

WHAT'S UP IN THE CAPE?

Crime rates in Western and Northern Cape provinces

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According to the official crime statistics, the Western Cape has emerged as the country's most crime-ridden province, and the Northern Cape as the most violent. This is confusing for criminologists who link crime to poverty, because these are two of the best developed provinces in the country, with the highest employment levels. Explaining crime in these provinces requires further research on the people and conditions in the area.

Unlike previous reports, the 2002/3 South African Police Service (SAPS) Annual Report and accompanying statistics did not make direct comparisons of provincial crime rates. A quick look at these figures shows stark disparities between the provinces, with the Western Cape having four and a half times more recorded crime than Limpopo. While this difference may be due in part to reporting rates, the divergence in crime profiles is so striking that it calls out for further discussion.

According to the official statistics, the Western Cape has by far the worst overall crime problem in the country (Figure 1) and in many crime categories, the fastest growing crime problem (Table 1). The Northern Cape has the highest rate of violent crime. Between the two of them, these provinces have the worst crime rates in the country in 17 of the 22 serious crime categories tracked by the SAPS.

Relying on the official crime statistics is problematic, especially for violent crimes, because of under-reporting. Many people do not report the crimes they experience to the police, for reasons ranging from inconvenience to mistrust. If rates of

reporting are high in a province, this could make the area look more crime-ridden than it actually is.

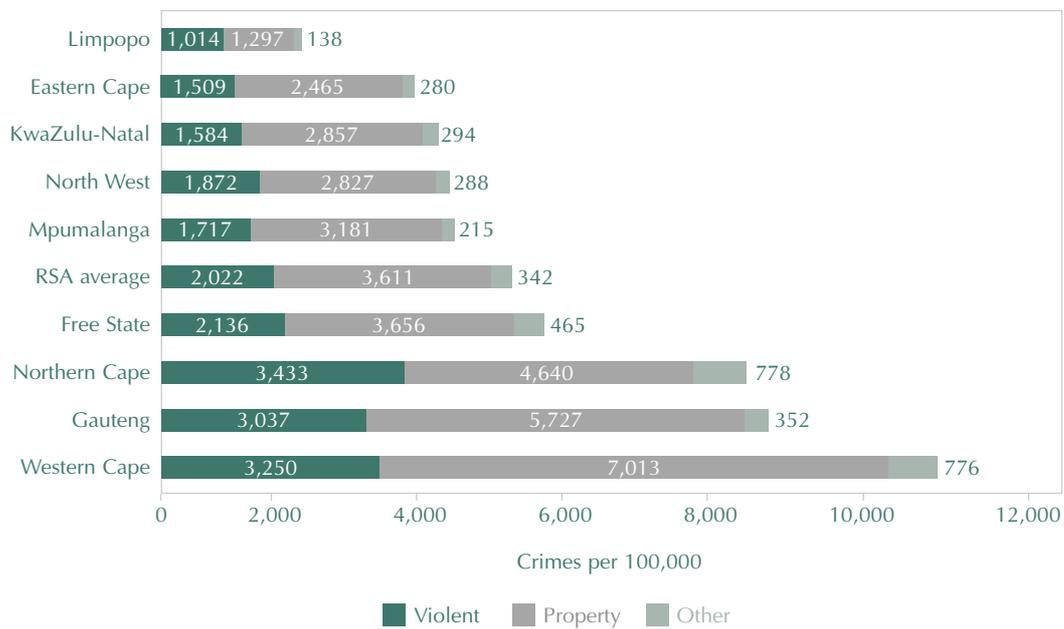
But the 1998 National Victims of Crime survey did not find particularly high levels of reporting in the Western or Northern Cape. While reporting rates for robbery were unusually high in the Northern Cape, they were unusually low in the Western Cape. Assault and burglary reporting rates were close to average in both provinces (Figure 2). Thus, the fact that these two provinces have relatively high recorded crime rates needs to be taken seriously.

Violent crimes

The Western Cape has by far the nation's highest rate of murder: 85 murders per 100,000 citizens in 2002/3. By comparison, second place Gauteng had 59 murders per 100,000, and the national average was 47. Murder is the most accurate gauge of the violent crime situation, as it is more likely to come to the attention of the police than other violent crimes. This means that very few murders remain unrecorded.

While the decline of political violence has caused drastic reductions in killings in Gauteng, KwaZulu-

Figure 1: Crime rates by province, 2002/3



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre

Natal and the Eastern Cape since 1994, murder levels have actually increased in Western Cape. Indeed, it is the only province that has more murders today than it did in 1994 (Figure 3). The data of the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS) show that the Western Cape is the only province in which the majority of non-natural deaths are due to murder.¹

Table 1: Changes in numbers of recorded crimes between 1994/5 and 2002/3

	Western Cape	South Africa
Murder	+34%	-17%
Aggravated robbery	+121%	+50%
Carjacking	+254%	+14%
Theft of motor vehicle	+56%	-12%

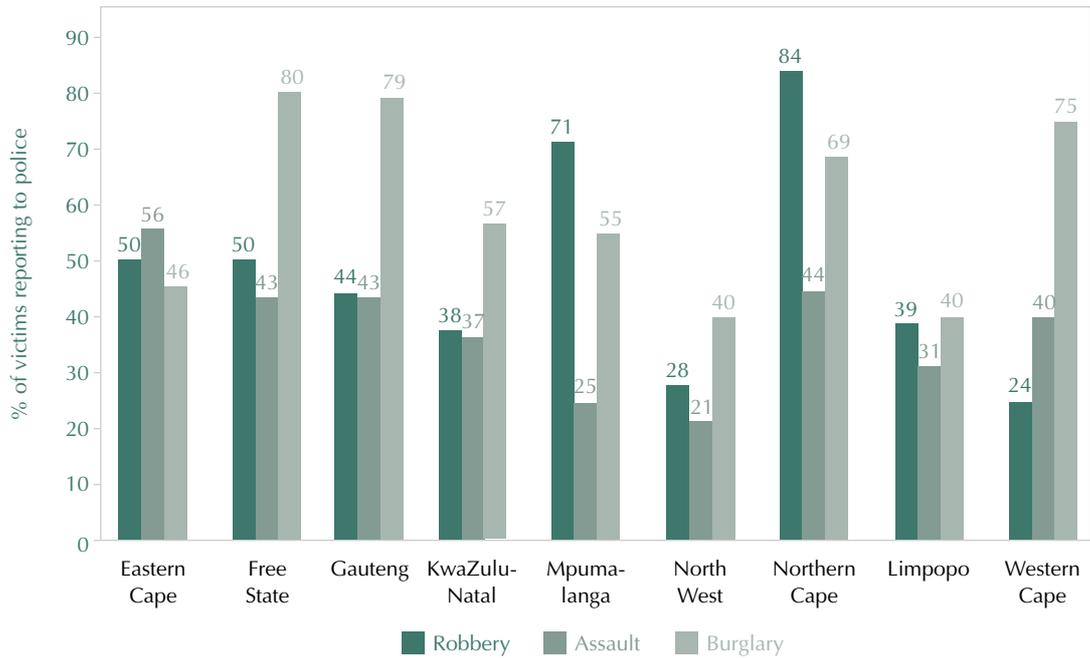
Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre

In addition, the Western Cape boasts the country's highest levels of common and indecent assault, as well as common (but not aggravated) robbery. And aside from the violence, the province also suffers from the highest overall rates of property crime.

But according to the recorded crime statistics, it is residents of the Northern Cape, not the Western Cape, who are at the greatest risk of falling victim to violent crime. The Northern Cape has the highest rates of reported attempted murder, assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm (GBH), rape, and child abuse. The rate of assault GBH in the Northern Cape is more than twice that of any other province besides the Western Cape, and the province also comes second to the Western Cape in many other crime categories. Figure 4 illustrates the provincial rates of total recorded assaults, including both common assault and assault GBH.

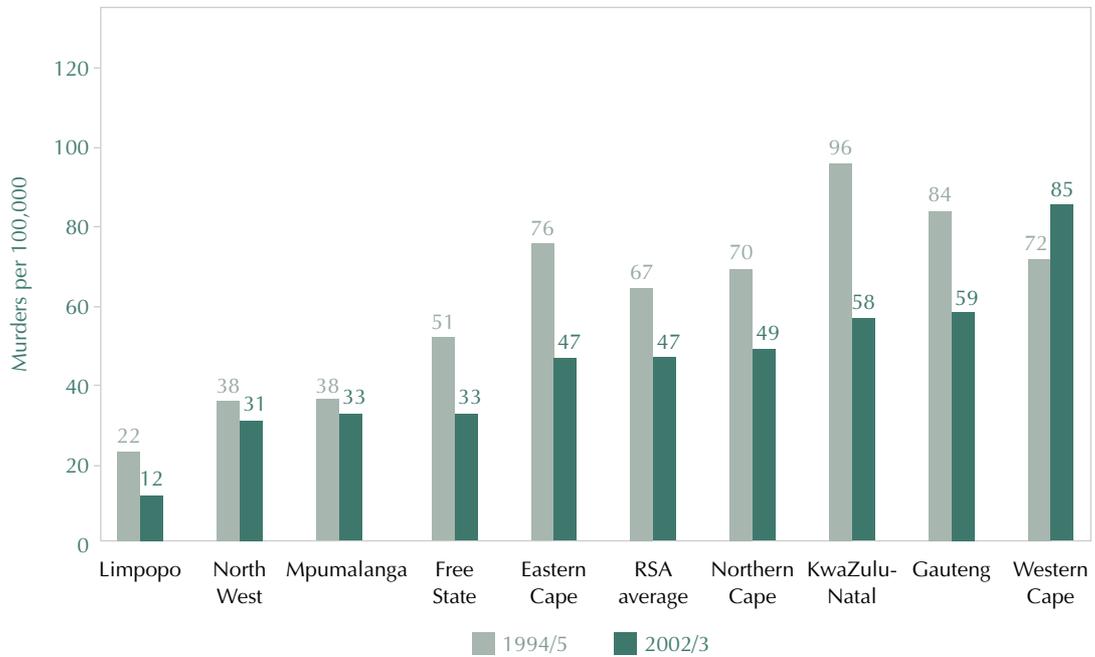
But if the Northern Cape has the most violence per capita, why does the Western Cape have the country's highest rate of murder? This puzzle could be explained by the proliferation of firearms in the

Figure 2: Reporting rates by province



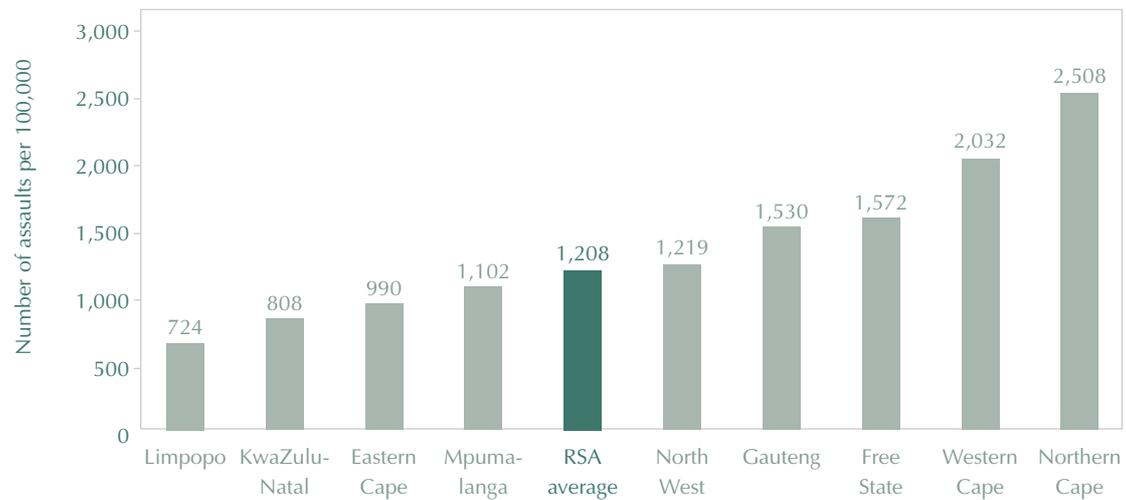
Source: Stats SA, 1998

Figure 3: Change in recorded murder rates between 1994/5 and 2002/3, by province



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre

Figure 4: Recorded total assault rates, by province



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre

Western Cape. The Western Cape has the highest rate of recorded cases of illegal possession of a firearm or ammunition, while the Northern Cape has the lowest rate, second only to Limpopo. While finding firearms generally requires proactive work on the part of the police, there is no reason to believe that the Western Cape is unusually diligent in this regard or that the Northern Cape police are particularly negligent.

This conclusion is backed up by NIMSS data. In the Western Cape, firearms are the preferred murder weapon, with 46% of homicides captured by the system caused by firearms. In the Northern Cape only 12% of the homicides captured were caused by firearms, with the primary cause being stabbings (64%).²

More lethal weapons could be the reason why Western Cape killers succeed more often than would-be killers in the Northern Cape. Calculating the number of murders as a percentage of both murders and attempted murders for each province reveals that only 19% of murders attempted in the Northern Cape in 2002/3 'succeeded', whereas 43% of those attempted in the Western Cape were 'successful'.

In keeping with the low levels of gun crime, the Northern Cape also has the second lowest rate of

aggravated (which generally means armed) robbery in the country, just slightly over that of Limpopo. But oddly, levels of aggravated robbery in the Western Cape remain less than half those in Gauteng, despite the fact that common robbery is most likely in the Western Cape. This may be due in part to the fact that Gauteng is still home of the heist, with more of the syndicate-type robberies such as hijackings, bank-related robberies, and home and business robberies.

Property crimes

Aside from the violence, the Western Cape also has a problem with property crime, including coming first in the rates of commercial burglary, residential burglary, theft from vehicle, common theft, and malicious damage to property. Apart from coming second or third in many of these categories, the Northern Cape is tops for shoplifting, stock theft, and arson. Oftentimes, the rate of these crimes is far in excess of most other provinces. For example, the rate of theft from vehicles in the Western Cape is ten times that of Limpopo, and more than double that of any other province besides Gauteng.

In addition to aggravated robbery, however, Gauteng remains tops for vehicular theft and fraud by quite a wide margin. Vehicular theft, like hijacking, is often conducted by organised syndicates, which may be better developed in Gauteng. The greater proximity of

Gauteng to the border and commercial interests may also contribute to the prevalence of vehicular crime in the area. Fraud, of course, is often related to business interests, and Johannesburg's continued role as the financial centre of the country probably leaves it more vulnerable.

But the bottom line is that the Western Cape and Northern Cape have emerged as the country's riskiest provinces, at least according to the official statistics. The question is: why?

Why is risk greatest in the two Cape provinces?

The high crime levels in the Western Cape are baffling to criminologists who link crime to deprivation, because it is also South Africa's best-developed province. The Western Cape has the lowest unemployment levels in the country and is better resourced in just about every respect than any other province.³ In addition, it has the lowest Gini coefficient of any province, which suggests that income is more equitably distributed in the Western Cape than in other provinces,⁴ possibly due to relatively high employment levels.

The Northern Cape is also highly developed, coming third after the Western Cape and Gauteng in having the lowest poverty rates in the country. The 2001 Census revealed that it has the highest share of formal dwellings in the country and, alongside the Western Cape, it has consistently held the nation's highest matric pass rate.⁵

Why are the best-developed provinces in South Africa the most crime-ridden? To answer this question would require considerable further research, but the following are offered as possible and partial explanations.

Migration and urbanisation

Two possible and related explanations are inward migration and urbanisation, as some criminologists link population instability and urbanisation to crime. The Western Cape is the second most urbanised province in South Africa (89%), second only to Gauteng (97%). According to the HSRC, it is also the province that experienced the fastest rate of annual population growth in the country between 1996 and 2001 (2%),⁶ perhaps due to its relative affluence. In addition, it had one of the highest levels of inward

migration in the country between 1992 and 1996, second only to Gauteng, with many migrants coming from the impoverished Eastern Cape.⁷

While the Northern Cape contains vast rural spaces, the majority of its people live in towns, and it is the third most urbanised province in the country.⁸ It is, however, projected to have the nation's slowest population growth, second only to the Free State.⁹ It is also believed to have one of the lowest levels of former migrants in the population,¹⁰ and traditional wisdom would view it as a source of outward migration. So population instability, at least in a trans-provincial sense, is not likely to be a factor.

Alcohol and drugs

It is likely that alcohol and drugs also play a role in the violence in the Cape. The Western Cape and the Northern Cape have the country's highest rates of arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, as well as the highest rate of recorded drug crimes. As with firearms, these crimes require proactive work on the part of the police in order to be detected, but there is no reason to believe that the Cape police are doing more in this area than their counterparts in the rest of the country.

Indeed, all past scientific work on the subject has indicated that the Cape has a serious substance abuse problem. A 1998 study found that in 55% of all non-natural deaths in Cape Town the deceased had blood alcohol concentrations equal to or greater than .08g/100ml, with the highest levels being found among homicide victims and transportation deaths. More recently, the NIMSS found that alcohol was present in the bloodstreams of most murder victims tested in 2002 in both the Western Cape (59%) and Northern Cape (69%).¹¹ An ongoing Department of Transportation study found that 13% of pedestrians stopped nationwide after office hours had blood alcohol levels above .08g/100ml, but in the Western Cape, the figure was 23%.¹²

The Western Cape has one of the highest incidences of foetal alcohol syndrome in the world. Individuals with foetal alcohol syndrome may become involved in crime as victims or perpetrators due to poor judgement and a low frustration threshold. A study in British Columbia found that 24% of youth in jail

showed evidence of foetal alcohol syndrome or foetal alcohol effects.¹³

But while alcohol may impact violent crime in a number of ways, its impact on property crime is less clear. Drugs, however, can feed property crime as addicts may steal to pay for their habits. In the 2000 MRC/ISS arrestee drug monitoring study, Cape Town was found to have the highest share of arrestees testing positive for any drug (56%), surpassing Gauteng and Durban. The study also showed six times the level of Mandrax usage in Cape Town as Gauteng.

Police coverage

To the extent that the police can make an impact on crime levels, then low levels of police service could contribute to criminality. Table 2 contains the police to public ratios listed by the SAPS on their website. Given the vast differences in provincial crime rates, considerable variation in the police to public ratios is appropriate.

The Northern Cape has the highest levels of police coverage in the country, which correctly corresponds with its position at the top of the crime rankings. But the Western Cape in 2002 scored just above the average in terms of police, and considerably below the Free State, a province with just over half the crime. This situation has changed drastically since that time, with the Western Cape moving to a more appropriate level of coverage. But the legacy of past neglect may have consequences still felt today, especially if many of these new troops are recruits fresh from the academy.

The coloured population

Another possibility is linked to the dominant population group in the region: the coloured community. Western and Northern Cape are the only provinces in which black Africans do not comprise the majority of the population. They are home to most of South Africa's coloured population, which makes up more than half of the population of both provinces. As will be discussed in the following article in this issue, this population group appears to be more likely to become both the victims and perpetrators of crime.

Table 2: Police to public ratios, by province, 2002–2004

	May 2002	October 2002	February 2004	Change 5/02–1/04
Limpopo	1:735	1:746	1:743	-1%
Mpumalanga	1:621	1:613	1:606	+3%
KwaZulu-Natal	1:570	1:568	1:571	0%
Eastern Cape	1:528	1:539	1:543	-3%
North West	1:481	1:486	1:492	-2%
Western Cape	1:449	1:413	1:343	+24%
Free State	1:353	1:360	1:360	-2%
Gauteng	1:370	1:352	1:350	+5%
Northern Cape	1:346	1:326	1:320	+8%

Sources: 2000 figures from the SAPS website: <http://www.saps.gov.za>; 2003 figures personal communication, SAPS Head Office

Endnotes

- 1 *Third Annual Report of the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, Crime, Violence, and Injury Lead Programme of the Medical Research Council, Cape Town, 2001.* This remained the case in 2002, according to a special report prepared for the ISS by the MRC.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 *Fast Facts*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, April 2002(a).
- 4 *South Africa Survey 2001/2*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 2002(b).
- 5 Northern Cape has highest matric pass rate, SAPA news release, 30 Dec 2003; *Fast Facts*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, February 1999.
- 6 SAIRR, 2002(a), op cit.
- 7 P Kok, M O'Donnovan, O Bouare, and J van Zyl, *Post-apartheid patterns of internal migration in South Africa*, Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 2003.
- 8 SAIRR, 2002(a), op cit.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 P Kok et al, op cit.
- 11 MRC, 2002, op cit.
- 12 C Parry, Alcohol and crime in the Western Cape: A provincial action plan, *Crime and Conflict* No 17, 1999.
- 13 N Williams, Foetal alcohol syndrome – what is it and what are the possible implications? Paper presented at the Best Practice Interventions in Corrections for Indigenous People Conference, Adelaide, 15 October 1999.