

Chapter 6

The Results of the Lekoa/Vaal Firearms Survey

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Introduction

At centre stage in South Africa are debates over crime, the violence associated with it, and the violence that is non-criminal. The role of firearms in the carrying out of crime, and in violence generally, is being discussed by government and civil society alike. There is strong support for action to be taken to address the seemingly uncontrolled availability of firearms, legal and illegal. However, for effective policy to be developed and implemented, information must be gathered on several aspects of the situation: the extent of the problem; previous attempts made to address the issue; lessons learned from other countries who have faced the same challenge; and the attitudes of those whom the policy is intended to protect to the prevalence of firearms within their communities.

As the previous chapters in this volume show, concrete action has been taken by the South African government to address the illegal proliferation of firearms, especially those being smuggled into the country, and to revise existing legislation so that it will achieve the desired outcome. Both of these approaches have been developed as national strategies, involving representatives from multiple government departments and provincial structures. In addressing strategies for the control of firearms, however, especially the much harder task of reducing the number of illicit weapons, it is as important that consideration be given to the reaction of the communities who are to be helped.

The first challenge to those developing policy lies in the difficulties involved in enumerating the number of firearms in South Africa. While the number of licenced weapons is probably fairly accurate, the number of unlicenced ones can only be guessed at. In addition, the collection of statistics on firearm-related incidents is also currently restricted, although

great increases in the collection and reliability of statistics by the police service have occurred over the past few years. Thus, in South Africa, it is in some ways impossible to get a firm idea of the extent of the firearms problem at national or even provincial level. Therefore, an impetus to the undertaking of the survey discussed in this chapter was the need for a more accurate picture of local attitudes towards firearms and individual responses to suggestions on the possession, use and control of guns. It is never wise to extrapolate the findings of one, limited survey to an entire country. However, the survey does show clearly the responses of this particular community. Consequently, it is suggested that the findings of the survey point to a means of responding for both civil organisations and government policy makers in this region that might indicate the need for localised (versus national) approaches in addressing the proliferation of weapons, or that could be piloted in other regions of the country. This could be done, either untested or preferably following a similar survey of attitudes that would, over time, be formulated into a comprehensive policy on firearms which would not only include citizens' input, but also incorporate the work that has already been achieved in improving controls over both licit and illicit weapons in South Africa.

The purpose of the survey described in this section was threefold: to collect information to develop the blueprint for an action plan; to gain information on attitudes towards firearms in communities; and to gather perceptions on changes in safety, crime and violence levels and the presence of firearms,

Methodology

The Arms Management Programme (AMP) at the ISS decided in 1997, that in order to achieve its aim – to study the proliferation of illicit weapons from the two areas that were determined as being the most relevant for control, namely regional and local – there needed to be deeper understanding of attitudes towards firearms within a specific locality. Thus, the development of a survey questionnaire was undertaken with the assistance of local experts on survey design and methodology, firearms and the chosen region, an area known as the Vaal Triangle, south of the city of Johannesburg. A review of other firearm-related surveys conducted in other countries (and one conducted in Sharpeville within the Vaal Triangle in

1996) indicated the sensitivity of the topic and the possibility that respondents might refuse to answer direct questions on firearms possession. Therefore, the choice was made to broaden the scope of the survey to incorporate various groups of questions: questions related to perceptions of changes in crime and violence since the elections in 1994; questions on steps taken to prevent victimisation, including security measures adopted for the respondent and those for the community; and questions on existing community structures that respondents belonged to and which they would use in the event of interpersonal conflict. These questions were the precursor to the section of the survey which dealt specifically with firearms. However, contrary to expectations, enumerators reported that generally respondents were quite interested in answering the firearms-related questions and the number of refusals or invalid surveys was very small for the total sample.

The area chosen was carefully selected so that the resulting survey would be representative of the area, while, at the same time, reflecting more broadly experiences of other parts of the country. The Vaal Triangle covers an area of about 40 kilometre south of Johannesburg. It is an area that witnessed much of the political violence under apartheid (including the Sharpeville massacre of 1960), has a distribution of the various races and a population more broadly reflecting the socio-economic situation of the country than other areas around Johannesburg which were also considered. Additionally, the area straddles the main north-south highway and is one which has a fairly migratory population (ie, mine workers who live in hostels in the area but return to family homes on weekends or over holidays). Both of these factors are linked to the movement of illicit weapons into and within the country.

As the population of this area totals almost one million, the decision was taken to survey a sample of 1 500 inhabitants. A household survey was used, in which the households to be surveyed and the respondent within each household were selected at random. Repeat visits were made to ensure that the identified person would be interviewed, substitutions being made only after the third unsuccessful attempt. The sample area included urban formal and informal dwellings, smallholdings (semi-rural or rural) and hostels. All respondents were required to be over sixteen years of age and most questions were asked about the household, rather than the individual.

The selected sample of 1 500 was developed on the basis of population figures supplied by the local metropolitan council. The final realised sample is shown in table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of survey sample	
NUMBER	
GENDER	
Male	598
Female	902
RACE	
African	993
Coloured	98
Indian	187
White	220
AGE	
16-20	185
21-25	219
26-30	195
31-40	390
41-50	220
51+	291

In order to ensure adequate numbers of responses for each race, the Indian and coloured respondents were over-sampled and then weighted back to the original population figures. This allows for the summarisation of the responses of these groups to be described with some confidence. A number of interviews from white smallholding areas were also distributed among the sample, after enumerators were unable to gain access to these areas.

The training of the enumerators was carried out over a four-day period and specific sessions were spent on explaining the purpose of the survey and

ensuring clarity on the questions asked and the types of responses that could be expected. As each respondent was interviewed in his/her own language, every effort was made to ensure regularity of translations of specific terms into that language and back into English for recording. Prior to the training, a pilot of the questionnaire had been tested randomly in Johannesburg and ambiguous questions were refined as necessary. The survey was in the field from 5 to 25 November 1997. The accuracy of the information was assessed through check-backs on 25% of the sample. The number of invalid cases was minimal, allowing for all the questions asked of the general population to be assessed on a sample size of more than 1 490.

In analysing the data, it became clear that the most important variables were age, race, dwelling and gender, as will become evident in the analysis which follows. Of the sample, 65% lived in urban formal dwellings, 30% in urban informal dwellings, 3% in hostels and 2% on smallholdings. Although less informative for the purposes of the analysis, the sample included 30% unemployed (against a national average of 34%),¹ 20% employed full-time, 15% students, 12% pensioners and 7% per cent housewives. The majority of the sample had schooling of between Grade 1 and Standard 10 (Grade 12) (87%), while 5% had schooling above Standard 10 (Grade 12) and 7% had no formal schooling whatsoever.

The survey was conducted by the organisation, Community Action for Social Enquiry (CASE), which was also responsible for the tabulation of the data. Analysis was undertaken by the ISS and through a series of workshops with outside experts, including academics, government officials and members of non-governmental organisations.

Attitudes towards Firearms

The survey ultimately gathered responses to four categories of questions:

- individual's perception of his/her area or community in terms of safety and changes in crime and violence;
- responses to the perceived situation, including those taken for the community's or for the individual's safety;
- firearms and perceptions regarding their possession and use and suggestions for control; and

- social interactions and conflict resolution mechanisms.

In this section, the analysis has been grouped around the following clusters: perceptions of crime and violence; attitudes towards firearms; responses to firearms; and the identification of intervention areas and players. The overarching theme in the analysis of the survey has been:

- to clearly represent the thinking of respondents on the above issues; and
- to identify those areas which show opportunities for intervention by policy makers to address issues related to gun-related threats to public safety and security.

Perceptions of Safety, Crime and Violence

To undertake a survey on firearms was to go where few had been before. A 1996 survey of Sharpeville undertaken by the University of Witwatersrand was deemed unsuccessful by the implementor.² The approach, a street survey, and the timing, during a period of growing dissatisfaction with the police in providing for the security of individuals, may both have played a role. In developing the questionnaire for the Lekoa/Vaal survey (as it will be referred to throughout), the decision was taken to use the broader issue of respondents' perceptions of personal safety and changes in crime and violence as an entry to the focus of the survey, namely attitudes and perceptions towards firearms availability and use.

The inclusion of questions on perceptions of crime and violence also allowed for some comparison with surveys being undertaken on victimisation in the major cities of South Africa: Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria and Durban. These latter surveys, which have increased available information on the 'dark figure' of crime, those crimes which go unreported by victims, have an important role to play in the development of policy around crime patterns and victim support in South Africa. In the same way, it is hoped, the Lekoa/Vaal survey will encourage further research into the attitudes of civil society towards both firearms and the actors identified by communities to improve control over these.

Changes in Crime and Violence

The Lekoa/Vaal region has a history of violence. During the late 1970s and 1980s, this area was the scene of uprisings by the population against the apartheid government, and clashes between township residents and hostel dwellers became increasingly violent in the early 1990s. In order to gain an understanding of peoples' perceptions of changes in the country since 1994, respondents were asked whether they thought there had been a change in violence since 1994. Overall, there was a feeling that violence had declined in the three and a half years since the election of a new government (table 2). However, people living in rural areas indicated that they felt that violence had increased since 1994. Although no questions were asked as to why they felt the situation had improved or declined, it may be that the increase of attacks on farmers, some without apparent criminal motive, are leading rural inhabitants to feel more exposed to violent attacks.

Table 2 – Change in violence since 1994	
PERCENTAGE	
Stayed the same	11
Increased	40
Decreased	49

In contrast to the more positive picture of declines in violence, most respondents (71%) felt that crime had increased since 1994 (table 3). An almost equal percentage felt that it had decreased (15%) or remained the same (14%). Of the 71% who felt that crime had increased, those living in

Table 3 – Change in crime levels since 1994	
PERCENTAGE	
Stayed the same	14
Increased	71
Decreased	15

informal (75%) or rural (80%) areas were most likely to feel the increase (table 4).

Table 4 – Change in crime levels since 1994, by area of residence

PERCENTAGE	
Hostels	72
Rural	80
Informal	75
Formal	70

These figures correspond to those given by respondents in a Pretoria city victim survey. In that case, 76% of respondents noted an overall increase in crime, with those people living in townships or informal residents recording the highest increases.³ These feelings about the increase in crime surface, “despite the fact that the government has recently made several statements [indicating stabilisation or declines in crime].”⁴

While respondents overall said that crime had increased, when asked the question, “Have you or someone in your household been a victim of crime?”, a total of 24% of respondents stated that, since 1994, they or someone in their house had been a victim of crime. In comparison with the city victim surveys, the Lekoa/Vaal region shows a lower victimisation rate than the four major South African cities (table 5).⁵ While the Lekoa/Vaal survey showed that 44% of whites, followed by Indians (28%), are victims

Table 5 – Levels of crime across four cities⁷

PERCENTAGE	
Lekoa/Vaal 1994-1997	24
Johannesburg 1993-1997	62
Pretoria 1993/4-1998	55
Durban 1993-1997	59
Cape Town 1992/3-1998	49

of crime, the Pretoria city survey shows a different pattern with Africans and Asians/Indians showing the highest victimisation rate (58%), followed by whites (50%) and coloureds. In the Johannesburg city survey, blacks were the most likely overall to be the victims of crime.⁶

The most common crime Lekoa/Vaal respondents identified as occurring in the area in which they live was house-breaking (40%) followed by murder (14%) (table 6). In comparison, Johannesburg also noted burglary as the most common property crime, with mugging and robbery as the most common violent crimes.⁸ The crimes most feared by respondents in the Lekoa/Vaal survey are rape (29%), murder (23%) and house-breaking (21%) (table 7). Not surprisingly, women feared rape the most, while men feared murder and mugging/stabbing. In Pretoria and Cape Town, in response to a similar question, loss of life (25% and 42%, respectively) and physical injury (33% and 32%, respectively) figured as the most common fears associated with crime.⁹

Table 6 – Most common crime in area	
PERCENTAGE	
Housebreaking	40
Murder	14
Rape	10
Carjacking	9

Table 7 – Crime most feared	
PERCENTAGE	
Rape	29
Muder	23
House-breaking	21
Carjacking	8
Mugging/stabbing	4

Perceptions and Responses to Feelings of Safety

While crime statistics indicate that some crimes have decreased, others have stabilised and yet others are climbing. Public perception tends to give little regard to the official statistics, often relying on personal or close experience to comment on the level of crime in the country. To gather more information on what respondents thought of the current government solutions and what else could be done, a series of questions was asked around individual and community responses to crime, and perceptions of who should be responsible for controlling crime in their area.

The individual responses taken to reduce crime by respondents may be broken down as passive, reactive or proactive. Into the first category fall those people who do nothing to reduce crime (32%). In the second are those who installed burglar bars (37%), reported the crime to the police (23%), bought a dog (16%) or a gun (7%). Those who purchased a gun were predominately white and lived in rural areas (tables 8 and 9).

Table 8 – Respondents who bought a gun for protection against crime, by race

PERCENTAGE	
African	1
Coloured	4
Indian	9
White	43

Table 9 – Respondents who bought a gun for protection against crime, by type of residence

PERCENTAGE	
Rural	60
Informal	1
Formal	9

Into the third category are those people who reported the crime to the community (16%) or joined a street patrol (11%).

In order to assist their community to help reduce crime, people in the Lekoa/Vaal region identified reporting crime to the police (40%) or community (25%) as the most common actions taken, while 40% of respondents have taken no action to reduce crime in their community. In proactive measures, 14% indicated that they had joined a street patrol and 6% had joined a community police forum.

Asked to assess various statements, respondents voiced a clear feeling of dissatisfaction with government attitudes towards crime and service delivery by the police. Most people agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that the “government does not care about crime”, while disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with “policing is effective in my area”. There is a feeling that there is a role for communities in solving crime, “local people solve crimes better than the police do”, but individuals do not see a role for themselves in stopping crime (table 10).

Table 10 – Assessment of crime prevention initiatives

	PERCENTAGE	
	AGREE	DISAGREE
Policing is effective in my area	52	38
Local people solve crimes better	31	50
Government doesn't care about crime	32	47
Nothing I can do to stop crime	42	46

Attitudes to Firearms

Issues around the possession and use of firearms in South Africa are popular areas of current debate. Government initiatives to improve the enforcement of existing regulations, redraft the *Arms and Ammunition Act* (Act no 75 of 1969) and to reduce the number of illicit weapons entering the country are under way. So, too, are steps by non-governmental organisations to increase

awareness around the issue of firearms and especially their misuse, which can lead to tragic results.

However, it is the minority of people who make their views on firearms broadly known. The degree to which interest groups reflect the view of the majority is not known. In an effort to gain a greater degree of understanding as to how the ‘average’ South African feels about firearms – who should own and use them and under what conditions – a section of the Lekoa/Vaal survey was devoted to questions about perceptions of firearms and those who own them. The results of this section follow. The subsequent sections focus on issues of possession, use and control, outlining those who should be responsible for the identification of control.

Perceptions of Firearms and Firearm Owners

One way to gain a better understanding of how people in the Lekoa/Vaal region perceived the use of firearms was to ask how they would choose to describe a person who owned a firearm. In response to a list of adjectives presented or described to them, respondents most often identified such a person as ‘violent’, ‘terrible’ or ‘scary’. In the table below, the full range of responses is listed. Most chose words expressing negative attitudes towards those with a gun, although the descriptions of ‘important’ and ‘powerful’ must not be ignored. In this response, in which the participant was asked to give only the best description, a gun is identified as the only accessory with a consistently negative image.¹⁰

The respondents identified someone with a BMW (8.2%) or a cell-phone (6%) as more likely to be “macho” than someone with a gun (4%). Someone with a gun is also less likely to be perceived as being “important” than someone with either a cell-phone or BMW, and marginally more “powerful” (8%) than the other two categories (3.8% and 4.3%, respectively). Men and women were almost equally likely to consider someone with a gun as being violent (28% of men and 26% of women). Africans and those between twenty-one and twenty-five were more likely than other races and ages to identify someone with a gun as “violent”.

**Table 11 – Description of someone who owns various items
(figures represent percentage of responses)**

	A CELL-PHONE	A BMW	A GUN	LOTS OF MONEY
Accessible	28.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Aggressive	1.6	2.0	37.0	1.2
Assertive	2.0	3.0	3.0	0.7
Dynamic	3.0	3.0	2.0	0.7
Important	20.0	12.0	6.0	3.0
Macho	6.0	8.2	4.0	3.0
Offensive	1.4	1.3	4.0	2.0
Powerful	3.8	4.3	8.0	3.3
Scary	3.0	7.0	32.0	2.0
Successful	11.0	24.0	1.0	20.0
Trendy	6.0	4.0	1.0	0.3
Weak	0.3	0.3	1.0	0.2
Wealthy	15.0	31.0	1.0	63.0

In a further question, respondents were asked to give the first word that came to mind after the enumerator said the word “gun”. The top five responses were:

Table 12 – Word that came to mind when hearing ‘gun’

	PERCENTAGE
Death	44
Kill	21
Fear	12
Protection	3
Violence	3
Shoot	3
Theft	3

For the purposes of analysis, the list of answers given were grouped into categories. Therefore, “death” includes ‘death’, ‘dying’ and ‘dead’, while “fear” includes ‘fear’, ‘scared’, ‘scary’ and ‘afraid’.

Respondents were also asked a series of questions related to who should be allowed to carry a gun, and under what conditions. In response to whether or not someone drinking in a bar should be, 86% of respondents indicated that such a person should not be allowed to carry a gun (table 13). Of these respondents, Africans were more likely to “strongly agree” with the statement (53%), while coloureds (74%), whites and Indians (57% each) were more likely to “agree”. Rural dwellers also “agreed” with the statement (73%), while urban and hostel dwellers “strongly agreed”.

Similarly, respondents felt that someone with a criminal record should be banned from owning a weapon (80%) (table 14). In response to the question

Table 13 – Response to statement: People drinking in a bar should not be allowed to carry a gun	
PERCENTAGE	
Strongly disagree	8
Disagree	6
Agree	36
Strongly agree	50

Table 14 – Response to statement: Criminals should be banned from owning a gun	
PERCENTAGE	
Strongly agree	45
Agree	35
Disagree	8
Strongly disagree	12

“do guns cause more violence than they prevent?”, 49% of respondents “strongly agreed”, while 39% “agreed” with the statement (table 15).

Table 15 – Response to statement: Guns cause more violence than they prevent	
PERCENTAGE	
Strongly agree	49
Agree	39
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	3

When asked whether or not a woman should carry a gun for security, the responses were more mixed. Forty-six per cent of respondents “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement, while 43% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” (table 16). In analysing the answers more closely, men were more likely to agree that women should carry a gun (26% of men versus 23% of women) or strongly disagree (22% versus 16%), while women were most likely either to strongly agree (20% versus 18%) or disagree (29% versus 24%) with the statement. Coloured (47%) and African (44%) respondents were most in favour of women carrying a gun for security, while Indians most strongly opposed the measure (51%).

Table 16 – Response to statement: Every woman should carry a gun for security	
PERCENTAGE	
Strongly disagree	19
Disagree	27
Agree	23
Strongly agree	20

The answers clearly show that respondents favour responsible use and ownership of firearms across race and gender. These strong responses show clear areas for policy interventions which will not provoke wide dissension (for example, identifying and restricting those with a criminal record from owning a firearm).¹¹

In terms of gaining more information on the presence of guns within the Lekoa/Vaal area, specific questions were asked on firearms in the community. Although it was beyond the scope of this survey to quantify the number of weapons, preliminary information on perceptions of the numbers of guns and whether these are connected to perceived increases in violence and crime are important for the development of policy around firearms. In response to being asked how frequently gunshots were heard in the community in which the respondent lived, the responses were often (56%), sometimes (25%), seldom (10%) and never (6%) (table 17). When analysed by dwelling, those who live in hostels and informal urban dwellings reported hearing gunshots frequently (69% and 65%, respectively). Africans and coloureds are also likely to hear gunshots more frequently than whites and Indians (63% and 50% versus 21% and 18%). This would generally correspond with peoples’ areas of residence.

Table 17 – Frequency of hearing gunshots

PERCENTAGE	
Often	56
Sometimes	25
Seldom	10
Never	6

People were also asked if they thought the number of guns in the community had increased since 1994. Sixty-eight per cent of people think that there has been an increase against 13% who noted a decrease and 5% who noted no change (table 18). Of those who thought the number of guns increased, 69% reported “frequently” hearing gunshots, while those who noted a decrease in the number of guns also reported hearing gunshots

“frequently” 37% of the time, and “sometimes” 40%. In addition, 82% of those people who think crime has increased also note an increase in the number of guns. Men are slightly more likely to notice an increase in the number of guns than women (72% versus 66%), while Indians and Africans were more likely to feel the presence of more guns in their communities (92% and 72%). In terms of places of residence, those living in informal and formal urban dwellings and hostels reported an increase in the number of guns (73%, 67% and 63%, respectively).

Table 18 – Change in number of guns in community since 1994

PERCENTAGE	
Increase	68
Decrease	13
No change	5

Respondents were asked why they thought the number of guns in their community had changed. Asked to provide one main reason, these answers were clustered for analysis. The top five reasons given were:

Table 19 – Why respondents thought the number of guns changed in their community

PERCENTAGE	
Guns are easily available	23
Increase in crime	13
Corruption	7
Unemployment	6
Effective policing	4

Men, and those living in urban formal and informal areas were most likely to note easy availability of guns as a reason for the increase in the number of weapons, as were African and coloured respondents. Those who attribute

the increase in guns to an increase in crime are generally women, Indians and Africans, and those who live in informal urban dwellings and in hostels. Those who attributed effective policing to a decrease in guns tended to be African women and those who live in urban areas, where policing may be more evident.

It seems clear that respondents identify the increase in the number of weapons within their communities as being a negative event linked to high levels of crime and the easy availability of weapons. As would be expected, those in urban areas who live in close proximity to one another are more aware of the presence of weapons and more likely to attribute it to negative causes.

The survey results confirm what police have been observing within these areas: increasing numbers of weapons. While not providing clear policy directions, these responses do indicate where weapons are and, when combined with responses from other sections of the survey, seem to indicate that the public would welcome steps to remove these weapons from their communities.

Possession and Access to Firearms

The issue of the civilian possession of firearms is currently under review in South Africa. With 2.3 million people owning 4.18 million firearms, South Africa does not have an especially high percentage of firearm owners, approximately 6% of the population owns firearms.¹² Internationally, this is not a high percentage of firearm ownership. The percentage of firearms is slightly higher at 10%.¹³ However, two critical factors influence the picture in South Africa: extremely high levels of crime and violence, with the use of firearms in perpetrating these acts increasing, and the presence of large numbers of illegal weapons in the country, many of which are stolen or lost licensed weapons.

To gain further information on the rate of firearm ownership in South Africa, a section of the Lekoa/Vaal survey focused on questions about ownership and access to firearms. Of the sample of 1 500 people, 213 respondents, or 14%, said that there was a firearm in their household. Of the

213 respondents, 204 said that the gun in the house was licenced, three said that it was not licenced and six people could not say whether the gun was licenced or not. The percentage of licenced firearms among the survey group (13.9%) is slightly higher than the national estimated percentage of 10%.¹⁴ It would seem, therefore, that the recording of licenced weapons in this survey might be seen as fairly accurate. However, the small number of people claiming to have an unlicenced firearm in their household is most certainly undercounted. Gun Free South Africa has published estimates indicating that there are an equal number of illegal and legal firearms in South Africa¹⁵ and although it is almost impossible to substantiate this claim, their estimate for illegal firearms is far higher than the minuscule percentage recorded in this survey.¹⁶

Of the 204 people indicating that there was a licenced firearm in their household, those with a higher than senior secondary education (39%), over fifty years of age (26%), white (67%) or Indian (46%) and living in rural (73%) or urban formal (17%) residences were most likely to own a licenced firearm (tables 20-23).

It is impossible to extrapolate to the general population of the Lekoa/Vaal region from the three people who reported an unlicenced firearm. However, the collection of information such as this will be important in efforts to understand who are the possessors of illicit firearms and how to gain effective control over these weapons, for example, whether or not illegal weapon owners would consider licencing these firearms or other measures, less voluntary, for collecting illegal weapons. Unfortunately, it was beyond the scope of the Lekoa/Vaal survey to collect this type information.

However, in an effort to understand the ways in which weapons are available to those who do not own them, respondents were asked whether or not they had access to a firearm, although they did not have one in their household. In response to the question, "Do you have easy access to a gun if you need one?", 12% indicated that they did, while 67% of respondents indicated that they did not have access to a gun. Men were more likely to say that they could get a gun if they needed it (17% versus 9% of women), as did people between between the age of twenty-one and forty (13% to 15% across the age group). Coloured and African respondents were also more likely to say that they could get a firearm (table 24).

Table 20 – Licenced firearm in household, response by education

PERCENTAGE	
Primary	3
Junior secondary	17
Senior secondary	20
More than senior secondary	39

Table 21 – Licenced firearm in household, response by age

PERCENTAGE	
16-20	15
21-25	10
26-30	13
31-40	14
41-50	15
51+	26

Table 22 – Licenced firearm in household, response by race

PERCENTAGE	
African	5
Coloured	20
Asian	46
White	67

Table 23 – Licenced firearm in household, response by area of residence

PERCENTAGE	
Formal	17
Informal	4
Rural	73
Hostel	2

Table 24 – Access to a firearm

PERCENTAGE	
Yes	12
No	67

While the two questions discussed above asked about the presence of, or access to a firearm, a later question asked whether or not the respondent himself/herself would own a gun. Of the respondents, 52% indicated that they would not own a gun, while 45% said they would. Men were more likely to indicate that they would own a gun (56%), against 38% of women. Whites are most likely (62%), followed by Indians (43%) and Africans (42%) to consider owning a gun, as are those between twenty-one and forty years of age. Of the rural dwellers, 60% would consider owning a gun, while only 46% of informal and 44% of formal urban dwellers would consider the same. Of the hostel dwellers, 37% said they would own a gun (table 25).

Respondents were asked to give the main reason they would or would not own a gun. Of those who said they would own a gun, the prime reason for doing so was for personal protection or safety (44% of total responses). Other reasons for owning a firearm include family tradition and hunting. The reasons people gave for not owning a firearm are more varied. Fourteen per cent were worried that the firearm might cause an accident, while 9%

Table 25 – Response by race to question: Would you own a gun?

	PERCENTAGE	
	YES	NO
African	42	55
Coloured	38	54
Asian	43	46
White	62	36

Table 26 – Reasons for not owning or owning a firearms

	PERCENTAGE	
	NOT OWNING	OWNING
Accident	14	
Makes trouble	8	
Fear of guns	9	
No need	9	
For safety		44

each said there was no need for a firearm or that they were afraid of guns. Eight per cent of respondents thought that a gun would only make trouble (table 26).

Men were more likely than women to cite personal protection as a reason for owning a firearm (55% against 37%). Whites and those respondents between twenty-one and forty years of age, as well as those living in rural areas (57%), were all more likely to cite safety as a reason for owning a firearm. Of those who would not own a gun, women were more worried than men about having an accident or more likely to be afraid of guns or think they “make trouble”.

Given the consistently high number of applications received by the Central Firearm Registry each month (see chapter 3, table 1), these responses seem to indicate that there is still a very large percentage of the population who

would consider owning a gun. The government must expect that if crime rates remain high, and fear of crime also maintains a high level, these potential owners will become owners.

It is clear that for those who own or would consider owning a gun, reasons of personal safety are foremost. The need for the government to make provision for individuals' safety is evident, especially among rural dwellers who seem, at least from the results of this survey, to fear violence the most and to be the most likely to own firearms, indicating that they may be most at risk.

The reasons for not owning a gun are also telling and thus important in implementing policy around firearms in South Africa. Enforcing the message that guns may be dangerous if misused or stored negligently would seem to find a receptive audience. Women, given that they show a greater concern about owning a gun, may be a group to work with to encourage norms against gun possession and use within communities.

Firearms Control

The survey results make it clear that individuals are concerned with crime in their areas and that a large number of these people identify weapons and crime as being related. In identifying individuals' responses to gun possession, many indicated that they would not own a gun. In the next section of the survey, questions were asked about how people felt about increased controls on firearms. The results show that there is strong support for additional controls and indicate the actors and some of the methods identified by respondents for undertaking these.

The question posed to respondents, whether or not they owned a firearm, was: "Do you think that there is a need for improved control over firearms in the area in which you live?" Seventy-three per cent of respondents answered in the affirmative, compared to 17% who saw no need for further controls (table 27). Men (72%) and women (73%) were almost equal in favouring greater controls, Africans (79%) favoured controls more than Indians (60%), coloureds (58%) or whites (35%). Interestingly perhaps, youth and those in their twenties most favoured more controls over firearms

(78% to 75% across seventeen to thirty years of age). Rural dwellers were the least likely to favour more controls over firearms (13%), compared to 81% of informal urban dwellers, 71% of hostel dwellers and 70% of formal urban dwellers (table 28). The profile of the respondents who most favour increased controls on firearms is that of African women, between thirty-one and forty years old, living in urban formal or informal residences.

Table 27 – Need for improved controls over firearms

PERCENTAGE	
Yes	73
No	17

Table 28 – Need for improved controls over firearms, by type of residence

	PERCENTAGE	
	YES	NO
Formal	70	20
Informal	81	10
Rural	13	80
Hostel	71	10

Those respondents who thought there should be greater control over firearms were next asked to identify who they thought would be best to improve control over firearms in their communities, in both the short and long term.¹⁷ In both instances, the police were identified as the primary authority in the control over firearms, as is shown in table 29. In both the short and long term, the defence force is identified as the responsible agency. In the short term, residents are identified as possible roleplayers followed by street committees, local government and local civic organisations. In the long term, the national government follows the defence force and is followed by residents, local government, local civic organisations and community organisations.

Table 29 – Organisations identified to improve controls over firearms, short versus long term

	PERCENTAGE	
	SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
Police service	30	18
Defence force	8	15
National government	5	15
Residents	5	3
Street committee	5	2
Local governments	5	2
Local civic organisations	2	2
Community organisations	2	2

The choice of the police as the body who should be responsible for increased controls over firearms complements findings of other surveys which consistently indicate that South Africans continue to identify the police as the actor responsible for controlling crime and protecting the safety of citizens, even while faith in the police to do so effectively currently remains low.¹⁸

Those who identify local structures as the best bodies for improving control over firearms – civic organisations, street or block committees, community organisations, church and other religious organisations, residents and local government – are likely (though not exclusively) to be women, African, urban formal or informal dwellers, over thirty-one years of age. However, Indian women identified residents and local government as effective implementers of control, as did men for local government and local civic organisations.

In terms of government structures and other non-community based organisations – police, defence force, private security and provincial and national governments – those who are most likely to support these actors are both men and women (men support the defence force, private security and provincial government, while women supported the police (35%) and the

defence force (7%). Africans and coloureds showed the greatest support for the police (35%), while Indians and whites also are more likely to support the police, although at lower levels (20% each) (Table 30). Those living in urban residences identified the police as the organisation that should provide increased control over firearms, while hostel dwellers identified the defence force (20%) as the government agency which should control weapons. This strong support for the defence force may be a remnant of the highly visible presence of the defence force in the area preceding the 1994 elections, especially in preventing political violence in the hostels.

Table 30 – Organisations identified to improve controls over firearms in the short term, by race

	PERCENTAGE		
	POLICE SERVICE	DEFENCE FORCE	RESIDENTS
African	35	8	7
Coloured	35	8	5
Asian	20	4	22
White	20	4	4

Rural inhabitants, who were most likely not to support further controls over firearms (80% of respondents indicated that no further controls are necessary), identified the police (7%), defence force (3%) and provincial government (3%) as the actors who should carry out controls over firearms.

The response pattern for the actors who should undertake control over firearms in the long-term remains similar, with the police and defence force remaining the top two choices for implementing further controls (20% and 16%, respectively). However, the national government, which was identified by only 4% of respondents as the actor in the short term, is identified as the third most likely actor in the long term, being selected by 16% of respondents (see table 29). These three choices are followed by residents, local government, local civic organisations and community organisations, each with 3%.

In comparing the differences between those identified as being responsible for the control over firearms in the short and long term, it seems that while people are willing to claim responsibility in the short term, they clearly see it as the responsibility of government bodies in the long term. Moreover, they see the national government as having a strong role in this regard.

Those who identify the police and defence force as the actors responsible for firearms control in the long term follow those who identified the same agencies in the short term. However, women are more likely to identify the national government as the responsible body in the long term (18% versus 3% in the short term), as are Indians and those living in informal urban dwellings. While in the short term women were more likely than men to support the police, this is reversed in the long term, with 23% of men identifying the police versus 18% of women. Coloureds (34%), Africans (21%) and whites (15%) were the most likely to support the police in the long term, while the percentage of Africans supporting the defence force increased by 9% to 18% over those who identified them in the short term. Support for the defence force also increased among whites and Indians, from 3 to 8% in the case of the former, and 2% to 11% in the case of the latter (Table 31).

	PERCENTAGE		
	POLICE SERVICE	DEFENCE FORCE	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT
African	21	18	18
Coloured	34	9	3
Asian	10	11	16
White	15	8	4

Among hostel dwellers, support for the defence force increased in the long term control over firearms by 8% to 28%, while support for the police dropped to 6%. National government was identified by 9% of hostel dwellers in the short term and 14% in the long term. The number of people

supporting various local structures declined to low levels and the validity of analysis on these small samples would be difficult to maintain.¹⁹

In addition to identifying who is in the best position within a community to improve control over firearms, respondents were also asked to name two things that could be done to improve control over the ownership and use of firearms within their community. In rank order, the responses were: more police (29%); laws and regulations for firearms and firearm owners (19%); community involvement (19%); issues around licencing (13%); harsher sentences for offenders (10%); destruction of illegal firearms (9%); banning of all firearms (7%); and age restrictions (6%) (table 32). As the responses were coded from multiple answers, they will be explored in more detail below to give a fuller picture of what citizens are looking for in terms of increased control over firearms.

Table 32 – Measures to improve controls over firearms	
PERCENTAGE	
More police	29
Laws/regulations	19
Community involvement	19
Licensing	13
Harsher sentences	10
Destruction of illegal weapons	9
Ban all guns	7
Age restriction	6

More Police

In the clustered response of “more police”, respondents identified increasing the number of police in general, increasing patrols (especially night patrols), more training and reducing corruption as components of improving controls over firearms. Other issues, such as better pay and the deployment of police from other areas into the community, were also identified. Both men (30%) and women (27%) identified “more police” as

the best way of improving controls over firearms. Africans were the group most likely to identify police issues as impacting on firearms control (34%), as were those living in informal (34%) and formal (27%) urban dwellings.

Laws and Regulations for Firearms and Firearm Owners

The cluster of “laws and regulations” included responses that supported the concept of responsible ownership (for example, no guns for heavy drinkers and testing and retesting of owners), safe storage of firearms, increasing restrictions on issuing of licences (one firearm per owner, proof of education and training prior to licences being issued and strong reasons being stated for wanting to own a firearm), and issues around the ownership of firearms by criminals. Although the current legislation does restrict ownership of firearms on the part of those with criminal records, there is clearly a perception among survey respondents that criminals have access to firearms and that this should be prevented. Those who most favour improving laws and regulations as a means of controlling firearms are Indians (40%) and whites (22%), and those who live in formal (21%) and informal (16%) urban dwellings.

Community Involvement

Examples given by respondents of community involvement in the control of firearms include: the use of community organisations and structures working in co-operation with police; the use of community police forums; the use of the community by police to gain information on unlicensed possessors and those who should not own a firearm; and the reporting of illegal holders of guns to the police.

Those respondents most likely to favour this approach are Africans (22%) and coloureds (20%), and those who live in informal urban dwellings (26%) and hostels (18%). Men are slightly more likely than women to favour community involvement (20% versus 18%).

Licensing of Firearms and Age Restrictions

The licensing of firearms was also identified as an important area for improving controls. Certain categories of people who should have licences were identified (for example, police and security personnel). Men and women supported improved licensing almost equally (14% versus 13%),

while Africans were the strongest supporters of this approach (15%) across the four race categories. Hostel dwellers (17%) and those living in informal urban dwellings (16%) also favoured issues around licencing.

While age restrictions were less frequently identified by respondents, those who did say that age should be restricted identified youth, in particular, as a group from whom weapons should be kept away. Women (7%) favoured age restrictions slightly more than men (5%). Whites (14%) and Indians (12%) were much more likely to support age restrictions than other control options, apart from stricter laws and regulations. All types of residential areas gave this option the same degree of support (6%).

Stricter Penalties for Offenders

Respondents felt that there was a need for more severe penalties for illegal gun ownership. Although no clear trend is found among the respondents, men and women almost equally supported this measure. Low levels of support occurred across racial categories, while, of residential types, hostel dwellers most supported stiffer penalties for illegal ownership (17%) followed by informal (11%) and formal (9%) urban dwellers.

Destruction of Illegal Firearms or Banning of All Firearms

While these two choices were less popular than those discussed above, they are policy options currently being debated and throw light on what individuals feel about the destruction and banning of weapons.

The destruction of illegal firearms was identified by 139 respondents as a means of improving controls over firearms. Women are more likely to support the destruction of illegal weapons (11%) than men (6%), and Africans are also more likely to favour this option (11%) than Indians (1%) or coloureds (2%). Those living in informal (13%) and formal (8%) dwellings also approved of this approach.

Fewer people favour banning all guns (96 respondents). Those who did identify this option were women (7%) outweighing men (5%), and Africans (8%). The option found almost equal support among urban formal and informal dwellers (7% each) and hostel dwellers (6%). Rural dwellers did not support either the destruction of illegal firearms or the banning of firearms at all.

Policy Options for Government

As the final question in the survey, all respondents were asked to indicate which of four policy options that the government could implement to prevent crime and violence in South Africa would work best. The four choices were:

- put more police on the street;
- ban all guns in South Africa;
- encourage community involvement in crime prevention through forums, street patrols and other means; and
- get rid of corruption in the police service.

Twenty-seven per cent of respondents indicated that they would support each of the options, excluding banning all guns in South Africa, which 19% supported (Table 33). Women most supported encouraging community involvement (28%), while men most supported more police (30%) as a means of preventing crime and violence in South Africa. Overall, Africans supported equally more police and community involvement (26% each), while coloureds most supported more police (36%), Indians community involvement (39%) and whites getting rid of police corruption (37%).

Of those who supported banning all guns, women were more likely than men (21% versus 16%) and Africans twice as likely as coloureds and three times more likely than Indians to support a ban on guns (22%, 11% and 7%, respectively). No white respondents supported a ban on guns. Those between sixteen to twenty years of age were most likely to support a ban on guns (24%), as were those who lived in hostels (26%). No rural dwellers

Table 33 – Policy options for government

PERCENTAGE	
More police	27
Ban all guns	19
Community involvement	27
Rid police of corruption	27

supported a ban on guns, perhaps because of the high fear of crime and violence among these respondents. However, rural dwellers were most likely to approve community involvement (53%), as were informal urban dwellers (30%).

Conclusions

It is clear that respondents see a twin approach of government and community working in parallel as the best option in combating crime and violence in South Africa. The strong support for community involvement in a prompted question (as opposed to the earlier question in which people were asked to list options for control without prompting) shows that the support for community involvement and co-operation with police and other bodies remains strong, but that people continue to look first to government to provide for the safety and security of its citizens, especially with regard to issues related to the control of firearms.

The information gathered from this survey shows overall strong support for increased government efforts around the issue of firearms and support for ensuring that criminals do not have access to firearms. It also shows that, while support for the police may be weak, they are still identified as the department responsible for controlling firearms in the county. The possibility for increased police/community interaction should be explored further, since there is no doubt that it is viewed positively in the Lekoa/Vaal area.

As with any initial attempt, this survey in some ways poses more questions than it answers. However, what it does show are clear patterns of attitudes and areas for further work and co-operation between residents and government bodies. Moreover, it opens the door for further comparative research, for example using police dockets to compare the use of firearms in crime with perceptions among respondents, and also for further refined studies on specific issues of concern in the region

Endnotes

The importance of finding community-based response to firearm proliferation cannot be over-emphasised, and for this reason the Lekoa/Vaal Firearm Survey is analysed in both

chapter 6 and chapter 7. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the main survey findings and chapter 7 explores possible insights for the design of a community-based response to firearm proliferation.

- 1 South African Institute of Race Relations, *Fast Facts*, SAIRR, Johannesburg, January 1999, supplement.
- 2 Discussions with Jacklyn Cock, Professor of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- 3 A Louw, *Crime in Pretoria: Results of a city survey*, Institute for Security Studies and Idasa, Halfway House, 1998, p 75, Figure 30.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid, p 14.
- 6 Ibid, pp 14-15; and A Louw et al, *Crime in Johannesburg: Results of a City Victim Survey*, ISS Monograph Series 18, Institute for Security Studies, Halfway House, February 1998, p 15.
- 7 Sources: Lekoa/Vaal survey, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town Victim Surveys, ISS, 1997-1999.
- 8 Louw et al, op cit, p 16.
- 9 Louw, op cit, p 74; L Camerer et al, *Crime in Cape Town: Results of a city victim survey*, ISS Monograph Series 23, Institute for Security Studies, Halfway House, April 1998, p 81.
- 10 These responses have been grouped from an original, larger list.
- 11 Although a person is currently prevented by certain convictions from qualifying for a firearm licence, there may be scope for increasing the types of crimes that cause him/her to forfeit the right to own a firearm. See Chapter 3 on legal firearms in South Africa.
- 12 Calculation is based on a total South African population of 40 583 573, as reported in the 1996 census. See Statistics South Africa, *The People of South Africa Population Census, 1996 Census in Brief*, Report 1:03-01-11 (1996), Statistics South Africa, Pretoria, 1998, Table 2.1.
- 13 See chapter 3 on legal firearms in South Africa for a more complete discussion.
- 14 The exact question was "Is there a gun in this household?", which focuses on the number of weapons rather than the number of licenced owners.
- 15 Gun Free South Africa, *Newsletter* 1, 1997.
- 16 Three unlicensed weapons out of a survey of 1 500 gives a percentage of 0.0002.
- 17 No specific periods of time were indicated for short or long term in the survey questionnaire.
- 18 See Louw, op cit; Louw et al, op cit; and Camerer et al, op cit.
- 19 With a total sample size of 1 500 respondents, the number of respondents in some categories falls below thirty. The validity of results with less than thirty respondents cannot be proven and therefore most responses with less than that number of replies have not been presented in this analysis.