



Political Violence in KwaZulu-Natal

1. Introduction

After 25 years of democracy, political violence remains one of the greatest challenges that continuously undermine South Africa's constitutional state. The province of KwaZulu-Natal accounts for the majority of political violence that occurs in South Africa and, especially around election time, fear and anxiety loom as political assassinations increase. The 2016 local government elections brought an end to the single dominant party situation in some major metros and rural municipalities, but the process that preceded the elections was marked by numerous political killings in KwaZulu-Natal.

Likewise, with the 2019 national and provincial elections fast approaching, suspense and insecurity is still hanging over many parts of KwaZulu-Natal. This paper attempts to analyse the issue, to better understand why the problem continues, and to consider possible solutions.

2. Background

Given the colonial history of South Africa since the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in 1652, and the violence that ensued – through conquest, war, colonisation, and the brutal treatment of native South Africans by the Apartheid government until the 1990s – it is safe to say that South Africans are no strangers to violence. Whenever the oppressed majority peacefully requested their human rights, they were met with more violence. Many came to the realisation that violence was effective to achieve freedom in a colonial system that only understood the language of force.

Post-1994 SA society has inherited the culture of using violence as an effective method of resolving conflict. Moreover, in some rural areas and villages, the use of violence has become culturally

ingrained; violent traits have long been used to exhibit masculinity. For example, *Ikhaba* or *lintonga* (the game of fighting with sticks) is usually played during traditional ceremonies and boys and young men gain status through this game. The more you defeat your peers, the higher will be your rank and power, and the more you will be feared and respected.

“That thing is in us. We grew up in rural areas where we would take our sticks and fight until one surrenders. Even now, if I go back to Greytown, I will take my sticks with and just fight someone I know to see if I can still beat him,” says Mr Meshack Radebe, an ANC leader in Mpumalanga.¹

3. IFP and ANC Conflict in KZN Before 1994

The transition from Apartheid to democracy was not easy; many people were sceptical of change and political violence intensified, especially in what was then Natal. Early in 1994, the ANC and IFP held a meeting in an effort to find a way forward. However, Nkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the IFP demanded greater powers for the IFP in the proposed government of national unity; while the ANC firmly opposed that idea.²

Consequently, Mr Buthelezi and IFP sought help from right wing groups such as the AWB, the police and former Vlakplaas operatives to ensure the Zulu nationalist party had a military force able to resist the incorporation of KwaZulu into an ANC- ruled South Africa.

4. The Proliferation of Guns and Ammunition

Widespread political violence requires access to weapons, and various enquiries over the years have shown how the political factions in KZN

obtained guns and ammunition from various sources.

Guns from Eskom: Testimony before the Goldstone Commission in 1994 detailed how an Eskom official agreed to sell 1000 LM4 rifles to middlemen acting on behalf of a senior member of the KwaZulu government.³ Even though Eskom subsequently said that it had cancelled the transaction, a number of its registered firearms remain unaccounted for.

Guns from the police: The notorious Colonel Eugene de Kock has told how, in the early 1990s, Inkatha paramilitary units received clandestine support from the police to attack ANC supporters. He himself was instructed to supply 100 home-produced shotguns. Consequently, demands for guns in Kwazulu-Natal increased, including more sophisticated weapons such as AK-47s, RPG-7s, and limpet mines. De Kock claims that he personally supplied truckloads of hand grenades, light machine guns, mines, ammunition, and AK-47s to senior Inkatha officials.⁴

Vlakplaas Weapons: Even today, an estimated 64 out of 70 tons of weapons which were transported by KwaZulu-Natal government trucks have not been accounted for. These weapons include RPG rockets and rocket launchers, 500kg of explosive, 1 000 hand grenades, 200 shrapnel mines, almost three thousand rifle grenades, and thousands of AK47s.⁵

Guns from the AWB: Before the Concerned South African Group (COSAG) and the Freedom Alliance (FA) came into existence, Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) groups in KwaZulu were working closely with the IFP, providing training on their farms, and often sharing membership.⁶ For example, the TRC granted amnesty to Mr Gerrit Phillipus Anderson, an AWB member whose cell in Natal co-operated with the IFP in the procurement and hiding of weapons.⁷

Guns from Heists: Mr T Chadwick admitted before the TRC that he was asked by the AWB to approach the IFP with a view to joint weapons heists at Flagstaff police station in the Eastern Cape in March 1994. The Amnesty Committee found that they were given orders to obtain arms to be used by the IFP's self-protection units in their war against the ANC. Unfortunately, gun heists, and gun disappearances from KwaZulu-Natal police stations have continued since 1994. Durban central station is one of the leading police stations

in South Africa when it comes to guns stolen from police officers.⁸

Of course, the ANC and its internal and exiled structures had access to their own supplies of weapons, many of which found their way into KZN and contributed to the huge proliferation of firearms in that province. This easy availability of guns has fostered a situation where there is a high degree of political violence and lawlessness.

5. The NFP Split from the IFP

Mary De Haas, an independent researcher who has been monitoring political violence in KwaZulu-Natal for many years, asserts that a large proportion of killings in KZN were the result of political party clashes.

In the beginning of 2011, the Inkatha Freedom Party's national chairperson, Zanele Magwaza-Msibi, was accused of having secret meetings with the ANC's former president, Jacob Zuma, and other ANC leaders, as well as receiving 'millions' from the ruling party to destroy the IFP.⁹ She was summoned before an IFP disciplinary committee, and those of her supporters who campaigned for her were expelled for propagating division in the party.

Consequently, Mrs Magwaza-Msibi and her supporters cut ties with the IFP and formed the NFP. She was elected to lead the party and it contested the 2011 local government elections. Although tension between the IFP and NFP has eased somewhat, six of the 20 political killings in the run up to the 2016 local government elections in KZN were of IFP or NFP members.

The other 14 were of, or linked to, ANC officials – which leads us to one of the main causes of political violence in the province.

6. ANC Factionalism

Between May 1994 and the end of 1998, there were an estimated 4 000 deaths as a result of political violence in KZN.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this has not stopped since; people are murdered almost every day, both before and after elective conferences, and more are likely to be killed as elections are approaching.

Mr Edwin Mkhize, the provincial secretary of COSATU in KZN, has said that there is a link

between political killings in the province and ANC conferences. He alleges that the growing trend of political killings in KwaZulu-Natal can be blamed on corruption, maladministration and, of course, the persistent factionalism in the movement.¹¹

A few recent examples are illustrative. On 10 March 2018, an ANC local voting district coordinator, Mr Nqobizwe Mkhize, was killed at his home in Durban over the voter registration weekend. He and his wife were in bed when he was killed; she was told to cover her face before he was shot.¹² A few months before that, a former ANC branch chairperson, Mr Lungisani Mnguni, was supposed to attend the party's national conference as a delegate in December 2017. But in November, he was shot and killed in broad daylight while he was delivering items for a school nutrition programme.¹³

Competition for political power, and factionalism among members of the same political party, has led to those who want to cling onto power, and those who desperately want to get their hands on it, to resort to hiring hitmen or assassins to eliminate their competition. This horror shows no sign of stopping. At an ANC meeting in April 2018, in Howick, bodyguards assigned to some ANC leaders drew guns and were ready to shoot as the meeting descended into chaos.¹⁴

7. The Fight for Resources

There is an overlap, in KwaZulu-Natal, between killings that are directly linked to political rivalry, and killings that result from a fight over resources; and in some cases, they are the same thing. For instance, there are many taxi owners in the province who sometimes fight for routes, transport tenders, and other taxi-related issues. These owners often hire hitmen to deal with their opponents, and some of those taxi owners are politically involved.

More to the point, Mary De Haas argues that the crux of the matter is that there is a culture of impunity. For instance, the most powerful taxi owner in the province is "politically extremely well connected," and there is a lack of political will to deal with transgressions by him and his people. Often the taxi owners employ well-trained gunmen, whom they second to work as bodyguards for politicians, and unfortunately there is no effective control over these bodyguards.

The Economic Freedom Fighters' (EFF) Deputy Secretary-General, Hlengiwe Mkhali, has said that "there is no political law taking place in KZN. So what is happening when we see people are killed is the factions that is taking place between the ANC." The fight is about resources: "One faction wants to eat, and the other faction is also fighting to eat."¹⁵ Hlengiwe dismisses the term 'political killing' in KZN, and argues that there is a war within the ANC itself.

Additionally, the EFF's National Spokesperson, Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, also dismissed the term 'political killings' in KZN. Testifying before the Moerane Commission of Enquiry, he said that the killings were due to criminality as factions within the ANC fight for tenders. "There are no politics here. They are killing each other the same way a thug would come to your house and kill you for your cell-phone." He added, "to brand it political is to almost suspend a due police investigation that must take place."¹⁶

Nevertheless, former Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Senzo Mchunu, confirmed that there are benefits to be gained when someone you are close to gets a high political position such as being councillor. He was outlining how tensions would unintentionally develop because of competition. Mr Mchunu highlighted two factors regarding competition for resources that often lead to political killings:

- *'My turn to eat has come' syndrome.* This syndrome does not have a chairman or a secretary. It is like a movement, it is unidentifiable and "can be very powerful. It can move a woman or a man."
- *Manipulation and Factionalism within the ANC.* "When positions within the organisation are available through manipulation mostly based on factions, it becomes a factor of potential violence, which sometimes develops into full violence."

8. Corruption

Corruption has been a key factor in the KwaZulu-Natal political killings; often, those who are corrupt execute those who threaten to expose corruption. For example, an ANC Youth League Secretary-General, Sindiso Magaqa, was assassinated after being outspokenly unhappy about alleged corruption and unauthorised spending in the Umzimkhulu Municipality. Mr

Magaqa's friend, Thabiso Zulu, an ANC Youth League leader who testified before the Moerane Commission of Enquiry in October 2017, also feared for his life as he exposed corruption. He said,

"I'm not going to be romantic when I deal with these matters, I lost a friend here. The cases are not getting solved, other cases we lost Wandile Mkhize, his case did not get solved, we lost Sbu Sbiya, his case did not get lost [solved]. I'm here. Do you know what may happen to me as I am here? I may get killed and the very same thing that happened to these cases may happen to me."¹⁷

Mr Zulu took up the matter with crime intelligence officials at provincial level, and with national government officials during the time of former President Jacob Zuma, but his situation remains the same.

9. Ineffective Policing

The police have not been very effective in stopping political killings in KwaZulu-Natal. In some cases, indeed, it has been alleged that police officers have been involved in the killings. Lwazi Magaqa testified before the Moerane Commission and expressed dissatisfaction about the police's handling of the Sindiso Magaqa murder. "Police arrived at the scene immediately after the shooting but they left shortly [after], saying they were going to call for backup. By the time they came back, a suspicious BMW which was at the scene had already left."¹⁸ He said the BMW was seen driving around Mr Magaqa's home a few days before he was killed.

Another witness testified that even if the police were not involved in killings, they made sure that cases were not solved.¹⁹ He also blamed the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the police's Crime Intelligence Division for allowing this situation to occur.²⁰ In this regard, few observers were surprised when Police Minister Bheki Cele recently confirmed that 27 Crime Intelligence officials have criminal records.²¹

Nevertheless, despite the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation's (HAWKS) reward of up to R450 000 for any information that could lead to the arrest of suspects in the ongoing political killings in KwaZulu-Natal, and the establishment of a special task team, convictions remain elusive. Likewise, KZN's community safety MEC, Mxolisi Kaunda, said that 61 suspects in 41 cases of political violence in KZN have been arrested, but no suspect has yet been successfully prosecuted.

10. Conclusion

Four key factors contribute most to political violence in KwaZulu-Natal:

- The fight for resources/'My turn to eat' syndrome
- Corruption
- The proliferation of weapons
- Violent mentalities

Many people want to eat; many want to win tenders, and they will do anything in their power to secure these deals. Patronage and nepotism thrive in the quest for resources. Those leaders and businesspeople who have achieved high political positions, and economic advantage, through patronage and nepotism will do anything in their power to remain in those positions. And when this is allied to the easy availability of dangerous weapons, danger is imminent and inevitable.

If these four factors, and others, are not resolved as soon as possible, then politically-linked violence will not end in KwaZulu-Natal or anywhere else in South Africa. As for the proliferation of guns, we need far more stringent gun control policies, and far better implementation of existing policies, in order to curb the proliferation of unlicensed guns. With the elections only six or seven months away, it is to be hoped that the authorities are taking the necessary steps.

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