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DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL POLICE SERVICE IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The public is interested in and concerned about the performance of the National Police Service because security-related issues persist in Kenya despite the government's promise to reforming the security sector. This study examined the effect of democratic leadership on performance of the National Police Service in Kenya. The study adopted a correlational research design guided by positivism research philosophy. The study targeted 1,437 gazetted officers and four civil society organizations, from which 314 respondents were sampled using stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28. A pilot study was conducted with 31 senior police officers and validity results showed that the content of the questionnaire was valid as approved by professionals, while reliability results confirmed internal consistency of the research instruments. Descriptive analysis revealed moderate to high levels of agreement among senior officers, with democratic leadership rated most favorably. Qualitative findings highlighted that while officers value inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making, implementation remains inconsistent across ranks and regions. Inferential analysis confirmed that democratic leadership significantly influences the performance of the National Police Service in Kenya and emerged as the strongest predictor of performance. Multiple regression established that leadership practices explained a substantial proportion of the variance in police performance, while hierarchical regression demonstrated that security sector reforms amplified the impact of democratic leadership. Overall, democratic leadership and structured reforms were seen as essential drivers of improved police performance.

Key Words: National Police Service, Democratic Leadership, Performance, Kenya

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Democratic leadership refers to a leadership approach where leaders involve subordinates in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Wang, Hou, and Li (2022) define participatory leadership as a behavior in which leaders motivate staff to take on roles and contribute ideas that shape the direction and operations of an organization, while Yanti (2021) explains it as an approach where leaders consult and integrate staff inputs into final decisions to create a sense of ownership and empowerment. Democratic leadership engagement has been identified as a core dimension of participatory leadership (Magbity, Ofei & Wilson, 2020), and scholars emphasize that democratic leadership is particularly influential in enhancing organizational performance (Atuti & Nyang'au, 2023; Muchiri, 2020; Njuguna, 2021).

Although policing institutions are traditionally structured along hierarchical command systems, contemporary democratic policing frameworks increasingly incorporate participatory governance principles within their operational and leadership processes. Effective policing in the twenty-first century depends on collaborative leadership, internal engagement, and external stakeholder integration rather than purely top-down control (Sparrow, 2021; Lum, Koper, & Willis, 2022). In Kenya, the Constitution of 2010 entrenches public participation, accountability, and transparency as binding governance principles applicable to all state institutions, including the National Police Service. Security sector reform frameworks implemented over the last decade promote decentralized command responsibility and community policing structures that require consultation and collective problem-solving (IPOA, 2022; Mudale & Mwea, 2024).

The performance of the National Police Service has been under increasing public scrutiny. The National Crime Research Centre (2021) reported that many Kenyans view the police as corrupt, untrustworthy, and brutal, while complaints of poor responsiveness and lack of professionalism persist. Kimeu (2023) highlighted that ineffective leadership, especially non-participatory decision-making, contributed to low morale and poor service delivery within the service. Public confidence, professionalism, adherence to human rights, and responsiveness to crime scenes are central indicators of police performance (Sparrow, 2021; Mark et al., 2021; Gachii, 2020).

In this context, democratic leadership offers a pathway for improving institutional performance by enhancing officer engagement, strengthening internal accountability, and promoting collaborative decision-making. Despite this relevance, limited empirical research in Kenya has specifically examined how democratic leadership influences the performance of the National Police Service. This study therefore isolates democratic leadership to determine its effect on police performance within a reform-oriented governance environment.

Statement of the Problem

Economic development and social stability are anchored in the provision of security, a fundamental human right recognized under Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite numerous reforms introduced in Kenya's security sector, including the National Police Service Act (2011), the Coroners Act (2024), the Private Security Regulation Act (2016), and the establishment of oversight bodies such as the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) and the National Police Service Commission (NPSC), concerns about the performance and public perception of the National Police Service persist.

The National Crime Research Centre (2021) reported that 50.1% of Kenyans perceive the police as corrupt, 33.8% as untrustworthy, and 25.3% as brutal. The Kenya Police Service Annual Crime Report (2022) further recorded an increase in complaints against police officers, particularly related to excessive use of force, poor responsiveness, and lack of community trust. In addition, the Numbeo Crime Index (2023) ranked Nairobi as having a high crime index of 67.58, reflecting widespread fear of crime among residents. These indicators suggest that despite structural reforms, institutional performance and public confidence remain fragile.

A critical but underexplored contributor to this challenge is leadership practice within the service. Decision-making in the National Police Service remains predominantly top-down, limiting engagement of officers in

shaping operational strategies. Previous reform reports, including the Waki Report (2008) and the National Task Force on Police Reforms (2009), highlighted inadequate engagement of frontline officers in decision-making processes, a concern that continues to affect accountability, morale, and innovation. While democratic leadership has been shown to improve performance in other public institutions, there is limited empirical evidence on its influence within the Kenya National Police Service. The absence of research examining how democratic leadership engagement affects police performance creates a critical knowledge gap that this study seeks to address.

Specific Objective

- To determine the effect of democratic leadership on the performance of the National Police Service in Kenya

Research Hypothesis

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between democratic leadership and performance of the National Police Service in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Decision participation theory was propounded by Vroom and Jago (1988). The theorists assert that the effectiveness of decision-making depends on aspects such as the amount of relevant information possessed by decision makers, importance of decision acceptance, and the likelihood of subordinate cooperation in decision-making if allowed participation. The theory highlights that there is no one-size-fits-all decision-making process. Instead, it presents a number of options and guides the user to the one that is most relevant for the situation. If haste and divisiveness are desired, for example, an autocratic process will be required.

If collaboration is required, then the process will become more democratic leadership. When leaders follow the principle, researchers have discovered that they are more effective, and their teams are more productive and satisfied. Vroom Yetton theory is so simple that it can be used by anyone from high level management to low-ranking staff. It may be useful in unexpected and uncommon situations, whether in decision making about a day-to-day matter or handling a complex challenge.

Involving team members in decision-making improves the quality of the final product and reduces the time it takes to make a choice (Vroom & Jago, 1988). When it comes to organizational or job-related decisions (such as task prioritization or work structure), Democratic leadership leaders provide their workers a voice. One such instance is when they allow staff members to suggest fresh ideas for strategies.

Conceptual Framework

According to Oso and Onen (2011), a conceptual framework is a diagrammatic, flow chart, or figurative illustration that explains the links between the variables and components that have been identified and are pertinent to the investigation. The theory presents the study variables; the independent and dependent variables

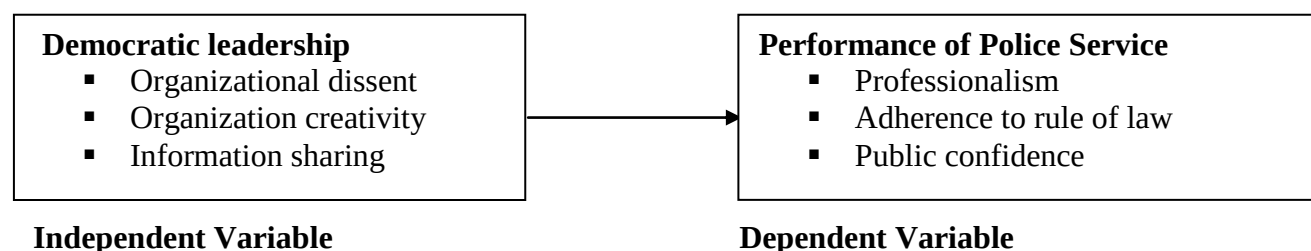


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership technique is a form of leadership where group members actively participate in decision-making. The democratic leadership leader permits the group and themselves to participate in decision-making. Objective criticism and appreciation are offered, and the group develops a sense of accountability (Akkaya, 2020).

The superior gives subordinates the freedom to take initiative and contribute. Additionally, the leaders assist the subordinates in completing their tasks. Dissent in the workplace refers to employees expressing disagreement, opposing viewpoints, or objections regarding various aspects of their work environment, including policies, practices, decisions, or actions taken by their organization or superiors (Rahmani, et al., 2023). Democratic leadership leaders will allow the officers to voice opinions regardless of the nature. The leaders embrace both positive and negative reviews/opinions from officers in lower ranks.

Organizational creativity is increasingly becoming the concern of many organizational stakeholders because creativity in organizations is a shared asset, both resulting from individual and group creativity (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021). The staff may have some ideas on how to improve their work productivity but they need support from their seniors actualize the ideas. Information sharing refers to the process of exchanging relevant information between team members, departments, government agencies, or even organizations (Cekuls, 2022). Information can be shared through the most preferred communication channels among the police officers. This will ensure that there is effective communication at the work place and coordination of activities as well.

Performance of Police Service

Performance of police institutions has evolved from a narrow focus on crime statistics to a multidimensional construct that incorporates effectiveness, legitimacy, accountability, ethical conduct, and public trust. Contemporary public administration and policing literature emphasizes that performance in security institutions should reflect both operational outcomes and normative governance standards, particularly in democratic contexts (Klose, 2024; Lum, Koper, & Willis, 2022). Modern policing performance is therefore understood as the extent to which law enforcement agencies effectively uphold the rule of law, deliver professional services, maintain ethical standards, and sustain public confidence necessary for cooperative crime control. Unlike private sector performance, which is often profit-driven, public security performance is evaluated through institutional credibility, constitutional compliance, and service responsiveness (Backhaus, Veltrop, & Van der Voet, 2022). This broader conceptualization aligns with democratic policing frameworks where legitimacy and public trust are critical to sustainable security outcomes.

In the Kenyan context, police performance is closely linked to reform implementation, oversight compliance, and public perception of integrity. Reports by oversight bodies consistently indicate that professionalism, adherence to legal standards, and public trust remain central determinants of institutional credibility (Independent Policing Oversight Authority [IPOA], 2022). Accordingly, this study conceptualized performance of the National Police Service as a composite construct measured using three indicators: professionalism, adherence to the rule of law, and public confidence.

Professionalism, adherence to the rule of law, and public confidence provide a holistic and theoretically grounded assessment of police performance within a democratic governance framework. These dimensions capture both internal institutional standards and external legitimacy outcomes, reflecting the dual responsibility of the National Police Service to enforce the law effectively while maintaining constitutional integrity and public trust. By integrating operational competence, legal compliance, and societal legitimacy into a single composite construct, this study aligns with contemporary public sector performance models that emphasize multidimensional evaluation of governance institutions (Backhaus et al., 2022; Tummers & Knies, 2021). The composite structure further allows examination of how participatory leadership practices influence

not only internal professional conduct but also broader legitimacy outcomes that depend on transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Accordingly, performance of the National Police Service in this study is conceptualized as an institutional outcome shaped by leadership behavior and conditioned by the broader reform environment.

Empirical Literature

Nada and Cihan (2022) studied the impact of democratic leadership on worker performance in Turkey. There were 207 responders in the study sample. To get information, they employed a questionnaire. According to this survey, the democratic leadership style is the most favored because it not only inspires workers to deliver quality work but also boosts organizational efficiency. Furthermore, employees' performance is less affected by leadership the more experienced they are. This is because seasoned employees already know how to perform their jobs and hence need little guidance from higher-ups.

Karacsony (2021) examined impact of a democratic leadership style on organizational performance. The results showed that democratic leadership improved performance through tolerance and inclusivity. Tolerance improved performance since it encourages workers to put in more effort at work. Democratic leadership styles enable leaders and staff to communicate openly, which improves successful execution and raises employee morale. Democratic leadership includes workers in the decision-making process within the organization. Heriyanti and Apriyani (2021) sought to ascertain how employee performance was impacted by a democratic leadership style. The study comprised fifty participants. To gather data, questionnaires were employed. According to the findings, a democratic leadership style positively and significantly affects worker performance, as does work discipline. It also demonstrated that work motivation positively and significantly affects worker performance.

Aytekin (2022) explored effect of democratic leadership perceptions on organizational dissent and creativity. The sample consisted of 785 people working in five-star hotels in Antalya and Izmir. Results showed that democratic leadership enhanced organizational dissent and creativity.

Obeng-Asare and Koran (2024) looked at how administrative staff members' performance at a few universities in Ghana's Bono area was affected by democratic leadership styles. The results showed that administrative staff members' performance at particular universities is significantly improved by democratic leadership styles. The study demonstrated that implementing a democratic leadership style enhanced worker output. Furthermore, democratic leadership fosters strong employee synergy through participation in decision-making, teamwork, and cooperation, all of which contribute to enhanced performance.

Otieno (2022) investigated the impact of democratic leadership philosophies on the health sector organizational performance of non-governmental organizations in Nairobi County, Kenya. A descriptive survey was used in the investigation. The 240 top management team members of the health sector NGOs in Nairobi County made up the study population. The outcomes demonstrated that a democratic leadership style has a favorable effect on organizational performance. This was accomplished by giving staff members the freedom to share and act upon their original ideas and take part in decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a correlational research design to examine the relationship between democratic leadership and performance of the National Police Service. Correlational design describes the degree to which variables are associated in quantitative terms and allows researchers to determine whether and to what extent two or more quantitative variables are related (Brymann, 2016). The design was appropriate because the study sought to test the relationship between democratic leadership and institutional performance without manipulating variables.

The study was guided by positivist research philosophy. Positivism assumes that there is one objective reality that can be impartially observed and measured using standardized tools. Under this paradigm, the researcher acts as an impartial observer and employs measurable and unbiased scientific procedures to examine theoretically inferential relationships (Dawson, 2019; Sullivan, 2011). The use of positivism ensured objectivity and minimized researcher influence during data collection and analysis.

The target population comprised 1,437 gazetted officers of the National Police Service and selected civil society representatives involved in police oversight. The unit of analysis was the National Police Service as an institution, while units of observation included Commissioners of Police, Senior Superintendents, Superintendents, and Assistant Superintendents of Police. These ranks were selected because they are responsible for decision-making and policy execution. Civil society organizations including Amnesty International Kenya, HAKI Africa, Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, and the Independent Policing Oversight Authority were included to provide oversight perspectives.

The sample size of 314 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations with a 0.05 margin of error. Stratified random sampling was applied to police officers based on cadre, while purposive sampling was used to select civil society representatives. This approach ensured proportional representation across leadership levels.

Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaire included closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Interview guides were used to gather qualitative insights from civil society representatives. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data enhanced credibility and minimized reliance on a single data source (Creswell, 2024).

A pilot study involving 31 respondents (10% of the sample) was conducted to refine the research instruments. Content validity was assessed through expert review, and construct validity was evaluated using factor loadings with a threshold of 0.4 as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with values above 0.7 considered acceptable (Cooper & Schindler, 2007; Zikmund, 2009).

Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28. Descriptive statistics included means and standard deviations. Inferential analysis involved correlation and regression analysis to test the effect of democratic leadership on performance. The regression model adopted for this article was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Performance of the National Police Service

X = Democratic Leadership

β_0 = Constant

β_1 = Regression coefficient

ε = Error term

All tests were conducted at a 95% confidence level. Diagnostic tests including normality, multicollinearity, linearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation were performed to ensure robustness of regression estimates.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 314 questionnaires distributed, 286 were fully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 91.1%. Of the 286 valid responses, 275 were from gazette police officers and 11 were from civil society representatives. The majority of quantitative data used in the regression and correlation analyses was therefore obtained from senior police officers within the National Police Service. The civil society responses complemented the internal perspectives by providing external oversight insights into institutional

performance. According to Sataloff and Vontela (2021), response rates exceeding 70% reduce non-response bias and enhance reliability of generalization within finite populations. The high response rate in this study suggests strong institutional cooperation and relevance of the research topic to the respondents.

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Descriptive Statistics on Democratic leadership

The objective of the study was to explore effect of democratic leadership on performance of national police service in Kenya. Democratic leadership was measured using nine Likert-scale items. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for this construct, based on responses from 286 participants.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Democratic leadership (n = 286)

Statement	SD F(%)	D F(%)	NS F(%)	A F(%)	SA F(%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Leaders support knowledge sharing among the junior and senior officers	6 (2.1%)	13 (4.5%)	24 (8.4%)	162 (56.6%)	81 (28.3%)	4.05	0.827
The leaders provide an environment that enables officers to be responsible in their roles and responsibilities	7 (2.4%)	15 (5.2%)	29 (10.1%)	158 (55.2%)	77 (26.9%)	4.00	0.867
The leaders guide the officers on what needs to be done and how to do it	9 (3.1%)	14 (4.9%)	30 (10.5%)	155 (54.2%)	78 (27.3%)	4.00	0.882
There are suitable communication channels to enhance information sharing among officers	10 (3.5%)	18 (6.3%)	32 (11.2%)	145 (50.7%)	81 (28.3%)	3.94	0.922
The seniors support junior officers' creativity	12 (4.2%)	20 (7.0%)	35 (12.2%)	144 (50.3%)	75 (26.2%)	3.88	0.961
There is an effective platform for the police officers to share their opinions and experiences	15 (5.2%)	23 (8.0%)	38 (13.3%)	139 (48.6%)	71 (24.8%)	3.80	1.002
The officer infrastructure support innovation	16 (5.6%)	28 (9.8%)	41 (14.3%)	130 (45.5%)	71 (24.8%)	3.75	1.062
Disagreements are considered as positive criticism	18 (6.3%)	30 (10.5%)	44 (15.4%)	127 (44.4%)	67 (23.4%)	3.68	1.086
Decisions are passed after approval of the majority of the officers	22 (7.7%)	34 (11.9%)	47 (16.4%)	121 (42.3%)	62 (21.7%)	3.59	1.128
Aggregate Score						3.854	0.971

The highest-rated item indicated that leaders support knowledge sharing among junior and senior officers (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.827). This reflects a strong culture of collaboration and institutional learning, central to democratic leadership. The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistent agreement among respondents on this aspect. Similarly, leaders were seen to guide officers in task execution and create environments that promote responsibility (Mean = 4.00 for both; SD = 0.882 and 0.867, respectively). These figures point to a structured leadership style that empowers officers while maintaining clarity of roles. While standard deviations for these items are still within moderate range, the slight increase reflects some variation, likely stemming from differences in departmental contexts or individual leadership approaches.

The availability of suitable communication channels was rated highly as well (Mean = 3.94, SD = 0.922), indicating that both vertical and horizontal communication are generally effective. However, the moderate SD reflects some variability, suggesting that while many officers benefit from strong communication structures, this is not universal across all units. Similarly, support for junior officers' creativity scored 3.88 (SD = 0.961), reflecting moderate agreement. The slightly wider spread here suggests that while creativity is encouraged, its practical expression may depend on leadership flexibility or task demands.

Officers also moderately agreed that they are provided a platform to share opinions and experiences (Mean = 3.80, SD = 1.002), though the SD exceeding 1.0 highlights more divergent experiences, possibly due to inconsistent availability of feedback mechanisms. The item measuring infrastructure support for innovation scored a mean of 3.75 with the standard deviation at 1.062. The elevated SD signals a wider range of responses, pointing to inconsistency in access to tools, systems, or environments that enable innovation.

The lowest-rated items were whether disagreements are viewed as positive criticism (Mean = 3.68, SD = 1.086) and whether decisions are passed after majority officer approval (Mean = 3.59, SD = 1.128). These high standard deviations reflect substantial variability in experience and perception, implying that democratic leadership values like openness to dissent and collective decision-making are not consistently applied. This variation may result from entrenched hierarchical structures or differing commander attitudes toward participative governance.

The aggregate mean score for democratic leadership was 3.854 (SD = 0.971), which falls within the "agree" range. This indicates that officers generally perceive democratic leadership principles, particularly communication, role support, and knowledge sharing, as present in the NPS. However, the relatively higher standard deviations for items like dissent handling and voting procedures suggest gaps in uniformity. These findings align with Decision Participation Theory by Vroom and Jago (1988), which asserts that leadership effectiveness improves when subordinates are actively involved in decisions. It also holds that different leadership contexts may call for varying levels of participative decision-making, which is evident in the NPS context. The findings are aligned with Otieno (2022), who reported that democratic leadership positively influenced organizational performance in NGOs by encouraging input from staff and fostering creative solutions. Similarly, Karacsony (2021) emphasized that democratic leadership enhances performance through inclusivity and open communication. However, the relatively lower scores on handling disagreement and collective decision-making suggest a deviation from findings by Aytekini (2022), who showed that democratic leadership enhanced organizational dissent and creativity. In the NPS, cultural or structural constraints may limit open disagreement and consensus-based voting, pointing to a need for leadership training or cultural shifts to enhance inclusivity.

Descriptive Analysis of Performance of the Police Service

The dependent variable in the study was performance of the police service. This variable reflects service outcomes in terms of responsiveness, public perception, professionalism, capacity, and resourcing. It was measured using six Likert-scale items. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, based on responses from 286 participants.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Performance of the Police Service

Statement	SD F(%)	D F(%)	NS F(%)	A F(%)	SA F(%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
There has been improved professionalism among police officers	8 (2.8%)	15 (5.2%)	30 (10.5%)	156 (54.5%)	77 (26.9%)	3.98	0.860
The officers quickly respond to distress calls and insecurity issues	10 (3.5%)	17 (5.9%)	33 (11.5%)	152 (53.1%)	74 (25.9%)	3.92	0.901
NPS has the necessary capacity to maintain law and order	12 (4.2%)	20 (7.0%)	38 (13.3%)	144 (50.3%)	72 (25.2%)	3.85	0.945
There is change in public perception on the police services	15 (5.2%)	24 (8.4%)	39 (13.6%)	138 (48.3%)	70 (24.5%)	3.78	0.980
There is significant decrease on complaints against police officers	17 (5.9%)	28 (9.8%)	44 (15.4%)	127 (44.4%)	70 (24.5%)	3.72	1.015
There are adequate resources to discharge out duties effectively	21 (7.3%)	33 (11.5%)	47 (16.4%)	123 (43.0%)	62 (21.7%)	3.61	1.083
Aggregate Score						3.810	0.964

The highest-rated item was improved professionalism among police officers (Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.860). The relatively low standard deviation indicates strong agreement and shared perceptions that reforms and leadership efforts are translating into enhanced ethical conduct, training, and service delivery. Similarly, the promptness in responding to distress calls and insecurity issues recorded a high mean of 3.92 (SD = 0.901). This reflects positive perceptions of responsiveness, with limited variation across respondents, suggesting consistent experiences with operational response mechanisms. The assertion that the National Police Service has the necessary capacity to maintain law and order also scored highly (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.945), indicating general confidence in structural readiness and staffing. However, the slightly wider standard deviation suggests some variability in how respondents experience or perceive this capacity possibly due to disparities in resources or staffing across regions.

The mean for positive change in public perception was 3.78 (SD = 0.980), pointing to a moderate level of agreement. The higher SD implies diverse views, potentially influenced by varying community contexts or media portrayals. Respondents may have observed localized improvements in community-police relations, while others may still perceive distrust or skepticism among the public. The statement regarding a decrease in complaints against officers had a mean of 3.72 with an SD of 1.015. Although there was agreement that internal accountability may be improving, the high standard deviation signals inconsistent experiences. Some respondents may have witnessed fewer grievances and disciplinary cases, while others continue to encounter or hear of misconduct, highlighting uneven implementation of accountability measures.

The lowest-rated item was on the adequacy of resources to discharge duties (Mean = 3.61, SD = 1.083), which also recorded the highest standard deviation. This reveals considerable disagreement among respondents, suggesting that while some units may be better equipped, others face significant shortages in logistics, technology, or infrastructure. The variability reflects persistent disparities in resource allocation across counties or stations.

The overall mean score for police performance was 3.81 (SD = 0.964), indicating general agreement that the National Police Service is performing better, particularly in terms of professionalism, responsiveness, and capacity to enforce the law. However, the standard deviation points to moderate variation in experiences across the service. Key challenges remain, especially in public perception and adequate resourcing, which could hinder uniform service delivery if not addressed.

These findings support the Theory of Negotiated Order (Strauss, 1978), which posits that institutional performance in dynamic environments like policing is shaped through continual negotiation, adaptation, and stakeholder interaction. Performance is not merely a result of structural reforms but emerges from the interplay between officers, leadership, the community, and systemic support. Empirical support is found in Ayieko and Gitonga (2020), who reported that police performance in Machakos County was significantly influenced by reforms in personnel and legal frameworks. Similarly, Mudale and Mwea (2024) observed that accountability mechanisms and community-oriented reforms improved police image and efficiency. However, the finding that resource constraints persist diverges from Otieno (2021), who noted no significant correlation between police facilitation and performance. The present study suggests that while reforms and leadership have strengthened professionalism, resource availability still plays a meaningful role in performance enhancement.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This section explores the presence and application of democratic leadership within the National Police Service (NPS), focusing on the degree to which officers feel empowered to voice opinions, participate in decisions, and work within a climate of openness, innovation, and constructive dialogue. Data were gathered from open-ended responses by senior officers and interviews with civil society representatives who regularly engage with or observe the NPS through oversight roles.

Senior officers were invited to suggest ways in which democratic leadership engagement could be enhanced between leadership and junior ranks. Many responses emphasized the need for more open communication, inclusive decision-making, and recognition of diverse perspectives. Officers expressed a desire to be involved earlier in the planning process, rather than being informed only after decisions have been made. This suggests a preference for proactive involvement over reactive compliance. A recurring theme was the need to remove fear from workplace communication. Officers called for leadership structures that allow open expression without fear of being reprimanded, misunderstood, or viewed as insubordinate. They stressed the importance of fair and respectful dialogue across all ranks and the need to ensure that input is valued regardless of position in the hierarchy.

Some officers proposed structural reforms to strengthen democratic leadership engagement. Suggestions included establishing unit-level consultation forums and regular feedback sessions between leaders and team members. These platforms were envisioned as opportunities to share operational concerns, discuss procedural improvements, and foster a stronger sense of inclusion in shaping service delivery strategies. Civil society interviewees largely supported these perspectives, acknowledging some positive shifts toward participatory leadership within the NPS but also highlighting areas of concern. While a few progressive leaders were reported to encourage consultation and idea-sharing, others continued to uphold authoritarian styles of management. Respondents noted that while communication channels may exist formally, the practical space for dissenting or alternative views remains limited.

Concerns were raised about how critical feedback is perceived within the service. In many cases, offering alternative viewpoints is interpreted as defiance rather than constructive input. This creates an environment where officers may self-censor or avoid participation, reducing the potential benefits of democratic leadership engagement. However, encouraging examples were also noted, particularly in instances where junior officers, when given autonomy and support, demonstrated initiative and innovation during operations. This underscores the link between inclusive leadership and organizational adaptability.

These insights resonate with Decision Participation Theory by Vroom and Jago (1988), which argues that leadership effectiveness is enhanced when subordinates are meaningfully involved in decisions affecting their work. The theory posits that democratic leadership engagement fosters better decision quality, greater motivation, and stronger employee commitment, outcomes that were clearly reflected in both officer feedback and civil society observations.

Empirical literature supports this relationship. Otieno (2022) found that democratic leadership in non-governmental organizations significantly improved performance by enabling staff to share ideas and actively participate in planning. Likewise, Heriyanti and Apriyani (2021) observed that democratic leadership workplace cultures increased motivation and job satisfaction, leading to more effective service delivery. These findings parallel the experiences of NPS officers who reported higher morale and creativity when their input was welcomed.

On the other hand, the persistence of fear and rigid authority structures highlights the challenges of implementing democratic leadership in environments historically characterized by top-down control. These concerns reflect Aytekini's (2022) assertion that democratic leadership must be intentionally developed and supported by mechanisms that protect open feedback and constructive disagreement. Without such safeguards, democratic leadership elements may remain superficial rather than transformative.

In summary, while the NPS appears to be making progress in embracing democratic leadership, this transformation remains uneven. Officers appreciate opportunities to participate and recognize the positive impact such engagement has on innovation and performance. However, cultural resistance, fear of reprisal, and inadequate feedback systems continue to limit the full expression of democratic leadership principles.

Strengthening leadership development, institutionalizing feedback structures, and normalizing open dialogue could significantly improve democratic leadership engagement and operational outcomes across the service.

Simple Regression Analysis

The specific objective of this study was to examine the influence of democratic leadership on the performance of the National Police Service (NPS). The corresponding null hypothesis was: H_{03} : Democratic leadership has no statistically significant influence on the performance of the National Police Service in Kenya. To test this hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was carried out, regressing police performance on democratic leadership. The analysis was conducted at a 95% confidence level with a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$.

Table 3: Model Summary for Democratic leadership

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.751 ^a	.564	.562	0.471

a. Predictor: (Constant), Democratic leadership

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of Police Service

Table 3 shows that the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.751$) indicates a very strong positive relationship between democratic leadership and police performance. The R^2 value of 0.564 means that 56.4% of the variation in police performance can be explained by democratic leadership alone. The adjusted R^2 (.562) confirms that the model remains robust after adjusting for sample size. The low standard error of 0.471 suggests that the model predicts performance with high precision. This makes democratic leadership the strongest individual predictor among all leadership practices tested in this study. This finding is consistent with recent research. Aslam et al. (2021) established that democratic leadership, by promoting communication and involvement, significantly boosts performance outcomes in service institutions. Similarly, Al Khajeh (2022) found that democratic leadership styles increase innovation and motivation, enhancing productivity in hierarchical organizations. In policing, democratic leadership ensure that officers feel empowered to contribute ideas and solutions, leading to higher morale and effectiveness.

Table 4: ANOVA Results for Democratic leadership

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	73.77	1	73.77	367.015	.000 ^b
Residual	56.99	284	0.201		
Total	130.76	285			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Police Service

b. Predictor: (Constant), Democratic leadership

The ANOVA results in Table 4 confirm that the regression model is statistically significant, with a calculated F-value of 367.015 compared to the F-critical value of 3.874 at $df(1, 284)$ and $\alpha = 0.05$. Since $F_{\text{calculated}} (367.015) > F_{\text{critical}} (3.874)$ and the p-value is less than 0.05, the model is highly significant. This demonstrates that democratic leadership is a reliable and powerful predictor of police performance. This conclusion resonates with findings by Qadri et al. (2020), who argued that democratic leadership enhances organizational performance by improving transparency and accountability, and Saleem & Khattak (2021), who reported that democratic leadership enhance trust and cooperation within teams. In the NPS, the significance of the F-test confirms that democratic leadership fosters professionalism and cohesion, both of which directly translate into better performance outcomes.

Table 5: Coefficients for Democratic leadership

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	T	Sig.
Constant	0.754	0.161		4.683	.000
Democratic leadership	0.691	0.038	.751	18.184	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Police Service

The regression coefficients in Table 5 show that the unstandardized coefficient (B) for democratic leadership is 0.691, meaning that a one-unit increase in democratic leadership results in a 0.691-unit increase in police performance, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.751$) indicates the strongest positive influence among all leadership practices tested. The high t-value (18.184) and significance level ($p < 0.05$) confirm that the effect is both statistically significant and practically meaningful. The constant (0.754) represents the baseline performance level in the absence of democratic leadership.

The fitted regression equation is:

Performance of Police Service = 0.754 + 0.691 Democratic leadership.

This result demonstrates that democratic leadership significantly enhances police performance more than any other leadership style analysed. By emphasizing open communication, organizational creativity, and the freedom to express dissenting views, democratic leadership fosters innovation, commitment, and adaptability. Mohiuddin et al. (2022) found that democratic leadership fosters creativity and sustainable performance in public institutions. Likewise, Babalola et al. (2021) highlighted that democratic leadership empowers employees, leading to stronger teamwork and job satisfaction. In the NPS, such practices not only strengthen officer morale but also improve transparency, community trust, and overall efficiency in delivering security services.

The results provide robust statistical and practical evidence that democratic leadership has a strong and significant influence on police performance. The model explains 56.4% of the variance in performance, with results confirmed by all statistical tests and F-critical comparisons. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected. Democratic leadership is therefore affirmed as the most powerful driver of performance in the National Police Service, underscoring its central role in advancing professionalism, accountability, and effectiveness in Kenya's policing sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that democratic leadership is the most influential participatory leadership practice affecting police performance. Leadership that promotes open communication, shared problem-solving, and constructive dialogue creates an enabling environment for innovation, professionalism, and adaptability. Officers operating under democratic leadership structures exhibit higher morale and stronger commitment to organizational goals. By reducing hierarchical communication barriers and encouraging expression of ideas, democratic leadership strengthens accountability and responsiveness. The findings affirm that institutionalizing democratic leadership practices would significantly enhance effectiveness and legitimacy within the National Police Service.

The study recommends that the National Police Service institutionalize democratic leadership within its formal policy frameworks. Democratic engagement should not rely solely on the personal leadership style of individual commanders but should be embedded in official leadership guidelines, promotion criteria, and operational procedures. Clear policy directives outlining inclusive decision-making procedures and structured consultation mechanisms would ensure uniform implementation across ranks and regions.

At the managerial level, structured leadership development programs focusing on democratic leadership competencies are recommended. Senior officers and station commanders should undergo continuous professional development in inclusive decision-making, constructive conflict management, and open communication practices. Leadership training should emphasize practical skills for fostering dialogue, handling dissent positively, and encouraging innovation without undermining discipline.

The study further recommends establishing structured internal consultation platforms within the National Police Service. Regular consultative forums, feedback meetings, and anonymous suggestion systems would

provide safe channels for officers to contribute ideas and express concerns. Institutionalizing these platforms would reduce fear-based communication barriers and enhance psychological safety within the organization.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes theoretically by contextualizing democratic leadership within a hierarchical and security-sensitive institution. While democratic leadership has been widely examined in corporate and nonprofit environments, limited empirical attention has been given to its application in policing systems characterized by rigid command structures. By demonstrating that democratic leadership significantly influences police performance, the study extends leadership theory into the security sector and confirms that inclusive leadership practices are compatible with disciplined, rule-bound institutions.

Empirically, the study provides new evidence from the Kenyan policing context by quantitatively establishing the influence of democratic leadership on institutional performance. The identification of democratic leadership as the most influential predictor of performance provides nuanced insights into leadership dynamics within reform-oriented institutions.

Methodologically, the study contributes through the integration of descriptive, inferential, and hierarchical regression analyses to examine both direct and moderating effects. The use of hierarchical regression to test the amplifying role of security sector reforms strengthens the analytical rigor of leadership-performance research within public institutions.

At the policy level, the findings provide evidence-based justification for embedding democratic leadership into official training curricula and leadership development frameworks within the National Police Service. The study demonstrates that leadership transformation, supported by institutional reforms, can significantly enhance professionalism, accountability, and public confidence.

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