



Publication: Daily Dispatch - Opinion
Title: OPINION: Assassinations are a result of economic factors
Publish date: 22 Nov 2023
Page: 18

Reach: 10889
AVE: R 16513.66
Author: Staff Reporter



Mbasa Mvenene Insight

Assassinations are a result of economic factors

How do members of a political organisation exercise their political rights, which include standing for office in an environment of political assassinations stemming from intra-party factional battles?

In the main these battles are inspired by political deployment into public office, access to municipal finances, economic opportunity and civil service employment, which in turn feed networks of patronage.

Though the crisis of assassinations may be glaringly evident in KwaZulu-Natal, with 21 recorded cases for 2022, it also exists in the Eastern Cape, with 10 documented cases in 2020.

Nelson Mandela Bay stands out in the province of the Eastern Cape.

Ward 20 ANC councillor Zwellandile Boozi was shot dead in 2020.

Ward 43 councillor Andile Andries and regional executive committee member and branch secretary Lubabalo Keso were both shot dead in a drive-by in 2022.

In the Bay's northern areas and African townships, warring factions are linked to gangsters who sometimes masquerade as security officers.

They are also employed to send threats of intimidation or even orchestrate assassinations.

The IFP and the DA are not excluded from this problem.

However, it is rife in the governing party.

The waning electoral fortunes of the ANC in the 2016 (53.91%) and 2021 (48%) local government elections was accompanied by a rise in political violence induced by what I believe are fewer available seats in municipal councils and provincial legislatures and a declining influence on high-value tenders.

The diminishing electoral support escalated political rivalries and tensions within the ruling party, which often turned deadly.

Growing voter apathy is induced by a confluence of endemic corruption, chronic youth unemployment and anorexic service delivery.

The intensification of political violence among competing aspirants inside the ruling party and its alliance partners in the 2021 election period was actually a struggle for access to municipal finances.

The procurement system in

municipalities means access to municipal finances, which has been recorded in scholarly literature to have been misused for private benefit by unscrupulous public and private actors in concert.

Making it to the party list, deployment into public office, and employment in the civil service increases the patronage group's influence on the direction of high-value municipal tenders.

For many emerging Eastern Cape companies in townships and rural areas, access to economic activity is found only through lucrative municipal tenders.

According to the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council, youth unemployment (15-34 years) in the province was 52.4% in the second quarter of 2023.

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metro recorded an unemployment rate of 32%, while Buffalo City Metro recorded 30%.

It can then be hypothesised that idle young people within the structures of the ruling party and its wings view party leadership as the only avenue for upward mobility, mainly through deployment as ward

councillors or civil servants.

Out of this employment, the political principal or the leader of the patronage network deployed into government must extend resources in the form of money, tenders, civil service employment, gifts, favours, or access to information to clients within the network, who are in the main tender-aligned companies, branch, and regional leadership.

The office of the councillor has two main employees, the secretary, and the cleaner, who both receive decent salaries.

Internally warring factions will also support their candidate with hopes of securing such jobs.

Employment in the Extended Public Works Programme is also understood to be controlled mainly by ward councillors.

So, whoever is closest to the ward councillor has a greater chance of securing employment.

Therefore, who becomes a councillor is a matter of life and death in a province with unacceptable levels of youth unemployment, dilapidated public infrastructure and anaemic productive investment.

This is coupled with a high

cost of living (food, accommodation, and transport) and absent service delivery in townships, informal settlements and rural areas.

This nurtures growing discontent, frustration and a rising lack of trust and confidence in local municipalities and the provincial government.

Political or public ethics are a distant afterthought in such dire social and economic conditions.

Everyone is concerned with securing a piece of the post-apartheid pie for themselves and those closest to them, especially their family members.

So the concentration of poverty, misery and chronic joblessness breeds a culture of acquisitiveness or self-seeking individualism, which, not only in SA but throughout the developing world, is sought through politics and the plunder of the public purse.

Competition within the ANC for councillorship is fierce and often grows into violent struggles because for whoever is victorious their faction is guaranteed employment and economic opportunity (municipal tenders).

Without a doubt the root

cause of political assassinations in the province and across the country is socioeconomic conditions caused by poor governance and the private sector's capital strike — investors unwilling to make productive investments and instead store wealth on the (JSE) to acquire passive income.

There is also increasing investment in the financial sector, mainly banks and insurance companies.

This kind of investment is not considered productive because it does not result in employment or infrastructure development.

So these are political-economic assassinations stirred by chronic joblessness and a lack of economic opportunity.

The deadly struggle for deployment as a councillor is to access municipal resources that are redirected into the private pockets of corrupt politicians, the relatives of civil servants and their tender-aligned companies.

Mbasa Mvenene is a PhD candidate at Nelson Mandela University (political studies) and teaches political studies at Walter Sisulu University. He writes in his personal capacity.