Almost 200 years ago, in 1829, the world’s first police force was created by Sir Robert Peel. These police members were authorised to protect the citizens of London and were financed by taxpayers. These days, in modern democracies, citizens who are taxpayers and who are therefore funding police agencies, be they national or metropolitan, expect to live in an orderly and peaceful society. In South Africa though, many taxpayers feel that they don't get enough "bang for their money" and mostly do one of two things: they either climb onto the criticism bandwagon (mostly by ranting via social media or by being armchair critics) or they roll up their sleeves and get involved in the fight against crime.

In South Africa, many citizens argue that the state is too weak to fulfil its responsibility of keeping its citizens safe. Their argument is based on our extremely high crime rates, especially when it comes to violent crimes, and people’s lack of faith in government and the SAPS to effectively fight crime and create a safe country. The results of the Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS) 2016/2017 (see below) show that households’ confidence in police services and courts has been gradually eroding over the years. The vast majority of households (59%), which held negative attitudes about the police, felt that the police could not recover stolen goods, while those that were disgruntled with court services said that courts were too lenient towards criminals. This has led to many individuals and organisations identifying alternative ways to safeguard themselves - mostly either by paying for private security providers; opting for mob justice or establishing variants of neighbourhood watches.

A year ago, on 6 September 2016, the South African Institute for Race Relations (IRR) and the civil rights organisation AfriForum released a report entitled “Winning the war on crime in South Africa: a new approach to community policing”. At the time, Ian Cameron, the Head of Community Safety at AfriForum, noted that the Back to Basics approach to policing of (the then) Acting National Commissioner of the SAPS, Lt-Gen Khomotso Phahlane, could only succeed if it was done in conjunction with communities.

**South Africa’s crime situation**

There is no doubt that South Africa has one of the highest murder rates in the world, with 19 016 murders, at an average of 52.1 murders per day, being committed according to the SAPS’s crime statistics for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. This indicates a 1.8% increase in murders compared to the previous report year’s 18 673 murders.

Murder is one of the few crimes which can be used as a reliable benchmark with which to compare safety and security levels among different countries, since there is relative consistency in its legal definition and it is one of the most widely reported crimes, while different countries have different crime reporting rates and different levels of efficiency when it comes to crime recording. Many analysts prefer to use murder rates as stated per 100 000 of the population for comparison purposes. When murder rates per 100 000 of 2013 are compared between different countries in order to see where South Africa fits into this picture, the situation is as follows:
and that many victims are predominantly involved in crimes such as street robbery. The study further revealed that knives were used in 36.3% of murders, followed by firearms (32.1%) and other sharp objects (11.1%) (Nhleko, 2016).

Many criminologists and analysts have held the opinion that police statistics are not necessarily accurate, and that many victims are increasingly unlikely to report crimes to the police. The latter is exacerbated by various factors ranging from people’s disillusionment about the police’s ability or willingness to investigate crime to the distance between, and lack of accessibility of, police stations, especially in rural areas. According to the VOCS 2016/2017, 51% of victims of housebreakings reported the crime to the police. Those who did not, together accounting for 60% of the households, stated either that the “police could do nothing” or “the police would do nothing”. Of the households that reported housebreaking to the police, 38% were satisfied with police response. Unfortunately, the general public often don’t realise that by not reporting crime incidents to the police, they hamper the police’s ability to compile accurate statistics, which is crucial for planning effective interventions against crime (VOCS 2016/2017).

The Victims of Crime Survey 2016/2017 in more detail

For the past couple of years, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) has been releasing a Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS) which is a countrywide household-based survey with three main objectives:

- to provide information about the dynamics of crime from the perspective of households and the victims of crime;
- to explore public perceptions of the activities of the police, prosecutors, courts and correctional services in the prevention of crime and victimisation; and
- to provide additional data on the level of crime within South Africa to complement the statistics published annually by the South African Police Service (SAPS).

The VOCS 2016/2017, which was released at the end of September 2017, found that crime experienced by households and individuals aged 16 years and older decreased between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017. The VOCS focuses on people’s perceptions and experiences of crime, as well as their views regarding their access to, and the effectiveness of, the police service and the criminal justice system. Each year, households are also asked about community responses to crime. The VOCS focuses on 11 types of household crime, namely theft of motor vehicles; housebreaking or burglary; home robbery; theft of livestock/poultry and other animals; theft of crops planted by households; murder; trafficking in persons; theft out of motor vehicles; deliberate damaging/burning/destruction of dwellings; motor vehicle vandalism or deliberate damage of motor vehicles; and theft of bicycles. It also focuses on seven types of crimes against individuals that can be violent or non-violent in nature, such as theft of personal property; hijacking of motor vehicles; robbery; sexual offences; assault; consumer fraud; and corruption.

According to this survey, an estimated 1 468 200 million crime incidents were experienced by approximately 1 153 980 million households during 2016/2017 - this represents approximately 7% of households in South Africa, compared to about 9% of households in 2015/2016. Housebreaking has been the most common crime, with 53% of households experiencing this crime type; followed by theft of livestock (11%) and home robbery (10%). Since housebreaking/burglary is also the most feared crime among households in South Africa, it does not come as a surprise that 51% of households are actively taking measures to protect their homes and their vehicles (41%). Theft of personal property tops the individual crime list at 42%, followed by assault at 18% and robbery at 16%. It is estimated that more than 54% of households lost electronic equipment while 29% of households lost cellphones during housebreakings in 2016/2017. Cellphones, however, topped the list of items lost through theft of personal property for 84% of victims.

As has been noted, there has been a decrease in some crime types, with housebreaking decreasing by 8%, house robbery decreasing by 25% and theft of personal property decreasing by 12%. However, the percentage of people who reported having a feeling of safety while walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark also decreased from 31% to 29% during the report period.

When data is analysed between provinces, the same pattern emerges, except for the case of individual crimes in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga, where there seems to be no improvement over time. In the four-year period during which these VOCS have been conducted, the Western Cape has maintained the top position, having the highest proportion of households victimised by crime, while Limpopo has kept the lowest level happening during the 2011/2012 report year, when 15 554 murders were reported.

Even though we agree that no murder can be justified and that South Africa’s murder rate is far too high, there has at least been a mostly downward trend during the past 20 years, from 26 877 murders committed during the 1995/1996 report year to the lowest level happening during the 2011/2012 report year, when 15 554 murders were reported.
ing in South Africa and by 1997, the companies for protection. By 1985, it households turned to private security violence. As a result, many wealthy in the battle against township vio-

lence. To withdraw its manpower from suburban police stations to use police to withdraw its manpower when political uprisings forced the non-entity until around the mid-80s security industry was a minuscule report (2016), South Africa's private security industry was a minuscule report (2016), South Africa's private security providers deliver, there are also unfortunately many unregis-

ty companies often pay low wages and are not compliant with industry regulations, making it possible for them to quote low and undercut competition. "Unregistered guards have not passed through the screening process run by PSiRA, which checks the ID numbers of all aspirant guards (sic) against the SAPS's criminal record database" (IRR/AfriForum report, 2016).

Mob justice/vigilantism

Although a significant portion of South African households can afford to pay for private security services, the largest portion of the population can't. "For such people, panic buttons, elec-

tic fences and armed response are an unattainable fantasy" (IRR/AfriForum report, 2016). Many of those in this latter group look elsewhere for protection - and it is often found in community self-policing or mob justice/vigilantism. The English Oxford Living Dictionaries defines vigilantism as "law enforcement undertaken without legal authority by a self-appointed group of people".

In South Africa, vigilantism has for a long period been associated with Pagad and Mapogo A Mathamaga. This latter organ-

isation "originated in Limpopo where cattle theft spurred the people of that community on to protect their livestock in the only way they knew how; by fighting fire with fire. Mr John Magolego, the founder of this organisation, describes the cen-

tral idea and methodology as follows: 'When an animal is attacked by another, that animal has to become like the ani-

mal that is attacking it in order to protect itself. It makes sense, especially today, where for the past 20 years citizens of this extraordinary country have not been able to put their trust in the police force to protect them'." Mapogo's methodology raised eyebrows among those who questioned its legality, but the understanding was clear "that if you mess with a Mapogo client you will be brought to book" (www.mapogogp.co.za/our-history).
In recent times, reports about vigilantism have had nothing to do with Mapogo. In fact, earlier this year, in February, a wave of vigilante violence rocked the working class suburb of Rosettenville, south of Johannesburg (Nel, 2017). This time locals took the law into their own hands over the authorities' lack of action against drug dens, which the community claimed were being run by Nigerians. In her doctoral thesis entitled “Crime as punishment: a legal perspective on vigilantism in South Africa”, Nel (2016) writes that the aim of these communities is to improve their collective security and social order where formal law enforcement is absent or ineffective. "Vigilantism challenges the formal boundary between crime and punishment, between law and justice ... vigilantes resort to violence to 'fill the gap' left by unsatisfactory law enforcement. This is because of the state’s failure to command widespread legitimacy. This loss of legitimacy is due to the state being inefficient, corrupt and out of touch with popular concerns. The situation is exacerbated in marginalised and poverty stricken communities, where violence is commonplace."

Nel (2016) goes on to quote Judge Binns-Ward who, in one case, stated: "... vigilantes are seen by many in the communities ... as upstanding and respectable members of the community, and indeed see themselves as serving the interests of their community. On reflection, even if wholly unacceptable, this much is understandable in the context of a perception by a community that the formal and constitutionally established criminal justice system is not functioning."

There have been far too many examples of vigilantism in South Africa, to such an extent that the Daily Sun, one of South Africa's largest newspapers, at one stage ran almost daily stories on the subject of vigilantism. In an interview with Newsweek in 2014, the publisher of the Daily Sun estimated that his paper received three to six “tip-offs a week about extra-judicial killings”. He was quoted as having said: "Someone cries thief, a mob chases the suspect down and burns or beats him to death, but when the police arrive, the community closes ranks and nobody knows anything. It's as if the ghosts did it". He added that "we've never covered a trial that led to convictions in a mob justice case" (IRR/AfriForum report, 2016).

**Neighbourhood watches**

Another option which many citizens have chosen to increase their sense of safety is to join neighbourhood watches or community safety groups. Neighbourhood watches are neither a new concept nor unique to South Africa. This refers to "a scheme of systematic local vigilance by householders to discourage crime, especially burglary" (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com). Whether it is successful or not in decreasing crime depends on circumstances which differ from one area to another, and many argue that neighbourhood watches only displace crime. The IRR/AfriForum report (2016) notes that "in the UK, Canada, USA and Australia, the neighbourhood watch was generally defined as a system that 'encourages neighbours to look out for and report suspicious behaviour to the police' with a view to discouraging crime. South Africans opted for a more muscular variant that included vehicle patrols, two-way radio communications and in some cases, emergency reaction capacity". When crime started to rise during the 1990s, such neighbourhood structures became common.

The IRR/AfriForum report (2016) tells of Mamelodi (Pretoria) and the greater Khayelitsha (Cape Town) which once boasted highly effective watches run by ex-soldiers and policemen, and explains how residents of Alexandra (Johannesburg) formed a home guard to protect residents at bus stops and taxi ranks. Unfortunately, many of these structures vanished over time.
There are even similar structures in rural areas in the form of farm watch systems, formed in response to a rash of violent attacks on farms. One such an active farm watch is the Farm Comm Neighbourhood Watch which was established in 2001 in the greater Port Elizabeth area. More than 200 families each have a handheld VHF radio working through their repeater system on their private Farm Comm frequencies, which means that, at the press of a radio button, 200 members will hear their call and respond to any emergency within minutes. Farm Comm renders assistance to the farming and rural residents of Maitlands, Colleen Glen, Greenbushes, Kragga Kamma, Seaview and Lakeside of Port Elizabeth. Farm Comm members assist in providing security, medical and fire-fighting emergency assistance to all the residents in their coverage area: the security team runs night patrols, the medical team is equipped to respond as first aid to all emergency scenes and the fire team is vital in protecting the area from the damage of bush fires. Farm Comm has a close working relationship with Kabega Park SAPS Sector 3 to combat crime, as well as with emergency services, which helps to protect all the residents in the area (Geldenhuys, 2011; www.farmcomm.net; www.facebook.com/pg/farmcommpe/).

There are many more examples of successful neighbourhood and farm watches, but as has been noted in the IRR/AfriForum report (2016), the lesson is simple: **neighbourhood watches work, but sustaining the interest of civilian volunteers is problematic.**

**Are there sustainable alternatives?**

It is clear from the above that community members have used or are still using alternatives to keep themselves safe - either legally, such as by contracting private security companies or joining neighbourhood watches, or in a controversial or illegal way, such as through vigilantism. But as has been noted, some of these initiatives are not necessarily sustainable, especially when only a select few community members are willing to ensure the success of the initiative through regular patrols.

It is always good to share real and inspiring stories, and in the IRR/AfriForum report (2016) the Elliot case study is shared. Ironically, it is an unlikely relationship between the taxi association and AfriForum that takes the limelight in this story. A few years ago, Elliot’s taxi association would take up weapons and set off to the former Transkei, in a convoy, if a taxi had been stolen. Rather than risk confrontation, the leaders of the Tsolo taxi association would order the thief to surrender the stolen vehicle and even offer compensation for the trouble which the Elliot men had put up with. The reason: to prevent a taxi war.

The general consensus was that by operating in the way they did, the Elliot taxi association most probably contributed to crime prevention. Young black criminals were terrified of them - specifically of Tax Nkampini. Many township residents had turned to him and his guys and it was clear: "When there is trouble, the taxis always help."

In 2013, Anton Brummer, a businessman from Elliot, formed an AfriForum branch, initially to combat a tripling in municipal water charges. After that battle was won, the next step that Anton took was to set up an AfriForum neighbourhood watch. He invited Tax Nkampini and some of his allies to the inaugural meeting. These men from Elliot’s taxi association liked what they heard, and signed up. Brummer was stunned - it was almost too good to be true. The black members gave this branch an undreamed of degree of social legitimacy and anti-crime muscle. AfriForum’s Head Office sent someone to do the requisite training and patrols began in November 2013.

Lt-Col Daryl Billson, the station commander of Elliot at the time, is quoted as having said: "They came like a thunderstorm. Up to 40 people patrolling every night, with flashing green lights on their cars and taxis.” The patrols were done inside the small town, but some also headed out to the surrounding farms and townships. That Christmas, for the first time in living memory, there was no stock theft at all in Elliot and its surrounding farmland.

Unfortunately, as we’ve seen in so many cases, the initial enthusiasm wore off and patrols were scaled back to Fridays and Saturday nights - but they worked. The local SAPS and AfriForum launched a joint campaign against unruly shebeens, forcing them to close on time and also searching them for knives and illegal firearms. Following this campaign, the nurses at the local hospital noted that the number of stab wounds that they had to treat showed a decline. Citizen's arrests were carried out on stock theft suspects and drug dealers and although the crime statistics did not necessarily show a decrease, the community of Elliot felt safer. It seemed that the recipe that was followed in Elliot was a success.

Unfortunately, in May 2015, Tax Nkampini had a run-in with criminals after he had received a call saying that "gangsters" were menacing teenagers on their way home from one of the local high schools. He raced to the scene, broke up the fight and cornered two suspects in a nearby house. Although police members arrived at the scene, they were allegedly afraid to go in and Tax had to make a citizen’s arrest. He went in with a kiekie and came out holding two young suspects by the scruffs of their necks. Back at the police station, the police made a note of the incident but decided not the charge the young-sters as they had seemingly learnt their lesson. A week later, Tax was arrested for aggravated assault - one of the youths apparently made a sworn statement that Tax had broken his finger.

AfriForum paid Tax’s bail and hired a lawyer to defend him, and initiated a campaign to put pressure on the provincial police management to investigate claims about the unjust persecution. Ironically, a few days later, about 400 protestors, of whom the majority was black, brandished AfriForum
placards with the words "Police must help community not criminals" while flying AfriForum colours. A similar crowd also pitched to show their support to Tax at his trial, which was eventually temporarily suspended - the charges were withdrawn, as the docket was lost (IRR/AfriForum report, 2016).

**Recommendations**

The *Winning the War on crime in South Africa* report (IRR/AfriForum, 2016) concludes with a few recommendations following the three alternative forms of self-protection that were set out in the report, namely private security, mob justice and variants of neighbourhood watches. These recommendations include the following:

- Vigilante rage can be channelled into a more humane direction, possibly by using AfriForum’s legal neighbourhood watch scheme as a model.
- A concerted state effort to resurrect and rebuild these formations might result in a decline in vigilante outrages as well as a reduction in crime.
- AfriForum’s Elliot model (see supra) can be used to build coalitions between township law and order activists and their counterparts in other communities, ideally culminating in joint, legal and effective neighbourhood watches. Some might find this suggestion naive, but surveys have shown that South Africans of all races are united in their anger about poor policing. This suggestion provides interesting prospects for coalitions, particularly in small towns and working class neighbourhoods where people of all races already live in close proximity with one another.
- Local private security providers can be incorporated into joint neighbourhood watch schemes to the point where they become active partners in the scheme.
- The community should seek to win the support and cooperation of the local police station commander into the scheme. The ideal outcome is one in which the local community, the local police and private security are cooperating closely in safeguarding the community.
- Neighbourhood watches can be expanded, through encouragement and guidance from those in the know, throughout South Africa.
- Interested groups can continue to agitate for police reform and against government policies that discourage economic growth. Ultimately, effective policing and job creation are the best long-term solutions to South Africa’s crime problems.

* * *

The Elliot story is not about Tax Nkampini, Anton Brummer or AfriForum per se, but about how a community can put aside their issues and differences, remove racial barriers and stand together to fight a common enemy, namely crime. This example speaks to all of us in asking why more South African communities can’t work together with the police to fight crime. Let’s forget politics, which often serve to divide us. Instead, let’s stand up, take the police’s hands and take back our streets. Let’s not wait until 2030 to make the dream of the National Development Plan a reality and let’s see people walking in our streets and feeling safe in the very near future.

**Editor’s note**

The list of references is published on p 74.