

Pre-election Violence in South Africa

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Violence erupted on June 20-21 in City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality after a disagreement over the African National Congress (ANC) selection for a mayoral candidate.

In several townships surrounding the capital of Pretoria, crowds attacked public buildings, transport buses and commercial enterprises. Numerous locations and vehicles were torched resulting in the military being placed on standby.

Local and provincial police were able to contain the unrest after government employees and other workers were sent home by midday on June 21.

In an article published by Quartz, it reports that “The week of protests in Pretoria was preceded by the murder of an African National Congress (ANC) member, who was shot when gunfire broke out between two fighting factions of the ruling ANC party. In the KwaZulu-Natal province, five people were killed this month; their deaths were linked to disagreements over candidate lists for the ruling party in Pietermaritzburg, the province’s capital. In two other cities, Durban and Port Elizabeth, violent protests erupted over candidate lists.” (June 27)

South Africa is holding its local governmental elections on August 3 where over 200 different political parties will field candidates for mayors and municipal councils. The rival opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are making efforts to increase their representation in cities, suburbs and rural areas angling in preparation for a greater portion of the national parliament in the 2019 assembly and presidential elections.

The unrest was immediately condemned by the ANC leadership and did not result in a change in its existing candidates’ list. The ruling party distanced itself from the violence saying that those involved were not ANC members but criminal elements seeking justification for looting and property destruction.

Tshwane Mayor Kgosietsi ‘Sputla’ Ramokgopa on June 21 attempted to calm ANC supporters who were in favor of him retaining his position, although the ruling party officials did not accept his nomination to stand again in the August 3 municipal poll. Ramokgopa’s Deputy Mapiti Matsena also sought to unify party members in support of the ANC’s selection of its candidate, Thoko Didiza, who is not from the Tshwane region but KwaZulu-Natal province.

Ramokgopa addressed members of the ANC in Atteridgeville along with Minister of Health Aaron Motsoaledi. Nonetheless, he was met with stiff resistance from residents shouting and chanting “No Sputla. No vote”, after being asked to accept Didiza as the party’s candidate.

Another report published in the state-run Zimbabwe Herald said on June 21 that “At least 21

Zimbabweans travelling to Johannesburg, South Africa were attacked and robbed of their valuables by violent protesters some 40km out of Pretoria along the N1 Highway on Tuesday morning. The protesters also burnt to a shell the Eagle Liner bus the Zimbabweans were travelling in after stripping the helpless passengers of their valuables. Eagle Liner proprietor Mr. Dhalib Ishemeal said the victims had taken refuge at Hammanskraal police station since the situation was still volatile.”

In a statement issued by Jesse Duarte, Deputy Secretary General of the ANC, she said “Comrade Didiza is a senior and seasoned leader of our movement with extensive experience in governance. Her nomination for mayoral candidacy demonstrates our commitment to strengthening the capacity of leadership at local government level across the board. We are confident that once elected by the people of Tshwane, she will continue to build on the solid foundation laid by Comrade Kgosietsi Sputla Ramokgopa and his collective over the last 5 years. The ANC expresses its gratitude to Comrade Ramokgopa who is an extremely capable administrator who has ably led the Capital City as Executive Mayor. We have no doubt that he will not be lost to the organization.” (anc.org.za, June 20)

Responses of COSATU and the South African Communist Party

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has also condemned the violence and given a resounding endorsement to all ANC mayoral candidates.

COSATU in a press release issued by national spokesperson Sizwe Pamla urged the ruling party to “intervene and work with communities to identify the criminals that are vandalizing properties and assassinating other people. COSATU is calling on the ANC Gauteng and Tshwane leadership to intervene and act decisively to calm the situation and stop the ongoing political violence.”(cosatu.org.za, June 22)

This same media advisory continues saying “The ANC needs to act decisively to sort out the current turmoil, disunity, factionalism and ill-discipline that are taking place in Tshwane. The present situation is untenable and unsustainable for the African National Congress and leadership has to be decisive to calm things down and stop the deterioration. We cannot afford to have a situation where corruption and impunity dominate. The movement needs to cleanse itself of reactionaries, opportunists’ flatterers, patrons, factionalists and hangers-on, who are infiltrating and tearing the movement apart. This narrow focus on internal factional battles by the movement and the never-ending scandals, political violence and killings risk; not only weakening the movement but killing it and its political capacity to lead society.”

On June 21, the South African Communist Party (SACP) came out in full support of the ANC’s intervention in Tshwane endorsing the nomination of Thoko Didiza. This was spelled out in a statement released by SACP Gauteng Provincial Secretary Jacob Mamabolo and Provincial Spokesperson Lucian Segami.

Mamabolo and Segami stressed “As part of the SACP’s intervention to deal with these sponsored acts violence we have appointed a Task Team led by our Provincial Chairperson Comrade Joe Mpisi to investigate involvement of any SACP and Young Communist League (YCL) members in these acts of criminality. The task team has commenced its work with immediate effect as of today and will be on the ground. The team will report on their findings to the Provincial Working Committee on Friday. (sacp.org.za)

This same statement goes on to say “Where any of our members are found to be involved in

these acts of criminality, they will be dealt with decisively, without fear or favor. We therefore call on members of the SACP to desist from taking part in any of these acts of criminality. We call on members to continue with the door-to-door campaign, factory-to-factory campaign to deliver a two thirds majority ANC victory.”

Later on June 26, the SACP announced that five of its district leaders in Tshwane were charged with bringing the organization into disrepute following the violence in the capital. The party suspended the members for their alleged involvement in the unrest on June 20-21.

Mamabolo said of the charges that chaos and factionalism in Tshwane municipalities was a direct outcome of the failure of internal organizational discipline. “Those in senior positions can’t be allowed to act with impunity or complete disregard of ethics and morality.” (Eyewitness News, June 27)

The unrest illustrates the rising tensions inside the country which is undergoing an economic downturn amid the upcoming August 3 local governmental elections. Due to the reduction in commodity prices, growing joblessness and the declining value of the rand (national currency), the country is experiencing tremendous hardships.

Developments within the EU which is the leading economic bloc trading partner with South Africa will heighten uncertainties. A process of renegotiating trade agreements involving Britain and the EU could complicate economic relations in the short and medium terms which will have an impact on political developments inside the country.

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