

Gun Massacres in SA: QUICK FACTS

Developed by Gun Free South Africa, 14 July 2022

Gun massacres in SA

21 people were shot and killed and 20 injured in three separate shootings at taverns in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal last weekend. These shootings highlight a changing pattern in gun violence in SA as we see:

- More multiple shootings: See GFSA's [gun violence map](#)
- More people being shot multiple times: Public health professionals have spoken publicly about this, see summary of 5 June Sunday Times article *Burden of gun violence on SA's health system* in GFSA's [latest newsletter](#)
- More shootings in public places, including shooting of women: See GFSA's briefing on [femicide in SA over 18 years](#)

Mass shootings and multiple shootings

Mass shootings are defined as where 1 shooter shoots 4 or more people (excluding the shooter) in a single event regardless of motive, setting or number of deaths. Because SA shootings in which 4 or more people are shot most often involve 2 or more shooters we should refer to them as **multiple shootings** or gun massacres, though the term mass shooting is commonly used.

Why are gun massacres increasing in SA?

A gun massacre cannot happen without a gun. The increasing flood of guns and ammunition into our society means more gun violence, including gun massacres.

Gun violence in SA

While gun massacres are shocking, **23 people, mostly young men, are shot and killed every day in SA.**¹

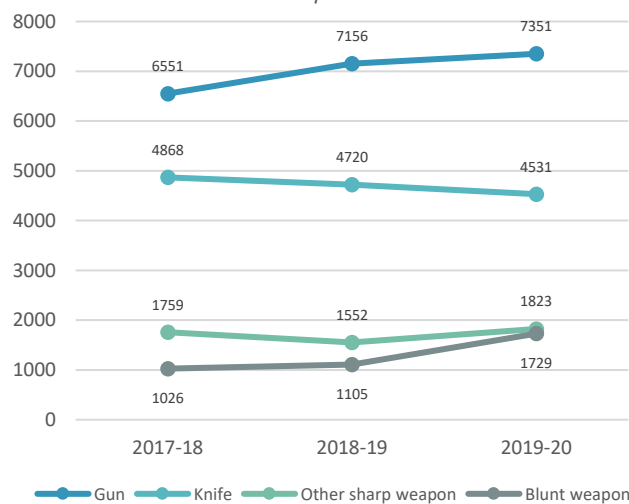
SA has a gun violence epidemic

- More people are shot and killed in SA than are stabbed and killed (see Graph 1²).
- More people are shot and killed in Gauteng than die in traffic accidents. Gunshot injuries overtook road traffic injuries as the leading cause of non-natural death in Gauteng in the 2018-19 financial year.³

Epidemic

A disease that affects a large number of people within a community, population or region. The disease doesn't need to be infectious, and could include drug use or gun violence.

Graph 1: SAPS annual crime statistics - Most common weapon used in murder for financial years 2017-18 to 2019-20 (N) Note: SAPS has not provided more recent data on the weapon used in murder



Gun violence is preventable

To reduce gun deaths we must reduce the circulation of guns: The tap must be turned off.

SA's own experience shows **that strong gun laws save lives, but poor restrictions on who can own what weapon for which purpose kill:**



Gun deaths in SA over 25 years	↑	Before 2000	Before SA's Firearms Control Act (2000) was passed into law, 34 people were shot and killed every day in SA. ⁴
	↓	2000 to 2010	Over the next 10 years this figure halved and by 2009, 18 people were shot and killed a day. ⁵ Research shows that reducing the circulation of guns in SA saved thousands of lives. ⁶
	↑	After 2010	In late 2010 SA's murder rate starts rising. ⁷ At the same time evidence of poor enforcement and gaps in the law begin mounting. ⁸ As more guns start circulating, so does gun violence. Currently 23 people are shot and killed every day in SA.

How will reducing the circulation of guns stop gun deaths?

- Most gun violence in SA is committed with illegal guns. By their nature these guns are outside of any controls.
- The biggest source of illegal guns in SA are legal guns owned by civilians, which includes the private security industry.
- Legal guns, the main supply of illegal guns, are flooding into SA: Gun dealers have reported an increase in the demand for guns and ammunition, particularly after the July 2021 unrest.⁹

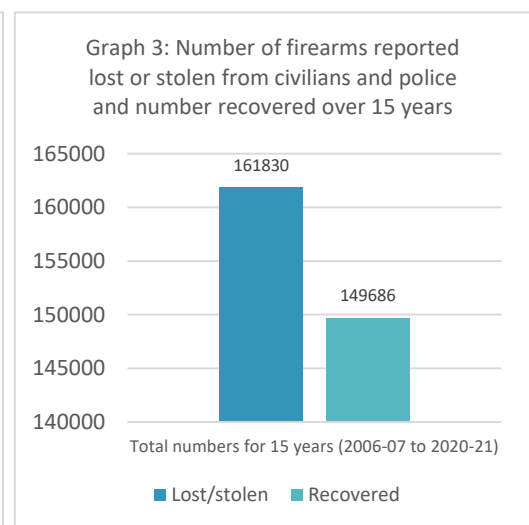
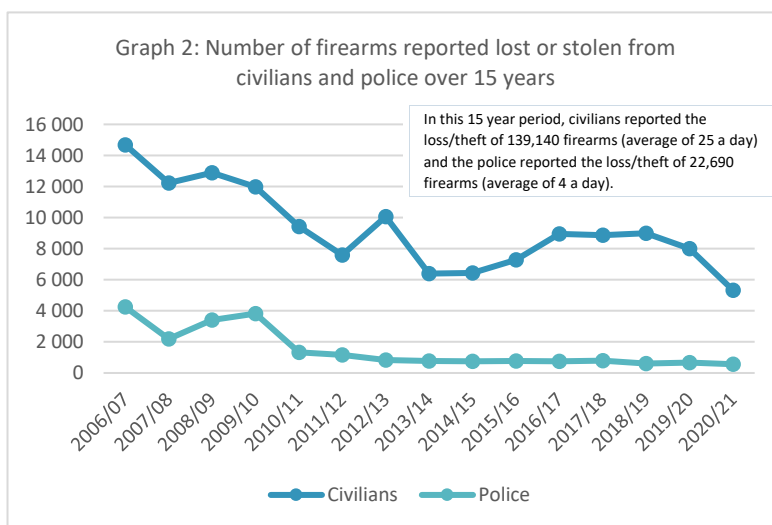
Rising demand for guns in SA not unique

In 2020 and 2021 gun sales in the USA broke all previous records as millions of guns were bought for protection in response to socio-economic devastation wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic and protests linked to the presidential election.¹⁰ Research in the USA has already linked pandemic gun sales to an increase in gun-related deaths in that country.¹¹

Illegal guns

Almost all illegal guns were legal before they leaked into the illegal pool. Leakage/diversion occurs in four ways:¹²

1. **Loss and theft:** Civilians – not the police – are the biggest source of illegal guns in SA (see Graph 2¹³). While 92% of lost/stolen guns are recovered, 12,000 guns lost/stolen in the past 15 years have not been recovered (see Graph 3¹⁴).
2. **Fraud, corruption and poor enforcement of the law:** People who do not meet the legal criteria of “fit and proper” are illegally granted gun licences.
3. **Cross-border trafficking:** The number of firearms being smuggled into SA decreased significantly in the late 1990s.
4. **Conflict guns:** Over the past 15 years there has been a shift to more modern firearms.



Calls to increase the number of guns to make us safer are irresponsible

There is no evidence anywhere in the world that more guns make people safer.¹⁵

There is overwhelming evidence that:

- Guns are not effective for self-defence
- A gun increases the danger faced by the gun owner, their family and their community. Read GFSA's latest Briefing on [Gun control, self-defence and public safety](#)

Action to stop gun violence

GFSA calls on government to:



Prioritise affected communities: Engage community members living with high levels of gun violence. Listen to what they want, rather than being distracted by a small minority of vocal gun owners who oppose any attempts to limit guns and ammunition



Stop new guns entering the market: Close the tap by tabling the Firearms Control Amendment Bill in parliament. A draft Bill published last year will help stop the circulation of guns in our society by limiting:

- Who can own guns and ammunition
- What types of guns and ammunition can be owned
- Why guns and ammunition can be owned



Establish a specialised firearms unit: This Unit must be resourced to comprehensively mop up guns flooding into our society by:

- Recovering and destroying legal and illegal guns and ammunition. Actions include holding an amnesty, strengthening intelligence-led policing, and, of principal importance, ensuring all recovered guns are publicly destroyed.
- Strengthening controls over legal guns and ammunition. Actions include limiting who can own what gun for which purpose, enhancing oversight of the entire firearms control management system to combat fraud and corruption, and ensuring that SA has a functional Central Firearms Registry.

¹ Details for:

- **Figure of 23 people shot a day:** 2019-20 annual crime statistics show that between 20 and 26 people are shot and killed a day, averaging 23 people a day. Source: South African Police Services. 2020. Crime situation in Republic of South Africa: Twelve (12) months (April to March 2019-20). Presentation to the Portfolio Committee of Police, 31 July. (Online). Available at www.saps.gov.za/services/april_to_march_2019_20_presentation.pdf (accessed 3 August 2020). Figures calculated as follows:
 - Figure of 20: There were 7,351 firearm-related murders in 2019-20, which is 34,5% of the 21,325 murders that year, 45% of the 16,272 murders for which the weapon is known, and an average of 20 people a day.
 - Figure of 26: The weapon is known in 76% of all 21,325 murders in 2019-20; assuming 45% of all murders are firearm-related = 9,5936 gun-related deaths, which is an average of 26 people a day.SAPS has not released a breakdown of the weapon used in crime, including murder, since 2019-20; it is likely the figure of 23 is an under-estimate considering that murder rates have risen since this time, from 4,668 murders in the three months between 1 January to 31 March 2020 to 6,083 murders for these three months in 2022. Source: South African Police Service. 2022. Police recorded crime statistics fourth quarter of 2021/2022 financial year, January to March 2022.(Online). Available at www.saps.gov.za/services/crimestats.php (accessed 14 June 2022).
- **Young men most at risk:** The most recent national mortality surveillance study shows that 89% of gun homicide victims are male and 11% are female. Source: Prinsloo, Megan. et al. 2021. The 2nd injury mortality survey: A national study of injury mortality levels and causes in South Africa in 2017. Cape Town: South African Medical Research Council.

² South African Police Service. 2019. Crime Statistics: Crime situation in Republic of South Africa (12) months (April to March 2018-19). Presentation to Portfolio Committee on Police, 12 September. (Online). Available at <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/28873/> (accessed 28 March 2020).



³ Gauteng Department of Health. 2019. Gunshot wounds and stabbings top the list of causes of death in Gauteng. Media statement, 5 November. Reports that for 2018/2019 financial year, “state mortuaries recorded 2416 gunshot deaths followed by motor vehicle accidents and stabbings at 1695 and 1295 respectively.”

⁴ Chetty, Robert. 2000. Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre.

⁵ Matzopoulos, Richard, Megan Prinsloo, Victoria Pillay-van Wyk, Nomonde Gwebushe, Shanaaz Mathews, Lorna Martin, Ria Laubscher, Naemah 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.

⁶ See: 1) 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. 2) Abrahams, Naemah, 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. 3) 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.

⁷ South African Police Service annual crime statistics, available online at www.saps.gov.za.

⁸ See: 1) Matzopoulos, Richard, J. Simonetti, M. Prinsloo, I. Neethling, P. Groenewald, J. Dempers, L.J. Martin, A. Rowhani-Rahbar, J.E. Myers, and M.L. Thompson. 2018. A retrospective time trend study of firearm and non-firearm homicide in Cape Town from 1994 to 2013. *South African Medical Journal*, Vol. 108, No. 3 pp. 197-204. 2) Taylor, Claire. 2019. Gun Control and Violence: South Africa's Story. Johannesburg: GFSa. (Online). Available at <https://gfsa.org.za/download/gun-control-and-violence-south-africa-story/?wpdmdl=2942&refresh=62cff65f5147c1657796191>.

⁹ See: 1) Khumalo, Fred. 2021. One man's meat is another's poison. City Press, 12 August. (Online). Available at www.news24.com/citypress/columnists/fredkhumalo/close-up-one-mans-meat-is-anothers-poison-20210812 (accessed 8 June 2022). 2) Neves, Jarryd. 2021. Following riots and unrest, demand for guns and ammo in SA has spiked. BizNews, 25 August. (Online). Available at www.biznews.com/undictated/2021/08/25/guns-ammo-demand-spike (accessed 30 August 2021). 3) Lehutso, Nondumiso. 2022. Spike in women owning firearms. Moneyweb, 20 June. (Online). Available at www.moneyweb.co.za/news/south-africa/spike-in-women-owning-firearms/ (accessed 20 June 2022).

¹⁰ Walsh, Joe. 2022. U.S. Bought Almost 20 Million Guns Last Year — Second-Highest Year On Record. *Forbes*, 5 January. (Online). Available at www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2022/01/05/us-bought-almost-20-million-guns-last-year---second-highest-year-on-record/?sh=324a1b7713bb (accessed 8 June 2022).

¹¹ Barton, Champe. 2021. New Data Suggests a Connection Between Pandemic Gun Sales and Increased Violence. *The Trace*, 8 December. (Online). available at www.thetrace.org/2021/12/atf-time-to-crime-gun-data-shooting-pandemic/ (accessed 8 June 2022).

¹² Gun Free South Africa. 2021. The illegal firearms trade in South Africa. *Firearms Control Briefing 3*, 15 November. (Online). Available at <https://gfsa.org.za/2021/11/14/briefing-3-of-2021-the-illegal-firearms-trade-in-south-africa/> which draws extensively on Irish-Qhobosheane, Jenni. 2021. How to silence the guns? Southern Africa's illegal firearms markets. Geneva: The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. (Online). Available at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GITOC-ESA-Obs-How-to-silence-the-guns-Southern-Africas-illegal-firearms-markets.pdf> (accessed 20 October 2021).

¹³ South African Police Service Annual Reports for the years 2001-2002 to date.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gun Free South Africa. 2022. Gun control, self-defence and public safety. *Firearms Control Briefing 2*, 15 June. (Online). Available at <https://gfsa.org.za/2022/06/15/briefing-2-of-2022-gun-control-self-defence-and-public-safety/>.

