A citizen’s guide to SAPS crime statistics: 1994 to 2015

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is for everyone interested in crime and safety in South Africa. It provides some background to help the reader understand the annual release of crime statistics by the South African Police Service. It is intended to be accessible to all – to students, non-specialist researchers, crime fighters, crime victims, journalists, policymakers, activists, and anyone else who wants to know what the crime statistics actually mean.

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Key points

What the crime statistics are – and aren’t

Every year in September, the SAPS releases statistics on all the crimes reported to them or revealed by their actions in the preceding reporting year running from 1 April to 31 March. They provide the number of recorded incidents of each of about 30 crime types for each of the country’s about 1130 police stations, as well as the sum for each province and for the country as a whole, and in the past has also provided rates per 100,000 population provincially and nationally. These stats affect the hundreds of thousands of people who work in the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security cluster, the functioning of numerous other government departments, NGOs, and the life and liberty of potentially every person in the country or wishing to enter it. They are public property. It is important that they be reliable, useful, and intelligible.

Unfortunately, the apparent precision of crime figures masks a messier reality. Many factors get in the way between an incident of crime and its reflection in official stats, such that it can be difficult to determine whether an observed pattern in the stats reflects the real pattern in crime or is a feature of other social, political or institutional mechanisms. The stats should be thought of not as an accurate map of reality but instead as one among the tools for understanding what is happening with crime. They are often supplemented by crime victimisation studies (which can reveal the extent and some reasons for underreporting) and other kinds of research.

Some challenges in interpreting the SAPS stats

The number of recorded incidents of each crime type in the last year is fairly meaningless on its own. In addition to this, each SAPS stats release provides figures for the previous nine years and indicates the percentage change from last year. In its Annual Reports, the SAPS also provides some further context by indicating the trend over time with a graph and a calculation of the percentage change between the present and some reference years – say, from 10 years ago and from 5 years ago. This approach makes for fairly arbitrary results, and can mask broader and more important fluctuations. This guide therefore uses 2003/2004 as a stable baseline, describes and tries to account for major fluctuations, and places these in their longer context where the data allows.

A second difficulty in tracking crime trends over time or comparing them between places is that populations vary and grow. For most crimes, it is preferable to use ratios/rates rather than figures/count, and the SAPS follows the international norm in doing so per 100,000 people in the population. This may be satisfactory for interpersonal crimes such as murder or assault, but for crimes primarily against other objects, figures should ideally be presented in proportion to the number of those items – e.g. car hijacking statistics in proportion to the number of cars around to be hijacked. Unfortunately, there is seldom the data to make this possible. There are challenges even in getting good overall population figures. The 2011 census found that the SA population had been growing faster than previously estimated,
meaning that calculations of crime rates had become increasingly inaccurate since the previous census. The SAPS began using the corrected estimates from 2012/2013, but did not correct their earlier rates using the revised historical estimates. The result is that the SAPS rates provided last year, for example, shrink increases and exaggerate decreases since 2012/2013. Likely in response to concerns about their historical rate calculations, the SAPS have in fact not provided rates whatsoever in the latest release of statistics. This is highly irregular and makes it difficult to make sense of trends in the context of population growth. This guide provides the latest rates and uses the revised historical population figures to recalculate the crime rates from 2003/2004 to date. It is thus more useful and accurate than the impression provided by the SAPS.

A third issue is the SAPS use of clusters for reporting and targets. These groupings can obscure important variations within them. For example, the SAPS reports on ‘drug-related crime’ but doesn’t distinguish between the possession by users and, say, the smuggling by criminal groups; it can claim success at reducing the aggravated robbery category as a whole even while one subcategory (business robbery) has increased dramatically. The stats should be provided for the most specific level possible. It can be hard, however, to make sense of all the trends in each of the disparate crime types. This guide makes use of the loose groupings of less policeable, somewhat policeable, more policeable, and police-detected crimes.

A fourth challenge to interpreting the stats is that often a longer historical view is valuable. Unfortunately, the further back in time one goes, the less reliable and comparable are the stats. Legal definitions and recording practices change, and the figures haven’t always been consistently captured. Crime statistics for the pre-1994 period are highly unreliable, and various changes in the SAPS crime registration and analysis systems mean that all stats prior to about 2003 should be treated with utmost caution, and thought of as only a very broad indication of what might have been the reality. This guide indicates numerical rates only from 2003/2004, but where possible provides the context of the broader trends as of 1994.

Finally, the latest stats release by the SAPS has made a break with previous years in that ‘unfounded’ cases are for the first time excluded from the stats. The figures are therefore slightly smaller than they would have been had this change not been made. Although the SAPS have provided comparable figures for the previous nine years’, they have not done so for the years prior to that. This guide uses the latest figures provided for 2014/2015, but uses the previously-released figures for all years prior. The result is that the figures and rates in this report do not perfectly match those of the SAPS for any but the last year. The difference is very slight (less than half a percent) and makes no real difference to the long trends.

**Crime trends**

**Long decline in murder until last three years**

Murder is a broad but reasonable proxy for crime, violence, and levels of security in general. Murder rates have shown a steady decline in South Africa, decreasing by about a quarter...
(23%) since 2003/2004, and by about a half (51%) since 1994/1995. However, this long downward trend has slowed and begun to reverse with consecutive increases in the last three years, for a total increase of about 9% since 2011/2012. The reasons for the recent uptick in murder are not yet clear, but may include policing factors such a deterioration in crime intelligence and crime prevention efforts since the highly focused years around the World Cup, the lowering of crime reduction targets from 2009/2010, instability in SAPS leadership, and of course broader possible changes in socio-economic or political factors.

Other crimes: mixed trends
The reported rates of most major crimes have seen considerable reductions since 2003/2004, but a number of them have seen a slowing of the decrease or even an increase in the last three years:

- Public/street robbery – down about 39% since 2003/2004, but up 24% since 2011/2012;
- Common robbery – down about 51% since 2003/2004, and decrease of only 1% since 2011/2012;
- Carjacking – down about 20% since 2003/2004, but up 29% since 2011/2012;
- Burglary at residential premises – down about 27% since 2003/2004, but decrease of only 1.3% since 2011/2012; and

There have also been more sustained reductions in the reported rates of many of the less policeable, more ‘social’ crimes, including:

- Assault GBH – down about 40% since 2003/2004, and down 9.5% since 2011/2012; and
- Common assault – down about 51% since 2003/2004, and down about 15% since 2011/2012.

The change in these two crimes is likely less a function of policing than of socio-economic or reporting factors.

Other crimes: negative trends
There are two glaring exceptions to these trends. There has been a major increase in robberies at residential premises – reported rates have increased by about 86% since 2003/2004. The relationship between the increase in house robberies and decrease in house burglaries suggests the role of target hardening. There was a relative dip in residential robbery around the World Cup years, but this has reverted to a rise in the last three years.

There has been an even larger increase in robberies at non-residential premises – reported rates have increased by about 348% since 2003/2004. These incidents are mostly at small businesses (like spaza shops, tuckshops, and shebeens) and mid-sized businesses (like butcher shops, small factories, liquor outlets, and corner supermarkets). This long rise has also continued in the last three years.
Introduction

Crime statistics do not belong to the South African Police Service, the Government, a handful of academics or other specialists, and/or the press. They are public property, created bit by bit every day, when individuals make the choice to pick up the phone or walk through the doors of one of the country’s about 1130 police stations, and take the time to report on what they’ve experienced, what they know, and what they need. This mass of information is not freely given, but rather freely loaned – with the reasonable expectation that it not only lead to action wherever necessary, but also be returned in a format that makes it possible for everyone to understand what is happening around them and what is being done about it.

Although imperfect in ways this guide will discuss, there is a sense in which crime statistics are utterly solid. Their solidity comes about through our collective attention, which even in mistrust serves to congeal them into social facts. Official crime statistics and their interpretation determine the course of the daily work of the South African Police Service’s (SAPS) almost 200,000 employees, plus that of the Departments of Correctional Services and of Justice and Constitutional Development, to some extent the policymaking and functioning of many if not most other government departments, numerous non-governmental organisations, as well as the life and liberty of potentially every person in the country or wishing to enter it. Access to reliable and intelligible crime statistics is a policymaking imperative and a Constitutional right, and together with good analysis helps to build meaningful transparency, accountability, and participation in the collective efforts to address one of the problems that most concerns the inhabitants of South Africa.

This guide seeks to provide some context for the latest release of the SAPS statistics. It highlights some of the challenges of interpretation and demonstrates some key problems in the SAPS presentation of the data, especially in its failure to properly reflect fluctuations, and in its use of incorrect rates, and of crime clusters. While the distinction is not perfect, it is proposed that it can be helpful to make a distinction between crimes that are more or less policeable. The guide then provides a longer and more detailed view of crime trends than the year-on-year changes often seized on in the media. The recent statistics are placed in their longer context, wherever feasible as of 1994.

Recorded statistics vs. reality

The apparent precision of crime figures masks a far messier reality. A number of factors get in the way between an incident of crime and its reflection in official statistics. Victims and witnesses may be unwilling or unable to identify or accurately report a crime; the police officers on duty may be unwilling or unable to properly record it; the recorded data may be poorly stored and handled; laws may change over time; data publication may be incomplete or for whatever reason misleading; etc. Variation in these factors may skew results considerably, making it difficult to determine whether an observed difference in crime stats
across jurisdictions or across time is the result of a real difference in crime, or rather a difference in social, political or institutional factors. It is common to speak of the ‘dark figure’ or iceberg of crime – meaning that what appears in official statistics represents a hard to predict (and potentially small) portion of the reality of crime.\(^2\) For this reason, crime statistics are often supplemented by crime victimisation studies and other kinds of research.

Rather than relying on the crime information that people volunteer to the police, studies can proactively approach people and ask them about the crimes that they’ve experienced, whether they reported them or why not, how safe they feel, what they think of how the police are doing, etc. Other organisations (including the Institute for Security Studies) have conducted victims of crime surveys, but the most up-to-date research comes from Statistics South Africa, which now conducts them annually and aligns its dates with those of the SAPS statistics. Its latest national report covers the period April 2013 to March 2014.\(^3\) Below are some insights from that report:

- The only crime with 100% reporting rate in 2013-2014 was car hijacking.
- Underreporting rates were also low for car theft (8.3%) and murder (11.3%). Official murder statistics are probably more accurate than this suggests, as this item in the survey is based on a very small number of reports, and because even if a murder isn’t reported, there is usually a body to be found.
- Underreporting rates were high, for example, for bicycle theft (69.9%), robbery excluding home robbery and carjacking (69%), theft of personal property (68.8%), and assault (54.4%). This means that official statistics for these crimes may be substantially inaccurate.
- Loss of insured items tends to be more frequently reported, as a record of the report is required for claims. So things like cars, jewellery, and high-end mobile phones are probably relatively well reflected in official stats, whereas cash, handbags, bicycles, crops, and lower-end phones are not.
- Housebreaking/burglary, followed by home robbery and then by street robbery, were rated as the most common and most feared crimes.
- 41.3% of respondents nationally believed that violent crime had increased in their area of residence over the last three years. This is up from 34.2% in 2008-2010.
- 44.2% believed that property crime has increased, up from 34.2% in 2008-2010.
• 34.7% say that crime in their area prevents them from going to parks and open spaces.

These and other flaws with the figures are easily forgotten in our national mania for using statistics as diagnostics of our national health and worth, and using crime statistics in particular to concretise and mediate our fears. Some critics entirely reject the usefulness of crime statistics, while others just advise considerable caution. This guide takes the view that there remains value in working towards improving the quality and interpretation of crime statistics.

**SAPS statistical release and analysis**

Every year in September, the SAPS releases crime statistics for the preceding reporting year that runs from 1 April to 31 March. In other words, by the time it becomes public knowledge, the information is between 6 and 18 months out of date. Figures are provided for each of about 30 crime types for each of the country’s police stations, as well as the sum for each province, and the sum for the country as a whole. The SAPS also provides Annual Reports which include analyses of crime and of the SAPS performance. As of the 2011/2012 crime statistics release, the SAPS have emphasised its longitudinal analysis of crime trends. Longitudinal analysis refers to research conducted on the same variables over time.

**Failure to account for fluctuations**

In good longitudinal analysis, not just the beginning and end point (or any other set of points) should be compared, but the fluctuations in the period should also be identified and where possible historically explained. The relationship between the overall trend and fluctuations should also be explained. The SAPS, however, generally refer only to the percentage increase or decrease between the present and a handful of reference years, without noting any fluctuations. So a typical sentence reads as follows: crime X has been reduced by ... % over the past 10 years... % over the past 5 years and ...% over the past financial year as shown in the graph below. This so-called systematic ten, five and one year longitudinal analysis cannot adequately explain crime trends. Where graphs are provided, they are often deceptive or inadequately analysed.

For example, the SAPS document, ‘An Analysis of the National Crime Statistics 2013/2014,’ states that: ‘Carjacking has decreased by 9.8% over 10 years (2004/5 -2013/14); and by 19.3% during the past five years (2009/10-2013/2014); but increased by 12.3% during the past financial year (2013/14) as illustrated in the graph below.’ As with many of the more serious crimes in that report, the graph provided fails to begin the vertical axis from zero, so exaggerates these swings – suggesting in this case that the low point in 2011/2012 represents barely any carjackings, rather than 9475. See the graph below as it appears on page 25 in that SAPS document.
The trend over this decade would be less misleadingly represented as follows.

More importantly, what is not unpacked in the SAPS analysis is the clear reality that from 2005/2006 to 2008/2009 there were small annual increases in carjackings. Then came 2009/2010 with a decrease of 6.8%, 2010/2011 with a huge decrease of 23.6%, and 2011/2012 with a decrease of 10.8%. These dates correspond with the dates of the Confederation Cup and the soccer World Cup. In the last two years for which crime statistics are available, there were again small increases, of 5.4% and 12.3%. Although not conclusive,
this suggests the significance of the three consecutive years around the World Cup (2009/2010, 2010/2011, and 2011/2012), during which the key difference may well be changes in policing patterns towards more intelligence-led, focussed methods.

A related problem with the SAPS longitudinal analysis is the relative arbitrariness of its selection of baseline dates for comparison. The report on the 2013/2014 statistics provides percentage changes for the last 10 years, 5 years, and 1 year – a 10-5-1 approach. The previous report used a 9-4-1 approach, and the one before that used 5-3-1. The baseline comparison dates are selected in accordance with key policy dates, such as the introduction of the Medium Term Strategic Framework, or the beginning of different political administrations. Reference to these moments may provide useful additional information for interpreting results, but using them as shifting baselines makes it difficult to get a clear sense of change over time.

This haphazard use of reference dates can also make for fairly meaningless and malleable results. For example, in their 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, it is stated that ‘[a]lthough crime is still high, longitudinally the figures generally record a decline towards the achievement of the ultimate outcome where people in South Africa are safe’. This is based on the claim that between 2009/2010 and 2013/2014, contact crime had been reduced by 8.3%, contact-related crime reduced by 9.6%, property-related crime increased by 1.7%, and other serious crime reduced by 4.2%. Selecting instead a baseline of 2008/2009, would yield different changes: contact crime decreased by 9.3%; contact-related crime decreased by 11.0%; property-related crime increased by 5.7%; and other serious crime reduced by 6.2%. The most dramatic difference here is that for property-related crime, which increased by 5.7% from 2008/2009 rather than only 1.7% from 2009/2010. Selecting a different baseline year has thus made a huge difference to how one might interpret police performance in this area.

Reporting percentage changes between floating dates has limited usefulness and can mask broader and more interesting fluctuations, which can only be revealed by representing and analysing trends more holistically. The SAPS approach is equivalent to picking a couple of points on a curve and drawing straight lines between them. A better approach is one that keeps a constant baseline throughout consecutive reports, as well as providing an account of changes within that total. This guide therefore uses 2003/2004 as a stable baseline, describes important fluctuations, and notes recent changes within that context.

**Figures and rates**

When crime trend analysis (over time) and comparative analysis (over space, e.g. provinces or countries) is done, it is always better to use ratios/rates rather than figures/counts, since rates account for population size and growth. The international norm is to present crime statistics as the number of reported incidents per 100,000 people in the population. This is not always a perfect formula. For interpersonal crimes such as murder or assault, dividing
the number of incidents by the number of people in the population is appropriate. For crimes primarily against other objects, figures should ideally be presented in proportion to the number of those items. For example, car hijacking statistics should be given in proportion to the number of cars around to be hijacked, burglaries to how many residential units in the area, stock-theft to livestock numbers, cell phone theft to how many cell phones, etc. Getting regular and reliable estimates of these other items, however, is generally impossible.

In addition to raw figures, the SAPS has in the past released its national and provincial crime stats as rates per 100,000. There are challenges, however, even in getting up-to-date overall population figures, and using wrong and outdated estimates can considerably skew results. During the most recent census in 2011, it was found that the country’s population had been growing faster than had been previously estimated since the last census in 2001. This meant that the population estimates used for the previous decade’s crime rate calculations had become increasingly inaccurate – the 2011 population was 52.3 million rather than the 50.6 million previously forecasted. Crucially, the SAPS began using the updated estimates from 2012/2013, but did not correct their earlier rates using the revised historical figures. The result is that all the crime rates they provide for prior to 2012/2013 are inaccurate, and that apparent changes in crime rates from before to after the implementation of the corrected figures are especially unreliable. The use of the much larger population estimate from 2012/2013 shrinks crime rate increases and swells crime rate decreases from before to after the change. It seems that in response to this criticism, the SAPS have opted not to provide rates at all this year. This is very unfortunate, as raw figures have limited usefulness.

This guide uses the revised historical population figures to recalculate the national crime rates from 2003/2004 to date. As such, the results in this guide match and do not contest the SAPS raw crime figures or its crime rates since 2012/2013, but the rates here do differ from those previously provided by the SAPS for the years prior to that, providing a more accurate view of longer trends.

**Recalculating rates**

This is crucial. This guide does not rely on SAPS’s skewed crime rates and instead recalculates them from 2003/2004 – using the same raw counts of incidents as provided and analysed by the SAPS (i.e. the same numerator), but more accurate historical population size estimates, as provided by Statistics South Africa based on the latest census (i.e. a different denominator). This latter differs by the end of the period by a hefty 1.7 million people. Therefore, there is no difference between these and SAPS’s spot crime rates for the last three years, the longer trends provided here are more accurate that those provided by the SAPS.

**Clustering of crimes**

The SAPS reports on roughly 25 crime categories based on the legal definitions of crime that they work with. Some of these categories can be broken down to subcategories, also based on legal definitions. So for example the category described as ‘Total sexual offences’
consists of 55 diverse subcategories of sexual offences, including rape (by far the largest subcategory), sexual assault, pornography offences, sex work offences, and so on. All of these subcategories have separate crime codes and could be analysed as separate crime trends – although it should be noted that the law governing various sexual crimes was changed in December 2007 by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, meaning that trend analysis is only meaningful from 2008/2009. From 2008/2009 the SAPS has publicised figures for total sexual offences in its initial release, plus the two largest subcategories namely rape (which was 73.8% of the total sexual offences in 2013/2014) and sexual assault (10.8% of the total sexual offences in 2013/2014) separately in the addendum to the annual report. In the latest release, they have also reported separately on sexual crimes detected by police action, which refers mostly to sex work and child pornography related offences.

There are other crime categories which have legal subcategories, but where the SAPS only provide figures for the broad total category. Two examples are:

- ‘Drug-related crime’, which includes the use and possession of drugs as well as the dealing in drugs. This is an extremely important distinction, as there is a large difference between targeting the trade and targeting the often highly vulnerable user.
- ‘Commercial crime’ (fraud and related offences), where legal provision is made for fraud (including attempted fraud), forgery and uttering, but they are all placed together in the same category in the publicised SAPS statistics.

Besides these clusters where legally-distinct crimes are combined, there is also a crime category used by the SAPS in which subcategories with no legal definitions have developed over the years out of operational needs: ‘robbery with aggravating circumstances’. This is indeed a legally defined crime, whereas its reported subcategories are not. The seven subcategories of aggravated robbery were created for operational purposes and are: house robbery (or robbery at residential premises); business robbery (robbery at non-residential premises), carjacking; truck hijacking; cash-in-transit (CIT) robbery; bank robbery; and street/public robbery.

Crime statistics should be provided for the most specific level possible. The clustering of crimes allows for a growing tendency for the SAPS to emphasise reduction in the broad groupings without accounting for increases in some of the subcategories. For example, as will be demonstrated below, although total aggravated robbery has until the last three years been generally decreasing (sometimes even surpassing the earlier target of 7-10% annually), two of its subcategories have massively increased: house robbery and business robbery (two of the three targeted TRIO crimes). This may be because the risks of robbery in public spaces increased, pushing robbers to turn to houses and businesses instead.
Shifting targets

The SAPS were given crime reduction targets in January 2004. These were formulated to address the country’s major crime concern at the time, namely the unacceptably high levels of violent crime. The targets were set for a 7-10% annual reduction in a number of violent crime categories. They were thought to be unrealistically high, but left so in order to have a motivating effect. They were implemented from the 2004/2005 reporting year. The SAPS Management later convinced the Portfolio Committee of Police to reduce the targets. For the 2009/2010 to 2013/2014 period new targets were set for three groups of crime which fit into each other like Russian dolls, namely:

- The largest group, **serious crimes**, which include: murder, attempted murder, total sexual offences, assault GBH, common assault, aggravated robbery, common robbery, arson, malicious damage to property, burglary at non-residential premises, burglary at residential premises, theft of motor vehicle, theft out of and from motor vehicle, stock-theft, all theft not mentioned elsewhere, commercial crime, and shoplifting. The five year reduction target for this group was set at 4-7%, or roughly 2% a year.

- **Contact crimes** include the first seven categories (from murder to common robbery) of the serious crimes above. The five year reduction target for this group was set at 34%, or roughly 4-7% a year.

- The **TRIO** sub-categories of aggravated robbery are house robbery, business robbery and carjacking. The five year reduction target for this group was set at 31%, or 4-7% a year.

These were far easier targets for the SAPS to achieve. This is so for both the crime categories which can more feasibly be reduced by policing (like the subcategories of aggravated robbery), and the crime categories where decreases are much less dependent on policing and more on cultural factors or reporting levels (like assault GBH and common assault). The larger and more diverse the targeted crime group, the easier it is to conceal discrepancies and possible policing failures. So for example the contact crime category could meet its target as a result of a decrease in assaults (which is largely beyond police control), despite a larger increase in aggravated robbery (which is not). In the SAPS Strategic Plan for the period 2014/2015 to 2018/2019, the TRIO crime targets are somewhat conveniently forgotten, and the targets for serious and contact crime are reduced to 2% reduction per annum. A target is also added for increasing ‘the reporting of unlawful possession of and dealing in drugs by at least 13%’. The selection of the drugs category as an indicator is also convenient, as it is relatively easy to drive up rates of drug-related crime by targeting users.

In short, targets can easily be designed to less reflect policing than general socioeconomic or cultural change, or set so low and carefully that they are almost impossible to miss.

More meaningful categorisation

Crime statistics should be provided and interpreted on the most specific level possible. It can be difficult, however, to make sense of the divergent patterns of dozens of different crime categories. One useful approach is to contextualise the figures as one of four broad types of crime: less policeable crimes, somewhat policeable crimes, more policeable crimes, and police-detected crimes. These are general categories, and not necessarily neatly mutually-exclusive.

This distinction is helpful, however, as many changes in crime trends have little to do with the police, but rather broad socio-economic or cultural factors. A great deal of crime is
determined by absolute deprivation (poverty), relative deprivation (inequality), unemployment, rates of urbanisation and resultant patterns of dwelling informality and community cohesion, alcohol and drug use, expectations, education, etc. These are determined by complex processes over decades or centuries. The most fundamental keys to crime in South Africa relate to embedded economic and social structures, over which the police have little or no power, and which cannot change overnight. It makes little sense to hold the police responsible for them. Of course, in the meanwhile everything possible should be done to reduce crime, in order to secure necessary development, investment and tourism – but crimes vary according to how accessible and susceptible they are to the tools that police have at their disposal. This can be represented as follows:

- **Less policeable**
  - Little or no scope for policing tools, e.g. assault, arson, commercial crime

- **Somewhat policeable**
  - Some limited scope for policing tools, e.g. murder, sexual offences

- **More policeable**
  - Large scope for policing tools, e.g. robbery, burglary, carjacking

- **Police detected**
  - Almost entirely driven by police action, e.g. drugs, firearms, DUI

There are some crimes for which the full spectrum of policing methodology can be used, namely:

- **Crime prevention.** This includes:
  - Focussed visible policing, like patrolling of crime hotspots, roadblocks, stop and search, and cordon and search operations,
  - Identifying environmental factors which are conducive to crime and informing other government departments at all levels of government, but especially local government, about these factors so that they can eliminate it,
  - Informing the community/public about trends, hotspots, peak times and modus operandi to prevent victimisation through raised awareness;

- **Crime detection.** This includes:
  - Proper crime scene management including fingerprints, ballistics and forensics,
Clustering of dockets with likely identical suspects and allocating them to the same investigator/s, and

Victim support and if necessary protection to ensure a low withdrawal rate; and

**Crime intelligence.** This includes:

- Crime mapping and crime pattern analysis to establish crime hotspots and peak times,
- Fieldwork to do environmental scanning of hotspots to establish why the crime occurred there at the specific time, and
- Docket linkage analysis to establish through common suspect descriptions, modus operandi, targets etc. cases where the perpetrators are in all probability the same to cluster dockets for detection and task the intelligence collectors.

When police are working effectively, they should be able to have a considerable impact on the more policeable crimes. As this guide suggests below, it seems likely that focussed police action around the 2010 World Cup helped make a measurable difference to some of these crimes.

Note finally that the degree of organisation involved in a crime is thought to play a crucial factor in its policeability, as it determines the scope for especially crime intelligence tools. So for crimes like truck hijacking, robbery of cash in transit, and drug trafficking, where a relatively large proportion of the crimes are committed by a relatively small number of groups, crime intelligence that successfully eliminates those groups can have a large impact on the rate of those crimes.

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**More policeable crimes**

Crimes for which police can use their full range of tools to have an impact:

- **Robbery:**
  - Public/street robbery
  - Common robbery
  - House robbery (robbery at residential premises)
  - Business robbery (robbery at non-residential premises)
  - Carjacking
  - Truck hijacking
  - Robbery of cash in transit
  - Bank robbery

- **Property-related crimes:**
  - Burglary at residential premises
  - Burglary at non-residential premises
  - Theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle
  - Theft out of from motor vehicle
  - Stock-theft
Some crime categories on the other hand occur in spaces and circumstances where the police usually do not exercise conventional policing. So for example the police do not patrol residential premises – these are private and the police need a search warrant to search them. Business and recreational spaces are a bit more public, but even these are not routinely patrolled by a police service. There is also shoplifting which occurs in self-service shops that are not normally patrolled by the police and where most cases are identified by the staff, customers and security/alarm system of the shop and only then handed over to the police to see it through court. Most of the ‘theft: other’ cases are ones where money and other valuables (jewellery, cell phones, cameras, laptops etc.) are left unattended in the home or office or are forgotten in restaurants, public toilets and other public places and can’t later be found. Cyberspace, in which most financial dealings take place, can also not be patrolled by police. Crime prevention in all of these ‘private spaces’ can primarily only be done by the residents and businesses which occupy them and are thus less policeable.

Unfortunately there are some subcategories of theft: other which are vital to the economy of South Africa like theft of non-ferrous metal, illegal mining, poaching and electricity theft which can all run into the billions of rand of loss to the people of South Africa and which in fact are relatively more policeable. Since these subcategories of theft: other are not provided separately in the SAPS statistics and the majority of cases are the smaller items which disappear in the home, workplace or recreation place, this crime category is best handled under less policeable crimes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less policeable crimes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crimes in spaces where police have limited access:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Common assault</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Malicious damage to property</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Arson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commercial crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shoplifting</td>
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<tr>
<td>• All theft not mentioned elsewhere</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Next, there are some crimes which are complexly and/or moderately policeable, namely murder, attempted murder, and sexual offences.

Docket analysis of murder in the late nineties indicated that by far the majority of murder dockets in those years were ‘social murders’ – mostly starting as an argument about money, alcohol, sex and/or family between people who know each other and of which at least one was intoxicated, then developing into a physical fight which spiralled out of control and ended up in murder. These are not conditions under which police can be very effective, and are thus very poorly policeable crimes. Later, however, a docket analysis in 2007/2008 found that only 65.4% of the dockets were social murders. Other important subcategories
were the 15.9% where the murders were as a result of other crime (mostly aggravated robberies), vigilantism at 4.8%, self-defence at 4.5%, gang-related at 1.2%, and taxi violence at 0.9%. The SAPS has released no other national docket analysis since to determine whether the trend away from social murders is continuing. During the Khayelitsha Commission hearings, however, evidence was presented to suggest that the percentage of murders which are social in nature may be nearer to 50%. This suggests that up to 50% of the murders of today may be more policeable. Murder (and attempted murder) can thus not be properly classified as either primarily more or primarily less policeable.

Old docket analysis has indicated that up to 75% of reported rape and sexual assault also occurs between people that know each other, and usually in the residence of the perpetrator or the victim. Whether this is still the case is unknown, and for this reason and because the police may still be able to prevent some 25% of sexual crimes, these will be analysed together with murder and attempted murder as somewhat policeable crimes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somewhat policeable crimes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crimes which are partly ‘social’ but also partly subject to policing tools:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Murder</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Attempted murder</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sexual offences</td>
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Finally, there are crimes which are far less likely to be reported to the police, and where the recorded rate is almost entirely driven by police action like roadblocks and raids. The result is somewhat counter-intuitive, as their numbers will increase when police are highly active at targeting them and decrease when police are not active, such that it is difficult to determine the actual incidence of the crimes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police-detected crimes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Crimes which are partly ‘social' but also partly subject to policing prevention tools:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Drug-related crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Illegal possession of firearms and ammunition</td>
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The distinction between the different levels of policeability has implications for how we interpret crime stats. For example, assault may be a serious and traumatic crime, and its rates may tell us a lot about the contexts and numbers of such ordeals being suffered, but they have little bearing on how well the police are performing. Truck hijacking on the other hand may be a relatively minor concern for the average inhabitant of the country, but is among the best indicators of how deftly police are employing their full array of tools. To
assign reduction targets or monitor police effectiveness according to changes in poorly policeable crimes is unfair to the police; to do so by highly policeable crimes is imperative; to do so by somewhat policeable and police-detected crimes requires some nuance.

**Time frames**

Each SAPS statistics release provides figures and rates not only for the last year, but also repeats those for the nine years before that. In the case of many crimes, this is too narrow, and interpretation of the trend is limited without a longer view. Unfortunately, the further back in time one goes, the less reliable and comparable are the stats. For some crimes, the legal definitions may have changed – most notably, those for various sexual offences. In other cases, there have been changes in the crime recording categorisation, or in whether or not it is individually disaggregated in the stats release.

A problem across the board is that the crime figures haven’t been consistently captured. In apartheid South Africa, there were separate policing agencies for ‘white’ South Africa and for each of the ‘homelands’, with wildly varying qualities of policing and data management. Some of the agencies did not have reported crime statistics databases while others had questionable databases, making crime statistics for the pre-1995 period highly unreliable. All the policing agencies were amalgamated into the SAPS in 1995. From this date, all reported crime in South Africa was registered on the Crime Administration System (CAS). However, in the first two years (1995 and 1996) the crime analysts of the Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) identified unacceptable validity problems with the crime statistics – mainly as a result of negative attitudes towards the registration of crime on CAS, which according to the stations had no operational use in combatting crime. In 1997 the Minister for Safety and Security appointed a Committee of Inquiry into the Collection, Processing and Publication of Crime Statistics, which reported to the Minister in 1998. The implementation of the recommendations of this report probably had considerable impact on the registration of crime on CAS. By 1999 there were still unresolved issues with especially the crime registration and analysis systems and on 18 July 2000 the Minister, on the recommendation of the National Commissioner, called a moratorium on the release of crime statistics. The moratorium was lifted on 31 May 2001. During and in the months after this period, numerous changes were made to systems and registration, such that crime statistics in 2001/2002 could be significantly influenced. As a result, crime statistics prior to about 2003 should be treated with utmost caution, and thought of as only a very broad indication of what might have been the reality.

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**Two levels of data quality**

This guide indicates numerical rates only as of 2003/2004 (with the exception of murder, as explained below), as these should be comparable and of reasonably good quality. However, the context of the longer trends is useful for many crimes going back further, so where possible a broad pattern is also graphed as of 1994.
Context of selected crime trends to 2014/2015

In this section, graphs are provided to indicate the trend in reported crime rates for some of the key crimes types within the three categories of policeability, as well as police-detected crimes. Numerical rates per 100,000 of the national population are provided from 2003/2004 to the latest release of statistics, and broad trends are also indicated as of 1994 or whenever comparable data exists, in order to demonstrate the value of taking this longer perspective. Brief context on the significance and some possible causal factors is provided for each crime type. Note that only a handful of crime types are accounted for, as there is a focus on the somewhat and more policeable crimes, and on the more numerous crime types.

Somewhat policeable crimes

These crimes are only partially subject to police activities. Murder in particular, however, is a lightning rod of concern and an indicator of the nature and magnitude of violence playing out nationally. Murder is often assessed not just as a single phenomenon but also as a broad but reasonable proxy for crime and especially violent crime in general. It is readily measurable, clearly and quite consistently defined, relatively well-reported, and overall a ‘robust indicator of levels of security’.

In the South African context, it also shows some of the most marked and interesting trends, and is thus the starting point here.

Murder

Contrary to what many may intuit, the national murder rate has for the most part been steadily decreasing since 2003/2004, with a total decrease over the period of about 23%. Note that the SAPS did not provide a murder rate for 2014/2015, so the rate provided here is our calculation.
The generally steady decrease in murder over the medium-term is notably reversed, however, in the pattern of the last 3 years, which have seen the largest and most sustained increase over the period. These features are even more marked in the context of the murder rate trend since 1994, indicated below.
This is a dramatic slope. The average person in the country was less than half as likely to be murdered last year as they were 20 years ago. The generally steady decrease in murder is slightly but notably reversed, however, in the pattern of the last 3 years, which have seen the largest and most sustained increase over the period. The longer context reveals that although the increase of the last three years is relatively small, it is striking – it is the first increase of this kind in the history of the SAPS.

National crime victim surveys indicate that people are feeling the long murder rate decline on the ground. In successive surveys between 2003 and 2014, murder has dropped steadily from the 4th to the 7th rank for what respondents considered to be the most common crime. It has also dropped from the 1st to the 4th ranked for the most feared crime.

Murder has become increasingly less ‘social’ and more linked to more policeable factors, especially aggravated robberies but also notably vigilantism. As demonstrated below, the trend in rates of aggravated robbery at homes and businesses is of serious concern. This changing context of fatal violence is shifting murder deeper into policeability, which makes the recent reversal of the long-declining trend worthy of further investigation and concern in this context.

Murders resulting from the commission of aggravated robbery, vigilantism, gang- or taxi-disputes etc. all require different strategies to best combat. Unfortunately, the SAPS does not publicly break down their murder figures into these subcategories, although it is said that they have this data through operational analysis at station level and docket/CAS analysis at provincial and national level, for use in operational and strategic decisions.

As discussed above, the further back one goes with the crime data, the less reliable are the figures. Murder, however, is likely the best and most consistently recorded crime among the older SA stats. Its rates are thus reasonably reliable, and serve as a useful proxy for crime and violence more generally. As such, we have indicated the numerical murder rate as released by the SAPS throughout this graph. In the remainder of the graphs, however, numerical rates will only be indicated on the graphs as of 2003/2004.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The impact of the rate recalculation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Note here the significance of the recalculation of the murder rate with the updated historical population estimates.</td>
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The difference is relatively small (note the vertical axis scale) especially in the broad longitudinal view. Given the SAPS practice, however, of emphasising percentage changes between relatively arbitrary past dates and the present, the difference is significant. According to the SAPS rates calculation, the percentage change from the low point in 2011/2012 to 2014/2015 is an increase of 6.7%. According to the recalculation in this paper, the increase is 9%, or over a third larger than the SAPS result.

This paper will continue to depict graphs and provide percentage changes according to the updated rate calculations rather than those provided by the SAPS, but be aware that the difference between the two will follow a similar pattern with other crimes. Because the SAPS crime rates prior to 2012/2013 were inflated by too-small population estimates, calculations of percentage increases since then in the SAPS rates will be inaccurately flattened, and decreases exaggerated. In other words, the reality of the change in the crime situation from before 2012/2013 to after is invariably slightly worse (or less good) than that suggested by the SAPS.

**Sexual offences**

The exact extent of underreporting for sexual crimes is unclear, but it is generally thought to be large, as a result of numerous cultural, psychological, institutional, and practical barriers that dissuade survivors of sexual offences from reporting them to the police or in non-specialised surveys. This means that estimates of total prevalence and apparent trends based on official statistics should be interpreted with extreme caution, as they are perhaps the least likely of all to be accurate. There have been major changes in the reporting of
sexual offences, making it impossible to provide meaningfully comparable rates for prior to 2003/2004.

A major complication is the legal change in the definitions of various sexual offences in December 2007. Some offences did not exist before that date or were grouped together with other crimes. For one thing, the definition of rape was expanded from only vaginal penetration to vaginal, anal and oral penetration with any object. The sharp increase to 2008/2009 is likely due to these legal changes. Further, the SAPS has as of the latest release of statistics separated out sexual crimes detected as a result of police action, providing these figures only as of 2011/2012. Cumulatively, these challenges make it almost impossible to meaningfully interpret the longer trend in sexual offences. On these highly imperfect figures, however, there has been an overall downward trend and a total decrease since 2003/2004 of about 30%.

The 2013/2014 national Victims of Crime Survey suggests that around 65% of the sexual offences that respondents were willing to disclose in these household surveys occurred in the victim’s home (about half) or in someone else’s home (about 15%). However, public spaces like streets, public transport, and fields/parks accounted for around 29% of the incidents, meaning that there is some scope for police responsibility.
More policeable crimes – robbery
These crimes are ones that police can work to reduce through the full range of crime prevention, detection, and intelligence tools. This category can be further divided into those which involve the unlawful and intentional removal of tangible property by means of the threat or use of force (i.e. robbery) and those which do not involve force (i.e. non-violent property-related crimes, or thefts).

The trend for all types of robbery together has been a generally steady decline followed by a reversal in the last three years.

As demonstrated below, this is largely due to the steady reduction in by far the two largest contributors to this total: public – street robbery (as a sub-category of aggravated robbery, i.e. with a weapon) and common robbery (without the use of a weapon). The smaller contributors to the total, however, have seen entirely different trends – so each is best subject to individual analysis. While most types of robbery have seen small to moderate reductions, residential robbery has seen a large increase, and non-residential robbery has seen a massive increase, as indicated below:
The trend in the recorded rate of aggravated robbery for the last decade is generally downwards, with a strong reversal in the last three years. The longer trend suggests, however, that this decrease is from a peak around 2003/2004. This may indicate the significance of the introduction of targets in 2004.

The trend in the recorded rate of aggravated robbery for the last decade is generally downwards, with a strong reversal in the last three years. The longer trend suggests, however, that this decrease is from a peak around 2003/2004. This may indicate the significance of the introduction of targets in 2004.
Public/street robbery and common robbery

Public or street robberies have shown a generally strong downward trend since 2003/2004, slowing in 2011/2012, followed by a reversal and the beginning an upward trend as of 2012/2013. In 2003/2004, public or street robberies constituted almost 80% of aggravated robberies – that is, robberies including the use of a weapon. In 2014/2015, this proportion is down to about 58%. The total decrease over the period is about 39%, or an average annual decrease of about 4%.

This type of robbery is most common in the large informal areas of the major metros like Diepsloot and ‘townships’, such as Khayelitsha, Nyanga, KwaZakele and New Brighton, as well as the old CBDs of cities like Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban and the periphery of some CBDs (such as Hillbrow, Braamfontein, Sunnyside, and Berea). Station level docket analysis has identified those who use public transport as the main victims of these crimes, with many incidents happening on the way to or from work, especially in the dark and just after receiving weekly or monthly wages. The main target is cash, but robbers also take cell phones and other valuables. These robberies may seem relatively minor, but besides being the most common type of robbery, they are a major cause of fear, massive life disruption, and frustration for many people, sometimes boiling over into vigilantism.

Common robbery does not involve the use of a weapon, and although it may be forceful or violent it does not involve the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm. Typical examples are the grabbing of handbags, backpacks, cell phones, or jewellery. It shows a trend similar to that of public/street robbery, with a strong downward trend, roughly halving since
2003/2004. Unlike public/street robbery, it has not seen a reversal in the last three years, but the decline appears to have stabilised. It may be that some of the general decline or the failure to show an increase in the recent past is due to declining reporting rates, as the victims of crime survey suggests that as much as almost 70% of robbery may not be reported.\textsuperscript{15}

Again, however, the longer view suggests that this decline may be best understood as a recovery from a peak around 2002/2003.
House robbery (robbery at residential premises)
Although officially reported incidents of robbery in public spaces are many times more numerous, the robbery most feared is that which happens at home. This may be partly a result of the trend that house robbery rates have taken since 2003/2004, which has been dramatic.

Robbery at residential premises has increased by about 86% since 2003/2004, with a slowing and then decrease in the period from 2009/2010 to 2011/2012, followed by renewed uptick since. House robberies made up 7.4% of all aggravated robberies in 2003/2004, compared to about 16% in 2014/2015. The two largest year-on-year increases, in 2006/2007 (with 23.4%) and 2008/2009 (with 25.7%), may relate to the prolonged security guard strike and the first outburst of xenophobic violence respectively, both of which diverted the SAPS attention away from crime prevention. The stabilisation and decrease during the period 2009/2010 and 2011/2012 is likely due to a mix of highly visible intelligence focused policing under strong police leadership and an economic upswing as a result of the soccer events of this period.

National and provincial docket analysis has shown that cash is the key target of house robbers, but that they will also take jewellery, firearms, cell phones, tablets, laptops, and expensive flat and curved televisions. House robbers have over time become more selective in what they take from homes, rather than just taking anything that can possibly be sold. This may be related to the introduction of the Second-Hand Goods Act of 2009, which may also have had the unintended consequence of making house robberies relatively more preferable as compared to house burglaries, as victims must be present to hand over the now-preferred items.
In the section on burglary below, it is shown that in the same period in which house robbery has increased by about 86%, house burglary has decreased by about 27%. This relationship suggests that some of the increase in robbery is likely due to criminals opting for robbery instead of burglary – possibly because residents need to be present to assist the robbers in obtaining the cash, jewellery, firearms and other items by unlocking the safe.

**Business robbery (robbery at non-residential premises)**

Non-residential robberies are largely at business premises, but also include robberies at religious, educational, cultural, governmental premises, and so on. The trend for these crimes has been even more extreme than that for house robbery.

![Reported rates of robbery at non-residential premises since 2003/2004](image)

Since 2003/2004, robbery at non-residential premises has increased by a massive 348%, or an average annual increase of about 32%, far more than any other type of aggravated robbery or any other crime type. Non-residential robberies constituted less than 3% of all aggravated robberies in 2003/2004, and this has risen to about 15% in 2014/2015.

Despite the media interest in robberies at shopping malls, docket analysis has shown that the typical business robbery happens at small, mostly informal businesses (like spaza shops, tuckshops, and shebeens) and mid-sized businesses (like butcher shops, small factories, liquor outlets, and corner supermarkets). Most of the businesses targeted are cash based, and there appears to be considerable overlap between house and business robbers.
Carjacking rates have seen an overall but very uneven decrease of about 20% since 2003/2004, and an even larger decline in the longer term (note that rates are not available prior to 1996). The sharp decrease between 2009/2010 and 2011/2012 match the decrease or relative stabilisation in rates of house and business robbery. This period corresponds to preparation for the 2010 World Cup, the World Cup itself, and the immediate aftermath. During this period, everything possible was done to address foreign fears, including of carjacking. Crime pattern analysis to identify crime hotspots and peak times, docket linkage analysis to identify modus operandi and common suspects, and environmental assessment of the hotspots were feverishly stepped up, apparently with excellent results. At the release of the crime statistics in September 2011, the Minister and the National Commissioner were adamant that this positive trend had nothing to do with the World Cup but was the start of a new era.

Most hijacked cars are exported to other countries, cloned and reintegrated into the system of legal cars, or dismantled and used as spare parts. As a result, most carjackings are necessarily highly organised crimes, requiring a number of participants with different skills. These include some to coordinate the process, others to identify and steal the required vehicles, others to store them while attention in them ‘cools down’, drivers to take them to the border, body shop experts, people to change engine and chassis numbers, and corrupt officials at the licensing department, the police, or the border. The highly organised nature of this crime suggests that this is the crime type which would most clearly reveal a collapse in crime intelligence. It may well be the conflict, scandal, and instability in Crime Intelligence...
that explain the increase in carjacking rates in the last three years. Car thefts, which as discussed may be somewhat less organised, have shown a steadier downward trend.

**Truck hijacking, robbery of cash in transit, and bank robbery**

These remaining aggravated robbery types are small in number, and are extremely clumsily provided as rates per 100,000 of the population. Ideally, what should be reflected is their respective proportions to the number of trucks or cash-in-transit vehicles on the road, or the number of functioning banks – but these figures are not reliably available and where available outdated. Raw figures are thus indicated here.

The trend for truck hijacking is an exaggeration of that for carjacking: rising to a peak in 2008/2009, followed by a major decrease, and again an increase as of 2011/2012. Although trucks are usually taken for their freight/cargo, sometimes the truck and especially the horse are also taken across international borders and used on transport routes in neighbouring countries.

Truck hijacking is highly organised. The complex division of labour involves someone to determine exactly when and where trucks with the needed merchandise can be intercepted, some to actually hijack the truck (sometimes in disguise as police or traffic officials, and sometimes by arrangement with the driver), someone to drive the hijacked truck to its new destination, someone to disable the satellite tracking system while the vehicle is in motion (failing which, the horse must be replaced), some to offload the vehicle at a pre-arranged depot, and finally others to market, order, and distribute the freight. One such syndicate can be responsible for a large number of hijackings, and the dismantling of one syndicate can
result in a significant decrease of incidents. This accounts for the rapid fluctuations in the prevalence of these crimes.

Cash in transit robberies more than doubled between 2003/2004 and 2006/2007, an increase from 193 cases to 467. The response was an extremely successful cooperation arrangement between the SAPS, the banking community, transit companies, and the South African Banking Risk Intelligence Centre (SABRIC). These robberies were reduced by almost 70% to 2012/2013, and appear now to be declining even further.

Bank robbery followed a similar pattern and for similar reasons – with an increase from 54 cases in 2003/2004 to a peak of 144 cases in 2007/2008, followed by SAPS-SABRIC cooperation and a 20-fold decrease to just 7 incidents in 2012/2013. There has been an increase in the last three years to 17 of incidents in 2014/2015.

It should also be emphasised that the largest increases in bank robbery and CIT robbery occurred just before and during the massive and violent security guard strike of 2006. Truck hijacking, CIT and bank robberies as already stated are some of the most organised crimes and the increase and stabilisation of these three crimes in the past three years can in all probability be an indication that all is not well in SAPS and more specifically Crime Intelligence.

More policeable crimes continued – property-related crimes
The rest of the more policeable crimes consist of the unlawful and intentional removal of tangible property without the threat or use of force – i.e. theft. Most have seen moderate decreases in rates since 2003/2004.

Residential and non-residential burglary
In stark contrast to robbery, rates of burglary at residential premises have generally been declining, with an average annual decrease of about 2.7%.
This major reduction is heartening, especially given that residential burglary ranks as both the most feared and the most common crime in the country. After ‘theft: other’, it is the single largest crime category reported. As such, together with the second most feared – house robbery – it is thus the biggest obstacle to Government attaining their Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cluster goal where ‘all people in SA are and feel safe’.

The decline may be partly due to target hardening – residents better securing their spaces through alarms, burglar bars etc. – which may be contributing to the rise in house robbery.

The longer trend, as with many other crime types, suggests that the decline began around 2002/2003.
The contrast between patterns of robbery and burglary is perhaps even starker at non-residential premises.

Where non-residential robbery rates have more than tripled, non-residential burglary rates have seen almost no change at all since 2003/2004. Indeed, the longer term trend suggests that non-residential burglary rates may remain considerably lower now than they were in 1994.
Again, this contrast between robbery and burglary is likely largely due to target hardening. As in the case of robbery it should be noted that not all of these non-residential are at business premises in the traditional sense. Some are at government premises like schools and clinics, cultural, social and sports clubs, religious premises and recreational facilities. Schools are a popular burglary target. When it is businesses targeted, it is most often small to medium businesses. In these cases, the entrepreneurs are often dependant on family and friends for start-up loans, and one burglary or robbery can devastate the business and numerous people around it.

**Theft of motor vehicles or motorcycles**
Where carjacking rates have reduced by about a fifth, the far more common car and motorcycle theft has reduced by almost half, and in a markedly steadier pattern.
Profitable vehicle theft also requires a fair amount of organisation, but older, less secure cars are relatively more likely to be stolen (and are more often used for spare parts), whereas newer cars are more likely to be hijacked, as their security features require driver cooperation (and they are more often exported or cloned). It seems likely that car thefts are relatively more opportunistic, relatively less organised, and thus somewhat less subject to changes in the effectiveness of police crime intelligence. This may account for the less volatile trend in vehicle thefts.

The decline may best be explained by the systematic decline of the market for older models or their spare parts, instead placing upward pressure on carjacking. In further support of the crime-suppressing impact of policing around the World Cup, the two years which saw the greatest percentage reduction were 2010/2011 and 2011/2012, which saw 11.3% and 9.6% decreases respectively.

The longer trend suggests an even more systematic and steady decline as of 1994.
Less policeable crimes
This category of crimes comprises those that occur in spaces and circumstances over which the police have very little control.

Assault, assault GBH, malicious damage to property etc.
These crimes are fairly closely associated, and docket analysis has shown that many of these occur in bars, taverns, shebeens, and homes where alcohol and other substances are at play. They often begin with an argument, and devolve into a physical fight which can also damage surrounding property. Victims and perpetrators usually know each other, the incidents are seldom premeditated, and they tend to occur in private spaces.

These are among the least policeable, and the most ‘social’ crimes. It is highly unlikely that conventional policing (intelligence focused patrolling, roadblocks, stop and search and cordon and search operations) will prevent these crimes. The only police-based prevention in the case of these crimes is to make examples of the perpetrators through proper investigation and prosecution, with full support to the victim so that she/he doesn’t withdraw under social and economic pressure.

Assaults which occur during aggravated robberies, including sometimes terrible assaults which border on attempted murder, are not registered as a separate incident of assault GBH on the main aggravated robbery docket. These assaults are seen as an integral part of the coercion which is part of aggravated robbery. The only additional crimes which are registered when they occur during an incident of aggravated robbery are murder, attempted murder, and rape. This recording practice entrenches the social character of
assaults, as assaults cannot be prevented by the prevention of aggravated robbery. However, there have been reports of a potentially growing tendency for some SAPS members or stations to record attempted house breakings as malicious damage to property.

It thus has relatively little to do with the policing, but it is a positive sign for the extent of violence in the country that reported rates for these have decreased by between 30% and 50% since 2003/2004. On the other hand, the victims of crime survey suggests that less than half of all assault incidents may be reported. In contrast to a number of the more policeable crimes, the years around the World Cup appear to have seen a slowing in the decline and in the case of common assault even a slight increase, likely a result of an uptick in social events and celebrations involving alcohol and drugs.

All theft not mentioned elsewhere
This is the single largest reported crime category in the country. It is also a very mixed bag, including anything from a pair of used dentures, through kilometres of copper cable, to a jet aircraft engine worth millions. Although some subcategories such as theft of non-ferrous metal, gold and diamonds cost the economy dearly and are relatively more policeable, docket and CAS analysis has shown that the majority of items stolen are small personal items taken in the home or workplace, and which can never be prevented by the police. An unknown proportion of these were lost, sold or given away rather than stolen, but are reported in order to claim from insurance.
Reported rates of theft not mentioned elsewhere have declined over the period by almost 49%. Given the mixed nature of this category, reasons for the particularly rapid declines to 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 are hard to interpret, but it may for example be that this period saw a focus on false claims, and people realised the risks to insurance fraud.

**Crimes detected as a result of police action**

This final category of crimes comprises those where the number of recorded incidents is largely driven by the actions taken by police. These are illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, drug-related crime, and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Their numbers can be expected to go up when police are doing more, and down when police are doing less – the opposite of more policeable crimes. So an observed increase in the rate of these crimes may reflect a real increase in the number of such activities occurring, but may equally reflect an increase in focussed and effective policing of these activities.

The problem is that illegal firearms, drugs, and alcohol are all important generators of other crimes, such that it is essential for crime prevention and justice decision-making processes to know if an observed change is due to a real change or to changes in policing. The only way to isolate real changes in these crimes would be to keep their policing constant over a period, but this is hard enough to do within a precinct or cluster, and practically impossible nationally.
Of interest here is the huge increase in drug-related crime – about 266% over the period. This is in one sense a major achievement for the SAPS, as it represents escalating interference with drug-related crimes, although it is noteworthy that the increase has slowed a great deal in the last year. Unfortunately, it is unclear what if any impact this has had on the availability of drugs in the South African market, the number of drug users, or the other crimes which may be partly generated by drugs. It is also unclear whether these incidents represent arrests of users of drugs or of producers or smugglers, or which drugs are involved. It is relatively easy to accelerate the arrest of users, while having very little impact on suppliers or the overall size or harm of the market. To make this category more intelligible and the targets more meaningful, the SAPS should provide figures for its two subcategories of ‘unlawful use or possession of drugs’ and ‘unlawful dealing in drugs’.

It is worrying that despite the death and physical and psychological damage caused by guns and motor vehicles driven by drivers under the influence of alcohol these two trends had stabilised around 2005/2006 and 2010/2011 respectively.

**Conclusion**

Murder rates have shown a steady decline, decreasing by about a quarter since 2003/2004, and by about a half since 1994/1995, but the decline has slowed and even slightly reversed in the last three years. The reported rates of most other major crimes have also seen considerable reductions since 2003/2004, but for many of them there has also been a slowing of the decrease or even an increase over the last three years. There have been
major increases in just two crimes: robberies at residential premises and robberies at non-residential premises.

Crime statistics are imperfect tools and do not reflect the full reality of the crime and insecurity experienced by the inhabitants of this country. They must continue to be supplemented by victims of crime surveys and enriched by a range of other methodological approaches. Nevertheless, they are public property and must continue to be improved and intelligibly interpreted, in order to give meaning to the rights of transparency, accountability, and participation in the process of making South Africa safer.
Endnotes

1 Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006, (page 211).
10 Note that Gauteng mortuary figures suggest that there may be as many as 9% more bodies of murdered victims showing up in mortuaries than are registered by SAPS. This percentage is very close to the 11,3% underreporting, and may be due to a) murders which are registered as inquest dockets, b) attempted murders which are not changed to murder when the victims die of their injuries, and c) multiple murders which are not individually accounted for.
13 See e.g. Rachel Jewkes and Naeema Abrahams, 2002, The epidemiology of rape and sexual coercion in South Africa: an overview, Social Science and Medicine, 55.
# Appendix: Figures and rates

## Mid-year population estimates employed for rates calculations

Source: Statistics South Africa

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## Somewhat policeable crimes: Murder, attempted murder, sexual offences: raw figures

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## Murder, attempted murder, sexual offences: recalculated rates per 100,000

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## Murder, attempted murder, sexual offences: annual percentage changes in rates

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### Longer term murder rates per 100,000

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### More policeable crimes: Robbery crimes: raw figures

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### Robbery crimes: recalculated rates per 100,000

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*Rates not provided

Robbery crimes: annual percentage changes in rates
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*Percentage changes in raw figures, not rates*

**More policeable crimes: Property-related crimes: raw figures**

- **Truck hijacking**: 3.2% -10.9% 7.6% 39.6% 15.4% -1.7% -29.2% -17.8% 14.9% 5.1% 29.1% 42.0%
- **Robbery of cash in transit**: 14.6% 74.1% 21.9% -15.4% -21.5% 15.5% -18.7% -37.5% -20.3% 0.0% -17.9% -38.0%
- **Bank robbery**: 7.4% 1.7% 118.6% 11.6% -29.2% -8.8% -58.1% -10.3% -80.0% 200.0% -19.0% -68.5%
- **Common robbery**: -6.2% -18.8% -6.0% -9.9% -10.1% -4.1% -5.9% -4.7% -0.3% -0.7% 0.1% -50.6%
### Property-related crimes: recalculated rates per 100,000

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<tr>
<td>Burglary at residential premises</td>
<td>-8.9%</td>
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<td>-6.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>-4.3%</td>
<td>-4.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burglary at non-residential premises</td>
<td>-14.4%</td>
<td>-4.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
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<td>9.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>-5.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
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<td>-1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>-0.9%</td>
<td>-8.3%</td>
<td>-6.6%</td>
<td>-6.8%</td>
<td>-11.3%</td>
<td>-9.6%</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
<td>-3.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft out of or from motor vehicle and motorcycle</td>
<td>-14.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stock-theft</td>
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### Less policeable crimes: Assault, theft (other), etc.: raw figures

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<td>185891</td>
<td>181670</td>
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<td>134261</td>
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<td>119733</td>
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<td>88388</td>
<td>88050</td>
<td>91569</td>
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<td>Shoplifting</td>
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<td>66525</td>
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### Assault, theft (other), etc.: recalculated rates per 100,000

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<tr>
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<td>560.4</td>
<td>530.3</td>
<td>476.4</td>
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<td>16.0</td>
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<td>12.4</td>
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<td>Malicious damage to property</td>
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<td>302.8</td>
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<td>280.0</td>
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<td>231.7</td>
<td>226.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>731.7</td>
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<td>113.8</td>
<td>127.8</td>
<td>133.5</td>
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<td>168.9</td>
<td>173.7</td>
<td>170.7</td>
<td>175.2</td>
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<td>125.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shoplifting</td>
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### Assault, theft (other), etc.: annual percentage changes in rates

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<th>13/14 - 14/15</th>
<th>03/04 - 14/15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily</td>
<td>-5.4%</td>
<td>-10.2%</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
<td>-4.9%</td>
<td>-4.3%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
<td>-4.3%</td>
<td>-4.8%</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
<td>-2.2%</td>
<td>-39.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common assault</td>
<td>-5.9%</td>
<td>-16.1%</td>
<td>-8.9%</td>
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<td>-3.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>-7.0%</td>
<td>-3.6%</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malicious damage to property</td>
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<td>-2.2%</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>All theft not mentioned elsewhere</td>
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<td>-1.6%</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>-4.1%</td>
<td>-48.9%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
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### Police detected crimes: raw figures

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<tr>
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<th>04/05</th>
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<th>13/14</th>
<th>14/15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illegal possession of firearm and ammunition</td>
<td>16839</td>
<td>15497</td>
<td>13453</td>
<td>14354</td>
<td>13476</td>
<td>14045</td>
<td>14542</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug related crime</td>
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<td>84001</td>
<td>95690</td>
<td>104689</td>
<td>109134</td>
<td>117172</td>
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<td>150673</td>
<td>176307</td>
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<td>260732</td>
<td>266902</td>
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<td>Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs</td>
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<td>29927</td>
<td>33116</td>
<td>38261</td>
<td>48405</td>
<td>56165</td>
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<td>66697</td>
<td>69441</td>
<td>71065</td>
<td>69757</td>
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### Police detected crimes: recalculated rates per 100,000

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<tbody>
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<td>Illegal possession of firearm and ammunition</td>
<td>36.3</td>
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### Police detected crimes: annual percentage changes in rates

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