

Armed and Unaccountable: South Africa's private security industry continues to fly below the radar

Context within which draft private security industry regulations have been published

The draft regulations for South Africa's private security industry published on 28 March 2025 (click [HERE](#) for a summary) are a much-needed step toward addressing a regulatory gap that has persisted for far too long and which has allowed this massive – and lucrative – industry to fly well below the radar, with minimal oversight and control:

- South Africa's private security industry (PSI) employs four times more guards than police members: In 2023/24. SA's Police Service had 150,388 SAPS Act employees, while the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA) reported 608,977 registered active security officers.¹
- The industry is estimated to be worth about R500 billion.²
- The industry is plagued by a range of serious and long-standing problems, with all the problems identified in Natalie Jaynes' 2012 report [Flying below the radar? The armed private security sector in South Africa](#) not only persisting, but in some cases worsening, as summarised below, these include:
 1. Poor stockpile management and record-keeping
 2. Leakage of guns and ammunition from private security companies to criminals
 3. Criminal infiltration of the security industry
 4. Private security companies operating like state law enforcement
 5. Regulatory failures and oversight gaps

¹ South African Police Service and Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority 2023-2024 Annual Reports.

² Altvest. 2023. Does crime really pay – the private security business, 20 April. (Online). Available at <https://altvestcapital.co.za/does-crime-really-pay-the-private-security-business/>; Thorne, Seth. 2024. Private security booms in South Africa – as trust in police tanks and criminals make a killing. BusinessTech, 21 May. (Online). Available at <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/772767/private-security-booms-in-south-africa-as-trust-in-police-tanks-and-criminals-make-a-killing/>

Key problems identified in 2012 that remain relevant today

1. Poor stockpile management and record-keeping

2012 Finding: “Firearms and ammunition stockpiles are not known” - Neither PSIRA nor the Central Firearms Registry (CFR, the police unit responsible for firearms management) had adequate records of private security company firearms holdings.

Current relevance: Historical dysfunction at the CFR means that the state is unable to say how many firearms or firearm owners are in SA, including within the private security industry as evidenced by comments made by the PSIRA’s Director to Parliament in 2023, when he said, “The CFR’s dysfunction had affected PSIRA’s access to the firearms database.”³ This is a particular risk when a company closes after a contract to provide armed guards ends, without any mechanism to monitor the company’s firearms post closure. For instance, 152 firearms and 93 rounds were recovered by the police in Thohoyandou, Limpopo from defunct security companies that used to operate in the area.⁴

2. Leakage of guns and ammunition from private security companies to criminals

2012 Finding: The report identified a range of concerns about private security guns and ammunition being diverted to criminals.

Current relevance: This remains a serious problem, with security companies reporting the loss/ theft of an average of 5 guns every day⁵ (the police lose 2 a day⁶). Loss and theft include both inadvertent loss and deliberate criminality:

- **Inadvertent** where guards are targeted for their firearms.⁷ This includes the theft of high calibre firearms used in CIT protection, with almost every successful heist seeing both cash and guards’ firearms getting stolen.⁸
- **Deliberate** criminality where security companies or guards sell guns or ammunition to criminals. Recent examples include Mark Kannemeyer, a G4S contract manager who was arrested while allegedly trying to sell various guns, including an AR15 assault rifle to undercover Hawks agents⁹ and research showing that private security companies are a significant source of ammunition for gangs: “almost all major Western Cape gang leaders have links to security firms (five of which were

³ PMG. 2023. PSIRA 2023/24 APP; Police unions’ input on SAPS APP. Minutes of Police Portfolio Committee meeting, 10 May. (Online). available at <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/36880/>

⁴ Tshikhudo, Elmon. 2019. Shock after police confiscate 152 guns. Zoutnet, 2 August. (Online). Available at www.zoutnet.co.za/articles/news/50623/2019-08-02/shock-after-police-confiscate-152-guns

⁵ In 2023/4 private security companies reported the loss/theft of 1,648 firearms while 847 firearms were reported lost/stolen in the first semester of the 2024/25 financial year. Source: Parliamentary Reply RNW1351-241209 (Online). Available at <https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/27402/>

⁶ In 2023/4 the police reported the loss/theft of 741 service guns. Source: South African Police Service 2023-2024 Annual Report.

⁷ Nxumalo, Sakhiseni. 2022. Private security guards in KZN targeted for their firearms. The Witness, 17 May. (Online). Available at www.news24.com/witness/news/durban/private-security-guards-in-kzn-targeted-for-their-firearms-20220517

⁸ See Gun Free SA’s gun violence map: <https://gfsa.org.za/gun-violence-map/>

⁹ Maromo, Jonisayi. 2024. Wrong turn: G4S boss arrested while allegedly trying to sell semi-automatic AR15 rifle to undercover Hawks agents. IOL, 26 November. (Online). Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/wrong-turn-g4s-boss-arrested-while-allegedly-trying-to-sell-semi-automatic-ar15-rifle-to-undercover-hawks-agents-c190c73c-a529-40a4-9deb-44927491a35e>



identified), which can legally purchase ammunition through registered dealers. The connection allows gangs to obtain a steady supply of ammunition through ostensibly legal means.”¹⁰

3. Criminal infiltration of the security industry

2012 Finding: “An unacceptable level of illegality amongst PSIRA members” and problems with criminal elements within the industry.

Current relevance: This has significantly worsened, and includes:

- “Moneyed individuals who are bad actors or have links to the underworld are buying up security companies” which act as “private militias to intimidate, harass, and settle personal scores.”¹¹ Examples include:
 - Sphamandla Mabonga, “controversial businessman”¹², “often surrounded by rumors of shady business deals and crime who was killed in a shootout at Solo restaurant” (see side bar).¹³
 - Shauwn Mkhize, “socialite, businessperson and football boss” who has had two documented incidents where “armed guards protecting Mkhize had clashed with Sars officials. On both occasions, the Sars officials had retreated”¹⁴ and at whose La Lucia property a cache of more than 40 firearms, including automatic machine guns¹⁵ were found in a raid. The firearms belong to “a well-known former presidential protection services police officer-turned-taxi boss, who provides security services” to Mkhize.¹⁶

Sphamandla Mabonga

“Mabonga was known to enter clubs with up to eight armed bodyguards. When he was denied access, the bodyguards allegedly assaulted the unarmed establishment's guards who were only trained to rough up rowdy patrons.”

Source: Mashego, Abram. 2025. Gunned down: Sphamandla Mabonga was a ruthless debt collector – sources. City Press, 9 March. (Online) Available at <https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/gunned-down-sphamandla-mabonga-was-a-ruthless-debt-collector-sources-20250309>

¹⁰ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime. 2024. Western Cape Gang Monitor, Issue 4, December. (Online). Available at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/WC-Gang-Monitor-No4-GI-TOC-December-2024.pdf>

¹¹ Libera, Malcolm. 2025. New mafia thriving on South Africa's high crime rate. BusinessTech, 13 March. (Online). Available at <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/816474/new-mafia-thriving-on-south-africas-high-crime-rate/>

¹² Madibogo, Julia. 2024. Londie London's ex-lover Sphamandla Mabonga arrested again. SundayWorld, 7 March. (Online). Available at <https://sundayworld.co.za/celebrity-news/londie-londons-ex-lover-sphamandla-mabonga-arrested-again/>

¹³ Kamko, Aphiwe. 2025. Londie London's ex-lover, Sphamandla Mabonga, killed in Solo Sandton shootout. Drum, 7 March. (Online). Available at <https://www.news24.com/drum/news/local/londie-londons-ex-lover-sphamandla-mabonga-killed-in-solo-sandton-shootout-20250307-2>

¹⁴ Mashego, Abram. 2024. Royal AMmunition - Weapons cache found in MaMkhize's home. City Press, 1 December. (Online). Available at <https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/royal-ammunition-weapons-cache-found-in-mamkhizes-home-20241201>

¹⁵ Hans, Bongani. 2024. Police Probe Security Boss About Firearms Recovered at Shauwn Mkhize's Property. IOL, 8 December. (Online). Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/sunday-tribune/news/police-probe-security-boss-about-firearms-recovered-at-shauwn-mkhizes-property-d4aa6956-f59e-4acf-baa9-d2e7dcfb3042>

¹⁶ Mashego, Abram. 2024. Royal AMmunition - Weapons cache found in MaMkhize's home. City Press, 1 December. (Online). Available at <https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/royal-ammunition-weapons-cache-found-in-mamkhizes-home-20241201>





**Shauwn Mkhize
(centre)**

Source: Mbhele, Sandisiwe. 2022. Inside Mam'Mkhize's beefed up security. *The Citizen*, 12 July. (Online). Available at <https://www.citizen.co.za/entertainment/celebrity-news/inside-mammkhizes-beefed-up-security/>

- Private security companies used as a front to arm gangs involved in organised crime, including extortion, where businesses are forced to hire specific security providers.¹⁷ One high profile case is that of crime boss Nafiz Modack, who has been linked to ASP Elite Protection Services,¹⁸ and who is currently on trial in the Western Cape High Court for a range of crimes including extortion and the September 2020 assassination of policeman Charl Kinnear.¹⁹



**Nafiz Modack (with
sunglasses)**

Source: Hyman, Aron. 2021. Nafiz Modack charged with murder of top detective Charl Kinnear. *TimesLive*, 14 May. (Online). Available at <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-05-14-nafiz-modack-charged-with-murder-of-top-detective-charl-kinnear/>

¹⁷ Irish-Qhobosheane, Jenni. 2024. Extortionists have South Africa's economies down the barrel of a gun. *Enact*, 10 September. (Online). Available at <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/extortionists-have-south-africa-s-economies-down-the-barrel-of-a-gun>

¹⁸ Dolley, Caryn. 2023. Cops target Cape Town security firm accused of having another business's shotguns and pistols. *Daily Maverick*, 23 June. (Online). Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-06-23-cops-target-cape-town-security-firm-accused-of-having-another-business-shotguns-and-pistols/>

¹⁹ Duval, Mahira. 2024. New evidence links Nafiz Modack to extortion claims. *Cape Argus*, 10 May. (Online). Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/new-evidence-links-nafiz-modack-to-extortion-claims-68eee234-1390-4997-b4bd-c14e74e2d835>

- Private security companies being used to either arm or provide hitmen for political and taxi violence.²⁰ A recent example is security company Professional Protection Alternatives (PPA) being linked to contract killings – including that of another ‘underworld businessman’ Mark Lifman, who was assassinated in November 2024.²¹
- Private security guards linked to serious crimes e.g. four of the six men killed by police with extortion kingpin Yanga 'Bara' Nyalara in February were registered security guards working for a company called KZN VIP, though the company has denied claims that the four were involved in a cash-in-transit robbery and possessed unlicensed firearms. IPID (the Independent Police Investigative Directorate) is investigating.



*Yanga 'Bara' Nyalara
(centre)*

Source: Mfazwe, Anele. 2025. Wes-Kaapse top-cop se gangsters is g'n heroes. Son, 26 February. (Online). Available at <https://www.son.co.za/nuus/wes-kaapse-top-cop-se-gangsters-is-gn-heroes-20250226-0566>

4. Private security companies operating like state law enforcement

2012 Finding: “Private security companies operate like state law enforcement” - The report noted companies engaging in policing functions without adequate regulation.

Current relevance: This trend has continued and intensified:

The private security industry now dwarfs SAPS, having grown 35% in the past 10 years (from 451,565 guards in 2014/15 to 608,977 in 2023²²). At the same time serious and violent crime has more than doubled e.g. there's been a 62% increase in murder (from 17,023 murders in 2013/14 to 27,494 in 2022/23) and almost 50% increase in attempted murder (from 16,989 to 25,131).²³ These parallel

²⁰ African News Agency. 2017. KZN bodyguards appear in court on illegal firearms charges. The Citizen, 20 September. (Online). Available at <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/1660805/kzn-bodyguards-appear-in-court-on-illegal-firearms-charges/>

²¹ Ludidi, Velani. 2024. Deeper ties revealed between security company boss and Lifman murder accused. News24, 12 December. (Online). Available at www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/deeper-ties-revealed-between-security-company-boss-and-lifman-murder-accused-20241212

²² Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority Annual Reports.

²³ South African Police Service national crime statistics.

increases raise questions about how effective the industry has been at addressing crime. Moreover, as this context analysis shows, the private security industry has itself contributed to crime in SA.

Within this context private security companies operate like law enforcement, without having the necessary training, equipment or oversight for this duty. This was evident in the 2021 unrest in which many deaths resulted from shootings by civilians, including private security guards illegally using lethal force to protect property,²⁴ especially in the Phoenix killings²⁵.

5. Regulatory failures and oversight gaps

2012 Findings: “Insufficient oversight” - with only 16 PSIRA inspectors for the entire country; “No accountability for clients employing negligent PSCs” - The report recommended client-level responsibility; Confusion over training standards” particularly related to maintenance training; and “Lack of harmonisation and alignment in key legislation”, most notably the Private Security Industry Regulatory Act and Firearms Control Act.

Current relevance: Problems persist, for example:

- PSIRA struggles with capacity to do the necessary inspections to ensure that companies and guards are registered and laws implemented. Examples include security companies not adhering to basic regulations like ID badges²⁶, instances of illegal military-style training camps operating in South Africa,²⁷ and regulatory confusion that has allowed security companies to operate with military-style weapons in public spaces²⁸. With regards to the latter, GFSA has been inundated with queries from members of the public complaining about bodyguards openly carrying high calibre weapons in restaurants, churches, shopping centres and townhouse complexes.
- Client-level responsibility recommendation has not been implemented, with no evidence of clients being held accountable for the actions of their security providers, as seen from recent issues with municipalities employing unregistered security providers.²⁹
- Training problems continue; in addition to the training gaps apparent from guards’ response to the 2021 unrest, there are various articles about training-related fraud over the years.³⁰

Studies from South Africa³¹ and internationally³² show that perpetrators of intimate partner femicide-suicide are more likely to be employed in the security industry (including police, army, and private security guards). This elevated risk is attributed primarily to easier access to firearms, a key risk factor for both femicide and subsequent suicide.

²⁴ Africa, S., Sokupa, S., & Gumbi, M. 2021. Report of the Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest. The Presidency Republic of South Africa.

²⁵ Phungula, Willem. 2021. Call to rein in 'trigger-happy' guards linked to Phoenix killings. Daily News, 9 September.

²⁶ Davis, Rebecca. 2019. As SA policing fails, private security steps in — but at a cost. Daily Maverick, 15 January.

²⁷ ProtectionWeb. 2024. White River military camp training unlawful – PsiRA. DefenceWeb, 30 July.

²⁸ African News Agency. 2018. Security industry regulator concerned about 'warzone' firearms. The Citizen, 25 September.

²⁹ Teixeira, Ricardo. 2025. Municipalities and Unregistered Security Providers: Efforts to Improve Compliance with PSIRA Regulations. ProtectionWeb, 10 January.

³⁰ Singh, Orrin. 2020. KZN man 'caught red-handed' printing security, matric and tertiary certificates. TimesLive, 30 January; South African Police Service. 2025. SAPS arrests fraudster for issuing fake firearm competency certificates. 20 March. (Oline). Available at www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=59739

³¹ Mathews, Shanaaz, Naeemah Abrahams, Rachel Jewkes, Lorna Martin, Carl Lombard, and Lisa Vetten. 2008. Intimate femicide-suicide in South Africa: a cross-sectional study. Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 86, No. 7, pp. 552-558.

³² Sorrentino, Ann, Vincenza Cinquegrana, and Chiara Guida. 2022. Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Femicide-Suicide in Italy: An Ecological Approach. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Vol. 19, No. 16: 10431.

