

# Farm attacks **and murders** in South Africa for 2024



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## Introduction

Attacks on farms and smallholdings affect farmers, farm workers, farm managers and their respective friends and families. Moreover, these attacks have a ripple effect on South Africa's agricultural economy and the rest of South Africa. It is essential to highlight crime trends in the farming community when considering the impact of crime in rural communities and the effectiveness of rural safety strategies.

AfriForum has been involved in the fight against farm attacks and murders since the organisation was founded. Efforts to curb farm murders and attacks are integral to AfriForum's Community Safety division, and raising awareness is a focus area of the organisation – the most recent project being the AfriForum delegation to Washington, D.C. in 2025.

This report contributes to AfriForum's initiative against farm attacks and murders in that it contains information on murders and attacks on farms and smallholdings that occurred in South Africa in 2024. The report forms part of an ongoing series of reports that AfriForum has published on farm murders and attacks.

## Methodology

### Data collection and analysis

The South African Police Service (SAPS) releases crime statistics quarterly and annually.<sup>1</sup> Although the SAPS currently does release statistics on farm attacks and murders, it declined to release this data as part of its crime reporting for a number of years.<sup>2</sup> The SAPS's past failure to release such data, combined with AfriForum's need for information, prompted AfriForum to perform its own data collection through its Community Safety division. AfriForum's Community Safety division collects the information from various sources, including AfriForum branches, community policing forums (CPFs), farm and neighbourhood watches, private security companies, SAPS media statements, mainstream and social media reports, and the victims themselves.

AfriForum's Community Safety division continuously updates its farm attack database, also for historic data. For this reason, it is very important to point out that the farm attack and murder figures that are published in this report for previous years may be different from figures that were released in earlier reports, or to be released in future reports (for past years). This is

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<sup>1</sup> South African Police Service. N.d. *SAPS Crimestats*. Available at <https://www.saps.gov.za/services/crimestats.php>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Burger, J. 2017. *Accurate statistics are needed for the SA farm murder debate*. Institute for Security Studies, 11 December, par. 8. Available at <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/accurate-statistics-are-needed-for-the-sa-farm-murder-debate>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

because new information about an incident may become available after the incident has been reported to AfriForum. This report represents the most current data on farm attacks and murders for 2024 that was available to AfriForum's Community Safety division at the time of writing this report. Furthermore, some people may know of or have information on farm attacks and/or murders that are not included in this report. In these cases, we invite them to contribute verifiable information to AfriForum's database of farm attacks to promote the accuracy of our research.

## The structure and terminology of the report

This report comprises five sections. We present the figures for the 2023 and 2024 calendar years in the first part. The second section contains details of farm attacks and murders in terms of the frequency of monthly incidents and the provinces in which these attacks were committed. We present the means by which victims were murdered in the third section. In the fourth section we highlight some details of farm attacks and murder suspects. In the fifth section we briefly highlight apprehensions of suspects that were made in 2024.

In this report, the term *farm attack* refers to a single incident that occurred on a specific date and at a specific location, but that may have involved multiple victims, who could have survived the attack or could have been murdered during the attack. It is therefore the overall incident. The term *murder incident* refers to attacks that resulted in at least one murder. *Number of murders* refer to the individual victims that were killed.

The term *suspect(s)* is generally used throughout the report to allow for incidents where the number of actual participants in the crime remains unknown or unconfirmed.

The SAPS defines *farm attack* in its National Rural Safety Strategy (NRSS) as<sup>3</sup>

*... [a]cts of violence against person(s) living in rural areas, including farms and smallholdings, refer to acts aimed at person(s) residing in, working in or visiting rural areas, whether with the intent to murder, rape, rob or inflict bodily harm. In addition, all acts of violence against the infrastructure and property in the rural community, which is aimed at disrupting farming or other commercial concerns, irrespective of whether the motive(s) are related to the commission of other crime(s), ideology, land disputes, land issues, revenge, grievances, racist concerns or intimidation, are included in this definitions. Cases related to domestic violence or liquor abuse, or resulting from common place social interaction between people, are excluded from the definition.*

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<sup>3</sup> South African Police Service. 2019. *The National Rural Safety Strategy*, p. 7. Available at [https://www.saps.gov.za/resource\\_centre/publications/national\\_rural\\_safety\\_strategy\\_2019.pdf](https://www.saps.gov.za/resource_centre/publications/national_rural_safety_strategy_2019.pdf). Accessed on 4 May 2025.



The NRSS defines *farm* as<sup>3</sup>

*[a]n area of land and its infrastructure used for agricultural pursuits (including the keeping of livestock or wild animals), as well as ecotourism and conservation purposes. The definition also includes cattle posts, rural villages/communal areas, where subsistence farming takes place and game farms.*

The NRSS defines *smallholding* as<sup>3</sup>

*[a] plot outside a built-up area of a city or town used for agricultural, residential or other purposes, but for reporting purposes, excluding properties subdivided into separate residential units, informal settlements or land, which is officially rezoned to become distinguishable from an agricultural holding.*

## Farm attack and murder incidents from 2023 to 2024

AfriForum recorded 176 farm attacks from January 2024 to December 2024, during which 37 victims were murdered. This is a substantial decline in comparison with 2023, in which the organisation recorded 297 farm attacks and during which 52 victims were murdered. The reasons for this significant decline are unknown. A possible explanation is that safety measures on farms and smallholdings may have improved; another is that farm attacks may be underreported. Further research is necessary to identify the variables that contributed to this decline. If research points to improved safety measures that contributed significantly to the decline, such measures should be developed further and expanded on. Conversely, if underreporting of crimes is the cause of the decline, institutions and organisations that record farm attacks must develop more efficient reporting systems.

Table 1: Number of farm attacks and number of murders from 2023 to 2024

Calendar year	Farm attacks	Number of murder victims
2023	297	52
2024	176	37

## Month, province and location

The months in which farm attacks and murder incidents were committed in 2024 are displayed in table 2. Although October had the fewest number of attacks (8) for the year, the murder incident-to-attack ratio was 0,38, which is the highest of all months of the year. June had the second-highest murder incident-to-attack ratio (0,37) with 7 out of 19 attacks turning deadly. Although most attacks (21) were recorded in February, the murder-to-attack ratio was 0,14.

Table 2: Number of farm attacks and murder incidents per month (2024)

Month	Farm attacks	Murder incidents (number of farm attacks with at least one murder victim)	Ratio
January	9	-	-
February	21	3	0,14
March	17	1	0,06
April	17	3	0,18
May	17	3	0,18
June	19	7	0,37
July	15	2	0,13
August	15	1	0,07
September	11	1	0,09
October	8	3	0,38
November	9	1	0,11
December	18	5	0,28

The number of farm attacks – including murder incidents (i.e., attacks that resulted in murder) per province for 2024 – is broken down in table 3. Most farm attacks occurred in Gauteng (64), which is more than double the number of attacks that were recorded in the North West (30), which is the province with the second-most recorded attacks.

Although the Northern Cape had the least number of attacks (3), each of these attacks resulted in a murder incident, giving the province the highest ratio of murder incident-to-attacks. The Free State had the second-highest murder incident to attack ratio (0,33), with 4 out of the 12 farm attacks resulting in at least one murder.

Table 3: Number of farm attacks and murder incidents per province (2024)

Province	Farm attacks	Murder incidents (number of farm attacks with at least one murder victim)	Ratio
Eastern Cape	19	-	-
Free State	12	4	0,33
Gauteng	64	10	0,16
KwaZulu-Natal	11	3	0,27
Limpopo	11	1	0,09
Mpumalanga	15	3	0,20
Northern Cape	3	3	1,00
North West	30	3	0,10
Western Cape	11	3	0,27

Most farm attacks (62%) took place on farms as opposed to smallholdings.

Table 4: Premises (2024)

Type of premises	Percentage
Farm	62%
Smallholding <sup>4</sup>	38%

## How victims were murdered

The reported method by which victims were murdered are displayed in table 5. It is important to note that a combination of methods may be employed by attackers to murder their victims. Victims were shot in just over half of cases (51%). The circumstances under which victims were shot vary from case to case, as with other methods. For example, a farm manager was ambushed in his home in one incident,<sup>5</sup> while in another incident a farmer was chased down and shot by robbers shortly after arriving at his farm.<sup>6</sup>

Victims were assaulted or bludgeoned with an object or weapon (including knives) in 32% of incidents. Such incidents include victims being assaulted to death or where it was reported that victims were found with severe trauma wounds (e.g. stab wounds)<sup>7, 8</sup> In one incident, the half-naked body of an elderly woman was found in a septic tank and the body of her husband was found in a borehole.<sup>9</sup> It is alleged that the woman's throat was slit, while her husband was murdered with a sheep shear.

In another incident, it was reported that a woman was strangled to death after attackers had taken her hostage.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> One incident occurred at a lodge. The incident was therefore included with incidents on smallholdings.

<sup>5</sup> Davids, K. 2024. *Jong Vrystater op wildplaas in Noordwes vermoor*. Netwerk24, 28 October. Available at <https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/nuus/misdaad/jong-vrystater-op-wildplaas-in-noordwes-vermoor-20241028>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Madhomu, B. N.d. *'He was approached by a suspect at gunpoint' – Farmer found lifeless on main road*. African Insider. Available at <https://www.africaninsider.com/news/he-was-approached-by-a-suspect-at-gunpoint-farmer-found-lifeless-on-main-road/>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Van der Watt, E. 2024. *Talle vrae ná twee moorde Weskus ruk*. Maroela Media, 9 May. Available at <https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa-nuus/talle-vrae-na-twee-moorde-weskus-ruk/>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Cloete, C. 2024. *Local goat farmer brutally murdered*. *Vaalweekblad*, 11 July. Available at <https://www.citizen.co.za/vaalweekblad/news/news-news/2024/07/11/local-goat-farmer-brutally-murdered/>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Davids, K. 2024. *2 se verhoor uitgestel ná moorde op egpaar in Glen*. Netwerk24, 1 July. Available at <https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/nuus/hof/2-se-verhoor-uitgestel-na-moorde-op-egpaar-in-glen-20240701>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>10</sup> South African Police Service. 2024. *Office of the Provincial Commissioner Mpumalanga*. Media statement on 3 December. Available at <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=57573>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

The category “unknown” was assigned to 14% of cases, as the murder method was not reported. For example, it was reported in one incident that a murdered farmer’s body was found in a sugarcane field after he had been reported missing.<sup>11</sup>

Table 5: How farm murder victims were murdered

Means by which victims were murdered	Percentage of murders (rounded off)
Shot	51%
Assaulted/bludgeoned with object/weapon, incl. knives	32%
Strangled	3%
Unknown	14%

## Modus operandi of suspects

Suspects who carry out farm attacks and murders can either operate alone<sup>12, 13</sup> or in groups, which may range in size from two individuals to much larger groups. While the circumstances of attacks vary, suspects use a variety of tactics to carry out their attacks. They may cut fences to gain entry onto the premises or ambush victims while they go about their daily activities or enter or leave their farms and smallholdings. Suspects may strike at any time of the day – in the morning, evening or night.

Attackers frequently resort to violence or threats of violence during attacks. In some cases, they may also kidnap victims. In one incident a farmer was shot and killed, and his wife was taken hostage.<sup>14</sup> Suspects may use firearms, crowbars, knives, shovels, screwdrivers, sheep shears and pangas (a machete-like blade).

Items that are taken include firearms, cash, bank cards, jewellery and electronic goods such as laptops and cell phones. Suspects may escape on foot or in vehicles – in some cases, the victim’s own vehicle.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Marriah-Maharaj, J. 2024. *Missing KZN pensioner found dead, police arrest two parolees*. IOL, 3 June. Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/missing-kzn-pensioner-found-dead-police-arrest-two-parolees-54798f47-9108-419d-bef6-6a42d5740349>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>12</sup> South African Police Service. 2024. *Office of the Provincial Commissioner Northern Cape*. Media statement on 2 September. Available at <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=55535>. Accessed on 2 February 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Van der Watt, E. 2024. *Aanvaller skiet reaksiebeampte op plaas in Vrystaat dood*. Maroela Media, 18 December. Available at <https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa-nuus/aanvaller-skiet-reaksiebeampte-op-plaas-in-vrystaat-dood/>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>14</sup> South African Police Service. *Police investigate incident on a farm where husband was killed, wife kidnapped and one suspect shot by police*. Media statement on 8 December. Available at <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=57679>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Van der Spuy, M. 2024. *Ses verdagtes gesoek ná gewapende rooftog op Vrystaatse plaas*. Landbou.com, 1 March. Available at <https://www.landbou.com/landbou/nuus/ses-verdagtes-gesoek-na-gewapende-rooftog-op-vrystaatse-plaas-20240301>. Accessed on 4 May 2025.



## Apprehension of suspects

The apprehension rate for farm murder incidents, i.e. for suspects of farm attacks in which victims were murdered, is displayed in table 6. It is important to note that not all arrests are reported in the media or to AfriForum's Community Safety division. There is therefore a possibility that the true apprehension rate may be higher than what is currently reported.

As shown in table 6, a total of 30 farm murder incidents occurred in 2024, with apprehensions made in 14 of these cases. In the Northern Cape arrests were made in all three recorded farm murder incidents. The Free State recorded the second-highest apprehension rate. Suspects were apprehended in two of the three recorded farm murder incidents in KwaZulu-Natal as well as in Mpumalanga. No arrests have been made yet in Limpopo and the Western Cape for farm murders that were committed in these provinces in 2024.

Table 6: Apprehension for farm murders

Province	Number of farm murder incidents (incidents may involve multiple murder victims)	Number of farm murder incidents that resulted in apprehension	Rate (rounded off)
Eastern Cape	No murders recorded	-	-
Free State	4	3	75%
Gauteng	10	3	30%
KwaZulu-Natal	3	2	67%
Limpopo	1	0	0%
Mpumalanga	3	2	67%
Northern Cape	3	3	100%
North West	3	1	33%
Western Cape	3	0	0%

## Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to describe attacks and murders on farms and small holdings that occurred in 2024. It is noteworthy that farm attacks and murders declined substantially from 2023 to 2024. This is a favourable development and a continuation of the downward trend since 2022. The reasons for this decline are unknown and it remains to be seen if this trend will continue.

There were on average 14,6 attacks per month across the country in 2024, which were mostly concentrated in Gauteng, North West and the Eastern Cape. Therefore, it is essential for the SAPS

to work together with private security companies, civil safety structures and the farming community in their efforts to apprehend suspects. An example where such cooperation bore fruit is where suspects attacked a female farmer at her farmhouse in Gauteng.<sup>16</sup> Six suspects were apprehended by the SAPS within a matter of hours in cooperation with AfriForum's local neighbourhood watch, the local CPF and private security.

It should also be clear that, given how victims are attacked, the perpetrators of these attacks have no regard for life. Victims who survive such attacks have to live with the loss of loved ones and carry the wounds of trauma. AfriForum therefore encourages victims of farm attacks to reach out to AfriForum's trauma support unit, who are trained to debrief victims of crime.

The following recommendations are made based on the information presented in this report:

1. Efforts should be undertaken to determine the reasons behind the decline in farm attacks.
2. AfriForum should increase its community safety structures in Gauteng and the North West. This does not imply that other provinces should neglect the expansion of their safety initiatives, however.

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<sup>16</sup> Van der Watt, E. 2024. *Boervrou aangerand in plaasaanval terwyl kleinkind slaap*. Maroela Media, 5 December. Available at [https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa-nuus/boervrou-aangerand-in-plaasaanval-terwyl-kleinkind-slaap/?fbclid=IwZXhobgNhZW0CMTEAAR19xG5uZnlzEE-u3h7u3VNQjE2S-txoO3OujAnpmz2y5gVcEvIM11c09mo\\_aem\\_CzWRS8l4lXmFQTImiZNo6g](https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa-nuus/boervrou-aangerand-in-plaasaanval-terwyl-kleinkind-slaap/?fbclid=IwZXhobgNhZW0CMTEAAR19xG5uZnlzEE-u3h7u3VNQjE2S-txoO3OujAnpmz2y5gVcEvIM11c09mo_aem_CzWRS8l4lXmFQTImiZNo6g). Accessed on 4 May 2025.