

Strategic Leadership and Incident Response Time Among Law Enforcement Agencies in Juba City, South Sudan

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the dynamics of strategic leadership on incident response time among law enforcement agencies in Juba City, South Sudan. The contention of the article is that incident response time is widely recognized as a critical indicator of law enforcement effectiveness, particularly within fragile and post-conflict contexts where institutional capacity and public trust remain limited. In South Sudan, persistent insecurity and weak governance structures have heightened the demand for timely and effective law enforcement responses, especially in urban centers such as Juba City. This paper examines the influence of strategic leadership on incident response time among law enforcement agencies in Juba City, South Sudan. Anchored in strategic leadership theory and the organizational performance literature, the study posits that leadership practices including strategic planning, coordination, resource allocation, and decision-making play a decisive role in shaping operational responsiveness. Employing an exploratory qualitative approach informed by a review of relevant empirical studies and contextual evidence, the paper finds that deficiencies in strategic leadership contribute to delayed response times, fragmented operations, and ineffective interagency coordination. Conversely, effective strategic leadership is associated with improved preparedness, clearer command structures, and enhanced operational agility. The study concludes that leadership-centered reforms are essential for strengthening incident response capabilities, improving public safety, and rebuilding public trust in law enforcement institutions in South Sudan.

Keywords: Strategic leadership; Incident response time; Law enforcement effectiveness; Post-conflict policing; South Sudan

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Introduction

Law enforcement agencies in South Sudan operate within an exceptionally volatile and multifaceted security environment characterized by prolonged political instability, recurrent armed conflict, fragile governance structures, and chronic resource constraints. Since the country gained independence in 2011, efforts to consolidate state authority have been repeatedly undermined by internal political rivalries and episodes of large-scale violence, resulting in weak institutional foundations and uneven law enforcement capacity across the country (de Waal, 2014; Johnson, 2016). These challenges are particularly pronounced in urban centers, most notably Juba City, where the concentration of political power, economic activity, and population density amplifies security risks. As the national capital, Juba frequently experiences a complex mix of violent crime, civil unrest, intercommunal tensions, and politically motivated violence, placing extraordinary and sustained pressure on law enforcement agencies to respond swiftly, decisively, and effectively to security incidents.

Within such fragile and high-risk contexts, the ability of law enforcement agencies to respond promptly to incidents is a critical determinant of overall effectiveness. Timely police response is widely recognized as a key indicator of law enforcement performance, with direct implications for crime deterrence, civilian protection, and the reinforcement of public confidence in state authority (Bayley, 2006; Skogan, 2008). In environments marked by weak institutions and limited public trust, delayed or inadequate police intervention can rapidly escalate localized incidents into broader violence, further undermining perceptions of state legitimacy. Empirical evidence from South Sudan indicates that police response times are often inconsistent and, in many cases, unacceptably prolonged, thereby weakening both operational outcomes and institutional credibility (Mayor, Mwangi, & Murenga, 2022). While these delays are frequently attributed to logistical challenges such as inadequate transport, poor road networks, and unreliable communication systems, growing evidence suggests that structural and leadership-related factors play an equally, if not more, significant role.

Strategic leadership has increasingly been identified in the literature as a central driver of organizational performance within public sector institutions, including law enforcement agencies operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Strategic leaders shape how organizations interpret security threats, prioritize competing demands, allocate scarce resources, and coordinate responses under conditions of uncertainty and pressure (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). In policing contexts, effective strategic leadership is closely linked to operational readiness, clarity of command structures, rapid decision-making, and effective interagency coordination during emergencies. In South Sudan, however, leadership structures within law enforcement agencies remain weak and fragmented, often characterized by unclear authority lines, limited strategic planning, and poor coordination across units. These leadership deficiencies have been directly associated with slow incident response, ineffective deployment of personnel, and breakdowns in command and control during critical incidents

(Ekidor, Wekesa, & Kiprono, 2025). This pattern suggests that response inefficiencies in South Sudan are not solely a function of material capacity constraints but are fundamentally shaped by shortcomings in strategic leadership and institutional governance.

Statement of the Problem

Timely incident response is a fundamental measure of law enforcement effectiveness, yet law enforcement agencies in Juba City, South Sudan, continue to experience persistent delays in responding to security incidents. While these delays are often attributed to logistical and resource constraints, growing evidence suggests that weaknesses in strategic leadership such as poor planning, unclear command structures, and ineffective coordination, play a significant but underexamined role. Existing studies on policing in South Sudan have largely emphasized capacity limitations, with limited attention to how strategic leadership influences operational performance outcomes like response time. This gap constrains both theoretical understanding and practical reform efforts. Examining the influence of strategic leadership on incident response time is therefore essential for informing leadership-centered reforms aimed at improving law enforcement responsiveness and public safety in South Sudan

Review of Related Literature

Strategic leadership is broadly defined as the ability of senior leaders to set direction, align organizational resources, and foster adaptability in response to complex and uncertain environments (Ireland & Hitt, 2005; Rowe, 2001). Unlike operational leadership, which focuses on routine management tasks, strategic leadership emphasizes long-term vision, institutional coherence, and the capacity to respond effectively to crises. In law enforcement organizations, strategic leadership shapes operational readiness through policy formulation, command structures, and the design of response protocols (Shane, 2010).

Extant literature demonstrates a strong relationship between leadership effectiveness and police response time. Studies in both developed and developing contexts show that agencies characterized by clear leadership vision, decentralized authority, and robust communication systems respond more quickly and effectively to incidents (Skogan & Hartnett, 2005; Shane, 2010). Strategic leaders facilitate faster responses by empowering frontline commanders, promoting intelligence-led policing, and integrating technology into decision-making processes (Ratcliffe, 2016). Conversely, rigid hierarchical systems that concentrate decision-making at the top often delay responses, particularly during emergencies that require rapid situational judgment (Mastrofski & Willis, 2010).

In fragile and post-conflict states, leadership challenges are further exacerbated by institutional fragmentation, limited infrastructure, and ambiguous legal mandates. Security sector reform literature emphasizes that without strong strategic leadership, policing institutions in post-conflict societies tend to remain reactive, poorly coordinated, and susceptible to political interference (OECD, 2011; Donais, 2018). In the South Sudanese context, studies highlight weak interagency coordination, overlapping responsibilities, and inconsistent command structures as persistent obstacles to effective incident response (Mayor et al., 2022).

Ekidor et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that strategic leadership deficiencies rather than staffing levels alone significantly undermine operational performance in South Sudanese law enforcement agencies. Their findings suggest that ineffective planning, poor

communication, and lack of accountability mechanisms contribute directly to delayed response times and reduced public trust. These observations align with broader organizational theory, which posits that leadership quality mediates the relationship between resource availability and performance outcomes (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Ireland & Hitt, 2005). Collectively, the literature underscores that in contexts such as Juba City, improving incident response time requires more than material investments. It necessitates strengthening strategic leadership capacity to enhance coordination, decision-making, and organizational adaptability within law enforcement agencies.

Methods

This study employs an exploratory qualitative research design grounded in secondary data analysis and contextual interpretation. This approach is appropriate for examining strategic leadership dynamics and their influence on incident response in contexts where reliable quantitative data on response times is limited or inconsistently recorded. Data were drawn from peer-reviewed scholarly literature on strategic leadership and policing, policy and institutional reports on law enforcement and security sector reforms in South Sudan, and documented case studies addressing operational performance in Juba City. The analysis is informed by strategic leadership theory, with particular emphasis on how leadership practices shape planning, coordination, decision-making, and resource deployment in law enforcement incident response.

Findings

The analysis indicates that strategic leadership exerts a substantial influence on incident response time among law enforcement agencies in Juba City through several interrelated mechanisms. First, operational coordination emerges as a critical factor shaped by leadership quality. Where strategic leadership is weak or fragmented, coordination between central command structures and frontline officers is often ineffective. This results in delays in mobilization, unclear communication during incidents, and duplication or misdirection of effort. In contrast, agencies guided by coherent leadership frameworks tend to exhibit clearer lines of command and more efficient information flow, enabling quicker deployment to incident scenes.

Second, decision-making structures within law enforcement agencies significantly affect response time. Highly centralized command systems, common in South Sudan's security institutions, require multiple layers of approval before action can be taken. During emergencies that demand rapid intervention, such bureaucratic processes delay operational responses and reduce effectiveness. Strategic leaders who decentralize authority and empower field commanders facilitate faster situational assessments and more timely interventions.

Third, resource deployment is directly influenced by leadership priorities and strategic planning. Decisions regarding patrol distribution, availability of vehicles, and functionality of communication systems are leadership-driven and determine how swiftly officers can respond to incidents. In Juba City, inadequate leadership oversight often leads to uneven patrol coverage, poor vehicle maintenance, and unreliable communication channels, all of which contribute to delayed response times. Conversely, strategic leaders who optimize

limited resources through targeted deployment and logistical planning are better positioned to enhance response efficiency despite systemic constraints.

Finally, preparedness and planning play a central role in shaping response patterns. Agencies that lack comprehensive strategic planning frameworks tend to operate reactively, responding to incidents only after escalation has occurred. This reactive posture increases delays and limits the effectiveness of interventions. Strategic leadership that emphasizes preparedness through contingency planning, routine briefings, and scenario-based readiness enhances institutional capacity to anticipate incidents and respond promptly.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that where leadership is more strategic, characterized by clear command structures, proactive planning, and heightened situational awareness, law enforcement agencies in Juba City exhibit relatively improved incident response times, even within a resource-constrained and unstable operating environment.

Discussion

The findings of this study strongly reinforce strategic leadership theory by demonstrating that leadership quality is a decisive determinant of operational outcomes in law enforcement organizations. Across policing contexts globally, leadership has been shown to shape how institutions translate resources, policies, and personnel into effective action, particularly during high-pressure incidents (Rowe, 2001; Ireland & Hitt, 2005). In Juba City, deficiencies in strategic leadership amplify pre-existing structural constraints such as weak infrastructure, limited mobility, and inadequate communication technology. Rather than mitigating these challenges, poor leadership often compounds them by failing to prioritize coordination, preparedness, and adaptive decision-making.

Comparative policing literature illustrates that strategic leaders play a critical role in enhancing organizational agility the ability of law enforcement agencies to respond rapidly and effectively to unpredictable incidents. Studies from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia demonstrate that leaders who emphasize preparedness planning, scenario-based training, and decentralized command structures significantly improve response times and incident outcomes (Skogan & Hartnett, 2005; Mastrofski & Willis, 2010; Alpert & Dunham, 2012). These leadership practices enable frontline officers to act decisively without waiting for prolonged authorization, a factor especially critical during emergencies.

Decentralization of authority during incidents is widely recognized as a hallmark of effective strategic leadership in policing. Research in crisis management and emergency response consistently shows that rigid, centralized command systems delay action and reduce situational responsiveness (Comfort, 2007; Boin, 't Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2016). In contrast, strategic leaders who delegate decision-making authority to field commanders foster faster, context-sensitive responses. The findings from Juba City mirror this global evidence, as centralized decision-making structures have been identified as a key source of response delays.

Interagency collaboration is another dimension through which strategic leadership enhances operational performance. International studies highlight that crime and emergency incidents increasingly require coordinated responses involving police, military, emergency medical services, and local authorities (Fyfe, Gundhus, & Rønn, 2018). Strategic leaders facilitate such coordination by establishing shared protocols, communication channels, and

joint operational frameworks. In fragile and post-conflict states, where institutional mandates often overlap, the absence of such leadership results in fragmented responses and operational confusion (Donais, 2018). The situation in South Sudan reflects this pattern, with weak leadership contributing to poor coordination among security actors in Juba City.

Leadership quality also has important implications for public trust and legitimacy. Policing scholarship emphasizes that timely and effective responses to incidents are central to public perceptions of police competence and fairness (Tyler, 2006; Tankebe, 2013). When leadership failures result in delayed or ineffective responses, public confidence erodes, further undermining cooperation and intelligence sharing. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in South Sudan, where historical conflict and state fragility have already weakened trust in public institutions.

Importantly, the South Sudanese context underscores a critical insight from global public administration literature: leadership reforms can produce meaningful performance improvements even in low-resource environments. Studies from sub-Saharan Africa and other developing regions demonstrate that strategic leadership through better planning, coordination, and accountability can offset material shortages and improve service delivery outcomes (Grindle, 2012; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). The findings from Juba City align with this perspective, suggesting that strengthening strategic leadership capacity offers a viable pathway to improving incident response efficiency despite persistent resource constraints.

The discussion situates the Juba City experience within a broader global body of evidence that identifies strategic leadership as a catalyst for law enforcement effectiveness. By shaping preparedness, decision-making, coordination, and public trust, leadership quality emerges not as a peripheral factor but as a central driver of operational performance in policing systems worldwide.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that strategic leadership is a decisive and indispensable factor in shaping incident response time among law enforcement agencies in Juba City, South Sudan. Although structural challenges such as limited infrastructure, inadequate technology, and resource shortages continue to constrain police operations, the evidence demonstrates that leadership practices significantly mediate how these constraints affect operational outcomes. Strategic leaders influence the speed and effectiveness of responses through their decisions on coordination, delegation of authority, preparedness, and resource deployment.

The findings underscore that weaknesses in leadership exacerbate existing systemic limitations, resulting in delayed responses, fragmented operations, and diminished institutional legitimacy. Conversely, where leadership is proactive, adaptive, and strategically oriented, law enforcement agencies are better able to compensate for resource deficits and respond more effectively to incidents. This highlights that leadership is not merely an administrative function but a core operational determinant in fragile and post-conflict policing environments.

Strengthening strategic leadership capacity is therefore essential for improving law enforcement performance in Juba City. Investment in leadership development, strategic planning, and command reform has the potential to enhance response efficiency, improve public safety outcomes, and restore public confidence in law enforcement institutions. In the

context of South Sudan's broader state-building and security sector reform efforts, strategic leadership emerges as a critical lever for sustainable improvement in policing effectiveness.

Recommendations

Law enforcement agencies in Juba City should prioritize the implementation of structured strategic leadership development programs targeting senior and mid-level officers. Such programs should focus on strategic thinking, crisis management, coordination, and ethical leadership to enhance leaders' capacity to guide operations in complex and high-risk environments. Strengthening leadership competencies at multiple levels will improve command effectiveness and operational coherence during incident response.

To reduce delays in emergency situations, law enforcement institutions should adopt decentralized response protocols that delegate decision-making authority to frontline commanders. Empowering officers closest to the incident scene enables faster situational assessment and timely action, minimizing bureaucratic bottlenecks associated with highly centralized command systems while maintaining accountability through clear operational guidelines.

Improving incident response time requires stronger interagency coordination among police units, security forces, emergency services, and relevant local authorities. Establishing integrated command systems supported by joint response frameworks and shared communication platforms would enhance information flow, reduce duplication of effort, and enable synchronized responses to complex security incidents in Juba City.

Law enforcement agencies should institutionalize data-driven strategic planning and regular performance evaluation mechanisms focused on incident response. Systematic collection and analysis of response-time data, after-action reviews, and continuous assessment of leadership decisions will support evidence-based improvements, promote organizational learning, and strengthen accountability within law enforcement institutions.

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