

The Impact of Police Reforms and Implementation on Public Safety and Security in Malawi

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Abstract

This research examines the effectiveness of recent reforms in the Malawi Police Service (MPS) in enhancing public security and safety. Targeting police officers alone as respondents, the research used a case study design to determine the effects of reforms on responsiveness in operations, public trust, accountability and crime patterns. Data collection was carried out using structured questionnaires, which were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis) were used to assess the impact of reforms on outcomes of interest. Findings show that although reforms have contributed to enhance reporting of crime, better police response times and enhanced community relations, remarkable challenges exist in accountability, formal public feedback mechanisms, and allocation of resources.

Keywords: Malawi Police Service, Reform Implementation, Police Reform.

Introduction

The quest for public safety and security is a core mandate of all law enforcement agencies globally. For Malawi, Police Service has been subject to various reforms designed to improve its efficacy, enhance community relationships, and rebuild trust with the public. Such reforms are imperative, particularly amidst emerging security threats, changing crime trends, and growing expectations for accountability and transparency (Bradford, 2025; Hassan, 2025).

Despite the implementation of various reform initiatives ranging from community policing programs and improved resource allocation to efforts at enhancing internal accountability there remains considerable debate about their real-world impact. Some police officers report that the reforms have not significantly improved their unit's ability to respond to crime, highlighting persistent operational and resource constraints (Cassino & Demir, 2024; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025). On the contrary, other measures indicate improvement: crime reporting by citizens is up, credited to enhanced trust between the police force and the public, and response times for police have evidenced quantifiable improvement in some jurisdictions (Abdi & Hashi, 2024; Melkamu & Teshome, 2023). Community policing, a staple of contemporary policing, has apparently never been certain in some areas, with reform initiatives yielding more peace and decrease in crime of a violent nature (Malatji et al. 2023; Palmer, 2025).

Still, issues persist in making these improvements long-term and prevalent. Of particular concern, most observers and officers reference current vulnerabilities in the accountability mechanisms in the police force, as well as the lack of formalized feedback mechanisms from the public (Magaloni, 2024; Snyman, 2023). The failure to have effective feedback and oversight can be damaging to public trust and curtail the efficacy of reforms. The image of the Malawi Police Service has improved in recent years, as an indicator of some positive effects from reforms (Bradford, 2024). However, criticism remains from both officers and the general public about the effect of the reforms on whether they are really fulfilling their security objectives. Doubts are raised among some officers about the potential of reforms to solve entrenched issues like corruption, resource constraints, and procedural justice (Magaloni, 2024; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025).

In light of these varied outcomes, the necessity exists to rigorously assess the effectiveness of reforms in the Malawi Police Service. This research, thus, aims to identify how much the current reforms have impacted public security and safety, as observed by police officers. This research specifically focuses on operational responsiveness, reporting of crime, contact with the community, trends in violent crime, accountability, perception, and the existence (or lack thereof) of formal feedback mechanisms.

By prioritizing the actual experiences and views of police officers the frontline practitioners of reform this research hopes to offer evidence-based knowledge that can guide future practice and policy. In the end, knowledge of the effectiveness of these reforms is crucial for developing a responsive, accountable, and trusted police service by the Malawian people (Bradford, 2025; Hassan, 2025; Malatji et al. 2023).

Maintenance of public safety and security is a core mandate of the Malawi Police Service (MPS). Over the last few years, the MPS has initiated a string of reforms to improve operational efficiency, enhance public relations, and regain public confidence. The reforms aim to resolve long-standing issues like delayed response by the police, poor community outreach, weak accountability structures, and wavering public attitudes towards the police (Bradford, 2024; Hassan, 2025; Magaloni, 2024).

In spite of all these challenges, most officers indicate that the introduced reforms have not made a noticeable difference in their unit's response to crime, with resource and operational bottlenecks continuing to be common (Cassino & Demir, 2024; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025). Despite the noted increase in citizen reporting of crime, attributed to enhanced trust and outreach these improvements are not always complemented by increased police responsiveness or decreases in violent crime (Melkamu & Teshome, 2023; Abdi & Hashi, 2024). Community engagement efforts have created positive momentum, with some locales seeing more effective police-community partnerships and improved peace.

But these gains are unequal, and doubts still linger over the sustainability of this engagement (Malatji, Madima & Rakubu, 2023; Palmer, 2025). Most importantly, accountability within the police force has not picked up as was hoped and there is little experience of systematic feedback mechanisms from citizens—issues that are critical in the establishment of legitimacy and ensuring public trust (Snyman, 2023; Magaloni, 2024). While public attitudes towards the police have improved in some respects, there remains cynicism among both officials and wider society about the overall effectiveness of the reforms. Others are uncertain if the reforms are effective in producing their desired security outcomes, noting that corruption, lack of transparency, and inadequate resource allocation remain ongoing concerns (Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025; Magaloni, 2024; Bradford, 2025).

Even though research in other environments has evaluated the effects of police reforms on misconduct, trust, and performance outcomes (Cassino & Demir, 2024; Bradford, 2024; Hassan, 2025), there is limited systematic investigation addressing the Malawi Police Service. Specifically, there is limited empirical research exploring how reforms have affected core outcomes like unit responsiveness, reporting of crime, community relations, accountability, and popular perception in the context of Malawi.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to systematically assess the effectiveness of police reforms in the Malawi Police Service. The study will examine how police reforms operates to enhance public safety and security of the citizenry. Through this, the study hopes to give evidence-based guidance on how to enhance the impact and endurance of police reforms in Malawi.

Literature Review

This section reviews the theoretical foundations and supporting empirical literature underpinning the assessment of police reforms and public safety within the Malawi Police Service. Two primary theories Theory of Change (ToC) and Procedural Justice Theory provide the conceptual grounding for analyzing the causal mechanisms through which reforms are expected to influence public security outcomes.

The Theory of Change (ToC) offers a structured model for explaining how specific inputs such as the implementation of community policing, accountability mechanisms, and equitable resource allocation are logically expected to lead to improvements in public safety and security. It emphasizes mapping the causal pathways from reform actions to intended outcomes, explicitly outlining the assumptions and contextual factors required at each stage (Cheruiyot & Musembi, 2025). Within the context of the Malawi Police Service (MPS), where reform effectiveness often hinges on implementation fidelity, ToC provides a valuable framework for tracking progress and identifying gaps.

ToC is particularly relevant in Malawi's policing context, where historical resource limitations, weak institutional capacity, and limited public trust necessitate a clear articulation of reform logic. By integrating monitoring, feedback loops, and stakeholder engagement, ToC enables a performance-based evaluation of reform success. It underscores that outcomes

such as increased police responsiveness, enhanced trust, and crime reduction depend on well-defined reform strategies grounded in local realities and continuously assessed for impact.

Procedural Justice Theory focuses on public perceptions of fairness, transparency, and respect in police interactions. It posits that when police procedures are perceived as just, citizens are more likely to comply with the law, report crimes, and collaborate with officers (Bradford, 2024; Hassan, 2025). In Malawi, where historical abuses and systemic inefficiencies have undermined trust, this theory provides a normative foundation for reform. Research affirms that procedural fairness rather than just enforcement capacity drives legitimacy in policing. When officers treat individuals with dignity and impartiality, the police institution earns credibility, fostering cooperation and reinforcing lawful behavior. Conversely, procedural injustice erodes public trust, even if operational metrics improve. The theory thus guides reforms beyond quantitative performance metrics to include qualitative aspects of legitimacy, community dialogue, and accountability. Integrating ToC and Procedural Justice Theory allows for a multidimensional evaluation of police reforms in Malawi. ToC ensures strategic planning, while Procedural Justice Theory safeguards legitimacy and social contract principles. Together, they frame police reform not only as a technical and institutional process but also as a relational and societal one.

Reform efforts in Malawi have included community policing, citizen feedback systems, budget realignment, and accountability audits (Afrobarometer, 2022; Chikwanha, 2021). Yet, evaluations reveal inconsistencies in implementation, especially across rural-urban divides and unit-level disparities. These findings validate ToC's emphasis on contextual fit and Procedural Justice Theory's insistence on equitable procedural standards.

Empirical research supports these theoretical claims. Community policing has shown gains in responsiveness and citizen engagement, but weak feedback mechanisms and uneven accountability persist (Nyankalwa, 2024; Mutupha & Zhu, 2022). Trust grows where procedural justice is practiced, but fears of corruption and ineffective oversight dilute reform gains (Afrobarometer, 2022; Kayira, 2023). Empirical studies suggest that sustained reforms anchored in procedural fairness and strategic coherence yield better security outcomes (Skogan, 2022; Bayley, 2005). Investments in officer training, open communication, and public input mechanisms are positively associated with trust and safety. Conversely, fragmented or uncoordinated reform actions those not grounded in theory or local feedback tend to produce limited or unsustainable results.

Procedural Justice Theory

This paper is based on Procedural Justice Theory and Theory of Change (ToC) as complementary theories that explain how police reforms would lead to the achievement of enhanced security and safety of the citizens. Procedural Justice Theory holds that citizens do not follow the law and cooperate with the police because of the fear of punishment, but they find the police processes to be fair, unbiased, transparent, and respectful (Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tankebe, 2013; Bradford, 2024). In the policing setting, this implies that accountability, respectful treatment, voice, and neutrality have a greater influence over the formation of public trust than the brute enforcing ability. With reforms that enhance the interaction of officers with citizens and management of misconducts, legitimacy improves, resulting in the subsequent improvements in crime reporting, cooperation, and compliance (Goldsmith, 2005; Hassan, 2025). Operationalization of procedural justice is supposed to take place in the Malawi Police Service through reforms like community policing, increased visibility or accountability mechanisms. This is indicated by the high regression coefficient of the outcomes of police reform to enhance the people's perception, accountability and, responsiveness in improving public safety. This explains the procedural justice hypothesis that legitimacy is the primary channel where reforms result in security implications (Bradford, 2024; Melkamu and Teshome, 2023).

The Theory of Change (ToC)

The Theory of Change abbreviated (TOC) in social programs and management was pioneered in the 1990s by a sociologist called Carol Weiss. In one of her masterpiece in the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change, clear assumptions of how interventions could lead to long-term outcomes (Weiss, 1995). In other words, Weiss expressed the "Theory of Change" as a way to evaluate complex initiatives by mapping out the causal steps and conditions for success.

This theory is applied in this study because it goes hand in hand with procedural justice theory since it discusses how reforms produce outcomes. ToC assumes that results are attained when interventions are rationally linked to outputs, medium results and ultimate effects using a distinct causal route (Cheruiyot & Musembi, 2025). This translates to training,

community involvement, and accountability being rolled out at the same time and checked to create trust and reduction of crime in policing. This is evidenced by the fact that the actions taken to enhance the implementation of reforms were found to be statistically non-significant: the actions are present, but they are neither strategic, institutional, nor monitored. This validates the main argument of ToC that ad hoc or ill coordinated reforms can never make a measurable difference, despite their well intention. These two theories can be used to explain why the outcome is more important than the activities within the police reforms in Malawi: legitimacy (procedural justice) and strategic coherence ToC explain how public safety is generated.

Successful police reform in Malawi requires grounding reform efforts in ToC and Procedural Justice Theory to ensure both strategic alignment and legitimacy. These frameworks provide essential guidance for designing, implementing, and evaluating reforms that are not only operationally effective but also socially legitimate and contextually appropriate.

Research methodology

Research Design

The current research employed a case study research design within a single institution, the Malawi Police Service (MPS). The case study research design is well suited to creating an extensive and multidimensional understanding of intricate matters, like the effectiveness of police reforms on public security and safety, in a real-life setting (Rashid et al., 2019). Through its focus on the MPS, the research can probe the complex impact of reforms on responsiveness in operations, citizens' participation, accountability, and other outcomes of relevance.

Target Population

The population of interest for this study consisted of police officers who worked in various units and ranks in the Malawi Police Service as presented in Table 1. This included high-ranking officers and junior officers, to ensure wide representation of views on the application and effects of reforms. The interest in police officers as respondents is valid based on their firsthand experiences and work in the reform processes and public safety programs.

Table 1: The Demographic Variables of the Police Officers (Target Group)

Target Group	Number of Police Officers
Senior Officers	173
Junior	82
Total	255

Data Collection Instruments

The research used structured questionnaires as the main data collection tool. As noted by Paradis et al., (2016), research instruments play a role in collecting ordered data to solve a specified research issue. The questionnaire was prepared using closed-ended questions to obtain detailed information on the effectiveness of police reform implementation and what action was taken to enhance the livelihood of the citizenry that is perceived within the Malawi Police Service.

The items in the questionnaire were drawn from well-established instruments applied in prior public sector and policing research, subsequently adapted to match the aims of the current research specifically the ten salient reform outcome variables like operational responsiveness, community interaction, accountability, and public image to name just a few. This process of adaptation improved the instrument's reliability and validity for application in the Malawian policing environment.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were computed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were applied in summarizing the categories of respondents and their answers to the ten reform outcome variables. Results were tabulated and graphed to enable easy interpretation.

Inferential statistics were employed in analyzing relationships among variables and testing hypotheses of the study. Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the predictive influence of independent variables (Implementation of Police Reforms and Action towards enhancing reform implementation) on the dependent variable (efficiency of police reforms as evidenced by public safety and security results). Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed in examining the strength and direction of variable associations. Moreover, t-tests and ANOVA were applied to identify whether statistically significant differences existed in the responses due to categorical factors.

The regression model for analysis was defined as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Dependent variable (*Public Safety and Security Outcomes*)
- X_1 = Police Reforms outcomes in the Context of Malawi
- X_2 = Action to improve reform implementation.
- β_0 = Constant term
- β_{1-2} = Beta coefficients
- ε = Error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Results on police reform outcomes toward public safety and security.

Items	Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
1	My unit's ability to fight crime has not been improved by reforms that have been implemented.	2.91	1.46
2	Growth in trust has made more people to report crimes	3.22	1.51
3	Reforms have enhanced police response time	3.47	1.52
4	Interaction with the community has never been stronger.	3.67	1.48
5	More peace exists in my jurisdiction due to reform efforts.	2.93	1.43
6	There has been a measurable decline in violent crime since reforms were implemented.	3.38	1.39
7	Since the enactment of reform, police accountability has not been raised.	3.65	1.41
8	Over the last few years, the public perception of the police has improved.	3.85	1.40
9	There is no formal mechanism for the public to make comments.	4.07	1.30
10	The specific security goals of the reform efforts, in my view, are not being achieved.	4.12	1.36

The primary aim of this research was to identify the effectiveness of reforms and measures taken to enhance public security and safety. Respondents were then asked to state how much they agreed with some of the statements concerning police reform outcomes. The descriptive statistical analysis of the ten reform outcome variables in Table 2, presents a mixed picture of the perceived effects of police reforms on public security and safety in Malawi. Respondents tended to agree that reform has resulted in improvements in a number of important areas. Specifically, what is evident is that there is general consensus that public interaction with the police has strengthened (Mean = 3.67, SD = 1.48), and how the police are viewed by the public is positively perceived in recent years (Mean = 3.85, SD = 1.40). Moreover, the respondents reported that police response times are better now (Mean = 3.47, SD = 1.52) and that there has been a notable reduction in violent crime since reforms were implemented (Mean = 3.38, SD = 1.39).

Yet, the results also identify areas of persistent difficulty. Most of the interviewees said that there is still no systematized manner for feedback from the people (Mean = 4.07, SD = 1.30), and a major percentage feel that the focused security goals of the reform efforts are not being completely achieved (Mean = 4.12, SD = 1.36). Accountability concerns persist, as reflected in a comparatively high mean rating on the item indicating that police accountability has not been greater since reforms have been implemented (Mean = 3.65, SD = 1.41).

While others, like heightened reporting of crime (Mean = 3.22, SD = 1.51) and jurisdictions' perceived peace (Mean = 2.93, SD = 1.43), record moderate improvement, the mean for the item relating to increased unit capacity to fight crime continues below the middle point (Mean = 2.91, SD = 1.46), indicating that working improvements have not been equally felt across all units.

These findings reveal that although police reform in Malawi has seen gains in community outreach, public trust, and crime response, there remain persistent gaps in accountability, formal public input, and the realization of fundamental security goals. These areas will be critical to fill in order to affect the full potential of current and future reform efforts.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Action for enhancing reform implementation and Public Safety and Security

S/No	Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Police response to crime incidents in my community has increased	2.98	1.45
2	Violent crime in my community has noticeably decreased.	3.20	1.41
3	The public feels safer now because of continuous police reforms.	3.57	1.39
4	People are more inclined to report crimes because they have more confidence I the police	3.68	1.44
5	Police visibility and presence in the community have enhanced.	3.89	1.46
6	There is enhanced public satisfaction with how the police respond to security matters	2.96	1.42
7	Community residents actively assist police in security operations.	3.37	1.42
8	Public confidence in the police has increased over the last few years.	3.65	1.47
9	Today, the police are more responsible for what they do compared to the past.	3.85	1.46
10	There is more tranquility and stability within my area.	2.96	1.51

The descriptive statistics analysis of the important police reform outcome variables provides a rich insight into the perceived impact of recent reforms on public security and safety in Malawi. The mean scores for the majority of items in Table 3, point to positive or moderate perceptions of the outcomes of reforms, whereas the uniformly high standard deviations provide evidence of significant variation of experiences and views among respondents.

Respondents assessed the promptness of police reaction to criminal activity moderately (Mean = 2.98, SD = 1.45), while the decline in violent crime was also felt to be modest (Mean = 3.20, SD = 1.41). The standard deviations in this instance indicate a broad spectrum of experience and imply that although some areas are helped by responsive police and decreased violence, others have not experienced substantial changes.

There is a fairly optimistic view of the public being safer because of continuing police reforms (Mean = 3.57, SD = 1.39), and even more so that citizens are more inclined to report crimes because of greater confidence in the police (Mean = 3.68, SD = 1.44). Police visibility and high visibility in neighborhoods had the highest mean rating (Mean = 3.89, SD = 1.46), reflecting that this is one of the most universally acknowledged achievements of the reforms. The high standard deviations for these items, however, point to the fact that such improvements are not equally felt.

Public confidence in the way the police deal with security matters is still moderate (Mean = 2.96, SD = 1.42), and people's feelings of peace and stability in communities are equally rated (Mean = 2.96, SD = 1.51). Community participation in

security operations is more positive (Mean = 3.37, SD = 1.42), showing increasing, but by no means automatic, willingness to cooperate with the police.

Public confidence in the police has grown stronger in recent years (Mean = 3.65, SD = 1.47), and there are strong perceptions of police accountability (Mean = 3.85, SD = 1.46). What these results indicate is that reforms to increase transparency and oversight are being noticed by the public, although the variation in the responses once more indicates that these gains are not felt uniformly across the board.

The comparatively high standard deviations (from 1.39 to 1.51) in all variables highlight considerable diversity in the experience and perception of respondents. This variation indicates that although reforms have produced significant improvements in police visibility, trust, and accountability, these are not uniformly delivered across all communities or groups. There are a number of respondents who feel there is considerable progress, but others continue to be skeptical or have not personally felt the effects of positive reform.

The evidence indicates that police reforms in Malawi have contributed to significant improvements in police visibility, public trust, and accountability, as well as higher civic willingness to cooperate with law enforcers. However, there are still challenges in registering uniformly timely responses, decreasing violent crime, and increasing public satisfaction and perceived peace. These results highlight the importance of continuing to invest in implementing reforms, ongoing community participation, and the reinforcement of feedback and accountability structures to ensure that the progress achieved is locked in and extended to all communities.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of Public Safety and Security, Police Reform Outcomes, and Actions to Improve Reform Implementation

Variables	Public Safety and Security	Police Reform Outcomes	Actions to Improve Reform Implementation
Public Safety and Security	1.000		
Sig. (2-tailed)	—		
Police Reform Outcomes	0.841	1.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	—	
Actions to Improve Reform Implementation	-0.050	-0.014	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.423	0.824	—

The Pearson correlation analysis as demonstrated in Table 4, establishes correlations among public safety and the most important reform outcome indicators. Pearson correlation analysis indicates a positive relationship between public security and safety and police reform results ($r = 0.841$, $p < 0.01$), which shows that better police reform results are highly correlated with better public security and safety in Malawi. This is in line with recent studies on the Malawi Police Service, which have established that reforms aimed at operational responsiveness, community interaction, and accountability are key drivers of public trust and enhanced safety performance (Afrobarometer, 2022; Nyankalwa, 2024).

Conversely, the examination indicates that the relationship between efforts made to enhance the status quo and both security ($r = -0.050$, $p = 0.423$) and public safety, respectively, and police reform successes ($r = -0.014$, $p = 0.824$) is not statistically significant or strong. This implies that the particular activities being pursued to enhance the status quo at present e.g., ad hoc programs or individualized interventions might not be targeted or effective enough to yield quantifiable improvements in public safety or in the perceived effects of police reforms. It could also mean that the impact of such measures has not yet been felt or that they do not have the strategic clarity needed to bring about dramatic change (Cheruiyot & Musembi, 2025).

These findings highlight the need for overarching, well-coordinated police reform measures that are founded on evidence-based procedures and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. To the Malawi Police Service, it therefore implies that concerted efforts to consolidate reform results such as enhancing accountability mechanisms, community-police relations, and transparency are much more likely to result in concrete gains in public security and safety than sporadic or sporadic initiatives (Biwott, & Nyamwanya, 2023; Ibrahim, 2024; Nyankalwa, 2024). For the full potential of reforms to be achieved, it is critical that the Malawi Police Service institutionalizes strong monitoring and evaluation systems, advised in more current public sector performance writing (Cheruiyot & Musembi, 2025), and ensures reform efforts are aligned with their respective needs and expectations of their respective communities.

Multivariate regression was used to test the impact of police reform results and measures to enhance the status quo on public security and safety. The model yielded a high R value of .842, suggesting a high overall relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The R Square of .709 indicates that the total variance of 70.9% in public safety and security can be attributed to the summed impact of police reform results and measures intended to enhance the status quo. The adjusted R Square (.707) validates the strength of the model by considering the number of predictors used in the model. The estimate standard error (.76965) shows the mean distance that observed values deviate from the regression line. These findings highlight how strong the model is and imply police reform outcomes, in specific, are key determinants of public safety and security improvement perceptions.

Procedural Justice Theory and Theory of Change

The multivariate regression analysis showed that police reform results and efforts to better the status quo together account for 70.9% of the variation in public security and safety ($R^2 = .709$), and it has a good overall model fit ($R = .842$). From a Procedural Justice Theory point of view, the strong predictive ability of police reform results measures up to the theory's core assertion: where police are viewed as fair, accountable, and open in their procedures, cooperation and compliance from the public grow yielding improved safety results. Strongness of reform results as a predictor indicates that legitimacy, trust, and fairness in policing procedures are more significant than individualistic actions.

In the same way, from the Theory of Change perspective, the findings affirm that desired results (i.e., enhanced public safety) are produced not so much by the mere existence of reform activity but by intervening actions that are strategically directed and effectively executed. The less significant contribution of general improvement activities is in keeping with the argument that change is only actualized if inputs (reform activities) are rationally linked to outputs, outcomes, and impacts via a well-defined implementation process. These results support the need to craft reform strategies that balance both procedural fairness and outcome-based planning.

Table 5: Model Summary for Regression Analysis Predicting Public Safety and Security

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.842 ^a	.709	.707	.76965

a. Predictors: (Constant), Actions to improve the status quo, police reform outcomes

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) in Table 5, showed that the regression model for the prediction of public safety and security from police reform outcomes and activities to address the status quo was statistically significant, $F(2, 252) = 307.547$, $p < .001$. This means that, as a group, the independent variables collectively significantly explain variation in public safety and security. The model sum of squares ($SS = 364.357$) represents a large proportion of the total sum of squares ($SS = 513.631$), affirming that the model is adding significantly to non-random variation. The mean square for the model (182.178) is dramatically greater than the residual mean square (.592), again affirming the power of the model. These findings corroborate the conceptual appropriateness of organized reform efforts especially those rooted in procedural justice and theory of change to account for increases in public safety. The significant F-statistic validates that at least one of the predictors is significantly contributing to the model, necessitating further investigation of the individual beta coefficients.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	364.357	2	182.178	307.547	.000 ^b
Residual	149.274	252	.592		
Total	513.631	254			

a. Dependent Variable: public safety and security

b. Predictors: (Constant), Actions to improve status quo, Police reform outcomes

Table 6 captures the unique contribution of each predictor to the dependent variable, public safety and security. The findings in Table 6 further illustrates that police reform outcomes were significantly and strongly associated with public safety ($\beta = 0.841$, $p < .001$), having an unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.830$). The implication of this is that an increase in one unit of the quality or perception of police reform outcomes results in a corresponding rise in perceived public safety of around 0.83 units, all else equal. This result is consistent with the Theory of Procedural Justice, which focuses on the fact that fair and legitimate reforms increase institutional trust and security levels.

Conversely, efforts to reform the status quo were not statistically significant predictors ($B = -0.038$, $p = .256$), signifying that such efforts when not systematically congruent with reform outcomes have no significant effect on public safety. This supports the Theory of Change, which holds that change efforts should be strategically planned and contextually relevant to yield desired impacts. The constant term ($B = 0.570$, $p = .001$) is the predicted level of public safety where both predictors are at zero, though its practical significance is minimal. The model highlights that it is not the existence of action, but the efficacy of outcome-oriented reforms, which powerfully influence public safety within the context of police reform.

Table 7: Regression coefficients for outcomes and actions related to police reform

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.570	.168		3.398	.001
	Police reform outcomes	.830	.034	.841	24.757	.000
	Action to improve reform implementation	-.038	.034	-.039	-1.139	.256

a. Dependent Variable: public safety and security

Regression Equation:

$$Y = 0.570 + 0.830X_1 - 0.038X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Efficacy of police reforms toward public safety and security.
- X = Action to improve reform implementation.
- ε = Error term.

The regression results as presented in Table 7, indicate that efficacy police reform outcomes have a statistically significant and strong positive influence on public security and safety, and that efforts to better the status quo have a weak and non-significant influence, can meaningfully be explained through the frameworks of both the theory of procedural justice and the theory of change in the Malawi Police Service. Legitimacy and public trust in the police are established under the theory of procedural justice when reforms emphasize fairness, openness, and dignified treatment of the citizens. The high positive coefficient on the outcome of police reform indicates that as reforms become ingrained in procedures that are seen to be procedurally just, as in guaranteeing accountability, interaction with the community, and impartial policing, public safety and security are significantly enhanced. This is because citizens are more likely to work with and trust the police if they feel that the procedures are fair, which further improves crime reporting, compliance, and overall safety in the community.

From the theory of change view, the findings also reveal that not all interventions or activities are created equal. The statistically insignificant impact of generic interventions to better the status quo shows that single or weakly targeted efforts might not yield significant alterations in public safety. Rather, it is the consistent, planned, and effectively implemented reforms those that support both procedural justice values and an explicit theory of change that generate substantial gains. For the Malawi Police Service, this is particularly important in highlighting the need for the development of evidence-based, context-specific reforms that are regularly assessed for effectiveness. By integrating procedural justice into reform initiatives and through a systematic theory of change, the police service can assure that reform impacts are realized as actual improvements in public trust and safety, and not merely through ad hoc or cosmetic interventions. This line of reasoning is informed by current literature, stressing the importance of accountability, citizen engagement, and strong monitoring and evaluation in bringing about sustainable outcomes in police reform in Malawi ((Kumwenda, et al 2023).; Afrobarometer, 2022; Cheruiyot & Musembi, 2025).

Discussion

The results offer strong empirical evidence for both Procedural Justice Theory and the Theory of Change. The very strong positive correlation coefficient between police reform outcomes and public safety of $r = 0.841$, as well as the standardized regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.841$, affirm that the implementation of police reform, rather than having police reform programs per se, is of paramount importance.

The above gains made in the visibility, public perception, interaction, and crime reportage are reflected in the empirical findings in the African setting and across the world at large. These trends have also been reported in Ethiopia and Somalia, in which increased perceptions of fairness in policing, as well as performance, fostered greater public trust and cooperation (Melkamu & Teshome, 2023; Abdi & Hashi, 2024). The study in Malawi displays a similar trend that legitimacy approaches to reforms result in tangible improvements.

Even so, the fact that a lack of weak accountability, the lack of a formal feedback mechanism, and uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of security goals also being achieved exists in a manner consistent with other developing countries' police organizations suggests that the findings of other studies are consistent. As indicated by Magaloni (2024) and Mphidi and Pheiffer (2025) studies, a lack of effectiveness and a lack of community engagement often occur when there are issues pertaining to a lack of control over a lack of internal control and a lack of a lack of weak accountability. The mean value of "no formal feedback mechanisms" (4.07) and "security goals not achieved" (4.12) indicate that a lack of effectiveness of reforms.

The non-significant effect of actions that focus on enhancing the process of reform implementation is also significant. The implication is that reform activities are still not integrated into usual institutional behavior, and this corresponds with Cheruiyot and Musembi (2025) that reforms are not capable of transforming input into outcomes when they are not monitored and coordinated. The impact explains why police presence has increased but the reduction of violent crimes and satisfaction are not uniform.

In general, the reform efforts within the Malawian police forces can be said to have been successful in enhancing legitimacy and participation rather than institutionalization. This follows the observations by Skogan (2022) and Mutupha and Zhu (2022), which suggest that decline happens when community policing and reforms receive poor feedback and do not include mechanisms of accountability.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between reform implementation and police reform and the grasp of security within the Malawi Police Service, and the inputs and processes of reform implementation, based on Procedural Justice Theory and Theory of Change, which were used to interpret the relationship between security and the processes of legitimacy and accountability. The results clearly show the effective police reform on both perceived and tangible security, which accounted for the variance of more than 70 percent of public security, and improved public cooperation and crime reporting, which proved the direct relationship between security and the processes of legitimacy of policing practices in Malawi.

On the other hand, the analysis also brought to the surface an important weakness on the institutional dimension. Though reform activities do exist, efforts towards improving reform implementation were not found to be statistically significant. This shows that reforms tend to be implemented on a project-based or piece-meal fashion that is not properly coordinated or monitored. As such, the reform potential towards achieving security excellence is not allowed to reach its full potential. The study, therefore, highlights the need for the Malawi Police Service to move from isolated reform to institutionalized reform processes. Inculcating justice in operations, together with community engagement, within the operations of the Malawi Police Service, will be crucial in yielding long-term results in enhancing citizen security and trust. Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods research designs to investigate the dynamics of change resulting from the impact of reform. Both citizen and policing data would provide a more complete view of the relationship between legitimacy and security. In general, the evidence indicates that police reform in Malawi can contribute to improved public security, although it will be successful only if it occurs in a just and accountable way.

Informed consent: All the participants were given informed consent to allow them to participate in this study before the data collection in Malawi. The respondents of the survey were all adults. The introductory part of the questionnaire included consent, which had the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of participation and the ability to withdraw at any time without implication. The participants had to respond to willingness to take part in the survey. In this research, there were no minors involved.

Ethical Approval: The study was conducted under the formal permission of the relevant authorities in the police service of Malawi before it was conducted. The study entailed the use of an anonymous survey given to the adult population only. As per the research ethic policy of Sharda University, the non-invasive social science research that requires non-invasive methods and involves answering anonymous questionnaires with minimal risks does not need formal Institutional Review Board approval. The research was conducted following the ethics rules of institutional research and the global principles of research with human participants. No names or personal identifiers were gathered by the questionnaire. The engagement was voluntary, and all the data were analyzed in aggregation form to provide confidentiality and anonymity.

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Data Availability Statement: The supporting data used in the findings of this study can be availed by the respective author on reasonable request.

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