

# FastFACTS

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## They all lived together in a crooked little house

This month the police will release their annual crime figures. Ahead of that, this *Fast Facts* delves into twenty-year trends to show the evolution of crime and violence in South Africa.

Progress has been made in reducing crime numbers. However, these should be interpreted cautiously. The decline in stock theft, for instance, might reflect collapsed farmer confidence in the police. Conversely, drug-related crime increases might reflect more effective policing.

Crime rates, which show crime trends adjusted for population growth, are a better means of measuring progress. Declines in both property- and contact-related crimes are seen. One notable exception is armed robbery, whose rate increased over the past twenty years. In the last decade, the number of trio crimes (armed house and business robberies and car hijackings) shot up sharply and increased as a share of all aggravated robberies.

Crime trends are also juxtaposed with economic growth and the tenures of different police commissioners. There is no clear relationship between armed robbery and economic performance, but the contrast between crime and police leadership presents a clearer connection. Bheki Cele was most successful in reducing crime rates while Riah Phiyega has had a catastrophic tenure.

There is also a strong connection between crime and location. Poorer provinces are considerably safer than the richer ones. The prosperity of a province is directly linked to its robbery rate. Using the murder rate as a baseline, South Africa performs poorly compared to both developed and emerging economies and finds itself in territory usually reserved for countries in civil conflict.

A notable trend is the extent to which the private sector has taken over safeguarding the country with there now being three times as many private security officers as police officers. There is much potential for the police to exploit private sector expertise and manpower to better deal with crime and violence in South Africa.

— Frans Cronje

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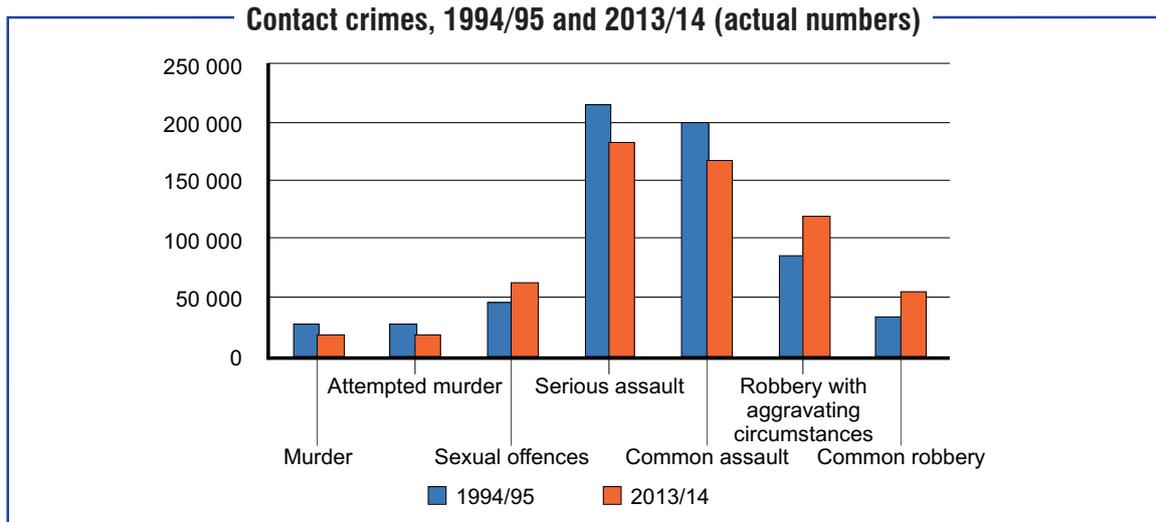
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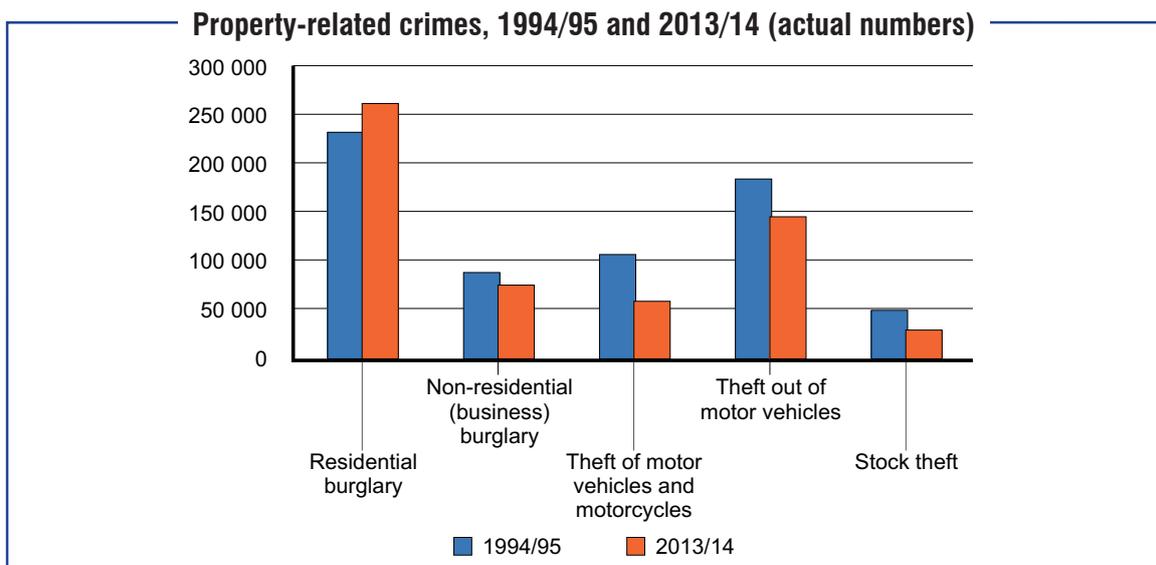
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## Major crimes — numbers

The graphic below shows that over the past twenty years, when measured in terms of numbers, the majority of contact crime categories have seen declines, most notably murder. The number of sexual offences appear to have increased but this is largely as a result of changing definitions of what such an offence entails. What is concerning is that aggravated robbery numbers have risen significantly as will be pointed out in greater detail later in this report.



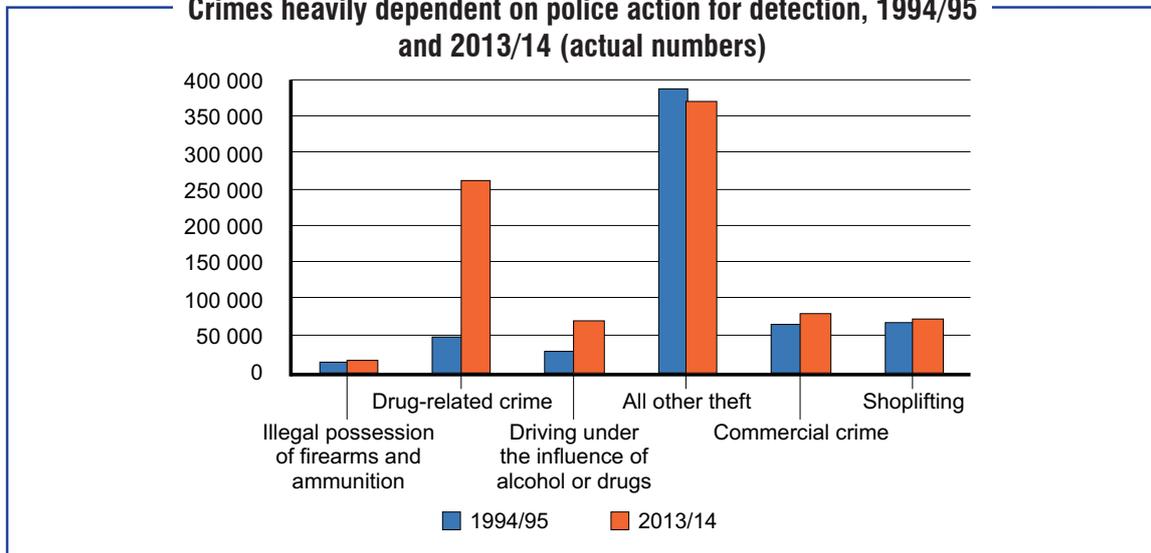
The graphic below shows that while the number of residential burglaries has increased over twenty years the numbers have fallen in other property crime categories such as motor vehicle theft. A cautious approach to this data is necessary. For example, there appears to have been a sharp decline in the number of stock theft incidents. Anecdotal evidence and reports from commercial farmers tell another story. The sense is that the data on stock theft is misleading and a function of under-reporting. Such caution should inform the general approach and analysis of crime numbers.



## Crime and Security

Crimes such as drug dealing and possession, have seen sharp variances in the number of incidents over twenty years. In many of such cases, an increase in reported incidents may be a positive indicator as it suggests more effective police action. This would certainly be the case for a crime category such as drunk driving. Again, caution needs to be taken in how the numbers are analysed and what increases and declines therefore mean.

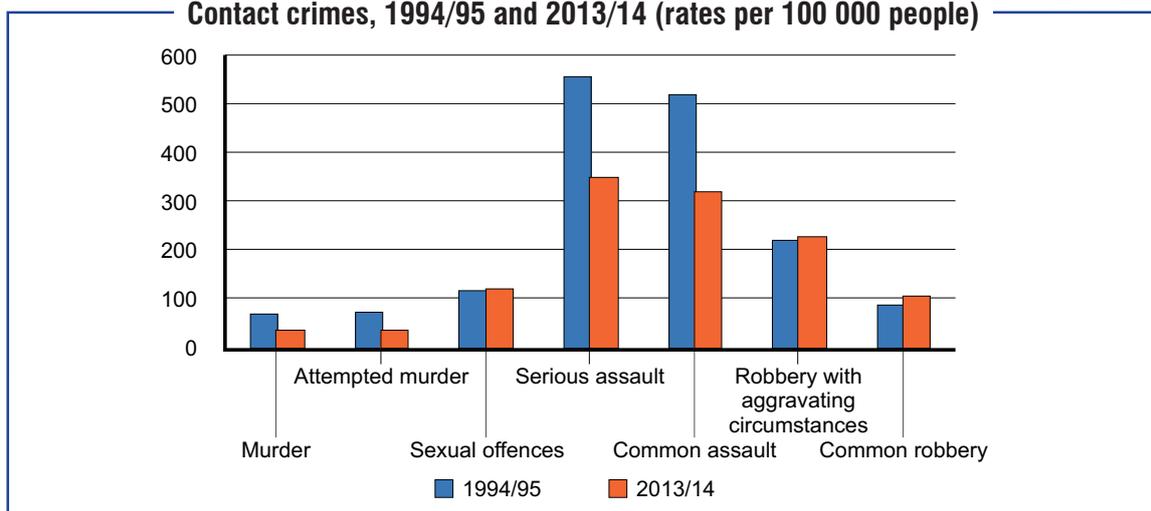
**Crimes heavily dependent on police action for detection, 1994/95 and 2013/14 (actual numbers)**



## Major crimes — rates

Crime rates measure how many incidents of a particular crime occur for every 100 000 people in the country. In other words, rates allow comparisons over time because they are adjusted for population growth.

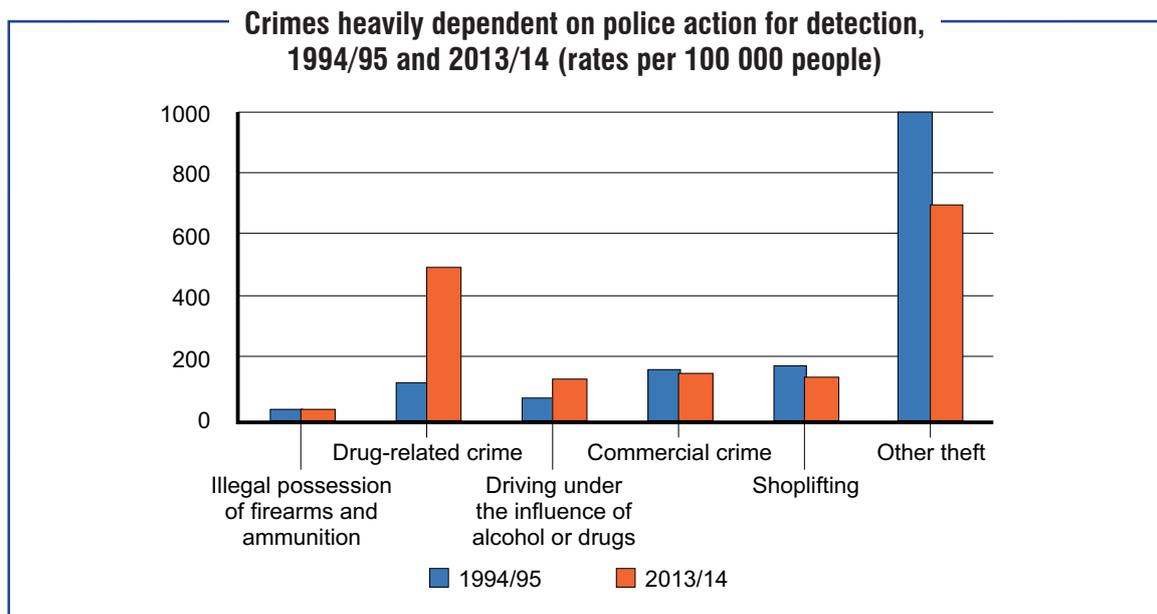
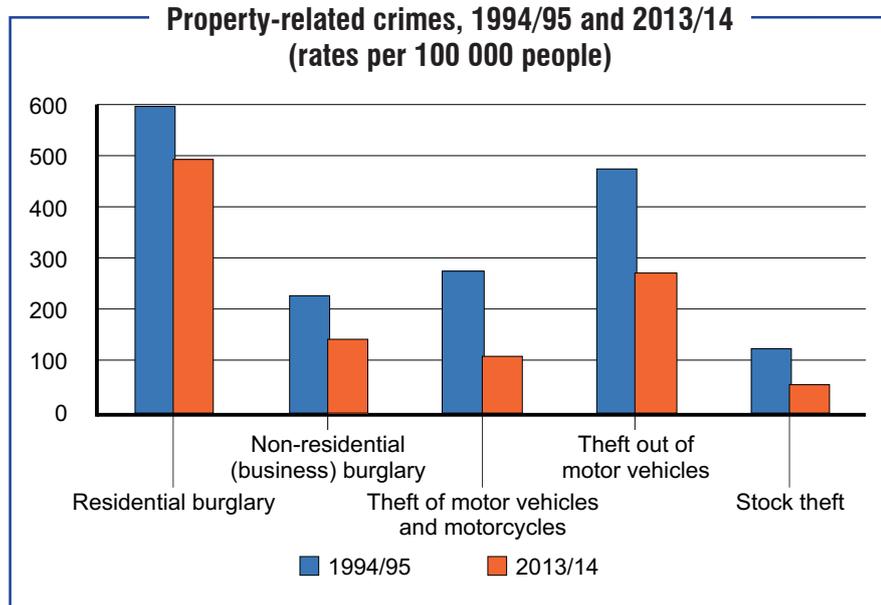
**Contact crimes, 1994/95 and 2013/14 (rates per 100 000 people)**



The graphic above shows steep declines in murder and attempted murder rates. It seems these declines are real and the data is sound. If murder is the benchmark of safety and security, then South Africa has become a much safer society over twenty years. The same is true for the two categories of assault rates. However, robbery rates have increased.

## Crime and Security

Property-related crime rates have all fallen sharply. Why would this happen while robbery rates increase? The reason is twofold: The first is under-reporting of such crimes as popular confidence in the police declines. The second is that as security measures lead to increasingly fortified homes and businesses, criminals become more violent to gain access to such targets.



Crimes heavily dependent on police action for detection show a mixed picture. Sharp increases in such crime rates can reflect improved police action.

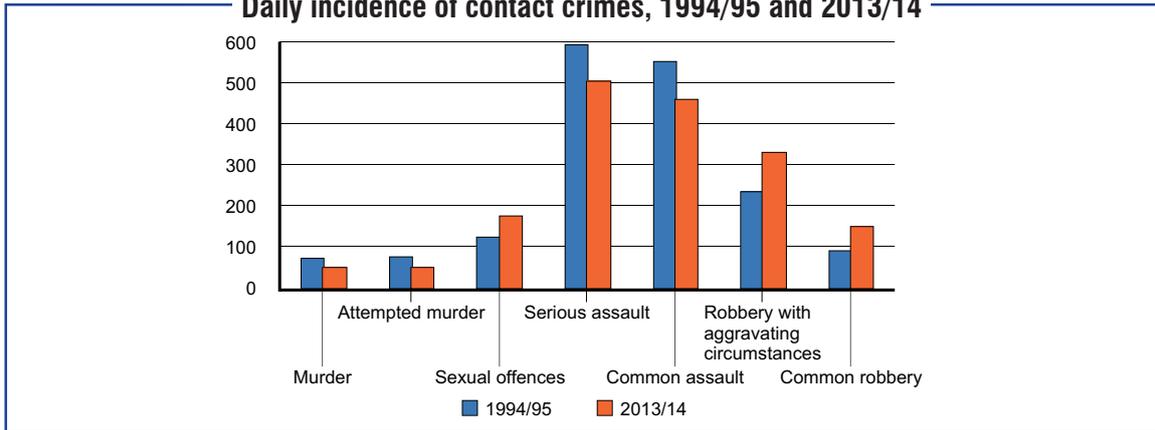
# Crime and Security

## Daily crimes — numbers

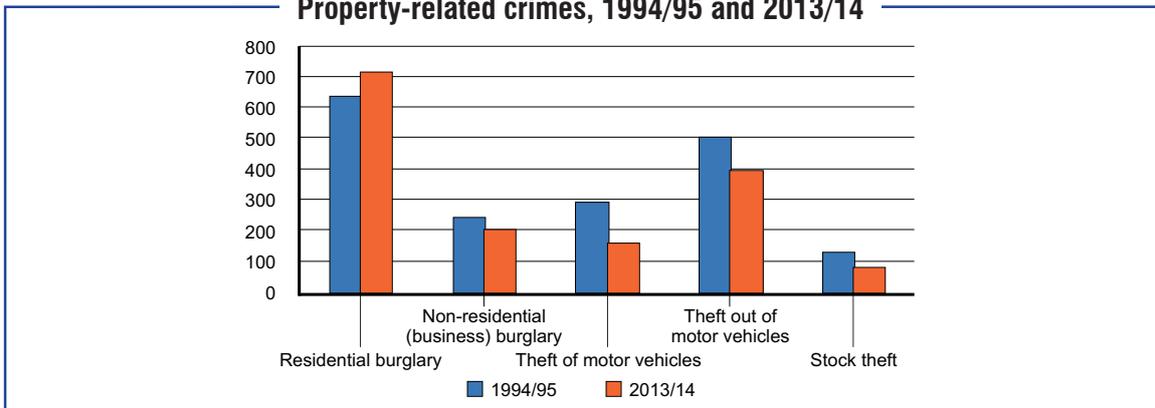
When analysing the number of daily occurrences of crime, the picture that emerges is that of a society under siege.

The data in the three graphics that follow shows that well over 1 500 contact-related and over 2 000 property-related crimes are committed every day (when the category 'other theft' is included). These contact crimes include over 300 armed robberies a day — or more than ten every hour.

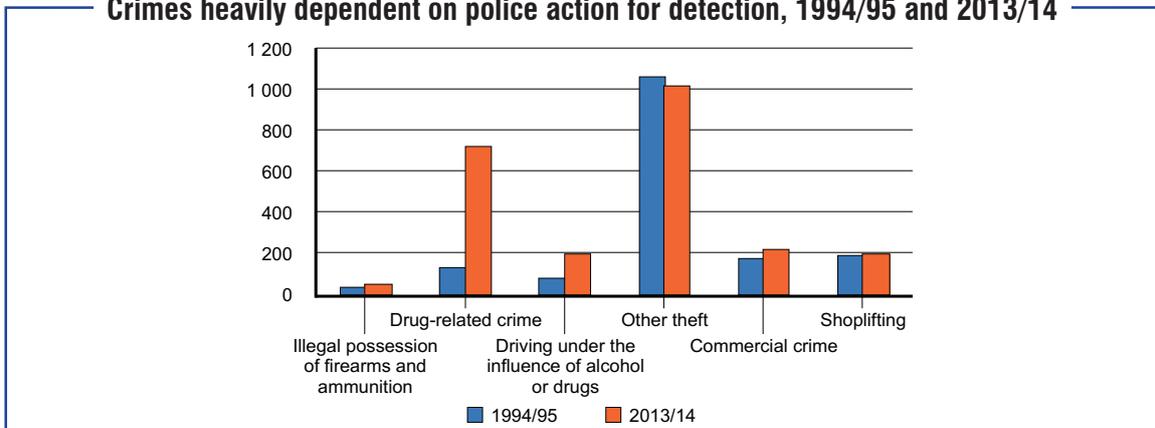
**Daily incidence of contact crimes, 1994/95 and 2013/14**



**Property-related crimes, 1994/95 and 2013/14**



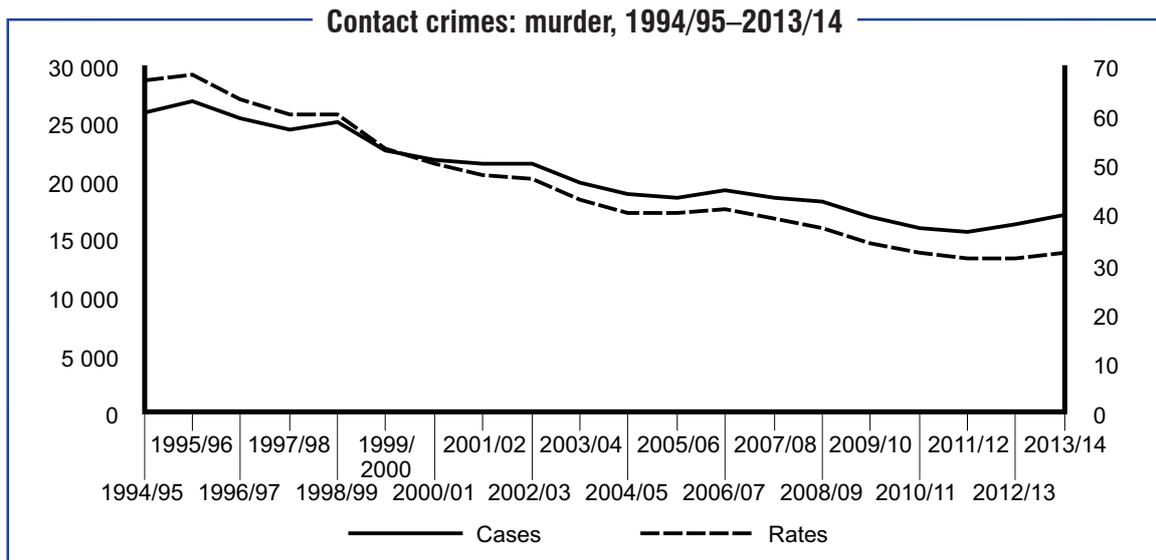
**Crimes heavily dependent on police action for detection, 1994/95 and 2013/14**



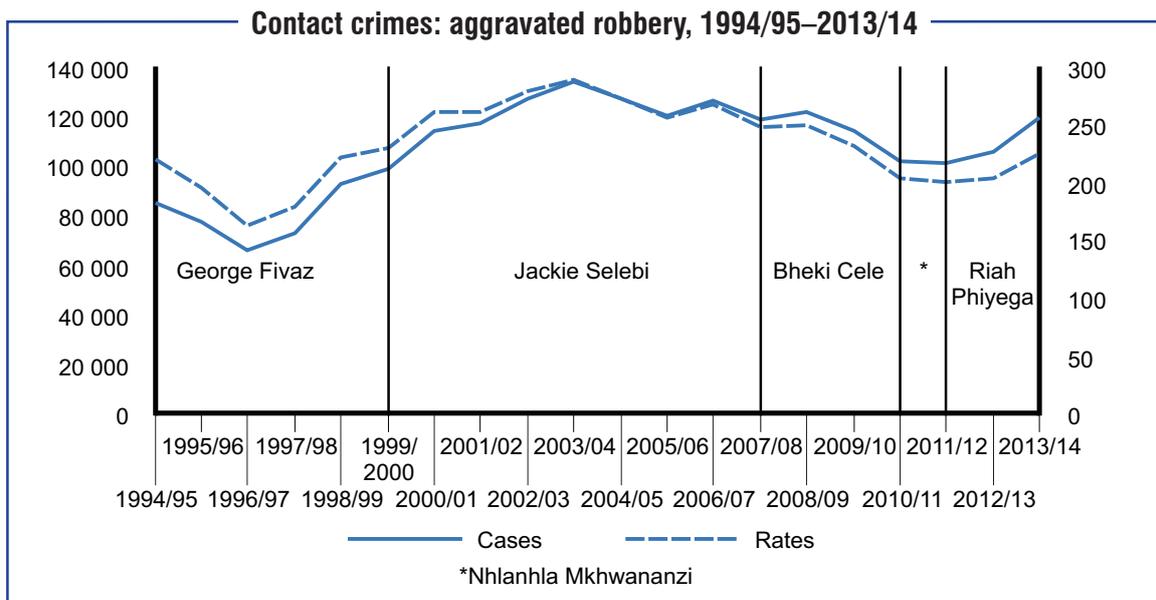
# Crime and Security

## Twenty-year trends

When twenty-year trends are analysed, the pattern relating to murder is positive and has seen steep and steady long-term declines in both absolute numbers and rates. However, over the past two years, that decline has reversed and an increase is again noted.



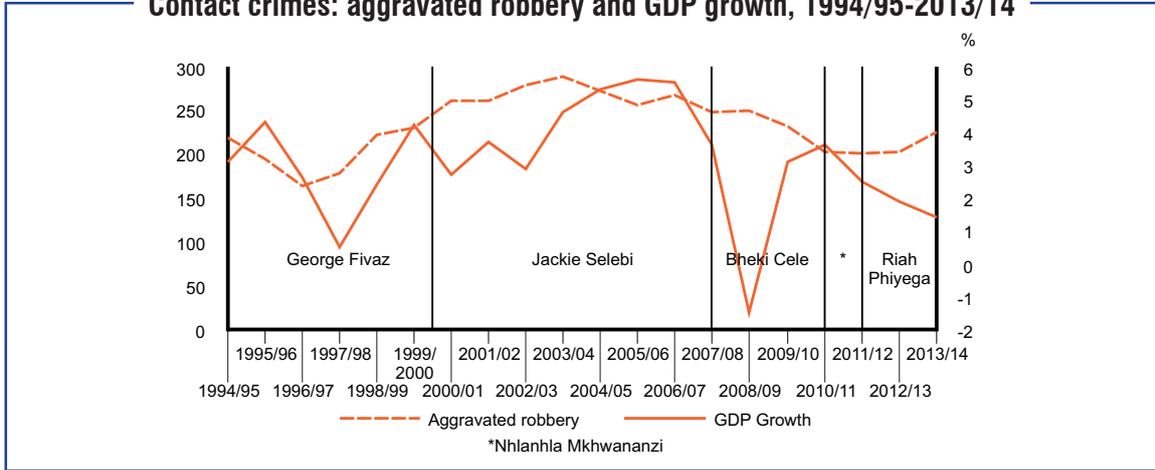
The pattern of armed robbery is far from positive. Twenty-year trends for both numbers and rates of such crimes are superimposed over the eras of South Africa's post-1994 police commissioners. George Fivaz's time showed a sharp increase in armed robberies. The era of Jackie Selebi also showed sharp increases which later flattened out. That of Bheki Cele was different and highly successful, recording sharp declines in such crimes. These accomplishments have been reversed under the current commissioner, Riah Phiyega, whose tenure has coincided with alarming increases.



# Crime and Security

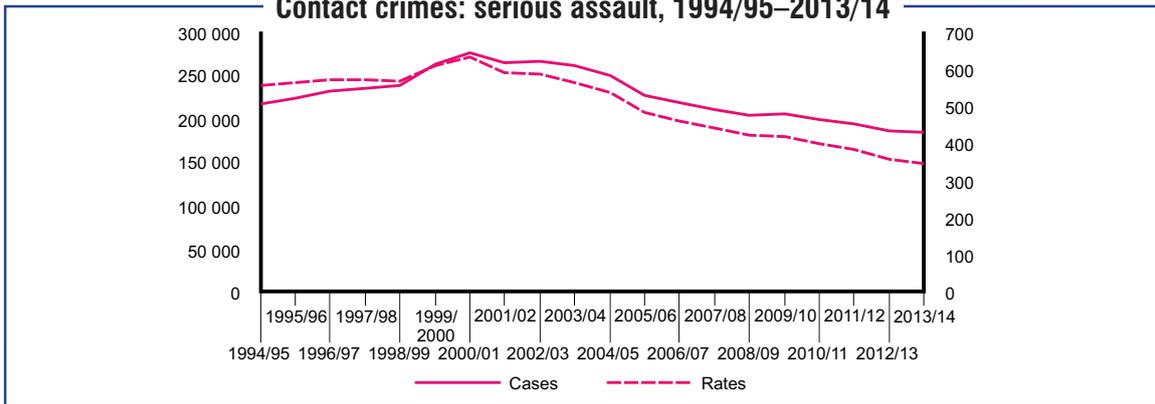
When the same robbery data is superimposed over GDP growth rates, no real relationship emerges. Rather, it is the choice of police commissioners that seems to have a definitive impact on robberies. General Cele's era even coincided with the global financial crisis, yet he managed to drive robbery levels down.

**Contact crimes: aggravated robbery and GDP growth, 1994/95-2013/14**



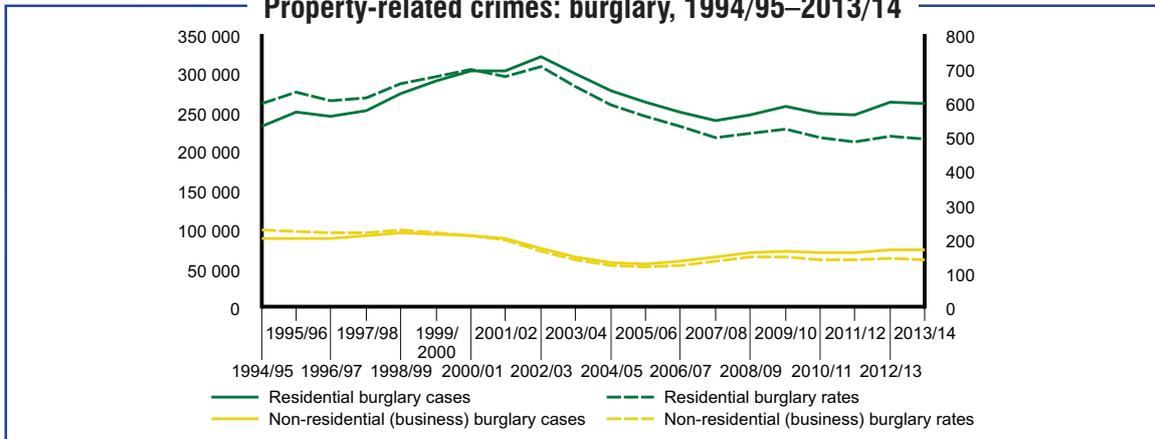
Serious assault numbers peaked around the year 2001 and have fallen steadily since.

**Contact crimes: serious assault, 1994/95-2013/14**



Burglary numbers and rates peaked into the period of around 2002 and subsequently declined before flattening out over recent years.

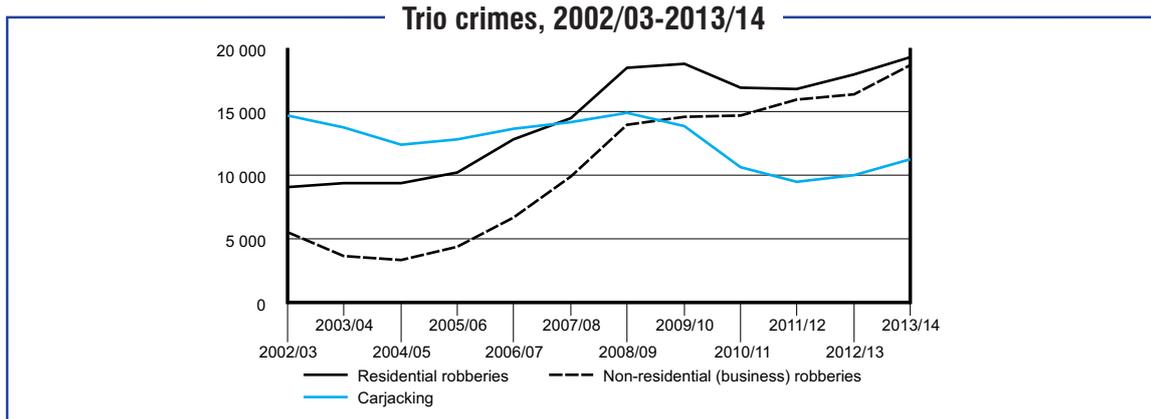
**Property-related crimes: burglary, 1994/95-2013/14**



# Crime and Security

## Trio crimes

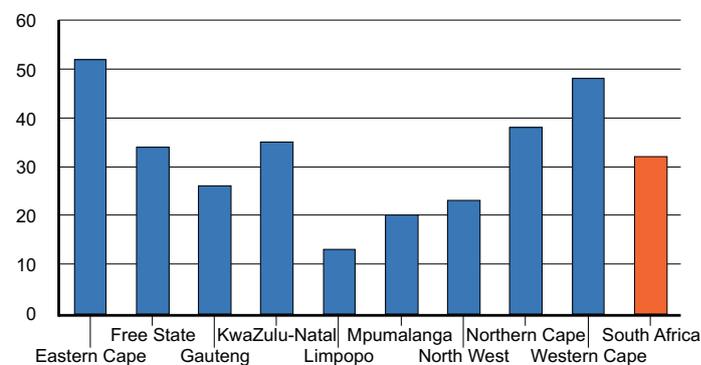
Trio crimes include armed house and business robberies, and car hijackings. After 2002, while many other crimes were falling, these escalated sharply into the period 2008-09 and then flattened out, albeit at high levels. This may partly be because of improved household, motor vehicle, and business security measures which saw criminals turn to armed assaults. This is without doubt the most concerning post-1994 crime trend and will require extraordinarily effective policing methods to overcome.



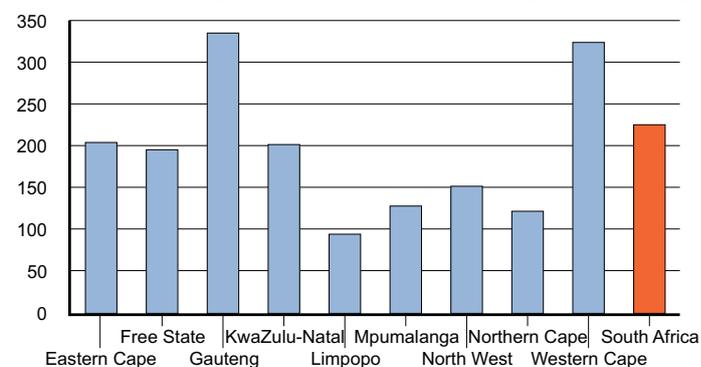
## Provincial trends

Where one lives in South Africa has a significant effect on personal safety. In many respects, levels of safety in a particular province are inversely related to the prosperity of that area. As a rough rule, poorer provinces are safer and wealthier provinces more dangerous. This can be seen most clearly on the two graphics alongside, which show a provincial breakdown of murder and armed robbery. Gauteng and the Western Cape have significantly higher rates of such crimes than poorer provinces.

**Murder by province, 2013/14 (rates per 100 000 people)**



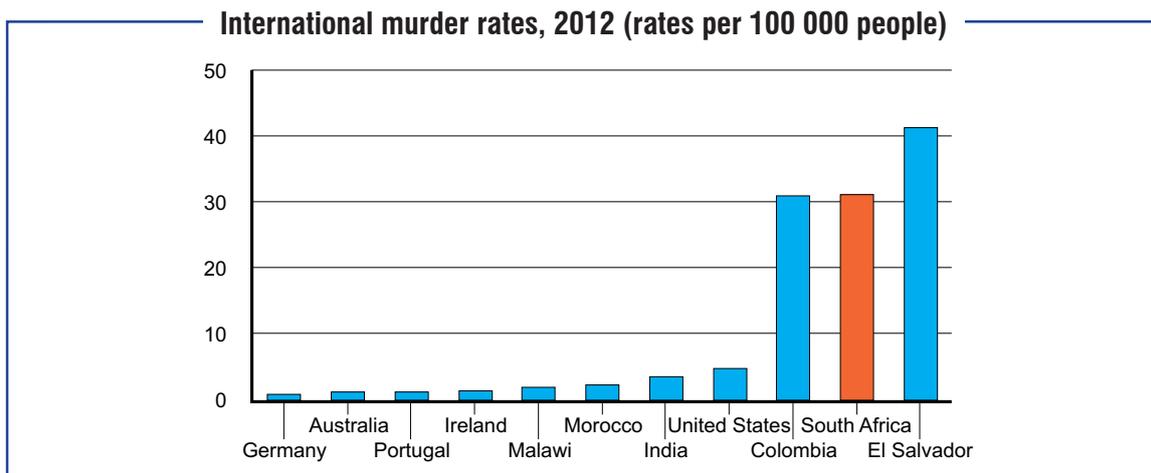
**Aggravated robbery by province, 2013/14 (rates per 100 000 people)**



## Crime and Security

### International comparisons

Below is a breakdown of international murder rate comparisons. Most Western democracies have murder rates of around 1 incident per 100 000 people each year. Major emerging markets, such as India, tend to sit at levels of on or around 5/100 000. Countries in states of low-intensity civil war such as Colombia and El Salvador are around 30 to 40/100 000. Alarmingly, and despite the decline of the past twenty years, South Africa's murder rate is in the last grouping. The burden of violence our society suffers therefore equates on some measures to countries experiencing civil insurrections.



### Private security

Society has resorted to dealing with the criminal onslaught by turning more to private solutions. In poorer communities, anecdotal evidence points to vigilantism, although the levels have not been ascertained. In wealthier communities, the private sector has been drafted in to do what the police cannot. An example is the extraordinary picture of the number of private security officers compared to police officers over the past twenty years. Their respective numbers were similar in 1997 but by 2014, there were more than three times the number of private officers to police officers. In addition, the police have shed skills to the private sector but unfortunately, government policy is now determined to undermine private security provision. A more enlightened approach would be to treat the latter as an equal partner in the fight against crime.

