

# Farm attacks and farm murders in South Africa

Analysis of  
recorded incidents: 2019

A report by  
**AfriForum Research Institute**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The revised National Rural Safety Strategy (NRSS) was compiled and launched by the South African Police Service's Division of Visible Policing on 11 October 2019. For effective application and implementation, the NRSS relies on the reporting and analysis of farm attacks and farm murder incidents committed in South Africa. With the help of organisations such as TAU SA – who has been collecting data on farm attacks since 1990 – and AfriForum, the importance of reliable, valid and transparent reporting of these crimes became evident in addressing violence in rural areas.

The definition of farm attacks as adapted from the National Rural Safety Strategy for the purpose of this report is as follows:

### Acts of violence against person(s) in the rural areas

*For the purpose of reporting, acts of violence against person(s) living in rural areas, including farms and smallholdings, refer to acts aimed at person(s) residing in, working in or visiting rural areas, whether with the intent to murder, rape, rob or inflict bodily harm. In addition, all acts of violence against infrastructure and property in the rural community which are aimed at disrupting farming or other commercial concerns, irrespective of whether the motive(s) are related to the commission of other crime(s), ideology, land disputes, land issues, revenge, grievances, racist concerns or intimidation, are included in this definition.*

*Cases related to domestic violence or liquor abuse, or resulting from commonplace social interaction between people, are excluded from the definition.*

# 2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The integrity of the data, from collection to analysis, is of the utmost importance in addressing farm attacks. Data is collected and verified by making use of various reliable sources. This includes the South African media who diligently report on individual cases, social media, security networks and information obtained from victims and the families of victims themselves.

To maintain data integrity, cases where conflicting or insufficient information was provided to verify and substantiate individual/specific incidents were excluded from this report. All incidents analysed were verified and the facts confirmed. It is important to note that for this reason, the farm attack statistics are considered as conservative and are subject to change.

# 3. TRENDS: 2010 TO 2019

Farm attacks have been increasing from 2011 onwards, as can be seen in Figure 1. For the 2019 calendar year, 552 farm attacks were reported and confirmed. When comparing 2018 with 2019, 27% more farm attacks were recorded by AfriForum. Fifty-seven farm murders occurred during 2019, which is three more than in 2018.

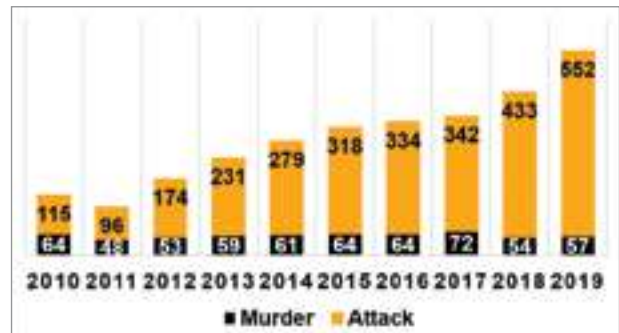


Figure 1: Number of farm attacks and farm murders: 2010 to 2019<sup>1</sup>

It must be taken into consideration that the number of attacks reported may be higher when compared to the figures of SAPS. There is a significant dark figure related to farm attacks because individual cases are reported at police stations – it is not always reported through security structures, and the media does not always report on every farm attack. A breakdown of the number of attacks per month is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Number of attacks per month for the 2019 calendar year

For the same period, 57 murders were confirmed. Because farm murders are widely reported on, however, this figure is considered a reliable indication of victims who were murdered during farm attacks (see Figure 3).

<sup>1</sup> Information collected by TAU SA was used to create this graph.



Figure 3: Number of murders per month for the 2019 calendar year

## 4. PROVINCIAL ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Farm murders per province

The number of murders in the Free State increased significantly over the last three years. The highest number of farm murders occurred in the Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of total murders per province

Province	Percentage of total murders
Free State	19%
Gauteng	14%
KwaZulu-Natal	14%
Limpopo	12%
North West	11%
Western Cape	11%
Mpumalanga	9%
Eastern Cape	7%
Northern Cape	4%

A breakdown of the number of murders per province is provided in Figure 4.

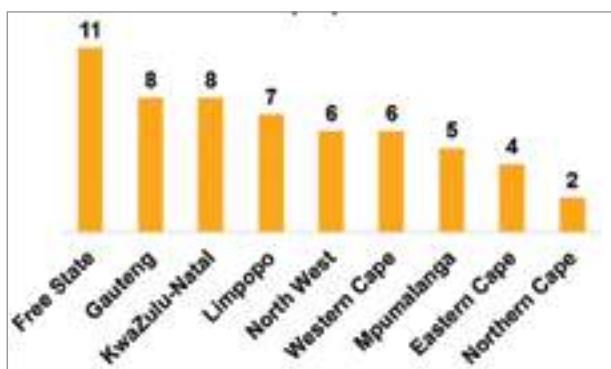


Figure 4: Murders per province for the 2019 calendar year

### 4.2 Farm attacks per province

Up to 2019, Gauteng still accounts for the most farm attacks, as can be seen in Table 2. The reason may be the high number of smallholdings and the density of these properties in areas such as Erasmia and Muldersdrift, which enable farm attackers to invade multiple properties during one night.

Table 2: Percentage of total attacks per province

Province	Percentage of total attacks
Gauteng	30%
North West	15%
Limpopo	11%
Free State	9%
Western Cape	9%
Mpumalanga	9%
Eastern Cape	8%
KwaZulu-Natal	7%
Northern Cape	1%

59% of attacks during this period were committed on farms and 37% on smallholdings.<sup>2</sup> The number of farm attacks per province for the 2019 calendar year is provided in Figure 5.

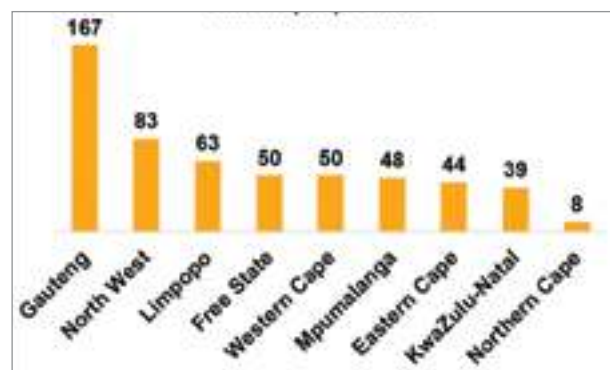


Figure 5: Attacks per province for the 2019 calendar year

The number of recorded attacks on farms and smallholdings increased in seven of the nine provinces of South Africa (see Figure 6). The increase in attacks on farms is worrying as the distance from farms to the nearest towns has always been viewed as a deterrent in identifying the property which the perpetrators intend to attack. The rural nature of most farms is advantageous to perpetrators, however, in the sense that long distances to neighbouring farms provide them with more time to commit crimes without being noticed by people passing by. To overcome the sometimes bad condition of rural roads, the vehicles of the victim/s, which are suitable for the terrain, may be used to flee the scene and are left abandoned once the criminals are able to switch vehicles.

<sup>2</sup> 1% of attacks were recorded for lodges, and the type of property was unknown for 2% of recorded incidents.

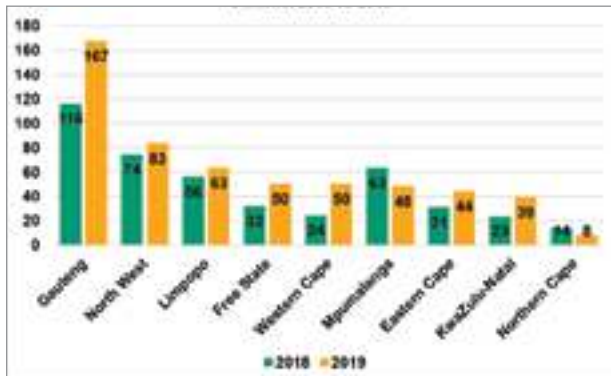


Figure 6: Comparison of the number of attacks: 2019 vs. 2018

## 5. TIME OF OCCURRENCE

### 5.1 Day of the week

There is no significant difference in the frequency of attacks per day of the week, as can be seen in Figure 7. The information indicates that attacks are slightly less likely to occur on a Sunday, Monday and Wednesday.

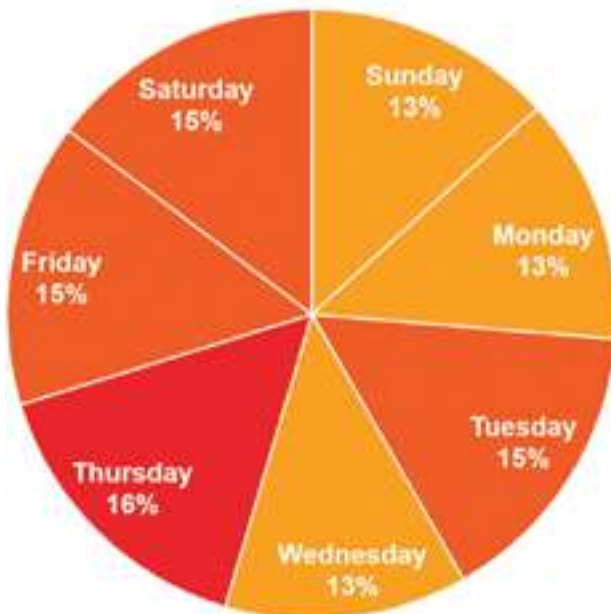


Figure 7: Percentage of total attacks per day<sup>3</sup>

### 5.2 Time of the day

The time of the day when the attacks occur is consistent with previous years. Most attacks are committed between 18:00 and 03:00.

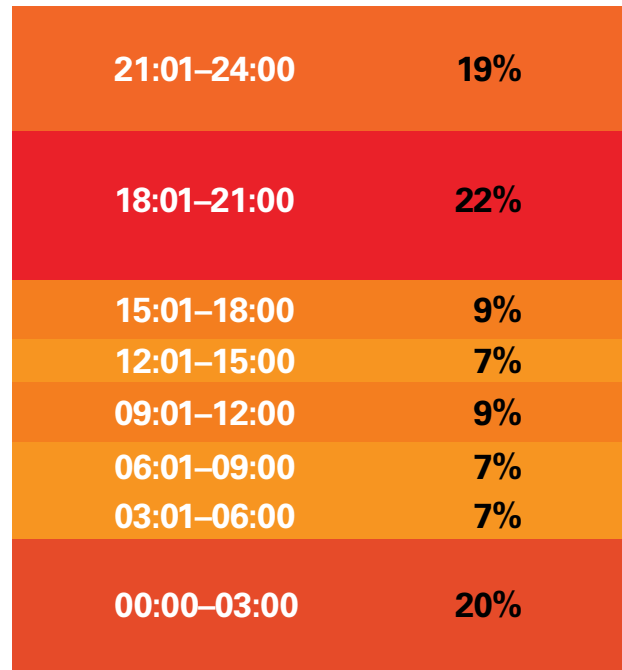


Figure 8: Percentage of total attacks per time of day<sup>4</sup>

## 6. VICTIMS

905 victims<sup>5</sup> were attacked in the 552 farm attacks that were analysed. In 57% of incidents, only one victim was attacked, whereas two victims were attacked in 30% of incidents. Research indicates that the more people present at the intended target, the less likely it is for an attack to occur.

In 66% of the incidents, the victims were the owners and the owners' families. The number of workers attacked (26% of incidents) seems to have increased from past years (Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of attacks per victim category

Victim category	Percentage of total attacks
Owner / family	66%
Worker <sup>6</sup> / family	26%
Guests	8%

The average age of victims is 55 years<sup>7</sup>. The majority of victims (42%) are aged between 60 and 79 years (see Figure 9), with a significant 28% of victims aged between 40 and 59 years.

<sup>3</sup> The exact date of the attack is unknown for 1% of the recorded incidents.

<sup>4</sup> The time of attack was unknown for 17% of incidents recorded.

<sup>5</sup> The number of victims was unknown for 23 (4%) of incidents recorded.

<sup>6</sup> Security personnel and foremen were also grouped with workers.

<sup>7</sup> The age of victims was unknown for 210 or 38% of incidents recorded.

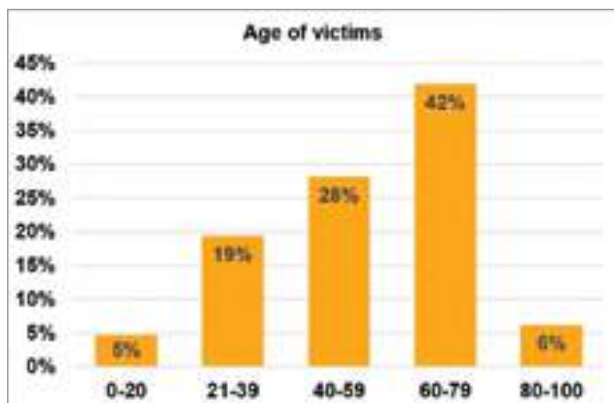


Figure 9: Age of victims

## 7. ATTACKERS

1 575 perpetrators<sup>8</sup> have been reported as the total number of attackers who committed these crimes. The average number of attackers per incident is three. It should be noted, however, that this number may be higher due to uncertainty from victims whether there were more attackers involved and/or present than they were actually aware of or whom they saw themselves. It is not uncommon for farm attackers to have lookouts stationed around the properties or to have a getaway vehicle positioned out of sight of where the attack occurred. It is commonly reported that attackers wore balaclavas and/or gloves in order to conceal their identity or to keep the victim from being able to identify the perpetrators at a later stage.

## 8. ATTACKS

Victims were overpowered, ambushed and surprised inside their place of residence in many of the cases. Attackers gained entry by breaking open security doors, burglar bars, doors or windows, or through doors or windows that were left open.

Specific crimes committed were only reported in 239 (i.e. 43%) of incidents recorded. It can be assumed, however, that in the case of a serious crime it would have been recorded. The percentage of incidents where a crime intending to cause physical harm was recorded for incidents where it was in fact recorded, and all incidents are summarised in Table 4.

The percentage of cases (26%) where the attackers attempted to murder one or all of the victims is extremely worrying. This shows that the perpetrators intended to murder the victims, although the victims survived. The number of farm murders would have been higher if the attackers were successful in carrying out their intentions.

Table 4: Percentage of crimes committed per incident

Crime recorded	Percentage of incidents where specific crime is recorded	Percentage of total incidents
Assault with the intent to cause grievous bodily harm	20%	9%
Attempted murder	61%	26%
Rape	7%	3%
Kidnapping	5%	2%
Torture	9%	4%
Victims murdered (number of incidents)	21%	9%

In 9% of the incidents reported, one or more victims were murdered. Other information worth noting:

- » 18 females were raped during this period. In some cases, victims were raped by more than one attacker.
- » One or more victims were kidnapped during the attack in 11 incidents.
- » One or all of the victims were subjected to various means of torture in 22 incidents. Some of these included burning victims with plastic, clothing irons or boiling water, or being dowsed in petrol.
- » Arson was committed by intentionally setting houses alight in three cases reported, twice with the victims locked inside.

The use of knives, pangas, axes and other sharp objects during attacks suggests that the perpetrators are willing and able to come within direct contact of the victims in order to cause harm. These weapons are also preferred by some attackers as the risk of being heard would be less as opposed to using a firearm. Other weapons used included torches, sheep shears, screwdrivers and other tools.

<sup>8</sup> The number of attackers was unknown for 79 (14%) of incidents recorded.



## 9. CONCLUSION

In one of the farm attack cases reported, the husband told his wife “They’re coming.”

Victims and families of victims are left with severe trauma and emotional and psychological damage. The most horrific details of these crimes are often those which are not reported. It is crucial to provide the much needed support – especially emotional support – to the victims of violent crime.

Communities are as always encouraged to become involved with security networks in their area. It is essential to make it as difficult as possible for attackers to gain access to dwellings.

We encourage victims and/or family members of victims to report incidents at [stopdiemoorde@afirforum.co.za](mailto:stopdiemoorde@afirforum.co.za).







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