POLICING IN SOUTH AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, FOCUSING ON MODELS OF POLICING, POLICING BEFORE THE POLICE, AND THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLICING

Dr. John Motsamai Modise

South African Police Service.

Abstract: This study aims to critically examine the evolution of policing in South Africa from a comparative and historical perspective, focusing on how colonial and apartheid legacies continue to shape policing practices, community trust, and institutional accountability. Despite democratic reforms since 1994, the South African Police Service (SAPS) faces persistent challenges including public mistrust, corruption, and ineffective oversight. These issues hinder the establishment of a legitimate and ethical policing system responsive to community needs. The research reveals that the historical context of policing, marked by control and repression, continues to influence police culture and behaviour. Community policing initiatives are inconsistently implemented and lack sufficient resources. Furthermore, political interference undermines leadership integrity and civilian oversight bodies, contributing to continued public dissatisfaction. This study integrates historical analysis with contemporary challenges, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of policing reform in South Africa. It highlights the critical role of ethical leadership, community engagement, and technology in fostering police accountability and trust. Effective police reform in South Africa requires multifaceted strategies that address historical legacies, empower community participation, and strengthen institutional oversight. By adopting inclusive and ethical policing models, South Africa can enhance public safety and advance democratic governance.

Keywords: Policing in South Africa, South African Police Service (SAPS), Police reform, Police legitimacy, Ethical leadership, Community policing, Police accountability, Police oversight, Post-apartheid policing,Colonial legacy, Police-community relations, Law enforcement challenges.

Introduction/Background

Policing in South Africa is deeply rooted in the nation's complex socio-political history, marked by colonial conquest, apartheid repression, and the ongoing struggle to establish a democratic society. Unlike many liberal democracies where the police evolved primarily to protect citizens and uphold rights, policing in South Africa developed as an extension of state power to enforce racial segregation and colonial domination (Newham, 2020). The transition to democracy in 1994 brought significant reforms, including the reconstitution of the South African Police into the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the introduction of community policing. However, these reforms have had mixed results, with the country continuing to grapple with issues such as police brutality, corruption, and public mistrust (Burger & Lancaster, 2023).

Globally, policing systems tend to follow one of several models, including the traditional reactive model, community-oriented policing, and militarized policing (Bayley, 2021). South Africa presents a hybrid model shaped by historical authoritarianism and

contemporary attempts at democratic transformation. Yet, the persistence of a militarized policing culture—exemplified by incidents such as the Marikana massacre and ongoing allegations of excessive force—suggests that reform has been superficial in many respects (Bruce, 2022).

Understanding policing in South Africa requires a dual lens: a **comparative approach**, assessing how South Africa's policing structures align or diverge from international norms, and a **historical approach**, tracing the evolution of law enforcement from precolonial systems of customary justice to post-apartheid democratic ideals. This dual perspective allows for a more nuanced critique of the effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability of the SAPS today.

Recent studies highlight that despite constitutional and legislative frameworks aimed at democratic accountability, the SAPS continues to struggle with implementing ethical and community-based policing, especially in poor and historically disadvantaged areas (Faull, 2024; Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023). The current climate of social unrest, service delivery protests, and escalating crime rates further underscores the urgent need for reflective and historically informed policing reform.

This paper explores the development and models of policing in South Africa from a comparative and historical lens. It critically analyzes the legacy of colonial and apartheid policing, the transition to democratic policing, and the challenges that continue to undermine police legitimacy and public trust in the post-apartheid era.

Background

The history of policing in South Africa is inseparable from the broader history of colonialism, apartheid, and socio-political inequality. Historically, the police were not primarily concerned with the protection of all citizens but rather with maintaining the interests of colonial and apartheid regimes (Brewer, 1994). During these eras, the police were used as instruments of oppression, enforcing racially discriminatory laws and suppressing dissent through surveillance, intimidation, and violence. This legacy has left a deep imprint on the structure, culture, and public perception of law enforcement in South Africa today (Bruce, 2022).

The birth of formal policing in South Africa can be traced to the early 19th century with the establishment of colonial police forces. These entities were largely militaristic and functioned as paramilitary units rather than civilian services (Newham, 2020). Even after the end of apartheid, the transformation of the South African Police (SAP) into the South African Police Service (SAPS) in 1995 was more administrative than cultural. Many of the old practices, such as militarized crowd control, heavy-handed responses, and a top-down approach to public safety, have persisted into the democratic era (Faull, 2024).

Despite extensive reforms guided by the Constitution of 1996 and the White Paper on Policing (2016), the SAPS has struggled to shed its historical baggage. The post-apartheid era promised community policing, transparency, and accountability, yet the reality has often been the opposite. Public confidence in the police remains low, particularly among historically marginalized communities (Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023). Incidents such as the Marikana massacre in 2012 and recent cases of police brutality have reignited debates around police accountability and legitimacy.

Moreover, South Africa's policing system operates within a challenging environment marked by high levels of violent crime, inequality, and widespread socio-economic discontent. These factors exacerbate tensions between law enforcement and the communities they are meant to serve. According to Burger and Lancaster (2023), while crime levels are rising, trust in the police is deteriorating, and this trust deficit undermines the effectiveness of any crime prevention strategy.

Recent discourse on policing emphasizes the need for a historically conscious, community-engaged, and rights-based approach to law enforcement. This requires a critical examination of the models of policing currently in use, how they evolved, and their effectiveness in a society grappling with inequality, crime, and democratic fragility (Faull, 2024; Bruce, 2022).

Problem Statement

Despite more than two decades of democratic governance and significant institutional reform, policing in South Africa continues to reflect many of the authoritarian practices inherited from the colonial and apartheid eras. The South African Police Service (SAPS), established in the post-apartheid period to ensure service-oriented, accountable, and community-focused policing, has struggled to break from its repressive legacy. Issues such as excessive use of force, corruption, poor community relations, and a lack of internal accountability persist, undermining public trust and democratic legitimacy (Bruce, 2022; Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023).

Comparatively, many democratic nations have embraced models such as community policing and procedural justice to improve police legitimacy and service delivery. However, in South Africa, the continued reliance on reactive, militarized policing strategies has proven ineffective in reducing violent crime or fostering public cooperation (Faull, 2024). This raises fundamental questions about the appropriateness and adaptability of current policing models to the South African context, especially in light of the country's complex socio-political history and enduring inequalities (Burger & Lancaster, 2023).

The lack of transformative change in police culture and operations points to deeper systemic failures. While legislation and policy frameworks such as the Constitution (1996) and the National Development Plan (2030) outline principles for democratic policing, the gap between policy and practice remains wide. This disconnect has contributed to deteriorating community–police relations, particularly in historically disadvantaged areas where trust in law enforcement is critically low (Newham, 2020; SAPS Annual Report, 2023).

Given these challenges, it becomes imperative to revisit the historical development of policing in South Africa, compare it with international trends, and assess the extent to which current practices align with democratic ideals. Without addressing the historical roots and systemic causes of dysfunctional policing, reform efforts risk being superficial and unsustainable.

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the evolution and current models of policing in South Africa through a comparative and historical lens, with the objective of identifying the systemic challenges that continue to undermine police legitimacy, democratic accountability, and effective service delivery in the post-apartheid era. The study seeks to analyse how

historical legacies of colonial and apartheid-era policing practices continue to influence contemporary law enforcement strategies, and how South Africa's current policing approach compares with international democratic models.

By integrating historical insights with recent empirical developments, the study aims to contribute to the discourse on meaningful police reform in South Africa, offering policy-relevant recommendations that align with democratic principles, community trust-building, and human rights protection.

This aim aligns with recent scholarship that underscores the urgency of transforming the culture, structure, and operational models of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to meet the needs of a democratic society (Bruce, 2022; Faull, 2024; Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023).

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for both academic scholarship and practical policymaking in the field of policing and democratic governance in South Africa. First and foremost, it provides a historically grounded and comparative understanding of the evolution of policing in the country, highlighting the persistence of colonial and apartheid legacies in current policing practices (Bruce, 2022; Faull, 2024). By doing so, the research moves beyond surface-level critiques and probes the structural and ideological foundations of law enforcement in South Africa.

Secondly, the study is vital for informing police reform efforts. As South Africa continues to experience high levels of violent crime, widespread community mistrust, and allegations of police brutality and corruption (SAPS Annual Report, 2023; Burger & Lancaster, 2023), this research will offer insights into why previous reform attempts have failed and how future interventions can be designed for greater sustainability and public legitimacy.

Furthermore, this research contributes to international comparative policing literature by contextualising the South African experience within broader global trends. By comparing domestic practices with models such as community policing, procedural justice, and democratic accountability seen in other democratic nations, the study provides a reference point for assessing South Africa's trajectory and reform potential (Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023).

Finally, the study has practical implications for stakeholders including the South African Police Service (SAPS), civil society organisations, policymakers, and parliamentary oversight bodies. It supports the design of evidence-based strategies aimed at improving community–police relations, promoting ethical policing, and ensuring that policing is aligned with the constitutional values of dignity, equality, and accountability.

Gaps in the Study

Despite the growing body of literature on police reform in South Africa, several critical gaps remain unaddressed:

1. Lack of Historical-Comparative Analysis

Much of the existing research tends to treat police reform as a contemporary policy issue without sufficiently interrogating the historical roots of policing practices. There is a limited exploration of how colonial and apartheid policing models continue to influence present-day operational strategies and institutional culture (Bruce, 2022; Faull, 2024). A historical-comparative

approach is essential to understanding the deep-seated structural challenges that persist within the South African Police Service (SAPS).

2. Limited Engagement with Global Best Practices

While South Africa has formally adopted community policing as a model, there is insufficient empirical work comparing its implementation with global practices. This restricts the ability to identify what has worked in other post-conflict or transitional democracies and how such models might be adapted to the South African context (Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023).

3. Gap Between Policy and Practice

Although South Africa has progressive policing policies and frameworks—such as the National Development Plan (2030) and the White Paper on Policing—there remains a significant gap between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities. Few studies critically assess why the implementation of these frameworks fails to translate into effective, community-oriented policing (Burger & Lancaster, 2023).

4. Insufficient Focus on Public Trust and Legitimacy

Current research often emphasizes crime statistics and police performance metrics, overlooking the central role of public trust and legitimacy in ensuring effective law enforcement. There is a lack of longitudinal studies that examine how historical injustices and present-day misconduct affect community perceptions of the police (Newham, 2020; SAPS Annual Report, 2023).

5. Under representation of Rural and Marginalised Voices

Most policing research focuses on urban centres, neglecting the experiences of rural and peri-urban communities, which may encounter different dynamics of police interaction, neglect, or abuse. This limits the inclusiveness and applicability of current policy recommendations (Faull, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two key theoretical frameworks that offer critical insights into the structure, function, and legitimacy of policing in South Africa: **Institutional Theory** and **Procedural Justice Theory**.

1. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand how historical legacies and institutional norms shape the current behaviour and structure of police organisations. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is deeply influenced by its colonial and apartheid-era roots, which emphasized militarized, coercive control over democratic service delivery (Bruce, 2022). Despite constitutional reforms post-1994, many of these institutional norms persist in subtle and overt ways, reinforcing authoritarian practices.

According to Scott (2008), institutions tend to resist change due to embedded norms, rules, and cultural-cognitive elements. This resistance explains why superficial reforms have failed to alter the deeper structure and mindset of the SAPS. Institutional theory allows the study to examine how historical policing models have been internalized and how they continue to influence policy implementation and public interaction (Faull, 2024).

Recent Insight: Burger and Lancaster (2023) argue that "reform efforts in South Africa have struggled precisely because they failed to account for the institutionalised behaviour and resistance to democratic norms within the SAPS.

2. Procedural Justice Theory

Procedural justice theory is central to evaluating how public perceptions of police fairness affect legitimacy and cooperation. According to Tyler (2006), people are more likely to comply with laws and cooperate with law enforcement when they perceive police processes as fair, respectful, and neutral. This theory is highly relevant in the South African context, where public trust in the police remains low, especially among historically marginalised communities.

Procedural justice emphasizes voice (being heard), neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness—all of which are lacking in many current interactions between police and the public in South Africa (Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023). This framework helps assess not only what the police do, but **how** they do it, with implications for restoring legitimacy and community trust.

Recent Insight: Faull (2024) notes that "the lack of procedural justice in day-to-day policing has contributed significantly to the alienation of communities and the erosion of trust in police legitimacy."

Integration of Theories

By combining **Institutional Theory** and **Procedural Justice Theory**, the study is able to:

- ✓ Examine **why** authoritarian policing practices persist despite constitutional and policy reforms (institutional analysis).
- ✓ Understand **how** these practices impact community trust, cooperation, and perceptions of legitimacy (procedural justice analysis).

This dual framework ensures a holistic approach to analysing South African policing through both historical structure and present-day experience.

Literature Review

The literature on policing in South Africa reveals a complex intersection of historical legacies, institutional practices, governance challenges, and community dynamics. This review synthesizes recent academic and policy work to highlight key themes in understanding the nature and challenges of policing in a post-apartheid, democratic South Africa.

1. Historical Legacy of Authoritarian Policing

Post-apartheid policing reforms were meant to transform the South African Police Service (SAPS) from a tool of state repression into a community-oriented, rights-based institution. However, Bruce (2022) argues that while formal institutions changed, many operational norms and mentalities from apartheid-era policing have persisted. Militarised tactics, top-down control, and impunity for misconduct are still common features of SAPS operations.

Faull (2024) underscores that the remnants of colonial and apartheid policing continue to manifest in modern-day policing culture, especially in the use of excessive force in poor, marginalised communities.

2. Community Policing and Public Trust

Community policing has been promoted in South Africa since the 1990s as a strategy to bridge the trust gap between citizens and the police. Despite these efforts, trust in the SAPS remains low. Dlamini and Kgatle (2023) found that in township areas, residents perceive the police as ineffective, corrupt, and often aligned with political or economic elites rather than the public good.

According to Burger and Lancaster (2023), only 27% of South Africans report high levels of trust in the police—a figure that has declined consistently since 2010. This erosion of trust has had tangible effects on cooperation and crime reporting, which are essential components of effective community policing.

3. Police Accountability and Oversight Mechanisms

Oversight institutions such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) have faced challenges in ensuring accountability. **Newham (2020)** observes that while IPID investigates thousands of cases annually, its recommendations are often ignored or undermined by weak internal discipline within SAPS. **Faull (2024)** notes that a lack of consequence management within the police undermines reform efforts and public trust.

4. Policing and Democratic Governance

Policing in democratic societies is meant to reflect transparency, accountability, and respect for rights. However, Bruce (2022) highlights that the SAPS continues to prioritise regime security over community safety. This contradicts South Africa's constitutional values and undermines democratic consolidation.

Moreover, Dlamini and Kgatle (2023) point out that SAPS leadership has often been politicised, which weakens independence and professional accountability.

5. Comparative and Global Perspectives

Comparative literature shows that post-authoritarian states often struggle with policing transformation. In similar contexts—such as Kenya, Brazil, and Northern Ireland—reform has required strong political will, community participation, and independent oversight. **Faull (2024)** argues that South Africa can benefit from learning how other post-conflict states have professionalised their police forces while improving legitimacy.

6. Technological and Procedural Innovations

In recent years, digital tools like body cameras, digital evidence management, and crime-mapping software have been introduced globally to enhance transparency and efficiency. Burger and Lancaster (2023) note that while South Africa has piloted such innovations, budget constraints and institutional resistance have hampered widespread adoption.

The literature suggests that while South Africa has made considerable progress in policy formulation and legal reform since 1994, implementation remains weak due to structural inertia, political interference, and a failure to earn public legitimacy. A deeper understanding of historical continuities, coupled with insights from global best practices, is essential for meaningful and sustainable police reform.

Themes of the Study

1. The Legacy of Authoritarian and Colonial Policing

This theme explores how the foundations of policing in South Africa were shaped by colonial and apartheid ideologies, emphasizing repression and control rather than service and protection. Bruce (2022) argues that the persistence of militarised policing stems from the institutional memory of apartheid, where policing prioritized political stability over community safety. Faull (2024) notes that the cultural DNA of the SAPS is still influenced by practices that were designed to suppress rather than serve communities.

2. Police Legitimacy and Public Trust

A key theme is the crisis of legitimacy within the SAPS and its implications for democratic policing. Dlamini & Kgatle (2023) found that low trust levels in police correlate with reduced cooperation and willingness to report crime, especially in marginalized communities. Burger & Lancaster (2023) reveal that only 27% of South Africans express confidence in the police, highlighting a trust deficit that undermines police effectiveness.

3. Community Policing and Participatory Safety Models

This theme interrogates the role of community policing forums and participatory models in strengthening police-community relationships. Faull (2024) emphasizes that although community policing is mandated, its implementation is weak, inconsistent, and often symbolic rather than practical. Bruce (2022) stresses the importance of co-produced safety, where communities are seen not as passive recipients but active agents in security efforts.

4. Police Accountability and Oversight Mechanisms

Another focus is the effectiveness of oversight institutions such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) in ensuring police accountability. Newham (2020) points out that oversight bodies often lack the authority, resources, and political support to discipline police misconduct effectively. Faull (2024) notes that a culture of impunity within SAPS continues to derail reform efforts.

5. Governance and Political Interference in Policing

This theme examines the politicisation of police leadership and the implications for operational independence. Dlamini & Kgatle (2023) argue that senior appointments in SAPS are often influenced by political loyalty rather than merit, weakening institutional credibility. Bruce (2022) notes that policing priorities are sometimes more aligned with regime protection than with democratic service delivery.

6. Global and Comparative Policing Models

This theme situates South African policing within global trends and reform models in other post-authoritarian societies. Faull (2024) suggests that South Africa can draw lessons from contexts like Northern Ireland, where comprehensive reform included rebranding, vetting, and community engagement. Burger & Lancaster (2023) argue that international models demonstrate the value of decentralised policing, civilian oversight, and strong internal ethics mechanisms.

7. Role of Technology and Innovation in Modern Policing

Technology has been identified as a possible enabler of transparency and improved performance. Burger & Lancaster (2023) highlight initiatives like digital evidence systems and body cameras, though they caution that rollout has been slow due to resistance and funding issues. Faull (2024) notes that technology without institutional reform can enhance surveillance but not necessarily legitimacy or community trust.

8. Police Professionalism and Ethical Leadership

Professionalism and leadership ethics are recurring concerns. Bruce (2022) calls for a new leadership ethos in SAPS grounded in public service values rather than militarised command. Dlamini & Kgatle (2023) stress the need for ethical leadership to restore credibility and drive cultural transformation.

Key Takeaways

Colonial and Apartheid Legacies Still Influence Policing

Despite post-1994 reforms, South African policing remains heavily influenced by its repressive past. This historical continuity contributes to ongoing issues of authoritarianism, mistrust, and violence in modern policing practices (Bruce, 2022; Faull, 2024).

Public Trust in the Police Remains Critically Low

Communities—especially those in townships and informal settlements—express deep mistrust in the SAPS. Factors such as corruption, slow response times, and police brutality have eroded confidence in law enforcement (Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023; Burger & Lancaster, 2023).

Community Policing Is Inconsistently Applied and Under-Resourced

Though community policing is a cornerstone of democratic reform, its implementation is fragmented and often symbolic, lacking real authority or operational resources (Faull, 2024).

Oversight Mechanisms Are Ineffective Without Political Will

Institutions like IPID are mandated to ensure accountability, but suffer from underfunding, limited power, and political interference, weakening their effectiveness (Newham, 2020).

Police Professionalism Requires Ethical, Depoliticised Leadership

Leadership appointments often reflect political loyalty rather than competence, which undermines professionalism and institutional independence (Bruce, 2022; Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023).

Technology Offers Promise, but Alone Is Insufficient

Technological innovations like body cameras and digital case management can support accountability—but must be accompanied by ethical reform, training, and community oversight (Burger & Lancaster, 2023).

Global Examples Provide Valuable Reform Lessons

Comparative models, such as police reform in Northern Ireland or Brazil, show that meaningful transformation requires integrated strategies—combining oversight, vetting, retraining, and cultural change (Faull, 2024).

Civic Participation Is Central to Police Legitimacy

For policing to be democratic and effective, communities must be empowered to shape safety priorities, participate in decision-making, and hold the police accountable (Faull, 2024; Dlamini & Kgatle, 2023).

Further Studies

Longitudinal Impact of Community Policing Models

While community policing has been widely endorsed, there is a lack of longitudinal data on its effectiveness in building trust and reducing crime in different regions of South Africa. Future studies should track these outcomes over time across urban and rural areas.

Effectiveness of Police Oversight Mechanisms

More empirical research is needed to evaluate the functionality, independence, and real-world impact of institutions like IPID and the Civilian Secretariat for Police, especially in holding officers accountable and deterring misconduct.

Youth Perceptions of the Police

Limited research has explored how young people in South Africa perceive the SAPS, and how those perceptions shape their willingness to cooperate with or resist law enforcement. This is critical for future trust-building.

Comparative Studies on Police Reform Models in Post-Conflict Societies

A comparative analysis of police reform in post-authoritarian or post-conflict countries—such as Northern Ireland, Rwanda, or Colombia—can offer deeper insight into which reforms could work in the South African context.

Technology, Surveillance, and Police Ethics

There is a need for focused studies on how emerging technologies (e.g., predictive policing, facial recognition, drones) are being adopted in South Africa, and what ethical implications they raise for civil liberties and accountability.

Gender and Policing

Further studies could investigate the role of gender within the SAPS—both in terms of representation in the ranks and in how policing approaches differ by gender, especially regarding gender-based violence (GBV) responses.

Role of Traditional Leaders in Local Safety Governance

An understudied area is the interface between traditional authority systems and formal policing, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. Research could explore how traditional leaders contribute to or hinder crime prevention and justice.

Mental Health and Police Officers

With rising reports of stress, trauma, and burnout among police officers, research is needed into the mental health challenges facing SAPS members, and how this impacts their performance, community engagement, and use of force.

Practical Recommendations

1. Strengthen Police Training and Ethics

Introduce mandatory ethics and human rights training at all levels of SAPS. Emphasise de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed policing, and community engagement skills. Regularly evaluate officers on adherence to Batho Pele principles and public accountability standards.

2. Revive and Empower Community Policing Forums (CPFs)

Ensure CPFs are properly funded, trained, and resourced to play meaningful roles in local safety planning. Legislate stronger oversight roles for CPFs, allowing them to evaluate local police performance and influence crime prevention priorities. Encourage inclusive CPF membership, especially involving youth, women, and civil society.

3. Reform Leadership Appointments and Accountability

Appoint SAPS leadership based on merit, integrity, and track record, not political affiliation. Implement transparent vetting processes and integrity tests for senior officers. Strengthen IPID's independence and authority to investigate and prosecute misconduct effectively.

4. Integrate Technology with Accountability Systems

Expand the use of body-worn cameras, dashcams, and digital case management, with public oversight on data use and privacy. Link technology initiatives to early warning systems that identify repeat offenders within SAPS. Ensure all technology use is guided by clear ethical and human rights frameworks.

5. Invest in Officer Wellness and Mental Health

Establish dedicated psychological support units in all police districts. Provide counselling, debriefing, and peer support programmes for officers exposed to trauma and violence. Reduce excessive workloads and improve work-life balance policies to prevent burnout.

6. Strengthen Civilian Oversight and Transparency

Empower bodies like IPID and the Civilian Secretariat for Police with more resources and enforcement powers. Mandate public reporting on investigations into police abuse, corruption, and failures in service delivery. Launch a national SAPS performance dashboard accessible to the public.

7. Decentralise and Localise Safety Strategies

Enable local municipalities and metros to develop customised policing strategies in collaboration with SAPS. Pilot community-led safety audits to identify specific threats and priorities in various neighbourhoods. Integrate traditional leaders and local structures in rural areas into formal safety governance frameworks.

8. Promote Youth Engagement in Safety Efforts

Establish youth-police dialogue forums to address mistrust and co-design safety interventions. Incorporate school-based safety programmes, where police work with educators and social workers on prevention. Offer internships or mentorships within SAPS to promote career interest and ethical values in public service.

Co-Impact Of The Study

Title: *Policing in South Africa: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*

The co-impact of this study refers to the broader collective benefits and influence it may have across multiple sectors and stakeholders. This includes academia, government, civil society, law enforcement agencies, and communities, all of whom share responsibility in shaping democratic, ethical, and effective policing.

1. For the South African Police Service (SAPS):

✓ Encourages institutional **self-reflection and reform** based on historical injustices and global best practices.

✓ Highlights the **need for ethical leadership**, improved training, and merit-based appointments.

✓ Supports SAPS efforts to professionalise and regain public trust, especially in under-served communities.

2. For Communities and Civil Society:

✓ Empowers local communities with knowledge of their **rights and roles in police oversight**.

✓ Validates long-standing concerns about **police brutality, corruption, and unresponsiveness**.

✓ Provides evidence to support **advocacy, litigation, and policy lobbying** for safer, more accountable policing.

3. For Government Departments (Safety & Security, Justice, Cooperative Governance):

✓ Offers an integrated understanding of how **interdepartmental collaboration** can support crime prevention, urban safety, and police accountability.

✓ Assists in developing **holistic safety policies** aligned with human rights and developmental goals.

✓ Encourages **data-driven policy-making** and enhanced support for under-resourced police stations.

4. For Traditional Leaders and Local Councils:

✓ Promotes **inclusive local safety governance**, acknowledging the role of traditional leadership in rural crime prevention.

✓ Encourages partnerships between **customary authorities and formal policing structures**.

5. For Parliamentary Committees and Oversight Bodies:

✓ Informs **legislative reform, oversight hearings, and performance evaluations** of SAPS and its leadership.

✓ Supports the strengthening of bodies like **IPID and the Civilian Secretariat for Police**, making accountability enforceable.

6. For Researchers and Academia:

✓ Contributes to a **growing body of critical South African policing literature**, blending historical and contemporary perspectives.

✓ Opens new fields of inquiry related to **transitional justice, police reform, public administration, and criminal justice**.

✓ Fosters multidisciplinary collaboration between **criminologists, sociologists, legal scholars, and human rights advocates**.

7. For Regional and International Policymakers:

✓ Provides a **comparative case study** relevant to other post-conflict or post-authoritarian societies grappling with police transformation.

✓ Informs **cross-border cooperation, peacebuilding, and capacity-building efforts** in law enforcement.

Conclusion

This study on policing in South Africa, examined through a comparative and historical lens, underscores the enduring impact of colonial and apartheid-era legacies on contemporary policing practices. Despite democratic reforms, challenges such as mistrust, corruption, and ineffective oversight continue to undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The research highlights the critical need for ethical leadership, enhanced community engagement, and the integration of technology with accountability mechanisms to rebuild public confidence.

Moreover, the study reveals that sustainable police reform requires a multifaceted approach—one that includes empowering community policing forums, strengthening civilian oversight bodies, and fostering cooperation between traditional leaders, government departments, and local communities. These strategies are essential to transform policing into a service that is both accountable and responsive to the needs of South African society.

Ultimately, this study contributes valuable insights for policymakers, law enforcement, and civil society, emphasizing that rebuilding trust and ensuring democratic policing is a collective responsibility. With committed leadership and inclusive partnerships, South Africa can progress toward a policing model that upholds justice, human rights, and public safety for all its citizens.

References

1. Bayley, D. H. (2021). *Police Models in Comparative Perspective*. In: *Policing in Democratic Societies*, Routledge.

2. Brewer, J. D. (1994). *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

3. Bruce, D. (2022). *Why Police Reform Still Fails in South Africa*. Institute for Security Studies.

4. Burger, J., & Lancaster, L. (2023). *Policing in South Africa: Growing Challenges and Diminishing Trust*. ISS Today.

5. Dlamini, T., & Kgatle, M. S. (2023). *Police Legitimacy and Democratic Accountability in South Africa: Challenges and Prospects*. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 23(1).

6. Faull, A. (2024). *Community Policing in South Africa: Illusion or Reality?* APCOF.

7. Newham, G. (2020). *30 Years On: The Unfinished Business of Police Reform in South Africa*. Corruption Watch.

8. SAPS Annual Report. (2023). *South African Police Service Annual Performance Report 2022/2023*. Pretoria: SAPS.

9. Scott, W. R. (2008). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests*. Sage Publications.

10. Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why People Obey the Law*. Princeton University Press.