

# ANC suspends Mpumalanga kingmaker

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Mpumalanga premier Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane's campaign to be the first female leader of the ANC in the province has suffered a setback after the suspension of her powerful lobbyist Ngrayi Ngwenya (**pictured**).

The ANC national executive committee (NEC) suspended Ngwenya's membership with immediate effect this week following an assault allegation.

Ngwenya, a heavyweight in Ehlanzeni region, allegedly assaulted acting secretary Lindiwe Ntshalintshali about two weeks ago because he and other leaders in the region and the provincial executive committee (PEC) wanted to overturn a decision taken by the provincial working committee on how to disband and merge Ehlanzeni and Bohlabela regions.

The existence of the two regions within the Ehlanzeni District Municipality clashed with the ANC's constitution, which does not allow it.

Ngwenya and Ehlanzeni acting treasurer Phindile Nkuna allegedly punched Ntshalintshali during a scuffle at Nutting House in Nelspruit. Said scuffle allegedly saw two police officers sustaining injuries. Ntshalintshali had called branch chairpersons and secretaries to the venue to get a briefing about merging the regions.

The two regional leaders and some working committee members, who took the decision on how the regional task team needed to be formed, allegedly tried to force new changes down

Ntshalintshali's throat, which according to her did not consider gender parity, geographical spread and inclusion of various factions. When she dug in her heels, other working committee members accused her of running the PEC as a "Ntshalintshali (Pty) Ltd".

City Press understands that Ngwenya and Nkuna were handed their suspension letters on Wednesday by acting Mpumalanga chairperson Mandla Ndlovu. Ntshalintshali said that

Luthuli House gave the letters to her as secretary and she then handed them to Ndlovu, who was not available to comment.

The NEC is expected to charge other Ehlanzeni regional leaders, as well as PEC and ANC Youth League members, who were seen in videos circulated on social media lambasting Ntshalintshali a day after she was assaulted.

Ngwenya was the regional task team's deputy convener and he will no longer take part in the process of merging the regions.

Ntshalintshali said that the assault made her stronger: "This has made me to be more principled and to take the hardest decisions to build the ANC," she said.

She also registered a criminal case with the police.

The suspension of Ngwenya's membership spells an end to his label of being an untouchable. He had been a force to be reckoned with for nearly 10 years at the helm of the region. A kingmaker for any leadership hopeful at national and local level, his influence explains why Mtsweni-Tsipane's campaign relied so much on Ngwenya.

Mtsweni-Tsipane's campaign team had been confident that Ehlanzeni, Bohlabela - until recently chaired by Public Works MEC Gillion Mashego - and Gert Sibande districts would rally behind her.

What complicates matters now is the disbandment of Ehlanzeni and Bohlabela, which will weaken the original support she had. The regional task team brings with it other factions into the fold, who may sway the first conference of the amalgamated regions in their favour.

The regional conference is set to take place in October, followed by the provincial conference in December.

Ngwenya's suspension has sparked jubilation in certain quarters. Seen as Deputy President David Mabuza's right-hand man, other factions have reason to believe that Mabuza's grip on the province has been dealt a serious blow.

"The elephant has fallen," said one of the comrades who had taken the provincial ANC to court.

"It's baffling why they are fighting comrade Lindiwe because they're in the regional task team. The biggest loser is Mtsweni because she pinned her hopes too much on Ngrayi, who assaults comrades and has been unprincipled," they said.

