

# The 2014/2015 Crime Statistics

- hope or despair?

- By Dr Chris de Kock\*



This year, the crime statistics were released during a briefing by the Minister of Police, Mr Nathi Nhleko and the National Commissioner of SAPS, Gen Riah Phiyega, to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee of Police, held on 29 September 2015 in Cape Town.

The release created certain impressions, which will form the framework of this article. These impressions are as follows:

- With the 2014/2015 crime statistics release, the Minister and the National Commissioner tried everything humanly possible to sketch a more positive picture of the crime situation of 2014/2015 but, in the end, the figures themselves paint a very dark picture.
- Those in charge of crime fighting efforts in South Africa either don't understand the crime threat, because they are ill-informed, or are trying everything possible to keep the reality of crime (the objective dimension of crime) away from the people to create a false sense of security. During the briefing, the author started to wonder whether or not the Minister and the National Commissioner themselves were living in their own "make-believe" world of security.
- The analysis techniques used in the release of the crime statistics can have serious consequences if they are used in strategic and daily operational planning and strategising.

- There is hope, but we need to go back to the basics of policing and foster partnerships between the police and other roleplayers, including other government departments, especially local government, NGOs and the community.

Are the public being misled about the seriousness of the crime situation?

- Police are using broad crime types instead of the smallest and purest available crime categories and sub-categories

For the three annual crime statistics releases since 2011/2012, this analyst has warned that the SAPS are hiding significant increases in very serious and more policeable crimes, such as street robbery, house robbery and carjacking by placing them in large, mixed crime type groups of both more and less policeable crimes, such as contact crime. For example, during the release of the 2014/2015 crime statistics, the 219 314 more policeable crimes of murder, attempted murder, aggravated robbery (in seven subcategories) and common robbery were mixed up with the 397 659 less policeable crimes. In the process, very important increases in crimes which can be influenced by police action are hidden by decreases in less policeable crimes. Put into perspective, the 12 834 count increase in murder, attempted murder, common robbery and aggravated robbery are "softened" by the 7658 decrease in common assaults and sexual offences, with the effect that there was only a marginal 0.9% increase in contact crime. If there is a 3% decrease in the reporting of assault GBH and common assault, a 9% increase in aggravated robbery can be wiped out if this broad crime type of contact crime is used.

The essence of analysis of any kind is that the phenomena which are being analysed should be dissected to the smallest possible parts for the analyst to establish the role of each part, as well as the relationship between parts. An analyst can never come to understand a phenomenon if different parts are fused into one big conglomerate. When it comes to crime, the analyst should start with the smallest and purest crime category or subcategory available and then, if necessary, create more subcategories to come to an understanding of the specific crime.

When the crime statistics are released, it is essential that they are released in such a way that the public/stakeholders can at least determine whether their government and Police Service are successfully reducing each category of more policeable crimes and, if not, why that is the case - and further, if necessary, demand more effective policing of the specific category. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish where the public and NGOs can contribute something in the fight against specific categories of crime. *Crime statistics come from the public when*

they report crime to the police, so the statistics should be returned to them in a useful and empowering format which does not create panic and vigilantism, but rather which assures them that they are in control of their own circumstances.

To achieve the above, it is essential, as far as possible, to distinguish between more and less policeable crimes. Universally, policing includes three groups of procedures/techniques/activities for crime prevention, crime detection and crime intelligence. Policing should preferably always be about prevention first and if some crimes still occur, thereafter it should be about detection, which will, if successful, deter/prevent crime again. Crime intelligence underlies all prevention and detection activities. Included in each of these three groups are, inter alia:

#### ■ Crime prevention

Focussed police visibility at the right place at the right time, roadblocks, cordon-and-search and stop-and-search operations can help to prevent crime. Partnerships are essential between the police and government departments, especially at local level, between the station/cluster of stations and the local authorities, NGOs and the community to minimise the generators and conditions of crime. The public should constantly be informed about hotspots, peak times of these hotspots and developing modus operandi.

#### ■ Crime detection

Inter alia include the clustering and proper allocation of dockets so that the same detective or team of detectives focus on the same suspects. This should be combined with proper evidence collection and analysis of forensics, ballistics and fingerprints evidence. Support and protection should be provided to the victim so that s/he does not withdraw the case.

#### ■ Crime intelligence

Crime mapping and crime pattern analysis are vital to identifying crime hotspots and peak times. Docket and linkage analysis should be done to link the commonalities in different dockets, which may indicate repeat/serial offenders, so that the intelligence collectors can be tasked. Another tool to consider is environmental scanning of hotspot areas to identify explanations of why hotspots exist at that point at that time.

In the case of some crime categories, such as theft of motor vehicles, all three of these groups of policing tools can be used and these will be called more policeable crimes.

However, there are social crimes which occur in private spaces between people knowing each other, often when having an argument and/or when under the influence of alcohol, when a fight (assault) results in a murder or an attempted murder. There are also crimes such as shoplifting and commercial crime, which also

occur in private spaces, where conventional policing does not occur. All of these crimes are less policeable since the police can't prevent them and the collection of intelligence is also not an option. The police can only open a case and focus on the successful prosecution of the perpetrator after the crime has been committed.

Of the 20 (now 21) crimes and the six subcategories of aggravated robbery listed on the SAPS's website, the following are predominantly more policeable:

- street/public robbery (which is not listed as such on the website, but which refers to those aggravated robberies which are not subcategorised under the six subcategories of aggravated robberies);
- robbery at residential premises;
- robbery at non-residential premises;
- carjacking;
- truck hijacking;
- robbery of cash in transit
- bank robbery;
- burglary: residential;
- burglary: non-residential;
- theft of motor vehicle;
- theft out of and from motor vehicle; and
- stock theft.

Traditionally, two very serious contact crimes, namely murder and attempted murder, are not dominantly policeable. However, according to all indications, growing proportions of these two crimes are becoming more policeable. For example, contrary to the Minister of Police's view, which he expressed on 29 September in addressing the portfolio committee - namely that somebody must be suffering from hallucinations if s/he believes that murder and, in effect, attempted murder can be controlled/prevented by the police - there are circumstances around some murders and attempted murders which can be better policed. These include, inter alia, aggravated robbery, vigilante action, hate crimes (eg homophobia and xenophobia), taxi violence, faction/clan violence, private defence, etc. There are indications that up to 50% of murders and attempted murders currently may be non-social and preventable. These will be included in the analysis in this article.

#### □ Using so-called longitudinal analysis to hide/soften annual increases

In an interview with [The Sunday Independent](#) dated 23 August 2015, the National Commissioner lists the longitudinal analysis of crime as one of the innovations and achievements made in her three years with the SAPS. In the very next sentence, she illustrates her lack of knowledge of longitudinal analysis by saying that, as the years advanced, the percentage decreases will become more marginal. It is impossible, within the limits of this article, to illustrate the shortcomings of the SAPS's so-called longitudinal analysis but it is clear to this author that, since the National Commissioner's appointment in the SAPS in June 2012, the so-called comparison of crime statistics over a one-, five- and ten-year period was done to confuse the people of South Africa. The ten-year comparisons for the last four releases include the relatively successful crime reductions of the Selebi era and the very successful crime reductions of the Cele/Fifa World Cup soccer era, while the five year comparisons, at least to the 2013/2014 release, include the high reduction era of 2009/2010 to 2011/2012. The inclusion of these historical reduction reservoirs has ensured that, even up to the latest 2014/2015 release of crime statistics, at least on the ten-year period, there are reductions. So crime still decreases! But not on the year-to-year comparison or even over the five-year comparison. In short, the increases of the Phiyega-period are hidden behind the decreases in the previous

two national commissioner periods. The problem with this "longitudinal strategy" is that, over the next two years, it will run out of luck - and, as the SAPS is erroneously applying it, this will happen sooner rather than later.

Table 1 beneath illustrates this very clearly.

Table 1			
Crime	10-year comparison	5-year comparison	1-year comparison
<b>Murder</b>			
2011/2012	-27.6%	-15.6%	-2.1%
2012/2013	-18.0%	-10.4%	4.2%
2013/2014	-9.2%	1.4%	5.0%
2014/2015	-3.5%	12.0%	4.6%
<b>Attempted murder</b>			
2011/2012	-58.6%	-20.9%	-4.1%
2012/2013	-45.6%	-10.6%	10.1%
2013/2014	-30.2%	-1.7%	4.6%
2014/2015	-13.9%	14.2%	3.2%
<b>Public/street robbery</b>			
2011/2012	-39.7%	-25.7%	0%
2012/2013	-42.8%	-16.3%	4.3%
2013/2014	-31.2%	6.8%	14.2%
2014/2015	-16.8%	30.8%	9.7%

Every year, the percentage decrease on both the five and the ten-year period comparisons became smaller and, in the case of the five-year comparisons, it is now increasing every year.

There are a few other, less important, ways in which the public are misled with every release of crime statistics, but unfortunately, there is only room for the above within the limits of this article.

### The crime situation in the RSA during 2014/2015

The crime situation for the period of 2014/2015 - in other words, between six months ago (March 2015) and 18 months ago (April 2014), is compared with other periods in table 2. The increases/decreases during 2014/2015 are compared with those in the previous year (2013/2014), and to the average annual increases/decreases during three distinct periods of policing in South Africa over the past 11 years, since crime reduction targets were implemented in 2003/2004. The three periods are as follows:

- The Selebi era (which includes the short period of acting Commissioner T C Williams) under the Mbeki administration (2004/2005 to 2008/2009) was the period where an annual reduction target of between 7% and 10% for each contact crime individually was set. During this period, the National Crime Combating Strategy, with its geographic and organised crime approaches, was followed. The emphasis was on the top stations for each of the contact crimes and visibility based on a proper crime pattern, linkage and environmental analysis.
- The Cele era (which includes the short period of acting of Lt-Gen Mkhwanazi) formed the first three years of the Zuma administration, from 2009/2010 to 2011/2012. During this period, the targets for contact crimes decreased to 4 to 7% per annum. The first two years of the period were dominated by the

Confederation Cup and the Soccer World Cup during which the government had to ensure at all cost that no harm befell the visitors and the participants in these events. The period was also characterised by high levels of socio-economic activity and employment as well as exceptional levels of patriotism. Although the targets were lowered in this period, Gen Cele, as the National Commissioner, showed very strong leadership and emphasised at every meeting that the "new targets" were actually those which were achieved during the soccer events. The era was characterised by intelligence-led policing in hotspot areas, especially in those areas where the soccer events occurred, as well as the birth of the Hawks, to focus especially on organised crime. The infighting and resultant instability in the crime intelligence environment, which could affect the efficiency of this very important part of the crime combating team, only became public and intense in the last year of this period.

- The Phiyega era (including the 2014/2015 reporting/current year) started on the wrong foot with the infamous events at Marikana and their aftermath. The Board of Commissioners of the SAPS, which should be the leaders in daily crime fighting, in all probability struggle to get enough time to devote to this, since their attention is drawn away by nearly daily "dramas" in the organisation. It is as if the management of the police, from the highest (national) to the lowest (station) level, accepted defeat in their fight against the developing crime crisis. The clearest sign of that is the lowering of the crime reduction targets to only 2% per annum. Strictly speaking, the targets were formulated in such a way that they could not be missed. At the same time, the South African economy hit the doldrums and resulted in diminishing patriotism, especially with daily announcements of corruption in high places.

### View Table 2 (on p 13)

The comparison of increases/decreases of more policeable crimes (which, for the purposes of this analysis, include murder and attempted murder) for different periods in Table 2 speak for themselves. It is very clear that, during the Phiyega period (2012/2013 to 2014/2015), with all the conditions mentioned above, there were only small average annual reductions in theft of motor vehicles (-2.1% per annum) and stock theft (-3.2% per annum) - hopefully, the 1.8% increase in stock theft in the 2014/2015 financial year is temporary and not a developing trend. The very systematic decrease of theft of motor vehicles over the last decade, and the development of a carjacking trend, may have less to do with policing than with target hardening by the industry and initiatives by NGOs such as Business Against Crime. However, despite the fact that there was a

Table 2

Table of comparisons of the reporting period (2014/2015) with other relevant periods

Crime category	Zuma Administration (2009/2010 to 2014/2015)			Mbeki Administration (2004/2005 to 2008/2009)	
	Increase/ decrease during the reporting year 2014/2015	Increase/ decrease during the previous year 2013/2014	NATCOMM average annual increase/ decrease 2012/2013 - 2014/2015	Average annual increase/ decrease for first 3 years of Zuma adminis- tration	Average annual increase/decrease during the Mbeki administration
Aggravated robbery	8.5%	12.8%	9.4%	-5.5%	-1.8%
Public / street robbery	9.7%	14.3%	10.3%	-6.6%	-6.3%
House robbery	5.2%	7.4%	7.0%	-3.0%	19.4%
Business robbery	3.2%	13.6%	6.8%	4.9%	55.7%
Carjacking	14.2%	12.6%	11.9%	-12.2%	1.6%
Truck hijacking	29.1%	5.1%	18.6%	-14.3%	11.9%
Common robbery	2.7%	0.6%	1.5%	-3.5%	-7.6%
Murder	4.6%	5.0%	4.8%	-4.7%	-1.7%
Attempted murder	3.2%	4.6%	6.4%	-6.3%	-7.8%
Burglary - Residential	-2.3%	-0.6%	1.2%	-0.1%	-3.5%
Burglary - Non-residential	1.2%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	1.7%
Theft of motor vehicle and motor cycle	-2.7%	-2.5%	-2.1%	-7.4%	-2.8%
Theft out of / from motor vehicle	1.1%	3.5%	4.0%	6.4%	-7.3%
Stock theft	1.8%	-7.3%	-3.2%	1.0%	-5.4%

marginal average annual growth in burglaries: residential (1.2%), the marginal decrease of 0.6% in 2013/2014 and the 2.3% decrease in 2014/2015 are providing some light in the tunnel. The National Victims of Crime Surveys (VOCS), done by Statistics SA over the past three years, found that house robbery and burglary residential, are, in particular in the minds of the public and even the media, basically the same thing (they are now called home/house invasions). While street/public robbery, which affects workers on their way to and from work and home especially, make South Africans feel unsafe. It is doubtful whether a marginal decrease in burglary residential will wipe out the 2014/2015 increase of 5.2% in house robberies, the 14.2% increase in carjacking, which mostly also occur at home, and the 9.7% increase in public/street robbery. This is especially clear when one considers how many people phoned in to radio talk shows following the release of the stats to reveal that the local police had registered their attempted burglary as an incident of malicious injury to property (MITP).

Whichever way one analyses and/or scrutinises Tables 1 and 2, the conclusion cannot be avoided that South Africa, during the last three financial years (2012/2013 to 2014/2015), has not only lost valuable time in which virtually no crime reduction took place, but also that the gains of the previous eight years (2004/2005 to 2011/2012) have been seriously depleted. South Africa is rapidly sliding back into the crime crisis of the late nineties and early two thousands.

### Is all hope lost?

Despite this worrying analysis, all hope can never be lost and there is light at the end of a very dark tunnel. But this is only the case if the government and the SAPS take certain steps, as follows:

- They must **recognise the real threat of crime** and convey that to the people of South Africa in an honest and empowering way.
- They must ensure that the **focus** of all government role-players, (especially the SAPS, including the Hawks) falls on the

**more policeable crimes** listed in Table 2. These crimes pose a serious threat to the achievement of medium and long-term objectives to eventually eradicate the socio-economic root causes of crime.

- They must **accept more motivating targets** for the more policeable violent/contact crime and keep people responsible for achieving this.
- They must **go back to the basics of intelligence-led policing**, as was used in the National Crime Combating Strategy (NCCS) during the Selebi era and even more so during the Cele era.
- They must **empower the people** by providing fully analysed and contextualised quarterly crime statistics to them, indicating where the public can assist.

### Editor's note:

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