Property crime
Overview of the official statistics: 2014/15

This factsheet provides an overview of murder and robbery trends between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 as recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS). The ISS is using the recalculated figures released by SAPS on 29 September 2015 for the years 2004/05 to 2014/15. The ISS takes no responsibility for the accuracy of these statistics.

A note about SA’s crime statistics
On the day of their release, these statistics were already at least six months out of date. That means that the current crime situation, particularly at local level, could be very different to that described by these statistics. For a guide on how to interpret crime statistics see the Africa Check Factsheet. For more factsheets, infographics, interactive maps, analysis and graphics on crime visit the ISS Crime Hub.

What is property crime?
The term ‘property crime’ refers to crimes in which property is stolen without the use of violence or force (i.e. no direct confrontation between perpetrators and victims). The police report on the following types of property crime:

- Residential burglary
- Business burglary
- Commercial crime
- Shoplifting
- Theft out of or from motor vehicles
- Theft of motor vehicles
- Stock theft
- ‘All theft not mentioned elsewhere’
Property crimes affecting households

Residential burglary

- Residential burglary incidents recorded by the police decreased by 2.3% to a total 253 716 incidents between 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- Each day, on average, 695 households were burgled.
- It is likely that the actual number of burglaries was higher than that recorded by the SAPS: the 2014 National Victims of Crime Survey (NVCS) by Statistics South Africa found that only about six in ten burglaries were reported to the police.

Theft of motor vehicle

- In 2014/15, each day, on average, 151 vehicles were stolen.
- Theft of motor vehicle decreased by 2.7% in 2014/15 when compared to 2013/14.
- The main reason for this drop may be decreasing reporting rates. According to the NVCS, reporting rates dropped from 98.2% in 2010 to 92.7% in 2013/14.

Figure 1: Trends for selected property crimes, 2003/04 – 2014/15

Thieves out of motor vehicles

- Thefts out of motor vehicles increased by 1.1% to 145 358 incidents in 2014/15.
- Each day, on average, 398 vehicles were broken into and property was stolen.

Stock theft

- Stock theft has increased this year by 1.8%.
- This crime has averaged around only 30 000 cases per annum over the past five years, but its impact on food security is significant. In the NVCS, 12% of households said the threat of crime prevented them from keeping livestock. For traditional small farmers, stock theft can cause serious tensions and conflict which can lead to crimes like murder, attempted murder and arson being committed.
Property crimes affecting business

Commercial crime

- Commercial crime includes different types of ‘white collar’ crimes such as corruption, fraud, money laundering, embezzlement and forgery.
- The number of incidents decreased by 11.6% to 67 830 incidents in the last year.
- Commercial crime decreased by 22% since 2012/13 when it peaked at 89 138 cases.
- Between 2004/05 and 2012/13 commercial crime increased by a substantial 65%.
- An accurate trend for this broad crime category is difficult to establish as the public and private sectors seldom report these crimes to police.
- The NVCS shows that only 15.6% (one out of six) victims of consumer fraud report it to the police. The survey also found that the proportion of fraud victims who report dropped by 12.6% between 2011 and 2013; arguably because of the SAPS’ inability to effectively investigate most cases of fraud and corruption reported to them.
- The impact of these crimes is perhaps more important than the numbers reported: the financial losses suffered are high; one incident can involve tens of millions of Rands.

Figure 2: Commercial crime and shoplifting, 2003/04 – 2014/15

‘All theft not mentioned elsewhere’

- The catch-all category of ‘all theft not mentioned elsewhere’ includes the theft of non-ferrous metal such as copper cable, illegal mining, heritage crimes and poaching.
- This category of crime decreased by 0.8% to 360 541 between 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- In April 2015, the Minister of Economic Development announced stricter controls and implementation of the Secondhand Goods Act to curb metal and cable theft.
Shoplifting

- Shoplifting increased by 1.2% to 71,327 cases. This follows a 20% decrease in the previous four years.
- The previous decreases were recorded despite high rates of unemployment and poverty. This may be because of better security measures at larger shops, and reluctance by the managers of smaller establishments to report this crime.

What does South Africa need to do?

Crime is a complex phenomenon with a range of social, economic and other contributory factors. Solutions are often equally complex and diverse, and cannot rely only on the police. The police can, however, have a direct impact on crimes linked to the activities of organised criminal groups, like burglary, vehicle theft, stock theft, copper cable theft, and illegal mining and poaching, as well as robbery. This requires: collecting and effectively using crime intelligence; better skilled, experienced and resourced detectives; targeted patrols and roadblocks; and strategically placed visible policing.

Crime intelligence is vital for the police to reduce crimes like robbery and burglary, since they are typically committed by organised criminal groups and repeat offenders who use networks to sell their stolen goods. Intelligence techniques enable the police to identify and investigate the networks and individuals and target them for investigation. Good detective work produces sufficient evidence, which can lead to successful prosecutions.

However, the ability of the SAPS’s Crime Intelligence Division is in question. According to the police’s 2013/14 annual report the division produced 50% fewer communication analysis reports than two years ago and 32% fewer intelligence analysis reports. This undermines the ability of the police generally, which depends on good quality and timely intelligence.

For more information and detailed crime maps for all municipalities and policing precincts in South Africa, visit the ISS Crime Hub at www.issafrica.org/crimehub.

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