

SYSTEMIC LEADERSHIP FAILURES, POLICE PROCUREMENT CORRUPTION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY AT SENIOR SAPS LEVELS, WITH ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AS THE ANALYTICAL ANCHOR

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to critically examine the impact of systemic leadership failures, corruption in police procurement, and accountability deficits on the effectiveness, legitimacy, and public trust of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The research aims to provide evidence-based, practical recommendations for reforming SAPS leadership and governance, enhancing operational efficiency, and fostering safer communities in South Africa. South Africa continues to face high levels of violent crime, with persistent challenges in policing effectiveness largely attributable to weak ethical leadership, allegations of corruption in procurement, and unresolved accountability issues at senior levels of SAPS (Bruce, 2013; Faull, 2017). Leadership misconduct, exemplified by high-profile cases such as the conviction of National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and maladministration by Bheki Cele, undermines organisational integrity, erodes community trust, and compromises operational capacity. Despite existing oversight mechanisms, SAPS remains vulnerable to systemic governance failures, creating a pressing need for comprehensive reform. This study adopts a systematic, qualitative research approach combining Document and Policy Analysis: Review of SAPS reports, Auditor-General findings, Public Protector investigations, and National Development Plan 2030 documents. Literature Synthesis: Integration of seven South African and seven international scholarly sources to contextualise leadership, accountability, and policing legitimacy issues. Case Study Analysis: Examination of practical SAPS incidents, including procurement irregularities, leadership scandals, and community-police engagement outcomes. Systematic Thematic Analysis: Organising findings around key themes ethical leadership, accountability, legitimacy, operational efficiency, and multi-stakeholder engagement ensuring a structured understanding of causes and consequences. This approach allows for a comprehensive, contextually grounded analysis linking theory, empirical evidence, and practical SAPS realities. Ethical Leadership Deficits: Leadership failures at the executive level undermine organisational culture, discipline, and public trust (Bruce, 2013; Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005). Procurement Corruption and Resource Mismanagement: Irregular procurement processes hinder frontline policing and operational efficiency (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019). Weak Accountability Mechanisms: Oversight bodies exist but are limited in enforcing consequences for senior leadership misconduct, contributing to impunity (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010). Erosion of Police Legitimacy: Community mistrust in high-crime areas, such as Khayelitsha and Alexandra, reduces crime reporting and cooperation (Tyler, 2006; Newham & Faull, 2011). Multi-Stakeholder Engagement is Essential: Effective reform requires coordinated action across SAPS, political leadership, communities, youth, faith-based organisations, private sector, and civil society. The study concludes that effective policing in South Africa depends on systemic reform at multiple levels, with ethical leadership at the top, accountable governance structures, transparent procurement, and active community engagement forming the cornerstone of sustainable improvement. Implementing integrated reforms across stakeholders can restore public trust, enhance operational capacity, reduce violent crime, and strengthen institutional legitimacy. This research contributes to both academic scholarship and practical policy-making, providing a roadmap for SAPS reform aligned with National Development Plan 2030 objectives and international best practices under SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Keywords: South African Police Service (SAPS), Ethical Leadership, Police Accountability, Corruption in Policing, Police Governance, Violent Crime Prevention, Community Policing, Public Trust in Law Enforcement, Multi-Stakeholder Engagement, Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16).

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Introduction

Violent crime, declining police legitimacy, and weakened public trust remain defining challenges for policing in South Africa. At the centre of these challenges lie systemic failures in

leadership, persistent allegations of corruption particularly in police procurement and unresolved questions of accountability at the highest levels of the South African Police Service (SAPS). While frontline policing capacity is often cited as the primary

problem, growing evidence suggests that failures at executive and strategic leadership levels play a far more decisive role in shaping organisational culture, operational effectiveness, and public confidence (Burger, 2015; Faull, 2017).

South Africa has experienced repeated leadership crises within SAPS over the past two decades, including instability in the office of the National Commissioner, allegations of political interference, and senior officials implicated in corruption and maladministration. High-profile incidents—such as the suspension and dismissal of former National Commissioner Bheki Cele, the criminal conviction of former Commissioner Jackie Selebi, and ongoing controversies surrounding procurement contracts for police vehicles, forensic equipment, and ICT systems have reinforced public perceptions that accountability does not extend to the highest ranks (Bruce, 2013; Public Protector, 2019). These incidents are not isolated events but reflect structural weaknesses in governance, oversight, and ethical leadership.

The consequences of leadership failure are felt directly at community level. Chronic shortages of functional vehicles, delays in forensic processing, inadequate detective capacity, and poorly resourced police stations often linked to procurement failures or mismanagement undermine the ability of SAPS to respond effectively to violent crime. In provinces such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape, community protests against police inaction and allegations of collusion with criminal networks have highlighted the widening gap between police leadership and the lived realities of citizens (Newham & Faull, 2011; Van der Spuy, 2017).

South African scholarship consistently emphasises that ethical leadership and accountability are foundational to police legitimacy. Where senior leaders are perceived as corrupt, politically shielded, or unaccountable, ethical norms deteriorate throughout the organisation, leading to misconduct, low morale, and erosion of discipline at lower ranks (Burger & Newham, 2010; Faull, 2018). Oversight mechanisms such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and parliamentary committees exist, yet their impact is often limited by delays, weak enforcement powers, and lack of consequence management for senior officials.

International policing research mirrors these concerns. Studies from the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia demonstrate that police organisations characterised by weak executive accountability are more vulnerable to corruption, abuse of power, and public distrust (Goldsmith, 2005; Prenzler, 2013). Theoretical and empirical work on procedural justice and police legitimacy further shows that public compliance with the law is strongly influenced by perceptions of fairness, transparency, and ethical leadership within police institutions (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

Globally, procurement corruption has been identified as a high-risk area within policing due to the scale of contracts, technical complexity, and limited transparency. Comparative studies reveal that where senior leadership fails to enforce ethical standards, procurement corruption becomes institutionalised, diverting resources from frontline policing and undermining service delivery (Klockars et al., 2006; Transparency International, 2011). South Africa's experience aligns closely with these international patterns, suggesting that SAPS challenges are not

merely operational but deeply rooted in governance and leadership failures.

This study is therefore grounded in the premise that effective policing begins with ethical leadership and credible accountability at the top. Without decisive action against corruption and misconduct among senior SAPS leadership, efforts to combat violent crime, improve community relations, and restore public trust are unlikely to succeed. By situating South African policing challenges within both local realities and international scholarship, this research seeks to contribute to evidence-based reform debates focused on leadership integrity, institutional accountability, and sustainable police legitimacy.

Background

South Africa's contemporary policing challenges are deeply rooted in historical, institutional, and governance-related factors that continue to shape the performance and legitimacy of the South African Police Service (SAPS). Despite extensive post-1994 reforms aimed at transforming the police into a democratic, accountable, and community-oriented service, SAPS continues to face persistent crises related to violent crime, leadership instability, corruption, and weak accountability (Burger, 2015; National Planning Commission, 2012).

The legacy of apartheid-era policing, characterised by militarisation, political repression, and limited accountability, has had enduring effects on organisational culture and leadership practices. Although legislative and policy frameworks such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the SAPS Act (1995) emphasise professionalism, transparency, and community service, implementation has been uneven and often undermined by governance failures at senior levels (Faull, 2017; Van der Spuy, 2017). These structural weaknesses have been compounded by high levels of violent crime, which place extraordinary pressure on police leadership and operational capacity.

Since the early 2000s, SAPS has experienced repeated leadership crises involving National Commissioners and senior executives. The conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi on corruption charges, the dismissal of Commissioner Bheki Cele following findings of maladministration, and subsequent suspensions and investigations of senior officials have highlighted persistent weaknesses in leadership vetting, oversight, and consequence management (Bruce, 2013; Burger & Newham, 2010). These incidents have reinforced public perceptions that accountability mechanisms are selectively applied and that senior leadership is often insulated from meaningful sanction.

Procurement-related corruption has emerged as a particularly damaging feature of SAPS governance failures. Investigations by the Public Protector and Auditor-General have revealed irregular expenditure linked to vehicle leasing contracts, forensic laboratory equipment, and information technology systems intended to support crime intelligence and case management (Public Protector, 2019; Auditor-General South Africa, 2022). In practical terms, these failures have resulted in police stations without functional vehicles, detectives sharing limited resources, and significant backlogs in forensic processing—directly affecting the investigation of serious crimes such as murder, rape, and organised criminal activity.

The impact of these governance failures is visible at community level. In areas such as Khayelitsha, parts of the Eastern Cape, and sections of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, community protests and inquiries have pointed to police inefficiency, delayed response times, and alleged collusion between police officers and criminal networks (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013). The Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry, for example, documented how poor leadership, inadequate resource allocation, and weak accountability contributed to ineffective policing in high-crime communities.

South African research consistently shows that public trust in SAPS is closely linked to perceptions of leadership integrity and ethical conduct. Where communities perceive senior police leaders as corrupt, politically compromised, or unaccountable, cooperation with police declines, undermining intelligence gathering and crime prevention efforts (Faull, 2018; Burger, 2015). This erosion of trust is particularly damaging in a context where effective policing depends heavily on community cooperation to address violent and organised crime.

International policing scholarship provides important comparative insights into these dynamics. Studies across democratic policing systems demonstrate that leadership accountability and ethical governance are central determinants of police effectiveness and legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2005; Bayley, 2006). Comparative research further shows that corruption within police procurement is a global risk area, particularly where oversight is weak and executive leaders fail to enforce transparency and ethical standards (Transparency International, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Theoretical and empirical work on police legitimacy highlights that citizens are more likely to comply with the law and cooperate with police when they perceive policing institutions as fair, transparent, and accountable (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014). Conversely, accountability failures at senior levels have cascading effects throughout police organisations, normalising misconduct, lowering morale, and weakening discipline among frontline officers (Klockars et al., 2006; Prenzler, 2013). These international findings closely mirror the South African experience, reinforcing the argument that SAPS challenges are systemic rather than isolated or purely operational.

Against this backdrop, the background to this study is grounded in the recognition that effective policing in South Africa cannot be achieved without addressing leadership integrity, procurement governance, and accountability at the highest levels of SAPS. Violent crime, community mistrust, and institutional decline are not merely symptoms of resource constraints but manifestations of deeper governance failures that require sustained, ethical, and accountable leadership.

Problem Statement

South Africa continues to experience persistently high levels of violent crime alongside declining public trust in the South African Police Service (SAPS). While crime trends are often attributed to socio-economic inequality, unemployment, and substance abuse, growing evidence indicates that systemic failures in police leadership, governance, and accountability constitute a central and under-addressed problem undermining effective policing (Burger, 2015; Faull, 2018). Despite constitutional mandates and policy commitments to professional, accountable,

and community-oriented policing, SAPS has struggled to translate these principles into sustained practice.

A core dimension of this problem lies in leadership instability and weak accountability at senior levels of SAPS. Over the past two decades, SAPS has experienced repeated crises involving National Commissioners and top executives, including criminal convictions, dismissals, suspensions, and allegations of political interference. High-profile cases such as the conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi for corruption and findings of maladministration against Commissioner Bheki Cele revealed serious governance failures at the highest level of the organisation (Bruce, 2013; Burger & Newham, 2010). These incidents have reinforced perceptions that accountability mechanisms are inconsistently applied and that senior leadership is often shielded from consequences.

Closely linked to leadership failure is the persistent problem of corruption and maladministration in police procurement. Reports by the Auditor-General and the Public Protector have repeatedly highlighted irregular expenditure, non-compliance with supply chain management regulations, and questionable contracts related to vehicle leasing, forensic laboratories, and information and communication technology systems within SAPS (Public Protector, 2019; Auditor-General South Africa, 2022). In practical terms, these failures have translated into police stations without operational vehicles, detectives lacking basic investigative tools, and extensive forensic backlogs—directly undermining the investigation of serious crimes such as murder, rape, and organised criminal activity.

At community level, these governance failures manifest as poor service delivery, delayed police responses, and eroded legitimacy. In areas such as Khayelitsha, parts of the Eastern Cape, and sections of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, communities have raised persistent complaints about ineffective policing, lack of visible patrols, and allegations of collusion between police officers and criminal networks (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013). The Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry demonstrated how weak leadership, inadequate oversight, and poor resource allocation contributed to systematic policing failures in high-crime communities.

South African research consistently shows that public cooperation with police is strongly influenced by perceptions of leadership integrity and fairness. Where SAPS leadership is viewed as corrupt or unaccountable, community trust declines, intelligence-sharing diminishes, and crime prevention efforts are severely compromised (Faull, 2017; Burger, 2015). This creates a vicious cycle in which poor leadership undermines trust, and the resulting lack of cooperation further weakens policing effectiveness.

International policing scholarship reinforces the seriousness of this problem. Comparative studies demonstrate that police organisations characterised by weak executive accountability and unethical leadership are more susceptible to corruption, abuse of power, and loss of legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2005; Prenzler, 2013). Research on police integrity further shows that misconduct at senior levels has cascading effects throughout organisations, normalising unethical behaviour and weakening discipline among frontline officers (Klockars et al., 2006).

Furthermore, global research on procurement corruption identifies policing as a high-risk sector due to the scale of

contracts, technical complexity, and limited transparency. Where leadership fails to enforce ethical standards and oversight, procurement corruption becomes systemic rather than incidental, diverting resources from frontline policing and eroding public confidence (Transparency International, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). South Africa's experience closely mirrors these international patterns, suggesting that SAPS challenges are structural and governance-related rather than merely operational.

Despite extensive policy frameworks such as the National Development Plan 2030, the SAPS Strategic Plans, and various anti-corruption strategies—there remains a significant gap between policy intent and institutional practice. Oversight bodies such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and parliamentary committees exist, yet their ability to ensure meaningful accountability for senior SAPS leadership remains limited (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010). Consequently, unethical leadership, procurement failures, and weak accountability continue to undermine public trust and effective crime control.

The central problem addressed in this study is therefore the absence of sustained ethical leadership and credible accountability at the highest levels of SAPS, which undermines organisational integrity, weakens service delivery, and erodes public trust. Without addressing these systemic governance failures, efforts to reduce violent crime, strengthen police–community relations, and build a legitimate and effective police service are unlikely to succeed.

Research Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine how systemic leadership failures, procurement-related corruption, and weak accountability at senior levels of the South African Police Service (SAPS) undermine ethical policing, institutional legitimacy, and effective crime control, and to propose evidence-based pathways for strengthening ethical leadership and accountability within SAPS.

Despite South Africa's comprehensive legislative and policy framework mandating professional, transparent, and accountable policing, persistent governance failures at executive level continue to compromise operational effectiveness and public trust (Burger, 2015; National Planning Commission, 2012). High-profile incidents—such as the corruption conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi, the dismissal of Commissioner Bheki Cele following findings of maladministration, and repeated adverse findings by the Auditor-General and Public Protector on SAPS procurement—illustrate how leadership failures translate into institutional instability and service delivery breakdowns (Bruce, 2013; Public Protector, 2019).

This study aims to move beyond a narrow focus on frontline policing capacity by interrogating the strategic and ethical dimensions of police leadership. In practice, procurement failures linked to leadership and governance weaknesses have resulted in police stations operating without adequate vehicles, detectives lacking essential investigative tools, and severe forensic backlogs that delay justice for victims of violent crime, including rape and murder (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Faull, 2018). These practical consequences demonstrate how leadership decisions at national and provincial levels directly affect policing outcomes at community level.

A further aim of the study is to assess the relationship between ethical leadership, accountability mechanisms, and police legitimacy in the South African context. Research conducted in communities such as Khayelitsha and parts of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal has shown that perceptions of corruption and unaccountability among senior SAPS leaders significantly reduce public cooperation with police, weaken intelligence gathering, and exacerbate violent crime (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013). By examining these dynamics, the study seeks to identify how leadership integrity influences community trust and compliance.

In addition, the study aims to situate SAPS leadership challenges within a broader international policing and governance framework. Comparative international research demonstrates that police organisations characterised by weak executive accountability and unethical leadership are more susceptible to corruption, abuse of power, and declining legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2005; Prenzler, 2013). Studies on police integrity further show that misconduct at senior levels has cascading effects throughout organisations, normalising unethical behaviour and undermining discipline among frontline officers (Klockars et al., 2006).

Drawing on international best practices and theoretical insights—particularly from legitimacy theory, ethical leadership theory, and institutional governance—the study aims to develop a context-sensitive framework for strengthening ethical leadership and accountability in SAPS. This framework seeks to address gaps between policy intent and implementation, enhance oversight effectiveness, and support sustainable reform aligned with the National Development Plan 2030 and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) (Faull, 2017; Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

Ultimately, the aim of this study is to contribute to academic scholarship, policy debates, and practical reform efforts by demonstrating that effective policing in South Africa begins with ethical, accountable leadership at the highest levels of SAPS. By addressing systemic governance failures rather than isolated misconduct, the study seeks to support policing reforms that restore public trust, improve service delivery, and enhance safety for South African communities.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study is guided by interlinked research objectives and questions designed to systematically examine the relationship between ethical leadership, accountability, corruption, and policing effectiveness within the South African Police Service (SAPS). The objectives and questions are aligned to ensure analytical coherence and policy relevance.

Objective 1:

To examine the nature and extent of systemic leadership failures at senior levels of SAPS and their implications for organisational performance.

Research Question 1:

How have leadership instability, politicisation of senior appointments, and weak consequence management at executive levels of SAPS affected organisational effectiveness and discipline?

Contextual Link:

Repeated leadership crises—including the conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and the dismissal of

Commissioner Bheki Cele—highlight enduring weaknesses in leadership accountability and governance within SAPS (Burger, 2015; Bruce, 2013). International research similarly demonstrates that leadership instability undermines command legitimacy and organisational coherence (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Objective 2:

To assess the impact of procurement-related corruption and maladministration on SAPS operational capacity and service delivery.

Research Question 2:

In what ways has corruption and maladministration in SAPS procurement processes affected frontline policing, investigative capacity, and crime response?

Contextual Link:

Findings by the Auditor-General and Public Protector on irregular expenditure related to vehicle leasing, forensic laboratories, and ICT systems have translated into police stations without functional vehicles, forensic backlogs, and delayed investigations (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019). International evidence identifies police procurement as a high-risk corruption area where leadership oversight is weak (Transparency International, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Objective 3:

To analyse the effectiveness of existing accountability and oversight mechanisms in addressing misconduct at senior SAPS levels.

Research Question 3:

How effective are oversight structures such as IPID, parliamentary committees, and internal disciplinary mechanisms in holding senior SAPS leadership accountable?

Contextual Link:

Despite multiple oversight bodies, senior SAPS officials are rarely subjected to swift or decisive sanctions, contributing to a culture of impunity (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010). Comparative international research shows that oversight without enforcement capacity fails to deter executive-level misconduct (Prenzler, 2013; OECD, 2018).

Objective 4:

To examine the relationship between ethical leadership, police legitimacy, and community trust in high-crime South African communities.

Research Question 4:

How do perceptions of ethical leadership and accountability among SAPS senior management influence public trust, cooperation, and police legitimacy?

Contextual Link:

Community experiences in Khayelitsha, parts of Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal show declining cooperation with police where leadership is perceived as corrupt or unaccountable (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013). International legitimacy theory demonstrates that trust and compliance are shaped more by fairness

and integrity than by coercive capacity (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

Objective 5:

To identify best practices in ethical police leadership and accountability from international policing contexts relevant to South Africa.

Research Question 5:

What international best practices in ethical police leadership and accountability can be adapted to strengthen governance within SAPS?

Contextual Link:

International case studies from democratic policing systems highlight the importance of transparent appointment processes, independent oversight, and ethical leadership development (Goldsmith, 2005; Bayley, 2006). These practices provide comparative lessons for addressing SAPS governance failures (Prenzler, 2013).

Objective 6:

To develop an integrated, context-sensitive framework for strengthening ethical leadership and accountability within SAPS.

Research Question 6:

What integrated framework can be developed to enhance ethical leadership, accountability, and institutional legitimacy within SAPS?

Contextual Link:

The gap between policy intent (e.g., National Development Plan 2030) and institutional practice underscores the need for a practical framework that links leadership ethics, procurement governance, and accountability mechanisms (National Planning Commission, 2012; Faull, 2017). International governance literature supports integrated, system-wide reform approaches (OECD, 2018; Klockars et al., 2006).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses one of the most critical yet under-examined challenges in South African policing: the impact of ethical leadership, governance, and accountability at senior levels of the South African Police Service (SAPS) on institutional legitimacy and effective crime control. While violent crime and operational shortcomings often dominate public debate, this research foregrounds the strategic leadership and governance failures that shape policing outcomes at community level (Burger, 2015; Faull, 2018).

Contribution to Policing Practice and Service Delivery

At a practical level, the study is significant for improving policing effectiveness and service delivery. Repeated findings by the Auditor-General and the Public Protector have shown that procurement-related corruption and maladministration within SAPS result in inadequate resources for frontline policing, including shortages of vehicles, forensic equipment, and functional information systems (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019). These failures have tangible consequences, such as delayed response times, prolonged forensic backlogs, and weakened investigative capacity in serious crimes including murder and rape.

By examining how leadership decisions and accountability failures contribute to these outcomes, the study offers evidence-based insights that can support more effective resource management and operational readiness within SAPS. Lessons drawn from practical incidents such as police stations in rural provinces sharing limited vehicles or detectives waiting months for forensic results highlight the urgent need for governance reforms that directly enhance service delivery (Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015).

Contribution to Police Legitimacy and Community Trust

The study is also significant in advancing understanding of police legitimacy and community trust in the South African context. Research conducted in communities such as Khayelitsha and parts of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal demonstrates that public cooperation with police is closely linked to perceptions of leadership integrity and accountability (Newham & Faull, 2011; Faull, 2017). Where senior SAPS leaders are perceived as corrupt or politically shielded, communities are less willing to share information, report crimes, or collaborate in crime prevention initiatives.

International policing scholarship reinforces this significance, showing that legitimacy, rather than coercive capacity alone, is central to effective policing (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014). By situating South African experiences within this broader theoretical framework, the study contributes to more nuanced, legitimacy-focused policing strategies capable of rebuilding trust in high-crime and marginalised communities.

Contribution to Governance, Accountability, and Anti-Corruption Efforts

A further significance of this study lies in its contribution to strengthening governance and accountability within SAPS. Despite the existence of multiple oversight mechanisms, senior-level accountability remains inconsistent, allowing unethical practices to persist (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010). High-profile cases involving former National Commissioners and repeated adverse audit findings illustrate the limitations of current accountability frameworks.

International comparative research demonstrates that effective police governance requires independent oversight, transparent leadership appointments, and enforceable consequence management (Goldsmith, 2005; Prenzler, 2013). By integrating these international lessons with South African realities, the study provides practical guidance for enhancing accountability mechanisms and reducing corruption risks, particularly in high-value procurement processes (Transparency International, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Contribution to Policy Development and Reform

This study holds significant value for policy development and police reform initiatives in South Africa. It directly supports national priorities articulated in the National Development Plan 2030, which emphasises professional, accountable, and community-oriented policing as essential to reducing violence and strengthening the rule of law (National Planning Commission, 2012). By identifying gaps between policy intent and institutional practice, the study offers actionable recommendations for aligning SAPS leadership practices with existing policy frameworks.

International policy literature further underscores the importance of trust-based governance and ethical leadership in

public institutions (OECD, 2018). The study's integrated approach enables policymakers to draw on both local evidence and global best practices when designing reforms aimed at restoring public confidence in SAPS.

Academic and Theoretical Significance

Academically, the study contributes to criminological and policing scholarship by empirically linking ethical leadership theory, institutional governance, and police legitimacy within a developing democracy context. While international literature on police integrity is well developed, there remains a relative shortage of in-depth, context-specific research focusing on leadership accountability in South African policing (Faull, 2017; Burger, 2015).

By incorporating practical SAPS incidents and governance failures into theoretical analysis, the study bridges the gap between abstract theory and lived policing realities. This contributes to comparative policing scholarship and provides a foundation for future research on leadership, accountability, and legitimacy in transitional and high-crime societies.

Gaps of the Study

Despite a growing body of scholarship on policing, crime, and governance in South Africa, several critical gaps remain in understanding how leadership ethics, procurement governance, and accountability at senior levels of the South African Police Service (SAPS) shape policing outcomes and public trust. These gaps limit the effectiveness of reform efforts and contribute to the persistence of violent crime and institutional instability.

Limited Focus on Executive-Level Leadership and Ethics

A substantial portion of South African policing research concentrates on frontline policing challenges such as visibility, response times, and community policing while insufficient attention is given to ethical leadership and governance at executive level (Burger, 2015; Faull, 2017). High-profile incidents, including the conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and findings of maladministration against Commissioner Bheki Cele, are often discussed descriptively but not systematically analysed through ethical leadership or institutional governance frameworks (Bruce, 2013).

International literature emphasises that misconduct and governance failures at senior levels have cascading effects throughout police organisations (Klockars et al., 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). However, South African studies rarely integrate these theoretical perspectives to examine how leadership ethics directly influence organisational culture, discipline, and service delivery.

Fragmented Analysis of Procurement Corruption and Policing Outcomes

While oversight reports by the Auditor-General and the Public Protector document procurement irregularities within SAPS, there is a notable gap in empirical research linking these governance failures to specific operational consequences for policing and crime investigation (Public Protector, 2019; Auditor-General South Africa, 2022). For example, studies seldom trace how irregular vehicle leasing contracts translate into police stations without operational vehicles or how delays in forensic procurement contribute to case backlogs in rape and murder investigations.

International research identifies police procurement as a high-risk area requiring dedicated analytical attention (Transparency International, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). However, South African scholarship has yet to fully contextualise these global insights within SAPS-specific procurement systems and leadership structures.

Weak Integration between Oversight Mechanisms and Accountability Outcomes

Another major gap lies in the disconnect between oversight structures and actual accountability. Although bodies such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and parliamentary committees are frequently referenced, there is limited empirical assessment of their effectiveness in holding senior SAPS leadership accountable (Burger & Newham, 2010; Faull, 2018). High-ranking officials are often suspended, transferred, or reinstated without clear consequence, reinforcing perceptions of impunity.

International governance literature stresses that oversight without enforcement capacity fails to deter misconduct, particularly at executive levels (Prenzler, 2013; OECD, 2018). South African studies have not sufficiently interrogated why oversight mechanisms struggle to translate findings into sustained accountability outcomes within SAPS.

Insufficient Community-Level Linkages to Leadership Failures

Research on police–community relations in South Africa has richly documented public mistrust and strained cooperation in high-crime areas such as Khayelitsha and parts of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013). However, few studies explicitly link community experiences to failures in senior SAPS leadership and governance. As a result, leadership failures are often treated as distant or abstract issues rather than as drivers of everyday policing breakdowns.

International legitimacy theory demonstrates that public trust is shaped not only by frontline interactions but also by perceptions of institutional fairness and integrity (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014). The lack of integrated analysis connecting executive leadership ethics to community-level outcomes represents a significant gap in the South African literature.

Limited Comparative and Best-Practice-Oriented Research

Although international policing scholarship offers extensive insights into ethical leadership, accountability, and anti-corruption strategies, comparative application to the South African context remains limited (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). South African studies often reference international experiences in passing, without systematically assessing their relevance or adaptability to SAPS's unique historical, political, and socio-economic conditions.

This gap limits the ability of policymakers and police leaders to draw on evidence-based international best practices to address governance failures within SAPS (Prenzler, 2013; OECD, 2018).

Gap between Policy Intent and Empirical Evaluation

South Africa possesses a robust policy framework including the National Development Plan 2030 and SAPS strategic plans that emphasises ethical leadership, accountability, and professional policing (National Planning Commission, 2012).

However, there is a lack of empirical research evaluating why these policies fail to translate into sustained institutional reform. Practical incidents such as repeated adverse audit outcomes and recurring leadership controversies suggest systemic implementation failures that remain under-theorised and under-researched. International governance research highlights the importance of institutional alignment between policy design and organisational practice (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). The absence of such evaluative studies in the SAPS context represents a critical gap.

Overall, the literature reveals a fragmented understanding of how ethical leadership, procurement governance, accountability mechanisms, and community trust interact within SAPS. There is a clear need for an integrated, empirically grounded study that connects executive-level governance failures to operational policing outcomes and public legitimacy. This study seeks to address these gaps by combining South African policing realities with international theoretical and empirical insights.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework drawing primarily on Ethical Leadership Theory, Police Legitimacy Theory, Institutional Theory, and Principal–Agent Theory. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how systemic leadership failures, corruption in police procurement, and weak accountability mechanisms at senior levels of the South African Police Service (SAPS) undermine ethical conduct, organisational effectiveness, and public trust.

Ethical Leadership Theory

Ethical Leadership Theory posits that leaders play a decisive role in shaping organisational values, behaviour, and norms through both formal authority and moral example (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005). Ethical leaders are expected to demonstrate integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability, thereby fostering ethical conduct throughout the organisation. In policing, ethical leadership is particularly critical because police officials exercise coercive power and discretionary authority over citizens (Prenzler, 2013).

In the South African context, repeated leadership crises within SAPS illustrate the absence of ethical leadership at the highest levels. The conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi for corruption and the removal of Bheki Cele following findings of maladministration reflect failures to uphold ethical standards expected of senior police leadership (Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015). These incidents support ethical leadership theory's assertion that misconduct at the top signals tolerance for unethical behaviour throughout the organisation.

South African scholarship further highlights how weak ethical leadership contributes to normalisation of corruption and abuse of power within SAPS (Faull, 2017; Newham & Faull, 2011). At station level, this manifests in practices such as manipulation of crime statistics, bribery in docket handling, and procurement irregularities affecting basic operational resources. Ethical Leadership Theory therefore provides a foundational lens for examining how leadership conduct directly shapes SAPS' organisational culture and operational integrity.

Police Legitimacy Theory

Police Legitimacy Theory, primarily developed by Tyler (2006), holds that public compliance with the law and cooperation with police are driven less by fear of punishment and more by perceptions of fairness, trustworthiness, and moral authority. When police leadership is perceived as corrupt or unaccountable, institutional legitimacy erodes, weakening voluntary compliance and cooperation (Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

In South Africa, empirical studies conducted in communities such as Khayelitsha and Alexandra demonstrate a clear relationship between perceptions of SAPS corruption and reduced willingness to report crime or assist investigations (Bruce, 2013; Faull, 2018). The Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry revealed that leadership failures and lack of accountability contributed significantly to community mistrust and ineffective policing (Western Cape Government, 2014). International research confirms these findings, showing that leadership scandals in police organisations have disproportionate effects on public trust compared to misconduct by lower-ranking officers (Goldsmith, 2005). This study uses legitimacy theory to explain how unresolved questions around accountability at senior SAPS levels undermine policing outcomes far beyond individual incidents.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory focuses on how formal rules, norms, and governance structures shape organisational behaviour (Scott, 2014). While SAPS operates within a robust institutional framework including the Constitution, SAPS Act, and Public Finance Management Act persistent governance failures indicate a disconnect between formal institutional design and actual practice (National Planning Commission, 2012).

Auditor-General and Public Protector reports repeatedly identify systemic weaknesses in SAPS procurement systems, including non-compliance with supply chain management regulations and poor consequence management (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019). These failures are not isolated incidents but institutionalised patterns of behaviour sustained by weak leadership oversight. Institutional theory helps explain why reforms focusing only on policy changes or training have had limited impact. Without addressing entrenched institutional norms that tolerate unethical leadership and weak accountability, formal rules remain symbolic rather than transformative (Faull, 2017).

Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-Agent Theory examines situations where agents (police leadership) are entrusted to act in the interests of principals (the public and the state) but instead pursue self-interest due to information asymmetry and weak oversight (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). In policing, this dynamic is particularly acute because senior officials control complex procurement processes and operational priorities with limited public visibility.

SAPS procurement scandals such as irregular contracts for vehicles, uniforms, and technology illustrate classic principal-agent problems, where leadership failures and corruption deprive frontline officers of essential resources while undermining public confidence (Burger, 2015; Transparency International, 2011). International studies confirm that ineffective oversight of police leadership significantly increases corruption risks, especially in procurement-intensive environments (Klockars et al., 2006). This

theory is particularly relevant in explaining why accountability mechanisms within SAPS, such as internal discipline and external oversight bodies, have struggled to deter misconduct at executive level.

Integrated Theoretical Application to SAPS

By integrating these four theoretical perspectives, the study conceptualises SAPS leadership failure as a systemic governance problem rather than a series of individual moral lapses. Ethical Leadership Theory explains the moral vacuum at senior levels; Police Legitimacy Theory illustrates the societal consequences of this failure; Institutional Theory reveals why governance weaknesses persist; and Principal-Agent Theory clarifies the structural incentives enabling corruption and unaccountability.

Practical SAPS incidents—ranging from leadership instability and procurement failures to community mistrust and operational breakdowns are thus interpreted as interconnected outcomes of systemic leadership and accountability deficits. This integrated framework guides the study's analysis and informs the development of reform-oriented recommendations aligned with the National Development Plan 2030 and international norms under SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Section 2: Literature Review and Objectives of the Study

This section synthesises relevant South African and international literature on policing leadership, governance, accountability, corruption, and public trust. The literature is organised thematically, with each theme linked to the study objectives to demonstrate the research gap and rationale for the study.

Theme 1: Ethical Leadership and Governance in Policing

Research on police leadership highlights that ethical and competent leadership is crucial for maintaining institutional integrity, operational effectiveness, and organisational culture (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005; Prenzler, 2013). In South Africa, studies have shown repeated crises in SAPS leadership, including corruption convictions of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and findings of maladministration against Bheki Cele, which have created organisational instability (Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015).

At practical level, leadership failures often translate into frontline inefficiencies, such as delayed crime responses, mismanagement of investigative teams, and failure to prioritise high-risk cases. Communities in Khayelitsha and Alexandra report that leadership lapses contribute to low morale among detectives and a culture of impunity that filters down to lower ranks (Newham & Faull, 2011). International evidence supports these observations, showing that ethical leadership fosters compliance, morale, and organisational integrity in policing institutions (Klockars et al., 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Link to Objectives: This theme informs Objective 1: *To examine the nature and extent of systemic leadership failures at senior levels of SAPS and their implications for organisational performance.*

Theme 2: Corruption and Procurement Maladministration

Procurement-related corruption has been widely documented as a critical governance challenge in policing. South African oversight reports by the Auditor-General and the Public

Protector highlight irregular expenditure, non-compliance with supply chain regulations, and mismanaged contracts for vehicles, ICT systems, and forensic laboratories (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019). Practical consequences include police stations operating without operational vehicles, delayed forensic results, and insufficient investigative resources, which compromise case resolution, especially in violent crime investigations (Bruce, 2013).

International research identifies procurement as a high-risk area in police organisations, where leadership oversight is critical to prevent corruption and maintain operational efficiency (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Transparency International, 2011). Studies demonstrate that weak governance and lack of ethical oversight in procurement result in resource misallocation and erosion of public trust (Prenzler, 2013).

Link to Objectives: This theme informs Objective 2: *To assess the impact of procurement-related corruption and maladministration on SAPS operational capacity and service delivery.*

Theme 3: Accountability Mechanisms and Oversight

Accountability is central to sustainable police reform. In South Africa, oversight structures such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and parliamentary committees exist but often fail to enforce consequences at senior SAPS levels (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010). Leadership impunity is a recurring issue, as illustrated by repeated reinstatements or transfers of senior officials implicated in misconduct.

International evidence indicates that accountability mechanisms without enforcement fail to deter executive-level misconduct (OECD, 2018; Bayley, 2006). Effective oversight is linked to transparent procedures, independent investigative powers, and timely enforcement actions, which collectively enhance organisational integrity and public trust (Klockars et al., 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Link to Objectives: This theme informs Objective 3: *To analyse the effectiveness of existing accountability and oversight mechanisms in addressing misconduct at senior SAPS levels.*

Theme 4: Police Legitimacy and Community Trust

Police legitimacy is a critical determinant of public cooperation. South African studies reveal that communities’ willingness to report crime or assist in investigations is strongly influenced by perceptions of fairness, integrity, and accountability of senior SAPS leadership (Faull, 2017; Bruce, 2013). For instance, research in Khayelitsha shows that citizens perceive

senior leadership corruption as a barrier to cooperation, which exacerbates violent crime and delays justice.

International literature aligns with these findings, emphasizing that police legitimacy depends on procedural fairness, ethical leadership, and institutional trust rather than coercive power alone (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014). Failure to uphold leadership integrity undermines legitimacy, perpetuating community disengagement and ineffective policing outcomes (Goldsmith, 2005).

Link to Objectives: This theme informs Objective 4: *To examine the relationship between ethical leadership, police legitimacy, and community trust in high-crime South African communities.*

Theme 5: Comparative and Best-Practice Approaches

Comparative studies show that police organisations that implement transparent leadership appointment procedures, enforce ethical conduct at senior levels, and adopt accountability frameworks demonstrate higher organisational integrity and public trust (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013). South Africa has yet to systematically adapt these practices despite repeated evidence of leadership failures and governance gaps within SAPS (Burger, 2015; Faull, 2018).

Practical SAPS incidents, such as repeated audit failures in procurement and slow disciplinary processes, suggest that adapting international best practices could mitigate systemic governance challenges and improve operational effectiveness (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Link to Objectives: This theme informs Objective 5: *To identify best practices in ethical police leadership and accountability from international policing contexts relevant to South Africa.*

Theme 6: Integrated Framework for Reform

Finally, an integrated approach combining ethical leadership, accountability, legitimacy, and institutional governance is necessary to address SAPS challenges comprehensively (Scott, 2014; Faull, 2017). South African policy frameworks, including the National Development Plan 2030, advocate professional, accountable, and community-oriented policing (National Planning Commission, 2012). Yet practical implementation gaps remain evident in high-crime communities where leadership and governance failures continue to affect frontline operations.

Link to Objectives: This theme informs Objective 6: *To develop an integrated, context-sensitive framework for strengthening ethical leadership and accountability within SAPS.*

Consolidated Summary of Objectives Linked to Literature Themes

Theme	Objective	Practical SAPS Example	Literature Sources
Ethical Leadership	Examine failures	leadership Selebi conviction, maladministration	Cele Brown et al., 2005; Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015; Prenzler, 2013; Klockars et al., 2006; Faull, 2017; Goldsmith, 2005
Procurement Corruption	Assess impact	procurement Vehicle shortages, forensic backlogs	Auditor-General SA, 2022; Public Protector, 2019; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Transparency Int., 2011; Bruce, 2013; Prenzler, 2013; Burger, 2015
Accountability Mechanisms	Analyse effectiveness	oversight IPID delays, executive impunity	Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010; OECD, 2018; Bayley, 2006; Klockars et al., 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Bruce, 2013
Legitimacy & Trust	Examine relationship	to Khayelitsha reporting	Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Faull, 2017; Bruce, 2013;

Theme	Objective	Practical SAPS Example	Literature Sources
	community cooperation	hesitancy	Goldsmith, 2005; Newham & Faull, 2011; Burger, 2015
Comparative Practice	Best Identify approaches	international Lessons for SAPS procurement & leadership	Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Goldsmith, 2005; Auditor-General SA, 2022; Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015
Integrated Framework	Reform Develop framework	context-sensitive National Development Plan alignment	Scott, 2014; Faull, 2017; National Planning Commission, 2012; Bruce, 2013; Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Prenzler, 2013; Goldsmith, 2005

Section 3: Discussions and Key Findings

This section discusses the study's findings in relation to the objectives, linking empirical evidence from South Africa with international research to highlight systemic patterns, practical implications, and lessons for policy and practice.

Ethical Leadership and Governance Failures

The study confirms that systemic leadership failures at the executive level of SAPS significantly affect organisational culture, decision-making, and operational efficiency. Evidence from cases such as the conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and the maladministration of Commissioner Bheki Cele shows that leadership misconduct sets a precedent for organisational behaviour, creating tolerance for corruption and reduced operational accountability (Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015).

Frontline police officers in several provinces reported delayed deployments and mismanagement of investigative teams due to unclear or politically influenced directives from senior leadership. This reflects Brown, Treviño, and Harrison's (2005) assertion that ethical leadership is critical in shaping organisational norms, and Klockars et al. (2006) support that lack of integrity at top levels fosters a culture of impunity. Internationally, Goldsmith (2005) and Prenzler (2013) note similar patterns where weak executive accountability undermines organisational performance, particularly in police institutions operating in high-crime contexts.

Key Finding: Ethical leadership deficits at senior SAPS levels compromise organisational integrity and operational effectiveness, producing systemic risks for crime prevention and investigation.

Procurement-Related Corruption and Operational Impact

The study finds that procurement corruption directly affects SAPS' operational capacity. Auditor-General reports document irregular vehicle leases, inadequate forensic equipment, and ICT mismanagement, leading to practical consequences such as police stations without functional vehicles and backlogs in murder and rape investigations (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019).

International studies underscore that procurement is a critical vulnerability in police organisations, where weak oversight enables diversion of resources and operational delays (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Transparency International, 2011). This study shows that SAPS procurement failures reduce investigative efficiency, limit rapid response, and undermine frontline policing credibility.

Key Finding: Procurement-related corruption and weak governance structures in SAPS have tangible operational consequences, affecting both crime-solving capacity and public confidence.

Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms

Findings reveal limited effectiveness of oversight mechanisms. Bodies such as IPID, parliamentary committees, and internal disciplinary units exist, but enforcement remains inconsistent. High-ranking officials implicated in misconduct are often transferred or reinstated without consequences, eroding accountability and reinforcing a perception of impunity (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010).

International research confirms that oversight without enforcement is insufficient to curb executive-level misconduct (OECD, 2018; Bayley, 2006). The study identifies a mismatch between institutional intent and practical enforcement within SAPS, creating a governance gap that compromises both ethical leadership and operational efficiency.

Key Finding: Oversight mechanisms exist but fail to consistently enforce accountability, contributing to organisational impunity and low public trust.

Police Legitimacy and Community Trust

The study indicates that community trust is strongly linked to perceptions of senior leadership integrity. Research in Khayelitsha, Alexandra, and Gauteng reveals that citizens are less willing to report crime or cooperate with investigations when leadership is perceived as corrupt or politically protected (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013).

International studies demonstrate that legitimacy, not coercive power alone, determines compliance and community cooperation (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014). In SAPS, leadership scandals at national and provincial levels reverberate to local stations, weakening police-community relations and hindering crime prevention efforts.

Key Finding: Public trust and cooperation are undermined by leadership failures at the executive level, directly affecting SAPS legitimacy and community engagement.

Comparative Best Practices

The study identifies international models of ethical leadership and accountability as potential benchmarks for SAPS reform. Countries with transparent executive appointment processes, independent oversight, and enforceable consequences show higher organisational integrity and public trust (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013).

For example, Australian and UK police forces employ rigorous leadership vetting, proactive ethics training, and real-time audit mechanisms for procurement. Applying similar principles in SAPS could reduce procurement corruption and enhance operational efficiency (Goldsmith, 2005; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Key Finding: Adopting international best practices in leadership, oversight, and governance can enhance SAPS ethical culture and operational performance.

Integrated Reform Framework

The findings support the development of an integrated, context-sensitive framework combining ethical leadership, accountability, institutional governance, and legitimacy. National Development Plan 2030 advocates for professional and accountable policing, but

the study shows persistent implementation gaps (National Planning Commission, 2012). Practical incidents, such as repeated procurement audit failures and leadership reshuffles, highlight the need for systemic reform that aligns policy intent with operational practice (Faull, 2017; Bruce, 2013).

Key Finding: A systemic, integrated approach is essential for sustainable reform, linking ethical leadership, accountability, and legitimacy to improved policing outcomes.

Consolidated Key Findings

Objective	Key Findings	Practical SAPS Examples	References
Examine leadership failures	Ethical leadership deficits compromise integrity and operational efficiency	Selebi conviction; maladministration	Cele Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015; Brown et al., 2005; Klockars et al., 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Prenzler, 2013; Faull, 2017
Assess procurement impact	Procurement corruption reduces operational capacity	Vehicle shortages; forensic backlogs	Auditor-General SA, 2022; Public Protector, 2019; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Transparency International, 2011; Bruce, 2013; Prenzler, 2013; Burger, 2015
Analyse accountability	Oversight exists but enforcement is weak	IPID delays; executive impunity	Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010; OECD, 2018; Bayley, 2006; Klockars et al., 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Bruce, 2013
Examine legitimacy	Leadership failures erode public trust	Khayelitsha and Alexandra citizen disengagement	Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Faull, 2017; Bruce, 2013; Newham & Faull, 2011; Goldsmith, 2005; Burger, 2015
Identify best practices	International benchmarks improve ethics and accountability	Transparent procurement, leadership vetting	Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Goldsmith, 2005; Auditor-General SA, 2022; Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015
Develop framework	Integrated approach links leadership, accountability, legitimacy	National Development Plan 2030 implementation gaps	Scott, 2014; Faull, 2017; National Planning Commission, 2012; Bruce, 2013; Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Prenzler, 2013; Goldsmith, 2005

Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations are proposed to strengthen ethical leadership, accountability, operational efficiency, and public trust within the South African Police Service (SAPS). Each recommendation integrates South African evidence with international best practices and real-world incidents.

Strengthen Ethical Leadership at Executive Levels

Recommendation: Implement a comprehensive ethical leadership development programme for senior SAPS officials, including ethics training, leadership accountability workshops, and structured mentorship.

Rationale: Ethical leadership is central to organisational integrity and operational effectiveness. Incidents such as the conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi demonstrate how executive misconduct erodes trust, morale, and operational efficiency (Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015).

Implementation:

- Mandatory ethical and strategic leadership training for all National and Provincial Commissioners.
- Annual independent performance and ethics audits.

- Integration of ethical leadership indicators into promotions and tenure decisions.

International Support: Countries such as Australia and the UK emphasise ethics and leadership vetting at senior levels to prevent corruption and enhance organisational culture (Prenzler, 2013; Goldsmith, 2005).

Reform Procurement and Resource Management

Recommendation: Establish an independent procurement oversight unit within SAPS, with real-time monitoring of high-value contracts and strict compliance with the Public Finance Management Act.

Rationale: Procurement irregularities have caused vehicle shortages, forensic delays, and equipment gaps, affecting frontline policing (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019).

Implementation:

- Digitisation of procurement processes for transparency and traceability.
- Annual audits conducted by independent bodies.
- Penalties for non-compliance enforced across all leadership levels.

International Support: Transparency International (2011) and Rose-Ackerman & Palifka (2016) emphasise that independent oversight and transparent procurement reduce corruption risks in police organisations.

Strengthen Accountability and Oversight Mechanisms

Recommendation: Enhance the powers and enforcement capacity of oversight bodies such as IPID and parliamentary committees, ensuring that findings against senior SAPS officials are acted upon without undue delay or political interference.

Rationale: Oversight currently exists but enforcement is inconsistent, allowing repeated impunity at senior levels (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010).

Implementation:

- Legally binding timelines for disciplinary outcomes.
- Public reporting of leadership accountability cases.
- Introduction of whistleblower protection policies for internal reporting.

International Support: OECD (2018) and Bayley (2006) demonstrate that strong oversight with enforcement powers is essential for integrity and public trust in policing.

Restore Public Trust and Police Legitimacy

Recommendation: Implement community-focused engagement strategies led by senior SAPS officials to rebuild public trust and enhance legitimacy.

Rationale: Community cooperation in high-crime areas like Khayelitsha and Alexandra is low due to perceptions of corruption and unaccountable leadership (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013).

Implementation:

- Regular town-hall meetings and feedback forums with communities.
- Transparent reporting of crime-solving successes and challenges.
- Deployment of leadership liaison officers to facilitate direct community engagement.

International Support: Tyler (2006) and Tyler & Jackson (2014) highlight that legitimacy-driven policing strengthens compliance, reporting, and cooperative partnerships between communities and police.

Institutionalise Performance Monitoring and Reporting

Recommendation: Develop and implement a leadership accountability scorecard linking ethical conduct, operational performance, and community satisfaction metrics for senior SAPS leaders.

Rationale: There is a mismatch between policy intentions (National Development Plan 2030) and actual practice in SAPS leadership and governance (National Planning Commission, 2012; Faull, 2017).

Implementation:

- Annual evaluation of senior officials on ethical, operational, and governance outcomes.

- Tie bonuses, promotions, and tenure renewals to performance on these indicators.
- Independent verification of reports by external auditors.

International Support: Scott (2014) and Prenzler (2013) highlight that institutionalised performance monitoring increases transparency, accountability, and organisational efficiency.

Adopt Integrated Reform Framework

Recommendation: SAPS should implement an integrated reform framework combining ethical leadership, procurement oversight, accountability, and community engagement, ensuring alignment between policy, practice, and outcomes.

Rationale: Leadership, legitimacy, and accountability are interconnected; isolated interventions are insufficient to address systemic governance failures (Bruce, 2013; Faull, 2017).

Implementation:

- Cross-departmental reform task force to oversee leadership, procurement, and community engagement reforms.
- Pilot programs in high-crime provinces (e.g., Gauteng, Western Cape) to refine framework before nationwide implementation.
- Integration of international best practices adapted to South African context (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Foster International Collaboration and Learning

Recommendation: Engage in international partnerships for knowledge exchange, leadership training, and technical assistance in governance and ethics.

Rationale: South Africa can learn from jurisdictions with established ethical policing frameworks to reduce corruption, enhance accountability, and improve community trust (Prenzler, 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Implementation:

- Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with UK, Australia, and Canada for leadership and ethics training.
- Annual international benchmarking reports to evaluate SAPS progress against global standards.
- Adoption of international case studies to guide local reform interventions.

These recommendations collectively aim to:

- Reinforce ethical leadership and governance in SAPS.
- Eliminate procurement corruption and resource mismanagement.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms and enforce consequences for misconduct.
- Restore public trust and police legitimacy through community engagement.
- Institutionalise performance monitoring linked to ethics and operational outcomes.
- Implement an integrated reform framework to address systemic challenges.

- Draw on international best practices for sustained reform.

Practical application of these recommendations can enhance operational capacity, reduce corruption, improve public trust, and align SAPS leadership with national and international standards.

Key Takeaways

Ethical Leadership is Critical for Effective Policing

- Leadership failures at the highest levels of SAPS, such as the conviction of National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and maladministration by Bheki Cele, demonstrate that unethical conduct at senior levels permeates the organisation, undermining morale, discipline, and operational effectiveness (Bruce, 2013; Burger, 2015; Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005).
- Internationally, ethical leadership is shown to shape organisational culture and influence compliance, trust, and performance within police institutions (Prenzler, 2013; Goldsmith, 2005).

Procurement Corruption Directly Affects Operational Capacity

- Irregularities in SAPS procurement processes have led to shortages of vehicles, forensic equipment backlogs, and inadequate ICT infrastructure, which compromise frontline policing and delay justice for victims of violent crime (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019).
- Global research confirms that procurement mismanagement in law enforcement erodes institutional effectiveness and public trust (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Transparency International, 2011).

Weak Accountability Mechanisms Encourage Impunity

- Oversight structures like IPID and parliamentary committees exist but are limited in enforcing consequences for senior leadership misconduct, allowing repeated impunity and contributing to organisational instability (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010).
- Internationally, studies highlight that oversight without enforcement is ineffective in curbing executive-level misconduct (OECD, 2018; Bayley, 2006).

Leadership Failures Erode Police Legitimacy and Public Trust

- Community cooperation in high-crime areas, including Khayelitsha and Alexandra, is severely reduced due to perceptions of corruption and unaccountable senior SAPS leadership (Newham & Faull, 2011; Bruce, 2013).
- International evidence supports that public trust and perceived legitimacy of police depend on ethical leadership, procedural fairness, and accountability, not solely on coercive power (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

International Best Practices Offer Lessons for SAPS Reform

- Countries with transparent leadership appointments, proactive ethics training, and enforceable oversight demonstrate higher organisational integrity and operational efficiency (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013).

- SAPS can adapt these models to address leadership failures, procurement corruption, and accountability gaps.

Integrated Reform is Essential

- Ethical leadership, accountability, institutional governance, and community engagement are interconnected. Isolated interventions are insufficient; sustainable reform requires a systemic, integrated framework aligned with the National Development Plan 2030 and SDG 16 (Bruce, 2013; Faull, 2017; Scott, 2014).

Practical Implications for SAPS

- Implementing ethical leadership programmes, independent procurement oversight, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and community engagement strategies can improve operational efficiency, reduce corruption, and rebuild public trust.
- Pilot programs in high-crime provinces can test reforms before nationwide rollout, while learning from international benchmarks can guide sustainable change (Prenzler, 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Overall Takeaway:

The study demonstrates that effective policing in South Africa begins at the top. Ethical leadership, accountability, and legitimacy are not abstract ideals—they directly affect operational performance, community cooperation, and the fight against violent crime. Addressing systemic leadership failures in SAPS is therefore both a governance imperative and a practical necessity for safer South African communities.

Impact of the Study for the South African Police Service (SAPS) and South Africa

This study provides critical insights into systemic leadership failures, accountability deficits, and operational challenges within SAPS, with wide-reaching implications for policing and governance in South Africa.

Strengthening SAPS Leadership and Ethical Culture

- **Impact on SAPS:** By highlighting the consequences of unethical leadership at the executive level—illustrated by cases such as National Commissioner Jackie Selebi's corruption conviction and maladministration by Bheki Cele—this study underscores the need for ethical leadership programmes, structured mentorship, and accountability frameworks.
- **Practical Outcome:** Implementation of these recommendations can foster a culture of integrity, reduce tolerance for corruption, and enhance organisational morale. Ethical leadership at the top will ensure that policies and operational directives are consistently aligned with legal and moral standards (Bruce, 2013; Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005).
- **Impact on South Africa:** Strengthened police leadership will improve public confidence in SAPS, enabling better cooperation with communities, increased reporting of crimes, and more effective enforcement of law.

Enhancing Accountability and Oversight

- **Impact on SAPS:** The study exposes the limitations of current oversight mechanisms, including IPID and parliamentary committees, in addressing executive-level misconduct. Recommendations for independent, empowered, and enforceable accountability structures can ensure that senior officers are held responsible for corruption, procurement irregularities, and operational mismanagement (Faull, 2018; Burger & Newham, 2010).
- **Practical Outcome:** Regular, independent audits and transparent disciplinary processes will reduce impunity, deter misconduct, and enhance operational discipline.
- **Impact on South Africa:** Increased accountability at the highest levels will reinforce rule of law and the legitimacy of law enforcement, contributing to stronger governance, safer communities, and improved public trust.

Improving Operational Efficiency and Crime Response

- **Impact on SAPS:** Procurement corruption and resource mismanagement, such as vehicle shortages and forensic backlogs, directly undermine SAPS’ ability to respond effectively to violent crime. The study’s recommendations for procurement reform, digital monitoring, and resource accountability can ensure that operational needs are met efficiently (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019).
- **Practical Outcome:** With functional resources and transparent management, SAPS will improve response times, investigative capacity, and overall effectiveness, particularly in high-crime areas like Gauteng and Western Cape.
- **Impact on South Africa:** Improved SAPS efficiency will result in reduced crime rates, faster justice delivery, and increased public safety, which is essential for social stability and economic development.

Restoring Community Trust and Police Legitimacy

- **Impact on SAPS:** The study demonstrates that community cooperation is directly linked to perceptions of leadership integrity. Implementation of community engagement strategies, town-hall meetings, and

transparent reporting mechanisms can enhance the legitimacy of SAPS (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

- **Practical Outcome:** Communities will be more willing to report crimes, provide intelligence, and participate in policing initiatives, leading to improved crime detection and prevention.
- **Impact on South Africa:** Restored public trust in SAPS strengthens **social cohesion, citizen participation, and public safety**, creating a safer environment for all citizens and supporting democratic governance.

Policy Development and Strategic Reform

- **Impact on SAPS:** By providing an **integrated framework combining ethical leadership, accountability, procurement integrity, and community engagement**, the study offers a roadmap for **systemic reform** within SAPS (Scott, 2014; Faull, 2017).
- **Practical Outcome:** Policymakers can use these insights to implement reforms aligned with the **National Development Plan 2030** and international best practices, ensuring that leadership and governance structures are robust, ethical, and sustainable.
- **Impact on South Africa:** Adoption of these reforms contributes to **national security, effective law enforcement, and stronger institutions**, supporting Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Informing Future Research and International Collaboration

- **Impact on SAPS:** The study identifies gaps in ethical leadership, procurement, and oversight practices that can guide **future internal research, audits, and policy reviews**.
- **Impact on South Africa:** Insights from this study can inform bilateral and multilateral collaboration, enabling SAPS to adopt international best practices in governance, ethics, and community policing, fostering regional and global policing excellence (Prenzler, 2013; Bayley, 2006).

Consolidated Summary of Study Impact

Area	SAPS Impact	National Impact
Ethical Leadership	Stronger leadership culture, reduced corruption	Enhanced organisational integrity, improved public trust
Accountability & Oversight	Effective enforcement of misconduct consequences	Strengthened rule of law, reduced impunity
Operational Efficiency	Better crime response and resource management	Lower crime rates, faster justice delivery
Community Trust & Legitimacy	Improved cooperation and reporting	Safer communities, stronger social cohesion
Policy & Strategic Reform	Roadmap for systemic governance reform	Alignment with NDP 2030 and SDG 16
Research & International Learning	Informs internal audits, reforms, and benchmarking	Adoption of global best practices, regional policing leadership

Overall Impact:

This study has a dual impact: for SAPS, it provides evidence-based pathways to strengthen leadership, accountability, and operational performance; for South Africa, it contributes to safer communities, enhanced governance, public trust, and progress toward sustainable development and democratic policing. By addressing systemic leadership failures, procurement corruption, and accountability gaps, the study offers practical, implementable solutions with measurable benefits for both policing and society.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into leadership, accountability, and operational challenges in SAPS, several limitations should be acknowledged. Recognising these limitations is essential for interpreting findings appropriately and guiding future research.

Scope and Generalizability

- **Limitation:** The study primarily focuses on leadership, governance, and accountability issues at senior levels of SAPS. While practical examples from high-crime provinces (e.g., Gauteng, Western Cape, Khayelitsha, Alexandra) are included, findings may not fully represent experiences in rural or less-researched regions.
- **Impact:** Generalising results across all SAPS divisions may be constrained. Certain local policing contexts may exhibit unique challenges not captured in this study (Bruce, 2013; Newham & Faull, 2011).
- **Mitigation:** Future research should include broader sampling across provinces and rural policing environments to enhance representativeness.

Access to Sensitive Data

- **Limitation:** Some internal SAPS documents, procurement records, and disciplinary files are confidential or restricted, limiting the study's ability to verify all allegations of corruption or leadership misconduct.
- **Impact:** Certain findings rely on publicly available reports, media coverage, and prior audits (Auditor-General South Africa, 2022; Public Protector, 2019), which may not capture the full operational reality.
- **Mitigation:** Collaboration with SAPS, parliamentary committees, and independent oversight bodies could provide deeper access in future studies.

Reliance on Secondary Data and Case Studies

- **Limitation:** A significant portion of the analysis draws on secondary literature, scholarly publications, and documented incidents. While this provides a strong theoretical and policy foundation, it may lack the richness of primary data from direct interviews or observations.
- **Impact:** Certain nuances, such as internal organisational culture, personal perceptions of officers, and informal practices, may be underrepresented (Faull, 2017; Burger, 2015).

- **Mitigation:** Future studies should incorporate mixed-methods research, including interviews with SAPS officials, community members, and independent auditors.

Dynamic and Evolving Policing Environment

- **Limitation:** SAPS and South African policing operate in a highly dynamic context influenced by political shifts, crime trends, and policy reforms. Findings represent a snapshot in time and may change with new leadership appointments, policy changes, or operational interventions (Scott, 2014; Faull, 2018).
- **Impact:** Some recommendations may require adaptation as circumstances evolve.
- **Mitigation:** Continuous monitoring and longitudinal research would allow assessment of the impact of reforms over time.

Comparative International Evidence

- **Limitation:** While international studies provide valuable insights into best practices and governance models, the South African policing context is unique, with socio-political legacies, resource constraints, and crime patterns that differ from developed-country benchmarks (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013).
- **Impact:** Direct application of international models may require careful adaptation to South African realities.
- **Mitigation:** Recommendations were contextualised for SAPS; however, pilot testing and incremental implementation are advised to ensure effectiveness.

Potential Bias in Publicly Reported Incidents

- **Limitation:** The study references widely reported SAPS incidents in media and official reports. Such sources may reflect biases, incomplete narratives, or political influence.
- **Impact:** Findings may emphasise certain high-profile cases while underrepresenting less publicised but equally important instances of misconduct or operational challenges.
- **Mitigation:** Triangulation with multiple sources and cross-validation with audit reports and academic research was used to mitigate bias.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a robust, evidence-based analysis of leadership, accountability, and operational challenges within SAPS, integrating South African and international perspectives. The limitations primarily relate to scope, data access, context specificity, and dynamic operational environments, which should be addressed in future research to enhance the generalisability and depth of findings.

Practical Recommendations for Key Stakeholders

The study highlights systemic failures in leadership, accountability, and ethical governance within SAPS, as well as broader social impacts of violent crime and corruption. To address these challenges effectively, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential.

South African Police Service (SAPS)

Recommendations:

- **Ethical Leadership Development:** Implement structured ethical leadership programmes for senior officials, including mentorship, ethics workshops, and accountability evaluations.
- **Procurement Reform:** Digitise and monitor procurement processes, enforce compliance with the Public Finance Management Act, and establish an independent oversight unit.
- **Community Engagement:** Strengthen local policing through community liaison officers, regular public forums, and transparent reporting of crime statistics.
- **Accountability Enforcement:** Ensure swift disciplinary action for misconduct at all levels, linking promotions and tenure to ethical performance (Bruce, 2013; Faull, 2017).

Practical Example: The vehicle shortages in Gauteng and Western Cape due to procurement mismanagement directly hindered rapid crime response and highlighted the need for procurement reforms.

Political Parties (including the African National Congress – ANC)

Recommendations:

- **Support Institutional Integrity:** Political parties should refrain from influencing SAPS leadership appointments and operational decisions to prevent politicisation of law enforcement.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Promote legislation that strengthens police accountability and oversight mechanisms.
- **Transparent Political Conduct:** Encourage party members to adhere to anti-corruption policies to model ethical leadership nationally (Burger, 2015).

Practical Example: Allegations of politically motivated transfers of senior SAPS officials demonstrate the risks of partisan interference in policing.

Churches and Faith-Based Organisations

Recommendations:

- **Community Mobilisation:** Use moral authority to promote ethical leadership, civic responsibility, and crime prevention initiatives.
- **Victim Support Services:** Provide counselling and rehabilitation programs for victims of violent crime.
- **Partnerships with SAPS:** Collaborate on outreach programs, youth mentorship, and awareness campaigns.

Practical Example: Faith-based initiatives in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal have successfully engaged youth in crime prevention programs and mentorship, improving local safety outcomes.

Community Structures and Local Leaders

Recommendations:

- **Participatory Policing:** Form local safety committees to liaise with SAPS, report criminal activities, and co-develop neighbourhood crime prevention strategies.
- **Community Watch Programs:** Encourage citizen patrols, reporting, and local vigilance while ensuring safety and coordination with police.
- **Accountability Advocacy:** Monitor local policing effectiveness and hold SAPS accountable for community promises.

Practical Example: Community policing forums in Khayelitsha and Alexandra have improved communication with SAPS and enhanced crime reporting rates, demonstrating the effectiveness of participatory engagement.

Youth and Student Organisations

Recommendations:

- **Education and Awareness:** Promote civic education about crime prevention, ethical conduct, and police engagement.
- **Youth Engagement Programs:** Establish mentorship, skills development, and volunteer initiatives that channel energy away from criminal activities.
- **Collaboration with SAPS:** Engage youth in advisory forums to strengthen community-police relations.
- **Practical Example:** Youth-led safety initiatives in Soweto have reduced petty crime rates and increased trust between SAPS and young citizens.

Private Sector and Business Community

Recommendations:

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Invest in community crime prevention, technology for policing, and vocational programs for at-risk youth.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Collaborate with SAPS to implement surveillance systems, rapid response infrastructure, and training programs.
- **Anti-Corruption Advocacy:** Promote ethical practices and transparency in business dealings that intersect with law enforcement procurement.

Practical Example: Security technology companies partnering with SAPS in Johannesburg have helped reduce response times in high-crime precincts.

Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Recommendations:

- **Oversight and Advocacy:** Monitor SAPS operations, publicise corruption cases, and support legal reforms to strengthen accountability.
- **Community Education:** Run programs to inform citizens about their rights, legal processes, and crime prevention measures.
- **Support Services:** Provide rehabilitation and counselling for crime victims.

Practical Example: NGOs like the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) have actively engaged in oversight, victim support, and community safety education.

Integrated Multi-Stakeholder Framework

Stakeholder	Role/Responsibility	Key Action
SAPS	Operational leadership	Ethical leadership programmes, procurement reform, community engagement, accountability enforcement
Political Parties (ANC & others)	Policy & governance	Advocate for anti-corruption policies, support depoliticised policing, enforce internal party ethical standards
Churches & Faith Groups	Moral & social guidance	Community mobilisation, victim support, mentorship, ethical leadership promotion
Communities & Local Leaders	Grassroots governance	Participatory policing, accountability monitoring, neighbourhood watch programs
Youth & Student Organisations	Civic engagement	Awareness campaigns, mentorship, volunteer initiatives, advisory forums
Private Sector	Resources & technology	CSR programs, PPPs for security, anti-corruption advocacy
Civil Society & NGOs	Oversight & education	Monitoring SAPS, public awareness, legal advocacy, victim support

Overall Recommendation:

Addressing violent crime and restoring trust in policing requires coordinated action across all sectors. While SAPS holds primary operational responsibility, political leadership, faith-based groups, communities, youth, private sector, and civil society each have complementary roles in promoting ethical leadership, transparency, accountability, and safer communities.

Co-impact of the Study

The co-impact refers to the interconnected and mutually reinforcing effects of implementing the study’s findings and recommendations across multiple levels of South African society. By addressing leadership, accountability, community engagement, and ethical governance simultaneously, the study produces ripple effects that strengthen policing, governance, social cohesion, and economic development.

Interconnected Impact on SAPS and Communities

- Strengthening ethical leadership within SAPS improves internal culture, operational efficiency, and decision-making.
- Simultaneously, community engagement initiatives increase public trust, cooperation, and crime reporting, creating a positive feedback loop.
- Example: If leadership integrity is enforced (e.g., accountability for procurement failures), frontline officers are better supported, which improves response times and community interactions (Bruce, 2013; Faull, 2017).

Co-Impact: Enhanced leadership leads to better policing outcomes, which in turn strengthens public confidence, community cooperation, and legitimacy.

Synergy between Political Parties and SAPS Reform

- Political parties that respect depoliticised policing and advocate for transparent, accountable leadership support the operational independence of SAPS.
- In turn, effective SAPS operations enhance public trust in political institutions, reduce perceptions of corruption, and increase citizen engagement (Burger, 2015; Bayley, 2006).

Co-Impact: Political commitment to ethical governance reinforces policing legitimacy, while improved policing strengthens democratic governance and citizen trust.

Integration of Church, Faith-Based Organisations, and Community Engagement

- Churches and faith-based organisations reinforce ethical norms, social cohesion, and youth mentorship, complementing SAPS efforts in crime prevention.
- Communities benefit from guidance, support, and early intervention programs, while SAPS gains informed partners who facilitate local intelligence and crime reporting (Newham & Faull, 2011; Tyler, 2006).

Co-Impact: Ethical social frameworks provided by faith-based actors amplify SAPS reform efforts and strengthen community resilience against crime.

Youth Participation and Social Transformation

- Engaging youth in mentorship, civic education, and volunteer programs prevents them from entering criminal networks.
- This proactive approach reduces violent crime, supporting SAPS’ operational goals, and nurtures future leaders committed to ethical governance (Bruce, 2013; Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

Co-Impact: Youth involvement reduces crime at source, strengthens social cohesion, and contributes to a sustainable culture of accountability and lawfulness.

Private Sector and Civil Society Contribution

- Public-private partnerships enable investment in security technology, infrastructure, and skills development, directly improving SAPS operational capacity.
- Civil society organisations monitor oversight, provide victim support, and promote accountability, complementing SAPS and government reforms (Prenzler, 2013; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Co-Impact: Coordinated contributions enhance efficiency, transparency, and social protection, creating shared responsibility for public safety.

Integrated National Co-Impact

By combining the effects of ethical SAPS leadership, accountable governance, political support, community participation, youth engagement, faith-based mentoring, and private sector collaboration:

- **Violent crime is reduced** through improved operational efficiency and prevention strategies.
- **Public trust in institutions grows**, strengthening democratic governance.
- **Social cohesion is reinforced**, fostering safer and more resilient communities.
- **Economic growth and development are supported**, as safer environments encourage investment and stability.

Practical Example: In Gauteng, collaborative efforts between SAPS, NGOs, local faith groups, and private security initiatives have improved safety in informal settlements, demonstrating how multi-stakeholder approaches produce synergistic outcomes.

Key Co-impact Insight:

The study demonstrates that no single actor can resolve violent crime or systemic policing challenges alone. When SAPS reforms, political commitment, community engagement, youth participation, faith-based guidance, and private sector support are aligned, the benefits are mutually reinforcing, producing a holistic improvement in policing, governance, public trust, and societal well-being.

Systemic Failures in Leadership and Accountability within Saps

Systemic Leadership Failures in SAPS

Systemic leadership failure within the South African Police Service (SAPS) has been repeatedly identified as a core contributor to declining police effectiveness, organisational instability, and weakened public trust. Leadership instability, politicisation of senior appointments, and poor consequence management have resulted in fragmented command structures and inconsistent strategic direction. South African scholars argue that these failures are rooted in historical legacies, cadre deployment practices, and weak professionalisation of police leadership (Burger, 2015; Newham & Faull, 2011).

Empirical evidence from commissions of inquiry and oversight reports reveals patterns of poor decision-making, limited strategic oversight, and tolerance of maladministration at senior levels (National Development Plan, 2012; Bruce, 2013). These leadership weaknesses undermine operational effectiveness and create environments where unethical behaviour can flourish unchecked.

International policing literature supports these findings, emphasising that ineffective leadership erodes institutional legitimacy and organisational discipline (Goldsmith, 2005; Tyler, 2006). Studies from the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia demonstrate that police organisations lacking ethical, accountable leadership are more vulnerable to corruption, misconduct, and loss of public confidence (Punch, 2009; Prenzler, 2013). Thus, SAPS leadership failures are not isolated anomalies but reflect global patterns where governance deficits weaken policing outcomes.

Allegations of Corruption Linked to Police Procurement

Police procurement has emerged as a critical risk area for corruption within SAPS, with allegations involving inflated contracts, irregular tender processes, and collusion between senior officials and private suppliers. South African oversight bodies have consistently highlighted procurement irregularities as a major contributor to financial losses and institutional decay within SAPS (Public Protector, 2019; Auditor-General South Africa, 2022).

Corruption in procurement directly affects service delivery by diverting resources away from operational policing, compromising equipment quality, and demoralising honest officers (Van der Spuy, 2017). Research further indicates that procurement corruption is often enabled by weak internal controls, poor transparency, and the absence of effective oversight at executive level (Newham, 2014).

International research corroborates these patterns. Comparative studies show that police procurement systems worldwide are particularly susceptible to corruption due to high-value contracts, technical complexity, and limited external scrutiny (Transparency International, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). In countries where senior leadership fails to enforce ethical standards and accountability, procurement corruption becomes systemic rather than incidental (Klockars et al., 2006). The SAPS experience aligns with these international findings, underscoring the structural not individual nature of the problem.

Unresolved Accountability at the Highest Levels of SAPS

A persistent challenge within SAPS is the lack of accountability at the highest leadership levels, particularly regarding misconduct, corruption allegations, and governance failures. Despite the existence of oversight mechanisms such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and parliamentary committees, senior officials are seldom held decisively accountable (Bruce & Neild, 2005; Faull, 2018).

This accountability gap contributes to a culture of impunity, where unethical conduct is normalised and whistle-blowers face retaliation rather than protection. South African research highlights that weak consequence management undermines discipline across the organisation, sending a signal that senior leaders operate above the law (Burger & Newham, 2010; NDP, 2012).

International policing scholarship consistently demonstrates that accountability failures at executive level have cascading effects throughout police organisations (Bayley, 2006; OECD, 2018). Effective accountability systems require independent oversight, transparent disciplinary processes, and political insulation of police leadership. Where these conditions are absent, public trust deteriorates and police legitimacy collapses (Tyler & Jackson, 2014). The SAPS case illustrates how unresolved accountability at the top erodes confidence in the entire criminal justice system.

Ethical Leadership as the Foundation of Effective Policing

Effective policing is fundamentally dependent on ethical leadership. Ethical leaders set the tone for organisational behaviour, model integrity, and ensure that accountability mechanisms are actively enforced. In the South African context, ethical leadership is essential for restoring legitimacy in communities historically marked by mistrust, inequality, and violence (Faull, 2017; Van der Spuy, 2017).

Without accountability at senior levels, ethical standards become symbolic rather than operational. Communities ultimately bear the consequences through reduced safety, poor service delivery, and weakened confidence in the rule of law. South African studies show that public trust in SAPS is closely linked to perceptions of leadership integrity and fairness (Bruce, 2013; Newham & Faull, 2011).

International literature reinforces this conclusion. Ethical leadership has been shown to improve police legitimacy, compliance, and cooperation across diverse contexts (Tyler, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). Comparative studies emphasise that sustainable crime reduction and community trust are unattainable without leadership that is transparent, accountable, and values-driven (Prenzler, 2013; OECD, 2018).

Systemic leadership failures, procurement-related corruption, and unresolved accountability at senior levels have severely undermined SAPS effectiveness and legitimacy. Both South African and international evidence confirm that ethical leadership is not optional but foundational to effective policing. Without accountability at the top, reform efforts remain superficial, trust collapses, and communities continue to pay the price through insecurity and injustice.

Conclusion

This study underscores the centrality of ethical leadership, accountability, and legitimacy in shaping effective policing in South Africa. Analysis of the South African Police Service (SAPS) reveals that systemic failures at executive levels particularly in leadership integrity and procurement processes have directly undermined operational efficiency, public trust, and community cooperation. High-profile cases such as the conviction of former National Commissioner Jackie Selebi and procurement scandals demonstrate that without integrity at the top, the entire policing system falters, leaving communities vulnerable to violent crime.

The research further shows that policing challenges cannot be addressed in isolation. Sustainable reform requires coordinated engagement across multiple stakeholders—including political parties, communities, youth, faith-based organisations, the private sector, and civil society. Multi-stakeholder collaboration amplifies the effectiveness of ethical leadership, improves accountability, strengthens community-police relations, and enhances crime

prevention efforts. Practical examples from Gauteng, Western Cape, Khayelitsha, and Alexandra illustrate how integrated interventions can produce measurable improvements in operational outcomes and public confidence.

By employing a systematic, evidence-based approach, the study identifies actionable recommendations: implementing ethical leadership programmes, enforcing procurement oversight, strengthening accountability mechanisms, fostering community engagement, and leveraging international best practices adapted to South African contexts. These reforms have the potential to transform SAPS into a transparent, accountable, and responsive institution, capable of reducing violent crime and restoring societal trust in law enforcement.

The co-impact of these interventions extends beyond SAPS. Strengthened police legitimacy enhances governance, improves social cohesion, reduces crime, and supports economic stability—advancing national objectives outlined in the National Development Plan 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Finally, while this study acknowledges limitations related to data access, scope, and the dynamic nature of policing, it provides a robust framework for policy reform, operational improvement, and future research. In essence, ethical leadership and accountable governance are the linchpins of effective policing, and implementing integrated reforms across society is critical for a safer, more just, and prosperous South Africa.

In summary, this study is not only an academic contribution but a practical roadmap: it demonstrates that addressing systemic failures, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, and prioritising ethical governance can create lasting positive change in South African policing and society at large.

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