

‘A Stream of Law Enforcement Has Been Polluted at the Source’: In Pursuit of Meritorious Selection of Police Recruits in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Just as with other international police agencies, Kenya’s National Police Service (KNPS) represents the face of bureaucracy. Its officers are entrusted with the State’s power to maintain peace and order, enforce laws, lawfully deprive people of their liberty (as in the case of arrest), and use force, to mention but a few. This position of privilege that potentially harbours serious ramifications, calls for a competent recruitment function to yield quality officers joining the rank and files of the organisation. However, recruitment of police in Kenya continues to be a wicked problem that has demonstrated durability of time, with claims of unethical misadministration causing it to be seen as unequal, unfair, and therefore illegitimate in the eyes of the public. Recommendations to address this contemporary issue have been suggested in the past, with implementation of some reforms, yet the problem persists. The present study argues that the prescriptions suggested so far lack the robustness to address the issue, which in part explains the persistence of the problem. This study adopts a different approach by revisiting the KNPS recruitment model to heed to the call for further research that shall culminate in suggesting a ‘competent recruitment’ model embedding merit in recruitment and selection of entry-level police officers in Kenya.

Keywords: Police, Merit, Police recruitment, Police selection, Meritocracy, Police hiring, Kenya National Police Service, Northern Territory Police Force, Equality, Fairness, Legitimacy

INTRODUCTION

Unlike the private sector, public sector hiring remains a matter of intense scrutiny, public interest, and debate. This is likely to explain the rejection of the spoils system, which was characterised by patronage in allocation of public jobs, in favour of merit-based hiring nearly a century ago (Ibrayeva et al., 2017; Stancetic, 2020). Tracing back to the classic justice discourse, public jobs were seen as a ‘national cake’, whereby every citizen, by the mere virtue of being a citizen were able to claim their just desert, or to a piece of it (Leventhal, 1980). Thus, favouritism, cronyism, nepotism, patronage etc in accessing public service is not only considered unfair, unjust, or illegitimate but it is also considered ‘a huge public evil’ (Stancetic, 2020, p. 420). Accordingly, merit-based hiring practices have since permeated bureaucracies around the world as it is thought to be a fair system subjecting all that lay claim to just desert to an open, competitive process (Mulligan, 2018; Mulaphong, 2023; Prijanto & Juwono, 2022; Nkgapele & Mofokeng, 2024; Dahlstrom et al., 2015; Mushtaque et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2024; Zaman, 2015; Haider, 2019).

Considering police agencies exemplify the being of bureaucracy, wield state’s legitimate coercive force, bear heavy initial costs in recruitment and selection, and risk serious ramifications including vicarious liability in case of bad hires, merit-based hiring is especially important to them for two reasons (Hilal et al., 2017; Ra’oof, 2014; Sweeting & Cole, 2023). First, is to meet the key priority of selecting high quality candidates that will assure safety of the community and yield return on investment, and secondly to ensure that such candidates are selected in an open, and fair process that legitimises the outcome of such process (Hilal et al., 2017; Nkgapele & Mofokeng, 2024; Stubbs, 2023).

Whereas KNPS ascribes to merit-based recruitment per their regulatory frameworks, the hiring of entry-level officers has always been problematic (Gastrow, 2009). Claims of unethical practices including political

interference, bribery, nepotism, favouritism, corruption and other misadministration have continued to cloud the recruitment exercises resulting in discontent among candidates, stakeholders and the public in general (Wasike, 2005; Gommans & Musumbu, 2014; Ketu, 2016; Kibor et al., 2015; Hope, 2017; Kinoti, 2017; Kipkirui & Rotich, 2023). For example, in 2005, the then KNPS Police Commissioner, Maj. Rtd. Hussein Ali cancelled police recruitment following sustained pressure from disgruntled candidates and stakeholders (BBC News, 2005; Nation, 2005). At the time, the now-defunct Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission (KACC) suggested that 80% of the exercise lacked legitimacy, with its chairperson Justice Aaron Ringera controversially remarking 'a stream of law enforcement has been polluted at the source' (BBC 2005, para. 11). Similarly, the High Court of Kenya nullified the 2014 KNPS recruitment on grounds of massive irregularities including but not limited to corruption, bribery and nepotism (Hope, 2018; Kinoti, 2017). This comes against the backdrop of supposed police reforms brought by Kenya's 2010 Constitution meant to professionalise police and by extension address this topical issue.

There have been a few attempts to suggest solutions both from empirical research (e.g., Wasike, 2005; Gommans & Musumbu, 2014; Hope, 2015; Hope, 2019; Nyamu, 2019; Rotich & Kiboro, 2023) besides national task forces like the 2009 Kenya National Task Force on Police Reforms (Ransley report) and the 2023 Task force on Police Reforms (Maraga report). To KNPS' credit, some ideas have been implemented, but the problem persists. For instance, police vetting to weed out rogue officers was completed in 2015 (culminating in the sacking of 125 officers, thirteen of whom were later reinstated), a watchdog civilian body dubbed Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) and the National Police Service Commission (NPSC) to oversee the running of the agency duly established, Internal Affairs Unit (IAU) created among other key reforms (Gommans & Musumbu, 2014; Hope, 2015; Hope, 2019). Perhaps, KNPS may have succumbed to the classic Goldstein (1979, p. 238) diagnosis of 'means over ends syndrome' by placing emphasis on improving internal processes without paying attention to the outcomes of those internal process to see if they are achieving what the public expects of them.

While these suggestions and their implementation thereof are a step in the right direction, this paper argues that existing empirical research has predominantly problematised the issue from a rather 'diagnostic' as opposed to 'design' perspective (Van Thiel 2014, pp. 17-18), such that a lot is left to be desired in terms of finding solutions. By implication, existing research has been conservative almost falling short of telling, albeit empirically, what is already public knowledge i.e., the problem exists, has serious ramifications, and needs addressing. Generic recommendations like eliminating biases and promoting fairness in recruit-selection (Wasike, 2005), ensuring free and fair selection by reducing malpractices in KNPS recruitment particularly corruption and political interference (Nyamu, 2019) etc without candidly nuancing the 'how' is regrettable because it could be the kind of information that KNPS needs to address the issue. Da Vinha (2024) argues that such recommendations fall into the category of criticism of social science research - particularly in political science and public administration where it is considered unusable in integrating theory to policy. As Van Thiel (2014) advises, the challenge for applied research in public administration is to link theory to practice, where researchers propose solutions to topical issues based on study findings, but only if such findings are practicable in an everyday context. Because after all, 'practitioners have tasks to carry out and problems to solve and can and will draw on whatever works in order to do those things' (Hughes 2017, p.353).

To this end, this paper adopts a design approach in problematising the issue and pursues a further line of enquiry posed by Wasike (2005, p. 68) calling for research that culminates in suggesting a 'competent recruitment model' for KNPS to inspire merit in recruitment and selection of recruits. To aid this endeavour, the paper engages the logic of comparison advanced by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017, p.1) where two scales are traced simultaneously to allow for 'process discovery and problem solving'. Hence, in pursuit of a feasible applicable model for recruit-hiring in Kenya, the KNPS recruitment model was compared to a similar agency from an advanced democracy with the same recruitment ideals.

Based on the size of the organisation in terms of police to citizen ratio, the regulatory framework guiding recruit-selection, the general contentment in entry-level police hiring, but from an advanced democracy, the Northern Territory Police Force (NTPF) was considered the most comparable Australian police agency to Kenya and thus suitable for this comparison. This paper therefore sought to answer the questions: 'Was the NTPF recruitment model better than KNPS in promoting merit-based recruitment and selection of recruits between 2002-2022?'

And if there are any differences, what lessons -if any- can be drawn from this comparison to suggest a model that can be applied to KNPS to promote meritorious recruit and selection of recruits?

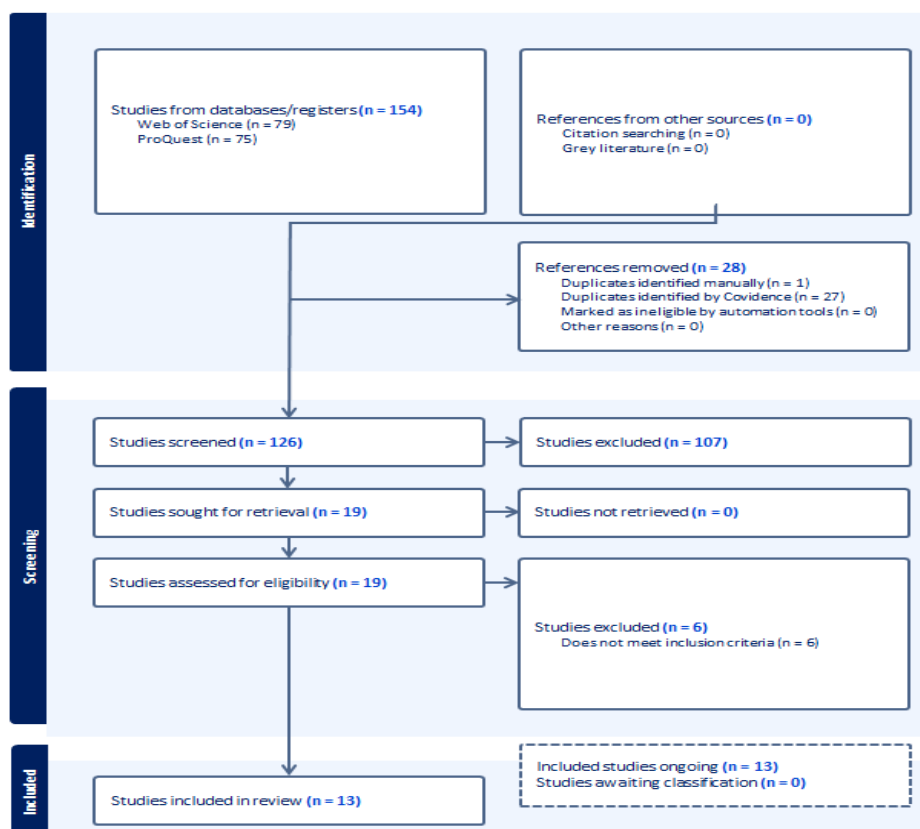
Building the conceptual puzzle: a scoping review

To build a concise and systematic conceptual puzzle, this paper sought to, first, paint a picture of the state of knowledge relating to merit-based hiring in police recruitment by conducting a scoping review. This was primarily geared towards providing a snapshot of the extent, nature, and range of evidence base on the topic culminating in summarising findings from heterogenous body of knowledge (Munns et al., 2018). In doing so, it would contextualise the Kenyan case within the broader global experience. Drawing from Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al., (2010) ideas on scoping studies, this review involved developing the research question, spotting appropriate articles, selecting studies, documenting data, and finally, synthesising, ordering, and writing the results. Reported results in this review follow the 2018 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA-ScR) guideline extension for scoping reviews.

Search strategy and selection

Following a pilot search, two electronic data bases were searched on 2nd June 2025 using a combination of key words (some of which were truncated) namely, "merit*" AND "police*" OR "law enforcement" AND "recruit*" OR "selection" OR "hiring" OR "employ*". The two data bases searched were ProQuest and the Web of Science (WoS). This was based on their elaborate assortment of relevant multidisciplinary journals like law, social sciences, psychology and policing. Whereas the search could have been broadened, searching two leading databases was deemed to suffice the objective of this review. To draw on the most up to date knowledge on the topic, the search was limited to the last two decades (2005 to 2025). Having excluding books, article reviews, as well as editorial material, 79 articles were extracted from WoS. Similar search protocol limited to peer reviewed articles and published in English on ProQuest database returned 75 articles. These articles were imported to Covidence where 28 duplicates, 27 (automatically) and one (manually) were removed leaving 126 articles for title and abstract screening. 107 articles were removed after title and abstract screening leaving 19 articles for full text review. Six articles were excluded for not meeting inclusion criteria during full text review, leaving 13 articles for inclusion. This is captured in the PRISMA flowchart diagram below.

PRISMA Flowchart diagram: Merit and police recruitment; the state of knowledge



Review question

This review posed the question: what is the state of knowledge on merit-based hiring in entry level police recruitment and selection? The eligibility for this question was evaluated using Population, Concept and Context (PPC) drawn from JBI guideline. See table I below.

Table I: Eligibility framework

S/No.	Eligibility framework for the review question	
1.	Population	Candidates seeking to join police.
2.	Concept	Merit-based police recruitment and selection processes in the last two decades (2005-2025).
3.	Context	Entry-level police recruitment and selection process(es).

Inclusion & exclusion criteria

The following inclusion criteria was used:

1. Articles relating to recruitment and selection of entry-level police candidates;
2. Articles reporting empirical findings on merit-based recruitment and selection of entry-level police candidates;
3. Articles covering a significant content on merit-based recruitment and selection of police recruits; and
4. Articles written in English and published between 2005 and 2025.

Articles not meeting the above inclusion criteria were excluded. In addition, review articles, books, and book reviews were excluded. Table II below shows the list of all included articles.

Table II: A full list of included articles

No	Author (s)	Title	Journal	Year
1.	Cambareri, J. F.; Kuhns, JB	Perceptions and Perceived Challenges Associated With a Hypothetical Career in Law Enforcement: Differences Among Male and Female College Students	Police quarterly	2018
2.	Ibrayeva, AS; Seifullina, AB; Kassymzhan, AA; Otyunshiyeva, AA	Applying New Management Principles to the Activities of Law Enforcement Agencies in the Republic of Kazakhstan as a Basis for Strengthening the Legal Culture of Kazakhstani Society	Academic Conferences International Limited	2017
3.	Probolus, K	"Drawn from Alice in Wonderland": Expert and public debates over merit, race, and testing in Massachusetts police officer selection, 1967-1979	Journal of the history of the behavioural sciences	2018
4.	Vejnovic, D; Lalic, V	Community Policing in a Changing World: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Police practice and research	2005

5.	Farrell, C; Barao, L	Police officer perceptions of diversity efforts: a disconnect between the quaffs and the methods	Police practice and research	2023
6.	Quah, J.S.T	Curbing police corruption in Singapore: lessons for other Asian countries	Asian education and development studies	2014
7.	Stubbs, G	"Whenever big changes come, big talks don't"- An examination of the police experience of recruitment and promotion positive action processes	International journal of law crime and justice	2023
8.	Quah, J.S.T	Combating police corruption in five Asian countries: a comparative analysis	Asian education and development studies	2020b
9.	Quah, J.S.T	Combating police corruption in Indonesia: cleansing the buaya (crocodile)	Asian education and development studies	2020a
10.	Davenport-Klunder, K; Hine, K; Fleet, R	The language of belonging: The role of symbolic language in shaping social identity and public perceptions of police gender targets	Australian journal of social issues	2025
11.	Skendaj, E	International Insulation from Politics and the Challenge of State Building: Learning from Kosovo	Global governance	2014
12.	Samar B. R; Babineau, A.	Beyond Reputation Management: An Auto-Ethnographic Examination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Canadian Policing	Societies	2023
13.	Pehlman, N	Patrimonialism through Reform: Public Participation in Police Reform, Institutional Capture, and Bureaucratic Independence in Ukraine	Harvard Ukrainian studies	2020

Results: key themes

Included articles provide a snapshot on merit and police recruitment revealed through the following themes.

Conceptualisation of merit in police hiring

Like other public sector agencies, police conceptualise merit in the context of demonstratable ability to perform the role (Stubbs, 2023) gauged by an objective selection process (Ibrayeva et al., 2017; Pehlman, 2020). This carries two intrinsic connotations of not just ‘candidate quality’ but also fairness in selection that ultimately legitimises the outcome of such selection process (Stubbs, 2023). Typically, police agencies blend a mesh of four key domains in operationalising merit including formal, physical, medical, and personality elements (Ibrayeva et al., 2017; Skendaj, 2014; Farrell & Barao, 2023; Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Stubbs, 2023). Thus, aspects like citizenship, age, education qualifications, physical and medical fitness as well as personality aspects are considered in meritorious selection of entry-level police (Quah, 2014; Probulus, 2018; Quah, 2020b; Farrell & Barao, 2023). The growing knowledge on representative bureaucracy (Stubbs, 2023; Romdhane & Babineau, 2023), has seen an underlying theme of diversity and inclusion superimposing itself in both conceptualising and operationalising merit within police (Vejnovic & Lalic, 2005; Farrell & Barao, 2023; Davenport-Klunder et al., 2025). By implication, affirmative actions intended to address disparate impact in police recruitment have shaped how merit is defined and practiced to an extent (Probulus, 2018; Romdhane & Babineau, 2023; Farrell & Barao, 2023). For example, it is now a common phenomenon in police recruitment to have different assessment standards for an aspect like physical fitness between male and female candidates, to account for physiological differences between them (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018).

Recruitment policies and procedures

Expectedly, merit-based hiring is enshrined in regulatory frameworks of police agencies consistent with the practice in the broader public administration (Ibrayeva et al., 2017; Quah, 2014; Quah, 2020b; Romdhane & Babineau, 2023). In practice, law enforcement agencies have laws, regulations, policy memoranda etc which anchors and guides the operationalisation of merit in selection of entry-level officers. For instance, the new system based on ‘competency approach’ adopted in selection, attestation and placement of Kazakhstan Police in 2015 is one such regulatory framework (Ibrayeva et al., 2017, p. 179). Often, these regulations are partly in furtherance of, or work in tandem with related policies aimed at dissipating barriers in accessing employment like fair and equal opportunity, diversity etc (Romdhane & Babineau, 2023; Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Farrell & Barao, 2023; Stubbs, 2023). As a result, concepts like quotas, ‘employment equity’, affirmative or positive action among others, though controversial, are predominant both conceptually and within the practice of the aforesaid regulatory framework (Romdhane & Babineau, 2023, p. 4; Stubbs, 2023). Critics however argue that interventions like quotas or positive actions, in sum, have dichotomised workers as beneficiaries of preferential treatment and those that access employment because they are meritoriously qualified (Romdhane & Babineau, 2023; Stubbs, 2023). And as Stubbs (2023) observed, where such interventions are not well communicated and or managed effectively may result in serious internal ramifications like eroding legitimacy of underrepresented officers among the ranks and files. Even more interesting is the recent Davenport-Klunder et al., (2025) finding that an affirmative action to improve women in policing like gender targets attracted an even split (for and against) among the wider public which is a contradistinction to 1990s literature (e.g., Leger, 1997 cited in Davenport-Klunder et al., 2025) that reported a general support for female officers. Perhaps this reflects a shift in societal perceptions on women in male-dominated fields like policing or the evolving nature of gender roles in the society (Davenport-Klunder et al., 2025).

Recruitment challenges

The practice of merit in police hiring has not been without challenges. Whereas merit, at least in normative terms, is expected to provide a level playing field for everyone to thrive, its practice within policing has not yielded this ideal. For instance, Cambareri and Kuhns (2018) found that females perceived themselves to be less successful compared to their male counterparts in a potential law enforcement career. The same study also reported that females perceived more difficulties in receiving acceptance, opportunities and respect in a policing career than men, the sum of which made them less interested in law enforcement career. Studies (e.g., Probolus, 2018; Romdhane & Babineau, 2023) have consistently highlighted concerns in operationalising merit, first, because of difficulties in defining and measuring it especially in the context of its interactions with inclusivity and diversity quest. As a result, whereas progress has been made, for example, to improve minority groups like females in policing (Farrell & Barao, 2023), they continuously lag their male counterparts, a fit that only gets worse when it comes to police leadership (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018). This finding is consistent with literature elsewhere, e.g., Thorton (2018) which posits that merit as traditionally practiced by police agencies favours white male candidates, not harnessing other competencies brought by other candidates of diverse background. For example, Probolus (2018) observed how written tests could, and have been culturally biased, disadvantaging racial minorities who might not share the dominant white culture and or language. Additionally, deep-lying issues like systemic discrimination and biases challenges the operationalisation of merit by undermining its underlying values of equity, fairness and legitimacy (Romdhane & Babineau, 2023). Studies have shown issues like racial biases, sexism etc that impede merit in selection of police recruits, casting doubt into the efficacy of current recruitment practices in terms of inclusivity and fairness (Probolus, 2018; Romdhane & Babineau, 2023; Pehlman, 2020; Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018). Contextual differences have made the situation worse in weak democracies (e.g., Indonesia, Philippines, Ukraine etc) where outright vices like corruption, nepotism, political interference and patrimonialism have been documented as stumbling blocks to merit in practice of police selection (Quah, 2020a; Quah, 2020b; Pehlman, 2020).

The merit of meritorious recruitment for police agencies

There is a link between the practice and or lack of merit in police recruitment to police effectiveness and corruption (Quah, 2014; Skendaj, 2014; Pehlman, 2020; Quah, 2020a; Quah, 2020b). Alongside other factors, meritorious selection is credited with more effective police agencies and less police corruption (Quah, 2014;

Skendaj, 2014; Pehlman, 2020; Quah, 2020a; Quah, 2020b). If we take merit to be ‘the best people for the job’ (Stubbs 2023, p. 6), it will logically follow that police performance will be enhanced thereby improving police effectiveness (Ibrayeva et al., 2017). For instance, a comparative study of five Asian countries by Quah (2020b) attributed the serious police corruption in Indonesia and Philippines to among other things, lack of meritorious selection compared to countries like Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan that practiced merit in police recruitment. Similarly, the effectiveness of Kosovo and the contemporary Singapore Police as well as the success of the former in addressing police corruption is attributed by among other interventions meritorious recruitment and selection (Skendaj, 2014; Quah, 2014). Also, the gains made in transforming Bosnia and Herzegovina police from ‘soldiers with police badges sewn to their uniform’ to democratic policing post-war are partly a result of personnel reforms anchored on merit (Vejnovic & Lali 2005, p. 364). These findings are broadly vindicated elsewhere, where Zaman (2015), Egeberg et al. (2019) and Oliveira et al. (2023) for example, found that bureaucracies that practice merit-based recruitment have better governance and less corruption tendencies.

Summary: a snapshot of the state of knowledge on merit and police recruitment

Scoping literature on the concept of merit within the context of entry-level police recruitment offers candid insights on conceptualisation, operationalisation, and criticisms thereof in police hiring practice. It reveals that merit is a contextual and evolving concept, well enshrined in police-hiring through regulatory framework, and conceptualised through the prisms of formal, physical, medical, and personality elements that are central to the hiring process (Ibrayeva et al., 2017; Skendaj, 2014; Farrell & Barao, 2023; Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Stubbs, 2023). Within these parameters lies the intersecting tension about diversity and inclusivity that superimpose in application of merit, with a few critics calling for caution in exercising this growing need (Vejnovic & Lalic, 2005; Farrell & Barao, 2023; Davenport-Klunder et al., 2025). Whereas merit is widely accepted and enshrined in police recruitment, operationalising matters have challenged its use with questions of misadministration e.g., racial bias, and in worst cases corruption, patronage etc. undermining its underlying value of promoting fairness and legitimacy of selection process (Probolus, 2018; Romdhane & Babineau, 2023; Quah, 2020a; Quah, 2020b; Pehlman, 2020; Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018). There is therefore a glaring need to focus research on ways to define and practice merit, first, to enhance effectiveness of police agencies, but in a way that supports the underlying value of fairness and therefore legitimacy in selection. Future research can also benefit from assessing the link and or implications of police recruitment reforms to key issues of performance and legitimacy especially within the context of addressing the challenges of operationalising merit.

Having situated the tapestry within which merit is conceptualised and practised in policing globally, attention will now turn to the Kenyan case to juxtapose its nexus within the existing knowledge.

Police recruitment: the Kenyan case

The Public Service (Values and Principles) Act of 2015 as read together with the supreme law of Kenya in Article 232 provides that the recruitment and promotion of civil servants be based on merit. Also important, article 232 1(e) of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution holds both levels of government as well as corporation and state organs accountable for all their administrative acts in executing their mandate. As a state organ, KNPS is therefore bound by this regulatory framework to conduct meritorious selection and is further held administratively liable for such function. And being an agency of the law, mandated to enforce the same law, it would generally be expected that it will adhere to these regulations or otherwise risk exemplifying the popular axiom ‘preaching water and drinking wine’. To this end, it is accepted that merit-based hiring is a non-negotiable requirement for KNPS.

Remarkably, the conceptualisation of merit in hiring of recruits in KNPS is largely consistent, at least in normative terms, with policing global experiences. For example, key parameters as revealed in the scoping review do exist in the KNPS recruitment model. To illustrate this, KNPS does have regulatory framework anchoring merit-based hiring. It also embeds key police recruitment issues like formal (citizenship, age, education), physical (physical fitness, medical fitness) and personality elements (e.g., integrity say, nil criminal record or pending charges) as well as diversity and affirmative requirements (e.g., gender, ethnic and regional balance considered in selection) which is in tandem with global police experience on application of merit.

KNPS recruitment in practice however has been clouded with endemic challenges e.g., bribery, corruption, nepotism etc such that Kenyans have come to associate it with unethical practices (Gastrow, 2009). A recent quote from the 2023 Maraga report paints a damning picture of the issue and the growing frustration from all concerned quarters as follows.

‘The public, other stakeholders and even members of NPS stated that corruption in the Service remains endemic and is now deeply embedded in the institutional culture and psyche of NPS. Despite institutional policies and strategies specifically targeted at addressing corruption in NPS, and existence of guidelines and policies that seek to enhance integrity in critical processes such as recruitment, most police jobs are sold to those who can afford or only offered to relatives of the powerful and politically connected. The Taskforce heard from all 47 counties of rampant corruption, cronyism, nepotism, favouritism, tribalism and political influence peddling during police recruitment exercises. Further reports indicated that slots were being sold for up to KSh600,000 if not more.’

There are grave consequences for the flawed KNPS recruit-hiring. The below sensational quote by the former Kenya anticorruption Czar, Justice Aaron Ringera following the 2005 KNPS botched recruitment highlights the serious ramifications therein.

‘Kenyans cannot expect officers recruited in such a manner to uphold any ethics and integrity in their future careers. A stream of law enforcement has been polluted at the source’ (Daily Nation, 2005, para. 4).

Sure enough, Wasike (2005) found increased corruption, poor service delivery, widespread negative public perception of KNPS and consequent poor relations, as well as dissatisfaction among serving officers as an implication of past recruitments. Recent commentary from Mutahi et al., (2021) reinforced this finding and reported that serving officers associated poor service delivery and public relations with maladministration in recruitment and appointment. Other studies (e.g., Gommans & Musumbu, 2010; Kinoti, 2017; Hope, 2018; Nyamu, 2019; Rotich & Kiboro, 2023) have among other things associated wrongful patterns of KNPS recruitment with the negative perception of the agency by the public. These empirical findings are vindicated by stakeholder reports e.g., International Police Science Association (IPSA), Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), Transparency International (TI) and IPOA which divulge similar issues. For example, when four parameters i.e., outcomes, effectiveness, legitimacy and capacity to measure countries’ ability to respond to internal security threats were used, IPSA (2016) ranked Kenya as the third worst performer of the 127 States with a score of 0.298 out of 1. Likewise, the 2013 IPOA survey found that 30% of respondents suffered malpractices including fabrication of evidence, police cruelty/assault, bribery and threats of being incarcerated at the hands of police within a year preceding the survey. In the same survey, 53% of police officers revealed having witnessed police malpractices including falsification of evidence, assaults, unwarranted shootings, bribery, excessive use of force and bribery (Hope, 2018). Backing this up, the 2015 TI study showed that 75% of the public viewed KNPS as the highest corrupt organisation in Kenya (Hope 2018, p. 92). This finding is also corroborated by the (EACC) surveys (e.g., 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016) which consistently placed KNPS as the most corrupt public agency in Kenya.

Summing up

To the extent of this analysis, it is evident that recruit-hiring is one of the key priority areas for police agencies (White & Escobar, 2008; Orrick, 2008; Ra’oof, 2014; Wilson et al., 2010; Wilson, 2012), with merit-based selection the preferred modus operandi in achieving this priority. This is anchored in the notion of settling for the best candidate, but underpinned by fairness in a competitive process that legitimises its outcome (Zaman, 2015; Prijanto & Juwono, 2022; Nkgapele & Mofokeng, 2024; Stubbs, 2023). In the face of evidence on negative ramifications associated with wrong recruitment and selection in KNPS e.g., loss in costs like in the case of cancelled recruitment drives, risk of harm to the public and vicarious liability thereof in the case of bad hires, reputational damage and decreased legitimacy of the process etc, KNPS should certainly endeavour to address the aforesaid priority.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study adopted a cross-sectional research design employing case study strategy and desk research method to collect data. This qualitative approach was preferred because, unlike quantitative studies, it provides for ‘emic’ in-depth insights on a unit of analysis (Kalof et al. 2008, p.79) rendering it superior in understanding interpretive research questions. Also, the applied nature of case studies and their benefit in examining research questions geared towards addressing a real-life topical issue made case study strategy suitable for this project. Thus, the KNPS recruitment model was compared to NTPF’s (n=2) with the assumption that there is an intrinsic relationship between recruitment models and perceptions of meritorious selection of candidates.

To ‘case bound’ the research (Yin 2011 cited in Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 6), and aid greater certainty in deducing the correlation between the recruitment models and their effectiveness in enhancing meritorious selection of recruits, these varied independent variables were studied between 2005 and 2025. The strengths and drawbacks of each model in promoting merit-based hiring of recruits was considered in depth, revealing insights that were integral in addressing the purpose of the study.

Both primary and secondary data was considered in the desk research; where primary data referred to information collected by researchers themselves and not previously used for research. Whereas secondary data was material from previous study findings on related topics (Van Thiel 2017, p.103). Thus, the study sourced available data from several sources including journal articles, KNPS and NTPF published documents, statistical results, legal documents, policy memoranda, news articles, books, and media reports to answer the research questions. A random approach, as advanced by Van Thiel (2017) was used to select data where keywords and phrases (e.g., merit, police recruitment in Kenya, Northern Territory police recruitment) relating to police recruitment and selection in Kenya and the Northern Territory were used to generate information from which a relevant dataset was compiled. For example, this included searching databases like Google Scholar, and Emerald Insights as well as both the NTPF and KNPS websites.

FINDINGS

Meta analysis of available information relating to KNPS and NTPF recruitment models revealed key insights which have been organised in four themes. These themes are recruitment criteria, recruitment process, recruiting agents, and recruitment guidelines and manuals. Each theme reports what was found on each model before finalising with a comparison analysis of those findings. Ultimately, the models were rated subjectively by the researchers based on global best practice before reaching a verdict that answers the research question.

Recruitment criteria	
<u>KNPS</u>	<u>NTPF</u>
As the body charged with the responsibility of hiring police recruits, the NPSC through its Recruitment and Appointment regulation (2015) enshrines merit-based selection consistent with constitutional and public service (Values and Principles) Act 2015. Preliminary matters in the aforesaid regulation conceptualise merit as meeting the criteria as advertised, educational qualifications, skills, aptitude, abilities, personal qualities, and experience required for the role, integrity, and development potential. With regards to operationalisation of merit in selection of constables specifically, Clause 9 of the same regulation provides recruitment criteria as follows:	Pursuant to the NT Police Administration Act (PAA) 1978, the NTPF is composed of the Commissioner and officers appointed by dint of the Act. Appointed by the Administrator, the Commissioner of police is charged with the administration and management of NTPF including constitution of the agency in terms of ranks and number of members holding those ranks. Section 15A of the Act establishes merit as the basis of appointment and promotion in the NTPF. This is conceived in the context of individual’s knowledge, qualifications, skills, experience, aptitude, good conduct, quality of service, diligence and the potential for future development. For the

<p>‘All candidates shall be required to meet the minimum requirements which includes-</p> <p>(a) be a citizen of Kenya;</p> <p>(b) hold a Kenya National Identity Card</p> <p>(c) possess the required academic qualifications as shall, from time to time, be determined by the Commission for purposes of recruitment;</p> <p>(d) be aged between eighteen to twenty-eight years for holders of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education or its equivalent and up to thirty years for university graduates;</p> <p>(e) be physically and medically fit; and</p> <p>(f) have no criminal record or pending criminal charges.’</p> <p>This is however an upgrade of the KNPS model following reforms brought about by the 2010 Constitution. Previously, the 1969 Constitution vested all recruitment powers of all officers, other than the Commissioner, to the then Police Commissioner with no structure guiding the process. The police standing orders at the time left the process at the discretion of the Commissioner, vaguely summing up the requirements ‘as determined by the commissioner of police’ (Wasike 2005, p.13).</p>	<p>office of the constable, the requirements are (NTPF 2020, p. 17):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Be at least 18 years old at the commencement of training. • be an Australian Citizen or have permanent residency, be a New Zealand Citizen or be a New Zealand Citizen eligible for a Special Category Visa. • have Year 12 or equivalent education level, a completed trade certificate or be able to demonstrate considerable employment experience and life skills. • have a current provisional or open licence to drive a manual vehicle. If successful applicants will be assessed on their ability to drive a manual vehicle at the NTPFES Training College. Any applicant found to be unable to drive a manual vehicle may be removed from the training program. • be physically fit and healthy. The medical questionnaire must be completed and submitted with the application.’ • Possess a first aid qualification equivalent to the national "Provide First Aid" standard also known as Apply First Aid/Senior First Aid. This certificate must be current and not expire during the training period. • have an ability to swim 200 metres uninterrupted, if successful applicants will be assessed on their ability to swim 200 metres uninterrupted at the NTPFES Training College. Any applicant found to be unable to swim may be removed from the training program. • have demonstrated general computing skills including the use of Microsoft Word, email internet and typing proficiency. A certificate verifying computer/typing skills evidenced by an employer or training provider may be required to be produced. • pass all medical tests and provide supporting documentation where necessary.’
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Summary comparison

Both models inculcate merit in their regulatory frameworks regarding recruitment and selection with similarities in its conceptualisations consistent with world practice. For instance, key leitmotifs like formal (age, education, citizenship), physical (medical, physical fitness), personality (criminal checks) requirements besides the question of inclusivity and diversity are highlighted, at least to an extent, in each model. What is not clear, and perhaps the biggest departure point in this theme, is whether social and personality traits are at all considered in the case of KNPS. It appears that the KNPS model is founded on a traditionalist ‘masculine’-oriented conceptualisation of policing, hence the emphasis on physical at the expense of social skills. It can therefore be seen as the traditional screen-out process of eliminating undesirable candidates rather than a screen-in process that considers candidates with desirable qualities (Sanders, 2003; Terpstra, White, & Fradella., 2022). On the contrary, whereas physical elements are considered in the NTPF model, social skills are part of the recruitment process to screen-in candidates of desirable traits. This has an implication particularly in view of the evolving police role (Wilson, 2012) towards models such as community policing, policing by consent, democratic policing etc all of which makes social and personality traits integral in contemporary policing (Bloksgaard, 2021; Hilal, Densley, & Jones, 2017).

Recruitment process

KNPS

Article 10 (3) of the NPSC (Recruitment and Appointment) Regulation 2015 establishes a three-tier process for selecting recruits. This includes, first, advertisement, initial application to the NPSC, and shortlisting of candidates by the commission. The commission shortlists at least three times the number of vacancies per each recruiting centre. Other than gender, ethnic, and regional balancing as provided for in part 12 (5) of the regulation, it is unclear how the commission settles on the short-list. Shortlisted candidates proceed to the second phase where they meet recruiting panels at established recruitment centres for verification of documents, as well as physical, medical and aptitude tests. Recruiting panels are then expected to submit a list of shortlisted candidates, at least twice the number of vacancies in each recruitment centre. For instance, if there are ten available vacancies in a recruiting centre, then the panel is expected to shortlist at least 20 candidates who will proceed to the third stage. The third stage involves NPSC selecting successful candidates from the list submitted, who are then informed to report to respective police colleges. This model is however yet to be practiced as KNPS has always resorted to the one-day countrywide recruitment drives. In this traditional model, the NPSC pursuant to Article 3 (2) of the aforesaid regulation, delegates its recruitment powers to the IG who advertises the vacancies in the local newspapers. Candidates attend recruitment centres with their filled application forms as well as other required documents. Verification of documents follows, before candidates are subjected to physical and medical

NTPF

The NTPF recruit hiring involves a five-stage process broken down in ten progressive steps. These include initial application, integrity and criminal history checks, driving and traffic checks, written assessment, panel interviews, fitness assessment, pre-employment medical examination, referee reports, selection and notification (NTPF 2020, p. 17). Important for this theme, written assessment involves an online time-based assessment on six leitmotifs namely numeracy, reading, aptitude, problem-solving, personality tests and writing assessments meant to determine suitability of candidates to perform duties attached to the role. This is done through an external service provider. On the other hand, panel interviews are a one-hour face-to-face interviews where candidates’ attitude, thought processes and behaviour is put to the test normally through behavioural interviewing. Also, referee reports are used to dig into the professional and personal characters of candidates. This involves checks with one character, and two professional referees which have been provided by the candidate.

examinations with successful candidates ultimately being selected on the same day.

Summary comparison

The one-day recruitment process raises concerns as to the merit of processes and exposes it to questions of equality, fairness and legitimacy. For example, determining all facets of a candidate's quality involves time and a structured, resource-based systematic process based on international best practice. It is therefore impractical to expect an effective assessment of quality candidates in a single day. For instance, how would formal elements, aptitude, physical and medical fitness and so on be assessed from a pool of many candidates in a matter of hours? Besides, the focus on 'screen-out' process anchored on physicality at the expense of personality and social traits essential for soft skills, challenges the efficacy of the KNPS model to recruit suitable candidates for contemporary policing (Bloksgaard, 2021; Terpstra et al., 2022; Hilal et al., 2017). Similarly, whereas the three-stage model is an upgrade, the opaqueness of some processes leaves a lacuna that challenges its fairness and equality. For example, with basic requirements, what parameters are used to shortlist candidates after submitting the initial application? And how will successful candidates be determined given that the panels are meant to submit twice the number of required applicants following completion of Phase Two? Similar questions could be raised in ultimately determining the selected candidates in stage three.

The NTPF model on the other hand has a structured systematic process encompassing ten steps which takes months to complete. Whereas the process may be costly in terms of time and resources, it provides for a measured process to determine the quality of candidates which is consistent with international best practice. For instance, other than the straightforward screen-out processes like physical and medical fitness, integrity and criminal checks, the written assessment, panel interviews, and referee checks are integral in determining the all-round quality of candidates. This means screening-in those qualities e.g., social skills that are highly important for contemporary policing (Bloksgaard, 2021; Terpstra et al., 2022).

Recruiting agents

KNPS

In the yet-to-be trialled three-phased recruitment, the NPSC receives initial applications, shortlists candidates, and selects successful ones upon receiving a shortlist compiled by the recruiting panel in Stage Two. It is however unclear who in the Commission shortlists and selects successful candidates. For instance, is it the Commissioners, the Secretariat or staff of the Commission? Also, whereas the supreme law of the land vested recruitment power to the NPSC, the Commission delegates this authority back to the Inspector General who further delegates it to the recruiting panels at the established recruitment centres in phase two of the exercise. As established in Part 13 (1) of Recruitment and appointment Regulation (2015), recruitment panels comprise officers of the rank of a superintendent or above (who chairs the panel), a medical officer, education officer, two officers of the rank of Chief Inspector or above (who form joint secretaries) and any other officers that the Commission may deem necessary. These teams are formed in an ad

NTPF

In comparison, the NTPF has a dedicated ongoing recruitment section specifically responsible for the hiring process. This comprises fulltime professionals, supported by administrative staff, and fully funded (e.g., offices, vehicles, administration amenities etc) to execute the hiring function of the agency. This dedicated department of the Organisation spearheads all matters of police recruitment including branding and publicising the role, maintaining a digital presence e.g., social media, website, organising and participating in information sessions, radio talk shows, in-field visits alongside the actual recruitment and selection. While the appointment authority remains with the Commissioner, the whole recruitment and selection process is detached from his/her office and run by professionals.

hoc manner i.e., when KNPS announces the nationwide recruitment drive, and the qualifications or repertoire need for the role remains blurry. Also, the regulation is not lucid about capacity building members to perform the role, merely stating that they will receive ‘briefing or training sessions’ as provided in Part 18 (c).

Turning back to the traditional one-day recruitment that KNPS continue to practice, the IG extends his delegated authority to recruiting officers at the recruitment centres nationwide. However, there is no standing force orders and / or regulations detailing who or how the recruitment panels ought to be formed and or what credentials are required for the role. As such, these temporary panels are constituted shortly before the exercise comprising selected officers and headed by senior members like the County Commanders. KNPS explains the rationale behind the ad hoc nature of constituting these panels is to minimise the chances of collusion, interfering with the process and or corruption (Ransley et al., 2009). For instance, in the 2014 KNPS recruitment drive, panels were comprised of sub-county recruitment committees made up of selected officers, senior county police members and national administration officials at the sub county level.

Summary comparison

Orrick (2014) posits that police agencies need to formally assign dedicated recruiting teams to execute specific hiring functions if they are to be effective in their recruitment quest. This includes ‘a thorough process of identifying, selecting, training, and evaluating recruiters should be completed’ to ensure that they have the knowhow and social astuteness to assess candidates that will meet departmental standards (Orrick 2008, p. 89). The KNPS’s lack of clarity surrounding the selection of recruiting officers and or their credentials attributable to the role, the ad hoc nature of their appointment, as well as the lack of training and evaluation thereof challenges meritorious hiring. For example, Wasike (2005) finding that recruiters neither had the knowledge nor skills required for the role, nor did they understand their role or follow procedures vindicates this assertion. Again, the temporary nature of the selection panels presents a missed opportunity to set standards and review performance as would have been the case with permanent terms.

In comparison, the NTPF can be regarded as the classic example of Orrick’s (2014) suggestion above. It has dedicated a department formally charged with its recruitment function. This has implications on the quality of recruitment processes owing to the quality of recruiting officers and implied benefits of their ongoing nature of operation e.g., trainings, performance reviews, institutional memory and so on(Orrick, 2008). It would be logical to think that if the recruitment is administered by skilled professionals with the knowhow for the role, and who are subject to performance reviews, then the process stands a higher chance of meeting the threshold of merit and fairness (Sanders, 2003 & Orrick, 2008).

Recruitment guidelines and manuals

KNPS

The KNPS recruitment model has limited information available on recruitment guidelines and / or manuals to outline how to streamline the recruitment and selection

NTPF

Recruitment guidelines informing the NTPF entry-level police hiring are a public knowledge. To begin with, the NTPF recruitment section maintains digital

process. For instance, Wasike (2005) found insufficient information underpinned KNPS recruitment which compromised the effectiveness of the exercise by among other things, limiting the potential of attracting high quality candidates. Most recently, the Commission on Administrative Justice (CAJ) found the KNPS (2022) police hiring exercise lacked adequate information, which impacted on it negatively. For example, much information was missing in the recruitment advertisement, yet the same information was used in eliminating candidates. To illustrate this, the recruitment tool as used in the 2022 recruitment had four parts i.e., physical (25%) and medical fitness (25%), personal particulars, academic credentials (40%) and period after secondary school education (10%) (CAJ, 2022). However, the accompanying tool assessing physical and medical fitness had no scores, meaning candidates would have had to score the maximum points for each facet to progress. For context, the physical examination had items like flat foot, knock knees, bowlegs, permanent scars, eyes (i.e., whether a candidate can wink with each eye/wears spectacles) among others, with Yes and No option in the assessment section. Similarly, physical fitness had a running component for men (6 kms) and women (4 kms) with Yes and No options for the assessment section. For medicals, gender (checking genitals), eyesight (short/longsighted), blood pressure (ranging 120/80 to 145/90) and urine (pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and protein percentage) were checked, again with Yes or No options provided for assessment. Interestingly, while these assessment items were supposedly integral in the hiring process, they were neither included in the advertisement nor laid out publicly in recruitment materials or guidelines.

presence both in traditional spaces (e.g., websites) as well as contemporary platforms like social media. Recruitment materials and guidelines are publicly available, and candidates can reasonably be informed on the role and what to expect in each stage of recruitment. For instance, the recruitment website details all the requirements, stages of recruitment (i.e., background checks, cognitive assessment, fitness assessment, panel interview, referee checks, pre-employment medical, as well as probity checks) and the expectations of each phase (NTPF, 2022). Similarly, all assessable items are provided such that candidates can be informed and prepare as required. For example, the fitness test as described in recruitment video shows 5 assessable items i.e., 10 push ups in 2-seconds cadence, 90 seconds probe-hold, 100 meters farmers carry holding 20 Kgs in each hand, minimum 6.1 MSFT 20 meters test, and a 100 meters forward stroke swimming component.

Summary comparison

Adequate recruitment information is important to define and attract high-quality candidates (Wilson, 2012; Orrick, 2008; Wasike, 2005) as well as aid self-selection and improve the efficiency of the exercise. For example, lack of adequate information in the case of KNPS resulted in unnecessary higher volumes of candidates who would have otherwise self-eliminated (CAJ, 2022). In contrast, detailed guidelines and manuals that are publicly available as in the case of NTPF, effectually reduce the discretion in the application of assessment, thereby increasing the transparency and credibility of meritorious selection. For example, if it is public knowledge that candidates ought to complete a 100-meter swim unaided as part of their physical fitness test, then it would be reasonably to think that a candidate eliminated for not meeting the criteria as a fair and legitimate call. On the contrary, limited recruitment guidelines as in the case of KNPS invites a wide array of discretion in selection; a lacuna that can and has been exploited to the detriment of a merit-based hiring process (Kinoti, 2017). No wonder, candidates have been eliminated from KNPS recruitment process over whimsical reasons like having yellow teeth (Kinoti, 2017).

Table III: Score card of comparison of KNPS and NTPF recruitment models

The table below shows the scores arrived at subjectively by the researchers, judging the findings on each item against the global best practice. The scores were awarded between 1 and 10 (with 1 being the least score and 10 the highest score) which were ultimately expressed in percentage.

Theme	KNPS (Score)	NTPF (Score)	Snapshot Commentary
Recruitment criteria	5	8	While the basic requirements are similar in both models (formal elements like education, citizenship, and age requirements, physical fitness, medical and physical fitness etc), NTPF was found to consider personality elements and social skills that are crucial for modern policing. This was not the case with KNPS that appears to overemphasise on physical elements at the expense of soft skills that are required for contemporary policing models. Similarly, KNPS model had no information relating to the role e.g., benefits, opportunities etc. NTPF on the other hand provided such information including, wages, opportunities for remote policing, diverse specialist units etc.
Recruitment process	4	8	Unlike the NTPF model that offers a systematic recruitment process allowing reasonably measured assessment of candidates, the KNPS model is practised haphazardly challenging its efficacy in attracting and selecting high quality candidates.
Recruiting agents	3	8	Whereas the NTPF has a dedicated recruiting team who work fulltime, KNPS selection panels are formed in an ad hoc manner shortly before the hiring exercise and work on a temporary basis. It is also not clear, what credentials they bring to the role or what kind of training they undergo, if any. By implication, it would be conceivable to perceive quality of recruitment processes in the case of NTPF owing to the quality of recruiting officers and implied benefits of their ongoing nature of operation e.g., trainings, performance reviews, institutional memory among others.
Recruitment guidelines and manuals	3	8	There is limited information guiding the selection process in KNPS as some requirements and or assessments items are not communicated yet they are used in the selection process. The dearth in recruitment guidelines open the process to discretion which can and has been abused in the past. Similarly, it hinders the application of a consistent process across the country that promotes merit-based selection of the hiring process. On the other hand, NTPF has detailed selection guidelines and manuals underpinning recruit-selection. This information is also publicly available which makes for self-elimination, helps candidates prepare for the same, and most importantly promotes transparency and consistency in application of merit during the hiring process.
Total score	15/40	32/40	
Percentage (%)	37.5%	80%	

To sum up the discussion, the NTPF recruitment model was superior to that of KNPS in promoting merit-based hiring of recruits scoring 80% compared to KNPS' 37.5%. Though subjectively awarded, the contentment levels with the recruitments of either model reflect the scores. In the period of analysis, for example, there was no documented discontentment with NTPF recruit-selection for unethical practices or otherwise lack of merit. On the contrary, the KNPS recruit-hiring was coloured by discontent over its lack of merit, unfairness, and therefore illegitimacy, and as a matter of fact cancelled twice in 2005 and 2014 (Keti, 2016; Kibor et al., 2015; Hope, 2017; Kinoti, 2017; Kipkirui & Rotich, 2023; Ombaka, 2015; Osse, 2016). The findings indicated recruitment models directly influenced merit-based hiring of recruits.

Summary and recommendations: the better alternative?

This paper sought to compare KNPS recruitment model to that of a comparable police agency from a developed nation i.e., NTPF to reveal strengths and weaknesses in promoting merit-based hiring of recruits. This was ultimately meant to draw lessons that can shed light in proposing a 'competent' model for KNPS that shall address this topical issue. In fact, this was a begging research endeavour suggested by Wasike (2005), a path that this paper pursues. From the above discussion, the hypothesis that NTPF recruitment model was better at promoting merit-based selection of recruits compared to the KNPS model was confirmed, leaving a trail of lessons that inform our proposed model below.

Proposed KNPS recruitment model

As revealed above, the sum of structural and process deficiencies has created an enabling environment for maladministration in KNPS recruitment to thrive at the expense of merit. Thus, structural, and process reforms are required to arrest the situation as follows.

Structural reforms

The independent constitution that vested recruitment power with the then police commissioner -a presidential appointee- resulted in among other recruitment challenges executive and political influence. Consequently, the drafters of the 2010 Constitution sought to remedy the situation by vesting recruitment powers to the newly formed constitutional commission (NPSC) as opposed to an individual. By dint of this reform, the constitution had conceived a streamlined process of selecting recruits as opposed to the traditional one-day recruitment exercise. However, the commission in line with Article 3 (2) of the NPSC (Recruitment and Appointment) Regulation 2015 delegates its recruitment powers back to (now) the Inspector General (IG) who reverts to the traditional one-day hiring of police recruits. In fact, the question of NPSC delegating its power to the IG has been subject to the court's determination in the 2014 contested and nullified KNPS recruitment. And whereas the court did not explicitly pronounce itself on the matter, it almost termed the supposed delegation an abdication of duty by NPSC (Kinoti, 2017). For obvious reasons as envisioned by the 2010 constitution, it is therefore recommended here that NPSC retains its recruitment mandate as part of the structural reform discussed here.

Following the above, NPSC should consider hiring police recruits in an ongoing framework which will strengthen the pursuit of meritorious hiring as revealed above. While we take cognisance of implied practical issues that may be raised especially considering the volume of applications vis-vis the size of the commission, we argue that these practical matters can be addressed. For one, effective branding and marketing of the role will mitigate the supposed pressure by attracting high-quality candidates and eliminating others by way of self-evaluation following comprehensive information that will be available. Also, aligning hiring procedures in a manner that manages the applications volume (elaborated in process reforms below) and co-opting members to the commission at relevant stages should ease the burden on the commission. As a starting point, staff from diverse personnel departments e.g., GSU, KPS, AP etc, and instructors from police colleges, for example, can be co-opted to aid the hiring process. Importantly, co-opted members should be fit-for-purpose with relevant trainings offered so that they are up to the task expected of them. This is followed by establishing standards of performance with concomitant performance reviews to ensure that the recruiting teams are meeting expectations.

For clarity, co-opted members can offer expert advice to the commission but do not have voting powers, per the constitution, which essentially means that NPSC will retain the appointing authority.

Thirdly, NPSC needs to conduct an apt job analysis for the role that captures contemporary policing models whilst remaining cognisant of contextual environment within which KNPS operates. This will culminate in revising the requirements for the role and the assessment guidelines thereof, all of which should be made public knowledge. These documents will then inform the recruitment process to promote transparency and consistency across board.

Process reform

Following the above structural reforms, the recruitment process should be reinvented as follows.

Stage 1: advertising, applications and background checks

KNPS' recruitment team should consider rebranding and inventing a robust marketing campaign for the constable role unlike the current standard that predominantly advertises the basic requirements only. Relevant information including the benefits of the role, requirements, recruitment process and assessments standards among others should be provided to allow meaningful self-evaluation and preparation among candidates. Both traditional modes (e.g., newspapers, mainstream media, websites etc) and emerging platforms (e.g., social media) should be utilised to advance wider reach. Applicants will then apply online or by post attaching certified copies of the required documents. Important for this part, the current application form ought to be updated to include relevant information like history of police involvement or criminal history, list of professional and character referees etc. Received applications will then be sorted and suitable applicants subject to background checks before progressing to the next stage.

Stage 2: cognitive assessment

Candidates that make it to this stage will undergo cognitive assessment to determine their suitability for the role. It is proposed that this stage be outsourced to a service provider who will conduct and transmit results to NPSC. This stage may potentially receive resistance especially in view of accessibility of internet that maybe perceived to gerrymander some candidates particularly those from remote areas. However, it is submitted here that Huduma centres (akin to Australia's service centres) available in all counties, Constituency Development Fund (CDF) offices open in all constituencies, as well as county information centres available in most counties will suffice to assist candidates with access issues. All successful candidates will be progressed to stage three.

Stage 3: Medical and physical fitness test

Here, candidates attend assessment centres where they will meet recruitment panels made of co-opted members of NPSC for recruitment purposes. As an advancement to the current practice, candidates' medical and physical fitness will be assessed consistently based on clear elucidated assessment tools that are publicly available. Further, since the panels are made of co-opted members of NPSC, their role will be reduced to only assessing candidates for their suitability to policing role and forwarding the list to NPSC which retains the appointing authority.

Stage 4: panel interview and referee checks

The evolving police role and the consequent demands that comes with it makes it inconceivable that police can recruit candidates to their rank and file without interviewing them. It is therefore suggested that this crucial stage and in particular behavioural interviewing be considered to aid screening-in and complement the screen-out processes. As an addition, there ought to be established a cutoff point, say, 70% minimum required to progress. All candidates are scored and those that meet the minimum cut-off are then subjected to personal and professional background checks through their referees. Following the outcome of reference checks, all suitable candidates are advanced to stage five.

Stage 5: selection

While it can be argued that candidates that make it to this stage and are rank-ordered such that they are hired against their scores depending on the available vacancies will be merit-based, it is argued here that a greater layer of transparency is required. For example, since Kenyans have come to associate police recruitment with malpractices (Gastrow, 2009), no average Kenyan can agree that, say, an Inspector's son was hired meritoriously even if he genuinely went through the process and emerged successful. Yet, that young person deserves an equal chance like every other citizen. It would therefore follow that an innovative option is required to meet 'greater transparency and accountability' threshold in selection as opined by Gastrow (2009, p.8).

The 2015 KNPS recruitment exercise witnessed an unusual occurrence at the Iten playground recruitment centre where two candidates were deemed suitable for the role and tied in every facet of the recruitment against one available vacancy. In a bid for transparency and fairness in selection, the recruiting officer, Ambrose Oloo, opted for a simple yet noble option to break the tie. He settled for two ballots, one with a 'YES' and the other 'NO' and both candidates as well as the public witnessing the exercise agreed whoever picked the 'YES' ballot would have 'won' the vacancy. Eventually, one candidate 'won' the slot much to the contentment of the witnessing public and the losing candidate as it being an open, fair and legitimate outcome. The recruiting agent was quoted: 'this was the only option to display fairness without locking out anybody and the public were there to witness the two picking the ballot and the one who picked 'No' disqualified himself' (Oloo 2015 cited in Kibor et al 2015, para. 4).

Randomising merit

It is in the same but nuanced vein that we propose eliminating the human element in the final selection of candidates. In this model, all candidates progressed to the selection stage will be allocated a unique number where they will be subjected to a computer-based lottery selection. Thus, the application of merit will yield suitable pool of candidates with the concept of randomness galvanising the underlying value of fairness and shield the exercise from grave misadministration.

To retain the regional representation and diversity in KNPS selection, this model ought to be engendered in practice. For instance, if there are 14 vacancies (say 8 males and 6 females) to be filled in a certain Sub County, then applications received from that sub county should be sorted and dealt with separately e.g., 130 males and 100 females. Application of this model will yield a pool of suitable candidates of say 60 males and 30 females, such that random selection will still produce 8 male, and 6 female successful candidates as intended. It is also proposed that candidates eliminated in the first four stages should be barred from reapplying for a period of say one to two years to address unnecessary high volumes of applications.

Utility of the model

There are two key reasons why we think this is so far the better model in promoting merit-based hiring in KNPS. For one, it provides a thorough systematic process for attracting and selecting quality candidates, an absolute necessity for modern-day policing (Sanders, 2003; Orrick, 2008). Policing has evolved from the traditional militaristic tendencies towards citizen-oriented models e.g., community policing that KNPS ascribes to (Annell et al., 2015; Bloksgaard & Prieur, 2021). Among other reforms that will yield this ideal policing is revisiting the recruitment function to ensure quality personnel in the rank and file of the agency (Orrick, 2008; Wilson et al., 2010; Wilson, 2012; Annell et al., 2015; Bloksgaard & Prieur, 2021). We argue, this model provides for both screen-out and screen-in processes that is critical in meeting the aforesaid contemporary police hiring priority (Sanders, 2003; Terpstra et al., 2022).

Secondly, the idea of eliminating human element in the final selection promises the potential of eliminating the endemic vices e.g., nepotism, corruption, favouritism, bribery, political interference etc that undermine merit and its underlying value of fairness in KNPS recruitment. With relatively basic entry requirements, this model promises to afford each suitable candidates an equal chance at selection backed by lottery-like randomness. This is also consistent with the NPSC regulation 2015 which anticipates more suitable candidates than available vacancies and provides for the commission to replace a selected candidate who, for

example, rejects the offer from a pool of suitable candidates without necessarily recruiting afresh. The concept of randomising merit is anchored on the growing literature on sortition and its utility in among other things addressing corruption, improving fairness, and advancing democracy (Bagg, 2024). It is already widely accepted in modern democracies (like Australia, Canada, Austria etc) e.g., in selection of citizen juries or otherwise people panels to reach policy decisions of the community in local and state governments for example. In fact, it heeds and in a nuanced way, to one of the Maraga report recommendations calling for digitising KNPS recruitment processes to address malpractices. The same concept is also commonly used, albeit successfully in empanelling juries to determine contested indictable criminal matters in court systems of all Australian jurisdictions (State Library of New South Wales, n.d.).

Challenges and objection of the proposed model

It is conceded that this model may be considered cumbersome in its first use with cost implications on the extra stages. It is argued here that continuous phased recruitment will reduce this tediousness by attracting high-quality candidates and deliver quality selection which ultimately offsets the cost by its implied beneficial outcomes.

Also, it is agreed that critics might charge against randomised selection on the basis that suitable candidates are eliminated not on the grounds of demonstrable inadequacies, which might then be addressed, but rather on a ballot for which there can be no future remedy. We however argue that since suitable candidates are not barred from reapplying, subsequent applications provide some sense of future remedy demanded by critics. Again, unlike the KNPS recruitment regulation 2015 that conceives more suitable candidates than the vacancies, but with no clarity in determining successful ones, this model guarantees an equal chance at selection for all suitable candidates thereby meeting the underlying fairness value of merit. In any event, the ballot has informally been used once at a recruitment centre to the satisfaction of involved candidates and the third parties i.e., public and stakeholders, a rare future to achieve in the current KNPS recruitment model. There is therefore cause for measured enthusiasm in the utility of the idea based on evidence of its application in that rare case.

CONCLUSION

This paper answered a clarion call for research that shall culminate in suggesting a ‘competent recruitment’ model embedding merit in hiring of entry-level police officers in Kenya. By leveraging the logic of comparison, the paper found NTPF recruitment model to be superior to that of KNPS in promoting merit-based hiring of recruits revealing lessons that are integral in reimagining a better model for KNPS. Thus, the sum of structural and process reforms to aid meritorious selection yielded a nuanced 5-staged recruitment system recommended for KNPS. To our knowledge, this is the first study to address the aforesaid task based on explicit conclusions drawn through strict scientific methodology. Future research should investigate the utility of this model in achieving its objective and consider expanded research that generates views directly from candidates and recruiters of both models. This follows the possibility of missed information owing to research design particularly if such data is not publicly available.

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