



**Western Cape  
Government**

Community Safety

## **POLICY BRIEF**

### **RESEARCH STUDY ON THE DEMILITARISATION OF SAPS, VISIBLE POLICING IN THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE**

**The Western Cape Department of Community Safety**

**Programme:** Provincial Secretariat for Safety and Security

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## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The National Development Plan (NDP) calls for a democratic, open, transparent and citizen-centered policing approach in order to achieve an effective and professional police service. It further envisages “demilitarizing the police service”, stating that:

*“The decision to demilitarise the police force, moving away from its history of brutality, was a key goal of transformation after 1994. The remilitarisation of the police in recent years has not garnered greater respect for the police or higher conviction rates. If anything, it has contributed to violence. The police should be demilitarised and managed towards a professional civilian service.”<sup>1</sup>*

Before 1994, the South Africa Police Force (as it was then called) was highly militarized, and often worked similar to, and with the country's military and defence forces. The use of force, especially as an instrument to quell public unrest, was widespread. This approach ran contrary to the idea of a professional and constitutional police service, however, the impact of the militarised past on the current day South African Police Service (SAPS) has not been established.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The Civilian Secretariat for Police (CSP) and the nine Provincial Secretariats for Safety and Security undertook a national study to explore the twin concepts of militarisation and demilitarisation of the South African Police Service, with a specific focus on the Visible Policing Units (VPU). This brief reflects the **Western Cape** provincial leg of this study only, as conducted by the Western Cape Department of Community Safety. It focused on 15 police stations and 5 police clusters across the Western Cape from both rural and urban settings.

This exploratory study employed a mixed method approach, which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Field data was collected during January of 2018 from 43 SAPS managers using scheduled, structured interviews with mainly commissioned officers. Respondents included Cluster Commanders, Cluster Coordinators, Station Commanders and Visible Police Commanders/Coordinators. 86% (37) of these participants had served the police for more than 25 years, and 65% (28) of them were older than 50 years. The table below provides a snapshot of the sample, based on rank.

**RESEARCH STUDY ON THE DEMILITARISATION OF SAPS, VISIBLE POLICING IN THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE****Table 1: Study Sample**

<b>VISIBLE POLICE DEMILITARISATION STUDY (2018) PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIC DETAILS</b>		
<b>SAPS Rank</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>% of Participants</b>
<b>Major General</b>	2	4,7%
<b>Brigadier</b>	7	16,3%
<b>Colonel</b>	13	30,2%
<b>Lieutenant Colonel</b>	6	14,0%
<b>Captain</b>	11	25,6%
<b>Warrant Officer</b>	4	9,3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

The primary aim of the study was to determine whether the SAPS Visible Policing Units are militarised, and if so, to explore ways that they could be further demilitarised to enable them to perform an effective, and professional visible policing service, capable of addressing the policing needs of a democratic South Africa. Furthermore, the study attempted to ascertain the respondents' understanding of militarisation and demilitarisation in the Western Cape. This study was important for Visible Policing Units, which work at the coal face of communities.

### **WHAT DOES POLICE MILITARISATION, REMILITARISATION AND DEMILITARISATION ENTAIL, ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF SAPS VISIBLE POLICING UNITS?**

Militarism is an ideology which is focused on the use of force and the threat of violence as the most appropriate and effective means to solve problems. It is centred on the exercise of military power, equipment, organisation, operations, and military technology as its primary problem-solving tools.<sup>2</sup> It includes the employment of military tactics and equipment by average law enforcement officers.<sup>3</sup> Militarisation is defined as the "act of assembling and putting into readiness for war or other emergency".<sup>4</sup> It is:

*"... the process by which a society organises itself for military conflict and violence. It ... reflects the level of militarisation of a state, and which is associated with the glorification of the military, armed forces and weapons and of military power, including through symbolic displays (e.g., parades of tanks and soldiers) and actual use of force, such as through warfare."<sup>5</sup>*

On the other hand, existing policy frameworks which govern the South African Police Service (SAPS) emphasise the importance of an open, transparent, well skilled and qualified and citizen-centred policing approach, to achieving an effective and professional police service.<sup>6</sup> These approaches juxtapose the notion of police militarisation. A police service which upholds the principles of policing in a constitutional democracy operates very differently to a police force which views itself and operates in a militarised way.

The fundamental characteristics of a citizen-centric and professional police service are:

- Police officers view their primary goal as serving people;
- They feel very positive and optimistic about citizens' roles in working with the police;
- They consider themselves accountable to citizens;
- They are supportive and positive of community policing activities.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially, policing in a democracy is based on the understanding that a police officer serves as an agent of the community and their responsibility is to serve and protect community members.

## INDICATORS FOR POLICE MILITARISATION

The study explored indicators for police militarisation and investigated the extent to which these indicators were present within the visible policing environment. Largely looking at Kraska's Framework, the study explored his proposed indicators of police militarisation, namely material, cultural, operational and organisational dimensions.<sup>8</sup> Research suggests that the behaviour of police officers is influenced by the culture of the organisation itself. The study therefore attempted to explore the existence of material, operational and cultural indicators within the SAPS Visible Policing environment, whether it evidences militaristic characteristics, attempted to determine whether these lead to militaristic behaviour within the unit. Table 2 summarizes the Kraska indicators for militarisation.

**Table 2: Kraska Framework and indicators for police militarisation**

INDICATORS	DESCRIPTION OF THESE INDICATORS
<b>Material Indicators</b>	According to Kraska material indicators for police militarisation are publicly visible. These indicators include insignia, equipment, uniforms and weaponry.
<b>Cultural Indicators</b>	Organisational culture includes values and assumptions about social realities. It comprises of the collectively shared forms of ideas and self-perceptions, symbols and meanings, values and ideologies, rules and norms espoused by members of an organisation. It is the collective unconscious, behaviour patterns, structures and practices evident within the organisation. They include relics and artefacts, order of dress, language, stories told, and observable rituals and ceremonies.
<b>Organizational Factors</b>	Organisational indicators include martial organisational arrangements such as command and control through ranking structures, or elite squads of officers patterned after military special operations which are deployed to patrol high-crime areas (as opposed to the traditional "officer on the beat").
<b>Operational indicators</b>	Operational indicators refer to elements and operational patterns modelled after the military. They include military modelling in areas of intelligence, supervision, handling high-risk situations, war making or restoration/stabilisation.

The study highlighted the perception that militarisation includes the polarisation between the community and the police, with a culture of secrecy and highly centralised decision-making.<sup>9</sup> Juxtaposing this, a community policing approach emphasises the establishment of police-community partnerships and a problem solving approach responsive to the needs of the community. Community policing is based on the idea that the objectives of SAPS can only be achieved through the collaborative effort of the police, other government institutions, the organisations and structures of civil society, and individual citizens. The more the service incorporates a community policing approach, the less likely it is that the organisation is militarised.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The study highlights the many strides made in demilitarising the SAPS Visible Policing Units, from 1994. This was primarily achieved through revamping the entire statutory foundation for the operation of SAPS and these units. Through transformation brought on by new laws, new national instructions, introduction of new structures, and the evolution of the common law, the Visible Policing Units are required to operate within a framework of constitutional checks and balances. The demilitarisation project, at least in the Visible Policing environment, gained further momentum through the NDP, and programmes such as the SAPS "Back to Basics" and "Customer is King" approaches.

The study highlighted some of the residual material, cultural and organisational indicators observable within the Visible Policing units that are traditionally associated with militarism, such as the uniform and insignia; the hierarchical rank structure; the language used within the organization (for example "waging a war on crime"); how members of the organisation view themselves compared to recognised military structures; the discipline; and daily parades. The respondents themselves linked the notion of police militarisation with rank structure, uniform and authority, but felt that this does not necessarily mean that the police are militarised. Respondents believed that the wearing of the uniform, conducting of drills and parades are important for internal discipline and associated protocols. The rank structure in particular helps to maintain necessary elements of command and control. The uniform serves to identify the police from other role players that render services to the communities.

The study shows that even during joint operations, the sanctioned actions of Visible Policing units are limited to specific orders, the types of weapons which may be used, and specific activities for instance, their primary responsibility is to conduct searches and seizures during raids and joint operations.

This study found that the Visible Policing units are largely community-centric and service orientated in their approach. This means that they see their responsibility to include serving and protecting community members. Guiding operational frameworks therefore highlight that:

*"...community policing is a philosophy that guides police management styles and operational strategies. It emphasises the establishment of police-community partnerships and a problem solving approach responsive to the needs of the community."*<sup>10</sup>

The visible policing units operate within this, and similar other frameworks, suggesting that they are not highly militarised.

The study points out that the call for the demilitarisation of the SAPS assumes a homogenous policing organisation. Yet, there are clear distinctions between the various policing units, and sections, such as the Visible Policing units, Tactical Response Team (TRT) and Public Order Policing Units. For this reason, the findings and recommendations arising from this study are relevant to the visible police environment, and are aimed at ensuring effectiveness and professionalism in this environment.

This study supports the objective of achieving a well-resourced professional visible policing establishment that is staffed by highly skilled officers who value their work and serve the community without discrimination.

Importantly, the study highlights systemic, organisational and operational risk factors for police brutality which require decisive and urgent address. These factors include increased frustration as a result of the lack of a clear promotion policy and concomitant feelings of stagnation and institutional bias (where it is perceived that some officials are favoured over others in an arbitrary manner when decisions on promotions are made); perceptions of the lack of institutional support for police, which ensures their operational effectiveness and safety; and an underused employee assistance programme, which does not accommodate the dynamics of policing institutional culture.

While the study does not dispute that unacceptably high levels of police brutality are prevalent across South Africa, it shows that this is not only due to remnants of (even low) police militarization.

These contributors to brutality and the use of excessive force are shown to be independent from elements traditionally associated with militarisation, and include such factors as operational stressors as a result of the socio economic environment in which police operate, high crime and violence levels, highly populated areas needing to be policed, and low police to population figures. Police officers are often

continuously exposed to violence and trauma through their work but seldom access the employee support programmes available.

Coupled with unresolved personal problems, this means that officials carry a significant and unattended stress load. The study makes it clear that better support systems need to be put in place to support police officers to operate optimally. Institutionally, such greater support systems should not be viewed as an optional process, but as a constitutional, statutory and policy obligation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study highlights that whereas policy frameworks like the NDP and the 2016 White Paper on Policing set out an approach to policing which emphasises the need for the demilitarisation of the police, there is a lack of understanding of the term “militarisation” and consequently, “demilitarisation”. The National Development Plan itself fails to create a clear and coherent understanding of this concept. The NDP recommendations on the demilitarisation of the SAPS does not take cognizance of the fact that the SAPS is not a homogenous institution, but rather, it is made up of distinct units, each with specific functions. Each unit is given the requisite training and powers which are commensurate with their functions and purpose.

Overall, the Visible Policing units within the South African Police Service in the Western Cape may experience challenges as they strive towards effectiveness and professionalisation, however, they hardly see themselves as militarised. They are essentially community-centric in their approach.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study raises important considerations for the SAPS demilitarisation project. This study distinguishes the Visible Policing units from other units like the Tactical Response Teams (TRTs) and Public Order Policing (POPs) units. It emphasises that the Visible Policing units operate very differently from the TRTs and POP units. When it comes to the Visible Policing Units, findings suggest that these units are neither militarised nor para-militarised, and that the emphasis should be placed on promoting operational effectiveness, employee health and wellness, as well as professionalisation.

## **ON THE WAY FORWARD**

The organisational culture of the police instils the type of mind-set among officers required for delivering citizen-centred policing. The continuous improvement in training and the professionalisation of the police service in this rights-based philosophy, together with clear Standing Orders and Standard Operating

Procedures must allow for enhanced levels of tactical and situational awareness by officers. Added emphasis must be placed on ensuring high standards of discipline and proper management.

Another central feature of policing within a democracy is the constant review of police actions, such as the use of force, as well as ways in which police conduct their work and adopt innovative technologies.

The orientation of the police in South Africa must be underpinned by a firm commitment to giving effect to the values and principles of democratic policing. Central to this is creating an environment that facilitates building sustained community support, integrity, transparency, accountability and participation. At the local level, the SAPS must be equipped to respond to the risks, vulnerabilities and policing needs of the diverse and disparate communities it serves.

When it comes to avoiding the development of militaristic tendencies within the SAPS, the question is whether the answer lies merely “professionalisation” or in the decisive and fervent cultivation of a human rights paradigm throughout the organisation.

Importantly, any change made to an organisation as integral as the SAPS should be well considered. The reliance on evidence-based practice is of utmost importance for an essential service. Attempts should be made to determine the effect of these changes on the members (at all levels) and the beneficiaries of the police service, namely the communities. Further research should look into the determinants of the maintenance of effective police discipline.

While the study gives policy makers much thought, respondents stressed the importance of proper and full consultation and that their safety must be considered in the process of effecting changes. Furthermore, communities and Visible Policing members on the ground need to be afforded an opportunity to express their understanding of militarisation/ demilitarisation and determine whether either of the two helps to increase safety for all communities in the country.

The full study can be found at: [https://www.westerncape.gov.za/dept/community-safety/documents/reports\\_research/R](https://www.westerncape.gov.za/dept/community-safety/documents/reports_research/R)



## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> National Planning Commission (NPC). (2012). The National Development Plan: Vision 2030. The Presidency: Pretoria, at p. 350.
- <sup>2</sup> Kraska, P.B. (2007). Militarization and Policing— Its Relevance to 21st Century Police in Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice. [Volume 1, Issue 4] [Online] at p. 1. Available at <https://academic.oup.com/policing/article-abstract/1/4/501/1440981>. Accessed on 19 December 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> Kraska, P.B. (2007). Militarization and Policing— Its Relevance to 21st Century Police in Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice. [Volume 1, Issue 4] [Online] at p. 1. Available at <https://academic.oup.com/policing/article-abstract/1/4/501/1440981>. Accessed on 19 December 2017.
- <sup>4</sup> Definition: "Militarisation" in the Farlex Online Dictionary, at <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/militarisation>.
- <sup>5</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Militarization>.
- <sup>6</sup> See Civilian Secretariat for Police. 2016. White Paper on Policing. [Online] Available at [http://www.policesecretariat.gov.za/downloads/bills/2016\\_White\\_Paper\\_on\\_Policing.pdf](http://www.policesecretariat.gov.za/downloads/bills/2016_White_Paper_on_Policing.pdf). Accessed on 14 December 2018; See also National Instruction 3 of 2013: Sector Policing.
- <sup>7</sup> Nalla, 2009 as cited in Western Cape Government, Department of Community Safety (2018) "Research study on the demilitarisation of SAPS: Visible policing in the Western Cape". DoCS: Cape Town.
- <sup>8</sup> Kraska, 2007 as cited in DoCS, 2018, Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> DoCS, 2018, Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> The SAPS Manual for the South African Police Service, as cited in Docs, 2018, Ibid.