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Exploring the Impact of Traffic Policing for Sustainable Development: South African Context

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Abstract: South Africa is using multi- approach law enforcement in traffic policing for sustainable development. Traffic policing is one of the most significant functions of law enforcement in South Africa. Each police department have its own rules and regulations. Although, the approach is good, it has its own dynamic and challenges. Traffic policing plays a critical role in ensuring road safety, improving compliance with traffic laws, and reducing incidents of accidents and fatalities on South African roads. The transportation system in the country is facing many challenges as a result of population growth, increased migration, poor road safety, and insufficient infrastructure. The government faces a high rate of road accidents, congestion and lawlessness on public roads. Due to the factors mentioned earlier, the country has various law enforcement agencies including; the National Traffic Police (NTP), Provincial Traffic Police (PTP), Municipal Traffic Police (MTP)/ Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the South African Police Service (SAPS) with the separation and the duplication of duties or responsibilities. This article aimed to explore the impact of traffic policing in South Africa. The research methodology utilized for this paper was a pure, reliable literature review analysis. The study relied mainly on theoretical, methodical, and thematic literature analysis to conduct non-empirical research. The article aimed to explore the impact of traffic policing in South Africa, examining its effectiveness, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Keywords: accidents, law enforcement, motor vehicle, public road, traffic policing

Introduction

Traffic policing is a critical component of road safety management, aimed at reducing road crashes, injuries, and fatalities globally. In South Africa, traffic policing is a shared responsibility between the National, Provincial and Municipal Traffic Authorities. In 1999, the RTMC was established "to eliminate a separation of responsibilities for road traffic management across the various spheres of government and to pool powers and resources" (RTMC 2016a:16). This act aimed to improve road safety by enforcing the law, implementing efficient traffic management plans, and initiating public awareness campaigns. In addition, it collaborates with various law enforcement organizations, including the South African Police Service (SAPS), province traffic authority, and municipal traffic departments, to regulate the enforcement of traffic regulations (Lekubu, 2024:23). South Africa has traffic policing duties that include maintaining road safety, easing traffic congestion, and promoting effective traffic flow.

As stated under section 44(2) of the South African Constitution, the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) was established to replace the separation of duties in road traffic management across the various spheres of government. Section 1 of the South African Police Service Act 1995 (Act 68 of 1995) and Section 3 National Road Traffic Act (1996) also appointed traffic officers appointed under Section 3A as well as any member of the service or a municipal police agency (Road Traffic Management Corporation,1999:13). The act stipulates that every traffic officer employed in terms of section 32(5) (a) and (b) of the Road Traffic Management Corporation Act, 1999 (Act No. 20 of 1999) has the authority to enforce traffic policing, nationally, provincially and within their area of jurisdictions.

Furthermore, section 334(2)(A) of the Criminal Procedure Act of 1975 stipulates that traffic officers appointed as Section 334(2)(A) of the legislation designate a traffic officer as a peace officer to arrest individuals for violating road regulations. By deterring traffic violations and making it easier to adjudicate traffic infractions, the Administrative

Adjudication of Road Offenses Act 46 of 1998 improves the quality of traffic on the roads. According to Mokoena (2019:1) the government established the National Road Traffic Act/ NRTA (1996) to detect violations of the rules of the road in the country. The article aims to explore the impact of traffic policing in South Africa, examining its effectiveness, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Discussion

The effectiveness of traffic enforcement in South Africa can be seen in the reduction in traffic violations. According to RTMC (2022:n.p.) the National Road Traffic Act (NRTA) covers all aspects of road traffic that are applicable consistently across South Africa. Mabitsela (2022:36) emphasizes that traffic policing may significantly reduce crime if it is implemented successfully. Research has indicated that traffic enforcement may efficiently reduce the number of fatalities and collisions on the roads. Additionally, it establishes national principles, requirements, guidelines, frameworks, norms and standards that must be uniformly implemented in the provinces, along with other issues addressed in Section 146 (2) of the Constitution (Modipa, 2023:558). The South African Police Service and the National Traffic Police ensure the enforcement of traffic laws and regulations nationally. On the other hand, the duties of the Provincial traffic police include enforcing traffic laws and regulations within the nine provinces in South Africa.

Municipal traffic policing ensures the enforcement of traffic laws and regulations within their district areas of jurisdiction, whilst Metropolitan Police Departments (MPD) are in charge of traffic policing in metropolitan areas. While Gauteng, the Free State, KwaZulu Natal, the Eastern Cape, and the Western Cape have Metropolitan Police Departments, provinces including the Northwest, Limpopo, Northern Cape, and Mpumalanga do not have metros (Maphaka, 2023:2). Enforcing traffic regulations and ensuring that drivers, passengers, and pedestrians are safe while driving are the police's duties (Waglay, 2019:n.p). The high number of road fatalities on the country's roads has had a detrimental impact on the Road Accident Fund, which negatively impacted the economy. Improved road safety and fatalities can decrease through the implementation of traffic rules and regulations.

Based on the data presented for the financial year 2024–2025 **during festive season**, there has been a concerning increase in accidents and fatalities, which are mostly attributable to human behaviour (South African News Agency (SANA), 2025:n.p.). At a press conference that was held on Monday in Pretoria, Transport Minister Barbara Creecy stated, "The number of fatalities represents a year-on-year increase of 5.3% (70) compared to the 2023/24 festive season, with a 4.2% (50) increase in the number of crashes." In the statistics that were revealed for the 2024/2025 financial year, there has been a concerning increase in crashes and fatalities which 87% primarily attributed to human behaviour. Characteristics such as hit-and-runs, jaywalking (illegal pedestrian crossings or walking on roadways or highways), fatigue, losing control of a vehicle, speed, drunken driving, reckless and negligent driving, and reckless overtaking were identified as contributing factors. Furthermore, the Minister mentioned that six (6) provinces, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, the Free State, Limpopo, the Northern Cape, and the North-West, experienced increases in the number of fatalities during the 2024–2025 festive season compared to 2023–2024 (SANA, 2025:n.p.). While Gauteng, Western Cape, and Mpumalanga recorded decreases of 76, 23, and 15 fatalities, respectively, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Free State saw rises of 70, 54, and 21 fatalities in comparison to 2023–2024. The high number of road fatalities and injuries can be lowered by enforcing traffic laws.

Based on the number of collisions, fatalities, and injuries on the country's roads, SA is rated the highest in the world with 22.2 per 100,000 (Road Safety White Paper (RSWP), 2024:3). The statistics revealed that the majority of traffic fatalities involve young individuals between the ages of 18 and 30. It is critical that young people obtain appropriate education and training in safe driving practices. Furthermore, RTMC analysis indicated that human factors, such as pedestrian and driver behaviours, vehicle factors, and environmental factors, such as road conditions are the primary causes of traffic deaths (RSWP, 2024:4). This involves becoming considerate of potential hazards related to distracted driving, speeding, and driving while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. Road accidents harm the victims, their families, and the communities. On the other hand, road accident-related deaths and injuries have a significant impact on the healthcare system.

However, during the presentation on road fatalities for the Easter weekend on April 29, 2025, there was a 45.6% reduction in fatalities compared to the same period in 2024. According to the minister, this was the lowest rate on crashes and fatalities that have been recorded in the previous three years. The number of crashes decreased from 209 in 2024 to 141 in 2025 (Koka, 2025:n.p.). All provinces recorded a decline in fatalities, except for Mpumalanga which experienced an increase of 27.3% in comparison to 2024 road fatalities. In addition, to reduce road crashes and fatalities in the country, the Easter road safety campaign was established in collaboration with civil society organizations including, private sector, public transportation providers, the religious community, and influential people conduct education and awareness campaigns among drivers, passengers, and pedestrians in the communities

(South African Government, 2025:1). Through implementation of this campaign the department managed to reduce the high rate of road fatalities within the country.

Table 1: The Statistic for provincial 2024 and 2025 Only Easter weekend

Province	2024 Stats	2025 Stats
Gauteng	2024 =52%	2024 =22%
Free State	2024 =12%	2025=7%
Eastern Cape	2024 =29%	2025=28%
Western Cape	2024 =26%	2025=22%
Kwazulu-Natal	2024 =47%	2025=27%
Limpopo	2024 =81%	2025=13%
North-West	2024 =21%	2025=14%
Northern Cape	2024 =17%	2025=6%
Mpumalanga	2024 =22%	2025=28%

Key Duties Correlational Relationship Of The Traffic Police In South Africa

1. South African Police Service (SAPS)

- Stop and examine the motor vehicle,
- Escorting VIP and abnormal vehicles,
- Inspect licences, and
- Issuing of traffic fines,
- Recording and investigating traffic accident; and
- Ensuring road safety

2. The National Traffic Police (NTP)

- Ensuring traffic laws,
- Traffic flow administration and regulation,
- Responding to emergencies and accidents,
- Escorting VIP and abnormal vehicles,
- Ensuring road safety and vehicle roadworthiness
- Issuing of traffic fines; and
- Responding to accidents and emergencies

3. Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC)

- Promoting road safety,
- Ensuring roadworthiness of the vehicles,
- Enforcing traffic laws,
- Issuing of traffic fines,
- Licencing and adjudication; and
- Traffic incident management

4. Municipal Traffic Police (MTP)

- Enforcing traffic laws,

- Controlling traffic flow,
- Escorting VIP and abnormal vehicles,
- Inspecting vehicle for roadworthy; and
- Ensuring compliance with the National Road Traffic Act

5. Provincial Traffic Police (PTP)

- Enforcing traffic laws,
- Escorting VIP and abnormal vehicles,
- Promoting road safety,
- Issuing of traffic fines,
- Responding to accidents and emergencies

6. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD)

- Enforcing traffic laws,
- Maintaining traffic flow,
- Escorting VIP and abnormal vehicles,
- Enforcing municipal by-laws
- Ensuring road safety
- Issuing of traffic fines,
- Upholding the city's parking regulations,
- Responding to accidents and emergencies; and
- Licencing and adjudication

Road accidents have the potential to affect the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of transportation networks, which are vital to growth in the economy. RTMC (2022:n.p.) outlined that approximately R200 billion was spent on road accident deaths and injuries in 2022, which harmed businesses, insurance companies, and the economy as a whole. Basili, Caschili, Dalla and Chiara (2024:3) confirmed that road traffic fatalities are a complex global health concern that is closely correlated with several variables, including the country's economy and educational attainment as well as the level of transportation. Given the significant number of traffic fatalities and injuries on the country's roads, road safety is a dire issue that needs serious attention.

Methodology

Methodologically, this article employs a qualitative research methodology and mainly relies on a literature review. The qualitative research methodology is an interpretive method that improves comprehension of social and human experiences that cannot be measured or articulated numerically (Fouché, Strydom, & Roestenburg, 2021:42). A non-empirical method was utilized in this study to explore the impact of traffic policing in South Africa. The study examines existing literature and data to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of traffic policing in South Africa. Secondary sources, or papers relevant to this subject, were used in the data collection process. This article's inclusion criteria were limited to documents published during the last 30 years. To find a summary of terms and information pertinent to the article's objectives and the study topic, this article employed non-probability sampling, also known as purposive sampling. Textual analysis was utilized for data analysis to examine documents thoroughly and critically.

Traffic Police with Separation and Duplication of Duties

South African Police Service (SAPS)

The South African Police Service is responsible for enforcing traffic regulations on national, provincial and local levels. The department's role is to combat crime, investigation, as well as managing traffic control and surveillance operations on roads and freeways (RTMC, 2016:14). They enforce traffic regulations to deter drunk driving, speeding, and reckless and negligent driving. Furthermore, they also investigate traffic accidents that occur on national roads. They have the authority to stop and examine the motor vehicle, inspect licenses, and issue a traffic fine. SAPS plays a crucial role in maintaining road safety and reducing the frequency of traffic accidents.

National Traffic Police (NTP)

The national traffic police refers to a division of the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), which is responsible for several national priorities, including overloading control, freight and public transportation, dangerous and drunk driving, pedestrian enforcement, and driver and vehicle fitness (RTMC, 2021:n.p.). National Traffic Police

was appointed in terms of established in 1999 terms of RTMC. The South African Government (2014:2) outlines the major responsibilities of the National Traffic Police as maintaining road safety and upholding traffic rules across the entire country. Furthermore, they are responsible for roadside inspections, traffic flow administration and regulation, and responding to emergencies and accidents on the road.

Provincial Traffic Police (PTP)

The provincial traffic police's responsibility includes enforcing traffic laws and regulations within the nine provinces in South Africa. In South Africa, traffic violations are governed under Section 34 of the Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offenses Act (No. 46 of 1998) (South African Government, 2014:2; Maphaka, 2023:69). Ramavhunga (2018:) emphasizes that the National Road Traffic Act in South Africa addresses several important issues, such as vehicle regulations, road guidelines, licensing and regulation, offenses, and fines. Moreover, PTP ensures that drivers adhere to the Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offenses Act (AARTO), the National Land Transport Act, and the National Road Traffic Act (Naaido, 2020:38).

Municipal Traffic Police (MTP)

Municipal traffic police personnel are responsible for enforcing traffic flow, performing roadside checks, and carrying out traffic safety programs within their area of jurisdiction. The establishment of municipal traffic policing can be traced back to 1930's where the traffic departments originated at the local government level to terrorize communities while making non-white individuals fearful (Naaido, 2020:38). Although their primary function was to help the South African Police Force in upholding law and order, they kept on checking or terrorizing non-white individuals. However, Maphaka (2023:2) outlined that their primary responsibility was to protect government facilities in the townships and also function as guards and police officers and were often used for violent crimes. On the other hand, municipal traffic police are in charge of visible policing, which involves responding to complaints and addressing crimes when the SAPS takes too long to react to prevent more property damage or fatalities (South African Government, 1998). However, in Metropolitan areas, MTPs were transitioned to the Metropolitan Police.

Metropolitan Police Department (MPD)

Before the year 2000, the MPD used to be named MPS, however, they were transitioned to MPDs (Parliament Portfolio Committee on Policing (PPCP) (2019:1). The MPDs mandated derived from the South African Police Service (SAPS) Act (No. 68 of 1995) with duties including by-laws, crime prevention, and traffic policing. The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is a law enforcement organization in charge of by-laws, crime prevention, and traffic policing in metropolitan areas (du Plessis, Jansen & Siebrits, 2020:4). On the other hand, Naidoo (2020:44) outlined that the MPDs primary duties include maintaining traffic flow and upholding the city's parking regulations. Although these departments are more noticeable than SAPS in their area of jurisdiction, they do not have the power to conduct the investigation and prisoners holding cells. Moreover, members of the MPD have the authority to participate in part in community-based police forums under Section 64C(2)(f) of Act 83 of 1998.

Table 2: on Provincial metro police and non-metro police

Province	Metro/No Metro Police
Gauteng	Have Metro Police
Free State	Have Metro Police
Eastern Cape	Have Metro Police
Western Cape	Have Metro Police
Kwazulu Natal	Have Metro Police
Limpopo	No Metro Police
North West	No Metro Police

Northern Cape	No Metro Police
Mpumalanga	No Metro Police

Legal Framework on The South African Traffic Policing

The Constitution of South Africa (1996)

The Constitution's Section 146(2) establishes the national standards, norms, structures, regulations, and principles that must be administered equally in the provinces, among other matters (Modipa, 2023:558). Additionally, in Section 156(2) of the Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution, a municipality can establish and enforce regulations that ensure efficient governance administration within its jurisdiction (Maphaka, 2023:68). Furthermore, in terms of Section 215 of this act "the National or Provincial Commissioner may, where it is reasonable in the circumstances to exercise a power or perform a function in writing authorize a member under his or her command, to set up a roadblock or roadblocks on any public road in a particular area or to set up a checkpoint or checkpoints at any public place in a particular area". Moreover, the Constitution's Section 206(7) mandates that national laws establish a framework for the development, authority, duties, and administration of metro police services, thereby acknowledging the SAPS as the only authorized law enforcement organization in the country (Mabitsela & Govender, 2022:34).

The South African Police Service (1995)

The South African Police Service (SAPS) was established in terms of section 64A of SAPS Act 68 of 1995 subsequently at the end of the apartheid era it became the national police service responsible for the combat, prevention, and investigation of crime and the safety and security of the citizens (SAPS, 1995:1). Subject to restrictions and guidelines set by the Minister of Police, every police officer who works for the SAPS and enforces traffic laws is a traffic police. The act essentially provides them the authority to enforce traffic regulations as part of their duties. Mabitsela and Govender (2022:34) stipulated that Section 64E of the SAPS Act 68 of 1995 outlined three (3) functions of MPS, however, more details regarding every obligation were not provided. On the other hand, Maphaka (2023:) outlined the function of MPS as follows; regulations of by-laws, traffic policing and crime prevention. The act outlines the police authority, ethical standards, and procedures for upholding the law. This legislation also emphasized that all municipal police officers are peace officers (Naaido, 2020:41).

National Road Traffic Act (NRTA) (1993)

The NRTA mainly regulates traffic-related matters and develops common standards for traffic countrywide (Madihlaba, 2018:37). This Act applies to all drivers of vehicles on South African roads, regardless of whether they are South African citizens or not (South African Government, 1996:2; Maphaka, 2023:68). Additionally, the traffic officer has the authority to determine whether the equipment and functioning of the vehicle in concern adhere to the NRTA's regulations (Mabitsela & Govender, 2022:34). Furthermore, the traffic officers have the authority to demand that you provide any document under transportation and road traffic laws. They may confiscate any documents that are deemed to be fraudulent or faulty (Arrive Alive, 2025:n.p.).

The White Paper on Safety and Security (1998)

The white paper on safety and security is a document outlined by the government detailing the policies and strategies for ensuring the security and safety of the citizens. This act was established to maintain security and safety within the local government (Maphaka, 2023:68). Several aspects of safety and security, including national defense, disaster mitigation, law enforcement, and crime prevention, are included in the act. These regulations underline the importance of municipal police officers for effective safety and security in local government. Mabitsela and Govender (2022:34) outline that the White Paper on Safety and Security may encourage and be involved in programs, including school-based public education programs, as an element of local government.

Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offenses Act (1998)

In South Africa, traffic violations are governed under Section 34 of the Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offenses Act (Maphaka, 2023:69). AARTO legislation was developed to encourage compliance with national traffic laws and enhance road traffic to decrease the administrative burden for courts that prosecute offenders for safety violations (Lekubu, 2024:19). Additionally, the act was formulated to reduce high rate of road fatalities and decreased the possibility of corruption in the country. This legislation is intended to increase road safety by establishing an

administrative adjudication system for traffic violations. The roads will eventually become safer when regulation is adhered to, which will ultimately decrease the amount of road fatalities.

Criminal Procedure Act (1977)

The CPA's Section 334 establishes traffic officers as peace officers, which gives them the authority to effect an arrest for moving violations. In terms of this act, any law enforcement officer is required to demonstrate and produce authorization for the roadblock if any person affected by a roadblock demands to see written authorization for the roadblock (Arrive Alive, 2025:n.p.). Additionally, traffic police are responsible for upholding traffic safety by ensuring that rules are adhered to. Maphaka (2023:67) outlined that any individual as defined in Section 1 of the Correctional Services Act, 1959 (No. 8 of 1959) with regard to any area, offense, class of offense, or authority mentioned in a notice issued under Section 334(1) is referred to as a designated peace officer. This includes magistrates, justices, police officials, traffic police and correctional officials.

Local Government Transition Act (1993)

The South African local government was formally restructured by the Local Government Transition Act, 1993 (Act 209 of 1993), enabling the country to transition from the last democratized local government administration (South African Government, 1994:n.p). The legislation establishes the authority and functions of municipalities, as well as the roles and responsibilities of local government officials, and it describes the procedures and processes for establishing new municipalities, reorganizing existing ones, and demarcating municipal boundaries. In addition, the Local Government Transition Act 209 of 1993 (Republic of South Africa, 1993b), Section 10(1), provides local municipalities the authority to establish bylaws in their respective area of jurisdiction and points out the procedures governing the enactment of bylaws (Mabitsela & Govender, 2022:34).

Conclusion

This article explored the impact of South African traffic policing, considering its positive and negative aspects and possibilities for sustainable development. In order to enhance traffic policing in South Africa, the government should provide support as well as funding. Road accidents, injuries, and deaths have negatively affected the economy by increasing spending on healthcare, decreasing productivity, damaging property, incurring legal expenses, decreasing tourism, and increasing transportation costs.

Recommendations and Findings

Proactive measures should be taken into consideration when addressing the problem of traffic accidents. In addressing the high number of road fatalities in South Africa, several strategies may be employed to increase traffic safety and decrease the number of deaths. This requires regular patrols, speed cameras, and higher police presence on the national, provincial and municipality roads to identify and ensure compliance on the public roads. In addition, improving adherence to traffic rules by implementing stricter penalties for the road traffic offenses will also encourage safer driving practices. The government needs to strengthen road infrastructure, increase public awareness of road safety, improve driver training, and strengthen law enforcement.

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