Since then, assassinations have become routine in the country. © Ferhat Momade/AFP via Getty Images





## Murdering politicians: José Almeida Murevete



Headquarters of RENAMO, the leading opposition party in Mozambique, in the northern city of Nampula. © Daniel Nguetse/AFP via Getty Images

On the night of 15 December 2016, unidentified shooters knocked heavily on the door of a house in Mutauanha, a neighbourhood in the largest urban centre of the Nampula province in northern Mozambique. The family who lived in the house screamed as the assailants opened fire. An eyewitness reported that 80 shots were fired.<sup>136</sup> One man was fatally wounded. The victim was José Almeida Murevete.<sup>137</sup>

José Murevete was 49 and a prominent deputy of the leading opposition party, RENAMO, in Nampula. It was reported that at least seven RENAMO members left their posts in the Zambézia province earlier on the day of Murevete's murder, afraid of suffering from political persecution.<sup>138</sup> It was also said that this problem was not restricted to Zambézia assembly, but all provincial assemblies led by RENAMO. Members were reported to have disappeared in daylight or even being killed.<sup>139</sup> Murevete's assassination was the second murder of a RENAMO member in just two months; in October 2016, another deputy of the opposition movement was killed, and no traces of the perpetrators were found by the police.<sup>140</sup>

Targeted killings of RENAMO members in Nampula did not stop after Murevete's death. Only 14 days after Murevete was murdered, José Naitele, the party's chief of

foreign affairs, was shot dead by unknown men while on his way to work.<sup>141</sup> The assault happened on the second day of a truce announced by the former RENAMO leader, Afonso Dhlakama,<sup>142</sup> amidst the conflict that followed after the Rome Peace Agreement between RENAMO and FRELIMO was ended by RENAMO.

Despite the relative predominance of RENAMO members among victims, there has also been a trend of civil society figures such as lawyers, journalists and academics being targeted.<sup>143</sup> In March 2015, renowned constitutional lawyer, Gilles Cistac, died after being shot outside a popular café in the capital city, Maputo. His proposal of creating autonomous regions that could be ruled by RENAMO, breaking away from centralized power, may have attracted the government's attention.<sup>144</sup> In October 2017, the Nampula city mayor, Mahamudo Amurane, who was affiliated with the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM)<sup>145</sup> and known for speaking up against corruption and poor governance, was shot dead by unidentified men. Suspicions were raised that members of the MDM party were involved in the killing.<sup>146</sup>

The manner of Murevete's killing has left no doubt that this was a premeditated killing and that the politician was the principal target. The modus operandi was the same

as seen in assassinations allegedly conducted by 'death squads', which operated in the centre and north of the country. FRELIMO has been accused of deploying 'death squads' to suppress opposition and to eliminate members of the party, and has also been linked to different stances of organized crime, such as money laundering, human trafficking, smuggling and selling contraband.<sup>147</sup>

Investigations into Murevete's murder were far from being exhaustive, and no suspect was brought to justice at the time of writing. The National Criminal Investigation Service was created one year after his death to respond more effectively to criminal assassinations in Mozambique. However, Nampula citizens have claimed that little has changed, and the political murders have continued to occur.<sup>148</sup> In contrast, authorities claimed that the lack of resources had clamped their ability to conduct investigations successfully.<sup>149</sup>

The lack of accountability and the atmosphere of impunity contributed to the instability in the country. Murevete's relatives believe that the assassination was linked to the context of political violence in the country and the hostilities between the two leading political movements.<sup>150</sup> However, the police investigation lacked credibility. Despite the local police station being relatively close to the house where the murder occurred – less than 100 metres away – no police officers responded to the sound of shots being fired.<sup>151</sup> Family members reported that the police arrived only six hours later.<sup>152</sup>

The new peace agreement, signed on 1 August 2019, aims to achieve pacification in Mozambique by reintegrating the remaining RENAMO fighters into the national army, and by dismantling the RENAMO military bases scattered across the country.<sup>153</sup> However, one year after the agreement was reached, peace seems to be a long way off. A self-proclaimed military junta, formed by RENAMO's dissident members, continue to carry out attacks throughout the country and has been pointed out as causing insecurity and preventing peace from finally being instituted in Mozambique.<sup>154</sup>

## Hits related to organized crime, 2015–2019

Although Mozambique has experienced targeted killings primarily in the form of political assassinations, the violence goes beyond the political arena. The insurgency in the northern province of Cabo Delgado is another example of the violence in the country. Although our data collection did pick up assassinations relating to the insurgency, they were generally excluded from our database, as they did not relate to organized crime. As mentioned previously, GI-TOC field research in the area confirmed that the Islamic militants in the area are in fact not profiting from the illicit economy.<sup>155</sup> Although limited in our database, the country is not without organized-crime-related hits. Those we recorded were linked to various motives, including the assassination of organized crime figures, witnesses, lawyers, journalists and someone involved in the arms industry.

Although our data set includes only a few targeted killings related to organized crime, the cases had a significant impact, such as the assassination of leading public prosecutor, Marcelino Vilanculos.

## An attack on justice: Marcelino Vilanculos

On 11 April 2016, shortly after 19.00, one of Mozambique's leading public prosecutors, Marcelino Vilanculos, was shot in the head through his car window as he arrived at his home in Matola, the largest suburb of the country's capital city, Maputo. As a prosecutor, Vilanculos was highly visible and outspoken in his opposition to organized crime, thus exposing his vulnerability that eventually resulted in his murder.

Subsequent investigations proved that Vilanculos was targeted for an intentionally brazen early-evening murder by multiple criminal elements. His killing became one of the many criminal assassinations the people of Mozambique have endured during the past two decades.

Although six people were charged in the Vilanculos killing, the fallout from his murder continues to this day. At the time of his murder, Vilanculos was prosecuting a criminal network allegedly run by Danish Satar, widely known in Mozambique's underworld for kidnapping wealthy businessmen for large ransom sums, many of which amounted to millions of US dollars.<sup>156</sup> Satar disappeared two months after the Vilanculos murder, allegedly through a 'kidnapping', which law enforcement officials believe was a staged heist. He has not been seen since.<sup>157</sup>

Violence was, and remains, a Satar family business. In 2000, Danish's uncle, Momad Assife Abdul Satar, or 'Nini', was convicted of ordering the assassination of Carlos Cardoso, one of Mozambique's top investigative journalists.<sup>158</sup> Widely known as the kingpin of the Satar criminal enterprise, Nini did minimal jail time for the journalist's murder and suffered little long-term consequences, continuing to rule his criminal empire from prison through illicit use of mobile phones.<sup>159</sup> In 2019, a Maputo court sentenced Nini to a one-year prison term for passport forgery, which was then commuted to a fine.<sup>160</sup> The farcical nature of the proceedings reflects the brazen systemic corruption that has spawned within the judiciary throughout the region, highlighting the very elements Vilanculos fought to prevent and expose.

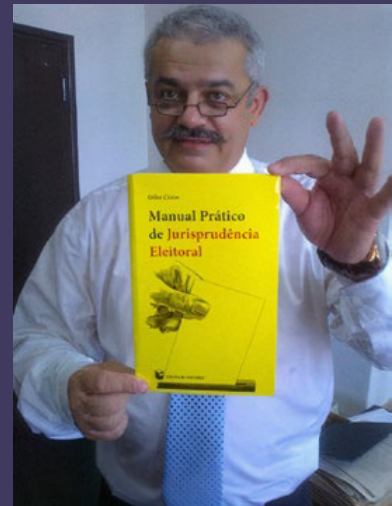
Crime scene of the assassination of public prosecutor Marcelino Vilanculos in Maputo, Mozambique. © Social media



In addition to the kidnappings, Vilanculos was also looking into the murder of Gilles Cistac, a prominent constitutional lawyer who was assassinated in 2015 and whose killing was profiled in the GI-TOC's *Faces of Assassination* chronicle of casualties from organized crime.<sup>161</sup> The Cistac murder had exposed Mozambique's structural vulnerability to organized crime by publicly revealing the endemic corruption of judges, bureaucrats and police officers. Ironically, Cistac's killing was in many ways a precursor to the Vilanculos murder that would happen barely a year later. Indeed, the assassins who killed Vilanculos barely bothered to conceal their tracks, and investigators quickly apprehended the parties who were directly responsible for his murder. Jose Ali Coutinho led the assassination team (and was himself murdered in prison while awaiting sentencing for the murder).<sup>162</sup> He recruited two other accomplices – Amad Antonio Mabunda, who fired the fatal shots, and Abdul Tembe, who drove the getaway car – having previously met in a Maputo prison.

Although all three were arrested, by the time of the trial only Mabunda was still in custody. Like Danish Satar, who was mysteriously 'kidnapped', Tembe escaped from Maputo Central Prison during a thunderstorm on the night of 24 October 2016.<sup>163</sup> The director of the prison, Castigo Machaieie, and eight prison guards were briefly detained on suspicion of facilitating Tembe's escape, although nothing of any consequence appears to have resulted, beyond the public report of their alleged involvement.<sup>164</sup> Tembe has not been seen since.

Of the six people allegedly involved in the plot, only two convictions have resulted from the Vilanculos murder. On 29 January 2018, Mabunda was sentenced to 24 years in prison for firing the shots that killed Vilanculos, and by all accounts he appears to remain incarcerated.<sup>165</sup> On 9 September 2019, Edith da Camara Cylindo was convicted on appeal of conducting surveillance of Vilanculos that contributed to the murder.<sup>166</sup> To this day, no one has been held responsible for ordering the assassination, and although evidence clearly points to the Satar syndicate, it remains unlikely they will ever be brought to justice.



Murdered constitutional lawyer Gilles Cistac holding a book he published on electoral law in Mozambique. Photo: Supplied



A close-up photograph of a handgun, likely a semi-automatic pistol, with a target overlay. The target consists of concentric circles and a central bullseye, rendered in a light beige color. The handgun is dark, possibly black or dark grey, and the background is blurred, showing what appears to be a person's arm in a light-colored shirt. The text "CHARACTERISTICS OF TARGETED KILLING IN THE REGION" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF TARGETED KILLING IN THE REGION

Firearms are the weapons most used to carry out assassinations in east and southern Africa.

© Shaun Swingler



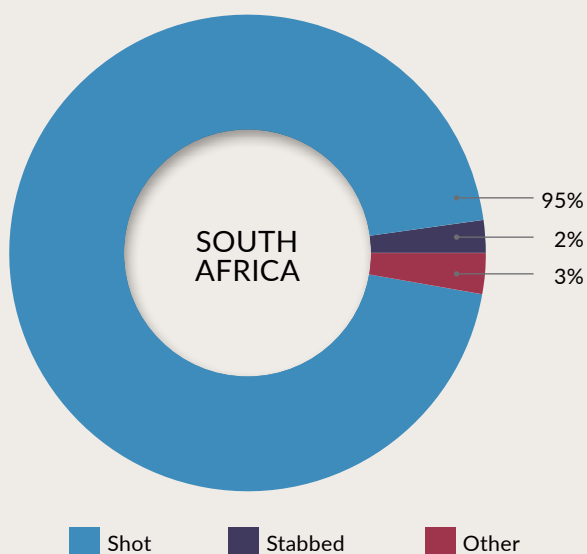
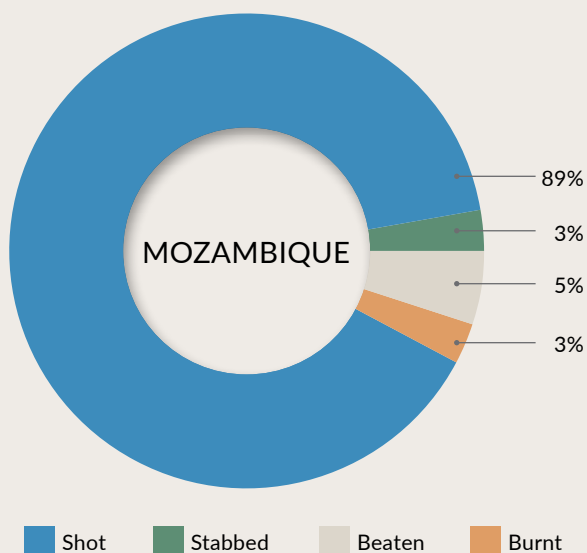
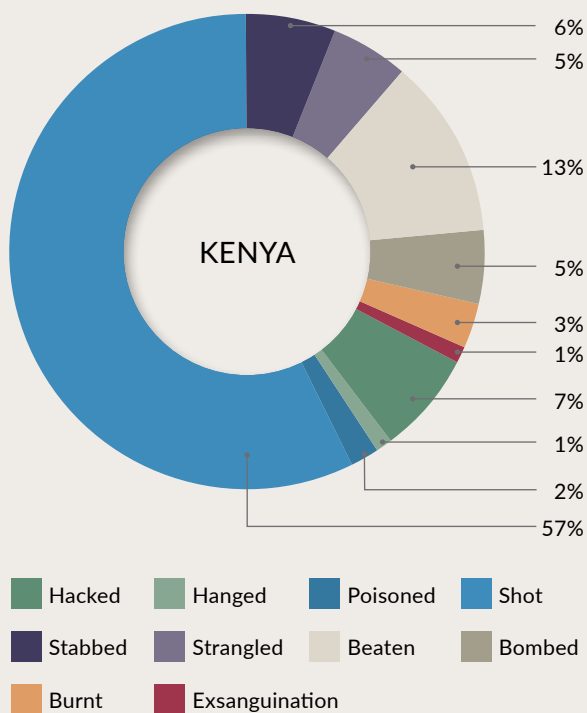


## Method of assassination

**R**esearch on assassinations has highlighted the various methods that are used in executing hits.<sup>167</sup> The database used in this analysis also offers valuable observations about the methods used in different contexts in the three regions. For example, both international literature and our data show that assassination by firearm is the leading choice. A possible explanation for this trend is that firearms provide assassins with greater accuracy and a higher chance of a successful hit compared with other methods (such as explosive devices).<sup>168</sup> Although the method of assassination was unavailable in some of the cases recorded in our database, all the necessary elements required for analysis were available in the majority of cases.

The popular use of firearms was seen in all three regions (Figure 12). In Kenya, 57% of all recorded hits were by shooting, while South Africa and Mozambique show rates of 95% and 89%, respectively. The accessibility of firearms also contributes to the popularity of the method.<sup>169</sup> The second most common method of assassination in Kenya and Mozambique was beating the victim to death. In Kenya, this was the case in 13% of the recorded hits, and this type of assassination was particularly prevalent in politically motivated hits and cases related to organized crime. In Mozambique, assassinations that occurred by beating accounted for 5% of the total data set.

The second most common assassination method in South Africa was stabbing the victim to death, which accounted for 2% of the cases. Assassination by stabbing or strangulation was a predominant feature of organized-crime cases in Kenya, with stabbing being a particularly common method used by youth gangs. Other research analyzing contract murders also found that stabbing a target to death was typically the second most common method of assassination.<sup>170</sup> Similar to shooting, this method possibly provides direct contact to the target, and is an easily accessible method.



**FIGURE 12** Method of assassination by country, 2015–2020.

Although Kenya recorded a comparatively lower percentage in shootings, it had the most varied assassination methods of the three regions. In cases where the method of assassination was known, the variety of methods were seen across all types of hits. Methods used in political hits seemed most varied, with victims having been beaten, bombed, burnt, hacked, poisoned, shot or strangled. This pattern is also seen in international literature.<sup>171</sup>

## Location of assassinations

The location of a hit can be linked to various factors, such as convenience and inconspicuousness if the hitman or contractor wishes to remain anonymous, or it can occur in a symbolic location as an intimidation tactic. Another aspect of the location of a hit may be the relationship between the location of the hit and where the body is found. A study analyzing contract murders in the United Kingdom found that in most cases of assassination, the hitman preferred not to move or dispose of the body, and to leave it at the site of the hit.<sup>172</sup> This is to limit the hitman's exposure to the victim, which decreases the likelihood of identification.

© Shaun Swingler

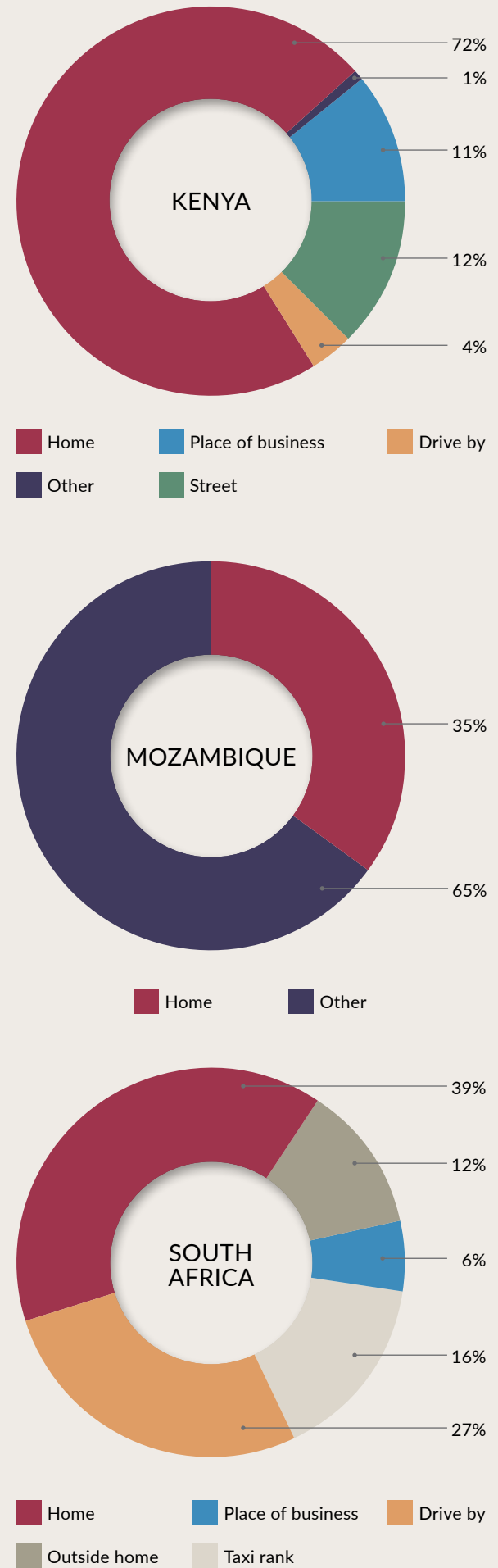


The assassinations recorded in our database show that the majority of the hits in Kenya and South Africa occurred at the victim's home (Figure 13). In addition, the Kenyan data highlights that the victim's home was the primary location for hits across all three categories. In the South African data set, 39% of cases occurred at the victim's home whereas 12% took place outside of the home. In both these countries, the victims were typically targeted when they were either arriving at their homes or leaving them. Data on the exact time of the hits is unavailable in our database; however, research on politically motivated assassinations or those related to organized crime in Mexico found that most assassinations took place at night and in the early hours of the morning.<sup>173</sup> Although the Mozambican data was limited, we were able to ascertain that only 35% of the recorded hits took place at a victim's home; most of the murders occurred elsewhere.

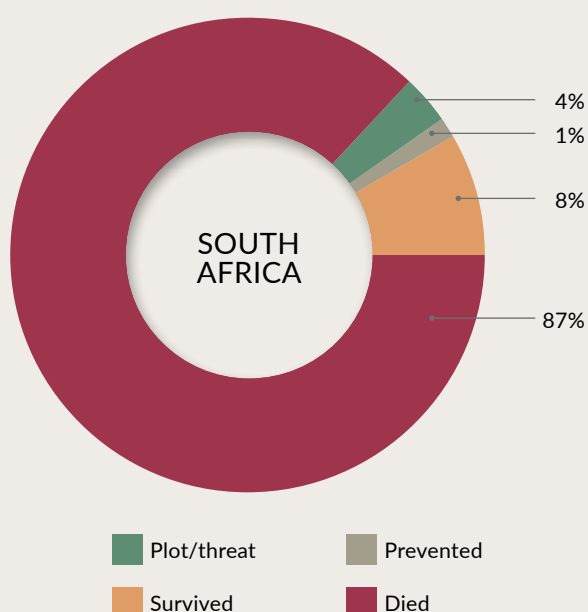
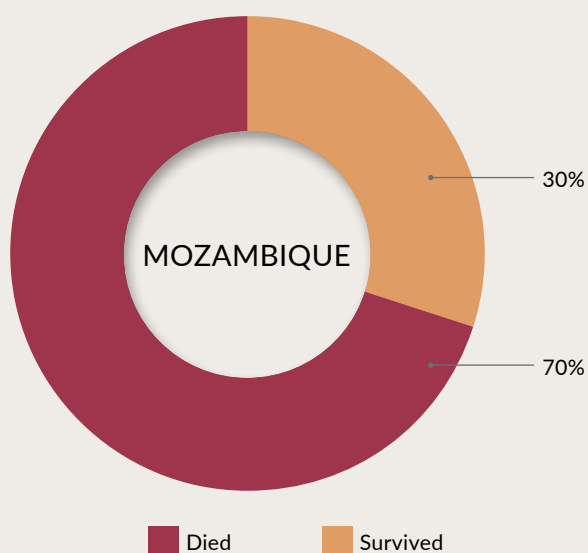
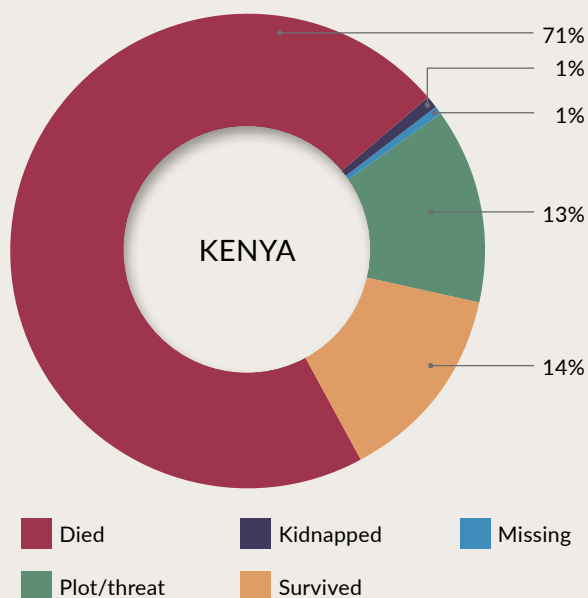
The location of hits was comparatively more varied in South Africa than in Kenya, with drive-by assassinations accounting for 27% of the South African cases, but only 4% of Kenyan hits. The second most prevalent location for hits in Kenya was in the street, with the majority of those hits being political. The victim's place of business was also a common location for hits in South Africa and Kenya. In South Africa, a notable number of taxi-related hits (16%) occurred at taxi ranks.

# Fatality rates

In assassination literature, a professional and successful hit is typically constituted by the death of the target.<sup>174</sup> Based on that definition, our research shows that professional hits in South Africa have the highest success rate, with 87% of all hits resulting in the target's death (Figure 14). In Kenya and Mozambique the success rates were similar (71% and 70%, respectively). The highest survival rate was recorded for hits in Mozambique (30%), whereas Kenyan and South African cases had a survival rate of 14% and 8%, respectively. However, owing to the limited data available from Mozambique, the conclusions are not generalizable.



**FIGURE 13** Location of assassination by country, 2015–2020.



**FIGURE 14** Fatality rates by country, 2015–2020.

In South Africa, the highest success rates were seen in taxi-related hits (94% fatality rate). The organized-crime category showed the second highest death rate in all three countries, with 86% of hits in this category in South Africa resulting in fatalities.

Political assassinations had the lowest fatality rate in all three countries. A 69% fatality rate was recorded in all political hits in Mozambique, and in Kenya only 57% of cases resulted in the target's death. A significant number of assassination plots, both in Kenya and South Africa, have also been unsuccessful due to being uncovered through sting operations or by the hitman revealing themselves to the intended target.

Personally motivated assassinations in Kenya and South Africa were associated with fatality rates of 69% and 77%, respectively. In Kenya, 23% of the cases were described as attempts and 8% of targets survived. In South Africa, 6% of the cases were found to be attempts in which the victims survived.

## The price tag of a hit

Most price data is based on cases from South Africa and Kenya, with only one price being recorded in the Mozambican data set. The data on assassination prices offers some valuable insights, although limited in nature. The limited data is likely due to many assassinations going unrecorded by the media, and the pricing information typically being made public only when, and if, cases go to trial. Another factor to consider is that some assassinations are made to appear as an accidental or natural death. In South Africa, there was a notable lack of data on hits that occurred in the taxi industry, which could be due to pre-existing relations between hitmen and the contractors in the industry; as a result it may be easier to maintain secrecy among those involved in hits.

In both Kenya and South Africa, the majority of price data recorded stems from analysis of personally motivated hits (i.e. disputes of a familial or domestic nature). It is possible that this category was the most common because those who contracted hitmen were not 'professional' criminals, making it simpler for them to be caught by law enforcement agencies. The price range for personal hits in Kenya was typically between US\$928<sup>175</sup> and US\$3 712,<sup>176</sup> with the exception of a foiled assassination plot in 2015 when a woman



plotted to have her husband killed for approximately US\$11 138.<sup>177</sup> In this particular case, the couple was known to be wealthy and her husband's death would have resulted in a considerable insurance payout.<sup>178</sup> This may have influenced the decision to offer a higher amount compared with other personally motivated hits.

In South Africa, personal hit prices ranged between US\$145<sup>179</sup> and US\$8 690.<sup>180</sup> However, the wider price range seen in South Africa compared with Kenya may be a result simply of the higher number of recorded contract killings in South Africa. The average amount paid for personal hits was around US\$3 166,<sup>181</sup> although prices varied, possibly also owing to the amount of the insurance payout in the event of the target's death.

In both countries, high amounts of money were paid for political hits. Although the attempt was unsuccessful, Kenya's most expensive recorded hit was contracted for US\$22 276<sup>182</sup> and was also the only politically motivated hit for which price data was recorded. Similarly, in South Africa, an assassination plot was uncovered in which US\$14 484<sup>183</sup> had been paid for a politically motivated murder. An unsuccessful political hit (in

2017) was contracted for US\$2 897.<sup>184</sup> In these two South African cases, the variation in prices is likely due to the political positions held by the respective targets; in the former case the target was a minister, whereas the latter targeted a trade-union affiliate.

In 2018, South Africa's most expensive recorded hit for the 2015–2019 period was for a case in the organized-crime category: US\$57 750<sup>185</sup> for the murder of defence advocate, Pete Mihalik. A hit on a crime-fighting activist reportedly cost US\$14 484.<sup>186</sup> Both of these cases have been linked to organized-crime groups. As such, in South Africa, the three most expensive cases have been linked to political motivations and organized crime.<sup>187</sup> A similar trend was seen in Kenya, with the third most expensive hit – for US\$4 641<sup>188</sup> – linked to organized crime and the most expensive being politically motivated. Access to funds as a result of political standing, or due to illicit funds held by a criminal group may have facilitated higher amounts being offered to hitmen in these categories. The data also suggests that the more prominent a target, the higher the cost of their assassination.


**Weapons presumably intended to murder a forensic investigator in South Africa in a conspiracy plot. © Alon Skuy**





# CONCLUSION: PREVENTING THE VIOLENCE

Targeted killings affect all sectors of society. Here, a relative of murdered Kenyan human rights activist Caroline Mwatha hangs her portrait. © Simon Maina/AFP via Getty Images



In eastern and southern Africa, the use of targeted killings affects all sectors of society. These hits manipulate politics, corrode criminal justice systems, endanger commuters, intimidate and silence voices of activists and student leaders, and undermine democracy in general.

In building our database for the region, we noted how each country and its context are unique, although a similar data collection method can be used across the region. Adjusting the data collection method during the research process was therefore important to ensure the best data set being compiled for each country. For example, the magnitude of hits could not be compared across countries in the region owing to methodological constraints such as notable differences in media freedom and coverage across the region.

Despite the unique contexts in the different countries, the categorization of the cases suggests general trends across the region. First, politically motivated hits account for a substantial proportion of hits across the region, making up over 21% of cases in South Africa, 47% in Kenya and 88% in Mozambique. Considering the detrimental effect of political hits on a functioning democracy, such crimes should be addressed with urgency. Second, hits related to organized crime were seen more frequently in South Africa and Kenya, although present across the region. In both countries, these hits occurred in gang-related contexts or involved targeted killings of activists or people involved in the criminal justice process. Third, in South Africa, taxi-related targeted killings made up over half of the assassination cases seen in the country. The sheer magnitude of these cases calls for them to be addressed. As these hits, usually targeting taxi drivers and taxi owners, often happen during the course of business, commuters are frequently caught in the crossfire and become further victims of this phenomenon.

A general decline in hits was noted in all three countries over the last few years. Our data shows that South African hits peaked in 2018, largely owing to taxi-related hits, and have since seen a decline. Kenyan hits were at their highest in 2015 and despite some minor peaks since, the numbers are also generally declining. Mozambique experienced most hits in 2017, with a decline in subsequent years. Whether this is a continued trend or linked to COVID-19-related lockdowns will become clear only later.

Comparing the method, location and the cost of hits across the countries revealed some notable findings. In the majority of cases, firearms are used to perform hits. National authorities should therefore look at addressing and improving firearm legislation and its enforcement in the respective countries. A notable number of hits also occurred either at or close to victims' homes. For those concerned about being potential victims of hits and those protecting them, it is important to focus on home security. Third, although there is limited data on the price of assassinations it is clear that the cost of a hit differs drastically within a country and between them. The fairly low costs seen across the region are of particular concern and speak to the dire socio-economic circumstances of the countries analyzed.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations follow from the research:

### 1. Increase civil society monitoring

It is vital for civil society to continue advocating for victims of targeted killings and shedding light on the extent of the problem in society. This raises awareness of the issue and amplifies the voices of those who have been silenced. Gathering data on cases and sharing the stories of victims, as is being done in the GI-TOC's Assassination Witness project,<sup>189</sup> is important as it puts faces to the numbers. Monitoring should be improved and increased by also including extensive court case monitoring. Our data collection has shown that most cases do not make it through the criminal justice system: the investigations either dead end or the prosecutions get delayed, and it is difficult to determine what happened to the case. It is therefore necessary to closely monitor these court cases to better understand where and why they are getting held up in the process.

### 2. Respond to specific assassination clusters

Our data identified various clusters of assassinations in the region. In South Africa, further focus on the taxi industry is needed. There have been various regional commissions, investigations and responses in the past few years, and although we have seen some decline in certain areas (Eastern Cape in 2018 and Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in 2019), there has also been a drastic increase of cases in other areas (e.g. the Western Cape in 2020). This is a large-scale, systemic problem that needs a focused national response to address corruption in the industry with regard to the issuing of licenses and more effective regulation of routes. If the state effectively regulates the industry, there will be no need for the industry to self-regulate with violence. Second, across the region, political assassinations are used to influence political outcomes. Each country needs to improve the response to corruption, protect whistle-blowers and offer more transparency into political processes, particularly around state resource management, to better protect those in office.



### 3. Support investigations

Both news reports and field research in the three countries revealed that police investigators were frequently either intimidated into not investigating cases or bribed to sideline cases or lose key evidence. The investigation of cases related to organized crime is an extremely dangerous job for investigators and they need to be adequately supported and protected by the state. As most cases do not make it through the criminal justice system, it means that hitmen, and those who contract them, generally remain unpunished and are further able to use this violent means to advance their interests. The high levels of impunity around targeted killings are one of the key reasons why they are seen as a viable option to 'solve a problem'.

### 4. Address reservoirs of violence

There are various reservoirs of violence from where hitmen are contracted, such as the taxi industry and hostel systems in South Africa, as well as gang-affected areas across the region. All three countries also have histories of political violence, which could provide a pool of people from where hitmen can be contracted. These reservoirs of violence should be addressed through effective social and development programmes as well as effective law enforcement. The social benefits of addressing these reservoirs of violence would reduce not only targeted killings but all forms of violence in these environments.

### 5. Improve firearm control

Across the region, firearms are the predominant tool used to commit targeted killings. Therefore, a key way to reduce targeted killings would be to improve firearm control. This can be done through improving both legislative and implementation responses. Our research into firearms control in South Africa specifically suggests four responses: first, conduct an independent audit into firearms issued; second, an inquiry into systemic corruption; third, establish an intervention team; and finally, ensure transparency and accountability.<sup>190</sup>

Illegal firearms are set on fire in Kenya, June 2021. © AFP via Getty Images



# NOTES

- 1 The South African taxi referred to in this report is a 14-seater minibus. The industry is the primary form of transport for most South Africans, and is made up of extensive networks, including long- and short-distance routes.
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# GI-TOC Assassination Witness Initiative

## FACES OF ASSASSINATION

Bearing witness to the victims of organized crime



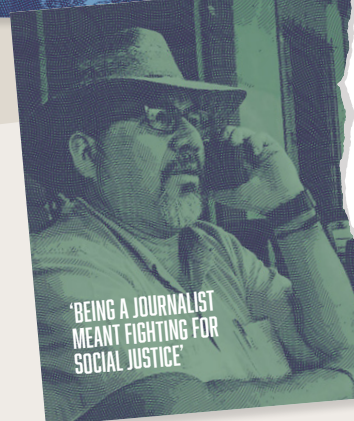
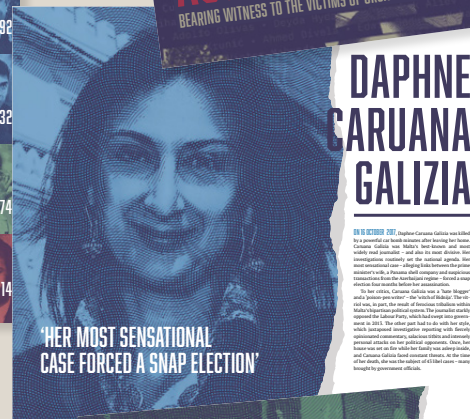
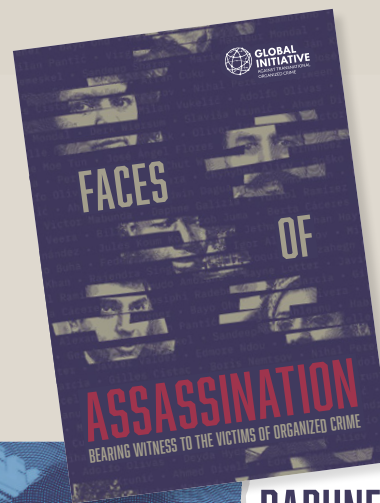
Organized crime is indiscriminate in who it targets. Not only are conflicts between, and within, criminal groups often settled with violence, but such violence also regularly claims the lives of innocent people. This book assembles 50 profiles of those who have been assassinated by criminal groups since the start of the millennium. It is a compilation of men and women who have been murdered because they confronted, weakened or threatened criminal groups.

The profiles in the book span 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. They were commissioned by the GI-TOC and brought together the work of journalists working around the world, who spoke directly with friends and families of the deceased to place their stories in a local context.

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Assassinations are a daily occurrence in many parts of the world, silencing not just individuals but entire communities. They spread fear, weaken society and the economy, and undermine democratic processes. Yet, they remain an understudied topic, in particular their link to organized crime.

This forthcoming report analyzes assassinations around the globe in 2019 and 2020, based on a database of more than 3 000 contract killings in 84 countries, the Global Assassinations Monitor, developed by the GI-TOC. The monitor provides disaggregated data on assassinations on a global scale, to inform better policy responses to assassinations and organized crime.



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