



POLICY BRIEF

Corruption in SA municipalities: a form of organised crime?

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The more organised, normalised and profitable corruption becomes in local government across South Africa, the less incentive there will be for good governance. This has serious implications for service delivery, infrastructure maintenance and development, and economic growth. This policy brief explores whether and to what degree corruption in South African municipalities is organised and whether this understanding might help disrupt it.

Key findings

- ▶ Reports of corruption from Madibeng Local Municipality, OR Tambo District Municipality and the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality provide examples of patterns that are likely replicated to some degree in other municipalities.
- ▶ Patterns involve gaining undue influence within government structures through irregular appointments, nepotism and patronage; using this influence to manipulate and exploit legitimate systems for gain; and protecting illicit activities by various means, including administrative and violent methods.
- ▶ The organised nature of this corruption has serious implications, disrupting the provision of essential services and eroding public trust. This leads to public protests and disengagement from participatory democratic processes.
- ▶ The prevalent and orchestrated nature of corruption within South Africa's municipalities can be seen as a type of organised crime – it becomes both the illegal activity itself and the facilitator of illegal activity.
- ▶ The more organised corruption is, the more it erodes governance and enables criminal enterprises to expand their reach into legitimate systems.
- ▶ The current concepts of corruption, state capture and organised crime, along with the links made between them, do not fully illustrate the illicit and organised activities reported at local government level in South Africa. Further analysis is therefore needed.

Recommendations

Civil society:

- ▶ Conduct more nuanced, in-depth research on the organised dimensions of corruption at the local government level to guide future investigation and intervention
- ▶ Explore who the corrupt actors are, the extent of their involvement and what roles they play in organising corrupt networks and processes
- ▶ Map the corrupt relationships and networks to determine how the actors are connected and what structures or hierarchies exist within the networks
- ▶ Examine the processes involved in the organisation and operation of corruption
- ▶ Assess the benefits that each actor gains by their involvement, and how these benefits are accrued, distributed, concealed and used

Government:

- ▶ Address accountability gaps by establishing what administrative and legal measures are necessary to ensure accountability – not only for lower-level actors but for those orchestrating the corruption

Multiple stakeholders:

- ▶ Determine what prevention, administrative, legal and law enforcement mechanisms are needed to disrupt organised networks and address systemic vulnerabilities
- ▶ Design evidence-based interventions based on these mechanisms

Introduction

Local government in South Africa is responsible for driving local economic growth, providing infrastructure and delivering essential services. Yet, municipalities are increasingly under the spotlight for incapacitating levels of corruption.

Public sector officials, private sector actors and criminals have often normalised collusion in conducting the ‘business’ of government. Reports by the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA), the Special Investigating Unit (SIU), journalists and anti-corruption organisations reveal misconduct motivated by personal gain and demonstrating varying degrees of coordination.

The apparent structuring of these illicit corrupt activities prompted an enquiry into whether and how they intersect with organised crime in the municipal context. This policy brief examines the extent to which corruption in South Africa’s municipalities is organised and how understanding this organisation might inform stronger prevention and enforcement measures.

Methodology

A literature review of the intersections between organised crime and corruption was summarised using Notebook LM, an artificial intelligence large language model. From this, a draft framework was developed to understand how these connections play out in local government.

To investigate whether the framework was plausible, a case study was selected from each of the three local government levels in South Africa: a local municipality (Madibeng),¹ a district municipality (OR Tambo)² and a metropolitan municipality (the City of Johannesburg).³ The case studies were chosen by triangulating information from the AGSA, SIU and parliamentary committee reports and the Governance Performance Index (GPI) 2024 for South Africa, news articles and investigations.⁴

In-depth research was conducted to map corruption incidents across the three municipalities over a 10 to 15-year timeframe,⁵ and then summarised by Notebook LM. The analysis of the mapping exercise explored trends and patterns and tested them against the draft framework.

This study serves the public interest and draws on existing sources in the public domain, including

official government reports, investigative findings and news coverage. These sources report allegations of corruption, maladministration and other misconduct against individuals who have not been found responsible in criminal or administrative proceedings, and such behaviour is presented here as ‘alleged’ or ‘reported’.

Key concepts: corruption, state capture and organised crime

‘Corruption’ is most broadly defined as a range of behaviours involving the misuse of entrusted power for private gain.⁶ At its most systemic, corruption is referred to as state capture, ‘whereby narrow interest groups take control of the institutions and processes through which public policy is made, directing public policy away from the public interest and instead shaping it to serve their own interests.’⁷

Organised crime is defined here as ‘illegal activities conducted by groups or networks acting in a coordinated way to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial, material or political benefit.’⁸ By its nature, it refers to ‘a broad spectrum of ever-changing activities and circumstances,’⁹ which has specific relevance to this exercise.

When corruption exhibits features of an illegal enterprise, it may be viewed as a form of organised crime

These definitions sometimes overlap because they describe similar types of conduct. Because these types of conduct evolve over time, it may be necessary for the concepts and definitions to evolve too.

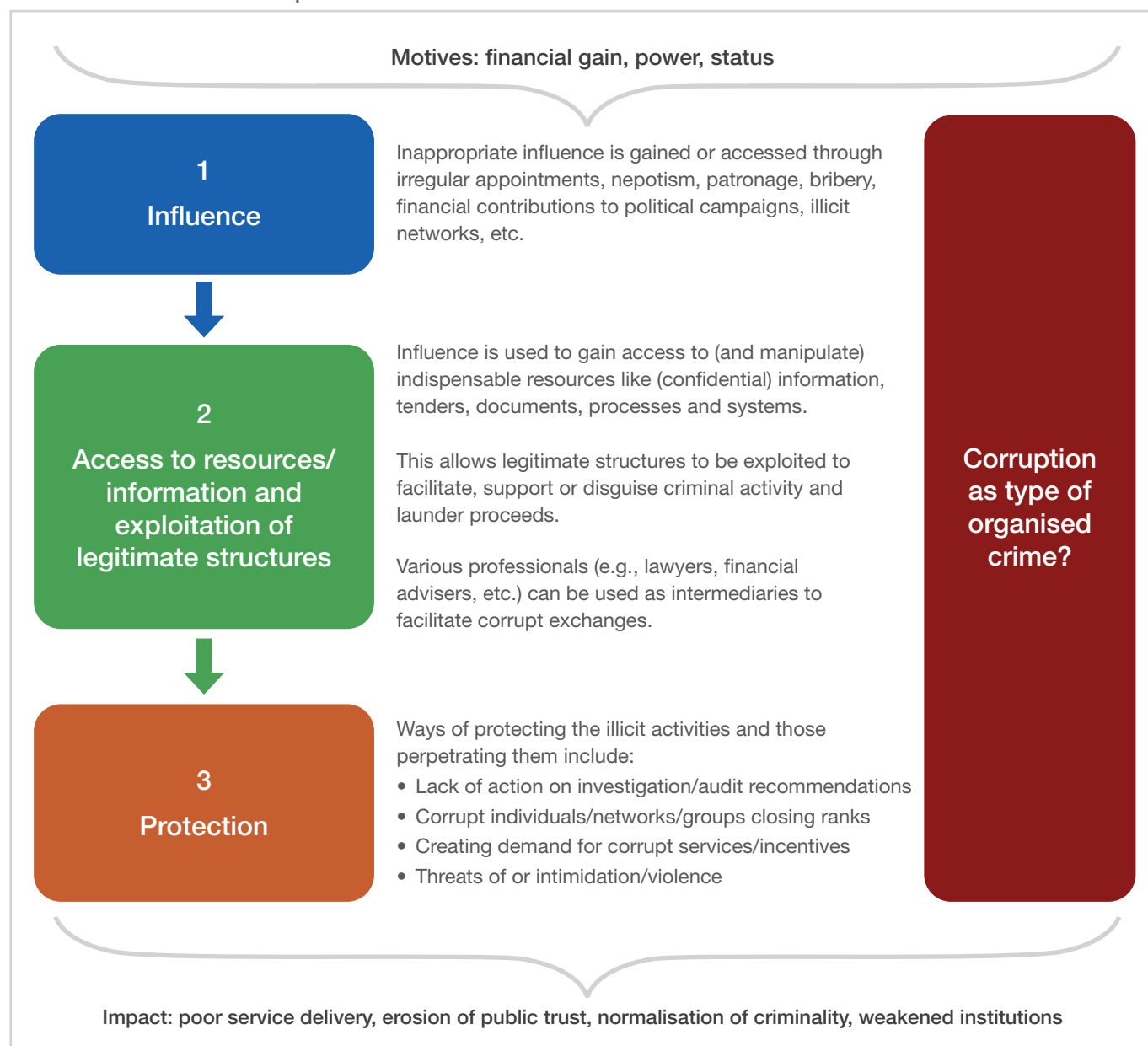
In the literature, corruption has traditionally been seen as one means of facilitating organised crime.¹⁰ But this view might be outdated. When corruption becomes organised to the point of exhibiting features of an illegal enterprise, it may itself be viewed as a form of organised crime – it is both the illegal activity and its facilitator. This is not ‘organised crime’ in the usual sense of mafia-style syndicates trafficking drugs, arms and people, but it is both organised and criminal, unfolding within government, business and in the often-hidden space between.

Jancsics explains that, given the risks and costs of corruption, ‘it is logical for the involved parties to organise their activity [to] enhance predictability and reduce the likelihood of detection and punishment.’¹¹ Corruption can be organised in multiple, overlapping ways, ‘as an entity, a process, and a degree that takes place within a formal hierarchy but also exceeds its boundaries.’¹² This organisation exists on a spectrum, from fluid and temporary to systematic and entrenched, shifting between levels of organisation and between established and emerging groups. It can also range

from one-off exchanges for immediate gain, to sustained reciprocity based on social or familial ties, coordinated schemes among employees or political elites capturing institutions for personal benefit.¹³

The processes of corruption can also be organised, as represented by the framework in Chart 1. Securing influence facilitates access to resources and information, which allows corrupt actors to exploit legitimate structures. These illegal activities are usually protected, either by complicity or threats and violence.

Chart 1: Processes of corruption



Source: Compiled by the author

Findings

Municipalities are the closest sphere of government to South African citizens, with a direct impact on their daily lives. With their financial management governed by the Municipal Finance Management Act,¹⁴ enforcement mechanisms rely heavily on the integrity of local governance structures. According to the AGSA, municipalities are 'in a dire state,' as the 'envisioned culture of performance, accountability, transparency and institutional integrity' is not being realised because 'the role players are not effective in doing what the legislation requires of them.'¹⁵

Of the three municipalities assessed here:

- Madibeng Local Municipality (hereafter Madibeng) in the North West is ranked 19 out of 19 secondary city local municipalities by the GPI 2024.¹⁶ It has an entrenched history of financial irregularities and mismanagement, set within a context of political instability.¹⁷
- OR Tambo District Municipality (hereafter ORTDM) in the Eastern Cape is ranked 16 out of 21 district municipalities with water service responsibilities by the GPI 2024.¹⁸ It has exhibited long-standing vulnerabilities, particularly concerning critical water infrastructure projects.¹⁹ In 2025, the AGSA flagged ORTDM for nearly R1 billion in unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure.²⁰
- The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (hereafter CoJ) in Gauteng is ranked fifth of eight metropolitan municipalities by the GPI 2024.²¹ In the 2023–2024 financial year, the CoJ lost over R12 billion in unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure.²² Plagued by political instability and shifting coalitions over the last decade, four of the last 10 mayors have faced corruption scandals,²³ while 11 of the city's 13 utilities and agencies have accumulated years of reported corruption.

Chart 2: Municipality audit outcomes, 2020/21–2023/24

	Unqualified with no findings (clean)	Unqualified with findings	Qualified with findings	Adverse with findings	Disclaimed with findings	Outstanding audits	
2020-21	41	100	83	4	28	1	257
Last year of previous administration							
2022-23	34	110	91	6	15	1	257
2023-24	41	99	90	6	11	10	257
	16%	39%	35%	2%	4%	4%	
2023-24	19%	45%	32%	<1%	1%	3%	
Percentage of estimated expenditure budget for municipalities: R561,95 billion							
Movement from previous year 31 ▲ 25 ▼ Movement from 2020-21 59 ▲ 40 ▼							

Source: AGSA, Consolidated general report on local government audit outcomes 2023–2024

Although these municipalities were selected as case studies, the AGSA's pronouncements and recent reports suggest that these dysfunctional patterns are likely mirrored, to some extent, in other municipalities.²⁴

What follows are descriptions of how corruption seems to be playing out within these municipalities. The analysis, using the framework for organising corruption above, reflects on how groups coordinate to obtain private benefits by misusing entrusted power.

Influence

Influence over decision making, processes, systems and appointments is vital for creating favourable conditions for illicit activities. People willing to facilitate corruption can be inserted into or recruited from strategic positions in government and the private sector – both at bureaucratic and senior levels – through irregular appointments, nepotism and patronage.²⁵

Influence over decision making, processes, systems and appointments is vital for creating favourable conditions for illicit activities

In Madibeng, an internal audit uncovered 'widespread irregularities in staff appointments,' including politically connected individuals, some lacking relevant qualifications or failing to meet basic job requirements, hired without following proper procedures.²⁶ Mayor Douglas Maimane, in office since 2021, has faced several accusations of nepotism, including allegedly irregularly hiring several relatives and awarding a contract to his son.²⁷

There is also a pattern of corrupt officials being redeployed across government institutions. Morufa Moloto was out on bail for alleged corruption as Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the Kagisano Molopo Local Municipality when she was appointed CFO at Madibeng, where she was suspended for alleged financial irregularities. As of writing, she is CFO of the North West Parks and Tourism Board.²⁸

After ORTDM irregularly awarded a tender to the Ayavelisa Consortium in 2017,²⁹ an Ayavelisa employee was permanently placed in the municipal manager's office as an executive assistant. An SIU investigation later found that the service level agreement had been used 'to enrich [municipal employees], their friends, families and relatives.'³⁰ Relationships between construction contractors and municipal officials led to upfront municipal loans and payments for work that was incomplete or not done at all.³¹ Undetermined links between municipal officials and Amatola Water Board employees also resulted in unauthorised advances from ORTDM to Amatola.

There is a complex web of alleged irregular appointments and relationships throughout the entities and agencies run by the CoJ. This includes job



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requirements altered for specific applicants, irregular board appointments, unqualified employees and board members, relatives employed without applying, and employees implicated in corruption being reinstated.³² There is also a pattern of redeploying connected people across different agencies.³³

Access to resources and exploitation of legitimate structures

Employees can be incentivised to manipulate and exploit legitimate systems, gain access to important information and resources, and commit or facilitate criminal activity from within a structure.³⁴

The AGSA has repeatedly reported significant irregular and wasteful expenditure in Madibeng, noting the municipality's internal controls have failed to identify fraud and corruption. This includes systematic bank account tampering, fraudulent and duplicate payments often without documents and with senior officials' collusion, illegal investments, irregular procurement, inflated tenders and the diversion of funds – all of which have required a coordinated effort to perpetrate and conceal.³⁵

Appointing political or familial connections puts complicit individuals in positions that can shield perpetrators

In ORTDM, the SIU's investigation into the Ayavelisa Consortium detailed widespread irregularities and fraud, with millions paid out to the Consortium, their partners and a company owned by an Ayavelisa employee.³⁶ The water and sanitation department had a 'prepaid' scheme for paying contractors for work on various dam projects that was never delivered.³⁷ Irregular payments and advances have been paid to the Amatola Water Board, as well as independent construction contractors involved in water projects, some of whom are currently under investigation by the SIU.³⁸

While the breadth and depth of financial, procurement and human resources irregularities happening across 11 of the CoJ's agencies and entities are too expansive to cover here,³⁹ the SIU has outlined several 'systemic

weaknesses' in the city's operations (see Appendix 1). These include:

- Collusion between supply chain management officials, bid committee members and service providers
- Overpricing of goods and services
- Products not meeting specifications
- Inadequate or flawed systems and processes
- Weak regulatory and compliance monitoring
- Insufficient skills and capacity
- Poor executive oversight
- Conflicts of interest
- Lack of accountability and consequence management
- Poor record keeping
- No segregation of duties
- Weak project and contract management⁴⁰

Protection

Protection of individuals, groups and illegal activities can take several forms: ignoring investigation or audit recommendations; corrupt networks closing ranks; creating demand for corrupt services; buying law enforcement protection; and threats or intimidation.⁴¹

In all three municipalities, the practice of appointing political or familial connections places complicit individuals in positions that can shield perpetrators from whistleblowing and reporting. The lack of consequence management for prior irregular spending reflects a culture of impunity within senior leadership, which is often a characteristic of environments where systematic illicit activities thrive.⁴² Non-binding recommendations create a challenge for enforcement at the municipal level, especially when senior people within the municipality are complicit.⁴³

Protection through intimidation was seen most explicitly in ORTDM, where aid workers from the Gift of the Givers, distributing free water after the June 2025 floods, were threatened by a 'water mafia' with alleged links to water contracts with the municipality.⁴⁴ This incident should be viewed in the wider context of threats and violence against anti-corruption actors in South Africa. In the Eastern Cape, a senior official and known anti-corruption advocate in Makana Local Municipality was killed at his home,⁴⁵ while a private engineer appointed by Makana

to fix their water crisis left his job due to threats to his life.⁴⁶ Similarly, several people involved in anti-corruption efforts have been assassinated in Gauteng over the last few years, highlighting the deadly risk of exposing graft in the province.⁴⁷

Impact

The mismanagement of municipal funds leads to disruptions in the provision of essential services, which can have health, environmental and economic consequences. Corruption scandals and service delivery challenges also result in an erosion of public trust, leading to protests and disengagement from participatory democratic processes.

In Madibeng, residents frequently lack clean, running water, functioning sewerage systems and a consistent electricity supply.⁴⁸ The road infrastructure is dilapidated, and there have been repeated delays in housing projects.⁴⁹ The R15 million Lethabile Fire Station has not been operational since its construction in 2015 due to a lack of resources, while the Brits Taxi Rank suffers from deteriorating infrastructure and operational failures.⁵⁰ Many of these issues have led to community protests, some of which have turned violent.

Many communities in ORTDM do not have access to clean drinking water and the municipality is non-compliant with wastewater effluent quality standards.⁵¹ Nine completed reservoirs, meant to serve almost a million people, cannot be used because the necessary infrastructure does not exist, is damaged or is inadequate to meet community needs.⁵²

Johannesburg's deteriorating water and power infrastructure results in regular and widespread cuts.⁵³ The city's road and bridge infrastructure is in a very poor condition due to a lack of maintenance.⁵⁴ The AGSA reported that the city's assets have been stolen, vandalised, hijacked, neglected or misused while resources are being inappropriately or fraudulently exploited for the gain of suppliers and employees.⁵⁵

Organised corruption?

Levi and Lord have noted that it is 'a common misconception that "organised crime" applies only to per se illegal activities such as drugs trafficking.' They argue that, 'one might define as organised crime an

alliance between corrupt leaders (elected or not), family members and others to embezzle funds from national treasuries or even to extract monopoly profits from superficially legal businesses, provided that they violate some criminal law in doing so.'⁵⁶

Most of the behaviours and activities outlined above arguably meet many of the criteria for corruption and organised crime. They involve illegal acts carried out by groups or networks of individuals who coordinate their actions and misuse entrusted power to obtain financial or material benefits for private gain. As such, it is useful to ask what factors shape the organisation of certain types of corruption, who becomes involved and how they are drawn in.⁵⁷

The more organised corruption is, the more it erodes governance and enables criminal enterprises to grow

The high prevalence of corruption in South Africa points to a convergence of organised actors and activities. Delivering services and meeting infrastructure needs at the local government level requires interaction between government and private sector service providers. These interactions form networks connecting numerous internal and external actors, none of whom is inherently criminal. Both groups maintain these networks for personal gain, exploiting patronage, current events and structural weaknesses.

In Madibeng, corruption has been organised around family, friend and political connections within the municipality and extending into the private sector. These networks, though not always involving the same individuals, facilitate tender fraud, illegal investments and duplicate payments and are protected by the municipality's entrenched culture of corruption.

In ORTDM, corrupt actors exploited the water crisis by linking officials, utilities and contractors to commit tender fraud, make payments for undelivered work and carry out other irregular transactions, enforced through threats of violence. The CoJ's private sector-style structure mirrors that of state-owned enterprises with corruption reflecting, on a smaller scale, the organisation of state capture.

Organisation can act as a powerful motor for corruption, allowing it to operate smoothly, bypass obstacles and expand its reach into legitimate systems. The more organised corruption is, the more it erodes governance and enables criminal enterprises to grow and deepen their destructive impact on society.

The term 'organised corruption' describes 'a symbiosis of organised crime, criminal methods and high-level corruption',⁵⁸ and typically applies to state capture. This creates a gap in terminology for forms of organised, wide-ranging corruption below the level of state capture, often involving private actors and elements of criminality. This gap warrants exploration because these forms, dynamics and methods of corruption and organised crime are prevalent in South Africa and must be understood to be prevented.

Conclusion

The more organised, normalised and profitable in the short term a corrupt way of conducting the business of local government becomes, the less incentive and muscle memory there will be for good governance. This has serious implications for the operations of government institutions and the ethical conduct of private businesses, leading to a web of improper decisions that further enable and normalise criminal activity.

The result may represent state failure at the level that most directly affects ordinary people's everyday lives, weakening service delivery and degrading quality of life.⁵⁹

Current concepts of corruption, state capture and organised crime, along with the connections between them, fail to fully illustrate the illicit and organised activities being exposed in South African local government. To address corruption, it is important to understand actors, their relationships, processes and benefits. Prevention

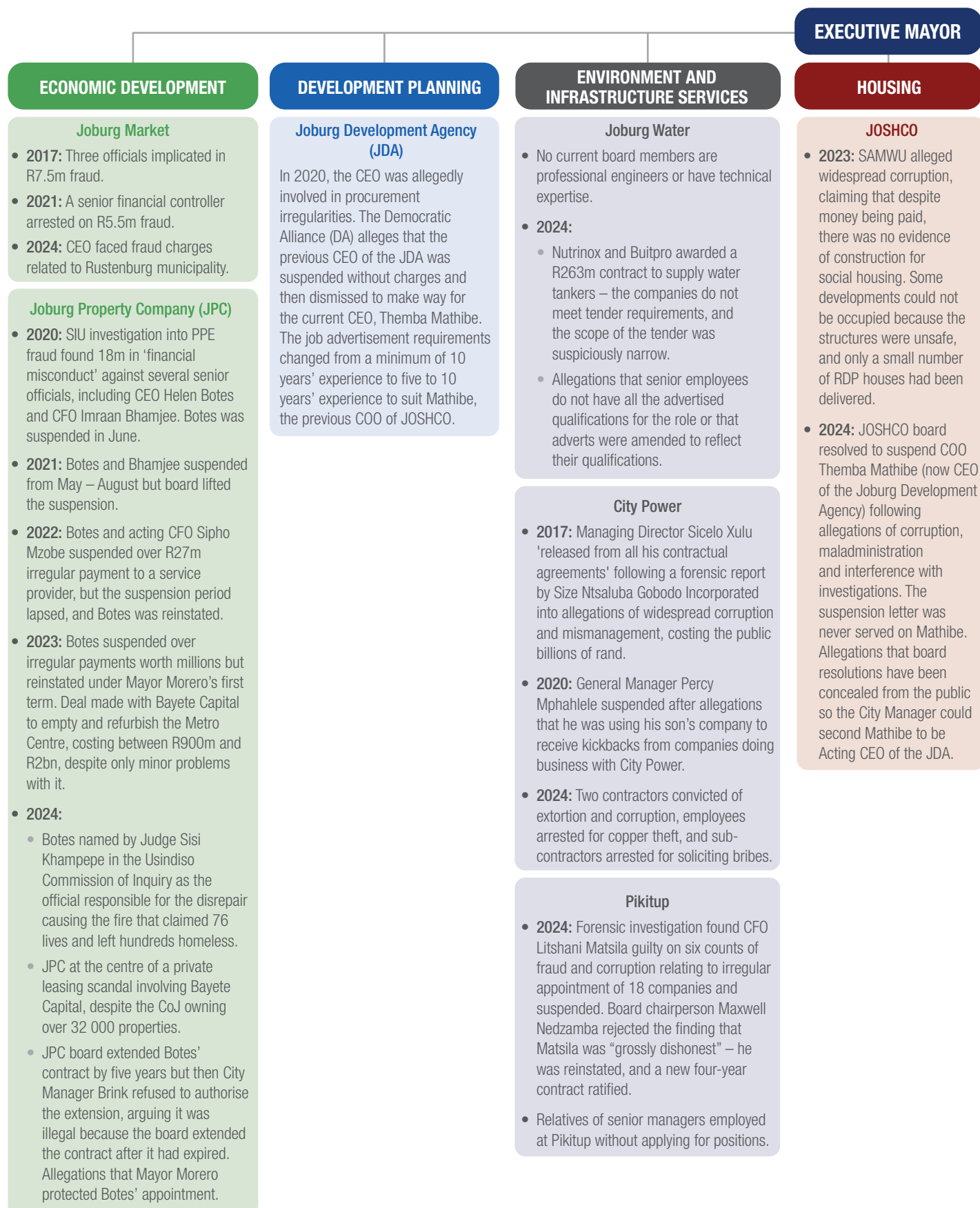
and enforcement efforts will remain limited without deeper insight into these dynamics.

Recommendations

More nuanced, in-depth research is needed to provide insight into the organisational dimensions of corruption. The following areas of enquiry are recommended to guide future investigation and intervention:

- Identify key actors: who is involved in organised corruption at the local level and what roles do they play?
- Map relationships and networks: how are actors connected and what forms of structure or hierarchy exist within these networks?
 - How do these relationships link local government officials and private sector actors?
 - To what extent are these ties formal or informal?
- Analyse organisational processes: how is corruption coordinated and maintained?
 - Are these processes organic, structured or a combination of both?
 - How do they operate across public and private sectors?
- Examine benefits and incentives: what advantages do actors gain, and how are these accrued, distributed, concealed and used?
- Address accountability gaps: in many cases, lower-level participants are prosecuted while organisers evade responsibility. What measures can ensure accountability for those orchestrating corruption?
- Design effective interventions: what mechanisms for prevention, early intervention and law enforcement can disrupt organised networks and address systemic vulnerabilities?

Appendix 1: Overview of corruption in the City of Johannesburg⁶⁰



PUBLIC SAFETY

Johannesburg Metro Police Department (JMPD)

There has been over a decade of allegations of corruption and bribery against JMPD officers.

In 2025, JMPD police officers were accused of accepting bribes through e-wallet and cash-send transfers. Several officers are being investigated for corruption by the JMPD's Internal Affairs Unit.

TRANSPORT

Joburg Roads Agency (JRA)

- **2017:**
 - Several allegations against the board, including: non-disclosure of interests by some board members; lack of independent checks of new board members by the city prior to appointment; alleged attempt by the chairperson to solicit funding from JRA service providers for personal use; chairperson's insistence on an office/secretary in the JRA despite being a non-executive director; and the board wanted to establish a Project Management Unit outsourcing tender process to consultants, despite having the function in house.
 - Company secretary Karen Mills suspended after making a protected disclosure to Group Forensic and Investigation Services (GFIS), led by Shadrack Sibiyi, about these concerns, before settling with the JRA.
 - CEO Sean Phillips resigned and blew the whistle on poor governance at the JRA. Mpho Kau, head of infrastructure development, resigned.
- **2018:** Chairperson reappointed despite Phillips' accusations. Two officials found to have flouted supply chain regulations after irregular expenditure of R1.5m found by audit and finance committee.
- **2019:** JRA's board adopted the findings of a series of forensic investigations by firm Nexus that implicated senior management and initiated disciplinary processes. The head of the Planning Department was suspended and then resigned following allegations of procurement misconduct.
- **2020:** Republic Monakedi appointed CEO. Monakedi had been the Mopani Municipality Manager and left the council R1bn in debt to creditors, with adverse and disclaimer audit opinions from the AGSA.
- **2021:** Chairperson Dr Albert Mokoena (Inkatha Freedom Party) was suspended after a GFIS investigation into board overreach and interference in tenders.
- **2022:** Tshepo Mahanuke appointed CEO – allegations emerged that he was unqualified for the job and had lied or overstated qualifications in his CV. Suspended in November for faking his qualifications and fired in June 2023. Paid a full salary while suspended.
- **2023:** Chairperson Charles Cilliers (Patriotic Alliance) dismissed Mahanuke without due process. The DA claimed Cilliers unlawfully held two roles in the CoJ, as Director: Executive Support to the MMC for Human Settlements, and JRA chairperson. The PA denies this, saying he resigned as chairperson before he was appointed as a director.
- **2024:** The South African Local Government Bargaining Council found that the JRA board's disciplinary proceedings against and dismissal of Mahanuke were procedurally unfair, and they had not proven that his qualifications or work experience were fake. JRA ordered to pay him R2m. JRA terminated the contract of Step-Up Engineering after it failed to meet contractual obligations for the Lilian Ngoyi Street rehabilitation project. Step Up was awarded the R200m contract despite allegedly defrauding City Power of R94m (as Setheo Engineering).

Metrobus

- **2017:** Several irregular procurement and tender awards flagged by internal audit and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Acting Managing Director Sabata Makoele suspended with immediate effect following allegations of financial misconduct amounting to millions of rands, which he authorised as the Metrobus acting CFO.
- **2018:** Whistleblower claimed Metrobus officials deliberately ignored recommendations by more than 10 forensic reports pointing to fraudulent activities in the system.
- **2021:** Drivers went on strike because, among other issues, Metrobus refused to address corruption allegations.
- **2025:** Four acting positions in executive management.

Rea Vaya

Operated by the CoJ and launched in 2009 to link Soweto and Sandton via cheap and efficient mass transport.

- **2017:** Phase 1A and 1B were complete and operational. Since then, Rea Vaya's progress has been hindered by a divided city council, stalled negotiations with the taxi industry, construction problems and bus depots encroached on by informal settlements. Phase 1C was meant to be completed by the end of 2017 but is still unfinished.
- **2023:** Phase 1A operator PioTrans entered business rescue. Business rescue practitioner Mahier Tayob dissolved the PioTrans board, alleging their actions were "bizarre" – this included the board signing a service level agreement with an audit firm to conduct a risk assessment, at a cost R350 000 a month, and then terminating it for no reason and being sued by the audit firm for R5.2m breach of contract; auditors raising concerns about the board paying out dividends despite owing money to creditors and facing financial difficulties; and flouting CIPC requirements.

Notes

- 1 Local municipalities provide basic, essential services and amenities to communities under their jurisdiction. There are 205 local municipalities in South Africa.
- 2 District municipalities coordinate and provide services to the local municipalities within their area, including regional planning, development and bulk services. There are 44 district municipalities in South Africa.
- 3 Metropolitan municipalities provide services and infrastructure to densely populated, large and complex urban areas. There are eight metropolitan municipalities in South Africa.
- 4 Case studies provide a valuable method for studying corruption because they present granular, localised insights into specific and dynamic real-world instances of corruption; see B Flyvbjerg, Case study, in Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln (eds), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011, 301–316, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2278194.
- 5 The in-depth research provided context to the findings outlined below and will be presented by the ISS in other formats in due course.
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- 8 Developed by author with input from ENACT, Appendix 3: definitions, 2023, <https://ocindex.net/report/2023/50-03-appendix.html#:~:text=State%2Dembedded%20actors,from%20within%2C%20the%20state's%20apparatus>.
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- 10 JS Albanese, Corruption as the cause, not the effect, of organized crime?: A review and assessment of cases across the world, *Journal of Economic Criminology*, 7, March 2025, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2949791425000132.
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POLICY BRIEF

Why the SAPS needs an internal anti-corruption unit

Johan Burger and Stefan Grobler

It is possible to combat police corruption – as long as leaders are committed and the right capacity is available. The South African Police Service (SAPS) recently announced that it is establishing 'a dedicated capability in the Detective Service to conduct criminal investigations against members allegedly involved in corrupt and fraudulent activities'. This policy brief offers a number of arguments for why this approach makes good sense.

Black Axe puzzle in South Africa

Layers of criminal culpability

Ndubuisi Christian Ani

Summary

South Africa, home to the most Black Axe branches in Africa, faces challenges from the group's links to cybercrime and trafficking. Contrary to Black Axe's portrayal as a centralised criminal enterprise, this study shows crime stems from autonomous individuals and fluid syndicates with no direct flow of illicit proceeds to the organisation. Yet Black Axe's secrecy, racketeering and global networks sustain affiliates' crimes. Recognising layered culpability at the individual, syndicate and organisational levels can help policymakers design targeted interventions.

Recommendations

- Black Axe needs to rebrand by rejecting criminality and mob violence exploited by syndicates.
- Law enforcement should map Black Axe structures and syndicate links for targeted responses.
- Invest in specialised cybercrime units for digital forensics and cross-border collaboration.
- Strengthen community policing with the Nigerian diaspora to identify syndicates, enhance security and reduce recruitment.
- Implement robust anti-corruption safeguards to keep law enforcement agents uncompromised and strengthen syndicate-focused operations.



Concentrations of violence

A case study of Grassy Park, Cape Town

Julia Starward

Summary

Grassy Park, a suburb in Cape Town, South Africa, bears a disproportionate burden of gang-related violent crime. The concentration of gang violence has eroded the ability of local government – including education, social services, housing and healthcare, as well as policing and the criminal justice system – to function effectively. A concentration of effort in response to gang violence, coordinated among different branches of government, is needed in Grassy Park and similar areas – other ‘concentrations of violence’ – to break this vicious cycle.

Recommendations

- Create a new role of violence reduction coordinators in local government who can coordinate responses across departments at the neighbourhood level.
- Prioritise interventions for child welfare delivered through schools, to protect children from the impacts of gang violence.
- Take measures to promote accountability for police and prosecuting authorities at the local level.
- Improve coordination between police and prosecuting authorities by ensuring that performance targets for these structures are aligned.
- Provide more support to local civil society organisations and encourage local cooperation.
- Reorient local government spending to ensure resources are allocated to the neediest areas.



Growing, growing, gone

Safeguarding South Africa's illegally traded succulents

Carina Bruwer

Summary

South Africa's Succulent Karoo is home to succulent flora that occur nowhere else on earth. But many species are disappearing due to a rapidly escalating onslaught by criminal networks orchestrating the harvesting and trade of rare and threatened species to satisfy international demand for ornamental plants. This report explores the illegal market for South African succulent flora from the Succulent Karoo region, the impact of this market on people and ecosystems, and the implementation of the National Response Strategy to address the crisis.

Key points

- Cooperation between State and non-State stakeholders has been integral to the response's successes.
- Despite the illegal succulent market's transnational nature, the response is concentrated in South Africa.
- Seized plants have become unmanageable.
- Resource and staff shortages have overwhelmed those responding to the illegal market.
- Limited law enforcement capacity and allegations of corruption in the Northern Cape Province have caused the response to be driven primarily by the Western Cape.
- Limited government departments are engaged in implementing the National Response Strategy, despite its multiple dimensions.

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