



## **Problems and challenges faced by Pakistani police: A case study of Police in Post-conflict Swat District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

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### **Abstract**

*Policing in post-conflict Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a challenging task. Public opinion about police and policing in Swat is unsatisfactory and police are considered inefficient. There is a lack of research on the problems that the police face. Police's perspective has received little or no attention. This study is conducted in district swat. This is a narrative qualitative study, while data is collected from police with the help of purposive sampling. Where the collected information has been analyzed with help of narrative analysis. The study shows that many constraints affect police in their service delivery but the most prevalent among them are insufficient numbers of police personnel, excessive workload, political interference, and financial issues. However, an increase in the number of the police force and reduction in the working hours, improvement in working conditions, allocation of adequate budget, making police apolitical, are some steps that can lead to effective policing.*

### **Keywords**

*Police, policing, Post-conflict Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.*

### **Introduction**

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The police are one of the main pillars of the state (Reiner, 2010). They are responsible for maintaining public order and safety, enforcing the law of the state, and work as preventive, and investigative agents against criminal activities (Suddle, 2003) (Bouza, 1990). Policing comprises various activities that help bring social order to society (Abbas, 2011a). Although policing has remained a topic of interest for researchers belonging to different disciplines, however, there is still a shortage of social sciences literature that looks at the challenges faced by the police from an insiders' perspective.

This study is one of the few studies that provide such insights from an insider's point of view. Such a perspective will not only help us understand the phenomenon of policing but will also help contest the stereotypical image that the police hold in the minds of the public. The stereotypical image is the result of the encounters of the public and police, the portrayal of police in the media. Police face several challenges on the part of police as well community which creates a hurdle to police service delivery.

Among them, lack of professionalism, legal, economic, logistic, and technological issues are more prevalent throughout the globe (Newburn, 2003) (Bouza, 2013). In addition to this, trust deficit and lack of co-operation between police and public worsen the level of service delivery of police. As a result of such challenges, the issues of crime, criminality, insecurity, and worsening law and order situation are more prevalent in Pakistan as compared to the rest of the world (Abbas, 2008). In this regard, police have been perceived as weak, corrupt, politically influenced, and incompetent (Segrave & Ratcliffe, 2017).

Furthermore, police are overburdened with work, under-trained, underpaid, and not properly educated. This results in the image of police as public frightened rather than public-friendly (Abbas, 2011a), harasser, brutal, and violators of human rights (Bashir, 2011). Another, issue that has been researched in the literature is the political and bureaucratic influence on the performance of the police. Their promotion, posting, and transfer rely on their terms with the influential. Though, there may be several other constraints/ factors to effective policing depends on the social, cultural, and geographical realities (Malik & Qureshi, 2020). Out of enormous challenges and factors, this study identifies (a) shortage of strength (b) excessive workload (c) lack of fiscal budget (d), and political interference as the leading factors affecting the performance of police in swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Since independence, the crises of law and order have not been addressed effectively by the successive regimes (Suddle, 2015). Police Department in Pakistan has remained ill-managed, ill-equipped, poorly trained, highly politicized, and corrupt (Rohde, 2002).

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Reforming police need to be the prioritized agenda of elected Government, but it has not been so in the past decades, and such lack of attention has resulted in deteriorating police performance.

Previous literature shows, inadequate training, Organizational shortcomings insufficient resources, lack of requisite funds, poor working conditions, and lack of coordination with other law enforcement agencies have been identified as obstacles to transparent and effective policing (Akhtar, et al., 2012).

In addition to this, incompetence, inefficiency, no response to citizens, highly politicized force, distorted public image, and institutionalized abuse of power are considered as the features of policing in Pakistan (Ullah, Hussain, Alam, & Akhunzada, 2016). According to various surveys conducted in 2002, 2006 and 2009 respectively police force is corrupt (Transparency International's National Corruption Perception Survey, 2002). As argued by Fasihuddin (2008) and Ras, (2010) that police force in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are not well trained to handle the issue of militancy, terrorism, and criminality. Police face multiple challenges and problems in their service delivery. It is due to the mentioned factors, police are unable to restore peace, protect people and their property, prevent, and investigate crimes, arrest the offenders, and enforce the law. In this regard, this paper is an attempt to investigate the different factors which affect police and policing from the perspective of police (insider's perspective).

This paper through its insider's perspective (police perspective) investigates various prominent factors and challenges faced by police while performing their duties and responsibilities. The study aims to explore police perspective regarding factors influencing policing in District Swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

### **Methods and Methodology**

This is a narrative research study, where data has been collected through in-depth interviews, with purposive sampling. According to Cresswell (2012), narrative studies help the researcher get insights into the phenomenon.

A total of 28 police officials have been interviewed. Data has been collected from Swat District. Swat was chosen as a locale because of the recent conflict in Swat which raised many questions on the performance of the police force in the district. Data has been collected through in-depth interviews. Interviews as a tool helped gain detailed insights into the issues of police. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the officials. Confidentiality has been ensured through pseudo naming.



The data has been analyzed with the help of narrative analysis. According to Creswell (2012) narrative analysis is used when informants are willing to share their stories. Cresswell (2012) also mentions that the process of data analysis may include both the description as well as the emergence of themes. Similar to Cresswell's suggestions, themes emerged from field information which helped explore various factors affecting policing from police perspectives and problems faced by police while delivering services. Below are the most prevalent factors that I found to have been affecting policing in swat. The most important and most mentioned factors are arranged in chronological order.

### **Analysis, Findings, and discussions from the interviews**

The following themes emerged from the field. Themes have been arranged in order of their importance in the study of the phenomenon.

#### **A) Shortage of Police personnel**

The shortage of the police force was recorded as the most alarming factor that affects the performance of the police. Almost all the respondents that were interviewed considered the number of the existing police forces are insufficient to cover the whole area.

Being a developing country, Pakistan is in the grip of economic crises for years. An adequate budget is a prerequisite for maintaining a sizeable number of police forces. Financial instability and disruption of democratic processes at different intervals have not only deprived Pakistan of becoming an economically stable country but has also led to a lack of effective policy and policing. Attention has not been paid to the issues of policing by different governments. Such little attention to policing, disruption of the democratic processes has resulted in severe budgetary constraints (Abbas, 2011a). The shortage of budget has resulted in a shortage of police force.

One of the respondents who serves as a station house officer (SHO) explained the shortage of personnel in this manner:

*“It is immensely important for police to respond quickly to public grievances and issues. In routine, we try our level best to tackle all the situations in time and an effective manner, but we need more police to provide the service our community expects, currently we are facing a shortage of the personnel”.*

Pakistan's population is one of the fastest-growing in the world, such an increase in population crimes rate has surged too (Amin & Ahmad, 2018). Shortage of police



personnel is not just an issue of third world countries, but also countries such as the United Kingdom, for example, Abbas (2011b) mentions that in England there are 260 police officers per 100,000 population, they are below the European average of 338 police officers. On the other hand, England and Wales have proportionately more officers than Japan (199 per 100,000), but dramatically less than Afghanistan (401 officers per 100,000).

During different interviews, the researcher was informed that the major hurdle in way of effective policing is the number of police deployed in different areas. One of the respondents of the police department i.e., deputy superintendent of police (DSP) informed me that:

*“We can't monitor all the areas that fall under our jurisdiction, we have areas that are inaccessible, hard to drive to, and we do not have the strength and resources to have a permanent physical presence there”.*

Almost every respondent raised the issue of shortage of policemen and its link to effective policing, another police officer i.e., Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) further informed me that:

*“How could you expect us to have zero crime rates in my area when we do not have enough police force too, we need double the force we currently have”.*

Response during field visit illustrates the fact that to have effective policing the number of the police force should be increased. The current number of policemen is not only insufficient for having effective policing but also to ensure peace and stability in the area. According to Suddle (2015), the UN recommends a 1:222 police-public ratio, but the situation in Pakistan is different and the same ratio here is 1:500, to have positive results, the number should be increased as per UN recommendations.

Another respondent Moharrir head constable (MHC) was of the view that:

*“Insufficient numbers and scant human resources are the greatest dilemmas in Pakistan and the same is the case along with our police in Malakand Division or District swat. Furthermore, the population of swat has increased many folds while the number of police personnel has not increased at the same level. This leads to an increase in crimes, and results in worsening law and order situation”.*



As mentioned above the population of swat has increased, and it has become difficult for police to administer the law-and-order situation with the available force. Similarly, the mountainous terrain and the issue of ease of access to certain areas is another problem.

Almost every police station faces the issue of a shortage of personnel. However, despite a smaller number of police personnel, and tough terrain the police are still doing their job to ensure public safety its priority.

### **B) Long and exhaustive hours of work and excessive workload**

Previous research has shown that police excessive duty and workload have negative impacts not only on their health and mind but also on the overall service delivery (Humayon, et. al., 2018). Similar views have been expressed by Haarr (2005) that the burden of work not only affects the mental and physical health of the individuals but has impacts on the overall functioning of the police department.

The majority of policemen are overburdened with work and live away from their families. It results in behavioral issues among police personnel. The police force is supposed to work or on duty for twenty-four-hour or around the clock. At this point one of the police officer, i.e. Station house officer (SHO) said:

*“Being a responsible person in the police department, we must own our work and perform duty with great zeal and fervor. But in our department, we are working in the capacity of police at the expense of our personnel and family worries. So, to serve the common public at the expense of our happiness is not justice with ourselves”.*

Police personnel in Pakistan are often engaged in multitasking, for example, they perform multiple duties such as protocol duty, provision of security to high government officers i.e., government officers and political personalities, public places, and public.

Because of the shortage of police force and an increasing number of issues and cases amongst people, the police stations are always overloaded with work and it seriously affects the service delivery. One of the deputy superintendents of police (DSP) in district swat, said:

*“Police force faces the dilemma of excessive workload. The duty time is not clear while performing multitasked extra duties. This sort of situation further creates the issue of tension and stress among the force. And it is a well-known fact that tension and stress*



*not only kill the potential but as well negatively influence the performance of police force”.*

The extreme workload leads to severe psychological and physical issues. Many police officers reported having developed such issues over the period. One of the Sub inspectors (SI) narrating his own story said that:

*“My nonstop working routine made me a psychiatric patient and I had severe psychiatric issues, for treatment I went to different doctors. For my wellbeing, I was advised to take some time off the duty, I did that, I felt better, but once I rejoined my duty, I am having the same issues again”.*

Goold (2004), also had the same findings, in his work he mentions that police are overloaded and performs multiples task, such as patrolling, response to crime, traffic control, arrest, appearance in the court, deals with emergencies, administrative task, protocol, and many more activities routinely. The chief investigation officer (CIO), said:

*“Being, a chief investigation officer in the police station, I handle dozens of cases of investigation of different nature, such as murder cases, theft, robbery, and burglary at a time. Along with this, I perform emergency duty too. My immediate boss demand progress in the cases of investigation while on the other hand, it is extremely stressful to manage the overall work situation”.*

The increasing psychiatric issues among the police also have impacts on their physical health. For example, when asked during different interactions, many police officers were suffering from conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart issue. The exhaustive working conditions are also a significant cause of frustration and low morale, which results in adverse effects on organizational effectiveness.

### **C) Financial issues**

Pakistan has been fighting the war against terror for two decades (Fair, 2012). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has been on the frontline in the War on terror. Such a position demanded heavy allocation of budget and resources for the police who are the first line of action against any attack. However, in practice, the budgetary allocation for the province in general and the police department seems insufficient. Annual spending on salaries, training, capacity building, operations, infrastructure, gadgets, accessories, weapons, bunkers, digital and communication equipment, etc. is not enough.



The existing rates of poverty, hunger, the dilapidated conditions of the health sector, poor infrastructure are some of the reasons why police did not get the desired budgetary allocation (Hughes, 2002) and Suddle (2015) also highlights the issue of budgetary allocation for police and documents that successive governments have failed to increase the police budget. Failure to increase budget leaves adverse effects on the performance of the police. Talking about the shortage of funds one of the respondents a Chief investigation officer (CIO) said:

“For certain cases, we have to travel, even to other provinces, for arrests of certain criminals, it is not possible to do it without a good budget. Besides other work-related stress, the stress of lack of budget is a huge obstacle in the way of effective policing. We need money to commute, we need resources”.

Most of the criminals fled the scene and go far away to other areas. Previously they used to take shelter in the tribal areas, or to some other province. It is due to financial constraints that timely arrests cannot be made in many cases.

The (CIO) further remarked:

*“Although, in certain cases, we got information from our sources that the criminal is living in Lahore or any other city, due to lack of finances or economic resources police can't ensure the arrest of the criminal within due time”.*

Mobility is one of the main duties the police should perform, but a shortage of logistics including vehicles and fuel hampers the mobility (Jackson, Asif, Bradford, & Zakria Zakar, 2014) of the police officials. One of the SHOs elaborated:

*“There are many incidents such as murder case, robbery, car lifting, and specifically elopement cases. And I am investigating all these at one time. But there is no specific amount in the form of cash allocated to peruse all these cases. In many cases, I have spent money from my pocket in advance. There is no clear-cut policy of return of the said amount. In major cases we prepare bills, but the reimbursement takes ages”.*

Financial issues and lack of logistic support hinder the work of investigation in the majority of the police station in district swat. The annual budget of the police station in the district is assigned to the police line under the control of the District Police Officer (DPO). Even the allocated budget is not effectively and efficiently spent because of the lack of transparency and accountability. In certain cases, it was revealed during the fieldwork that complainants had to finance the fuel or provide financial support for their



cases to be investigated and followed up. Such scenarios lead to enhanced trust deficits between the public and the police.

#### **D) Political interference**

Political influence and interference over the police are common in South Asia and particularly in Pakistan. As noted by Lamani and Venumadhava (2013) in India transfers and postings of officers are based on the wills of the politicians. Similarly, in Bangladesh, political interference is one of the main reasons the police are labeled as corrupt and inefficient (Kashem, 2005). In Afghanistan too, the police are considered as a weapon of the elite who misuse them for certain illegal (Singh, 2014). In Pakistan, one of the criteria of the political following is the influence within the police department. The public issues are mostly dealt with by the police, and the public comes across the police on a daily basis, so it is considered important to influence within the police station. Such influence is created either by personal relations or by giving the police officials favors in the form of transfers and postings. An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) in this context expressed his opinion that:

*“Police officers usually contact politicians to get posted or transferred to a favorable police station. And, politicians, usually favor their posting and transfer. Resultantly, police officers, reciprocate the same by giving him favors. This favor influences the routine business of policing such as investigation and operation and fair play. So, the said issue spoils the true essence of effective policing”.*

The culture of political transfers and postings makes the police dependent upon the politicians and influential people. It is then the will of the influence that is followed rather than the law and procedure (Malik and Qureshi, 202). One of the Assistant sub-inspector (ASI) said:

*“Although the current government of Pakistan Tehrik Insaf (PTI) claims much more about police transparency and accountability while the true essence of effective policing is still missing in practice due to political interference, politicians interfere in our affairs as much as the previous ones did, nothing has changed, and nothing will change, until this dependence finishes”.*

Political influence over the police is considered an investment in local politics. In the words of one of the deputy superintendents of police (DSPs):



*“If, we don’t follow the order and instruction of the public representative such as politicians. Then, negative public opinion is created against us. They usually collect the local masses and arrange press conference while in major cases block the roads which exert pressure on police administration, it also ruins our careers”.*

The influence of politics and politicians over the police force is an undeniable fact. Police as per the statement of one of my respondents serve as ‘touts’ of the influential “who are being used as tissue papers”. The same views resonated in an informal conversation with one of the Station houses officers (SHO) said:

*“On the one hand we have to perform our duties, while on the other hand, we have to obey the orders of the high ups and the influential people, it becomes really hard for us to handle both at the same time, ultimately, we have to compromise on principles, or we must be ready to face the consequences”.*

Under the Police Order 2002, the transfers, and postings of senior police officers in the province were the responsibility of the inspector general of police (IGP). But now the chief minister (CM) is performing this function. The CM also has to take care of his MPs and that is where the problem comes from.

## **Conclusion**

Swat is one of the prime tourist locations in Pakistan, where the security situation is directly linked to the number of visiting tourists which is ultimately linked to the local economy. Security on other hand depends upon the adequate number of police personnel in any area. Swat faced militancy that worsened the local security. The local people faced hardships due to the worsening law and order situations. The police force fought on the front line and delivered more than what was expected of them. The situation in post-conflict Swat as per the local people is considered as ‘unsatisfactory and not to the mark’. The local people consider the police as the main reason for the worsened security situation. During my fieldwork, I observed that people had different complaints against the police, however, no previous study has adequately addressed the issues from the perspective of the police. This study recorded the police perspective about the security situation and the factors that hamper smooth policing.

During the fieldwork, the issue of shortage of police force came up as the most prevalent issue followed by excessive workload, political interference, and lack of funds.



The shortage of police force makes them unable to monitor the whole district where the terrain is mostly hilly and inaccessible in many areas. Police perform multitasked duties i.e., routine security duties, protocols to bureaucrats, and high ups and politicians. Such multitasking leads to the prevalence of stress and anxiety among the police. Besides this, the extended duty timings do not allow them to spare time for exercise or to spend time with their families – which leads to certain physical diseases such as heart-related issues, diabetes, and hypertension.

Financial hurdles are yet another reason that affects policing in Swat. The police do not have enough funds to thoroughly monitor the whole district effectively, nor do they have enough funds to patrol certain areas where crime rates are high. Transparency and lack of checks intensify the financial crises.

Politically influential people consider their influence over the police as one of the most important strategies of strengthening their vote bank. To help people out in courts and police stations, the influential people use the tactics of giving favors to the police officers of their choice, such favors are then reciprocated. This mutual dependence makes the police subservient to the wills of the influential people who manipulate the police proceedings in their favor. Such political interference is prevalent in Swat, and many respondents considered it as one of the leading factors that have long-lasting impacts on the performance of the police.

### **Recommendations**

Successive governments have failed to chalk out a comprehensive strategy for the police departments to make them effective and agents of peace and security. There is a dire need for policy debate on how to make police effective. Generous budget, transparency, and accountability, a manageable and apolitical working environment are some of the recommendations that may help make policing more effective and efficient. Governments must also encourage and fund multidisciplinary research on the issue of policing which will not only provide detailed insights into the problems and challenges faced by the police as well as the public but will also bring out the insider's perspective that will help solve the issues of the police department in an effective manner.



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