MORE THAN ROBBERY

Violence during attacks on farms and smallholdings in South Africa (2019–2025)

AUGUST 2026

AfriForum

Content warning: This report contains details which might be traumatic for some readers.

If you are a survivor of a farm attack or a family member who is again experiencing emotional distress or trauma after reading this report, AfriForum's trauma unit can support you. The unit can be contacted on 064 870 8312 or at https://afriforum.co.za/veiligheid/afriforum-traumaeenheid/kontak-ons/.

Afrikaans quotations were translated to accommodate English readers. The original Afrikaans quotations can be found in the relevant sources.

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Introduction

AfriForum has taken a leading role in the fight against farm attacks and farm murders since its inception in 2006. This civil rights organisation's campaign to highlight and address farm attacks and murders is comprehensive. It focuses on increasing not only national but also international awareness of these crimes, most notably at institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the government of the United States of America (the US). The US especially has shown growing interest in the topic in recent years. At grass roots level, AfriForum has built community safety structures across South Africa to not only prevent or respond to farm attacks, but also to curb other crimes. These structures offer training, specialised reaction teams, drone assistance and trauma support. In addition, AfriForum also cooperates with other stakeholders such as private security firms, consultants and other organisations that also focus on farm attacks and murders.

AfriForum's stance is that farm attacks and farm murders require a unique counterstrategy. One of the characteristics that the organisation believes contributes to the unique character of farm attacks is the levels of torture and violence that are often associated with these crimes. It is of course true that not every farm attack involves torture. However, we highlight in this report that torture is a recurring theme in the farm attacks and murders that we discuss in this report, covering the period 2019–2025. The aim of the report is therefore to highlight incidents of torture that were associated with farm attacks and farm murders that occurred in the period under review.

Methodology

For this report, 47 incidents (which occurred between 2019 and 2025) were reviewed that involved torture, provided that there exists sufficient detail in the source(s) to draw such conclusions. For example, where victims of such attacks refer to *brutality*, the use of this word is considered sufficient to classify the attack as a form of torture.

Consequently, we adopt the South African Police Service's (SAPS's) definition of a *farm attack*, as set out in their *National rural safety strategy*.[1] The information in this report was collected from open-source information from media reports, among other forms of sources. Consequently, no formal consent from the victims is required. However, as many survivors of farm attacks and their family members continue to live with the consequences, AfriForum urges readers to approach the contents of this report with the necessary sensitivity and respect for the privacy and personal circumstances of these survivors.

The report is guided by two questions:

1. What forms or methods of violence were used during farm attacks and farm murders?
2. How are farm attacks and farm murders described by survivors, family members, employees and other parties, such as members of the SAPS and the courts?

Important theoretical points of departure

1. For the purposes of this report, *incident* or *case* refers to a single event, which may involve more than one victim and/or more than one attacker.
2. The term *victim* also includes people who survived the farm attack but excludes attackers who may have been injured or killed during the attack.

3. The terms *attackers* and *robbers* are used interchangeably throughout this report. However, the description of individual incidents does not necessarily include every aspect of the offence, including theft. Readers should therefore not assume that the absence of such details indicates that no theft had occurred, or – on the other hand – that the attack was committed solely for the purpose of inflicting violence.

What is torture?

The definition of torture varies between different countries[2] and organisations such as the UN, Amnesty International and the International Criminal Court. For this reason, it is necessary to provide a definition of torture that applies to this report and in the context of farm attacks. By leaning on both international and local definitions of torture, the following definition applies to torture:

> In the context of South African farm attacks, *torture* refers to the deliberate infliction of severe physical or psychological pain, suffering, brutality and/or violence on a victim during attacks on farms and smallholdings. Such pain, suffering, brutality and violence include among others severe beating, mutilation, burning, extortion, abuse, intimidation and sexual assault of at least one victim. The term *victim* includes the farmer, his/her family, workers and friends, or anyone who is legally present on the farm or smallholding during the attack.

Key findings

In reviewing the literature, the current researcher identified recurring patterns that are associated with farm attacks and farm murders that are referred to in this report. These patterns are presented under four key findings: 1) instruments of torture, 2) physical injuries, 3) extortion through torturing and 4) excessive violence. Incidents were grouped according to the finding that they fit best. However, many cases exhibit characteristics that can fit two or more of the findings.

Key finding 1: Instruments of torture

In the attacks that were reviewed, farm attackers were armed with a range of weapons, including knives, crowbars, spades, pangas (a machete-type knife) or other blunt objects. In cases where access was not gained under the guise of posing as potential buyers of produce or livestock, some of these weapons were also used to gain entry to premises (for example, crowbars).

Once inside, attackers sometimes also used whatever objects were available in the house to obtain their goals. These included kettles with boiling-hot water, clothes irons or cords, wires or pieces of clothing to restrain victims. For example, in the Hekpoort incident in August 2019, farm attackers used boiling water and a hot clothes iron to torture their victim, while another victim was assaulted with a spanner during a robbery incident.[3] However, in some instances, for example where blowtorches were used to torture victims, it is unclear whether attackers found these items on the property or brought these with them.

Flammable liquids were also used in some attacks. In the case of Andries Myburgh (31), who was attacked in October 2020 on his farm in the Koffiefontein district in the Free State, two attackers struck him with an object and attacked him with a knife outside his farmhouse. One of the attackers also poured petrol over him and set him alight. Realising that he was being consumed by fire, Myburgh jumped into his swimming pool to extinguish the flames.[4]

Firearms were also commonly used during farm attacks to intimidate and/or execute their victims. For example, in November 2021 Robert Stander was shot twice while trying to protect his fiancée, Mariaan Brits. When she emerged from the bathroom, the attackers hit her with a firearm. She pleaded with them to take their electronic equipment and leave, so that she could help her husband. However, the attackers replied that they did not want any equipment; that was not the purpose of their attack – they had already done what they had wanted to do. They then threw her onto the bed, where one of the attackers attempted to pull down her trousers before another intervened. Believing they had left, she later went outside to her vehicle, but the attackers returned, pointed their firearms at her head and forced her back into the house before fleeing.[5]

Key finding 2: Physical injuries

In the attacks that were reviewed, victims sustained various physical injuries due to assault. Their injuries included multiple stab wounds and severe beatings. Other injuries included broken arms, knees, ribs and jaws. Head injuries were also frequent and included skull fractures and severe brain trauma.

Johan Roos (63) suffered severe brain swelling and two skull fractures after being struck multiple times with a crowbar during an attack in January 2025 on his farm outside Stellenbosch.[6] Riaan Smit (53) was hit multiple times with a Stillson (or pipe) wrench during an attack in April 2019 on a smallholding in Muldersdrift. He sustained serious head injuries and later required treatment by a neurologist.[7] Bruce Brodie (55) and his family were assaulted by a group of attackers in De Doorns, Western Cape in March 2019. They tied up his mother, son and wife, and also threatened to rape his wife. Brodie's injuries were severe and he was later admitted to hospital with a skull fracture, broken jaw and concussion.[8, 9]

In another case, three people attacked Francis Davidson (74) in April 2023 on his farm near Nqanqarhu (formerly Maclear) in the Eastern Cape. He had to undergo two brain operations after he had been badly tortured during the attack.[10] A family member described Davidson, who had already suffered from Alzheimer's disease, as being in a "zombie-like state" after the attack.[11] During an ordeal that reportedly lasted about 12 hours,[12] Davidson was beaten with a wooden beam, tied up and burned. The attackers reportedly poured paraffin over him.[13] He also suffered severe head injuries and extensive muscle trauma.[14] When the attackers later appeared in court, it was revealed that he had burns covering approximately 15% of his body.[15] He died in intensive care nearly a month after the attack. This was the second time he was attacked on his farm.[16]

Other physical injuries, such as burn wounds caused by boiling water or blowtorches, were documented in several attacks investigated as part of this study. In July 2020 Schalk Coetzee (64) and his wife, Lana (63), were ambushed at their farmhouse near Reivilo in the North West. The attackers burned Schalk with boiling water and tied him up. They assaulted Lana and left her with a broken nose and fractured cheekbone.[17, 18]

Victims are sometimes humiliated. For example, in September 2021 Chris Barnard (63) and Hesta du Plessis (52) were tortured for hours by three attackers on Barnard's farm outside Koster. Du Plessis was burned with a hot iron and her hair cut with a knife; Barnard was repeatedly beaten with a sjambok and a crowbar.[19, 20, 21]

There were also incidents where victims were burned to death. Louis Cloete (74) and his wife, Ina

(66), were attacked in April 2022 on their farm in the Levubu region. They were later found tied up and burned beyond recognition after attackers set their home alight.[22]

Some cases of rape were also reported. A farmer (77) and his farm workers were assaulted in March 2020 near Belfast, Mpumalanga. Later, the farmer's wife was tortured with a blowtorch and raped with an object.[23] In 2019, a 17-year-old girl and her father were admitted to hospital after a group of attackers overpowered them on their farm near Fochville in Gauteng. The girl was raped, and her father was repeatedly hit on the head.[24]

Due to the severity of their injuries, many victims of the attacks that were reviewed for this report required urgent medical intervention and/or were hospitalised. However, the geographical location of some farms and smallholdings can make access to emergency care difficult. Pietro Mahne (74) and her 77-year-old husband, At, were attacked in November 2025 on their farm in Baltimore, Limpopo. Pietro was overpowered outside their house, tied up and assaulted. When At later returned from the cattle kraal, he was ambushed by two attackers. His body was later found in a pool of blood inside the house. According to a private investigator, "[t]here was a lot of blood at one of the doors of the house." The attackers repeatedly assaulted him with multiple objects, hitting his body and head before tying his hands behind his back with baling wire. After the attack, Pietro managed to call for help. Neighbours rushed her to a hospital more than 140 km from the farm.[25, 26]

36-year-old farmer Natie Vos was attacked and tortured in January 2025 in front of his wife and their three young children on their farm outside Musina, Limpopo. The family was tied up and robbed. Natie suffered severe head injuries after the attackers repeatedly beat him with a hammer and golf clubs. Initially, he had to be airlifted to hospital, but adverse weather prevented this. He was then transported by ambulance to a hospital 200 km from their farm.[27]

In July 2024 a member of a farm watch group brought 65-year-old farm manager Gerhard Nel to hospital with stab wounds to his neck, back and chest. He was attacked near Porterville in the Western Cape. The assailants ransacked the farmhouse and tied up his wife, Barbara (63).[28] There was no doctor available to treat him immediately, and he died later that night from his injuries.[29]

Key finding 3: Extortion through torture

The third key finding concerns the use of pain and fear as a means of extortion. After gaining access to victims' homes or property, attackers frequently tied victims up to subject them to torture. This torture is aimed at forcing the victims to comply with their demands for items such as money, firearms or keys to a safe.

"The one man actually had fun laughing at us. They were enjoying themselves and took pleasure in torturing us," recounted Stephanus Botha (24), one of three victims who survived an attack and torture in October 2025 along with 70-year-old Roulé Uys and a security guard in Carolina, Mpumalanga.[30] The attackers ransacked the farmhouse while demanding money and firearms. During an interview, Uys explained that one of the attackers kept hitting her in the face, asking for money and weapons: "Where is the money you keep in the house? […] Tell me where the weapons are!" one of the attackers kept demanding. Uys was scalded with boiling water.[31] During the ordeal, she was repeatedly assaulted and sustained a broken rib after being kicked. She was also hit over the head with an object. One attacker also threatened to inject them with a dirty syringe containing an unknown substance.[32] Both Botha and the security guard were kidnapped, with the attackers fleeing

the scene with Roulé's truck, weapons and some cash.[33]

Simoné van Niekerk (31) and Vinolia Sedibe (41) were attacked on a smallholding near Lydenburg, Mpumalanga, in late 2024.[34] "They dragged her into the veld, tied her to a tree, and continued striking her with the panga until she gave them the PIN for the bank card," explained Van Niekerk's father. The attackers held the two women hostage and forced Van Niekerk to open a safe, threatening to rape her if she refused. When they found no money in the safe, they took Van Niekerk's money but left the firearms behind.[35] Sedibe's body was found outside the house with her wrist tied behind her back. She was probably strangled. Two suspects were arrested shortly afterwards and charged.[36]

In February 2024, 48-year-old Hayden Luck and his four employees were attacked on Luck's farm outside East London in the Eastern Cape by robbers who posed as prospective dog buyers.[37] The attackers bound Luck with duct tape, forced him into his truck and drove him back to the farmhouse. His domestic worker and another employee were also tied up. The attackers repeatedly hit Luck with firearms, punched and kicked him, while demanding money and the keys to his ammunition safe. His domestic worker was also hit with a gun and forced to phone Luck's wife to obtain the keys. The attackers then waterboarded Luck, a form of torture that simulates drowning, before forcing him into a bath of hot water. Luck later explained: "They put a towel over my head, poured cold water over me so I couldn't breathe, to try and get information out of me." The attackers also threatened to dismember him with a chainsaw and held a knife to his throat and threatened to kill him. [38] The attackers fled with firearms, vehicles, and other stolen property. Two of the attackers were arrested after a police pursuit that ended in a collision in which 16 people were injured.[39]

"You do not want to see what my grandfather's face looks like today." These were the words of an "angry" grandson after his grandfather, grandmother and other family members had survived an attack in May 2022 on their family farm near Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal. Four attackers arrived at the family-owned farm, pretending to buy groceries. After the 72-year-old grandfather had entered the house to fetch a glass of water, the attackers followed him inside and drew their firearms. He was beaten, kicked, shocked with a taser and scalded with boiling water. His wife and young grandson (15), who had been tied up in the kitchen, were forced to watch. The grandmother and grandson were subsequently also tortured because the attackers demanded money. They later fled with cash, cell phones and jewellery.[40]

In January 2021, 77-year-old farm foreman Simon Makhotha survived an attack on a farm near Zastron in the Free State after three attackers entered his home while he was asleep. The attackers demanded access to the main farmhouse. After failing to open the safe, they stole solar panels and groceries. According to a spokesperson for Free State Agriculture, he (Makhotha) was assaulted and stabbed before the attackers tried to drown him in the farmhouse's septic tank. He was kicked and pelted with stones when he resisted them from keeping his head under the sewage water.[41] After hours of torture, Makhotha managed to free himself the following morning, where neighbours found him. He was later admitted to the hospital. All the stolen items were later found abandoned in a nearby field.[42, 43]

84-year-old Hester Esterhuizen was attacked on a farm outside Bronkhorstspruit in November 2021. Her attackers demanded money and firearms. She later stated that the attackers dragged her from room to room: "They spent most of the night with me. I was abused by them. All my rooms were in chaos, and they took most of my belongings." She was assaulted and burned with hot water and a blowtorch on her hands and feet in what she perceived as an attempt to "force her into submission"

to hand over money and firearms on the property. The attackers eventually fled the scene in Hester's vehicle filled with their loot from the attack, including furniture, electronics, and household goods, but were apprehended by police.[44]

In an attack that took place on a smallholding in Boschkop, outside Pretoria, in November 2019, four attackers demanded the keys to a safe that contained a firearm. When Ansu de Villiers (74) did not comply, the attackers cut the electrical cords from lamps and used the wires to tie up De Villiers and Rina Kritzinger (64). They poured boiling water over De Villiers's legs. They also pistol-whipped De Villiers while interrogating her about the keys to the safe. During the attack, Rina's husband, Gerhard (64), was shot and killed.[45] "I feel so sorry for Rina […] I asked that she should not turn Gerhard over, because he was lying on his stomach. One could only see the good side," De Villiers explained later. According to her daughter Gerhard was immediately shot in the chest – there was no interaction or talking.[46] The attackers later escaped with a TV, two mobile phones and some jewellery. De Villiers's daughter would later remark, "Was it really worth murdering for this?"[47]

In July 2019, four attackers overpowered two families on a smallholding in Kameeldrift East outside Pretoria. Jurie Kolbé (70), who lived on the smallholding on the property, was dragged to the main house where the incident unfolded. The attackers tied up two couples and their children who had been staying in the guest houses on the smallholding. Kolbé survived after being kicked, beaten and burned with boiling water over his stomach. At one point he was suffocated with a large plastic bag in an attempt to find out where the keys to a safe were. Later on, Kolbé managed to free himself and shot one of the attackers. The other attackers managed to flee with cell phones, cash, and wristwatches. "My uncle was in a terrible state [last night] […] after everything that happened," remarked Zelda Brown, the niece of Kolbé.[48, 49]

The attack on and murder of Pierre (59) and Belinda de Kock (56) is another example of extortion by attackers to obtain what they want. In June 2023, the couple were found dead by farm workers on their farm near Velddrif in the Western Cape.[50] They had only been seen two days earlier. Belinda's body was found in the bathroom by one of the couple's shop assistants, while her dog reportedly stood guard beside her. Her throat had been slit. Pierre's body was discovered in the shop garage, lying in a pool of blood near a freezer, with a stab wound to his neck. One of the attackers was later arrested and convicted. The De Kocks were apparently tortured and forced to transfer R230 000 into two of the perpetrators' bank accounts before they were murdered.[51]

Not all acts of torture are necessarily physical by nature. Consider the attack on Niël Bierman (47), his wife, Sonja (43), and their three children, aged 13, 10 and 6. The family was attacked in November 2021 on their farm near Ogies, Mpumalanga. They were deceived by people who enquired about accommodation before seven armed attackers entered the farmhouse and held them hostage. Niël was tied up and Sonja forced through the house as the attackers searched for money and the keys to the safe. After discovering that the safe contained only firearms, the attackers attempted to force the family's six-year-old son into the kitchen oven while, as Sonja recalled, the restrained Niël watched "in fear". Although the family escaped without serious physical injuries, they were left severely traumatised.[52]

Key finding 4: Excessive violence

The fourth finding highlights the disproportionate level of violence inflicted on victims that extends beyond what would be required to facilitate a robbery. The evidence points to a recurring pattern of

excessive torture, reflected not only in the injuries that victims sustained, but also in the accounts of first responders, survivors, victims' families and friends, agricultural organisations, and members of SAPS and the criminal justice system.

First responders

First responders are often among the first to witness the aftermath of farm attacks. Their accounts provide insight into the severity of the torture that victims had to endure.

"The aunty […] was […] repeatedly hit over the head. […] Among other things, the aunty's jaw was broken and the uncle's ribs were kicked off," recalled a member of AfriForum's neighbourhood watch. The neighbourhood watch member responded to the attack on Willie (79) and Elmarie (75) Pistorius on their farm outside Brits in the North West on New Year's Eve in 2021.[53] The full extent of the attack would later emerge in an interview that Willie gave to Maroela Media: "When they held the firearm against my head, I was not afraid [...]. But it was awful when they started looking for matches, because I know it is a dreadful suffering to burn to death." Besides dousing Willie with petrol and attempting to set him alight, Willie was also beaten and stabbed in the abdomen. At the same time, Elmarie was repeatedly hit with the butt of a rifle. The attackers attempted twice to shoot Willie at gunpoint, but the firearm failed to discharge. The attackers then fled with cash.[54]

An emergency response member attended the scene where cattle farmer Jan Dhooge (75) and his wife, Elna (72), were attacked in Heidelberg, Gauteng, in October 2025. He later commented: "They were put through hell for about two or three hours before we were notified." He also stated that the attackers "tore the whole house apart". Jan came to his wife's aid when she cried out in distress after she had been overpowered by five attackers. Elna was severely assaulted, sustaining multiple facial fractures that later required specialist medical treatment. When Jan intervened, the attackers shot him in the neck. He survived by pretending to be dead. The suspects fled with firearms, cash and the couple's vehicle, which was later recovered by the SAPS.[55]

In July 2022, a representative of Lepat Farming came across the body of farm guard Petros Shivuri in a suspected stock theft incident at the irrigation dam on a farm in Fochville, Gauteng. "He was tortured throughout the night and [then] murdered," recalled the representative. It was believed that he had been ambushed while carrying out his night patrol. Shivuri's body was found with his hands and feet tied, baling twine wrapped around his head and neck, and with multiple stab wounds. He had reportedly been dragged some distance while he was only in his undergarments before being left with his head against the side of the dam.[56]

Victims

Sometimes first responders themselves are targeted during farm attacks. A security officer who had responded to an attack on a smallholding in Randfontein in August 2024 was shot and killed in full view of the victims.[57] "He immediately fell to the ground and lay there motionless. I think it was around 20:10," explained Sylvia Calitz (41), one of the victims in the attack. The attackers held several victims hostage (including children) and repeatedly raped one of the females.

"I am aware of the increase in attacks on farms and smallholdings, but I have not come across brutality like this for a long time. I cannot believe that one human being can do this to another," remarked the owner of a chicken farm whose employee, Johan Du Plessis (60), was attacked on a

smallholding in the Hartbeespoort area in December 2019. Du Plessis was found in a "pool of blood, beaten black and blue, with a piece of his ear cut off" and was admitted to the hospital.[58]

In April 2024 Clint Christians (57) called out his final words to his wife, Lisle (55): "Lisle, come help me, or we are not going to make it!"[59] The couple had just returned from town to their smallholding in Vredenburg, Western Cape, when they were ambushed by two attackers at the front door of their home. The attackers were armed with a screwdriver and a panga. Lisle was kicked, beaten and stabbed in the back with the screwdriver. The attackers also tried to chop off her fingers with the panga in an attempt to steal her rings. As she lay on the ground, she witnessed the attackers torturing Clint. Despite her injuries and blood-soaked clothes, Lisle later managed to escape and run to the road and flag down a passing motorist for help. She was then admitted to hospital.

"I stood there and witnessed everything," said a shocked Wessel Kriek (77), the owner of a smallholding in the Northern Cape, after he was forced to watch how Andries Jacobs (39), his farm foreman, was hacked to death in June 2022.[60] Jacobs's head was crushed with a rock by an intruder. Kriek had called Jacobs for assistance after the intruder demanded money and a firearm.

In December 2020 71-year-old Mariaan Nieuwoudt and her husband, Dries (75), were attacked by three criminals on their smallholding in Dinokeng, Gauteng. "I would not have been able to breathe, but fortunately my head was still bleeding," she said.[61] The blood from her wounds soaked the tape that was used to tie her up, and she was able to remove it. Mariaan was hit over the head with a steel pipe before the attackers dragged her into the house. Her hands were tied and the attackers put a piece of cloth and plastic over her mouth with adhesive tape before locking her in one of the bathrooms. When Dries returned home, he was attacked and later died from his injuries. Mariaan remained trapped in the bathroom for two nights – bloodied, injured and bound with wire before she was found. All three perpetrators were later arrested and sentenced.[62]

Family, employees and friends

Carmen Hanekom said that she could not believe the nerve of the murderer of her mother, Anneke Claassen (76), and her mother's life partner, Hennie Claassen (77): "It feels like the way he was laughing at us is sitting inside my body."[63] She referred to the way that her mother's murderers smiled at the family while being sentenced in late August 2025. The court heard that the attack had been planned for months.[64] In June 2023, the couple were robbed and murdered on their farm near Ohrigstad, Limpopo.[65] Evidence showed that the attacker travelled from Gauteng the previous day and hid in bushes near the farmhouse before ambushing the couple. Anneke suffered burns to approximately 85% of her body, which is believed to have caused her death. Hennie sustained multiple deep wounds, severe blunt-force head trauma and burns that covered about 41% of his lower body.

In July 2020, the bodies of Breggie (73), her husband Dan (83), and their daughter Elzabie Brand (54) were discovered after a search was launched because the family had disappeared from their smallholding in Hartswater near Taung in the Northern Cape. During the subsequent trial, it was revealed that the family were murdered before the attackers loaded their bodies into the family's stolen vehicles and concealed them in different locations in the veld.[66] Elzabie was strangled to death, and Breggie's throat was slit. Dan was found tied to a tree with at least 11 wounds to his head. The attackers also stole cell phones, laptops and other personal belongings, some of which were later pawned.[67, 68] During the trial of the murderers of the Brand family in what became known as the Hartswater murders, Heidie Taljaard, the sister of Elzabie, asked:[69] "What kind of people torture

defenceless people in such a gruesome manner and leave their broken bodies in the veld? The men could simply have stolen the vehicles and spared our loved ones' lives. They have also destroyed our lives."

Robert Horner found the body of his murdered son, Brendin Horner (21), in October 2020 on a farm near Paul Roux in the Free State.[70] An autopsy established that Brendin had died of strangulation. He also had stab wounds to his head, shoulder, arms and hands, and his body was dragged and tied to a pole.[71] His father found his body next to an iron pole. "But that is not right," the father said.

In January 2020 Timothy Rademeyer (51) and his partner, Dirkie Voges (61), were overpowered by four intruders while asleep on their farm in Bapsfontein, Gauteng. Rademeyer was strangled with a scarf. Voges was beaten and suffered a ruptured eardrum and concussion. Despite her injuries, Voges managed to free herself and crawl to the farm gate, where someone from a neighbouring farm found her. Rademeyer was inside the house in a critical condition, and the paramedics had to cut the scarf from around his neck. The attackers fled with tools, a cell phone and R300 in cash.[72] "The suspects tortured Rademeyer, mutilating his genitals, while Voges was tied up and beaten inside the house," explained Voges' son, Rudi.[73]

"It was not something you wanted to see; he was badly hurt," was how a friend described the "horribly mutilated" body of Moolman Meyer (67), a father of four, who was found in June 2019 next to his tractor in a plantation on his farm near Ermelo, Mpumalanga.[74] According to a friend, blood spatter was visible on the tractor's wheel, while Meyer's body had sustained extensive injuries. He had multiple deep slash and cut wounds to his head, body and arms. The friend described how Meyer had been "hacked to pieces with a panga", adding that there were slash wounds between his fingers,[75] which suggest that he had tried to defend himself during the attack. The farmhouse was ransacked, and the attackers fled with firearms and cell phones.

Agricultural organisations

In May 2025 the body of the 78-year-old Robert Stoltz was found on a farm in Roossenekal in what was described as an "inhuman" scene. "That brutality […] what we saw […] it was unnecessary," remarked a TLU-SA representative who attended the scene, referring to the level of violence weighed against the items stolen.[76] Stoltz was overwhelmed; his hands were tied behind his back with wire and he was dragged into the house on a dog blanket. A piece of cloth was stuffed into his mouth, and he was stabbed twice with a sharp object.[77]

"He was severely beaten with iron bars before they slit his throat," stated the Southern African Agri Initiative regarding the "horrendous" attack on 79-year-old farmer Theo Bekker and his wife Marlinda, who were tied up and assaulted on their farm in July 2023 in Balfour, Mpumalanga. The suspects fled with firearms, cash and the couple's vehicle. They were arrested later that day after the stolen vehicle overturned in the Free State.[78]

The SAPS and the criminal justice system

He observed blood stains and an electric drill and angle-grinder lying on the floor.[79] This was the statement from a seasoned SAPS officer, who was called out to the scene of Tool (53) and Liezel (51) Wessels. The couple was attacked on their wine farm near Bonnievale in the Western Cape in May 2019 in what the court would describe as a "meticulously planned murder".[80] The officer was

"shocked by the brutality" and "had sleepless nights" thereafter. During the ordeal, which lasted for several hours, the couple were stabbed, beaten and burned with boiling water. The attackers demanded money and firearms. At some stage the attackers tried to use an angle grinder to torture the couple, but the grinder did not work.[81] Liezel was beaten unconscious. Tool was taken from the farmhouse to a pump house, where he was executed with a gun. He was found seated against a wall with his hands tied behind his back and a necktie forced through his mouth. The attackers fled with firearms and a large amount of cash. Liezel later regained consciousness, managed to call for help and was admitted to the hospital.[82]

In September 2022 Marthinus Richter (68) and his wife, Elsie (67), were overpowered by a group of robbers at their farm in Vygeboompoort.[83, 84] "The robbers murdered Marthinus, after which his wife was tortured with a red-hot object. The house was ransacked, after which the robbers fled with two televisions, firearms, cell phones and tools. They fled with the loot in the couple's Volkswagen Amarok in the direction of Bela-Bela," was how the SAPS described the "nightmare experience". A family member mentioned that Marthinus had been taken to the nearby river, where he was killed, before Elsie was abducted and later abandoned elsewhere. She eventually walked back to the farmhouse and called for help.

"Bloody" was how the SAPS described the scene in which seven victims were murdered on a farm near Kestell in the Free State in July 2022.[85] The victims were Sesi Smith (53), Rhudie Binta (17), Portia Monareng (30), Lerato Julia Moloi (33), Mothoduwa Paulina Moloi (36), Nomasonto Christina Zulu (56), and Nomasontsha Topsy Maduna(43).[86] The SAPS reported that some victims had sustained multiple stab wounds while others had gunshot wounds; two of the women were sexually assaulted.[87] A ward councillor who rushed to the scene said: "I never thought that the kind of brutality we see on television would one day happen in my ward."[88] Later, when a family member of Rhudie was asked to identify his body, she stated that she could not see his body because "he was terribly injured. They burnt him with hot water ... hence we were not allowed to see him."[89]

During the trial of a 17-year-old attacker, the court heard that he had deliberately targeted 79-year-old Valerie Enzer in July 2025 because he had known she lived alone. Enzer was discovered on the veranda of her farmhouse near Van Wyksdorp. She had been assaulted and raped, and while she was incapacitated, her attacker strangled her with a metal chain. He then stole several items from the property, including her laptop, cell phone, purse, and handbag. He later used her bank card to buy things, and distributed some of the stolen property to other people.[90]

Upon viewing the SAPS photos of 76-year-old Christo Morrison and his 73-year-old wife, Christa, acting judge Nompumelelo Gloria Gusha said: "I have seen many photographs of bodies during my career, but looking at these photographs was extremely difficult for me." She continued: "No person deserves to be attacked and murdered in this way." The Morrisons were robbed and murdered in May 2024 on their farm near Glen in the Free State.[91] Christo was overpowered and stabbed with sheep shears. Christa was tied to a chair in the farmhouse and tortured with a stun gun, forcing her to transfer R118 000 into one of the attackers' bank account. She was hit over her head with an iron, and her throat was slit. Christa's half-naked body was found in a septic pit, and Christo's body was discovered in a borehole.[92]

A "premeditated crime executed with extreme violence" was how prosecutors described the murder of 35-year-old farmer Nicolaas Janse van Rensburg in October 2022.[93] Janse van Rensburg was murdered on Derdekraal Farm near Roedtan, Limpopo. Three attackers arrived at the farm under the false

pretence of buying milk. Once inside the house, they overpowered a 15-year-old boy, tied him up, held a firearm to his head and demanded the keys to the safe. When Janse van Rensburg and his partner, Veronica Grobler, returned home, the attackers also held them at gunpoint and tortured Janse van Rensburg before forcing him to surrender the safe keys. He was then kneecapped and executed in the head. It was reported at the trial that Veronica had also been raped by one of the attackers.[94] The attackers fled with firearms, cell phones, computer equipment and other valuables, leaving Grobler and the boy tied up until help arrived the following day.[95]

Judge John Smith used the words "carnage and madness" to describe the attack before sentencing the men who were responsible for the brutal murder of 28-year-old Vuyiswa Mali and the torture of her life partner, 37-year-old stockman Bulelani Tshaka in March 2020. After they had witnessed three men stealing cattle, Tshaka and Mali were confronted by the attackers. Tshaka was stabbed, forced to drink cattle dip and repeatedly struck with a spade, which shattered his skull. It was later reported that Tshaka drank as much of the cattle dip as possible in an attempt to spare Mali from the same ordeal. The attackers then stabbed Mali, strangled her so fiercely that her hyoid bone fractured, and hanged her from a beam inside her home.[96]

Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to highlight individual incidents of torture that were committed on farms and smallholdings from 2019 to 2025. We aimed to include as many direct quotations as possible (where available) from victims, family members, friends, agricultural organisations, the SAPS and members of the South African criminal justice system to highlight the experience of individuals affected by acts of torture present in farm attacks.

The key findings in this report point to a recurring pattern of severe physical and mental pain and suffering, inflicted by attackers who use a variety of tools, extortion through torture and excessive violence. Although the report includes only 47 incidents, they are not geographically isolated to one region or to one particular year. This indicates a widespread phenomenon.

Considering the quotations that are contained in this report, one could argue that farm attacks are indeed extraordinary crimes. This argument is perhaps best articulated by one family member who said that "the violence with which the attack was carried out once again makes one realise that this was not an ordinary house robbery."[97] Indeed, even opposition parties[98] and agricultural organisations[99] expressed the view that farm attacks should be a priority crime for government, in part due to the torture that characterises these incidents. This sentiment corresponds with AfriForum's viewpoint.

The incidents in this report serve as a reminder that farm attacks and farm murders are a reality in South Africa. Victims were subjected to violence of differing nature that are universally recognised as acts of torture. Moreover, many survivors and family members might continue to experience the psychological effects of these attacks. Although not every farm attack in South Africa that had occurred between 2019 and 2025 was characterised by torture, the severe nature of these attacks over the period under review supports AfriForum's view that farm attacks warrant a unique approach by the South African government.

List of victims

2019, 14 March: Brodie, Bruce (55), Louise (54) and Philip (25), and an unidentified female (unknown age), De Doorns, Western Cape

2019, 7 April: Smit, Riaan Juan (53), Muldersdrift, Gauteng

2019, 13 May: Wessels, Tool (53) and Liezel (51), Bonnievale, Western Cape

2019, 20 May: Unidentified child (17) and male (55), Fochville, Gauteng

2019, 12 June: Meyer, Moolman (67), Ermelo, Mpumalanga (was last seen on 8 June 2019; his body was discovered on 12 June 2019)

2019, 5 July: Kolbé, Jurie (70), along with (reportedly six) guests, Kameeldrift East, Gauteng

2019, 16 August: Two unidentified males (62 and unknown age) and unidentified female (unknown age), Hekpoort, Gauteng

2019, 19 November: Kritzinger, Gerhard (64) and Rina (64), and De Villiers, Ansu (74), Donkerhoek, Gauteng

2019, 3 December: Du Plessis, Johan (60), Hartbeespoort, North West

2020, 29 January: Rademeyer, Timothy (51) and Voges, Dirkie (61), Bapsfontein, Gauteng

2020, 9 March: Mali, Vuyiswa (28) and Tshaka, Bulelani (37), Alexandria, Eastern Cape

2020, 26 March: Unidentified male (77), female (unknown age) and farm workers (unknown number and ages), Belfast, Mpumalanga

2020, 6 June: Coetzee, Schalk (64) and Lana (63), Reivilo, North West

2020, 26 July: Brand, Breggie (73), Dan (83) and Elzabie (54), Hartswater (Taung), Northern Cape (suspected to have been murdered on 26 July 2020; the bodies were discovered on 28 July 2020)

2020, 1 October: Horner, Brendin (21), Paul Roux, Free State

2020, 12 October: Myburgh, Andries (31), Koffiefontein, Free State

2020, 21 December: Nieuwoudt, Dries (75) and Mariaan (71), Dinokeng, Gauteng

2021, 17 January: Makhotha, Simon (77), Zastron, Free State

2021, 8 September: Barnard, Chris (62) and Du Plessis, Hesta (52), Koster, North West

2021, 2 November: Brits, Mariaan (unknown age) and Stander, Robert (unknown age), Muldersdrift, Gauteng

2021, 4 November: Esterhuizen, Hester (84), Bronkhorstspruit, Gauteng

2021, 27 November: Bierman, Niël (47), Sonja (43), Daniel (13), Jacobus (10) and Gideon (6), Ogies, Mpumalanga

2021, 31 December: Pistorius, Willie (79) and Elmarie (75), Brits, North West

2022, 20 April: Cloete, Louis (74) and Ina (66), Levubu, Limpopo

2022, 10 May: Unidentified male (72), female (unknown age) and child (15), Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal

2022, 13 June: Jacobs, Andries (39), Kriek, Wessel (77) and Valerie (76), Danielskuil, Northern Cape

2022, 15 July: Smith, Sesi (53), Binta, Rhudie (17), Monareng, Portia (30), Moloi, Lerato Julia (33), Zulu, Nomasonto Christina (56) and Maduna, Nomasontsha Topsy (43), Kestell, Free State

2022, 27 July: Shivuri, Petros (70), Fochville, Gauteng

2022, 6 September: Richter, Marthinus (68) and Richter, Elsie (67), Vygeboompoort, Limpopo

2022, 7 October: Janse van Rensburg, Nicolaas (35), unidentified female (unknown age) and child (15), Roedtan, Limpopo

2023, 26 April: Davidson, Francis (74), Nqanqarhu (formerly Maclear), Eastern Cape

2023, 2 June: De Kock, Pierre (59) and Belinda (56), Velddrif, Western Cape

2023, 3 June: Claassen, Anneke (76) and Claassen, Hennie (77), Ohrigstad, Limpopo

2023, 30 July: Bekker, Theo (79) and Marlinda (unknown age), Balfour, Mpumalanga

2024, 20 February: Luck, Hayden (48) and Yekani, Bongani, Veni, Maboy, Gelem, Zameka, and Khangelana, Andile (all unknown ages), Mooiplaas, Eastern Cape

2024, 13 April: Christians, Clint (57) and Lisle (55), Vredenburg, Western Cape

2024, 3 May: Morrison, Christo (76) and Christa (73), Glen, Free State

2024, 1 July: Nel, Gerhard (65) and Nel, Barbara (63), Porterville, Western Cape

2024, 31 August: Nortje, Jacques (unknown age) and Calitz, Sylvia (41), an unidentified male (19), three unidentified children (ages 16, 13 and 2) and reportedly 17 unidentified guests (all unknown ages), Randfontein, Gauteng

2024, 2 December: Sedibe, Vinolia (41) and Van Niekerk, Simoné (31), Mashishing (previously Lydenburg), Mpumalanga

2025, 8 January: Vos, Natie (36), Jean-Mari (34) and three unidentified children (unknown ages), Musina, Limpopo

2025, 9 January: Roos, Johan (63) and Lucille (62), Stellenbosch, Western Cape

2025, 1 May: Stoltz, Robert (78), Roossenekal, Limpopo (suspected to have been murdered on 30 April; his body was discovered on 1 May 2025)

2025, 14 July: Enze, Valerie (79), Van Wyksdorp, Western Cape

2025, 11 October: Uys, Roulé (70), Botha, Stephanus (24) and unidentified security guard (unknown age), Carolina, Mpumalanga

2025, 28 October: Dhooge, Jan (75) and Elna (72), Heidelberg, Gauteng

2025, 29 November: Mahne, At (77) and Pietro (74), Baltimore, Limpopo

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