

Firearms Control Briefing

QUICK FACTS

Guns and Violence in SA

INDEX	
Gun violence in SA	1
Guns and gun owners	1
Illegal guns	2
SA's Firearms Control Act	2
Guns and self-defence	2

Gun violence in SA

Guns (not knives) are the leading cause of murder in South Africa

In 2018/19, firearms overtook stab weapons as the leading cause of murder nationally.¹

In Gauteng more people are shot and killed than die in traffic accidents

In 2018/19 gunshot injuries overtook road traffic injuries as the leading cause of non-natural death in Gauteng.²

Every day in South Africa:

- **23 people are shot and killed:** ³ 20 men and 3 women.⁴
- 2 people complete suicide with a gun.⁵
- 138 people survive a gunshot, often with severe disabilities.⁶ Severe disability is closely associated with spinal cord injury. While traffic injuries are the leading cause of spinal cord injuries worldwide,⁷ in 2014 **gunshots overtook traffic injuries as the leading cause of spinal cord injuries** in the City of Cape Town's government hospitals.⁸

The face of gun violence is a young black man living in a metro area:⁹

- 89% of gun murder victims are men.
- Murder rates are highest in the 15–29 years age group.
- Men living in metro areas have a “notably higher” rate of murder.
- Homicide rates are highest among people categorised as black.

11% of gun murder victims are women:¹⁰

- Women are most at risk of being shot in their home by their intimate partner.¹¹
- Most victims have been threatened with a firearm before being shot.¹²
- The four main types of threatening gun-related behaviour by men are: 1) Threatening to shoot their partner; 2) Cleaning, holding or loading a gun during an argument; 3) Threatening to shoot a person or pet the partner cares about; and 4) Shooting a gun during an argument.¹³
- Intimate partner murder-suicide is particularly high in families where men use a gun for work, such as in the police, army or private security industry.¹⁴

Gunshots cost billions to treat

- R6 billion (4% of South Africa's National Health Budget) was spent treating gunshot injured patients at state hospitals nationally in 2014; accounting for inflation this is +/-R8,2 billion as of November 2020.¹⁵
- This figure only includes medical treatment costs, but excludes other direct and indirect costs (such as emergency transport, fees of surgeons and allied health professionals and rehabilitation).¹⁶

Guns and gun owners

90% of gun owners in SA are civilians and the majority of guns are handguns owned by older men for self-defence:

- There are almost 4.5 million licensed guns in SA (owned by civilians, private security companies and the state).¹⁷
- 90% of gun owners are civilians.¹⁸

- There are almost 1,8 million (1,749,034) civilian gun owners who own almost 3 million (2,990,256) guns (1.7 guns per owner).¹⁹
- 81% of legal gun owners are men.²⁰
- 64% of licensed gun owners are over the age of 50.²¹
- 49% of legally owned guns are handguns (pistols or revolvers).²²
- The majority of legally owned handguns are licensed for self-defence purposes.²³

Illegal guns

We do not know how many unlicensed guns are in SA.

Most unlicensed guns were once legal before they leaked into the illegal pool. Leakage/diversion occurs through one of three ways:

1. **Loss and theft** is the most significant mechanism: **Civilians – not the police – are the biggest source of illegal guns in SA**, losing seven times more guns than the police.²⁴
2. **Cross-border trafficking**: Contrary to common perceptions that guns are smuggled into SA from our neighbours, indications are that handguns in particular are trafficked from SA to neighbouring countries.²⁵
3. **Fraud, corruption and poor enforcement of the law**: This means that people who do not meet the legal criteria of “fit and proper” are illegally granted gun licences.²⁶

AK47 assault rifles are seldom used to commit crimes. Instead handguns (pistols and revolvers) are the weapon of choice: Between 1999/2000 and 2013/14, handguns were used in 94% of murders, 94% of attempted murders and 97% of aggravated robberies in which a gun was used.²⁷

SA’s Firearms Control Act (2000)

SA’s Constitutional Court has ruled that **gun ownership is not a right, rather it is a privilege regulated by the Firearms Control Act**.²⁸

SA’s experience shows that strong gun laws save lives, and poor enforcement kills:²⁹

- ↑ Before the Firearms Control Act (2000) was passed into law, an average of 34 people were shot and killed a day.³⁰
- ↓ Over the next 10 years this figure halved – in 2009, 18 people were shot and killed a day.³¹ Researchers have shown that SA’s strong gun law saved lives by reducing the number of guns available in the country.³²
- ↑ In 2010/11 SA’s murder, attempted murder and aggravated robbery rates began increasing.³³ At the same time evidence of the Firearms Control Act not being properly implemented began mounting.³⁴ This included:
 - Theft, fraud and corruption by some police officers, gun industry members and gun owners
 - Poor enforcement of the law by police and poor compliance by gun owners
 As the number of guns began increasing in SA from 2010/11 so did incidents of gun violence. Currently 23 people are shot and killed every day in SA.

Guns and self-defence

Note: References SA and international research

- Most handguns in SA are licensed for self-defence.³⁵
- While having a gun may make you feel safer, it doesn’t make you safer:
 1. Guns are highly prized and are targeted by criminals:
 - Civilians are the biggest source of lost or stolen guns in SA: Of the 9,609 firearms reported as lost or stolen in 2018/19, 94% (9,002, an average of 25 guns a day) were civilian-owned; the police reported the loss/theft of 607 guns in this time (an average of 2 a day).³⁶

- Research in two policing precincts in Johannesburg shows you are four times more likely to have your gun stolen from you than to use it in self-defence.³⁷
- 2. Guns are rarely used in self-defence against a criminal attack.³⁸ This is because criminals carefully choose the time and place of attack, making sure victims are vulnerable and outnumbered to increase the success of a crime.
- 3. A gun in the home is more likely to be used to commit murder, suicide or to threaten and intimidate someone known to the owner e.g. an acquaintance, friend or family member including a spouse, than to successfully protect against an intruder.³⁹
- 4. If you shoot your gun at armed criminals they will shoot back 100% of the time, putting your life and the lives of bystanders at risk.⁴⁰
- 5. Someone with a gun is 4 to 5 times more likely to be shot at, and thus shot, if they have a gun in their possession when attacked by armed criminals:
 - Research in two Johannesburg police precincts shows you are four times more likely to be shot at if you use your gun in self-defence.⁴¹
 - International research from Philadelphia in the USA not only supports this finding, but shows that you are 4 to 5 times more likely to be shot (not just shot at) if you have a gun in your possession when attacked, compared to someone not carrying a firearm at the time.⁴²

¹ South African Police Service. 2019. Crime Statistics: Crime situation in Republic of South Africa (12) months (April to March 2018-19). Presentation to Portfolio Committee on Police, 12 September. (Online). Available at <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/28873/> (accessed 28 March 2020).

² Gauteng Department of Health. 2019. Gunshot wounds and stabbings top the list of causes of death in Gauteng. Media statement, 5 November. Reports that for 2018/2019 financial year, “state mortuaries recorded 2416 gunshot deaths followed by motor vehicle accidents and stabbings at 1695 and 1295 respectively.”

³ 2019-20 crime statistics show that between 20 and 26 people are shot and killed a day, averaging 23 people a day. Source: South African Police Services. 2020. Crime situation in Republic of South Africa: Twelve (12) months (April to March 2019-20). Presentation to the Portfolio Committee of Police, 31 July. (Online). Available at www.saps.gov.za/services/april_to_march_2019_20_presentation.pdf (accessed 3 August 2020). Figures calculated as follows:

- Figure of 20: There were 7,351 firearm-related murders in 2019-20, which is 34,5% of the 21,325 murders that year, 45% of the 16,272 murders for which the weapon is known, and an average of 20 people a day.
- Figure of 26: The weapon is known in 76% of all 21,325 murders in 2019-20; assuming 45% of all murders are firearm-related = 9,5936 gun-related deaths, which is an average of 26 people a day.

⁴ The most recent national mortality surveillance study shows that 89% of gun homicide victims are male and 11% are female. Source: Matzopoulos, Richard, Megan Prinsloo, Victoria Pillay-van Wyk, Nomonde Gwebushe, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Ria Laubscher, Naeemah Abrahams, William Msemburi, Carl Lombard, and Debbie Bradshaw. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, Vol. 93, pp. 303-313.

⁵ Matzopoulos, Richard, Megan Prinsloo, Victoria Pillay-van Wyk, Nomonde Gwebushe, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Ria Laubscher, Naeemah Abrahams, William Msemburi, Carl Lombard, and Debbie Bradshaw. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, Vol. 93, pp. 303-313.

⁶ A comprehensive global study on gun violence and disability estimates that for every person shot and killed as many as six victims will survive, often with severe disabilities. Source: Buchanan, Cate. (Editor). 2013. *Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery*. Sydney: Surviving Gun Violence Project.

⁷ Bickenbach, Jerome (Editor). 2013. *International Perspectives on Spinal Cord Injury*. World Health Organization. (Online). Available at www.who.int/disabilities/policies/spinal_cord_injury/en/ (accessed 1 February 2017), p. 20.

⁸ Joseph, Conran, A. Delcarme, I. Vlok, K. Wahman, J. Phillips, and L. Nilsson Wikmar. 2015. Incidence and aetiology of traumatic spinal cord injury in Cape Town, South Africa: a prospective, population-based study. *Spinal Cord*, Vol. 53, pp. 692–696

⁹ Matzopoulos, Richard, Megan Prinsloo, Victoria Pillay-van Wyk, Nomonde Gwebushe, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Ria Laubscher, Naeemah Abrahams, William Msemburi, Carl Lombard, and Debbie Bradshaw. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, Vol. 93, pp. 303-313.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Women's vulnerability to a gun in the home confirmed by international research: A number of sources are cited in Shaw, Margaret. 2013. Chapter 2: Too Close to Home – Guns and Intimate Partner Violence. *Small Arms Survey 2013*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. SA research confirms this risk, see Abrahams, Naeemah, Rachel Jewkes, and Shanaaz Mathews. 2010. Guns and Gender-based Violence in South Africa. *South African Medical Journal*, Vol. 100, No. 9, pp. 586–588.

¹² Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2011. Chapter 4: When the Victim is a Woman. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Rothman, Emily, David Hemenway, Matthew Miller, and Deb Azrael. 2005. Battersers' Use of Guns to Threaten Intimate Partners. *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association*, Vol. 60, No. 1, pp. 62–68.

¹⁴ Mathews, Shanaaz, Naeemah Abrahams, Rachel Jewkes, Lorna Martin, Carl Lombard, and Lisa Vetten. 2008. Intimate femicide–suicide in South Africa: a cross-sectional study. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, Vol. 86, No. 7, pp. 552-558.

¹⁵ van As, Sebastian. 2014. Gun violence: What it costs the body, and our country. *Daily Maverick*, 20 March. (Online). Available at www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-03-20-gun-violence-what-it-costs-the-body-and-our-country/ (accessed 24 November 2020), citing Allard, Denis, and V.C. Buich. 2005. The cost of treating serious abdominal firearm-related injuries in South Africa. *South African Medical Journal*, Vol. 95, No. 8, pp. 591-594.

The figure of R8,2 billion was calculated using Inflation Adjustment Calculator.

¹⁶ Direct costs are the hard costs incurred after someone is shot and killed or injured, including emergency transport, medical care in hospital and post-discharge, mental health care and costs associated with the criminal justice system (police, courts and prisons). Indirect costs include potential wages and household productivity that are lost by victims/survivors and perpetrators, costs to the employer and quality of life costs, which estimate the financial value of the pain, suffering, and fear that accompany a death or injury.

¹⁷ Exact figure: 4,487,837. Source: Phiyega, Riah (National Police Commissioner). 2015. Implementing the Firearms Control Act. PowerPoint presentation at the National Firearms Summit, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 24-25 March.

¹⁸ Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). Report commissioned by the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

¹⁹ Data sourced from: 1) Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). Report commissioned by the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. 2) Phiyega, Riah (National Police Commissioner). 2015. Implementing the Firearms Control Act. PowerPoint presentation at the National Firearms Summit, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 24-25 March.

²⁰ Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). Report commissioned by the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ South African Police Service Annual Reports for the years 2001-2002 to 2019-2020.

²⁵ McKenzie, Katharine. 1999. Domestic Gun Control Policy in Ten SADC Countries. Johannesburg: GFSA. Hennop, Etienne. 2000. Chapter 2: Illegal Firearms in Circulation in South Africa in Gamba, Virginia (Editor). 2000. *Society Under Siege: Managing Arms in South Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

²⁶ Taylor, Claire. 2019. Gun Control and Violence: South Africa's Story. Johannesburg: GFSA. (Online). Available at www.gfsa.org.za/component/jdownloads/send/13-research/114-gun-control-and-violence-south-africa-s-story (accessed 24 November 2020).

²⁷ Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). Report commissioned by the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

-
- ²⁸ Froneman, Johan (Judge). 2018. Judgement of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, Case CCT 177/17 in the matter between the Minister of Safety and Security (Applicant), South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association (Respondent), Fidelity Security Services (PTY) Limited (First Amicus), and Gun Free South Africa (NPO) (Second Amicus), 7 June. (Online). Available at www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2018/14.pdf (accessed 12 June 2018).
- ²⁹ Taylor, Claire. 2019. Gun Control and Violence: South Africa's Story. Johannesburg: GFSA. (Online). Available at www.gfsa.org.za/component/jdownloads/send/13-research/114-gun-control-and-violence-south-africa-s-story (accessed 24 November 2020).
- ³⁰ Chetty, Robert. 2000. Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre.
- ³¹ Matzopoulos, Richard, Megan Prinsloo, Victoria Pillay-van Wyk, Nomonde Gwebushe, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Ria Laubscher, Naeemah Abrahams, William Msemburi, Carl Lombard, and Debbie Bradshaw. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, Vol. 93, pp. 303-313.
- ³² See: 1) Matzopoulos, Richard, Mary Lou Thompson, and Jonathan Myers. 2014. Firearm and Nonfirearm Homicide in 5 South African Cities: A Retrospective Population-Based study. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 104, No. 3, pp. 455-460. 2) Abrahams, Naeemah, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Carl Lombard, and Rachel Jewkes. 2013. Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. *PLOS Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 1-8. 3) Campbell, Nathan, G. Colville, Y. van der Heyde, and A.B. van As. 2013. Firearm injuries to children in Cape Town, South Africa: Impact of the 2004 Firearms Control Act. *South African Journal of Surgery*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 92-96.
- ³³ South African Police Service annual crime statistics, available online at www.saps.gov.za. The most recent national crime statistics (2019/20) show that murder increased 37% between 2011/12 and 2019/20 (15,554 to 21,325), attempted murder 27% (14,370 to 18,635) and aggravated robbery 43% (100,769 to 143,990).
- ³⁴ Matzopoulos, Richard, J. Simonetti, M. Prinsloo, I. Neethling, P. Groenewald, J. Dempers, L.J. Martin, A. Rowhani-Rahbar, J.E. Myers, and M.L. Thompson. 2018. A retrospective time trend study of firearm and non-firearm homicide in Cape Town from 1994 to 2013. *South African Medical Journal*, Vol. 108, No. 3 pp. 197-204.
- ³⁵ Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). Report commissioned by the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- ³⁶ South African Police Service 2018-2019 Annual Report. (Online). Available at www.saps.gov.za/about/stratframework/annualreports.php (accessed 20 October 2020).
- ³⁷ Altbeker, Antony. 1999. Guns and Public Safety: Gun crime in Alexandra and Bramley. Johannesburg: GFSA.
- ³⁸ See: 1) Hemenway, David, and Sara Solnick. 2015. The epidemiology of self-defense gun use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011. *Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 79, pp. 22-27: This USA study shows that self-defence gun use occurs in fewer than 1% of contact crimes. 2) Violence Policy Centre. 2016. Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use: An Analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Crime Victimization Survey Data. (Online). Available at www.vpc.org/studies/justifiable16.pdf (accessed 24 November 2020): This USA study based on FBI data shows that guns are very effective for attack but very bad for defence: For every incident that a gun was used to kill someone justifiably in self-defence, there were 32 gun-related criminal murders. In addition, a significant percentage (27%) of the people killed justifiably were known to the shooter.
- ³⁹ See: 1) Santaella-Tenorio, Julian, Magdalena Cerdá, Andrés Villaveces, and Sandro Galea. 2016. What do we know about the association between firearm legislation and firearm-related injuries? *Epidemiologic Reviews*, Vol. 38, pp. 140–157. 2) Van Kesteren, John. 2014. Revisiting the gun ownership and violence link. *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 54, pp. 53-72. 3) Anglemyer, Andrew, Tara Horvath, and George Rutherford. 2014. The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Vol. 160, pp. 101-110. 4) Hemenway, David. 2011. Risks and Benefits of a Gun in the Home. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. Vol. 5, pp. 502-511, which summarises the scientific literature on the health risks and benefits of having a gun in the home for the gun owner and his/her family, concluding that, "The evidence is overwhelming for the fact that a gun in the home is a risk factor....".
- ⁴⁰ Altbeker, Antony. 1999. Guns and Public Safety: Gun crime in Alexandra and Bramley. Johannesburg: GFSA
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Branas, Charles, Therese Richmond, Dennis Culhane, Thomas Ten Have, and Douglas Wiebe. 2009. Investigating the Link Between Gun Possession and Gun Assault. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 99, No. 11 pp. 2034-2040.
-