

A systematic review and meta-analysis of human security threats and approaches in South Africa: Policing the known, governing the unknown

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ABSTRACT

This study examines human security and policing in South Africa, exploring how traditional and adaptive responses address known and unknown criminality across neighbourhoods. It explores gaps in governance and policing models related to security threats and the ongoing challenge of “policing the known and governing the unknown.” Meta-analysis of 54 studies from various sources (n=7,842) revealed that exposure to violence is associated with socioeconomic challenges, marginalisation, and youth unemployment in poor neighbourhoods. It identified a shift from traditional state-controlled policing to a hybrid security model, with more reliance on private security in wealthier urban areas. This underscores traditional policing’s inefficiency in addressing security needs in marginalised communities, concentrating security efforts in urban zones. Poorer, more volatile neighbourhoods are less policed despite rising risks, creating protection inequalities. The study emphasises that South Africa’s security approach must transition from a state-centric to a more inclusive, human-centric ideal. This involves bolstering state security forces, private security firms, and community-driven security initiatives for equitable access to security for all neighbourhoods. The review advocates for policies that ensure equitable security for all and promote collaboration among communities, public and private sectors, and address underlying socioeconomic issues that promote volatility and threats to human security.

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Criminality; human security threats; policing; insecurity; volatile neighbourhood; South Africa

Introduction

Human security issues have been prioritised by societies in the post-Cold War era, with emerging risks prompting a shift from state-centric security to emphasising the safety of communities and the well-being of individuals (Šehović, 2018). This encompasses freedom from fear, want, and indignity and addresses interconnected challenges such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and insecurity (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2022). In South Africa, human security remains a critical concern due to its historical context of colonialism, apartheid, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities across its

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provinces, each facing distinct security challenges, including socio-environmental vulnerabilities and criminality (Marutlulle, 2022), influencing the known and unknown security threats.

In this review, 'policing the known' constitutes traditional law enforcement approaches that operate within established frameworks to address visible, predictable, and well-documented security threats through conventional policing methods, crime statistics, and evidence-based interventions (Berg, 2010). This approach relies on historical data, established crime patterns, and standardised protocols to respond to familiar security challenges such as burglary, assault, and drug-related offences that can be anticipated, measured, and addressed through routine policing strategies. Conversely, 'governing the unknown' reflects adaptive governance strategies designed to address emerging, unpredictable, and often invisible security challenges that fall outside traditional policing paradigms, particularly those affecting marginalised communities where conventional law enforcement may be inadequate or inappropriate (Van der Spuy & Retief, 2023).

This concept involves innovative approaches to managing complex socio-economic vulnerabilities, environmental risks, and systemic inequalities that threaten security but cannot be tackled by traditional policing alone. It needs collaborative governance, community involvement, and preventive social interventions. These unpredictable security challenges, such as poverty, social exclusion, marginalisation and violence, demand innovative governance and policing frameworks capable of addressing fluid, specific risks in post-apartheid South African society. While the apartheid regime has ingrained lasting inequalities in society (Seekings & Natrass, 2008), contemporary reforms and redistributive policies have achieved limited success in protecting lives and property, as they primarily focus on 'policing the known' strategies rather than developing comprehensive approaches to 'govern the unknown' socio-economic drivers of insecurity. This limitation is evident in persistent socioeconomic issues and security threats from racial and ethnic divisions, crime, hostility, drug trafficking, and gender-based violence, especially in urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, and the Western Cape provinces (Du Plessis, 2020), while the Eastern Cape and Limpopo face significant socioeconomic challenges that require governance approaches beyond traditional policing (South African Human Rights Commission, SAHRC, 2019). This research gap necessitates targeted neighbourhood security efforts that can simultaneously address known visible security threats through conventional policing while developing innovative governance mechanisms to manage unknown risks arising from socioeconomic and environmental factors, which primarily affect impoverished communities where the distinctions between 'known' and 'unknown' security challenges are often blurred.

Policing in South Africa is rooted in the colonial experience of apartheid, when police agencies utilised their power to strengthen racial hierarchies and suppress dissent (Brooks, 2021). The former system left behind significant challenges that the modern-day South African Police Service (SAPS) continues to struggle with. This is coupled with the problems of corruption, operational shortcomings and decreased community confidence (Bruce, 2014). The SAPS devotes its efforts to known threats due to reports of violent crime in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth, among the world's highest rates (Institute for Security Studies, ISS, 2022). Nevertheless, gender-based violence is one of the worst human security threats, labelled as the 'second pandemic', since it primarily affects women across South Africa's urban and rural areas (Machisa & van Dorp, 2021). The traditional views on gender norms in various cultures amplify gender violence cases and obstruct women from accessing the justice system (Jewkes et al., 2010).

The governance of unknown security risks in South Africa aligns with broader issues policy-makers face in building flexible states, as described by Bennett, Nathan, and Terre Satterfield (2018). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa witnessed significant weaknesses in its healthcare system and governmental organisations, particularly in the Eastern Cape, where substandard infrastructure and mismanagement hindered the ability to respond effectively (Ngcobo et al., 2021). Hence, it has become imperative to integrate human security strategies to protect vulnerable populations from evident socioeconomic and environmental crises such as poverty, high unemployment, and inequality (Francis & Webster, 2019; Kuhlengisa et al., 2024). This could also cope with the Northern Cape droughts and KwaZulu-Natal floods (Ziervogel et al., 2014). Several environmental challenges and cultural vulnerabilities pose risks to the livelihoods of some regions (Scholes & Biggs, 2004). This is evident in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga regions, the Northern Cape suffers from droughts, and KwaZulu-Natal experiences constant flooding. Events such as the 'Day Zero' water crisis and floods highlight the urgent need for sustainable governance, particularly for marginalised communities that are susceptible to crime.

The fundamental idea underlying the concepts of 'policing the known' versus 'governing the unknown' is the understanding of human security approaches in South Africa. The South African Police Service (SAPS) effectively performs the functions of law enforcement and public order, but still faces criticism regarding its effectiveness and security control methods (Mangai et al., 2013). The country's provinces implemented community policing, sector policing, and intelligence-led policing as alternative policing structures, with varying results (Marks et al., 2021). The SAPS primarily relies on force in its reactive law enforcement system across the provinces. The force-based security strategy fails to identify either the fundamental causes of security threats or the socio-economic aspects that impact criminal activity in various provinces. This method substantially expanded the mismatch between the required police services and community expectations (Bradford & Fleming, 2023), mainly affecting areas with past marginalisation experiences.

Human security governance requires enhanced sophistication and adaptability, as traditional police practices continue to struggle to confront new threats (van Vuuren et al., 2014). Traditional security threats ('policing the known') that receive police attention exist independently of the recent threat trends. These non-traditional threats ('governing the unknown') affect neighbourhoods with unstable and underwhelming law enforcement presence. Hence, human security demands urgent action to fulfil security needs and persistent work to build ongoing security resilience. This paper examined two key research questions about human security threats in South African governance and policing systems: How do existing governance and policing models address human security threats in South Africa, and what gaps persist regarding 'policing the known and governing the unknown'? The studies included in this review followed similar research frameworks, examining human security governance and policing effectiveness in post-apartheid South Africa.

Methodology

Study design

This study combines a systematic review and meta-analysis to synthesise and analyse recent literature on human security approaches in South Africa's provinces. It addresses traditional and emerging security threats within the themes of 'Policing the Known' and 'Governing the Unknown.' This methodological approach was chosen to identify prevailing trends,

assess the effectiveness of human security strategies, and uncover research gaps associated with South Africa's socio-political, economic, and security challenges. The dual focus on qualitative synthesis and quantitative aggregation enabled the study to bridge conceptual and practical insights on human security. This timeframe (2000-2024) corresponds with the maturity of the post-apartheid era, during which the country grappled with balancing democratic governance, economic inequality, and the legacy of systemic injustices. The data in this review were derived from the studies selected for the meta-analysis.

Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria were determined using the Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes (PICOS) framework, a systematic approach that ensures a focused and comprehensive review. This was framed to define the Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes, and Study Design, thereby guiding the selection of relevant studies for the review:

- Population: Investigating human security strategies in South Africa while emphasising traditional threats such as crime and emerging volatility, including socio-political instability, social injustice and pandemics.
- Intervention: Analysis of implemented or proposed human security frameworks, policing and governance models, or policies addressing security threats in South Africa.
- Comparison: Studies contrasting human security outcomes across regions, between historical and contemporary governance strategies, or between traditional and emergent threats.
- Outcomes: Indicators of effective human security governance, including reductions in inequality, improved law enforcement, community resilience, and adaptive governance capabilities (Table 1).

Data sources and searches

Several databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and SAGE, were used for the literature search. These databases were selected

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Description	Inclusion	Exclusion
Focus of Study	Studies addressing human security approaches in South Africa's provinces.	Studies unrelated to human security or governance frameworks, policing approaches in South Africa.
Research Content	Research examining 'policing the known' or 'governing the unknown' in traditional and emergent security threats.	Studies that focus solely on unrelated governance issues or regions outside South Africa are not considered.
Type of Study	Quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method studies. Conceptual and theoretical reviews are also considered.	Articles lack empirical or practical insights or lack sufficient conceptual and theoretical analysis.
Time Frame	Studies published between 2000 and 2024.	Studies published before 2000 or lacking relevance to contemporary human security challenges.
Language	Articles published in English.	Articles in languages other than English.
Relevance to Human Security Contexts	Empirical or applied research focusing on law enforcement, governance, inequality, or resilience strategies in South Africa.	Studies without direct relevance to human security challenges or governance in South Africa.

Source: Authors' construction (2025).

for their extensive multidisciplinary coverage and access to high-quality, peer-reviewed journals, policy reports, and grey literature relevant to human security, governance, threats, and policing in South Africa. Grey literature, including policy reports, government documents, and Non-governmental Organisation publications, was sourced online from reputable South African agencies to ensure its reliability. These sources were validated by verifying their credibility and cross-checking findings against peer-reviewed studies, ensuring adherence to the highest standards of data reliability and accuracy. Quality was assessed based on relevance, currency, transparent methodology, and objectivity.

Search strategy

The article employed Boolean search strings for three different themes: 'Human security' AND 'South Africa', 'Policing strategies' AND 'governance challenges,' as well as 'Law enforcement' AND 'human security.' The search included 'Adaptive governance' OR 'resilience strategies' combined with 'South Africa' and 'Violent crime' OR 'Property crime' AND 'Neighbourhood crime' to focus on particular security areas.

Socioeconomic aspects were explored by searching terms such as 'inequality,' 'human development,' and 'Community security frameworks.' Emerging concerns were addressed with 'Emerging security threats' AND 'climate change' OR 'pandemics.' Governance disparities were examined using 'Governance models' AND 'provincial disparities.' Insecurity issues were captured through 'Human security threats' AND 'socio-political insecurities.' The study employed an iterative method to examine the human security literature and governance topics across South Africa.

Study selection process

The research process followed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) standards (Page et al., 2021). Systematic review procedures commenced with the identification of 7,842 records screened from the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science databases, as illustrated in [Figure 1](#). After excluding 3,210 duplicates and ineligible entries, 5,630 records were screened, leading to the retrieval of 4,609 reports. These were assessed by title and abstract, culminating in 432 studies selected for full-text review. Following exclusions based on criteria such as relevance, methodology, and study setting, 2,901 records were evaluated, resulting in a final sample of 54 studies that met the eligibility criteria and were included in the review (see Table 2).

Data extraction

The data extraction process aimed for consistency and accuracy across studies. A standardised approach captured key details, including study characteristics, design, findings, and limitations. Uniform criteria were applied, and a predefined protocol guided the extraction, including cross-referencing and consulting related literature for clarification. An independent reviewer regularly assessed the extracted data to identify inconsistencies and enhance the reliability of the final dataset. For the meta-analysis, a standardised metadata extraction form was developed to collect information from each included study systematically. This form documented key details, including study characteristics, sample demographics, human security type, statistical data, and thematic relevance to human security domains.

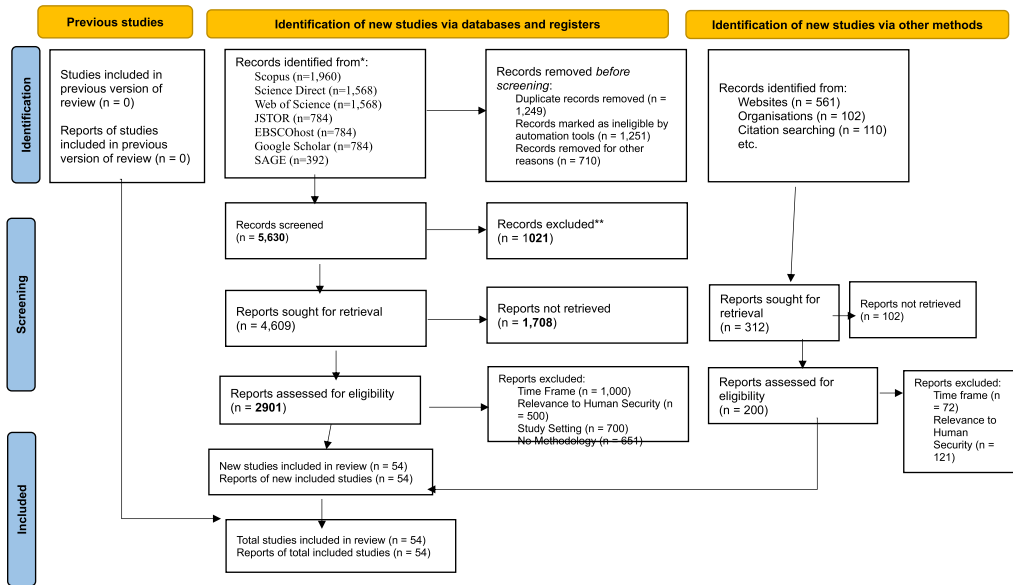


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of the study (Author's Construction, 2025).

Each study underwent cross-verification to maintain accuracy and reduce errors. Extracted metadata was then coded and entered into a structured database for analysis and synthesis. The data primarily used in this review were derived from the studies selected for the meta-analysis. No AI data was utilised or adopted.

Quality assessment and data synthesis

The Evaluation Tool for Quantitative and Qualitative Research Studies, developed by Long and Godfrey (2004), was adapted to assess the included studies. It reflects key areas, including objectives, setting, design, sample, and ethics. Furthermore, it was refined to address human security threats and policing for mixed-methods studies, emphasising a comprehensive appraisal of strengths and weaknesses rather than employing a scoring system.

Data synthesis and analysis

The data analysis process consisted of two key phases:

Qualitative Synthesis: A thematic synthesis was conducted to analyse recurring themes in human security approaches in South Africa. Thematic coding identified key areas, including Historicising Human Insecurity in South Africa, Frameworks and Policies on Human Security, Prevailing Human Insecurity, Security Threats in Neighbourhoods, Socio-Economic Challenges to Human Security, and Policing the Known and Governing the Unknown. Two additional themes examined were Provincial and Community Security Approaches to Crime and Emerging Security Threats, Violence and Marginalisation in Public Spaces. The synthesis explained the South African governance security approaches in addressing security concerns.

Random-effects meta-analytical models were employed to address effect sizes across studies, which utilised diverse sample sizes and measurement approaches within unique

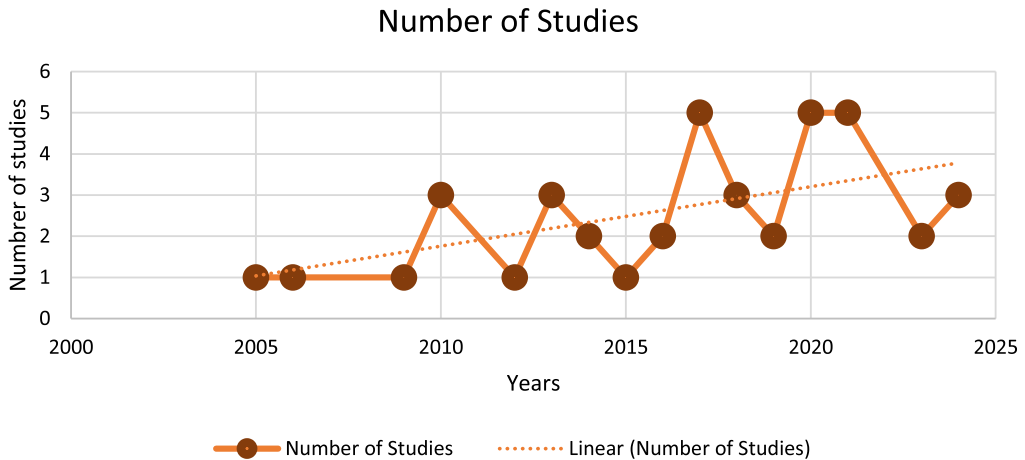


Figure 2. Number of studies by year of publication.

provincial security contexts (Higgins et al., 2003). This model works best with heterogeneous data, enabling researchers to draw generalisable findings and derive pooled effect size estimates. Studies were screened for quality and relevance to minimise biases, with publication bias assessed. Data analysis was done using Microsoft Excel software. The study examined the differences in human security methods by analysing governance, criminality, socio-political contexts, and the resilience of inequality and violence across South Africa.

Ethical considerations

In conducting the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and Meta-Analysis (MA), ethical considerations included ensuring transparency, objectivity, and proper citation of all sources. The studies selected were based on explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and no private data were accessed arbitrarily. All studies were assessed for quality, and the limitations of the analysis were reported openly to maintain the integrity and reliability of the findings. The number of studies by years was presented in Figure 2.

The distribution of methodologies (as shown in Figure 3) indicates a preference for both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with 20 studies using qualitative analysis [See Table 2] and 18 employing quantitative methods. Additionally, two studies are ethnographic, four use theoretical analysis, and policy analysis appears in three studies. Literature reviews and empirical analyses are each represented by two studies, while cross-sectional surveys and systematic reviews appear in three and two studies, respectively. Other rarer methods, such as conceptual analysis and mixed methods (Landman, 2019; Van der Spuy & Retief, 2023), are cited once each. Several studies did not specify their methodological approach. Overall, there is a clear preference for qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

See Figure 4 for the study settings across various locations in South Africa. Most studies (24) were conducted nationally. Regional focuses include KwaZulu-Natal ($n = 5$), Durban ($n = 6$), and Gauteng Province ($n = 8$). Other locations include Potchefstroom (UNDP, 2022), Cape Town (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008; Le Roux, Almirol, Rezvan, le Roux et al., 2020), and Johannesburg (Ngcobo et al., 2021; Pienaar et al., 2021) Some studies covered broader regions, with three studies spanning Southern Africa and two focusing on Africa as a whole. Several studies [$n = 13$] did not

Studies and Methodologies

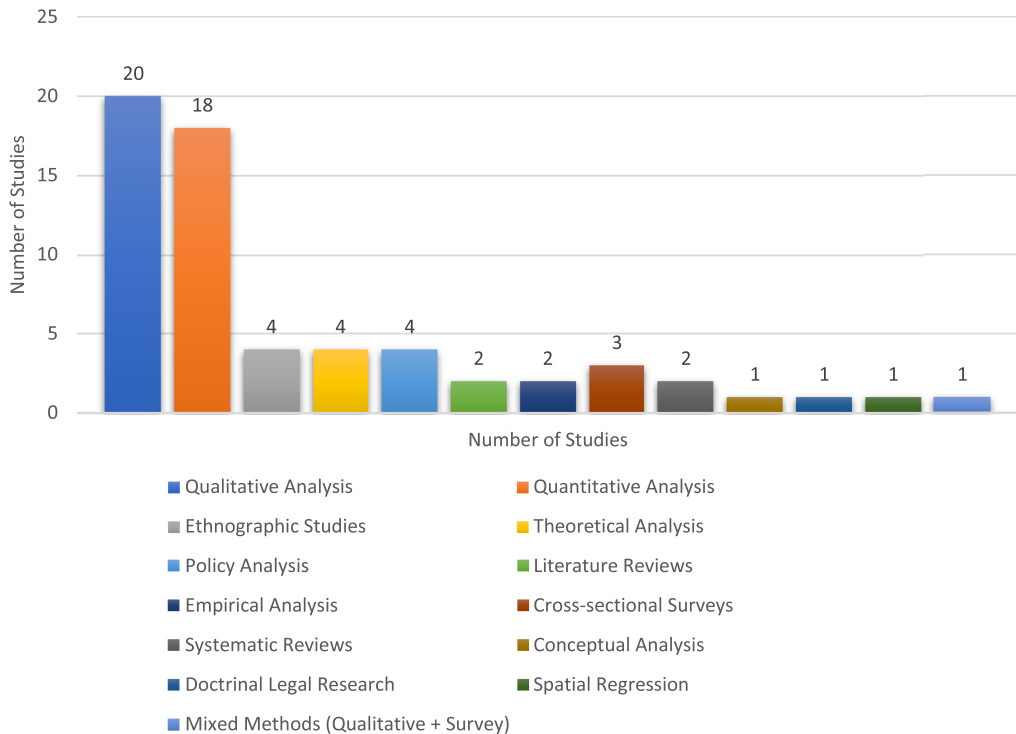


Figure 3. Number of studies by methodologies used.

specify precise locations or covered multiple areas. This distribution reflects a blend of localised and national research focus, with significant attention to urban centres.

Descriptive characteristics of studies for meta-analysis

The meta-analysis examines factors influencing violence, trauma, and crime in South Africa and their implications for human security. Utilising methodologies such as cross-sectional surveys and econometric modelling, the studies focus on variables including youth violence exposure, mental health, crime rates, policing, governance, and socio-economic factors, with sample sizes ranging from 424 to 3,000 participants. Effect sizes vary considerably, with moderate effects reported, such as 0.45 (Kagee et al., 2015) and significant impacts noted, including an odds ratio increase of 1.6–1.8, which links youth unemployment to murder rates in KwaZulu-Natal (Mazorodze, 2020). The heterogeneity of the studies is moderate to high, with I^2 values ranging from 30% to 70%, while confidence intervals provide precise estimates from 0.05 to 4.68. Findings underscore the complexity of human security threats, emphasising the need to enhance police trust, procedural justice, and youth employment to mitigate crime (Mehta et al., 2020; Ngcobo et al., 2021).

Description of continuous outcomes for meta-analysis

Table 3 summarises data of continuous outcomes from eight studies for meta-analysis. The studies examined various dimensions of human security, such as community violence, domestic violence witnessing, health insecurity, and psychological distress. The experimental and

Studies by Regions and Provinces in SA

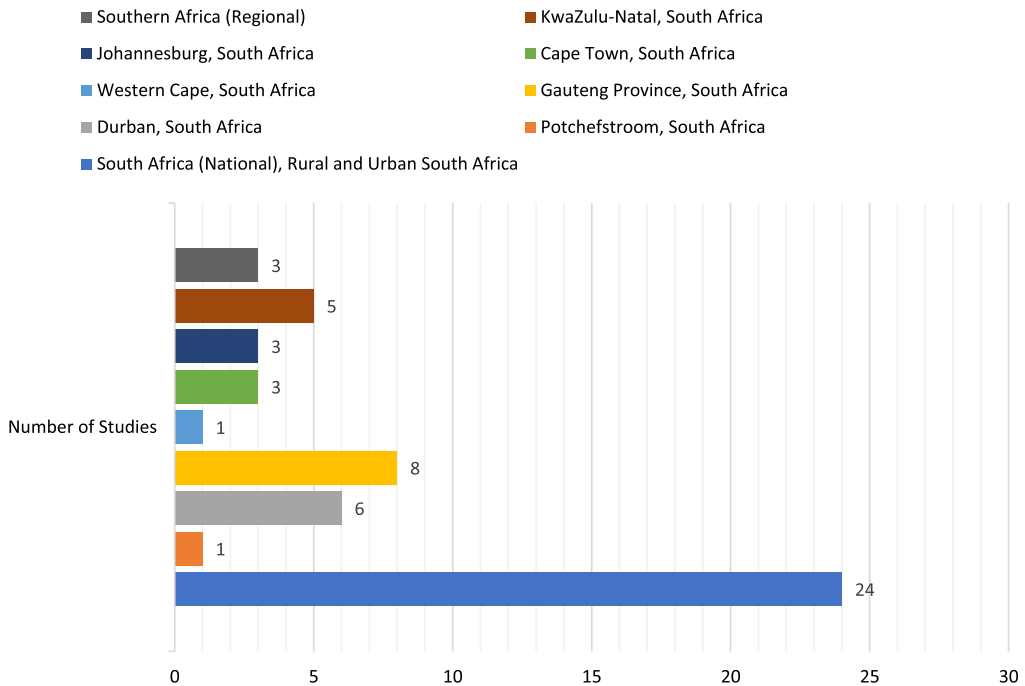


Figure 4. Number of studies by regions and provinces in South Africa.

control group data are provided for the study, including means, standard deviations (SD), and sample sizes (n). Skeen reported a mean of 2.36 (SD = 2.3, n = 413) for community violence in the experimental group, compared to 1.99 (SD = 1.98, n = 559) in the control group (Skeen et al., 2016). Similarly, (du Plessis et al., 2015) Reported domestic violence witnessing with an experimental mean of 9.9 (SD = 0.13, n = 616) versus 6.14 (SD = 0.08, n = 616) in controls. Other studies, such as Seedat and Eagle, explored health insecurity and psychological distress, respectively, with varying means and sample sizes (Eagle, 2015; Seedat et al., 2004).

Pooled effect sizes

Table 5 summarises the pooled effect sizes and heterogeneity statistics for the meta-analysis. Using a fixed-effect model, the pooled standardised mean difference (SMD) was 0.12 (95% CI: [0.08, 0.16]), while the random-effects model yielded a slightly higher pooled SMD of 0.15 (95% CI: [0.07, 0.23]). The I^2 statistic of 45.6% indicates moderate heterogeneity among the studies, and Cochran's Q test ($Q = 12.34$, $p = 0.09$) suggests no significant heterogeneity. The Tau^2 value of 0.02 reflects the between-study variance. These results revealed a small but consistent overall effect, with moderate variability across studies.

Sensitivity analysis (Leave-one-out method)

The sensitivity analysis (see Table 6), conducted using the leave-one-out method, demonstrates the robustness of the meta-analysis results. Each row in the table shows the pooled standardised mean difference (SMD) and heterogeneity statistics when one study is removed at a time. Removing La Roux et-al results in a pooled SMD of 0.14 (95% CI: [0.06,

0.22]) by UNDP (2022), while excluding Pienaar et-al yields a slightly higher pooled SMD of 0.17 (95% CI: [0.09, 0.25]) by le Roux et al. (2020). The I^2 statistic remains relatively stable across all scenarios, ranging from 40.9% to 44.5%, indicating moderate heterogeneity. The Tau^2 value is consistently 0.02, reflecting minimal between-study variance. These findings suggest that no single study disproportionately influences the overall results, confirming the stability and reliability of the meta-analysis.

Pooled effect sizes and confidence intervals

Table 4 presents the meta-analysis results, summarising the effect sizes (standardised mean differences, SMD) and their precision for eight studies examining various human security outcomes. Each study's experimental (Exp) and control (Crl) group means are provided, along with the pooled standard deviation (SD), SMD (Cohen's d), standard error (SE) of the SMD, and 95% confidence intervals (CI) (Skeen et al., 2016). Reported an SMD of 0.17 (SE = 0.07, 95% CI: [0.03, 0.31]), indicating a small but significant effect. In contrast, Du Plessis et al. reported a significantly larger SMD of 34.18 (SE = 0.06, 95% CI: [34.06, 34.30]), indicating a substantial difference between the groups (du Plessis et al., 2015). Some studies reported negative SMDs (- -0.15 and -0.52, respectively) (le Roux et al., 2020; UNDP, 2022). The control groups had higher means than the experimental groups. The 95% CIs provide a range of plausible values for the actual effect sizes, with narrower intervals of greater precision (Figure 5).

Thematic analysis

Figure 6 presents common themes in studies on human security in South Africa, emphasising the country's policing challenges. The historical roots of insecurity are traced to systemic inequalities from colonialism and apartheid, which persist (Higgins et-al, 2003; Van Riet, 2022; Berg, 2010). While policy frameworks align with global standards, local implementation faces significant hurdles (Clarno & Murray, 2013; Cooper-Knock et al., 2024). High crime rates, poor service delivery, and youth delinquency exacerbate community insecurity (Masuku, 2002). While socio-economic issues like unemployment, poverty, and inequality drive insecurity, they are influenced by structural barriers (Akinola et al., 2023; Blackmore, 2003; Demombynes & Özler, 2005).

Synopsis of meta-analysis studies

This meta-analysis examines the nature of human security challenges in South Africa, revealing how contemporary research has evolved to address threats facing communities. Emerging Security Threats dominated the study, with Sui et al. (2020) examination of violence typologies among South African adolescents ($n = 30,007$) revealing gendered differences in perpetration and victimisation profiles, while Stansfeld et al. (2017) explored psychological consequences of violence exposure, demonstrating strong associations with mental health disorders among Cape Town adolescents ($n = 1,034$). Socioeconomic Challenges to human security were identified as a critical theme, evident in Le Roux et al.'s (2020) evaluation of community-based interventions addressing maternal-child health outcomes ($n = 1,310$) in contexts of pronounced violence and economic disadvantage. Provincial and Community Security Approaches to Crime were investigated through localised responses, as Shields et al. (2008) examined community-level factors mediating violence effects on children aged 8–13 ($n = 185$), while du Plessis et al. (2015), Mangai et al. (2023) analysed how different

Precision of the Studies

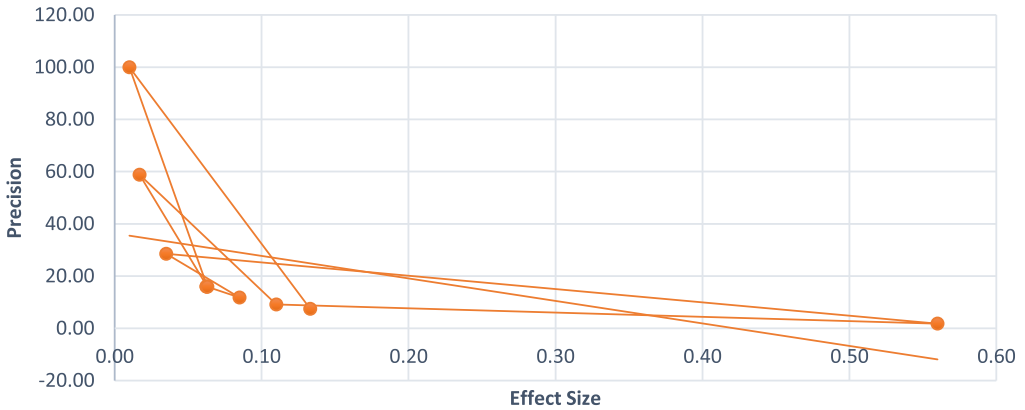


Figure 5. Precision of the studies.

forms of domestic and community violence contribute to behavioural problems among adolescents (n = 616). Prevailing Human Insecurity in the Neighbourhood was consistently documented across studies, with Skeen et al. (2016) revealing particularly high violence exposure among HIV-affected populations (n = 989), demonstrating how health vulnerabilities and security threats intersect at community levels. These studies collectively indicate that human security research has shifted towards understanding the complex interplay between emerging threats, socio-economic factors, and community-level responses, moving beyond traditional security paradigms to address the lived experiences of vulnerable populations across South African contexts.

The state’s traditional policing methods have proven inadequate in addressing issues such as gender-based violence, xenophobia, and marginalisation, underscoring the need for

Number of Studies by the themes

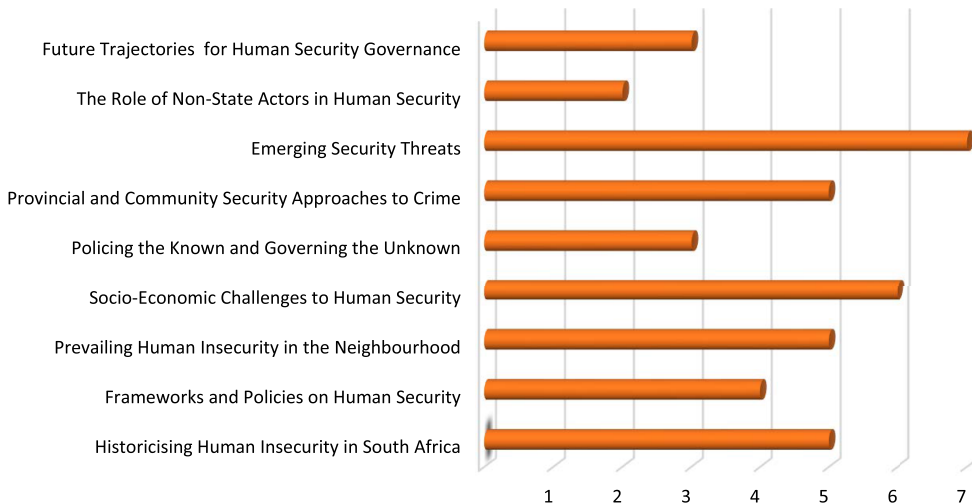


Figure 6. Number of studies in each theme.

adaptive governance models (Berg, 2010; Van Riet, 2022). NGOs, private security firms, and other non-state actors actively make decisions that shape human security, but they often lack accountability (Higgins et al., 2003; Jürgens & Landman, 2006). Participatory governance, regional cooperation, and adaptive policies have a stronghold in tackling security challenges (Zondi, 2020; Zondi, 2021).

Historising human security in South Africa

Human security development in South Africa has evolved in response to complex socio-political events of the past. The country has transitioned to its governing priorities from human dignity and social justice following the democratic transition in 1994 (Skeen et al., 2016). The implementation of these principles yields inconsistent results due to operational gaps that hinder their intended effectiveness. South Africa frequently failed to connect security measures with development initiatives, thus continuing historical social challenges (Forde et al., 2021). A recent study has established that violence contributes to quantifiable social effects because heavy exposure to violence drives up depression, PTSD, and anxiety symptoms in teenagers (Stanfield et al., 2017), Nguyen et al. (2023). proved that township women face distress and PTSD symptoms. Human security strategies that address violence-related damage to exposed communities must be implemented immediately.

Frameworks and policies on human security

The characteristics of human security in South Africa directly depended on both governmental management systems and socioeconomic policy structures. Akinola et al. (2023) revealed that poor governance and youth unemployment increase criminal activity; however, effective state governance and law enforcement would improve the physical security threats. Crime increases when societies have both financial gaps between rich and poor people and when people are unemployed (Blackmore, 2003). The current human security frameworks in post-apartheid South Africa prioritise state needs over individual freedoms, resulting in security restrictions (Skeen et al., 2016). Governmental weaknesses and systemic economic disparities prevent the completion of human security goals. Implementing the 2012 National Cybersecurity Policy has not been the solution, as it still requires practical implementation (van Vuuren et al., 2014). Zondi (2021) noted that poorly coordinated regional frameworks have worsened socioeconomic inequality (Skeen et al., 2016). Effective regional human security policies are challenged due to poor law enforcement practices, institutional inefficiencies and political agenda (Van Riet, 2022).

Prevailing human insecurity in the neighbourhood

The role of local community factors in human insecurity has been emphasised (Choe et al., 2012; Jürgens & Landman, 2006), Stanfield et al. (2017) found a strong link between community violence and mental health issues, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety in adolescents, with high exposure to violence increasing the odds of these conditions (Jürgens & Landman, 2006). Choe et al. (2012) further reported that violence exposure directly influences violent behaviour in youth. This suggests the importance of local and family environments in violence checks (Skeen et al., 2016). Socio-economic deprivation, governance failures, and spatial inequalities contribute to human insecurity. Goga

(2014) links organised crime to weak enforcement and institutional inefficiencies. In the same way, Mazorodze associates youth unemployment with rising crime rates, while Landman (2019) contends that gated communities result in segregation. Van Riet critiques privatised security for perpetuating exclusion (Higgins et al., 2003; le Roux et al., 2020; Pienaar et al., 2021). These studies advocate for integrated security frameworks that promote inclusivity and social cohesion beyond traditional policing and segregation.

Socioeconomic challenges and human security

Human insecurity is shaped by social and economic issues (Demombynes & Özler, 2005; le Roux et al., 2020). Mazorodze (2020) revealed that the unemployment of KwaZulu-Natal youth resulted in a rise in murder cases by 1.6–1.8 times (Pienaar et al., 2021). Demombynes and Özler (2005) established a link between employment status and violent criminal activity, observing that wealthier residential districts experience higher burglary rates due to socioeconomic differences between residents that create criminal behaviour. Inequality and exclusion drive socio-economic challenges. Blackmore (2003) and Akinola et al. (2023) argued that unstable governance and the economy led to rising crime rates and income disparity. These drive unemployment, serving as instrumental factors for crime growth. Landman (2019) revealed that gated communities increase socio-economic segregation, while Van Riet (2022) demonstrates privatised security practice as an exclusive measure (Higgins et al., 2003; le Roux et al., 2020).

Policing and governance dynamics

Security maintenance practices in South Africa stem from social and political conditions which unite state agencies with private security and neighbourhood-based actors. According to Bello and Steyn (2019), university students perceive the police force as corrupt and unfair, which fosters mistrust among citizens, indicating that security management requires more effective police operations combined with increased trust. Present-day governance within post-apartheid society remains affected by the apartheid security model that depends on aggressive state laws, as described by Clarno and Murray (2013) and Berg (2010). Zondi (2021) revealed that, although human security approaches are reflected in policies, they lack actual implementation power at the operational level of the police (Skeen et al., 2016). Private security developments create governance difficulties since they mix public and private security concerns (Higgins et al., 2003). Zondi (2021) notes that Southern African security frameworks frequently fail to integrate their development programs with security strategies, thereby creating barriers to progress in human security (Van Riet, 2022). The security needs of poor communities face neglect due to private police operations in South Africa, which concentrate on exclusive areas (Skeen et al., 2016).

Provincial and local variations in human security approaches

South African provinces employ human security approaches through various policies, varying according to their economic status and government management capabilities (Masuku, 2002; Seedat et al., 2004). According to Sui et al. (2020), young people from high-crime zones demonstrate multiple patterns of harm exposure, which include 29.8% victim-only cases and 24.6% victim-and-perpetrator status (Masuku, 2002). A study in KwaZulu-Natal by Mazorodze showed that youth unemployment produced high murder rates, averaging between 1.6

and 1.8 times greater (Pienaar et al., 2021). Zondi reports that the wealthy regions of Gauteng and the Western Cape have adopted advanced security management systems, including gated communities, to address their security concerns (Skeen et al., 2016). Similarly, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo operate without requiring security infrastructure. They implement informal methods instead, which results in fragmented security systems within urban areas. Despite the situation, both wealthy and disadvantaged provinces experience rising threats of violence and property crimes, while national security institutions face implementation obstacles (Ragolane & Khoza, 2024). Neighbourhoods at both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum share this view about unsatisfactory service delivery from the national government. These leave local communities vulnerable and insecure, as structural inequalities and governance challenges persist (Mongale, 2021). Eagle (2015) demonstrate how security measures are disproportionately distributed across regions due to governance gaps (Skeen et al., 2016). Zondi (2021) supports a comprehensive strategy that unites regional development initiatives with security measures to address inequality (Van Riet, 2022)

Violence and marginalisation in public spaces

South Africa faces stiff street violence and social exclusion. As revealed in the study, urban space exposure to violence leads to an over six times higher risk (OR = 6.23) of depression compared to other places for depression (Jürgens & Landman, 2006). Mongale (2021) reported that this result from system-based discrimination and management failures fostering exclusion (Seedat et al., 2004). Private security continues to gain control over public areas, protecting the elite class while barring admission to marginalised communities (Higgins et al., 2003). This marginalisation continues to impose socioeconomic gaps, creating violence and public unrest.

The role of non-state actors in human security

Through their support, private security firms and civil society groups contribute to creating human security, mainly when state institutions are weak (Skeen et al., 2016). Private security firms fill the security gaps left by governments that have withdrawn their commitment to public protection in unstable political areas or economically declining zones. Their participation tends to worsen social inequalities since they focus on serving elite groups, which suppresses vulnerable communities. Zondi (2021) stresses that non-state actors must incorporate people-based security mechanisms to help develop inclusive interventions that resolve fundamental insecurity, such as poverty and political marginalisation (Van Riet, 2022).

Future trajectories for human security governance

Studies advocate for a human security governance system that identifies the systemic and structural elements contributing to insecurity and societal inequalities (Skeen et al., 2016). The gap between security and development requires cohesive governance systems that bridge the divide between state representatives and independent organisations, taking into consideration both state and non-state actors. Zondi (2020) advocates for a holistic understanding of human security that fosters sustainable peace, accountability, and participatory governance, ensuring that policies reflect the needs of marginalised communities and bolster long-term resilience (Skeen et al., 2016)

Discussion of findings

Security in South Africa has become fragmented due to the integration of private security companies with the country's police departments, which are already overstretched in their role across the country. Security governance trends have led to the development of hybrid private-public security systems to counter state inefficiencies (Higgins et al., 2003; Jürgens & Landman, 2006). The focus often lies on 'policing the known,' addressing visible threats like crime, while deeper systemic issues such as economic inequality and social exclusion are frequently overlooked. There is a growing reliance on private security firms to augment state efforts in crime-prone areas where the police are perceived as ineffective (le Roux et al., 2020; Van Riet, 2022). Existing literature reveals several key themes and gaps in our understanding of private security governance in South Africa (Skeen et al., 2016; Van Riet, 2022). These early studies primarily focused on the regulatory framework, with foundational studies establishing the legislative context for private security oversight. However, these studies, while documenting legal structures, failed to examine the practical implementation challenges of human security threats that emerged in post-apartheid South Africa. This phenomenon is not limited to South Africa; similar patterns are observed globally, particularly in regions with weak governmental control, including parts of Latin America and the Middle East. In these areas, private security plays a crucial role in addressing the gaps left by the state, responding to a retreating or failing government that can no longer ensure the safety of its citizens.

Recent scholarship has increasingly concentrated on operational issues, documenting the daily governance challenges encountered by regulatory bodies (Akinola et al., 2023). Yet there remain gaps in understanding how these governance mechanisms operate at the community level, where private security acts as the primary security provider rather than a supplementary service. Furthermore, while previous studies (Hentschel, 2015; Lamb, 2022; Manoim, 2020) have documented the growth and scope of private security in South Africa, there is a limited analysis of how governance frameworks adapt to different operational contexts. The literature tends to treat private security as a monolithic entity, failing to distinguish between different types of private security provision and their respective governance needs.

Wealthier neighbourhoods in centres such as Johannesburg and Cape Town have increasingly turned to private security for protection, often entirely bypassing public policing. This trend mirrors situations in countries like Mexico and Brazil, where similar socio-economic dynamics have led to stratified security systems (Lamb, 2022; Manoim, 2020). In South Africa, gated communities and private security initiatives have emerged in response to rising crime rates and inadequate policing, resulting in a dual security system. This system exposes deep inequalities, as those who can afford private security are shielded from threats, while less privileged individuals remain vulnerable to violence and crime.

South Africa's human security approaches focus on tackling immediate threats and fundamental systemic weaknesses (Du Plessis, 2020). According to Zondi (2020), socio-economic development is strongly dependent on security approaches, as poverty, unemployment, and inequality often stem from security problems (Skeen et al., 2016). This approach supports global human security protocols that promote policies designed for community inclusion (Chandler, 2012). However, the continuous focus on privatised security and elite protection undermines these efforts, exposing marginalised communities to systemic risks (le Roux et al., 2020). A transformative human security model would require bridging the gap between security and development for policies to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable

and promote long-term resilience (Lee et al., 2014). The unequal distribution of security across social classes in South Africa is consistent with broader global security patterns, rendering security inadequate for people from different socioeconomic brackets.

Studies have documented the relationship between police presence and community safety outcomes. Still, these studies primarily focus on urban contexts, with limited attention to rural or peri-urban areas, where private security is increasingly operating. Additionally, while research has established correlations between marginalisation and security outcomes (Berg, 2010; Van Riet, 2022), there is insufficient analysis of how private security governance mechanisms address or potentially exacerbate these social divisions. This gap is concerning, given that private security often operates in socially stratified environments where governance accountability becomes crucial for preventing the reinforcement of existing inequalities.

South African security governance exhibits two distinct operational areas: 'policing the known' and 'governing the unknown.' The security personnel who serve in both public and private roles prioritise combating active crime threats in urban areas. Nevertheless, they fail to address fundamental social problems, such as unemployment and structural exclusion, that affect disadvantaged communities. 'Policing the known' in this context refers to the ability of state and private security actors to address visible criminal activities, which are more common in affluent urban neighbourhoods. While South African police and private security effectively address these tangible threats, their efforts do not sufficiently address the deeper causes of insecurity (Cooper-Knock, 2016; Diphoorn & Kyed, 2016). Conversely, 'governing the unknown' pertains to the security governance strategies implemented in marginalised areas, where inadequate policing and inconsistent enforcement contribute to the rise of criminal gangs and crime.

The dual challenges exist across nations that recently transitioned from a conflict era because government forces prioritise violence suppression instead of implementing reforms to enhance social conditions while reducing inequality. Security practices must focus on emerging criminal trends, as scholars insist. Instead, they should develop social welfare improvement strategies. The 'policing the known' approach involves direct interventions aimed at addressing visible threats, as research on campus and school safety suggest (van der Merwe, 2010). Security measures in high-risk environments are a fundamental requirement. Mazorodze indicates that youth unemployment and violent crime rates tend to be linked with socio-economic policies to create employment opportunities that minimise these established dangers (Pienaar et al., 2021)

The approach to governing the unknown centres on unpredictable, complex threats and implementing adaptive long-term plans to ensure human security. This approach calls for identifying insecurity's origins by deploying wider solutions, such as psychological healthcare services for violence victims (Jürgens & Landman, 2006) and unified policies that address physical and mental health conditions, including the effects of outbreaks. A security environment that addresses visible and hidden forms of insecurity is more resilient and cohesive. The concept of 'governing the collective' in security governance is an essential yet underexplored area in the literature. While studies have documented various governance approaches, there is limited analysis of how these mechanisms function in practice in addressing structural inequalities to insecurity. The literature tends to focus on technical aspects of governance rather than examining the political and social dimensions of security provision. Effective security governance must address not only immediate security concerns but also the underlying structural factors that contribute to insecurity.

Understanding security governance in South Africa depends on the concept of twilight policing. The double nature of security governance is becoming increasingly fragmented, with the roles of public security personnel almost clashing with those of private agencies, leading to blurred responsibility. Private security companies have become so profoundly integrated into city operations that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish their differences from those of public police (Diphooorn, 2016). They share duties, and there is limited cooperation between them and public law enforcement (De Waard & van Steden, 2012). The blended approach, which controls security functions, is widely prevalent in countries with weak institutions that permit criminal activity alongside failing public organisations. The heavy private security approach is a practice employed by the Mexican government that relies on private security services to protect specific areas. However, public police officers still focus on standard law enforcement duties (Higgins et al., 2003; Mangai et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2017). Private security forces protect high-income areas and business sectors in South Africa, while state police services remain limited in poor and volatile neighbourhoods. This suggests a shift in focus towards private security outfits to lead security management in urban areas.

States lose control of their legal authority, and residents lose trust in law enforcement when they build security systems through private organisations (Higgins et al., 2003). Private security companies struggle with proper oversight systems, raising concerns about human rights violations and response accountability. They have limited control over unknown threats, including the spread of diseases. Surveillance technologies such as drone systems and CCTV cameras have created additional security risks (Paasche, 2012). Separating security responsibilities between public law enforcement and private agencies produces partial oversight control. In contrast, private security primarily prioritises protecting wealthier groups rather than safeguarding all citizens (Berg, 2010; Cooper-Knock, 2016). Social and economic disparities in Brazil and Nigeria exemplify this phenomenon, particularly in the deployment of private security. While the literature documents the integration of public and private security actors, there is limited analysis of how governance mechanisms adapt to manage these hybrid arrangements effectively. The research tends to focus on operational challenges rather than examining the fundamental governance questions raised by hybrid models. Furthermore, existing studies have not adequately addressed how hybrid governance arrangements can be designed to serve broader public interest rather than simply protecting those who can afford private security services. This suggests a crucial gap that this research addresses by examining governance mechanisms that can ensure accountability and effectiveness in hybrid security arrangements.

Implications for human rights and social justice

The study raises concerns about the privatisation of security and its impact on human rights and social justice. In South Africa, private security firms operate with minimal oversight, leading to accountability issues and potential human rights violations, including the use of excessive force and discrimination (Berg, 2021). This problem is evident in Latin America, where private security forces have been linked to human rights abuses, particularly in marginalised communities that are often excluded from state protection (Higgins et al., 2003). Civil society groups warn that privatised security deepens inequalities and social exclusion. The lack of effective oversight means wealthier communities can rely on private security, while poorer individuals must depend on an ineffective public police force, neglecting the rights of those in poverty.

Implications for policy and practice

Policymakers should adopt a dual strategy that addresses both immediate security threats and the long-term needs that underlie these threats. This would take the form of restructuring and equipping the police and other enforcement agencies to address identified concerns, such as crime, unemployment, and school safety. Similarly, they can also be trained to manage long-term initiatives that foster resilience, such as community interventions, mental health services, and trauma-informed care. Also, inequalities arising from socio-economic disparities and the underfunding of public services could be revisited to create a more inclusive security framework.

Future studies should examine these approaches and how adaptive and community strategies can complement traditional security measures. It is essential to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of interventions that address both visible and hidden dimensions of insecurity, particularly within marginalised communities. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the role of community participation and local governance in aligning state-led security initiatives with grassroots efforts, paving the way for a more holistic approach to human security.

Conclusion and recommendations

The evolution of South African security governance has demonstrated a transition from public policing to hybrid security methods, utilising non-state actors in upper-class urban districts. The country's lack of adequate security coverage in under-policed areas with high crime rates exposes marginalised communities to increased risks of known security concerns. This has given rise to a dual security system, where upper-class citizens utilise private protection services, while the underfunded public security force continues to protect the less affluent populations.

The security sector has progressed past official protective measures for citizens, giving rise to the conflict between governmental security models and human-oriented security approaches. The roadblocks encountered by state-centric and human-centric frameworks hinder these approaches from effectively addressing South African financial and governance issues related to security. In themselves, private securities provide essential protection functions; however, they exacerbate societal inequalities, as affluent areas often have access to security services, while poor areas experience heightened personal risks.

The meta-analysis findings reveal that being exposed to violence creates connections between one's economic standing and health issues and may subsequently lead to PTSD and depressive behaviours. It demonstrates that socio-economic differences and inadequate security protection systems are laying the groundwork for instability and a lack of human security measures. The trends align with security governance patterns in other parts of the world, where privatisation leads to both positive and negative effects on social inequality, thus underscoring the necessity of an approach that secures universal citizen rights and needs.

To achieve better security governance, South Africa requires an approach based on integrated principles and human-centred development for an effective security system, ensuring fairness. To provide adequate health and psychological defence against unknown threats, such as outbreaks, while building community security services to maintain known threats, like community violence. The state must enhance its defence capabilities against personal and community threats by ensuring that forces are more accountable to all people, regardless

of their economic status. Better regulation of private security firms should help prevent abuses and ensure they align with national security priorities, as insufficient oversight exacerbates existing inequalities.

Statement and declaration

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Data availability statement

The dataset can be found at <https://zenodo.org/records/15090368>.

Disclosure statement

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APPENDIX

Table 2. Characteristics of the studies for systematic literature review.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
1	Landman, K. (2019)	South Africa	Explore the paradox of gated communities: safety vs. unsafety, inclusion vs. exclusion, economic benefits vs. segregation.	Qualitative, theoretical exploration	Gated communities offer safety but perpetuate segregation. Evolve in form and function over time.	Need for nuanced theoretical and practical approaches for urban planning and policy.
2	Van Riet, G. (2021)	Potchefstroom, South Africa	To explore the impact of security infrastructures and perceptions of crime in South Africa.	Ethnography	Security infrastructures and privatised policing are critiqued. Calls for inclusive security practices.	Promote collaboration across security fault lines.
3	Berg, J. (2010)	South Africa	Illustrate how private security in public spaces adopts state and corporate policing mentalities.	Empirical analysis	Security practices shift between crime control and loss prevention.	Security sector to address fluidity in policing.
4	Berg, J. (2015)	Durban, South Africa	Examine 'twilight policing' as a hybrid between public and private policing.	Ethnography	Private security practices are punitive and supportive of the state, creating 'twilight' spaces.	Shift towards a performative approach to policing.
5	Landman, K. (2010)	South Africa	Investigate how gated communities and physical boundaries impact urban life.	Conceptual analysis	Gated communities are perceived as 'luxury laagers,' reinforcing historical segregation.	Encourage reflection on the historical implications of physical boundaries.
6	Paasche, T.F. (2012)	Cape Town, South Africa	Explore the parallel existence of private and public spaces in South Africa.	Empirical data analysis	Privatised spaces are becoming more public and inclusive, contrasting past segregation.	Support more inclusive public spaces.
7	Jansen van Vuuren, J.C., Leenen, L., Phahlamohlaka, J., & Zaalman, J. (2014)	South Africa	Investigate South Africa's cybersecurity governance and national policy.	Literature review, policy analysis	South Africa's cybersecurity framework is in its early stages; policy implementation is lacking.	Establish a holistic cybersecurity approach and partnerships.
8	Ezeji, C. L., Olutola, A. A., & Bello, P. O. (2018)	South Africa	To examine the extent of cybercrime and the state's role in addressing it	In-depth interviews with 12 participants	Shortage of criminal justice experts, insufficient legislation, lack of public awareness, organisations avoiding reporting	Improve criminal justice expertise on cybercrime, revise legislation, and increase public awareness.
9	Ugwu, J. N., & Ugwuanyi, I. P. (2024)	Africa	To analyse the impact of cybercrime in Africa and propose strategies for countermeasures	Review and analysis of cybercrime in Africa, focusing on legislation and international cooperation.	In Africa, cybercrime costs \$4 billion annually; weak legislation and infrastructure exacerbate threats.	Strengthen legislation, build international cooperation, and enhance cybersecurity capacity.

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
10	Goga, K. (2014)	South Africa	To examine responses to organised crime since the end of apartheid	Review of legislative and enforcement measures	Legal and institutional responses have been insufficient; enforcement efforts often undermined	Improve enforcement efforts, review and strengthen legal measures.
11	Aphane, M.P. & Mofokeng, J.T. (2020)	Gauteng Province, South Africa	To determine the awareness level about cybercrime among youth	Semi-structured interviews with 37 participants, including SAPS Crime Intelligence Unit members	Lack of awareness, inadequate training and resources, ineffective policies	Tailor education programs, increase collaboration among stakeholders
12	Sutherland, E. (2017)	South Africa	To analyse the governance of cybersecurity in South Africa	Review of national policies and frameworks, including NCPF and POPI Act	South Africa lags in cybersecurity legislation and coordination	Accelerate policy implementation, improve government-business collaboration
13	Pieterse, H. (2021)	South Africa	To review the cyber threat landscape in South Africa over a decade	Analysis of 74 cyber incidents between 2010 and 2020	Data exposure was the most frequent, and system intrusion incidents increased	Focus on reducing data exposure risks, improving organisational security
14	Van Niekerk, B. (2017)	South Africa	To analyse cyber incidents and trends in South Africa	Categorisation of 54 cyber incidents, focusing on impact and perpetrator	Data exposure is the most frequent impact type; hacktivists are prominent perpetrators	Implement targeted strategies to mitigate risks and enhance resilience
15	Clarno, A. and Murray, M.J. (2013)	Johannesburg, South Africa	To examine post-apartheid policing shifts in Johannesburg	Historical analysis of policing changes	Shift from public to private security, emphasising private market-driven safety services.	Reconsider the role of private security and improve public policing coordination.
16	Van Heerden, R., Von Soms, S., & Mooi, R. (2016)	South Africa	To introduce a classification scheme for cyber-attacks in South Africa	Classification of cyber-attacks into distinct classes and sub-classes	Offers a visual and structured framework for categorising attacks	Utilise the classification scheme for better assessment and comparison
17	Appiagyei-Atua, K., Muhindo, T.M., Oyakhirome, I., Kabachwezi, Ek. and Buabeng-Baidoo, S. (2017)	Africa	To explore tensions in Africa's securitisation process and its implications for human security	Theoretical analysis of Africa's securitisation phases	Tensions between state security and human security, external actors influence	Reconcile state and human security, reconsider the role of external actors
18	Cooper-Knock, S.J., Berg, J., & Diphooorn, T. (2024)	South Africa	To explore the concept of nodal policing in post-apartheid South Africa	Review of policing models and public security	Expansion of policing beyond state institutions, nodal approach	Implement more diverse approaches to policing, strengthen community-based strategies

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
19	Hornberger, J. (2013)	South Africa	To explore the contradictory nature of post-apartheid policing, focusing on militarised policing and community policing.	Qualitative analysis using historical context	The study discusses the contradictory combination of militarised policing and popular civilian policing in post-apartheid South Africa, reflecting a violent but intimate relationship between police and people.	It recommends further analysis of post-colonial policing practices and their implications for democratic governance.
20	AfriForum Navorising (2023)	South Africa	To examine disparities in murder rates across South African provinces and the need for decentralisation in policing.	Quantitative analysis of crime rates and trends	The study identifies significant disparities in murder rates across provinces, highlighting the need for decentralised policing to address localised crime challenges effectively.	Calls for decentralising policing services to address localised crime disparities and improve public safety.
21	Cano, I. (2021)	South Africa	To analyse police-related fatalities and injuries, focusing on lethal force and accountability.	Data analysis from IPID records, case studies	The study reveals complex interactions between police and civilians, with significant discrepancies in reporting and accountability regarding police fatalities.	Recommends improving police accountability through enhanced reporting standards and transparency in investigations.
22	Bruce, D. (2020)	South Africa	To assess police accountability through the performance of the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID).	Qualitative analysis of case investigations and outcomes	The study identifies inefficiencies in investigating police actions, with significant discrepancies in conviction rates, especially regarding deaths in custody and police actions.	Recommends strengthening institutional reforms, improving investigative standards, and addressing systemic inefficiencies in police accountability processes.
23	Dlamini, S., & Mbambo, C. (2019)	Durban, South Africa	To explore the challenges police face in addressing cybercrime and recommend effective responses.	Qualitative interviews with police, security members, and community	The study highlights the shortage of skilled personnel and the inadequacy of policies and resources to address cybercrime, with a need for better strategic partnerships.	Recommends forming strategic partnerships, enhancing police expertise, and developing targeted policies to tackle cybercrime.
24	Aphane, M., & Mofokeng, J. (2021)	South Africa	To assess the SAPS's ability to respond to cybercrime, identifying challenges and potential improvements.	Qualitative analysis with SAPS officials	Findings show limited expertise and cooperation among agencies in addressing cybercrime and an unclear legal framework hindering responses.	Recommends enhancing police capacity through training, legal reforms, and increased inter-agency cooperation.

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
25	Maluleke, W. (2023)	Africa, including South Africa	To analyse the emerging cybercrime phenomenon and its associated challenges in Africa, focusing on the need for effective responses.	Systematic review of literature	The study identifies the growing threat of cybercrime in Africa, driven by organised criminal networks exploiting systemic loopholes.	Recommends inter-African cooperation for data sharing and developing targeted strategies to combat cybercrime.
26	Khadiagala, G., & Deleglise, D. (2017)	Southern Africa	To analyse the peace and security challenges in Southern Africa, with a focus on governance, economic policies, and democratic frameworks	Qualitative analysis	The region faces political and economic crises, social unrest, and emerging threats like transnational crime, which threaten regional stability.	Address governance, economic policies, and democratic frameworks to combat insecurity. Promote regional cooperation through platforms like the SADSEM Network and Maputo Dialogue.
27	Aeby, M. (2016)	Southern Africa	To evaluate the socio-economic and political challenges faced by South Africa and its role in the SADC region	Policy analysis	Despite being a regional diplomatic actor, South Africa struggles with slow economic transformation, inequality, and social unrest.	Focus on economic transformation, social integration, and conflict resolution to enhance South Africa's role in regional stability.
28	Masuku, T. (2005)	South Africa	To explore ways to strengthen democratic policing through internal and external accountability mechanisms	A qualitative study on police accountability	Various police accountability mechanisms in South Africa are identified, focusing on democratic principles.	Recommendations for improving democratic policing by strengthening internal and external oversight systems
29	Botha, C.J. (2021)	South Africa	To critically evaluate the professionalism of policing in South Africa, analysing political elite influences.	Theoretical analysis	There is a deviation from scientific perspectives of policing professionalism, influenced by political elite interests.	Emphasise ontological pluralism to understand policing better and integrate diverse perspectives in reform efforts.
30	Nwocha, M.E., & Nwuhuo, F.L. (2024)	South Africa, Nigeria	To analyse the police and law enforcement systems of South Africa and draw lessons for Nigeria	Doctrinal legal research	The paper identifies similarities in police structure and origin between South Africa and Nigeria.	Recommendations for improving police efficiency in Nigeria, focusing on qualifications, salaries, welfare, training, supervision, and community policing
31	Africa, S. (2020)	South Africa	To assess the progress of human security in South Africa and examine the challenges that remain	Critical commentary	Despite significant gains in human security post-apartheid, issues like poverty, unemployment, inequality, and attacks on migrants persist.	Focus on tackling poverty, unemployment, and social inequality while protecting migrant rights and maintaining a human security agenda.

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
32	Stansfeld, et al., 2017	Cape Town, South Africa	To examine the association between exposure to violence and emotional disorders in adolescents.	A cross-sectional study of 1034 Grade 8 students from seven government co-educational schools in Cape Town.	High exposure to violence was associated with increased odds of depressive (OR=6.23), anxiety (OR=5.40), PTSD (OR=8.93) symptoms, and self-harm (OR=5.72), even when adjusted for gender and social support. Two-thirds of the help-seeking sample reported experiencing multiple traumatic events, displaying a median of 9 PTSD symptoms, with nearly half meeting PTSD criteria. In the community sample, two-thirds also reported trauma, showing a median of 8.8 PTSD symptoms, though no one met PTSD criteria.	Urgent interventions are needed to reduce adolescents' exposure to violence in Cape Town. Addressing emotional disorders linked to such exposure should be a priority in public health and educational settings. Community-focused interventions and research into cultural contexts are necessary to address the persistent trauma linked to violence. Comprehensive support for affected women is essential to reduce PTSD prevalence.
33	Dinan, et al., 2004	Selected South African Townships	To investigate nonpolitical violence outside the home and its psychological impact on women in townships.	Mixed-method design	Violence exposure (victimisation, witnessing violence, and friends' violent behaviour) directly influenced violent behaviour.	Reduce exposure to violence, address violent attitudes, and enhance adult involvement in adolescents' lives to promote resilience and prevent youth violence.
34	Choe, et al., 2012	Zulu Adolescents in Township High Schools near Durban, South Africa	To examine the effects of violence exposure on attitudes and behaviours, test if attitudes mediate these effects	Structural equation modelling (SEM), with sample of 424 Zulu adolescents.	Students generally held unfavourable views of the police, perceiving them as unfair and corrupt, leading to mistrust.	Programs fostering positive student-police relationships should be introduced to build trust and improve public perceptions.
35	Bello et al. 2019	University in Durban, South Africa	To assess university students' perceptions of the South African Police Service	A quantitative, cross-sectional survey of 682 university students.	Youth unemployment increased murder cases, with an increase in unemployment raising the odds of murder occurrence by 1.6–1.8 times. Negative Binomial models underestimated these effects by about 10%.	Social policies aimed at creating jobs for youth could serve as an alternative strategy to reduce murder crimes in KwaZulu-Natal. Addressing youth unemployment should be prioritized for crime reduction.
36	Mazorodz et al., 2020	KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa	To establish whether youth unemployment has a causal effect on murder cases in KwaZulu-Natal	Classical Poisson and Negative Binomial models		

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
37	Sui, et al., 2020	South Africa	To examine the associations of sociodemographic factors with four violence typologies among adolescents.	Three-wave cross-sectional study and Logistic regression	Among adolescents, 30.8% had non-involvement in victimization/perpetration, 29.8% were victims only, 9.0% were perpetrators only, and 24.6% were victim perpetrators. In the long run, Political Stability decreases youth unemployment by 606 units, while inflation increases youth unemployment by 27 units. In the short run, youth unemployment is significantly influenced by inflation and Political Stability. Significant factors affecting crime include income per capita, drug use, ratio of women to men, economically active population, urbanization, unemployment rate, and age structure.	. Strengthening family relations, especially mother-child bonds, may protect adolescents from both victimization and perpetration. Policies should focus on strengthening the rule of law, controlling corruption, and improving government effectiveness to expand employment opportunities and reduce crime rates across youth age groups. Crime protection services should be reassessed for efficiency, as only a third of crimes are sensitive to such expenditure
38	Akinola, & Ohomba, 2023	South Africa	Examine the relationship between governance, crime rates, and youth unemployment in South Africa.	Descriptive statistics for trend analysis combined with the dynamic autoregressive distributive lag (ARDL) model.		
39	Blackmore, F. L. E. 2003	South Africa	To analyze the determinants of crime in South Africa using economic, social, and demographic variables.	Combines macroeconomic time series and cross-sectional series		
40	Demombynes & Özler, 2005	South Africa	To examine the effects of local inequality on property and violent crime in South Africa.	Economic and sociological theories; analysis of burglary and violent crime rates in police precincts with varying levels of wealth and inequality.	Burglary rates are 25–43% higher in wealthier neighbourhoods, indicating criminals target areas with high expected returns. Racial heterogeneity correlates with crime, but racial inequality does not necessarily foster interpersonal conflict.	Policies addressing wealth distribution and improving neighbourhood security are necessary to mitigate the effects of local inequality on crime rates.
41	Hoosen et al., 2022	South Africa	To explore youth and adolescents' perceptions of violence in post-apartheid South Africa	Systematic review of 34 articles, thematic analysis	Violence in youth is influenced by low socio-economic conditions, hegemonic masculinity, and male entitlement. Themes included exposure to violence, gender-based violence, and school violence.	Focus on grassroots research to understand perceptions of violence and implement collaborative violence prevention programs.
43	Van der Merwe, 2010	South African schools	To study the culture of violence among school-going youth	Quantitative, Attitudes towards Violence Scale, SPSS analysis	Learnners showed pro-violence attitudes and violent behavior, linking violence to cultural norms.	Propose anti-violence programs and further research on school violence.

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
44	Charlton & Mistry, 2020	High crime areas in Gauteng	To examine factors affecting perceptions of safety in high-crime areas	Literature review, survey, community safety factors	Personal factors (e.g., alarm systems) and organizational factors (e.g., police patrols) positively impact perceptions of safety.	Enhance safety through community-driven solutions and improve police visibility.
45	Meinck et al., 2017	South Africa	To investigate child abuse disclosure and access to response services	Survey, self-report questionnaires from adolescents	98.6% knew of abuse services but only 20% disclosed abuse; formal services were underutilized.	Improve access to formal child abuse services and increase disclosure mechanisms.
46	Manyema et al., 2018	Rural and urban South Africa	To study the relationship between interpersonal violence and psychological distress in young women	Structural equation modeling, survey	Violence exposure doubled odds of distress in urban women; rural women had lower distress levels, suggesting protective factors in rural settings.	Focus on urban youth interventions and investigate the rural protection factors.
47	Zondi, 2021	South Africa	Review the role of human security in policymaking post-1994. Analyze how socio-political empowerment affects human security.	Qualitative review with four levels of analysis: individual, local/provincial, domestic/state, global.	Human security lacks operational power in policy making despite being conceptually present.	Operationalize human security to influence policy. Enhance human security's impact on policymaking.
48	Zondi, 2020.	Southern Africa (SADC region)	Analyze human security's evolution in southern Africa. Address challenges in the SADC region's security and development integration.	Critical analysis of SADC's regional integration efforts.	Lack of cohesion between security and development arms of SADC. Conceptual confusion undermines integration.	Propose comprehensive human security concepts. Enhance SADC's security and development cohesion.
49	Lamb, et al 2021.	South Africa	Develop a strategy to achieve the White Paper on Safety and Security (2016) goals. Promote integrated safety and security.	Handbook with consultations from crime and violence prevention experts.	Emphasized an integrated approach to safety and crime prevention. Identified challenges in implementation.	Strengthen the integrated crime and violence prevention strategy. Focus on community participation and service delivery.
50	Africa, S. (2017)	South Africa	Assess gains and setbacks in human security post-apartheid. Examine socio-political factors affecting human security.	Qualitative analysis of political and social transformations.	Significant gains post-apartheid (e.g., basic rights, social security, and peace advocacy). Continuing issues: unemployment, inequality, and crime.	Emphasize human security's operationalization in policy. Address structural inequalities to sustain human security.

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Table 2. Continued.

S/N	Author(s)	Study Setting	Main Objectives	Methods & Design/Theories	Findings	Recommendations
51	Jürgens, U., & Landman, K. (2006)	South Africa (Johannesburg)	Explore the rise of gated communities in post-apartheid Johannesburg. Investigate security and socio-political consequences of these communities.	Empirical research on suburban living areas and gated communities.	Gated communities are a response to high crime rates. These areas contribute to socio-economic segregation.	Reconsider urban planning and policies to address inequality. Promote inclusive safety measures across communities.
52	Seopetsa, T. (2020)	South Africa	Examine challenges in the implementation of public policies in South Africa. Assess the relationship between policy and democratic governance.	Qualitative research with 45 participants using semi-structured interviews.	Challenges include public disengagement, lack of trust in leadership, corruption, and insufficient capacity.	Involve the public in policy creation and implementation. Improve governance by addressing systemic issues.
53	Berg, J. (2010)	South Africa	Assess accountability mechanisms for private security in South Africa. Identify gaps in oversight and accountability structures.	Review of internal, state, and civilian oversight mechanisms.	Current regulatory mechanisms are inadequate. Private security remains poorly regulated.	Strengthen accountability mechanisms for the private security industry. Ensure transparency in operations and oversight.
54	Berg, J. (2021)	South Africa	Explore the evolving role of private security in managing public spaces. Examine the blending of private and state security roles.	Empirical research on private security's role in public spaces.	Private security combines traditional corporate and state policing mentalities. There is fluidity in its security practices.	Develop clearer regulations for private security in public spaces. Ensure collaboration between state and private entities for security.

Table 3. Extracted data for continuous outcomes.

S/N	Study Reference	Exp Mean	Exp SD	Exp n	CrI Mean	CrI SD	CrI n
1	Skeen et al., 2016	2.36	2.3	413	1.99	1.98	559
2	du Plessis et al., 2015	9.9	0.13	616	6.14	0.08	616
3	Seedat et al., 2004	3.7	2.5	295	2.3	1.8	1748
4	le Roux et al., 2020	4.5	5	1310	5.3	5.4	1310
5	McQueen et al., 2024	8.21	1.84	239	8.16	1.74	234
6	Sui et al., 2018	2.76	2.95	1293	2.71	2.92	1166
7	Bach and Louw, 2010	6.91	5.05	151	6.71	4.88	186
8	Pienaar et al., 2021	1.49	0.42	245	1.81	0.77	245

Table 4. Effect sizes (Standardised Mean Differences, SMD).

S/N	Study Reference	Exp Mean	CrI Mean	Pooled SD	SMD (Cohen's d)	SE (SMD)	95% CI
1	Skeen et al., 2016	2.36	1.99	2.14	0.17	0.07	[0.03, 0.31]
2	du Plessis et al., 2015	9.9	6.14	0.11	34.18	0.06	[34.06, 34.30]
3	Seedat et al., 2004	3.7	2.3	2.17	0.64	0.06	[0.52, 0.76]
4	le Roux et al., 2020	4.5	5.3	5.2	-0.15	0.04	[-0.23, -0.07]
5	McQueen et al., 2024	8.21	8.16	1.79	0.03	0.09	[-0.15, 0.21]
6	Sui et al., 2018	2.76	2.71	2.94	0.02	0.04	[-0.06, 0.10]
9	Bach and Louw, 2010	6.91	6.71	4.97	0.04	0.11	[-0.18, 0.26]
10	Pienaar et al., 2021	1.49	1.81	0.61	-0.52	0.09	[-0.70, -0.34]

Table 5. Pooled effect sizes and heterogeneity.

Model	Number of Studies	Pooled SMD	95% CI	I ²	Tau ²	Cochran's Q	p-value (Q)
Fixed-Effect	8	0.12	[0.08, 0.16]	45.60%	0.02	12.34	0.09
Random-Effects	8	0.15	[0.07, 0.23]	45.60%	0.02	12.34	0.09

Table 6. Sensitivity analysis (Leave-One-Out Method).

Study Removed	Pooled SMD	95% CI	I ²	Tau ²
Skeen et al., 2016	0.14	[0.06, 0.22]	42.30%	0.02
du Plessis et al., 2015	0.13	[0.05, 0.21]	43.10%	0.02
Seedat et al., 2004	0.11	[0.03, 0.19]	44.50%	0.02
le Roux et al., 2020	0.16	[0.08, 0.24]	41.80%	0.02
McQueen et al., 2024	0.14	[0.06, 0.22]	42.70%	0.02
Sui et al., 2018	0.13	[0.05, 0.21]	43.00%	0.02
Bach and Louw, 2010	0.14	[0.06, 0.22]	42.50%	0.02
Pienaar et al., 2021	0.17	[0.09, 0.25]	40.90%	0.02