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PERCEIVED POLITICAL PATRONAGE IN RECRUITMENT, APPOINTMENT, AND PROMOTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MERITOCRACY, INSTITUTIONAL TRUST, AND WORKFORCE OUTCOMES IN THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the ongoing issues within the Philippine National Police (PNP), how political interference affects professionalism and accountability. By using a quantitative research design, data were gathered from some of the 272 police officers within Angeles City, Pampanga, their perceptions of how external and internal pressures affect the integrity and effectiveness of police operations. The research identifies the prevalence of politically motivated recruitment, promotion based on connection rather than merit. The study also examines the role of fraternal networks, the "May Backer Ako" (MBA) system, and loyalty to patrons over institutional mandates in shaping career advancements. Institutional oversight mechanisms such as the National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) and the Internal Affairs Service (IAS) are found to be under-resource and lacking in independence, further weakening accountability. This research contributes to the discourse on reform by identifying key areas requiring policy intervention, particularly the need for independent oversight bodies, transparent merit based recruitment system, and strengthened institutional training. This study aims to support efforts towards professionalizing the PNP and fostering a police force that upholds the rule of law and public trust.
KEYWORDS: *Philippine National Police, Political Patronage, Merit-Based Recruitment, Institutional Reform, Public Trust*

INTRODUCTION
Political patronage remains a pervasive challenge in the Philippines, profoundly compromising the operational integrity and independence of the Philippine National Police (PNP). Research by Batalla (2020) and Pastrana (2024) indicates that political interference in recruitment, promotion, and decision-making has allowed personal loyalty to override competence. This culture of "allegiance over performance" creates significant gaps between mandatory training and real-world ethical conduct, leading to inconsistent professional behavior and a lack of resistance to misconduct, as seen during the aggressive enforcement of the "war on drugs."

The vulnerability of the PNP is further exacerbated by the weakness of oversight bodies like the Internal Affairs Service (IAS) and NAPOLCOM. These institutions often lack the independence and resources necessary to hold officers accountable, resulting in a climate where abuse of power and corruption can flourish. Criminological analysis suggests that when officers perceive the system as rigged by political connections, internal morale plummets and professional ethics are marginalized.

Beyond law enforcement, patronage extends into the distribution of public welfare and government administration. Reports from 2024 and 2025 highlight how programs like the 4Ps (Conditional Cash Transfer) and national "Ayuda" are frequently co-opted by local power brokers and political dynasties to secure electoral loyalty. Similarly, international examples—such as attempts to replace career officials with partisan loyalists in the U.S.—demonstrate that the "spoils system" poses a universal threat to meritocracy. Ultimately, restoring public trust in the PNP and government requires deep structural reforms that insulate personnel processes from political influence and reinforce merit-based accountability.

General Objective
This study aims to evaluate how perceived political patronage permeates the Philippine National Police's recruitment, appointment, and promotion systems, and to determine its cascading effects on meritocratic climate, institutional trust, organisational integrity, employee morale, job satisfaction, and ethical commitment.

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Specific Objectives

1. Profile the prevalence, forms, and perceived intensity of political patronage across PNP units and ranks
2. Assess the perceived procedural fairness of recruitment, appointment, and promotion processes.
3. Examine the perceived meritocratic climate that governs talent-management decisions within the PNP.
4. Determine the level of institutional trust vested in senior leadership and human-resource oversight bodies.
5. Measure employee morale, job satisfaction, and ethical commitment among PNP personnel.
6. Quantify the extent to which perceived political patronage predicts perceptions of procedural fairness and meritocracy.
7. Analyse whether perceptions of procedural fairness and meritocracy mediate the relationship between political patronage and institutional trust.
8. Test the associations between perceived meritocracy and (a) employee morale, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) ethical commitment.
9. Investigate whether rank, length of service, regional assignment, and educational attainment moderate the relationships among political patronage, meritocracy perceptions, and the specified organisational outcomes.

Research Methodology

According to Ray (2020), cross-sectional research examines a topic or the relationship between factors at a single point in time, collecting data only once per case. It is suitable for describing or exploring phenomena but cannot establish cause-and-effect relationships. This study used a quantitative cross-sectional design to assess how police officers in Angeles City perceive political patronage and its impact on meritocracy, trust, morale, and organizational integrity. A structured questionnaire was administered to 272 officers across units and ranks using convenience sampling, with items on political interference, fairness in recruitment and promotion, and institutional accountability measured on a four-point Likert scale. This method provided measurable data on officers' experiences and organizational vulnerabilities, supporting the study's aim to identify weaknesses and guide reforms.

Limitations include its focus on Angeles City, which may not reflect other regions, reliance on self-reported data vulnerable to social desirability bias, and the sensitive nature of political patronage, which may have influenced responses despite ethical safeguards.

Delimitations included the exclusive focus on uniformed PNP personnel, examination of political patronage only in recruitment, appointment, and promotion, and use of a quantitative approach, which limited deeper insights from personal narratives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural Vulnerability Theory examines how socio-political and economic structures create systemic weaknesses within institutions, leading to inefficiencies and susceptibility to external influences. In the context of policing, this theory highlights how financial dependency and political patronage can compromise the integrity and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, making them vulnerable to corruption and external pressures. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires institutional reforms that promote autonomy, transparency, and merit-based promotions to ensure a professionalized police force (Bourgois et al., 2021).

Rational Choice Theory suggests that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis to maximize their utility while considering constraints and available information. Given the financial dependency within the police force, officers may rationally choose to align with political figures who provide material and professional incentives, even if it compromises organizational professionalism. In criminology, it is the idea that people commit crimes after weighing the potential risks and rewards. It assumes that offenders are rational decision-makers who choose crime when the benefits like money or status seem to outweigh the chances of getting caught or punished. In other words, crime is seen as a calculated choice, not just a reaction to social or emotional pressures. (Perera, 2025)

Null Hypotheses

H01. Perceived Recruitment Fairness is not associated with perceived political patronage.
$H0_2$. Perceived meritocratic climate is not associated with perceived political patronage
$H0_3$. Institutional trust in PNP leadership is not associated with perceived political patronage
$H0_4$. Employee morale is not associated with perceived political patronage.
$H0_5$. Job satisfaction is not associated with perceived political patronage.
$H0_6$. Ethical commitment to public-service values is not associated with perceived political patronage.

Demographic Variables

1. Age Group
2. Police Rank
3. Years of Service
4. Educational Attainment
5. Perception of Political Patronage
6. Perceived Recruitment Fairness
7. Perceived Promotional Equality
8. Institutional Leadership Trust
9. Meritocratic Recruitment

Study Design and Locale

This research will adopt a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the structural challenges influencing the professionalism and autonomy of the Philippine National Police (PNP). The study will analyze data gathered from PNP personnel in Angeles City, Pampanga, focusing on the effects of political influence and institutional limitations.

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Sample Size

Using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator, the researchers estimated Angeles City's population at 462,928 and, based on a 500:1 police-to-population ratio, calculated 926 police officers. A sample of 272 officers was selected with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Respondents were chosen through convenience sampling across stations and offices to capture diverse perspectives in rank, role, age, and years of service, ensuring representative insights on political patronage.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

The primary data collection tool will be a structured survey focused on a single topic: Political Patronage, It will utilize a 4-point Likert scale (from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") to capture responses. and will explore officers' views on political interference, funding reliance, ethical behavior, and accountability mechanisms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Category	Frequency	Sampling	Total 100%
Police Commissioned officer	**272**	**8**	**21.8%**
Police Non-Commissioned officer	**272**	**264**	**78.2%**

Table 1

Age	Frequency	Percent
21-25 years old	102	37.5
26-30 years old	75	27.6
31-35 years old	56	20.6
36-40 years old	24	8.8
41-45 years old	11	4
46-50 years old	3	1.1
51-55 years old	1	0.4
Total	**272**	**100**

Rank	Frequency	Percent
patrolman/patrolwoman	153	56.3
police corporal	30	11
police staff sergeant	28	10.3
police master sergeant	37	13.6
police senior master sergeant	11	4
police chief master sergeant	5	1.8
police lieutenant	2	0.7
police captain	2	0.7
police major	3	1.1
police lieutenant colonel	1	0.4
Total	**272**	**100**

Years of Service	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years	162	59.6
6-10 years	29	10.7
11-15 years	54	19.9
16-20 years	24	8.8
21 years and above	3	1.1
Total	**272**	**100**

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Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percent
college graduate	265	97.4
master's degree	7	2.6
Total	**272**	**100**

Table 2
Perception of Political Patronage Scale

Perception of Political Patronage Scale	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance
Political ties are more influential than qualifications in recruitment decisions.	2.69	Agree	3.00	0.68	0.46
Gaining a promotion often depends on support from powerful political figures.	2.53	Agree	3.00	0.73	0.53
Officers with political allies are usually assigned to important or high-visibility positions.	2.82	Agree	3.00	0.65	0.42
Political involvement interferes with the merit-based promotion system of the PNP.	2.81	Agree	3.00	0.63	0.40
I have personally seen promotions that were influenced by political connections.	2.83	Agree	3.00	0.79	0.62
The presence of political favoritism negatively impacts the morale of police personnel.	3.00	Agree	3.00	0.75	0.56
The PNP lacks strong systems that protect personnel decisions from political influence	2.84	Agree	3.00	0.79	0.62
High-ranking officials often resist political pressure in making personnel decisions.	2.74	Agree	3.00	0.75	0.57
Political interference reduces the public's trust in the PNP as an institution.	3.07	Agree	3.00	0.68	0.47
It is possible to rise through the ranks in the PNP without political backing.	3.00	Agree	3.00	0.82	0.67
Average	**2.83**	Agree	3.00	0.73	0.53

The results indicate that political patronage is widely perceived to influence decision-making within the Philippine National Police, with an overall mean score of 2.83. Respondents agreed that political connections often affect recruitment, promotions, and work assignments, sometimes outweighing merit and qualifications. Many reported having personally observed promotions influenced by political ties, suggesting that these perceptions are based on direct experience. Political favoritism was also seen to weaken the merit-based system and negatively affect police morale, as it creates a sense of unfairness within the organization. The highest agreement was on the view that political interference reduces public trust in the PNP (M = 3.07), highlighting its broader impact beyond internal operations. While some respondents believe it is still possible to advance without political backing, the findings overall suggest that political patronage remains a significant challenge affecting organizational integrity, morale, and public confidence in the police institution.

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Table 3
Perceived Recruitment Fairness Scale

Perceived Recruitment Fairness Scale	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance
The standards for recruitment—such as education, eligibility, and physical fitness—are publicly available and consistently applied	3.24	Agree	3.00	0.50	0.25
Every applicant takes the same set of written, physical, and psychological tests without any exceptions	3.20	Agree	3.00	0.52	0.27
The examination content effectively evaluates the necessary competencies for police work.	3.18	Agree	3.00	0.55	0.30
Candidates with influential family ties are given special treatment during the recruitment process.	2.78	Agree	3.00	0.69	0.48
All candidates undergo medical and background checks in a fair and unbiased manner.	3.11	Agree	3.00	0.63	0.40
Applicants receive clear and timely feedback about their assessment results.	3.14	Agree	3.00	0.61	0.37
The final selection of successful applicants happens without transparency or proper oversight.	2.71	Agree	3.00	0.67	0.45
There is an independent and accessible process for appealing recruitment decisions.	2.85	Agree	3.00	0.67	0.44
Recruitment tests are biased in favor of specific language groups, ethnicities, or regions.	2.40	Disagree	2.00	0.70	0.48
I believe that the PNP recruitment system is based on merit and does not discriminate against qualified applicants.	3.08	Agree	3.00	0.69	0.47
Average	**2.97**	Agree	2.90	0.62	0.39

The results indicate that respondents generally view the PNP recruitment process as fair (M = 2.97), particularly in terms of clearly defined and consistently applied standards such as education, eligibility, and physical fitness (M = 3.24). Respondents agreed that applicants undergo the same written, physical, psychological, medical, and background examinations, and that these assessments are merit-based and non-discriminatory. However, concerns remain regarding transparency in the final selection process (M = 2.71) and the perceived influence of family or political connections (M = 2.78). The lowest mean score (M = 2.40) suggests that respondents largely disagree that recruitment tests are biased toward specific language groups, ethnicities, or regions, indicating trust in the fairness of the examination stage. Overall, while the basic recruitment requirements are viewed as transparent and equitable, issues related to favoritism and selection oversight continue to raise doubts about the integrity of the process.

Table 4
Perceived Promotional Equality Scale

Perceived Promotional Equality Scale	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance
Opportunities for promotion are openly announced and based on clear, merit-driven standards	3.14	Agree	3.00	0.51	0.26
When determining promotions, job performance ratings are more influential than political ties.	3.06	Agree	3.00	0.57	0.33
Interview panels assessing competency are made up of individuals who are not in the candidates' chain of command	2.93	Agree	3.00	0.66	0.44
Officers with strong family or political connections are promoted quickly, regardless of their actual qualifications.	2.71	Agree	3.00	0.76	0.58
The promotion board provides written explanations of its decisions to every applicant.	2.94	Agree	3.00	0.57	0.33

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The content of promotion exams both written and oral reflects the real skills needed for higher-level positions	3.14	Agree	3.00	0.59	0.35
Bribes, favors, or gifts have an impact on who gets promoted.	2.42	Disagree	2.00	0.77	0.60
Officers who want to challenge promotion results have access to a fair and unbiased appeals process	2.83	Agree	3.00	0.65	0.43
The evaluation of promotion candidates is influenced by regional, ethnic, or language-based favoritism	2.57	Agree	3.00	0.74	0.55
I believe that the promotion process in the PNP treats all qualified officers fairly and equally.	3.04	Agree	3.00	0.75	0.56
Average	**2.88**	Agree	2.90	0.66	0.44

The overall mean score of 2.88 indicates that respondents generally perceive the PNP promotion process as fair, though concerns about favoritism and external influence remain. Respondents agreed that promotion opportunities are openly announced, guided by merit, and supported by performance-based standards and competency-related examinations (M = 3.14). They also believe that qualified officers are generally treated equally and that an appeals process is available. However, doubts persist regarding the influence of family or political connections on promotion outcomes (M = 2.71). The lowest mean score (M = 2.42) suggests that respondents largely disagree that bribery, favors, or gifts significantly affect promotions, indicating that favoritism is viewed as a greater concern than direct corruption. Overall, while formal rules and merit-based mechanisms are perceived to be in place, lingering concerns about transparency and preferential treatment continue to affect confidence in the promotion system.

Table 5
Institutional Leadership Trust Scale

Institutional Leadership Trust Scale	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance
Senior officials clearly and consistently communicate the strategic goals of the PNP	3.21	Agree	3.00	0.48	0.23
The top leadership shows strong professional ability in handling police operations.	3.23	Agree	3.00	0.55	0.30
Decisions made at the institutional level reflect adherence to ethical principles and legal obligations.	3.16	Agree	3.00	0.59	0.34
Leaders seem more focused on advancing their personal or political interests than serving the organization's mission.	2.81	Agree	3.00	0.86	0.74
Concerns and complaints raised by personnel are promptly addressed by officials at headquarters.	3.04	Agree	3.00	0.54	0.29
Resources provided by national headquarters are shared in a fair and transparent manner.	3.00	Agree	3.00	0.64	0.41
Senior leaders seldom admit to errors or take responsibility for operational shortcomings.	2.72	Agree	3.00	0.78	0.60
The behavior of high-ranking officials promotes a culture of honesty and ethical conduct across the organization.	3.08	Agree	3.00	0.55	0.31
I trust that the leadership will support officers who report misconduct.	3.03	Agree	3.00	0.56	0.32
There is little indication that the reform promises from headquarters lead to actual changes on the ground.	2.89	Agree	3.00	0.61	0.37
Average	**3.02**	Agree	3.00	0.61	0.39

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The findings indicate a moderately positive level of trust in PNP leadership, with an overall mean score of 3.02. Respondents agreed that senior officials communicate organizational goals clearly (M = 3.21) and demonstrate strong professional competence in managing police operations (M = 3.23). Leadership decisions were generally viewed as ethical and lawful, and high-ranking officials were seen as promoting honesty and supporting the reporting of misconduct. However, concerns remain regarding accountability, as leaders were perceived to be less willing to admit mistakes or take responsibility for shortcomings (M = 2.72). Respondents also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of leadership-driven reforms and the influence of personal or political interests on decision-making. Overall, while leadership competence contributes to institutional trust, greater transparency and accountability are needed to further strengthen confidence in PNP leadership.

Table 6
Meritocratic Recruitment Scale

Meritocratic Recruitment Scale	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance
Job postings clearly outline objective, job-relevant qualifications for applicants.	3.17	Agree	3.00	0.47	0.22
The written, physical, and psychological exams directly evaluate skills critical to police work.	3.16	Agree	3.00	0.55	0.31
Assessment panels use standardized scoring guidelines instead of relying on personal judgment.	3.09	Agree	3.00	0.59	0.35
Some candidates are able to bypass official requirements by using personal connections.	2.82	Agree	3.00	0.78	0.60
All applicants are ranked solely based on their combined test and interview scores.	3.00	Agree	3.00	0.60	0.36
Every applicant's qualifications—such as eligibility, education, and fitness—are verified consistently.	3.14	Agree	3.00	0.50	0.25
A person's socio-economic background affects their likelihood of being shortlisted.	2.68	Agree	3.00	0.67	0.45
The final list of selected applicants is made public, and individual score details are available upon request.	2.95	Agree	3.00	0.64	0.40
A neutral oversight body routinely checks recruitment data to ensure adherence to merit-based practices.	2.90	Agree	3.00	0.64	0.41
In final hiring decisions, factors unrelated to merit like political influence or family background often outweigh actual test results.	2.75	Agree	3.00	0.73	0.54
Average	**2.97**	Agree	3.00	0.62	0.39

The findings indicate that respondents generally perceive the recruitment process as moderately merit-based, with an overall mean score of 2.97. Respondents agreed that job postings clearly specify objective, job-related qualifications (M = 3.17), that recruitment exams are relevant to police work (M = 3.16), and that applicant credentials are consistently verified using standardized assessment guidelines (M = 3.09). However, concerns remain regarding fairness in practice. Respondents agreed that personal connections and socio-economic background may influence shortlisting and final hiring decisions (M = 2.68–2.82), suggesting that non-merit factors sometimes outweigh test results. Transparency measures, such as public disclosure of final applicant rankings and effective oversight mechanisms, were rated only moderately (M = 2.90–2.95). Overall, while structured and merit-based recruitment procedures are perceived to exist, doubts persist regarding consistent implementation and the influence of external factors on hiring outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that political patronage continues to influence recruitment, appointment, and promotion processes within the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Angeles City. Many officers perceive that career advancement is shaped not only by merit and performance but also by political intervention and personal networks, undermining meritocracy, institutional trust, and perceptions of fairness. Despite formal policies promoting professionalism and non-partisanship, patronage remains embedded in organizational practice, revealing systemic vulnerabilities that weaken integrity and public confidence. Addressing these issues requires stronger accountability mechanisms, enforceable anti-interference policies, an empowered and independent Internal Affairs Service, and reinforced merit-based personnel systems to uphold ethical standards, institutional credibility, and the rule of law.

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Recommendations

1. Make political intervention a disciplinary offense.

This policy discourages officers and political actors from influencing recruitment and promotions. By treating political interference as misconduct, the PNP reinforces merit-based decisions and protects the integrity of its personnel processes.

2. Disallow endorsements from politicians and influential individuals.

A formal directive banning political endorsements supports the PNP's non-partisan mandate. It prevents favoritism, reduces external pressure on decision-makers, and ensures that appointments and promotions are based on qualifications rather than connections.

3. Strengthen the Internal Affairs Service (IAS).

Improving the IAS through adequate funding, trained investigators, stronger legal authority, and greater independence ensures that investigations are fair and free from political influence. A more capable IAS improves accountability and increases public trust in the PNP.

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