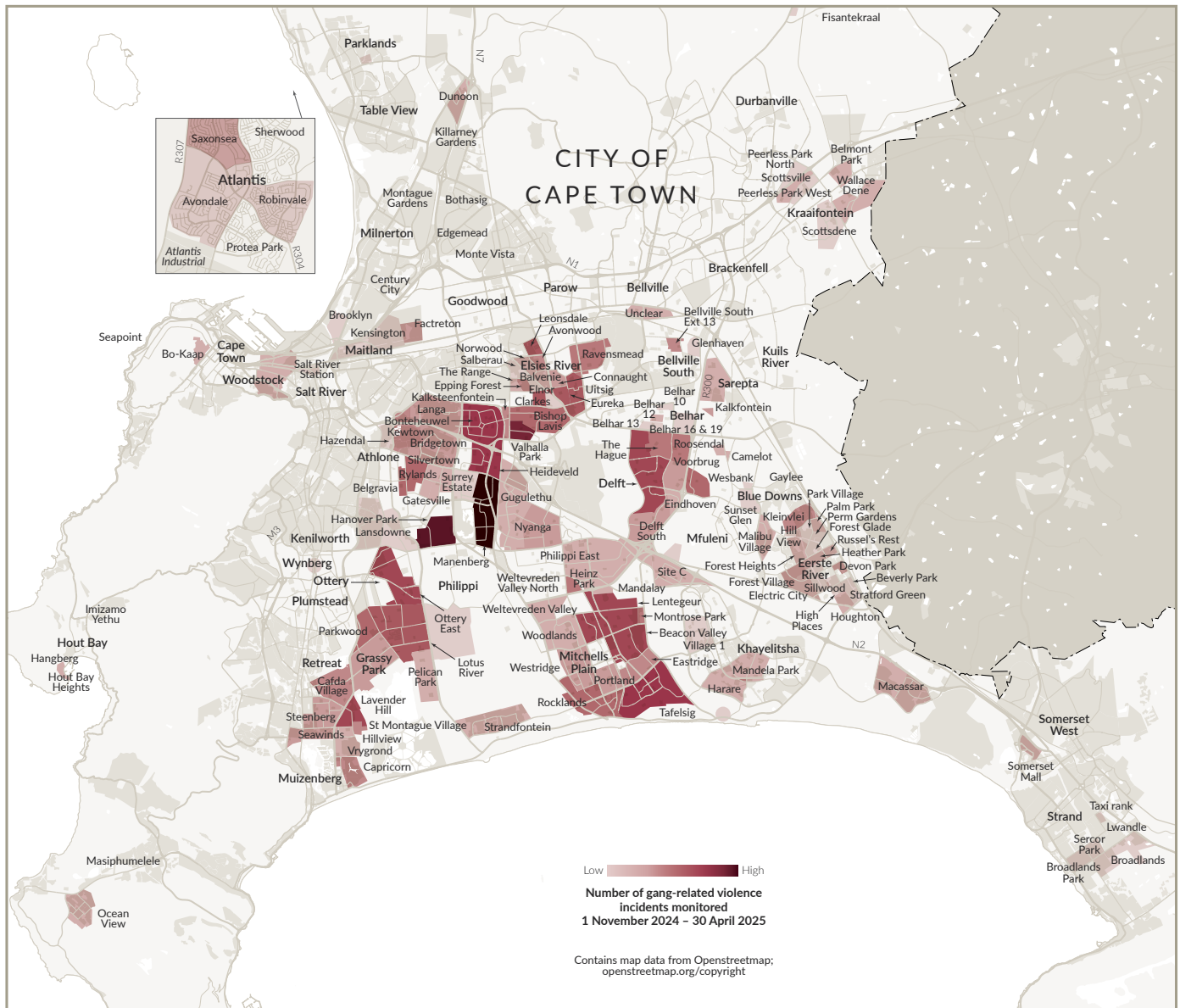




WESTERN CAPE GANG MONITOR



IN THIS ISSUE

The past quarter has seen major incidents of taxi and gang-related violence, concentrated in areas such as Vrygrond, Hanover Park and Ottery. Our research team continually gathers and maps granular data on gang territories across Cape Town. This aims to shed light on how criminal control in different neighbourhoods shapes patterns of violence.

In this issue:

- The induction of Ralph Stanfield into a prison 'Number' gang.
- Systemic security failures highlighted by the Wynberg court shooting.
- Accelerating gang recruitment of children.
- Mapping gang dynamics in Ocean View.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is the fifth issue of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's Western Cape Gang Monitor, an output of our South Africa Organized Crime Observatory. This series of bulletins tracks developments in Western Cape gang dynamics each quarter, to provide a concise synthesis of relevant trends to

inform policymakers and civil society. The monitor draws on information provided by field researchers working in gang-affected communities of the Western Cape. This includes interviews with current and former gang members, civil society and members of the criminal justice system.

The new Numbers game: Ralph Stanfield takes a shortcut into the 28s prison gang

Ralph Stanfield, the alleged leader of the 28s street gang, has leveraged his criminal notoriety on the streets to achieve something exceptional in the South African prison system: rapid induction into the 28s prison gang.

Stanfield was arrested in September 2023 and faces multiple criminal charges.¹ During his incarceration, he has managed to bypass the customary years-long progression through the hierarchical structure of the Number – one of the world's oldest prison gang cultures – to become an *ndota*.² According to sources within these gangs,³ Stanfield's street credentials earned him this unprecedented position – a development that breaks with the deeply ritualized traditions of prison gang culture.

This is a significant episode in the ongoing transformation of the Number subculture. To understand its importance, it is necessary to consider the complex history of this group. Stanfield's swift ascendancy in the 28s prison gang represents the culmination of decades of erosion of once-sacred practices, and symbolizes a fundamental shift in how power and status transfer between street and prison gang hierarchies in contemporary South Africa.

The Number and its traditions

The Number gangs have dominated South Africa's prisons for decades. The three groups – the 26s, 27s and 28s⁴ – have their own operations, beliefs and councils, known as parliaments, which sustain them as authorities within the prison system. The 26s are known as strategists and businessmen; the 27s are the enforcers of gang law; and the 28s are the advocates for better prison conditions. Their mythology dates back to the 19th century, with the apocryphal story of a wise man and two groups of bandits who established a criminal organization to fight colonial exploitation.⁵ This symbolic legend provides an anchor point for the gangs and, before the transition to democracy, fed into their anti-apartheid ideological stance. For many prisoners, the Number provides an identity, a framework for masculinity, and a code to govern thoughts and actions. For some, it is an entire worldview.⁶

Traditional adherents of the Number do not see themselves as gangsters, but rather as law makers,⁷ restoring order within the chaotic environment of the prison, albeit by violent means:

attacking a prison warden, for example, is one of the rites of passage to the Number.⁸

As affiliation with the Number provides inmates with security and status, recruitment is highly selective. When they enter prison, potential members' personalities, physiques and lives are scrutinized by high-ranking *ndotas*. Inductees must align with the interests of their assigned camp.

Becoming a member of the Number gang has historically involved a series of initiation rituals, an intimate understanding of the gang's history and mythology and a thorough knowledge of a set of commandments outlining the structures and organizational hierarchy, known as the *twalf punte* (12 points).⁹ Recruits also spend time learning the covert communication system known as *sabela*.¹⁰

Finally, a separation between prison life and life on the streets has long been central to the ethos: 'The Number wasn't built for outside,' said a former member of the 28s.¹¹ Various members interviewed agreed that the system was created to reign within the bounds of '*die vier hoeke*' ('the four corners', i.e. the prison walls). Upon entering prison, one's street gang identity, regardless of rank, was to be abandoned. However, this boundary between prison and street gang cultures has increasingly blurred in recent decades.

Stanfield entered prison as the 28s street gang leader, but not an inducted 28s prison gang member. He had become the alleged head of the 28s street gang after the death of his uncle, Colin Stanfield, in 2004.¹² However, he was not an *ndota*. His sudden promotion during his incarceration can therefore be seen a significant break with tradition, and the latest episode in a decades-long erosion of the ritualized processes that the Number gangs once entailed.

The history of the Number

The first major shift in the Number's rules and traditions began in the 1980s, coinciding with a massive rise in street gang activity as synthetic drugs such as Mandrax (methaqualone) and Ecstasy became ubiquitous. From the profits of these drug markets came increasingly professionalized gangs and very wealthy gang leaders.

First among these was Jackie Lonte, the boss of the Americans gang,¹³ who used his wealth to purchase his rank within the Number when he was imprisoned in the 1980s.¹⁴ This caused friction between the old order, which protested Lonte's coup, and a new order that embraced the development. In the years that followed, other gang bosses bought their way into the Number, opening the door to further changes.¹⁵ Gang customs, symbols and hostilities from the outside were imported into prison and vice versa, synergizing South African prison and street gangsterism.¹⁶

In the 1990s, the new order within the Number began to gain influence, thanks to the financial backing of gang leaders with drug empires outside prison, while external political conditions, as South Africa entered democracy, threatened the old order. In post-apartheid South Africa, the Number's founding objective – to counter colonial exploitation through banditry – had become obsolete.¹⁷

Around the turn of the century, there were further reforms. The new order within the 27s and 28s began to allow prisoners to be initiated while on remand, rather than only after being convicted and sentenced. This was partly in response to a massive influx of Americans members (who generally became 26s) following the gang's rise under the leadership of Lonte. In addition, by 2000, the entire top leadership of Pagad (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs), a militant vigilante group that used targeted violence to combat gangsterism, had been arrested.¹⁸ To counter the threat posed by Pagad within the prisons, Number recruitment was expanded.

This shift was fiercely contested by the traditional order, who feared that on-remand prisoners who were not found guilty would leave prison before fully being initiated into the Number system. This risked the complexity of the Number system being inaccurately represented on the outside. As one former member of the 27s put it: 'The old guard of the Numbers were very adamant that you must not change the Number in any way ... it must not be corrupted!'¹⁹

Some sources argue that these fears have been realized, that the Number has been mischaracterized by former on-remand prisoners after their release – 'one fucking idiot teaching another fucking idiot', as one member of the 28s put it²⁰ – and that a simplified version of the Number has been exported to the streets.²¹ As one representative of the traditional order confirmed: '[It] no longer signifies what it signified back in the day. Come 2000, the Number died down.'²² Moreover, the entanglement of street and prison gangsterism led to the formation of Number street gangs – separate to their prison counterparts – and continued to soften the grip of the traditional order.²³

The 28s, the gang that Stanfield allegedly leads, has been the most prominent of the three camps on the streets.²⁴ By the 2010s, the 28s prison gang increasingly began to view the 28s street gang less as a separate organization and more as a junior partner. This situation was reinforced by South Africa's high recidivism rates, as gang members cycled in and out of prison.

When Stanfield stepped into this evolving environment upon his arrest in September 2023, he became the catalyst for yet more change. As leader of the street 28s, he was able to exploit and formalize the connections that already existed between his street gang and prison 28s.

Stanfield and the state of the Number

Sources close to the 28s have argued that if Stanfield, a figure of respect and authority outside prison, lacked formal recognition inside, the internal balance of power would be disrupted.²⁵ 'Obviously it's not going to be good if the boss of all the 28s on the street does not have a rank with the 28s in prison,' one 28s member said.²⁶ Stanfield's street status was therefore sufficient to elevate his prison status; he did not need millions of rands to purchase his rank,²⁷ and he did not have to endure a violent recruitment.

Stanfield's case may be fairly unique, but his rise to *ndota* status suggests a further softening of the Number's rules. This new avenue to become part of the prison Number is also solid evidence of the current dominance of the gang's new order.

As much as Stanfield's fast-track admission into the Number is a new development, it also speaks to a systemic shift away from a rigid tradition over time. The beneficiaries of illicit enterprises outside prison are reshaping the Numbers' mythological roots by means of their wealth and status, redefining what it means to be powerful in South Africa's underworld.²⁸

The Number now finds itself in a transitional phase. It is still very much present and fundamental to the structure of everyday life in prison, but changes to its traditions – from the admission of on-remand prisoners to the sudden elevation of Stanfield – are becoming more common. Stanfield's situation is likely to have some effect on the relationship between the 28s street gang and its prison equivalent, but whether the two will align more closely remains unclear.

However, the continued fragmentation of what was once a unifying system centred around resistance to colonial oppression threatens to cause tensions both on the streets and within the prisons of the Western Cape. Moreover, the synergy between street and prison gangsterism is likely to allow hostilities to spill over and be acted upon in both spaces. As a former senior 27s member puts it: 'This big divide between the ... different factions of the Number causes trouble.'²⁹

As the grip of the old guard loosens, the Number's violent so-called 'justice', which previously imposed discipline in prisons, may also become less controlled. This would create a vacuum for

a self-enforcing and unpredictable system of regulation. Powerful street gangsters such as Stanfield extend their control within prisons going forward. ■

Fatal Wynberg Magistrates' Court shooting exposes security risks in courts

Magistrates, officials and members of the public were left shaken after a fatal shooting inside the Wynberg Magistrates' Court on 8 April. It appears that standards have not always been adhered to in Wynberg and other courts, allowing gang members to smuggle weapons into court buildings. This incident highlights the security failures within the South African court system that undermine access to justice and the prosecution of organized crime.

The deceased, identified by police as 50-year-old Dingalimoya Cintso,³⁰ was a taxi owner in the Muizenberg area and was due to appear as an accused in a murder trial scheduled that day. His death is believed to have been a hit ordered by the Junky Funky Kids gang, and is linked to conflict in the taxi industry.³¹ The shooter escaped the scene, but five people have since been arrested in connection with the case.³² According to Cintso's brother, this was not the first time he had been targeted at the court.³³

Xola Nqola, chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Justice and Constitutional Development, described the incident as 'shocking' and 'unprecedented', and it is the first time someone has been killed with a firearm inside the court.³⁴ However, it is not the only violent attack to have taken place in or around the building in recent years. In 2019, a man was fatally stabbed inside a courtroom.³⁵ In April 2023, an alleged gang member suffered multiple stab wounds in a confrontation involving more than 10 rival gang members directly in front of the court.³⁶ Just a month later, a state witness was shot dead after leaving the building.³⁷ And in September 2024, rival gangs exchanged gunfire just outside the court.³⁸

Security measures failing in courts

In 2020, the Western Cape High Court issued an order mandating that Wynberg and several other courts in the province adhere to legal standards for security measures. Attorney Ben Mathewson, who launched the application,³⁹ told reporters that 'Wynberg refused to comply. And now we're seeing the consequences.'⁴⁰

According to several gang sources, firearms are often smuggled into court buildings. 'Many people have been threatened at court at gunpoint, it just doesn't make the newspapers, because when that person was threatened, they left court and were too scared to testify,' one gang member said.⁴¹ The Wynberg Magistrates' Court is particularly vulnerable, because of its jurisdiction, covering several areas with high levels of gang activity. Rival gang members often face each other across the courtroom, and the predictable presence of witnesses, victims and family members brings with it the risk of targeted intimidation or violence.

Mathewson has spent years campaigning for safer court security measures. His case against the management of eight Western Cape magistrates' courts, including Cape Town, Khayelitsha and Wynberg, argued that they had failed to follow security procedures by relying on manual body searches rather than electronic screening devices, such as handheld metal detectors.⁴² His application contended that the pat-down searches commonly used in these courts were both unjustifiably invasive and not sufficient to identify concealed weapons.

Mathewson wrote to Wynberg court management as far back as 2017, after a stabbing incident, saying he had 'warned many times in the past that this will happen as the incorrect searching procedure is followed at the Magistrate's Court'.⁴³ Court management disputed the severity of the incident, but admitted that 'corrective measures' needed to be taken, including instructing security officers to use handheld scanners as well as a walk-through metal detector.⁴⁴

In its order on the matter in 2020, the Western Cape High Court ruled that searches should be 'conducted in a dignified and respectful manner' using handheld electronic devices or other electronic equipment, and that 'no physical body searches by hand [should] be permitted', by legal requirements.⁴⁵

Yet security lapses continued at the Wynberg court, up to and after the fatal shooting. In an interview in April 2025, Mathewson stated that guards at the court were still conducting pat-down searches in the lead-up to the latest incident at Wynberg: 'It would be so easy for someone to smuggle in a weapon between their legs or for different people to smuggle in the parts to a gun and then to reassemble it in the court building.' He added that it appeared that the security team had handheld metal detectors but did not routinely use them.⁴⁶

Several other sources have echoed this assessment. A former attorney reported that pat-down searches were standard at Wynberg and that the walk-through metal detector at the court entrance 'doesn't work, or not that I know of, as it never beeps when I walk through it with cellphone and keys'.⁴⁷ Following the April shooting, Mmamoloko Kubayi, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, confirmed to the media that the metal detector at the Wynberg court was not working, yet had not been reported as broken.⁴⁸

A prosecutor who has worked at the Wynberg Magistrates' Court said he and his colleagues had been complaining to their

superiors about security 'for years', raising the same concerns as Mathewson. He also confirmed that manual body searches were still being used: 'I was patted down when I went to court today [10 April]. There were no handheld metal detectors. If a court order was granted to comply, they certainly haven't.'⁴⁹

Alarming, gang sources have confirmed that they exploit these security lapses to smuggle weapons into the court. 'You can scope a few days before [to see] if those metal detectors don't really work, because they're not beeping,' one gang member said. 'Or you can have the court security on the payroll and they could have tampered with that machine to make it not work.'⁵⁰ Others outlined methods such as hiding parts of a gun in clothing and then reassembling it in the courtroom (as Mathewson predicted).⁵¹ Similar claims have been made before. In the murder trial following the 2019 Wynberg court stabbing, a gang member turned state witness described how he had smuggled a knife into court: 'I was searched by male security guards, but I was wearing two pants, so I put it in the pocket of the pants I had on underneath.' According to the witness, it was also common for gang members to hide knives in their shoes.⁵²

Legal professionals offered contrasting views on whether Wynberg's security situation reflected a broader systemic failure. According to Mathewson, security procedures 'should be like the airport': 'It's like that at 8 out of 10 courts in the Western Cape, but for some reason, these protocols aren't being applied at Wynberg.'⁵³ Prominent attorney William Booth had a more pessimistic view, telling the media: 'This is not only [a problem] at Wynberg, but it happens at many other courts throughout South Africa.'⁵⁴ Another former attorney agreed, suggesting that apart from minor procedural differences, security measures in

all Western Cape courts were 'basically the same' and largely inadequate.⁵⁵

There is evidence that this is a national concern. An oversight visit to various courts in KwaZulu-Natal in March found that most metal detectors were not working.⁵⁶ A 2022 survey of 230 magistrates across South Africa, conducted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) Democratic Governance and Rights Unit, found that 55% described security in court buildings as 'poor' and a further 9% as 'non-existent', while 33% said they had been personally threatened or harmed because of their work in the previous year.⁵⁷ While these threats did not necessarily happen within the court buildings themselves, it is telling that many of the respondents did not feel protected from these threats within their place of work.

The study concluded: 'The independence of the judiciary is fundamental to the operation of the justice system. Where magistrates are threatened in relation to their work, their independence is almost inevitably compromised at a subconscious level, even if they are ostensibly able to shrug it off.'⁵⁸

The incident at the Wynberg Magistrates' Court in April demonstrates the real-world consequences of the failure to implement legal standards for security. But more broadly, as the UCT study concluded, a persistent level of risk has a detrimental effect on the justice system as a whole. Ongoing security deficiencies – which not only seem to be persistent at Wynberg but also at other courts in the Western Cape and nationwide – undermine the independence of the judiciary, create unsafe working conditions for court staff and discourage the participation of victims and witnesses. ■

Gang recruitment drives child murder rates in the Western Cape

More than one child was murdered every day in the Western Cape over a three-month period in 2024, according to the South African Police Service (SAPS) crime data update.⁵⁹ This is an alarming increase in the number of child murder victims in the province. Police attributed the spike to gang-related violence, and in the months since the report, children have continued to be caught up in the conflict, either as victims of crossfire between rival gangs or as young recruits on the front lines.

This sobering statistic is indicative of a wider trend: more children than ever before are being recruited into gangs in the Western Cape. Gangs have been targeting young, vulnerable children for many years, as many community organizations and the GI-TOC's own research have documented.⁶⁰ But the rate of child recruitment appears to be accelerating, posing a huge challenge to affected families and communities, as well as to the criminal justice and juvenile detention systems, which are seeing an influx of children accused of gang-related offences.

Young recruits are a valuable asset to gangs. Because they arouse less suspicion than adults, they are often used as spotters to watch out for the police, or to carry or conceal weapons. They may also act as decoys during attacks on rival gangs,⁶¹ or be tasked with moving contraband such as drugs. Court officials have reported that cases involving minors in possession of large quantities of drugs are becoming increasingly common,⁶² as, according to one prosecutor, the police 'do not look to children first when conducting a search'.⁶³

Children are also deployed as shooters, as impressionable youngsters who are eager to prove themselves are often more easily persuaded to commit violence. Craven Engel, a pastor who runs Ceasefire, a gang violence prevention organization, described a 12-year-old boy he had assisted, who had been recruited as a gunman for the Only the Family gang, as 'brainwashed to kill people'.⁶⁴



An increase in child recruitment was first seen during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, when school closures and economic uncertainty left many children with a surplus of free time and the need to earn an income, even if by criminal means.⁶⁵ However, many NGOs and community organizations working with vulnerable young people suggest that more children are being recruited today than ever before. Several sources claim that gangs are increasingly targeting children, some as young as eight.⁶⁶ Others argue that gangs are targeting the same age group they have always drawn from – typically 12-year-olds and early teenagers – but that they are bringing in larger numbers of young recruits.⁶⁷

Many community organizations identified generational trauma, caused by decades of intense gang violence, as a key reason why children are at risk of gang recruitment. Many children have lost family members, parents and guardians to violence and drug addiction, leaving them without protection or support and making them more susceptible to gang influence.⁶⁸ Experiencing conflict daily can also have a profound psychological impact. 'These kids are totally desensitized to violence. When they play games in the street, they have to play around a dead body,' one community worker said.⁶⁹ As some communities endure months and years of gang warfare and murder rates increase due to the wider availability of firearms, this trauma becomes even more common.

Another factor contributing to the recruitment of children is the increased rate of gang fragmentation. As previous editions of the Gang Monitor have discussed, breakaway groups have been forming more frequently in the Western Cape in recent years.⁷⁰ These active gangs are then driven to expand their cohorts of foot soldiers, which include young recruits.

These splinter groups are often so-called 'junior' gangs formed when young members break away from the older leadership. For instance, the newly formed Gotsavalias, who have been linked to a spate of shootings in Ottery in April and early May, have emerged from the older No Fears gang.⁷¹ The group is made up exclusively of juvenile members, none of whom is older than 18, and has been involved in drug dealing in the Ottery area, robberies, attempted murder and murder – in the case of a member of the JFKs, who was stabbed to death in November 2024 by the Gotsavalias group.⁷² Several of their members were arrested on suspicion of murder and other offences (and held in juvenile facilities), yet all have reportedly been released back into the community. Several cases against their members, including a robbery charge, have since been dropped.⁷³

Again, generational trauma plays a part. 'These boys are so traumatized they are now fearless,' one community worker said of the Ottery group.⁷⁴ The area in which the Gotsavalias are based has long been a site of gang warfare, historically between the Yuru Cats, the JFKs and the Mongrels, who control territory nearby.⁷⁵ Other juvenile gangs – including offshoots of the JFKs and the

Mongrels – are also wreaking havoc in the region.⁷⁶ It seems that the younger generation have learned from the example of their elders and are turning their violent tactics against them.

Many sources report that these younger gangs are in fact more reckless and aggressive than previous generations, as they are less familiar with the codes of conduct that – at times – regulate and control violence.⁷⁷ This, in turn, has contributed to the higher rates of child murder, with children increasingly becoming both perpetrators and victims.⁷⁸

Another indicator of increased child recruitment into gangs is an increase in the number of children coming into conflict with the law. Magistrates, prosecutors and court officials have observed a sharp increase in children charged with gang-related criminal offences, including drug possession, murder, attempted murder, aggravated robbery, sexual offences and assault.⁷⁹

Not all criminal matters involving children are dealt with in court, including many gang-related cases.⁸⁰ In the instance of a juvenile accused, an initial assessment is made to determine whether they have criminal capacity (in other words, that the child can be held responsible for the offence, as they have reached an age and mental capacity to distinguish right and wrong). If they do, the case is prosecuted in court. Court data, therefore, may not capture the scale of the problem. However, magistrates and prosecutors are not alone in their view that these kinds of offences are on the rise: many organizations working with at-risk children agree. Such organizations have also noted an increase in serious offences involving children, including stabbings, robberies, sexual offences and assaults.⁸¹

Within the legal framework of the Child Justice Act, it is preferred that juvenile offenders be diverted from the criminal justice system into non-custodial programmes designed to address the root causes of the child's criminal behaviour within the community.⁸² Although these measures are intended to prevent children from being incarcerated without due cause, they also provide another incentive for gangs to recruit them. As children are less likely to be imprisoned, they are back on the streets more quickly. Yet the alternative – more children being sent to juvenile detention centres – would present a different set of challenges.

Juvenile detention centres in the Western Cape, unfortunately, reinforce child gang recruitment. A young offender may enter as a very junior gang recruit – for example as a 'runner' delivering drugs or weapons – but upon leaving, may join the ranks outside as a fully fledged member. 'When he comes out, he is more of a gangster ... [being in a juvenile facility] is their graduation into the gang,' a member of a community organization in Hanover Park said.⁸³ Many in the criminal justice system believe the situation has now reached crisis point. As one court official said of the juvenile courts and detention system: 'I wish I could stand on a platform and say something is not right here.'⁸⁴

Young recruits often receive gang tattoos in young offender institutions as a visible mark of their status.⁸⁵ A former child gang member who served a sentence in such a centre reported that a structure similar to that of the Numbers gangs in South Africa's prison system was present there too.⁸⁶ NGOs working with young offenders, such as Ceasefire, confirmed that they are also aware of the presence of the Numbers gangs in juvenile facilities.⁸⁷ Rather than being places of safety and rehabilitation, these are therefore spaces where gang identities are formed.

The headline statistic showing an increased rate of child murder in the Western Cape is tragic in itself, but it is also a warning sign

of a systemic problem. Children are being recruited into gangs more frequently, and are being exposed to the most violent and extreme elements of their activities. This is not only potentially fatal, but also perpetuates the generational trauma that many people working in gang-affected communities believe to be the root cause of the problem. Breaking this cycle will be the key challenge for policymakers, communities and society in the years to come. Community-based programmes, where social workers and civil society organizations provide support to those most affected by generational trauma and violence, may be an important part of the solution. ■

AREA PROFILE

Gang fragmentation fuels a deadly cycle in Ocean View

This is the first in a series of articles drawing on the GI-TOC's mapping of gang territories across the Western Cape. Delving into the information gathered during the mapping and data-gathering exercise, each area profile will investigate a particular gang-affected neighbourhood of the Western Cape and examine its place within broader criminal trends in the province. Here, we look at Ocean View and examine the impact of gang violence on the community and the shifts in control that distinguish this suburb from places where territory has been held for generations.

When gangs fracture, it is a violent process: breakaway gangsters may turn on their former allies or fight for territory in new areas to establish themselves. The situation in Ocean View demonstrates this in action. The murder rate in the area has risen dramatically over the past decade amid a turf war between the Junky Funky Kids (JFKs) and a splinter group known as the Taylor gang, which has led to the Taylors being effectively wiped out. The JFKs have consolidated their position by recruiting youth at local schools and stepping up extortion of local businesses.

The neighbourhood differs, however, from many other gang-affected areas in the Western Cape, where a single group may have dominated a territory for decades. Instead, the criminal landscape in Ocean View is in a constant state of flux. This can, in part, be traced back to Ocean View's somewhat isolated geography – it is set apart from the main sprawl of the Cape Flats, which means that gangs are less deeply embedded within the community than is the case in other gang areas.

Gang fragmentation as a driver of violence

Gang fragmentation in the Western Cape has increased significantly in recent years – as reported in previous editions of this Monitor – contributing to rising levels of conflict and insecurity.⁸⁸ Ocean View is a prime example of this trend. Clashes between the JFKs and the Taylor gang began in around 2012, with the rivalry reaching its peak in 2015/16.⁸⁹ This is corroborated by

local sources and in court testimony, gathered in proceedings against the killers of seven-year-old Emaan Solomons, who was shot and killed in crossfire between JFKs and the Taylors in 2020.⁹⁰

This timeline is clearly reflected in the murder statistics for the Ocean View police precinct, which rose sharply from 16 in 2010/11 to 41 in 2015/16 and have remained elevated since.⁹¹ The Taylors, as a result, have been virtually wiped out.⁹² The violence has taken a heavy toll on the community, as shown by the death of Solomons.⁹³

The JFKs are by far the larger and more notorious of Ocean View's two main gangs, and control territory in other areas of intense gang activity such as Lavender Hill, Retreat, Muizenberg and Vrygrond.⁹⁴ The Taylors, by contrast, have their last remaining stronghold in a few residential blocks in Ocean View, and their leader – known by his street name 'Ibi' – has reportedly left the area for fear of assassination. As a result, he has taken a less active role in running the gang,⁹⁵ leaving his brother as the only leadership figure in the suburb. Most of the gang's hitmen have either been killed or imprisoned. The remaining Taylor gang members are said to be wavering, and many have defected to the JFKs.⁹⁶

The JFKs, meanwhile, have remained stable. Fears that the murder of JFKs leader Ashley 'Essie' Phillips in Lavender Hill in January 2025 would spark a succession battle that could spill over into Ocean View proved unfounded,⁹⁷ suggesting that the JFK leadership in the suburb remains uncontested. The main JFK boss in the area is known by the street name of 'Timer', with another gang member known as 'Leeboy' as second in command. Reports that the Flakka Kids (Flakkas), a formidable youth gang aligned with the JFKs, have moved into Ocean View may indicate an attempt to deepen the pool of foot soldiers and entrench their position.⁹⁸

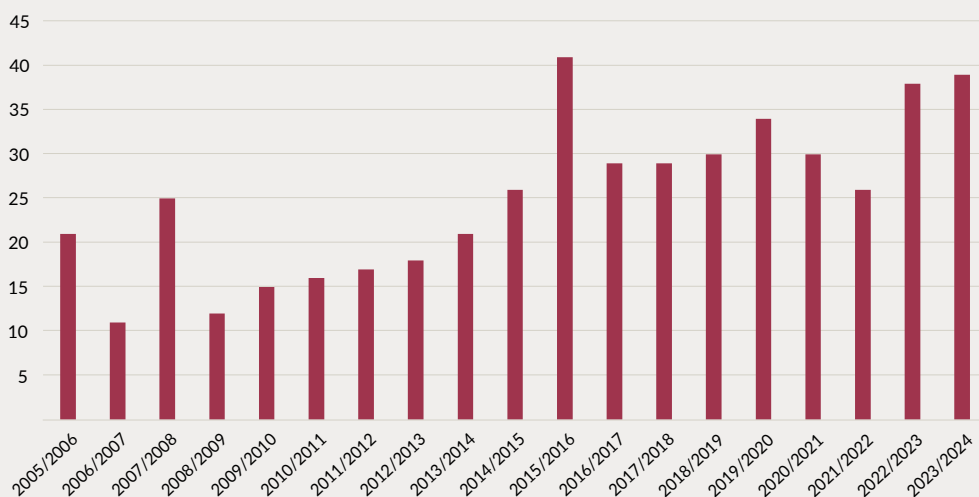


FIGURE 1 Murder statistics from Ocean View police precinct, 2005-2024.

SOURCE: SAPS via ISS Crime Statistics Wizard

While the JFKs and the Taylors are the only gangs with actively defended territories in Ocean View, many others have a presence but keep a lower profile. This includes activities such as smuggling, running safe houses and the drug trade. According to a community member: 'You can see members of other gangs here as well; they are maybe not as dominant as the Taylor gang or the JFKs, but they are here.'⁹⁹ The Cisco Yakkies, for example, have a presence in the area, reportedly centred around moving contraband from the Hout Bay harbour, and have sporadically clashed with the JFKs.¹⁰⁰

Given the decline of the Taylors, these other groups are likely to try to expand their territory in Ocean View, according to major gang sources. The Fast Guns, for example, a Johannesburg-based gang that has extended to Cape Town to collaborate with the Hard Livings (HLs), have small pockets of members in the suburb and are said to be looking to consolidate their presence.¹⁰¹ The HLs, one of Cape Town's largest and most violent gangs, are long-time opponents of the JFKs.¹⁰²

No legacy gang territory

Before the 2010s, Ocean View was not territorially dominated by any major gang in the way it is today by the JFKs. Gangs in the area included the HLs, the Ugly Americans, the 28s, the Mongrels and the JFKs.¹⁰³ News reports from the time suggest that the Naughty Boys were present in the suburb in 2013, and were feuding with the HLs.¹⁰⁴ The HLs left the area in around 2015, after the murder of their alleged local leader, Andre George.¹⁰⁵

Over time, however, these other gangs lost control of their territory. According to a former leader of the Fast Guns, the Taylors established control in Ocean View by expelling the 28s. This feat helped establish them as a major independent gang, rather than just a junior offshoot of the JFKs. One by one, gangs were edged out by the JFKs and Taylors, and by the height of the turf war,

they were the only major players left with active territory in the suburb.¹⁰⁶

This mutability over the course of several decades stands in contrast to other gang-affected areas in the Western Cape. In Hanover Park, for instance, the Americans have held territory for generations. Other examples include the Mongrels, whose dominance of a certain area in Parkwood dates back to the 1970s,¹⁰⁷ and the HLs, who have for many years had a stronghold in Manenberg.¹⁰⁸ These gangs are deeply embedded in their communities, with generations of the same families being recruited or otherwise involved in illicit activities.

No gangs in Ocean View have this kind of legacy. Some sources claim that the suburb lacks the depth of community support and loyalty to gang bosses seen in other areas.¹⁰⁹ Others argue that Ocean View's geography has created a sense of insularity. According to a local government official: 'There's little spillover into Ocean View from places like Grassy Park because of how isolated Ocean View is, and you can't come in there as a stranger from outside without anyone noticing.'¹¹⁰ Several of these sources were of the opinion that the removal of some key leaders would significantly weaken gang activity in the area. Others, however, are concerned about an observed uptick in gang recruitment in the neighbourhood's schools, which would lead to a younger generation of gangsters.

Targeting youth: schools as recruitment grounds

In early March, a teacher at Ocean View High School was knocked unconscious while attempting to break up a fight involving a group of gang members who were targeting a boy for recruitment.¹¹¹ According to community sources, the school has been struggling with pupils becoming affiliated with gangs, as well as gang members occupying the public space around a shop near the

main entrance. Police sources confirmed that gangs were recruiting younger members, some of whom were known to attend Marine Primary School, one of three junior schools in the area.¹¹²

These young recruits can be drawn into the most violent aspects of gang life. The circumstances surrounding the murder of Emaan Solomons illustrate this point: during the shootout, a child transported a firearm, reloaded it and fired it at people in the surrounding area.¹¹³ Gangs are known to use juveniles tactically to mislead their opponents during clashes, because they are not always perceived as a threat. The school gate is often the first place where children encounter gangs, before becoming full members. As one community worker put it, 'These kids aren't really [in] gangs, but they are playing at being gangs and drinking codeine on street corners while they should be at school.'¹¹⁴

Interviews with community, police and local government sources revealed a consensus that without a strategy to reduce the conditions that allow gangs to infiltrate communities and recruit children, hopes of weakening gang activity in Ocean View are unlikely to be realized.¹¹⁵

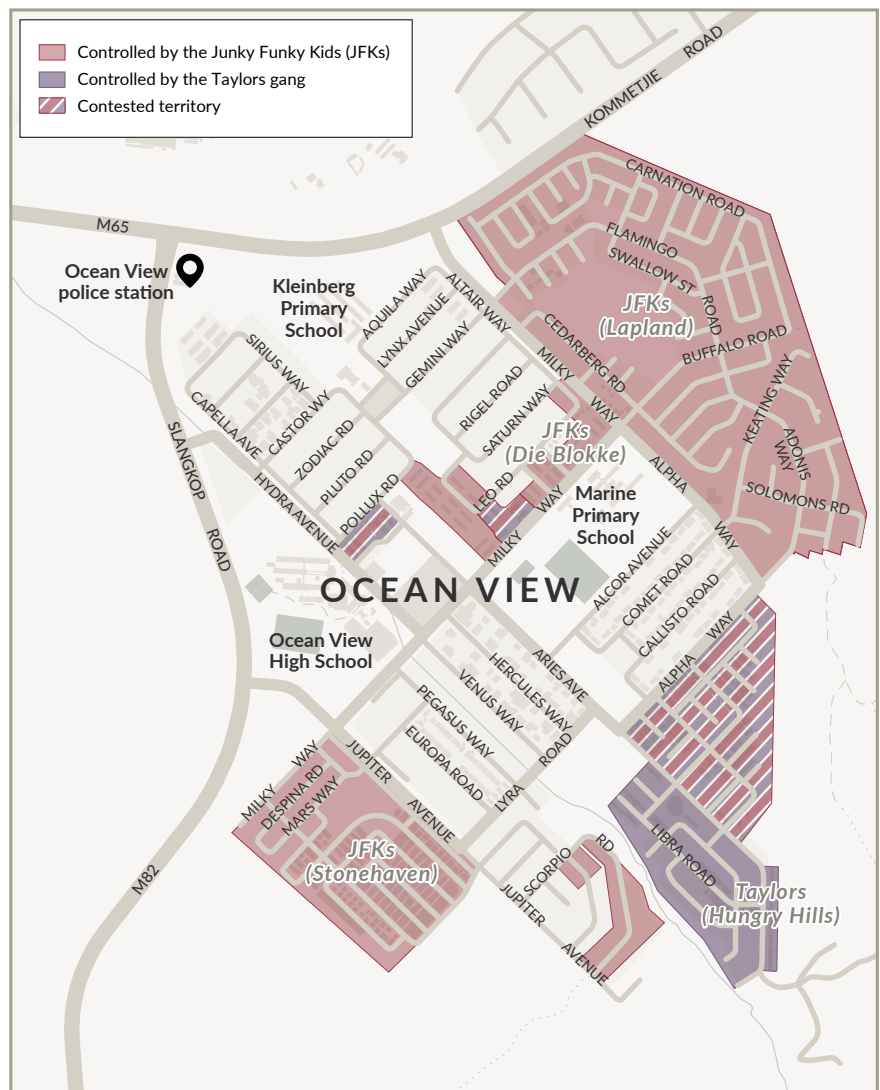


FIGURE 2 Gang turf in Ocean View.

Expansion beyond traditional gang activities

In order to strengthen their position in the area, the JFKs have reportedly partnered with a prominent taxi boss in Masiphumelele, a predominantly black township.¹¹⁶ Although Masiphumelele is close to Ocean View, the criminal dynamics there are different. Demand for drugs is lower, meaning no gangs control drug turf there.¹¹⁷ However, according to local police and government sources, the extortion of informal businesses and municipal services – linked to the taxi industry – is becoming increasingly prevalent. This follows a trend in other areas, particularly Khayelitsha.¹¹⁸ In Ocean View, there appears to be cross-pollination between Coloured street gangs (in this case, the JFKs) and township criminal groups linked to taxi associations – a phenomenon seldom observed elsewhere.

It is reported that the JFKs' collaboration with the taxi boss involves supplying manpower for extortion and robbery in the

Masiphumelele area.¹¹⁹ It is also believed that they are using Masiphumelele as a hideout for members wanted by the police or other gangs. Furthermore, they are bringing extortion practices from Masiphumelele into Ocean View. Councillors and community organizations allege that the Junky Funky Kids (JFKs) have started extorting money from foreign-owned shops and drug dealers operating in Stonehaven, a government housing development on the south-western edge of Ocean View.¹²⁰

For now, the JFKs have established dominance in Ocean View and created a situation in which they can expand. Yet while they may have defeated the Taylors, the suburb is by no means an uncontested space. With the latent presence of other gangs – from the Cisco Jakkies to the Fast Guns – the neighbourhood remains vulnerable to further violence, an outcome with a historical precedent. ■

Notes

- 1 Stanfield is accused of murder, attempted murder and the possession of illegal firearms and ammunition, and finds himself associated with parts of South Africa's illicit construction sector. See Western Cape Gang Monitor, Issue 3, GI-TOC, September 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/western-cape-gang-monitor-issue-3>; Western Cape Gang Monitor, Issue 2, GI-TOC, March 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/western-cape-gang-monitor-issue-2>; Jenni Irish-Qhobosheane, The shadow economy: Uncovering Cape Town's extortion networks, GI-TOC, April 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-shadow-economy-uncovering-cape-towns-extortion-networks>.
- 2 An initiated member of a prison numbers gang. The term is derived from 'indoda', meaning 'man' in isiZulu; see Bill Sanders, *A Dictionary of Gangs*, Oxford University Press, 2019.
- 3 Interviews with eight gang members, Cape Town, November 2024 to April 2025.
- 4 In Number mythology of the origin of 27 and 28, the two signifies the heroic figures of Nongoloza and Kilikijan, and the seven and the eight signify the Number of outlaws in which the groups of robbers operated. See Moritz Döbele, Rethinking gangsterism in Cape Town: The incompleteness of identity (Master's thesis), Oxford University Research Archive, 2024.
- 5 Jonny Steinberg, *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2004, 53–58.
- 6 Interview with a former Mongrel and 28 gang member, Cape Town, 25 March 2024.
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- 8 Jonny Steinberg, *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2004, 33–34.
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- 15 Jonny Steinberg, *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2004, 33–34.
- 16 Ibid., 310–311.
- 17 Interview with a former gang member, Cape Town, 3 April 2024.
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- 19 Interview with a former member of the 27s, June 2016.
- 20 Interview with a former high-ranking member of the 28s, February 2020.
- 21 Interview with a former member of the 27s, September 2019.
- 22 Interview with a former member of the 26s, Cape Town, 20 March 2024.
- 23 Interview with Matthew Skade, Senior Research Officer at the Institute for Safety Governance and Criminology, 2 April 2024.
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- 25 Interview with a 28s gang member, January 2025.
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- 27 According to some sources, Stanfield continues to control the 28s street gang and his illicit businesses from prison and retains access to significant funds. See Western Cape Gang Monitor, Issue 3, GI-TOC, September 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/western-cape-gang-monitor-issue-3>.
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- 75 Julia Stanyard, Concentrations of violence: A case study of Grassy Park, Cape Town, ENACT Africa, 8 March 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/concentrations-of-violence-enact/>.
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