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## **Report reveals main motives of rising contract killings in South Africa**

A report released by the Assassination Witness project on contract killings in South Africa has revealed that the main motivations for assassinations were political, economic and social.

The report, titled *The Rule of the Gun: Hits and assassinations in South Africa 2000–2017*, also revealed that those in the country's criminal justice system were targets of commissioned killings.

The Assassination Witness project is a collaboration between the Centre for Criminology at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC).

According to the report, the province with the highest number of recorded assassinations was KwaZulu-Natal (40%), followed by Gauteng (24%) and the Western Cape (14%).

While many segments of the economy nurture and feed the contract killing market, the taxi industry provides a notable recruitment pool for hitmen. It also accounts for the bulk of hits (43%), followed by organised crime (22%) and political incidents (22%).

All the incidents that were identified as hits were divided into four separate categories. Cases that fall within the political category generally targeted individuals designated as holding a political or administrative office, almost always in local government.

According to the report, political conflict, poor governance and political uncertainty contributed to an increase in the numbers of assassinations that fall into the political category. But there were also increases in cases associated with organised crime and a large recorded growth in the number of targeted killings associated with the taxi industry.

Prof Mark Shaw, Director of the Centre for Criminology at UCT and Director of GITOC explains: "The data that has been collected for the report continues work that the GITOC and UCT have done on assassinations related to organised crime in South Africa. We feel it is an important way to monitor the nature, extent and violence of the country's evolving criminal economy. What is most disturbing is that there was a 36% increase in our recording of hits or assassinations to the end of 2017. That increase also took place across all categories, so it is important to note that it was not only confined to what is recorded under

our category of 'political' hits, which are those cases that generally make the news. Increases in hits related to taxi conflicts for example have been particularly notable."

*The Rule of the Gun* report aims to quantify the problem of killings by paid hitmen in South Africa, examine why the rate of contract killings has risen so sharply in recent years and build an evidence base that can provide a platform for a call to action.

The report offers the following key recommendations:

- Improve firearm control to reduce the flow of illicit arms;
- Focus on reducing the violent competition within the taxi industry;
- Erode the 'nurseries of violence' that provide a supply of hitmen for hire;
- Bolster prosecution-led investigations; and
- Expand efforts at monitoring assassinations and disaggregate homicide data, so that better quality statistics on contract killings are made available.

Kim Thomas, an analyst at GITOC, commented: "This research is important as it provides both data and analysis on assassinations in South Africa. It further sheds light on the impact of these assassinations, which is far reaching as they undermine South Africa's democracy, judiciary and fair economic competition. They also have an overwhelming impact on the victims' family and community."

While there are numerous international studies that aim to understand how and why contract killings have become more prevalent, these analyses have focused largely on developed countries. As a developing country, the South African situation is different – the sheer number of hits is greater, the urgency of collecting the data more apparent and the need to act more pressing.

### **Notes to editors**

To access the full report, click [here](#).

To learn more about the work of the Assassination Witness project, visit [www.assassinationwitness.org.za](http://www.assassinationwitness.org.za)

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