

Press Release

For immediate release

6 November 2014



South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Law and (dis)order

The IRR last week released a *Fast Facts* report tracking major crime trends against the financial and human resources invested to fight crime.

According to the report, the number of very violent robberies has increased, as has the number of arrests. However, the number of convictions is falling. Therefore, many perpetrators are arrested but not convicted.

Furthermore, the private security industry is now almost three times bigger than the South African Police Service.

Report highlights include:

International comparative data

South Africa remains an extraordinarily violent society with murder rates 10 to 20 times higher than countries ranging from Italy to India.

National data

South Africa's murder rate has shown a 52.2% decline since 1994. Despite this 409 937 people have been murdered in South Africa since 1994 – enough to fill the Newlands rugby stadium ten times over.

National data shows that most serious crime rates peaked in the period around 2002 to 2003 and then began a slow retreat.

Focus on violent robberies

However, this is not true for the most violent crime categories such as armed house and business robberies.

These recorded rapid increases (of 112.8% and 238.6% respectively) over the past decade to hit their peak years in 2013/14.

Even murder, which was in steady decline since 1994, has shown an uptick over the past two years.

[More...](#)

Provincial data

On a provincial level the data is full of surprises.

Gauteng does not have the highest murder rate in the country. That dubious honour goes to the Eastern Cape, closely followed by the Western Cape. Gauteng comes in sixth, having experienced a 68.7% decline in its murder rate over the past 20 years.

Gauteng does, however, have the highest armed robbery rate in the country at 335 incidents per 100 000 people, closely followed by the Western Cape at 324 per 100 000 people.

Limpopo is arguably the safest place in South Africa, with murder and robbery rates less than half the national average.

Poorer provinces tend to be safer provinces.

Arrests and convictions

One in every 40 South Africans is arrested for a serious crime every year.

There has been a significant increase (27.5%) in the number of people arrested for serious crimes over the past decade (almost 1.4 million such arrests in 2013/14).

Yet over the same period the total number of convictions fell by 9.1%.

Convictions expressed as a proportion of arrests fell from 30.4% to 21.7% – in other words arrests are not translating into convictions.

One in every 350 South Africans found themselves in jail in 2013/14 – a number on a par with that in 1994.

The fight against crime

In terms of anti-crime resources, government expenditure on criminal justice has kept pace with overall government expenditure.

However, there has also been a massive increase in private sector anti-crime activities. In 1997, for example, there were 115 331 private security officers in South Africa, and 110 177 sworn police officers. Yet by 2013, there were 445 407 security officers and 156 859 police officers.

The private industry now commands almost three times as many ‘boots on the ground’ as the police.

Ends
