

# Release the Quarterly Crime Statistics now

- to confirm whether the “Back to Basics approach” is starting to work

By Dr Chris de Kock\*

## Introduction

With the release of the crime statistics for the 2013/2014 and the 2014/2015 periods, I only analysed those crimes which are more policeable when I wanted to shed some light on the impact of policing on crime reduction.

These analyses were published at [www.crimefactssouthafrica.co.za](http://www.crimefactssouthafrica.co.za) while an article about the 2014/2015 crime statistics was also published in **Servamus**: November 2015. These crimes, for which the full range of policing procedures (namely prevention and detection, based on intelligence) can be used, and in relation to which the impact of policing should be visible in a reduction, appear in table 1 (see p 35). The only two mixed crime categories in table 1 are murder and attempted murder, as some of the subcategories for these categories may be more policeable (eg murder as a result of carjacking) and others less policeable (eg social murders).

## Crime reduction in 2015/2016

On the positive side, truck hijacking (reflecting only 1184 cases) and theft out of and from motor vehicle (139 386 cases) decreased quite substantially by 7.4% and 4.1% respectively during 2015/2016. In all probability, truck hijacking decreased by 95 cases as a result of the arrest of an organised truck hijacking syndicate or two. This highly organised crime trend can fluctuate quite dramatically with the arrest, disappearance and appearance of syndicates (eg when ex-truck hijackers are released from prison). Theft out of and from motor vehicles, over many years since 1994/1995, has decreased very systematically. In 2008/2009 it reached an all-time low of 108 909 incidents - over the next six years it increased by 33.5%, eventually boiling down to an increase of 5.6% per annum. The first decrease of 4.1% has now been noticed in seven years. The increase from 2008/2009 to 2014/2015, in all probability, can be attributed to the use of jamming devices, ie when drivers walk away from their vehicles and press the lock button on their locking devices (without physically checking whether the vehicle is locked)

while somebody else (sometimes located in a parked vehicle very nearby) presses the button of another remote device to block out the locking signal to the vehicle. While the driver of the parked vehicle is busy with shopping, recreational activities, dining etc, the perpetrator can simply open the vehicle and remove the valuables (eg laptops, cellphones, and other expensive items). This modus operandi also allows for more insurance fraud, since it is much more difficult to prove that the car has indeed been broken into. The explanation for the sudden 4.1% decrease during 2015/2016, after six annual average increases of 5.6% each, can probably be found in a combination of the following factors:

- more public awareness about this modus operandi resulting in drivers manually checking whether a vehicle is locked before walking away;
- some police stations not being keen on opening cases of theft out of a motor vehicle without clear signs that access was gained with force; and/or
- some short-term insurance companies not being keen on accepting claims without clear evidence of theft out of or from a motor vehicle.

Marginal decreases are also evident in: theft of motor vehicles (-2.3%), common robbery (-1.5%), burglary at residential premises (-1.2%) and stock theft (-1.0%). Out of these categories, only common robbery and stock theft have really decreased. In 2014/2015, common robbery and stock theft increased by 2.7% and 1.8% respectively. Contrasted against these increases, the marginal decreases of 2015/2016 are quite significant. In the case of theft of motor vehicles, the 2.3% decrease in 2015/2016 is less than the 2.7% decrease in 2014/2015. It is also the second smallest decrease over the last decade. The 1.2% decrease in residential housebreaking in 2015/2016 is only half of the 2.3% decrease which was obtained in 2014/2015.

## Crime increases in 2015/2016

The most shocking increases in 2015/2016 were the 4.9%, 3.4% and the 14.3% increases in respectively murder, attempted murder and

carjacking. The real number increases for these crimes for 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 were as follows:

| Crime            | 2014/2015 | 2015/2016 |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Murder           | 782       | 868       |
| Attempted murder | 548       | 590       |
| Carjacking       | 1593      | 1829      |

Even the Minister of Police and the ISS (Institute for Security Studies), which were the first to deduce from the 2015/2016 crime statistics that the "Back to Basics" strategy was starting to pay off, had to admit that murder and carjacking were matters of concern. Murder was explained away by both the Minister and the ISS by referring to it as a social phenomenon which can't be prevented by the police. The Minister, who (during the release of crime statistics in September 2015) made the statement that people who think that the police can prevent crime are hallucinating, repeated this statement on 2 September 2016, but this time around he put his sociological cap on and used a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Understanding the Sociology of Crime in South Africa". It was clear that the central message of the "Nhleko Sociology" is that, if crime declines, it is due to the police's good work, but if it increases, it is due to social behaviour which can't be policed. This is illustrated by the following remark: "This suggests that in instances where the category of crime can be policed, there is a decline whilst there is an increase in areas that involve social behavioural patterns that are difficult to monitor and police." In following slides, there are many indications that at least 40 to 50% of murders, and even a higher proportion of attempted murders, are not less policeable social murders but more policeable murders which are mainly the result of other crime, especially all kinds of aggravated robbery, vigilante reaction to robbery and/or intergroup conflict. However, the Minister tends to ignore these indications despite it being his own Sociology. Another interesting remark found in the presentation is the remark that possible motive and causative

TABLE 1 - Table of comparisons of the reporting period (2015/2016) with other relevant periods

| Crime category                        | Zuma Administration<br>(2009/2010 to 2015/2016)       |  |   |   | Mbeki Administration<br>(2004/2005 to 2008/2009)                 |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|
|                                       | Increase/decrease during the 2015/2016 reporting year | Increase/decrease during the previous year 2014/2015 | Average annual increase/decrease 2012/2013 to 2015/2016 | Average annual increase/decrease for the first three years of Zuma administration | Average annual increase/decrease during the Mbeki Administration |
| Public / street robbery               | 0.9%  | 9.7%   | 8.0%  | -6.6%   | -6.3%  |
| House robbery                         | 2.7%  | 5.2%   | 6.0%  | -3.0%   | 19.4%  |
| Business robbery                      | 2.8%  | 3.2%   | 5.9%  | 4.9%  | 55.7%  |
| Carjacking                            | 14.3%   | 14.2%  | 13.8%   | -12.2%  | 1.6%   |
| Truck hijacking                       | -7.4%   | 29.1%  | 11.1%   | -14.3%  | 11.9%  |
| Common robbery                        | -1.5%   | 2.7%   | 0.7%  | -3.5%   | -7.6%  |
| Murder                                | 4.9%  | 4.6%   | 5.0%  | -4.7%   | -1.7%  |
| Attempted murder                      | 3.4%  | 3.2%   | 5.8%  | -6.3%   | -7.8%  |
| Burglary - residential                | -1.2%   | -2.3%  | 0.6%  | -0.1%   | -3.5%  |
| Burglary - non-residential            | 0.9%  | 1.2%   | 1.8%  | 0.0%  | 1.7%   |
| Theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle | -2.3%   | -2.7%  | -2.1%   | -7.4%   | -2.8%  |
| Theft out of / from motor vehicle     | -4.1%   | 1.1%   | 1.9%  | 6.4%  | -7.3%  |
| Stock theft                           | -1.0%   | 1.8%   | -2.6%   | 1.0%  | -5.4%  |

factors could only be established in 59.3% of the 2015/2016 murder cases analysed (this in itself raises serious questions about detectives' ability to form a first impression on possible motives). Further on in the presentation, it is stated that many bodies are discovered early in the morning and that, although the reason for this is unclear, they may in all probability be victims of street/public robbery. This should convince the Minister and those analysts who were very vocal about the social nature of murder that it may have changed over the years and that the police can indeed do something about the 40 to 50% or even more murders that are not social.

The fact that street/public -, house - and business robberies have increased by a marginal 0.9%, and 2.7% and 2.8% and not the 9.7%, 5.2% and 3.2% of 2014/2015, may indicate that the new strategy may work in future. But there is not enough evidence that it is already starting to work and the people of South Africa should just wait until next year to get better confirmation.

### Conclusion and recommendations

As long as the government, including the police, do not except the fact that:

- different crimes have to be analysed in their

smallest, purest/most coherent parts and that the dynamics of each of these should be understood before the results can be operationalised into policing;

- there has to be a national plan for systematic crime reduction of the more policeable crime categories and subcategories and station operational management must be kept accountable for reduction of these; and
- police visibility and actions should be intelligence-based, and that these steps should form the basis of the Back to Basics approach/strategy, they are not going to succeed in pushing the crime back to where it was in 2011/2012 and then continuing to reduce it at the rate at which it was being reduced during the 2004/2005 to 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 to 2011/2012 periods (see table 1). In short, the failure of crime reduction in the Phiyega era has to be eradicated in the shortest period possible and crime reduction at the rate of the Selebi and Cele eras has to be restored.

A good short-term starting point would be to at least release the four quarterly crime statistics datasets for 2015/2016, compared to the same quarters of 2014/2015 and also the first quarter of the current year (2016/2017), namely April to June 2016, which should have been available

and edited since at least the first week of August 2016 (available within 24 hours after 30 June, but not edited). This is to confirm or reject the Minister of Police's conclusion in his sociology of crime that: "We will continue to implement the Back to Basics approach to policing which has started to yield positive results. The majority of our successes are based on its implementation." The fact that an announcement was already made in July 2016 that the quarterly release of crime statistics was approved made it imperative to analyse the 2015/2016 statistics in quarters and to also release the statistics of the first quarter of the current year together with the 2015/2016 crime statistics, and not to suddenly declare that quarterly statistics will only be released by next year.

It is also necessary to release the full results of the 2015/2016 national murder docket analysis and to at least introduce sub-codes for murder and rape on the CAS (the Crime Administration System), to establish the more and less policeable proportions of these crimes. This is essential if the SAPS/Government really wants to reduce these two types of crime.

### Editor's note

\* Chris de Kock is an analyst of crime violence and crowd behaviour.