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PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICING IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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Abstract

The police service in Kenya, as in many other countries around the globe, is established as a service to secure a peaceful society. They do this by enforcing the law and deterring criminal behaviour. The effectiveness with which they undertake this task depends, among other things, on the level of professionalism with which they pursue their duties and the adequacy of coverage of all members of society in their operations. Professionalism refers to the degree to which they meet social expectations in the conduct of their duties while adequacy of coverage refers to their ability to respond in a timely fashion to any security threats that may come up in society. It should be self-evident that the extent to which they are able to meet these expectations depends, to a large degree, on their integrity. And yet since the early 1990s, the Kenya Police has earned the dubious distinction of always leading the list of the state institutions perceived as most corrupt. Over the years, this has led to a public perception of an ineffective service that does not meet social expectations. This paper uses data collected for a doctoral thesis on public perceptions of the effectiveness of policing in Kenya. It examines public perceptions of professionalism and adequacy of coverage by the police in Nairobi policing region. It found that the public largely views the police service as lacking in professionalism and ability to give adequate coverage, a view that was also shared by some members of the police service as well. It also found that contrary to what may often be assumed, the middle class and lower classes have strikingly similar perceptions of an ineffective police service and further these perceptions do not change across gender, educational status or socio-economic status. It concludes that what ails the police is what ails the society as a whole and true reform must begin from that broader perspective.

Key words: Police effectiveness, professionalism, adequacy of coverage, corruption, integrity

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