

# Elections 2024: Arming you with the facts about Gun control to reduce crime

## Introduction

While political parties have proposed different strategies to deal with violent crime in SA, most don't mention gun control even though guns are the leading weapon used to commit violent crimes like murder and attempted murder. Are they right to ignore gun control as a strategy to address violent crime in SA?

## Violent crime in SA

Since 2011/12 violent crime in SA has steadily increased. As shown in Graph<sup>1</sup>, murder has increased by 77%, attempted murder by 71% and aggravated robbery (which includes carjacking, residential and business robbery) by 56%.

## Gun violence in SA

According to the United Nations, gun murder rates across the world are the driver of overall murder rates.<sup>2</sup> As such and coinciding with the increase in SA's overall murder rate is an increase in gun-related murder. As shown in Graph 2<sup>3</sup>, the number of people murdered with a gun has more than doubled over the past eight years from 5,417 murders in 2015/16 (when 29% of the 18,673 murders that year were from gunshot) to 11,347 murders in 2022/23 (when 41% of 27,494 murders were gunshot).<sup>4</sup>

Currently 34 people are shot dead every day in SA.<sup>5</sup>

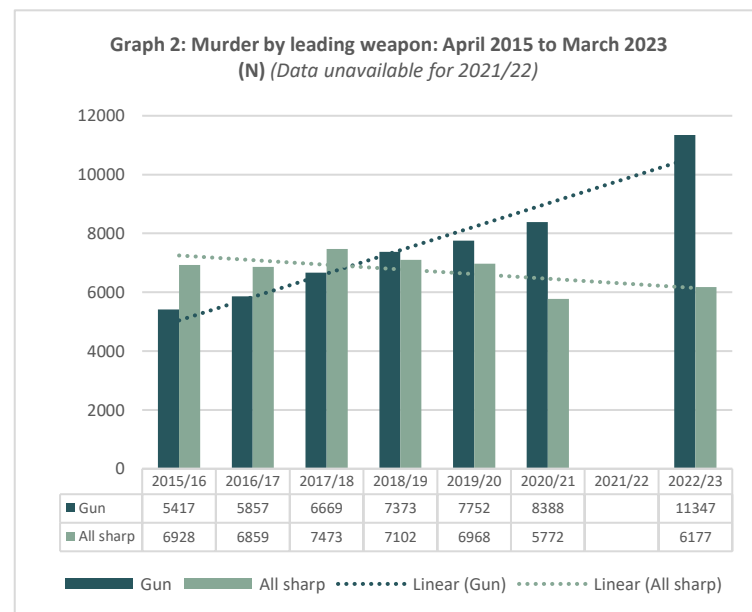
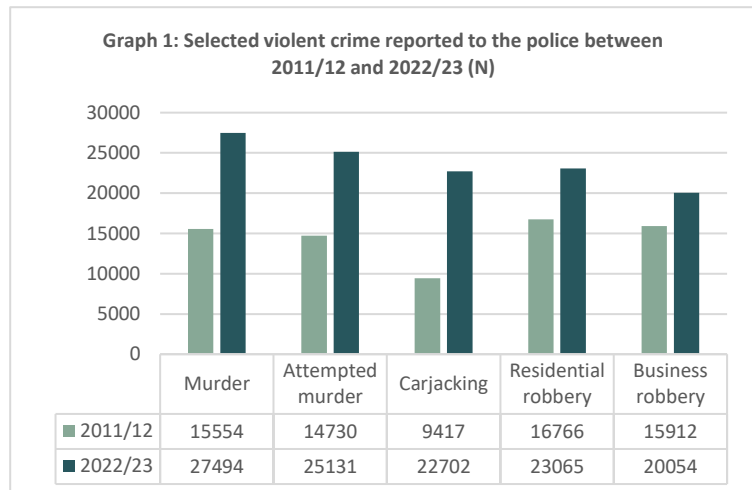
## Gun control saves lives

When SA's Firearms Control Act was passed into law in 2000, guns were the leading cause of murder, with 34 people shot and killed a day.<sup>6</sup> By 2009 this number had halved to 18 a day.<sup>7</sup> Published research has attributed this decrease in gun deaths to the reduction in gun availability in SA between 2000 and 2010 because of gun controls associated with the Firearms Control Act (2000):

**Men:** 4,500 lives, mostly male, were saved in five South African cities between 2001 and 2005 because of stricter gun control, which limited the acquisition, possession and use of guns by civilians.<sup>8</sup>

**Women:** The decrease in the number of women shot and killed between 1999 and 2009 is "explained by gun control legislation ...with provisions for safer firearm use and ownership amongst its key features."<sup>9</sup>

**Children:** The decline in the number of children injured from gunshot from 2001 shows that "strengthening firearm legislation can reduce firearm-related injury."<sup>10</sup>



The power of gun control to save lives in SA is confirmed globally e.g. a study, analysing data on gun ownership and crime from 27 countries – including South Africa – found that the number of guns per person in a country predicted that country’s gun death rate, and that “the current study debunks the widely quoted hypothesis that guns make a nation safer.”<sup>11</sup>

## Gun availability kills

The steady increase in gun crime since 2010 is associated with various breakdowns in SA’s firearms control management system – both inadvertent (due e.g. to inappropriate police target setting, under-resourcing, and poor planning) and deliberate (e.g. fraud, corruption, and theft). As a result, guns have become increasingly available. Even during SA’s Covid-19 lockdowns, which were some of the strictest in the world, involving a ban on alcohol, restricted movement and intensified policing, gun violence remained high while sharp-object murders dropped significantly, further proof that the availability of guns drives gun violence outside of stricter policing or alcohol bans.<sup>12</sup>

### Guns make killing easier

Guns are small, light, easy to use, easy to conceal and can be used from a distance to efficiently kill.

## Gun control = Crime control

SA’s experience that gun control saves lives while gun availability kills is not unique, studies across the world have shown this.<sup>13</sup> In addition to saving lives and reducing overall murder rates, research in Australia shows that stronger gun laws reduced armed robbery and attempted murder rates in that country.<sup>14</sup>

## Summary and conclusion

SA’s experience between 2000 (when the Firearms Control Act was passed into law) and 2010 powerfully shows how gun controls that reduced the availability of guns resulted in a reduction in violent crime across the country; this includes almost halving our gun murder rate from 34 people shot dead every day to 18 and a net decline in overall murder rates. Violent crime in SA has again reached levels last seen in the late 1990s, with 34 people shot dead every day. The solution is to reduce gun availability through stricter gun controls making gun control a prerequisite for any crime prevention strategy.

### Elections 24: Arm yourself with the facts about gun violence and gun control

This info sheet is part of a series developed by Gun Free South Africa for Elections 24, helping you assess:

- Where does your party stand on gun control?
- Does your party have a plan to combat the rising levels of gun violence in SA?
- Does your party believe in arming citizens as a form of self-defence?
- What is your party’s position on illegal guns, and how do they plan to stop the legal guns becoming crime guns?

Also read: • [Gun crime and illegal guns](#) • [Guns for self-defence](#)

**Make your vote count!**

<sup>1</sup> South African Police Service. Annual national crime statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrase of the following quote, ‘an observation that can be drawn across all regions is that high homicide rates are usually associated with a high percentage of homicides committed with firearms..., which may suggest that firearm homicides could be a driver of overall homicides on an aggregate level.’ Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2023. Global Study on Homicide 2023. New York: United Nations. (Online). Available at



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[https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/2023/Global\\_study\\_on\\_homicide\\_2023\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/2023/Global_study_on_homicide_2023_web.pdf) (accessed 6 March 2024), page 133.

<sup>3</sup> Source of figures in Graph 1:

- Gun, knife and other sharp object murders for 2015/16 and 2016/17: National Police Commissioner. 2019. Reply to question 15 from Dr PJ Groenewald (FF+), 7 February. (Online). Available at <https://static.pmg.org.za/RNW15-190322.docx> (accessed 6 May 2024).
- Gun, knife and other sharp object murders for 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21: Minister of Police. 2021. Reply to question 1637 from Dr PJ Groenewald (FF+), 4 June. (Online) Available at <https://static.pmg.org.za/RNW1637-2021-06-25.docx> (accessed 6 May 2024).
- Gun, knife and other sharp object murders for 2022/23 sourced from South African Police Service presentations on quarterly annual crime statistics. Available at [https://www.saps.gov.za/services/older\\_crimestats.php](https://www.saps.gov.za/services/older_crimestats.php) (accessed 6 May 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Total murders sourced from South African Police Service annual and quarterly crime statistics. Available at [https://www.saps.gov.za/services/older\\_crimestats.php](https://www.saps.gov.za/services/older_crimestats.php) (accessed 6 May 2024).

<sup>5</sup> South African Police Service 2023-24 national crime statistics for [quarter 2](#) and [quarter 3](#).

<sup>6</sup> Chetty, Robert. 2000. Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre.

<sup>7</sup> Matzopoulos, Richard, Megan Prinsloo, Victoria Pillay-van Wyk, Nomonde Gwebushe, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Ria Laubscher, Naeemah Abrahams, William Msemburi, Carl Lombard, and Debbie Bradshaw. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bull World Health Organisation*, Vol 93, pp. 303-313.

<sup>8</sup> Matzopoulos, Richard, Mary Lou Thompson, and Jonathan Myers. 2014. Firearm and Nonfirearm Homicide in 5 South African Cities: A Retrospective Population-Based study. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 104, No. 3, pp. 455-460.

<sup>9</sup> Abrahams, Naeemah, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Carl Lombard, and Rachel Jewkes. 2013. Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. *PLOS Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 1-8, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, Nathan, G. Colville, Y. van der Heyde, and A.B. van As. 2013. Firearm injuries to children in Cape Town, South Africa: Impact of the 2004 Firearms Control Act. *South African Journal of Surgery*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 92-96, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Bangalore, Sripal, and Franz Messerli. 2013. Gun ownership and firearm-related deaths. *American Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 126, pp 873-876, p 873.

<sup>12</sup> Faull, Andrew; et al. 2021. Lockdown lessons: Violence and policing in a pandemic. *Southern Africa Report 44*, March. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Santaella-Tenorio, Julian, Magdalena Cerdá, Andrés Villaveces, and Sandro Galea. 2016. What do we know about the association between firearm legislation and firearm-related injuries? *Epidemiologic Reviews*, Vol. 38, pp. 140–157.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, Benjamin and Jing Li. 2015. Do fewer guns lead to less crime? Evidence from Australia. *International Review of Law and Economics*, Vol. 42, pp. 72-78.

