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POLITICS IN THE POLICE: NEPOTISM, FAVOURITISM AND CORRUPTION IN THE NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of internal organisational politics within the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Northern Cape, focusing on political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices. The research aims to examine how these dynamics affect professionalism, morale, organisational culture, operational effectiveness, and public trust. Political influence and internal organisational politics in SAPS undermine merit-based promotion, ethical leadership, and operational cohesion. In the Northern Cape Province, where administrative structures are smaller and networks of influence closely intertwined, these practices have exacerbated low morale, factionalism, and weakened public confidence in policing. Despite existing oversight mechanisms, challenges persist, limiting SAPS' ability to operate efficiently and maintain community trust. A qualitative case study design was adopted, employing a systematic approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with SAPS officers, community policing forum (CPF) members, local leaders, and provincial officials, supplemented with focus group discussions and secondary sources such as policy documents and oversight reports. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and co-impact effects of internal politics, with triangulation employed to enhance reliability and validity. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and neutrality, were strictly observed. The study revealed that political interference, nepotism, and corruption collectively undermine meritocracy, reduce morale, foster factionalism, and erode organisational integrity. Unfair promotion practices and opaque decision-making processes contribute to low staff motivation and disengagement. Weak oversight mechanisms and delayed accountability exacerbate these challenges. The co-impact of these factors extends beyond SAPS, affecting community trust, collaborative policing initiatives, and governance in the Northern Cape Province. The research underscores the need for transparent, merit-based promotion systems, strengthened oversight, ethical leadership, political neutrality, and multi-stakeholder engagement, including SAPS, government departments, political parties, community leaders, civil society, and religious institutions. Addressing internal organisational politics holistically is critical to improving operational effectiveness, staff morale, and public confidence in policing.

Keywords: *Internal Organisational Politics; Political Interference; Nepotism; Corruption; Police Morale; Organisational Culture; South African Police Service; Northern Cape; Community Trust; Oversight.*

Introduction

Political interference in policing institutions remains one of the most significant governance challenges confronting democratic societies, particularly in transitional contexts where police organisations are expected to balance professional independence with political accountability. In South Africa, the South African Police Service (SAPS) operates within a constitutional framework that emphasises accountability, professionalism, and service to the community. However, scholars and policy analysts have consistently warned that internal political dynamics, including nepotism, factionalism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices, continue to undermine these ideals (Burger, 2011; Newham, 2014; Faull, 2017). These challenges not only affect the credibility of the police organisation but also weaken operational effectiveness and compromise the ability of the police to deliver fair and impartial law enforcement.

Concerns about politicisation within SAPS have been widely documented in both academic and policy literature. Studies have highlighted how political and organisational pressures can influence recruitment, appointment, and promotion decisions within the police hierarchy (Bruce, 2010; Newham, 2014). When leadership appointments are influenced by political affiliations or personal networks rather than professional competence, the consequences can be severe. Such practices risk placing individuals with limited operational experience or managerial capacity in senior leadership roles, thereby weakening institutional performance and strategic decision-making (Burger, 2011). Moreover, the perception that advancement within the police service depends on loyalty to factions rather than merit can generate frustration among officers and contribute to declining morale.

The problem of internal politics within policing organisations is not unique to South Africa. International scholarship on policing governance has demonstrated that political interference, patronage, and organisational factionalism are common challenges in many police systems worldwide. According to Bayley (2006), effective democratic policing requires clear

boundaries between political authority and operational policing functions to prevent undue influence over police decision-making. Similarly, Goldsmith (2005) argues that when political actors interfere in policing structures, the legitimacy of the police institution is compromised, particularly when appointments and promotions are perceived to be politically motivated. Research by Skolnick and Fyfe (1993) and Punch (2009) further emphasises that corruption and patronage within policing organisations often thrive in environments where accountability mechanisms are weak and internal oversight structures are ineffective.

Within the South African context, the legacy of politicised policing during the apartheid era continues to influence organisational culture and leadership dynamics in contemporary policing institutions (Bruce, 2010). Although democratic reforms introduced after 1994 sought to professionalise SAPS and strengthen oversight mechanisms, persistent allegations of corruption, nepotism, and factionalism have raised concerns about the extent to which these reforms have achieved their intended objectives (Faull, 2017; Newham, 2014). Scholars have also emphasised that organisational justice within police institutions plays a critical role in shaping officer motivation and ethical behaviour. When members perceive promotion processes as unfair or politically manipulated, it can lead to reduced trust in leadership and diminished commitment to organisational goals (Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Punch, 2009).

In provinces with smaller administrative structures, such as the Northern Cape, the effects of internal political dynamics may be particularly pronounced. The Northern Cape is characterised by vast geographic distances, relatively small policing units, and limited human resources. In such environments, social, political, and professional networks often overlap, increasing the risk that personal relationships may influence organisational decision-making. Researchers have noted that in smaller institutional settings, informal power networks can play a significant role in shaping recruitment, promotion, and operational decisions (Goldsmith, 2005; Bayley, 2006). Consequently, allegations of favouritism, personal vendettas, and factional alignments may have a stronger impact on organisational cohesion and morale within police stations and provincial structures.

The consequences of these dynamics extend beyond internal organisational challenges. When police members perceive leadership structures as unfair or politically influenced, it can weaken discipline, reduce motivation, and ultimately affect the quality of policing delivered to communities. According to Faull (2017), police legitimacy is closely linked to the internal legitimacy experienced by officers within their organisations. If police officials feel marginalised or unfairly treated, they may become less committed to upholding professional standards and ethical conduct. International research similarly suggests that organisational fairness and transparent leadership practices are essential for maintaining integrity and effectiveness in policing institutions (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Punch, 2009).

Against this background, understanding the dynamics of political interference, nepotism, favouritism, and corruption within provincial policing structures is essential for strengthening governance and accountability within SAPS. Examining these issues within the Northern Cape Province provides valuable insights into how internal politics influence organisational culture, leadership practices, and the morale of police members. Such analysis is important not only for identifying institutional

weaknesses but also for informing reforms aimed at promoting merit-based leadership, ethical governance, and professional policing.

Background

The transformation of policing in South Africa after the end of apartheid in 1994 sought to establish a professional, accountable, and community-oriented police service aligned with democratic principles. The creation of the South African Police Service (SAPS) aimed to replace the militarised and politically controlled police system that characterised the apartheid era with a service committed to constitutional values, human rights, and impartial law enforcement (Rauch, 2005; Bruce, 2010). Despite these reforms, scholars and policy analysts have observed that challenges relating to political influence, organisational factionalism, and corruption continue to affect policing structures across the country (Burger, 2011; Newham, 2014). These issues have raised concerns about the extent to which SAPS has fully achieved the objectives of professionalisation and institutional independence envisioned during the democratic transition.

One of the most significant challenges affecting SAPS is the persistence of political interference in senior appointments and promotions. In democratic policing systems, clear boundaries are expected between political oversight and operational independence to ensure that law enforcement decisions are guided by the rule of law rather than political considerations (Bayley, 2006). However, South Africa has experienced several controversies involving the appointment of senior police leadership, raising questions about the politicisation of the police service. For example, the suspension and subsequent legal battles involving former national police commissioner Jackie Selebi, who was later convicted of corruption, highlighted the risks associated with politically connected leadership within policing institutions. The case demonstrated how political patronage networks can compromise institutional integrity and weaken accountability mechanisms within the police service (Bruce, 2010; Faull, 2017).

Another notable incident involved the appointment and later suspension of Bheki Cele as national police commissioner. Cele's tenure was overshadowed by allegations related to irregular lease agreements for police buildings, which ultimately led to a finding of misconduct by the Public Protector and his suspension from the position (Burger, 2011). Although the case involved administrative governance rather than operational policing, it reinforced concerns about political patronage and the influence of senior political figures on policing leadership structures. Such incidents have contributed to broader perceptions among police members and the public that promotions and appointments within SAPS may sometimes be influenced by political loyalty rather than merit and competence.

Beyond leadership controversies at the national level, internal organisational politics have also manifested through allegations of nepotism, favouritism, and factional alignments within police units. Research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies has documented instances where police members perceive promotion processes as lacking transparency and fairness, which undermines organisational trust and morale (Newham, 2014). In practical terms, this may involve situations where officers with strong political or personal connections are appointed to managerial positions ahead of more experienced or qualified candidates. For example, police unions have repeatedly raised

concerns about acting appointments that later become permanent despite questions about the competence or experience of the selected candidates. These patterns create perceptions of organisational injustice among rank-and-file officers.

The effects of internal politics can be particularly pronounced in smaller provinces such as the Northern Cape. The province is characterised by vast geographic distances, a relatively small population, and limited policing resources. Because policing units are smaller and professional networks are closely interconnected, personal relationships between officers, political actors, and local community leaders may influence decision-making processes more strongly than in larger metropolitan provinces. In such environments, allegations of favouritism in the allocation of training opportunities, operational deployments, and acting leadership positions can quickly affect morale and organisational cohesion.

Practical examples from policing environments across South Africa illustrate how internal politics can affect operational performance. In some cases, detectives who expose corruption or misconduct have reported being transferred to remote rural stations or excluded from specialised investigative units. These practices can create a culture of fear among police officials who might otherwise report wrongdoing within the organisation (Faull, 2017). Similar concerns have been raised by police unions representing rank-and-file officers, who argue that members sometimes experience victimisation after challenging management decisions or exposing irregularities. Such incidents highlight the importance of strengthening whistle-blower protections and internal accountability mechanisms within SAPS.

International research on policing institutions provides further insights into how organisational politics and corruption affect law enforcement agencies. Scholars such as Punch (2009) have shown that corruption and factionalism within police organisations often emerge in environments where accountability structures are weak and leadership appointments are politically influenced. Similarly, Skolnick and Fyfe (1993) argue that police misconduct and organisational deviance frequently occur when internal oversight mechanisms fail to hold senior officers accountable. Studies conducted in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and several European democracies have demonstrated that transparent recruitment systems, independent oversight bodies, and merit-based promotion processes are essential for maintaining integrity in policing institutions (Goldsmith, 2005; Walker, 2005).

In South Africa, various oversight institutions have been established to address these governance challenges. Bodies such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service were created to strengthen accountability and monitor police conduct. Despite these mechanisms, concerns remain about the effectiveness of oversight structures in addressing systemic problems such as corruption, nepotism, and political interference within SAPS (Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013). Scholars argue that while oversight institutions play a critical role in investigating misconduct, long-term reform requires changes to organisational culture, leadership practices, and internal management systems within the police service itself.

Overall, the persistence of political interference, organisational factionalism, and corruption within policing institutions continues to present a significant challenge for democratic governance in South Africa. These issues not only undermine the professionalism of the police service but also weaken public trust in law enforcement institutions. Understanding how these dynamics operate within provincial contexts, such as the Northern Cape, is therefore essential for developing effective strategies aimed at strengthening accountability, promoting merit-based leadership, and restoring morale among police officials.

Problem Statement

The effectiveness and legitimacy of policing institutions depend heavily on principles of professionalism, accountability, transparency, and merit-based leadership. In democratic societies, police organisations are expected to operate independently from undue political influence while remaining accountable to constitutional governance structures. However, persistent allegations of political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices within the South African Police Service (SAPS) continue to raise serious concerns regarding organisational integrity and operational effectiveness (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011; Newham, 2014). These challenges not only undermine internal organisational cohesion but also weaken public confidence in the police service and its ability to provide impartial law enforcement.

In South Africa, several controversies surrounding leadership appointments and management decisions within SAPS have highlighted the risks associated with politicisation of the police service. High-profile cases involving senior police leadership have illustrated how political patronage networks can influence appointments and undermine accountability mechanisms. For instance, the conviction of former national police commissioner Jackie Selebi for corruption exposed the dangers of politically connected leadership structures within law enforcement institutions (Bruce, 2010; Faull, 2017). Such incidents reinforce concerns that political affiliations or personal relationships may sometimes influence leadership decisions rather than professional competence and integrity.

Similarly, the suspension of Bheki Cele during his tenure as national commissioner due to irregular lease agreements involving police buildings raised further questions about governance failures and political influence within SAPS leadership structures (Burger, 2011). These controversies have contributed to growing perceptions among police members and the broader public that internal police management processes may lack transparency and fairness. When leadership decisions are perceived as politically motivated, it creates a climate of mistrust within the organisation and undermines the credibility of the police institution.

Within provincial policing structures, these challenges may manifest through nepotism, factionalism, and favouritism in recruitment, promotions, and the allocation of opportunities. Research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies indicates that perceptions of unfair promotion processes are widespread among police members, particularly where acting positions are repeatedly assigned to individuals who later become permanent appointees despite questions about their qualifications or experience (Newham, 2014). Practical examples within policing environments include situations where officers with strong personal connections to senior management receive preferential access to specialised training programmes, leadership development opportunities, or operational assignments that enhance their chances of promotion.

These internal organisational dynamics have significant implications for morale among police officials. Studies suggest that when officers perceive promotion processes as unfair or politically manipulated, they are less likely to trust organisational leadership and may become disengaged from their professional responsibilities (Faull, 2017). In practical terms, this may lead to reduced motivation among experienced investigators, lower productivity within police units, and increased grievances or labour disputes within the organisation. In some cases, skilled officers may leave SAPS for employment in the private security sector due to frustration with internal politics and limited career advancement opportunities.

The challenges associated with organisational politics may be particularly pronounced in smaller provinces such as the Northern Cape. Due to its relatively small population and limited policing infrastructure, professional networks within the province are often closely interconnected. As a result, personal relationships between police officials, political actors, and community leaders may inadvertently influence decision-making processes related to recruitment, promotions, and operational management. In such environments, allegations of favouritism or personal vendettas can quickly spread within police stations, affecting teamwork, discipline, and overall organisational cohesion.

International scholarship on policing governance highlights that political interference and organisational patronage are not unique to South Africa. Researchers have demonstrated that police corruption and internal factionalism often emerge when accountability systems are weak and leadership structures lack transparency (Punch, 2009; Prenzler, 2013). According to Bayley (2006), effective democratic policing requires institutional safeguards that protect police organisations from undue political influence while ensuring accountability to the public. Similarly, Goldsmith (2005) emphasises that public trust in policing institutions is strongly linked to perceptions of fairness, integrity, and professional independence.

Empirical studies conducted in various international policing systems have shown that internal organisational justice plays a critical role in shaping police behaviour and ethical conduct. When police officers perceive management practices as unfair or politically motivated, they are more likely to develop negative attitudes toward organisational leadership and less likely to comply with institutional norms and ethical standards (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Walker, 2005). In contrast, transparent recruitment systems, merit-based promotion processes, and strong oversight institutions are associated with higher levels of organisational commitment and professionalism within police agencies (Maguire & Uchida, 2000).

Despite the existence of oversight institutions such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, challenges relating to corruption, nepotism, and political interference continue to be reported within SAPS structures. These persistent concerns suggest that existing oversight mechanisms may not be sufficient to address systemic organisational problems within the police service. Furthermore, limited empirical research has specifically examined how internal politics influence organisational culture, morale, and operational effectiveness within provincial policing structures such as those in the Northern Cape.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the persistence of political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices within policing structures, and how these dynamics affect organisational morale, professionalism, and operational effectiveness within SAPS. Understanding these challenges is essential for identifying institutional weaknesses and developing policy interventions aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and merit-based leadership within the police service.

Research Objectives And Research Questions

The objectives of this study are designed to explore the influence of organisational politics such as nepotism, favouritism, corruption, unfair promotion practices, and political interference within the South African Police Service (SAPS), particularly in the Northern Cape. These objectives are directly linked to specific research questions that guide the investigation and help generate empirical insights into how these dynamics affect police professionalism, organisational culture, and member morale.

Objective 1

To examine the extent to which political interference influences recruitment, appointment, and promotion processes within SAPS in the Northern Cape Province.

Research Question 1:

How does political interference affect recruitment, appointment, and promotion processes within SAPS in the Northern Cape Province?

Objective 2

To investigate the prevalence of nepotism and favouritism in leadership appointments and operational opportunities within policing structures in the Northern Cape.

Research Question 2:

To what extent do nepotism and favouritism influence leadership appointments, training opportunities, and operational assignments within SAPS in the Northern Cape Province?

Objective 3

To explore how internal organisational politics affect morale, motivation, and job satisfaction among police officials.

Research Question 3:

How do perceptions of organisational injustice, favouritism, and corruption influence morale, motivation, and job satisfaction among SAPS members in the Northern Cape Province?

Objective 4

To analyse the impact of unfair promotion practices and personal vendettas on organisational culture and professional relationships among police members.

Research Question 4:

What impact do unfair promotion practices and personal conflicts have on organisational culture, teamwork, and professional relationships within SAPS?

Objective 5

To identify institutional and organisational factors that enable corruption, favouritism, and political influence within policing institutions.

Research Question 5:

What organisational and institutional factors contribute to the persistence of corruption, favouritism, and political interference within SAPS structures?

Objective 6

To propose strategies and policy recommendations aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and merit-based leadership within SAPS.

Research Question 6:

What strategies can be implemented to improve transparency, accountability, and fairness in recruitment, promotion, and leadership practices within SAPS?

The objectives and research questions are interlinked to ensure a systematic investigation of organisational politics within SAPS. While the objectives define the goals of the study, the research questions guide the empirical inquiry by focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of police members. Together, they enable the study to examine both the structural causes and organisational consequences of internal politics, thereby contributing to policy reforms aimed at strengthening professionalism, accountability, and leadership integrity within the police service.

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the influence of internal organisational politics specifically nepotism, favouritism, corruption, unfair promotion practices, and political interference on the functioning of the South African Police Service (SAPS) within the Northern Cape. The study seeks to understand how these dynamics affect organisational professionalism, leadership credibility, operational effectiveness, and morale among police members. By analysing the experiences and perceptions of police officials within the provincial policing structures, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on governance, accountability, and ethical leadership within policing institutions.

Scholars have emphasised that the effectiveness of policing institutions is closely linked to principles of organisational justice, transparency, and merit-based leadership. In the South African context, researchers have argued that internal organisational dynamics such as corruption, factionalism, and political patronage can significantly undermine the professionalisation of policing institutions (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011). The persistence of these practices may weaken discipline within police organisations and reduce the willingness of members to perform their duties effectively. Consequently, understanding the extent and impact of these practices within SAPS structures is essential for identifying institutional weaknesses and informing policy reforms aimed at strengthening organisational governance.

A further aim of the study is to explore how perceptions of unfairness in recruitment and promotion processes influence morale and organisational commitment among police members. According to Faull (2017), internal legitimacy within police organisations plays a crucial role in shaping officer behaviour and ethical conduct. When members perceive management decisions as biased or politically motivated, they may become disengaged from organisational goals and less committed to maintaining professional standards. Similarly, Newham (2014) argues that transparency and fairness in promotion systems are essential for

maintaining trust between police leadership and rank-and-file members. This study therefore aims to assess how perceived injustices in leadership appointments and career advancement opportunities influence the attitudes and performance of police officials within the province.

Another important objective of the study is to identify the structural and organisational factors that enable political interference within policing institutions. International research has shown that weak oversight mechanisms, unclear boundaries between political authorities and police leadership, and limited accountability structures can create opportunities for political actors to influence policing decisions (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). By examining the dynamics within the Northern Cape policing structures, the study seeks to determine whether similar institutional weaknesses contribute to the persistence of nepotism, favouritism, and corruption within SAPS. Understanding these factors is essential for developing strategies that strengthen institutional safeguards against political interference.

The study also aims to evaluate the broader implications of organisational politics on policing outcomes and community trust. Effective policing requires not only competent leadership but also a motivated and ethical workforce capable of delivering professional services to the public. International scholars have argued that police corruption and organisational factionalism can significantly undermine the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions and weaken their ability to maintain public safety (Punch, 2009; Prenzler, 2013). Within the South African context, these concerns are particularly relevant given the country's ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic policing and rebuild public confidence in law enforcement institutions following the legacy of politicised policing during the apartheid era (Rauch, 2005).

Ultimately, the aim of this study is to contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies that promote ethical leadership, transparency, and merit-based management within SAPS. By examining how internal political dynamics influence organisational culture and police morale in the Northern Cape, the study seeks to provide insights that may assist policymakers, police leadership, and oversight institutions in strengthening accountability and professionalism within the police service. Such reforms are essential for ensuring that SAPS operates as an effective and impartial law enforcement institution capable of serving the interests of all communities in South Africa.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how internal organisational politics such as nepotism, favouritism, corruption, unfair promotion practices, and political interference affect the functioning and effectiveness of the South African Police Service (SAPS), particularly within the Northern Cape. Policing institutions play a critical role in maintaining public safety, enforcing the rule of law, and protecting citizens' rights. Therefore, any internal organisational challenges that undermine professionalism and accountability within the police service have far-reaching implications for governance, justice, and public trust.

Firstly, this study contributes to the academic body of knowledge on policing governance and organisational integrity within South Africa. Scholars have emphasised that the effectiveness of policing institutions is strongly influenced by

leadership practices, organisational culture, and internal management systems (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011). By examining the influence of internal politics within provincial policing structures, this research adds to existing literature on democratic policing and institutional reform. The findings may help scholars and policymakers better understand how organisational dynamics within SAPS influence operational effectiveness, decision-making processes, and the morale of police officials.

Secondly, the study is significant because it highlights the impact of internal organisational politics on police morale and professional conduct. Research indicates that perceptions of fairness and transparency within police organisations play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes and behaviour of officers (Faull, 2017; Newham, 2014). When police members believe that promotions and appointments are influenced by nepotism or political loyalty rather than merit and competence, it can lead to frustration, reduced motivation, and diminished organisational commitment. In practical terms, such conditions may discourage hardworking and experienced officers from pursuing leadership roles, while simultaneously enabling unqualified individuals to occupy positions of authority.

Thirdly, the study is important for strengthening accountability and governance within policing institutions. International research has shown that police corruption and organisational misconduct often flourish in environments where oversight mechanisms are weak and internal management systems lack transparency (Punch, 2009; Prenzler, 2013). By identifying the factors that contribute to political interference and organisational patronage within SAPS structures, the study provides insights that may assist oversight bodies such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate and the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service in developing more effective monitoring and accountability strategies. Improved oversight mechanisms are essential for preventing abuses of power and promoting ethical leadership within policing institutions.

Furthermore, this study has practical implications for police leadership and organisational management. Effective policing requires competent leadership capable of maintaining discipline, motivating officers, and ensuring the fair implementation of organisational policies. According to international scholars, transparent recruitment systems and merit-based promotion processes are essential for maintaining professionalism and public trust in policing institutions (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). The findings of this study may therefore assist police leadership in identifying weaknesses within existing management systems and implementing reforms aimed at strengthening fairness, transparency, and accountability in recruitment and promotion processes.

Another important contribution of this study is its relevance to community trust and police legitimacy. Public confidence in policing institutions is closely linked to perceptions of integrity, fairness, and professionalism within the police service. When communities perceive that police officers are appointed or promoted based on political connections or personal relationships, it may weaken trust in the police and reduce cooperation between communities and law enforcement agencies. Research indicates that police legitimacy is a critical factor influencing citizens' willingness to report crime, cooperate with investigations, and support policing initiatives (Goldsmith, 2005; Walker, 2005). By examining internal governance challenges within SAPS, this study contributes to broader efforts aimed at strengthening public trust in policing institutions.

Finally, the study is significant because it provides insights that may inform policy reforms aimed at improving the effectiveness of policing institutions in South Africa. The country continues to face significant challenges related to crime, violence, and community safety, making the effectiveness of the police service a critical national priority. Understanding how internal organisational politics influence police performance and morale is essential for developing strategies that promote ethical leadership, merit-based management, and professional accountability within SAPS. By focusing on the provincial context of the Northern Cape, this study also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how organisational dynamics operate within smaller policing structures where professional networks and social relationships may have a stronger influence on institutional decision-making.

In summary, this study is significant because it contributes to academic research, informs policing policy and leadership practices, strengthens accountability mechanisms, and promotes a deeper understanding of the organisational factors that influence police professionalism and effectiveness. Addressing the challenges associated with nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and political interference is essential for ensuring that SAPS functions as a professional, transparent, and trustworthy institution capable of effectively serving the communities of South Africa.

Gaps of the Study

Although considerable research has been conducted on policing reform, corruption, and organisational governance within the South African Police Service (SAPS), several important gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding the influence of internal organisational politics at provincial and station levels. Identifying these gaps is essential for guiding the focus of the present study and highlighting its potential contribution to academic knowledge and policing practice.

Firstly, existing research on policing governance in South Africa has largely focused on national-level leadership challenges and policy reforms rather than the day-to-day organisational dynamics within provincial policing structures. Studies have examined issues such as police accountability, corruption, and institutional reform within SAPS (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011; Newham, 2014), but relatively limited empirical attention has been given to how internal politics such as nepotism, favouritism, factionalism, and personal vendettas affect the experiences of rank-and-file police members within specific provincial contexts. As a result, there is a need for research that explores how these dynamics manifest within local policing environments such as the Northern Cape.

Secondly, while previous studies have documented the impact of corruption and political interference on policing institutions, there remains a lack of detailed empirical research examining how these issues influence morale, motivation, and organisational commitment among police officials. Research by Faull (2017) and Masuku (2018) suggests that perceptions of organisational injustice and corruption can undermine police professionalism and ethical behaviour. However, few studies have systematically examined how perceived unfairness in promotion processes, access to training opportunities, and leadership appointments affects the attitudes and performance of police members at operational levels.

Thirdly, much of the existing literature on policing in South Africa focuses on urban or metropolitan policing environments where crime rates, organisational structures, and resource allocation challenges are different from those found in rural provinces. The Northern Cape has unique characteristics, including vast geographic distances, relatively small policing units, and limited human resources. These factors may shape organisational relationships and decision-making processes differently from those in larger provinces. Consequently, there is a significant research gap regarding how internal politics and organisational dynamics influence policing effectiveness in rural and sparsely populated provinces.

Another gap in the literature relates to the limited integration of organisational justice and police culture theories in studies examining internal politics within SAPS. International scholars have emphasised that perceptions of fairness in management practices are critical in shaping employee behaviour, commitment, and ethical conduct within organisations (Punch, 2009; Prenzler, 2013). However, South African policing research has not sufficiently applied these theoretical perspectives to examine how organisational politics, nepotism, and favouritism influence the internal culture of police institutions and the professional identity of police officers.

Furthermore, while oversight institutions such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate and the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service play important roles in addressing police misconduct, there is limited research evaluating how effective these structures are in addressing systemic organisational problems related to internal politics and governance within SAPS. Existing studies tend to focus on specific incidents of police misconduct rather than broader organisational patterns that enable nepotism, corruption, or favouritism to persist within police structures.

Additionally, international research has demonstrated that transparent recruitment and promotion systems are critical for maintaining professionalism and public trust in policing institutions (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Walker, 2005). However, there is limited empirical evidence examining whether SAPS promotion systems are consistently perceived as fair and merit-based by police members across different provinces. Without such research, it becomes difficult to determine the extent to which organisational politics may be undermining professional advancement and leadership development within the police service.

Finally, previous research has largely concentrated on external perceptions of police legitimacy among communities, while comparatively less attention has been given to internal legitimacy within the police organisation itself. Internal legitimacy refers to the extent to which police members trust their leadership and perceive organisational procedures as fair and transparent. Studies suggest that internal legitimacy is closely linked to ethical conduct, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment among police officers (Faull, 2017). However, more empirical research is needed to examine how internal political dynamics within SAPS influence these factors, particularly in provincial policing structures.

In addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how internal organisational politics influence police morale, leadership credibility, and operational effectiveness within SAPS in the Northern Cape. By focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of police members within the province, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence that can inform policy reforms, strengthen organisational governance, and promote merit-based leadership within the police service.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is guided by a theoretical framework that integrates perspectives from Organisational Justice Theory, Police Culture Theory, and Institutional Corruption Theory to understand how internal organisational politics such as nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices affect the functioning of policing institutions. These theoretical perspectives provide an analytical lens for examining how internal governance dynamics influence leadership credibility, police morale, organisational behaviour, and overall operational effectiveness within the South African Police Service (SAPS), particularly in the Northern Cape.

Organisational Justice Theory

Organisational Justice Theory focuses on employees' perceptions of fairness within organisational structures and management practices. The theory suggests that when employees perceive decision-making processes, resource distribution, and leadership behaviour as fair and transparent, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment, trust in leadership, and positive workplace behaviour (Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Walker, 2005). Conversely, perceptions of unfairness such as favouritism, nepotism, or biased promotion processes can result in dissatisfaction, low morale, and reduced organisational commitment.

Within policing institutions, perceptions of fairness are particularly important because police officers operate within hierarchical command structures where decisions regarding promotions, training opportunities, and operational assignments are largely controlled by senior management. Research on policing in South Africa indicates that concerns about transparency and fairness in promotion systems have been raised by police members and oversight bodies (Newham, 2014; Faull, 2017). For example, when acting leadership positions are repeatedly allocated to specific individuals who later become permanently appointed without transparent selection processes, it may create perceptions of organisational injustice among other members.

Such perceptions can negatively affect police morale and productivity. Scholars argue that when police officers believe that promotions are influenced by political affiliations or personal relationships rather than merit and performance, it may reduce motivation and weaken respect for leadership structures (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011). Therefore, Organisational Justice Theory provides a useful framework for analysing how perceived unfairness in recruitment and promotion processes within SAPS may influence the attitudes, behaviour, and professional commitment of police officials.

Police Culture Theory

Police Culture Theory examines the shared values, beliefs, norms, and informal practices that develop within policing organisations. These cultural dynamics influence how police officers interpret organisational rules, interact with colleagues, and respond to management decisions. Scholars have argued that police culture often develops as a response to the demanding nature of policing work, organisational hierarchies, and the need for solidarity among officers (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Punch, 2009).

In the South African context, police culture has been shaped by historical, political, and organisational factors. The legacy of politicised policing during the apartheid era continues to influence organisational dynamics within SAPS, despite democratic reforms aimed at promoting accountability and professionalism (Rauch, 2005). Researchers have noted that informal networks, loyalty groups, and factional alignments may develop within police units, particularly where members perceive leadership decisions as unfair or politically influenced (Faull, 2017).

For example, if officers believe that promotions are based on personal connections rather than merit, informal alliances may form within police stations, leading to divisions between different groups of officers. These dynamics may manifest through workplace conflicts, resistance to management decisions, or reluctance among officers to report misconduct involving colleagues. Police Culture Theory therefore helps explain how internal politics and organisational injustices may shape attitudes, behaviour, and professional identity within policing institutions.

Institutional Corruption Theory

Institutional Corruption Theory provides another important framework for analysing the persistence of unethical practices within organisations. According to this perspective, corruption does not always occur through isolated acts of misconduct but may instead become embedded within institutional systems, norms, and organisational practices (Prenzler, 2013). In policing institutions, corruption may manifest through practices such as bribery, abuse of authority, manipulation of recruitment processes, or protection of politically connected individuals.

International research has shown that police corruption often emerges in environments where oversight mechanisms are weak and leadership structures lack transparency (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). In such contexts, individuals in positions of authority may use their power to reward loyal supporters, marginalise critics, or influence organisational decisions for personal or political gain. These practices may create a culture of impunity within the organisation, where unethical behaviour becomes normalised.

Within SAPS, concerns about corruption and political interference have been highlighted in several studies examining governance challenges within the police service (Masuku, 2018; Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013). Practical examples may include instances where senior officers influence recruitment processes to favour certain candidates or where members who expose corruption face victimisation or punitive transfers. Institutional Corruption Theory helps explain how such practices can persist over time if internal accountability mechanisms fail to address systemic governance weaknesses.

Integration of the Theoretical Perspectives

The integration of Organisational Justice Theory, Police Culture Theory, and Institutional Corruption Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the complex dynamics of organisational politics within policing institutions. Organisational Justice Theory explains how perceptions of fairness influence employee morale and organisational commitment. Police Culture Theory highlights the role of informal norms and group dynamics in shaping officer behaviour. Institutional Corruption Theory examines how systemic governance weaknesses may enable unethical practices to persist within organisational structures.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional approach for examining how nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and political interference affect leadership credibility, organisational culture, and police morale within SAPS. By applying these theories to the provincial policing context of the Northern Cape, the study seeks to generate deeper insights into the institutional factors that shape governance, accountability, and professionalism within the police service.

Themes of the Study

The literature on policing governance, organisational politics, and internal management dynamics highlights the complex relationship between leadership practices, organisational culture, and operational effectiveness. This review synthesises both South African and international research on political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices within police institutions, with a focus on their implications for police morale, professional conduct, and public trust. Practical examples are integrated to illustrate how these phenomena manifest in policing contexts.

Political Interference in Policing

Political interference in police institutions has been widely identified as a threat to organisational integrity, professional independence, and public trust. In South Africa, SAPS has historically experienced challenges related to politicisation, particularly in leadership appointments and promotion decisions (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011). Instances such as the conviction of former national commissioner Jackie Selebi and the suspension of Bheki Cele illustrate how political patronage networks can compromise accountability and decision-making processes (Faull, 2017; Masuku, 2018).

International research echoes these concerns, showing that when policing institutions are subject to political influence, operational effectiveness is often undermined (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005). For example, in countries with weak institutional safeguards, police leaders may prioritise political loyalty over competence, resulting in poor organisational performance and reduced public confidence (Punch, 2009).

Nepotism and Favouritism

Nepotism and favouritism involve the preferential treatment of individuals based on personal, familial, or political connections rather than merit. In SAPS, research indicates that acting positions, special unit assignments, and access to leadership development programs are sometimes allocated based on informal networks (Newham, 2014; Faull, 2017). Police unions have documented complaints of officers being overlooked for promotions despite years of experience, while others with political ties advance rapidly, leading to perceptions of organisational injustice.

Internationally, nepotism and favouritism have been linked to low organisational morale and decreased commitment (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Walker, 2005). Studies from the United Kingdom and the United States suggest that when organisational rewards are perceived as unfair, employees disengage from professional responsibilities, resist leadership directives, and may even leave the institution (Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Prenzler, 2013).

Corruption and Unethical Practices

Corruption within policing institutions undermines legitimacy, impedes service delivery, and erodes public trust. South African studies have highlighted cases where police officers engage in bribery, misuse authority, or protect politically connected individuals, often with minimal consequences due to weak oversight mechanisms (Masuku, 2018; Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013). A practical example includes police officers involved in irregular tender processes for policing infrastructure who avoided accountability because of political alliances (Burger, 2011).

Internationally, institutional corruption is often associated with systemic weaknesses in leadership, oversight, and organisational culture (Prenzler, 2013; Punch, 2009). Research indicates that when unethical practices are tolerated at senior levels, they become normalized, creating a culture where corruption and misconduct are expected rather than exceptional (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Unfair Promotion Practices

Promotion systems are critical for maintaining organisational integrity and ensuring competent leadership. However, in SAPS, research shows that promotions are sometimes influenced by personal alliances or political affiliations, rather than experience or professional merit (Bruce, 2010; Faull, 2017). For instance, experienced detectives or senior officers may be bypassed for acting or permanent positions, while less experienced but politically connected officers are promoted, affecting unit performance and staff morale.

International studies confirm that unfair promotion practices reduce internal legitimacy, lower morale, and encourage disengagement among staff (Walker, 2005; Maguire & Uchida, 2000). Transparent promotion policies are therefore crucial for ensuring organisational justice and maintaining professional standards within police institutions (Prenzler, 2013).

Impact on Morale and Organisational Culture

Morale and organisational culture are significantly shaped by perceptions of fairness, leadership integrity, and internal politics. In South Africa, Faull (2017) and Newham (2014) note that officers subjected to political interference, nepotism, or victimisation often report dissatisfaction, reduced commitment, and strained professional relationships. In smaller provinces such as the Northern Cape, where professional networks are tightly interwoven, internal conflicts and factionalism can spread rapidly, affecting teamwork and operational efficiency.

International research supports this view. Police Culture Theory suggests that informal norms, group loyalty, and solidarity may reinforce resistance to leadership decisions perceived as unfair or politically motivated (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Punch, 2009). Low morale in turn can affect organisational performance, accountability, and community engagement (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms

Effective oversight mechanisms are essential to mitigate the negative effects of internal politics. In South Africa, the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and Civilian Secretariat for Police Service were established to enhance accountability and monitor misconduct (Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013). However, limitations in resources, authority, and enforcement capacity have sometimes hindered these institutions from addressing systemic problems of political interference and nepotism (Masuku, 2018; Bruce, 2010).

Internationally, effective policing oversight includes independent review bodies, transparent promotion processes, and whistle-blower protections (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013). Studies indicate that when oversight mechanisms are weak, organisational corruption, political interference, and nepotism are more likely to persist, further eroding public trust (Goldsmith, 2005; Walker, 2005).

Summary of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature underscores the interconnectedness of internal organisational politics, corruption, promotion practices, and police culture in shaping organisational effectiveness and morale. Both South African and international studies indicate that political interference, nepotism, and unethical practices not only reduce professional standards but also erode trust between police leadership and rank-and-file officers. In the provincial context of the Northern Cape, where professional networks are closely intertwined, these dynamics can have amplified effects on morale, organisational cohesion, and operational efficiency.

This literature review establishes a foundation for the current study to empirically investigate how internal organisational politics manifest within SAPS in the Northern Cape and to develop policy recommendations to strengthen transparency, accountability, and merit-based leadership.

Themes of the Study

The themes of this study emerge from the central focus on internal organisational politics within the South African Police Service (SAPS), particularly in the Northern Cape. Drawing from both South African and international literature, six primary themes have been identified: political interference, nepotism and favouritism, corruption, unfair promotion practices, morale and organisational culture, and oversight and accountability. These themes provide a framework for structuring data collection, analysis, and discussion.

Political Interference

Political interference refers to the influence of external political actors on police operations, appointments, and promotions, often undermining organisational autonomy and professional standards. In South Africa, studies have documented instances where appointments to senior positions in SAPS were influenced by political considerations rather than merit (Bruce, 2010; Burger, 2011; Faull, 2017).

For example, the appointment of some provincial commissioners has occasionally been criticised for favouring politically aligned candidates, which can compromise operational independence and create resentment among other officers (Newham, 2014). International research similarly shows that political interference in policing often results in compromised law enforcement effectiveness, reduced public trust, and organisational dysfunction (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Punch, 2009).

Nepotism and Favouritism

Nepotism and favouritism involve preferential treatment of individuals based on personal relationships, family ties, or political

loyalty. In SAPS, officers have reported instances where promotions, acting appointments, and access to specialised units were influenced by informal networks rather than professional competence (Masuku, 2018; Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013).

International studies suggest that nepotism reduces organisational justice, discourages meritocracy, and fosters division within police organisations (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Walker, 2005). These practices often demoralise competent officers who perceive that effort and performance are undervalued, thereby impacting organisational performance (Maguire & Uchida, 2000).

Corruption

Corruption is a pervasive theme that involves the misuse of authority for personal or political gain. In the South African context, research has highlighted cases where officers engaged in bribery, irregular procurement, or protection of politically connected individuals (Bruce, 2010; Masuku, 2018).

For instance, irregular allocation of policing contracts and the protection of known offenders by politically connected officers illustrate how corruption can be institutionalised within SAPS structures. International literature indicates that police corruption weakens internal accountability, reduces legitimacy, and impedes effective law enforcement (Prenzler, 2013; Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Unfair Promotion Practices

Unfair promotion practices are closely linked to political interference and nepotism. Officers in SAPS have raised concerns about merit being overlooked in favour of personal or political alliances (Faull, 2017; Newham, 2014). These practices often manifest through acting appointments that later become permanent, bypassing more qualified or experienced personnel.

International research emphasises that transparent promotion systems are crucial for sustaining morale, organisational trust, and professional standards (Walker, 2005; Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Punch, 2009). Unfair promotions can create factionalism, reduce productivity, and increase turnover in policing institutions.

Morale and Organisational Culture

Morale and organisational culture are affected by perceptions of fairness, leadership integrity, and internal politics. Low morale results from experiences of nepotism, political interference, or perceived corruption, and can lead to disengagement and decreased organisational commitment (Faull, 2017; Newham, 2014).

Practical examples in the Northern Cape include officers feeling demotivated after being overlooked for leadership roles, which fosters resistance to management directives and weakens teamwork. Internationally, Police Culture Theory highlights those informal norms, solidarity among officers, and shared perceptions of organisational injustice influence behaviour, compliance, and ethical conduct (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Punch, 2009; Prenzler, 2013).

Oversight and Accountability

Oversight and accountability mechanisms are essential for mitigating the effects of internal politics and corruption. In South Africa, the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service are responsible for monitoring misconduct and ensuring compliance with ethical standards (Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013).

However, studies indicate that limited resources, insufficient authority, and political pressure sometimes hinder the effectiveness of these oversight bodies (Bruce, 2010; Masuku, 2018). Internationally, research shows that strong oversight, whistle-blower protections, and transparent review processes are critical for sustaining integrity and public trust within policing institutions (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Walker, 2005).

The six themes—political interference, nepotism and favouritism, corruption, unfair promotion practices, morale and organisational culture, and oversight and accountability—provide a coherent framework for analysing the internal politics of SAPS. These themes are interlinked: political interference often facilitates nepotism and unfair promotions, which in turn can lower morale and weaken organisational culture, while inadequate oversight allows these practices to persist. Exploring these themes in the Northern Cape Province provides empirical insight into the systemic challenges facing provincial policing structures and informs strategies for reform.

Discussions and Key Findings

This section presents a synthesis of the study's key findings, linking them to the identified themes, theoretical framework, and relevant literature. The discussion highlights how internal organisational politics—such as political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices—affect police professionalism, morale, organisational culture, and operational effectiveness within the Northern Cape.

Political Interference

Key Findings:

The study found that political interference significantly influences recruitment, promotions, and leadership appointments within SAPS in the Northern Cape. Many participants reported that leadership positions were sometimes filled based on political alignment rather than merit. Officers indicated that political loyalty often outweighed experience or competence in decision-making.

Discussion:

These findings align with the Organisational Justice Theory, which suggests that perceptions of unfairness in decision-making erode morale and organisational commitment (Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Walker, 2005). The experiences of officers in the Northern Cape reflect similar patterns observed nationally in South Africa, where political considerations have historically affected senior appointments in SAPS (Bruce, 2010; Faull, 2017). Internationally, research shows that political interference reduces operational efficiency, undermines the legitimacy of policing institutions, and compromises public trust (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Punch, 2009).

Practical Example:

One participant highlighted a case where an acting provincial commander, despite limited experience, was permanently appointed due to political backing, bypassing other qualified officers. This created resentment and tension among rank-and-file members.

Nepotism and Favouritism

Key Findings:

Nepotism and favouritism were reported as common practices in promotions, acting appointments, and access to specialised units. Participants observed that family ties, personal friendships, and informal networks often dictated opportunities rather than professional performance.

Discussion:

This finding reinforces Police Culture Theory, which argues that informal networks and loyalty groups influence behaviour within police organisations (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Punch, 2009). Nepotism undermines organisational justice, creating divisions among staff and reducing trust in leadership (Faull, 2017; Newham, 2014). International studies similarly report that favouritism in police institutions leads to disengagement, low morale, and organisational inefficiencies (Walker, 2005; Maguire & Uchida, 2000).

Practical Example:

A participant noted that officers who were not part of influential "cliques" were often excluded from leadership development programs, affecting their career progression and operational assignments.

Corruption

Key Findings:

Corruption emerged as a critical issue influencing operational effectiveness and institutional credibility. Officers reported instances of bribery, irregular tender allocation, and the protection of politically connected individuals. Participants indicated that weak oversight mechanisms allowed these practices to persist.

Discussion:

Institutional Corruption Theory explains that corruption becomes embedded within organisational systems when oversight is weak and informal networks dominate decision-making (Prenzler, 2013; Punch, 2009). These findings confirm previous research showing that corruption reduces legitimacy, weakens accountability, and fosters a culture of impunity in policing institutions (Masuku, 2018; Bruce, 2010). International studies similarly highlight the link between systemic corruption and reduced police effectiveness (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005).

Practical Example:

The irregular awarding of vehicle maintenance contracts within certain policing units demonstrated how political connections can override merit-based procedures, leading to mismanagement and resource wastage.

Unfair Promotion Practices

Key Findings:

The study found that unfair promotion practices negatively affect professional motivation and organisational commitment. Officers frequently reported being overlooked for promotions despite years of experience, while politically connected individuals advanced rapidly.

Discussion:

Organisational Justice Theory suggests that perceived unfairness in promotion and career advancement can result in frustration, disengagement, and resistance to organisational directives (Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Walker, 2005). These practices contribute to factionalism and weaken operational cohesion. Similar patterns have been observed in international policing contexts, where opaque promotion processes reduce morale and organisational effectiveness (Prenzler, 2013; Punch, 2009).

Practical Example:

An officer mentioned being bypassed for an acting detective position multiple times, despite consistently exceeding performance targets, while colleagues with political connections received appointments.

Morale and Organisational Culture

Key Findings:

Low morale and deteriorating organisational culture were identified as consequences of political interference, nepotism, and unfair promotions. Officers reported feelings of frustration, disengagement, and alienation from leadership structures.

Discussion:

Police Culture Theory posits that morale and culture are shaped by shared perceptions of fairness and leadership integrity (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Punch, 2009). When organisational justice is undermined, internal cohesion weakens, and operational performance is compromised (Faull, 2017; Newham, 2014). These findings are consistent with international evidence showing that internal legitimacy is critical for effective policing, ethical conduct, and organisational resilience (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith, 2005; Walker, 2005).

Practical Example:

In some Northern Cape stations, officers expressed reluctance to report misconduct by colleagues for fear of reprisal or political backlash, demonstrating how low morale affects accountability and integrity.

Oversight and Accountability

Key Findings:

Oversight mechanisms, including the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, were found to be essential but limited in addressing internal organisational politics. Officers reported that political pressure and resource constraints hinder effective accountability.

Discussion:

Effective oversight is critical for addressing systemic challenges, reducing corruption, and promoting merit-based management (Newham, Faull & Burton, 2013; Bruce, 2010). International research similarly highlights that robust accountability frameworks, whistle-blower protections, and independent monitoring are necessary to mitigate internal politics and organisational misconduct (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013).

Practical Example:

Participants noted delays in investigations into misconduct due to insufficient staff or political interference, allowing unethical practices to persist.

Key Findings Summary

➢ Political interference compromises recruitment, promotion, and leadership decisions, undermining organisational effectiveness.

➢ Nepotism and favouritism perpetuate inequities in career progression and operational opportunities.

➢ Corruption is systemic, often enabled by weak oversight and political networks.

➢ Unfair promotion practices reduce morale, create factionalism, and weaken operational cohesion.

➢ Low morale and organisational culture deterioration result from perceived injustice, factionalism, and unethical leadership practices.

➢ Oversight mechanisms, while critical, are often insufficient to address systemic internal politics effectively.

These findings confirm the relevance of the theoretical framework: Organisational Justice Theory, Police Culture Theory, and Institutional Corruption Theory collectively explain how internal politics affect morale, culture, and operational effectiveness.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings and key themes of the study, the following practical recommendations are proposed to address internal organisational politics, corruption, nepotism, and low morale in the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Northern Cape Province. These recommendations involve multiple stakeholders, including the police, government departments, political parties, community structures, religious organizations, and oversight bodies, to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach.

South African Police Service (SAPS)

Recommendations:

➢ Implement Transparent Promotion Systems: SAPS should standardise promotion and appointment procedures, ensuring decisions are merit-based and documented. Independent panels can verify selections to prevent nepotism and political interference.

➢ Internal Ethics Training: Introduce regular workshops on ethics, organisational justice, and professional conduct to reinforce integrity at all levels.

➢ Whistle-Blower Protection: Strengthen internal channels for reporting misconduct and ensure protection from retaliation.

➢ Performance Management: Adopt a performance appraisal system that objectively assesses officers' achievements, contributions, and professional competencies.

Rationale: Transparency and ethical reinforcement will reduce perceptions of unfairness, improve morale, and enhance organisational legitimacy (Faull, 2017; Prenzler, 2013).

Department of Police and Safety

Recommendations:

➢ Oversight Enhancement: Strengthen the capacity of oversight bodies like the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) to investigate misconduct efficiently and independently.

➢ Policy Development: Formulate policies that explicitly prohibit political interference in recruitment, promotions, and operational decisions.

➢ Accountability Mechanisms: Introduce clear consequences for senior officers who engage in nepotism, favouritism, or abuse of power.

Rationale: Strong oversight ensures accountability and limits opportunities for political or personal influence in SAPS (Bruce, 2010; Bayley, 2006).

Political Parties and Political Leadership

Recommendations:

➢ Non-Interference Commitment: All political parties should formally commit to non-interference in policing operations and leadership appointments.

➢ Independent Recruitment Panels: Advocate for the establishment of neutral, politically independent recruitment and promotion committees.

➢ Awareness Campaigns: Educate party members on the negative effects of politicising police institutions on public safety and governance.

Rationale: Political neutrality in policing is critical to ensure public trust, operational effectiveness, and professional integrity (Goldsmith, 2005; Punch, 2009).

Community Policing Forums (CPFs) and Community Leaders

Recommendations:

➢ Regular Engagement: CPFs should meet regularly with SAPS leadership to monitor service delivery, report misconduct, and provide feedback from community members.

➢ Early Warning Systems: Develop mechanisms to identify and report cases of nepotism, corruption, or unfair treatment of officers within local policing units.

➢ Training and Capacity Building: Equip community leaders with skills in conflict resolution, ethics, and governance to participate meaningfully in oversight.

Rationale: Active community participation strengthens internal legitimacy of SAPS and provides a grassroots check on unethical behaviour (Newham, 2014; Bayley, 2006).

Religious Institutions and Church Fraternities

Recommendations:

➢ Moral Guidance and Ethics Education: Engage churches to promote ethical behaviour, integrity, and public service values among community members and police officers.

➤ Conflict Mediation: Leverage church leaders as neutral mediators in disputes arising from political interference or factionalism within SAPS or communities.

Rationale: Religious and moral institutions can influence social norms and reinforce ethical conduct, especially in tight-knit communities (Rauch, 2005).

Educational and Civil Society Institutions

Recommendations:

➤ Research and Monitoring: Universities and research institutes should conduct ongoing studies on police ethics, governance, and morale to provide evidence-based recommendations.

➤ Capacity Building: Conduct workshops for police officers and community leaders on governance, organisational justice, and ethical leadership.

➤ Public Awareness Campaigns: Civil society organisations can run campaigns highlighting the importance of impartial policing and reporting misconduct.

Rationale: Knowledge generation and public awareness help reduce tolerance for unethical practices and promote accountability (Masuku, 2018; Walker, 2005).

Media and Public Accountability

Recommendations:

➤ Investigative Journalism: Encourage investigative reporting on cases of political interference, nepotism, or corruption within SAPS to ensure transparency.

➤ Public Forums: Use media platforms to educate citizens on their rights and the importance of police accountability.

Rationale: A vigilant media acts as a watchdog, reinforcing transparency and deterring malpractice (Goldsmith, 2005).

Integrated Multi-Stakeholder Approach

Recommendation: Establish a Northern Cape Policing Integrity Forum consisting of SAPS representatives, provincial government officials, political party delegates, community leaders, CPFs, religious leaders, civil society, and academic institutions. The forum should:

➤ Monitor fairness in promotions and appointments.

➤ Investigate complaints of political interference or nepotism.

➤ Develop joint strategies for morale improvement and ethical leadership.

➤ Track progress on accountability measures and report publicly.

Rationale: Multi-stakeholder engagement ensures that solutions are inclusive, practical, and supported by both institutional and community actors, reducing the risk of unilateral decisions that perpetuate internal politics (Bruce, 2010; Bayley, 2006).

Addressing political interference, corruption, and nepotism in SAPS requires coordinated action across multiple sectors. Recommendations emphasize:

➤ Merit-based systems in recruitment and promotion.

➤ Strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms.

➤ Active community involvement through CPFs and leaders.

➤ Ethical guidance from religious and civil society institutions.

➤ Political neutrality in policing decisions.

➤ Public engagement via media and awareness campaigns.

Collectively, these measures aim to enhance organisational integrity, improve police morale, and strengthen public trust, ensuring that SAPS operates effectively and professionally in the Northern Cape Province.

Overall Takeaway from the Study:

Internal politics in SAPS, particularly in smaller provinces like the Northern Cape, weaken organisational effectiveness, morale, and public trust. Addressing these challenges requires transparent promotion systems, strengthened oversight, ethical leadership, community engagement, and political neutrality, supported by a multi-stakeholder approach. The study on political interference and internal organisational politics within the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Northern Cape reveals critical insights with implications for policing, governance, and community safety. The following are the key takeaways:

Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights into internal organisational politics within the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Northern Cape, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualise the findings:

Geographical Scope

The study focused solely on SAPS structures within the Northern Cape Province. While this allows for a detailed provincial analysis, the findings may not fully generalise to other provinces in South Africa, where policing structures, political dynamics, and community contexts differ.

Implication: Broader national studies are needed to assess whether similar patterns of political interference, nepotism, and corruption exist elsewhere.

Sample Size and Participant Bias

The study relied on qualitative interviews with a select group of police officers and key stakeholders. Participants may have underreported or overstated certain incidents due to fear of reprisal, political sensitivity, or personal biases.

Implication: Findings should be interpreted with caution, and quantitative surveys could complement qualitative insights in future research.

Access to Confidential Information

Certain sensitive documents and internal records related to promotions, disciplinary actions, and political influence were not fully accessible due to confidentiality restrictions. This limited the

ability to triangulate all reported cases of nepotism, favouritism, or political interference.

Implication: Future studies could explore partnerships with oversight bodies like the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) to gain deeper access to official records.

Temporal Limitations

The study captures perceptions and incidents at a specific point in time. Internal politics and organisational dynamics are fluid, and trends may shift depending on changes in leadership, political climate, or policing reforms.

Implication: Longitudinal research is recommended to examine how internal politics and morale evolve over time.

Focus on Police Perspective

While the study included perspectives from community policing forums and some community leaders, the primary focus was on SAPS members. Limited representation from other stakeholders, such as political parties, civil society organisations, and media, may have restricted the diversity of insights.

Implication: Broader stakeholder engagement in future studies could provide a more holistic understanding of the effects of political interference and organisational politics.

Generalisation of Practical Examples

Practical examples provided in the study are context-specific and may not reflect all SAPS units or officers in the Northern Cape. Variations in station management, leadership styles, and local political networks could produce different experiences.

Implication: Case studies in other regions could help validate whether these challenges are systemic or context specific.

Despite these limitations, the study provides critical insights into the impact of political interference, nepotism, and corruption on SAPS organisational culture, morale, and operational effectiveness. The findings are useful for informing policy, reform strategies, and multi-stakeholder interventions to improve police professionalism and accountability in South Africa.

Political Interference Undermines Professionalism

Political influence in appointments, promotions, and operational decisions compromises meritocracy and reduces the effectiveness of policing. Officers who perceive leadership as politically aligned often feel alienated, which weakens internal cohesion and accountability.

Implication: Ensuring political neutrality in police appointments and promotions is essential to maintain public trust and operational effectiveness.

Nepotism and Favouritism Are Persistent Challenges

Nepotism and favouritism negatively affect career progression, leading to resentment among officers and fostering factionalism within the service. Informal networks often determine access to leadership positions and specialised assignments, undermining organisational justice.

Implication: Merit-based promotion systems and transparent selection processes are critical to uphold fairness and morale.

Corruption Is Systemic and Eroding Institutional Integrity

Corruption, including bribery, abuse of authority, and protection of politically connected individuals, persists due to weak oversight and limited enforcement. These practices reduce operational efficiency and compromise the legitimacy of SAPS in the eyes of the public.

Implication: Strengthening oversight bodies, accountability measures, and whistle-blower protections is crucial to prevent corruption.

Unfair Promotion Practices Lower Morale and Productivity

Promotion systems influenced by political connections rather than performance demotivate competent officers and create divisions. Low morale affects teamwork, operational cohesion, and service delivery.

Implication: Transparent promotion and appraisal systems are vital for sustaining morale, professional standards, and organisational commitment.

Organisational Culture and Morale Are Highly Sensitive

Internal politics, factionalism, and perceptions of injustice directly impact organisational culture. Officers' reluctance to report misconduct and their disengagement from duties indicate a culture weakened by fear and mistrust.

Implication: Ethical leadership, morale-building programs, and organisational justice initiatives are necessary to strengthen a professional police culture.

Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms Need Strengthening

While institutions such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) exist, political pressure, limited resources, and procedural delays hinder their effectiveness. Without robust oversight, unethical practices persist unchallenged.

Implication: Independent, well-resourced, and empowered oversight bodies are necessary to uphold integrity and accountability within SAPS.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Is Essential

Addressing internal politics requires coordinated engagement from SAPS, government departments, political parties, community policing forums, civil society, religious institutions, media, and academic bodies. Inclusive structures like a provincial Policing Integrity Forum can help monitor and implement reforms.

Implication: Sustainable reform is only possible when both institutional actors and the community collaborate to promote transparency, fairness, and accountability.

Lessons for Policy and Governance

The study underscores that internal organisational politics not only affect police personnel but also have broader implications for governance, public trust, and community safety. Transparent, accountable, and merit-based systems are essential to restore confidence in policing institutions.

Co-impact Of Internal Politics In Saps

The co-impact of internal organisational politics comprising political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices creates a cumulative effect on various aspects of the South African Police Service

(SAPS) in the Northern Cape. This section analyses how these factors interact, reinforcing each other and producing compounded consequences for police effectiveness, morale, organisational culture, and community trust.

Interaction Between Political Interference and Nepotism

Observation:

Political interference often facilitates nepotism and favouritism. When political actors influence leadership appointments, those with personal or political connections are more likely to benefit from promotions, acting positions, or special assignments.

Co-Impact:

- Merit-based officers are overlooked, creating resentment and factionalism.

- Units led by politically appointed officers may experience reduced operational cohesion and efficiency.

- Organizational justice is undermined, resulting in low morale among competent officers (Bruce, 2010; Faull, 2017).

Practical Example:

An acting provincial commander, appointed due to political alignment, prioritised officers loyal to them, sidelining others and creating divisions in operational units.

Link Between Nepotism, Corruption, and Unfair Promotions

Observation:

Nepotism and favouritism can perpetuate corruption and unfair promotion practices. Officers with personal or political connections may bypass formal procedures, exploit resources, or shield unethical colleagues.

Co-Impact:

- Corruption becomes normalized within units, with unethical behaviour going unchecked.

- Unfair promotion practices demotivate staff and increase turnover.

- Operational effectiveness declines due to leadership inefficiency (Masuku, 2018; Newham, 2014).

Practical Example:

Officers connected to influential networks received promotions and access to lucrative contracts, while qualified officers were denied career advancement, reinforcing a culture of impunity.

Effect on Morale and Organisational Culture

Observation:

Political interference, nepotism, corruption, and unfair promotions collectively erode morale and weaken organisational culture. Officers perceive leadership as biased and unjust, resulting in disengagement, resistance to directives, and reduced accountability.

Co-Impact:

Summary of Co-Impact

- Reduced cooperation among officers within units.
- Decreased adherence to professional standards and ethical codes.
- Increased reluctance to report misconduct due to fear of reprisal (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993; Faull, 2017).

Practical Example:

In some Northern Cape stations, low-ranking officers avoided reporting misconduct by senior officers because they feared politically backed retaliation, perpetuating unethical practices.

Impact on Public Trust and Community Relations

Observation:

Internal politics in SAPS have a ripple effect on community perceptions of policing. When the public perceives police, operations as influenced by political loyalty or nepotism, trust and cooperation decline.

Co-Impact:

- Reduced community participation in crime prevention initiatives.

- Hesitancy to report crimes due to fear of bias or corruption.

- Lower effectiveness of community policing forums and partnerships (Newham, 2014; Bayley, 2006).

Practical Example:

Community members in smaller towns reported reluctance to engage with police due to perceived partiality in law enforcement decisions favouring politically connected individuals.

Multi-Stakeholder Implications

Observation:

The co-impact of internal politics is not confined to SAPS alone— it affects political parties, local governance, and community institutions. Political interference undermines accountability across the broader system, while nepotism and corruption compromise collaborative initiatives with civil society and community policing forums.

Co-Impact:

- Collaboration between police and other institutions (churches, NGOs, CPFs) is weakened.

- Policy reforms and governance interventions face resistance when political and personal interests dominate.

- Community development and safety initiatives are hindered, affecting socio-economic growth (Bruce, 2010; Goldsmith, 2005).

Practical Example:

Attempts by CPFs and local NGOs to implement community safety programs were stalled due to reluctance from politically connected police leadership to cooperate fully, affecting crime prevention efforts.

The co-impact demonstrates that internal organisational politics are interlinked and mutually reinforcing:

Internal Politics Factor	Reinforcing Factor	Co-Impact
Political interference	Nepotism/favouritism	Unfair appointments, factionalism, reduced meritocracy
Nepotism/favouritism	Corruption	Resource mismanagement, normalized unethical behaviour
Corruption	Unfair promotions	Low morale, disengagement, operational inefficiency
All factors combined	Organisational culture	Weak cohesion, low accountability, diminished public trust

Overall Insight:

Addressing one factor in isolation is insufficient. Reform efforts must be holistic, targeting political neutrality, merit-based systems, ethical leadership, oversight mechanisms, and community engagement simultaneously.

Methodological Approach: Systematic Approach

To comprehensively investigate the impact of internal organisational politics within SAPS in the Northern Cape, a systematic methodological approach was adopted. This approach ensures rigor, reliability, and validity in capturing the dynamics of political interference, nepotism, corruption, and its effects on organisational culture and morale.

Research Design

Qualitative Case Study Design

- ➢ A qualitative case study approach was employed to allow an in-depth understanding of internal organisational politics in a specific provincial context.

- ➢ The case study design is appropriate for exploring complex phenomena such as factionalism, political interference, and corruption, which are often influenced by contextual and relational factors (Yin, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

- ➢ Focused on the Northern Cape SAPS structures, providing insights into provincial-specific challenges and dynamics.

Population and Sampling

Population:

- ➢ SAPS officers (junior, mid-level, and senior), community policing forum (CPF) members, local community leaders, civil society representatives, and relevant provincial government officials.

Sampling Strategy:

- ➢ Purposive Sampling: Selected participants who have direct experience or knowledge of internal organisational politics, promotions, corruption, and morale issues within SAPS.

- ➢ Sample Size: Approximately 30–40 participants, ensuring representation across different ranks, units, and stakeholder groups.

- ➢ This sampling method prioritises information richness over statistical generalizability (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews:

    - ➢ Conducted with SAPS officers, CPFs, and community leaders.

    - ➢ Questions focused on experiences of political interference, nepotism, corruption, morale, and operational challenges.

    - ➢ Allowed for probing, clarification, and collection of narratives reflecting practical incidents and examples.

1. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):

    - ➢ Conducted with CPFs and community stakeholders to explore shared perceptions and community impact of SAPS internal politics.

Secondary Data:

- ➢ Review of official SAPS reports, oversight reports from IPID, disciplinary records, and government policy documents.

- ➢ Analysis of relevant literature on internal politics, organisational justice, and police governance.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis:

- ➢ Data were systematically coded and analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach:

    - ➢ Familiarisation with data

    - ➢ Generating initial codes

    - ➢ Searching for themes

    - ➢ Reviewing themes

➢ Defining and naming themes

➢ Producing the report

➢ Themes were aligned with the study framework: political interference, nepotism/favouritism, corruption, unfair promotion practices, morale, organisational culture, and oversight/accountability.

Triangulation:

➢ Data from interviews, FGDs, and secondary sources were triangulated to enhance reliability and validity.

➢ Practical examples and incidents reported by participants were cross-checked with oversight reports where possible.

Ethical Considerations

➢ Informed Consent: All participants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntarily consented to participate.

➢ Confidentiality: Participants' identities were anonymised to protect them from reprisal.

➢ Researcher Neutrality: Efforts were made to reduce bias and ensure objective reporting of sensitive information.

➢ Approval: Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board.

Limitations of the Methodological Approach

➢ Reliance on qualitative data limits generalisability but provides depth and context-specific insights.

➢ Some participants may have been hesitant to discuss politically sensitive issues fully.

➢ Access to confidential internal SAPS documents was restricted, limiting full verification of reported incidents.

Systematic Approach Summary

➢ The study employed a systematic, step-by-step methodology to ensure credibility, transparency, and reliability:

➢ Defining research scope and objectives focused on Northern Cape SAPS and internal politics.

➢ Selecting participants purposively for rich, relevant insights.

➢ Collecting data via interviews, FGDs, and secondary sources.

➢ Thematic analysis and triangulation to identify key themes and corroborate findings.

➢ Adhering to ethical protocols to protect participants and ensure data integrity.

Overall Insight:

This methodological approach allows a comprehensive understanding of how internal politics affects police operations, morale, and organisational culture, while providing practical evidence for policy and reform interventions.

This study has examined the pervasive influence of internal organisational politics including political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices within the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Northern Cape. The findings reveal that these interrelated factors collectively undermine professionalism, morale, operational effectiveness, and public trust, creating a cycle of organisational dysfunction that is both systemic and context specific.

Key Insights

➢ Political Interference and Nepotism: Political alignment often dictates promotions and appointments, sidelining competent officers and fostering factionalism. This undermines meritocracy and weakens institutional integrity.

➢ Corruption and Unfair Promotions: Corruption, facilitated by nepotism and political influence, reduces organisational accountability and perpetuates a culture of impunity. Unfair promotions demoralise staff and erode commitment to ethical practices.

➢ Low Morale and Organisational Culture: The compounded effect of internal politics manifests in low morale, disengagement, and weakened organisational culture, reducing both operational effectiveness and adherence to professional standards.

➢ Community Trust: Internal politics have ripple effects on public perception, diminishing confidence in policing institutions, reducing cooperation with community policing initiatives, and impacting overall safety and governance.

➢ Oversight Limitations: While oversight mechanisms such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) exist, political pressures, resource constraints, and procedural delays hinder their effectiveness, allowing unethical practices to persist.

Practical Implications

The study highlights the urgent need for a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach to address internal politics in SAPS:

➢ Merit-based promotion and transparent appointment systems to reduce nepotism and political interference.

➢ Strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms to monitor and address corruption and misconduct.

➢ Ethical leadership and morale-building initiatives to restore organisational cohesion and professional culture.

➢ Community engagement through CPFs, civil society, religious institutions, and media to ensure transparency, accountability, and trust.

➢ Political neutrality commitment from all political parties to protect SAPS from partisan influence.

Broader Significance

Addressing internal organisational politics in SAPS is not only a matter of institutional reform but also a critical governance and societal concern. The co-impact of political interference, nepotism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices compromises the ability of SAPS to maintain law and order, undermines public trust, and limits community participation in crime prevention initiatives. Reform efforts must therefore be comprehensive,

inclusive, and context-sensitive, engaging police leadership, government departments, political parties, civil society, and communities to create sustainable change.

The Northern Cape Province exemplifies how internal organisational politics can weaken institutional integrity, reduce morale, and erode public trust, illustrating a broader challenge facing SAPS nationally. The study underscores that transparent governance, ethical leadership, political neutrality, and community engagement are essential to restore professionalism and public confidence. Only through coordinated and sustained interventions can SAPS achieve operational effectiveness, ethical integrity, and legitimacy in the eyes of both its members and the communities it serves.

Overall Impact of the Article for SAPS and Future Corrections

This study provides critical insights into the systemic challenges posed by internal organisational politics within SAPS, particularly in the Northern Cape Province. Its findings are valuable for police leadership, policymakers, oversight bodies, community stakeholders, and academic researchers, offering both diagnostic and prescriptive value for reform and operational improvement.

Strengthening Institutional Integrity

Impact:

The article highlights how political interference, nepotism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices erode meritocracy and professional standards within SAPS. By systematically documenting these challenges, the study provides evidence for the need to reinforce transparency, ethical leadership, and merit-based systems.

Future Corrections:

➢ Develop and strictly implement transparent promotion and recruitment policies.

➢ Establish independent appointment panels free from political influence.

➢ Introduce regular ethics and professional conduct training for all ranks.

Improving Operational Effectiveness

Impact: The co-impact analysis demonstrates that internal politics directly affects morale, organisational culture, and teamwork, which in turn reduces operational efficiency. Understanding these dynamics equips SAPS to address internal dysfunctions that compromise policing outcomes.

Future Corrections:

➢ Strengthen internal performance appraisal systems that focus on measurable outcomes.

➢ Implement rotational leadership to prevent entrenched political networks from dominating units.

➢ Encourage feedback loops from officers on operational challenges and ethical concerns.

Enhancing Oversight and Accountability

Impact: The study emphasizes gaps in oversight mechanisms, showing that bodies such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and internal audit functions require more

authority, resources, and independence to curb political and corrupt practices.

Future Corrections:

➢ Increase funding, staffing, and independence for oversight bodies.

➢ Implement timely disciplinary actions for misconduct.

➢ Encourage whistle-blower reporting systems that guarantee protection from retaliation.

Restoring Public Trust and Community Relations

Impact:

By linking internal organisational politics to community perceptions, the article shows that ethically compromised policing undermines public trust, affecting cooperation with crime prevention initiatives and community safety programs.

Future Corrections:

➢ Strengthen community policing forums (CPFs) to serve as active monitors of SAPS integrity.

➢ Engage civil society, churches, and local leaders to promote ethical policing and collaborative safety initiatives.

➢ Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate communities about merit-based policing reforms.

Policy and Governance Implications

Impact:

The study provides policymakers and SAPS leadership with evidence-based recommendations to reduce factionalism, corruption, and political interference. It highlights the need for coordinated multi-stakeholder interventions that address both internal culture and external governance pressures.

Future Corrections:

➢ Form a provincial Policing Integrity Forum involving SAPS, government, political parties, community leaders, and civil society to oversee ethical reforms.

➢ Incorporate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into SAPS reform programs to track progress on ethics, promotions, and operational integrity.

➢ Align reforms with national policing standards and international best practices to ensure sustainability.

Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

Impact:

➢ Provides an empirical case study of how political interference and internal organisational politics manifest in a South African provincial policing context.

➢ Demonstrates the co-impact of internal politics on morale, culture, and operational effectiveness, offering insights applicable to other provinces or similar institutions.

➢ Serves as a reference for future research, policy formulation, and organisational reform in policing.

Overall Insight:

The study underscores that addressing internal organisational politics is essential not only for operational efficiency but also for ethical governance and public trust. By implementing its recommendations, SAPS can move towards a professional, accountable, and community-focused policing service. These interventions will reduce internal conflict, strengthen oversight, enhance morale, and ultimately improve safety and security outcomes for the Northern Cape Province and beyond.

Conclusion

Internal organisational politics within the South African Police Service (SAPS) present a profound challenge to effective policing, particularly in the Northern Cape. This study demonstrates that political interference, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and unfair promotion practices do not operate in isolation; rather, they form an interconnected system that weakens organisational integrity, lowers morale among officers, and ultimately undermines the ability of the police to deliver professional and impartial services to the public.

The findings reveal that when merit-based systems are replaced by political loyalty and personal networks, the consequences extend far beyond internal administrative problems. They directly affect operational effectiveness, ethical conduct, teamwork, and public trust in law enforcement institutions. In provinces with smaller administrative structures such as the Northern Cape, these dynamics can be even more pronounced because social, political, and professional networks are closely intertwined. As a result, organisational politics can quickly translate into factionalism, diminished accountability, and reduced community confidence in policing.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and multi-level reform agenda. SAPS leadership must prioritise transparent promotion systems, ethical leadership, and accountability mechanisms that restore confidence among officers. Government departments and oversight bodies must strengthen monitoring frameworks to ensure that misconduct and political interference are effectively addressed. At the same time, political parties, civil society organisations, community policing forums, religious institutions, and community leaders must actively support the principle of politically neutral, professional policing.

Ultimately, the future credibility of SAPS depends on its ability to rebuild institutional integrity, fairness, and professionalism. By confronting internal organisational politics and implementing transparent governance systems, SAPS can strengthen morale within its ranks, enhance operational effectiveness, and restore the trust of the communities it serves. The Northern Cape, therefore, represents not only a site of challenge but also an opportunity—an opportunity to demonstrate that ethical leadership, accountability, and collaborative reform can transform policing into a service that truly protects and serves all citizens.

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