



ROLE OF MEDIA IN POLICE REFORMS

RESEARCH PAPER BY

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I S H T I R A Q



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ROLE OF MEDIA IN POLICE REFORMS

Importance of Police Reforms- Role of Media

An efficient and fair police is needed to equally enforce rule of law, fight crime effectively, reduce fear of crime and promote political and economic development. Media is uniquely placed to play an important role in police reforms both at policy as well as operational levels; media persons are constantly in touch with the policy makers as well as the frontline police officers and importantly the community at large. As an effective watchdog media can expose the abuse of power by police and the political executive and organizational ineffectiveness; as an agenda-setter it can raise awareness to increase demand for reforms and to make the political executive, police and other relevant authorities responsive to their roles; and as a gate keeper-public forum for diverse perspectives, it can promote inclusive and informed debate and help in sound decision making and problem solving.

Media's Portrayal of Police and Crime in Pakistan: An Overview

- Media narrative and public perception of police are influenced by the role of police in the historical and experiential context. The visuals and print reports showing police brutality and subservience to the political and the military regimes over the years have deeply influenced public opinion undermining police legitimacy.
- Media generally portrays *police as a rotten basket- an institution, which lacks the capacity to perform its core functions* lacking integrity, competence and sensitivity to people's needs. Such portrayal is not too dissimilar from the experiences of a large number of citizens in dealing with police. However, it does ignore contributions of a significant number of hard working, honest police officers of all ranks who are working with commitment including willingness and demonstrated ability to give up their lives to protect the citizens and their country against criminals and terrorists.
- News and fiction stories about police and crime are *prominent in all forms of media*.
- There is *disproportionate focus on serious violent crimes, which constitute only 10% of the total recorded crime*, in the print and electronic media that increases fear of crime amongst the citizens. It also means media is not sufficiently covering 90% of the crime.
- Crimes committed against influential sections of the society get more coverage than crimes against the weaker sections of the society. Cattle theft in rural areas and burglaries in lower income groups residential areas/slums get much less coverage as compared to robberies or theft where the victims are from richer/influential sections of society although the former might be causing more harm and loss in relative terms.
- The focus of the media reporting of police and crime has been *more on stories and less on analysis* briefly describing the incidents without analyzing sufficiently the causes and possible responses. Tight

deadlines for reporters, dependence of crime reporters on police for information, low priority to research, analysis and building capacity of the reporters, and celebrity focus lead to under reporting of causes and issues of policing and crimes.

- The media does not effectively condemn extra judicial coercive measures by police and mob justice.
- Programs such as *Shabbir tau Dekhae Ga*, *SP Musa* have blurred the distinction between fact and fiction in crime and policing. Research shows that such depictions heighten peoples' anxiety and fear of crime. Over 50% of respondents in a survey in England said that watching Crime-Watch increased their fear of crime, while a third said it made them feel afraid.

Media's Portrayal of Police and Crime: International and Regional Trends

- Internationally and regionally the media has shown similar trends in reporting on police in terms of dominance of crime news, disproportionate focus on violent crime, more of stories than analysis etc. There have been, however, variations in terms of depiction of a) police relations with the political executive, b) police response to political and human rights and c) integrity of police as an institution.

- **Britain**

- For stronger rule of law traditions, police is not perceived as a tool in the hands of the political executive. The misuse of police powers and police inefficiency are portrayed in the context of the need for institutional reforms rather than blanket condemnation of police as an institution.

- **India**

- While submission to the political executive is portrayed in a similar manner as in Pakistan, the cynicism vis a vis police is perhaps less severe than Pakistan as reflected in the Bollywood movies where an honest police officer is frequently shown fighting hard and successfully against corrupt politicians and police.
- The media in India like in Pakistan also does not effectively condemn violence such as extra judicial coercive measures by police and mob justice.
- Though the focus in India also is more on stories rather than analysis of the issues yet the quality of analysis is perhaps comparatively better in India than Pakistan. For

example, the Times of India report ‘No one killed Jessica’¹ carries more analysis than The News International report on quite a similar case of injustice in Pakistan- killing of Zain and acquittal of Mustafa Kanju.²

- **Bangladesh**

- Similar to Pakistan, has experienced misuse of police by the military and political authorities for protecting their narrowly defined political interests. Resultantly, the relationship between the police and the media has not experienced much mutual respect given the constant struggle against each other for their conflicting roles.

How Can Media in Pakistan Contribute to Police Reforms

The media has a unique advantage over other actors in the context of police reforms to make an improvement in the lives of the people. It can support police reforms through its several important roles such as a) watchdog-exposing authorities, b) agenda setter-raising awareness in public and generating pressure on authorities, and c) gatekeeper- acting as a public forum for diverse community groups and perspectives. ³

Media as Watchdog

It is argued that media can act as a check on powerful and influential segments of society and protect public interests. Quality investigative journalism playing watchdog role and highlighting corruption, highhandedness and incompetence can potentially increase efficiency, reduce corruption and check human rights violations while inducing improvement in police performance and consequently enhancing public confidence in police.

Assertive media over last decade or so has made the political executive and the police leadership slightly more conscious of their respective roles. Nonetheless, the pressure is not enough to force the political executive and the police leadership to make real changes and sincerely pursue police reforms.

Sindh has unfortunately in 2011 repealed democratic Police Order 2002 and reverted to colonial and undemocratic police law, Police Act 1861 and this

¹ No One Killed Jessica, Times of India, February 22, 2006, accessed on 1 January, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/No-one-killed-Jessica/articleshow/1423393.cms><http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/No-one-killed-Jessica/articleshow/1423393.cms>

² Mustaf Kanju among all 5 suspects acquitted in Zain’s murder case, The News International, Pakistan, October 27, 2015, accessed on January 1, 2016 at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/9407-mustafa-kanju-among-all-5-suspects-acquitted-in-zain-murder-case>

³ Sina Odugbemi and Pippa Norris, Do the News Media Act as watchdogs, agenda setter and gate keeper, Role of Media in Governance Reforms, Edited: Pippa Norris, World Bank, Washington DC, accessed on January 2, 2016 at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTDEVCOMMENG/EXTGOVACC/0,,contentMDK:22343085~page>.

democratic reversal in police governance has gone almost unnoticed in the media. Similarly, Punjab has avoided implementing crucial democratic provisions of Police Order 2002 such as public safety commissions, complaints authorities and selection and tenure of the Inspector General of Police and there is hardly any debate in the media regarding non-implementation of these provisions of Police Order 2002 which are crucial to make police politically neutral and accountable to the people.

In two cases which have been covered extensively in the recent past by the media, parents of young boys who were murdered by influential political families' sons namely Shahrukh Jatoi in Karachi, Sindh⁴ and Mustafa Kanju in Lahore, Punjab⁵ refused to pursue their cases blaming inadequate means and lack of protection for the remaining members of the families. Such miscarriages of justice send wrong signals reinforcing image of police as a tool for the powerful against the weak and lessen individual restraint towards use of violence especially amongst the children and the youth.

The debate around these cases failed to effectively expose the weakness in the criminal justice system and the law- lack of faith of the victims' families in the criminal justice system, prohibitively expensive access to an inefficient criminal justice system whose wheels get jammed for the poor, compounding offenses of murder whose implications go far beyond the loss for the families of the murdered boys.

Media as Agenda Setter

The media in its role as agenda setter is expected to raise awareness on issues of social importance including police reforms and help the policy makers in understanding the interests and concerns of the people. Highlighting social needs such as efficient police and security through media and linking policy makers with public concern help in improving policy responses.⁶

Media's role as 'agenda setter' on police reforms in Pakistan has been largely inconsequential; it needs to play more meaningful role to raise awareness regarding the issues and need for police reforms, such as, a) standardized democratic governance structure for police and its implementation in all four provinces, b) adequate financial support to improve police capacity, c) working collaboration amongst law enforcement departments and agencies to counter terrorism, organized and serious crimes, d) specialized police training, refresher courses and reasonable budgetary allocations for the

⁴ Shahzeb Khan's killers pardoned by family, Dawn, September 9, 2013, accessed on January 6, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1041654>

⁵ [Mustafa Kanju's acquittal: Supreme Court refers Zain murder case back to LHC](http://tribune.com.pk/story/995006/mustafa-kanjus-acquittal-supreme-court-refers-zain-murder-case-back-to-lhc/), Express Tribune, Pakistan, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/995006/mustafa-kanjus-acquittal-supreme-court-refers-zain-murder-case-back-to-lhc/>

⁶ Sina Odugbemi and Pippa Norris, Do the News Media Act as watchdogs, agenda setter and gatekeeper, Role of Media in Governance Reforms, Public Sentinel, News Media and Governance Reform, Edited by Pippa Norris, World Bank, Washington DC, accessed on January 2, 2016 at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTDEVCOMMENG/EXTGOVACC/O,,contentMDK:22343085~page>.

purpose, and e) aligning the police station through intensive engagement, supervision and support etc.

Media as Gatekeeper-Public Forum for Diverse Perspectives

Media in its role as a ‘gate-keeper’ can act as a useful public forum for diverse perspectives in the society. Media’s role as a public forum for police reforms in the country lacks meaningful engagement with diverse groups and consequently lacks informed and inclusive discussion on the issues. Contentious issues, such as, governance structure/laws of police, amendments in criminals laws-FIRs etc., role of paramilitary forces-Rangers in policing, policing responses in Baluchistan B areas and Federally Administered Tribal Areas, training needs of police, response at the police station and stop and search pickets etc. require open and inclusive debate amongst diverse groups and stakeholders. This will help people to be more informed and aware about the issues relating to police and security and empower them to demand more effective response from the policy makers.

Regional and International Experiences

India

In India, watchdog activism amongst the media and its collaboration with the civil society is seemingly stronger as reflected in the movie ‘No one Killed Jessica’ based on a real story in which Rani Mukerji in the role of a television journalist and supported effectively by the civil society exposes the collusively corrupt conduct of police and politicians. The media civil society activism generated awareness and moved authorities successfully to rectify the injustice meted out in Jessica’s case earlier at the trial court through guilty verdicts successively in the High Court and the Supreme Court of India.

Britain

In an unprovoked racist attack Stephen Lawrence, teenage black student, was murdered by five white males in London on April 22, 1993. The case engaged British media for almost six years with varying intensity. On February 14, 1997 the Daily Mail ran five pictures of white men on the front page with the caption: *“The Mail accuses these men of killing. If we are wrong let them sue us”*. Jack Straw the Home Secretary ordered an inquiry, which led to Macpherson Report in 1999 accompanied by wide media coverage. The report blamed police for professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers. The Macpherson report made 70 recommendations – 67 of which had resulted in specific changes in practice or the law within two years of its publication.

The reasons for the successful contribution of the British media in following up on Stephen Lawrence’s murder case were its bold, specific and clear demands such as demanding a) condemnation of the incident, b) government to take legal action against those responsible for institutional failure and c) establishment of a commission to analyze and suggest police reforms.

Unfortunately, we don't see such effective campaigns leading to policy changes in Pakistan despite ugly and tragic incidents such as Model Town killings 2013 and Youhannabad Lynching 2015.

Recommendations

- It is vital to work on building capacity of journalists covering police and criminal justice issues so that they can perform their watchdog, agenda setter and gatekeeper roles vis a vis police reforms more effectively
- Media owners, editors and senior journalists may provide support by encouraging the journalists especially the investigative journalists to analyse in depth and report on various aspects of police reforms more frequently.
- Capacity development and support will not mature automatically; it needs some organization and call to action. Media representative organizations, such as, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE), All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) need to get together and plan specific interventions to act as an effective watchdog, create awareness and prioritize areas of police reforms and provide a public forum to diverse groups for inclusive discussion and build informed public opinion.
- Civil society organizations (CSOs) also need to be included to facilitate the media in its watchdog, agenda setting and public forum roles. CSOs can facilitate the media in building capacity of the journalists on police and criminal justice issues and providing support in research, raising awareness and campaigning for specific cases and interventions.
- Executive, legislators and police leaders need to be asked specific questions both on the print and the electronic media regarding police reforms, such as, about reversal of democratic police law- Police Order 2002 in Sindh and Baluchistan, poor implementation of Police Order 2002 in Punjab, hopelessly insufficient budgetary support for police training, operations and investigations etc.
- Media needs to train and encourage the journalists to use the Right to Information law frequently and persistently and play the watchdog role effectively.
- Media's role as 'agenda setter' and 'public forum' will help in exposing real constraints to police, enabling people to understand the limitations of police and reduce public discontent with police.
- The rotten basket portrayal of police needs to be rectified through acknowledging the contributions of hard working, brave and honest police officers who have been committed to sacrifice their lives for their country and the people. Sacrifices of police martyrs such as Safwat Ghayuur, Malik Saad, Chaudhary Aslam and hundreds of others need to be remembered to raise the morale of police, provide emotional strength to the families of the martyrs and improve police-public relations.
- In areas of low literacy television and radio are more effective means to educate people about issues and need of police reforms and to increase

public demand for democratic police reforms.

Recommendations for Police vis a vis the Media

- Police officers must be available to the media at all times to respond to their queries promptly.
- Police needs to train its officers on how to deal with the media and how to answer their questions.
- Research shows that the positive portrayal of police is not as helpful for police image as is the avoidance of negative reporting. Scandals seriously damage police image. It is, therefore, imperative that the police leaders respond to such allegations carefully, professionally and as far as possible convincingly.
- Although media management on part of police is important, improving the quality of police-people interaction is ultimately more helpful to improve public image of police. It is negative rather than the positive experiences with police that people remember and share with their family and friends influencing their own and friends' and families' opinions of police definitively.⁷

Conclusion

It is critical to move the debate on police reforms from mere criticism of or complaint against police to understanding the complexities of policing and underlying challenges and the need to bring about specific changes. This requires an alliance of the media, civil society and the criminal justice experts interested to exercise leadership and bring about change through organized effort. Media's roles as an agenda setter and public forum are critical; only deeper knowledge of the problem will help develop informed public opinion which will act as a stimulus for police reforms.

⁷ Ibid.

