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South Africa Post-Election Review Policy Series POLICY BRIEF NUMBER 4

Elections Peace and Security – Security Planning, Implementation and Results

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 national and provincial elections were highly competitive and occurred within a politically charged environment. The research finds that despite several threats made to disrupt the election with 'shutdowns', 'blockades' and 'anarchy' in the pre-election phase, followed by claims of vote-rigging and demands for a recount in the post-election phase, the 2024 election proceeded without large-scale violence or security incidents. However, targeted political killings were prominent of political rivals, tender-contractor competitors, whistle-blowers and critics in the run-up to and aftermath of the election, particularly in disputed 'hot-spot' areas. Other security challenges during the electoral period centred on community and service delivery protests, political/politicised demonstrations, taxi and truck violence, and 'informational manipulation' aimed at inciting violence.

On voting day, issues that caused other security challenges resulted from electricity outages (generating personal safety concerns, particularly for women and the elderly), digital outages and connectivity problems (leading to long queues, tension and crowd control problems), protest action and intimidation (resulting in voting stations not opening on time or not opening

at all), and situational insecurities (such as the physical handling of the elderly, disabled, deaf and visually impaired; verbal threats and abuse directed towards IEC staff; and gender-based provocations and assaults).

Going forward, recommendations to improve safety and security during the elections include tackling 'everyday violence' and crime to create a full, enabling democratic and electoral participatory environment; identifying and targeting criminal and political instigators, perpetrators and networks of political violence and disinformation/misinformation/'fake news'; enforcing penalties and cancelling votes of political parties whose members incite violence, disorder and unrest, as per the Electoral Code of Conduct; increasing the number of SAPS and IEC officials at voting stations, inclusive of dedicated queue controllers; mainstreaming specific sensitising measures and protections for the aged, persons with special needs and women at voting stations; and, regarding improving the above, reconducting state-of-readiness audits of voting stations with stakeholders from the identified vulnerable groups.

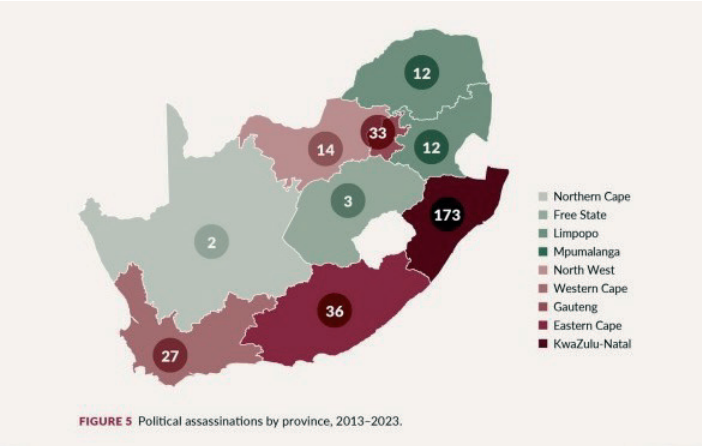
ELECTION SECURITY BACKGROUND

A high degree of persistent, everyday violence and crime plays a seen and unseen role during electoral contests. The *Global Organized Crime Index* report (Global Initiative, 2023) ranked South Africa seventh globally in terms of the highest crime rates.

Political violence is one manifestation of criminal violence: criminal actors are utilised to eliminate political rivals such as local/municipal councillors, ward officials, party agents and government administrators.

Figure 1:
Political Assassinations by Province 2013–2022

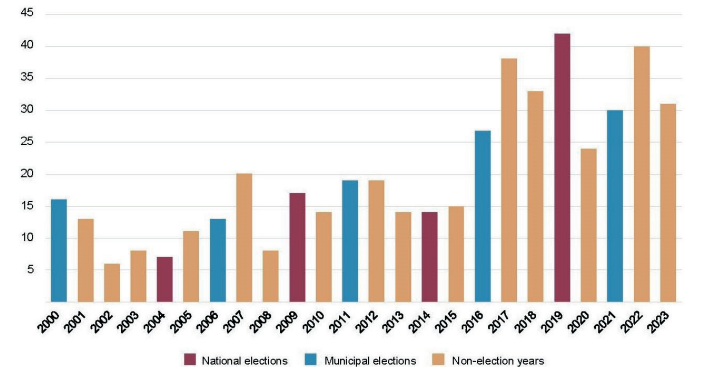
Source: Matamba and Thobela (2024).



In the first four months of 2024, ten targeted political killings occurred representing 'one political hit every two weeks between January and April 2024'. Politically targeted killings ('hits') are a recurrent and ascendant feature during electoral contests. In the national election of 2004, there were 7 hits; 17 hits in 2009; 14 hits in 2014; and 42 hits in 2019 (Comins, 2024; Matamba & Thobela, 2024). Between 2004 to 2019, there was a six-fold increase in political assassinations during national electoral contests.

Figure 2:
Political assassinations, 2000–2023, showing election years

Source: Matamba and Thobela (2024).

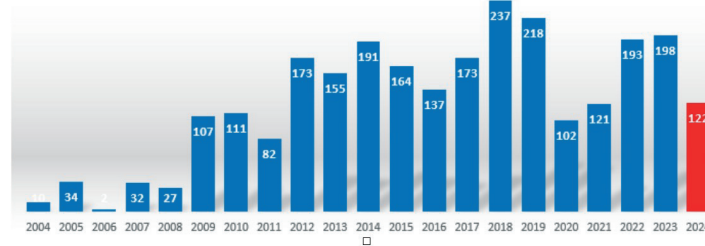


Violence has also become a mainstay tool used to express everyday frustration, disgruntlement and disagreement. Electoral periods represent an 'opportunity window', not only for increased visibility and mobilisation, but also for violent action. In the run-up to the

2024 elections, this played out in several ways: political/politicised demonstrations; industry protests (truck, taxi, transport); and community protests over 'service delivery issues'. The blocking of roads, burning of trucks, tyres and schools, digging of trenches and defacement of election posters, with threats of 'shutdowns', 'blockades' and 'anarchy', created significant disruption and security challenges. In KwaZulu-Natal alone, police contended with 900 civil unrest and protest actions in the lead-up to the 2024 elections, 211 of which turned violent. The threat of escalation into nationwide looting and civil unrest loomed large following the experience of July 2021. 'Informational manipulation' accompanies violent unrest and protest action – this represented a particular concern for the IEC during the elections.

Figure 3:
Service delivery protests by year, 2004–2024

Source: Municipal IQ. Municipal Hotspots Monitor (2024).



ELECTION SAFETY AND SECURITY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Election safety and security planning leverage off existing national security structures: the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster (JCPS); the National Joint Operational and Intelligence (NatJoints) structure; and National and Provincial Operational Command Centres (N/POCC). NatJoints and N/POCCs are led by the South African Police Services (SAPS), State Security Agency (SSA) and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and engage in threat and crime pattern analysis, identifying national key points under threat, and identifying 'hot-spot' areas of disorder, crime and violence.

Other key role players in the overall JCPS include the Departments of Justice, Home Affairs, Correctional Services and Finance. In addition, 350 private security providers form part of the Eyes and Ears (E2) Initiative, an early warning system that feeds into the NatJoints and N/POCC structure. Election security planning is informed by the supreme law of the country, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which designates and delimits roles and responsibilities to the Independent Electoral Commission (Chapter 9) and Security Services (Chapter 3 and 11). Election security planning is further informed by the Electoral Act (1998) and Electoral Code of Conduct (1998, 2024), and divided into three phases with specific delineated security priorities:

1. **The pre-electoral phase:** the policing and monitoring of registration of voters, gatherings, demonstrations, celebrations and campaigns; protection of national key points; and escorting of IEC and election officials.
2. **Voting day:** the static deployment of the SAPS at voting stations, election warehouses and other national key points; escorting of voting materials, IEC and election officials; crowd management and control of firearms at voting stations; and enforcement of the Electoral Act.
3. **Post-election phase:** following the announcement of results, the provision of safety and security to national key points, and policing of celebrations, protests and demonstrations.

Other security initiatives employed throughout the election period included public-private and civil society partnerships to identify, track, document and remove informational manipulation, such as the Real411 reporting platform and the 'Voluntary Cooperation Framework' with Meta, Google and TikTok.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for future security planning during elections:

Recommendations for the IEC

- Incorporate and sensitise notions of consent into IEC staff training, particularly around physical touching and handling of persons who require physical assistance, of persons who vocalise vulnerabilities, and of persons who experience assault (e.g. close inappropriate proximity in queuing, sexual assault, verbal assault).
- Develop and implement gender and minority security-specific protection at voting stations and an enabling environment on voting day (such as separate queues for women before sunrise/after dark and mobile voting booths outside of the station for those who are infirm, where access is cumbersome/difficult, and/or to prevent the physical handling of persons).
- Incorporate backup power as part of essential voting equipment.

Recommendations for the SAPS and IEC

- Increase the number of SAPS and IEC officials at voting stations inclusive of dedicated 'queue controllers'.
- Conduct ongoing sensitising training of the SAPS and IEC officials on consent, vulnerability, trauma and victim support.

Recommendations for the South African government, SAPS and criminal justice system

- Mainstream the problem and prevention of targeted political killings by (re)establishing, building upon and extending the work of the Moerane Inter-Ministerial Commission on Political Violence, widening the lens to nationwide occurrences of political killings, politicised protests, politicised violence, the politicisation of state tenders and contracts, political disinformation and misinformation; and the inter-connections of these dimensions into a consolidated incident and action-orientated database.
- Drawing upon the findings of such a commission, identify and prosecute individuals, including politicians, who are implicated in the political-criminal violence network.

Recommendation for the South African government, SAPS, criminal justice system and IEC

- Implement the Electoral Code of Conduct regarding incitement of political violence by fining political parties in breach, and cancelling the offending party's votes and registration in the area.

Recommendation for the South African government and SAPS

- Tackle 'everyday violence', which represents a barrier not only to full voter turnout and participation during elections, but to 'everyday democracy', democratic consolidation and democratic participation.

Recommendation for the IEC and JCPS cluster

- Reconduct 'state of readiness' audits of voting stations

accompanied by representatives from gender and minority stakeholder entities (such as Blind SA, Disability South Africa, Sonke Gender Justice, Women for Change and Age-in-Action), and take aboard security-specific protection identified by these entities.

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