

# Press Release

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SOUTH AFRICAN  
INSTITUTE OF  
RACE RELATIONS

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

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## Nearly 200 killed in strike action in 13 years

Some 181 fatalities occurred in strike violence between January 1999 and October 2012. A further 313 people were injured and over 3 058 arrests made during the period. This is according to figures compiled by the South African Institute of Race Relations using print media reports. They are contained in the latest *South Africa Survey*, published in Johannesburg this week.

The greatest number of fatalities occurred in 1999, 2006, and 2012 with 30, 69 and 60 deaths respectively. Fatalities were high in 1999 because of a dispute between the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the United Workers' Union of South Africa (Uwusa), and the United Democratic Movement (UDM), with fatalities occurring between May and July in that year. The high number of fatalities in 2006 occurred during the security guard strike between March and May, in which non-striking guards and on-duty guards were attacked, some being thrown off moving trains.

All but one of the fatalities in 2012 was the result of violent strikes in the mining sector. In August 2012 rock-drill operators downed tools at the Lonmin mine in Marikana (North West) in a wildcat strike. A clash with police saw 34 strikers shot and killed on 16 August. In the week leading up to the police shootings, two security guards and two police officers were allegedly hacked to death by the strikers. Six other people, including a shop steward, were killed, bringing the death toll in Marikana to 48 within a six-day period. Wildcat strikes followed at various mines across the country. The shootings at Marikana brought into question the state of public order policing and the conditions of workers in the mining sector.

A total of 1 337 people were arrested in 217 cases between 1 January 2009 and 31 July 2011 for crimes related to violent strike action (including intimidation and the destruction of property). A total of 447 people were prosecuted in 40 cases related to these crimes and nine people were convicted in nine cases for violent strike-related crimes. This is according to an answer by the minister of police to a parliamentary question.

Boitumelo Sethlatswe, a researcher at the Institute, said, 'Although the figures may not be exhaustive they indicate how strike action in South Africa is often characterised by violence. Fatalities were most often the result of clashes between police and strikers, between striking and non-striking workers, and between rival unions. In many cases, the intimidation of non-striking workers escalated to public humiliation, brutal beatings, maiming with weapons such as pangas and knobkerries, and even homicide.'

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