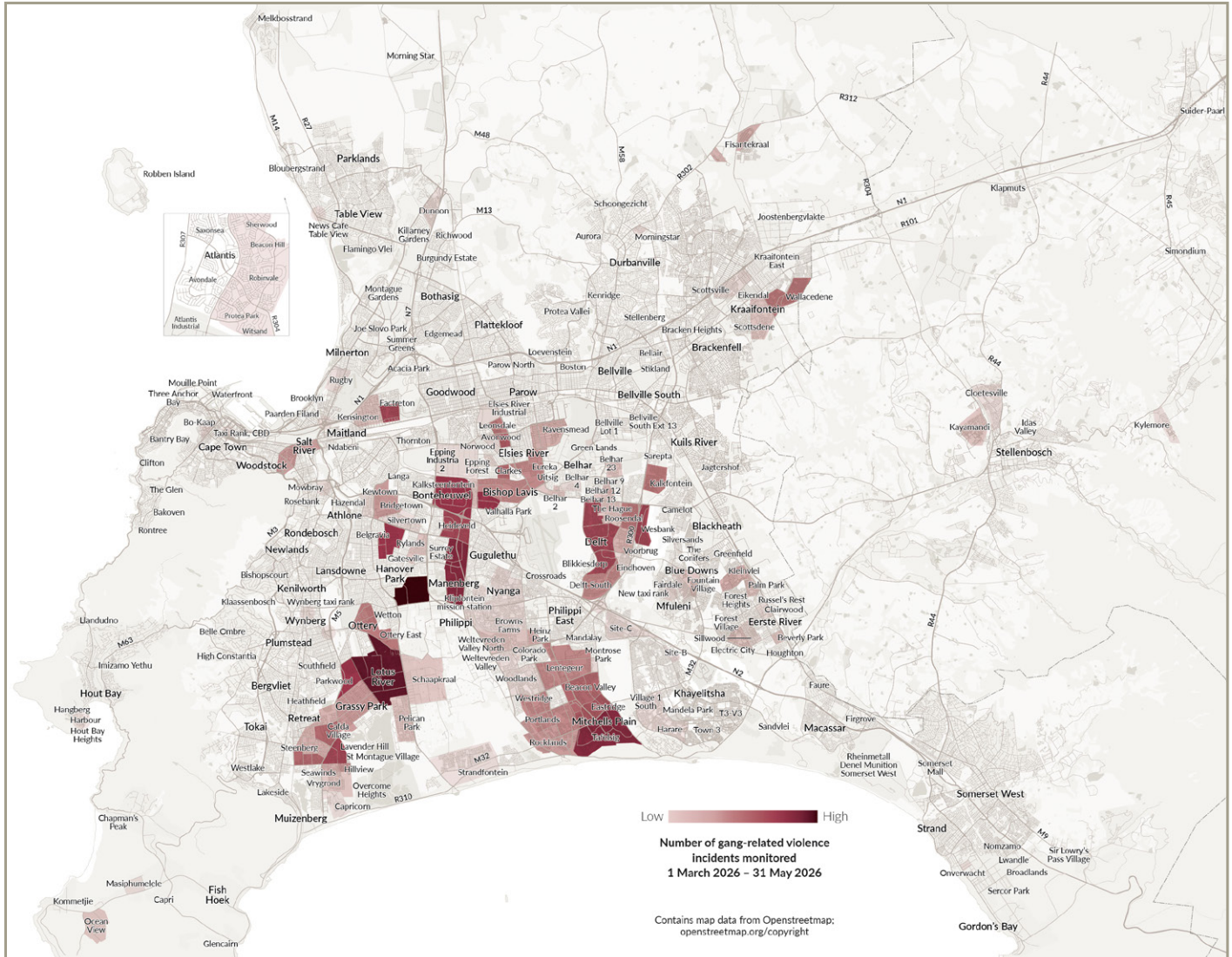




WESTERN CAPE GANG MONITOR



IN THIS ISSUE

In the past quarter, gang violence in the Western Cape has been characterized by entrenched rivalries, internal power struggles and cycles of retaliation. Recent trends from March to May 2026 are illustrated in the map above. This issue explores the implications of the killing of the region's most powerful gang boss and examines the dynamics of codified revenge practices. It also traces the expansion of sex trafficking into Cape Town's suburbs, and shows how Hout Bay now functions as a key logistics node for transnational cocaine trafficking.

This monitor traces four developments that have shaped the criminal landscape over the past quarter:

- The killing of Cape Flats kingpin Igshaan 'Sanie American' Davids and its impact on gang succession and future conflict.
- How the ritualized practice of 'blood feuds' continues to drive retaliation, personal revenge and family-related conflict.
- The expansion of sex trafficking into Cape Town's suburbs, where it intersects with drug markets, extortion and foreign criminal networks.
- Hout Bay's consolidation as a logistics hub for international trafficking, where criminal groups have established themselves as a parallel authority structure.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is the ninth 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.

Hotspots of gang violence

During the monitoring period, hotspots of gang violence were closely linked to conflicts between some of the province's oldest gangs (see heatmap above). Retaliatory attacks sustained cycles of violence and drove up homicide rates. The fragmented gang landscape continued to see breakaway gangs competing over turf, while internal leadership battles turned former allies against one another.

This persisted despite the deployment of the military to the Cape Flats in March 2026.¹ As previous monitoring anticipated,² community members report that the R823 million operation has had minimal impact on gang activity. Crime statistics for the reporting period are expected to be available in the coming months, and future monitoring will assess these figures, in combination with research on the ground, to determine the measure's effectiveness.

In Kensington and Factreton, the Americans continue to fight their decades-long rivals, the Nice Time Kids (NTKs), in an escalating gang war that culminated in the killing of Igshaan 'Sanie American' Davids, the gang's former leader (see 'The death of a kingpin'). In Ottery and Lotus River, the Mongrels are engaged in a vicious conflict with their long-standing rivals the No Fears (formerly the Yuru Katte), which has escalated since the killings of Ameerodien du Plooy (Mongrels) and Keenan 'Papas' America (No Fears) in October 2025.

In Hanover Park, breakaway gangs such as Only the Family (the OTFs) and Dollar Kids have continued to clash over territory, leading to the deaths of key figures. Meanwhile, internal conflict within the Junky Funky Kids continues, with Jason 'Fabulous' Arendse poised to take control amid ongoing conflict in Lavender Hill. In Manenberg and Mitchells Plain, meanwhile, the Fancy Boys' expansion attempts continue, as they seek to displace the Hard Livings, 28s and Americans in both areas.

The death of a kingpin: What the killing of 'Sanie American' means for the Americans

Igshaan 'Sanie American' Davids, widely regarded as the leader of the Americans gang,³ was shot in Kensington in April 2026, dying three weeks later from his injuries. His murder is a significant escalation in the long-running war between the Americans and their rivals, the NTKs. Yet it has not produced the power vacuum many had anticipated.

According to senior Americans figures, the gang is stable thanks to the smooth implementation of a succession plan, indicating a degree of forward planning rarely seen in gang structures of this kind.⁴ At the same time, they warn that the conflict with the NTKs is likely to continue and may intensify, with further violence expected in areas where both gangs hold turf.⁵

Trading hits and cycles of retaliation

The years-long gang war between the Americans and the NTKs intensified in October 2025, following the defection of a small

group of Americans – estimated at six to eight individuals⁶ – to the NTKs, and the shooting of one of the defectors.⁷ The resulting tensions sparked violent clashes in Factreton and Kensington, where the Americans and NTKs have held turf for decades (see map below).⁸ Since then, the conflict has been driven by cycles of retaliation, including mass shootings, the killing of numerous foot soldiers, and the deaths of key figures from both groups.⁹

In November 2025, an ambush-style mass shooting in Goodwood, adjacent to the Kensington precinct, left two people dead and two injured. The incident was described by the local ward councillor as a retaliatory attack by the NTKs.¹⁰ In January, Faghrie 'Faghaz' Augustine, an alleged senior NTK figure with links to international drug trafficking networks, was shot dead in Maitland, in a killing attributed to the Americans.¹¹ In April, the conflict claimed its most prominent casualty – the shooting of 'Sanie American' in a hit allegedly ordered by a leader of the NTKs.¹²

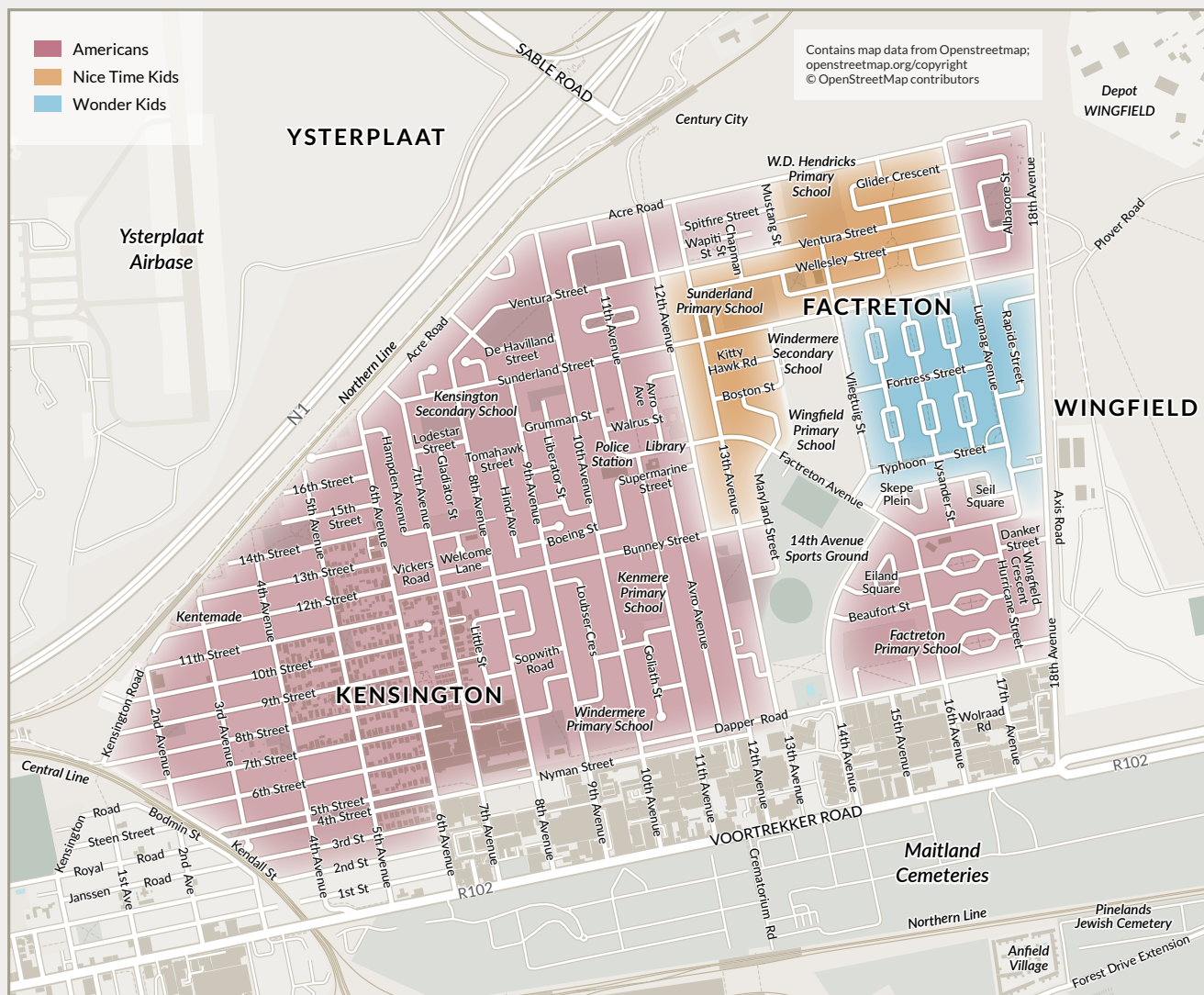


FIGURE 1 Gang-controlled territory amid the war between the Americans and Nice Time Kids.

According to a senior Americans figure, the gang launched retaliatory attacks in response to Sanie's murder, with two of his alleged killers being shot in the Kensington precinct just one week later. More violence is expected, with a close friend of Sanie's warning that Americans members in Kensington, Bonteheuwel, Hanover Park and Mitchells Plain are threatening further attacks on the NTKs.¹³

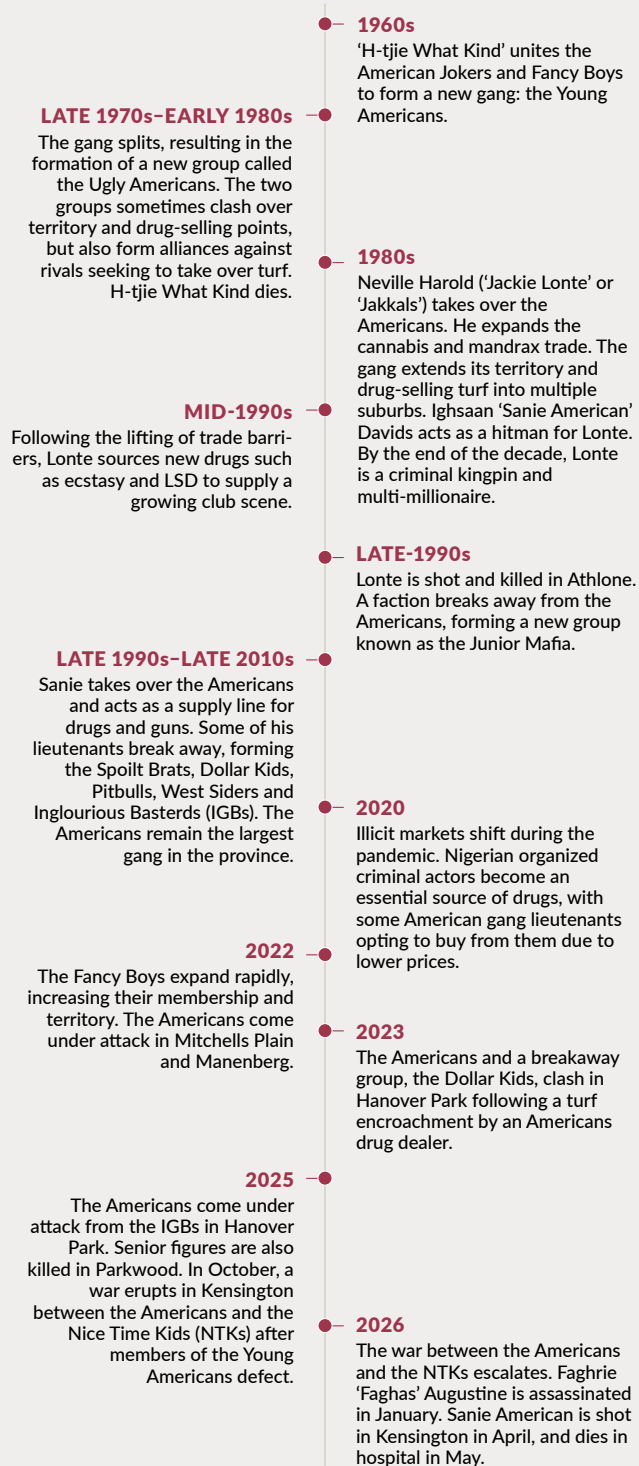
These events reflect a deeply rooted dynamic within Western Cape gang culture, in which murder generates a 'blood debt' – an obligation to respond in kind. Retaliation is not merely strategic; it is also a form of 'honour'. A gang's reputation and survival depend on its demonstrated willingness to retaliate, and failure to do so signals vulnerability and invites encroachment. This code of conduct, and the self-perpetuating cycles of conflict it produces, are examined in greater detail elsewhere in this issue (see 'Blood will have blood').

Regicide and succession

Despite the violence on the ground, the Americans' internal structure has remained intact following Sanie's death. Initially, SAPS Anti-Gang Unit members had expressed concern about the risk of internal fragmentation and infighting,¹⁴ a pattern commonly seen in Western Cape gangs after the removal of a senior figure.¹⁵ The Americans, with their broad geographic presence and devolved system of leadership, are particularly susceptible to this, with breakaway factions such as the Junior Mafia, Westsiders, Dollar Kids, IngLOURIOUS Basterds (IGBs), Spoilt Brats and Pitbulls emerging from internal divisions in the past.¹⁶ This time, however, they have challenged that pattern.

Gang sources have confirmed that the Americans will stay under the control of the Davids family. Some field sources suggest that Sanie's younger brother may be playing a more prominent role following his death,¹⁷ alongside a leadership structure of at

THE AMERICANS THROUGH HISTORY



least three other individuals, known as 'Chevonne', 'Kinnes' and 'Marky'.¹⁸ This swift transition indicates that a succession plan was in place, allowing the gang to absorb the loss of a key figure without significant internal disruption.¹⁹

The gang's operational capacity has also been maintained. Interviewees indicate that established drug and firearm supply lines – including weapons sourced through Sanie's cousin in Durban – will remain in place, thanks to the continuation of family control.²⁰ As one close friend of Sanie put it: 'That guy in Durban won't trust anyone other than family.'²¹

The case of Sanie American illustrates two defining features of the current Western Cape gang landscape: the capacity of established gang structures to withstand disruptions to leadership, and the persistence of retaliatory violence driven by long-standing rivalries. The Americans' resilience demonstrates how established gangs can absorb targeted disruption by drawing on hereditary leadership and decentralized family networks – systems that allow a managed transition to take place while core operations continue largely untouched.

The episode thus emphasizes the limitations of enforcement approaches that focus on the removal of key gang figures. While targeted arrests are necessary, they are unlikely to reduce violence while the underlying dynamics remain intact.

Effective responses must therefore target the broader infrastructure that sustains gang activity, particularly drug and firearm supply chains. Building intelligence and investigative capacity within the SAPS will be critical to identifying and dismantling these networks.

The killing of a major player like Sanie should also be treated as an early warning signal, given the strict codes of retaliation that govern gang conduct. The proactive deployment of policing resources to identified hotspots, combined with support for community organizations that mediate gang conflict, may help to limit the spread of violence before it escalates.

Longer-term responses must also address the social, economic and familial conditions that sustain gang structures across generations. The central role of family networks in leadership and recruitment – as illustrated by the Davids family succession – points to the need for targeted support for children and young people in gang-affected areas and households, aimed at disrupting pathways into gang affiliation before they become entrenched.

Blood will have blood: Feuds, retribution and revenge as drivers of gang violence

Of the various factors that contribute to gang violence in the Western Cape, the role of obligation is commonly overlooked in policy and policing. For gangs, formalized codes of revenge – known as ‘blood debts’ – often compel acts of retaliation, trapping rivals in cycles of violence that can persist long after the original dispute has been resolved.

Retaliatory violence takes three forms: retributive killings, a codified system of reciprocal attacks; revenge killings, shaped mainly by individual grievances; and blood feuds. The distinction between the first two categories is not always clear-cut, as acts of retribution can become personalized over time. Blood feuds,²² by contrast, are long-running conflicts within or between families, marked by recurring cycles of violence.

WHAT DEFINES A BLOOD DEBT?

- Blood debts are driven primarily by perceived obligations to avenge past grievances, rather than immediate economic or strategic objectives.
- Often rooted in established norms, codes or practices governing retaliation.
- Frequently involve family members, gang families and affiliates, including individuals who were not directly involved in the original incident.
- May be ‘inherited’ (passed down through family and gang-family networks), drawing successive generations into conflict.
- Can persist long after the original grievance has ceased to be relevant, transforming into enduring cycles of retaliatory violence or blood feuds.

Ghazie optel: codified retribution

Retributive killings among Cape gangs have their roots in Number gang culture. ‘*Ghazie optel*’ – a Sabela term meaning ‘to pick up blood’²³ – is a formalized practice that was developed within the prison Number gangs in the late 19th or early 20th century, later adopted by street gangs.²⁴ *Ghazie optel* demands that an equal or greater number of rivals be killed in response to each loss suffered by a gang. The practice has led to wars of attrition, in which repeated cycles of killings cause the effective destruction of one group. In Ocean View, for instance, retributive violence between the Taylor gang and the Junky Funky Kids (JFKs) raged from 2012 to 2025. The clashes culminated in the murder of the Taylor’s leader in September 2025 and the subsequent defection of most of its remaining members to the JFKs.²⁵

To avoid this zero-sum outcome, gangs are highly sensitive to fatality counts during cycles of retribution. If, after a series of killings, both sides consider the score settled, they may agree to a peace settlement involving non-lethal concessions.²⁶ Under the practice of ‘*perde ruil*’ (‘horse trading’), a gang may demand that a rival cede territory, hand over a compromised police contact, or provide payment in drugs or cash. Breaking such agreements can trigger renewed hostilities,²⁷ and gang members who defy the terms face internal discipline or even death at the hands of their associates.²⁸

Desmond Swartz, leader of the Young Gifted Six Bobs until his death in 2022, exemplified this approach. Widely described – including by the local police – as a ‘strategic’ boss, he selected feuds carefully,²⁹ using negotiated settlements and concessions to avoid cycles of retribution where possible. At the same time, he maintained tight internal control over his members, sometimes through brutal methods.³⁰ Under his command, the gang came to dominate Grassy Park.

When revenge becomes personal

In the high-stress, substance-fuelled environment of gang life, however, encoded practices do not always override individual motivations. Gang members may lose friends and family during gang wars, and while leaders may agree to stop fighting for financial or strategic reasons, some individuals may remain dissatisfied with the outcome and continue to bear a grudge. In addition, a gang member imprisoned during a period of conflict may, upon release years later, seek revenge for earlier losses. By that point, however, the gang landscape may have shifted, with new leadership or peace agreements in place. In this context, revenge killings can reignite long-settled disputes and cause a resurgence in violence,³¹ a risk heightened by South Africa’s high recidivism rate.

In the early 2000s, for instance, a leader of the Americans allegedly responsible for the deaths of several members of arch rivals the Hard Livings³² was arrested and imprisoned for over two decades. Shortly before his release, a number of Americans in Hanover Park defected to the IGBs, a rival gang responsible for the accidental shooting of his younger brother during his incarceration.³³ On the day of his release, he allegedly shot five people, including his brother’s killer and four of his former close friends, now members of the IGBs, viewing them collectively as part of an outstanding blood debt.³⁴ This incident demonstrates that individual emotional imperatives can override collective gang logic, resulting in revenge that is delayed, deeply personal and, in some instances, extends beyond direct perpetrators to their associates.



Weaponizing family ties

In cases where a settlement has been reached between two gangs but an individual feels that a score remains unsettled, they may resort to what is known as ‘historical’ or ‘family violence’. Here, the gang member reveals the identity of the perpetrator to the victim’s relatives, including those with no gang affiliations. The gang then grooms a family member to carry out the killing, framed as a personal vendetta rather than a breach of the cease-fire.³⁵ As a community worker put it, ‘They are priming him to take revenge.’³⁶ In this way, the gang weaponizes family loyalty to achieve its goals without triggering a war. In areas like the Cape Flats, which has historically high levels of violence and low conviction rates, the non-gang-affiliated family members of murder victims are extremely vulnerable to this form of manipulation.³⁷

Kinship and conflict

Family blood feuds take two forms: disputes between families and conflict within a single family. The former are long-standing rivalries that can be sustained for decades. The latter usually arise from competition over leadership, succession or resources. Although both are based on kinship, they operate differently: inter-family feuds tend to maintain and prolong established patterns of conflict, whereas intra-family feuds can destabilize established hierarchies and give rise to new factions.

During inter-family blood feuds, gang members seek to ‘balance the scorecard’ by avenging the killing of their relatives at the hands of rivals. The practice is most visible in gangs led by the same family over extended periods, where leadership is a hereditary title passed down from father to son.³⁸ Examples include some of the oldest and largest gangs in the province, such as the 28s and The Firm, associated with the Stanfields; the Hard Livings, formerly controlled by the Staggies; and the Mongrels, a gang that has been controlled by the Du Plooy family for three generations.³⁹

However, intra-family blood feuds are becoming a more prominent driver of violence in Cape Town,⁴⁰ with disputes between close relatives increasingly fragmenting gang structures and fueling new cycles of conflict.

In Hanover Park, the assassination of Ghetto Kids leader Faizel ‘Sheikh’ Manuel in May 2021 set off a power struggle between his sons, half-brothers Esa Manuel, known as ‘Hadjie’, and ‘Biggie’.⁴¹ The feud was reportedly linked to tensions between their mothers over their father’s estate,⁴² and resulted in an open conflict. Hadjie was assassinated in April 2022, in a hit allegedly ordered by his brother. The fallout led to the formation of a splinter group, the OTFs, led by Biggie and his loyal associates.⁴³ This blood feud is ongoing, and continues to drive violence in the area (see heatmap on p. 1).⁴⁴

Another long-running intra-family feud led to the creation of one of Cape Town’s most powerful underworld alliances. In 2016, Colin Booysen split from a group known as The Brotherhood following a disagreement with his brother, the alleged leader of the Sexy Boys gang, Jerome Booysen.⁴⁵ Colin then reportedly drew Nafiz Modack, a prominent businessman and alleged crime boss, into a coalition.⁴⁶ Following the split, violence erupted between the two groups over extortion, racketeering and drug-dealing turf in nightclubs in the city’s central business district. The clashes culminated in several high-profile murders, carried out on a tit-for-tat basis.⁴⁷ Evidence from two ongoing court cases in the Western Cape High Court confirms the conflict was sparked by the brothers’ feud.⁴⁸ According to the court indictment, Jerome stated that he ‘could not kill his brother’, but would ‘act against’ his allies.⁴⁹

Breaking the cycle

Retaliatory killings and ‘blood debts’ governed by formalized gang codes are one of the most persistent drivers of gang violence in the Western Cape, resulting in excess mortality, yet they are not adequately addressed in policing strategy and policy, or even fully understood by those in authority. The arrest of peripheral actors, for instance, can paradoxically accelerate retaliation, either by triggering pre-emptive action, disrupting internal control, or by shifting the target elsewhere.

Recognizing the logic behind these dynamics – and the rules governing specific feuds – is essential for disrupting them and must become a priority for law enforcement and prevention efforts. Improving intelligence on existing and emerging rival gang relationships – including identifying the grievances and key actors sustaining cycles of violence – as well as dynamics within and between gang families, will be central to these measures. The establishment of early-warning systems and more consistent recording of incidents could help detect rising retaliatory tensions.

Addressing some practices – particularly incidents of ‘family violence’, or kin-based vengeance, in which non-gang-affiliated community members are drawn into a conflict – requires an integrated approach, combining stronger enforcement and coordinated social interventions. This should include taking action against youth exposure to gangs and gaps in education and support services.

Finally, in order to improve the police’s ability to disrupt emerging cycles of violence, the prosecutorial and judicial arms of the criminal justice system should view retributive violence as an organized system, rather than a sequence of separate events. Without addressing both enforcement gaps and the underlying causes, cycles of retaliatory killings are likely to persist.

The suburban underworld: Sex trafficking and the convergence of criminal economies

An increasing number of women are being trafficked for sexual exploitation in Cape Town, particularly in the northern and southern suburbs. In this emerging illicit economy, local gangs, international syndicates and private property owners collaborate to recruit women from across South Africa and beyond.

While the city centre has long been a major hub for commercial sex, mainly involving nightclubs that double as high-end brothels, the suburban trade differs in several ways. In the CBD, women may retain a portion of their earnings through nightly room fee arrangements, and high-value drugs such as cocaine are prevalent. The suburban trade is more exploitative: earnings are minimal or non-existent and dependency-inducing substances like crystal meth (known locally as 'tik') and heroin are used as tools of control. Furthermore, in some settings, conditions are said to resemble slavery.⁵⁰

Throughout the city, sexual exploitation is steadily being absorbed into a sophisticated criminal ecosystem. Drug trafficking, extortion and the sex trade, once largely distinct illicit activities, are now deeply intertwined, allowing criminal actors to expand their reach, distribute risk and maximize revenue.

From disruption to diversification

The shift in Cape Town's sex trade can be traced to the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, when increased police patrols and the deployment of the army exposed local gangs to greater scrutiny. This disrupted their drug supply operations, and pushed them to enter into partnerships with Nigerian criminal networks, who supplied them with drugs and facilitated distribution.⁵¹

These new partnerships also enabled Cape gangs – particularly the 28s and the Sexy Boys – to diversify their activities. With their extortion revenue decimated by the closure of nightclubs and restaurants, and with Nigerian criminal actors already active in the industry, the sex trade offered a ready alternative.⁵² These alliances have endured since the pandemic ended, with gang sources now widely describing Nigerian networks as fully integrated into the local criminal economy.⁵³

One prominent example of this newly entrenched relationship is Jerome 'Donkie' Booysen, the alleged leader of the Sexy Boys.⁵⁴ Booysen is currently on trial in two major cases⁵⁵ linked to his reported long-standing illicit control of Cape Town's nightclubs, some of which also operate as brothels.⁵⁶ According to one NGO representative, Booysen's sex trade activities are inextricably linked to Nigerian trafficking networks: 'Where Donkie went, the Nigerians followed.'⁵⁷

Recruitment, coercion and control

The only comprehensive study of the Cape sex trade, conducted in 2008, found that just 5 per cent of sex workers were foreign nationals, and that trafficking was 'not a significant feature' of the industry.⁵⁸ According to recent field research, both findings are now out of date. The demographic make-up of Cape Town's sex workers has shifted considerably – in line with broader national trends – and the number of victims of human trafficking has risen sharply.⁵⁹

According to representatives from counter-sex trafficking organizations, there has been a 'marked shift' in the nationalities of victims nationally.⁶⁰ 'More workers from other African countries appeared as more transnational crime syndicates entered South Africa,' one representative said. Women from Asian countries, including the Philippines and Thailand, have also begun to appear among victims,⁶¹ alongside financially vulnerable South Africans trafficked from other parts of the country.⁶²

For Cape Town's suburban sex trade, particularly in areas such as Rugby, Brooklyn, Tijgerhof, Landsdowne and Wynberg, Nigerian trafficking syndicates are generally responsible for recruiting and grooming victims from outside the province and from neighbouring countries.⁶³ One of their methods is to target women with informal 'pop-up' employment agencies that obscure coercion, deception and exploitative labour practices behind promises of legitimate work.

Following recruitment, victims are typically introduced to drugs and drawn into a system of debt. As one sex worker, now under police protection, explained, 'They give them the drugs on book [on credit].'⁶⁴ Dependence-inducing substances like heroin, alcohol and tik maintain compliance while generating revenue, giving handlers a high degree of control over victims' movements and autonomy.⁶⁵

Financial deprivation exacerbates the control that drugs and debt exert. Many sex workers receive no payment at all; while those who do reportedly earn around R1 500 per month.⁶⁶ Regardless of context, handlers maintain a firm hold, including over women who are not, strictly speaking, in servitude.

Even street-based sex workers operating in gang-controlled areas often have to pay a 'tax' – a portion of their earnings – in exchange for permission to work. 'The environment is brutal for women,' said one sex worker. 'They are often physically abused by their handler or pimp and by their clients. If you are in with a pimp or a handler, it is very difficult to leave.'⁶⁷

A layered criminal economy

Property ownership is central to the sex trade, enabling criminal actors to control space, extract rent and conceal exploitation. It also creates a protected operating environment for various intersecting illicit markets, and for laundering funds.

Ratepayers' associations in several Cape Town suburbs, including Milnerton, Brooklyn, Rugby and Tjigterhof, have expressed

concerns about the systematic purchase of properties for use as brothels.⁶⁸ In some cases, private owners rent out their premises to gangs; in others, gang bosses own the properties and sublet them to Nigerian sex-trafficking networks.⁶⁹ Two landlords with alleged links to the 28s are particularly prominent: one reportedly owns several properties in the northern suburbs, another as many as 48 across the city.⁷⁰

BROOKLYN – BRIDGING EXTORTION, DRUGS AND THE SEX TRADE

The suburb of Brooklyn has become a hub for a range of criminal activities. Foreign criminal groups and local gangs are involved in various illicit markets, including extortion, drug dealing, the sex trade and sex trafficking,⁷¹ with these activities often overlapping. Street gangs profit from all of these markets, either through direct involvement or by 'taxing' those operating in the area.⁷²

Brooklyn is a stronghold of the 28s street gang, reportedly led by an individual known as 'Anwar'. Under his leadership, the gang runs large-scale extortion networks and is the area's primary drug supplier.⁷³

All businesses, whether operating legally or illegally, are expected to pay protection fees. According to gang members, this includes brothels run by foreign nationals, most of whom are from other African countries.⁷⁴

Court documents and recent arrests support this. For example, in 2024, two Cameroonian nationals who ran a brothel in Brooklyn were convicted of human trafficking, 'living on the proceeds of prostitution', kidnapping and drug dealing.⁷⁵

In May 2026, an operation in Brooklyn led by the Hawks resulted in the arrest of a Nigerian national for trafficking persons for

sexual exploitation, 'living on the proceeds of prostitution' and contravening the Immigration Act, as well as drug-related offences.⁷⁶ The investigation resulted in the rescue of three women, aged between 21 and 26, who were identified as potential victims of sexual exploitation.⁷⁷ In June, authorities arrested three more members of this network.⁷⁸

On 24 June, a disruptive operation freed 15 trafficking victims from a property in Milnerton run by the same Nigerian network and owned by a landlord with alleged links to the 28s.⁷⁹

Police sources and anti-human trafficking groups describe these collaborations as a three-way organized crime venture between the 28s under Anwar, the property owner and Nigerian networks. Roughly 25 victims have so far been rescued and freed, most originating from KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.⁸⁰

According to gang members, the 28s are 'allowing' these activities to take place, as they provide a valuable source of income for the gang.⁸¹ One American member said, 'Anyone that works there must pay ... the girls and the pimps as well.'⁸² Interviewees also suggest that the gang supplies the brothels with mandrax (methaqualone) and tik, which are then sold to both clients and the women working there.⁸³

The 28s and the Sexy Boys are repeatedly identified by law enforcement and NGOs as the main local gangs profiting from Cape Town's sex trade. Both are deeply embedded in the city's extortion and drug-trafficking economies, and have long been associated with the nightclub scene. Other prominent gangs active in the sector include the Americans, the Hard Livings and the Terrible Josters.⁸⁴ These gangs provide security at the brothels and occasionally extort clients.⁸⁵

Brothels are also hotspots for drug dealing. Local gangs control the supply of drugs to properties they manage,⁸⁶ while their partnerships with Nigerian networks provide a back-up when their own supply chains are disrupted.⁸⁷

The result is a layered criminal economy in which drug trafficking, sex trafficking and extortion are mutually reinforcing. Each market strengthens the others, and risk is shared across the network.

Targeting the system

The degree of coercion within the Cape Town sex trade varies depending on the setting, but it is never entirely absent. Any intervention should focus on tackling trafficking and exploitation, targeting the pimps, handlers and criminal networks that profit from these practices. This would reduce the ability of organized criminal groups to launder money through the sex trade, and help counter related activities such as drug trafficking and extortion.

Enforcement efforts that focus primarily on raids on venues risk displacing victims to less visible and more dangerous settings, however, potentially reducing the likelihood that they will report

abuses or seek help. Measures taken should thus also include victim-centred approaches, referral pathways, safe reporting mechanisms, trauma-informed services and safe accommodation.

AREA PROFILE

Hout Bay: A key logistics hub for Western Cape gangs

Hout Bay has become a critical logistics node within the Western Cape's criminal economy, linking local gangs to transnational trafficking networks. In Hangberg, a community adjacent to the harbour, illicit markets for firearms, drugs and poached marine wildlife converge in a highly integrated system of organized crime.

Central to these operations is the Terrible Josters. The gang holds a near-monopoly over criminal markets in Hangberg, operating alongside affiliated criminal entrepreneurs with links to international trafficking syndicates.⁸⁸ Together, these groups are shaping broader gang dynamics in the Western Cape, contributing to shifts in drug markets – particularly rising cocaine sales – and fuelling cycles of violence across the province.

An international trafficking node

Hout Bay Harbour is a major entry point for illicit goods, particularly cocaine and poached marine wildlife. Hangberg serves as storage and distribution hub for this contraband, as well as

illegal firearms. Over time, these interconnected activities have expanded significantly, with consequences felt across the province. Cocaine has flooded local drug markets, while smuggled guns fuel gang violence.⁸⁹

The December 2024 edition of the Gang Monitor documented the growing link between abalone poaching and cocaine trafficking in the Western Cape.⁹⁰ Building on these findings, a subsequent area profile of Saldanha Bay in March 2026 showed how smaller ports are used by poachers to collect cocaine shipments dropped off in international waters.⁹¹ Operations in Hout Bay follow a similar pattern, with poachers linked to the Terrible Josters reportedly launching from the harbour to retrieve consignments. According to gang members and law enforcement officials, Hout Bay forms part of a network of secondary ports used by gangs and trafficking syndicates to move cocaine into the country, enabling them to bypass larger, more heavily monitored entry points.⁹²

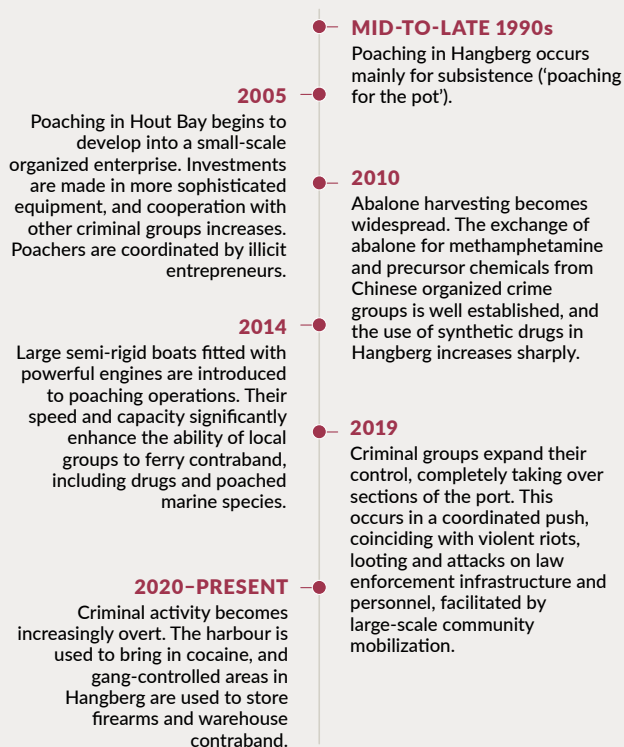
While Hout Bay is used as a launch and coordination point for vessels collecting cocaine, consignments are often offloaded at smaller ports and slipways along the coastline in order to avoid detection by the authorities, who are alert to the main's harbour's central role in trafficking operations.⁹³

According to a senior law enforcement officer, however, Hout Bay lacks effective port control, allowing traffickers to move freely.⁹⁴ Efforts to strengthen security have reportedly been undermined by local residents with gang sympathies, with surveillance cameras being damaged and security guards being intimidated and even robbed.⁹⁵

Once onshore, the drugs are moved into Hangberg and stored in an area known as 'The Zone'. The site is located deep within the neighbourhood, and well protected by the Terrible Josters and the broader community, making it difficult for the police to access. A path called 'Die Sloot', running along the back of Hangberg, serves as a concealed smuggling route into and out of the area.⁹⁶

These dynamics are reshaping local drug consumption, with demand for powder cocaine increasing alongside reports that users of low-cost synthetics such as tik and mandrax – historically dominant in Hangberg – are also shifting towards cocaine. However, this consumption is believed to involve cheaper

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE AND ILLICIT MARKETS IN HANGBERG



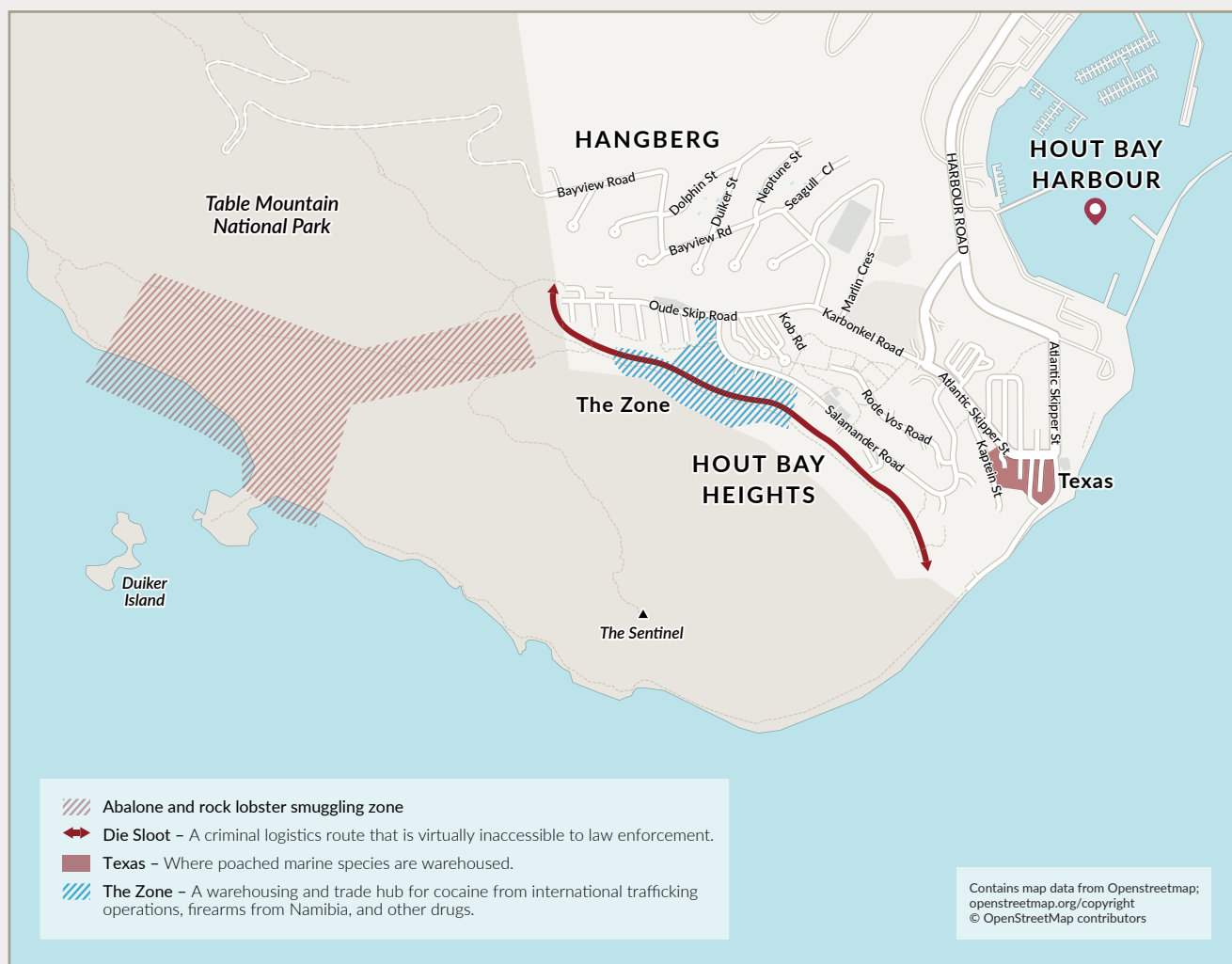


FIGURE 2 Key gang infrastructure and routes in Hout Bay and surrounding areas.

derivatives, such as crack cocaine.⁹⁷ SAPS officials have noted a surge in cocaine use,⁹⁸ with similar trends reported in Ottery and the Terrible Josters strongholds of Hawston and Delft.⁹⁹ This reflects the broader national pattern described by the Global Organized Crime Index, which has recorded sustained growth in the cocaine market in South Africa since 2021.¹⁰⁰

The expansion of cocaine trafficking is generating significant revenue for local gangs and criminal entrepreneurs. These profits are reportedly reinvested into gang operations, funding recruitment, weapon procurement and territorial expansion, compounding levels of violence in gang-affected areas.

Previous Gang Monitor reporting detailed how firearms, including AK-47s and Uzi submachine guns, are smuggled into South Africa from Namibia, steadily building the arsenals of Cape Flats gangs.¹⁰¹ The same routes used for firearm trafficking are used to smuggle abalone in the opposite direction.¹⁰² New findings indicate that Hangberg sits at the centre of this network.

These movements are facilitated by a network of intermediaries – Namibian criminal actors – based in Hangberg and the nearby informal settlement of Imizamo Yethu.¹⁰³ This group reportedly operates in coordination with the Terrible Josters. The weapons are then stored in The Zone, alongside cocaine consignments, before being distributed to gangs across the Western Cape.¹⁰⁴

A significant number of firearms used in gang violence across the Western Cape reportedly originate in Hangberg. In Imizamo Yethu, for example, extortion groups are said to use firearms purchased in Hangberg, including AK-47s, to intimidate business owners and assert control over territory.¹⁰⁵ In Ottery, the leader of the No Fears gang, known as 'Dino', is said to source firearms from Hangberg regularly to strengthen the group's position in their ongoing war with the Mongrels.¹⁰⁶ And in Delft, a key Terrible Josters base, these flows have contributed to elevated levels of violence as the gang defends its drug and extortion turf.

The Terrible Josters and local control

The current situation in Hout Bay has its roots in apartheid-era forced relocations, which disrupted people's economic stability and livelihoods, leading some to turn to poaching abalone and crayfish as a means of subsistence.¹⁰⁷ Over time, these activities became increasingly organized, with gangs and criminal entrepreneurs taking control of the market. By the mid-2000s, poaching operations had developed into a structured illicit economy, supported by specialized equipment and driven by rising demand.¹⁰⁸

The industry has also established links with international actors. Abalone has been traded with Chinese criminal groups for drug precursor chemicals used in the production of tik and mandrax, embedding Hangberg within global trafficking circuits. This has contributed to the growth of the synthetic drug market in communities across the Western Cape.¹⁰⁹

Gang dynamics in Hangberg are unique within the Western Cape context. The area is widely regarded as neutral turf,¹¹⁰ with no clearly demarcated gang territories and comparatively limited inter-gang conflict.¹¹¹ These local dynamics are reinforced by partnerships between the Terrible Josters and a broader network of criminal actors, including poaching syndicates and foreign organized crime groups involved in drug and firearm trafficking. This includes a Namibian criminal organization based in Hangberg and the broader Hout Bay area, which is allegedly involved in cross-border firearm smuggling.¹¹²

In addition, the Balkan criminal groups that dominate the cocaine trade through South Africa, alongside their South American partners, have forged connections with the gang.¹¹³ Jaggers is said to have played a role in establishing these international links, with the gang reportedly receiving portions of cocaine shipments as payment for facilitating their collection and storage.¹¹⁴

The gang's grip on Hangberg is reinforced by community investment. The Terrible Josters reportedly use proceeds from abalone and synthetic drug markets to fund local initiatives,¹¹⁵ including children's education. They have also drawn residents into their operations. Children have been recruited as lookouts and runners, and are tasked with moving contraband – including guns – and alerting gang members to police presence.¹¹⁶

This strategic philanthropy has created a dependency on the illicit economy, and has strengthened the gang's position as an alternative form of authority – a common tactic in the Western Cape gang landscape. Law enforcement efforts are frequently resisted

as a result, with community members actively obstructing police operations. As one resident put it: 'We don't allow the police to come in here.'¹¹⁷ Local government and police officials concur, warning that in Hangberg, 'rocks [will be] raining from above the moment you move in'.¹¹⁸

Disrupting gang control

The Terrible Josters' consolidation of power in Hangberg has transformed the area from a localized criminal economy into an entrenched system of criminal governance. By controlling illicit markets and logistical infrastructure, including the harbour and internal distribution networks, the gang and its affiliates have established themselves as a parallel authority that operates largely beyond the reach of the state.

Disrupting this ecosystem will require a coordinated approach that targets the gang's structural vulnerabilities. Such an approach should include intelligence-led investigations into the group's leadership, financial flows, and firearm and drug supply chains. Its links to the harbour should also be scrutinized, supported by closer coordination between the police, fisheries and port authorities. Precision operations against key figures in the broader criminal network would curb the flow of cocaine and firearms into the province.

However, enforcement-led responses alone are unlikely to produce lasting change. The criminal system is underpinned by community support, and the state must therefore rebuild its presence and trust through reliable service delivery, targeted employment opportunities and support for those dependent on the illicit economy for survival.

Progress in Hout Bay cannot be measured by arrests and seizures. Interventions should instead be assessed by how effectively they weaken the Terrible Josters' ability to recruit members, generate income through illicit markets, control territory and garner community support.

In the initial version of this report, an individual referred to as 'Boksie' was named as a suspected role player in gang-related activities of the Terrible Josters in the Hangberg area. Boksie subsequently informed the GI-TOC that he denies being a member, leader or associate of any gang operating in the Hangberg or Hout Bay area and denies participating in any illicit poaching or drug-related activities. On legal advice, the GI-TOC has removed references to Boksie in its report.

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