GLOBAL **ASSASSINATION** MONITOR
METHODOLOGY

GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

The Global Assassination Monitor database is an event database, recording contract killings from around the globe. The database draws on newspaper reports and records information on perpetrators, victims and dynamics of the killings, such as location, date, method and prices. The current database covers the years 2019 and 2020 and includes more than 2 700 cases.

1. DEFINITION AND CASE SELECTION CRITERIA

The Global Assassination Monitor database includes assassinations (successful; attempts; plots/threats) that:

A. ARE TARGETED AGAINST INDIVIDUALS
(I.E. TARGETED KILLING)

B. INVOLVE A CONTRACT
(I.E. CONTRACT KILLING)

The database covers assassinations that fall into the category 'targeted contract killings'. This includes actual, attempted and planned lethal attacks on individuals or small groups of individuals. The definition of targeted killings here includes cases where specific individuals are targeted for personal characteristics – such as identity, position or the work they do, and does not include attacks on random members of groups. Contract killings are cases where a third party is contracted to conduct the actual attempted or planned murder. At times, this might involve the transfer of money: the contract killer is paid for his or her services; at other times, the contract killer might receive other forms of benefit, including personal favours, political favours or a change in status in a criminal gang. The killing is contracted for political, economic, personal or organized-crime-related motives. The aim of the killing is to change the status quo by eliminating somebody considered to be an 'obstacle'.

Unfortunately, newspaper reports do not always carry enough information about individual cases to know with certainty that they meet the two criteria. Therefore, a score from 1 to 5 was assigned to each case, indicating the level of certainty that the case meets the criteria of an assassination to be included in the database.

Figure 1: Selection criteria

1	2	3	4	5
Not a relevant case	Not enough information to determine whether relevant or not	Could be a relevant case but information is ambiguous	This is very likely a relevant case	This is definitely a relevant case
(A) not fulfilled (B) not fulfilled	Not enough information	(A) ambiguous (B) ambiguous	(A) fulfilled (B) ambiguous	(A) fulfilled (B) fulfilled

Since coding of cases based on newspaper reports is highly interpretative, detailed criteria were formulated determining the certainty level individual cases fall into, and to provide some consistency to the case selection process:

5 – DEFINITE CASE	
CONDITION A Fulfilled	The article clearly states that: • The person was targeted as an individual (e.g., because of their work against organized crime, because they are a politician, etc.) and not just as representative of a group. • The killing was an assassination, either explicit or with the use of descriptive terms (such as execution style; etc.).
CONDITION B Fulfilled	The article confirms: • The use of hitmen. • That the hit was clearly masterminded.
CONDITION A Ambiguous	According to the article: • The person could be targeted for individual reasons or as representative of a group (e.g., transgender, immigrant, Albino, police).
CONDITION B Fulfilled	The article confirms: • The use of hitmen • That the hit was clearly masterminded.

4 – HIGH LIKELIHOOD CASE	
CONDITION A Fulfilled	The article clearly states that: • The person was targeted as an individual (e.g., because of their work against organized crime, because they are a politician, etc.) and not just as representative of a group. • The killing was an assassination.
CONDITION B Ambiguous	There are elements in the article that indicate that the killing was planned or premediated (not a spontaneous killing), such as: • Gunmen/drive-by shooting/use of firearms/execution style (many shots). • Bomb planted in car/on street. • Professional killers/unidentified hitmen. • Organized crime group or motive involved. • Contradictory information, e.g., police say it was a suicide, the family is convinced it was an assassination, possibly because of previous threats.

3 – LIKELY BUT AMBIGUOUS CASE	
CONDITION A Ambiguous	According to the article: • A person could be targeted for individual reasons or as representative of a group (e.g., transgender, immigrant, Albino, police). The article does not indicate that the person was targeted for individual reasons (e.g., activist for minority rights, etc.)
CONDITION B Ambiguous	There are elements in the article that indicate that the killing was planned or premediated (not a spontaneous killing), such as: • Gunmen/drive-by shooting/use of firearms/execution style (many shots). • Bomb planted in car/on street. • Professional killers/unidentified hitmen. • Organized crime group or motive involved. • Contradictory information, e.g., police say it was a suicide, the family is convinced it was an assassination, possibly because of previous threats.

2 – UNCERTAIN CASE
It is not clear whether this is a hit or a murder, because substantial information is missing. • *For example, the article states that an unidentified dead body has been found, with no further information.*

1 – NOT A RELEVANT CASE

It is clear that the killing – even if targeted – was a murder and not an assassination when:
- There is a confession from the perpetrator/the police investigation concluded it was a murder.
- The person was killed spontaneously, e.g., as the result of a bar fight.
- The person was killed in a crossfire – e.g., police or militants.
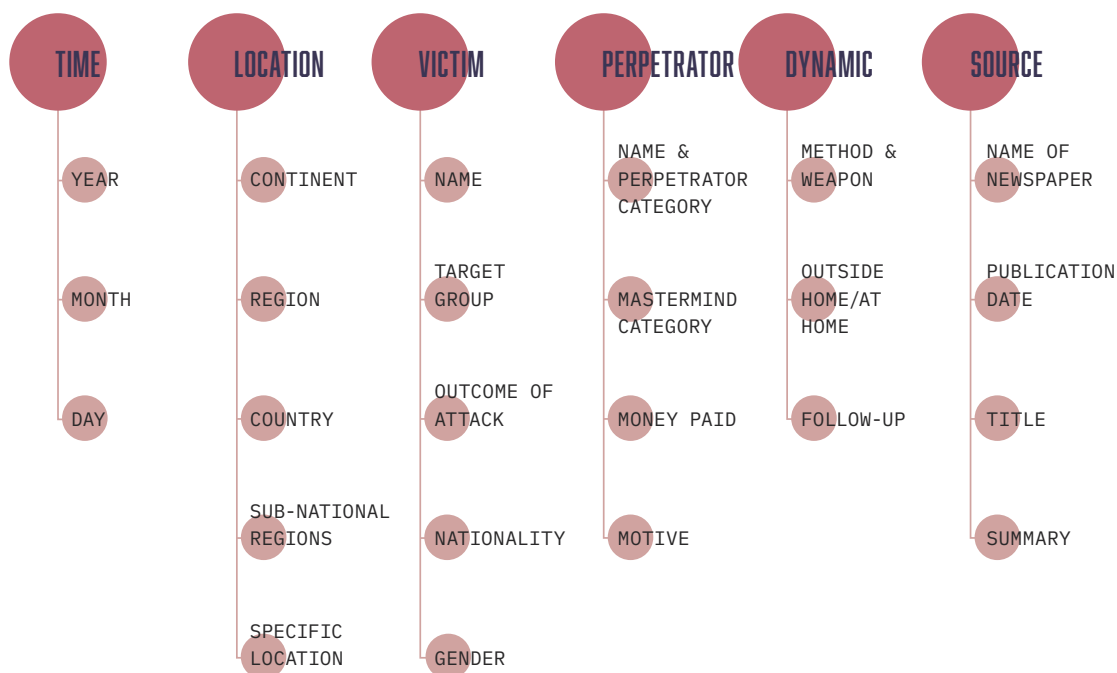- The killing was a result of a military air strike.

2. DATA COLLECTION AND VARIABLES COVERED

The database draws on an extensive selection of global, regional and national news sources, available on LexisNexis[1]. For each recorded assassination, data was collected according to several variables (where available), including the date, location, information about victims and perpetrators, and dynamics of the incidents, such as motive, method and price paid for the killing.[2]

Using a consistent search string, a team of researchers sifted through every article, extracting information about each relevant case. The approach was streamlined, following the same coding protocol, and the researchers were trained. The online search was conducted in English, Spanish and Portuguese, where applicable. The database went through a number of rounds of verification, where individual cases were checked for their accuracy. The database records information about individual assassinations along six key dimensions: date, location, victims, perpetrators, dynamics and source of the incidents, such as motive, method and price paid for the killing.

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Figure 2: Dimensions and variables

TIME	LOCATION	VICTIM	PERPETRATOR	DYNAMIC	SOURCE
YEAR	CONTINENT	NAME	NAME & PERPETRATOR CATEGORY	METHOD & WEAPON	NAME OF NEWSPAPER
MONTH	REGION	TARGET GROUP	MASTERMIND CATEGORY	OUTSIDE HOME/AT HOME	PUBLICATION DATE
DAY	COUNTRY	OUTCOME OF ATTACK	MONEY PAID	FOLLOW-UP	TITLE
	SUB-NATIONAL REGIONS	NATIONALITY	MOTIVE		SUMMARY
	SPECIFIC LOCATION	GENDER			

1 LexisNexis is a data-mining platform that provides access to a large database of media reports. The database is searchable with the use of key terms.
2 Although information on perpetrators and prices was recorded, it is important to note that there is a likely bias in the data, because the data records only 'failed' cases – i.e., cases where the perpetrator was caught. The most professional contract killers are unlikely to get caught, hence the potential bias.

2.1. TARGET GROUPS

The database categorizes victims into eight target groups: politics and governance; local community; security; illicit market; media; criminal justice; the private sector; and the international community. Victims not in these categories fall within the category of 'others'.

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
LOCAL COMMUNITY	This category includes victims whose work is embedded in what can be broadly defined as 'local-level civil society'. This comprises religious and community leaders, scholars, activists and cultural workers, among others.
MEDIA	This category includes professionals working in information, news, communication and entertainment networks. This includes, for example, journalists, bloggers and camera people, among others.
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	This category of victims includes people who work in the various branches of the criminal justice system. These can be lawyers, public prosecutors, judges and staff of the judiciary.
POLITICS & GOVERNANCE	This category includes victims who held public office or whose occupation was linked to a public entity or to a political party, including presidents, ministers, local-level officials, such as councillors and mayors, as well as party affiliates.
SECURITY / POLICE	This category includes victims who work in the state or private security sector. This includes military personnel, police officers and members of private security companies.
PRIVATE SECTOR	This category includes victims who carry out economic activity that is not controlled by the state. This includes employees of private companies (except private security companies), businesspeople and also informal workers who carry out unregulated economic activity.
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	This category includes victims whose occupation or activism is embedded in the international-level institutions. These could be, for example, staff of international organizations.
ILLICIT MARKET	This category includes victims who previously or at the time of the assassination were members of armed groups, organized criminal groups, people who were known to collaborate with any of those groups, hitmen, as well as inmates and former inmates.
OTHERS	This category includes victims whose work or personal features are known but do not fit into any of the established target group categories.
NOT REPORTED	This category includes victims of contract killings, whose background information as a target was not provided by the source.

2.2. MOTIVE

Four types of assassinations are included in the database, namely politically, economically, personally and organized-crime motivated incidents. At times, the primary motive might not be clear, or motives might overlap. For example, a member of a competing gang might be killed in the context of an ongoing gang war, yet the perpetrator might have had personal reasons for the killing. The motive recorded in the database is based on the information provided in the report. In cases where the main motive is not clear, because more than one possible motive is reported, the primary and secondary motive are recorded in the database.

The categories are broadly based on The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's database on assassinations in South Africa, with one crucial difference – while the South African database includes 'organized crime and economic' as one single category, the Global database keeps these in two separate categories. There is also no separate category for assassinations related to the taxi industry, since this is a category specific to the South African context.

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
ECONOMIC	Economically motivated assassinations aim to influence an economic outcome. These assassinations are the result of economic or business competition with the aim of seeking revenge or to eliminate economic or business competition and/or competitors.
POLITICAL	This category includes assassinations that are most often linked to party competition, but also more generally killings that aim to influence a political outcome. While many cases with a political motive targeted politicians or government representatives, the category also includes cases of civil society actors who are representative of a political agenda.
ORGANISED CRIME	These are assassinations directly linked to, or preceded by, an illicit activity. Most of the killings are perpetrated by members of organized crime groups. Examples of illicit activities and markets commonly connected to these assassinations are gang disputes, drug trafficking and extortion.
PERSONAL	Assassinations with a personal motive are killings that take place for personal reasons. This can include love triangles, revenge or honour killings.
OTHER	Assassinations that do not fit any of the other categories.
NOT REPORTED	These were incidents where there was no motive known or informed by the source.

2.3. METHOD

Assassinations are conducted using a number of methods, such as bombing, shooting or poisoning, among others. The information in this category was recorded as and if it was provided in the source.

BEATEN	**BURNT**	**SHOT**	**TORTURED**
BEHEADED	**HACKED**	**STABBED**	**OTHER**
BOMBED	**POISONED**	**SUFFOCATED**	

2.4. OUTCOME

The database includes assassinations and attempted assassinations. This includes cases where the victim died as a result of the attack; cases where the victim survived an attack; and cases where the attack could be prevented. Further, due to their relevance to the subject, threats and plots were also monitored and included in the database. However, because of the reliability of reporting threats and plots, this category found to be too weak to be included in quantitative analysis.

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
DIED Assassination	The person who was targeted died as a result of the assassination.
SURVIVED Assassination Attempt	The person who was targeted survived the assassination.
PREVENTED Assassination Attempt	The assassination was prevented and the target survived.
THREAT / PLOT Threat / Plot	No actual assassination attempt took place. The assassination was foiled before it took place.

2.5. PERPETRATORS

Following the definition of assassinations used in this study (see above), those behind the killings can be separated into two groupings: those who perpetrate the killing (perpetrator) and those who order the killing (mastermind). The relationship between the mastermind and the perpetrator is guided by some form of contract, that can be motivated by monetary or non-monetary exchanges. In the latter, the 'contract' involves the prospect of some reward, such as advancing within the ranks of the organization as a result of carrying out the killing.

Five different perpetrator categories were included: state representatives; armed groups; organized crime groups; hitmen; and political parties.

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
STATE REPRESENTATIVES[3]	This may include killings by current or former police, military or intelligence agents. Since it can be difficult to ascertain the level of state involvement, the focus was on the identity of state perpetrators rather than the masterminds. Cases were not included if the killing was part of state governance or fell under state policy. Extrajudicial killings, military air strikes, or similar attacks were not included.
ARMED GROUP	This includes members of armed groups, such as separatists, militias and others.
ORGANIZED CRIME	This includes any named organized crime group, as well as gangs.
HITMEN	This includes cases that only mention a (suspected) hitman, without links to any other group. Articles may use alternative descriptions, such as contract killer, paid killer, etc.
POLITICAL PARTY	This includes assassinations perpetrated by political party members, politicians and political party affiliates.
NOT REPORTED	All cases where no information about perpetrators or masterminds was provided in the source.

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3   Cases recorded might generate doubts on whether it was an extrajudicial killing or a hit. When in doubt, the case was maintained for further verification following the progress of the investigation and prosecution.

3. SOURCES

The cases included in the database are drawn from a search of news reports. The database has two layers. The first includes a global database that draws on 18 international and regional news sources. These sources were selected based on their global coverage and reputation. The second layer includes a national database drawing on sources for a selected number of countries. Except for the three African countries, the national database draws on one national source only. Due to varying reporting quality, freedom of the press, and accessibility across countries, the national database is not suitable for comparisons across countries. However, it may be used for a more nuanced analysis of contract killings on the sub-national level.

3.1. GLOBAL SOURCES

- BBC Monitoring: international reports; CNN International; *The New York Times* International Edition; *The Guardian*; Associated Press International; Thomson Reuters ONE

3.2. REGIONAL SOURCES

- **Asia** – *Daily Regional Times; National Herald Tribune*
- **Latin America** – EFE Newswire; CANA News; *Caribbean Today*
- **North America** – *The Washington Post*
- **Europe** – EuroNews; Baltic News Service
- **Middle East** – *Arab Times*
- **Africa** – AllAfrica Web Publications

3.3. NATIONAL SOURCES

ASIA

- **India** – *Times of India*
- **Pakistan** – *Dawn*
- **Philippines** – *Philippines Daily Inquirer*

AMERICAS

- **Colombia** – *El Espectador*
- **Mexico** – *La Prensa/Reforma*
- **Brazil** – *O Globo*
- **El Salvador** – *La Prensa Gráfica*
- **USA** – *The Washington Post*

EUROPE

- **Malta** – *Malta Today*
- **Ukraine** – Intellinews, Ukraine Today

AFRICA

- **Mozambique** – Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique (AIM English); AIM (Portuguese); Major World Publications; Mozambique News Agency
- **South Africa** - *Beeld; Burger; Business Day; Cape Argus; Cape Times; Citizen; Citizen Saturday; City Press; Daily Despatch; Daily Maverick; Daily News; Daily Sun; Diamond Fields; Advertiser; Ditsem Vrystaat; Financial Mail*; IOL; News24; *Mail & Guardian; Pretoria News; Pretoria News Weekend; Rapport; Saturday Argus; Saturday Beeld; Saturday Dispatch; Saturday Independent; Saturday Star; Saturday Volksblad; Sowetan; Star; Sunday Argus; Sunday Independent; Sunday Sun; Sunday Times and Time; Sunday Tribune; Sunday World; The EP Herald; The Mercury; The New Age; The Times; Volksblad; Weekend Post; Weekend Witness; Natal Witness*
- **Kenya** –*Africa Review (Al Bawaba); Business Daily* (Nairobi)*; Business Daily* (Nairobi ANPAK)*; Daily Nation; The East African (Nairobi);* IRIN (English)*;* IRIN Middle East Service*;* The Nation (Nairobi); News Bites - Africa: Kenya*;* PlusNews (English); ScienceAfrica; *The Star* (Nairobi); *Sunday Nation; Sunday Trust;* UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (Nairobi); Major World Publications