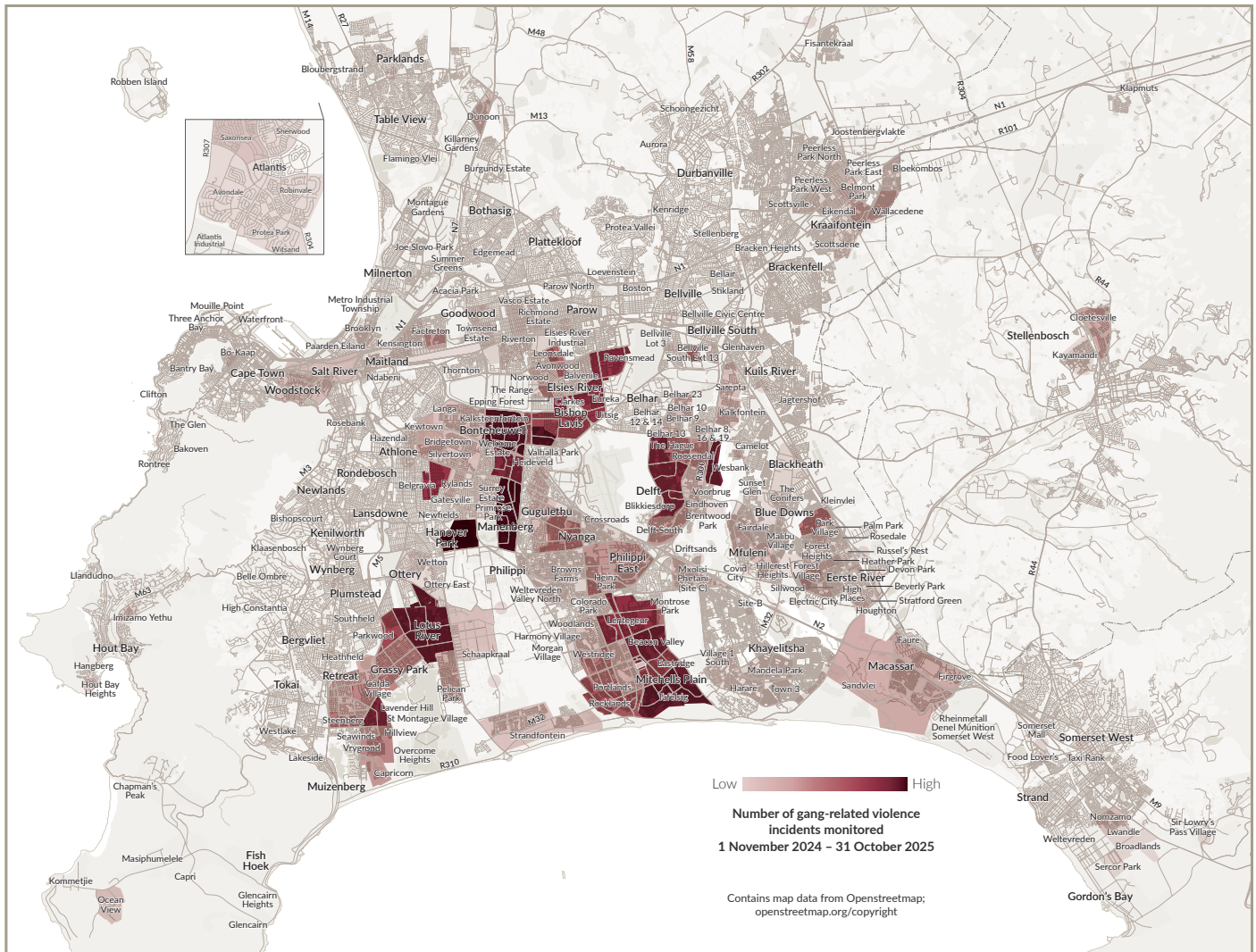




WESTERN CAPE GANG MONITOR



IN THIS ISSUE

A year of escalating gang violence in the Western Cape has sustained the worrying upward trend of the past five years.¹ This issue of the Western Cape Gang Monitor summarizes the factors that have driven gang dynamics in 2025 and sets out a plan to tackle the challenge in the short term. As we move into 2026, this plan can help form a basis for decisive action against escalating gang violence – and support for the individuals and communities it endangers and harms.

In this issue:

- Gang dynamics: 10 trends.
- What generates clusters of violence?
- Know your enemy: the ever-shifting challenge.
- A 12-point plan for the rapid mitigation of gang violence.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is the seventh issue of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's (GI-TOC) 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. This is a year-in-review issue, combining

analysis published by the GI-TOC throughout the year with new research. 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.

Gang dynamics: 10 trends

Gang-related violence in the Western Cape has reached intolerable levels. To take gang-related murders as one indicator, the total in the first six months of 2025 was 58 higher than in the same period in 2024, according to South African Police Service (SAPS) figures.² This is significant, as gang-related murders had already doubled between 2020 and 2024. The gangs fuelling this relentless violence have been allowed to proliferate, steadily entrenching their power and reaching crisis levels of brutality. Accurately understanding the nature of the gang phenomenon, its changing dynamics and its impact on society is the first step towards a revitalized government response.

The GI-TOC has identified 10 themes illustrating the status of gangs in the Western Cape, how they make money, and how they embed themselves in communities and corrupt public institutions.³

While gangs are a complex social phenomenon, these themes provide a framework that can inform debate and provide a foundation for evidence-based policy responses. This issue also offers a road map of 12 recommendations for immediate action on gang violence (see page 14).

1. A more fragmented and volatile gang landscape is fostering clusters of violence

As shown on the map above, the burden of gang-related violence is concentrated in socially and economically marginalized areas. These can be termed 'clusters of violence', with a high concentration of gangs in territories that border one another. Hotspot areas include parts of Hanover Park, Manenberg, Mitchells Plain, Delft and Elsies River. They largely coincide with areas where police stations are particularly vulnerable to corruption, reducing local resilience to gang activity.

Social dynamics in gangs have led to greater volatility and violence over at least the past five years. Turf wars, leading to new groups taking over territory from older rivals in some areas, have long been a characteristic of Western Cape gangs. But there has been a significant acceleration in the frequency with which splinter groups form, gangs fragment and new groups emerge to challenge long-established predecessors.⁴

Some gangs have capitalized on this trend. The Fancy Boys, for example, have attracted breakaway members of rival gangs with promises of greater access to firearms and illicit profits. This has enabled their rapid expansion since 2020 and they are now one of the Western Cape's largest gangs.⁵ By contrast, long-established gangs such as the Americans have come under attack: several recent Americans leaders have been assassinated, and breakaway groups such as the Dollar Kids, Junior Mafia and Inglorious Basterds (IGBs) have established their own operations.⁶ While the Americans remain one of the largest and most powerful gangs – a position they have held for decades – a more volatile landscape is taking its toll. Meanwhile, powerful extortion gangs such as Boko Haram and the Guptas hold sway in township areas.⁷

Increased gang fragmentation contributes to greater violence. Breakaway gangs fight for control of territory against rivals and former allies, and they are under pressure to bring in recruits to strengthen their numbers. This makes gang violence harder to predict.

Law enforcement operations should be led by an evidence-based strategy that identifies clusters of violence. A recent trial of a hotspot policing initiative yielded promising results and is being rolled out in nine police precincts.⁸ This could go some way to helping police target resources in a context of gang-related violence that is highly geographically concentrated.

MOST PROMINENT GANGS IN THE WESTERN CAPE, 2025

■ **Fancy Boys**

Since 2020, the Fancy Boys have expanded aggressively. After COVID-19 lockdowns disrupted many gangs' business models, the Fancy Boys began attracting members of other gangs by offering access to drugs, guns and money. Their membership and territory have grown significantly. They are most embedded in Mitchells Plain.

■ **Americans**

The Americans are the most populous gang in the Western Cape and hold territory in almost every area. Set up like the '50 states' of the US, leaders in each area operate largely independently (almost like a franchise) but ultimately answer to a de facto leader, who manages the supply of drugs and firearms to franchise leaders.

■ **28s**

The 28s rose to prominence under the leadership of Colin Stanfield, who organized members of the 28s prison gang under the banner of the 28s on the street. The 28s are deeply embedded in extortion. Their strongholds are in Valhalla Park and Mitchells Plain, and they have relationships with extortion groups in areas such as Khayelitsha.

■ **Sexy Boys**

The Sexy Boys' leadership reportedly built a significant business empire with underworld figure Mark Lifman, who was murdered in November 2024.⁹ The Sexy Boys are well known for hitmen-for-hire and for dealing in Mandrax (methaqualone). They were one of the first Western Cape gangs to successfully manufacture Mandrax in the late 1990s and 2000s and continue this business today. Their key territory is in Belhar.

■ **Hard Livings**

Long-standing rivals to the Americans, the Hard Livings became prominent when their former leadership established links with gangs in Johannesburg and through them made contact with South American cartels who supplied the gang with cocaine. Key Hard Livings territory is in Manenberg and Mitchells Plain.

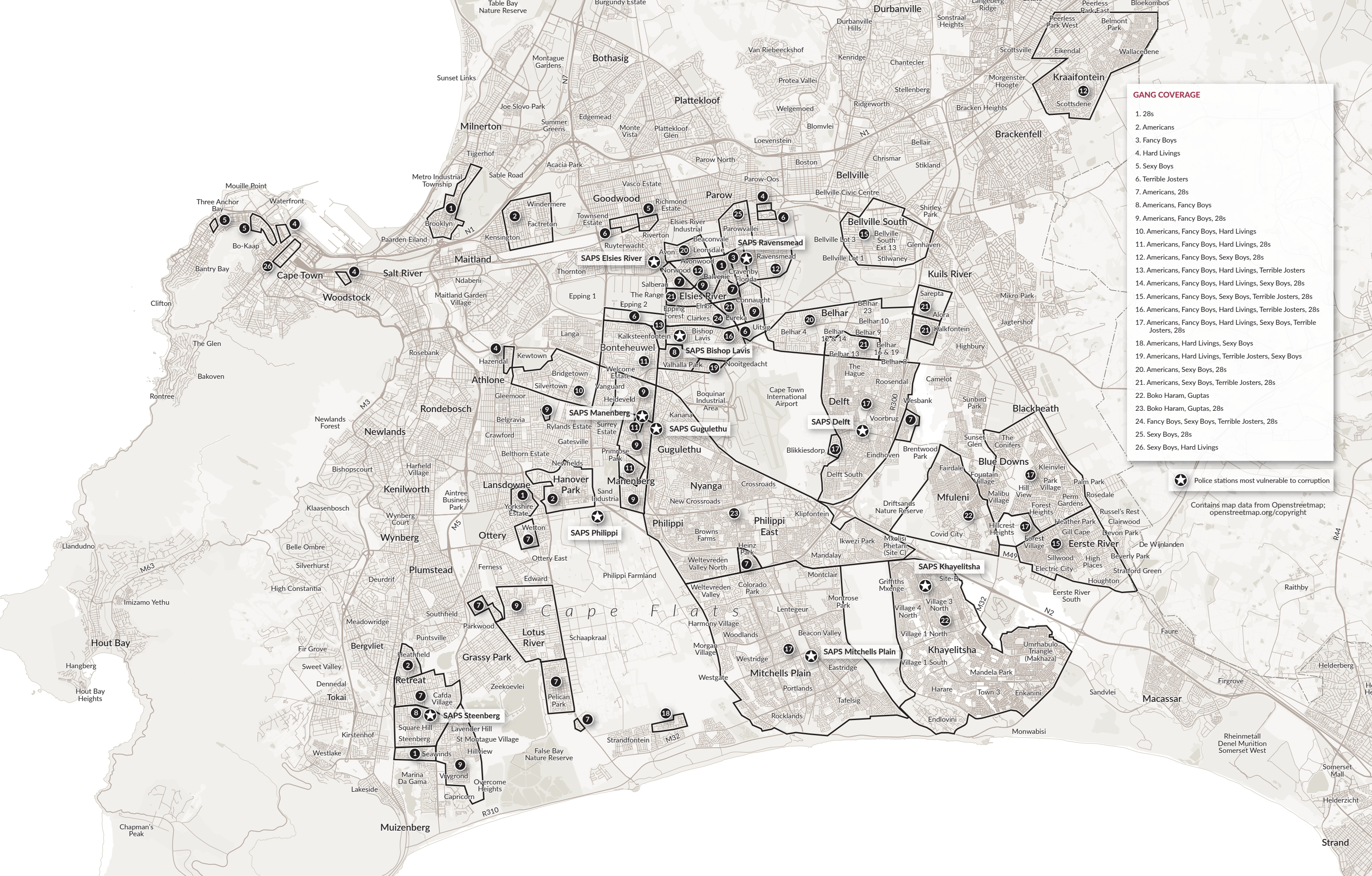
■ **Terrible Josters**

From their heartland in Hawston, the Terrible Josters came to prominence by monopolizing the illegal abalone trade and bartering abalone for drug precursors with Chinese criminal groups. They later established links with South American drug cartels for cocaine supplies. While groups such as the 28s now have a role in the abalone industry, the Terrible Josters remain dominant around Hawston and Hout Bay.

■ **Boko Haram and the Guptas**

Boko Haram and the Guptas are deeply embedded in Khayelitsha and Mfuleni. Their business model centres on extortion, brutally extracting so-called protection fees from businesses in their territories. They are more loosely structured than other Western Cape gangs, with less hierarchical control over members. They operate through local extortion groups who act as proxies, collecting protection payments on their behalf. Both gangs have partnered with the 28s, who supply weapons and manpower in exchange for extortion profits and the opportunity to channel drug flows to township areas.





2. Countering gangs' ready access to illicit firearms and ammunition should be a policy priority

The diversion of thousands of former police firearms to gangs by former SAPS colonel Christiaan Prinsloo significantly increased the volume of weapons in the hands of gangsters.¹⁰ Gangs are now competing to maintain and expand their armouries, using several illicit channels.

Some supplies are diverted from police and military sources, including the recirculation to rival gangs of weapons seized by police from gang members.¹¹ Other firearms are taken in robberies,¹² and some licensed gun owners divert ammunition from legal channels for criminal use. This exploits the absence of a central database to track the amount of ammunition licence-holders buy from different dealers, ensuring it stays within legal limits.¹³ Corruption in the SAPS Central Firearm Registry has enabled criminals to obtain firearm licences.¹⁴ Gang boss Nafiz Modack, for example, faces charges of fraudulently acquiring licences for high-calibre firearms.¹⁵

Almost all major gang leaders reportedly have links to private security companies, which can legally purchase firearms and ammunition. These weapons can then be diverted for criminal use, allowing gangsters to obtain firearms through ostensibly legal means.¹⁶ Finally, a small but growing number of weapons (including automatic weapons) are smuggled to the Western Cape from Namibia.¹⁷ There have also been indications, while not verified through official channels, that some firearms may be supplied by foreign criminal groups.

Most of these firearm flows are facilitated by corruption among legal custodians of firearms (police, military and private licence holders) or by weak regulatory oversight. In the short term, law enforcement agencies should bolster resources for investigations and intelligence-gathering focused on firearms, which could bring a near-term reduction in violence by taking weapons off the streets. In the medium and longer term, measures to improve police accountability and transparency in handling firearms and closing gaps in the implementation of firearms legislation are required to reduce the flows of guns to gangs.

3. International illicit supply chains connect gangs to global drug markets

Drugs are gangs' largest source of income, and control over turf where drugs are sold and consumed is a primary driver of gang violence. Drug markets are thriving not only due to gang violence but also thanks to sophisticated international supply chains to and through South Africa. In this market, Western Cape gangs cooperate with numerous foreign criminal entrepreneurs.

Heroin originating in Afghanistan, for example, is trafficked through East Africa and primarily sold in bulk in the Western Cape by Tanzanian networks.¹⁸ Cocaine is trafficked from Latin America (particularly Brazil) on container ships and Nigerian or Eastern European networks often act as intermediaries, distributing the drugs to criminal groups in South Africa.¹⁹ Some Latin American networks, particularly Colombian groups, have also reportedly begun to establish a presence in South Africa and deal with gangs directly. A key South African transit hub for cocaine is the port of Durban, where shipments are repackaged for final destinations in Europe and Australia. There is strong criminal control over parts of the port, and corruption is widespread. Large cocaine shipments from Latin America and West Africa have been seized entering Cape Town and Saldanha Bay to the north, which is emerging as a significant hub.²⁰

Methamphetamine (known locally as 'tik') has three main supply chains. So-called 'Mexican meth' is produced by Nigerian drug syndicates that allegedly learned the manufacturing process from Mexican cartels then flooded the South African market.²¹ Methamphetamine produced in South Africa emerged in the early 2000s through a link to Chinese organized crime interests, which began trading drug precursors for illicitly harvested abalone.²² Finally, 'Pakistani meth' has emerged since 2021. It is trafficked with Afghan heroin along the East African coast.²³

Western Cape gangs leverage their local presence to control drug distribution on their turf, directly or through merchants. In addition to drugs such as tik, cocaine, heroin and Mandrax, local drug use is becoming increasingly diversified, with more recreational use of prescription drugs, including benzodiazepines such as Xanax.²⁴

4. Extortion is the largest income stream after drugs, yet gangs are involved in a wide range of illicit markets

Extortion of businesses – particularly foreign-owned shops – has been a long-standing practice in gangs' territorial heartlands.²⁵ The practice of extortion is most deeply embedded in township areas such as Khayelitsha. Extortionists, including the notorious Gupta and Boko Haram gangs, seek to illegally 'tax' all economic activity, demanding protection fees from a threat they themselves create.²⁶ They target all businesses, from shops to medical practices and construction companies to service providers. Even schools and streetside food vendors are vulnerable.²⁷ The gangs often act through local proxies and sub-groups that collect extortion rents on their behalf.²⁸

Extortion practices have become more widespread in recent years, targeting a wider range of businesses and emerging in more neighbourhoods.²⁹ So-called 'construction mafia' extortion had

put construction projects worth more than R3 billion at risk by early 2024, according to City of Cape Town officials.³⁰ Many gangs have also become involved in extorting taxi routes, demanding protection fees for routes passing through their territories.

The expansion of extortion has had a widespread economic impact, dragging down the profitability of otherwise viable businesses, destroying job opportunities, and acting as a drag on government spending and service delivery. Extortion is ruthlessly enforced, contributing to the increase in gang-related violence. Mass shootings in areas such as Khayelitsha have been linked to extortion, both in terms of turf wars between extortion groups and as an intimidation tactic against communities.³¹ Similarly, increased competition in taxi extortion has had violent consequences. For example, confrontation in early 2025 between the Junky Funky Kids (JFKs) and taxi associations in the Vrygrond area over protection payments left dozens dead, including a taxi operator shot in a Wynberg courtroom.³²

Extortion and drugs are gangs' primary income streams but there are many others, including armed robbery and housebreaking. Violence itself is traded as a commodity, with gang members acting as hitmen for hire. Trade in illegally harvested abalone has been a gang-linked commodity along the Western Cape coast for decades, particularly for the Terrible Josters.³³ Other gangs reportedly have illicit sidelines in commodities such as diamonds, smuggled along the same routes as weapons from Namibia.³⁴

5. Gangs increasingly recruit children, with implications for future generations

More children than ever before are being recruited into gangs. Civil society organizations working with children and in schools in gang-affected communities say gangs are increasingly targeting children as young as eight; others report that they are targeting the same age group they have always drawn from – 12-year-olds and early teenagers – but attracting larger numbers.³⁵ These young recruits may act as lookouts, runners, gun carriers and shooters.

A massive uptick in child recruitment, which began during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, has continued and intensified, with gangs recruiting in and around schools.³⁶ GI-TOC research has monitored recruitment around schools in areas such as Ocean View,³⁷ Grassy Park and Parkwood,³⁸ but these are examples of a widespread phenomenon.

This change in recruitment practices is reflected in the criminal justice system. 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.³⁹ The

trend is also reflected in a higher number of child murders, as young gang recruits are killed by rivals.⁴⁰

The younger generation is traumatized by the loss of parents and guardians over decades of gang violence, and their increasing recruitment into gangs sustains the cycle of trauma. There is an urgent need for policymakers to provide social and psychological support to communities affected by gang violence. This can be done by social workers and civil society organizations, which in many cases offer services and support the government has been unable to provide. The government should also move towards prevention strategies that prioritize early interventions, supporting children at risk of gang recruitment.

6. The changing relationship between street gangs and prison Number gangs has consequences on the street

The operations of prison Number gangs – the 26s, 27s and 28s – have evolved, with significant knock-on effects for violence and criminality on the street as well as in prison.⁴¹ Most Western Cape street gangs have an affiliation with the 26s or 28s, meaning their members usually belong to one of the gangs while in prison.⁴² The 28s street gang (distinct from the 28s prison gang) is one of the largest and most powerful gangs and, according to media reporting,⁴³ is led by accused Ralph Stanfield, who was arrested in September 2023 on charges relating to car theft, fraud and attempted murder. Additional charges of murder and violations of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act were added in June 2024 as the investigation widened, bringing the total number of charges against Stanfield to 41.⁴⁴ The 28s street gang is deeply involved in the extortion of construction sites and township areas. The 27s also have a powerful street gang presence.⁴⁵

In the latest development, Stanfield has reportedly been inducted into a high rank in the prison 28s, based solely on his status as leader of the street 28s.⁴⁶ This would be the first time a street gangster has been elevated to this status without having to 'buy' a prison Number ranking.

This has a real-world impact. In previous decades, shared membership of the prison Number and understanding of its traditions and language offered members of different street gangs a way to communicate, resolve disputes and in some cases avoid turf wars through negotiation.⁴⁷ As the grip of the old guard loosened and the Number subculture adapted, this shared understanding and means of communication have dissipated. Within prison, the Number's violent 'justice', which previously imposed discipline, may also become less controlled as it evolves. Powerful street gangsters could extend their control within prisons.⁴⁸ Yet overall, street gang dynamics are still shaped by prison Number influences, and vice versa.

7. Police corruption hampers the response to gangsterism, particularly in hotspot areas

Corruption in police units, allegedly reaching the highest echelons, is a major stumbling block for efforts to counter gangsterism. Several major court cases have documented instances of police misconduct. A Western Cape High Court judgment in October 2022 warned that 28s members had infiltrated the highest levels of police management in the province,⁴⁹ and in November 2025 the Western Cape police ombudsman agreed, saying it is likely that the police have been infiltrated by the 28s and noting that complaints against a provincial commissioner and his senior management were likely to be true.⁵⁰ Nafiz Modack was sentenced in September 2025 for corrupt long-term dealings with a former SAPS brigadier who accepted kickbacks in exchange for assigning police officers to find cars for Modack's repossession business.⁵¹

During interviews with numerous investigators over recent years, several examples of police corruption have emerged as relatively common practices. They include seized firearms and drugs being recirculated to gangs; information being shared with gangsters about witnesses, investigations and impending raids; investigations being diverted away from certain gangsters and towards their rivals; and police officers participating in extortion or fraud for financial gain.⁵² These allegations – which have been shared with the police – relate to rank-and-file officers and members of high-level units focused on combating organized crime and gangsterism,⁵³ such as the Western Cape Organized Crime Unit.⁵⁴

Based on extensive interviews with police officers, gang members and community members, the GI-TOC has identified 10 police stations where long-standing issues of collusion between officers and gang members are well known, and where service delivery is notoriously poor. These are highlighted on the map on page 4, which shows that the police stations are in neighbourhoods with some of the highest levels of gang-related violence.

Collusion between gangs and the police has the effect of sowing mistrust between policing agencies, discouraging inter-agency cooperation; and between the police and communities, worsening the problem of witnesses being unwilling to share information. Investigations into allegations of corruption at these 10 stations should be prioritized to identify and remove officers colluding with gangs and placing their colleagues and communities at risk. The SAPS should also act to improve service delivery at these priority stations and increase oversight. Counter-corruption measures such as lifestyle audits for senior officers and using officers from elsewhere to conduct raids in gang areas (to minimize information leaks) should be considered.

8. Gang-related corruption extends to other areas of government

Corruption in public procurement is closely intertwined with the gang phenomenon. An example is corruption in construction contracts.⁵⁵ Gang leaders do not only extort construction sites; they also manipulate tender processes and use threats to ensure companies they own receive public contracts. Construction companies connected to the Mongrels, for example, have muscled in on contracts in the Parkwood area, where the gang holds territory.⁵⁶

Charges against Stanfield, several associates and former Cape Town mayoral committee member Malusi Boozi, relating to allegedly unlawfully awarded tenders worth more than R1 billion, were provisionally withdrawn in May 2025 after detectives found 'new evidence' requiring investigation.⁵⁷ The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) intends to reinstate these charges after investigating the new evidence. Stanfield appeared on camera in a pre-trial conference at the Cape Town High Court in November 2025, saying he was being denied a fair trial.⁵⁸ The practices of which they were accused are allegedly widespread in the construction industry and other sectors. Sources in the private security industry have described how they see tender processes being manipulated for the benefit of gang-linked firms.⁵⁹ Practices include corrupt officials tailoring tenders to suit companies linked to gangsters.⁶⁰ This deters legitimate firms from applying for these contracts,⁶¹ reducing the quality of bids available to public bodies.

The SAPS is pursuing investigations into corrupt links between extortion gangs in Khayelitsha and political officials, with suspicions that kickbacks are being paid to share sensitive government information on tenders.⁶² To excise criminal interests from public life, action is required to end corruption in the police and broader corruption of public procurement and the role of political officials.

9. Gang leaders launder money through seemingly legitimate businesses

Gang leaders amass illicit millions that need to be laundered into seemingly legitimate businesses. Sectors at risk of gang-related money laundering include construction, property, taxis, casinos and private security. This has a knock-on effect for the wider economy, as gang-linked firms can undercut legitimate businesses, property prices become artificially inflated, and government tenders are left uncompleted. Stanfield allegedly made large profits from state tenders for building housing developments and schools. His bids were allegedly cross-subsidized by the 28s' illicit income, allowing them to undercut rivals. By artificially inflating their income, gang-linked businesses can offer cheaper services and out-compete legal rivals.⁶³ Similarly, the so-called 'security services' provided (often forcibly, as a form of extortion) to nightclubs are extremely cheap, as they operate as a front for illicit funds.⁶⁴

These front businesses are set up in the names of family members,⁶⁵ spouses and associates of gang leaders, presenting a challenge to law enforcement seeking to prove gang connections. Prosecutions of major gang figures in recent years have often focused on violent offences such as murder, which are less complex for prosecutors to prove. The government should consider providing additional resources for investigations into money laundering charges against gang leaders – including expertise in areas such as forensic accounting – to recover assets purchased with laundered money and mitigate the economic knock-on effects.

10. Systemic issues in the criminal justice system hinder the response to gangs

The conviction rate relating to firearms seized in the City of Cape Town (for offences committed with those firearms) since 2021 stands at only 5%.⁶⁶ This is part of a broader, long-standing pattern of low conviction rates for offences linked to gang activity,⁶⁷ and indeed low detection rates for serious crime nationwide. The SAPS performance plan for 2025 came under fire in parliament for having a murder detection rate target of only 11.33%. The implication is that most murders are expected to go unsolved.⁶⁸

This pattern of impunity points to systemic challenges in the criminal justice system. Contributing factors include intimidation of witnesses, magistrates and prosecutors; police corruption; investigating officers' unmanageable caseloads; and incompatible priorities between the police and the court system.

Lack of cooperation between the police and the NPA contributes to low conviction rates. Prosecutors and magistrates argue that to meet performance targets, police are incentivized to submit cases for prosecution even if they are not yet strong enough to succeed. Police counter that prosecutors lack sufficient capacity to work with them to take cases to trial. Implementing a prosecutor-led strategy that involves prosecutors working closely with the police to build a solid case has been successful in South Africa and elsewhere.

What generates clusters of violence?

Most gang violence is highly geographically concentrated in areas that experience an overwhelming number of gang shootings. These clusters of violence have a high concentration of gangs controlling adjacent territories. Mapping data on the location of gang-related violent incidents throughout 2025 (see map on page 11) has made it possible to visualize the spatial distribution of violence.

As the trends above have outlined in broad terms, social dynamics in gangs have led to greater volatility and violence over at

Security in courts is also a persistent issue. The two suspects shot dead outside Athlone Magistrate's Court in December 2025 were the latest victims of several attacks in and around court buildings. Research has found that basic security measures such as electronic scanners are not always used, allowing gang members to smuggle in weapons. This highlights security failures in the court system that undermine access to justice and the prosecution of organized crime.⁶⁹ Prosecutors, magistrates and other court officials have reported feeling at risk while carrying out their duties.⁷⁰

Impunity in gang-related cases is a major source of frustration and anger in gang-affected communities. The real-world impact of a low conviction rate is that gangs repeatedly use the same hitmen with impunity. If arrested, gang members are often swiftly released, either with charges dropped or bail granted.

Revitalize efforts to counter gang violence

In reviewing these themes, it is clear that countering gangsterism is an increasingly uphill battle. Gangs are more violent, more unpredictable, and fuelled by larger sums of illegally acquired cash. At the same time, there is a lack of accountability in policing, inadequate investigation of corruption in the police and government, and inadequate social support to gang-affected communities and civil society organizations trying to bridge the gap.

In the short term, rapid action should be taken to mitigate gang violence, provide emergency support in affected communities, and stem the flow of firearms and ammunition to gangs. The GI-TOC has analyzed the priority areas and provided a 12-point plan for the immediate mitigation of gang violence (see page 14). This is an essential first step. Yet as the themes above demonstrate, many of the most pernicious aspects of gangsterism are deep-seated issues entrenched in society and governance. Longer-term strategies are also required to shift, by degrees, the deep-seated cycles of violence.

At least the past five years, as firearms have become more readily available and the potential profits from extortion and drug sales have grown. These factors have driven increased violence in all the clusters. Yet varying inter-gang conflicts make each cluster unique. In some areas, violence is most strongly driven by new, breakaway groups of young gang members taking on the older generation. In others, violence has flared because major gangs with long-standing rivalries have struck up a new turf war. Here, we focus on clusters of violence in Hanover Park, Manenberg and Mitchells Plain, outlining the rivalries fuelling bloodshed.

Hanover Park: Breakaway factions fuel violence

In Hanover Park, fragmentation of gangs is a core driver of violence.⁷¹ Historically, conflicts in this area were shaped by well-established rivalries between gangs that had held territory for decades (see map on page 4). More recently, new groups have broken away and turned against their former allies, driving violence to a new level of intensity. This dynamic is best illustrated through the Only the Family gang (OTFs), which broke away from the Ghetto Kids; and the Inglourious Basterds (IGBs), which broke away from the Americans.

For decades, the Ghetto Kids have been engaged in turf wars in Hanover Park against rivals such as the Americans, Mongrels and Laughing Boys. After the death of alleged Ghetto Kids leader Faizel 'Sheikh' Manuel in May 2021, the gang was reportedly handed over to his two sons, known locally as 'Hadjie' and 'Biggy'.⁷² At this point, a power struggle led to a split between the older and younger generations of gangsters.⁷³ In April 2022, Hadjie was assassinated in a hit that was allegedly ordered from within the gang. These events saw one faction, now known as the OTFs, break away from the Ghetto Kids. The splinter group has since claimed small pockets of territory, some of which belonged to the Ghetto Kids, including an area known as 'the backstreets'.⁷⁴ Intense violence erupted in this territory between the OTFs and the Ghetto Kids, with numerous shootings recorded by the City of Cape Town's ShotSpotter technology.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the long-standing Americans strongholds in Hanover Park were hit by waves of violence when the IGBs and the Dollar Kids broke away from them. As a result, the Americans lost many members who either defected or were killed in the conflict, and they remain embroiled in conflict with the IGBs.⁷⁶ What makes the formation of the IGBs even more significant is that they took control of firearms that previously belonged to the Americans.⁷⁷ Today, the IGBs are a large faction with access to firearms and ammunition from various sources, including the police, the military, gun dealerships and international suppliers. This means they have the firepower to maintain and deepen their feud with the Americans.

However, conflict and fragmentation can quickly lead to unlikely alliances. When the Fancy Boys tried to capture the Americans' turf, the Americans banded together with their former allies, the IGBs and Dollar Kids, and forced the Fancy Boys to retreat. This unusual alliance highlights the unpredictable, opportunistic nature of gangs and shows how they may form short-term alliances (even with factions of their own gangs who have splintered away) to ward off aggressive rivals.

Hanover Park illustrates a broader trend towards gang fragmentation. Although gang turnover is nothing new, the speed at which it is happening is transforming the landscape and altering the

nature of conflicts. Traditional gang rivalries combined with splits exacerbate an already volatile environment, making it increasingly difficult to predict violence.

Manenberg: Converging gang rivalries

Manenberg has been a gang battleground for several decades, and some of today's violence is driven by the same trends seen in Hanover Park and Mitchells Plain. For example, the Americans' turf war against their breakaway faction, the IGBs, has played out in Manenberg much as it has in Hanover Park. Similarly, the expansionist tactics of the Fancy Boys have had a major impact on the legacy strongholds of the Americans in Manenberg, much as they have in Mitchells Plain.

However, the dynamics of gang violence in Manenberg differ from these other areas in several ways. As shown on the map (see page 11), the most powerful gangs in the Western Cape – including the 28s, the Sexy Boys, the Hard Livings, the Terrible Josters, Boko Haram and the Guptas – claim territory in areas across Cape Town. Several claim neighbouring territory in Manenberg, making the area a flashpoint for inter-gang violence.

The most recent clashes have been between the Fancy Boys and the 28s, and the Americans and the Nice Time Kids. Violence is also being fuelled by older turf wars between the Hard Livings and three gangs: the Clever Kids, the Dixie Boys and the Americans.⁷⁸

The Fancy Boys have been embroiled in a growing conflict with the 28s over territory and resources in several areas, including Manenberg. The 28s have strongholds in Valhalla Park (Bishop Lavis) and Beacon Valley (Mitchells Plain), as well as in Manenberg. After the arrest and incarceration of 28s leader Ralph Stanfield in September 2023, the Fancy Boys capitalized on the perceived leadership vacuum and began waging an aggressive campaign to capture drug turf from the 28s in these areas.⁷⁹ They also muscled in on 28s territory in Elsies River and Delft.⁸⁰ During simultaneous attacks in several areas, they used scouts and 50-man strike teams, in one instance launching six attacks in a day.⁸¹

While they inflicted damage, the Fancy Boys could not break the 28s, as Stanfield retained authority over his gang from prison. A steady supply of drugs and firearms has continued to flow to the 28s, allowing them to maintain control of illicit markets in their territories and ward off most of the Fancy Boys' attacks.⁸²

In an interview, a former Americans hitman said: 'Ralph Stanfield has far too much money and he is able to use that money to his advantage. He showed that even a phenomenal war campaign like that of the Fancy Boys was unable to overwhelm him as the leader of the 28s, even though both he and his wife are in prison.'⁸³

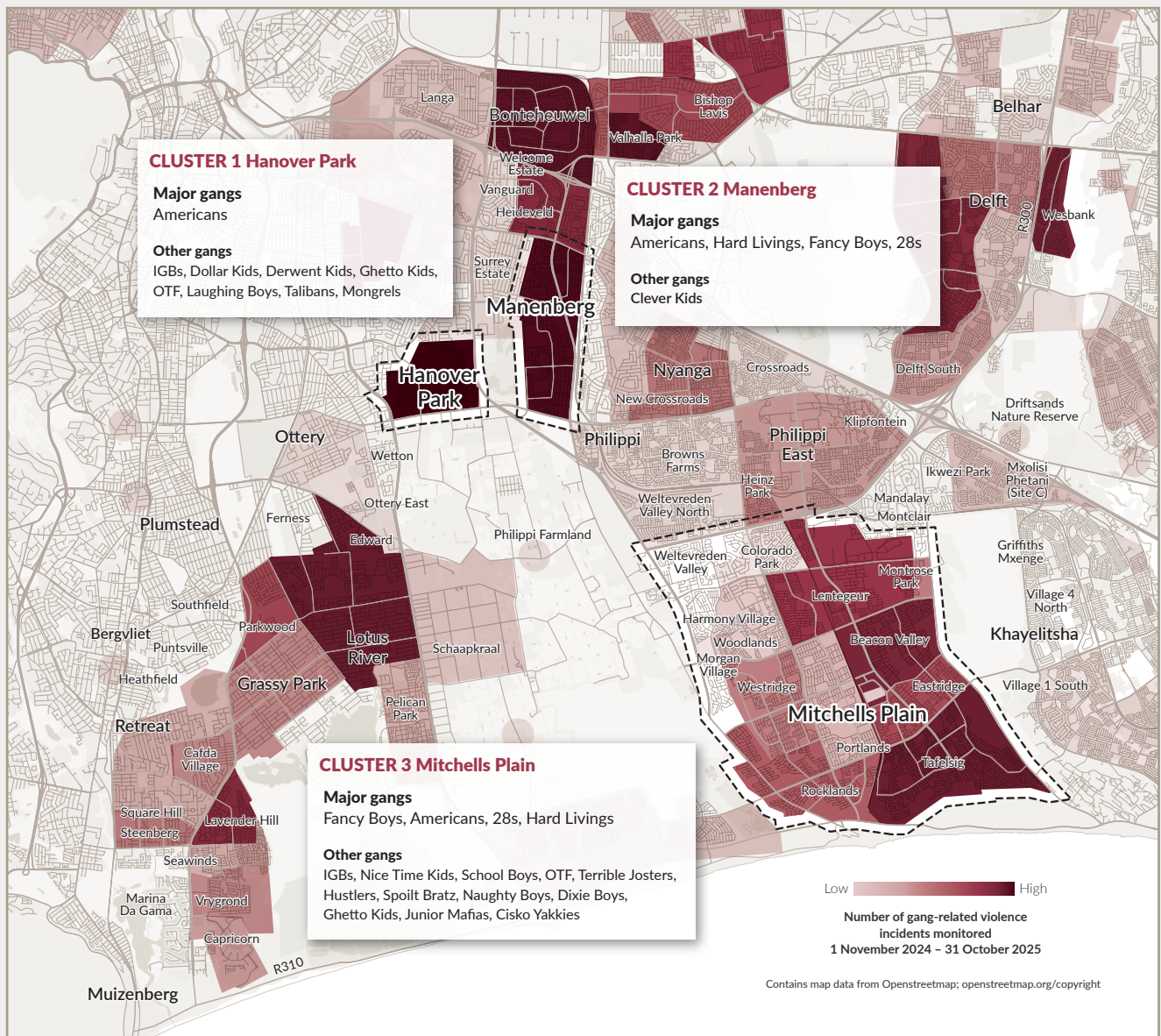


FIGURE 1 Clusters of violence.

The result is that the 28s have been able to hold territory in Manenberg and elsewhere, while the Fancy Boys have encroached on neighbouring areas. This sets the scene for future clashes between the two in Manenberg. Added to this are the ongoing conflicts with the Hard Livings and their rivals, meaning Manenberg will remain one of the most violent and contested spaces in the Western Cape.

Mitchells Plain: the Fancy Boys take on the Americans

Mitchells Plain is one of the main front lines in a major and protracted conflict between the Americans and the Fancy Boys, whose numbers have surged as they absorb smaller gangs and capture turf. 'When we attacked the Americans, many of their *manskappe* [members] turned and became Fancy Boys,' said one

Fancy Boys member in Mitchells Plain. 'They all understood that we have it better in our *kamp* [camp or gang]. We got more guns, more girls, more drugs, more money and more power.'⁸⁴

This pressure has resulted in increased gang violence, particularly in Beacon Valley and Lenteguur, and there are reports of frequent shootings between the Americans and the Fancy Boys.⁸⁵ The Fancy Boys' continued expansion, combined with the Americans' fragmentation and vulnerability, is driving some of the highest levels of violence seen in the Western Cape in recent years. The Fancy Boys are regarded by senior SAPS officials as 'a serious threat to safety and security in the province',⁸⁶ and in some areas they are alleged to have surpassed some of their most powerful rivals.⁸⁷

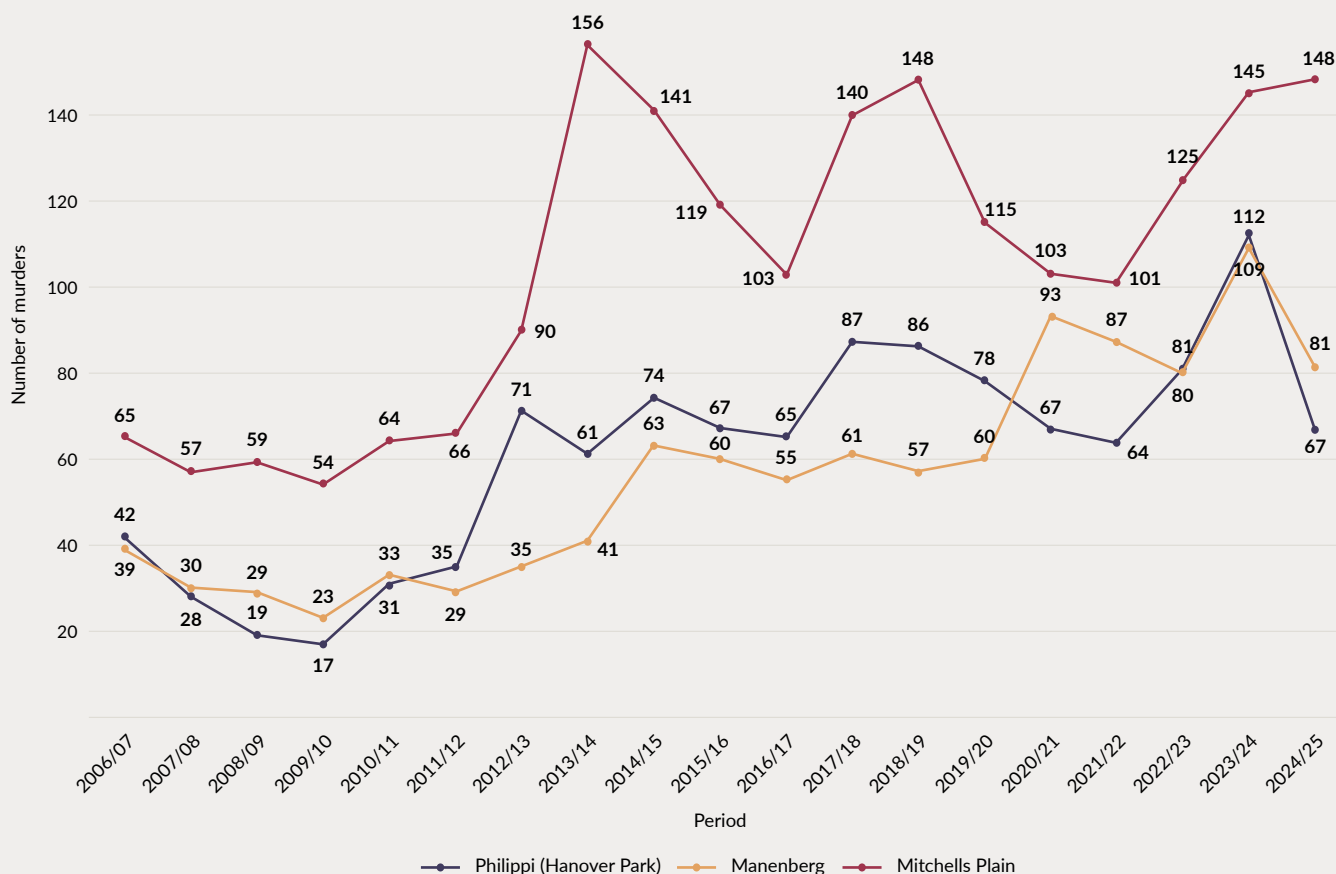


FIGURE 2 Number of murders in the Philippi (Hanover Park), Manenberg and Mitchells Plain precincts, 2006–2025.

Interlocking alliances and rivalries shape clusters of violence

The distinctive gang landscapes of Hanover Park, Manenberg and Mitchells Plain mean they have become clusters of violence for different reasons. These drivers include the conflict between the Americans and the Fancy Boys, clashes between dominant gangs, and accelerating gang fragmentation. However, while these issues might emerge in one area more intensely than

another, they cannot be neatly delineated. Gang fragmentation is occurring in Mitchells Plain and Manenberg, for example, while Hanover Park has also seen its fair share of clashes between historically dominant gangs. Violence will continue to flare in areas where these dynamics converge. This monitor will continue to map the geographies of violence and investigate the inter-gang conflicts that shape them.

The gang ecosystem: an ever-shifting challenge

Understanding who leads gangs in the Western Cape, and how leadership changes over time, is essential for policing and policy. Some gang leaders in the Western Cape are publicly identified and well known. Prosecutions against them fill the headlines, and accusations against them as gang leaders are recorded in court documents. In some cases they have become synonymous with the criminal enterprises they lead.

Many other gang leaders are not publicly identified, arrested and prosecuted, or remain known only by their ‘street’ names. There are several reasons for this, including shifting gang leadership structures, the emergence of new rival factions, and limited policing capacity slowing down prosecutions.

Leadership structures vary widely

Gangs vary widely in structure, meaning methods that help identify the leaders of one gang may be ineffective when analysing another. These structures also change as gangs adapt to shifting environments.⁸⁸ Some gangs are organized vertically, with decision-making and control over resources (drugs, money, weapons) concentrated at the top. Others spread power more laterally among several leaders who have a high degree of autonomy over their own operations.

The Americans are an example of a gang with a decentralized, lateral structure. While they are one of the largest and historically most powerful criminal operations in the Western Cape, they

are not organized around a single leader. Almost like a franchise business, leaders in each area operate independently. However, when they rally together, they can pool substantial resources and become a formidable force.⁸⁹ By contrast, most of the 28s' resources are controlled by a single figure – Stanfield, now operating from prison – and his allies.⁹⁰

An analysis in 2000 by gang expert Irvin Kinnes (now associate professor at the Centre of Criminology in the University of Cape Town Law Faculty) identified a trend towards decentralization of gangs. Allowing minor leaders to set up in different areas, each with their own resources and infrastructure to maintain and expand illicit activities, helped gangs mitigate the risk of disruption by the police.⁹¹ This was a shift from previous trends, where Western Cape gangs more commonly adopted the vertical hierarchies typical of prison gangs.

Some sources suggest that today there is renewed enthusiasm among younger gang members for vertical hierarchies,⁹² and this generational shift has fuelled violent internal conflict in several gangs. One example is the conflict in the JFKs between 'Ibi', the leader, and 'Fabulous', a hitman with ambitions to take over the gang and overhaul its structure.⁹³ Under Ibi's leadership, the JFKs operate like a franchise,⁹⁴ with areas such as Ocean View, Muizenberg, Vrygrond, Capricorn, Lavender Hill and Steenberg controlled by different leaders. Fabulous, however, is reportedly pushing to consolidate control.⁹⁵

Gang fragmentation creates a production line for new leaders

The increasingly common fragmentation of gangs into splinter groups drives the constant emergence of new leaders. Some of the new gangs may quickly fade into obscurity, while others could become the major gangs of tomorrow. Identifying the leaders of new groups, and assessing whether they represent a substantive threat, is a challenge for crime intelligence officers.

More broadly, the gang landscape is diversifying and transforming rapidly, making it a moving target that requires constant monitoring. Gang wars, internal conflicts and law enforcement operations lead to attrition, and when senior figures are killed, leadership structures can change and resources need to be redeployed to identify new leaders.⁹⁶

In addition to factions and new gangs, the presence of obscure local formations of gangsters that resemble gangs – but are, in fact, military wings of larger gangs – presents an additional obstacle to identifying gang leaders. These are usually internal

'battalions': elite formations of hitmen under the control of a senior gang member, responsible for defending the gang's turf and attacking enemy turf. Examples include the MOBs (a hit squad in the Mobsters gang), the Terribilistics, Sons of Satan and Terrible Rude Boys (operating under the umbrella of the Terrible Josters), and the Ruffies (a division of the Mongrels).⁹⁷ It is challenging for investigators to differentiate divisions within a gang and junior or breakaway groups operating independently, and to understand their leadership structures.

Limited policing capacity and corruption slow identification of gang leaders

Police at station level often have detailed information on the gangs and gang leaders operating in their neighbourhoods, but processing information into intelligence requires time, resources and properly trained and effective personnel. 'Stations don't have the capacity for projects [emerging from intelligence or information] and the Anti-Gang Unit doesn't have the capacity to investigate gang dockets in significant numbers,' noted a senior investigator stationed in a priority gang precinct.⁹⁸ These capacity gaps mean intelligence is often fragmented, outdated or not processed quickly enough, hindering investigations.

Gangs also employ counterintelligence measures to pick up on subtle changes in the criminal justice system, further complicating intelligence gathering. They rely on networks of corrupt police, judicial officers, lawyers and government officials who warn them about investigations targeting them.⁹⁹ This can complicate police efforts to identify key individuals and gang leaders, as gangs may feed false information such as several different street names for a leader, in an attempt to throw the police off track.¹⁰⁰

Towards a more proactive approach to monitoring gang leadership

Effective policing and policymaking require an understanding of gangs and their leaders, but the landscape constantly shifts. New gangs and splinter groups emerge rapidly, leadership structures differ widely, and many gangs deliberately obscure the identity of leaders through counterintelligence and corruption.

At the same time, policing capacity constraints make it harder to track these changes and respond effectively. Together, these dynamics mean the picture of gang leadership is always in flux and at risk of becoming outdated. To be effective, strategies to reduce gang violence should treat gangs as fluid organizations, monitor changes in real time, and focus not only on the individuals who lead gangs but on the wider conditions that allow them to thrive.

A 12-point plan for the rapid mitigation of gang violence

The death toll from gang violence in the Western Cape continues to mount amid systemic failings in the government's response in three priority areas. First, the lack of accountability in policing means strategic shortcomings are not addressed, police action does not lead to successful prosecutions, and police corruption is not adequately investigated. Second, there is no cohesive strategy on the prevention of gang violence. Finally, more action is needed to stem the flow of firearms and ammunition to gangs. The huge arsenals accumulated by Western Cape gangs in recent years have fuelled the growing loss of life in turf wars. The recommendations below aim to address these three priority areas.

Priority area 1: Improve accountability and counter-corruption actions

Recommendation 1: Create an oversight mechanism to monitor police progress in addressing gang violence

An oversight body made up of government agencies, including the SAPS, the Department of Social Development, the NPA, the State Security Agency and the provincial government, should be formed to monitor the progress in addressing gang violence. This should happen within two months.

The role of this body will be to ensure the accountability of units tasked with addressing gangsterism. It should oversee Crime Intelligence in the province to ensure that intelligence is effectively used. It should also improve coordination between its member agencies, especially between police and prosecutors.

Specific key performance indicators should be agreed to support a coordinated effort by all participating agencies. These could include improving the number of gang-related arrests that are converted into successful prosecutions, and the number of prosecutions of high-level gang leaders. These strategic targets must be used to measure progress, and they should be part of a public strategy to counter gang violence. Government should also consider appointing an external panel – drawn from civil society, the private sector, academia and affected communities – to provide input on the public plan and independently monitor its progress.

Recommendation 2: Depoliticize the responses to gang violence

Human lives should come before politics. The national government should work with the provincial government to ensure the response to gang violence is as effective as possible. This should give life to the memorandum of understanding signed by national and provincial governments, aiming to foster a more collaborative approach to policing.¹⁰¹ Policing powers should

be devolved to city and provincial law enforcement agencies, which will also be held accountable through the oversight body recommended above.

Many communities in the areas worst affected by gang violence feel their voices are not heard in policymaking. A series of meetings between these communities and senior representatives of the national and provincial governments would send a powerful message that a new era of cooperation has arrived.

Recommendation 3: Investigate corruption and provide extra support in clusters of violence

The GI-TOC has identified eight priority police precincts where long-standing issues of collusion between officers and gang members have been identified, where service delivery is notoriously poor, and which serve neighbourhoods with some of the highest levels of gang-related violence. These police stations are in Philippi (Hanover Park), Manenberg, Elsies River, Bishop Lavis, Lavender Hill, Ravensmead, Mitchells Plain and Delft.

Within three months, investigations into allegations of corruption at these priority stations should be prioritized, aiming to identify and remove officers who collude with gangs and place their colleagues and communities at risk.

The SAPS must also introduce initiatives to improve service delivery at these priority police stations. These should include the expansion of a recent programme coordinated by the GI-TOC that places legal professionals at police stations to improve the efficacy of basic duties such as taking statements (this has been implemented at Grassy Park police station and has yielded positive results). This initiative also enhances oversight at police stations.

Recommendation 4: Use resources from other provinces to conduct targeted policing operations

Consistent and sustained targeted policing operations, such as raids on gang locations, have previously succeeded in removing firearms from the streets and gathering evidence for the prosecution of leading gang members. However, informers at police stations frequently notify gangs of impending raids, giving them time to discard evidence.

Within one month, the SAPS must assemble police officers from other provinces to conduct targeted operations, including raids on gang infrastructure. This will assist in mitigating the effects of police corruption. A similar initiative in North West province, where police officials from elsewhere carried out targeted operations against illegal miners, reduced instances of corruption and resulted in successful raids.¹⁰²

Recommendation 5: Implement a prosecutor-led strategy to investigate high-profile gang leaders

Lack of cooperation between police and prosecuting authorities contributes to low gang prosecution rates. Implementing a prosecutor-led strategy that involves prosecutors from the outset in building cases has been effective in South Africa and elsewhere.

The need for heightened cooperation between the SAPS and the NPA must be reiterated by the Minister of Police, to ensure this strategy is driven at the highest levels of these organizations. It should be prioritized in complex investigations targeting high-profile gang leaders.

Recommendation 6: Audit the lifestyles of senior police officers

Lifestyle audits have been used in numerous countries to help identify unexplained wealth that may come from criminal sources. They are effective when combined with other counter-corruption measures.¹⁰³ Such audits could be implemented for senior officers in the Western Cape as a way to identify and prevent high-level corruption. This measure has been mooted by the provincial government, with an offer to fund it, but the offer was rejected.

Priority area 2: Counter flows of illicit firearms and ammunition

Recommendation 7: Mount stop-and-search operations in clusters of violence to remove firearms from the streets

Gang access to firearms is one of the major factors contributing to violence.¹⁰⁴ Within a month, law enforcement agencies should deploy targeted resources to the areas where firearm crime is the most concentrated.¹⁰⁵ Increasing the frequency of stop-and-search operations to intercept those carrying firearms in clusters of violence can help bring a near-term reduction in gunfire by seizing more ammunition and firearms and taking them out of circulation. These operations should be led by an evidence-based strategy to identify hotspots. A trial of a hotspots policing initiative of this kind has yielded promising results and is being rolled out in nine precincts. This rollout can be prioritized and widened.¹⁰⁶

Recommendation 8: Scale up intelligence-gathering and responses to firearms

Gangs have several sources of firearms: they are diverted from police sources, through corruptly acquired firearms licences and corrupt firearms dealers, or smuggled internationally. In the long term, action should be taken to address all these routes, including overhauling licensing systems and improving governance of the private sector.

In the short term, the SAPS should dramatically reinforce resources for intelligence collection and responses to firearms. Within a month, specialist investigators working on firearms cases should be given additional resources and manpower.

Recommendation 9: Improve police accountability for seized firearms, including the use of body-worn cameras

Interviewed gang members consistently say that corrupt police officers selling seized weapons are a major source of firearms. Law enforcement bodies should prioritize the weapons leaking from their own stores. One way to do this with immediate impact would be to mandate the use of body-worn cameras for officers taking part in operations where firearms are likely to be seized. These cameras, as shown in their use in other countries, provide a level of oversight and accountability that can help counter corruption by ensuring seized firearms are recorded and cannot be diverted back to gangs.

Priority area 3: Create a strategy for gang violence prevention

Recommendation 10: Establish civil society support networks to support vulnerable community members and build resilience to gang culture

Civil society organizations work on the front line in gang-affected areas, filling roles that the government cannot and providing services it does not deliver. Such groups mediate disputes between gangs to prevent further violence, and they shield vulnerable people (especially children) from gang activity and violence by providing safe spaces (such as after-school care) and alternatives to gang culture.

Within two months, the government must facilitate the establishment of robust support networks in gang-affected communities. These networks must be partnerships between community-based organizations, religious institutions and schools, and be supported by the provincial government. Civil society organizations working with school-age children should be supported as a matter of priority, as gangs have increasingly targeted vulnerable younger children for recruitment. As recommended above, representatives of the minister and the provincial government should meet these civil society groups to ensure their voices are heard, and to help inform anti-gang strategies.

Recommendation 11: Increase security measures at courts, especially those in areas of high gang activity

Intimidation of witnesses is a major stumbling block to gang prosecutions. While reforming the witness protection system is a



long-term goal, there are measures that can be taken in the short term. Over recent years, several witnesses have been killed in and around Western Cape courts,¹⁰⁷ and judges and prosecutors have been subject to intimidation. Yet at many courts, basic security gaps can be remedied within a month.

Six courts are particularly vulnerable because they take cases from the areas most affected by gang violence. They are the magistrates' courts in Wynberg, Bishop Lavis, Athlone, Blue Downs, Mitchells Plain and Cape Town. Inside the court buildings, it is imperative that metal detectors are well maintained and functional, while security staff are sufficiently trained to identify potential threats. Outside, police should be visible to reduce the likelihood of targeted killings or attempts to intimidate those testifying.

Recommendation 12: Invest seriously in prevention

Prevention must be at the centre of any strategy to reduce criminality, particularly in contexts where gang violence is entrenched and intergenerational. Data from the 2025 Global Organized Crime Index shows that South Africa's weakest resilience indicators are prevention, and victim and witness support.¹⁰⁸ The Index also shows that these two indicators have the highest impact on reducing certain elements of criminality. Marginal improvements to prevention strategies and those targeting victim and witness support can, therefore, have a significant, direct impact on reducing gang violence.

Strengthening prevention, through early interventions, community-based programmes, social protection, gender-sensitive approaches and youth pathways, targets the weak spots that gangs exploit. This is particularly critical because the

Index shows that while criminality is rising, its rate of increase is slowing, creating an opportunity for targeted resilience reforms to produce lasting reductions in organized crime.

Improving victim and witness protection is equally essential, not only from a rights-based perspective, but as a core crime-reduction mechanism. Strengthening formal witness protection, investing in gender-sensitive and community-anchored victim services, and building confidential reporting channels undermine the power gangs exert over communities. Together, prevention, and victim and witness protection form a mutually reinforcing strategy that can help South Africa move from high criminality towards stronger resilience.

Conclusion: Building South Africa's resilience

Escalating gang violence in the Western Cape demands urgent, coordinated action on several fronts. The 12-point plan outlined above provides a roadmap for rapid intervention, addressing the three critical failings that have allowed the crisis to deepen: inadequate police accountability, the absence of a coherent prevention strategy and unchecked flows of illegal firearms. The recommendations are designed for swift implementation, with most actionable within one to three months.

These measures are not presented as a complete solution to gang violence, but as urgent interventions to arrest the current trajectory. Longer-term strategies that adopt a whole-of-society approach are also required to progressively dismantle the deep-seated cycles of violence. Implementation requires political will, adequate resources and sustained commitment. The cost of inaction, measured in lives lost and communities destroyed, is unacceptable.

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