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The nexus between political influence, corruption, and governance failures within law enforcement and the criminal justice system is a classic example of the government not being strong but fat. Corruption is a key focus of how political power and vested interests manipulate law enforcement policies, criminalising specific activities while safeguarding influential minority groups. The analysis reveals the symptoms of undetected shady corrupt public officials and lobby groups in establishing police protection rackets, creating a cycle of corruption that benefits various stakeholders and sustains the status quo. Token interventions, such as occasional police raids or prosecutions, are shown to be superficial efforts aimed at placating public concerns without effectively addressing the entrenched corruption. The ever-mounting corruption cases and numbers detail how the criminal justice system's resources are hypnotised. This article further examines the role of oversight bodies like the Civilian Secretariat for Police and the Portfolio Committee on Police in curbing corruption within the South African Police Service (SAPS). However, it finds that political interference, exemplified by cases involving high-ranking officials, continues to impede monitoring efforts. This underscores the broader implications of corruption, including threats to national security, economic instability, and deepening social inequality. It concludes by advocating for enhanced oversight and comprehensive reform to rebuild trust in governance and uphold the rule of law.

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The Symptoms of Interference: Review of Political Influence in Policing

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ABSTRACT

The nexus between political influence, corruption, and governance failures within law enforcement and the criminal justice system is a classic example of the government not being strong but fat. Corruption is a key focus of how political power and vested interests manipulate law enforcement policies, criminalising specific activities while safeguarding influential minority groups. The analysis reveals the symptoms of undetected shady corrupt public officials and lobby groups in establishing police protection rackets, creating a cycle of corruption that benefits various stakeholders and sustains the status quo. Token interventions, such as occasional police raids or prosecutions, are shown to be superficial efforts aimed at placating public concerns without effectively addressing the entrenched corruption. The ever-mounting corruption cases and numbers detail how the criminal justice system's resources are hypnotised. This article further examines the role of oversight bodies like the Civilian Secretariat for Police and the Portfolio Committee on Police in curbing corruption within the South African Police Service (SAPS). However, it finds that political interference, exemplified by cases involving high-ranking officials, continues to impede monitoring efforts. This underscores the broader implications of corruption, including threats to national security, economic instability, and deepening social inequality. It concludes by advocating for enhanced oversight and comprehensive reform to rebuild trust in governance and uphold the rule of law.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern organisational landscape, deliberately placing individuals in decision-making roles intending to exploit shared visions or undermine others is not only ethically indefensible but profoundly damaging to institutional integrity (Pillay, 2004 & Sundström, 2015). Often masquerading as bold innovation or radical transformation, such interferences undermine the core principles of accountability, equity, and trust essential for sustainable success. These unethical practices are frequently executed covertly, shielded from scrutiny to avoid accountability and represent a pervasive yet often overlooked challenge across both corporate and public sectors. When leadership strategies prioritise manipulation over dynamic governance, they foster a culture of fear, resentment, and disillusionment, ultimately eroding morale and organisational cohesion. This underscores the urgent need for transparent and principled leadership that upholds ethical standards and centres on the dignity, rights, and well-being of all individuals in the workplace (Campos & Giovannoni, 2007). Leaders must cultivate environments of trust and inclusivity, where progress is measured not by coercion or exploitation but by all stakeholders' empowerment and shared success.

In the South African context, the political interference issue is not new. Political interference in policing institutions remains a global concern, with studies indicating a rising trend of police forces serving the interests of politicians and being loyal to elite powers (Burger, 2016; Kutnjak Ivković & Sauerman, 2013 &

Peters, 1991:96). Before the country transitioned to interim constituted democracy, the South African Police (SAP), established on 1 April 1913, primarily served the despotic apartheid regime (SAPS Annual Report, 2012/13:13). Its primary role was to uphold the illegitimate apartheid regime through the preservation of internal security, the maintenance of law and order and the investigation of offences (SAPS Annual Report, 2012/13:13). The SAP was used as a political tool to uphold an unjust oppressive system (SAPS Annual Report, 2012/13:13) and has a significant systemic effect. Despite the internal transformation efforts within the SAP in the early 1990s and its sharp change (rebranding) as the South African Police Service (SAPS) in 1995, political interference has persisted and transitioned into the democratic order. It is perceived that politicians influence recruitment, appointments, and procurement processes within the SAPS, often using the police force to further their interests and minimally eliminate political opposition (Steinberg, 2014 & Sundström, 2015). This interference extends across all levels of the SAPS hierarchy, fostering loyalty to corrupt political figures and undermining the integrity of the police force.

Although it is unrealistic to remove politics from policing, this article critically engages with reports that reveal increasing violations of legislation, policies, and National Instructions within the SAPS, often driven by political interference (Pillay, 2004). Key factors contributing to this problem include political influence, competing ideologies, the legacy of apartheid injustices, and the detrimental effects on governance, service delivery, and attempts to control crime. Theoretical frameworks such as 'Political Crimes,' 'Criminal Governance,' and 'State Crimes Against Democracy' will be explored to deepen the understanding of political interference in the police. The significance of this article lies in unmasking the complex and poorly understood effects of political interference on police activities in South Africa (Newham, 2002:6). Previous research has examined its negative impacts on governance, service delivery, and crime rates, this article considers the broader socio-economic

consequences emanating from the ever-changing society. By highlighting specific instances of political interference in the SAP, such as the notorious cases of the Port Elizabeth Black Civics Organisation (PEBCO) Three, the Cradock Four, and the Gugulethu Seven, this article aims to stoutly advocate preventive measures against such interference (Minyuku, 1998:12) that disintegrate police service. These were precedents of police hit squads or security police aimed to suppress the democratic ideals 'enjoyed' today. This article advocates that the SAPS employs individuals of integrity and reforms its recruitment, ethics training, and disciplinary systems as essential to curbing the influence of opportunistic political actors (Newham & Gomomo, 2003:5) who never exercises crime prevention tasks for political absurdities.

II. INTERFERENCE AND CORRUPTION PROBLEM STATEMENT

Police corruption, extortion, violence, and political manipulation across the African continent have been broadcast by media outlets, investigated by humanitarian organisations, scrutinised by international leaders, and increasingly studied by scholars' (Straus & Tripp, 2024). There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that the South African government is burdened by inefficiency, desire for power, mismanagement, disenchantment, and police corruption, which undermines its ability to foster safety and security through a strong policing system (Burger, 2016). The problem of police corruption, deeply intertwined with political influence and power dynamics is globally prevalent as illustrated through historical and contemporary genesis. Tunnell and Gaines (1992) theorise that 'the effects of politics on police personnel administration historically have been devastating'. Socio-political effects play a significant role in shaping the functioning of law enforcement, as corrupt politicians and public officials often attempt to delude the law through court cases to align their own moral and economic interests (Peters, 1991 & Prenzler, 2009:18). This manipulation is sustained by minority groups and lobbyists who manage to influence political

leaders, thereby criminalising activities involving sections of the majority population. As a result, the stability of such a system is only marginally disrupted by sensational occasional police interventions designed to maintain the status quo rather than enforce justice. These interventions, such as selective raids and prosecutions, illustrate how corruption has become customary within the law enforcement system, allowing it to persist with minimal efforts to curb its effects (Prenzler, 2009:21).

The South African Police Service has historically been influenced by political agendas, particularly during the apartheid era when it collaborated with the South African Defence Force (*SADF*) to uphold racially discriminatory policies (Brogden & Nijhar, 1998:89 & Steinberg, 2014). Such historical entanglements have long-term consequences, as they lay the foundation for the modern-day interference seen within the “adjusted police service” and other government programmes to serve modern society. The democratic changes hoped to produce rapid development and vanquish doubt and distrust produced disillusionment at the expense of political blindness. Contemporary governance issues, such as the interference from the Civilian Secretariat for Police, illustrate the ongoing struggle to maintain a balance between oversight and operational independence. The Secretariat's attempts to provide civilian oversight and policy guidance have at times, risked encroaching on SAPS operations, which may inadvertently accelerate corruption (Faull, 2011:7). This complex relationship between political bodies and the SAPS highlights the delicate nature of maintaining ethical policing without exacerbating corruption.

The problem of persistent corruption is further compounded by the SAPS's internal culture, specifically the “code of silence” among officers. This code serves as a protective mechanism that shields corrupt practices from scrutiny and accountability, perpetuating systemic issues within the police force (Newham & Faull, 2011:14). The challenges extend beyond internal police culture, as political interference continues to play a role in intruding SAPS activities.

High-profile cases, that serve as a precedent, illustrate how political corruption infiltrates law enforcement and impedes efforts to reform and improve governance (Faull, 2007:3). This deeply embedded corruption, affects not only the police but also the criminal justice system and governance structures (Transparency International, 2023), necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of the underlying political dynamics and their impact on policing and justice delivery in South Africa.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research method to explore the lived experiences of police officers involved in investigating corruption within the SAPS, specifically in the Northern Cape province. Guided by the principles defined by Dawson (2002:14) and Kothari (2004:8), the research utilised a qualitative approach to investigate political interference in modern policing activities systematically. This method ensured subjective experiences, opinions, and perspectives (Davis & Francis, 2018:96). Rich and non-numerical data was collected from police, aligning with the phenomenological approach described by Creswell (2007:57-58). This approach captured the essence of participants' lived experiences with police corruption and adherence, or lack thereof, to preventive measures.

The structured open-ended telephonic interviews and questionnaires, ensuring a consistent yet flexible interaction with participants were used. Interviews were designed to allow respondents to freely express their experiences and insights, ensuring that the data remained true to their subjective perspectives (Mouton, 2004:195). Participants consisted of 130 police officials in the Northern Cape, specifically targeting detectives and investigators from Kimberley Detectives, the Northern Cape Independent Police Investigative Directorate (*IPID*), and the Northern Cape Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (*DPCI*). Twenty-four participants with firsthand experience relevant to the research questions were purposively selected. Due to availability constraints, the final sample included 22 respondents. The application of methodological

strategies ensured that possessed knowledge and insight into police corruption, derived from findings representing problematic issues within the SAPS context.

IV. POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Political interference 'relates to the pressures exerted on the police service' (Peters, 1991 & Tunnell & Gaines, 1992). Turning over policing activities to politicians creates vested and self-serving interests, conflicts, and diverged decisions. There are police protection rackets that are a by-product of a political process in which minority lobby groups successfully influence politicians to criminalise activities from sections of the majority (Prenzler, 2009:20-21). Consequently, the desired outcome is achieved when powerful and corrupt public officials have their morality deceptively enshrined in policies and operations. Consumers can satisfy their desires, suppliers can make a living, politicians maintain their power, and the police can increase their income while keeping their political masters satisfied. A totalitarian concept at play with vested interests. When this stable state is slightly threatened, occasional adjustments in the form of police raids and prosecution are unleashed to protect the self-serving interests of unashamed politicians. Ultimately, this corrupt system can survive for decades with little maintenance (Prenzler, 2009:21). Akers and Sellers (2013:33) mention political crimes theory, which refers to crimes committed by radical groups to overthrow a government or overturn a government action, or crimes committed by government officials to control groups seen as a threat, political circles. Which side in any given conflict is labelled radical depends upon which side one supports, and which side wins the dispute (Akers & Sellers, 2013:33).

Interference with the operational running of the SAPS could easily accelerate police corruption. No one is shocked anymore by media reports about police injustices. Drastic measures to prevent the degree of police corruption have been eliminated and aborted since the inception of democratic policing which involves community participation (community policing). The Civilian Secretariat for Police Act 2 of 2011 was passed in March 2011,

which freed the Secretariat from the bounds of the SAPS Act (Faull, 2011:7). Among other things, the Secretariat provides policy and strategic support to the police minister; provides civilian oversight of police; liaises with stakeholders; and contributes towards effective, ethical and efficient policing; and monitors the performance and utilisation of the budget of the SAPS (Faull, 2011:7). The Secretariat maintains a clear distinction between its oversight role and the operational functions of the South African Police Service (SAPS). While providing strategic guidance, policy advice, and monitoring, it must refrain from direct involvement in SAPS operations to ensure the police maintain operational independence and effectiveness. This separation of duties helps uphold accountability, transparency, and proper governance within the security sector. The portfolio committee is responsible for monitoring the action of the Minister of Police; the National Commissioner of Police; the National Secretariat; the IPID; the DPCI; as well as the legislation relating thereto (Faull, 2011:9-10).

The 2023 Corruption Perception Index ranked South Africa 83 out of 180 and scored below 50 out of 100 (Transparency International, 2023). Francois Valérian, Chair of Transparency International asserts that:

'Corruption will continue to thrive until justice systems can punish wrongdoing and keep governments in check. When justice is bought or politically interfered with, it is the people that suffer. Leaders should fully invest in and guarantee the independence of institutions that uphold the law and tackle corruption. It is time to end impunity for corruption'.

The Corruption Perceptions Index of 2023 highlights South Africa's fluctuating levels of perceived corruption from 2016 to 2022, reflecting varying degrees of governance and institutional integrity. However, in 2023, the index showed a modest improvement, with a downward shift of two points (-2), indicating a slight reduction in perceived corruption. This positive development could be attributed to efforts by the current administration to address

corruption, enhance transparency, and strengthen accountability measures. While progress is evident, continued vigilance and systemic reforms of the crime-fighting machinery remain essential to sustaining and accelerating these gains. Code of silence.

Crime is pervasive and more complex than issues affecting societies globally, with no exception. It impacts individuals, communities, and economies, often sparking debates about its causes, prevention strategies, and the effectiveness of law enforcement methodologies to crime prevention. However, the scourge of crime is compounded by persistent police corruption interwoven in police activities, which oftentimes ensures that criminals go unpunished (Newham & Faull, 2011:14). The data indicate that one of the most significant generic characteristics of police culture that promotes corruption is what has been called the "code of silence", which is a strong informal agreement among police officials that no officer will report the misconduct of a fellow officer or cooperate with any investigations against them. Participants reported that secrecy acts as a protective shield, safeguarding police organisations from external scrutiny, public awareness, and potential interference or infringements.

The commonly held view by scholars and researchers such as Prenzler (2009:18), Newham and Gomomo (2003:5), and Williams (2002:87-96) is that causes of corruption emanate mainly from personal moral failure, inadequate accountability mechanisms, shortcomings in recruitment, training and promotion, poor salaries, low emotional intelligence, as well as influence from individuals and organisations trying to bribe the police officers. The participants contributed valuable insights into the factors that motivate some police officers to engage in corrupt practices and maintain silence. Key themes emerged from the data set, emphasising the relationship of individual, social, and systemic influences. Greed was a recurrent factor, where the magnetism of personal enrichment often overshadowed professional ethics. Another significant driver was a conspiracy, with some officers engaging in corrupt activities to foster

camaraderie or maintain the approval of their peers, emphasising the role of group dynamics in perpetuating unethical behaviour.

The findings indicate that some officers engaged in corruption to "blend in" with their colleagues or within a broader culture of misconduct, thereby avoiding scrutiny or alienation from policing activities. The perceived opportunity to earn extra, untraceable income without fear of detection or reprisal further incentivised such actions, particularly in environments where oversight was weak or non-existence. Personal financial pressures, including debt or the need to support dependents, were also cited as factors that could compel officers to prioritise short-term financial relief over their ethical obligations of law enforcement. These insights underscore the complexity of the issue, illustrating how a combination of personal vulnerabilities, peer influences, and systemic shortcomings can create an environment conducive to uninterrupted corruption. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including fostering a culture of accountability, enhancing supervision mechanisms, and providing financial literacy aligned with the Public Finance Management Act 1 of 1999 and support programs for police officers.

V. INJUSTICES OF THE PAST

Unquestionably, the socio-economic implications resulting from political interference with the police in South Africa are as old as the suppressive regime as alluded to earlier. For example, the SAP, currently known as the SAPS together with the SADF, currently known as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) were instrumental in sustaining and maintaining the apartheid regime by gross violation of human rights for almost half a century (Brogden & Nijhar, 1998:89). The hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened a window for the world to witness the ruthless, aggressive and corrupt mechanisms used by the police (Brogden & Nijhar, 1998:89) back then. For example, during the gruesome events such as the PEBCO Three, the Cradock Four, the Gugulethu Seven and others whereby anti-apartheid activists were abducted and killed, the SAP engaged in elaborate

and effective cover-up schemes (Minyuku, 1998:12). The apartheid regime survived for almost 50 years from 1948 to 1994, because in its fierce commitment to the law, it ensured that relevant legislation and procedures were very tolerant (Brogden & Nijhar, 1998:104). This tolerance was intended to allow and encourage deviance on behalf of the state while serving the immediate interests of its personnel (Brogden & Nijhar, 1998:104). Akers and Sellers (2013:33) emphasise that society is divided into two or more groups with competing political ideas and values. Consequently, the group(s) with the most power makes the laws and controls society (Peters, 1991:96). Groups lacking the formal power to make the rules still maintain their group norms, and continue in their behaviour, which may now be viewed as criminal by the larger society (Akers & Sellers, 2013:33).

Corruption's indirect effects include damaging the public institutions' functioning and image, impairing citizens' trust in their government thereby lowering incentives for innovation and increasing social inequality (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2015:4). Corruption leads to higher tax on economic activities, which translates to the ultimate users or consumers of the products or services (OECD, 2015:4). Eskom is a timeless South African example of the symptoms of political interference consequences of institutions poorly managed. Through corruption, markets get distorted, which then discourages foreign investment and competition (OECD, 2015:4). Ultimately, the unpredictable tax on operations distorts political decisions because corruption results in budget allocations, sector regulation, and trade barriers that are contrary to the public interest and lead to long-term losses of revenue for the state (OECD, 2015:4). Incorporated are many negative impacts that derive from the capturing of the political space by corrupt private companies, or biased decisions in the public sector when the main consideration is personal gain (OECD, 2015:4). Similarly, the police service, designed after illegitimate regime, was meant to reconcile the country from distress of the past policing but it aggravates corruption.

Corruption's effects can seriously constrain national economies' development and prevent good governance. Equally, corruption erodes stability and trust, damages the ethos of democratic governments, and dearly costs a nation's macroeconomic and social standing (Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), 2003: i). For example, the National Party (NP) governed South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The NP enacted laws such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, the Population Registration Act of 1950, and the Group Areas Act of 1950. Interestingly, these inhumane laws were enforced by state agencies. The international community severely criticised inhumanity and introduced mandatory economic sanctions against South Africa, including trade and investment. Consequently, the effects of the sanctions still have adverse consequences for poor South Africans long after the sanctions were lifted (Evenett, 2002).

VI. GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

Corruption is nothing new, but contemporary police corruption is underscored by the prosecution of the highest authority in the SAPS (Burger, 2016 & Faull, 2007:3). On face value, it appears that there is nothing the government can do to reduce the scourge of police corruption, particularly SAPS. In agreement, Newham and Faull (2011) confirm that the conviction of Jackie Selebi (former National Commissioner of the South African Police Service) on corruption charges marked a shallow point for the public image of the SAPS locally and internationally. This was a qualitative symptom of major political interference in the police. Moreover, corruption diverts scarce resources from the generation of the policing capabilities a country needs at a proper cost, it also limits the opportunities to engage the police in operations that would enhance the security of the country and its allies (Newham & Gomomo, 2003:5). For instance, the State Capture Commission of Inquiry heard that the State Security Agency (SSA) ran an operation called "Project Wave" (Mabelane, 2021). The operation was established to incentivise journalists and influence their reporting, taking the money from the public purse. The testimony

before the commission confirmed that the media house African News Agency received bribes in the amount of R20 million to report favourably about the government during former president Jacob Zuma's time in office (Mabelane, 2021). A further instance is witnessed during a murder bail application of former CI head Richard Mdluli, with two other senior CI officers as accomplices. Mdluli's testimony revealed a report containing an alleged conspiracy by top African National Congress (ANC) members to undermine former President Jacob Zuma's second term of office attempt, using police intelligence resources to settle political scores (Burger, 2011:14).

Apart from this, in March 2021, Police Minister Bheki Cele wrote to President Cyril Ramaphosa requesting the institution of an inquiry into General Sitole's fitness to hold office (Mtshali, 2021). This came after the Pretoria High Court found in January 2021 that General Sitole and his two deputies namely, Lieutenant-General Francina Vuma, and Lieutenant-General Lebeona Tsumane, were in breach of their duties for not providing and declassifying documents for the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) to investigate allegations of fraud and corruption against them (Pothier, 2021:2). General Sitole and his two deputies allegedly attempted to procure a 'grabber', which is an electronic device with the capabilities of intercepting phone calls and cell phone messages at an inflated price (Pothier, 2021:2). The attempt to procure the device was allegedly with the idea to influence loyalists in conference voting for the African National Congress (ANC's) top leadership positions (Mtshali, 2021). Subsequently, President Cyril Ramaphosa terminated the employment contract of General Sitole with effect from 31 March 2022 (The Presidency, 2022). Furthermore, on 31 March 2022, President Ramaphosa appointed General Sehlahle Fannie Masemola as the new National Police Commissioner (The Presidency, 2022). In the same way, former police commissioner General Ria Phiyega was appointed in 2012 and finished her term in 2015 while on suspension after the Farlam Inquiry questioned her conduct in the Marikana massacre (eNews Channel Africa

(eNCA), 2021). Similarly, her predecessor Jackie Selebi was fired from the position amid corruption allegations, and later convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison (Burger, 2011). Lastly, in 2011 there was an investigation by the Public Protector into allegations that the then National Police Commissioner, General Bheki Cele had irregularly approved an R500 million lease for new police premises from a businessman Roux Shabangu, who allegedly had a close relationship with the ANC (Burger, 2011:14). Consequently, the investigation found that General Bheki Cele's conduct was improper, unlawful and amounted to maladministration (Burger, 2011:14). These scenarios illustrate instances where police leadership oversteps its professional boundaries by interfering in matters beyond the legitimate scope of law enforcement. The SAPS is eventful of unreported cases of serious dereliction of duty by its personnel. Effective police leadership requires a clear understanding of jurisdictional limits, collaboration with relevant authorities, and a commitment to ethical governance to maintain public confidence and operational integrity.

VII. CASE ANALYSIS OF CRIME IMPLICATIONS

Corruption undermines democracy and social justice, thereby deepening certain degree of dereliction, fuelling organised crime and stunting the efforts to promote human security (Faull, 2007:1). For instance, in February 2018 the former Western Cape Police Provincial Commissioner, Lt Gen. Arno Heinrich Lamoer was convicted and confined to eight years' direct incarceration with two years suspended for five years because he accepted the gratifications given to him by Mohammed Saleem Dawjee and two others to the value of R67 329-50 (*S v Dawjee and Others*). Initially, Lamoer requested a letter to be drafted in which he declared that Dawjee was a person of good standing and was not under investigation by the SAPS, while Dawjee was the subject of an inquiry and investigation (*S v Dawjee and Others*). In the same way, former Brigadier Darius van der Ross was convicted to two years in jail, and Brigadier Kolindhren

Govender was convicted to four years in jail respectively. They initially faced 100 charges of corruption, racketeering and money laundering (*S v Dawjee and Others*).

Moreover, law-abiding SAPS members involved in crime investigations are threatened or killed as they get closer to uncovering corruption and arresting corrupt individuals (Kwinika, 2019:4). For instance, the investigation by the DPCI into allegations that the CI head, Major General Richard Mdluli and other senior officers had illegally tapped telephones of the investigators and shared the information with a fugitive and alleged organised crime leader, Radovan Krejcir, as a result jeopardising the case, serves as an excellent example (Burger, 2011:14). In some incidents, justice does not prevail as case dockets disappear or get missing from criminal investigators and prosecutors. Apart from this, corruption endangers the security of society and threatens the democratic governance mechanisms, as well as the foundations of a modern state. For instance, in 2000 the then KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Head of Organised Crime Unit, Piet Meyer was arrested for accepting bribes in exchange for not raiding illegal gambling establishments and protecting drug syndicates (Newham, 2002:6).

Although the impact of corruption remains challenging to quantify, further analysis of corruption in a broader context is still needed, however, corruption has a direct impact on the cost of doing business both for the private and public sectors (OECD, 2015:4). The SAPS Annual Report (2018/19:278) indicates that within the SAPS, 360 members were charged with corruption and fraud, 178 were found guilty, 70 were dismissed, 114 were found not guilty, 29 were withdrawn, and 108 were handed sanctions short of dismissal. In addition, between January 2021 and June 2021, Corruption Watch received 1 964 allegations of corruption in both private and public sectors reported by whistle-blowers (Corruption Watch, 2021a:1). On top of the list is the SAPS with 12% of all reported incidents of corruption; the majority on abuse of authority at 37%, dereliction of duty at 34% and bribery at 22% (Corruption Watch, 2021a:2-3). Imagine

what the statistics would present if all cases are reported. Unfortunately, those brave enough to report cases continue to face threats to their lives from people acting with impunity. A gruesome example has been the violent death of Babita Deokaran on 23 August 2021 in Johannesburg (Corruption Watch, 2021a:1). The instigator of the murder remains actively involved in securing lucrative government contracts, operating with apparent impunity despite their criminal ties. The vulnerability of whistle-blowers needs to be addressed. Sarah Chayes reiterates how corrupt groups are structured and integrated (Chayes, 2015).

VIII. SERVICE DELIVERY IMPLICATIONS

When left unchecked and unrestrained, corruption poses a significant threat to social, economic, and institutional stability. It subscribes to challenges to public institutions and their operational effectiveness (Tagarev, 2010:6-8). These challenges are escalated by the public sector which has an uneven capacity to enforce and comply with the legislation (DPSA, 2003:7). For instance, the courts are overloaded and struggle to retain experienced public prosecutors (DPSA, 2003:7). As a result, this overload leads to backlogs, delays and withdrawals in corruption cases, and it may contribute to the perception of the prevalence of corruption within some organisations. Additionally, the backlog sees an increasing number of witnesses and victims withdrawing. However, the Integrated Justice System Project and other measures are beginning to address the problems of delays and withdrawals in courts (DPSA, 2003:7). The Special Commercial Crime Court Unit is performing well and serves as a useful model for corruption cases. Consequently, qualified and suitable candidates are ignored during promotion and appointment processes while giving preference to unqualified and unsuitable family members and friends. For example, on 10 November 2020, the DPCI (also known as the *Hawks*) arrested senior police officials, Brigadier Peggy Morongo, Colonel Malesela Moylan, and a former police officer Colonel Paulina Mokhadi stationed at the DPCI Silverton (Mthethwa, 2020). The arrest was for their alleged

involvement in fraud and corruption about promotional appointments in the DPCI (Mthethwa, 2020). This affirms that corruption takes many forms and can prosper in all manner of environments. In this regard, criminals, unqualified individuals and businesses are employed in the SAPS, while policing is undermined in the process and deteriorates.

Tendering processes are flouted, and awards are given to unqualified family members and friends' service providers, as a result cease to exist (Basdeo, 2010:398). For instance, the former Acting National Commissioner of Police, Lt Gen. Kgomo Phahlane, was one of the suspects who were arrested by IPID in connection with tender fraud and corruption worth R86 million (*Phahlane v South African Police Services and Others*). Subsequently, Kgomo Phahlane was dismissed from the SAPS on 30 July 2020 after being found guilty of elements of dishonesty (Thamm, 2020). Before his dismissal, Kgomo Phahlane earned almost 4 million rands for idling while suspended, not delivering any service to the community (Koko, 2019). There were also reported cases of corruption, fraud, theft, and money laundering in a matter related to an R191 million contract to supply warning equipment for the SAPS in 2017 (Seboka, 2021:1). The following civilians Judy Rose, Samantha Andrews, and Vimpie Manthatha, the owner of Instrumentation for Traffic Law Enforcement (Pty) Ltd faced the same charges (Seboka, 2021:1). Senior officers in the SAPS, Lieutenant-General Francinah Vuma who is the Divisional Commissioner: Financial Management and Administration, as well as Lieutenant-General Johannes Riet who is the Divisional Commissioner: Supply Chain Management, were both under criminal investigation by the DPCI (Hawks) and the Special Investigative Unit (SIU) for an alleged R200 million SAPS PPE inflated tender spree (Thamm, 2021). The diverted resources could have been efficiently used to purchase service delivery resources for crime prevention and criminal investigation.

Furthermore, many SAPS members, in their private capacity, are conducting business with the state in the form of tendering, thereby denying

work opportunities to deserving members of society (SAPS Annual Report, 2016/17:328). For example, the Auditor General found that some police officials who had business contracts awarded by the SAPS failed to disclose such interest as required by Treasury Regulation 16A8.4 and Public Service Regulation 3C (SAPS Annual Report, 2016/17:328). This was in breach of the public service code of conduct. Vice versa, family members, partners and associates of some police officials had business contracts with the SAPS and failed to declare those interests. Interestingly, some of the goods and services of a transaction valued above R55 000 were procured without inviting competitive bids and some deviations were approved by the accounting officer, in contradiction of Treasury Regulation 16A8.4 even when it was possible to invite competitive bids (SAPS Annual Report, 2016/17:328). These small amounts build up to larger sums of money stolen through rigged processes.

In some cases, mentioned above, disciplinary actions were not taken against some officials responsible for irregular expenditure, as required by section 38(1)(h)(iii) of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (SAPS Annual Report, 2016/17:328). This fosters corruption, where a few monopolise jobs, tenders, and opportunities, while whistle-blowers face harassment, demotion, dismissal, threats, involuntary or coerced displacement, and even death (Corruption Watch, 2021b:1). For instance, the CI Division allegedly interfered with a key state witness, Glen Agliotti, leading to criminal charges against its former head, Mulangi Mphepho (Burger, 2011:14). In Mpumalanga, whistle-blowers like James Nkambule, who exposed corruption linked to the Mbombela World Cup Stadium, were killed (Bruce, 2013:16-17). Similarly, in the North-West, anti-corruption whistle-blowers Moss Phakoe (2009) and Obuti Chika (2012) were murdered, with Kabelo Mataboge surviving an attempt on his life (Bruce, 2013:16-17). These are some of the examples of the 'price' of speaking out about corruption.

IX. VICTIMS OF POLICE CORRUPTION

Ordinary citizens, particularly the poor, are subtly the primary victims of police corruption due to their vulnerability and dependence on law enforcement to uphold justice, protect communities, and aid during crises (Williams, 2002:85). The poor are disproportionately affected by corruption, often being coerced into paying bribes, enduring abuses of power, or being exploited in the concealment of criminal activities (OECD, 2015:15 & Pillay, 2024). Such acts not only violate human rights but frequently involve racial and ethnic discrimination in the delivery of police services (Williams, 2002:85). Akers and Sellers (2013:33) highlight the "racial profiling theory," wherein police actions are unjustly based on an individual's race, socioeconomic status, exacerbating inequalities. Communities of lower socioeconomic status tend to have access to scarce police resources.

Corruption also extends to procurement processes, where inflated costs and shared mark-ups lead to significant losses for taxpayers, service users, and excluded potential market participants (OECD, 2015:50). Whistle-blowers, who play a critical role in exposing corrupt practices, often face severe retaliation and victimisation in the workplace, deterring others from speaking out about the chronic corrupt activities (Corruption Watch, 2021b:1). Ultimately, corruption disproportionately penalises and harms the poor more than any other income group, deepening social inequality (OECD, 2015:51). Scholars such as Faull (2007:1), Jain (2001:72), and Kumssa (2015:6) widely agree that corruption undermines democracy, erodes social justice, fuels organised crime, jeopardises public safety, and discourages private investment, thereby threatening societal stability and progress. These are selected symptomatic or signs of persistent corruption influenced by weak governance of police structures driven by political greed (Bhandari, 2023:5-17).

X. CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORIES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN POLICING

Political Crimes: These are crimes committed by radical groups intend to overthrow a government or overturn a government action, or crimes committed by government officials to control groups seen as a threat (Akers & Sellers, 2013:33). Which side in any given conflict is labelled radical depends upon which side one supports, and which side wins the dispute (Akers & Sellers, 2013:33). Tunnell (1993) posits that political crime should be seen both as a theoretical concept and events. This highlights the complexity of its definition. It is suggested that all crimes, regardless of intent or context, are linked to political dynamics and can be viewed as political acts. This perspective challenges the traditional divide between political and non-political crimes, emphasising that corruption reflects power structures, social conflicts, and ideological struggles in society. By reframing corruption as inherently political, a deeper examination of how laws are created, enforced, and contested, this view expands the scope of criminology and political science. Tunnell (1993) further spells out that 'government corruption also is treated as a political crime in criminology texts.' Participants explained that corruption committed by police officials for their interests differs from state crime in the interests of advancing the functions of the state.

Criminal Governance (Mafia): In informal urban areas across the developing world, and even in certain neighbourhoods in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK), tens, if not hundreds, of millions of people, live under forms of criminal governance (Lessing, 2020:1). For these communities, the state's claims of monopolising the legitimate use of force often appear insubstantial. Local criminal organisations often serve as the primary authority, mediating disputes, enforcing rules, and even delivering services. Despite this, the state is not absent. Residents may still pay taxes, participate in elections, and sometimes report gang activity to the police as retribution for criminal overreach or abuse (Lessing, 2020:1 & Sibiya, 2024).

Criminal governance thrives in areas where state presence is weak but not wholly absent (Shaw, 2019). These zones, though often neglected, remain accessible to state agencies, even if entry sometimes entails violent confrontation. Unlike state, corporate, or rebel governance, criminal governance operates within the broader framework of state authority, occupying pockets of contested control rather than entirely autonomous territories (Lessing, 2020:1). In South Africa, the challenges of governance are compounded by allegations and proven cases of corruption and misconduct among police high-ranking officials.

The case of the “Boko Haram” gang in South Africa’s Pretoria East is an example of the group illegally taking over business control at a small scale.

State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs): Government insiders sometimes engage in actions or neglect responsibilities to manipulate democratic processes and undermine public sovereignty. These State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs) are often difficult to detect and prosecute due to their complexity, compartmentalisation, conflicts of interest that hinder investigations, politicisation, and societal norms against suspecting high-office corruption. However, liberal democracies can mitigate such risks by proactively identifying vulnerabilities and implementing policies for SCAD detection and prevention (De Haven-Smith & Matthew, 2009:527).

State Crimes Against Democracy occur at all levels of government, but high-office cases draw the most scholarly focus due to their potential to destabilise institutions and governments (De Haven-Smith & Matthew, 2009:527). For example, South Africa’s Commission of Inquiry into the State Capture exposed corruption and money laundering between public officials and private businesses (Grootes, 2019). Corruption Watch (2019) revealed that former Crime Intelligence boss Richard Mdluli used his properties to profit indirectly, leasing them to Crime Intelligence through a company owned by his associate, John Appalsamy. Colonel

Dhanajaya Naidoo testified that Appalsamy would collect rent payments, later handing the cash to Mdluli.

Similarly, in 2005, the Directorate of Special Operations (Scorpions) raided Schabir Shaik for evidence of tender irregularities and bribes involving former South African president, Jacob Zuma. The union federation COSATU criticised these raids as politically biased (Berning & Montesh, 2012:6). In 2006, the Scorpions also searched former president’s lawyers’ offices during their investigation. In 2008, the Scorpions were disbanded, partly due to intense political pressure stemming from their probes into high-profile politicians, and was replaced by the DPCI, ‘Hawks’ (Berning & Montesh, 2012:7).

XI. CONCLUSION

The collapse of government services and malfunctioning of state entities serve as an early warning system that the South African government lacks strong institutions capable of supporting effective constitutional values and 21st-century policing practices. This highlights systemic weaknesses, including insufficient oversight, accountability, and enforcement mechanisms, which are essential for addressing contemporary security challenges and maintaining public trust corroded by malfeasance. However, President Cyril Ramaphosa’s administration has superficially shown a renewed commitment to combating corruption, particularly by strengthening the criminal justice system. His government has implemented several reforms aimed at restoring the integrity and efficiency of key institutions that were severely weakened during former President Jacob Zuma’s tenure. Efforts include strengthening law enforcement agencies, enhancing prosecutorial independence, and revitalising institutions such as the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the Special Investigating Unit (SIU), and the police’s Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI, the *Hawks*). While challenges remain, these strides signal a determined attempt to reverse the widespread damage caused by state capture and systemic corruption under former President Zuma’s governance. Strengthening these

institutions is critical for fostering transparency, ethical governance, and the rule of law. This paper outlined how political groups and opportunists manage to influence political leaders to interfere in law enforcement agencies, and policing to their favour, and criminalise selected activities involving sections of the majority population.

Inhumane laws were enacted by politicians and enforced by the former SAP and SADF pre-colonial system. The current findings point to the abuse of authority as seen through corrupt activities which threatens democracy and equality amongst South African citizens. The criminological methodologies and theories employed in the study put into perspective that political influence on the police is indeed a habitual global phenomenon within the law enforcement system. Consequently, corruption persists to exist due to minimal efforts to eradicate it (Prenzler, 2009:21).

Political influence on police implies that resources meant to fight crime at national, provincial and local levels are diverted into the pockets of inglorious corrupt actors. Furthermore, poor service delivery to the most vulnerable communities broadens, and incidents of crime and corruption escalate, including the silencing of whistle-blowers (Nortje, 2023). Hence a police service with integrity and ethical leadership should be customised. An improved process of identifying, employing, training, and continuous lifestyle audits, as well as adequate salaries for police officials, could minimise and progressively stamp out corrupt elements and their activities within the police service. Most importantly, the corrupt actors must be prosecuted and severely sentenced as prescribed by the law regardless of the socioeconomic and political status of the actors.

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