

Tackling police corruption in South Africa

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There is abundant evidence of high levels of corruption in the South African Police Service (SAPS), metro and traffic police. Police corruption affects all ranks and many police activities. It is a key contributor to low levels of public trust in police, as well as poor policing outcomes. With proper leadership and clear strategic interventions, corruption can be tackled, with many benefits for the SAPS and policing in South Africa.

Key findings

- ▶ There is strong evidence of ongoing widespread corruption in the South African Police Service (SAPS), including among its senior leaders. Corruption levels in the metro and traffic police are also high, although they receive less scrutiny than the SAPS.
- ▶ Perceptions of high levels of police corruption contribute to low levels of public trust in the police. Trust is vital for the police to effectively address crime.
- ▶ SAPS members are often unwilling to report crime or corruption by colleagues because they fear negative consequences for themselves.
- ▶ The willingness of many members of the public to pay bribes is an important contributor to high levels of police corruption.
- ▶ A range of agencies and mechanisms are tasked with investigating police corruption, but no agency has overall responsibility. Coordination between agencies is limited.
- ▶ SAPS has introduced multiple anti-corruption strategies, but has not implemented intelligence-driven measures to ensure that corruption is tackled effectively.
- ▶ The SAPS Anti-Corruption Investigation Unit (ACIU) is substantially under-resourced.
- ▶ Despite evidence of misconduct, a majority (77%) of SAPS disciplinary hearings result in no meaningful accountability.

Recommendations

- ▶ Initiatives to professionalise SAPS must prioritise police integrity and ensure a coherent and effective response to police corruption.
- ▶ The ACIU should be strengthened to form an autonomous SAPS national unit, serving as South Africa's main police-corruption investigation unit.
- ▶ Dedicated disciplinary units, with requisite expertise and resources, should be established to deal fairly and effectively with serious misconduct cases.
- ▶ SAPS top management must integrate high ethical standards into the performance management of senior and middle managers.
- ▶ SAPS, or another entity, should establish capacity to monitor police misconduct and responses to it. A public annual report should detail allegations and how they were dealt with by SAPS, traffic and metro police, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI), Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and Investigating Directorate Against Corruption (IDAC).
- ▶ A consolidated memorandum of understanding between the ACIU, DPCI, IDAC and IPID should address overlapping mandates to ensure consistent investigations into police corruption, and assign responsibility for reporting police corruption, cooperation and information sharing.
- ▶ Police corruption data should be used to identify units, stations or police functions frequently linked to corruption. Proactive investigations should target these corruption 'hot spots' in the SAPS, metro and traffic police.
- ▶ The Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, in cooperation with provincial secretariats, should report on anti-corruption measures in the metro police.
- ▶ The use of corruption-related lifestyle audits for SAPS senior managers should be strengthened. The Special Investigating Unit should ensure these audits are consistent and effective.
- ▶ Police should be encouraged to report corruption, and discouraged from viewing corrupt colleagues as worthy of their support. Systems for public reporting of police corruption should be promoted outside and inside SAPS and metro police departments.

Introduction

Available data shows that police corruption is the most widespread form of official corruption in South Africa. Police in South Africa, including the South African Police Service (SAPS) and many metro police and traffic policing agencies, are affected by high levels of corruption. Perceptions that police corruption is widespread limit public trust in and cooperation with the police. This report:

- Provides an outline of available information on the nature and scale of the problem of police corruption in South Africa
- Describes the current fragmented and poorly coordinated nature of responses to the problem
- Discusses constraints on the reporting of corruption as well as the limited availability of information on the effectiveness of responses to corruption in the SAPS and metropolitan police services

The report calls for a clear focus on substantially reducing police corruption in South Africa. This includes enhancing the capacity for its detection and investigation by substantially strengthening the SAPS internal Anti-Corruption Investigation Unit (ACIU) to increase its ability to identify and investigate SAPS members and other police who are involved in corruption.

Scale of police corruption

We do not know how many members of the SAPS are involved in corruption and other crimes. Corruption is characterised by secrecy between both parties to the crime. Neither has any incentive to report it, as both usually benefit.¹ An example would be criminal suspects who are arrested and offer the police a bribe to avoid being charged. If the police officers accept the bribe and release the suspects, neither will want to report it and will conceal information about it.

Many SAPS employees do good work under difficult circumstances and are not involved in illegal activities. But most police members do not have to be involved in corruption for the organisation to have a serious credibility problem. Even if 90% of SAPS members are not corrupt and 10% are, then 15 000 officials are involved in corruption.²

This implies a rough average of 12 police members involved in corruption at each of the country's 1 170 police stations. The frequency with which senior SAPS members have allegedly been implicated in corruption suggests that it is likely that the number involved is greater than this.

Allegations involving senior SAPS management

Senior police officers are supposed to serve as role models for rank-and-file police officers. Corruption involving senior police is especially concerning as it has a deeply destructive impact on organisational culture. Top-ranking police may also use their authority and networks within the organisation to prevent or interfere with investigations against them. This can include destroying evidence and undermining the police officers who may be tasked with investigating them.

Corruption involving senior police has a deeply destructive impact on organisational culture

Since the criminal conviction of Jackie Selebi, who was SAPS National Commissioner from 2000 to 2008,³ numerous other top officers have been convicted or are alleged to be implicated in crime and corruption (see text box on page 4).

In July 2025, President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Criminality, Political Interference and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System – or Madlanga Commission – to examine wide-ranging allegations made by SAPS KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Commissioner Lt-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi at a media briefing earlier that month.⁴ Parliament also established an ad hoc committee to investigate the allegations.

At Mkhwanazi's media briefing and in testimony before the inquiries, allegations were made that Police Minister Senzo Mchunu and Deputy National Commissioner for Crime Detection Lt-General Shadrack Sibiya interfered with police investigations to protect criminal syndicates they were allegedly linked to.⁵ During appearances before the inquiries, Mchunu and Sibiya disputed these allegations.

Top SAPS officers implicated in crime and corruption since 2008

- Former Western Cape Provincial Commissioner Lt-General Arno Lamoer was convicted of corruption in 2018.⁶
- The former national Head of the Crime Intelligence Division, Lt-General Richard Mdluli, was convicted for kidnapping and assault in 2019.⁷ He is currently facing another trial for corruption.⁸
- Former KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Commissioner Mmamonye Ngobeni is facing corruption charges related to 2010 FIFA World Cup tender fraud worth R47 million.⁹
- Former Acting National Commissioner Khomotso Phahlane is facing two separate trials for corruption and procurement fraud, which allegedly took place during his term of office between 2015 and 2017. His term of office also coincided with a dramatic 28% increase in senior management service personnel, from 689 in 2015 to 880 in 2017,¹⁰ raising questions about possible misuse of appointment processes.
- With Phahlane, Bonang Mgwenya, who held the country's second-most senior police rank as Deputy National Commissioner, was arrested on charges of corruption, fraud, theft and money laundering involving R191 million in 2020. They are among 14 SAPS officers facing prosecution in this case. Five other members of SAPS senior management (rank of brigadier and above) are among the accused.¹¹
- A former Gauteng Provincial Commissioner, Lt-General Deliwe de Lange, along with former National Head of SAPS Supply Chain Management Lt-General Ramahlapi Mokwena, are also facing corruption charges with Phahlane and Mgwenya regarding the allegedly irregular R191 million procurement deal. In addition, they and other senior officers are facing charges relating to an R84 million government vehicle deal.¹²

Various other allegations, including against senior personnel in various SAPS structures, have also been made, with some of them leading to arrests. It is also claimed that some of these allegations are unfounded.¹³ The inquiries currently underway will hopefully help to provide greater clarity on these matters.

Surveys on bribery in South Africa

Research evidence has consistently shown that corruption is entrenched in policing in South Africa. Since 2003, seven out of nine Statistics SA surveys on bribery have listed police and/or traffic police law enforcement as one of the two government services most often linked to bribery (Chart 1).

Afrobarometer surveys corroborate Stats SA findings, with the 2022 survey showing that between one fifth (19%) and one quarter (25%) of those interviewed said they had been asked to pay a bribe to police.¹⁴ As is well recognised in international literature on police corruption, when corruption becomes this rife in an

organisation, it is not a matter of a few bad apples, but an organisational and societal problem.¹⁵

The SAPS is the country's biggest government department. Its officers interact with many members of the public across South Africa each day. This includes performing numerous arrests.¹⁶ For drivers (minibus taxi drivers, delivery drivers and people using cars for private transport, among others), encounters with metro or traffic police are also a frequent occurrence.

The many interactions they have with the public, along with the powers they wield, provide police with myriad opportunities for corruption. Clearly, there are too many members of law enforcement in South Africa who take advantage of these opportunities.

Media and other reports of police members being arrested, dismissed, or sentenced to prison for corruption show that the issue is sometimes treated with an appropriate level of seriousness.¹⁷ But far too many police officials continue to engage in corruption with impunity. Current measures appear inadequate given the scale of the problem.

Chart 1: Corruption levels related to policing and traffic policing as reported in 10 South African national victimisation surveys

	Government service whose members most often request bribes, by ranking in survey	
Stats SA survey	Police (SAPS)	Traffic/metro police
2003 NVCS	3	1
2007 NVCS	2	1
2010 NVCS	2	1
2011 NVCS	2	1
2013/14 NVCS	2	4
2014/15 NVCS	4	3
2015/16 NVCS	2	3
2019/20 GPSJS	2	1
2022/23 GPSJS	2	1
2023/24 GPSJS	Not reported	Not reported

Source: NVCS – National Victims of Crime Survey; GPSJS – Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey. Surveys from 2010 onwards have been conducted by Stats SA

Public perceptions of police corruption

Given the findings of the above surveys of people’s experiences of law enforcement corruption, it is unsurprising that many people perceive the police to be corrupt. The Afrobarometer 2022 survey found that ‘six in 10 citizens (61%) say that “most” or “all” police are corrupt.’¹⁸

The Human Sciences Research Council has been surveying public trust in the police since 1998. Its most recent report shows that since then, public trust in the police has not reached higher than 47% in 1999. In 2022, 2023 and 2024/25, only 22% of people said they ‘trust’ or ‘strongly trust’ the police. Sixty-two percent said they had no trust in the police in 2024/25.¹⁹

Perceptions do not always accurately reflect reality, but they do shape people’s behaviour. The large proportion of the public that sees most police officials as corrupt and distrusts the police should be of serious concern to SAPS leadership. It is well established that public trust in the police is necessary for community cooperation and, therefore, for police to reduce crime.

Factors contributing to high levels of corruption

Police corruption is recognised globally as an occupational hazard that is experienced by all police agencies. This is because police officials have power that few other public sector occupations possess. They have legal powers to limit the movement of people, search people, make arrests and use force. Some police officials will always be tempted to abuse these powers for personal gain or other reasons.



But while it is a common challenge, there are large differences between police agencies in the levels of corruption within their ranks. Some police agencies have only a small number of police officials involved in corruption. A factor that has a major impact on the extent of corruption is the overall culture of the police organisation and whether it is seen to tolerate corruption or not.²⁰

If there is corruption involving police leadership, this encourages a tolerance of corruption in the organisation. Other factors contributing to high levels of police corruption in South Africa include:

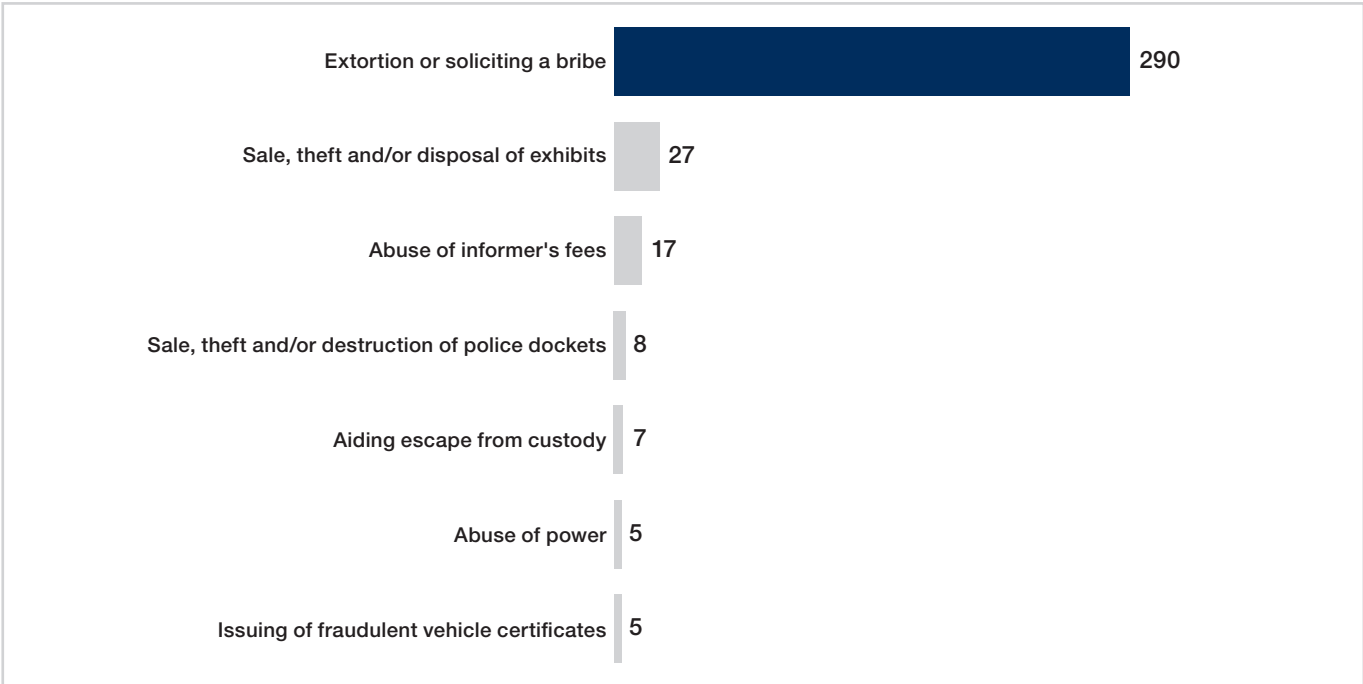
- Repeated exposure of high value corruption by political elites and senior government officials, is likely to be seen by many police officials as a justification for their own corruption.
- Low levels of managerial supervision in the SAPS contribute to a lack of accountability. The absence of accountability is a major risk factor for police corruption. If most police officials who are engaged in unlawful conduct are not held to account, despite hard evidence, a sense of impunity develops across the ranks. As discussed below, the SAPS disciplinary system is generally not effective. Most cases against police officials do not result in any sanction.²¹

- Inadequate capacity to identify, investigate and hold corrupt police members accountable is likely to contribute to a perception that corruption is worth the risk. Since the SAPS Anti-Corruption Unit was shut down in 2003, the structures and systems for addressing police crime and corruption have been fragmented, and there has been no coherent response.
- Many civilians willingly pay, or even initiate, corrupt transactions. South Africa’s economic and social environment aggravates this problem. Large numbers of people work in informal or illegal markets, often as a means of survival. This environment creates ample opportunity for police to accept bribes for non-enforcement of laws, including vehicle and traffic laws and by-laws.

Police corruption in practice

Various definitions of police corruption are put forward in different works on the subject.²² However, the core element of police corruption is the abuse of power for personal gain. This may include the benefit of family members and other associates. Understood in this way, police corruption may mean something slightly different to corruption as defined in the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act.²³

Chart 2: IPID classification of corruption cases received, April 2019 – March 2024



Source: IPID annual reports

State bodies apply a variety of different approaches to defining police corruption. Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) reports distinguish various types of police conduct that constitute forms of corruption (Chart 2). The SAPS defines some of these types of misconduct, such as aiding an escape, as disciplinary offence categories that are distinct from the disciplinary offence of corruption.²⁴

Various agencies in SA investigate police corruption, but none has the principal responsibility to do so

Corruption in the police has many different manifestations. Some incidents in the SAPS and other police agencies involve the abuse of departmental resources and human resource processes. A principal example is procurement corruption. Many of the senior SAPS officials who are facing charges are allegedly implicated in procurement fraud and corruption.²⁵

Other corruption of this kind occurs when supervisors or commanders misuse their power to make irregular appointments or promotions, allocate more favourable shifts, recommend transfers, or do not register absenteeism or leave days taken by their subordinates. Misuse of police vehicles or other police resources also falls into this category.

Police members may also misuse their official powers or capabilities unlawfully for their personal or group gain. The soliciting of bribes is often reported. Of 359 reports of corruption received by IPID over the five years of April 2019 to March 2024, 290 (81%) were cases of extortion or soliciting of bribes (Chart 2).

As Chart 1 shows, Stats SA surveys also link SAPS members and traffic police to the extraction of bribes. Extortion and the soliciting of bribes are linked to many of the other forms of corruption listed below:

- *Losing dockets or exhibits or closing cases in exchange for a bribe:* Between 2019 and 2024, 35 (10%) of corruption cases received by IPID involved the alleged sale, theft, disposal, or destruction of dockets or exhibits. A false withdrawal statement, allegedly completed by the complainant but with a forged signature, may be inserted into the docket

- *Complicity with organised crime groups and other links to illicit activities:* In areas dominated by gangs, community members are often reluctant to report crime. They fear that corrupt or compromised police will reveal their identity to gang members. SAPS members have also allegedly been implicated in drug trafficking²⁶ and truck hijacking²⁷ syndicates.
- *Corruption by traffic police, including metro police:* As reflected in Chart 1, this is one of the most widespread types of corruption in South Africa.²⁸ It also includes corruption at municipal licensing departments and traffic officers who impound vehicles and demand bribes to return them.²⁹ It extends into the National Traffic Information System (eNaTIS)³⁰ for issuing traffic register numbers.³¹
- *Borders and the policing of migration:* This includes corruption relating to immigration and other smuggling. In addition to the police, other agencies at the borders are also linked to corruption.³²
- *Crime intelligence³³ and specialised units:* Units involved in responding to organised crime, such as illegal mining³⁴ and the theft of precious metals or protected species,³⁵ have been linked to corruption or faced allegations in this regard.

Structures for tackling police corruption

Currently, South Africa's approach to addressing police corruption is fragmented and incoherent. Various agencies investigate police corruption, but none of them has the principal responsibility to do so.

Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation

The Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI, or Hawks) investigates police corruption as part of its mandate to investigate 'serious corruption'. This includes the investigation of cases of police procurement corruption.

However, the DPCI does not only investigate alleged police procurement corruption. It investigates some police corruption cases that do not involve very large sums of money. It has investigated cases involving human resource decisions,³⁶ tampering with evidence at a crime scene (defeating the ends of justice),³⁷ police complicity in Road Accident Fund fraud,³⁸ or a police

officer who ‘demanded a gratification of R5 000 in order to destroy evidence against the accused.’³⁹

In its progress reports, the DPCI gives synopses of some cases culminating in convictions. However, the number of police corruption cases it investigates and the overall result of these investigations are not reported.

Investigating Directorate Against Corruption

The Investigating Directorate Against Corruption (IDAC) in the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) started operating in 2019 and was formally established by law in 2024.⁴⁰ It was created partly to ensure the investigation of cases that emerged from the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State (Zondo Commission).

But it has taken on other cases, including some regarding reports of senior SAPS officials’ involvement in procurement corruption and other alleged crimes. These are being investigated in line with its mandate to investigate ‘serious, high profile or complex corruption’ and ‘related offences’.⁴¹ As with the DPCI, NPA reports provide synopses of some SAPS-related cases investigated by IDAC, but do not provide overall data on police-related cases that IDAC is investigating.⁴²

Independent Police Investigative Directorate

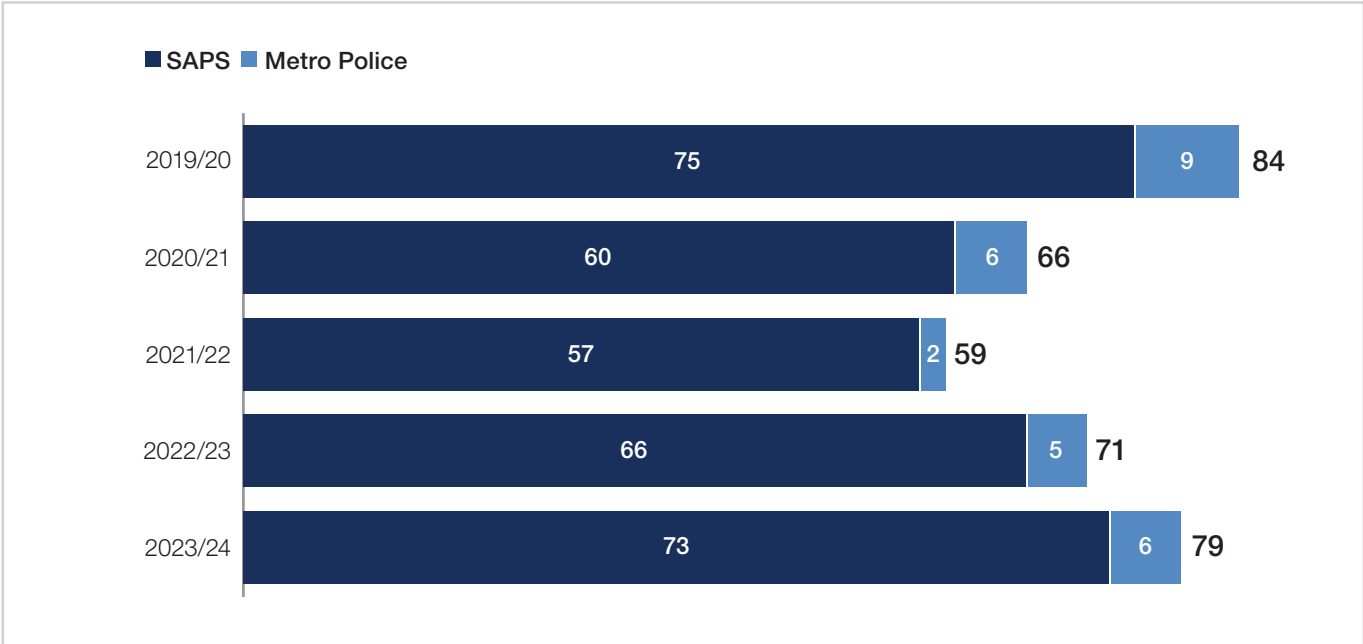
Police corruption is one of eight categories of cases that the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) is required to investigate under Section 28 of the IPID Act, as amended in 2024.⁴³ Police corruption cases accounted for only 1.3% of the 27 467 cases received by IPID between April 2019 and March 2024.

Chart 3 shows that 92% of the corruption cases that IPID receives concern the SAPS. Evidently, very few of the large number of people who experience metro police corruption (see Chart 1) report this to IPID.⁴⁴

Investigating reported cases only is inadequate since most police corruption is not reported

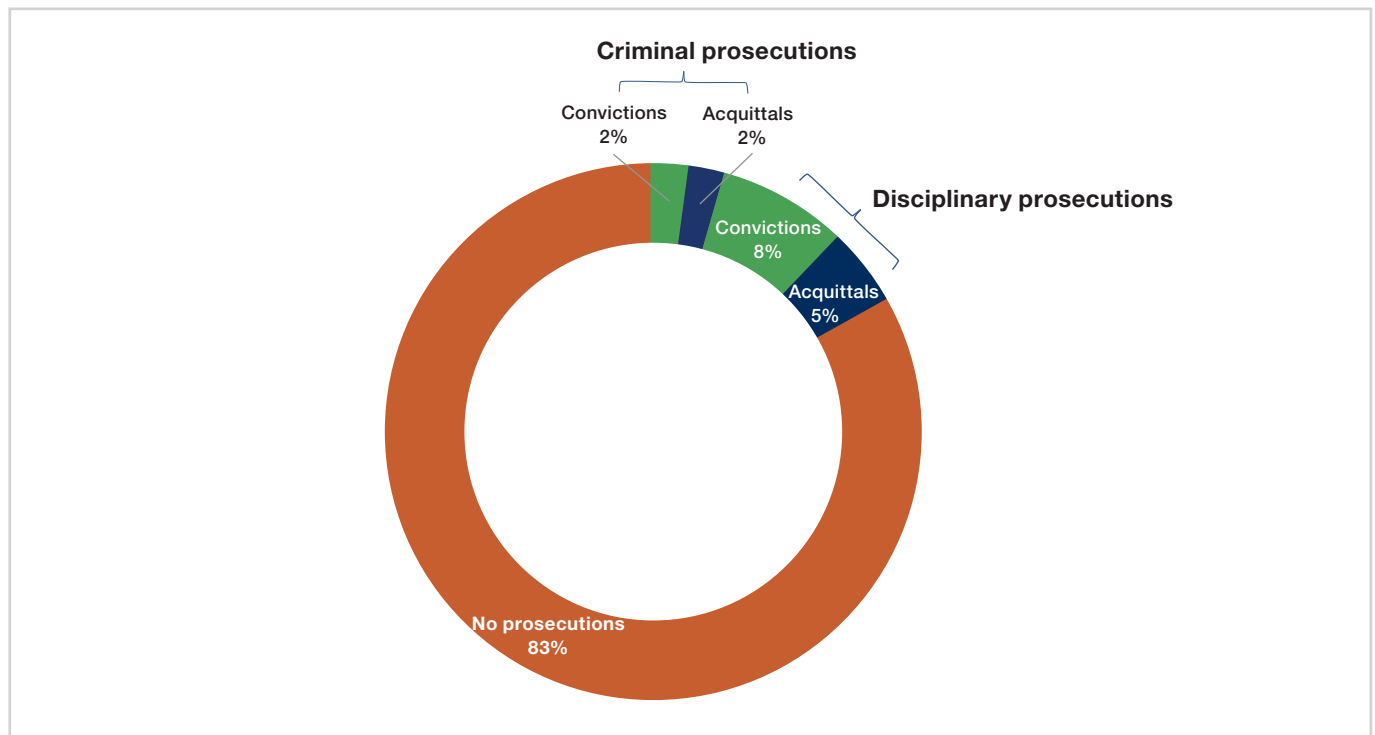
In the 2018 Stats SA victims of crime survey, 91% of respondents who said they were asked to pay a bribe said they had not reported it. Reasons given were that it (bribery) was a ‘common practise’ (25%), the respondent benefitted from the bribe (25%) and that reporting is ‘pointless, nobody would care’ (19%).⁴⁵ Responding to reported cases alone is clearly inadequate as a means of addressing police corruption.

Chart 3: Corruption allegations received by IPID, April 2019 – March 2024



Source: IPID annual reports

Chart 4: Criminal and disciplinary outcomes for police corruption cases received by IPID, April 2019 to March 2024, n = 359



Source: IPID annual reports

Chart 4 presents a summary of the primary outcomes of corruption cases reported to IPID (criminal or disciplinary convictions or acquittals). Over a period of five years, IPID investigations of 359 cases resulted in criminal convictions in only eight (2%) cases and disciplinary convictions in only 28 (8%) cases. These figures, and the low levels of reporting of corruption to IPID, suggest that IPID is likely to have a limited impact in deterring police corruption.

SAPS Anti-Corruption Investigation Unit

A national Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) was established in 1996, a year after the SAPS was formed in 1995. In 2000, the ACU had 250 members. By 2001 it had started 23 426 investigations, had made 3 268 arrests, and ensured the convictions of more than 467 police members.⁴⁶

The ACU was closed by National Commissioner Jackie Selebi in 2003.⁴⁷ After its disbandment, the ACU mandate was transferred to SAPS provincial organised crime units (OCUs). However, the OCUs have a broad mandate. The time and resources assigned to combatting corruption by the OCUs were limited,

and police corruption was largely neglected. The OCUs secured far fewer arrests and convictions against corrupt members.⁴⁸

Many allegations of police criminality are investigated by detectives based at police stations. These investigations are probably ineffective in most cases. Links between police officials under investigation and others at the station are likely to result in the police 'suspect' being protected and the investigating officer being intimidated or otherwise discouraged from pursuing a thorough investigation.⁴⁹

After a long hiatus, a SAPS work study in 2014/15 resulted in a new internal unit, the SAPS Anti-Corruption Investigation Unit (ACIU), being established in 2017. The national component of the unit is located under the Divisional Commissioner: Detective Services. The provincial ACIUs fall under Provincial Commissioners. In 2025, there were roughly 90 to 100 personnel in provincial ACIU units, with a further 11 at national level.

Though the SAPS is now much larger than it was when the ACU existed (1996–2003), the ACIU is much smaller than the former ACU. However, there is reportedly an

initiative supported by the SAPS National Commissioner to strengthen the units by adding further personnel.⁵⁰

The unit indicates that it makes between 300 and 400 arrests of allegedly corrupt police members, including metro police, annually.⁵¹ No mention is made of the unit in SAPS annual reports, and there is no publicly reported information on its case load or other aspects of its performance.

The current decentralised structure of the ACIU, with the bulk of personnel falling under Provincial Commissioners, makes it more vulnerable to interference in investigations. This is not the ideal structure for an anti-corruption unit. A national unit can also be subjected to interference, but it is more practical to ensure that one national unit is protected from such pressure, than diverse provincial units.

As Johan Burger and Stefan Grobler note, the ACIU faces ‘an intrinsically difficult task’ as it operates ‘in an environment that often is extremely hostile to its objectives’ and is required to investigate many ‘seasoned and streetwise’ police officers.⁵²

Some police officers will recognise the value of having an anti-corruption unit. But ‘detectives charged with investigating colleagues are often looked upon by some as disloyal and traitorous.’⁵³ It can be extremely difficult to carry out investigations against police members when many of their colleagues feel defensive of the members being investigated.

Related to this, members of anti-corruption units face formal and informal pressure not to conduct their investigations professionally. This pressure increases where the allegations that are investigated are against higher-ranking members, police members who are favoured by senior members, or members who have influential internal networks that are strongly loyal to them.

Anti-corruption unit members need to be able to work without being influenced by these pressures. This becomes far more difficult to achieve if ACIU personnel are in units that fall under the provincial SAPS offices.

National Prosecuting Authority

In addition to housing IDAC, the NPA is the prosecution service responsible for criminal cases referred to it by

bodies such as the ACIU, DPCI, and IDAC. It is widely acknowledged that the NPA, like other criminal justice agencies, suffers from capacity constraints.⁵⁴ This may contribute to long delays in finalising corruption cases against allegedly corrupt police officers.

SAPS disciplinary hearings

The SAPS disciplinary system should ensure that allegations of misconduct against police members are investigated properly and adjudicated fairly. In line with the framework provided in the Labour Relations Act, it applies ‘progressive discipline’, which emphasises a corrective rather than punitive approach.⁵⁵ As far back as the early 2000s, serious shortcomings in the SAPS disciplinary system regarding holding police members accountable for misconduct, crime, and corruption were identified.⁵⁶

The SAPS disciplinary regulations were revised in 2016. For reasons that are unclear, this was followed by a major decline in the number of finalised disciplinary hearings from over 4 400 per annum in the years up to 2016/17 to 1 702 and less in subsequent years. Chart 5 shows the number of SAPS members found guilty of corruption-related offences, an annual average of 129.

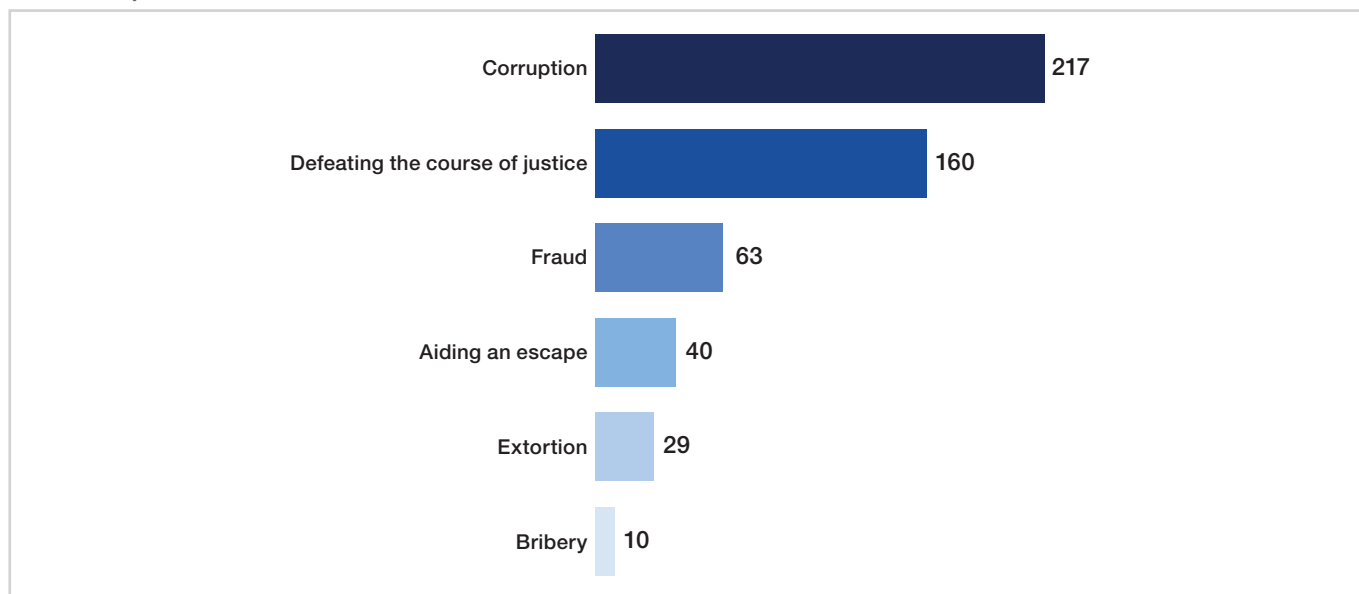
Police officers often feel defensive of colleagues who are being investigated for corruption

The categories of corruption, defeating the course of justice, and fraud account for nearly 70% of the 646 cases over the five-year period. The 28 IPID-related disciplinary convictions (see Chart 4) may account for some of these. It is unclear what share of these cases are from ACIU or DPCI investigations.

SAPS reports do not indicate the sanctions applied for these offences. But SAPS data on the overall outcome of disciplinary hearing procedures indicates that almost 80% end with no meaningful sanction.⁵⁷ Inappropriate application of ‘progressive’ discipline in serious cases is likely to contribute to the low rate at which sanctions are applied.

For cases where members are found guilty, 56% result in progressive disciplinary measures such as warnings,

Chart 5: SAPS members found guilty in disciplinary hearings for selected ‘corruption-related’ offences, April 2019 – March 2024



Source: SAPS Annual Reports

with only 44% resulting in sanctions (either suspension without pay for one or two months, or dismissal).

There is ‘very little control or accountability in relation to the type of sanctions imposed by disciplinary hearings.’⁵⁸ IPID reports indicate that the SAPS is inconsistent in sanctioning corruption. IPID statistics for 2019-2024 show that relative to 359 cases of corruption that they received during this period, 20 (5.6%) members were dismissed following disciplinary convictions.

Over a third (11 out of 31) SAPS officials who were found guilty of corruption in disciplinary hearings were not dismissed from the SAPS. Six SAPS members were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment following IPID corruption investigations.⁵⁹

Other SAPS responses to internal corruption

Over the years, the SAPS has introduced various anti-corruption strategies.⁶⁰ The 2025 SAPS framework for addressing corruption includes:

- Ethics awareness and advocacy programmes through internal communication platforms and workshops.
- Lifestyle audits on senior management.⁶¹
- The SAPS maintains a register of the outcome of alleged fraud and corruption incidents that are investigated. In addition to disciplinary measures,

confirmed cases are also reported for further criminal investigation and prosecution.⁶²

- In March 2025, the SAPS announced that it was in the process of establishing dedicated disciplinary units at national and provincial levels.⁶³
- In addition to the ACIU, the SAPS also currently has an Ethics Committee and Risk Management Committee.
- The DPCI has a Risk and Integrity Management Section and other integrity measures.⁶⁴

Acknowledging and reporting corruption

SAPS reluctance to acknowledge corruption

While surveys and other evidence show that police corruption is widespread, SAPS leadership and management appear reluctant to acknowledge the scale of the problem and often appear ambivalent about anti-corruption measures.

While the SAPS annual report has a brief section on the ‘fraud prevention plan’, the existence of the ACIU is not mentioned in the annual report, and data on efforts to tackle corruption is not consistently provided. When SAPS leadership and police unions refer to the issue, they typically suggest that it is a problem of a few ‘rotten apples’.⁶⁵

Solidarity and mutual support between police members are important features of police culture at a rank-and-file level.⁶⁶ This solidarity can play a positive role (positive solidarity) when police members assist each other in responding to violence or other dangerous situations. Negative solidarity between police is the basis for the 'code of silence', which is a major factor in enabling police corruption. One manifestation of negative solidarity is when SAPS members sometimes object when members are arrested for alleged corruption.⁶⁷

Reporting of cases for investigation

According to the SAPS annual report, 'The SAPS is committed to identifying and removing corrupt members from its ranks by continuing to encourage whistle-blowers to report instances of unethical behaviour, fraud and corruption.'⁶⁸ Channels for reporting corruption include 'the SAPS Service Complaints Hotline, the Public Service Commission Hotline, Crime Stop and the MySAPS App.'⁶⁹

SAPS corruption investigators say they receive few, if any, internal reports of police corruption

However, insofar as corruption is reported, this is mostly from the public.⁷⁰ Police corruption investigators in the SAPS say they receive few, if any, internal reports of police corruption, including few from personnel involved in policing functions that are frequently associated with corruption.⁷¹ Related to the 'code of silence', police may observe acts of corruption but not report them.⁷²

Those who are not directly involved in corruption and do not condone it may fail to report it due to fear that reporting colleagues will result in negative consequences, including ostracism. SAPS members who report corruption tend to say, 'I am just notifying you, but I can't make a formal statement.'⁷³ Little is done by the SAPS to motivate members to report it. Where station commanders or other managers report corruption, the tendency is to report 'those they don't want, not their blue-eyed boys.'⁷⁴

Reporting on the performance of anti-corruption mechanisms

As indicated, the systems for responding to police corruption are fragmented. Related to this, the information on investigating police corruption is patchy at best. The SAPS itself, the DPCI, and IDAC provide limited information on this topic. There is no alignment between the categories of information reported by these agencies and IPID. Since the ACU's closure in 2003, overall data on corruption complaints, investigations, and arrests have been poor.

Conclusion

Constraints on responses to police corruption in South Africa include the SAPS's reluctance to recognise the scale of the problem and the fragmented investigative system for addressing police corruption. Integrity-related shortcomings involving senior SAPS officials have been particularly damaging to public confidence, as well as that of honest police officials, in SAPS leadership.

Low levels of reporting of police corruption, linked to a police culture that discourages internal reporting of corruption, highlight the fact that police corruption cannot be addressed only by responding to reported cases. A more proactive investigative response to tackling police corruption is required, which relies on information and intelligence gathering.

Overall, SAPS interventions against internal corruption have been inconsistent and characterised by the absence of a clear, firm and sustained commitment to tackling the problem. The problem of corruption in metro and traffic policing agencies is also neglected in most metros and municipalities. A firmer, coherent and decisive response to police corruption should be central to efforts to professionalise and build greater trust in the police in South Africa.

Principal emphasis should be given to ensuring the integrity of the SAPS, which is the national police service, provided for in Section 205(1) of the Constitution. When members of the public encounter a SAPS member, or a member of another police organisation, they should be able to assume that this is a person who can be trusted and respected.

Notes

- 1 The exception to this are forms of extortion particularly where people are forced to pay for a service to which they should be entitled (see D Bruce, Counting the covert – using data to understand corruption in South Africa, Institute for Security Studies, Monograph 189, 21–23, <https://issafrica.org/research/monographs/counting-the-covert-using-data-to-understand-corruption-in-south-africa>, 2014).
- 2 As at 31 March 2024 there were 150 420 police personnel in the SAPS and an additional 33 686 personnel employed under the Public Service Act.
- 3 BBC, South Africa ex-police chief Jackie Selebi jailed, *BBC News*, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16040489, 5 December 2011.
- 4 Government Gazette No 53048, 23 July 2025.
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