



Written by [Anthea Pollock](#) on June 22, 2021

Gun-control Bill Causes Outrage in South Africa

There's been outrage among some South Africans following the "Draft Firearms Control Amendment Bill," which was released May 21. If passed, the bill will prevent law-abiding citizens from owning firearms for the purpose of self-defense — effectively disarming them while criminals remain armed. The legislative process remains open to public comments until July 4.

The South African political party Congress of the People (COPE) — founded by former ANC members — rejected the bill, referring to it as "madness" and a "disgrace that will put the lives of law-abiding citizens in more danger." The party went on to suggest that "President Ramaphosa and his Cabinet Ministers should lead by example — removing the firearms from their protectors." The closing sentence of their statement echoed the sentiment of millions of South Africans: "All of us have the right to protect ourselves. On a daily basis in this country, hundreds of people are robbed and killed by thugs who don't have any respect for human life."

The civil-rights organization AfriForum — a non-governmental organization focused mainly on the interests of Afrikaners — slammed this "irrational and reckless" proposal and signaled their intention to fight the legislation. As pointed out by their law and risk manager Marnus Kamfer, "This draft in its current format, will result in citizens being left defenceless in a country where the South African Police Services have already openly admitted they don't have the ability to protect the citizens of the country against the wave of crime."

The Democratic Alliance (DA) — South Africa's largest opposition party — strongly opposed the bill, claiming that over 50,000 people had signed their petition against it. Andrew Whitfield, DA spokesperson on police, said "a legal handgun is the last line of defence for millions of South Africans." He added, "South Africa has one of the highest murder rates in the world and that just by walking the streets, citizens are exposing themselves to dangers similar to those faced by people in some war-torn countries." Whitfield concluded that "disarming law-abiding citizens in the current crime-ridden environment is reckless, ill-advised and places many innocent civilians at the mercy of criminals."

Damian Enslin, chairperson of the South African Gun Owner's Association (SAGA) and an attorney who specializes in firearm related issues, believes the government has lost touch with reality — largely



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because Cabinet ministers and several high-ranking government officials are protected 24/7 by security teams and the police. Albert Fritz, western cape provincial minister of safety, termed the ban on firearms for self-defence “beyond any form of understanding.”

In South Africa’s recent “Firearms Re-licensing Amnesty,” which expired on January 31, legally owned firearms had to be submitted to police authorities for ballistics testing as part of a re-licensing process — leaving farmers defenseless against would-be attackers and other threats. Furthermore, with the COVID-19 Pandemic and associated lockdowns, partnered by power-supply interruptions due to load shedding and other factors that undermined South African police resources, the re-licensing process was slowed down considerably. Members of pro-gun organizations reported having to return to their local police stations as many as seven times. Taking high rural crime into account — cattle theft, crop theft, game poaching, and farm murders — the SAP acted completely irresponsibly, particularly in light of the fact that they refused to allow farmers to keep their firearms until police were able to perform the testing. Minister of Police Bheki Cele’s response was that he could not unilaterally extend the amnesty because “a whole legal process needs to be followed.”

When interviewed by the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) concerning the Firearms Control Amendment Bill, Cele said that one of the factors motivating the ban on legal ownership of guns for self-defense is that legally owned guns can be used in crimes. He added that possession of a gun in a household can lead to increased rates of victimization for its members. Cele was unable to provide statistics to corroborate his statements. And although reliable statistics are exceptionally hard to come by in South Africa, Cele’s opening statement suggested he’d been working with both international and local research companies.

At this point, it’s worth mentioning that government’s own security services have been a greater source of stolen firearms than the private sector. In the 1990s, when South African statistics were more readily available, a spokesperson for the Department of Safety and Security admitted that from 1990 to 1999, 14,636 firearms issued to police officers were either lost or stolen. At that time, less than one percent of privately owned firearms were stolen in any one year. In December 2020, Vanguard News — a Nigerian newspaper — reported that South Africa’s police force has lost more than 20,000 firearms since 2004. South Africans frequently read news headlines of gun thefts from security companies and gun stores. Weapons watchdog Small Arms Survey released a report in 2018 on gun ownership around the world, which concurs that the number of registered gun owners in South Africa is still relatively low compared to other countries. This raises the question: What is this bill really about? Dr. Guy Lamb, criminologist and expert in crime and violence, confirmed to SABC News on June 1 that registered gun owners in South Africa are largely white males.



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