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CAUGHT BETWEEN POWER AND ORDER: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS UNDER POLITICAL INFLUENCE DURING ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL LUZON

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of law enforcement officers operating under political influence during electoral activities in Central Luzon. Specifically, it examined the nature and forms of political influence encountered by law enforcement officers, the effects of political pressure and accountability mechanisms on their professional and personal lives, the challenges and ethical dilemmas they experienced, and the coping strategies they employed to maintain professionalism, accountability, and political neutrality during election periods.

The study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with selected Philippine National Police (PNP) officers who had direct experience in election-related operations within Central Luzon. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify essential themes that described the participants' lived experiences.

The findings revealed that political influence was commonly manifested through indirect political pressure, personal relationships with political actors, intervention in police operations, and expectations associated with electoral activities. Based on the findings, the study developed the Police Neutrality and Accountability Enhancement Program (PNAEP) as an intervention designed to strengthen ethical decision-making, accountability, resilience, leadership, and professionalism among law enforcement officers during electoral activities.

KEYWORDS: *Political Influence, Electoral Activities, Law Enforcement Officers, Phenomenology, Accountability Mechanisms, Political Neutrality, Election Security.*

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement institutions are central to maintaining peace, protecting public safety, and upholding the rule of law in democratic societies. Their effectiveness depends not only on operational capacity but also on professionalism, impartiality, accountability, and public trust. However, policing does not occur in isolation from the political environment in which it operates. Political leadership, power relations, and electoral competition may influence law enforcement priorities, resource allocation, and operational decision-making, creating challenges for officers expected to perform their duties independently and fairly (Bayley, 2006; Bradford & Jackson, 2020). These challenges become particularly pronounced during election periods, when the need to maintain public order intersects with competing political interests and heightened security concerns.

Election-related policing places officers in situations that require them to balance competing demands while remaining faithful to their legal mandates and professional responsibilities. Political pressure, expectations from influential individuals, and the potential consequences of enforcement decisions may create ethical dilemmas and role conflicts. These circumstances raise important questions about police discretion, institutional independence, and accountability. Although democratic policing emphasizes political neutrality and equal enforcement of the law, the practical exercise of these principles may become difficult in politically sensitive environments. Understanding how officers navigate these circumstances is therefore essential to examining the relationship between political influence and professional policing.

Internationally, the importance of impartial and accountable law enforcement is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (United Nations, 2023). International governance frameworks likewise emphasize the need for professional policing that respects human rights and operates within the rule of law (OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2023). Nevertheless, political interference remains a concern in democratic and developing contexts, where informal directives, patronage relationships, and selective enforcement may affect police discretion and operational priorities. When officers perceive that political considerations influence enforcement decisions, their professional judgment and confidence in institutional accountability may be challenged, with potential consequences for public trust and institutional legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2023; Terrill et al., 2024). While existing scholarship has contributed to understanding the institutional and governance dimensions of political influence, further attention is needed to the experiences of frontline officers who encounter these pressures in their everyday work.

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In the Philippines, these concerns are particularly relevant because law enforcement operates within a decentralized governance structure in which local government officials participate in peace and order coordination. Local chief executives work with police units through local peace and order councils and related mechanisms intended to strengthen public safety and interagency cooperation. Although these arrangements support locally responsive governance, they also create a context in which political relationships and local power structures may intersect with policing priorities and operational decisions (Batalla & Parrado, 2021; Quimpo, 2022). The Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 underscores the importance of strengthening justice institutions, improving public accountability, and enhancing the capacity of the security sector to maintain peace and protect citizens' rights (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2023). Achieving these objectives requires not only institutional reforms but also a clearer understanding of the circumstances under which law enforcement personnel perform their duties and uphold professional standards.

Election periods intensify these governance challenges. Police officers are expected to enforce election laws, respond to threats and disturbances, and maintain peace and order while demonstrating neutrality toward candidates, political parties, and their supporters. In politically competitive settings, these responsibilities may expose officers to conflicting expectations, scrutiny from political actors, and difficult decisions regarding the exercise of police authority. The challenge is not simply whether election laws are enforced but also how officers interpret their responsibilities, respond to external pressures, and preserve professional integrity in situations where political interests and public safety concerns intersect. Consequently, examining the experiences of officers during election-related operations may provide insights that cannot be captured fully through crime statistics, arrest records, or institutional performance indicators alone.

These concerns are significant in Central Luzon, particularly in Nueva Ecija, where active local political competition and election-related security demands provide an important context for examining the relationship between political dynamics and policing. The region's electoral environment requires law enforcement personnel to monitor campaign activities, enforce election regulations, respond to political disputes, and protect communities from violence and intimidation. The reported confrontation involving the security escorts of rival mayoral candidates in Nueva Ecija during the 2022 national and local elections, which resulted in injuries and arrests, illustrates the potential for political competition to escalate into situations requiring immediate police intervention. Such incidents highlight the operational complexity of election security, where officers must respond decisively to threats while maintaining impartiality and adhering to legal procedures. These demands underscore the importance of understanding how officers manage their professional responsibilities in politically sensitive environments.

Despite the importance of these issues, research on policing and political influence has often emphasized institutional arrangements, crime trends, election-related incidents, and governance outcomes. Although these perspectives are valuable, they provide limited insight into how frontline law enforcement officers personally experience political pressure, interpret expectations from political actors, and make decisions when their professional obligations intersect with local political interests. This limitation is particularly relevant at the provincial level, where political relationships and community dynamics may shape the conditions under which policing is performed. A closer examination of officers' accounts can help explain how political influence is perceived and negotiated in practice, including the challenges it may pose to professional discretion, accountability, and public service.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the lived experiences of law enforcement officers in Nueva Ecija, Central Luzon, concerning political influence and pressure in the performance of their duties, particularly during election periods. By focusing on officers' perspectives, the study seeks to deepen understanding of the ways political dynamics intersect with operational responsibilities, ethical judgment, and institutional accountability. Its findings may inform discussions on police professionalism, strengthen mechanisms that protect impartial law enforcement, and contribute to policies and practices that support officers in politically sensitive assignments. Ultimately, understanding these experiences is important to promoting policing that remains responsive to public safety needs while upholding the principles of neutrality, integrity, and the rule of law.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily anchored in **Democratic Policing Theory**, which serves as the main theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between political influence and law enforcement practices. Democratic Policing Theory emphasizes that police institutions must operate with neutrality, professionalism, accountability, and respect for the rule of law while serving the public interest. Within democratic societies, law enforcement agencies are expected to remain independent from partisan political influence in order to maintain legitimacy, public trust, and institutional integrity. The theory further explains that police officers must balance public expectations, legal mandates, and ethical standards, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as elections (Bradford & Jackson, 2020; Jackson et al., 2022). In the context of this study, Democratic Policing Theory provides a lens for examining how law enforcement officers in Central Luzon navigate competing expectations from political leaders, and institutional regulations while attempting to maintain professional neutrality and ethical decision-making.

Supporting this main theoretical lens is Accountability Theory, which explains how power is exercised, monitored, and constrained within governance systems. Accountability Theory highlights the roles of formal oversight mechanisms, legal structures, and informal social expectations in regulating institutional behavior. Within policing institutions, accountability mechanisms include legal mandates, internal disciplinary procedures, external oversight bodies, and community scrutiny. However, scholars note that these mechanisms may be influenced by political dynamics, particularly within decentralized governance systems (Bottoms, Tankebe, & Liebling, 2021). In this study, Accountability Theory helps explain how local political leadership, election-related pressures, and governance structures shape law

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enforcement officers' discretion, operational decisions, and coping strategies while performing their duties.

In addition, the study is informed by Phenomenological Philosophy, which provides the philosophical foundation for understanding lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge. Rooted in the works of Husserl and later phenomenological scholars, this perspective emphasizes that human experiences and interpretations offer meaningful insights into social phenomena. Within the context of this research, phenomenology supports the exploration of how law enforcement officers interpret political influence, ethical dilemmas, and professional challenges encountered during electoral activities. By focusing on the lived experiences of officers, this philosophical perspective allows the study to capture the personal meanings, interpretations, and coping mechanisms that emerge from their interactions with political leadership and institutional accountability systems (Laraga et al., 2025; Sun, Wu, & Hu, 2024).

Taken together, Democratic Policing Theory provides the central framework for understanding the expectations of neutrality and professionalism in policing, Accountability Theory explains the governance mechanisms that shape officer behavior, and Phenomenological Philosophy supports the exploration of officers' lived experiences within politically influenced environments. These theoretical perspectives collectively guide the analysis of how political leadership, accountability mechanisms, and electoral activities influence the professional realities of law enforcement officers in Central Luzon.

Statement of the Problem

This study explores the lived experiences of law enforcement officers in Central Luzon as they navigate the influence of political leadership, accountability mechanisms, and electoral activities in crime prevention and control.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do law enforcement officers describe the nature and forms of political influence they encounter during electoral activities?
2. How do political influence and accountability mechanisms impact the professional and personal lives of informants in maintaining peace and order?
3. What challenges and ethical dilemmas do informants encounter relating to political influence during electoral periods?
4. In what ways do informants cope with or resist the effects of political influence and heightened crime activities during election seasons?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of law enforcement officers concerning political influence during electoral activities in Central Luzon, Philippines. Descriptive phenomenology was appropriate because it focused on understanding participants' firsthand experiences and the meanings they attached to them (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher practiced bracketing to minimize the influence of personal assumptions during data collection and analysis.

Research Participants and Sampling. The study involved 20 law enforcement officers from Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, and Aurora. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevant experience in election-related law enforcement activities (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Eligible participants were active PNP members assigned in Central Luzon or retired officers with previous service in the region, at least three years of law enforcement experience, and direct involvement in election security, patrol, investigation, intelligence, or command operations. Participation was voluntary and required informed consent. Officers assigned to VIP security duties were excluded.

Research Instrument and Data Collection. Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide based on relevant literature, election laws, institutional guidelines, and the study's research questions. Three experts in qualitative research, criminology and law enforcement, and governance and public administration validated the instrument for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

In-depth interviews explored participants' experiences of political influence, professional responsibilities, ethical dilemmas, and accountability during electoral activities. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the process.

Data Analysis. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) Seven-Step Phenomenological Method: (1) familiarization with the transcripts; (2) extraction of significant statements; (3) formulation of meanings; (4) organization of meanings into thematic clusters; (5) development of an exhaustive description; (6) identification of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; and (7) validation of findings through member checking. These steps enabled the researcher to identify recurring themes and describe the essential meanings of participants' experiences.

Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was supported through probing questions and member checking; dependability through systematic documentation of research procedures; confirmability through analytical records and reflexivity; and transferability through detailed descriptions of the participants and research context.

Ethical Considerations. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed of their rights, including their freedom to decline questions or withdraw without penalty. Anonymity was protected through participant codes or pseudonyms, and recordings and transcripts were stored securely with access restricted to the researcher. Data were used solely for research purposes and reported accurately. Interviews were conducted respectfully, with particular attention to the sensitivity of political influence within law enforcement institutions.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Using Colaizzi's (1978) Seven-Step Phenomenological Method, significant statements were extracted from the interview transcripts, meanings were formulated, and themes were generated to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. The findings are discussed in relation to Democratic Policing Theory, Accountability Theory, relevant literature, laws, and related studies.

Twenty (20) law enforcement officers from Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, and Aurora participated in the study. To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified using informant codes. The findings are presented thematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' shared experiences regarding political influence, accountability mechanisms, ethical challenges, and coping strategies during electoral activities.

Nature and Forms of Political Influence During Electoral Activities

Theme 1: Indirect Political Pressure. Participants described political influence as subtle suggestions, informal requests, and social expectations rather than direct orders. Informant 2 referred to "subtle suggestions, expectations, or social pressure," while others reported requests for information, increased police visibility, and preferential attention to politically connected individuals. These experiences required officers to distinguish legitimate public safety concerns from attempts to influence police decisions. Participants emphasized that adherence to election laws, operational procedures, and professional ethics helped them maintain political neutrality. The findings support Democratic Policing Theory and Accountability Theory, which emphasize police independence, impartiality, and institutional safeguards against undue influence.

Theme 2: Operational Intervention. Participants reported attempts by political personalities to influence police operations through recommendations regarding personnel assignments, deployment schedules, and security coverage during campaign activities. Informant 16 noted that political actors occasionally made recommendations concerning police operations. Although some requests addressed legitimate security concerns, officers recognized the risk of political favoritism. They emphasized basing operational decisions on intelligence assessments, risk analyses, and established protocols rather than political preferences. These findings highlight the importance of operational independence and accountability in preserving fairness and public confidence during elections.

Theme 3: Information-Seeking Behavior. Participants reported that politically connected individuals sometimes sought confidential information about investigations and police activities. Officers described repeated inquiries and requests for case updates, particularly during election periods. They emphasized that protecting sensitive information was essential to preventing political advantage and maintaining public trust. Documentation, chain-of-command procedures, and established confidentiality protocols helped them manage these requests. The findings underscore the importance of political neutrality, accountability, and information security, consistent with Democratic Policing Theory and Accountability Theory. They also highlight the relevance of applicable PNP operational procedures, Republic Acts Nos. 6975 and 8551, and the PNP Code of Ethical and Professional Standards in safeguarding professional integrity and confidential information.

Theme 4: Material Political Influence. Participants described attempts to influence police officers through gifts, food, or other favors. Informant 14 from Bulacan shared, "Some tried to bribe us by giving food, but they did not succeed." Although these gestures were sometimes presented as simple acts of hospitality, participants recognized that accepting them could create conflicts of interest and perceptions of political favoritism. Their refusal to accept inappropriate gifts reflected their commitment to professionalism, integrity, and political neutrality. The findings reinforce the importance of ethical conduct under Republic Act No. 6713 and applicable PNP ethical standards, emphasizing that police decisions must remain free from personal gain and political considerations.

Theme 5: Deployment and Security Influence. Participants reported requests from political actors for increased police visibility, additional security personnel, and deployment adjustments during campaign activities. Informant 10 from Tarlac identified deployment, visibility operations, and security coverage as common areas of political influence. Although some requests addressed legitimate safety concerns, others raised concerns about political advantage and unequal treatment. Participants emphasized that deployment decisions should be guided by intelligence reports, risk assessments, and established election security protocols rather than political preferences. These findings highlight the importance of evidence-based operational planning, transparency, and institutional accountability in preserving police neutrality and public trust during elections.

Synthesis of Findings. The findings revealed five forms of political influence experienced by law enforcement officers during electoral activities: indirect political pressure, operational intervention, information-seeking behavior, material political influence, and deployment and security influence. These influences generally occurred through informal requests, personal relationships, recommendations, and attempts to obtain information or preferential security arrangements rather than explicit commands.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized the importance of maintaining political neutrality through compliance with election laws, established operational procedures, confidentiality requirements, proper documentation, and professional ethical standards. Their accounts suggest that sound professional judgment and institutional safeguards help officers distinguish legitimate coordination from inappropriate political interference.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of ethical leadership, transparent operational procedures, and effective accountability mechanisms in protecting police independence during electoral activities. Consistent with Democratic Policing Theory and Accountability Theory, the participants' experiences demonstrate that professional integrity and institutional oversight are essential to ensuring impartial law enforcement and sustaining public trust in politically sensitive environments.

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Effects of Political Influence and Accountability Mechanisms

Theme 1: Heightened Professional Responsibility. Participants reported that election periods increased their professional responsibilities because police actions were closely scrutinized by political groups, the public, and the media. Informant 2 noted that political pressure made police work more complex, requiring greater caution, objectivity, and professionalism. Officers also described longer working hours, increased documentation, and greater accountability. These findings suggest that political scrutiny reinforces the importance of lawful conduct, sound judgment, and adherence to established procedures. Consistent with Democratic Policing Theory, heightened professional responsibility serves as an important means of preserving police neutrality, integrity, and public trust during electoral activities.

Theme 2: Institutional Accountability. Participants viewed accountability mechanisms as essential safeguards against political interference. Informant 16 emphasized that these mechanisms ensure lawful, transparent, and policy-compliant police operations. Operational reports, documentation, supervisory reviews, and command inspections helped officers justify their decisions and demonstrate impartiality. The findings indicate that institutional accountability provides both organizational oversight and protection for officers who perform their duties professionally. Consistent with Accountability Theory, transparent procedures and effective supervision strengthen institutional credibility, responsible decision-making, and public confidence in law enforcement during elections.

Theme 3: Psychological and Emotional Stress. Participants described election-related assignments as psychologically and emotionally demanding because of constant scrutiny, fear of accusations of bias, extended working hours, and increased workloads. Informant 9 explained that politically sensitive assignments created considerable mental and emotional strain. These pressures required officers to maintain composure and objectivity despite fatigue and public criticism. The findings indicate that political scrutiny affects not only operational performance but also officers' well-being and job satisfaction. They highlight the importance of psychological resilience, organizational support, mental health services, and stress-management programs to help officers maintain professionalism and impartiality during electoral operations.

Theme 4: Impact on Family and Personal Life. Political influence during electoral activities affected officers' family relationships and personal well-being. Informant 3 shared that family members sometimes worried about their safety and reputation during election periods. Extended deployments, long working hours, and assignments in politically sensitive communities reduced family time and created additional emotional pressure. Despite these challenges, family support and open communication helped officers manage stress, maintain resilience, and remain committed to their duties. The findings highlight family support as an important protective factor in sustaining officers' well-being and professional effectiveness during politically sensitive assignments.

Theme 5: Professional Integrity and Neutrality. Despite political pressures, participants emphasized their commitment to professionalism, integrity, and political neutrality. Informant 20 stated, "I maintain professionalism by relying on facts, evidence, and due process." Officers described avoiding political discussions, following established procedures, making evidence-based decisions, and seeking guidance from supervisors when necessary. Their experiences suggest that personal ethical commitment, reinforced by institutional policies and accountability mechanisms, helps prevent undue political influence. Consistent with Democratic Policing Theory and relevant laws and ethical standards, the findings underscore that impartiality, due process, and integrity are essential to preserving public trust and the legitimacy of election-related police operations.

Synthesis of Findings. The findings revealed that political influence during electoral activities affected officers' professional responsibilities, emotional well-being, and family relationships. Heightened public scrutiny, prolonged deployments, and concerns about perceived political bias increased occupational demands and personal stress. These challenges extended beyond the workplace, as family members expressed concern for officers' safety and professional reputation.

Institutional accountability mechanisms, including documentation, operational reporting, supervisory oversight, and compliance with election security guidelines, helped officers perform their duties lawfully and objectively. These mechanisms reinforced adherence to established procedures and provided safeguards against undue political influence.

Professional integrity and political neutrality also emerged as essential protective factors. Participants emphasized reliance on facts, evidence, due process, and established protocols when making decisions. Overall, the findings suggest that effective accountability systems, strong ethical values, family support, and officer wellness initiatives are important in strengthening resilience, maintaining impartiality, and preserving public trust during electoral operations.

Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas Encountered During Electoral Activities

Theme 1: Ethical Conflict and Preferential Treatment. Political influence during elections created ethical dilemmas when influential individuals requested preferential treatment. Informant 3 from Nueva Ecija noted that such requests involved access to information or special consideration. Participants described pressure to expedite complaints, prioritize investigations, or accommodate political connections. Despite possible criticism and strained relationships, they emphasized following laws, Police Operational Procedures, and ethical standards. The findings highlight integrity, impartiality, and adherence to due process as essential safeguards against favoritism and the erosion of public trust. These experiences align with Accountability Theory and Democratic Policing Theory, which emphasize ethical decision-making and equal enforcement of the law regardless of political affiliation.

Theme 2: Conflict Between Legal Procedures and Political Expectations. Participants experienced tension between demands for immediate police action and the legal requirements

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governing investigations. Informant 9 from Tarlac explained, "Political supporters expected immediate police action, but legal procedures require investigation and evidence." Political stakeholders sometimes interpreted the time needed to verify information, gather evidence, and complete documentation as inefficiency or political bias. Officers therefore had to manage expectations while upholding due process, communicating professionally, and resisting pressure to bypass established procedures. The findings underscore that evidence-based decisions and compliance with legal requirements protect individual rights, preserve institutional credibility, and strengthen public confidence in election-related law enforcement. These experiences reflect Democratic Policing Theory, which emphasizes legality, fairness, and accountability in maintaining police legitimacy.

Theme 3: Pressure to Disclose Confidential Information. Participants reported that politically connected individuals sometimes requested confidential information about investigations, intelligence reports, deployment plans, and election security operations. Informant 7 from Pampanga shared, "Ethical dilemmas occur when officers are pressured to disclose information." Officers recognized that unauthorized disclosure could compromise investigations, endanger personnel, and undermine operational security. They emphasized following established protocols, observing the chain of command, and releasing information only through authorized channels. The findings highlight confidentiality as a critical ethical responsibility that protects investigative integrity, operational effectiveness, and public trust. These experiences align with Accountability Theory and professional standards governing the handling of sensitive law enforcement information.

Theme 4: Political Influence and Perceived Immunity. Participants observed that some politically connected individuals perceived themselves as exempt from ordinary law enforcement procedures. Informant 15 from Bulacan stated, "Some individuals perceive themselves as untouchable because of political connections." Such perceptions challenged officers to enforce the law consistently despite political and community pressure. Participants stressed that political affiliation, social status, or personal connections should not determine police decisions or exempt individuals from legal accountability. The findings underscore equality before the law, impartial enforcement, and evidence-based decision-making as essential safeguards against favoritism and perceived political immunity. These experiences reflect the principles of Democratic Policing Theory, the 1987 Philippine Constitution, and Republic Act No. 6713, which emphasize integrity, accountability, and impartial public service.

Theme 5: Maintaining Neutrality Amid Political Pressure. Participants identified maintaining neutrality in politically polarized environments as a major challenge during electoral activities. Informant 12 from Zambales stated, "Remaining fair and impartial despite external pressures is one of the greatest challenges." Officers faced competing demands from opposing political groups and recognized that even lawful actions could be perceived as biased. They emphasized transparency, proper documentation, objective decision-making, and compliance with established procedures to demonstrate impartiality. The findings highlight political neutrality as both an ethical obligation and a professional commitment essential to democratic governance and public trust. These experiences align with Democratic Policing Theory and relevant laws and ethical standards requiring impartial, professional, and politically neutral law enforcement.

Synthesis of Findings. The findings revealed that officers encountered several ethical, professional, and operational challenges during election-related activities. These included requests for preferential treatment, pressure to act before legal requirements were satisfied, demands for confidential information, perceptions of political immunity, and competing expectations that tested their neutrality. These experiences required officers to balance external pressures with their legal obligations and professional responsibilities.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized due process, confidentiality, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making. They relied on established procedures, proper documentation, supervisory guidance, and personal integrity to ensure that their actions remained lawful and impartial. However, political polarization made their work more difficult, as even procedurally correct decisions could be perceived as politically motivated.

Overall, maintaining public confidence while enforcing the law fairly emerged as a central challenge of election-related policing. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening ethics education, accountability mechanisms, leadership support, confidentiality safeguards, and legal awareness programs. These measures can help officers manage ethical dilemmas, resist undue political influence, maintain neutrality, and preserve the credibility of law enforcement operations.

Coping Strategies and Resistance to Political Influence

Theme 1: Adherence to Laws and Operational Procedures. Participants identified strict compliance with laws, operational procedures, and institutional policies as their primary strategy for managing political pressure. Informant 2 from Nueva Ecija stated, "I maintain professionalism by strictly following PNP policies, election laws, and intelligence protocols." Officers relied on PNP Operational Procedures, COMELEC guidelines, intelligence protocols, and command directives to guide decisions and avoid allegations of political bias. The findings indicate that adherence to established rules promotes accountability, consistency, and impartiality while protecting officers from undue influence. Consistent with Democratic Policing Theory, lawful and evidence-based decision-making emerged as a key safeguard for maintaining professionalism and public trust during electoral activities.

Theme 2: Teamwork and Leadership Support. Participants emphasized teamwork and supportive leadership as important strategies for managing politically sensitive assignments. Informant 10 from Tarlac shared, "I rely heavily on operational guidelines, command directives, and teamwork." Operational briefings, coordination meetings, and information sharing helped officers clarify responsibilities, reduce uncertainty, and make informed decisions. Supportive supervisors also provided guidance and reassurance, strengthening officers' confidence in

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following established procedures despite external pressures. The findings suggest that teamwork and leadership support promote shared responsibility, ethical decision-making, and professional resilience. These experiences align with Transformational Leadership Theory, which highlights collaborative leadership and shared commitment in strengthening personnel effectiveness during high-pressure operations.

Theme 3: Collective Professional Support. Participants identified communication and mutual support among colleagues as important strategies for managing political pressure. Informant 7 from Pampanga stated, "Teamwork and information sharing strengthen resilience." Sharing experiences, discussing operational concerns, and exchanging information helped officers clarify uncertainties, consider different perspectives, and make informed decisions. The findings suggest that collective professional support reduces feelings of isolation, strengthens accountability, and promotes emotional resilience and operational effectiveness. Supportive workplace relationships also encourage ethical conduct and consistency in applying laws and procedures during politically sensitive assignments.

Theme 4: Guidance from Supervisors. Participants emphasized consulting supervisors when handling politically sensitive situations. Informant 12 from Zambales stated, "Following legal procedures and consulting supervisors." Supervisors provided guidance, clarified policies, and helped officers make decisions consistent with legal requirements, command directives, and election security guidelines. This practice reduced uncertainty, strengthened confidence, and minimized the risk of subjective decision-making. The findings highlight supervisory guidance as an important safeguard that reinforces accountability, professional judgment, and political neutrality. Consistent with Accountability Theory, effective supervision and organizational oversight help officers manage political pressure while maintaining ethical and professional standards during electoral operations.

Theme 5: Documentation and Transparency. Participants identified accurate documentation as an essential strategy for protecting officers and institutions against allegations of political bias. Informant 20 from Aurora emphasized, "Evidence-based investigations and accurate documentation." Officers explained that recording operational decisions, investigative actions, and deployment activities provided verifiable evidence that their actions followed established procedures and legal requirements. The findings indicate that proper documentation promotes transparency, strengthens accountability, and helps officers justify their decisions in politically sensitive situations. Consistent with Accountability Theory, accurate record-keeping and responsible information management help preserve institutional credibility and public trust during election-related operations.

Synthesis of Findings. The findings revealed that law enforcement officers employed several strategies to manage political influence during electoral activities. These included adherence to laws and operational procedures, teamwork and leadership support, collective professional support, supervisory consultation, and documentation and transparency. Together, these strategies helped officers maintain neutrality, strengthen professional resilience, and perform their duties objectively despite political pressures.

Adherence to legal requirements and ethical standards emerged as the primary safeguard against undue influence. By following election laws, PNP Operational Procedures, COMELEC guidelines, and institutional policies, officers relied on established standards rather than personal preferences or external demands. Meanwhile, teamwork, peer support, and supervisory guidance helped reduce uncertainty, strengthen confidence, and promote consistent decision-making in politically sensitive situations.

Documentation and transparency also played an important role in demonstrating that operational decisions were based on evidence, legal requirements, and established procedures. Accurate records supported accountability, helped address allegations of bias or misconduct, and strengthened public confidence in law enforcement operations.

Overall, the findings suggest that resisting political influence requires both individual commitment and institutional support. Professional integrity, ethical conduct, and respect for the rule of law must be reinforced by effective leadership, collaborative work environments, supervisory oversight, and transparent operational practices. Strengthening these mechanisms through continuing ethics education, professional development, and accountability initiatives can help sustain police neutrality, enhance organizational resilience, and preserve the credibility of election-related law enforcement operations.

Consolidated Summary of Themes Generated Through Thematic Analysis

The emergent themes generated from the participants' narratives comprehensively addressed the four Statements of the Problem. The themes under Statement of the Problem No. 1 described the nature and forms of political influence encountered during electoral activities. The themes under Statement of the Problem No. 2 explained how political influence and accountability mechanisms shaped the participants' professional and personal experiences. The themes under Statement of the Problem No. 3 reflected the ethical dilemmas and operational challenges encountered during election-related duties, while the themes under Statement of the Problem No. 4 described the coping mechanisms and resistance strategies employed by the participants to maintain professionalism, accountability, and political neutrality. Collectively, these themes captured the essence of the participants' lived experiences and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

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Statement of the Problem	Emergent Themes
SOP 1. Nature and Forms of Political Influence	Indirect Political Pressure; Operational Intervention; Information-Seeking Behavior; Material Political Influence; Deployment and Security Influence
SOP 2. Professional and Personal Impact	Heightened Professional Responsibility; Institutional Accountability; Psychological and Emotional Stress; Impact on Family and Personal Life; Professional Integrity and Neutrality
SOP 3. Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas	Ethical Conflict and Preferential Treatment; Conflict Between Legal Procedures and Political Expectations; Pressure to Disclose Confidential Information; Political Influence and Perceived Immunity; Maintaining Neutrality Amid Political Pressure
SOP 4. Coping and Resistance Strategies	Adherence to Laws and Operational Procedures; Teamwork and Leadership Support; Collective Professional Support; Guidance from Supervisors; Documentation and Transparency

Viewed collectively, the twenty emergent themes reveal the essence of the lived experiences of law enforcement officers operating in politically sensitive electoral environments. The findings demonstrate that political influence is commonly experienced through indirect pressures, requests for preferential consideration, attempts to influence operational decisions, information-seeking activities, and expectations arising from political relationships and affiliations. These experiences create professional, ethical, emotional, and personal challenges that require officers to continuously balance public expectations, legal obligations, and organizational responsibilities while preserving political neutrality and public trust.

The findings further show that political influence extends beyond operational concerns and affects the professional and personal lives of law enforcement officers. Participants experienced heightened accountability, increased public scrutiny, emotional strain, and concerns affecting family relationships. Nevertheless, institutional accountability mechanisms, professional ethics, and organizational safeguards served as important protective factors that enabled them to perform their duties lawfully and transparently despite political pressures.

The study also revealed that the most significant challenges encountered by the participants involved ethical conflicts, competing expectations between legal procedures and political demands, pressures to disclose confidential information, perceptions of political immunity, and the continuing struggle to maintain neutrality in politically polarized environments. These challenges underscored the importance of integrity, impartiality, due process, and accountability in sustaining the legitimacy of law enforcement during electoral activities.

Finally, the findings demonstrated that participants resisted political influence through strict adherence to laws and operational procedures, teamwork, professional collaboration, supervisory guidance, and accurate documentation. These coping mechanisms enabled them to maintain professionalism, strengthen resilience, and safeguard the credibility of their decisions and actions.

Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that while political influence remains an inherent reality of election-related policing, law enforcement officers are able to preserve neutrality, accountability, and professional integrity through the combined influence of personal ethical commitment, institutional support systems, effective leadership, and adherence to legal and procedural standards. The essence of their lived experience reflects a continuous commitment to upholding the rule of law and public service despite the complex political pressures associated with electoral operations.

Outcome of the Study

The findings of the study revealed that law enforcement officers experienced various forms of political influence during electoral activities, including indirect political pressure, operational intervention, requests for confidential information, and expectations of preferential treatment. These experiences affected their professional responsibilities, emotional well-being, and decision-making processes while requiring them to maintain political neutrality and accountability. Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience by adhering to established laws, operational procedures, accountability mechanisms, teamwork, and supervisory guidance. The emergent themes highlighted the need for a structured institutional intervention that would strengthen political neutrality, ethical decision-making, accountability, transparency, and professional resilience among law enforcement officers. Consequently, the Police Neutrality and Accountability Enhancement Program (PNAEP) was developed based on the participants' lived experiences and the needs identified from the findings of the study.

Consistent with the requirement that every dissertation of this kind culminate in a concrete institutional output, the findings synthesized above gave rise to the Police Neutrality and Accountability Enhancement Program (PNAEP), a capability-building framework for neutral, professional, and accountable election policing. The program translates the coping and resistance mechanisms identified in Statement of the Problem No. 4, together with the accountability and ethical-neutrality imperatives surfaced across Statements of the Problem No. 1 to No. 3, into a standing, institutionally sponsored intervention rather than leaving them to individual initiative alone. PNAEP is organized into five interlocking program components — Political Neutrality and Ethics Strengthening, Capacity Building on Accountability and Democratic Policing, Transparency and Internal Accountability Enhancement, Community Engagement and Stakeholder Partnership, and Data-Driven Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning — each carrying its own objectives, major activities, performance indicators, lead office, timeline, resource requirements, and budgetary allocation, for a total estimated

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program investment of Php 80,000,000.00 over a three-year implementation horizon.

Police Neutrality and Accountability Enhancement Program (PNAEP)

Goal. To strengthen political neutrality, ethical decision-making, accountability, resilience, and professionalism among law enforcement officers assigned to election-related duties.

Program Components

Component 1. Political Neutrality and Ethics Strengthening

The first component addresses the indirect political pressure and material-influence themes documented in Statement of the Problem No. 1 by instilling and reinforcing a culture of political neutrality, integrity, and ethical decision-making among personnel. It will be carried out through an enhanced Code of Conduct orientation, the "Integridad at Katapatan" seminar series, a normal Pledge of Political Neutrality signed by all personnel, and structured ethical decision-making workshops. Program success will be measured against three indicators: full annual orientation coverage of personnel, at least ninety percent of participants scoring "Satisfactory" or higher in ethics assessments, and full compliance in the signing of the Pledge. The component will be jointly led by the PNP Directorate for Personnel and Records Management (DPRM) and the PNP Ethics Office, rolled out across all four quarters of Year 1 and sustained annually thereafter, drawing on trainers and facilitators, training materials, an e-learning platform, and training venues. The estimated allocation for this component is Php 12,000,000.00.

Component 2. Capacity Building on Accountability and Democratic Policing

The second component responds directly to the accountability and professional-responsibility themes surfaced in Statement of the Problem No. 2 by strengthening officers' knowledge and skills in democratic policing, accountability mechanisms, and human rights-based policing. Major activities include Democratic Policing Training, a Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) refresher course, an Accountability Mechanisms Workshop, and Community Engagement Training. Performance will be tracked through at least ninety-five percent of personnel trained, an eighty-percent improvement between pre- and post-test results, and community engagement activity conducted by at least seventy-five percent of units. The PNP Academy, PNP Human Rights Office, and Civil Security Group will jointly lead implementation across Years 1 and 2 on a continuous basis, supported by subject-matter experts, training modules, a learning management system, and logistics support, at an estimated cost of Php 18,000,000.00.

Component 3. Transparency and Internal Accountability Enhancement

The third and largest component operationalizes the institutional-accountability and documentation themes central to Statements of the Problem No. 2 and No. 4 by strengthening internal accountability systems and ensuring transparent police operations and decision-making. It comprises an Internal Accountability Audit, Command Responsibility Briefings, transparency initiatives such as body cameras and activity logs, and the active promotion of complaint and feedback mechanisms. Success will be evidenced by one hundred percent of units audited annually, full compliance in the use of reporting and logging systems, and at least a twenty-percent annual increase in resolved complaints. Implementation will be led by the PNP Internal Affairs Service (IAS), the PNP Directorate for Operations (DO), and the PNP ICT Management Service across Years 1 to 3 on a continuous-monitoring basis, requiring audit teams, ICT systems, body cameras, and monitoring tools. This component carries the largest single allocation in the program, at an estimated Php 25,000,000.00, reflecting the centrality of transparent, verifiable accountability to the neutrality this study documents.

Component 4. Community Engagement and Stakeholder Partnership

The fourth component extends the program beyond the police organization itself, building trust and partnership with communities and stakeholders in support of neutral and peaceful elections. Planned activities include community dialogues and forums, a Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Council, information campaigns on police neutrality, and structured feedback and consultation mechanisms. Performance will be assessed through engagement with at least seventy percent of target communities annually, a positive community perception rating of at least eighty percent, and an increase in community reports and feedback received. The PNP Community Relations Service (CRS), Provincial Police Offices, and local government units in coordination with civil society partners such as CSO-PCAARD will lead a rolling implementation across Years 1 to 3, supported by community facilitators, information, education, and communication (IEC) materials, venue and logistics support, and communication materials, at an estimated cost of Php 15,000,000.00.

Component 5. Data-Driven Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The fifth and final component closes the loop of the program by ensuring that its implementation is data-driven, continuously monitored, and iteratively improved. It will be carried out through the development of a dedicated PNAEP Monitoring Dashboard, regular monitoring and evaluation cycles, After Action Reviews (AAR), and structured knowledge-sharing on emerging best practices. Indicators of success include an operational dashboard by the second quarter of Year 1, quarterly submission of monitoring and evaluation reports, and the annual implementation of a documented improvement plan. This component will be led by the PNP Planning Service, the PNP Directorate for Management, and the PNP ICT Management Service on an ongoing basis across Years 1 to 3, requiring data analysts, ICT systems, monitoring-and-evaluation tools, and training for M&E teams, at an estimated cost of Php 10,000,000.00.

Taken together, the five components form a single, mutually reinforcing architecture: ethics and neutrality training builds the individual disposition documented throughout Chapter 3; accountability capacity-building and internal transparency mechanisms institutionalize the documentation and oversight practices officers already rely on; community

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engagement extends neutrality outward into public trust; and data-driven monitoring ensures that the program itself remains accountable to evidence rather than to assumption.

Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that political influence during election-related policing in Central Luzon often occurs through indirect requests, recommendations, and expectations rather than explicit interference. These interactions create ethical and operational challenges that require officers to exercise professionalism, integrity, and sound judgment while maintaining impartiality.

The study further concludes that political pressure increases officers' responsibilities, public scrutiny, and emotional stress. Nevertheless, adherence to laws, institutional policies, and accountability mechanisms helps participants maintain neutrality and fulfill their duties. Ethical dilemmas also arise from requests for preferential treatment, confidential information, and immediate police action, requiring officers to prioritize due process, fairness, and evidence-based decisions.

The findings also highlight the importance of organizational support in managing political influence. Teamwork, peer support, supervisory guidance, accurate documentation, and transparent procedures help officers make objective decisions and address allegations of bias. These mechanisms reinforce accountability and strengthen public confidence in election-related law enforcement.

Overall, the study concludes that resisting political influence requires both individual integrity and institutional support. Strengthening ethical leadership, legal compliance, accountability systems, professional development, and officer wellness initiatives can help sustain political neutrality, protect institutional credibility, and promote fair and effective policing during electoral activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are respectfully offered:

1. **The Philippine National Police (PNP)** should strengthen continuing education and specialized training programs focusing on political neutrality, ethical decision-making, accountability, and election security operations to further enhance officers' professionalism during electoral activities.

2. Police Regional Offices, Provincial Police Offices, and Municipal Police Stations should institutionalize regular seminars, simulation exercises, and operational briefings emphasizing proper responses to political influence, ethical dilemmas, and election-related security challenges.

3. **The Commission on Elections (COMELEC), in partnership with the PNP and NAPOLCOM**, should strengthen inter-agency coordination by developing standardized operational guidelines, joint capability-building programs, and evaluation mechanisms that promote transparency, accountability, and political neutrality throughout election periods.

4. **PNP leadership** should continue reinforcing accountability mechanisms by ensuring consistent supervision, proper documentation, operational audits, and evidence-based decision-making during election-related operations to protect both officers and the integrity of the organization.

5. **Police training institutions and criminology schools** should integrate more comprehensive instruction on democratic policing, political neutrality, election laws, ethical leadership, and accountability into police education and professional development programs.

6. **The Philippine National Police** should consider adopting and implementing the Police **Neutrality and Accountability Enhancement Program (PNAEP)** developed in this study as a structured intervention program designed to strengthen political neutrality, ethical decision-making, accountability, resilience, and professionalism among law enforcement officers during electoral activities.

7. **Future researchers** are encouraged to conduct similar qualitative or mixed-method studies in other regions of the Philippines or among different law enforcement agencies to validate, expand, and compare the findings of the present study while exploring additional factors influencing political neutrality and democratic policing.

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