

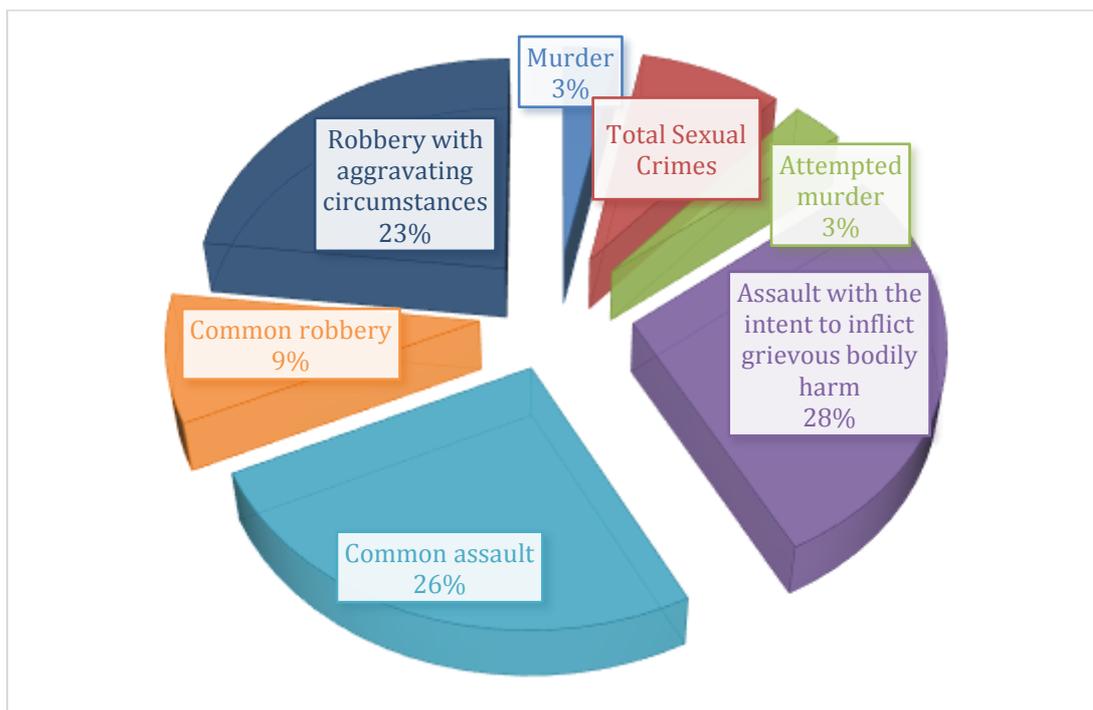
Violent crime statistics

1 April 2016 – 30 March 2017

The South African Police Service (SAPS) released the crime statistics for the period 1 April 2016 to 30 March 2017. Therefore, these crime statistics cannot tell us what the situation is right now, nor what the situation may have been since April 2017. Nevertheless, they do help us to better understand long-term trends in key categories.

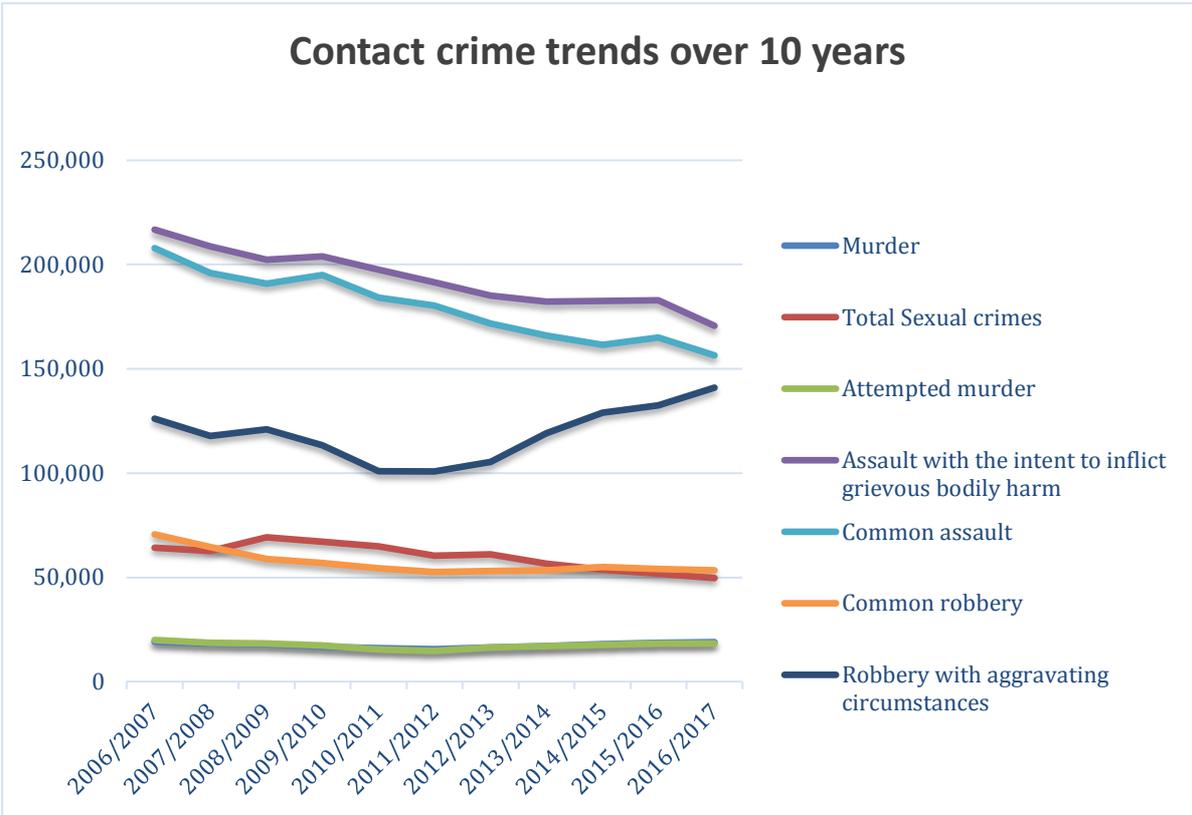
Violent or contact crime involves harm or the threat of harm against a person. These crimes are recorded within the following categories: murder, attempted murder, common and serious assault; sexual offences and common and aggravated robbery.

Common assault or assault with the intention to inflict grievous bodily harm (Assault GBH) make up more than half of all violent crime reported to the police. One third are as a result of robbery, while sexual offences make up eight percent and murder and attempted murder three percent each.



Source: 2016/17 SAPS statistics

With the exception of aggravated robbery, murder and attempted murder, the other four categories of violent crimes reported to the police decreased nationally over the past financial year. The 10-year trend is contained in the graph below.



Source: 2006/07 to 2016/17 SAPS statistics

Murder

The most reliable violent crime statistic is that of murder. The 2015/16 Victims of Crime Survey (VoCS) puts the murder reporting rate at 95%.¹ Murder is internationally the most reliable crime statistic as most cases are recorded by the police.

In the past financial year 343 more murders were recorded by the SAPS than the previous year, bringing the total number of murders for 2016/17 to 19 016. This 1.8% increase in one year represents a 22.3% increase in 5 years. Using the population figures from the SAPS, this increase means a 13.3% increase in the murder rate (the number of murders per hundred thousand of the population) over the past five years. The murder rate of 34.1 is still five and a half times the international average of 6.2 homicides per 100 000 population.²

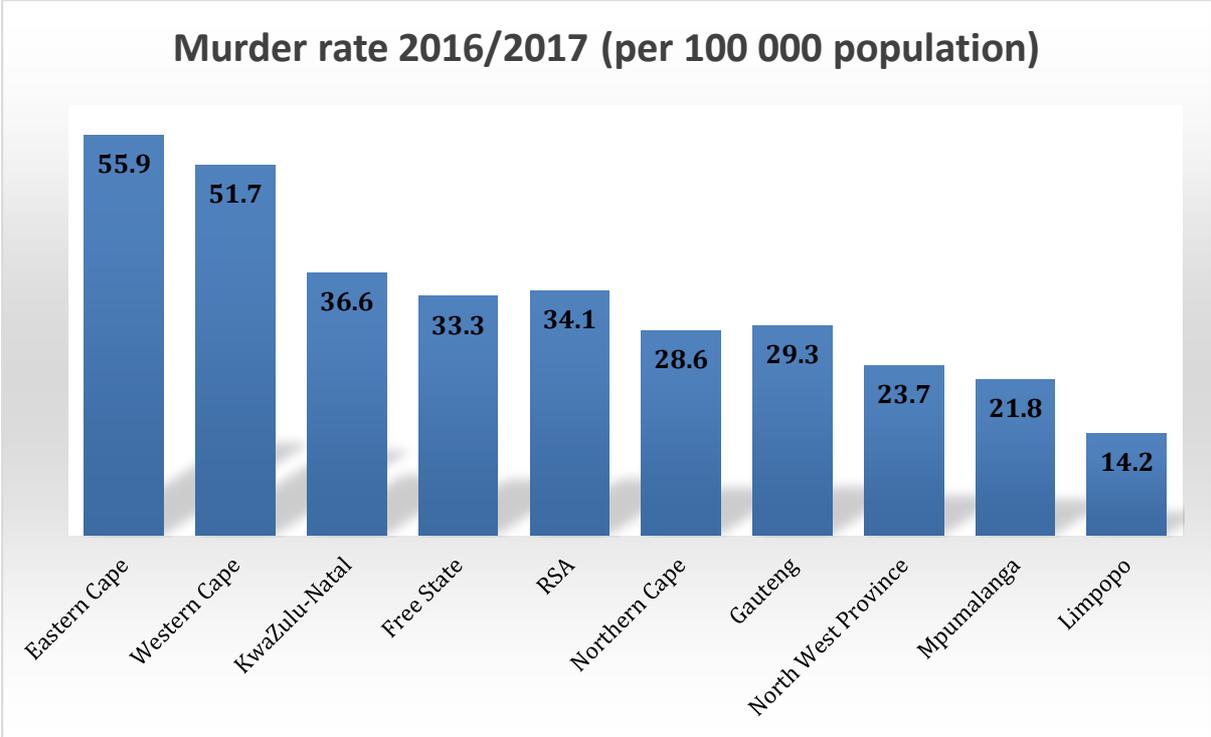
In the 2016/17 financial year, more than 52 people were killed in South Africa each day on average. Of this number 43 were men, seven were women and two were children.³

¹ Statistics South Africa (2017), Victims of Crime Survey 2015/16: Statistical release P0341. Pretoria. 69. The 2016/2017 VoCS release provides reporting rates for only three crimes namely 51,4% for house burglaries, 56,7% for house robberies, and 94,0% of theft of vehicles. Statistics South Africa (2017), Victims of Crime Survey 2016/17: Statistical release P0341. Pretoria. 14-20.

² UNODC (2014), Global Study on Homicide 2013. Geneva, 21.

³ Using SAPS figures for 2015/16. SAPS (2016). Annual Report 2016/17. Pretoria. 191.

The graph below, shows the murder rate for each of the nine provinces. As can be seen, some provinces have much higher murder rates than others. People are therefore more than twice as likely to fall victim to murder in the Eastern and Western Cape than they are in Mpumalanga and more than three times as likely than people living in Limpopo.



Source: ISS Calculations based on 2016/17 SAPS statistics and SAPS population estimates

The fifth consecutive increase in the number of murders was the result of increases in four of the nine provinces. The number of murders as well as the murder rate (per 100 000 population) increased in Mpumalanga, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The Eastern Cape and Western Cape still have a murder rate well over the national average and eight times more than the international average.

While the murder statistics tell us where murders are increasing or decreasing, they don't tell us anything about the factors that cause murder to occur. We know from research into murder, that most assaults, murders and rapes occur between people who know each other. Research into the causes of violence highlight how the roots of this behaviour begins in the home and is strongly linked to factors such as inconsistent care giving, exposure to violence in the home and community, poor role models, high levels of inequality, as well as alcohol and drug abuse. Violence against women or child abuse are key factors that perpetrate cycles of violence.

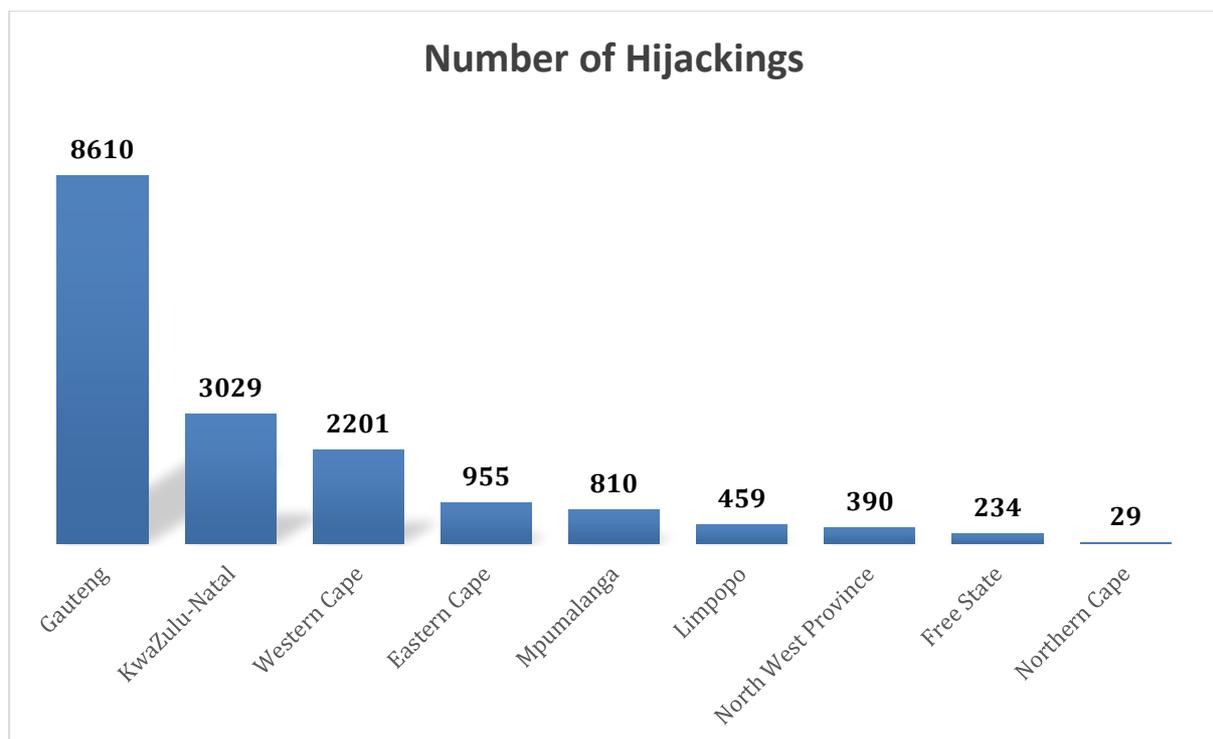
It is for these reasons, that the police can do very little about most murders, assaults and sexual violence. If South Africa is to ensure long-term and sustainable reductions in murder, then much more must be done to reduce the risk factors for violence. This means that rather than relying on the police alone to address the murder rate, greater attention and funding must be given to programmes that show evidence of reducing violent behaviour for example by supporting parents, offering counselling to those affected by violence, and ensuring that basic services such as education, health, and housing are delivered effectively and efficiently.

Aggravated Robbery

Aggravated robberies occur when perpetrators, typically armed with a weapon such as a firearm or a knife, threaten or use violence in order to steal belongings. This can happen in public places against pedestrians walking to work or the shops (i.e. street robbery), in order to steal a motor-vehicle (i.e. hijacking), by invading a home in order to steal from the residents (i.e. house robbery), attacking people in their places of work (i.e. business robbery). More organised forms of aggravated robbery include truck hijackings, bank robberies or Cash-in-transit-Heists.

Compared to the previous year, aggravated robbery increased overall by 6.4% to 140 956 cases recorded by the police. This means that overall, there were 8 429 more aggravated robberies recorded by the police last year than the previous year. This means that there were 40 191 more robberies, an average of 110 more each day than was the case in 2011/12. This is almost a 40% increase over the past five years.

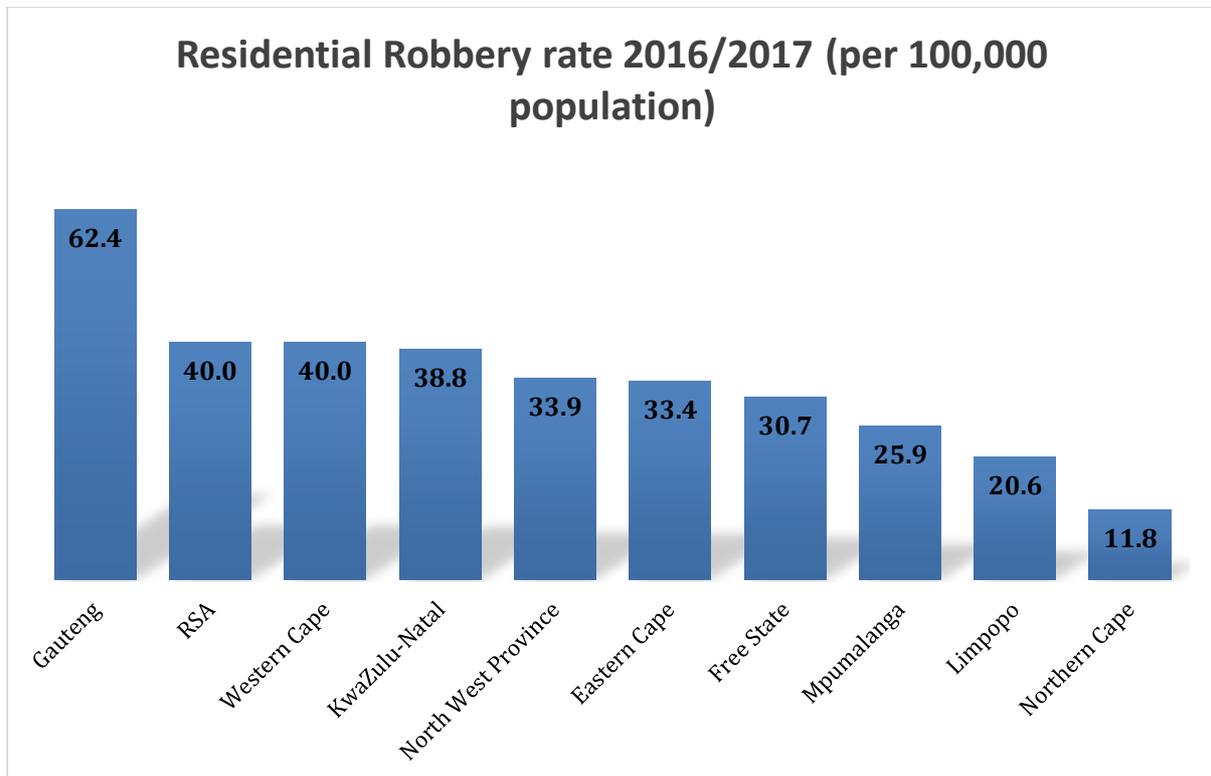
Most sub-categories of robberies increased, with hijackings by 14.5%, house robberies by 7.3% and business robberies by 5.0%. These three crimes referred to collectively by the police as 'Trio Crimes' which as a total increased by 8.4%.



Source: 2016/17 SAPS statistics

The increase in hijackings mean that the number of incidents increased by 77.5% in five years. Half of all hijackings take place in Gauteng where 24 cars are forcibly taken from their drivers every day on average.

An average of 61 house robberies and 57 business robberies are reported to the police each day on average. House and business robberies have increased in all provinces except for the Western Cape and Limpopo.



Source: ISS Calculations based on 2016/17 SAPS statistics and SAPS population estimates

On average, 24 houses are reported as experiencing a robbery in Gauteng every day on average. House robberies are particularly traumatic for victims as they typically take place in people's homes while family members are present. While most house and business robberies take place in urban settings, people in rural areas also fall victim with farm attacks being a key source of concern.

More than half of all reported aggravated robberies are street robberies with 79 878 recorded by the SAPS. Every day on average 219 cases of street robbery were reported to the SAPS. Street robberies increased by around 5.0% compared to the previous year and by 38.6% over five years.

Street robbery primarily affects the poor and typically occurs as people travel to and from work, school or shops. According to the 2017 VoCS, the crimes feared most by households include house robbery (44.9%), street robbery (41.6%), murder (35.7%), sexual assault (24.8%) and assault (21.1%), as well as business robbery (15.2%).⁴

Effective policing can reduce robbery and other organised crime. This requires:

- Collecting and effectively using crime intelligence
- An increase in the number of skilled and trained detectives
- Establishing specialised robbery investigating units
- Improving forensic support to detectives investigating robberies
- Strategically targeted patrols and roadblocks
- Closer cooperation between investigators and prosecutors on robbery cases to ensure convictions of perpetrators
- An increased focus on dismantling the groups and networks that purchase, store, process and sell goods stolen in robberies

⁴ Statistics South Africa (2017), Victims of Crime Survey 2016/17: Statistical release P0341. Pretoria. 56.

That robberies have increased is the clearest indicator that the police are not using their vast resources effectively. The SAPS have been able to reduce robbery in the past but due to what the National Development Plan calls a 'serial crises of top management', policing has generally deteriorated. Due to poor appointments by the President, the SAPS has had five people occupy the post of SAPS National Commissioner over the past eight years. Until only the best women or men are appointed to the senior echelons of the SAPS and there ceases to be inappropriate political interference in the police, improvements in policing are unlikely and public safety will continue to deteriorate.

Assault and sexual offences

Both these crime categories have decreased substantially over the past decade. However, the statistics for these kinds of crime are highly unreliable because most instances of this crime are not reported to the police. According to the 2015/2016 National Victims of Crime Survey (VoCS), only 49% of assaults and 36% of sexual offences are reported to the police.⁵ These figures are likely to be higher than this because the survey conducted in households and we know that many of these crimes happen in the home.

The decrease in these crime categories may very well be largely due to a reduction in the numbers of victims reporting cases to the police, rather than a real decrease in these crime types. This is supported by the VoCS which found that between 2013/14 and 2015/16, reporting rates for sexual offences declined by 32% and assault by 18%.⁶

It is important to understand why reporting rates may be dropping for these crimes. The VoCS found that there were various reasons why victims of assault did not report the matter to the police. For example, some decided to solve the matter themselves while some felt that the police would not do anything about their case. Reporting rates are likely to increase if there were to be considerable improvements in the service culture at police stations. For example, if police officers treated all rape and assault victims professionally and with regard to their dignity, it is likely that the police statistics in these categories would increase substantially. Unfortunately, too often people reporting cases to the police are treated badly or with a lack in interest which reduces public confidence in the police and therefore reporting rates decline.

Unfortunately, as the government and the SAPS use crime statistics as a measure of police performance, there are no incentives to improve reporting rates. If assault or sexual offences statistics would increase, then people and the government would assume the police are doing a bad job. Most people don't know that public trust in the police improved, then the reporting rates for these types of crimes would almost certainly increase. Therefore, there is a need to consider other ways of measuring police performance with regards to the crime categories for sexual offences and assault. For example, by assessing the levels of satisfaction by victims with the service they received by with the police when they reported their cases at local police stations.

⁵ Statistics South Africa (2017), Victims of Crime Survey 2015/16: Statistical release P0341. Pretoria. 69. The 2016/2017 VoCS release provides reporting rates for only three crimes namely 51,4% for house burglaries, 56,7% for house robberies, and 94,0% of theft of vehicles. Statistics South Africa (2017), Victims of Crime Survey 2016/17: Statistical release P0341. Pretoria. 14-20.

⁶Ibid.

Usefulness of Crime Statistics

The police crime statistics show us how reported crime levels increase or decrease over time. This is important because it can tell us whether efforts to reduce certain types of crime have been successful or not in the previous financial year.

For crime statistics to be more useful than they are now, they need to be released for each police precinct at least once per quarter. This would enable the local police to use the statistics to encourage communities to respond to emerging crime risks such as an increase in house or business robberies. Communities could then develop specific crime prevention interventions to respond to the problem. After three months, communities would be able to use the crime statistics to determine whether their initiatives had been successful or not and make adjustments if necessary.

Fortunately, the Cabinet took a decision in 2016 that the crime statistics would be released every quarter. Unfortunately, however, this decision has yet to be implemented properly as the quarterly crime statistics were not released at the beginning of each quarter, but at irregular intervals. Furthermore, the police precinct level statistics are not released per quarter so communities are still not able to access this information for crime prevention purposes. Hopefully, the Ministry of Police will give attention to this in the near future.

There is some good news as currently, the SAPS are working with Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) to enhance the quality and integrity of the statistics. Hopefully this process will result in better quality crime data which will result in improved responses to crime in South Africa.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Institute for Security Studies.

For more information including detailed crime maps for all policing precincts in South Africa visit the Crime and Justice Information and Analysis Hub: www.issafrica.org/crimehub.

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