

How Transformational Leadership Influences Algorithmic Governance: The Case for Zimbabwe Republic Police

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Abstract

Modern policing is becoming characterised by algorithmic governance which involves predictive analytics, biometricisation and automated enforcement, promising efficiency benefits, but provoking issues of bias, secrecy and accountability in weak institutional settings. The Transformational Leadership Theory, as a mediating factor, is a relatively unexplored field despite its established effectiveness in promoting ethical innovation and cultural change in the context of public security institutions. The primary aim of the present qualitative research is to find out the role of transformational leadership in the adoption and management of algorithmic technologies in the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in the context of digital transformation initiatives in line with Vision 2030. The data were created by conducting a qualitative desk review of peer-reviewed literature, policy documents and grey literature on digital policing in Global South settings. In analysing data, the study employed textual analysis to generalise leadership behaviours, technological issues and outcomes of governance. The qualitative case study review reveals that ZRP leadership promotes digital reform, such as body-worn cameras and biometric records, to reduce corruption, but infrastructural shortages keep hybrid manual-digital practices; algorithmic tools increase operational capacity

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but raise the risk of legitimacy without a strong ethical culture; and transformational leadership partially overcomes bureaucratic inertia through visionary communication, but skill gaps impede thorough implementation. The results indicate that leadership commitment is one of the factors that make or break the notion of power asymmetries in algorithmic governance or lead to citizen-oriented and transparent policing. The article provides contextual knowledge to responsible adoption of AI in African policing, calling on combined leadership-technology models.

Keywords: digital policing, ethical oversight, public trust

INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution is redesigning governance and state administration around the world, and the role of algorithmic systems in mediating decisions, their monitoring and enforcement in the state is becoming more and more common (Kitchin, 2016; Schuilenburg and Peeters, 2020). Predictive analytics, risk assessment models and automated enforcement are algorithmic tools that have become central to crime prevention and resource allocation in policing, transforming practices and relations between citizens and states (Dencik *et al.*, 2017; Sarzaeim *et al.*, 2023). Nonetheless, there are fundamental issues of bias, obscurity, responsibility and democratic control of these technologies, particularly in regimes with weak or asymmetrical regulation (Hobson *et al.*, 2021; Donia, 2025). In the Global South, such as in African settings, infrastructural shortcomings, regulatory voids and complicated political economies compound the promises and dangers of algorithmic government (Alba, 2024; Gritsenko *et al.*, 2025). Limited attention has, however, been given to transformational leadership on how it shapes the adoption of algorithm systems in the police department, primarily in Zimbabwe. The current

digitalisation of the public sector in Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in particular, therefore, offers a timely background to the interrogation of how algorithmic governance is practised in reality amid institutional reform and long-term governance problems (Gondo and Suwaryono, 2024). In this changing environment, leadership has become a pivotal yet under-theorised aspect which influences the way state institutions can adopt and govern digital and algorithmic systems. The levers of organisational change and ethical behaviour include idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Burns, 1978; Longshore and Bass, 1987; Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership has been linked to enhanced organisational identity, congruence between values and alignment and openness to innovation in policing, which allows the institution to overcome the constraints of fixed and transactional cultures (Silvestri, 2007; Schneider *et al.*, 2024). Such capabilities are particularly critical when organisations are faced with complex, data-driven technologies that may further worsen the existing inequalities and lack of legitimacy unless managed in a responsible manner (Skyba *et al.*, 2023; Haley and Burrell, 2025). However, the concept of leadership is seldom explicitly incorporated into the discussion of algorithmic governance in policing, resulting in a small grasp of how leaders can mediate the risks of ethics and trust in technology-mediated decision-making (Donia, 2025; Suljic, 2025).

The study proposes that transformational leadership can play a critical role in guiding algorithmic governance in policing towards accountability, transparency and social justice, especially in weak governance systems like Zimbabwe. It builds upon the main argument that leadership behaviours and value commitments mediate whether algorithmic tools reinforce or

challenge the status quo of power asymmetry and corruption, or promote fair, responsive and citizen-oriented policing (Hope, 2021; Tsokota *et al.*, 2025). With the ZRP in mind, the study analyses how transformational leadership influences the design, implementation and daily application of digital policing systems, such as digital records, automated traffic enforcement and digital surveillance systems (Chitongo, 2022; Foma *et al.*, 2026). The significant objective is to shed light on the leadership technology nexus in algorithmic governance, examining how leaders manoeuvre around infrastructural constraints, ethical dilemmas and issues of public trust in a setting of continuous institutional reform (Manenji and Marufu, 2016; Mhaka and Hodhera, 2025). In this way, the article aims to provide empirically based information that informs the scholarship of leadership and policy discussions about responsible, context-sensitive algorithmic policing in the Global South (Alba, 2024; Gritsenko *et al.*, 2025). As such, the study asks the question how transformational leadership influences the implementation and governance of algorithmic systems within the ZRP. This study's contribution to literature is on linking the Transformational Leadership Theory with algorithmic governance in police, providing evidence in the under researched context of the global South.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework that underpins this research combines Transformational Leadership Theory and the Algorithmic Governance Theory to critically examine the nature of leadership in modern policing. Transformational leadership, based on the original works of James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass, focuses on four main elements: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Longshore and Bass, 1987; Fettke,

2008). This style of leadership encourages flexibility and ethical behaviour which are becoming more and more essential as policing organisations become more complex and technology-driven. In law enforcement, transformational leaders play a central role in leading staff members in the face of rapid technological change and ethical dilemmas of data-driven policing. Their ability to motivate, break the paradigm and consider personal needs of officers is consistent with the demands of responsive and ethically based leadership in data-driven and algorithmically mediated policing settings (Skyba *et al.*, 2023).

The study conceptualises transformational leadership as a driver of algorithmic systems as it influences how they are adopted, interpreted and governed within policing institutions. Algorithmic governance is expected to be shaped by leadership behaviours like ethical guidance, innovation support and employee empowerment. These also shape transparency, accountability, decision-making processes and oversight. Organisational culture, digital capacity, regulatory environments and institutional readiness mediate these interactions and finally influence governance outcomes like operational effectiveness, public trust, fairness and legitimacy. As such, there is a causal relationship where transformational leadership affects governance outcomes indirectly through its influence on algorithmic governance practices and organisational conditions. Figure 1 shows the analytical path through which leadership behaviours are expected to influence the effectiveness and ethical implementation of algorithmic governance within the ZRP.

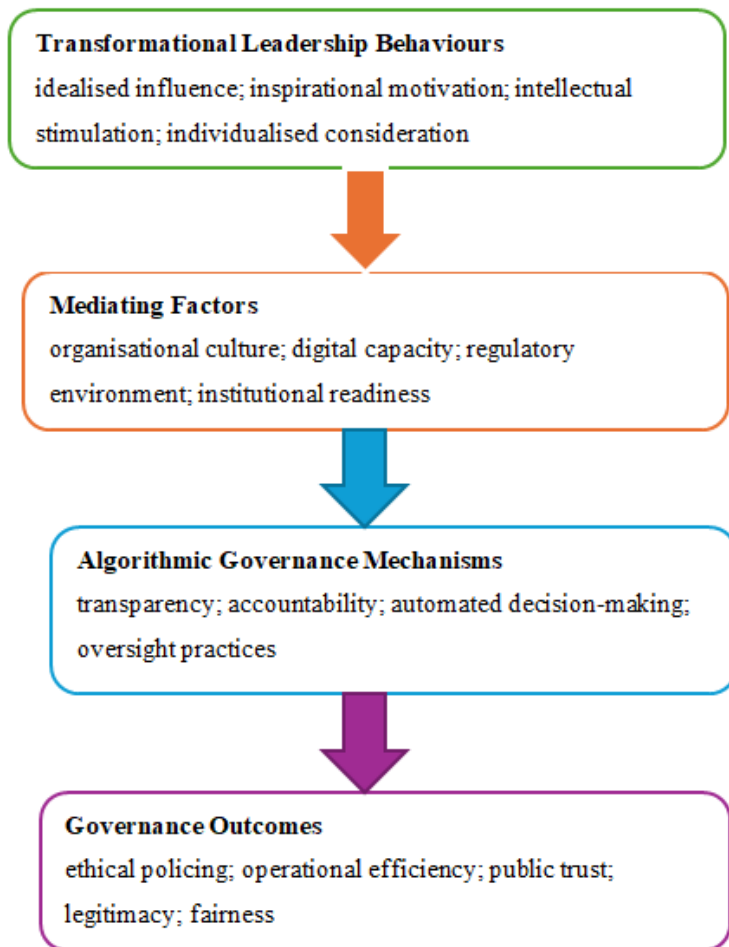


Figure 1: *Conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between transformational leadership and algorithmic governance outcomes in the Zimbabwe Republic Police*

The Algorithmic Governance Theory complements the Transformational Leadership Theory by explaining how datafication and automated decision-making reshape institutional authority. Other scholars like Antoinette Rouvroy define algorithmic governance as a regime of datafication,

decision automation and increased surveillance and control (Schuilenburg and Peeters, 2020). This is reflected in policing by predictive policing models and data-driven crime mapping that improve the operational efficiency of policing but present risks to bias, lack of transparency and lack of accountability (Dirutigliano and Baldini, 2025; Donia, 2025). The importance of transformational leadership and algorithmic governance is critical and the mediation of risks by leadership is the need to ensure ethical use of algorithms, create institutional trust and remain responsive to citizens. Transformational leaders are able to develop governance systems that are able to balance both technological opportunities and the values of transparency and social justice, thereby fostering responsible and socially equitable policing in an algorithmic society (Kitchin, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section covers literature on Digital Transformation and Algorithmic Governance in Policing and Transformational Leadership in the Public Sector and Security Institutions. The review is organised around these two associated themes. Further examination is conducted in line with key debates relating to ethics, accountability, institutional readiness and leadership capacity in technology-driven governance. Through the synthesis of this discussion, the literature review identifies gaps in the current scholarship in line with interaction between transformational leadership and algorithmic governance in policing in the Global South, primarily Zimbabwe.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE IN POLICING

Digital transformation has significantly changed the way policing is conducted across the globe and algorithmic governance has become an essential part of contemporary policing. Police agencies worldwide have been increasingly using predictive analytics, surveillance systems and integrated

databases to improve operational efficiency and pre-emptive capabilities (Dencik *et al.*, 2017; Sarzaeim *et al.*, 2023). Predictive policing algorithms are used to predict high-risk zones and possible criminals based on crime data and surveillance technologies are used to monitor and respond quickly. Nevertheless, even with these improvements, the level of trust in the population differs significantly based on the perception of fairness and suitability and some studies have found that algorithmic decisions are perceived as less trustworthy than human decisions (Hobson *et al.*, 2021). This ambivalence highlights the importance of designing and ethical governance structures to create acceptance and legitimacy of algorithmic policing in various societal settings.

The infrastructural and governance challenges of algorithmic policing are peculiar to African and Global South contexts. The lack of technological infrastructure, unequal data quality and regulatory loopholes limits the successful use of AI-driven tools (Alba, 2024). The problems that countries face when struggling with these issues are incomplete datafication and low interoperability between databases that undermine the predictive accuracy and operational effectiveness. Moreover, privacy, accountability and transparency are also complex issues related to data governance and most areas do not have strong frameworks to control algorithmic decision-making (Kitchin, 2016; Donia, 2025). As an example, the study of algorithmic policing in authoritarian states, for example, Kazakhstan, emphasises how surveillance technologies can streamline governance effectiveness and can also strengthen authoritarian rule without political changes (Gritsenko *et al.*, 2025).

Although literature on digital policing is expanding, there is still a significant lack of empirical research on the topic of algorithmic governance in Zimbabwe. The majority of the

available studies are based on Global North settings or general regional studies and the socio-technical issues of Zimbabwe remain under-researched (Schneider *et al.*, 2024). Limited attention is given in literature that examined technological adoption, surveillance practices and digital policing outcomes in isolation on how leadership influences the ethical implementation, governance and legitimacy of algorithmic systems in policing institutions. The gap encompasses a lack of focus on the role of leadership in the development of technological adoption and governance ethics in policing. Since leadership affects organisational identity, ethical standards and operational flexibility, the combination of leadership theories and algorithmic governance constructs is a promising path to overcome barriers to implementation and distrust in the population (Suljic, 2025). As accountability, transparency, organisational readiness and public confidence are key in shaping technology driven policing, this gap matters a lot. In addition, insufficient attention to local infrastructural limitations and governance systems in the existing studies reduces the relevance of international results, that is why there is an urgent necessity to conduct specific studies on Zimbabwean policing during the digital transformation. This study addresses the gap through examining how transformational leadership impacts algorithm governance in the ZRP as it situates the analysis within Zimbabwe.

The integration of leadership in the algorithmic governance discourse is still minimal, even though it can mediate the ethical application and institutional trust. Transformational leadership has been demonstrated to boost organisational identification and value congruence among police officers, which is essential to socially responsible use of AI tools (Schneider *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, policing research seldom links leadership practices to algorithmic accountability models that deal with the problem of transparency, partiality and equity

(Donia, 2025). Ethical governance, transparency and sustainability are leadership-based requirements of digital transformation highlighted in the literature and there is a gap in which leadership scholarship can play a significant role in the discussion of algorithmic policing (Alba, 2024; Suljic, 2025). The gap may be filled by contributing to the understanding of how leadership influences citizen trust, responsiveness and fair application of more sophisticated policing technologies in various socio-political settings.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SECTOR AND SECURITY INSTITUTIONS

Transformational leadership is becoming a key style of leadership in policing and other institutions in the public sector, which is central to the creation of organisational change and innovation. It has been shown that transformational leaders inspire and motivate personnel by idealised influence, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration, which leads to improved organisational performance and adaptation (Silvestri, 2007; Schneider *et al.*, 2024). These leadership behaviours can be used in policing to confront established bureaucratic and transactional norms to encourage more community-based and ethical policing models. However, it has been indicated that most police organisations are still stuck in transactional leadership styles that restrict the level of transformational change (Silvestri, 2007). This disjuncture underscores the institutional politics of inhibition of substantive leadership renewal in security institutions, even as there is a common demand to modernise and reform.

Leadership can be crucial in managing change and institutional reform in policing by navigating and restructuring bureaucratic cultures that are hierarchical and rigid in nature and legacy systems. This is especially relevant in such a situation as Zimbabwe, where the ZRP struggle with the old organisational

framework and lack of modernisation (Schneider *et al.*, 2024). Transformational leadership facilitates the embracement of innovation through open communication, learning and the creation of a common vision that allows police institutions to adopt new technologies and adapt to changing security needs (Steinheider and Wuestewald, 2008). Nevertheless, the systems of legacy and bureaucratic stagnation in Zimbabwe pose structural obstacles which need to be overcome with the help of strategic leadership interventions to promote sustainable digital change and institutional responsiveness.

The adoption of innovation in policing, particularly in the area of digital governance, needs a leadership that is able to balance the technicalities with the ethical and community issues. Predictive policing and AI-based surveillance are algorithmic tools that offer opportunities and challenges and they require leaders who focus on transparency and accountability (Oswald *et al.*, 2018; Haley and Burrell, 2025). However, studies indicate that digital governance shifts in policing are not usually accompanied by leadership research which leads to the under-theorisation of the role of leadership in influencing algorithmic deployments and governance practices (Gritsenko *et al.*, 2025). Empirical studies that examine this nexus are urgently required to make sure that technological advances in law enforcement are consistent with institutional values and requirements of public trust.

Although there is an increasing focus on digital transformation, the empirical evidence of the relationship between leadership and digital governance in policing is limited, particularly in Zimbabwe. The majority of research is either Global North-based or technical in nature without properly considering the mediating role of leadership in organisational change and ethical technology adoption (Schneider *et al.*, 2024; Haley and Burrell, 2025). This lack restricts knowledge on how

transformational leadership can operationalise accountability and responsiveness in digital governance within bureaucratic constraints. This gap may be addressed to a great extent to improve policy and practice by providing frameworks by which the police leadership in Zimbabwe may be guided in the intricacies of adopting emerging technologies in institutional reform agendas.

METHODOLOGY

The information required to write this study on transformational leadership and algorithmic governance in policing was accessed using electronic databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science and ScienceDirect. The keywords were used in isolation or in combination to search data, included “transformational leadership”, “algorithmic governance”, “digital policing”, “predictive policing”, “Zimbabwe Republic Police” and “digital transformation in public administration”. In this study, a desk-based narrative literature review research design using secondary data sources was used. Searches were done during January - March 2025, with a focus on secondary studies that are algorithmic governance-related and were carried out between 2015 and 2025, although the foundational literature on transformational leadership remained, irrespective of year of publication. Empirically based peer-reviewed journal articles were given priority in reliability of findings. The research is founded on the English language published sources directly connected with the thematic focus of leadership, digitalisation and policing.

Inclusion criteria entailed all secondary peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, grey literature about policing and governance in general, while irrelevant, duplicates, or any other material not in the English language, was excluded. The secondary materials obtained were screened in terms of theme

relevancy, thus keeping only those most relevant to the study. The items searched were not restricted by the year of publication of the articles to make sure that both old and recent debates were covered. The published materials obtained as a result of the search process were further narrowed down in terms of conceptual and contextual relevance to obtain the most suitable materials to be used. Policy documents, government reports, NGO reports and other grey literature were also consulted. In this way, this study is founded on the evaluation of the available reports and claims, instead of new empirical evidence in the field. A possible limitation to the use of such an approach could include lack of direct primary interview data, possibility of bias from secondary sources and lack of access to official information from the ZRP database.

Case selection was done using a literature review where purposeful selection of the cases was done with regard to their relevance to algorithmic governance practices, process of digital transformation and leadership implications in the process, based on available documentation, including policy reports and scholarly literature relating to the ZRP. The thematic analysis of the cases provided insights into how transformational leadership contributes to the adoption, governance and ethical use of algorithmic technologies within various aspects of policing.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings in the form of case studies. The first case study is on Crime Data Management and Digital Record Systems in the Zimbabwe Republic Police, followed by Traffic Management and Automated Enforcement Systems and lastly Surveillance, Intelligence and Predictive Policing in the Zimbabwe Republic Police.

CASE STUDY 1: CRIME DATA MANAGEMENT AND DIGITAL RECORD SYSTEMS IN ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE

The ZRP started implementing body-worn cameras for officers nationwide as part of the continued modernisation of policing, to enhance accountability and reduce corruption. This is after the Smart Traffic Enforcement System was introduced in Harare and Bulawayo which has already led to several arrests on traffic offences. The introduction of body cameras supports the transition of the ZRP towards technology-oriented policing. This ensures more transparency, improves evidence-based approaches and enhances police accountability (Maskaly *et al.*, 2017). Wright and Headley (2020), on the other hand, posit that the adoption of technological innovations does not necessarily lead to legitimacy if there is no improvement in governance structures. The ZRP has embraced a policing model that employs smart data analytics to minimise crime and enhance the delivery of evidence to policing. This is linked to a system that is being developed in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Centre of High-Performance Computing at the University of Zimbabwe. The police leader, Steven Mtamba, witnessed the way the system works. The Police Commissioner explained that it is hard to investigate crimes using the manual system (ZTNPRIME, 2025). In a comment posted on ZIMPRIME YouTube channel, he stated that the system facilitates easy search of fingerprints as compared to the manual method (*ibid.*). The system is efficient because it is quick and easy to track criminal records since it records biometric data of criminals once the system is adopted.

The implementation of the system is linked to leaders of various sectors such as the police, judicial service and academics, among others. The ZRP leadership is in the process of implementing a fast-paced, technology-based change, where manual crime recording and management are being replaced with digital records to enhance efficiency, transparency and

reduce corruption. These changes are being implemented by key leadership figures such as Commissioner-General Stephen Mutamba and provincial commanders as part of the mandate of Smart Policing towards Vision 2030. The ZRP leadership has enforced the use of body-worn cameras and visible name tags by all police officers and has ordered them to be responsible (*iHarare.com*, 2 February 2026; *The Herald*, 2 February 2026). The implementation of electronic dockets and digital automated fingerprint identification systems (AFIS) to substitute paper-based systems to curb corruption and enhance the speed of investigations is being led by senior leadership, such as Commissioner Maxwell Chikunguru (Officer Commanding Harare Province). The leadership has developed a 24-hour social media monitoring system controlled by a team within the police. Internal digitisation of crime records and reporting systems in the ZRP is not without its challenges, mostly termed as an initial phase of digital maturity due to systemic and resource-based limitations. Although the ZRP has embarked on digital record-keeping and automated systems (AFIS and CCTV) to be in line with Vision 2030, the process of replacing the manual and paper-based records with digital records is slow. The implementation of new technologies has been received with some distrust in terms of their reliability and trustworthiness, resulting in the preservation of a hybrid system of paper and digital records (Foma *et al.*, 2026). The absence of detailed data governance systems has added to societal fears about the possible abuse of surveillance (Mhaka and Hodhera, 2025). Online reporting systems introduced in the COVID 19 pandemic improved access to police services but have been criticised due to slow response and unreliable follow-up (Chitongo, 2022).. Common power cuts restrict the application of technology-based systems that require electricity, rendering digital systems unusable in certain locations. Poor internet connectivity, especially in rural and remote regions, is a barrier to the operation of interconnected systems.

CASE STUDY 2: TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT AND AUTOMATED ENFORCEMENT SYSTEMS

As part of wider modernisation of the public sector, the ZRPhas been experimenting with digital technologies in traffic control, such as electronic ticketing and surveillance-based enforcement. These systems are a move towards algorithmic governance, in which the enforcement of rules is, in part, devolved to automated or semi-automated technologies. These reforms are commonly presented as the means of enhancing transparency and efficiency in the context of fragile governance, like in Zimbabwe, where corruption has long been a problem in the state institutions (Gebrihet *et al.*, 2023; Mafohla and Sipeyiye, 2024). Transformational leadership in the ZRP is instrumental in introducing and maintaining such innovations, particularly through fostering accountability and ethical behaviour (Shoki, 2025). E-government studies indicate that electronic systems have the potential of minimising human discretion in service provision, which minimises chances of bribery and inefficiency. Therefore, the implementation of automated enforcement in Zimbabwe is an indicator of a technological and leadership-based reform agenda. In Zimbabwe, digital transformation has simplified operations, increased resource use and responsiveness to citizen requests and feedback, boosting the delivery of public services and policymaking (Gondo *et al.*, 2024).

The introduction of automated or semi-automated traffic policing systems is meant to solve the long-term problems of manual enforcement, including the lack of uniformity in the application of the rules and rent-seeking behaviour. African policing experiences indicate that the conventional traffic checkpoints tend to turn into informal payment and negotiated compliance zones undermining the rule of law (Onyango, 2022; Sam, 2022). In comparison, algorithmic systems, like speed cameras and digital ticketing, make decisions about

enforcement uniform and provide audit trails, reducing chances of discretionary misuse. This transition relies heavily on transformational leadership which helps to establish organisational culture and promote the use of technology-driven accountability mechanisms. Research indicates that transparency commitment by leaders increases transparency intervention effectiveness in African public institutions (Hope, 2021). Digital reforms, led by leaders, can thus be used to institutionalise justice and uniformity in the application of the law of traffic in the ZRP.

Nonetheless, automation and corruption cannot be directly related, with technological systems acting in more extended institutional contexts that can still facilitate malpractice. Although e-government tools can reduce petty corruption, they are only as successful as the quality of governance, its oversight and ethical leadership. Implementing e-government in the ZRP has more chances but will need a conducive environment. The environment can be described as poor or weak legislative frameworks that govern and guide the implementation of e-government, limited budget, digital divide and technological incompetence (Manenji and Marufu, 2016). In Zimbabwe, the lack of trust in new enforcement technologies in case of a feeling of manipulation or biased use, may be observed due to constant suspicions of corruption in the public institutions (Tsokota *et al.*, 2025). In addition, the studies indicate that bribery experiences can severely damage the trust which societies put in the institutions that can be transferred to automated systems, unless they are seen as transparent (Adong 2017; Tsokota *et al.*, 2025). Transformational leadership should thus not be limited to the use of technology, but also involve the general population, effective communication and other accountability measures that give citizens confidence in the integrity of the algorithmic systems of governance.

CASE STUDY 3: SURVEILLANCE, INTELLIGENCE AND PREDICTIVE POLICING IN THE ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE

Surveillance technologies and intelligence-led policing have been significantly adopted by the ZRP as a part of the wider modernisation of crime prevention and control. Such trends are in line with trends globally towards algorithmic governance, where data-driven technologies, including CCTV systems, communication interception systems and analytics systems, influence operational decision-making. The legal frameworks such as the Interception of Communications Act also affect the use of surveillance in Zimbabwe because they allow the use of extensive surveillance abilities (Munariyarwa and Chiumbu, 2019). Furthermore, the state intelligence apparatus has long been at the heart of surveillance, not only in the field of crime control, but also in political aspects (Tendi, 2016). Intelligence-led policing paradigms focus on gathering and analysing data to inform decision-making (Burcher and Whelan, 2018). They are, however, effective depending on the organisational capacity and leadership orientation. In the ZRP, leadership is vital in ensuring that these technologies are incorporated into the governance systems without compromising efficiency, legality and trust of the people.

The issue of transformational leadership is especially relevant to the development of the governance of surveillance and intelligence systems in the ZRP. Ethical standards, transparency and accountability can be encouraged by leaders and affect the collection, processing and application of data in policing. Studies indicate that intelligence-led policing poses challenging ethical and legal issues, particularly in terms of proactive surveillance and the use of data (Fyfe and Gundhus, 2017). Likewise, machine learning and prediction tools should be implemented cautiously into policing and data should not be misused and abused (Sarzaeim *et al.*, 2023). Police research has indicated that leadership strategies have a direct impact on the

implementation of innovations and whether they are implemented in a democratic manner or not (Davis and Bailey, 2017). In this regard, leadership can be seen as a linking point between technological capacity and accountable algorithm governance.

Although surveillance and predictive policing may be beneficial, there are still important risks, especially when it comes to the situation where there is a lack of oversight mechanisms. The problem of over-surveillance and lack of responsibility is salient in Zimbabwe, where surveillance has been linked to the limitation of civil freedoms and a lack of transparency (Tendi, 2016; Chiumbu, 2019; Munariyarwaa, 2019). The existence of covert surveillance as a norm all over the world is another example of how this practice can be extended without any adequate questioning (Loftus, 2019). The algorithmic policing systems also have the potential of contributing to the bias in the data, thus contributing to the lack of fairness and justice (Sarzaeim *et al.*, 2023). Transformational leadership can help in alleviating these risks by enhancing accountability mechanisms, stakeholder involvement and ethical controls. The success of the algorithmic governance is based not only on the technology, but also on the leadership that upholds integrity, the trust of the people and democracy as seen in the ZRP case.

DISCUSSION

Thus, the study demonstrates how transformational leadership impacts the introduction and implementation of digital and algorithmic innovation in the Zimbabwe Republic Police.. The findings are in line with Burns (1978) and Bass (1990), who indicated that transformational leaders are supposed to project a clear vision, arouse critical thinking and set ethical behaviours in such a manner that transforms organisational cultures to innovation and service to society. Such leadership in policing, as echoed by Schneider *et al.* (2024), has been found

to improve organisational identification and value alignment and allows officers to internalise reform agendas and respond to new technologies. The implementation of digital crime records and body-worn cameras by the ZRP and the implementation of automated enforcement, are indicative of a leadership-led effort to modernise the organisation and prevent corruption, as research has identified transformational leadership with accountability-oriented change in security organisations (Silvestri, 2007; Hope, 2021). Steinheider and Wuestewald (2008) concur with Onyango (2022) in that the bureaucratic inertia and legacies that have been emphasised in African policing studies, imply that transformational desires tend to face the transactional norms that restrict deep-rooted behavioural change in line with this study's findings.

Algorithmic governance in Zimbabwe's police service highlights opportunities and vulnerabilities associated with digital transformation in the Global South. Algorithmic governance research cautions that data collection and automation technologies could exacerbate surveillance and control when implemented within an environment characterised by poor regulatory oversight (Schuilenburg and Peeters, 2020; Donia, 2025). Kazakhstan and African experiences demonstrate that algorithmic policing is prone to strengthening authoritarian or illiberal tendencies in the absence of transparency, participation and oversight (Alba, 2024; Gritsenko *et al.*, 2025). The experiments of predictive analytics, CCTV and biometric systems by the ZRP are in line with world trends of data-driven policing, yet are conducted in an environment with limited resources, uneven digital access and citizen concerns about corruption and human rights infringement (Foma *et al.*, 2026; Mhaka and Hodhera, 2025). All these three case studies are illustrative of the connection between leadership, technology and governance since digital records highlight efforts towards modernisation; automatic traffic monitoring shows attempts at

improving the process of accountability, and surveillance highlights problems with transparency and accountability issues. This situation resembles African discussions about algorithmic governance which highlight issues such as inadequate legal frameworks, accountability and public redress in cases where harm occurs (Kitchin, 2016; Research ICT Africa, 2022).

Digital transformation of policing shows that technology is not enough to address the historical lack of accountability and trust without effective, value-oriented leadership and inclusive governance. Research into e-government in the African public sector indicates that digitisation can lead to greater efficiency and reduced discretion. However, its effectiveness is conditional on strong leadership, organisational capability and citizen-oriented policy (Manenji and Marufu, 2016; Gondo and Suwaryono, 2024). Algorithms, like automated ticketing and speed cameras, have been advocated in traffic enforcement as a way to standardise the application of rules and minimise bribery opportunities, which is consistent with the wider literature that points out that digitisation can reduce the gaps in petty corruption (Sam, 2022; Mafohla and Sipeyiye, 2024). Yet scholarly work has cautioned that the automation process may not remove corruption entirely, but merely shift it from one form to another without addressing incentives and monitoring mechanisms (Adong, 2017; Tsokota *et al.*, 2025). This ambivalence is reflected in the blended regime of manual and digital practices of the ZRP and the ongoing lack of trust in the population, proving that digital reforms need to be integrated into broader organisational and societal initiatives to enhance integrity, accountability and citizen engagement (Hope, 2021; Chitongo, 2022).

The ethical and rights-based issues of predictive and data-driven policing point to the necessity of transformational leadership that pre-empts justice, transparency and community

trust. Global research highlights the potential for algorithmic risk assessments and predictive policing models to perpetuate historical biases against disadvantaged groups in society (Oswald *et al.*, 2018; Hobson *et al.*, 2021). In African contexts, the lack of strong regulatory frameworks and possibilities to challenge algorithmic decision-making makes violations of rights and abusive monitoring more likely (Kitchin, 2016; Algorithmic Justice in South Africa, 2025). Here, transformational leadership within the ZRP should go beyond technological zeal to proactively influence ethical governance structures, mobilise citizens and institutionalise channels of oversight and redress (Haley and Burrell, 2025; Suljic, 2025). The present study, accordingly, argues that the readiness of leaders to challenge any form of bias, engage local communities and adhere to constitutional norms that will define the future direction of algorithmic governance either towards democratic accountability or authoritarianism (Skyba and Tkachenko, 2023; Foma *et al.*, 2026).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that transformational leadership is central to the development of algorithmic governance in the Zimbabwe Republic Police, especially at a time when the institution is in the process of digital transformation. The analysis shows how leaders can promote the use of technologies like body-worn cameras, biometric systems and automated traffic enforcement to improve operational efficiency, decrease corruption and meet the objectives of Vision 2030. However, these interpretations are drawn from reviewed sources rather than primary empirical investigation. Issues such as insufficient technological infrastructure, poor IT skills of officers and entrenched bureaucratic resistance will continue limiting the application of technology and causing hybrid forms of policing. Transformational leadership is found to be the key to breaking these barriers by visionary communication, ethical modelling

and a culture of innovation and accountability. The results highlight a conflict between technological potential and governance facts in weak settings such as Zimbabwe, where algorithmic technologies can contribute to increased obscurity and bias in the absence of robust leadership intervention. Finally, the research confirms that leadership practices have a direct effect on whether digital policing enhances or reinforces the lack of legitimacy, providing a framework to interpret the leadership-technology nexus in African public security agencies. This observation goes beyond the wider discussions of responsible algorithmic governance, emphasising context-specific dynamics that are not always considered in the Global South by global models. The study makes the following recommendations:

- Taking into account the results of research highlighting problems with infrastructure development, unequal access to digitisation and the absence of governance mechanisms for algorithms used, there is a need for governments to focus on investment into infrastructure development and regulation of processes in the sphere of data governance, privacy protection and algorithmic accountability and transparency.
- The findings related to the lack of digital literacy of police officers necessitate the introduction of rank-based training programmes aimed at developing the necessary skills.
- The results related to resistance on the part of bureaucrats and low levels of digital readiness of the ZRP necessitates transformational leadership training focused on issues like ethical decision-making and change management. Also, it is important that the leadership of the ZRP forms oversight boards within the organisation to ensure compliance with established requirements related to the use of the technologies, including considerations of fairness and human rights.

- It is imperative to foster independent monitoring in an effort to respond to the needs of the community concerning issues of surveillance and legitimacy. This is because the assessment of the application of the technologies in the process of policing is important.
- Due to the use of secondary data in this study, there is need for further research through empirical analysis involving interviews and cases at institutional level to determine how the leadership of the ZRP impacts algorithmic governance outcomes.

In light of the limitations associated with the process of implementation, there is need for ZRP leadership to foster partnerships with universities, companies and civil society organisations towards modernisation of infrastructure and ethical use of AI in policing.

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