

# What do the police do?

## Performance measurement and the SAPS

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### INTRODUCTION

Few would dispute the good intentions of the present South African government. Following the 'miraculous' transition to democracy in 1994, the new leadership earnestly looked to international best practice to bring 'a better life for all' to the South African people. Popular participation in formulating policy was solicited, and some remarkably progressive and far-thinking documents were generated. In contrast to the cynicism that dominates politics in the developed world, there seemed to be a real belief that social problems were soluble, if only they were approached with the good of the people foremost in mind.

By the time of the second national elections in 1999, the optimistic climate had changed somewhat. Despite the creation of a world-class policy framework, including a macroeconomic policy that could have been authored by the World Bank, the lives of many South Africans were not getting better. There seemed to be a breakdown somewhere between the declarations of the national government and the delivery of services to those who needed them. These delivery problems persist to this day. According to an October 2002 national poll, only 41% of respondents think that the South African government is better at delivering services today than it was under apartheid.<sup>1</sup>

The conspiratorially minded might see this failure as a product of deliberate sabotage, or at least passive resistance to reform. Part of the negotiated package that allowed the peaceful transition to democracy was the retention of much of the existing civil service. This move was also eminently pragmatic—it would have been impossible to generate anew the core of public servants required to run the country. But the existing, white-led work force had been dedicated for years to implementing a system of government inimical to the new leadership. Given the basic psychology of organisation culture, some inertia to sweeping changes might be anticipated.

The government response was to pass further progressive policy, this time aimed at ensuring service delivery. In 1997, the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, popularly known as the 'Batho Pele' (People First) White Paper, was issued. This policy was given teeth by Act 1 of 1999, the Public Finance Management Act, which required reporting on delivery as part of the fiscal accounting process. The thrust of these documents was that the people of South Africa now owned the government, not the other way around, and that they had the right to demand both courteous service and information on the way their taxes were being spent. These two rights are, of course, related—by forcing departments to account for the value produced by the funds they spend, it is hoped that these departments will be compelled to deliver the goods. Unfortunately, compliance with these requirements has been mixed. An August 2000 Public Service Commission survey found that there was a lack of capacity for the departments to comply with the policy.<sup>2</sup>

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This survey should have rung some bells. The fact that the civil service lacks the capacity to account for its productivity suggests that there are very deep structural reasons why delivery is not forthcoming. It underscores the profundity of the transformation that was expected of government workers in the new policy environment. Its failure to comply may have to do with a real lack of skills to do

so, rather than obstinate resistance to change.

If, in fact, the civil service of South Africa does not have the real ability to keep pace with the rate of change, further pronouncements of policy, even if backed by the coercive force of legislation, are unlikely to produce the desired effect. It may be impossible to squeeze the kind of services demanded out of this particular turnip, given its history. In retrospect, this should come as no surprise to anyone. To expect a civil service, partly comprised of those who were trained under a fundamentally different regime and part of who were new to the job altogether, to absorb complex new ways

of doing business without significant training seems ludicrous.

And these new ways of doing business are indeed complex. Taking the Department of Education as an example, the shift from 'rote learning' to 'outcomes-based education' requires a massive number of educators to undergo a major paradigm shift and to learn a whole new set of professional skills. This shift has been complicated further still by much vacillation on the policy side. At any given time, very few educators understand what exactly the policy is, much less how to implement it.

Even if the policy were made clear and accepted by all, it may be that the present workforce simply lacks the capacity to make it work. Older workers may find it impossible to change—it might be at odds with the skills they possess or even their reason for getting into the profession in the first place. Some of these deficiencies could be rectified by training, but some may relate to deeper competencies. If the skills required to do outcomes-based education could bring greater profit to the workers if employed in some other field of endeavour, it may prove impossible to attract educators of the calibre desired, given fiscal constraints. In other words, South Africa may know what best practice is, but it might not be able to afford to apply it.

This is not the sort of compromise any national legislator or executive will accept easily, and it is likely that the government will continue to try to force delivery on its own terms. The mechanism by which this compliance is demanded is the tracking of quantitative performance indicators. In order to account for services produced, the present policy framework requires the creation of clear performance measures and the setting of goals in terms of these indicators. While the consequences of failing to meet identified targets are unclear, considerable informal pressure has been brought to bear in many departments.

This paper is about the creation of reasonable performance indicators for the South African Police Service (SAPS), which falls under the Department of Safety and Security (DSS). This department has actually been among the most innovative in attempting to develop and track performance indicators, driven in part, no doubt, by its desperate need for legitimisation and immense public pressure for delivery. Past efforts, unfortunately, have been stymied by the old capacity problem—in an attempt to track all that the SAPS does, a complicated system of indicators was generated, only to fail when the reporting stations were unable to keep up with the task.<sup>3</sup>

The following is an attempt to suggest a simple and easily collected system of performance measures

aimed at tracking the most significant aspects of what the police do without creating perverse incentives. In this discussion, it is necessary to consider what it is that the police ought to be doing, especially the question of whether the police ought to proactively prevent crime from happening. Reference is made to field research done at station level, where the police were followed in an attempt to ascertain what it is, in fact, they produce. The paper concludes with a set of recommended indicators, with some exploration of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

## PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

While most are not aware of it, performance measurement is a part of all of our lives. All of us do our jobs based on certain indicators of performance, either explicit or implied. For many, this simply means showing up on time, following orders, and not causing any trouble. For others, this can mean meeting precise numerical targets set by supervisors. In either case, what gets done at work every day is governed by these expectations. In a very real sense, performance indicators determine what gets done on the job.

The police are no different. They pursue benefits and avoid penalties by pursuing the targets set for them, either formally or informally. To discuss what indicators should be used to measure police performance, then, is to ask the fundamental question: "what should the police be doing?"

To discuss indicators of police performance is to ask: "what should the police be doing?"

This is a very deep question, because the police are not just any public servants. They represent the right of the collective to use force against the individual in pursuit of the common good. What they are allowed to do is at the core of our understanding of democracy.

In recent years, the primary debate about the role of the police has focused on whether their job should be confined to law enforcement, or whether they have a role to play in preventing crime. This debate has direct relevance for performance measurement, because the

kinds of indicators used to measure the delivery of law enforcement services are very different from those that would be used to measure the prevention of crime. For the South African Police Service (SAPS), as for many other police departments around the world, a central conflict lies in the fact that while they are legislatively charged with preventing crime, many analysts question whether they have the ability to do so.

## CAN THE POLICE PREVENT CRIME?

On 28 August, 2002, at a seminar at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, Assistant Commissioner

Johan Burger, head of SAPS Operational Coordination, publicly questioned the role of the police in preventing crime.<sup>4</sup> He opened his discussion by quoting Sir Robert Peel, the founder of the London Metropolitan Police Service. Peel is famous for his, then revolutionary, contention that, “the basic mission for which the police exist is the prevention of crime and disorder”.<sup>5</sup> This assertion moved the police away from their traditional law enforcement role by placing in their hands the responsibility of proactively preventing crime before it happens. In his talk, Burger challenged this notion in the context of today’s South Africa, suggesting that the skills for preventing crime are more likely to be found in other departments. In the end, Burger concluded that while a national centre for crime prevention was necessary, it should ultimately be located outside the police.

Burger is not the first to dispute whether the police are the agency best suited for the task of crime prevention. Prominent international police scholar David Bayley opens his book *Police for the Future* with the following provocative lines:

The police do not prevent crime. This is one of the best kept secrets of modern life. Experts know it, the police know it, but the public does not know it. Yet the police pretend that they are society’s best defence against crime and continually argue that if they are given more resources, especially personnel, they will be able to protect communities against crime. This is a myth.<sup>6</sup>

Bayley goes on to cite numerous studies which demonstrate that there is no correlation between the number of police deployed and crime rates, and that all the tactics employed by modern police (visible patrols, rapid response to crime scenes, and investigation by detectives) are not effective in reducing crime. One such study, which looked at the impact of a sudden reduction in police coverage during strike actions or drastic layoffs, found that crime rates were unaffected. While high-density ‘saturation’ patrolling has been found to have a temporary effect, this technique is too expensive to be maintained, and mere displacement of crime to less well-manned areas is often the unintended consequence.

Unfortunately, the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is unequivocal about where responsibility for crime prevention lies. While it is not mentioned in the mandates of any other department, the Constitution places crime prevention at the head of a list of the four “objects” of the SAPS:

to prevent, combat, and investigate crime, to maintain public order, to protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic and their property, and to uphold and enforce the law.<sup>7</sup>

“The police do not prevent crime. This is one of the best kept secrets of modern life”

Subsequent policy documents issued by the Department of Safety and Security, on the other hand, quickly disavowed exclusive responsibility for crime prevention. The 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy and the 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security argue that preventing crime requires the participation of a range of departments at all levels of government, as well as civil society. To quote the White Paper:

Reducing crime ... entails more than policing, an effective system of criminal justice, and appropriate systems of oversight. Also required are new forms of governance and social control ... Crime control and prevention strategies must ... be underpinned by complimentary social and economic policies.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this, both the public and the police themselves continue to focus on crime prevention as though it were the primary purpose of the police, and that the police are exclusively accountable for crime levels. Even worse, the method used most often to measure crime prevention performance—the number of crimes recorded by the police—is not a very good indicator of anything.

### Why crime rates are a bad performance indicator

If you become a victim of crime, you will most likely be faced with a choice: should I bother to report this crime to the police, or should I rather spend my time dealing with the impact of victimisation in other ways? Your answer to this question will depend on a number of things:

- whether the requirements of insurance require that you have a case number;
- whether property was taken that you believe the police have a reasonable likelihood of recovering;
- whether you believe that your reporting will prevent the perpetrator from victimising either yourself or others in the future;
- whether you believe that reporting will result in desired punishment of the perpetrator;
- whether your past experiences with the police, and those of your friends and community, have been positive or negative;
- whether you have the time and means to report, either via telephone or by transporting yourself to the local police station;
- whether you have access to other means of resolving the problem, such as traditional justice structures;
- whether you feel a sense of civic duty to report.

In the end, you will have to weigh up any expected benefits against the inconvenience involved in reporting and possible subsequent involvement in the

case. Victim surveys, in which fieldworkers going door to door ask people about their experiences of crime and reporting, show that, for many people, the effort outweighs any expected gain. As Table 1 shows, for certain crime types, such as murder and vehicular theft, most victims say they reported the crime, while for others, such as assault and robbery, the rate of reporting is much less.

transition, such as South Africa, the relationship between the police and the public is in flux. Prior to 1994, the majority of the people in this country felt that reporting anything to the police was itself a kind of crime. Hopefully, this relationship is changing, but until the situation stabilises, it is impossible to disentangle changes in the real crime rate from changes in the reporting rate.

**Table 1: Reporting rates of crime according to victimisation surveys**

	Durban <sup>9</sup>	Pretoria <sup>10</sup>	Cape Town <sup>11</sup>	National <sup>12</sup>	Africa average <sup>13</sup>
<b>Murder</b>	90%	88%	93%	–	–
<b>Robbery</b>	45%	48%	48%	41%	41%
<b>Burglary</b>	72%	80%	80%	59%	59%
<b>Car theft</b>	81%	89%	93%	95%	89%
<b>Assault</b>	39%	48%	42%	38%	34%
<b>Sexual offences</b>	54%	57%	36%	47%	25%

In the end, the police crime figures are based on what the public bothers to tell them.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the police cannot control the decision of the public to report, but if the criminal justice system does a good job, more people will feel that reporting crime is worth the effort.<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically, this will result in the apparent level of crime going up, not down, contrary to the way the public expects good police performance to manifest itself.

The way that reporting rates can affect official crime rates is illustrated in the following counterintuitive international examples from the United Nations Development Programme statistics:

- Canada has the second highest rate of recorded rape in the world (267 per 100,000), second only to Estonia in the UNDP statistics.
- The rate of drug crimes in Switzerland (574 per 100,000) is more than ten times that in Colombia (40 per 100,000).
- The rate of total crimes in Denmark (10,508 per 100,000) is more than five times that in the Russian Federation (1,779 per 100,000) and more than 100 times that of Indonesia (80 per 100,000).<sup>16</sup>

Canada has high official rape rates because Canadian women know they can expect a good response from the criminal justice system if they report a rape, while in other countries, this crime remains massively underreported. These crime figures are more an indication of public trust in the system than they are of the real level of criminal activity. In many crime categories, high reporting rates should be the aspiration, not the bane, of the police.

In some countries, the police may have very little leeway in changing reporting rates, because the relationship between the police and the public has been well established over time. But in countries in

Thus, whatever opinion one holds as to the role of the police in crime prevention, it is wrong to use recorded crime rates as the basis for judging the performance of the police. Teamed with the fact that there is little evidence that the police can prevent crime through their normal activities, this means other measures are needed, based on things the police can actually control. This, of course, prompts the question: what do the police do?

## WHAT DO THE POLICE DO?

Aside from support and management functions, police forces are traditionally divided into two core areas of operational activity: patrol (usually uniformed) and investigations.<sup>17</sup> The functions of these two roles are so different that independent sets of indicators are required for each. In addition to these operational functions, the members are managed by supervisors and supported by administrators and other specialists. In theory, these management and administrative workers exist to support the operational personnel, so while the former can be evaluated independently, their performance is ultimately reflected in the success of front line staff.

The patrol function is multifaceted. Street cops are required to respond to calls for assistance, whether initiated from a central dispatch system or from direct public requests. These contacts often require a range of skills, and are more often resolved through mediation than through arrest. The uniformed member is required to make the determination of whether a crime has occurred and whether an arrest is possible and appropriate. They are responsible for generating accurate public records and may be called upon to testify in court.

Uniformed members also patrol the streets both to detect crime problems and to provide a visible presence

that is believed to have a crime deterrent effect. Other methods of increasing police visibility popular in South Africa include conducting 'crime prevention' operations, such as roadblocks, building raids, and cordon and search operations. While on patrol, they are often called upon to provide support to other state actors, such as medical emergency services and fire fighters. They also deal with traffic problems and accidents, whether or not criminal activity is involved, and maintain order at public gatherings, both formal and impromptu.

In South Africa, uniformed members also provide a range of services often consigned to more specialised units or privatised in other countries. The SAPS is responsible for guarding courts and public buildings, including acting as court orderlies, controlling the court holding cells, and transporting prisoners in custody to court from correctional institutions. It is responsible for providing body guards to public officials and other dignitaries. At the station charge desk, police are required to act as commissioners of oaths, dedicating a significant amount of time to certifying official documents. They play an important role in a variety of other public administration functions as well, including licensing of firearms, public carriers, and establishments selling alcohol.

Measuring all this activity provides something of a challenge, and assigning relative value to individual tasks is nearly impossible. Does providing life-saving first aid count for more or less than arresting a murder suspect? Does this evaluation change based on the verdict of the suspect's trial? How does one quantify the crime prevention effect of visible patrol? How much time should a 'good' police member spend in court? These questions can be confounding, and will be discussed in more detail below.

In contrast, the investigative function is less problematic. Investigative members are generally referred to as detectives. They follow up on cases once a complaint is entered. They can also initiate arrests as their investigations develop. Their primary task is to investigate reported cases to determine whether an arrest is possible and, if so, to prepare the case for trial, but this involves a number of responsibilities. They must locate and liaise with victims and witnesses, enlisting their cooperation in the investigation and the trial. They must secure and document physical evidence. They must brief the prosecution and provide testimony in court. In South Africa, detectives are also responsible for subpoenaing and producing witnesses even after the case has gone to court, as well as for their own testimony. In the end, however, each complaint assigned to a detective in the SAPS must be filed in one of four distinct categories:

- referred to court (accepted by the prosecutor);
- unfounded (affirmatively determined to be without basis);

- undetected (not presented to the prosecutor due to lack of evidence);
- withdrawn (not fit for trial because of affirmative impediments to building a prosecutable case, such as refusal of the complainant to cooperate).<sup>18</sup>

The percentage of cases referred to court combined with the percentage of cases affirmatively determined to be unfounded is termed the 'clearance rate' and represents fairly comprehensively the level of success of the detectives.<sup>19</sup> Once a case is accepted by the prosecution as presenting a reasonable prospect of conviction and the accused is formally charged, the responsibility for the case is, in theory moved to the prosecution. In practice, this transfer of responsibility is not so clear cut, as detectives are still required for the purposes of testimony and witness liaison, but the willingness of the prosecution to accept the case indicates that the police have effectively completed their core mission—identifying and building a case against a suspect.

Thus, the clearance rate satisfies the criteria laid out above for a valid performance indicator, and it is used as such in police jurisdictions across the world. While it summarises a range of activities, it focuses on what the detectives actually do. The prosecution will not accept cases that have not been adequately investigated because their failure to secure a conviction after acceptance is seen as a negative performance indicator on their part. The prosecution then becomes the final judge of whether the detectives have performed their duties adequately, and a set of checks and balances is established.

But can the police really have more control over their clearance rate than they have over the crime rate? What do the police really control?

### What do the police control?

While the police cannot be said to control the amount of crime reported, they can control their own internal management, including the distribution and use of resources. This includes managing the quantity and quality of personnel and equipment assigned to various locations and functions for maximum efficiency. For example, this means avoiding the creation of skilled but idle desk staff or the inequitable distribution of vehicles. Field staff need to be deployed in ways that meet organisational objectives, and need to be supervised to ensure that they perform their tasks fairly and effectively. Where weaknesses are detected, training needs to be designed to address these deficiencies.

If resources are being spent on activities for which the police are not credited, either these resources need to be reallocated to areas the public deems more

## Recorded crime figures are a poor indicator of police performance in countries in transition

important or performance measures need to be expanded to account for all that is actually being produced. If these resources are limited or the demand on these resources is great, performance expectations will have to be amended accordingly and flexibility may be limited.

While all public servants complain about a lack of resources, how well endowed is the SAPS by international standards? Objective measures suggest that current resource levels should be sufficient for the task at hand. SAPS total personnel number in excess of 125,000, or about 312 members for every 100,000 people in the population.<sup>20</sup> Since the role of the police varies between countries, doing international comparisons is difficult, but this is more than are found in the US (300), Australia (275), or Canada (249).<sup>21</sup> South Africa has one police member for every 320 people. A ratio of one per every 400 is considered good, while one per every 600 is considered bad.<sup>22</sup>

These ratios do not account for the high crime levels experienced in South Africa, however. Approximately 2.5 million crimes were reported in this country in 2000.<sup>23</sup> The uniformed (not detective or civilian) police force is about 80,000 members. This means that each uniformed member was responsible for handling an average of 32 crimes for the year, or about one every eight working days.

This does not sound like much to the layperson, and comparing workloads across time reinforces the impression that the police are not presently challenged for numbers. In South Africa in 1978, a total police force of 35,019 members all told handled just over a million offences plus an equal number of "infringements of the law" (mainly violations of apartheid segregation laws). According to the Commissioner at the time and subsequent observers, a disproportionate amount of police time was spent on enforcing the race laws, including a good deal of public order work and even counter-terrorist enforcement abroad. Discounting this fact and focusing only on the enforcement of comparable laws to those in force today, contemporary police members handle at least one third less crime per member than did their counterparts in the 1970s.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the police do not seem unduly burdened by international standards. There were approximately 4.6 violent crimes (defined for comparison as murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) per member in 2000. This is less than Canada (4.7) but more than the US (2.8).<sup>25</sup> Thus, current crime-to-cop ratios in South Africa do not seem to constitute an untenable situation, if all of these members were assigned to tasks directly involving crime.

That this is not the case is demonstrated by the much less favourable ratio of detectives to crimes in South

Africa. Since most detectives are involved in handling recorded crime, their workload will more fairly represent the burden placed on frontline police staff. About 18% of total police personnel are detectives, which is more than in Britain or the United States (15%), but less than Japan (20%).<sup>26</sup> These 22,000 detectives are responsible for processing this same input of 2.5 million crimes, or about one new crime every other working day. The ratio of crimes to detective varies quite a bit between crime types, with detectives specialising in murders generally having a much lighter caseload than those dealing with petty thefts, for example. Once factors such as time spent on service of summons and court time are added in, this caseload could represent quite a challenging situation, even given the fact that a good share of incoming cases are given cursory treatment when evidence is limited.

While the number of court cases generated summarises detective performance, the patrol function is more complex to measure

Only about 18% of sworn police members are detectives, however, and this share is within the control of the SAPS. Indeed, the need for more detectives has been recognised by the SAPS, with Detective Services being the fastest growing portion of the SAPS budget.<sup>27</sup>

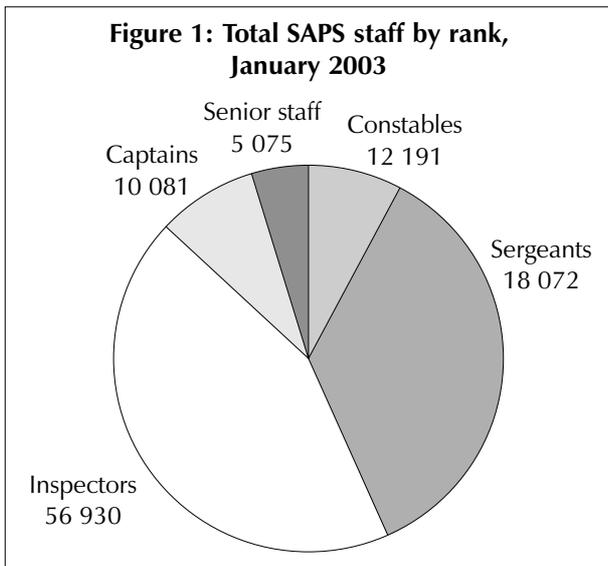
The SAPS also officially controls about 27,000 vehicles, or more than one vehicle for every four operational staff (uniformed and detective).<sup>28</sup> While this total includes all sorts of vehicles in all states of repair, it is also true that the entire staff of the SAPS is never on duty

at the same time. With regard to street staff, most work four-day blocks of 12-hour shifts alternating with four days off, plus holidays, or some other comparable shift arrangement. Thus, less than half the street staff will be working on any given day, and only a quarter during any given shift, allowing each member (in theory) to have his own vehicle.

Thus, there should be enough members and vehicles to deal with the crime in South Africa, if these resources were focused on dealing with crime. Unfortunately, as was discussed above, most personnel-hours are spent on other sorts of activities. If combating crime (rather than, say, guarding public buildings) is seen as the primary purpose of the police, there is clearly a need for a reallocation of resources.

The fact that the raw numbers of members do not correspond to real street strength can be attributed in part to 'rank inflation'. In an effort to bolster police numbers and re-deploy members of the apartheid state and former homeland governments, the SAPS has been subject to waves of integration of large bodies of members with little or no real experience and limited training in police work. A desire for parity, a quota-based affirmative action policy, and union pressures have caused these members to be regularly promoted, mainly because pay increments are tied to rank. As a result, there are presently more than four times as

many Inspectors (the senior non-commissioned rank) than Constables (the entry level rank) (Figure 1). Constables, intended to be the primary street level operatives, comprise 12% of total SAPS personnel.

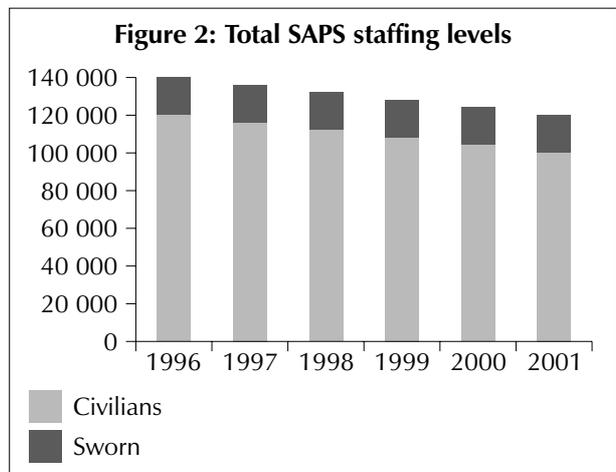


Source: SAPS Management Services

This development, teamed with a systematic demilitarisation of the police since the coming of democracy, has resulted in an effective collapse of the rank structure. The rank of Inspector is supposed to represent the senior field supervisory rank, the equivalent of 'Lieutenant' in many American departments. At present, however, Inspectors are being placed in charge of whole teams of other Inspectors, some of which have greater seniority in terms of years of service than their commanders. Without a sense of a clear chain of command, field accountability is at risk, highlighting the need for individual performance indicators. Once a member becomes a 'commissioned officer' with the rank of Captain, he is often effectively removed from field duty, and the SAPS has almost as many Captains as it does Constables. A huge share of total sworn personnel (6,600 members, or about 7%) are assigned to the head office in Pretoria, most of whom are engaged in desk work.

Despite these early infusions of personnel, total SAPS staffing has been in decline in recent years. Natural attrition is about 5,000 members per year.<sup>29</sup> While there are plans to counteract this trend with a massive recruitment drive (initially, 16,000 members in three years),<sup>30</sup> even this effort will only result in 1997 staffing levels being regained in 2005 (Figure 2). While the number of anticipated recruits has been augmented subsequently, a report by the national commissioner to

parliament at the end of 2002 indicated that the SAPS had already fallen behind schedule.<sup>31</sup> There simply does not seem to be the infrastructure or the personnel to train this volume of recruits, even with an abbreviated training programme.



Source: SAPS Management Services

Thus, the SAPS faces some serious challenges in redeploying resources to optimise performance. The Service is burdened with a range of responsibilities extraneous to its core functions and not tallied in the expectations of the South African public. There is an excess of management-level staff, many of who cannot be deployed to street duties. Total personnel levels are in decline, and present training capabilities make countering this trend difficult.

## DETECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Given these capacity challenges, it is essential that the workload the police are facing be taken into consideration when it comes to setting benchmarks for the South African police. For example, the level of workload detectives face can substantially impact their ability to perform. If a detective in the Western Cape has only half the time to devote to each case as one in Gauteng, the same clearance rate cannot be expected in both provinces.

On a national level, the SAPS detectives send to court about one out of every four cases (24%) that come across their desks.<sup>32</sup> This is better than the US (22%), but worse than Britain (35%),<sup>33</sup> although recent figures suggest that Britain's rate is in decline.<sup>34</sup> But referral rates vary quite a bit across crime categories (Figure 3) and between provinces (Figure 4). Some crime types demand significantly more detective attention per case

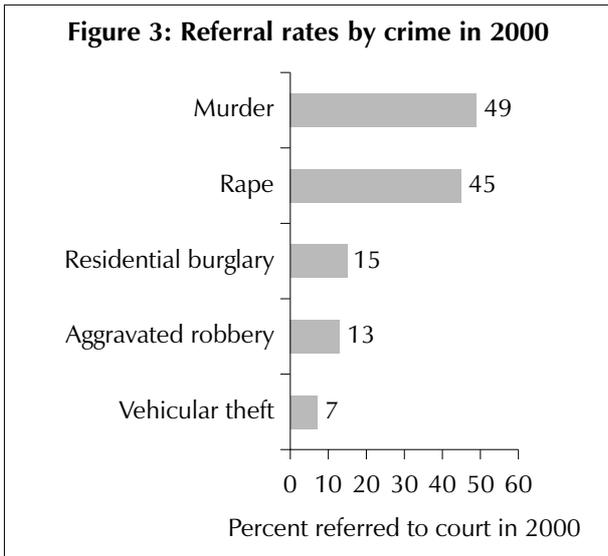
\* Throughout this discussion, referral rates are calculated on the basis of annual crimes recorded by the police compared to the number of cases referred to court for that same calendar year. This is not an entirely accurate way of proceeding, because cases recorded in one year may be finalised in another, but if case intake is fairly consistent between years, rates thus calculated should be close to the real values. This so-called "yearly-review" method is widely used both in South Africa and internationally. A study that tracked the outcome of individual cases (also called the individual case tracking method) came to similar results as the yearly-review method. See R Paschke, Conviction rates and other outcomes of crimes reported in eight South African police areas, Research paper 18, Project 82, South African Law Commission, Pretoria (undated).

than do others, while some provinces and stations must process many more cases per detective than do those situated in better-resourced areas. These factors need to be taken into consideration before clearance rates can be compared.

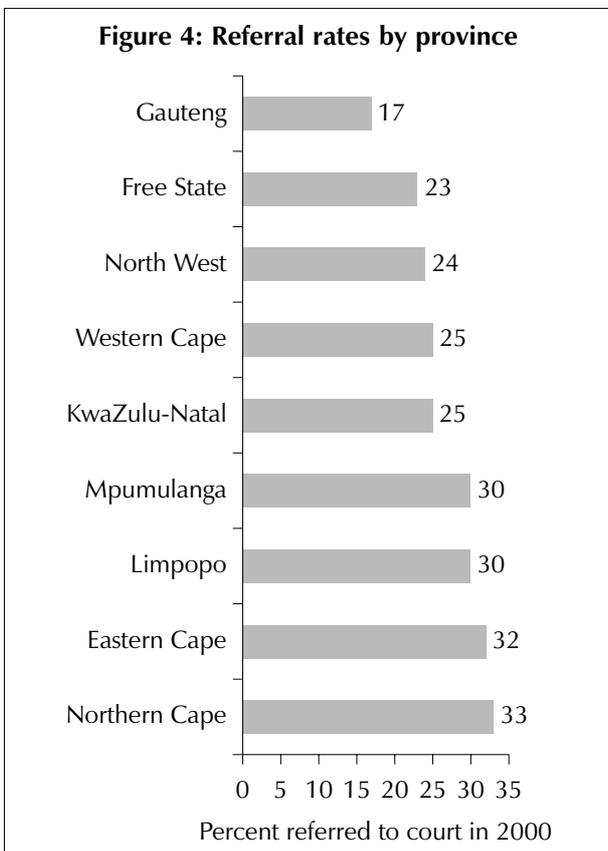
This is easily done by calculating the number of cases referred to court per detective, although this performance measure is far from perfect. It posits some sort of linear relationship between workload and referral rate, while surely there exists some point

at which workload becomes overwhelming, and no point exists at which referrals will be 100%. But its practical application to the South African situation produces some interesting results.

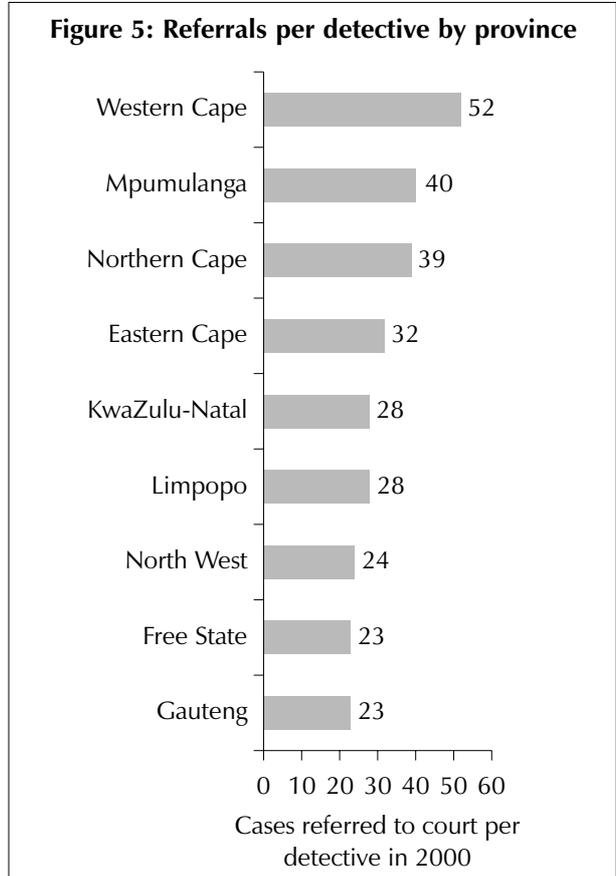
Figure 5 plots crimes referred per detective for each of the nine provinces.



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre

With the possible exception of the Western Cape, which advances twice as many cases to court per detective as does Gauteng, there appears to be enough consistency between provinces to suggest a reasonable performance standard could be set, with enough variation to suggest that some provinces are better applying their resources than others.

The number of cases referred to court per detective seems to satisfy our criteria for a valid performance indicator, and should be tracked on any level where sufficient discretion as to use of resources exists to hold decision makers accountable, including at individual (making allowance for crime category variations), station, area, provincial, and national levels.

Coming up with an index for uniformed police is far more complicated, especially given that many uniformed members in South Africa are assigned to highly specialised duties rather than general patrol.

## UNIFORMED PERFORMANCE

Unlike detectives, whose duties are fairly consistent between jurisdictions, probing the performance indicators for uniformed police quickly leads to a discussion of policing philosophy. Because their duties are so varied, choosing what to credit uniformed police for is tantamount to stating what their function is in society. That is partly why in countries like South Africa, where many new ideas are being explored, setting of standards is so difficult to do.

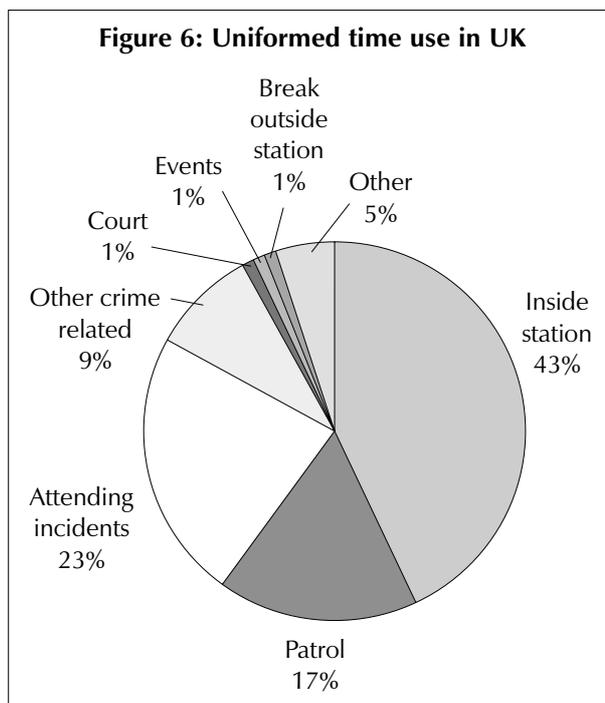
One of the best places to start is to look at what the police are already doing, evaluate whether this matches social priorities, and set standards to encourage changes in emphasis. To assess what the police are doing, several countries produce detailed time use studies of the police (through periodic surveys) and some require daily accounting by all members of what was done during their working hours (though daily activity logs). Several states in Australia do periodic studies<sup>35</sup>, while many departments in the United States and New Zealand require daily reports. These reports facilitate both value-for-money accounting and assist internal decision making.<sup>36</sup>

The Home Office of the United Kingdom conducted one such study recently, the results of which are summarised in Figure 6. This study found that uniformed members spent 17% of their time on patrol, 23% of their time attending incidents, and 9% of their time on other crime related duties outside the station. Depending on the shift, between about a third and half their time was spent inside the station house, doing paperwork (about 41% of in-station time), processing prisoners, and performing related duties.<sup>37</sup>

Bayley cites British studies that found a different profile: 22% of time spent patrolling and 12% responding to incidents, with half the time in the station house and half the station time spent on administration. He contrasts this to Australia (40% incidents, 30% patrol, 30% administration).<sup>38</sup>

Preliminary studies of a few stations in South Africa have indicated a starkly different time use profile.<sup>39</sup> This is largely due to the fact that only a fraction of station level staff are engaged in comparable street duties. These are generally members assigned to one of two divisions: 'crime prevention' (CP) and the 'client service centre' (CSC). In fact, generally only one unit of the CSC is assigned to street policing, the so-called 'outside' or responding unit. The CP division is, as the name suggests, dedicated to crime prevention activities, while the responding CSC unit reacts to calls for assistance. This bifurcation of the patrol function seems odd to outsiders, since in most other countries uniformed members engage in both types of activities.

While the data cannot be generalised, one case study of a major metropolitan station found approximately 40% of station staff assigned to Crime Prevention. This



Source: British Home Office

comprises by far the largest component of uniformed patrol. On its own, this represents a share of total staff somewhat less than that held by uniformed members in the US (65%), Canada (64%), Britain (56%), and Australia (54%), but about the same as Japan (40%).<sup>40</sup> In South Africa, these members spent their time engaged in a series of group 'operations' targeting areas identified as crime 'hotspots' based on analysis of crime statistics. These operations generally involved roadblocks, 'cordon and search' activities, raids, and 'visible patrol'. While these members were required by regulations to respond to priority calls for assistance, in the case study few attended to radio calls. This was left to the CSC staff, who spent most of their time going from call to call, with brief intervals of random patrol.

The station also had units dedicated to 'sector policing', focusing on community liaison with individual members dedicated to specified geographic areas within the station boundaries. Nearly a fifth of the staff was assigned to full time guard duty, as the station had responsibility for security at the local court houses as well as its own extensive holding cells. The remainder of the CSC staff was dedicated to acting as commissioners of oaths and otherwise maintaining the charge desk, while dedicated detectives took all criminal complaints.<sup>41</sup>

This extreme specialisation of function means that time use must be examined at the station level, as individual profiles are likely to vary radically. The station level outputs observed in the case study, including detectives and support staff, are summarised in Table 2.

What this table makes clear is that only a small percentage of total station personnel hours are dedicated to the prevention of crime and field enforcement. Aside from administration, guarding is

**Table 2: ISS case study of a metropolitan police station's time use, 2002**

	Staff hours per week	Percent of daily station output
Other administration	7 476	23%
Guarding	6 444	20%
Doing visible patrols	4 940	15%
Investigations and other forms of field contact	3 240	10%
Public administration	2 552	8%
Responding to calls for assistance	2 618	8%
Incident-related paperwork	1 748	5%
Doing random searches and raids	1 008	3%
Testimony and service of process	920	3%
Supervision	1 024	3%
PR and intelligence	440	1%

the single function that absorbed most of the time resources of the station, despite the fact that the SAPS is rarely credited with the number of hours of custodial and premises safety it provides. Assuming that, as the proclamations of the political leadership suggest, the combating of crime is the primary focus of the Service, then a radical rework of member deployment at station level appears to be necessary.

### SUGGESTED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Since internationally many police departments are required to account to the taxpayers for the services they render, looking at annual reports and other delivery-related research is one way to glean the kind of performance measures valued in other jurisdictions. In the United Kingdom, the Inspectorate of Constabulary has conducted detailed national studies of value for money in the police<sup>42</sup>, and the numerous local authorities produce strategic plans with quantified benchmarks.<sup>43</sup> In Australia, similar research has been done on state level.<sup>44</sup> In the United States, thousands of municipal police departments and county sheriffs set targets and track indicators.<sup>45</sup>

The benchmarks set in many of these cases do involve recorded crime, but are tempered with a range of other performance, service, and organisational indicators, including:

- detection rates (similar to referral rates, already discussed above);
- response time, including emergency response;
- arrests, especially in discretionary areas like drug offences;
- seizures of contraband;
- public satisfaction (based on surveys);
- use of force indicators;
- substantiated complaints (negative indicator).

The remainder of this paper discusses a range of indicators that could be adopted in the South African context.

### Response time

Internationally, the police are called upon whenever the public needs immediate response from the state, or whenever there is a need for a quick restoration of order. While this function is vital, it often has nothing to do with crime. One UK study found that 75% of the calls received by the police were for non-criminal matters.<sup>46</sup> Whether criminal in nature or not, one of the primary things that the public expects from the police is personal attention in a reasonable period of time in the case of an emergency. As such, response time comprises one of the most important indicators of police performance.

This figure is generally derived automatically from computer-aided dispatch systems, and capacity exists in South Africa for this information to be derived from 10111 call centres where these are operational. Both station level staff and the 'flying squad' are dispatched from 10111, but stations also receive their own calls, so this information would not present a complete picture of station response time. Nonetheless, changes in protocol could make this information more complete in the future, and even a limited sample of cases could provide the basis for benchmarking. Most areas that do set targets for response time make allowances for jurisdiction type and resources available. Most important is setting reasonable goals for improvement and working on strategies to enhance timely response to citizen requests.

## Arrests and seizures

Arrests and seizures, like many other crime related indicators, are problematic because they presume a set level of criminal activity against which targets can be set. The South African Police Service is charged with working to reduce crime levels in addition to providing effective law enforcement—big arrests and seizures are a negative indicator of the former and a positive indicator of the latter. Seizing large amounts of imported drugs or guns may indicate good intelligence and detective work, but it also indicates poor border control and a prevailing climate in which these commodities are in demand.

Further, unless the types of arrests are specified by crime category, ‘padding’ of figures with arrests for minor infractions (usually prostitution and illegal immigration arrests) is inevitable. If arrests are not tracked through the criminal justice system to determine whether they are sound enough to provide a basis for a conviction, an incentive is created to open a criminal case in matters where other forms of action may be more advisable. As Bayley and many others point out, very few of the ‘criminal’ situations the police encounter merit an arrest, and most are resolved through other forms of mediation, to the benefit of all concerned.<sup>47</sup>

The current criminal records system of the SAPS does not automatically generate arrest figures, but this should be rectified once the promised ‘paperless’ docket system is in place. At present, both arrests and seizures have been tracked manually as positive indicators in large-scale, high-density operations, like those initiated under the geographic focus of the National Crime Combating Strategy (popularly referred to as ‘Operation Crackdown’). As suggested above, the focus on arrests as a performance indicator in these operations has apparently led to ‘padding’—Crackdown operations have been criticised by human rights groups because of the focus on illegal immigrants, and by prosecutors for the low overall rate of convictions in these cases. After Crackdown, the number of cases referred to court went up dramatically, but conviction rates did not follow.<sup>48</sup>

The 2001/2002 SAPS Annual Report gives arrest and seizure totals for border posts and commercial crime branches; seizure figures for drugs, endangered species parts, stock theft, and guns; and arrest and conviction figures for crimes against women and children. If nothing else, these figures show that the branches assigned to investigate these areas have not been sitting on their hands. But use of these figures could be improved by:

- comparing local recorded crime rates immediately before and after large seizures for specific crime types (e.g. gun violence following a weapons sweep);

- tracking trends over time and comparing types of seizures (large versus small caches of contraband, changing methods of trafficking, shifts in offender demographics, etc.);
- a more detailed analysis of productivity per staff member or by personnel-hours per operation, to provide a cost/benefit type analysis (for example, how much does it cost to take a gun off the street using a particular operational approach?).

The point is that arrests and seizures cannot stand on their own as a performance measure, but need to be contextualised with other indicators. Ultimately, the goal should be for these totals to go down, as fewer drugs, guns, and other forms of contraband are present in the society.

## Public satisfaction

The ultimate gauge of public service performance in a democracy is public satisfaction. This is especially true in the present South African context, in which the police are transforming from an agency of repressive social control to a ‘community oriented’ service. Indeed, the SAPS has shown its concern with public opinion by commissioning research in this area.

Gathering this information requires conducting an independent survey, but the returns on this investment are a bottom-line statement on successful service delivery. This information is particularly useful if collected longitudinally and for carefully delineated geographic areas (such as a station area), so that innovations in policy can be tested.

One problem with general surveys are that popular prejudice against the police, which may be informed by media reports about activities outside the subject jurisdiction, can make progress in this area difficult. Davis found, “while

people’s feelings about the police are affected by direct experience, they depend even more on culturally transmitted norms and beliefs.”<sup>49</sup> This is particularly true in a country like South Africa, where victimisation surveys have shown stark contrasts in perceptions between ethnic groups and communities.<sup>50</sup>

One way to avoid this problem is to conduct exit polls or follow-up calls of those who have just received service, so that opinions are informed by direct experience. Both general opinion and that of service recipients were measured in a survey commissioned by the SAPS and conducted by the ISS, and it was found that those who had had recent experience with the police had far better opinions of them than the general public.<sup>51</sup> But in the end, the police will have to contend with the fact that their diverse constituencies often have contradictory expectations, needs, and responses to interventions.

While lots of arrests and seizures show active police work, they also indicate a lawless society

It is also useful to use these polls to test matters of fact, rather than just opinion, by checking, for instance, that people having filed a complaint are given a case number and have received detective contact. This allows an independent evaluation of real service provision not tainted by the vagaries of public perception. Also important to test is the level of public knowledge about what service should be provided. Ironically, low expectations can result in unfounded high satisfaction ratings.

The importance of ongoing public opinion polls as a complement to police generated numerical targets was underscored in a new report on the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This report, described as “the most in-depth analysis of policing in London for 20 years”<sup>52</sup> concluded, “the MPS needs to be able to develop ways of managing performance that place greater emphasis on achieving professional standards and less emphasis on hitting numerical targets.”<sup>53</sup> As was the case in New York, public opinion appears to be cyclical, with demands for crime reduction being followed by a reaction against aggressive policing. While South Africa is surely on the pro-enforcement end of the spectrum at the present time, the SAPS must keep in mind that public opinion is dynamic, that public reception to policies must be continually reevaluated, and regular polls must be conducted to measure the real impact of other indicators.

### Use of force and complaints

Any system that places strong emphasis on indicators of crime combating is at risk of running afoul of the constitution. New York City’s highly publicised crime reduction though ‘zero tolerance’ of ‘lifestyle crimes’ (such as vagrancy and loitering) was accompanied by a rise in complaints against the police.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore necessary that indicators that track police misconduct be included so that zeal for the law is leavened with respect for human rights. Rather than relying on the conscience of the members, the tension between optimal performance and respectful restraint should be enshrined in clear quantitative terms.

Tracking numbers of complaints and their outcomes provides some insight into trends in misbehaviour, but, as with reported crime, these figures may increase as a result of good police work. The more the public feels confident that complaints will be treated with respect and will result in positive outcomes, the greater the chances of an incident being reported. Thus, the increase in complaints since 1994 must be assessed with the fact in mind that the relationship between the public and the police has changed significantly since that time.

There is always a problem with relying on an agency to collect its own negative performance indicators, so it is imperative that another agency be charged with this duty. In fact, the system probably works best when one agency’s negative performance indicator is another’s productivity measure. In South Africa, the Independent Complaints Directorate is ideally situated to play this role, but resource constraints mean that only a limited portion of complaints can be handled, mostly those involving death in police custody. Further endowing this agency with jurisdiction and commensurate resources could greatly enhance the performance measurement process.

The SAPS also collects its own disciplinary statistics, and reports on both misconduct and corruption investigations in the 2001/2002 Annual Report. These figures do not specify the nature of offences involved, which is highly relevant for disentangling increases in real incidence (a negative indicator) from increases in reporting (a positive indicator). The disciplinary figures presented in the annual report are confusing, but clearly show the chances of being disciplined after a hearing are low. Corruption investigations as presented also show a very low likelihood of conviction (around 1%–3% of ‘enquiries’, and 15%–25% of arrests). But these figures need to be weighed with further information on the nature of the complaints, explaining possible barriers to conviction.

## Enforcement success must be weighed against complaints from the public

### Internal and other measures

In addition to service delivery measures, the station should be held accountable for internal management. One of the most potent indicators in this respect is absenteeism, which is rife in the SAPS.

Others include the number of available vehicles as a ratio of assigned vehicles, losses of firearms and other equipment, failures of members to appear in court, and other evidence of poor administration. While failure to manage internal processes properly is likely to result in poor external performance, these indicators are helpful in getting to the root of the problem.

### Other considerations

While none of these indicators is perfect, it is important that all efforts be made to ensure that poor performance by one division does not impact negatively on other divisions. This may require the inclusion of additional procedures and paperwork to ensure that credit is given where due. For example, while the prosecution is ultimately responsible for the case once it is accepted to court, poor detective performance, either in witness liaison or testimony, can sink an otherwise sound case. In order to ensure

that detectives continue to have an interest after credit has been given for their primary performance, it may become necessary for a complaints procedure be put in place for prosecutors to protect their own statistics. Similarly, detectives should be empowered to refer back to uniformed members any case that does not have sufficient or accurate baseline information on which a case can be built, and that rejected cases not be tallied against their referral rate.

Finally, if South Africa is serious about implementing community or sector policing after decades of an adversarial relationship to the public, some measure needs to be taken of the extent of public contact with the police. One way of keeping track of field contacts is the 'field interview' card—an index card which lists the identity details of members of the uniformed member's primary beat.<sup>55</sup> In addition to encouraging public contact, these cards can become a source of intelligence about members of the community, both law abiding and not. The total number of such contacts documented can be used by both the station and individual members as a performance indicator.

## CONCLUSION

Measuring performance is about more than apportioning credit and blame. The goals towards which an organisation strives essentially dictate its priorities. It is therefore vital that these objectives be formulated to encourage the behaviour desired from the organisation.

The police are a multipurpose agency whose behaviour is difficult to track and control. Sound performance measures are all the more important when a branch of government is given the kind of discretion and authority given to the police. Indicators must be selected that both allow accountability and promote socially beneficial activity.

In the South African context, the recent drive towards crime combating poses a substantial risk to individual liberties, and fails to address the underlying structural weaknesses present in the Service. Emphasis on reducing the levels of crime recorded is both disempowering to a police service struggling with its operational priorities and produces perverse incentives, given that much crime remains unreported. While past efforts to track performance collapsed beneath a Byzantine morass of paperwork, a few simple changes to present reporting procedures could greatly enhance both internal and public understanding of police performance. This effort would produce indicators that:

- are reflective of what the police actually do;
- are within the control of the police;
- take into account capacity and workload;
- are simple to collect and understand; and,
- promote socially desirable behaviour.

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## About this paper

The South African government requires all departments to establish and track indicators of performance and service delivery, and the South African Police Service has been highly innovative in this area. Public obsession with recorded crime statistics has, unfortunately, resulted in these figures being seen by many as the primary police performance indicator. This paper argues that recorded crime levels do not reflect the real crime situation and may, in fact, increase due to good police work. In addition, there is little evidence that the work the police are trained to do has any impact on the incidence of crime. It is therefore necessary that alternative indicators be developed and publicised that are reflective of what the police actually do; are within their direct control; take into account their capacity and workload; are simple to collect and understand; and promote socially desirable behaviour.

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Ted Leggett works as a senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies Crime and Justice Programme. His professional background includes police work, prosecution, and social work. He holds the degrees of Juris Doctor from New York University School of Law and Master of Social Science in Development Studies from the University of Natal, Durban.

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