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2023
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Research Report Abstract

Exploration of the Impact of Police Brutality during demonstrations on Public Trust: A case study of the Malawi Police Service in Malawi, 2010-2020

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A dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Organisational and Institutional Studies

The University of Witwatersrand

16th December 2022

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Abstract

Police brutality during demonstrations has been a concern all around the world. Over the last decade, Malawi has recorded tens of violent demonstrations which have been associated with police brutality which has negatively affected an already declining public trust in the Malawi Police Service (MPS). This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate how police brutality during demonstrations has negatively affected public trust in the MPS. This study used semi-structured interviews and document analysis to collect data. This research study sampled twenty (20) respondents namely, citizens who had participated in demonstrations in the past decade, MPS officers, and members of Community Social Organisations (CSO's) who had been organising different demonstrations in Malawi over the past decade. The major findings of this study are that there has been a political influence in the MPS which has led to the adoption of partisanship in the MPS. This has influenced police brutality especially during anti-government demonstrations. The study also found that the MPS have adopted a militarisation approach also known as an "us vs them" posture, where the police see the public as enemies and respond with excessive force during demonstrations. Due to this militarisation approach and police partisanship, there has been an impaired relationship between the citizens and the police which has resulted in a shift of public trust from the MPS to CSOs. Strategies and recommendations have also been explored to begin to address public trust in the MPS.

Key Words: Demonstrations, Police brutality, public trust, MPS, Malawi