

# Criminal protection

## Illicit uses of South Africa's private security industry

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As the South African Police Service and other state law-enforcement agencies face intense scrutiny over alleged high-level corruption, this report examines how criminal interests may also be infiltrating South Africa's private security industry. While many private security companies are an important asset in tackling crime, some are used to exploit criminal opportunities, ranging from irregular procurement to the illicit use of firearms.

## Key findings

- ▶ The private security industry makes a largely positive contribution to safety in South Africa, but it is also vulnerable to being used for criminal ends.
- ▶ The number of registered and active private security companies (PSCs) rose by 76%, from 9 744 in 2020 to 17 146 in 2025, according to Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority data.
- ▶ Several PSC owners have allegedly been involved in organised crime.
- ▶ Reports suggest that PSCs are sometimes set up to acquire firearms for criminal purposes.
- ▶ State procurement of private security is a major risk area for corruption.
- ▶ Criminal practices include fabricating security threats to secure the allocation of additional resources for procuring security services.
- ▶ Other practices include extortion, the use of private security to intimidate rival companies, and collusion with corrupt police officers.
- ▶ Enforcing registration requirements that bar people convicted of serious offences from the industry can reduce the risk of its criminal abuse.
- ▶ Tackling criminality in the industry depends on broader efforts to prevent procurement and police corruption and strengthen the criminal justice system's overall effectiveness.

## Recommendations

### Minister of Police:

- ▶ Ask the president to set the date on which the 2014 amendment to the Private Security Industry Regulation Act comes into operation.
- ▶ Establish a forum to review the 2003 Code of Conduct for Security Service Providers, promoting cooperation between the state and the private security industry to strengthen the industry's integrity.
- ▶ Resolve differences of opinion on the 2024 draft amendments to the 2002 Private Security Industry Regulations. The revised regulations should strengthen accountability for firearm management in private security.

### National Treasury and Auditor-General of South Africa:

- ▶ Prioritise monitoring of spending on security contracts and flag evidence of corruption risk in security procurement.

- ▶ Assess how effectively state departments verify the delivery of procured security services.

### Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority and the South African Police Service:

- ▶ Continuously review information on PSCs allegedly linked to criminal activity and assess their registrations accordingly.
- ▶ Ensure PSC inspections consider risk indicators such as firearms held, compliance history and repeated losses or thefts.
- ▶ Suspend, pending review, the registration of PSCs that fail to report lost or stolen firearms.

### Central Firearms Registry:

- ▶ Assess private companies' holdings of semi-automatic rifles and apply enhanced standards when licensing them.

## Introduction

South Africa has a large private security industry numbering upwards of 17 000 ‘active and registered’ private security companies (PSCs) and 630 000 security officers, according to 2025 figures.<sup>1</sup> The industry is generally seen as having a positive impact on safety in the country, particularly in a context where official agencies are overwhelmed, plagued by internal crises and enjoy little public confidence.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that so many companies are contracted to provide security services suggests that PSCs play a valuable role in South Africa. They provide services ranging from guarding and close personal protection to the protection and transport of cash and other assets, sometimes facing heavily armed criminal gangs. In many parts of the country, the South African Police Service (SAPS) recognises PSCs as important partners in solving criminal cases.<sup>3</sup> Some companies have also invested in advanced technologies, including surveillance and vehicle identification and tracking systems, enhancing their capacity to support police investigations.

## Evidence has emerged repeatedly of the abuse of the private security industry for corrupt and criminal purposes

However, there is another, more concerning side to the private security industry. Evidence has emerged repeatedly of the abuse of the private security industry for corrupt and criminal purposes. Testifying before the Madlanga Commission of Inquiry<sup>4</sup> and the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee,<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant-General Dumisani Khumalo, head of the SAPS crime intelligence division and Political Killings Task Team (PKTT), described PSC registration as a method used by organised crime groups. This is not the first time such allegations have been made.

This report discusses evidence, or allegations, of the use of the private security industry for criminal purposes, sometimes associated with role players in organised crime. The focus is on identifying forms of criminality in which PSCs, or people involved in the private security industry, are alleged to be involved. After identifying ways PSCs may be used illegally, the report briefly discusses

measures to prevent and detect such use and makes recommendations for responding to the problem.

## Methodology and limitations

The report draws on media reports, investigative studies, commissions of inquiry, state agency annual reports, parliamentary proceedings, parliamentary replies and other written sources. While some of the allegations discussed have led to arrests and charges being lodged, including reports on criminal cases in progress, few reported here have led to findings by courts of law. As such, the report may be seen to highlight areas of risk for criminality in the private security industry rather than providing specific findings against any PSC or person.

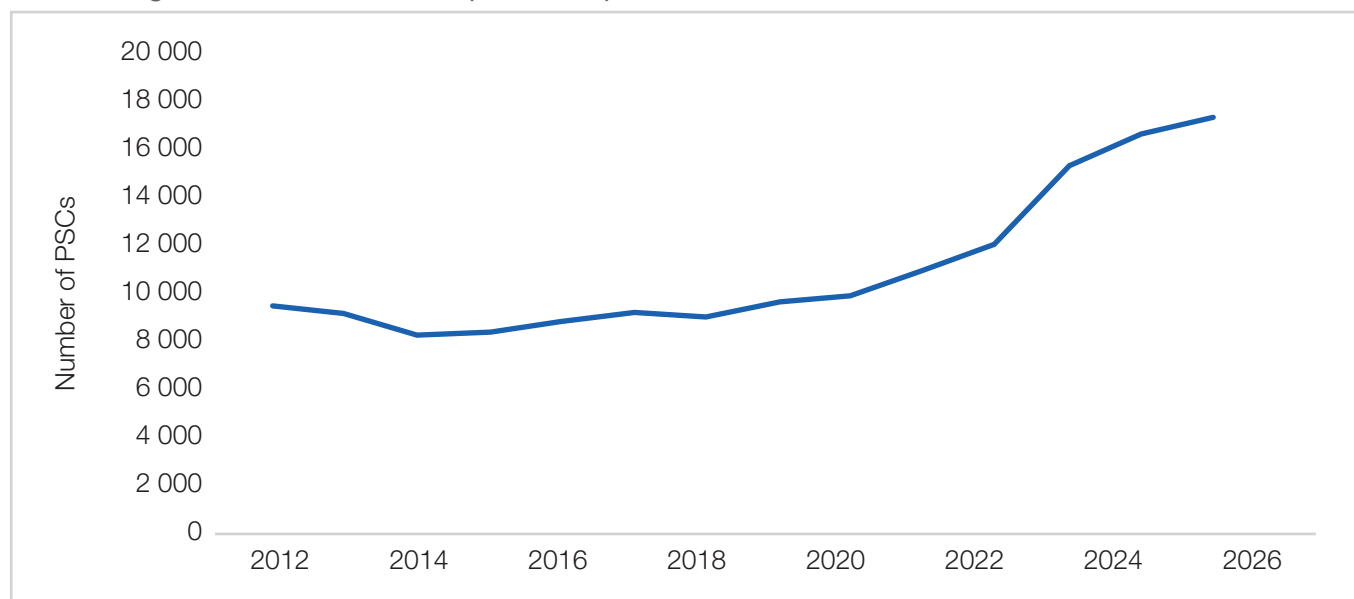
## Overview of the South African private security industry

A helpful starting point is the distinction between PSCs and officers that are ‘active’ and those not currently active. Legislation requires all ‘active’ private security businesses and officers to be registered with the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSiRA).<sup>6</sup> The PSiRA reported that 637 675 (22%) of more than 2.9 million (2 921 316) registered private security officers were ‘active’ on 31 March 2025. While the number of SAPS members has dropped marginally since 2012,<sup>7</sup> the number of active registered private security officers has increased. The 2025 figure represents a 43% increase from the 2012 figure (445 407).

Even more striking is the growth in the number of companies. The number of ‘active and registered’ companies fell between 2012 and 2014 (from 9 364 to 8 144), but since 2014, the number has more than doubled. In 2020, the number of active registered PSCs (9 744) was only 4% greater than the 9 364 in 2012. Since 2020, that number has grown to 17 146. This is an increase of 110% since the low point of 8 144 in 2014 and of 76% since 2020. Over the five years between April 2020 and March 2025, the number of active registered companies grew by an average of 1 480 each year. The PSiRA report for 2024 to 2025 also indicates that an additional 4 869 companies are registered but not active.

A major factor driving the increasing registration of PSCs is likely to have been the economic situation in South

**Chart 1: Registered and active PSCs (2012–2025)**



Source: PSiRA Annual Reports

Africa, with the private security industry seen as an ‘easy sector to get into.’<sup>8</sup> The potential to use PSCs to tender for government security contracts may be another motivation. As indicated in this report, using PSCs to advance other criminal interests may be one of the factors behind this surge in registrations.

### Variations in the private security industry

A feature of the private security industry is major variations in the size of PSCs. There are companies that employ over 70 000 people<sup>9</sup> and others that employ between 5 000 and 10 000 personnel.<sup>10</sup> PSiRA data

indicates that there are a very large number of very small companies and suggests that the vast majority of companies employ fewer than 50 or even 20 people.<sup>11</sup> The type of services that they offer may be related to the size of the companies. Companies are generally registered for a range of different services. PSiRA data for the main services for which companies were registered in 2023 is reflected in Chart 2. Other services for which companies were registered include private investigator services (26%), manufacturing security equipment (20%) and locksmiths (16%). Only 0.7% of companies are listed as alarm installers.

**Chart 2: Main services for which security companies are registered (2022/23)**

| Types of services offered in 2022/23 | Number | % of security businesses (out of 15 113) |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------------|
| Security officers                    | 12 126 | 80                                       |
| Reaction services                    | 7 151  | 47                                       |
| Special events                       | 6 391  | 42                                       |
| Entertainment and venue control      | 5 916  | 39                                       |
| Bodyguarding                         | 5 834  | 39                                       |
| Cash-in-transit                      | 5 812  | 39                                       |
| Security consultant                  | 5 270  | 35                                       |
| Security control room                | 5 170  | 34                                       |
| Security equipment installer         | 5 026  | 33                                       |

Source: PSiRA, Annual Report 2022/23<sup>12</sup>

## Unregistered companies

A further challenge pertains to unregistered PSCs, which are typically not compliant with private security industry regulations, minimum pay requirements and other standards. Although in one case an alleged organised crime figure was accused of operating an unregistered PSC,<sup>13</sup> it is unclear to what degree the problem of criminality highlighted in this report is linked to unregistered as opposed to registered companies.

## Manifestations of criminality in the private security industry

### Ownership of PSCs by figures with alleged criminal associations

Various high-profile figures alleged to be involved in forms of organised crime have had interests in the private security industry or private security contracts. These include Cyril Beeka (assassinated in March 2011),<sup>14</sup> Jerome Booysen,<sup>15</sup> Mark Lifman (assassinated in November 2024)<sup>16</sup> and Nafiz Modack,<sup>17</sup> who have been linked in various sources to organised crime in Cape Town.

During 2025 and 2026, the activities of individuals with interests in private security businesses allegedly linked to organised crime were scrutinised by the Madlanga Commission<sup>18</sup> and the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee,<sup>19</sup> both of which considered matters arising from Lieutenant-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi's allegations of 6 July 2025.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent of these is Vusimuzi 'Cat' Matlala whose PSC, Cat VIP Protection (also known as Cat Protection and Security (Pty) Ltd), was registered in 2018.<sup>21</sup> Though he has only one previous conviction, Matlala has been arrested and prosecuted multiple times<sup>22</sup> and is currently facing charges in criminal cases for procurement fraud<sup>23</sup> and attempted murder.<sup>24</sup> Suspicious communications with senior police officers and various payments he has made to them have also been revealed.<sup>25</sup> In addition, police suspect Matlala of having links to a November 2024 kidnapping and disappearance.<sup>26</sup>

Matlala initially received publicity over an allegedly corrupt relationship with Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Police Department (EMPD) commissioner Julius Mkhwanazi, unrelated to Lieutenant-General Mkhwanazi, which allowed his company's vehicles to use police blue lights.<sup>27</sup> Matlala and Julius Mkhwanazi now face fraud and corruption charges in this matter.<sup>28</sup> Matlala and his business associate, Mike van Wyk, who also owns a security company (Anubis Security), were allegedly dealing in cocaine.<sup>29</sup>

Other figures with private security interests and alleged criminal links identified during the Madlanga Commission and Ad Hoc Committee processes include Steve Motsumi,<sup>30</sup> who is alleged to have links to a drug cartel,<sup>31</sup> and Suliman Carrim, a North West businessman linked to the ANC, Matlala and others alleged to be involved with the cartel.<sup>32</sup>

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NUMBER OF ACTIVE  
REGISTERED PRIVATE  
SECURITY OFFICERS  
INCREASED

43%

BETWEEN 2012 AND 2025

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Tariq Downes, who has been charged, along with police officers Major-General Feroz Khan and Major-General Ebrahim Kadwa, with contravening the Precious Metals Act (37 of 2005) and obstructing the course of justice, is also linked to the private security industry.<sup>33</sup> Downes was allegedly found with unwrought gold while boarding a flight at OR Tambo International Airport in 2021.<sup>34</sup>

### **Allegations of procurement fraud and corruption**

In the context of widespread procurement corruption, the procurement of private security services by government entities or parastatals is a major risk area.<sup>35</sup> Evidence presented to the Madlanga Commission in early 2026 suggests that the Tshwane Metro Police Department had become a conduit for awarding questionable security contracts on behalf of the Tshwane metropolitan government. The department paid an annual average of R730 million to 22 security companies between March 2022 and January 2026.<sup>36</sup>

'Ad hoc' security services have allegedly been used as a vehicle for irregular payments. In addition to R42 million received for 'watchman' services in 2024 and 2025, one company was awarded 43 additional sites and received R59 million for ad hoc services.<sup>37</sup> Evidence suggests that the company used an intermediary to make payments to the official responsible for allocating the ad hoc services.<sup>38</sup>

In August 2026, media reports indicated the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) paid more than R1 billion between 2021 and 2026 for security services to companies linked to a 'politically connected' person without following mandatory procurement processes.<sup>39</sup> Other alleged procurement irregularities reported at PRASA have included security contracts signed in 2011,<sup>40</sup> 2018 and 2022.<sup>41</sup> Similar allegations or findings have been reported in relation to security contracts awarded by the Gauteng Department of Education<sup>42</sup> and the Airports Company of South Africa.<sup>43</sup> Irregularities with respect to the awarding of security contracts have also been alleged in eThekweni municipality,<sup>44</sup> Govan Mbeki municipality (in both 2020 and in 2024)<sup>45</sup> and Knysna<sup>46</sup> municipality.

The suspicion that irregularities are involved is often heightened when contracts are repeatedly extended

after they have expired without the required procurement processes. In eThekweni, companies appointed in 2007 were still being paid by the metro for security services in 2020 on a month-to-month basis, reportedly because of difficulties adjudicating subsequently advertised tenders and no clear resolution.<sup>47</sup> Another mechanism that may be used to flout tender procedures is the award of emergency tenders.

Where security procurement is linked to corrupt motives, there may be little motivation to ensure that the procured services are indeed being provided. Measures to ensure that services that are paid for are being delivered may include unannounced inspections and the verification of security time sheets and occurrence books before payments are approved.<sup>48</sup> In Tshwane's case, it was unclear if inspections were regularly taking place.<sup>49</sup> The Auditor-General of South Africa found that the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality in North West province had paid R27 million for security services in 2019 and 2020 without verifying that services had been delivered. A disciplinary process initiated in response to the findings led to one official receiving a verbal warning.<sup>50</sup> This type of measure is often used to avoid imposing appropriate sanctions against favoured officials.<sup>51</sup>

### **PRASA paid more than R1 billion between 2021 and 2026 for security services without following procurement processes**

Alongside non-delivery or under-delivery, illicit practices may also involve abusive labour practices by PSCs such as fraudulent deduction of Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) or medical aid contributions without these deductions being paid over to the Department of Labour or medical aid schemes.<sup>52</sup>

The PSiRA itself is facing an investigation by the Special Investigating Unit regarding allegations of maladministration and unlawful conduct linked to training contracts awarded by the authority and the UIF. The investigation focuses on training programmes that were supposed to benefit over 7 000 young people. The PSiRA allegedly paid for the services without proof that the training had been carried out.<sup>53</sup>

## Manufacturing security threats to generate security contracts

PSCs may themselves be a source of violence and intimidation. They may stage acts of violence, concealing the fact that they are the source of insecurity. Or they may overtly threaten those from whom they wish to secure payment in exchange for ‘protection’ in which case their actions explicitly qualify as extortion. In 2017, a witness to the Moerane Commission on political killings in KwaZulu-Natal reported that ‘the security risk of certain councillors was staged and faked in order for security companies to obtain tenders to guard them.’<sup>54</sup> Those who stage acts of violence to generate demand for security contracts presumably intend to ensure that contracts are channelled to favoured companies.

A witness reported that ‘the security risk of certain councillors was staged and faked in order for security companies to obtain tenders to guard them’

Allegations regarding the staging of acts of violence have also been linked to security contracts at the University of Fort Hare. In May 2022 and January 2023, two university employees were assassinated. The vice-chancellor, Professor Sakhela Buhlungu, placed pressure on the President and Minister of Police to ensure that the assassinations were fully investigated, which led to the appointment of the PKTT. The subsequent investigation concluded that, prior to the assassinations, shootings in March and April 2022 had been staged ‘to create fear and panic at the university ... and then manufacture urgent security tenders to milk the institution.’<sup>55</sup> A deviation from the formal tender process initially led to R8 million being approved to procure additional security. The PKTT investigation concluded that victims of the two assassinations were people seen as adversaries by the conspirators.

Extortion rackets or ‘protection rackets,’ where a business is forced to pay money to a criminal group to avoid ‘damage to a business, or construction site, or harm to employees and customers’<sup>56</sup> have also been used to force companies to sign security contracts. The PSCs owned by Beeka, Pro Access and Red Security, would allegedly ‘trash’ the premises and assault the staff of nightclubs that declined the offer of their services.<sup>57</sup> Control of nightclub security (‘bouncer’) services may also be used to trade in illicit drugs.<sup>58</sup> A 2026 media investigation highlighted allegations that organised crime groups were linked to the violent intimidation and extortion of PRASA workers and contractors involved in the Central Line repair project in Cape Town in 2022. Intimidation was allegedly intended to ensure that contractors hired specific security subcontractors.<sup>59</sup>

A variation of the protection racket involves payments being made to protect a business or project from violent disruption by a construction mafia. It is reported that a water authority paid R8.5 million to a company

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FROM 2022–2026

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for ‘strategic security and partnership’ services to prevent disruption of work by construction mafia.<sup>60</sup> The company that received the payment is not registered as a PSC and did not provide security services to a bulk-water supply project.

### **Use of PSCs to intimidate rival businesses or groups**

PSC protection may be necessary in legal markets permeated by criminal interests. However, there is often a blurred line between PSCs that are protecting their clients including against aggressive rivals and those involved in intimidation to secure market dominance for their owners or clients. These dynamics have been especially prominent in the minibus taxi industry, an economic sector in which competition has frequently been characterised by lethal violence.<sup>61</sup>

In 2018, a KwaZulu-Natal taxi owner stated that there were between 50 and 60 PSCs that specialised in the taxi industry.<sup>62</sup> A 2015 PSIRA report based on inspections at taxi ranks found that, in many instances, guards were armed with rifles, armed guards were frequently not compliant with regulations and one security company was owned by a taxi owner.<sup>63</sup> The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) described these companies as the ‘armed wings’ of taxi associations.<sup>64</sup> Some PSCs owned by taxi associations ‘have been used as a means for taxi associations to secure modern heavy firepower for their hitmen, who are often employed by the security companies as “guards” on behalf of taxi bosses.’<sup>65</sup> An Eastern Cape taxi boss who was charged in 2026 as part of an alleged extortion racket, allegedly also owns a security company to ‘enforce the group’s demands.’<sup>66</sup>

### **Extortion and theft from perpetrators and victims of crime**

Criminally oriented PSC personnel may establish networks with corrupt police for their joint enrichment. Testimony presented at the Madlanga Commission alleged the existence of a criminal network in Ekurhuleni, involved in extortion, theft, murder and other crimes, led by members of the EMPD and involving SAPS members and PSC owners and personnel. Ekurhuleni has a high volume of truck traffic as it is a major transit point between Gauteng, South Africa’s most

populous province and economic heartland, and ports, international borders and other destinations. SAPS 2024/25 crime statistics show that six of the 10 police stations with the highest number of truck hijackings, and 10 of the top 30, are in Ekurhuleni, with Alberton and Kempton Park recording the most.<sup>67</sup>

EMPD personnel who were involved were allegedly part of a ‘truck hijacking task team.’ The ‘task team,’ which allegedly involved PSC owners and personnel, would intercept hijacked trucks and demand that owners pay ‘a 10% reward’ for the return of ‘recovered stock.’<sup>68</sup> They may also have carried out the hijackings themselves.<sup>69</sup> Private security personnel were among those present at a property where a man died, allegedly as a result of police torture to force him to reveal the location of stolen goods.<sup>70</sup>

PSCs owned by taxi associations ‘have been used as a means to secure modern heavy firepower for their hitmen’

One of the private security personnel reported the crime, though others who were present did not, in the apparent hope that they would continue to benefit from their criminal partnership with the police. EMPD head, Julius Mkhwanazi and two other EMPD personnel, an SAPS member and one of the private security owners who was allegedly present, have been charged for the murder.<sup>71</sup> Evidence suggests that Cat Matlala’s business partner and PSC owner, van Wyk, was informed about and also hoped to benefit from the truck hijacking extortion scheme.<sup>72</sup>

### **Brutality and excessive force by PSCs and guards**

Publicly available reports of alleged excessive force by private security personnel largely concern labour disputes and other protests.<sup>73</sup> Allegations have also been made that private security recklessly or abusively used rubber bullets or other weapons.<sup>74</sup> Probably the most serious allegations regarding misuse of force by private security guards were made following the July 2021 unrest in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. It was broadly acknowledged that PSCs played a valuable

protective role in various locations where the unrest took place, including by guarding shopping malls against attack.<sup>75</sup> However, some local PSCs were suspected of participating in vigilante violence in Phoenix and other areas in and around eThekweni or of having provided firearms to those involved in vigilantism.<sup>76</sup>

### **Diversion of private security firearms and ammunition for criminal use**

In October 2024, the Minister of Police reported that there were 126 529 firearms licensed to PSCs in South Africa.<sup>77</sup> It is unclear whether this figure is comprehensive. Available information also does not indicate how many PSCs are currently licensed to own firearms or what types they hold, and it is unclear whether the SAPS Central Firearms Registry (CFR) or the PSIRA has accurate data on this.

Whatever the numbers may be, the majority of the 637 675 active and registered private security guards performing functions such as guarding or access control are not authorised to carry firearms when they are at work as they have not passed firearm competency tests. Nevertheless, it is likely that most PSCs are equipped with firearms and licensed to use them. Where unarmed guarding services are provided, these services are often supported by armed reaction capacity. More generally, whether PSC services require personnel to be equipped with firearms will depend on the specifics of the service being rendered. Services such as cash-in-transit consistently carry firearms.

As indicated, one reason why criminal role players may try to establish and register PSCs, may be that it enables licensed firearms to be procured more readily. Caryn Dolley's 2019 book on organised crime and Cape Town nightclub security notes that 'starting a private security business was a convenient way to access firearms for nefarious means under a legitimate guise.'<sup>78</sup>

In testimony to the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee, Lieutenant-General Khumalo described PSC registration as 'the easiest route' for criminal syndicates to obtain firearms. He alleged that some PSCs would avoid submitting firearms for 'ballistic analysis' allegedly to avoid being linked to cases under investigation and that PSCs unlawfully borrowed firearms.<sup>79</sup> The hiring of firearms is also alleged in an analysis of PSCs working

in the KwaZulu-Natal taxi industry.<sup>80</sup> A leading figure in the private security industry has also made allegations of this kind.<sup>81</sup>

Between 2019 and 2022, PKTT investigations found that the firearms of 20 or more PSCs were linked to PKTT cases or Firearms Control Act contraventions.<sup>82</sup> PSCs' firearms have allegedly also been used in crimes linked to rivalry between taxi associations.<sup>83</sup> As indicated, PSCs were also suspected of providing some of the firearms that were used in vigilante killings and violence during the July 2021 unrest. Whether or not registered PSC guns are used in crimes, the registration of PSCs by people linked to organised crime is concerning, partly because it gives them access to firearms.

### **In 2024 an average of 138 firearms were reported lost or stolen by security companies each month**

A substantial number of PSC firearms are reported to be lost or stolen. The number of firearms lost and stolen by PSCs, and the contribution of private security firearms to the total number of lost and stolen firearms, is not routinely reported. In 2024, 2 495 firearms, an average of 138 per month, were reported lost or stolen by security companies during the 18 months from April 2023 to September 2024. In 2019, a person associated with taxi industry violence told GI-TOC researchers that firearms were obtained from private security personnel<sup>84</sup> as well as the South African National Defence Force. In 2024, GI-TOC reported that PSCs were a major source of ammunition for gangs in the Western Cape.<sup>85</sup> In 2015, the SAPS reported that the number of firearms lost or stolen by PSCs exceeded the number lost by the SAPS.<sup>86</sup> The disposal of firearms when PSCs are dissolved is another risk.<sup>87</sup>

The SAPS seized 18 firearms during a firearms compliance inspection at the premises of Cat Matlala's company, CAT VIP Protection. These included two 9mm Taurus pistols, a Beretta pistol and two R5 rifles.<sup>88</sup> The presence of alleged criminal interests in the private security industry enhances the risk that private security industry firearms will be used for criminal purposes or illegally disposed of, then reported lost or stolen. Though

it is unclear whether any were licensed to Matlala's PSC, firearms linked to crimes for which he has been charged have also been linked by the SAPS to murders and other crimes allegedly involving Katiso 'KT' Molefe.<sup>89</sup>

Legally acquired weapons may therefore be used for illegal purposes. The fact that the firearms seized from the premises of Cat Matlala's security company included semi-automatic R5 rifles is a special concern. Semi-automatic rifles are widely distributed to private security officers in various sections of the industry including members of reaction units and personnel involved in security related to cash-in-transit. There are no publicly available figures on the number of security companies equipped with these semi-automatic weapons, but it is apparent that they include some of those associated with the taxi industry.<sup>90</sup>

The firearms seized from the premises of Cat Matlala's security company included semi-automatic R5 rifles, raising concerns about access to such weapons

Weapons that have been seized after taxi industry shooting incidents involving security companies have included AK-47s, R4s and R5s, LM series rifles, AR rifles, Dashprod SAR M14s and an assortment of pistols.<sup>91</sup> The fact that criminal groups sometimes use this type of rifle has fed into an 'arms race.' Inadequate attention is given to regulating access to these weapons.<sup>92</sup>

### Preventing criminal use of the private security industry

South Africa has substantial legal and regulatory provisions governing PSC registration and firearm licensing. This report does not discuss these in detail, though selected provisions are briefly discussed below. As indicated, certain amendments to these provisions have not been brought into force despite having been passed some time ago. Doing so would improve the robustness of the legal architecture.



SOUTH AFRICA HAS  
SUBSTANTIAL LEGAL AND  
REGULATORY PROVISIONS  
GOVERNING PSC  
REGISTRATION AND  
FIREARM LICENSING

However, it is unclear to what degree these or other amendments to the legal framework would reduce the risks identified. A related question is whether strengthening the resourcing, effectiveness and integrity of the PSiRA and the CFR and SAPS designated firearms officers responsible for ensuring compliance with the Firearms Control Act could further mitigate these risks.<sup>93</sup>

Alongside steps to digitise the CFR,<sup>94</sup> a persistent issue has been coordinating the efforts of the PSiRA and the SAPS to ensure PSC compliance with legal and regulatory standards. Along with the PSiRA, it is primarily the SAPS Firearms, Liquor and Second-Hand Goods Control component that is involved in firearms-related inspections, often in cooperation with the PSiRA. This includes taking steps to ensure the lawful and safe disposal of firearms when a PSC stops operating.<sup>95</sup>

Considering the dramatic expansion of the industry, it will be necessary for the targeting of inspections to be carried out more strategically to ensure these mechanisms are not overwhelmed by the burden of trying to ensure compliance.

The diverse forms of criminality in the private security industry mean that the problem cannot be resolved solely by improving the PSiRA and the CFR; it also depends on action across the wider governance and criminal justice system. Addressing corruption and irregularities in public-sector procurement of security services will depend in part on curbing endemic abuse of procurement by state personnel and their civilian accomplices in South Africa.<sup>96</sup> Addressing collusion between criminally oriented PSCs or personnel and corrupt police members will similarly depend on tackling corruption in police agencies, including the SAPS and metropolitan police departments.<sup>97</sup>

### **Legal provisions regarding PSiRA registration of PSCs**

Notwithstanding a large number of criminal allegations against him, Cat Matlala was able to register a PSC in 2018. When the company was registered, Matlala had been arrested and charged 14 times, including for carjacking and cash-in-transit robbery, but had been convicted only once, for a 2001 burglary.<sup>98</sup>

Irregularities related to Matlala's security company links with the EMPD were first exposed in early 2023.<sup>99</sup> Over 30 months later, in October 2025, the PSiRA announced that it had suspended eight officials pending disciplinary and criminal investigations for the registration of Matlala's company, and that it had initiated a legal review of the registration. The PSiRA statement said that a preliminary investigation 'revealed improper conduct, procedural lapses, and systemic weaknesses in internal control mechanisms, including failures in document verification, oversight, and ethical compliance.'<sup>100</sup>

Matlala's company may not have breached the Private Security Industry Regulation Act (PSIR Act) when it was registered in 2018, as he had not been convicted of a serious criminal offence listed in the Act's Schedule in the previous 10 years.<sup>101</sup> However, other provisions of the Act grant the PSiRA discretionary authority to refuse to register a person. This includes being investigated or

prosecuted for a scheduled offence or being convicted of one more than 10 years earlier.<sup>102</sup>

The PSiRA may also suspend the registration of a person pending the conclusion of a criminal investigation against them 'or a determination by the prosecuting authority' or finalisation of criminal proceedings.<sup>103</sup> Though it was not mandatory, the PSIR Act did provide the PSiRA with the authority to decline Matlala's application or subsequently at least to suspend his company's registration.

### **Stopping irregular security procurement requires addressing the overall procurement corruption problem**

A 2014 amendment to the PSIR Act, which has not yet been brought into operation,<sup>104</sup> modifies these provisions by removing the reference to the 10-year period from section 23. When the amendment comes into operation, people who have been convicted of offences listed in the Schedule will not be able to register as security service providers, regardless of when they were convicted. Section 26 will also be amended. This will make it mandatory for the PSiRA to suspend the registration 'if there is a prima facie case' of an offence listed in the schedule.

As indicated, in the five years between April 2020 and March 2025, the number of registered and active companies increased from 9 744 to 17 146 implying that PSiRA registered an average of 1 480 PSCs per year during this period. In 2024/25, PSiRA registered 2 167 new companies and rejected 262 applications on the basis of criminal records linked to those applying.<sup>105</sup> It is evident that some level of scrutiny is being applied to questions about the risk of criminally involved individuals applying for the registration of PSCs. It may, however, be that the high rate of registrations impacts on the quality of such scrutiny.

### **Accountability for the use of firearms by PSCs**

The 2014 amendment also requires the PSiRA to submit quarterly reports on discharges of firearms by security officers that cause 'death or injury.'<sup>106</sup> A draft amendment to the 2002 Private Security Industry Regulations, published by the Minister of Police in March 2024, also

required PSCs to report instances in which the use of firearms resulted in death or injury, or damage to property, to the PSiRA.<sup>107</sup> However, due to criticism of the regulations, they were never finalised. In the absence of these regulations, PSCs are currently not required to report firearm use to the PSiRA. Therefore, the PSiRA would be unable to submit the quarterly reports envisaged by the 2014 amendment.

Firearms Control Act regulations require PSCs to report firearm ‘use’ to the nearest police station,<sup>108</sup> but it is unclear whether such reports are recorded or whether PSCs comply with this requirement. Other than the possibility that alleged crimes by private security personnel may be investigated if they are reported to the SAPS, there is no effective provision for accountability by PSCs regarding firearm use by their personnel. Bringing the 2014 amendment into force would not improve this accountability unless provisions are introduced and enforced requiring that PSiRA be notified of the firearm discharges by PSC personnel.

### Uncovering criminality in the private security industry

If applications are reliably assessed, the process of company registration may play an important role in reducing levels of criminal infiltration of the private security industry. It cannot, however, guarantee that elements within the industry do not continue to pursue criminal ends. Criminal involvement by people associated with the private security industry may not be detected particularly if they do not have criminal records and there are no known investigations and prosecutions against them.

Cases involving alleged criminality in the private security industry suggest that the process for uncovering it is haphazard and raises questions about how to ensure more consistent scrutiny of potential criminal involvement by PSCs. The alleged criminal activities linked to private security at the University of Fort Hare may not have been exposed without Buhlungu’s efforts, which led to a specialised SAPS unit investigating the two assassinations.

Other alleged private security criminality that is highlighted in this report has only been publicly revealed

as a result of media investigations,<sup>109</sup> Lieutenant-General Mkhwanazi’s 6 July 2025 disclosures and the work of the Madlanga Commission. It may therefore be that there is considerably more criminality associated with the industry, but that current mechanisms have a limited capacity to ensure that it is uncovered.

### Conclusion

At a time in South Africa when the SAPS and other state police agencies are under intense scrutiny regarding alleged high-level corruption, this report shows that criminal interests have also infiltrated parts of the private security industry. But just as there are many hardworking and honest police officers, it is of course also true that many in the private security industry are committed to preventing crime and protecting their clients and the public.

There may be much more criminality in the private security industry that remains undetected

Nevertheless, the use of the private security industry for criminal ends needs to be recognised as one of the risks facing the industry. Whether or not they had previous criminal involvement, security service providers may take advantage of criminal opportunities they encounter. Based on a review of written sources of information detailing allegations of criminality by role players in the industry, this report shows that in South Africa these may include:

- Taking advantage of corrupt procurement opportunities
- Exercising coercive power to intimidate rival business owners
- Operating a protection racket that forces potential clients to procure their services
- Positioning themselves as partners of corrupt police
- Obtaining licensed firearms, possibly for illicit purposes

This list is not exhaustive and only details private security criminality highlighted in research for this report.

The ability of South African society to tackle the problem of criminal involvement in the private security industry is intertwined with measures to respond to embedded forms of crime including procurement corruption, organised crime, extortion and police corruption. It will also depend on the reliability and effectiveness of agencies and capabilities such as the PSiRA and the CFR including more effective implementation of the Firearms Control Act. However, as the industry expands, the burden of regulating it is likely to become more demanding.

## Recommendations

### Minister of Police:

- Ask the President to set the date on which the 2014 amendment to the Private Security Industry Regulation Act comes into operation.<sup>110</sup>
- Establish a forum to review the 2003 Code of Conduct for Security Service Providers, promoting cooperation between the state and the private security industry to strengthen the industry's integrity.
- Resolve differences of opinion on the 2024 draft amendments to the 2002 Private Security Industry Regulations. The revised regulations should

strengthen accountability for firearm management in private security.

### National Treasury and Auditor-General of South Africa:

- Prioritise monitoring of spending on security contracts and flag evidence of corruption risk in security procurement.
- Assess how effectively state departments verify the delivery of procured security services.

### Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority and the SAPS:

- Continuously review information on PSCs allegedly linked to criminal activity and assess their registrations accordingly.
- Ensure PSC inspections consider risk indicators such as firearms held, compliance history and repeated losses or thefts.
- Suspend, pending review, the registration of PSCs that fail to report lost or stolen firearms.

### Central Firearms Registry:

- Assess private companies' holdings of semi-automatic rifles and apply enhanced standards when licensing them.

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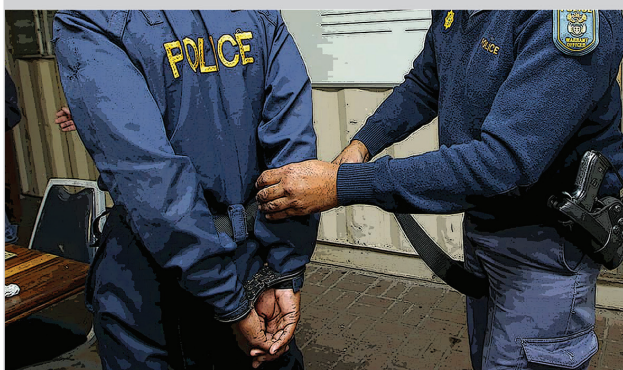
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## Tackling police corruption in South Africa

David Bruce and Gareth Newham



There is abundant evidence of high levels of corruption in the South African Police Service (SAPS), metro and traffic police. Police corruption affects all ranks and many police activities. It is a key contributor to low levels of public trust in police, as well as poor policing outcomes. With proper leadership and clear strategic interventions, corruption can be tackled, with many benefits for the SAPS and policing in South Africa.

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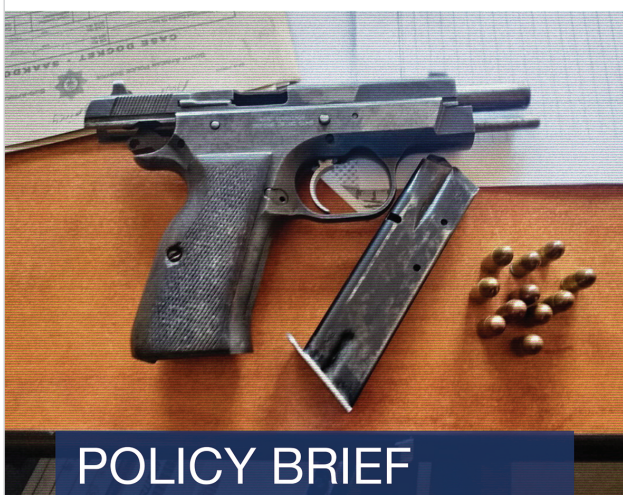


## POLICY BRIEF

### The future of South Africa's Special Investigating Unit

David Bruce, Colette Ashton and Cheryl Frank

The Special Investigating Unit (SIU) is one of South Africa's most effective anti-corruption agencies. It has a good civil litigation track record, an organisational culture of excellence and is supported by a dedicated Special Tribunal. Given the large scale of corruption in the country, several reforms could further strengthen the unit. The research for this policy brief was undertaken in cooperation with the SIU.



## POLICY BRIEF

### Targeting firearm crime will make South Africa safer

David Bruce

Firearm crime is rife in South Africa. Mapping it can help ensure police resources are used in a targeted way to reduce firearm-related offences. This policy brief illustrates how firearm crime can be mapped by using police data. It focuses on Gauteng province, which has high levels of gun use by criminals.



## POLICY BRIEF

### Corruption in SA municipalities: a form of organised crime?

Romi Sigsworth

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.

## About the author

David Bruce is an independent researcher on policing and public security, and a consultant to the Institute for Security Studies.

## About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. The ISS is an African non-profit with offices in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible policy research, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

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