



South African police drug trade ties exposed: Who is protecting the drug dealers?

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ABSTRACT

Allegations linking members of the South African Police Service to the drug trade have triggered widespread public outrage. Evidence points to police protection, intelligence leaks, and selective enforcement that benefit drug syndicates. This paper critically examines claims of institutional complicity in organised drug trafficking. This study also raises the following relevant questions: (i) Who is shielding drug dealers from arrest? (ii) Why do officers linked to drug syndicates remain in service? (iii) Who obstructs investigations when accountability reaches senior ranks? Using a qualitative research method, the study used existing literature, statutes, and other useful reports. It situates police corruption within broader patterns of state capture and institutional decay. It finds that structural weaknesses and judicial interference undermine enforcement. Persistent impunity strengthens organised crime and also erodes public trust and community safety. The paper argues that unchecked police corruption threatens constitutional governance. It concludes that without independent investigations, credible prosecutions, and deep institutional reform, the drug trade will continue to operate under institutional protection. This paper contributes to scholarship by exposing how police protection of drug syndicates undermines accountability, the rule of law, and public trust in South Africa.

Keywords: South African Police Service, Drug Trade, Police Corruption, Accountability, Organised Crime.

INTRODUCTION

The principle of the rule of law is a cornerstone of the South African Constitution, as articulated in Section 1(c), which asserts that the Republic is established on the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law.¹ This implies that all legislation must align with the Constitution, and no law can contradict it. The rule of law guarantees that governmental actions are held to the same legal standards as those applicable to individuals, thereby fostering fairness and legality in the exercise of authority.² It is crucial to upholding a democratic society in which all citizens are treated equally by the law and have the right to access justice. The South African Police Service systematically protects drug traffickers through institutional corruption, thereby establishing a complex network that undermines law enforcement and

¹ The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Section 1(c).

² The rule of law is a fundamental principle that ensures that all governmental actions are held to the same legal standards as those applicable to individuals, thereby fostering fairness and legality in the exercise of authority.

public safety. Some scholars have indicated that the protection of drug syndicates is deeply ingrained. For instance, Goga illustrated how criminal networks forge protective connections with political and civic institutions.³ The Western Cape remains troubled by the drug trade and the subsequent rise of organized crime networks.⁴ Although the expansion of criminal governance can be ascribed to the shortcomings of state institutions, it also arises from the growing connections between criminal networks and political and civic institutions, which may shield criminal activities. Police corruption is widespread and systemic, creating environments in which drug dealers can function without fear of repercussions.⁵ Despite the favorable transformations that have taken place within the South African Police Service (SAPS) since the advent of democracy in 1994, corruption within the police force continues to pose a significant challenge for the organization.⁶ Although the magnitude of police corruption is not easily or precisely quantifiable, there is substantial evidence to indicate that this problem is both pervasive and systemic. On the other hand, Mothibi further discussed how political transitions have weakened border controls, thereby creating operational opportunities for organized crime.⁷

The political transformations in South Africa created opportunities for criminals that had not previously been available. With the conclusion of apartheid, border security was decreased, thereby establishing possible zones for organized crime.⁸ Generally, increased police corruption diverts resources from crime-fighting, effectively shielding criminal networks.⁹ For instance, there has been an issue in which Xolani Khumalo, the mayoral candidate for Ekurhuleni representing Action-SA, is presently confronting an assault charge that has led him to voluntarily turn himself in to the South African Police Service (SAPS).¹⁰ This situation reportedly involves an alleged drug dealer, and Khumalo's decision to surrender follows reports of harassment by criminal elements as a form of retaliation for his anti-crime initiatives in Ekurhuleni.¹¹ This clearly indicates that “we”, as South Africans, lack stringent laws to effectively address the drug issue, especially when police officers are still helping dealers. Then, what about the future of the South African generation? In reality, what is the role of police officers in South Africa? Therefore, the main focus of this study is on the issue of accountability of police officers who betray their constitutional duty by protecting drug dealers and enabling the destruction of communities. In response to the issues above, this study will attempt to address and uncover them in line with its problem statement.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, mainly desktop-based research method. The study used the existing literature from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and other online platforms. In this study, no data collection was conducted. This study aimed to confront and hold accountable police officers who betray their constitutional duty by protecting drug dealers and enabling the destruction of various communities.

DISCUSSION

Alleged SAPS Links to the Drug Trade Spark Public Outrage

The claims suggesting that certain officers of the South African Police Service are participating in the drug trade have astonished the nation and prompted significant concerns about the integrity of law enforcement. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is faced with considerable challenges related to

³ Khalil Goga, “The Drug Trade and Governance in Cape Town,” *Institute for Security Studies Papers* 2014, no. 263 (2014): 18.

⁴ Goga, “The Drug Trade and Governance in Cape Town.”

⁵ Gareth Newham and Andrew Faull, “Protector or Predator? Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa,” *Institute for Security Studies Monographs* 2011, no. 182 (2011): 65.

⁶ Newham and Faull, “Protector or Predator? Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa.”

⁷ Kholofelo A Mothibi, Cornelis J Roelofse, and Atlas H Maluleke, “Organised Crime in South Africa since Transition to Democracy,” *Sociology and Anthropology* 3, no. 12 (2015): 1–8.

⁸ Mothibi, Roelofse, and Maluleke, “Organised Crime in South Africa since Transition to Democracy.”

⁹ Vinesh Basdeo, “The Curse of Corruption in the South African Police: A Rot from Within,” *South African Journal of Criminal Justice* 23, no. 3 (2010): 385–400.

¹⁰ Michael Beaumont, “Xolani Khumalo to Hand Himself Over as SAPS Arrests Crime Fighters While Letting Criminals Go Free,” *ActionSA*, 2026, <https://www.actionsa.org.za/xolani-khumalo-to-hand-himself-over-as-saps-arrests-crime-fighters-while-letting-criminals-go-free/>.

¹¹ Beaumont, “Xolani Khumalo to Hand Himself Over as SAPS Arrests Crime Fighters While Letting Criminals Go Free.”

systemic corruption, creating significant vulnerabilities to potential infiltration by the drug trade. Some scholars have indicated that police corruption is not simply an isolated issue but a pervasive organizational problem.¹² Although not every police officer is corrupt, the extensive and systemic involvement of certain SAPS members in corruption significantly weakens the force's capacity to enforce the law and to gain the public's trust. Furthermore, a non-trivial percentage of police officers fail to recognise severe corruption as violations of rules.¹³ Transforming the South African police into a more democratic institution emerged as a significant challenge following the end of the apartheid regime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has designated South Africa as a global hub for drug activity, which further complicates the effectiveness of law enforcement.¹⁴ In recent years, South Africa has witnessed a significant increase in the volume and variety of illegal drug production, distribution, and consumption.¹⁵ This surge has led to a heightened burden of crime and health hazards within the community. Additionally, currently, this country has a serious problem in South Africa, where Xolani Khumalo, the candidate for mayor of Ekurhuleni representing Action-SA, is facing an assault charge that has prompted him to voluntarily surrender to the South African Police Service (SAPS).¹⁶ This incident reportedly involves an alleged drug dealer, and Khumalo's choice to turn himself in comes in the wake of reports indicating harassment by criminal elements as retaliation for his anti-crime efforts in Ekurhuleni.

The case is associated with a SAPS operation in Katlehong, during which Khumalo was present, and police uncovered unlicensed ammunition, leading to the arrest of the suspect. However, the suspect was subsequently released without being brought before the court, and Khumalo has been accused of filing a false assault charge against him. These developments raise concerns about the effectiveness of existing legal and enforcement frameworks. The judicial system does not hold the dealers accountable, indicating a failure to protect citizens as well. How can one release a drug dealer within 24 hours? What about the harm he has inflicted on society? Are we still adhering to the regulations set forth in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa?

Police Protection, Intelligence Leaks, and Selective Enforcement Benefiting Drug Syndicates

Generally, certain police officers are actively shielding drug dealers, leaking critical intelligence, and applying the law selectively to protect criminal networks. South African law enforcement seems to be significantly compromised by drug trade networks, with systemic issues hindering the effective policing of illegal drug markets. According to Abdi, South Africa has emerged as "the centre of important international patterns of crime, notably in the drug trade," possessing the continent's largest criminal economy.¹⁷ Machethe further corroborates the existence of substantial challenges, pointing out an "enormous increase" in drug manufacturing and distribution, which raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of law enforcement.¹⁸ This has led to an increase in the burden of crime and health hazards within the community. In this regard, post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed soaring crime rates and a proliferation of illegal activities, indicating deep-seated systemic problems.¹⁹ These unlawful activities persist due to those in positions of power, who utilize the system to safeguard the dealers, while the citizens remain vulnerable to these drugs. For instance, in the North-West, it has been reported that three

¹² Newham and Faull, "Protector or Predator? Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa," 65.

¹³ Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovic and Adri Sauerman, "The Code of Silence: Revisiting South African Police Integrity," *South African Crime Quarterly* 40 (2012): 15–24.

¹⁴ Petrus Machethe and Jacob Tseko Mofokeng, "The Impact of Illicit Drug Networks on the Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in South Africa," *Technium Soc. Sci. J.* 27 (2022): 338.

¹⁵ Machethe and Mofokeng, "The Impact of Illicit Drug Networks on the Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in South Africa."

¹⁶ ActionSA's Ekurhuleni mayoral candidate, Xolani Khumalo, will voluntarily hand himself over to SAPS following an alleged assault charge linked to a 2025 incident Khumalo and ActionSA say the charge is part of ongoing harassment by criminal elements and corrupt police officials targeting those fighting crime The party will stand with Khumalo, warning SAPS that it is monitoring the process and vowing to expose any collusion between police and criminals Read more: <https://briefly.co.za/south-africa/233295-actionsas-xolani-khumalo-voluntarily-hand-saps>.

¹⁷ Ali A Abdi, "The Criminalization of the State in Africa" (JSTOR, 2000), 454 - 456.

¹⁸ Machethe and Mofokeng, "The Impact of Illicit Drug Networks on the Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in South Africa," 338.

¹⁹ Greg Mills and Robert I. Rotberg, *War and Peace in Southern Africa: Crime, Drugs, Armies, and Trade* (Brookings Institution Press, 1998).

out of the five identified drug kingpins are Nigerians. Additionally, more Nigerian nationals are said to be leading illicit drug activities in Limpopo.²⁰

Police Complicity in Organised Drug Trafficking:²¹ Who is shielding drug dealers from arrest?

The South African Police Service encounters considerable institutional obstacles that effectively protect drug dealers from thorough arrest and prosecution, rather than through overt intentional safeguarding. The absence of political will, management, expertise, and skills within law enforcement agencies greatly hinders drug trafficking interventions.²² South Africa has witnessed a significant rise in organized crime during the last decade. The government has implemented various strategies to address organized crime.²³ In addition, Machethe pointed out the presence of illicit drug networks that obstruct the efficiency of law enforcement.²⁴ Substance abuse represents one of the most widespread problems facing our nation, particularly within townships. Hence, some scholars observed a lack of cooperation/collaboration and trust between the South African Police Service (SAPS) and community stakeholders, which further undermines drug enforcement.²⁵ These institutional deficiencies foster an environment in which drug dealers can function with diminished risk of arrest, not due to explicit protection, but as a result of systemic inefficiencies and disjointed law enforcement capabilities. In this instance, corrupt law enforcement officials are protecting drug traffickers by neglecting arrests, alerting them in advance, and hindering investigations.

Exposing Police Ties to Drug Syndicates: Why Corrupt Officers Remain in Service?

South African police officers associated with drug syndicates continue to serve due to numerous systemic failures that shield corrupt individuals from facing accountability. The code of silence acts as the main protective mechanism. According to Ivković, at least a quarter of officers would shield colleagues involved in various types of misconduct.²⁶ For instance, in examining the nuances of the code of silence prevalent among South African police officers, our 2005 survey, which included 379 police officers from seven provinces, revealed that a significant number of respondents were inclined to protect various forms of police corruption.²⁷ On the other hand, Sauerman indicated that a significant minority of SAPS supervisors would protect against the exposure of different forms of police corruption.²⁸ Disciplinary systems are notably weak. This situation arises in South Africa, where individuals who violate the law are often connected to those in positions of authority, complicating the punishment of offenders. Kutnjak Ivković revealed that officers anticipated relatively lenient discipline for some of the most serious breaches of official regulations, with many failing to even recognize severe corruption as a violation of the rules.²⁹ Consequently, if this situation is not resolved, South Africa will continue to face a situation in South Africa in which the rule of law will be violated. Mofokeng highlighted how "corrupt friendship bonds with friends and associates within the communities" create significant organisational issues.³⁰ Despite independent investigative mechanisms, police corruption remains a

²⁰ Justin Williams, "Confidential SAPS Report Names Key Drug Kingpins Operating in South Africa," Briefly, 2025, <https://briefly.co.za/south-africa/227394-names-south-african-drug-lords-revealed-report/>.

²¹ Drugs and Drug Trafficking Amendment Act 14 of 2022.

²² Mahlatse Ragolane and Nthabiseng Gratitude Khoza, "Challenges Faced by the Government in Addressing Organised Crime in South Africa: A Policy Framework Analysis," *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy* (2687-2293) 6, no. 3 (2024): 252–65.

²³ Ragolane and Khoza, "Challenges Faced by the Government in Addressing Organised Crime in South Africa: A Policy Framework Analysis."

²⁴ Machethe and Mofokeng, "The Impact of Illicit Drug Networks on the Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in South Africa," 338.

²⁵ P. Machethe, E E Obioha, and J T Mofokeng, "Community-Based Initiatives in Preventing and Combatting Drug Abuse in a South African Township," *International Journal of Research In Business and Social Science*. <https://doi.org/10.20525/Ijrbs.V11i1.1555> (2022).

²⁶ Ivkovic and Sauerman, "The Code of Silence: Revisiting South African Police Integrity."

²⁷ Ivkovic and Sauerman, "The Code of Silence: Revisiting South African Police Integrity."

²⁸ Adri Sauerman and Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovic, "Measuring the Integrity of the South African Police Service during Transitional Times," *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 2008, no. sed-2 (2008): 29–31.

²⁹ Ivkovic and Sauerman, "The Code of Silence: Revisiting South African Police Integrity."

³⁰ Jacob Tseko Mofokeng, "The Apple Does Not Fall Far from the Tree: Can Society Corrupt Police Officials?," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies* 8, no. 2 (2016): 150–64.

challenge within the organization.³¹ Additionally, police corruption is a multifaceted global issue that affects both developing and developed nations. This raises the question of where individuals in society can seek assistance when those who have pledged to serve and safeguard them are often the very ones causing harm. Corruption is widespread and systemic, significantly obstructing the police service's constitutional goals.³²

Exposing Police Ties to Drug Trade: Who Blocks Investigations at Senior Levels?

The corruption within South African police regarding drug trade investigations uncovers a complex network of obstruction that becomes more pronounced when accountability extends to senior officials, with numerous protective layers safeguarding high-ranking individuals from prosecution. For instance, former National Commissioners have been found to accept kickbacks from powerful families, highlighting corruption at the upper echelons.³³ When investigations focus on senior officials, obstruction is systematically implemented through intentional evidence manipulation, the withdrawal of cases, and protective networks spanning various agencies. Additionally, during investigations by the Independent Complaints Directorate, police officers often decline to respond to inquiries, especially when their own conduct is under scrutiny.³⁴ A significant minority of SAPS supervisors actively shield various forms of police corruption from public view.³⁵ This fosters an institutional culture in which accountability mechanisms are consistently weakened. For instance, investigators collaborate with prosecutors and drug traffickers, with certain officers being arrested multiple times yet having cases repeatedly dismissed through corrupt practices. Nigerian syndicates specifically target police personnel using sophisticated recruitment tactics, beginning with minor gifts and progressively increasing to significant financial rewards.³⁶

The obstruction escalates due to procedural manipulation, characterized by protracted approval processes for operations, information leaks to criminal networks, and intentional delays in the applications for search warrants.³⁷ Sometimes, senior commanders oversee operational approvals, resulting in bottlenecks that safeguard drug trafficking networks. Provincial offices oppose national directives, and numerous generals exercise conflicting authority, which undermines accountability efforts. Police corruption is a pervasive and systemic issue that significantly obstructs the constitutional objectives of SAPS.³⁸ The interplay of power, discretion, and insufficient accountability fosters an environment in which the drug trade encounters systematic obstruction, especially when aimed at senior officials who have the power to manipulate evidence, sway prosecutions, and shield criminal networks through institutional means. For example, cocaine valued at R200 million was taken from the Hawks' offices in KwaZulu-Natal four years prior. It has been determined that the method of storage of the drug appeared to violate police protocols. Furthermore, there are now allegations that this incident is connected to a murder, which aligns with South Africa's extraordinary police scandal.³⁹

Persistent Impunity: Fuelling Organised Crime and Eroding Public Trust

Ongoing impunity (which occurs when authorities fail to prosecute offenders due to corruption or interference, letting crimes go unpunished) in South Africa's police system enables criminal

³¹ Tintswalo Baloyi, "An Evaluation of Independent Investigative Mechanisms in the South African Police Services to Control Corruption: A Criminological Perspective" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, 2018).

³² Newham and Faull, "Protector or Predator? Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa," 65.

³³ Mofokeng, "The Apple Does Not Fall Far from the Tree: Can Society Corrupt Police Officials?"

³⁴ David Bruce, Kate Savage, and Johan De Waal, "A Duty to Answer Questions? The Police, the Independent Complaints Directorate and the Right to Remain Silent," *South African Journal on Human Rights* 16, no. 1 (2000): 71–96.

³⁵ Sanja Kutnjak Ivković and Adri Sauerma, "Threading the Thin Blue Line: Transition towards Democratic Policing and the Integrity of the South African Police Service," *Policing and Society* 25, no. 1 (2015): 25–52.

³⁶ Kutnjak Ivković and Sauerma, "Threading the Thin Blue Line: Transition towards Democratic Policing and the Integrity of the South African Police Service."

³⁷ Machethe and Mofokeng, "The Impact of Illicit Drug Networks on the Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in South Africa," 338.

³⁸ Newham and Faull, "Protector or Predator? Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa," 65.

³⁹ R200m cocaine theft from KZN Hawks office may tie police to global drug traffickers. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-08-12-suspicious-r200m-cocaine-theft-from-kzn-hawks-office-likely-links-police-to-global-drug-traffickers/> (accessed 03 January 2026).

organisations, especially drug cartels, to function with little fear of legal action, which directly exacerbates organised crime and gradually undermines public confidence in law enforcement agencies. Akinsola and Hamzah state that this issue concerns the persistent inability of authorities to hold wrongdoers accountable, often due to internal corruption, political meddling, or fundamental flaws in oversight systems.⁴⁰

Furthermore, findings from the Madlanga Commission and parliamentary inquiries revealed that members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) allegedly protect drug traffickers, alter evidence, and even act as enforcers for organisations such as the "Big Five" cartel operating in Gauteng.⁴¹ According to Sullivan et al., this cartel is a suspected criminal syndicate based primarily in Gauteng, South Africa, and is implicated in various crimes, including drug trafficking, extortion, tender fraud, hijackings, kidnappings, and contract killings.⁴² This protection allows cartels to grow their activities in drug trafficking, extortion, and assassinations, as high-ranking officials inform suspects or dissolve specialised task forces probing these connections.

Generally, the connection between the lack of accountability and the rise of organised crime is clear in notable cases. In July 2025, KwaZulu-Natal Police Commissioner Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi accused several officials, including then-Police Minister Senzo Mchunu, of conspiring with crime syndicates.⁴³ Mudau and Takalani argue that this prompted President Cyril Ramaphosa to establish the Madlanga Commission to investigate the infiltration of the police and justice systems.⁴⁴ Dhlamini revealed that billions in South African Police Service (SAPS) tenders were misappropriated and diverted to associates of the cartel.⁴⁵ For instance, by January 2026, Crime Intelligence chief Lt-Gen Dumisani Khumalo testified before Parliament that nearly the entire Gauteng SAPS had been infiltrated.⁴⁶ Longmire revealed that personnel were reportedly gathering protection payments and offering hitman services for gangs involved in drug trafficking, hijackings, and kidnappings.⁴⁷ These trends, documented throughout the failed apprehensions of 2024, illustrate how lawlessness fosters a self-sustaining criminal economy, allowing syndicates to thrive unchecked and expand into even remote regions such as the Eastern Cape.

As a result, public confidence in SAPS has significantly decreased, with 2025 surveys showing widespread dissatisfaction due to unresolved drug cases and the arrest of officers for drug dealing.⁴⁸ Residents are turning more to private militias or vigilantism, as evident in Gauteng townships, where

⁴⁰ Oluwaseun Kayode Akinsola and Farinu Hamzah, "Corporate Mismanagement and Executive Liability: Legal Approaches to Ensuring Accountability in Corporate Governance," 2025.

⁴¹ Gareth Newham, "Tackling Police Corruption in South Africa," *Africa Do Sul: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation*, 2002.

⁴² Eliz-Mari Sullivan, Clinton Oellermann, and Jacqui-Lyn McIntyre, "Combating Cartel Behaviour in South Africa: Lessons Learned and the Case for Asset Forfeiture," *Journal of Financial Crime* 32, no. 5 (2025): 1041–58.

⁴³ On 6 July 2025, the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Provincial Commissioner of Police, Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, held a press briefing on the work of the Political Killings Task Team (PKTT). He also made a range of allegations, claiming, among others, political interference in the demise of the PKTT; the existence of a potentially corrupt relationship between the Minister of Police, Mr Senzo Mchunu, and certain individuals; and the existence of an organised crime syndicate, which involves various role-players across the criminal justice system, and is ultimately controlled by an international drug cartel. The allegations were set out in a PowerPoint presentation and additional details were provided in comments made by the Provincial Commissioner during the briefing. The evidence presented by Lt Gen Mkhwanazi include WhatsApp chats and financial records. In separate letters addressed to the Chairpersons of the Portfolio Committees on Police and Justice and Constitutional Development, dated 9 July 2025, the Speaker requested both Committees to consider the matter in terms of their respective mandates, make an assessment on the appropriate approach and submit recommendations for consideration by the National Assembly. Subsequently, the Committees received an undated advisory note that highlighted the urgency of the matter. The Committees were requested to submit a joint report to the National Assembly by no later than 23 July 2025, containing recommendations on the mechanism and process to be followed in dealing with the matter. Further, the Report should contain a summary of findings; recommendations for further action; and any proposals the Committees consider appropriate for the speedy resolution of the matter.

⁴⁴ Joseph Mudau and Hulisani Takalani, "Commissions of Inquiry in South Africa: Towards an Enhanced Model of Ethics and Accountability," *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 13, no. 1 (2024): 51.

⁴⁵ Sabelo Dhlamini, *State of Corruption Causing Financial Misconduct in the South African Public Sector* (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2024).

⁴⁶ Ad Hoc Madlanga Commission 2025.

⁴⁷ Longmire, S., 2025. *Cartel: the coming invasion of Mexico's drug wars*. Macmillan+ ORM.

⁴⁸ Claudia Lopes, "'And Then You Go Home Having Anger Issues': Investigating Police-Perpetrated Domestic Violence in South Africa," 2025.

communities fear police due to perceived complicity.⁴⁹ Political factors intensify this decline; claims of bribery and ministerial interference have increased scepticism, as suspended leaders continue to deny their involvement despite growing evidence from commissions. Thomas argues that in areas such as O.R. Tambo Inland, where gang violence affects schools and communities, this disintegration directly correlates with larger societal expenses, such as youth involvement in crime and obstacles to inclusive education initiatives.⁵⁰

Addressing persistent impunity demands urgent reforms, such as bolstering the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID), implementing whistleblower protections, and conducting full audits of SAPS leadership.⁵¹ Yet, ongoing denials and slow prosecutions indicate that without decisive action, organised crime will continue to flourish, further alienating the public and destabilising South Africa's rule of law.⁵²

Summary

This study has investigated the issue of how individuals within the South African Police Service are involved in the drug trade by providing protection to dealers, leaking intelligence, and enforcing laws selectively. It centered on three primary concerns: (a) the protection of drug dealers from apprehension, (b) the ongoing employment of officers associated with drug syndicates, and (c) the hindrance of investigations when accountability extends to higher ranks. The findings indicated that structural deficiencies, compromised oversight, and a prevailing culture of impunity have enabled organized crime to flourish, thereby eroding public trust, community safety, and constitutional governance. The study underscored the critical need for independent investigations, effective prosecutions, and institutional reforms to restore accountability and uphold the rule of law within the South African police.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proposes the following recommendations:

- Dealing with allegations of police involvement in the drug trade in South Africa requires more than having laws on paper. It calls for a policing system that is transparent, accountable, and trusted by the public, where wrongdoing is properly investigated and addressed without fear or favour.
- Independent investigation bodies, such as the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID), must be strengthened so that they can operate without interference. This means giving them real autonomy, adequate funding, and the authority to ensure that cases involving police officers linked to drug syndicates are fully and fairly investigated.
- Stronger internal accountability systems within the South African Police Service are essential. In this instance, regular lifestyle audits, asset checks, and integrity testing must be part of routine policing, especially in high-risk units dealing with drugs and organised crime. This helps ensure that officers who may be compromised are identified early and removed from sensitive positions.
- Better protection for whistleblowers is crucial. People who report corruption or criminal activity within the police often fear retaliation. Clear and reliable protection measures are needed so that both officers and civilians can come forward safely without risking their lives or careers.
- Cases involving police officers and organised crime must be prioritised for prosecution. The National Prosecuting Authority should strengthen specialised capacity to deal with corruption linked to law enforcement, so that these matters are handled quickly and are not weakened by delays or interference.

⁴⁹ Michael Molefe Tuge, "An Evaluation of Policing Participation of Communities in Informal Settlements in Mamelodi, Gauteng" (University of South Africa (South Africa), 2024).

⁵⁰ Greg Thomas, "Beat Rebels Corrupting Youth Against Babylon," in *The Routledge Reader of African American Rhetoric* (Routledge, 2024), 711–84.

⁵¹ John Motsamai Modise, "An Examination of the South African Police Service (SAPS) Service Delivery Objectives, the Challenges Encountered by Station Commanders, and the Implications for Operational Effectiveness and Public Trust," 2025.

⁵² Huma Haider, "Addressing Organised Crime and Security Sector Reform and Governance," 2024.

- Tighter control over intelligence information is necessary. Leakage of sensitive information to drug networks undermines investigations and puts lives at risk. This can be addressed through stronger data security systems, controlled access to case information, and strict disciplinary consequences for breaches.
- Finally, rebuilding public trust in the police requires openness and accountability. Regular public reporting on disciplinary actions, stronger oversight by independent bodies, and greater involvement by civil society can help ensure policing is not hidden from public scrutiny. Hence, addressing police involvement in the drug trade is not just about enforcing laws, but about restoring integrity within the system. Without real accountability and institutional honesty, organised crime will continue to exploit weaknesses in law enforcement and operate with impunity.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that claims about SAPS involvement in the drug trade are not mere isolated incidents but rather indicative of more profound institutional failures within South Africa's law enforcement framework. By examining police protection of drug traffickers, the ongoing employment of officers under suspicion, and the hindrance of investigations at higher echelons, the study uncovered how corruption is perpetuated through systemic vulnerabilities, selective enforcement, and compromised accountability systems. These factors have allowed organised crime to thrive while diminishing public confidence, community safety, and constitutional governance. The results highlighted that judicial interference, inadequate oversight, and a prevailing culture of impunity have eroded the rule of law from within the very institution responsible for maintaining it. The study asserted that without decisive measures, such as independent inquiries, credible prosecutions, and comprehensive institutional reforms, the drug trade will continue to be protected by those charged with law enforcement, thereby perpetuating injustice and undermining democratic legitimacy in South Africa.

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