

Murder in South Africa: a
comparison of past and present,
first edition

This paper looks at a history of murder in South Africa. The official statistics in the New South Africa (since 1994) show that violent crime has had the greatest increase of all crime categories. Murder is a sub-category of "violent crime". The official state statistics claim that while, since 1994, all sub-categories of "violent crime" are on the increase, murder is the only sub-category on the decrease. However, these statistics are contested, for example, Interpol have South African murder statistics that are roughly double the official South African state statistics, while the South African Medical Research Council claim there are roughly a third more murders in South Africa than the official police statistics reveal. This casts doubt on the New South African government's claim that the murder rate has in fact decreased since 1994.

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Murder in South Africa: a comparison of past and present

Brief

The brief of this research was to investigate the extent of the number of murders in the “Old South Africa” (under apartheid) compared to the “New South Africa” (post 1994). I have extended it slightly, to include an international comparison, a brief review of the criminal justice system and possible explanations for South Africa’s high crime rate as articulated in the literature.

Methodology

I have read an overview of the literature on the topic, examining criminology journals, websites (especially those related to crime statistics, for example, the South African Police Services (SAPS), Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC), Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and Interpol websites) as well as reviewing the major newspapers on crime statistics and related issues. Particular references are made to the *Mail & Guardian*. Because the web searches proved incomplete, I did a library search at the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) Government Library to review original source documents in an attempt to make sense of the crime statistics prior to 1994, which are not readily available. It was here that I sourced government archives of annual police reports dating back to 1950 which contain statistics on reported murders and also the Central Statistics Service: Statistics of Offence reports (CSS) which records all convictions of crimes. The courts forward these statistics to the CSS who in turn record them in reports. With these statistics I went back to the year 1949. From here I entered the data into excel worksheets, made calculations and plotted graphs. I refer to the SAP and CSS reports as the “source documents”.

Problems with crime statistics in general

“The year 1994 is used as a base year, as detailed and accurate crime statistics from station to national level were first made publicly available by the SAPS in that year.”
(*Sibusiso Masuku, p.17. FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE: South African crime trends in 2002*)

It is difficult to get crime statistics prior to 1994. For example, on the South African Police Services (SAPS) official website, they only have crime statistics from 1994 onwards (the year of the “New South Africa”). However I managed to access original source documents, which includes SAP annual reports going back to 1950, and CSS

reports which documents both the number of prosecutions and convictions, going back to 1949. (see p.15 for details).

Crime statistics do not tell us everything and can be incredibly misleading as the following examples portray:

- Canada has the second highest rate of recorded rape in the world (267 per 100,000), second only to Estonia in the UNDP statistics.
- The rate of drug crimes in Switzerland (574 per 100,000) is more than 10 times that of Colombia (40 per 100,000).
- The rate of total crimes in Denmark (10 508 per 100,000) is more than five times that of the Russian Federation (1 779 per 100,000) and more than 100 times that of Indonesia (80 per 100,000).

Amongst the explanations given for these discrepancies within the literature includes the fact that countries have different legal and criminal justice systems. Crime definitions vary from one country to the next. For example, a serious assault in one country may be recorded as an attempted murder somewhere else. Moreover, what constitutes a recordable crime in one country might not be a criminal offence in another (*South Africa World crime capital? Published in Nedbank ISS Crime Index Volume 5 2001 Number 1, January-February*).

Furthermore it needs to be considered,

- The likelihood of victims reporting crime, and the police recording them, is not the same in every country. Crime victims are less likely to report crime in a country with an oppressive or incompetent police force than in a country where the police are helpful and trustworthy. The distances people have to travel to the nearest police station, and the availability of transport to get there, is another factor which can affect crime reporting rates.
- Multiple offences are not recorded uniformly in all countries. In some countries only the most serious offence reported in a single incident is recorded while in others all offences reported are recorded.
- Differences in data quality between countries is also a factor. In developed countries, recorded crimes are entered into a computerised database and channelled to a central point for analysis. In many less developed countries,

crime statistics are recorded only on paper which can easily result in the loss of some of the statistics.

It is estimated that **victim surveys uncover between 60% and 70% more crime than that reported by official sources** (*Ibid.*).

The use of recorded crime as a performance measure in the current South African context is especially problematic, as research in this country shows that **upwards of 50% of crime in many important categories goes unreported**. Historic distrust between the police and the public has led to the failure of many communities to report crime, and as this relationship improves (partly due to successful police outreach and performance), it will affect the crime rate. This is particularly true for interpersonal crimes such as domestic violence and rape, where growing consciousness of human rights, teamed with a more victim-friendly legal and procedural framework, should enhance reporting. (*Ted Leggett. IMPROVED CRIME REPORTING: Is South Africa's crime wave a statistical illusion?*)

According to Ted Leggett, “the increase in reported crime since 1994 may well be due in part to the progressive enfranchisement of the majority of the population, including greater access to commodities that are known to boost reporting, such as vehicles, telephones and property insurance” (*Ibid.*).

The question then follows, what are the official crime statistics, especially as regards murder and attempted murder?

Crime Statistics in South Africa – murder and attempted murder

According to Interpol, South Africa's overall crime rate is comparable to other developed countries. However, what sets South Africa's crime apart from basically every other country on earth, is the incredibly high levels of violent crime.

It is common for the literature to claim that crime statistics in the Old South Africa were “unreliable” (although little explanation is offered as to why), however the new statistics are “still unreliable” (*Ibid.*).¹ **At one stage the current government imposed a moratorium on crime stats**. Although they repeatedly claimed that this

¹ At times the Old South Africa tended to turn a blind eye to most traditional Black on Black intertribal murders or “muti” murders because of sensitivity to “their cultures”. For example, the human sacrifices in Venda.

was not to hide the problem of excessively high crime rates in South Africa, opposition parties protested otherwise. The government maintained that the purpose of the moratorium was to put systems in place that would ensure accurate crime stats. They were referring to the new computerised Geographic Information System (GIS), which, as of June 2001, had been implemented at 340 priority police stations covering 80% of the country. However after the moratorium was lifted, it has been asserted by the media that the crime stats remained "unreliable" because they were still based on the old system of collecting information about crime (*M&G, 'Unreliable' crime stats released to SA, 01 Jun 2001*). However, Antoinette Louw, head of the Crime and Justice Programme at the Institute for Security Studies, found that at "no stage" were the problems of data accuracy of "such an extent that a moratorium on the release of crime statistics to the public was necessary" (*M&G, Crime stats the govt hides from you, 06 Apr 2001*). It appears then that the crime stats still are not and never have been very particularly reliable, however they are accurate enough to provide us with some indication of the crime levels in South Africa.

What has happened since 1994?

"When comparing crime figures of April 2001 to March 2002 with that of the same period in 1994/95, the number of (overall) crimes increased by 20%. (*Sibusiso Masuku, p.17. FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE: South African crime trends in 2002*). Leggett claims, "It was not unexpected that the arrival, in 1994, of a democratic government should lead to a dramatic increase in crime reporting." (*IMPROVED CRIME REPORTING: Is South Africa's crime wave a statistical illusion?*)

Violent crime

In the past seven years (1994/95 to 2000/01), violent crime increased by 33%, the highest increase in any crime category (*Sibusiso Masuku, p.18. FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE: South African crime trends in 2002*).

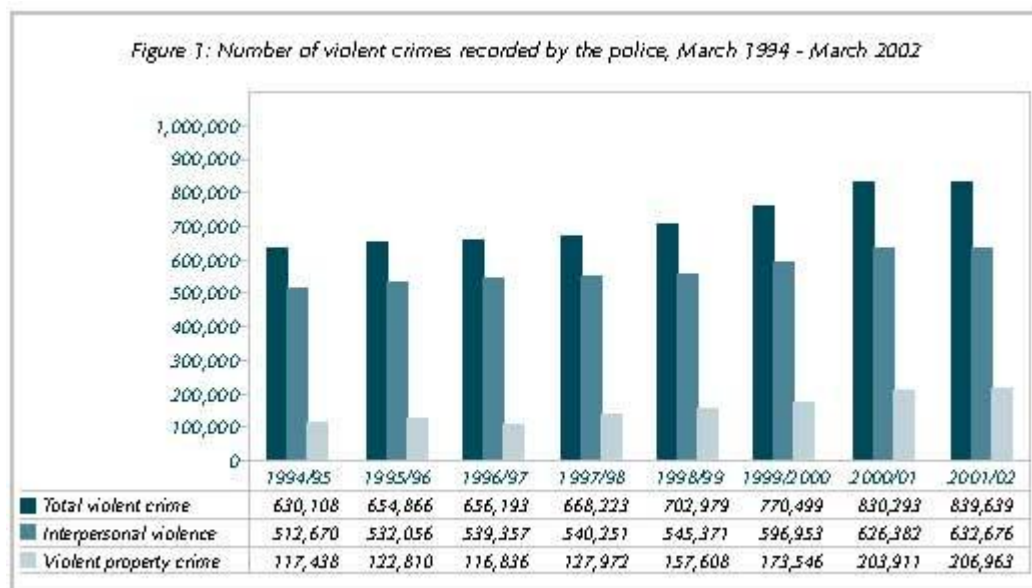
What is violent crime?

Sibusiso Masuku distinguishes between two types of violent crime:

Interpersonal violent crime – “murder, attempted murder, serious and common assaults, and rape”; and

Violent property crime – “all categories of robbery, i.e. robbery with aggravating circumstances (armed robbery, car hijacking etc.) and common robbery” (*PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE: Addressing violent crime in South Africa, Institute for Security Studies. Published in SA Crime Quarterly No 2, November 2002*).

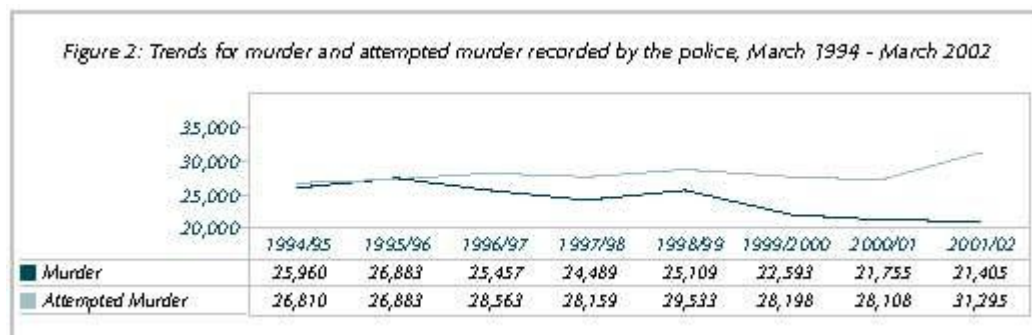
The following graph (Figure 1) shows the increase in violent crime since the inception of the New South Africa in 1994.



Murder

As Masuku points out, the graph below shows that “murder decreased by 18% in the past seven years and by 2% in the past 12 months” (p.19. *FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE: South African crime trends in 2002*). This decrease needs to be considered critically. Masuku points out that “it is unusual for murder rates to decline while other forms of violent crime are increasing, and this trend is particularly striking because the percentage of murders committed with a firearm has increased.” All other violent crimes, such as attempted murder, serious assault and rape had continued to rise (*M&G, Mbeki pulled up over crime figures, 09 Feb 2001*). In fact murder is the only violent crime that is reported to be in decline since the inception of the New South Africa.

The following graph (Figure 2) shows the unusual trend in that reported murders are decreasing, while attempted murder is steadily increasing. It is important to point out that never in South Africa’s history has attempted murder exceeded (or even approached) actual murder except in the New South Africa. One therefore shudders to think of comparing the total number of murders and attempted murders in the Old and New South Africa’s.



Contested statistics

While government, through the release of these figures, claims that murder is said to be in decline, not everyone agrees. A recent report by the Medical Research Council (MRC) states otherwise. **While police crime statistics show there were 21,683 murders in 2000, the MRC puts the figure at 32,482.** The MRC's estimate is close to the figure from the Department of Home Affairs, which is 30,068. This is a third more murders than reported by the SAPS. A discrepancy of more than 10,000 murders is more than a “margin of error”.

The MRC's revelation of serious under-registration and misclassification in the government's death statistics was gleaned from various sources, including the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, a body supported by the Department of Health and the Department of Science and Technology. The system gathers information on "non-natural" deaths from 37 mortuaries in six provinces (note that South Africa now has nine provinces). The cause-of-death profile estimated in their study "differs substantially from the findings of the sample of death records processed by Stats SA for 1997-2001", the MRC reports reads (*The Sunday Independent, Shock report doubles road death toll, May 25 2003*).

According to a brochure "*Fight Crime: Put 150,000 cops on the streets where you live*", produced by the official opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) **the average daily murder rate in South Africa is 55 murders committed every day**. However, if we use the MRC statistics, there **are 89 murders committed on average every day in South Africa**.

Interpol, claims even higher numbers of murders in South Africa. Interpol claimed that there were **approximately double the numbers of "murders known to police" in South Africa than the official police statistics reveal**. This is substantial, for example, while the **SAPS claims there were 26,883 murders in 1995/96, Interpol claims there were 54,298**.

If there is any error in official statistics, they appear to be erring on the side of serious under-reporting. The reason for this under-reporting could be the desire to change the growing reputation of South Africa as the "crime capital of the world", this title is one any government would desperately want to lose as it would cause any potential investor to take his money elsewhere. Furthermore, it is an embarrassment to a government desperate to live up to the image of the New South Africa – liberated and peaceful.

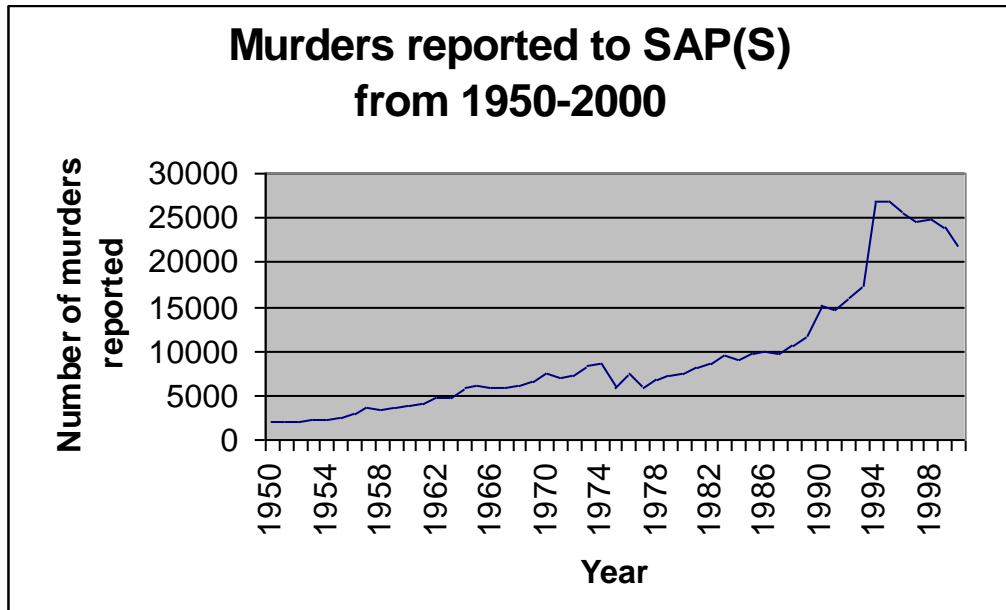
Nevertheless, even if we take the official crime statistics as authoritative, how does the murder rate in the New South Africa compare to the Old?

Murder – up or down?

As stated earlier, it is incredibly difficult to find information that compares the current murder rate with the past murder rate as the stats are not readily available. Perhaps these figures are concealed for political reasons. Nevertheless, I went to the original

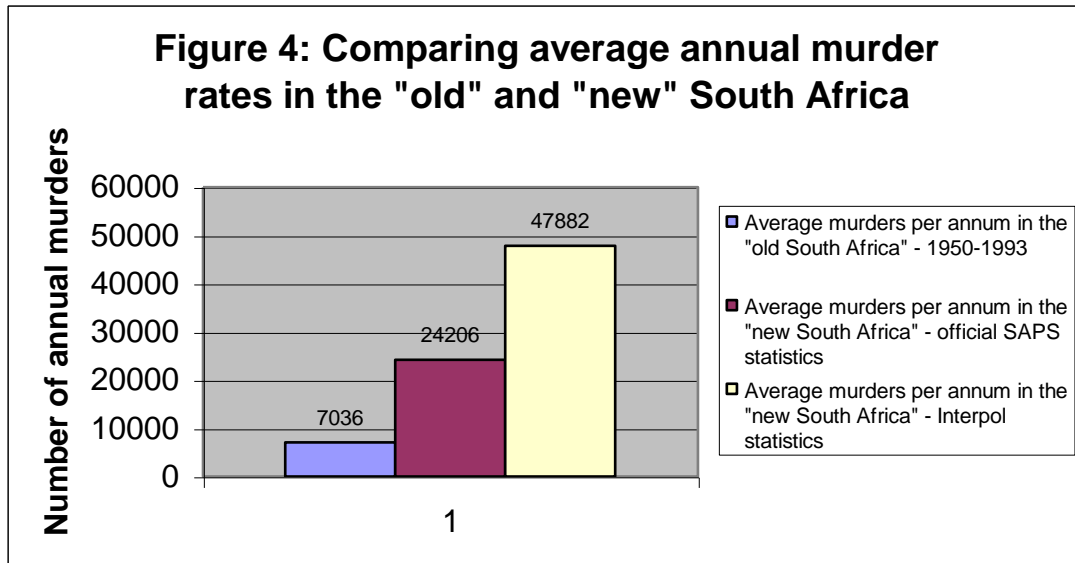
source documents of the annual police reports and CSS: Statistics of Offence annual reports to get the following statistics.

The following graph (Figure 3) reveals the marked increase in murders over the past half century. (Note that the figures used in the analysis includes South West Africa, currently Namibia, which was a protectorate of South Africa, until 1990. These do not however make a substantial increase to the “Old South African” crime statistics, as they averaged about 75 murders per annum).



This equates to 309,583 murders from the year 1950 to 1993 (44 years – **averaging 7,036 per year**), meanwhile according to SAPS statistics, 193,649 murders were committed in 8 years after the “new democratic dispensation” came to power, thus giving an **average of 24,206 per year** (crime statistics for 2002/03 are not yet available). However if we consider the Interpol statistics, which are only available on their website for the years, 1995-1999 and 2001 (6 years), the number of persons murdered in South Africa within those 6 years is 287,292 – **averaging 47,882 per year**.² Clearly the new government is not winning the war on crime, especially violent crime. These averages compare as follows (Figure 4):

² It must be pointed out that it is not logically sound to do such comparisons. Obviously there are other factors such as population growth and differentials in time periods, which would make it unfair to compare this data. Nevertheless I have done it merely to illustrate a point that is clearly illustrated by the sharp ‘exponential’ increase in the number of murders over the past half century.

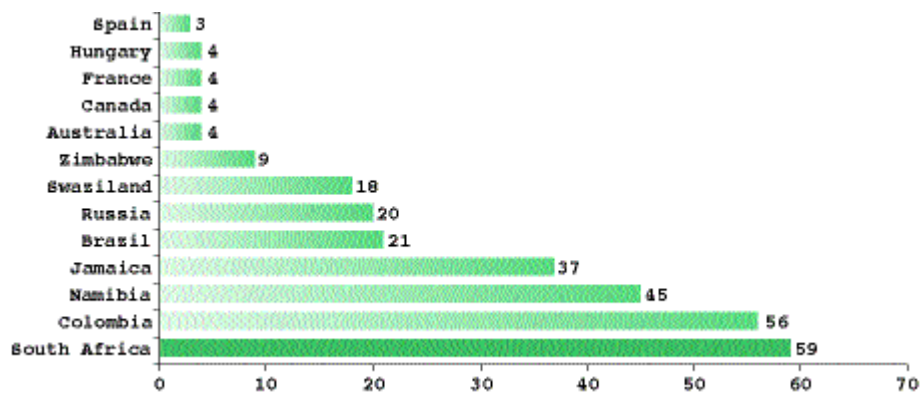


The Nedcore Project concludes that ***“South and Southern Africa are probably the most murderous societies on earth, even with probable under-reporting”*** (*The Nedcore Project, 1996: 6*).

How does South Africa’s current murder rate compare internationally?

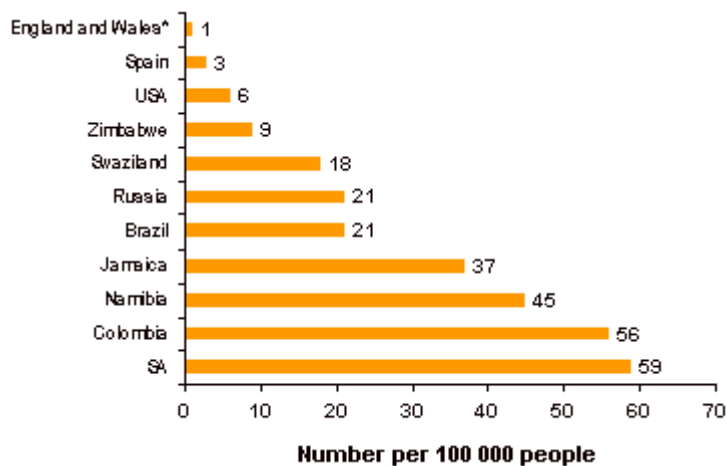
Murder is the most suitable crime to compare between countries. There are few definitional disputes about what constitutes a murder and most murders are recorded because the evidence of the crime, in the form of the body of the victim, is rarely concealed permanently. In 1998 South Africa had the highest recorded per capita murder rate of the countries selected in the 1998 Interpol report. In 1998 there were 59 recorded murders in South Africa per 100,000 of the population, followed by Colombia with 56 murders per 100,000. While Namibia’s murder rate was high (45 per 100,000) the murder rate in Swaziland was approximately a third of South Africa’s and Zimbabwe’s less than one-sixth (Figure 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Number of murders recorded per 100 000 of the population, 1998



Source: Interpol 1998, CIAC 1998

Figure 6: International Murder Rates, 1998



Note that while 59 persons per 100,000 were recorded murdered per 100,000 in South Africa, only 6 per 100,000 were recorded in the USA.

While violent crime makes up nearly a third of all South African crimes recorded, and South Africa experiences remarkably high levels of recorded violent crime, levels of recorded property crime appear to be comparable to those in other countries.

This is confirmed by Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) crime data between 1994 and 1999 according to which one out of three crimes recorded in South Africa involves violence or the threat of violence. (See *Nedbank ISS Crime Index Vol 4, No 3, pp. 1—4*). According to Interpol, Australia had high levels of recorded serious assaults in 1998, but had lower levels of robbery and violent theft and very low levels of murder. Colombia had high levels of recorded murders — possibly because of the

low-intensity civil war that has been raging in that country for some time — but low levels of recorded robbery and violent theft and serious assaults. It is only in South Africa where recorded levels of all three categories of serious violent crimes were exceptionally high of the countries covered in the Interpol report.

It is South Africa's high level of violent crime which sets the country apart from other crime ridden societies. This finding is supported by CIAC data indicating that since 1994 recorded violent crime has been escalating at a faster rate than any other crime category (by 33%). It is primarily violent crime which fuels people's fear of crime. To lose its label as crime capital of the world, violent crime levels have to drop substantially in South Africa.

Who are the primary victims of South Africa's high murder rate?

Police statistics and victim surveys conducted in South Africa also suggest a link between social deprivation, race, and risk of victimisation. Victim surveys conducted from 1997 to 2000 show that the poor, the majority of whom are black and coloured and living in townships, are more at risk of being victims of interpersonal violent crimes as well as violent property crimes like robbery. By comparison, wealthy people living in the suburbs are most at risk of property crimes, in particular vehicle theft and burglary. In the 1999 National Mortality Surveillance System data, homicides of black and coloured people accounted for 93% of the 6,800 homicides reported. (This is higher than the 86% that these race groups make up of the total population recorded in the 1996 census.) (*Sibusiso Masuku, PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE: Addressing violent crime in South Africa, Institute for Security Studies. Published in SA Crime Quarterly No 2, November 2002*). This reveals a consistent pattern. Throughout South Africa's history, as revealed by the source documents, going back half a century, the vast majority of homicides and murders were committed by non-whites on/to non-whites.

People's perceptions of crime

In a number of victim surveys conducted in South Africa since 1996, rape was described as one of the most widely feared crimes, second only to murder (*Ibid.*).

The Nedcore Project claims that the results of surveys “**underscore the fact that crime has become South Africa's pre-eminent sociological problem**. It now eclipses even unemployment in concerns of all South Africans” (*The Nedcore Project, 1996: 10*).

What is the response of the SAPS to the high levels of crime?

Besides imposing a moratorium on crime statistics, the SAPS has gone out of its way to lose the title of “crime capital of the world”, by making **bizarre comparisons**, for example, according to Leggett (*Response of SAPS - IMPROVED CRIME REPORTING: Is South Africa’s crime wave a statistical illusion?*) their most recent quarterly statistical report claims:

- Murder rates are compared between Washington, D.C., the city with the highest murder rates in the US, and Pretoria, which has the lowest murder rates of any major city in South Africa – presumably on the basis that they are both capitals.
- Johannesburg is compared to Diadema, Sao Paolo, Brazil in 1999, not on the basis that the two areas are in any way comparable, but because Diadema is one sliver of the world that once had a higher murder rate.
- ‘Very serious violent crimes’ make up just over 10% of overall crime, with the bizarre conclusion that the ‘chances of becoming a victim of serious violent crime are just over one out of ten crimes reported to the police’.

Organised crime makes a dramatic increase in the New South Africa

A report from the World Economic Forum said South Africa's organised crime was second only to Colombia's, with its frightening drug cartels, and Russia's, with its omni-present mafia. This is very feasible as there is widespread corruption in the South African Police Service - 1996 figures show **one in four police officers in the greater Johannesburg were under criminal investigation.**

Mark Shaw, at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), argues that *"crime grows most rapidly in periods of political transition and violence, when state resources are concentrated in certain areas only and gaps emerge in which organised criminal gangs may operate"*. He cites the former Soviet Union as the most obvious example.

But it does appear that the political and diplomatic isolation of South Africa during the apartheid years protected it to some extent from the organised-crime phenomenon which was rapidly going international in tandem with the growth of the "global village" (M&G, SA crime is getting organized, 13 Feb 1998).

The extent of organised crime in South Africa is revealed by the following quote: *"Intelligence estimates indicate that organised crime has doubled under the new government. Police estimates further suggest that there are currently about 700 extremely well-financed and superbly armed crime syndicates operating in and from South Africa."* However, police admitted (in October 1996) that not a single ringleader of any of the 700 crime syndicates operating in South Africa has been arrested and only 192 syndicates are being investigated (*M&G, Police can't cope with organised crime, Gustav Thiel, 23 Oct 1997*).

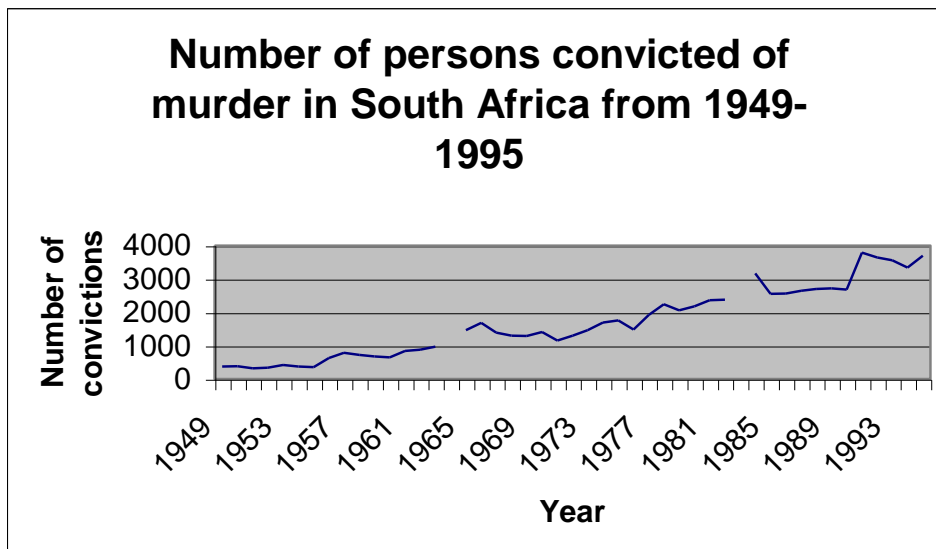
However, despite the rapid increase in these syndicates, organized crime accounts for very little of the direct murders, as they are more into *"drug-trafficking, money-laundering, weapon-smuggling, vehicle theft, trafficking in endangered species, people-smuggling and smuggling of precious metals and stones"* (Claasen, p. 183, *Statistics, perspectives and perceptions: Interpreting crime and violence in South Africa*). The CIAC comments that, according to the available information, it seems as if organised crime may, contrary to popular belief, contribute much less directly than indirectly to the crime scoreboard as far as violent crime is concerned. For example, it seems as if hijackings - which are mostly organised - at most contribute about **60** murders per annum to the \pm 25 000 murders committed per year (that is only **0.2%** of the total volume of murders). The same apply to bank robberies and robberies of cash in transit (\pm 100 persons, which represent **0.4%** of all murders).

The failure of the criminal justice system

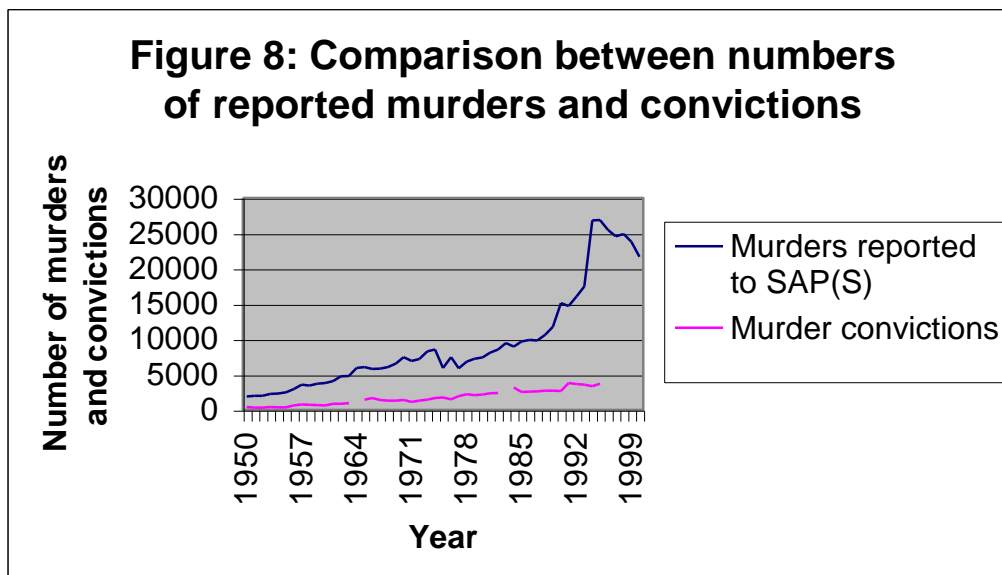
Sibusiso Masuku points out that **only half of all murder cases are sent to court**. In 2000 only 49% of murder cases were sent to court, while only 4,007 resulted in a guilty verdict (p.20. *FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE: South African crime trends in 2002*).

The ANC government (especially the Minister of Safety and Security) makes incessant claims that crime statistics have been dropping since 1994. However the *Mail and Guardian*, claims otherwise – *"Despite the president's boast that South African crime statistics are improving - with reductions in the incidence of some serious categories of offences - other figures showing the decline of convictions suggest that the forces of law and order are alarmingly on the retreat. Convictions for using and dealing in drugs, for example, collapsed from 46 468 in 1991/92 to 19 895 in 1995/96"* (*M&G, SA crime is getting organized, 13 Feb 1998*).

The same can be said for murder convictions. From the data I collected from the source documents, I calculated the number of convictions as follows (see graph below – Figure 7). (Note that I added “Infanticide” to the total number of murders. Also, unfortunately source documents were not available for the years 1964 and 1983. However, one is still able to plot the general trend).



It is worthwhile to compare the number of reported murders with the number of convictions (Figure 8).



While the convictions show a marked increase, the graph is not nearly as steep as that for the reported murders, especially as regards the early 1990's where steps were being taken towards dismantling apartheid. This same trend of low prosecution

and conviction rates continues with even more alarming disparities into the new dispensation.

The failure of the criminal justice system is portrayed by the following statistics, **for every 1,000 crimes committed in South Africa, only 430 criminals are arrested, furthermore, only 77 are convicted and despite the huge numbers of serious crimes of violence committed** (remember a third of all South Africa's crime is violent), **only 8 are sentenced to 2 or more years of imprisonment.**³ Further, it is estimated that South Africa has a **94% recidivism rate** (i.e. 94% of all persons released after serving a sentence immediately become involved in crime again). Only 1 of the 8 actually gives up criminal activity (*The Nedcore Project, 1996: 5*).⁴

Explanations offered for South Africa's high violent crime rate

Several explanations are put forward with the literature and are worth noting. These "include a low standard of education, a lack of social and vocational skills, poor housing and living conditions, a lack of parenting skills, and so forth." (*Sibusiso Masuku, p.24. FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE: South African crime trends in 2002*). Sibusiso Masuku also notes that "at a community and neighbourhood level, violent crimes are influenced by factors such as overcrowding, poor housing design, and a lack of infrastructure and development" (*PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE: Addressing violent crime in South Africa, Institute for Security Studies. Published in SA Crime Quarterly No 2, November 2002*).

Alcohol abuse clearly goes hand in hand with South Africa's culture of violence – "according to the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, 56% of 2,469 homicide victims sampled for blood alcohol level tested positive" (*Ibid.*). "Firearms are used in most violent crimes reported to the police. About 10,854 (49%) of murders recorded by the police in 2000 were committed with a firearm" (*Ibid.*). It is interesting to note that the increase in murders with firearms is a fairly recent phenomenon in South Africa, picking up most likely around the time of the ANC's call to the armed

³ It must be pointed out that these crime statistics refer to general crime and not specifically to murders. However, they would include murders as a category. Other reports claim that only half of all reported murders are actually sent to court, of which from the graph (Figure 8) it appears that in recent years less than a quarter of all reported murders lead to convictions. Considering that violent crime (which includes murder as a sub-category) makes up a third of all crime committed in South Africa, these low levels of convictions and evidently light sentences would unlikely act as a serious deterrent to crime.

⁴ The original text is ambiguous. If there is a 94% recidivism rate, then nearly only 1 in 20 would actually give up criminal activity. Perhaps the 1 in 8 refers to giving up a lifestyle of criminal activity or gives up criminal activity in the long-term.

struggle. Furthermore, it is quite probable that the many organised crime operations in South Africa indirectly affects the “murder using a firearm” rate, by supplying illegal firearms onto the market while the police are clearly failing in their efforts to curb these syndicates.

The CIAC offers some interesting socio-economic explanations:

It is internationally accepted that urbanisation of the youth (especially the 15 to 29 years age group) and the accompanying social processes are extremely conducive to crime. In South Africa the role of rapid, abnormally high rates of urbanisation (and urban unemployment) should never be under-estimated. Up to 1986, the majority of blacks (Africans) were confined to the rural areas by Influx Control Measures which were part of the apartheid system. In the overcrowded rural situation the majority were unemployed, but even so they could rely on the extended family (social network) and subsistence economy to at least fulfil the basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. Rural life is also plain and simple, with no real relative deprivation or extravagant aspirations. When influx control was removed in 1986 it released a massive urbanisation process which would under natural circumstances have started three - five decades earlier. A "compacted" urbanisation consequently happened in ± 13 years. In reality, we have not seen the end of urbanisation yet - at least 50% of the black population (aged 15 - 29 years) remained in rural areas in 1996 (according to the last Census). It should also be remembered that, added to this compacted internal urbanization within South Africa, a massive influx of especially young work-seekers (economic refugees) to our cities from especially neighbouring countries, but also from as far afield as Nigeria, Morocco, Europe and China also occurred. It is estimated that at least 6 million undocumented immigrants live in especially our cities. The people who migrate to the cities (urban areas) first are the young (18 - 30 years old). In the cities they encounter massive unemployment, with no extended family (social support network) and subsistence economy to support their basic needs. In the cities the only support they may find is within the peer group. A very strong sense of relative deprivation and resultant rising expectations may also develop. The difference between rich and poor in the city is very obvious and stark. At the same time the material belongings of the rich is considered to be the measure of success.

The CIAC also notes the legacy of South Africa's turbulent past on the current culture of violence:

During the years of political struggle (especially the eighties and the early nineties) many members of the former security forces and liberation armies were trained in

guerilla warfare skills like intelligence gathering, ambush techniques, the handling of firearms and explosives, etc. Many of these combatants are now out of work and many of these skills can be used to commit hijackings, house and business robberies, bank robberies and robberies of cash in transit.

However, Leggett (*IMPROVED CRIME REPORTING: Is South Africa's crime wave a statistical illusion?*) points that the **“easiest way for the police to reduce the crime rate is simply to do nothing but record only those crimes where a case number is absolutely mandatory, such as cases involving deaths or insured property.”** (*PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE: Addressing violent crime in South Africa, Institute for Security Studies. Published in SA Crime Quarterly No 2, November 2002*).

It is clear from the data, graphs and statistics that the current high levels of violent crime really began to escalate around the early 1990s, while the rate of convictions did not nearly keep pace. **It was at this same time that South Africa suspended the death penalty** (the death penalty was suspended in 1989 and abolished in 1996). Considering that only 8 out of every 1000 crimes committed in South Africa receives a two or more year jail sentence, it would be interesting to discover how many of these murders were repeat offences, and how the suspension of the death penalty as a deterrent has fuelled the culture of violence. Despite countless calls for the return of the death penalty, calls for referendums and victims rights, the current South African government is determined not to reinstate the death penalty claiming that to do so would contradict the new Constitution. However, I did not find any reference to the impact of the death penalty and its suspension, later abolition, in the literature I reviewed.

Conclusion

It is clear from this study that violent crime has continued to climb faster than any other category of crime in the New South Africa. The only apparent category of violent crime that is in decline is murder. However, the Medical Research Council, the Department of Home Affairs and Interpol all seem to agree that South Africa's murder rate is far higher than the official statistics show. Nevertheless, regardless of what may be the reasons for this apparent under-reporting, South Africa has earned the title of the “crime capital of the world” – especially as regards violent crime. While crime rates are increasing, conviction rates are decreasing (or certainly not keeping pace), thus adding to the South Africa's “culture of violence”. Although explanations

are offered to explain this phenomenon of violence in the New “liberated and peaceful” South Africa, they appear to be inadequate. Perhaps it should be argued for the reinstatement of the death penalty. While the people on the ground would support such a call, their desires are suppressed by the Constitution and a ruling elite averse to its reinstatement.

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