

Assessing the Effectiveness of Recruitment Practices in the National Police Service and their Impact on National Security in Kenya

*David Koome Mutea; Dennis Ndambo; Victor Muithya

National Defence University – Kenya

Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.906000280>

Received: 16 May 2025; Accepted: 20 May 2025; Published: 11 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of recruitment practices within the National Police Service (NPS) of Kenya and their implications for national security. The research aimed to assess whether current recruitment procedures align with the operational needs and professional standards required to safeguard internal security. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with NPS personnel across various ranks and regions. The findings revealed key shortcomings in the recruitment process, including inadequate vetting mechanisms, political interference, limited transparency, and the lack of merit-based selection. These factors have contributed to the entry of underqualified and sometimes compromised individuals into the service, undermining professionalism, discipline, and operational effectiveness. The study further established that weak recruitment systems hinder the NPS's ability to respond effectively to evolving security threats, eroding public trust and weakening national security. The study recommends reforming recruitment frameworks to emphasize integrity, competence, and institutional accountability as critical steps toward strengthening the security sector and enhancing the legitimacy of the police service in Kenya.

Keywords: Recruitment practices, National Police Service, effectiveness, national security, police professionalism, Kenya

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The efficacy of law enforcement agencies in safeguarding national security and public safety is inextricably linked to the quality of their recruitment practices. This study examines the recruitment practices within Kenya's National Police Service (NPS) and critically assesses their implications for national security. As the principal institution entrusted with maintaining law and order, the NPS plays an indispensable role in ensuring public safety and upholding the rule of law. However, inefficiencies in its recruitment process—specifically concerning the selection, deployment, and professional development of personnel—have contributed to operational inadequacies, ethical concerns, and diminished public trust in law enforcement.

Globally, law enforcement agencies are confronted with increasingly complex and multifaceted security threats, such as cybercrime, terrorism, and organized transnational crime. In response, police forces worldwide have adapted their recruitment strategies to meet these challenges. For example, European nations such as Germany and France have tailored their recruitment frameworks to prioritize multilingualism, digital forensics, and counter-terrorism expertise, aiming to develop officers capable of addressing the transnational nature of modern security threats (Zarychta, et al, 2023). Similarly, in the United States, recruitment policies have evolved to reflect the demographic diversity of urban centers, with an emphasis on community policing to build trust in historically marginalized communities (Fielding, 2024).

In Africa, where the challenges of insurgency, organized crime, and terrorism are particularly acute, recruitment practices in law enforcement have been similarly adapted to address regional security dynamics. For instance, Nigeria has increasingly focused on recruiting officers with local cultural knowledge, which is

vital for intelligence gathering and fostering public cooperation in conflict-prone regions (Bot, 2023). In South Africa, recruitment has prioritized technological expertise to address the rising tide of cybercrime and digital fraud (Fielding, 2024).

Kenya's National Police Service, established under the National Police Service Act of 2011, is a product of the country's constitutional reform process, which sought to create a more transparent, accountable, and service-oriented policing institution. This reform was a critical response to the historical challenges faced by the Kenya Police Force, including corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of public trust (National Police Service Act, 2011). Recruitment, as the entry point to the NPS, was identified as a pivotal area for transformation, with the aim of attracting officers who embody the values of integrity, professionalism, and respect for human rights. However, despite the progress made under the reform agenda, significant challenges remain in ensuring that recruitment practices align with the evolving security needs of the nation and the constitutional expectations for the police service (Hope, 2017).

Reports from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2022) highlight ongoing deficiencies in the recruitment process, including mismatches between the skills of newly recruited officers and the competencies required to address modern security threats. In particular, concerns have been raised about the inadequate vetting of recruits, limited psychological assessments, and insufficient training for handling complex and non-traditional security challenges. These issues underscore the importance of reevaluating the recruitment framework within the NPS to ensure that it meets the demands of contemporary policing and contributes effectively to national security.

The significance of this study lies in its examination of the NPS recruitment practices through the lens of both national security imperatives and institutional reforms. By critically assessing the alignment of current recruitment strategies with the NPS's broader mandate, this research aims to identify key gaps and offer recommendations for enhancing the professionalism and effectiveness of the force. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore the relationship between human capital management and national security outcomes, recognizing that a well-recruited and adequately trained police force is essential to addressing the complex security challenges facing Kenya.

This investigation is geographically focused on Kenya, with particular attention to the NPS's recruitment practices. It also examines the broader implications of these practices on law enforcement and national security in the country. While the study acknowledges the wider scope of human capital challenges within the NPS, it specifically concentrates on recruitment as a critical determinant of police efficacy and professionalism. The limitations of the study include potential access constraints to sensitive institutional data, as well as respondent biases in surveys and interviews.

Ultimately, this research will contribute to the ongoing discourse on police reform in Kenya, offering a nuanced understanding of how recruitment practices, if strategically refined, can strengthen the capacity of the NPS to address contemporary security threats and enhance public trust in the institution.

Statement to the Problem

The National Police Service (NPS) in Kenya is a critical institution mandated to maintain internal security, enforce the rule of law, and uphold public order. However, persistent challenges in its recruitment processes have raised serious concerns about the institution's capacity to fulfill this mandate effectively. Reports of favoritism, corruption, political interference, and inadequate transparency in the recruitment of police officers have led to the appointment of individuals who may lack the requisite qualifications, ethical grounding, and professional competence. These systemic weaknesses not only erode public trust in the NPS but also compromise its operational effectiveness, thereby posing a significant threat to national security.

While various reforms—such as the establishment of the National Police Service Commission (NPSC) and the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA)—were instituted to professionalize the service, the intended outcomes of merit-based and accountable recruitment remain largely unmet. Existing literature has acknowledged the broader challenges facing the NPS, but there is a paucity of empirical studies that critically

examine how recruitment practices directly affect the quality of policing and the broader national security architecture in Kenya. Furthermore, the ongoing evolution of security threats, including terrorism, organized crime, and public unrest, demands a highly trained, motivated, and ethically grounded police force—qualities that are unlikely to emerge from a flawed recruitment system.

The disconnect between recruitment ideals and actual practices highlights an urgent need for systematic evaluation. Without a deliberate and evidence-based effort to assess and reform recruitment frameworks, the NPS risks perpetuating institutional inefficiencies and weakening Kenya's resilience to internal and external threats. This study therefore seeks to assess the effectiveness of recruitment practices in the NPS and analyze their implications for national security, with the goal of informing policy, enhancing institutional integrity, and strengthening public safety.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of recruitment practices within the National Police Service (NPS) in Kenya and their implications for national security. It critically examines how recruitment processes influence the quality, professionalism, and operational capacity of police officers. The study concentrates on practices carried out by the National Police Service Commission (NPSC), emphasizing issues such as transparency, fairness, and merit-based selection. While it acknowledges other aspects of police management, the analysis is limited to recruitment and only considers related areas where they directly affect national security outcomes. Data is drawn from selected counties with varying security dynamics to provide a balanced and representative perspective.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited to the National Police Service (NPS) of Kenya, focusing on the period post-2011, following the implementation of the National Police Service Act. It examines recruitment practices and human capital management within the NPS, specifically in relation to their impact on national security. The study does not extend to other law enforcement agencies or security sectors and does not address broader factors such as budget allocation, political interference, or external security influences. Data is sourced primarily from NPS personnel, policymakers, and government reports, limiting the scope to internal human capital management challenges and their direct implications on law enforcement effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, police recruitment has been extensively examined within the broader discourse of public administration and law enforcement professionalism. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, studies by Reiner (2020), Newburn (2015), and White and Escobar (2008) have addressed recruitment as a foundation of effective policing, emphasizing meritocracy, diversity, and procedural fairness. These studies often highlight the importance of competency-based hiring, psychological assessments, and integrity vetting as central to building public trust and institutional effectiveness. However, these contexts benefit from relatively stable governance systems and robust institutional oversight mechanisms—conditions that differ markedly from those in developing countries. As such, while these studies offer valuable theoretical insights, their direct applicability to states grappling with political interference, ethnic divisions, and weak accountability frameworks—like Kenya—remains limited.

Moreover, although global studies have drawn attention to the role of recruitment in enhancing operational readiness and legitimacy (Bayley, 2006; Prenzler, 2013), they largely overlook the intersection between recruitment and national security imperatives in fragile or transitional states. This presents a theoretical and empirical gap, especially in contexts where the quality of police personnel has a direct bearing on counterterrorism, border control, and internal stability.

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, the literature on policing has often focused on structural and post-colonial challenges, including militarization, low professionalism, and limited public confidence (Hills, 2007; Tankebe, 2013). Recruitment, while occasionally mentioned, is rarely the central object of study. Where addressed, it is

often treated as a procedural formality within broader reform narratives. For instance, studies in Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa (Alemika, 2009; Bruce, 2003; Kasozi, 2017) acknowledge that recruitment suffers from politicization, nepotism, and limited capacity, yet few explore how these deficits translate into weakened security responses or compromised rule of law.

Even when recruitment is analyzed, there is minimal application of organizational theories or human capital frameworks to explain how poor hiring practices impact long-term police performance. Furthermore, most regional analyses fail to link recruitment deficiencies to broader national security outcomes such as vulnerability to violent extremism, ethnic conflict management, and civil-military relations. This oversight limits the depth of policy prescriptions offered by existing studies and underscores the need for a more integrated and context-aware approach to police recruitment in the region.

In Kenya, scholarly attention to the National Police Service has primarily revolved around themes of police reform, public perception, and extrajudicial killings (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003; Osse, 2016; KNCHR, 2015). Although recruitment is periodically mentioned in audit reports and policy documents, academic inquiry into its design, implementation, and security implications remains scant. The National Task Force on Police Reforms (2009) and reports by the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) have identified recruitment as a critical area plagued by bribery, ethnic favoritism, and lack of transparency. However, empirical studies investigating how these shortcomings affect the strategic functions of the police—such as intelligence gathering, public trust, and resilience against internal threats—are still underdeveloped.

Additionally, no comprehensive study has systematically applied theoretical models such as Human Capital Theory or Organizational Behavior Theory to interrogate how recruitment affects professionalism, morale, and retention within the Kenyan police service. This theoretical silence, combined with a lack of longitudinal or comparative studies, makes it difficult to generate actionable recommendations for policy reform or capacity-building. Furthermore, most local studies do not explore the direct linkage between recruitment flaws and Kenya's evolving security landscape, including terrorism, transnational organized crime, and urban unrest.

Identified Gap

From this global-to-local synthesis, it is evident that while recruitment is widely acknowledged as a foundational element of effective policing, the empirical and theoretical exploration of its implications for national security remains limited—particularly in the Kenyan context. The absence of a context-specific, theory-informed, and policy-relevant analysis constitutes a critical research gap. This study seeks to fill that gap by critically examining the recruitment practices of the National Police Service of Kenya, drawing on Human Capital Theory and Organizational Behavior Theory to explore their impact on institutional effectiveness and national security.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two key theories: Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Organizational Behavior Theory (OBT). These theories provide insights into how recruitment practices can enhance the performance and effectiveness of the National Police Service (NPS) of Kenya.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (HCT), developed by economists like Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961), emphasizes the value of investing in individuals' skills and knowledge. In the context of the NPS, HCT highlights the importance of recruiting candidates with specialized skills, such as expertise in cybercrime and crisis management, to address evolving security threats. HCT also stresses the need for continuous training and development to ensure that officers remain adaptable and capable of managing emerging challenges (Cohen & McKee, 2022). This investment in human capital strengthens the overall effectiveness of the police force and enhances its ability to respond to complex security issues.

Organizational Behavior Theory

Organizational Behavior Theory (OBT) focuses on how individual and group behaviors influence organizational performance. Scholars like Mayo (1933), Weber (1947), and Barnard (1938) have shown that effective recruitment practices can shape the culture and efficiency of an organization. For the NPS, OBT suggests that recruitment should prioritize candidates whose values align with the force's mission, improving morale and organizational cohesion. Additionally, adopting transparent and merit-based recruitment processes can help reduce corruption and foster public trust in the police force. Schein's (2010) Organizational Culture Theory further supports the idea that recruitment practices should promote a positive culture, enhancing professionalism and accountability within the NPS.

DATA AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design to evaluate recruitment practices in the National Police Service (NPS) and their implications for national security. The descriptive component enabled an in-depth examination of current human capital management practices, while the correlational element facilitated analysis of relationships between professionalism, public trust, and national security outcomes. A mixed-methods approach—combining quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insights from interviews—was employed to ensure both analytical breadth and contextual depth (Creswell, 2014).

Site Description

The research focused on Kenya, specifically within the framework of the NPS's operations across various regions. Since Kenya presents a unique and complex security landscape that includes urban and rural areas with diverse security challenges, major urban center such as Nairobi and Mombasa experience unique threats such as organized crime, terrorism and cybercrime, will be considered. Rural regions which face issues such as cattle rustling and local conflicts such Baringo, Garissa, Isiolo, Meru etc, were also considered. These varying contexts provided a comprehensive view of how human capital management practices and professional standards within the NPS impact the overall national security landscape.

Sample Size

The study targeted a diverse group of stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in human capital management within the National Police Service (NPS). These comprised officials from the National Police Service Commission (NPSC), responsible for formulating and overseeing human resource policies; serving police commanders and officers across various ranks and units; senior policymakers from the Ministry of Interior and NPS directorates; as well as opinion leaders and select members of the public, particularly from regions significantly affected by insecurity. This inclusive approach aimed to capture multiple perspectives on how recruitment practices influence professionalism, public trust, and national security outcomes.

To determine an appropriate sample size, Cochran's formula for large populations was applied at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error to ensure statistical reliability. A sample of approximately 120 participants was selected to achieve balanced representation across the identified stakeholder groups. This sample size was considered adequate for generating credible, generalizable insights within the Kenyan context.

Data Collection Method

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires distributed both online and in person to NPSC officials, police officers, policymakers, and the public. The aim was to capture diverse perspectives on recruitment, professionalism, public trust, and national security outcomes.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including human capital managers, policymakers, and security experts. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via digital platforms, depending on participant availability. This approach provided in-depth insights into human capital practices and their impact on national security.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants. All participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential implications of the research, allowing for informed consent. Their identities were anonymized, and data protection measures were implemented to safeguard sensitive information. Only aggregated data will be reported to maintain confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The study was conducted with integrity, ensuring honest analysis and reporting of findings to maintain trust and validity.

Data Processing And Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires will be analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), whereby descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation will provide an overview of respondents' views on human capital management practices. Correlation and regression analyses will then be conducted to examine relationships between recruitment, professionalism, public trust and national security, aligning with the research objectives.

Qualitative data from interviews will undergo thematic analysis in Nvivo software. Recurring themes, such as perceptions of recruitment fairness, professionalism and trust in law enforcement identified, will then be analyzed to provide context to the quantitative findings. This mixed-methods approach will enhance the depth and breadth of the analysis, yielding a more holistic understanding of recruitment and security dynamics in the NPS.

FINDINGS

Response Rate

The response rate is an essential aspect of this study, reflecting the level of engagement from the targeted participants, approximately of 120 individuals were targeted for participation in the study, and 94 completed and returned the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 78.33%, which exceeds established threshold of satisfactory for research purposes. This response rate is considered adequate for drawing meaningful conclusions from the study, providing a solid basis for analyzing the human capital management challenges within the National Police Service (NPS) and their impact on national security outcomes.

Table 1: Response Rate

Participants	Responses Received	Response Rate (%)
Questionnaires Returned	94	78.33%
Questionnaires Not Returned	26	21.66%
Total	120	100%

Demographic Data

The demographic data offers essential insights into the diversity of participants, helping to contextualize their perspectives on human capital management within the National Police Service (NPS). The following section summarizes the key demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age group, education level, and years of service in the NPS.

Gender Distribution Of Respondents

Of the respondents, 73.4% were male, and 26.6% were female, reflecting the male dominance in policing. Despite this, the inclusion of female officers signals a shift toward gender inclusivity in the National Police Service (NPS). Female officers often face barriers, such as limited leadership opportunities, affecting their morale and job satisfaction. Addressing these gender dynamics is crucial for promoting equity and improving professionalism in the NPS.

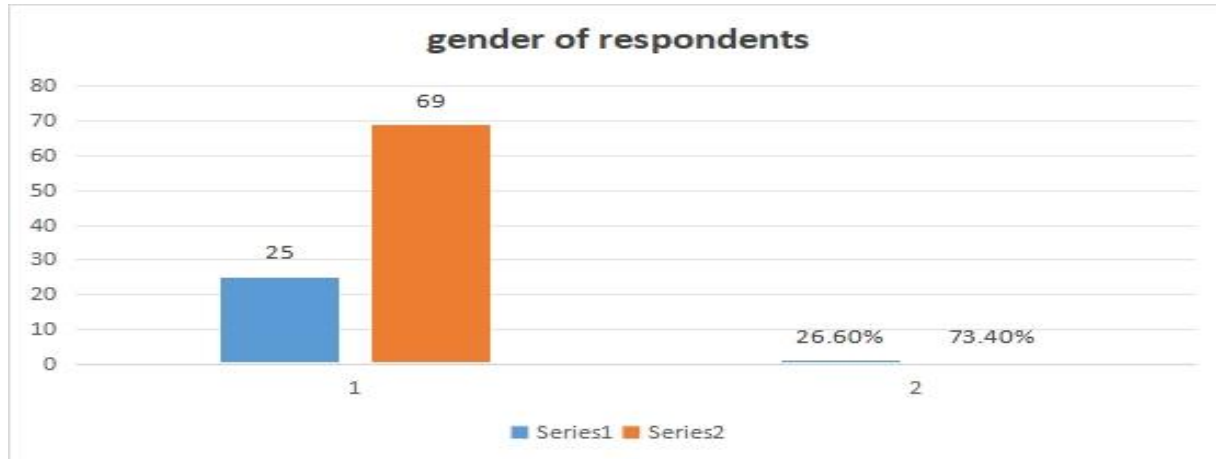


Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents (Source; Field Data ,2024)

Age Group Of Respondents

The majority of respondents (64.9%) were aged 36–45 years, representing a mid-career group with valuable operational experience and institutional knowledge. This group is crucial for policy implementation and supervision, aligning with Max Weber’s (1946) bureaucratic theory, where authority is most effectively exercised in hierarchical structures. The lower representation of younger officers (13.8%) and senior officers (19.1%) suggests potential challenges in recruitment, retention, and succession planning. Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977) highlights the importance of mentorship, which may be hindered by the lack of senior officers and early-career officers. This age imbalance underscores vulnerabilities in long-term institutional sustainability within the NPS.

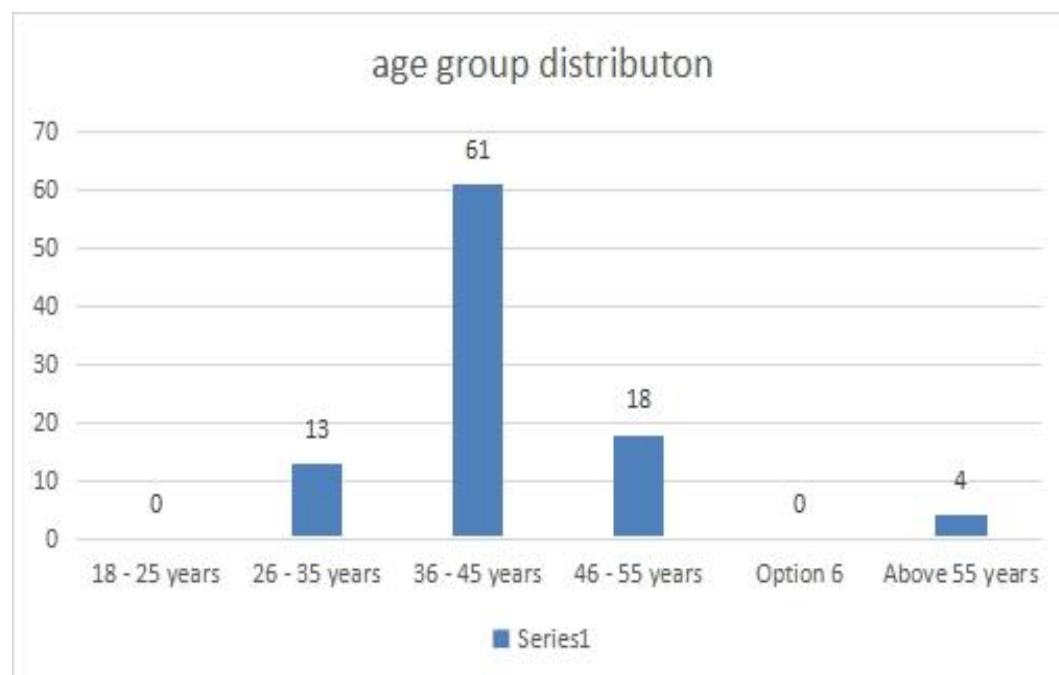


Figure 2: Age Group of Respondents (Source; Field Data ,2024)

Level Of Education of Respondents

Most respondents (44.7%) hold bachelor’s degrees, followed by 18.1% with master’s degrees. Diploma holders make up 21.3%, and 16% have secondary education. This shows a trend toward a more educated police force. According to Becker’s Human Capital Theory (1964), higher education improves officer productivity and effectiveness. However, the presence of officers with lower educational levels highlights the need for ongoing training and development to enhance overall competency within the NPS.

Level of Education

94 responses

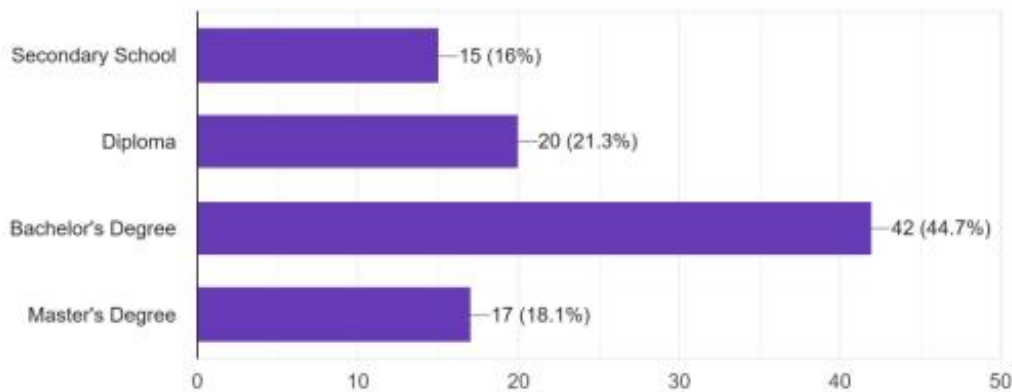


Figure 3: Level of Education of Respondents (Source; Field Data ,2024)

Years of Service In The Nps

The majority of respondents (69.1%) have over 15 years of service, with fewer officers having between 1–10 years of experience (30.8%). This indicates workforce rich in institutional knowledge but also points to potential gaps in succession planning and knowledge transfer. According to Argyris and Schön’s (1978) theory of organizational learning, the imbalance between experienced officers and newer recruits may hinder the exchange of ideas and innovation. To address this, the NPS could implement mentorship programs to facilitate knowledge transfer and foster intergenerational collaboration.

Years of Service in the NPS

94 responses

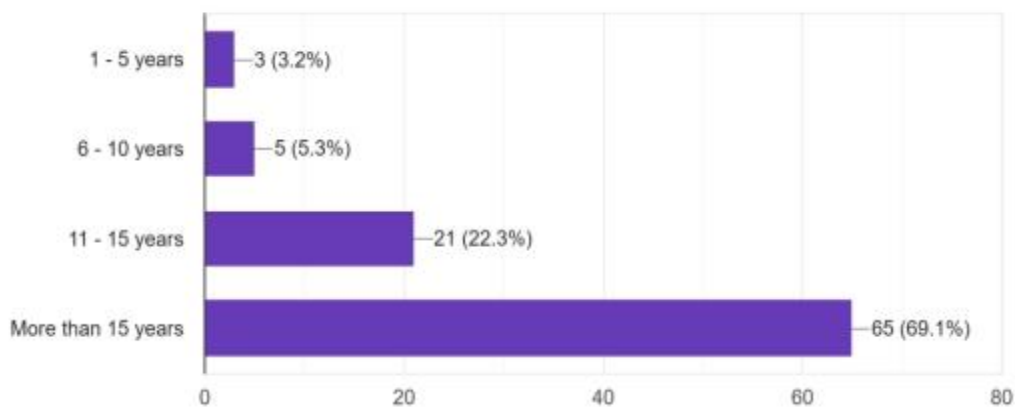


Figure 4: Years of Service for Respondents (Source; Field Data ,2025)

Main Respondents' Demographic Information

The study aimed to assess the transparency and merit-based nature of the National Police Service (NPS) recruitment process, as well as the challenges associated with recruitment, and the impact this process has on the effectiveness of law enforcement in Kenya. The findings highlight a number of challenges, especially around transparency, meritocracy, and the quality of recruits.

Transparency of the Nps Recruitment Process

Figure 5 presents respondents' perceptions of the transparency of the National Police Service (NPS) recruitment process. A significant proportion of respondents (38.3%) viewed the process as not transparent, while 23.4% went further, categorizing it as highly corrupt. In contrast, only 1.1% described the recruitment as very transparent, and 22.3% considered it somewhat transparent, with another 21.3% selecting neutral. These responses indicate that over 60% of officers perceive the recruitment process to be lacking in integrity or marred by corruption. The minimal confidence shown by the mere 1.1% who found the process very transparent underscores the severity of the perceived deficit in accountability and fairness.

These findings directly respond to research question, which sought to explore how recruitment practices affect professionalism and trust within the NPS. Transparency in recruitment is a cornerstone of professional policing; when absent, it fosters disillusionment, weakens organizational legitimacy, and undermines both internal and public trust. The data demonstrates that the NPS is grappling with a crisis of confidence, not only from external observers but also from within its ranks.

Qualitative responses corroborate this quantitative pattern. One officer stated: "It's clear that there are elements of corruption in the recruitment process, and this undermines the entire institution." Another added: "The recruitment process is not clear, and it seems to be influenced by who you know, not what you can do. This creates frustration and a sense of unfairness among many of us." These insights expose a culture of favoritism, nepotism, and political interference, which many officers perceive as pervasive and normalized. Such practices erode meritocracy, delegitimize leadership, and stifle morale among qualified officers.

This aligns with Colquitt's (2013) Organizational Justice Theory, which emphasizes the role of perceived fairness in shaping organizational behavior and morale. The theory posits that when procedural justice is compromised — as through opaque or biased recruitment — employees' commitment, motivation, and performance decline. The evidence from the NPS supports this framework, illustrating that when recruitment lacks transparency, it not only creates distrust but also catalyzes disengagement and resentment.

Furthermore, these findings confirm observations in existing regional scholarship. For instance, Okoth (2020) identified political patronage and regional biases in NPS recruitment as major impediments to professionalization. Akech (2019) similarly highlighted the institutionalization of informal networks that override formal hiring procedures. However, the current study goes beyond these general critiques by providing statistically grounded evidence and first-hand accounts from officers themselves. This internal perspective contributes to a more granular understanding of how corruption in recruitment affects morale, organizational loyalty, and long-term institutional capacity.

One officer remarked: "We are not informed about the selection criteria, and many times we don't know who is in charge of making the decisions. This creates confusion and makes it hard to trust the system." This suggests not only a lack of procedural clarity but also inadequate communication and accountability mechanisms. Literature on institutional trust (e.g., Tyler & Huo, 2002) consistently shows that when rules are unclear and decision-making opaque, employees disengage and organizational performance suffers.

The categorization of 23.4% of the recruitment process as "highly corrupt" is particularly troubling, as it indicates that corruption is not merely perceived as incidental but as embedded in the system. This finding extends previous empirical work by demonstrating the internal normalization of corrupt practices. Officers are not just victims of opaque processes; many have come to expect — and even anticipate — favoritism as part of

institutional life. This normalization presents a long-term threat to police reform efforts and underscores the need for radical procedural overhaul.

In summary, the combination of statistical data and qualitative responses highlights a widespread belief that the NPS recruitment process is fundamentally flawed. The perception of high corruption and low transparency not only damages internal morale and merit-based advancement but also perpetuates a broader crisis of professionalism. These findings validate theoretical frameworks of organizational justice, reinforce regional critiques, and contribute new evidence on how recruitment transparency — or the lack thereof — affects the structural and psychological integrity of the National Police Service.

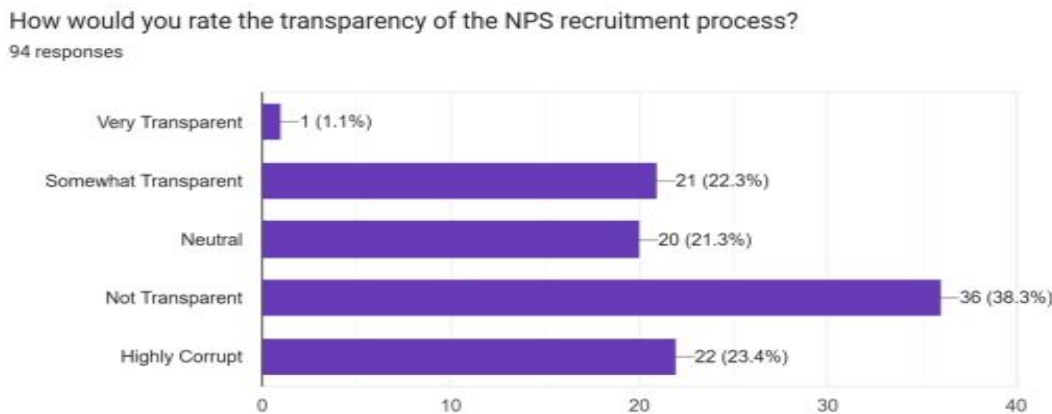


Figure 5: Transparency of the NPS recruitment process (Source; Field Data ,2025)

Extent At Which Nps Recruit’s Officers Based on Merit and Qualifications

Figure 4-9 presents the respondents’ views on whether recruitment in the National Police Service (NPS) is based on merit and qualifications. A substantial number of officers — 37 respondents (39.4%) — felt that recruitment is conducted to a moderate extent based on merit. Another 35 respondents (37.2%) believed merit plays a role to a small extent, while 13 (13.8%) indicated it happens to a large extent. Only 1 respondent (1.1%) thought recruitment occurs to a very large extent based on qualifications, and 9 respondents (9.6%) stated that it is not at all based on merit.

This distribution reveals that more than 85% of respondents believe merit either plays only a moderate, small, or nonexistent role in the NPS recruitment process. These perceptions reinforce the concerns raised in Research Question 2, which interrogates the relationship between recruitment practices and the professionalism of the police force. The results suggest that a significant trust deficit exists among officers concerning the fairness and credibility of recruitment mechanisms.

One officer observed: “There are some efforts to select based on qualifications, but it often feels like other factors play a more significant role, like political connections and favoritism.” This aligns with broader concerns about patronage and informal influence, suggesting that while formal qualifications may be superficially acknowledged, they are routinely overridden by external pressures. Another officer remarked: “Most officers are recruited because of their connections or political influence, not their ability to perform the job.” These insights reflect a shared frustration that meritocracy is systematically undermined.

Such perceptions echo the findings of Bendick (2010), whose study on organizational hiring practices demonstrated that nepotism and favoritism significantly erode institutional credibility, reduce internal morale, and hinder organizational effectiveness. In the context of the NPS, similar outcomes appear evident. Officers frequently reported feelings of disillusionment and alienation, particularly where they perceived promotions or hiring decisions to be based on who one knows rather than demonstrable capability or training.

Moreover, one respondent bluntly stated: “The recruitment process is more about connections than skills. It’s frustrating to see people promoted or hired based on who they know, not what they know.” This reflects a deeper concern that such practices result in structural inefficiencies within the force. Officers hired or promoted through non-meritocratic channels may lack the necessary competencies, undermining both unit cohesion and public confidence in police performance.

This analysis gains further relevance when interpreted through Organizational Justice Theory (Colquitt, 2013). The perceived absence of procedural fairness — particularly in crucial human capital practices like recruitment — contributes to widespread dissatisfaction, reduced organizational identification, and impaired performance. The theory posits that procedural justice is central to motivating ethical behavior and institutional loyalty, outcomes which appear severely compromised in the NPS case.

Compared to previous studies, this research extends understanding by grounding perceptions of unfair recruitment not only in general public opinion but in the lived experiences of police officers themselves. While regional studies such as Otenyo (2018) and Nyaribo (2016) have documented corruption in the NPS from a public oversight perspective, the present findings add a valuable internal dimension. They show that even among rank-and-file officers, there is a consensus that the integrity of recruitment has been compromised, leading to broader concerns about the legitimacy of the institution.

The fact that only 1.1% of respondents believe the NPS recruits to a very large extent based on merit reveals a critical vulnerability in the force’s human capital strategy. Recruitment, as the entry point into professional policing, should ideally embody the principles of fairness, competence, and accountability. When compromised, it triggers a ripple effect — demotivating high-potential candidates, entrenching mediocrity, and breeding systemic cynicism.

Ultimately, the data illustrates that while some officers recognize partial attempts at merit-based recruitment, many more highlight the continued dominance of political interference, favoritism, and opaque criteria. This deeply rooted challenge threatens not only the professional integrity of the NPS but also its ability to execute core functions effectively. If the recruitment process continues to prioritize connections over qualifications, it is unlikely that the institution will meet the evolving demands of contemporary policing or regain the public’s trust

To what extent do you believe that the NPS recruits officers based on merit and qualifications?

94 responses

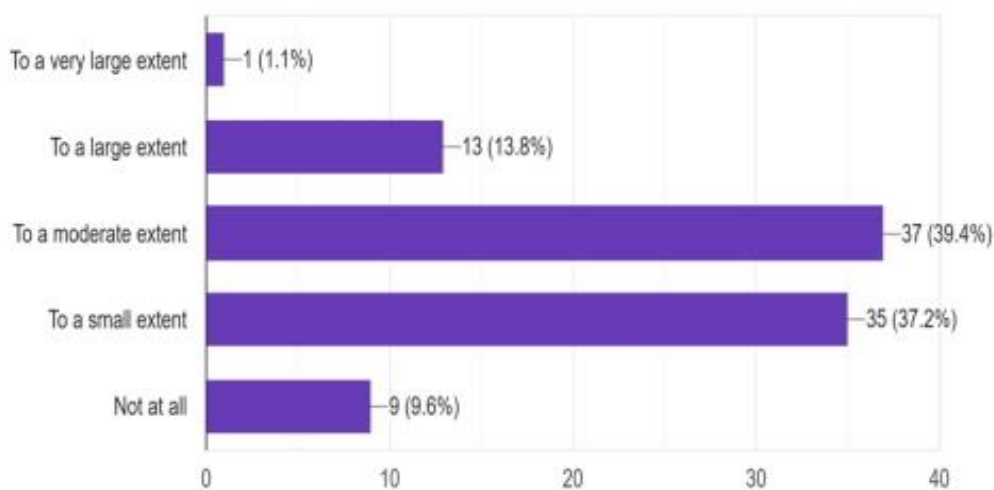


Figure 6: Extent at which NPS recruits officers based on merit and qualifications (Source; Field Data ,2025)

The Major Challenges Associated with the Recruitment Process in the Nps

The findings regarding the recruitment process within the National Police Service (NPS) reveal several significant challenges that directly affect its effectiveness and the overall quality of law enforcement in Kenya. Figure 4-10 highlights the most frequently cited issues, which include corruption and favoritism, political interference, inadequate vetting, and the lack of clear recruitment criteria, all of which were identified as major barriers by the respondents.

A striking 83% of respondents pointed to corruption and favoritism as central problems in the recruitment process. One officer remarked, “The officers recruited through corruption and political interests often do not serve the interests of the NPS but their own interests, which is why we see increasing cases of rogue police officers.” This sentiment underscores the detrimental effects of allowing personal connections and political loyalties to guide recruitment decisions. The overwhelming presence of corruption and favoritism in the NPS recruitment process compromises the integrity and professionalism of the force, leading to a mismatch between recruits' qualifications and the needs of the police service. The findings align with research by Bendick (2010), who found that organizations suffering from such practices often experience reduced effectiveness and public trust.

Political interference was another significant concern, with 76.6% of respondents noting its pervasive influence on recruitment decisions. One participant stated, “The recruitment process is highly influenced by political agendas, with officers selected based on their political connections rather than their ability to serve the public.” This reinforces findings in the literature that political patronage undermines merit-based recruitment systems, often leading to the selection of individuals whose primary loyalty is to political figures rather than to the mission of the police service. This political interference weakens the ability of the NPS to function effectively, as recruits may prioritize political interests over the professional competence required for law enforcement duties.

Inadequate vetting of recruits was also cited as a major challenge, with 46.8% of respondents acknowledging that many recruits enter the force without thorough background checks. One officer pointed out, “There is a lack of thorough background checks, and many recruits slip through the cracks without proper scrutiny.” This issue raises serious concerns about the integrity and reliability of officers within the NPS, as recruits who are not properly vetted may have criminal backgrounds or insufficient qualifications, posing risks to public safety. This finding aligns with Mugambi's (2019) study, which highlighted that inadequate vetting procedures can lead to the recruitment of individuals who are ill-equipped to serve effectively in law enforcement roles.

The lack of clear recruitment criteria was another area of concern, with 36.2% of respondents emphasizing that the absence of standardized and transparent recruitment standards creates opportunities for bias and inconsistency. One participant shared, “We don't have a consistent or transparent set of criteria, which makes the recruitment process unfair and biased.” This lack of transparency undermines the legitimacy of the recruitment process, leading to perceptions of unfairness and unequal opportunities. It further suggests that a more structured and clear set of criteria is needed to ensure that only qualified individuals are selected for the NPS.

Finally, the lack of diversity in recruitment was raised by 35.1% of respondents, with one participant noting, “A homogeneous police force may struggle to engage with and gain the trust of the broader public.” This observation highlights the importance of ensuring that the NPS reflects the diversity of the Kenyan population. A police force that is not representative of the community it serves may struggle to build trust and effectively engage with different social and ethnic groups, further complicating the already challenging task of maintaining public security.

These challenges collectively point to the systemic weaknesses within the NPS recruitment process, which is characterized by corruption, political interference, inadequate vetting, and a lack of clear and transparent criteria. These issues not only hinder the recruitment of qualified officers but also negatively impact the overall effectiveness of law enforcement in Kenya. As one respondent aptly put it, “The kind of recruits produced in a flawed recruitment process will be ineffective,” emphasizing the direct link between the quality of recruits and

the performance of the police force. The findings underscore the need for urgent reform in the NPS recruitment process to address these challenges and ensure that the service is staffed by capable and committed officers.

These findings also resonate with Lindbeck, Nyberg, and Weibull’s (2003) study, which identified similar issues of political interference and corruption within public sector recruitment, suggesting that merit-based systems are essential for improving the performance of public institutions. The study’s emphasis on the importance of transparent and fair recruitment processes further supports the need for systemic change within the NPS to foster greater professionalism, trust, and effectiveness.

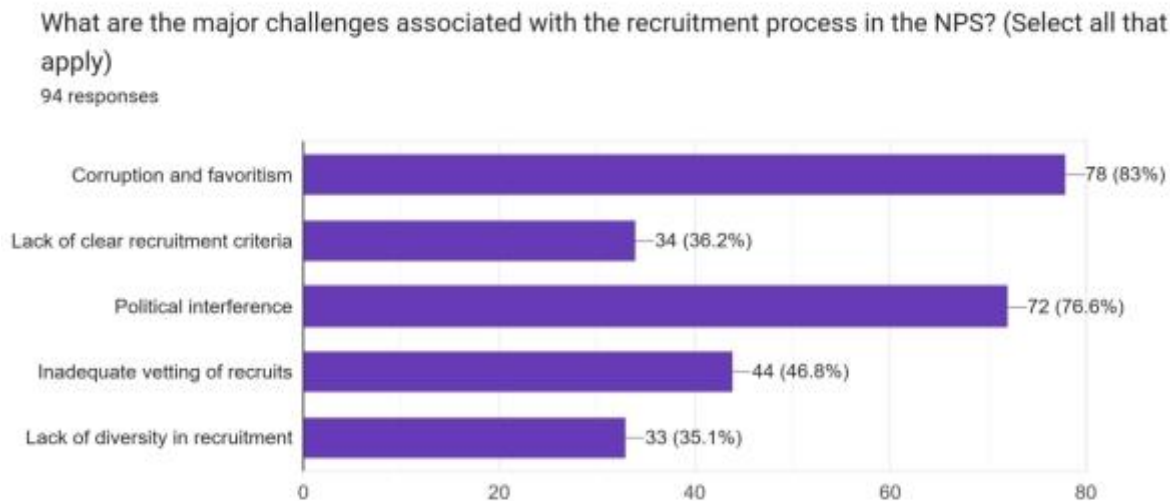


Figure 6: Major challenges associated with the recruitment process in the NPS (Source; Field Data ,2025)

DISCUSSION

The study provides significant insights into the relationship between recruitment practices and national security within the National Police Service (NPS) of Kenya. Findings indicate that opaque recruitment processes, marked by corruption and political interference, severely compromise the quality and professionalism of the force. The respondents overwhelmingly highlighted the role of political patronage and favoritism in recruitment decisions, which, in turn, erode institutional trust and morale. These findings resonate with existing literature, such as Okoth (2020), which suggests that non-meritocratic recruitment practices undermine institutional integrity. The study also reveals that the lack of transparency not only impedes the internal functioning of the NPS but also threatens national security, as it diminishes the force’s capacity to address complex security challenges, such as terrorism and organized crime.

Moreover, the research underscores that merit-based recruitment remains largely sidelined in favor of political considerations. Over 80% of respondents reported that political affiliation outweighed professional qualifications in recruitment decisions. This aligns with broader concerns regarding the NPS’s inability to attract and retain qualified candidates, a critical issue for national security. The literature, such as Bendick (2010), highlights that neglecting meritocracy in recruitment leads to inefficiencies and suboptimal performance in law enforcement agencies. Therefore, a shift toward a merit-based recruitment system is essential for improving the NPS’s capacity to respond to contemporary security threats.

Finally, the study emphasizes the urgent need for institutional reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability in recruitment practices. The findings suggest that the current practices, by neglecting professionalism in favor of political connections, hinder the NPS’s ability to effectively address evolving security challenges. The absence of a clear, merit-based recruitment system undermines public trust, which is essential for the legitimacy and effectiveness of law enforcement. As noted by Lindbeck et al. (2003), a meritocratic system would contribute to a more competent, efficient, and reliable police force, thus improving

national security. Consequently, the study calls for comprehensive reforms to address these issues and ensure that the NPS can meet the demands of contemporary security landscapes.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings highlight critical issues within the National Police Service (NPS) recruitment process, primarily revolving around corruption, favoritism, and political interference. These challenges significantly undermine the professionalism, integrity, and effectiveness of the force. The lack of transparency and merit-based selection practices not only erode internal morale but also weaken the public's trust in law enforcement institutions.

To enhance the NPS's capacity to meet Kenya's security needs, urgent reforms are necessary. These reforms should focus on establishing clear, transparent recruitment criteria that prioritize merit, qualifications, and competence. Such a shift is essential for fostering a professional police force capable of addressing contemporary security challenges while rebuilding public confidence.

Ultimately, addressing these systemic flaws in the recruitment process is crucial not only for improving the internal functioning of the NPS but also for ensuring the security and stability of the nation. A reformed, merit-based recruitment system will strengthen the force's ability to serve the public effectively and with integrity.

REFERENCES

1. Alemika, E. E. O. (2009). *Police practice and police reform in Nigeria*. Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) Foundation.
2. Bayley, D. H. (2006). *Changing the guard: Developing democratic police abroad*. Oxford University Press.
3. Bot, A. (2023). *Security and law enforcement in Africa: A strategic overview*. Nairobi: African Security Press.
4. Bruce, D. (2003). *Unfinished business: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations on police reform*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.
5. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
6. Fielding, N. (2024). Recruitment, diversity, and community relations in policing: A global perspective. *Journal of Policing*, 18(3), 199-211.
7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpol.2024.03.001>
8. Hills, A. (2007). *Policing post-conflict cities*. Zed Books.
9. Hope, R. (2017). *Reforming police recruitment in Kenya: A history of progress and setbacks*. Nairobi: Justice & Reform Publications.
10. Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA). (2015). *Monitoring report on police recruitment 2015*. Government of Kenya.
11. Karanja, P. (2021). The challenges of recruitment and human capital management within the National Police Service of Kenya. *International Journal of Law Enforcement*, 11(2), 101-115.
12. Kasozi, A. B. K. (2017). *The role of the police in Ugandan politics: From protector to participant*. Fountain Publishers.
13. Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR). (2015). *The error of fighting terror with terror*. Nairobi: KNCHR.
14. National Police Service Act, 2011. Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 35 (Act No. 11 of 2011). Nairobi: Government Printer.
15. National Task Force on Police Reforms. (2009). *Report of the National Task Force on Police Reforms (The Ransley Report)*. Government of Kenya.
16. Omondi, B. (2019). Kenya's National Police Service reforms: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 12(4), 322-340.
17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jafricansec.2019.06.002>

18. Osse, A. (2016). Police reform in Kenya: A process of ‘meddling through’. *Policing and Society*, 26(8), 907–924. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2015.1077838>
19. Prenzler, T. (2013). *Professionalizing police management: A comparative study*. CRC Press.
20. Reiner, R. (2020). *The politics of the police* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
21. Ruteere, M., & Pommerolle, M. E. (2003). Democratizing security or decentralizing repression? The ambiguities of community policing in Kenya. *African Affairs*, 102(409), 587–604. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adg103>
22. Tankebe, J. (2013). Viewing things differently: The dimensions of public perceptions of police legitimacy. *Criminology*, 51(1), 103–135.
23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2012.00291.x>
24. White, M. D., & Escobar, G. (2008). Making good cops in the twenty-first century: Emerging issues for the effective recruitment, selection and training of police in the United States and abroad. *Crime and Justice International*, 24(1), 20–27.
25. Zarychta-Romanowska, L. (2023). Policing in the digital age: The evolution of recruitment practices in Europe. *European Journal of Policing*, 20(1), 58-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eupol.2023.01.006>