

FACT SHEET

Explaining the official crime statistics for 2013/14

19 September 2014

This factsheet provides an overview of key crime trends for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 as recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS).

On the day of their release, these statistics were already at least six months out of date. That means that the current crime situation, particularly at local level, could be very different to that described by the statistics below. For a guide on how to interpret crime statistics see the [Africa Check Factsheet](#) and [Crime Facts and Analysis](#) from the ISS Crime Hub.

Violent crime

Sustained high levels of violent crime over the past 20 years has a cumulative effect that negatively impacts South Africa's growth and development. When businesses and their staff are affected revenue and productivity suffer. Investor confidence is also negatively affected. When violence is experienced in the home it affects the ability of victims to work and increases fear. When the victims are children, violence affects their ability to do well at school, and has long term implications for their health.

While overall the violent ('contact') crime rate has decreased by 0.8% in the recently released statistics, the particular types of violent crimes that cause the most fear and trauma have increased.

Homicide: the most reliable crime statistic

For the first time in 20 years the number of murders and the murder rate has increased for a second consecutive year.

Facts about homicide in South Africa:

- Incidents of murder increased from 16 259 murders in 2012/13 to 17 068 in 2013/14.
- This means that there were 809 more people murdered than in the previous year.
- This comes on the back of a similar increase in 2012/13 when 650 more murders were recorded compared to 2011/12.
- SA's murder rate increased from an average of 45 murders per day to 47 murders per day.
- Using Statistics South Africa's 2013 midyear estimates, the murder rate in 2013/14 was 32.2 per 100 000, up from 31.1 in 2012/13.
- SA's murder rate is about five times higher than the 2013 global average of 6 murders per 100 000.

Murder is an important crime to monitor because unlike other crimes, the number of reported murders is likely to be very close to the actual number of murders committed. The murder rate is regarded as one indicator of a country's stability – the higher it is, the less stable a country is regarded to be.

The murder rate refers to the number of people who are murdered per 100 000 of the population. Rates allow for comparisons between areas of high and low population density.

Which violent crimes decreased, and why that may not always be a good thing?

Over the past financial year (2013/14) there has again been a reduction in the number of recorded cases of assault. The statistics on assault are however the least reliable because cases of assault are not routinely reported to the police and because the police do not always record all cases that are reported to them.

A reduction in reported assault does not necessarily mean that there are fewer assaults taking place. It may mean that the legitimacy of the police is decreasing in the eyes of the public. Similarly, an increase in reported cases of assault may indicate an increase in confidence in the police.

Since cases of domestic violence are likely to be recorded as cases of assault, it is particularly important that reporting is encouraged.

- Cases of assault with the intention to inflict grievous bodily harm (GBH) decreased by 1.5% between 2012/13 and 2013/14.
- Cases of common assault decreased by 3.3% between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Arson and malicious damage to property, crimes that are often committed at the same time as an assault, also decreased.

- Cases of arson decreased by 4.2% between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

- Cases of malicious damage to property decreased by 1.1% between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

The Domestic Violence Act makes it a legal requirement for the police to keep a register of all cases of domestic violence reported to them at each station. Despite having these data the police do not make it available to the public.

It's tempting to blame the police for the increase in violent crime. But most murders, attempted murders and rapes occur between people who know each other. Alcohol and drug abuse are some of the social conditions at the root of these crimes. The police can do very little to prevent this kind of violence.

Between 15% and 20% of murders and attempted murders are the result of aggravated robbery while intergroup conflicts such as gang or taxi violence and vigilantism make up the rest.

Sexual assault

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 came into effect in December 2007 and created a number of 'new' sexual offences and expanded the definition of rape. This makes it difficult to compare the rape statistics before December 2007 with more recent figures.

'Total sexual crimes' as reported by the police includes 59 separate offences ranging from sex work to rape. Increases or decreases in such a broad category of crime cannot tell us much. The police should provide statistics for each of the crimes.

- Overall sexual offences have decreased by 11.2% since 2008/9 when 70 514 cases were recorded. In 2013/14, 62 649 cases were recorded.
- Reported cases of rape stabilised, with a slight decrease of 3%, since 2008/9 from 47 588 to 46 253 in 2013/14.

The Medical Research Council has estimated that only one in nine rapes are reported to the police. Thus the actual numbers of rapes in SA is much higher than numbers recorded by the police.

Reporting of rape must be encouraged. This will however necessitate a change in how police performance is measured. Currently, the police are expected to reduce violent crime by between 4% and 7% per year. This creates a disincentive for police to record all violent crimes reported to them. If victims are encourage to report rape, and the police indeed record all these reports, the number of recorded rapes will increase. This should not impact negatively on assessments of police performance.

Robbery

There has been an increase in all categories of robbery over the past year. These crimes are referred to by the police as 'violent property crimes'.

Robberies occur when armed perpetrators threaten or use violence against their victims in order to steal their belongings. When perpetrators use a weapon, it is recorded as 'aggravated robbery.'

- The number of aggravated robberies increased from 105 888 cases in 2012/13 to 119 351 cases in 2013/14 (an increase of 13 463 cases 12.7%).
- The aggravated robbery rate increased from 202.6 per 100 000 people in 2012/13 to 225.3 per 100 000 people in 2013/14, which represents an increase of 11.2%.
- Most sub-categories of aggravated robbery increased between 2012/13 and 2013/14:
 - Street or public robberies increased by 8 598 cases to a total of 69 074 incidents. This is 14.2% higher than the 60 476 incidents recorded the previous year. It means that every day in 2013/14, on average, there were 189 cases of street robbery.
 - House robberies occur when people are confronted by armed gangs while they are in their homes. This crime increased by 7.4% to 19 284 incidents representing an additional 1 334 households being attacked when compared to the previous year. On average 53 households were attacked each day in 2013/14.
 - Business robberies increased by 13.7% to 18 615 incidents. This crime type has consistently increased in the past eight years. It is 461% higher now than it was in 2004/05. There were an additional 2 238 armed attacks on businesses in 2013/14 compared to the previous year.
 - Vehicle hijacking increased by 12.3% to 11 221 incidents. This means that 31 motor vehicles were hijacked every day on average in 2013/14. This is of particular concern given that most of these cases are as a result of organised crime syndicates.
 - Truck hijacking increased by 5.1% from 943 incidents in 2012/13 to 991 incidents in 2013/14. As with vehicle hijacking, this crime is generally perpetrated by organised crime syndicates and the increase in both types of hijacking suggests that organised crime is on the rise in SA.

Can better policing reduce street robbery?

Street-robbery primarily affects the poor and typically occurs as people travel to and from work, school or shops.

- Street robbery decreased at an average rate of 7.2% per annum between 2004/05 and 2008/09. An even larger annual average decrease of 10,4% was recorded in 2009/10 and 2010/11. In 2011/12 street robbery only decreased by 2%.
- In the years when street robbery decreased, other more serious robberies namely carjacking, house robbery and business robbery (which the police call the 'Trio robberies') increased substantially.

According to the SAPS, improved visible policing reduced street robberies. The increased visibility was the result of the approximately 10 000 additional police officers that were hired each year between 2002/03 and 2009/10. However, the police believe that this also pushed robbers to target houses, businesses and vehicles instead.

Yet when the police worked hard to improve security in the run-up to the FIFA World Cup, Trio robberies stabilised. During 2010, these crimes decreased by a significant 11.8%. So these kinds of crimes can be reduced through a change in police focus and strategy.

Unfortunately, in 2011/12 the decrease in Trio robberies was much smaller (1.3%), suggesting that the police were not able to sustain the gains made in previous years. The police will have to address problems in crime intelligence and implement the recommendations of the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry in relation to improving the detective service.

Property crime

The term 'property crime' refers to crimes in which property is stolen without the use of violence or force (i.e. no direct confrontation between perpetrators and victims). Between 2012/13 and 2013/14:

- Residential burglary decreased by 0.6% (a reduction of 1 653 reported cases) to a total 260 460 incidents. This means that each day, on average, 714 households were burgled.
- Business burglary has remained largely unchanged (a reduction of 30 reported cases) to a total of 73 600 incidents. This means that each day, on average, 202 businesses were burgled.
- The number of cases of theft out of and from motor vehicles increased by 3% (an additional 4 154 cases) to a total of 143 812 incidents. This means that each day, on average, 394 vehicles were broken into and property was stolen.

- Commercial crime incidents (which include several crimes like fraud and corruption) decreased by 13.6% (a reduction of 12 460 cases) to a total of 79 109 incidents. A single incident can involve tens of millions of Rands.
- The catch-all category called 'all theft not mentioned elsewhere' increased by 1.6% to 368 664, an additional 5 848 reported cases.

Crime intelligence is vital for the police to effectively reduce most of the robberies and burglaries. These crimes are typically caused by organised criminal groups (syndicates) and by repeat offenders who use networks to sell their stolen goods. Using intelligence techniques, the police can identify the networks and individuals involved in these types of crimes and target them for criminal investigation. Solid detective work can ensure that sufficient evidence is obtained to successfully prosecute those involved. Removing these individuals from society decreases the risks to others and ultimately reduces these types of crime.

However, the current ability of the SAPS's Crime Intelligence Division is in question. According to the police's 2012/13 annual report crime intelligence produced 60% fewer communication analysis reports than the previous year and 33% fewer intelligence analysis reports. With such a decrease in productivity the rest of the SAPS, who are dependent on good quality and timely intelligence, cannot perform optimally.

Other property crimes that decreased are:

- Theft of motor vehicle decreased by 2.6%
- Shoplifting decreased marginally by 1.1%
- Stock theft has decreased this year by 6.2%.

Stock theft has shown a steady decrease in the past three years. This could be because of the implementation of the Rural Safety Strategy. While this crime has only averaged around 30 000 cases per annum over the past five years, its impact on food security is significant. For traditional small farmers, especially those with cattle and goats, stock theft can cause serious tensions and even manifest in vigilantism and violent conflict which in turn results in murders, attempted murders and arson.

Why are these crime statistics important?

The 2013/14 crime statistics show that South Africa experienced two of the worst years in the last decade from a crime reduction point of view.

In the eight years between 2003 and 2011 there was a reduction in levels of crime overall. Since 2011 the rate of the annual reduction slowed and in the past two years there has been an increase in the most significant categories of crime.

What contributes to high levels of crime and violence in SA?

Social factors that influence crime and violence include high levels of inequality along with the normalisation of violence in homes, neighbourhoods and schools. The ability of the police to reduce crimes such as robbery has been negatively affected by instability in senior police management and the deterioration of police crime intelligence.

The government has used crime statistics as a measure of police performance. This means that if crime goes up the police are criticised and if they go down the police are praised. But since there are a large number of crimes that the police cannot be expected to prevent, this approach means that we tend to look for solutions in the wrong places.

For most types of crimes the police, courts and prisons only step in once the crime has been committed. At that stage it is important for the criminal justice system to work effectively and efficiently. But we need to look elsewhere if we want to reduce much of the violence in our society in the long term.

Most murders, assaults and rapes take place between people who know each other and live in the same neighbourhood. This kind of violence takes place for a number of reasons including that we accept violence as a normal and reasonable way to solve problems, at home, at school and in neighbourhoods. Unequal gender-relations exacerbate the problem.

Murder, assault and rape are rarely premeditated and are often exacerbated by alcohol and other substance abuse. In such cases the best the police can do is to react swiftly and professionally.

What does South Africa need to do?

The most effective ways of preventing the kinds of violence noted above typically do not involve the police, but do require long-term investment. More must be done to reduce the risk factors for violence, by supporting parents; offering counselling to those affected by violence; and ensuring that basic services are delivered.

Effective policing can reduce robbery and other organised crime. This requires the collection and effective use of crime intelligence, strategically targeted patrols, roadblocks, and visible policing, a significant improvement in the training of police officers and an increase in the number of skilled, trained detectives.

These are some of the crimes that could be reduced by good policing practices:

- Murders and attempted murders that take place during aggravated robbery or intergroup conflict (such as gang or taxi violence), and vigilantism. These types of murders typically make between 35% and 45% of all murders and attempted murders.
- All kinds of robbery such as street robberies, vehicle and truck hijacking, residential and non-residential robberies.
- Residential and business burglaries.
- Certain types of theft such as those committed by organised crime syndicates such as theft of motor vehicle and motorcycles; stock theft; theft of non-ferrous metal such as copper cable, illegal mining, and poaching.

For more information including detailed crime maps for all policing precincts in SA please visit the ISS Crime Hub at www.issafrica.org/crimehub

