



OSAC Country Security Report

South Africa

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This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State South Africa Travel Advisory and [South Africa Country Information Page](#).

Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

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- Address: 1 Sandton Drive, Sandhurst (Opposite Sandton City)
- Phone: +27-11-290-3000; After-hours emergency assistance: 079-111-1684

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- Address: 2 Reddam Ave, Westlake 7945
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OSAC Country Chapter(s)

OSAC Country Chapters are active in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Contact [OSAC's Africa team](#) with any questions.

South Africa Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should exercise increased caution in South Africa due to crime, civil unrest, and kidnapping.

Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban as being **CRITICAL**-threat locations for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Crime “C” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Africa, indicating that there may be widespread violent crime and/or organized crime present in the country, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond to serious crimes.

Violent crime remains an ever-present threat in South Africa and impacts people where they live, work, shop, and while in-transit. Criminals do not necessarily single out U.S. citizens for criminal activity because they are Americans, but rather for their perceived relative wealth as most crimes are opportunistic in nature. Common crimes include murder, rape, armed robbery, carjacking, home invasion, property theft, smash and grab, and ATM robbery. Armed robbery is the most prevalent major crime in South Africa, most often involving organized gangs armed with handguns and/or knives.

Home invasion, robbery, and carjacking are prevalent throughout South Africa. These crimes are often violent and can occur at any time of day. In many cases, criminals prefer to attack when the occupants are home or arriving/leaving the premises. While major hotels and resorts mitigate violent crime through access restrictions and security guards, other temporary lodging like bed and breakfasts, short-term rentals, apartment buildings, and stand-alone residences may not. Layered physical security including gates, hardened doors, window grilles, electric fences, and alarms are truly necessary in many of the large cities to mitigate against violent armed residential crime. Due to load shedding (blackouts), backup power is also necessary to maintain alarms, security lighting, and electric fence capabilities.

Smash and grabs, as well as carjackings occur primarily at on-ramps/off-ramps and stoplights. Do not leave valuables on a visible and unoccupied seat in the car or cell phones on a docking station visible from the outside of the vehicle. Drivers must maintain heightened vigilance and keep a distance from other vehicles to allow for an escape route when stopping their vehicle at traffic lights or ramps. Many carjackings occur when the victim arrives at home and pulls into the driveway or entrance gate; the carjackers pull up behind the victim to block an escape path. Carjackers may kill or seriously injure victims who resist or fail to comply with demands. In many scenarios, robbers force the victim into the house, rob them of their valuables, and take the vehicle. Driving at night increases chances for carjacking with the practice of gangs laying tire spikes on the road or dropping items from overpasses to force damaged vehicles to pull over. Avoid proximity to cash-in-transit vehicles, which are frequent targets of armed criminal gangs both while parked and while driving, including on the highway.

According to the South African Police Service’s (SAPS) latest crime statistics, almost 23,000 vehicle hi-jackings were reported from April 2023 to March 2024, approximately one vehicle

stolen every 19 minutes. Private security companies have reported the most commonly stolen vehicles in 2022 are: Toyota Hilux, Volkswagen Polo, Toyota Quantum, and Nissan NP200. Four-wheel drive vehicles continue to remain in high demand on the illicit market. According to SAPS, Gauteng Province is a hot spot for hijacking, with over 11,000 incidents recorded between April 2023 and March 2024.

Thieves also use remote and key fob jammers/scanners. As you use your remote or key fob to lock and unlock your car doors, thieves disrupt or capture the signal to use later to gain access to your vehicle in order to steal the contents or the car itself. Thieves can also scan the RFID signal from your key and clone it, enabling them to unlock and steal the vehicle. RFID blocking sleeves and wallets can be found on Amazon or other online stores. South Africa has one of the highest rape rates in the world. While rapists do not specifically target foreigners, foreigners have been victims.

Express kidnapping to steal money from ATMs remains more common than the longer-term kidnapping for ransom (KFR), although it is becoming more frequent (see “Kidnapping Threat” below). Thieves will often pose as volunteers to help their victims withdraw money at ATMs. These thieves may grab the money as it is ejected from the machine, grab the card as it is ejected (after watching the PIN being entered), ensure the card is successfully “skimmed” (copied by a device attached to the outside of the ATM), or a combination of the three. Only use ATMs inside trusted banking institutions with security personnel present.

Financial and identity theft crimes, including debit/credit card and advance-fee scams, are common. Most businesses have portable credit card machines they bring to the customer to allow them to swipe their card themselves. Despite these safeguards, scammers frequently clone cards, resulting in fraudulent charges. ATM fraud includes the placement of a skimming device on the ATM itself or the ruse of a “helpful citizen” who offers to assist. Armed robberies and shootings occur with some frequency in shopping malls, particularly at jewelry stores, high end electronics stores, and high-end liquor stores. Most such stores will deliver to customers’ homes.

The proliferation of “tap to pay” cards has resulted in increased personal credit card skimming to execute immediate purchases without the knowledge of the card owner. Often, using a cellular phone application or actual credit card processing machine, skimmers can enter a purchase amount and successfully charge a credit or debit card by “bumping” into a person or holding the RFID receiver up against a wallet or purse. Some skimmers will use an attaché case with a skimming device concealed in it.

To avoid this, the RSO recommends the use of an RFID blocking sleeve, wallet, or faraday bag in which to keep the credit and debit cards. RFID blocking sleeves and wallets can be found on Amazon or other online stores. Only remove the card from the protective RFID blocking device when using the card and replace it immediately. Community members are advised to be wary of individuals with handbags or cellphones getting close to your person.

In South Africa, retail theft is common. Thieves at shopping malls will use spotters who follow victims to ascertain what they might be able to steal. The spotter may follow the patron to the parking lot where the victim is robbed (away from witnesses) or passed along to the thieves' partners waiting in a nearby car, where they will be followed and robbed away from security and police. Thieves following shoppers home continues to be a trend. Cell phone thefts in shopping centers are also common. Numerous cell phone thefts occur from patrons not paying attention to those near them as they walk to their cars or communicate with their hired driver. Criminals will often observe their target departing the store, and engage in a "follow home" robbery, stopping the unsuspecting victim at a location on the victim's route home advantageous to the criminal, and robbing them at gunpoint.

To help avoid these incidents, the RSO advises against making these purchases in person and shopping online when possible.

A common street scam targeting tourists involves criminals posing as security personnel and insisting pedestrians pay for a walking pass to continue walking on the street. Such walking passes do not exist. Do not pay anyone for a walking pass.

Threats of crime increase when neighborhoods experience power outages. Criminals frequently conduct crimes during power outages when mitigation measures such as alarms, security lights, and electric gates may be out of service if not powered by backup generators. Criminals are also likely to target vehicles stuck in traffic and in poorly lit areas during power outages, putting drivers and passengers at risk of carjackings or armed robberies.

Increase awareness in Central Business Districts (CBDs) and Townships during daylight hours due to high crime rates and spontaneous protests that may involve roadblocks. Demonstrators frequently burn tires and throw rocks and other projectiles. Avoid CBDs and Townships after dark unless traveling with an organized tour group or with someone who knows the area. Townships are less developed, but heavily populated areas generally located on, but not limited to, the edges of urban centers. For example, Soweto is a well-known and heavily visited township outside of Johannesburg, enjoyable during the day with a tour group. At night, even areas popular with tourists (such as Soweto's Vilakazi Street) can become dangerous; be deliberate with your parking plan and purposeful with your presence. Crime is common around taxi and other public transport stands. Avoid using rideshare services near taxi stands. Taxi drivers may assault rideshare cars and drivers who pick up or drop off riders near taxi stands.

U.S. citizens should avoid driving during periods of load shedding (rolling blackouts) as the roads can become extremely congested due to a lack of traffic signals. These traffic jams and slow-moving traffic can provide opportunities for smash and grab robberies.

The U.S. Consulate General in Cape Town requires all employees use fully armored vehicles for official travel into townships and other high-risk areas in the Cape Peninsula. In addition, official travel in townships and other high-risk areas require a Consulate General driver and is only permitted during specific times.

Occasionally, the U.S. Diplomatic Mission to South Africa may declare specific locations off-limits to employees because of risk of violence or other physical danger. The Mission frequently advises avoiding nighttime driving between cities (aside from the airport to hotels) and to stay in well-lit and populated areas if out at night. When these same dangers apply to private citizens, the Mission will alert the public to the fact. Check the Embassy website to review recent [Security Alerts](#).

Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Africa.

Kidnap-for-ransom (KFR) is widespread. In the past, kidnappers have targeted U.S. citizens and other foreign travelers. Criminals kidnap individuals for financial gain, often forcing victims to withdraw money and provide passwords for online accounts before releasing them. While rare, kidnappings to extort ransom from family members also occur and many of these incidents involve violence. The frequency of kidnappings of all varieties have increased in 2024. The South African Police Service (SAPS) reported 17,061 kidnappings between April 2023 and March 2024, an 11% increase from the previous year. The majority of incidents were recorded in Gauteng Province (8,683) and KwaZulu Natal Province (3,329).

U.S. nationals have not been the target of kidnap for political gain. There have been a few cases of criminals misrepresenting themselves as legitimate businesspersons and abducting U.S. nationals seeking business opportunities.

Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, as being **MEDIUM**-threat locations for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Africa.

Traditionally, South Africa’s nexus to international terrorism has been through recruiting, funding, and as a safe haven for international terrorists. There has been increased activity by ISIS sympathizers and supporters locally. The Department is also concerned about international Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremist (REMVE) organizations, including those that advocate white supremacy or seek affiliation with like-minded groups in South Africa. In July 2024, OFAC designated two members of an ISIS cell in South Africa involved in generating and transferring illicit funds for the group.

Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Durban and Johannesburg as being **HIGH**-threat locations and Cape Town and Pretoria as **MEDIUM**-threat locations for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Africa, indicating that demonstrations, protests, and strikes occur frequently. These can develop quickly without prior notification, often interrupting traffic, transportation, and other services; such events have the potential to turn violent.

In July 2021, parts of KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng provinces experienced riots and looting, resulting in the death of 340 individuals and economic damage. The unrest was triggered by the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma.

Elections/Political Stability

After decades of democratic rule since the end of apartheid, the government maintains a vibrant free society and a market-based economy. Despite the world’s highest wealth inequality, unemployment exceeding 34%, persistent poverty, and ever-present violent crime, South Africa remains a successful multiparty democratic society and boasts a robust civil society, free media, and independent judiciary.

KwaZulu-Natal, a coastal South African province, suffers from a long history of political violence. The province has been plagued with politically motivated killings of African National Congress (ANC), Inkatha Freedom Party, and National Freedom Party members in contest for power and economic gain. In recent years, intra-party killings have risen significantly, with ANC members reportedly ordering the killings of rival party members, either in run up to elections, or in connection to a potential tender award or other economic benefit. The violence targets local politicians, not foreigners.

South Africa held elections in May 2024. For the first time since 1994, the Africa National Congress (ANC) fell short of capturing 50% of the vote and had to enter into a coalition to form a parliamentary majority. In response to election results, a number of political parties submitted appeals to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). There was a small uptick in politically motivated assassinations largely at the local level in the leadup to elections, with 10 incidents recorded over the first four months of 2024. Outside of these limited instances of targeted political violence, electoral activity in the pre-election period was largely peaceful with the exception of some instances of localized violence generally involving clashes between supporters of opposing parties. There were no instances of political violence or violent protests recorded following elections; however, additional South African police were deployed to KwaZulu Natal in the event of violent protests by supporters of Jacob Zuma and the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party.

Protests & Demonstrations

Labor strikes and protests occur frequently and can be violent and disruptive; avoid them, given the frequency at which they turn violent. Gauteng Province hosts the political and economic capitals (Pretoria/Tshwane and Johannesburg, respectively) and typically experiences more labor unrest than other provinces. Labor unions carry substantial political influence and can mobilize thousands of people. Typical protest activities include blocking major thoroughfares between Johannesburg and Pretoria (termed “go-slows”) by vehicles, or gridlocking Central Johannesburg with large numbers of protestors. Labor unrest affects electricity, mining, farming, retail, civil service, public transportation, private trucking, and manufacturing sectors.

Unlicensed protests have led to property destruction and assaults. Unannounced large-scale wildcat strikes have occurred in the mining sector and in agricultural areas in the Western Cape in recent years. These wildcat strikes involved thousands of workers and led to numerous deaths, injuries, and extensive property damage.

Although not connected to industrial action, another form of protest is “service delivery protests,” which often flare up in neighborhoods when water, electricity, or other public utilities are cut off. These protests often result in participants burning tires, stoning vehicles, and blocking roads.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

In a Pew Research Center study released in 2017, 53% of South African respondents had a favorable view of the U.S. Occasionally anti-capitalism groups remark that the U.S. is to blame for unemployment and other inequalities. Bilateral relations improved moderately in 2021, buoyed by high-level government engagement, including U.S. support for South Africa’s fight against the COVID pandemic.

Law Enforcement

The emergency line in South Africa is **10-111** from any phone or **112** from a mobile phone.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) breaks down nationwide policing responsibilities into national, provincial and municipal levels. In addition to SAPS, there are various traffic and metropolitan police departments throughout South Africa. The National Traffic Police has authority to enforce traffic laws throughout South Africa, especially on all major highways. In addition, there are traffic police departments at the provincial level in each of South Africa’s nine provinces. The metropolitan police departments enforce traffic and bylaw offenses in their areas of operation.

Though there has been an improvement in community policing, the public mistrusts police and sees them as corrupt. Corruption does occur in South Africa, including police requesting bribes. On occasion, police officers have informed motorists that they can pay a fine directly to the officer in a speed trap or at a road-worthy checkpoint. If this occurs, the best course of action is

to advise the officer to provide a citation and that you will pay the fine at a police station. Complaints of street-level shakedowns for money or similar forms of harassment are not common among the U.S. expatriate community but can happen.

Police Response

SAPS has made a strong effort to decrease its response time in recent years. While active crimes will take precedence over crimes that have happened in the past, SAPS tries to respond to incidents within a reasonable time. SAPS patrol vehicles will typically be the first responding unit and can open a case docket and take statements at the scene or can advise the complainant to report the crime at the nearest police station. There are detective programs at all SAPS stations. Once the detective receives a case and they are ready to continue the investigation, they will generally contact the complainant. Large caseload backlogs, largely paper-driven process, and inefficient case management system from initial contact to prosecution hampers the effectiveness of the justice system. For those cases brought all the way to prosecution, the long lead time does not serve as a deterrent to crime.

For residential/commercial properties in affluent neighborhoods, the use of private security companies is normal as first response to a crime in-progress. These private companies generally staff one or two armed officers in response vehicles and patrol neighborhoods throughout the day. While more affluent areas employ roving security reaction units with the responsibility of responding to violent crimes, these patrols have done little to decrease the prevalence of these crimes.

Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in South Africa, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention "D" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Africa.

The law provides for criminal penalties for conviction of official corruption, and the government continues efforts to implement the law effectively. However, officials sometimes engage in corrupt practices with impunity. Official corruption remains a problem. The ANC has sought to remove party members implicated in corruption scandals due to concern the scandals

undermine public confidence in the ANC-led government with mixed results. The State Capture Commission, chaired by the Chief Justice Zondo, is the latest public commission to release thousands of pages in reports on state capture and public corruption within the government and state-owned enterprises.

Cybersecurity

South Africa has seen a significant rise in cybercrime. SAPS lacks the resources and technical capability to combat these crimes effectively. Organizations with the financial resources continue to invest heavily in cybersecurity to protect their assets. Much of the country, to include critical infrastructure, remains vulnerable to cyberattack. Major companies in a number of critical sectors including maritime and health have fallen victim to cyberattacks.

Avoid connecting to public Wi-Fi hotspots, as it is difficult to ascertain if the connection is secure. If you must connect to a public Wi-Fi hotspot, use a virtual private network (VPN).

Identity theft remains a significant concern due to several contributing factors: SIM swap fraud, a strong infrastructure of money wiring services, readily available internet, prepaid cell phones, high levels of corruption in many companies and government agencies, and a lack of police resources/expertise to combat this type of crime.

Import/Export Restrictions

Export-controlled items are very similar to those requiring import permits, including scrap metals, autos, fossil fuels, minerals and other natural resources, chemicals.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).