

The Saps Reset Agenda: Rebuilding Police Legitimacy, Professionalism and Public Trust through Institutional Reform, Accountability And Community-centred Policing in South Africa

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Abstract: South Africa continues to face one of the highest levels of violent crime globally, characterised by increasing incidents of murder, organised crime, gender-based violence, extortion, illegal firearms, corruption, cybercrime and attacks on critical infrastructure. Despite substantial investments in policing, public confidence in the South African Police Service (SAPS) has deteriorated because of operational inefficiencies, allegations of corruption, political interference, inadequate leadership, resource constraints and declining institutional legitimacy. The recently introduced SAPS Reset Agenda represents a significant policy intervention aimed at restoring professionalism, strengthening accountability, rebuilding public trust and improving crime prevention through integrated partnerships, intelligence-led policing and community participation.

This study critically examines the SAPS Reset Agenda as a strategic framework for institutional reform within South Africa's policing environment. The study seeks to evaluate whether the Reset Agenda provides a sustainable roadmap for rebuilding police legitimacy, organisational accountability and public confidence while strengthening crime prevention and service delivery. Particular attention is given to the Agenda's emphasis on accountability, integrity, professionalism, intelligence-led policing, intergovernmental collaboration and community partnerships.

The study adopts a systematic literature review methodology guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework. Peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, commission reports, policy documents and publications from international organisations including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Bank, Institute for Security Studies (ISS Africa) and South African Police Service were systematically reviewed. Particular emphasis is placed on the findings of the Zondo Commission, the Khampepe Commission, the Madlanga Commission and recent crime statistics to assess the effectiveness of police reform initiatives.

The findings demonstrate that while the SAPS Reset Agenda provides a comprehensive policy framework aligned with international policing standards, successful implementation will depend upon ethical leadership, institutional independence, improved accountability mechanisms, adequate resourcing, professional development, intelligence-driven policing and strengthened partnerships between government and communities. Persistent structural weaknesses including corruption, political interference, resource shortages, fragmented intelligence systems and declining public trust continue to undermine police effectiveness.

The study concludes that meaningful police reform requires more than policy pronouncements. Sustainable transformation demands measurable implementation, transparent governance, continuous performance monitoring, investment in human capital and community-centred policing approaches that reinforce democratic accountability. The SAPS Reset Agenda presents an important opportunity to reposition SAPS as a professional, ethical and trusted institution capable of improving public safety and strengthening constitutional democracy in South Africa.

Keywords: *South African Police Service; SAPS Reset Agenda; Police Reform; Accountability; Police Legitimacy; Professionalisation; Community Policing; Institutional Reform; Public Trust; Organised Crime; Intelligence-led Policing; Governance; South Africa..*

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Introduction

South Africa continues to experience persistently high levels of violent crime despite more than three decades of democratic governance and extensive reforms within the criminal justice system. The country faces significant challenges associated with murder, attempted murder, aggravated robbery, gender-based

violence, organised criminal networks, illegal mining, extortion, cybercrime and corruption, all of which undermine socio-economic development, public safety and constitutional democracy. According to the South African Police Service (SAPS), thousands of violent crimes are reported annually, while the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) consistently identifies South

Africa as one of the countries with the highest homicide rates globally (SAPS, 2025; UNODC, 2024).

The increasing complexity of crime has exposed structural weaknesses within SAPS, including inadequate investigative capacity, declining forensic effectiveness, shortages of skilled personnel, fragmented intelligence structures, insufficient technological innovation and declining public confidence. These operational deficiencies have been compounded by allegations of corruption, political interference, maladministration and governance failures documented in several commissions of inquiry and oversight reports. Collectively, these challenges have eroded police legitimacy and weakened public trust in law enforcement institutions.

The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector, commonly known as the Zondo Commission, revealed extensive institutional corruption across multiple state institutions and highlighted the devastating effects of political interference, procurement irregularities and weakened accountability systems on public administration (Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, 2022). Although the Commission primarily investigated state capture, its findings reinforce broader governance concerns directly relevant to policing institutions.

Similarly, the Khampepe Commission underscored the importance of intelligence-led policing, effective coordination among security agencies and constitutional oversight in addressing public violence and safeguarding democratic governance. More recently, the Madlanga Commission has further highlighted the need to strengthen institutional accountability, ethical leadership and public sector governance while addressing persistent weaknesses affecting law enforcement and justice institutions.

Against this backdrop, the SAPS Reset Agenda represents one of the most significant contemporary policy initiatives aimed at repositioning the police service. The Agenda seeks to restore professionalism, reinforce ethical leadership, strengthen organisational accountability and improve operational effectiveness through integrated partnerships, intelligence-led policing and community-centred approaches. The policy emphasises accountability, integrity, professionalism, measurable results and collaborative governance involving national, provincial and local government structures together with communities.

Internationally, police reform has increasingly focused on procedural justice, community policing, evidence-based policing, organisational legitimacy and public accountability. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore have implemented reforms that prioritise transparency, ethical leadership, independent oversight and intelligence-driven policing to improve public confidence and crime prevention. These international experiences provide valuable lessons for South Africa as it seeks to modernise its policing institutions while strengthening constitutional democracy.

This study therefore critically examines whether the SAPS Reset Agenda provides a practical and sustainable framework capable of rebuilding institutional legitimacy, improving police professionalism and restoring public confidence within South Africa's evolving policing environment.

Background of the Study

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has implemented numerous legislative and institutional reforms intended to transform policing from an authoritarian model into a democratic, community-oriented service guided by constitutional principles. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, mandates SAPS to prevent, combat and investigate crime, maintain public order, protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic and uphold the law while respecting human rights.

Over the past three decades, successive governments have introduced various policy frameworks aimed at improving policing effectiveness. These include the National Crime Prevention Strategy (1996), the White Paper on Safety and Security (1998), the White Paper on Policing (2016), the National Development Plan (2030), Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy and numerous SAPS strategic plans. Despite these interventions, crime levels remain unacceptably high while public confidence in SAPS continues to fluctuate.

Numerous independent reports have attributed these challenges to inadequate leadership, institutional instability, corruption, ineffective accountability mechanisms, declining detective performance, limited intelligence capabilities, poor resource allocation and fragmented intergovernmental coordination. Organised criminal syndicates have become increasingly sophisticated, exploiting technological advancements and institutional weaknesses to expand illegal economic activities, including extortion, trafficking, cybercrime and financial crimes.

The recently announced SAPS Reset Agenda responds directly to these longstanding institutional challenges by advocating comprehensive organisational renewal. Its core pillars include accountability, integrity, community partnership, professionalism and measurable results. Furthermore, the Agenda introduces integrated partnerships among all spheres of government, intelligence-led policing strategies, enhanced oversight mechanisms and targeted interventions in high-crime precincts.

The Reset Agenda reflects international trends promoting evidence-based policing, community participation and institutional accountability. Nevertheless, questions remain regarding implementation capacity, organisational culture, resource availability and political commitment required to translate policy intentions into measurable improvements in policing outcomes.

Problem of the Statement

Despite extensive legislative reforms, increased policing budgets and multiple strategic interventions, South Africa continues to experience exceptionally high levels of violent crime, organised criminal activity and declining public confidence in law enforcement institutions. The persistence of these challenges suggests that existing policing strategies have not adequately addressed the structural, organisational and governance deficiencies affecting SAPS.

Several commissions of inquiry—including the Zondo Commission, Khampepe Commission and the Madlanga Commission—have identified systemic weaknesses relating to corruption, governance failures, institutional instability, inadequate accountability mechanisms and ineffective leadership. These institutional shortcomings have undermined police legitimacy and weakened public trust.

The SAPS Reset Agenda represents an ambitious policy response intended to restore professionalism, accountability and public confidence. However, limited empirical evidence currently exists regarding its potential effectiveness, implementation challenges and alignment with international best practices in democratic policing.

Consequently, there is an urgent need for comprehensive scholarly evaluation of the SAPS Reset Agenda to determine whether it constitutes a transformative framework capable of addressing the underlying institutional challenges confronting South African policing.

Central Research Problem

The central research problem guiding this study is:

To what extent can the SAPS Reset Agenda effectively rebuild police legitimacy, organisational accountability, professionalism and public trust while improving crime prevention and institutional performance within South Africa's complex policing environment?

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to critically evaluate the SAPS Reset Agenda as a comprehensive institutional reform framework intended to strengthen accountability, rebuild public trust, enhance police professionalism and improve policing effectiveness in South Africa through evidence-based analysis and international best practice.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the evolution of police reform in democratic South Africa.
2. Analyse the principles underpinning the SAPS Reset Agenda.
3. Evaluate the impact of institutional governance challenges on policing effectiveness.
4. Assess the implications of the Zondo, Khampepe and Madlanga Commissions for police reform.
5. Examine international best practices relating to police accountability and legitimacy.
6. Evaluate the role of intelligence-led policing in combating organised crime.
7. Assess the importance of community partnerships in rebuilding public trust.
8. Identify implementation challenges affecting the SAPS Reset Agenda.
9. Develop evidence-based recommendations for strengthening police reform and institutional performance.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What institutional factors have contributed to declining public trust in SAPS?
2. What are the key components of the SAPS Reset Agenda?

3. How do the findings of the Zondo, Khampepe and Madlanga Commissions inform police reform?
4. To what extent does the SAPS Reset Agenda align with international policing standards?
5. What role does accountability play in improving police legitimacy?
6. How can intelligence-led policing improve crime prevention?
7. What implementation challenges may hinder successful execution of the SAPS Reset Agenda?
8. What reforms are necessary to strengthen democratic policing in South Africa?

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to academic scholarship, policing practice and public policy by providing one of the first comprehensive evaluations of the SAPS Reset Agenda. It advances understanding of how institutional reform, ethical leadership, accountability and community-centred policing can improve police legitimacy and operational effectiveness.

For policymakers, the findings will provide evidence to refine policing strategies, strengthen oversight and support implementation of sustainable reforms. For SAPS leadership, the study identifies opportunities to improve governance, professional standards, intelligence capabilities and service delivery. Academically, it addresses an emerging area of policing research by integrating commission findings with contemporary theories of police legitimacy and institutional reform. Ultimately, the study seeks to support safer communities, improved public trust and a more accountable police service.

Research Gap

Although considerable scholarship exists on police reform, corruption and public trust in South Africa, there is a notable absence of systematic academic evaluations of the newly introduced SAPS Reset Agenda. Existing studies generally focus on isolated issues such as community policing, crime trends or organisational performance without examining the Reset Agenda as a comprehensive institutional reform strategy.

Furthermore, limited research integrates the recommendations of the Zondo Commission, Khampepe Commission and Madlanga Commission with contemporary theories of police legitimacy, organisational accountability and evidence-based policing. Comparative analyses that situate the SAPS Reset Agenda within international experiences of democratic police reform are also scarce.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a systematic, theory-informed and policy-oriented evaluation of the SAPS Reset Agenda, drawing on recent national and international literature, commission reports and empirical evidence to assess its potential for rebuilding legitimacy, professionalism and public trust in South Africa's policing system.

Theoretical Framework of the Article

Introduction

A theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation that guides research by explaining relationships among variables and

supporting the interpretation of findings. It enables researchers to situate a study within established scholarly debates and provides a lens through which empirical evidence can be analysed (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The SAPS Reset Agenda seeks to transform policing through accountability, professionalism, ethical leadership, institutional reform, intelligence-led policing and community partnerships. Given the multidimensional nature of police reform, no single theory sufficiently explains all aspects of institutional transformation. Consequently, this study adopts an integrated theoretical framework comprising Institutional Theory, Procedural Justice Theory, Police Legitimacy Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, New Public Management Theory, Governance Theory, Accountability Theory and Public Value Theory. Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding organisational change, public trust and democratic policing.

Institutional Theory

Definition

Institutional Theory explains how organisations develop, maintain and change their structures, rules and practices in response to formal institutions, social norms and external pressures (Scott, 2014). Institutions influence organisational behaviour through legal requirements, cultural expectations and governance mechanisms.

Scott (2014) identifies three institutional pillars:

- Regulatory institutions (laws, policies and regulations)
- Normative institutions (professional values and ethical standards)
- Cultural-cognitive institutions (shared beliefs and organisational culture)

According to North (1990), institutions reduce uncertainty by creating stable frameworks that shape organisational behaviour and decision-making.

Relevance to the Study

Institutional Theory is highly relevant because the SAPS Reset Agenda represents an institutional reform programme aimed at changing organisational culture, governance and operational practices. The theory assists in explaining why previous reforms often failed due to entrenched organisational norms, weak governance and resistance to change.

The findings of the Zondo Commission demonstrated that institutional weaknesses, political interference and corruption undermined the effectiveness of state institutions, including policing. Institutional Theory therefore provides a useful lens for analysing how the Reset Agenda seeks to strengthen accountability, ethical leadership and institutional resilience.

The theory also supports the evaluation of reforms such as improved oversight, intelligence-led policing and community partnerships within the broader constitutional and governance environment.

Procedural Justice Theory

Definition

Procedural Justice Theory, developed primarily by Tyler (2006), argues that citizens are more likely to comply with the law and

cooperate with police when they perceive policing processes as fair, impartial and respectful.

The theory identifies four dimensions of procedural justice:

- Fair decision-making
- Respectful treatment
- Neutrality
- Trustworthy motives

Citizens evaluate police legitimacy based on how they are treated rather than solely on policing outcomes.

Relevance to the Study

Procedural Justice Theory is directly applicable to the SAPS Reset Agenda because rebuilding public trust depends on fair, transparent and respectful policing. Public dissatisfaction with SAPS has often been linked to allegations of corruption, excessive use of force, inconsistent service delivery and unequal treatment.

The Agenda's emphasis on professionalism, integrity and accountability aligns closely with procedural justice principles. Improved procedural fairness is expected to strengthen community cooperation, increase crime reporting and enhance confidence in law enforcement.

9.4 Police Legitimacy Theory

Definition

Police Legitimacy Theory focuses on public acceptance of police authority. Tyler (2006) defines legitimacy as the belief that police have the rightful authority to exercise power and that citizens have a moral obligation to obey lawful directives.

Legitimacy is built through:

- Fairness
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Ethical behaviour
- Effective service delivery

Where legitimacy is high, voluntary compliance with the law increases and communities are more willing to cooperate with police.

Relevance to the Study

South Africa has experienced declining public confidence in SAPS due to corruption, governance failures, political interference and operational shortcomings. The SAPS Reset Agenda explicitly seeks to restore legitimacy through improved accountability, professionalism and measurable service delivery.

Police Legitimacy Theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for evaluating whether the Agenda can rebuild public confidence and strengthen democratic policing.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Definition

Transformational Leadership Theory, developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), explains how leaders inspire organisational change by motivating followers to achieve shared goals and embrace innovation.

Transformational leaders exhibit:

- Idealised influence
- Inspirational motivation
- Intellectual stimulation
- Individualised consideration

Such leaders create organisational cultures based on ethics, trust, innovation and continuous improvement.

Relevance to the Study

The SAPS Reset Agenda requires transformational leadership capable of changing organisational culture, combating corruption and restoring professionalism. Leadership failures identified by the Zondo Commission and other oversight bodies demonstrate that technical reforms alone are insufficient without ethical and visionary leadership.

The theory helps explain how leadership influences organisational performance, employee morale and successful implementation of police reforms.

New Public Management Theory

Definition

New Public Management (NPM) advocates the application of private-sector management principles within public institutions to improve efficiency, accountability, performance and service delivery (Hood, 1991).

Key principles include:

- Performance measurement
- Results-based management
- Customer orientation
- Decentralisation
- Efficiency
- Innovation
- Strategic management

Relevance to the Study

The SAPS Reset Agenda emphasises measurable results, performance monitoring, intelligence-led policing and improved service delivery. These priorities are consistent with New Public Management principles.

The theory assists in evaluating how performance management systems, strategic planning and operational efficiency can strengthen policing outcomes and public confidence.

Governance Theory

Definition

Governance Theory examines how governments, public institutions, civil society and private organisations collectively

contribute to decision-making, accountability and public service delivery.

Good governance is characterised by:

- Transparency
- Participation
- Accountability
- Rule of law
- Responsiveness
- Effectiveness
- Equity

(World Bank, 2024)

Relevance to the Study

The SAPS Reset Agenda promotes integrated partnerships among national, provincial and local government together with communities. Governance Theory explains how collaborative governance strengthens crime prevention and institutional effectiveness.

The theory is also relevant because many policing challenges require coordinated responses involving municipalities, prosecutors, intelligence agencies, social services and community organisations.

Accountability Theory

Definition

Accountability Theory explains how individuals and institutions are held responsible for decisions, conduct and organisational performance (Bovens, 2007).

Police accountability operates through several mechanisms:

- Internal discipline
- Independent oversight
- Judicial review
- Parliamentary oversight
- Financial accountability
- Community accountability

Relevance to the Study

Accountability is the first pillar of the SAPS Reset Agenda and is fundamental to rebuilding public trust. The findings of the Zondo Commission highlighted how weak accountability systems contributed to corruption and institutional decline.

The theory provides a framework for evaluating whether strengthened oversight, transparent governance and ethical leadership can improve police performance and restore institutional credibility.

Public Value Theory

Definition

Public Value Theory, developed by Moore (1995), argues that public institutions exist to create value for society by delivering

services that improve citizens' well-being, security and quality of life.

Public value is achieved through:

- Public trust
- Service quality
- Democratic legitimacy
- Social outcomes
- Citizen satisfaction

Relevance to the Study

The SAPS Reset Agenda aims to create safer communities, improve public trust and deliver measurable policing outcomes. Public Value Theory is therefore highly relevant because it shifts the focus from organisational outputs to societal outcomes.

Rather than measuring success solely through arrest statistics, the theory encourages evaluation of whether policing enhances community safety, trust, legitimacy and public confidence.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

The integration of these eight theories provides a holistic framework for analysing the SAPS Reset Agenda. Institutional Theory explains organisational change; Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy theories illuminate the relationship between fair policing and public trust; Transformational Leadership Theory highlights the role of ethical leadership in driving reform; New Public Management emphasises performance and service delivery; Governance Theory underscores collaborative decision-making; Accountability Theory focuses on oversight and responsibility; and Public Value Theory evaluates whether policing delivers meaningful societal benefits. Together, these perspectives enable a comprehensive assessment of how the Reset Agenda can contribute to rebuilding professionalism, accountability and safer communities.

Literature Review of the Study

Introduction

The South African Police Service (SAPS) occupies a central position in safeguarding constitutional democracy, protecting human rights, maintaining public order and combating crime. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, successive governments have introduced numerous policing reforms intended to transform SAPS into a professional, accountable and community-centred organisation. Despite these reforms, South Africa continues to experience persistently high levels of violent crime, organised criminal activity, corruption and declining public trust in policing institutions (SAPS, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025).

Recent policy developments, particularly the SAPS Reset Agenda, represent renewed efforts to reposition policing through accountability, integrity, professionalism, intelligence-led policing and community partnerships. The literature suggests that sustainable policing reforms require institutional legitimacy, ethical leadership, professional competence and collaborative governance (Tyler, 2006; Goldsmith, 2015; OECD, 2024).

This literature review synthesises national and international scholarship relating to police reform, police legitimacy, accountability, professionalisation, institutional reform and

community policing while examining how these concepts underpin the SAPS Reset Agenda.

Definition of Key Concepts

South African Police Service (SAPS) Reset Agenda

The SAPS Reset Agenda is a strategic reform initiative introduced in 2025 to restore professionalism, improve organisational accountability, rebuild public confidence and strengthen operational effectiveness across the South African Police Service. The Agenda prioritises five institutional pillars:

- Accountability
- Integrity
- Community partnership
- Professionalism
- Results

Furthermore, the Agenda promotes intelligence-driven policing, integrated government partnerships, enhanced operational oversight and prioritisation of high-crime precincts.

According to the Ministry of Police (2025), the Reset Agenda represents a transition from reactive policing towards proactive, intelligence-driven and community-orientated policing aligned with constitutional principles.

Internationally, similar policing reform programmes have emphasised procedural justice, evidence-based policing and collaborative governance (OECD, 2024; United Nations, 2024).

Police Reform

Police reform refers to planned organisational, structural and operational changes aimed at improving police effectiveness, accountability, transparency, professionalism and legitimacy.

Bayley (2006) defines police reform as:

"The transformation of policing institutions to enhance democratic governance, accountability and effective service delivery."

Similarly, Goldsmith (2015) argues that police reform encompasses:

- organisational restructuring;
- professional development;
- legislative reform;
- ethical leadership;
- accountability mechanisms;
- public participation;
- improved operational performance.

The United Nations (2024) further emphasises that democratic police reform should promote:

- human rights;
- constitutional governance;
- public confidence;
- transparency;

- evidence-based policing;
- independent oversight.

South Africa has implemented numerous police reform initiatives, including:

- National Crime Prevention Strategy (1996);
- White Paper on Safety and Security (1998);
- White Paper on Policing (2016);
- National Development Plan 2030;
- Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy;
- SAPS Reset Agenda.

Despite these reforms, implementation challenges continue to undermine institutional performance.

Police Legitimacy

Police legitimacy refers to the degree to which the public believes that police exercise authority lawfully, fairly and in accordance with democratic principles.

Tyler (2006) defines legitimacy as:

"Public acceptance that police possess rightful authority deserving of compliance."

Legitimacy is founded upon four principles:

- fairness;
- impartiality;
- transparency;
- accountability.

Research consistently demonstrates that legitimate policing increases:

- voluntary compliance;
- crime reporting;
- public cooperation;
- community participation;
- trust in government.

Conversely, corruption, political interference, abuse of power and excessive use of force reduce police legitimacy.

South Africa's declining trust in SAPS has been linked to:

- corruption;
- state capture;
- poor service delivery;
- delayed investigations;
- ineffective crime intelligence;
- political instability.

The SAPS Reset Agenda explicitly seeks to rebuild legitimacy through professional conduct and measurable service delivery.

Accountability

Accountability is a fundamental principle of democratic policing and public administration. It refers to the obligation of public officials to explain, justify, and accept responsibility for their decisions, actions, and performance. According to Bovens (2007), accountability is "a relationship between an actor and a forum in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify conduct." Within the South African Police Service (SAPS), accountability extends across multiple dimensions, including legal, constitutional, political, administrative, financial, ethical, and community accountability. Together, these forms of accountability ensure that policing is conducted in accordance with the Constitution, the rule of law, sound governance principles, ethical standards, and the expectations of the communities served.

Effective police accountability is strengthened through robust independent oversight mechanisms that monitor police conduct, investigate misconduct, and promote transparency and public confidence. In South Africa, key oversight institutions include the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID), the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, Parliament, the Auditor-General of South Africa, and the Public Protector. These institutions play a critical role in ensuring that SAPS remains accountable to both government and the public.

The importance of strong accountability mechanisms was highlighted by the findings of the Zondo Commission, which demonstrated that weak oversight, poor governance, and inadequate accountability contributed significantly to corruption, abuse of power, and institutional decline within state institutions. Recognising these challenges, the SAPS Reset Agenda identifies accountability as its primary organisational value, emphasising the need to strengthen ethical leadership, improve governance, enhance transparency, enforce consequence management, and rebuild public trust through a culture of responsibility and integrity. The Zondo Commission demonstrated how weak accountability mechanisms facilitate corruption and institutional decline. The SAPS Reset Agenda identifies accountability as its primary organisational value.

Professionalisation

Professionalisation refers to the process of developing policing into a recognised profession characterised by specialised knowledge, ethical conduct, competency, continuous learning, and accountability. It seeks to ensure that police officials possess the skills, knowledge, values, and professional standards necessary to provide effective, lawful, and community-centred policing. According to Stone and Travis (2011), professionalism in policing is underpinned by key elements, including education, ethical conduct, competency, specialised training, certification, and continuous professional development. These components promote a culture of excellence, integrity, and lifelong learning, enabling police organisations to respond effectively to evolving crime trends and public expectations.

Modern policing increasingly requires specialised expertise in areas such as forensic science, cybercrime investigation, intelligence analysis, financial investigations, leadership, and digital policing. As crime becomes more sophisticated and technology-driven, police officials must continually enhance their knowledge and skills to address emerging security threats effectively. Internationally, countries such as Singapore, Canada, and Australia have demonstrated that sustained investment in

police education, leadership development, specialised training, and professional standards contributes significantly to improved policing performance, organisational legitimacy, and public trust.

Within the South African Police Service (SAPS), professionalisation requires a comprehensive approach that includes ethical leadership, transparent and competency-based recruitment and promotion systems, continuous education and training, leadership development, and the adoption of evidence-based policing practices. These measures are essential for strengthening organisational capacity, improving service delivery, enhancing accountability, and restoring public confidence in the police. Recognising the importance of these principles, the SAPS Reset Agenda identifies the restoration of professionalism across all policing functions as a strategic priority, with the aim of building a modern, ethical, competent, and intelligence-led police service capable of effectively serving and protecting all South Africans.

Community Policing

Community policing is a policing philosophy that promotes collaborative partnerships between the police and communities to identify, prioritise, and address local safety and security challenges. Rather than relying solely on traditional law enforcement approaches, community policing emphasises shared responsibility, proactive problem-solving, and mutual trust between the police and the public. According to Skogan (2006), community policing encourages partnerships that strengthen public trust, enhance collaborative problem-solving, and improve crime prevention outcomes. The philosophy is founded on three interrelated pillars: community partnerships, problem-solving, and organisational transformation. These pillars require police organisations to work closely with communities, adopt innovative approaches to addressing the root causes of crime, and transform internal structures and practices to support community-oriented policing.

In South Africa, community policing has been institutionalised through mechanisms such as Community Police Forums (CPFs), sector policing, neighbourhood watches, and integrated local safety planning. These structures are intended to facilitate meaningful engagement between SAPS and communities, promote shared ownership of public safety, and encourage collaborative responses to crime and disorder. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that effective community policing contributes to improved public trust, enhanced intelligence gathering, increased crime reporting, stronger social cohesion, and greater police legitimacy. These outcomes not only improve operational effectiveness but also strengthen confidence in the police as a democratic institution.

Despite its recognised benefits, the successful implementation of community policing depends on several critical factors, including active community participation, adequate human and financial resources, mutual trust, transparency, effective communication, and sustained partnerships among government, civil society, and local communities. Recognising the central role of collaborative policing in crime prevention, the SAPS Reset Agenda identifies community partnership as a cornerstone of sustainable public safety. By strengthening relationships between police and communities, the Reset Agenda seeks to build a professional, responsive, and community-centred police service capable of

addressing South Africa's complex crime challenges while restoring public confidence in policing.

Institutional Reform

Institutional reform refers to the comprehensive transformation of organisational structures, governance systems, leadership practices, accountability mechanisms, and operational processes to enhance institutional effectiveness, integrity, and service delivery. It aims to strengthen the capacity of public institutions to respond to evolving societal needs while promoting transparency, accountability, efficiency, and public trust. According to North (1990), institutions shape organisational behaviour through formal rules, informal norms, and governance arrangements that influence decision-making and institutional performance. Consequently, sustainable institutional reform requires both structural and cultural change to ensure that organisations operate effectively within a framework of good governance and constitutional principles.

Institutional reform typically encompasses governance reform, organisational restructuring, leadership renewal, legislative reform, anti-corruption measures, technological modernisation, and strengthened performance management systems. These interventions are designed to improve organisational accountability, modernise service delivery, enhance operational efficiency, and foster ethical leadership. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024) further emphasises that successful institutional reform depends on strong political commitment, capable and ethical leadership, transparency, active citizen participation, and continuous organisational learning. Together, these elements create an enabling environment for sustainable organisational transformation and improved public sector performance.

Within the South African Police Service (SAPS), institutional reform seeks to address longstanding governance, leadership, accountability, and operational weaknesses that have undermined organisational effectiveness and public confidence. These challenges have been highlighted in several major oversight and investigative reports, including the findings of the Zondo Commission, the Khampepe Commission, the Madlanga Commission, reports of the Auditor-General South Africa, and recommendations of the National Planning Commission. Collectively, these reviews have identified persistent concerns relating to corruption, weak governance, inadequate accountability, ineffective leadership, resource constraints, and declining public trust. In response, the SAPS Reset Agenda positions institutional reform as a strategic priority aimed at strengthening governance, restoring ethical leadership, enhancing accountability, modernising policing systems, improving organisational performance, and rebuilding public confidence in the South African Police Service.

SAPS Reset Agenda: An Emerging Paradigm for Police Transformation

The SAPS Reset Agenda represents one of the most comprehensive policing reform initiatives introduced since democratic transition. Rather than focusing exclusively on crime statistics, the Agenda seeks to rebuild organisational culture, ethical leadership and public confidence through institutional transformation. Its five strategic pillars accountability, integrity, community partnership, professionalism and results reflect internationally recognised principles of democratic policing. The emphasis on intelligence-led operations, intergovernmental cooperation and prioritising high-crime precincts also aligns with

contemporary policing models that use data-driven deployment, multidisciplinary collaboration and targeted interventions to disrupt organised crime.

The literature indicates that the success of such reforms depends less on the policy document itself and more on implementation fidelity, leadership commitment, adequate resourcing and organisational culture. Experience from jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand demonstrates that reforms gain traction when accompanied by transparent performance management, independent oversight, continuous professional development and meaningful community engagement.

Synthesis of the Literature

The literature demonstrates broad consensus that effective police reform cannot be achieved through organisational restructuring alone. Sustainable reform requires an integrated approach that combines institutional accountability, professionalisation, ethical leadership, community partnership, procedural fairness and evidence-based policing. The South African context reinforces this conclusion, as persistent challenges including corruption, resource constraints, uneven leadership capacity, declining public trust and sophisticated organised crime continue to undermine police effectiveness despite successive reform initiatives.

The SAPS Reset Agenda addresses many of these dimensions conceptually by promoting accountability, integrity, professionalism and intelligence-led policing. However, the existing literature reveals a notable gap: there is limited empirical research evaluating the Agenda's implementation, its alignment with the recommendations of the Zondo, Khampepe and Madlanga Commissions, and its consistency with international best practice. This study therefore contributes to the scholarly and policy discourse by critically examining the SAPS Reset Agenda as a comprehensive institutional reform framework capable of rebuilding police legitimacy, strengthening governance and improving public trust in South Africa.

Challenges and Failures of the Saps Reset Agenda

Limited Consultation with SAPS Members

One of the greatest weaknesses of previous reform initiatives has been the insufficient involvement of police officials who perform operational duties daily. Many members possess valuable practical knowledge but are rarely consulted before strategic decisions are made. As a result, policies may fail to address operational realities experienced at station level.

Lack of Bottom-Up Decision-Making

Many organisational reforms are designed at National Head Office without adequate input from provinces, districts, specialised units, and police stations. Effective organisational change requires participation from employees at every level of the organisation.

Inadequate Involvement of SAPS Leadership Structures

Senior management, divisional commissioners, provincial commissioners, district commissioners, station commanders, and middle management should all play an active role in shaping implementation plans. Without collective ownership, implementation becomes fragmented and inconsistent.

Limited Role of the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service

The Civilian Secretariat should play a stronger role in coordinating policy development, monitoring implementation, and ensuring accountability between SAPS and government.

Limited Parliamentary Oversight

The Portfolio Committee on Police should conduct regular oversight visits and receive quarterly implementation reports on the Reset Agenda. Parliamentary oversight is essential to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsible use of public resources.

Insufficient Engagement with Provincial Legislatures

Provincial legislatures have constitutional oversight responsibilities but are often not fully integrated into national policing reform initiatives. Greater alignment between national and provincial oversight is necessary.

Limited Involvement of Organised Labour

Police unions and employee representative organisations should participate in discussions affecting working conditions, organisational restructuring, wellness programmes, and human resource reforms. Excluding organised labour may create resistance and reduce organisational commitment.

Weak Community Participation

Although community policing is frequently emphasised, Community Police Forums (CPFs), neighbourhood watches, traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, youth organisations, business forums, and civil society organisations are not always meaningfully involved in decision-making.

Limited Local Government Participation

Crime prevention extends beyond policing. Municipalities play a critical role in improving street lighting, maintaining infrastructure, addressing by-law enforcement, and reducing environmental conditions that facilitate crime. Weak intergovernmental coordination limits effectiveness.

Inadequate Multi-Agency Collaboration

Crime cannot be addressed by SAPS alone. Stronger operational coordination is required between SAPS, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (Hawks), the National Prosecuting Authority, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Correctional Services, Border Management Authority, Home Affairs, Financial Intelligence Centre, State Security structures, Metro Police Departments, and Municipal Law Enforcement agencies.

Failure to Address Critical Vacancies

Thousands of funded vacant posts remain unfilled across National Head Office, provincial offices, districts, specialised units, and police stations. Staff shortages increase workloads, reduce visibility, delay investigations, and negatively affect service delivery.

Resource Constraints

Many police stations continue to experience shortages of operational vehicles, forensic equipment, ICT systems, office accommodation, firearms, protective equipment, and

communication technology. Reform cannot succeed without adequate resources.

Poor Internal Communication

Many SAPS members only become aware of strategic initiatives after decisions have already been made. Continuous communication, consultation, and feedback mechanisms are essential for successful organisational change.

Resistance to Change

Organisational culture, fear of losing influence, entrenched interests, and resistance from some leaders may delay implementation. Effective change management strategies are necessary to overcome resistance.

Weak Performance Management

Previous policing strategies have often focused on administrative compliance rather than measurable community safety outcomes. Performance indicators should measure reductions in crime, improved investigations, public trust, response times, and victim satisfaction.

Limited Use of Evidence-Based Policing

Operational decisions are sometimes influenced by tradition rather than research and crime analysis. Greater collaboration with universities, researchers, and policing experts would strengthen evidence-based decision-making.

Political Interference

Public confidence in policing is weakened when operational decisions, appointments, or disciplinary processes are perceived to be influenced by political or personal interests. Operational independence, within constitutional and legal accountability, is essential for professional policing.

Weak Accountability and Consequence Management

Delayed disciplinary processes, inconsistent application of discipline, and limited consequences for poor performance or misconduct undermine organisational integrity. Accountability must apply equally to all members regardless of rank.

Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation

Without clear implementation plans, measurable targets, independent monitoring, and regular public reporting, the Reset Agenda risks becoming another policy document with limited practical impact.

Failure to Harness Internal Expertise

SAPS employs many highly experienced and qualified officials with postgraduate qualifications, specialised operational experience, and innovative ideas. Yet these members are often underutilised in policy development and organisational reform. Their expertise should be systematically incorporated into strategy design and implementation.

Lack of Independent Advisory Capacity

A sustainable reset would benefit from a multidisciplinary advisory forum comprising experienced retired police leaders, academics, criminologists, legal experts, psychologists, forensic specialists, technology experts, business leaders, and civil society representatives. Such a forum could provide objective advice, evaluate progress, and identify implementation challenges.

Insufficient Focus on Officer Wellness

High levels of operational stress, trauma, burnout, and inadequate psychological support affect members' performance and decision-making. A successful reset must prioritise physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing as part of organisational effectiveness.

The SAPS Reset Agenda has the potential to transform policing in South Africa, but its success depends on inclusive governance, broad stakeholder participation, transparent leadership, and measurable implementation. Reform should not be driven solely from National Head Office; it must involve police officials at every rank, organised labour, oversight institutions, government departments, communities, academia, and the private sector. Only through genuine collaboration, accountability, and sustained commitment can the Reset Agenda achieve its goal of creating a professional, ethical, intelligence-led

Research Methodology

Introduction

This study employs a qualitative systematic literature review to critically evaluate the SAPS Reset Agenda within the broader context of police reform, accountability, legitimacy and institutional transformation. A systematic review provides a transparent, rigorous and replicable process for identifying, evaluating and synthesising existing evidence (Page et al., 2021).

The methodology is guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework to ensure methodological quality, transparency and reproducibility.

Research Philosophy

The study is underpinned by the pragmatist research philosophy, which recognises that complex public-sector problems require the integration of multiple sources of evidence and practical solutions. Pragmatism is appropriate because it focuses on identifying strategies that can improve policing outcomes, organisational performance and public trust.

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative systematic literature review design. This design is appropriate because it enables comprehensive synthesis of peer-reviewed research, policy documents, commission reports, legislation and international publications related to policing, governance and institutional reform.

Research Review Process, Data Sources, Selection Criteria, Data Extraction and Analysis

This systematic literature review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework to ensure methodological rigour, transparency, and reproducibility while minimising selection bias. The review was conducted through four sequential stages. The identification stage involved systematic searches of electronic academic databases and institutional repositories using predefined search terms relevant to police leadership, organisational accountability, professionalism, police legitimacy, intelligence-led policing, community policing, governance, institutional reform, and the SAPS Reset Agenda. During the screening stage, duplicate records were removed, and titles and abstracts were assessed for relevance. The eligibility stage involved a full-text review of the remaining publications against predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, while the

inclusion stage comprised the final selection of studies that satisfied the required quality, relevance, and methodological standards.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of both scholarly and policy literature, the review draws on multiple authoritative academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Sabinet, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, Sage Journals, and Wiley Online Library. In addition, extensive grey literature and official policy documents were reviewed to provide contextual and policy-specific evidence. These sources include South African Police Service Annual Reports, Statistics South Africa publications, Institute for Security Studies reports, Auditor-General South Africa reports, Department of Justice reports, the Zondo Commission, Khampepe Commission and Madlanga Commission reports, the National Development Plan 2030, the White Paper on Policing (2016), the National Crime Prevention Strategy, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports, OECD publications, and World Bank governance reports.

The review included English-language peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, commission reports, and international literature relating to policing, governance, and public administration published between 2000 and 2026, with particular emphasis on literature published between 2020 and 2026. Eligible studies were required to address police reform, organisational accountability, police legitimacy, governance, professionalism, institutional reform, intelligence-led policing, or community policing. Publications excluded from the review comprised duplicate records, opinion pieces lacking empirical or policy foundations, studies unrelated to policing or public administration, and publications that did not demonstrate adequate methodological quality.

A structured data extraction matrix was used to ensure consistency and reliability throughout the review process. Information extracted from each source included the author(s), year of publication, study objectives, research methodology, study context, principal findings, recommendations, and the relevance of each publication to the SAPS Reset Agenda and broader policing reform in South Africa.

The extracted data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke. The analytical process involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of recurring themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of final themes, and the production of an integrated analytical narrative. The thematic synthesis focused on the key dimensions underpinning the SAPS Reset Agenda, including accountability, professionalism, police legitimacy, governance, intelligence-led policing, community partnerships, and institutional reform. This analytical approach enabled the integration of findings from diverse sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of contemporary policing challenges and the strategic reforms required to strengthen the South African Police Service.

Quality Appraisal and Trustworthiness

The methodological quality of the studies included in this systematic literature review will be critically appraised using established qualitative research quality criteria to ensure the credibility, reliability, and relevance of the evidence synthesised. Each publication will be evaluated against recognised indicators of

research quality, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, methodological rigour, and relevance to the research objectives. This appraisal process will assist in identifying high-quality studies, strengthening the validity of the review findings, and ensuring that the evidence included contributes meaningfully to understanding police leadership, organisational accountability, professionalism, police legitimacy, governance, intelligence-led policing, community partnerships, institutional reform, and the SAPS Reset Agenda.

The trustworthiness of the review will be enhanced through the application of rigorous and transparent review procedures. These include the use of a clearly documented and systematic search strategy, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and comprehensive searches across multiple academic databases and authoritative institutional sources. The review further employs triangulation by integrating evidence from peer-reviewed scholarly literature, government policy documents, commission reports, and international governance publications, thereby providing a balanced and comprehensive perspective on policing reform. In addition, detailed documentation of each stage of the review process and the maintenance of an audit trail will promote transparency, consistency, and reproducibility, enabling other researchers to verify the review process and increasing confidence in the reliability and credibility of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

As the study relies exclusively on publicly available documents and published literature, it does not involve human participants or primary data collection. Nevertheless, ethical research principles will be upheld through accurate citation, faithful representation of authors' findings, avoidance of plagiarism and compliance with institutional research integrity standards.

Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This section synthesises evidence from the systematic literature review to critically evaluate the South African Police Service (SAPS) Reset Agenda within the broader context of democratic policing, institutional reform, organisational accountability and police legitimacy. The discussion integrates scholarly literature, government policy documents, official commission reports, crime statistics and international best practices to assess whether the Reset Agenda is capable of addressing the longstanding structural challenges confronting South African policing.

The findings indicate that while the SAPS Reset Agenda represents one of the most comprehensive reform initiatives introduced since the democratic transition, its long-term success will depend on effective implementation, ethical leadership, institutional accountability, intelligence-led policing, adequate resourcing, professionalisation and sustained community partnerships.

SAPS Reset Agenda: A Critical Analysis

The SAPS Reset Agenda was introduced as a strategic response to declining public confidence in policing, increasing levels of violent crime and persistent organisational weaknesses within SAPS. Unlike previous reform initiatives, the Reset Agenda adopts a holistic institutional approach by focusing on five interrelated pillars:

- Accountability

- Integrity
- Community partnerships
- Professionalism
- Results-driven policing

The review found that these pillars closely align with internationally recognised principles of democratic policing promoted by the United Nations (2024), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Accountability

Accountability emerged as the foundation of the Reset Agenda. Evidence from the literature demonstrates that police organisations characterised by transparent oversight, ethical leadership and effective disciplinary systems generally enjoy higher levels of public trust.

The Agenda proposes:

- stronger internal accountability;
- improved operational oversight;
- enhanced performance management;
- consequence management;
- ethical leadership.

These reforms directly address concerns raised by several commissions regarding governance failures and organisational misconduct.

Integrity

Integrity is recognised as fundamental to restoring public confidence.

Numerous studies indicate that corruption undermines:

- police legitimacy;
- public trust;
- organisational morale;
- crime prevention.

The Reset Agenda proposes:

- ethical leadership;
- anti-corruption strategies;
- lifestyle audits;
- strengthened disciplinary systems.

These initiatives reflect international anti-corruption standards recommended by the OECD and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Community Partnership

The literature consistently demonstrates that successful policing depends upon collaboration between police and communities.

Community partnership contributes to:

- crime reporting;

- intelligence gathering;
- crime prevention;
- procedural justice;
- public trust.

The Reset Agenda strengthens:

- Community Police Forums;
- municipalities;
- business partnerships;
- traditional leadership;
- civil society organisations.

These reforms are consistent with community policing models implemented successfully in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Professionalism

Professionalisation remains one of the strongest components of the Reset Agenda.

The findings indicate that professional policing requires:

- continuous training;
- competency-based recruitment;
- ethical leadership;
- specialised investigation;
- forensic expertise;
- digital policing capabilities.

The literature further emphasises that policing increasingly requires multidisciplinary expertise in:

- cybercrime;
- financial investigations;
- organised crime;
- intelligence analysis;
- forensic science.

Results-Oriented Policing

Unlike previous strategic plans that focused primarily on activities, the Reset Agenda emphasises measurable outcomes.

Performance indicators include:

- reduced violent crime;
- improved conviction rates;
- increased public confidence;
- improved detective performance;
- enhanced intelligence capabilities.

The findings support the introduction of measurable organisational performance indicators aligned with New Public Management principles.

Findings from the Zondo Commission

The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector (Zondo Commission) represents one of the most significant governance investigations in South African democratic history.

Although the Commission focused primarily on state capture across government institutions, several findings have direct implications for policing.

Major findings relevant to SAPS

The Commission identified:

- political interference;
- procurement corruption;
- abuse of public resources;
- weak accountability;
- institutional capture;
- leadership failures;
- poor governance.

These governance failures weakened public institutions responsible for combating organised crime and corruption.

Implications for the SAPS Reset Agenda

The literature suggests that the Reset Agenda responds directly to many recommendations emerging from the Commission.

These include:

- strengthening institutional independence;
- improving ethical leadership;
- enhancing internal controls;
- rebuilding organisational integrity;
- improving financial governance.

However, evidence suggests that policy reforms alone cannot eliminate corruption without effective implementation and sustained political commitment.

Findings from the Khampepe Commission

The Khampepe Commission examined failures relating to intelligence coordination, public violence and constitutional governance.

The review demonstrates that several recommendations remain highly relevant.

Key recommendations include:

- improved intelligence coordination;
- integrated security planning;
- strengthened constitutional oversight;
- inter-agency cooperation;
- enhanced operational preparedness.

The SAPS Reset Agenda reflects many of these principles through:

- intelligence-led policing;

- integrated partnerships;
- priority crime interventions;
- coordinated operational planning.

The findings suggest that successful implementation will require greater investment in Crime Intelligence, technological modernisation and analytical capabilities.

Findings from the Madlanga Commission

The Madlanga Commission has reinforced broader concerns regarding governance, accountability, institutional integrity and ethical leadership within the public sector.

Emerging themes include:

- institutional resilience;
- constitutional accountability;
- transparency;
- leadership ethics;
- governance reform.

The systematic review indicates that these principles strongly complement the SAPS Reset Agenda.

Particularly significant is the Commission's emphasis on rebuilding public institutions capable of functioning independently, professionally and transparently.

Analysis of South African Crime Statistics

Crime statistics continue to demonstrate that South Africa experiences exceptionally high levels of violent crime.

Persistent crime categories include:

- murder;
- attempted murder;
- rape;
- aggravated robbery;
- cash-in-transit robberies;
- extortion;
- illegal mining;
- vehicle hijackings;
- stock theft;
- organised crime;
- cybercrime.

The review found that:

- organised criminal networks have become increasingly sophisticated;
- extortion syndicates have expanded into urban and rural economies;
- illegal firearms continue to fuel violent crime;
- cybercrime has increased substantially;
- gender-based violence remains a national crisis.

These findings support the Reset Agenda's emphasis on intelligence-led policing, technology, specialised investigations and targeted deployment in high-crime precincts.

Intelligence-Led Policing

One of the strongest findings concerns intelligence-led policing.

International evidence consistently demonstrates that successful policing increasingly depends upon:

- predictive policing;
- crime analysis;
- intelligence fusion centres;
- digital investigations;
- forensic intelligence.

Countries with successful policing reforms have invested heavily in:

- integrated intelligence systems;
- data analytics;
- surveillance technologies;
- inter-agency intelligence sharing.

The SAPS Reset Agenda appropriately identifies intelligence as a central pillar of modern policing.

Police Professionalisation

The review demonstrates that professionalisation extends beyond training.

Modern police organisations require:

- competency-based recruitment;
- continuous education;
- ethical leadership;
- specialist career pathways;
- research-informed policing;
- technological competency.

Countries such as Singapore, Finland, Norway and Canada have transformed policing through significant investment in education and evidence-based policing.

The findings suggest that SAPS should strengthen partnerships with universities to enhance research capacity and continuous professional development.

Organisational Accountability

The literature consistently identifies accountability as one of the strongest predictors of police legitimacy.

Effective accountability includes:

- independent oversight;
- internal discipline;
- transparent investigations;
- performance monitoring;

- financial accountability;
- parliamentary oversight.

The review indicates that stronger accountability mechanisms reduce corruption while improving public confidence.

Community Partnership

Community policing remains central to democratic policing.

International evidence demonstrates that partnerships improve:

- crime prevention;
- intelligence gathering;
- procedural justice;
- trust;
- legitimacy.

The Reset Agenda appropriately recognises communities as strategic partners rather than passive recipients of policing services.

International Comparisons

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has strengthened policing through:

- neighbourhood policing;
- independent police oversight;
- evidence-based policing;
- public accountability.

These reforms have improved transparency and community confidence.

Canada

Canadian policing emphasises:

- Indigenous partnerships;
- procedural justice;
- community engagement;
- police wellness;
- intelligence-led policing.

The findings suggest valuable lessons for South Africa's rural safety initiatives.

Australia

Australian police reforms have focused upon:

- intelligence-led policing;
- digital investigations;
- professional education;
- collaborative governance.

Australian policing increasingly relies upon predictive analytics and multi-agency partnerships.

Singapore

Singapore demonstrates how:

- ethical leadership;
- zero tolerance for corruption;
- professional recruitment;
- technological innovation

can significantly enhance policing effectiveness.

New Zealand

New Zealand has successfully promoted:

- procedural justice;
- restorative policing;
- Māori partnerships;
- community confidence.

Its emphasis on legitimacy offers useful lessons for rebuilding trust in South Africa.

United States

American policing has increasingly shifted towards:

- evidence-based policing;
- crime mapping;
- predictive analytics;
- hotspot policing;
- procedural justice.

Although challenges remain, research demonstrates improved operational efficiency through data-driven decision-making.

Evidence Synthesis

The systematic review identified several recurring themes across the national and international literature.

Theme 1: Accountability drives legitimacy

Transparent governance, ethical leadership and effective oversight consistently strengthen police legitimacy and public confidence.

Theme 2: Professionalisation improves performance

Police organisations investing in education, specialised skills and competency-based career development consistently demonstrate stronger operational effectiveness.

Theme 3: Community partnerships enhance crime prevention

Collaborative policing improves intelligence gathering, trust and crime reporting while reducing conflict between police and communities.

Theme 4: Intelligence-led policing is indispensable

The literature overwhelmingly supports intelligence-led policing as the cornerstone of contemporary crime prevention, particularly in addressing organised crime, cybercrime and violent criminal networks.

Theme 5: Ethical leadership determines reform success

Leadership emerged as one of the most significant determinants of successful police reform. Ethical, transformational leaders foster organisational cultures characterised by integrity, accountability and innovation.

Theme 6: Institutional reform requires implementation

The review consistently found that policy frameworks alone are insufficient. Sustainable reform depends on effective implementation, adequate resources, continuous monitoring, political commitment and measurable outcomes.

Summary of Findings

The evidence demonstrates that the SAPS Reset Agenda is conceptually aligned with international principles of democratic policing and addresses many of the governance deficiencies identified by the Zondo, Khampepe and Madlanga Commissions. Its focus on accountability, integrity, professionalism, intelligence-led policing and community partnerships provides a coherent framework for institutional renewal. However, the literature also indicates that the Agenda's success will depend on sustained implementation, adequate resourcing, ethical leadership, strengthened oversight mechanisms, investment in technology and skills, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Without these enabling conditions, the Reset Agenda risks remaining an aspirational policy rather than achieving the transformative outcomes required to restore police legitimacy, improve operational performance and rebuild public trust in South Africa.

Practical Recommendations for the Successful Implementation of The Saps Reset Agenda In Building Safer Communities

To ensure that the SAPS Reset Agenda achieves its intended objectives and delivers measurable improvements in policing and community safety, the following practical recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen Ethical and Accountable Leadership

- Appoint leaders based on merit, competence, integrity, and proven performance rather than patronage or political influence.
- Hold commanders accountable through measurable performance agreements linked to crime reduction, service delivery, and community satisfaction.
- Introduce regular independent leadership performance evaluations.

Institutionalise Intelligence-Led Policing

- Strengthen crime intelligence capacity through investment in technology, analytical capabilities, and specialised training.
- Improve intelligence sharing between SAPS, municipal police departments, border management authorities, correctional services, and intelligence agencies.
- Use predictive policing and crime analysis to proactively deploy resources to crime hotspots.

Invest in Human Capital

- Prioritise continuous professional development for all members.
- Identify and utilise the expertise of experienced officials who possess institutional knowledge.
- Develop structured mentorship programmes where experienced officers mentor younger members.

- Create transparent career progression pathways based on competence and performance.

Promote Merit-Based Appointments

- Ensure promotions and appointments are transparent, fair, and based on objective competency assessments.
- Eliminate favouritism, nepotism, and organisational politics that negatively affect morale.
- Recognise and reward innovation, exceptional service, and ethical conduct.

Modernise Police Resources and Infrastructure

- Replace ageing vehicle fleets and ensure sufficient operational vehicles in every police station.
- Upgrade police stations, forensic laboratories, communication systems, and digital technologies.
- Expand the use of body-worn cameras, drones, CCTV integration, and mobile digital policing systems.

Strengthen Community Policing Partnerships

- Revitalise Community Police Forums (CPFs) by providing training, resources, and meaningful participation in local safety planning.
- Build stronger partnerships with schools, traditional leaders, religious organisations, businesses, NGOs, and youth organisations.
- Promote community ownership of crime prevention initiatives.

Focus on High-Crime Areas

- Allocate additional personnel and specialised units to high-crime precincts using evidence-based deployment models.
- Conduct regular crime hotspot analyses to ensure resources are aligned with emerging crime patterns.
- Introduce multidisciplinary intervention teams to address violent crime, gang activity, organised crime, and gender-based violence.

Improve Detective Services

- Reduce detective caseloads to improve investigation quality.
- Strengthen forensic support and reduce laboratory backlogs.
- Improve witness protection and victim support services.
- Increase specialised investigative training.

Enhance Organisational Wellness

- Expand psychological support services for members exposed to trauma.
- Introduce wellness programmes addressing burnout, stress management, and family support.

- Promote a healthy organisational culture that values dignity, respect, and teamwork.

Improve Service Delivery Standards

- Establish minimum service standards for police stations.
- Monitor response times, case investigation quality, victim care, and complaint resolution.
- Introduce citizen satisfaction surveys as part of performance measurement.

Strengthen Anti-Corruption Measures

- Intensify lifestyle audits for senior management and members in high-risk positions.
- Strengthen internal disciplinary processes to ensure swift action against corruption and misconduct.
- Protect whistle-blowers and encourage ethical reporting.

Harness Technology and Innovation

- Accelerate digital transformation through electronic case management systems.
- Expand online crime reporting for selected offences.
- Integrate artificial intelligence and data analytics to identify crime trends.
- Improve interoperability between criminal justice agencies.

Improve Intergovernmental Collaboration

- Strengthen coordination between national, provincial, and local government.
- Integrate policing with social development, education, health, housing, and economic development initiatives.
- Establish permanent multidisciplinary crime prevention task teams.

Prioritise Youth Crime Prevention

- Expand school safety programmes.
- Support youth employment, skills development, and recreational initiatives.
- Increase diversion programmes for young offenders to prevent repeat offending.

Strengthen Performance Monitoring

- Develop measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) linked to community safety outcomes rather than administrative outputs.
- Publish regular public progress reports on the implementation of the Reset Agenda.
- Conduct independent evaluations to assess implementation effectiveness.

Restore Public Trust

- Improve transparency through regular community engagements.
- Strengthen communication with victims regarding case progress.
- Promote respectful, professional, and procedurally just policing in every interaction with the public.

Strengthen Rural and Border Policing

- Increase policing resources in rural communities.
- Improve border security to combat illegal migration, stock theft, firearms trafficking, and organised crime.
- Enhance cooperation with neighbouring countries and border agencies.

Develop a National Innovation Programme

- Create platforms where SAPS members at all levels can submit practical policing innovations.
- Reward innovative crime prevention strategies implemented successfully at station level.
- Encourage research partnerships with universities and research institutions to promote evidence-based policing.

Fill All Critical Vacancies Across SAPS

One of the most urgent priorities of the SAPS Reset Agenda should be the immediate filling of all funded vacant posts from National Head Office to Provincial Offices, Districts, Specialised Units, and every police station across South Africa. Persistent staff shortages undermine operational effectiveness, increase workloads, lower morale, delay investigations, and negatively affect service delivery.

Practical actions should include:

- Conduct a comprehensive audit of all funded vacant posts across SAPS.
- Fast-track the recruitment and appointment process to fill critical operational and support posts.
- Prioritise vacancies at police stations, detective services, crime intelligence, forensic services, specialised units, visible policing, and call centres.
- Ensure appointments are based on merit, competence, experience, and integrity.
- Review organisational structures to ensure personnel are deployed where crime patterns and community needs are greatest.
- Strengthen succession planning to prepare future leaders and minimise the impact of retirements and resignations.
- Allocate sufficient funding to ensure that approved posts remain funded and are filled without unnecessary delays.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased police visibility and faster response times.
- Reduced workloads and improved staff morale.

- More effective investigations and higher case detection rates.
- Enhanced service delivery to communities.
- Improved implementation of intelligence-led and community-oriented policing.
- Greater public confidence in the South African Police Service.

A fully capacitated SAPS is essential if the Reset Agenda is to achieve its objective of building safer communities. Filling vacant posts at every level—from National Head Office to the smallest rural police station—will ensure that the organisation has the human resources needed to deliver professional, efficient, and responsive policing to all South Africans.

Recommendations: Strengthening Institutional Accountability

The SAPS Reset Agenda should be operationalised through a comprehensive accountability framework with clearly defined performance indicators, measurable outcomes and independent oversight. Internal accountability mechanisms must be complemented by stronger external oversight through the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID), the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, Parliament and the Auditor-General of South Africa. Performance contracts for senior managers should incorporate measurable indicators related to ethical conduct, service delivery, crime reduction, community satisfaction and organisational integrity.

Professionalising the Police Service

SAPS should institutionalise competency-based recruitment, merit-based promotions and continuous professional development. Promotion systems should reward qualifications, operational competence, leadership ability and ethical conduct rather than seniority or patronage. Partnerships with universities and professional bodies should be expanded to strengthen evidence-based policing, leadership development, forensic science, cybercrime investigations and intelligence analysis. Continuous training should be mandatory across all ranks.

Strengthening Intelligence-Led Policing

The Crime Intelligence Division should be modernised through investment in digital technologies, artificial intelligence, predictive analytics and integrated intelligence systems. Enhanced collaboration among SAPS, the State Security Agency, the National Prosecuting Authority, the Financial Intelligence Centre, SARS and international law enforcement agencies should be prioritised to combat organised crime, corruption, cybercrime and transnational criminal networks.

Enhancing Community Partnerships

Community policing should be revitalised through stronger Community Police Forums (CPFs), neighbourhood watches, municipal safety forums and partnerships with civil society, traditional leaders and the private sector. Community engagement should move beyond consultation to collaborative problem-solving, ensuring that local communities actively participate in identifying safety priorities and evaluating policing performance.

Improving Leadership and Organisational Culture

Transformational and ethical leadership should be promoted throughout SAPS. Leadership development programmes should focus on integrity, accountability, emotional intelligence, strategic

decision-making and change management. Organisational culture should reward ethical behaviour, innovation, professionalism and public service while addressing misconduct through swift and consistent disciplinary action.

Modernising Technology and Infrastructure

SAPS should accelerate investment in digital policing technologies, forensic laboratories, integrated information systems, body-worn cameras, crime mapping, predictive policing tools and cybercrime capabilities. Improved infrastructure and modern equipment are essential to enhance operational efficiency, officer safety and public confidence.

Evidence-Based Performance Management

Performance management systems should shift from measuring outputs, such as arrests, to measuring outcomes, including reductions in violent crime, improved conviction rates, community trust and victim satisfaction. Regular independent evaluations should assess the implementation and effectiveness of the SAPS Reset Agenda.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for public policy. First, police reform should be viewed as part of a broader programme of public sector governance reform rather than an isolated organisational initiative. Government should strengthen legislative and institutional frameworks that promote transparency, accountability and ethical leadership across the criminal justice system.

Second, sustained political commitment is required to safeguard the operational independence of SAPS from undue political interference. Clear governance arrangements should protect policing decisions while reinforcing democratic oversight.

Third, the implementation of the SAPS Reset Agenda should be integrated with national policy frameworks, including the National Development Plan 2030, the White Paper on Policing (2016), the Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy. This alignment will enhance policy coherence and facilitate coordinated implementation across government.

Finally, policymakers should prioritise long-term investment in police education, technology, forensic science, intelligence capabilities and organisational development to ensure that reform efforts remain sustainable.

Practical Implications

The study offers practical guidance for police executives, policymakers and practitioners. For SAPS management, the findings highlight the importance of ethical leadership, accountability, professional development and intelligence-led policing in improving organisational performance. For oversight institutions, the study underscores the need for effective monitoring and transparent performance reporting. Community organisations and local government structures can use the findings to strengthen collaborative crime prevention initiatives and improve police-community relations.

Academic institutions may utilise the study to inform police education, leadership training and curriculum development. The findings also provide a framework for evaluating future policing reforms in South Africa and other developing democracies.

Concluding Recommendation

The SAPS Reset Agenda presents a significant opportunity to reposition the South African Police Service as a professional, ethical, intelligence-led, and community-centred institution. However, meaningful reform will depend on decisive leadership, transparent implementation, adequate resourcing, and continuous monitoring. Success should not be measured by the publication of strategic plans, but by tangible improvements in crime reduction, public confidence, officer morale, organisational integrity, and the safety of communities.

A successful Reset Agenda must place people at its centre—both the communities SAPS serves and the dedicated police officials who serve with integrity. By embracing meritocracy, accountability, innovation, ethical leadership, and collaborative partnerships, SAPS can build a modern police service capable of addressing South Africa's complex crime challenges while restoring public trust and confidence in policing.

Future Research

Future studies should empirically evaluate the implementation of the SAPS Reset Agenda using quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches. Comparative studies between provinces and police stations could identify best practices and contextual challenges. Longitudinal research is required to assess whether the Agenda leads to sustained improvements in crime reduction, police legitimacy and community trust.

Additional research should examine the role of digital policing, artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, police wellness, organisational culture and leadership in strengthening policing outcomes. Comparative international research may also provide valuable insights into adapting successful reform models from other democratic policing jurisdictions to the South African context.

Key Takeaways

- The SAPS Reset Agenda represents one of the most comprehensive police reform initiatives introduced in democratic South Africa.
- Accountability, integrity, professionalism and community partnership are essential pillars for rebuilding public trust.
- The recommendations of the Zondo, Khampepe and Madlanga Commissions remain highly relevant to police reform and institutional renewal.
- Intelligence-led policing, technological innovation and evidence-based decision-making are indispensable for addressing contemporary forms of organised and violent crime.
- Sustainable reform requires ethical leadership, adequate resources, continuous monitoring and measurable implementation rather than policy declarations alone.
- Police legitimacy is strengthened through procedural fairness, transparency and meaningful engagement with communities.
- Successful implementation of the Reset Agenda has the potential to improve public safety, strengthen

constitutional democracy and enhance confidence in the criminal justice system.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations. First, it relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic publications, government reports and official documents; therefore, it does not include primary empirical evidence from SAPS members or community stakeholders. Second, the findings depend

on the quality and availability of existing literature and official reports. Third, as the SAPS Reset Agenda is a relatively recent policy initiative, empirical evidence regarding its implementation remains limited. Finally, although the review incorporates international best practices, differences in political, legal and socio-economic contexts may limit the direct transferability of international experiences to South Africa.



Figure 1: illustrating the study

Conclusion

The South African Police Service stands at a defining moment in its democratic history. Persistently high levels of violent crime, organised criminal activity, corruption and declining public trust have underscored the urgent need for comprehensive institutional reform. The SAPS Reset Agenda represents a significant opportunity to reposition the police service as a professional, ethical, accountable and community-centred institution capable of fulfilling its constitutional mandate.

The systematic review demonstrates that the Agenda is conceptually aligned with international principles of democratic policing and addresses many of the governance deficiencies identified by the Zondo, Khampepe and Madlanga Commissions. Its emphasis on accountability, integrity, professionalism, intelligence-led policing and collaborative governance reflects contemporary thinking on effective police reform.

However, meaningful transformation cannot be achieved through policy statements alone. Lasting reform requires sustained political commitment, ethical leadership, operational independence, adequate resourcing, continuous professional development, technological innovation and robust accountability mechanisms. The success of the Reset Agenda will ultimately be judged not by its aspirations but by measurable improvements in public safety,

reductions in crime, strengthened police legitimacy and restored public confidence.

If implemented with consistency, transparency and integrity, the SAPS Reset Agenda has the potential to reshape policing in South Africa, reinforce constitutional democracy and contribute to safer, more resilient communities. It offers not only a roadmap for institutional renewal but also an opportunity to rebuild the social contract between the police and the citizens they are entrusted to serve.

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