High-Density Policing, Community Participation and the Reduction in Violent Crime in South Africa

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Reduction in Murder – Why?

[Graph showing the reduction in murder and firearm murder rates from 1994/95 to 2013/14, with a steady decline in both categories.]
Focus on homicide/murder & firearms

• Homicide is the most reliable and complete data
• 1998: SA’s firearm homicide rate was 28.5 per 100,000 people (one of highest recorded rates at the time)
  – Firearms = leading cause of all ‘non-natural’ deaths in SA (includes homicide, suicides, accidents & undetermined causes)
• NIMSS study: firearms = 26.3% of non-natural deaths in major cities
  – Sharp force injuries: 15.7%; motor vehicle accidents-pedestrians: 10.5%; blunt force: 5.8%
Firearms & violence

- ‘Priming’ effect = aggressive behaviour
- Increases intimate distance
- More lethal than other common weapons
- Increase in armed crime (opportunities)
- Escalation of firearm possession (self-protection)
- Escalation of violence in interpersonal disputes
Firearm availability & firearm violence

• Link between firearm availability & firearm violence is highly contested
• Available research (strong US-bias) suggests a connection, but causation yet to be established
• Context is critical
1998: Firearm possession & use

Firearm stocks:
- 4.5 million licensed (civilians)
- 750,000 government (police & military)
- +/- 100,000 private security
- 500,000 illegal firearms

Loss/theft:
- 1994-98 average of 20,000 civilian firearms lost/stolen annually
- +/- 1000 SAPS weapons lost/stolen each year
- SAPS recovering half that number annually
Firearms control

- Measures to regulate manufacture, trade, distribution, storage, possession & use of firearms (& ammunition)
- Typically prescribed in government policy, legislation (regulations) & strategies
- Types of control: licensing criteria; safe storage requirements; banning of certain types of firearms; & ammunition restrictions
- Specific policing operations
- Typically a policing & criminal justice approach, & only addresses access to firearms
- Often confused with disarmament
Public health explanation for decline in the murder rate in South Africa

• More effective firearms control brought about by the introduction of the Firearms Control Act (2000) (reduced access).
  – Increase in minimum age
  – Background checks
  – Competency testing
  – Reduction in maximum number of firearms per person
  – Amnesties

• Impact: reduction in loss & theft of licensed firearms
Firearm loss/theft (licensed)

Firearm losses/thefts

Firearm recoveries by SAPS
Limitations of this explanation

• Firearms Control Act (FCA) only promulgated in late-2004 (with the Regulations)

• Illegal firearms mostly used in murder – not directly addressed by the FCA

• Reductions firearm license approvals associated with previous Act
  – 1994-99: annual average of 194,000 firearm licences approved
  – 2000-04: annual average of 107,203 firearm licenses approved
High-density operations

• “saturation of high crime areas with patrolling police members, performing proactive patrols...[that are] intent on law enforcement”
• Target hot spots in high crime areas (shebeens, taxi ranks, hostels etc.)
• Roadblocks; cordon-and-search; patrols; arrests
• In partnership with: SANDF; Metro Police; other government depts; CPFs; NHWs
High-density operations in SA
High-density operations in Brazil
High density operations

- Murder in SA concentrated in 10% of precincts
- SAPS targets high crime areas with high density operations (with SANDF) from mid-1990s
- Strong focus on firearms seizures and arrests

Some SAPS high density operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Operations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>Sword &amp; Shield</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Pax</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Ventilation</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Monozite</td>
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<td>1997-2000</td>
<td>Recoil; Saladin; Good Hope</td>
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<td>2000-03</td>
<td>Crackdown</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Tsipa</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Sethnuya</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007-15</td>
<td>Duty Calls / Festive Season</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-16</td>
<td>Combat</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>Fiela-Reclaim</td>
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The Study

• SAPS annual crime data (total cases) at SAPS police area level
• Considered the relationship between illegal possession of firearms/ammunition (IPFA) & murder (trajectory analysis)
• IPFA = proxy for high density SAPS operations
• Sample of 132 high crime SAPS station areas (all 9 provinces): 1994/95-2014/15
Findings

• Murder is variable within high crime areas
• 26% of station areas: symbiotic association between IPFA & murder
• 13% of station areas: delayed inverse symbiotic association between IPFA & murder
• 8% of station areas: elevated IPFA levels that corresponded with consistent declines in annual murder cases over a period of years
• 11% of station areas = no consistent inverse association between IPFA & murder
Inanda

Murder

Unlawful possession of firearms and ammunition
Hillbrow

- Murder
- Illegal possession of firearms and ammunition
What can explain these findings?

• Numerous studies/experiments (mainly US research) indicate that hotspots policing = decrease in murder
• Disarmament effect
• Incarceration effect (mass arrests)
Mitchells Plain

- Murder
- Unlawful possession of firearms and ammunition
Delft

- Murder
- Unlawful possession of firearms and ammunition
Confiscated (by SAPS) firearms to gangs