

# A Study of Economic, Cultural, and Political Causes of Police Corruption in Pakistan

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**Abstract** There is a dearth of studies on police corruption that have analysed the correlation of economic, cultural, and political causes of police corruption in Pakistan; therefore, the existing studies fail to provide such a holistic picture of the phenomenon. This article aims to fill the gap. It is claimed that police corruption in Pakistan is a politicized, institutionalized, and a legitimized phenomenon. The police force entrenched in a kinship-based patron–client social and political culture benefits the political elite to use the police force for controlling the electorate and political opponents. The policy reforms for curbing police corruption have failed and cannot be successful without a strong political will of the political elite. This is a qualitative study using a purposive sampling method. The article will be a useful reference for readers, including police officials who are interested in understanding why corruption could not be effectively prevented and may have some broader relevance to other South Asian countries.

## Introduction

Corruption is a global phenomenon. However, in Pakistan, it is endemic and remains a systemic problem entrenched at all levels of society and government (Dogar, 2017). According to the most recent estimates available, there was Rs 852 billion (the US\$ 8,192,307,692) worth of corruption in public sector enterprises only in 2016 (Sajid, 2016). The Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) identifies Pakistan as 117th out of 180 most corrupt countries (TI, 2019). While CPI alerts policymakers

about corruption, it is ‘not a sufficient indicator of the level of corruption in developing countries because the perception of corruption does not always reflect the reality or complexity of the actual level of corruption within a country’ (Madichie, 2005, p. 320). Such observation is relevant to Pakistan, where corruption has become a way of life in society, and the evaluation of perceptions of corruption fails to explain a holistic picture. Of all government departments, corruption within the police is of utmost concern because Pakistan represents a case where religious intolerance,

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sectarian, ethnic, and gender-based violence, as well as growing poverty, inequality, and crime, have led to significant deterioration of the rule of law. Deteriorating law and order also have grave consequences for economic growth and attracting foreign investment in the country (Raza *et al.*, 2015). The police are incapable of dealing with such challenges because of corrupt practices (TI, 2013). It is, therefore, imperative to understand the holistic nature of police corruption and its causes in Pakistan.

Despite the gravity of the issue, there is a dearth of studies on police corruption in Pakistan. One of the reasons is that the discipline of Criminology is rarely studied in the country. Out of 133 universities, only 3 offer Criminology to their students (Fasihuddin, 2013). Except Jackson *et al.* (2014), few studies on police have mainly concentrated on other aspects of police organization such as administrative reforms for police efficiency, lack of training, inadequate salaries, lack of accountability, lack of robust requirement, and lack of police legitimacy (see Chattha and Ivkovic, 2004; Abbas, 2011; Ahmed and Ahmed, 2012). These studies have recommended an increase in salaries, improvement in training and curriculum, increasing public awareness, changing organizational culture, provision of modern technology for investigation, reform of the criminal justice system for police accountability.

Jackson *et al.* (2014), however, focused on examining the empirical links between people's perceptions of police corruption and their perceptions of the fairness and effectiveness, and their beliefs about the legitimacy of the police. Their findings suggest that in Pakistan's context where 'minimal effectiveness and integrity is yet to be established, police legitimacy may rest not just on the procedural fairness of officers, but also on their demonstrated ability to control crime and avoid corruption' (Jackson *et al.*, 2014, p. 2). The main emphasis of their research is, nevertheless, on police legitimacy and not adequately studying the causes of police corruption.

This article will bridge the gap by focusing on multiple causes of police corruption.

The issue of police corruption in Pakistan is complex, and its several permutations and characteristics cannot be addressed adequately in a single article. It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this article to analyse police reforms, systems of police management and accountability or attempts made to curb police corruption. The article instead focuses on examining the economic, cultural, and political causes of police corruption in Pakistan that have emerged from our field research. It is demonstrated that police corruption in Pakistan is a politicized, institutionalized, and a legitimized phenomenon. Since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, there have been 21 reports on recommendations for police reform that were rarely implemented and the Police Act of 1861, which was introduced by the British colonial powers to quell political uprisings or opposition remained operative (Babakhel, 2018; Sadiq, 2014). It, therefore, becomes imperative to analyse multiple causes of police corruption in Pakistan, which may have some broader relevance to other developing countries in South Asia.

As will be demonstrated, with some variations, Singh's (2019, p. 24), six-fold typology on police corruption in Afghanistan seems relevant to Pakistan:

1. Patronage and loyalty (recruitment is based on connections and a patrimonial bureaucracy);
2. Unprofessionalism (not performing duties correctly and treason) and lack of motivation (no noble cause or sense of mission);
3. Bribery and extortion (the alleged cause is low pay to supplement income which is culturally accepted, but this is also due to the lack of police oversight and high solidarity);
4. Violence and protection rackets (demanding payments for vendors to continue selling produce or operating businesses);
5. Direct involvement and protection of drug-related activities (involves kickbacks paid to

senior officers to continue working in high drug-producing areas); and

6. Payment for posts (internal payoffs to secure positions).

This article proceeds as follows. The next section is on methodology. ‘Conceptualising corruption’ section conceptualizes police corruption. ‘Findings’ section presents research findings, and ‘Discussion and conclusions’ section is on overall discussion and conclusions.

## Methodology

The study is qualitative. The fieldwork for this study was conducted from December 2017 to February 2018. However, the co-author conducted an initial study, as part of his Master’s thesis in Criminology at the University of Melbourne in 2005. This research builds on the earlier study in terms of some initial ideas. However, the data used in this article are the one collected in 2017–18. The analysis is, therefore, based on significantly extended field research and literature surveyed. The research tools employed were semi-structured interviews, focus group meetings, and observations. The study follows an interpretive research paradigm. The interpretative paradigm focuses on the meanings from the perspective of the participants involved in the social phenomenon, in contrast to statistical techniques that are employed heavily in positivist research (Noon, 2018).

The study adopted a purposive sampling method to ensure that the participants selected fitted best for the phenomenon of police corruption being studied. Data analysis can become difficult and time exhaustive without proper screening of respondents. Measuring credentials method was used to remove unwanted participants (Fluid Survey, 2013). The primary credentials considered were whether the participants possessed certain credentials (e.g. significant work experience) that made them suited for the study or whether they had in-depth knowledge or experience of

encountering police corruption. Existing contacts and snowball technique were used, in the beginning. The snowball technique is consistent with purposive sampling, as groups of people recommend potential participants for the study (Naderifar *et al.*, 2017).

Following Chadwick *et al.* (1984), we triangulated the data. Triangulation involves the collection of data using different methods from different sources. In this case, the secondary sources included academic books and articles, newspaper articles, government documents, and primary data were collected through police officers (eight senior officers (deputy superintendents of police, superintendents of police (SPs), and deputy inspector general of police (DIGs)), six mid-level officers (i.e. station house officers (SHOs), investigating officers, and sub-inspectors), and six junior officers (police constables) participated in the research). Moreover, other policing stakeholders such as policy analysts (seven), criminal lawyers (seven), and members of the public (48 in 6 focus group meetings (each focus meeting comprised of eight participants)) participated. After completing interviewing 82 participants, the researchers reached a consensus that saturation was obtained in this study. Generally, 10–25 interviews are recommended to obtain saturation (Creswell, 2013). The citation style of participants’ comments followed is consistent with Reynolds *et al.* (2018) study on police. In other words, we have followed the citation style of participants’ comments used by Reynolds *et al.*

Though there is no research regulatory body in Pakistan, the authors researched in compliance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018). The participants were provided with the plain language state for their consent explaining the aims of the research and what was required of participants during interviews and focus meetings. All participants had signed informed consent to participate in the research. All interviews were taped and typed verbatim. The transcripts were later coded to protect

the identities of participants. The names of participants; police stations in which they work; and the cities, villages, or districts in which their police stations are located are not mentioned to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Also, to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the roles of the participants are not revealed in the analysis that follows. Following the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2007\)](#), the data are stored in password-protected computer files for 5 years.

Upon completion of the interviews, transcripts were produced and compared with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. The data obtained were thematically categorized at the stage of data analysis.<sup>1</sup> The categories identified were compared, and the relationships existed between and among them were examined. While doing this, personal notes, comments, or memos were made. These memos assisted in the reflection and discussion of research findings.

## Conceptualizing corruption

Having its epistemological roots in the West, and considered universally applicable, a widely accepted legal definition of corruption is ‘the abuse of public office for private gains’ ([Rose-Ackerman, 1996](#); [Zakiuddin and Haque, 1998](#); [Kaufmann and Vicente, 2011](#)). Following this definition, the National Accountability Bureau of Pakistan (NAB Pakistan) defines corruption as a phenomenon that:

Involves behaviour on the part of officeholders in the public and private sectors, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves and/or those close to them, or induce others to do so, by misusing the position in which they are placed. More simply,

it comprises the misuse of entrusted power for private benefit. (NAB Pakistan, 2002, p. 5)

Concerning the legal definition of police corruption, [Punch \(2009, p. 18\)](#) suggested that it ‘refers to an officer knowingly doing or not doing something that is against his or her duty for some form of financial or material gain or promise of such gain’. Corrupt activities typically include bribery, extortion, perjury, and embezzlement ([Newburn, 1999](#)). [Roebuck and Barker \(1974\)](#); but also see [Sayed and Bruce, 1998](#)) have provided the best known typology of corruption. They identified eight types of police corruption, i.e. corruption of authority (material gain without violating the law *per se*); ‘Kickbacks’; opportunistic theft stealing from arrestees; ‘Shakedown’ (acceptance of a bribe for not making an arrest, filing a complaint, etc.); illegal police protection of those engaged in illegal activities; ‘The fix’ (undermining of criminal investigations or proceedings, etc.); Direct criminal activities; internal payoffs (where holidays, shift allocations, promotion are bought, bartered, and sold). [Punch \(1985\)](#) added the 9th type, i.e. ‘Flaking’ or ‘padding’ (planting of or adding to evidence). This typology represents a hierarchy from the least to the most ‘serious’ corruption practices. The implicit argument in such a typology is that officers who become corrupt tend to start at the bottom with the least serious offences and then gradually progress to the other end of the spectrum. [Kleinig \(1996\)](#) referred to such an argument as the ‘slippery slope argument’. [Singh \(2015\)](#) added nepotism as corruption in the context of Afghanistan and argued that the system of patronage undermines the rule of law. All nine types of corruption and nepotistic activities in the Afghan context can be applicable to define police corruption in Pakistan.

<sup>1</sup> Broader themes were developed through codes. For example, codes such as low wages, work–leisure balance, and inadequate operational funds led to themes such as ‘Survival (Individual and Institutional)’; codes such as ‘large families’, ‘kinship obligations’ led to themes such as ‘cultural constraints’ and ‘political patronage’ led to themes such as ‘politicisation’.

While the typology of corruption helps define the phenomenon, to understand the complex causes of corruption, one needs to go beyond definitions (Porter and Warrender, 2009). It becomes imperative to understand what it entails and who it implicates (Porter and Warrender, 2009). Various theories of police corruption have conceptualized the causes differently. A brief analysis of a few specific theories of public sector corruption that talk about its causes equally relevant to police corruption is, therefore, in order. For our purposes, six theories, i.e. Public Choice Theory, Rotten Apple Theory, Organizational Culture Theory, Cultural Constraint theory, The Ethos of Public Administration Theory, and Correlation Theory can be identified.

The Public Choice Theory puts the onus of corrupt practices on rational individuals who choose the corrupt transaction by weighing the cost and benefits of such a transaction. Klitgaard (1988, p. 70) in this context states, 'if the benefits of corruption minus the probability of being caught times its penalties are greater than the benefits of not being caught, then an individual will rationally choose to be corrupt.' Overall, the Public Choice Theory focuses on the specific situation of an agent (a corrupt official) instead of a larger social context that can be a general determining factor for corruption.

The Rotten Apple Theory locates the cause of corruption in the existence of people with faulty moral character, the so-called 'rotten apples' (Jancsics, 2014). The theory professes that only a few corrupt officers are problematic instead of overall police institutions (Newburn, 1999). It conceives corruption as an issue related to individual pathology leading to propensities of individuals to be corrupt (Sherman, 1978; Tankebe, 2010). Consequently, the solution to the problem lies in 'carefully screening applications for police positions, pursuing defective officers aggressively, and removing them from their police position before their behaviour spread through the agency' (Klockars, 1999, p. 208).

However, several studies have demonstrated that police corruption is a systemic phenomenon (Smith, 2010). The explanations based on individual pathology or deviances of police officers are, therefore, theoretically unsatisfying (Tankebe, 2010). Several known examples of police corruption defy the 'rotten apple' theory, the classic one being the hearings of the Knapp Commission in New York that 'destroyed the police unions argument that police corruption was confined to a few "rotten apples" in another health barrel', as the Commission argued that the task of corruption control is to examine the barrel, not just the apples (Sherman, 1978, p. xxviii).

Those who advocate 'examining the barrel' proposition propose the institutional theory of corruption. This theory provides organizational perspective to police corruption. Such theory emphasizes on the culture and structure of the organization in which the agent works, instead of the background or motives of the corrupt officials (Punch, 2000). Accordingly, the theory argues that proper management with clearly defined organizational goals and objectives, effective division of labour, and hierarchy of authority are essential to prevent officials from being corrupt. Moreover, a robust system of command and control, an ongoing process of accountability, effective communication, and mechanism of information within organizations are considered important to prevent corruption (Dias and Vaughn, 2006). The breakdown of such organizational attributes, on the contrary, can lead to individual officials to be corrupt. The solution, therefore, is successful recruitment, screening, effective policy implementations, constant training, supervision, and discipline during the entire tenure of the officers' service (Lee *et al.*, 2013).

The Cultural Constraint Theory of Corruption goes even beyond organizational culture as corruption is considered at the level of society. According to this theory, certain cultural values and norms of society directly influence the values and norms of police officials, making them

corrupt (Waddington, 1999; Buttle *et al.*, 2016; Hurbert, 2002). The culturalist view of corruption provides an alternative to the legalistic view. The legalistic view of corruption has been challenged by this school of thought that believes that like other social terms, there is no single set of words to define corruption because it depends on the social construction, customs, and norms of the community (Gupta, 1995; Sissener, 2001). For example, Bardhan (1997, p. 1330) noted that unlike the West:

It is widely recognised that in developing countries, gift-exchange is a major social norm in business transactions, and allegiance to kinship-based or clan-based loyalties often takes precedence over public duties even for salaried public officers.

give birth to what Gupta (1995) calls the blurring of boundaries between the state and society. Using the case study of Sharmaji, the lowest irrigation official involved in corrupt practices in India, he argued that Sharmaji poses, ‘an interesting challenge to Western notions of the boundary between “state” and “society” in some obvious ways’ (Gupta 1995, p. 384). The reason, he continues, is perhaps because ‘those categories are descriptively inadequate to the lived realities that they purport to represent’ (Gupta, 1995, p. 384). In the case of India, he opines, therefore, that the discourse of corruption gives birth to people’s discursive construction of the state (and helps the state’s functioning; Gupta, 1995).

Explaining the cultural aspects of corruption, Olivier de Sardan (1999, p. 2) used the expression ‘moral economy’ referring to ‘the value systems and cultural codes, which allow a justification of corruption by those who practice it (and who do not necessarily consider, quite the contrary, it to be such) and an anchorage of corruption as banal everyday practice.’ In such a situation, public employees find themselves in a schizophrenic situation. Their ‘administrative and professional

legitimacy is derived from their training in modern European administration (which is now a worldwide standard) and therefore in its values concerning the public service’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p. 20). However, the social legitimacy of government officials implies, on the contrary, that they act in conformity with more or less contradictory ‘socio-cultural’ logics. The apparent adherence to the so-called rational official norms of European origin accompanied by the concept of neutral State working for public interest coexists comfortably ‘with an equally prevalent pattern of behaviour in conformity with social norms in favour of the pre-eminence of private and partisan interests’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p. 20). Such a scenario creates a situation of blurring of boundaries between the state and society.

Overall, the proponents of the cultural view argue that different societies will have to deal with the issue differently, keeping in view the specific nature, characteristics, patterns, and organizational structure of the phenomenon (Sissener, 2001).

The Ethos of Public Administration Theories argues that corruption is a result of culture within public management and society in general (Gregory, 1999). The theories are related to Organizational Culture Theories but also vary because the concern is not merely the organizational culture. The main argument is that the structure of the state, which is influenced by societies’ social structures influences the way a certain ethos is maintained in favour or against corrupt practices at the organizational and individual levels. Following Heywood (1997), Graaf (2007) argued that the Ethos of Public Administration Theory shares close synergies with the ‘structural approach’ to political corruption.

The Correlational Theory literature put forward a view that corruption can be understood at all levels, i.e. social, political, organizational, and individual levels. The variables considered are on all possible levels: individual, organizational, societal, and structural (governance; Graaf, 2007). As mentioned earlier, the economic, cultural, and political

causes of police corruption in Pakistan that have emerged from our research findings, we, therefore, find Correlation Theory of Corruption most relevant to contextualize our research. However, though it will be demonstrated in the next section that an overarching factor is political, that is, police corruption exists primarily as the ruling elite benefit from it in Pakistan.

## Findings

This section analyses three prime causes of police corruption in Pakistan, i.e. (1) economic, (2) cultural, and (3) the politicization of the police.

### Economic

[Khan \(2006\)](#) argued that political stabilization in advanced countries could typically be achieved through transparent redistributions through the fiscal process, whereas political stabilization in the context of underdevelopment in developing countries involves political corruption. At the level of the economy, greater tax revenues in advanced countries mean that political stabilization can be achieved with in the form of transparent fiscal transfers. At the same time, the productive sector generates enough of a surplus to pay taxes for the effective protection of property rights, limiting the possibility of expropriation. On the contrary, in developing countries, the tax base is low, and the distribution of resources is not transparent. In the case of Pakistan, the tax regime is regressive, where the poor pay more taxes, enhancing poverty further. The distribution of resources is non-transparent, and politicians in power prefer to spend more on projects that have more visibility and better optics to fetch votes, compared to spending more on citizens' security and development. Resultantly, the police officers are paid low wages, and police operations are not adequately resourced. The combination of both leads to police corruption. An analysis of both is given below.

**Low wages.** [Rose-Ackerman \(1999, p. 72\)](#) noted that in countries where police officials are not provided with adequate wages, the police force engages in corrupt transactions for survival. Her observation neatly fits the case of Pakistan. In a country where 4 out of 10 Pakistanis live in multi-dimensional poverty, there are numerous incentives for corruption ([UNDP, 2016](#)). The discretionary powers of police officers are plenty. There is no risk involved in corruption since the entire system is corrupt ([Khan et al., 2012](#)). The salary package of police officers is in extreme contrast to the powers entrusted to them. The monthly salary of a police constable is around US\$ 83 per month, a head constable US\$ 89, a sub-inspector US\$ 107, an inspector US\$ 122, a SP US\$ 288, a DIG of police US\$ 576, an inspector general of police \$ 577 (GoP, 2017–18). Some officers get extra allowances because of their specific assignments, but the overall picture is not different from the one painted above.

The average cost of living is extremely high, i.e. PKR 119,927.81 (US\$ 776.726 per month) ([TransferWise, 2017](#)). It, therefore, becomes difficult even for senior police officers to make both ends meet. According to all police officers, there are very few government residences available for the low-ranking officers. In big urban centres, accommodation is often not available for high-ranking police officers either. Since there is no 'provision of health insurance by the government, the police personnel have to bear the cost of healthcare from their small pay package' (Senior officer 1). The annual inflation rate is in double digits, and 'the increase in salary other than yearly increments is announced after five to seven years' (Senior officer 2). Junior officers (90%) complained that there is no formal leave system and they spend never-ending hours. They blamed their senior colleagues for not providing them breathing space to relax and maintain work–leisure balance. The police officers 'are supposed to be on duty for 16–18 hours without any extra remuneration,

seven days a week, and there are no regular duty rosters in operation' (Junior officer 3). The prolonged work hours and low salaries 'cause enormous stress and depression among officers' (Junior officer 4). The rest of the 10% junior officers were of the view that the shortage of adequate police officers is a significant cause of their overwork. This view was shared by all senior and mid-level police officers too.

The lack of provision of adequate wages, therefore, deteriorates the quality of work, productivity, and morale. Economists argue that low wages negatively impact the morale and productivity of the workforce (Paul and Du, 2018). If this is accompanied by long working hours, the effect on morale and productivity can be extreme and become a disincentive for clean behaviour. It is because of these reasons that the lack of adequate investment in human resources was considered to be the cause of frustration and corruption within the police force.

#### *Lack of police operational resources.*

Apart from the above, there are other structural causes of police corruption in Pakistan. As mentioned before, the police stations are not provided with any funds to run their everyday official business. As Chino points out, 'police mandates are still unfunded, with the average budget for a police station per year being a mere PKR 8,000 (US\$120)' (Chino, 2001, p. 42). The 'increase in the budget is still not significant' (Senior officer 4). The recent report (2017–18) from the office of the Inspector General of Police Punjab reveals that only 12% of the total budget is allocated for police operations. The rest of the amount is spent on salaries and allowances (GoP, 2017–18). However, even for salaries and allowance, 88% of the budget of PKR 1,970 billion (US\$ 12.76 million) is meagre for a police force responsible for maintaining law and order for a population of 110,012,442 in Punjab. Despite such a meagre budget, there has been hardly any pay reform process introduced by the government.

Senior police officers stated that police stations are defaulters of hundreds of thousands of rupees regarding payment of utility bills. Police are not made accountable because 'the officers in different utility departments do not bother police stations for defaults due to the coercive powers of the police' (Senior official 3). The fuel is rationed per police station. However, 'police station vehicles are provided with six litres of diesel per day in rural areas. In some police stations, fuel for vehicles is not provided at all' (Mid-level officer 6). According to another mid-level police officer:

In practice, both in rural and urban areas, it is an unofficial responsibility of police stations to mobilise their resources to bear all operating costs ranging from the investigation of a crime, arranging vehicles and fuel for raids, expenses of forensic tests and serologist, chemical examiners and firearms expert reports to utility bills, and even stationary for office use. Such a practice forces police to mobilise the required resources through unofficial means (Mid-level officer 3).

The resources are mobilized through kickbacks; taking bribes for not registering First Investigation Report, protecting criminals, undermining criminal investigations, and adding or removing evidence against or in favour of someone convicted and getting bribes from arrestees (Criminal Lawyer 1). Moreover, police stations are bought and sold and bribery for promotions is given to senior officers (Criminal Lawyer 1). Such corrupt activities testify the typology of corruption identified by Roebuck and Baker (1974).

Also, a police station arranges resources to fulfil the demands made by the senior officers. Most of these demands are made by officers known to be corrupt. For example, 'if a senior police officer wants to buy a computer for his son or a daughter, all he has to do is to call officer-in-charge of a police station, and the demand would be fulfilled'

(Mid-level officer 5). The term used for the demands made by senior officers is known as; *fatik*, an Urdu version of 'fatigue' which is a military term meaning excessive labour. It is important to note that even honest police officers fail to control corruption.

Once, police officers were instructed by a Superintendent of Police to abstain from corruption. The same evening when he asked the positions of patrolling vehicles of police stations, he found that some of them were parked in police stations instead of patrolling. He asked the SHOs furiously to tell the reason, and they replied that the diesel provided by the government had finished and since they were instructed to abstain from corruption, the vehicles were parked in police stations. Next morning, the SP called the meeting again and said to SHOs to carry on with the past practices but refrain from taking money in investigations (Mid-level officer 4).

The above example illustrates that due to resource constraints, it is impossible for even an honest officer to avoid corruption to run the official business while doing their duties. They mobilize such resources through enormous powers entrusted to them. Such a situation signifies that corruption exists at the individual level because of the institutional structures, which force police officers to indulge in corrupt transactions to run their offices, leaving no moral justification not to do so at a personal level. For police officers, corruption, therefore, becomes a kind of noble cause to run police stations because they consider that 'bribery is valid as it leads to the cause of protecting citizens and maintaining law and order in society' (Senior officer 3).

The members of the public shared interesting views about the above situation. Though they

showed reluctance to approach police even to report a crime because of the fear of extortion, they were sympathetic concerning the current state of police officers' well-being and thought that police often do not have options to survive without corruption. For example, one of them opined that:

Although people are fearful of visiting police stations because of their corruption and brutal attitudes, and I do not justify corruption in any form, but what can a police officer do if he is unable to meet the basic needs of his family through the salary offered to him. Nevertheless, they should not take bribes from poor citizens and not be brutal with ordinary citizens. They should avoid abusive language and use of violence to harass people.

The above views signify the legitimacy of police corruption in people's eyes, but they oppose any act of violence by police officers.

### Cultural

The causes of corruption also have cultural dimensions. The expression of 'moral economy' used by [Olivier de Sardan \(1999\)](#), in African context, explains the 'cultural embeddedness of corruption'. Cultural embeddedness of corruption, however, does not refer to a backward, monolithic, or determinist theory of culture. It rather pinpoints to 'certain *social norms* widely represented in today's Africa, which "communicate" with or influence the practices of corruption' ([Olivier de Sardan, 1999](#), p. 2). Inherent in the 'moral economy' is the logics of redistributive accumulation, i.e. a government official when acquires a position of authority (small or big) not only benefits his/her family but also works for the benefit of his/her extended family, acquaintances, and the village in a kinship-/clan-based societies.

Such an aspect of the 'moral economy' is relevant to police corruption in the Pakistani context. Pakistani society is based on a strong kinship-

based culture (Lyon, 2004), where individuals do not exist as individuals but in relation to others. In most cases, the financial burden of meeting family, and many a time, the extended family members fall on the heads of the family. An example of a junior police officer is instructive:

I have the responsibility to feed my family and my brother's family, which includes my six children and his wife, along with the three children and a wife of my deceased brother. My conscience, as well as the fear of being stigmatised by my extended family for not supporting my late brother's family, forces me to take care of them too. In the absence of adequate salary and social services available to me, I have no choice but to earn money from illegal means. (Junior officer 3)

Though it might be difficult to generalize the above case, there is a trend of having large families<sup>2</sup> in Pakistan, and the responsibility of one person (mostly male) to feed these families is a huge burden (since the dependence is on one person, there is hardly a rotation strategy within families). Gift exchange and meeting other expectations of extended family members are also common. The public, in general, is aware of such a reality and as mentioned in the previous section, they are sympathetic to police taking bribes for survival. Referring to societal norms, a member of the public opined that:

In our culture, we have a *biradari*<sup>3</sup> system, and we have to meet the expectations of our biradari. Police officials are also human beings like us. They also have responsibilities to their families and their biradari. We

have to be collegial and generous enough to help each other, especially in difficult times to maintain relationships within our biradari and friends. All this requires resources. If the income is not enough what other choices we have. In such circumstances and given an opportunity, anyone would take a bribe.

The nature of the social fabric and the economic hardship faced by police officers even to run their official business are critical factors contributing to widespread police corruption. However, as noted by a senior police officer, 'bribers often exploit the prevalent social norm of gift exchange and present the government officers with expensive gifts to obtain favours' (Senior police officer 6). The above is in line with what Chattha and Ivkovic (2004, p. 167) following Roebuck and Baker (1974) called 'corruption of authority' and suggested that 'the leadership of the police department considers this to be a system of informal rewards provided that the officers receiving such gifts are acceptable to the department and that the corruptors belong to the respectable class of citizens'. Such a situation leads to a complex spectrum of corruption where the legalistic and cultural conceptions of corruption overlap and create a room to what Olivier de Sardan (1999) called the moral economy of corruption.

### Politicization of policing

Political influence on police is widespread in South Asia. For example, Lamani and Venumadhava (2013, p. 234) noted that 'it has been commonplace in India for transfers and postings of officers to be used as a kind of reward and punishment, as a result of which, many chiefs of police have had allegiances to political parties.' In Bangladesh also, political influence contributes

<sup>2</sup> Average household size in rural areas is 6.3 persons and in urban areas it is 7.2 persons in Punjab (Government of the Punjab 2018. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017–18, Bureau of Statistics).

<sup>3</sup> *Biradari* is an Urdu language word, which means 'extended family', clan or tribe.

to police corruption (see [Kashem, 2005](#)). In Afghanistan, the influence of political elites affiliated with drug traffickers on police has resulted in bribery, extortion, and ethnic favouritism ([Singh, 2014](#)).

In Pakistan, the police station is the axis institution around which the politics of the country revolve, and 'the worth of a politician in his/her constituency is judged in terms of his ability to influence the police' (Policy analyst 1). The police investigation officers 'are expected to oblige politicians because the politicians take offence if the police fail to do so' (Policy analyst 5). The transfer and postings of police officers are, therefore, a politicized activity. At the provincial level, 'the transfers of District Police Officers (DPOs) are entirely at the disposal of Chief Ministers (CM) of the provinces' (Policy analyst 3). During various regimes, 'the heads of police in different provinces have long been asking for the executive powers to post the district Superintendents of Police, but not many of them have succeeded' (Policy analyst 2).

Political influence on the transfer and postings of police officers is a powerful instrument for controlling the police department. A policy analyst in this context noted that:

It is not considered corruption if a police officer asks a politician<sup>4</sup> to get him a posting of his choice. But then such favours come at a price such as favouring the politician in police investigations, posting SHOs of their choice to establish the authority of a politician in his constituency, irrespective of any considerations of efficiency and integrity. Very rarely, an officer gets a good posting without political patronage. The workplace procedures are seldom followed (Policy analyst 6)

He further said that the concept of 'good postings' refers to field assignments where a police officer is in charge of a jurisdiction exercising significant influence on people's lives and liberties and provides them with opportunities for embezzlement and corruption. In this context, police officers, either lacking political contacts or not willing to serve politicians, suffer. Another policy analyst noted that:

The police officers with no access to political support mostly end up as Officer on Special Duty (OSD). The post of OSD is considered no less than punishment to officers who do not serve the interests of politicians because they are hardly assigned any work or offices, and are never given field postings (Policy analyst 7).

The powerful landowners dominate politics in Pakistan. All members of the public were of the view that there is an overwhelming representation of the landowning class in the politics of Pakistan. In the urban centre, they opined, the paradigm is shifting towards industrialists and business people. These distinctions are also blurring since the business class is also acquiring land holdings to assume political power and landowners are investing in industries and business enterprises to accumulate wealth—a key, to participating in politics. A member of the public opined that 'politicians' wealth and power becomes instrumental in politicising police and benefits them and police officials alike'.

Another member of the public argued that 'the control of the police force is the dream of every Pakistani politician, for it means the power to harass, hound and make life miserable for their opponents'. They were highly fretful about the abuse and politicization of police by politicians. They held politicians responsible for police corruption and brutality. A member of the public stated that 'the police is corrupt and acts rudely and violently

<sup>4</sup> This can be any politician having power and influence within the government.

with citizens because the ruling elite has given them unlimited authority and they know they are not accountable to anyone’.

The legislative aspect of providing police with unbridled legal authority is a horrific phenomenon. A criminal lawyer noted that:

The draconian colonial laws to subvert political uprising are still not only present on paper but are frequently practised in spirit. The legislative aspect of providing police with unbridled legal authority to crush political opposition is a horrific phenomenon (Criminal lawyer 1).

The above observation is affirmed by Section 16 of the notorious Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Act that allows police to detain any person found guilty of disrupting public peace to prison up to 6 months. Once the person is prosecuted under 16 MPO, the judicial function is superseded by the executive function, and the appeals have to be made to the Home Office to withdraw the order (see Maintenance of Police Order (MPO, 1960). Section 144 of the criminal procedure code, if enforced in a district, bans any form of an assembly of four or more people, and they can be booked in violation of Section 144 (MPO, 1960).

None of the successive governments ever thought of abolishing these laws, ‘as they were often found very useful to maintain control’ (Criminal lawyer 2). Another criminal lawyer stated that:

The Criminal Procedure Code and other numerous Acts, having their roots in the colonial period, empower police to play havoc with civil liberties and with the fundamental human rights of people. Politicians and police have abused human rights and civil liberties with impunity (Criminal lawyer 4).

According to all criminal lawyers, when police are used to further the political ends of politicians, a culture of collusion is developed. Such a culture erodes the concept of accountability, and whatever mechanism of institutional or public accountability is present, it is rendered toothless. A comment by a criminal lawyer is instructive:

If an honest police officer, therefore, wants to initiate departmental action against a corrupt subordinate, he can do little, because of the pressure from politicians to drop the proceedings. If the officer decides to go ahead with the action, the corrupt officer would use his political link to influence the superior officer and would either get the punishment withdrawn or converted into a minor sanction bearing no effect on the career of the corrupt officer, making a mockery of the accountability system (Criminal lawyer 3).

Such situation is not likely to change overnight, and the influence of politicians and influential people on police remains in most provinces because as mentioned earlier, the police stations are the hub of electoral politics and are used for intimidating politicians from opposition parties, rigging elections, and maintain patron–client political relations. The political will to free the police force from political pressures and manipulation, therefore, does not seem to be visible. Without the political will of the ruling elite, it is highly unlikely that the current state of police practices would change.

## Discussion and conclusions

The study findings explicitly demonstrate that a comprehensive account of police corruption in Pakistan is inconceivable without analysing the correlation of corruption at the economic, cultural, and political levels. Two economic causes for

the individual as well as institutional corruption have been identified. One, low wages, and, two, lack of adequate operational budget. Low wages lead to corruption at an individual level because police officers make rational choices in the absence of any risks of being caught as proposed by the Public Choice Theory. A few rotten apples might also have been recruited. Lack of adequate resources for day-to-day police operations forces police officials for corrupt transactions, as without such transactions they can hardly run their official business, validating the Institutional Theory of police corruption. The Public Choice Theory and the Institutional Theory of police corruption are thus interlinked as the predicament of generating institutional resources through corrupt transactions leaves no moral justification not to get bribes for personal gains. Corruption for personal gains to mitigate the effects of the low wage for survival as well as extravagant living in some cases at the senior level, and as an operational necessity, therefore, cannot be separated in the case of police corruption in Pakistan.

It is important to mention that in the above context, Khalid (2016, p. 256) study on three traffic police departments in three cities such as Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Attock in Pakistan, argues that provision of more resources for paying better salaries does not seem to limit integrity violations. However, the argument does not seem to hold grounds because as mentioned in our research findings the raise in salaries is given after 5–7 years, which does not seem to be adequate to limit integrity violations in the police force.

The Cultural Constraint Theory is also present in Pakistani policing because of the nature of the social fabric and the blurring of the boundary between the state and society. The *biradari* liabilities with a large family and a huge dependency burden on one person who is not paid enough to live a decent life forces him/her to be corrupt. The corrupt transaction that the officer is involved in not only benefit his/her family but the extended family as well according to the logics of redistributive

accumulation inherent within ‘moral economy’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999).

The research findings indicate that the Ethos of Public Administration Theory is also relevant to policing in Pakistan, as the structure of the state is dominated by the moral economy linked to patron–client politics where police officials facing economic hardship are patronized by politicians to quell the opposition and control people in their constituencies. Following Graaf (2007) such a situation does allude to the ‘structural approach’ to political corruption having synergies with the Ethos of Public Administration Theory.

Overall, the Correlational Theory of police corruption that encompasses all relevant theories (discussed above and relevant to our research findings) explains the pervasive presence of police corruption in Pakistan. However, since the patron–client structure of the state determines the very field of action of police officers by trading off adequate budget for policing with that of more popular projects leading to more visible optics to fetch more votes, the ethos of public administration theory within the Correlational Theory explains the primary cause of corruption—i.e. the structure of the state governance and politics in Pakistan.

argued that in advanced liberalized industrial countries living standards of citizens largely depend on the productive capitalist sector resulting from direct taxation and the purchasing power of the capitalist sector resulting into more democratic and transparent redistribution creating stability in society. As mentioned in ‘Conceptualising corruption’ section, in developing countries, the productive capitalist sector is small, and the direct tax base is low. In Pakistan, the direct tax base is so narrow that only 1% of people in Pakistan pay taxes (The News, 2019), which makes the state poor due to highly unregulated economy. Unlike advanced Western countries, stability in Pakistan is, therefore, not maintained through transparent redistribution of resources but the chain of patronage right from the parliamentarians down to the

people. As noted by [Uberti \(2016, p. 330\)](#) in such societies, ‘true participants in corrupt exchange frame their interactions through culturally specific scripts and norms.’

Moreover, unlike advanced industrial countries, the primary logic of patronage in post-colonial agrarian societies is that the distribution of economic resources is not open to all citizens, state departments, and sections of society on an equal basis ([North et al., 2009](#)). Such logic is relevant to Pakistan, especially in the case of the police force, which receives meagre resources compared to some other state institutions. Such seems to be the case of police in other countries in South Asia as well. For example, meagre resources provided to the police leading to low wages, extended work hours, and the problems of accommodation are some of the factors responsible for the police corruption in India ([Verma, 1999](#)). Similarly, according to [Singh \(2014\)](#), poor wages lead to bribery and extortion within the Afghan police force. Moreover, [Singh’s \(2019, p. 24\)](#) six-fold typology, excluding treason, is relevant to police corruption in Pakistan. Though, as mentioned by Singh with reference to Afghanistan, there is a high level of unprofessionalism in Pakistan too, no police officer has ever been reported to commit treason. Moreover, the lack of motivation in the police force is demonstrated in our research findings, the corrupt transactions, in the eyes of police officials and community members, seems to lead to a noble cause of running their official business in the absence of adequate resources provided to them. Without corruption, they think, they would not be able to run their police stations.

Consequently, as demonstrated in this article, police corruption, becomes an institutionalized and legitimized phenomenon. For example, it is not considered corruption if a police officer asks a politician to get him a posting of his choice or to mobilize resources to run the day-to-day police operations through informal/illegitimate means. With low salaries and the provision of inadequate means for their well-being, when police officers

mobilize resources for police operations, they mobilize resources for themselves too. Corruption, therefore, gains certain legitimacy. Such a situation further gains currency because of kinship responsibilities of police officers to meet the demands of their immediate as well as extended family members. It is, therefore, that corruption (or exchanges considered corrupt in Western societies) may not be legal but ‘like patronage and clientelism have its own morality, at least in the eye of the local public’ ([Shore and Haller, 2005, p.12](#)). As a result, even a few honest officials who abstain from corrupt transactions are not in a position to control institutional corruption.

[Rijckeghem and Weder \(2001, p. 324\)](#) cross-country analysis of 31 developing countries suggest that in a corrupt system, increase in wages does not significantly reduce corruption unless there is a political will for strong anti-corruption efforts and policies to reform the society. Similarly, [Quah \(2006; 2010\)](#) noted that Singapore and Hong Kong have significantly overcome police corruption in the post-colonial period through a significant increase in salaries and better training and recruitment, etc. However, the most important factor behind police reforms in these countries was the political will of the ruling elite to curb police corruption. In Singapore, reforms became powerful since the People’s Action Party government came to power. The amendment of the Prevention of Corruption Act in 1960 defined corruption explicitly and gave the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) wider powers. Indeed, ‘the greater vigilance of the CPIB in recent years has also made it difficult for Singaporeans in general and members of the Singapore Police Force (SPF) in particular to indulge in corrupt behaviour’ [Quah \(2006, p. 65\)](#). Similarly, in Hong Kong, right from its inception, the Independent Commission Against Corruption heavily resourced by the government adopted a three-pronged strategy of focusing on investigating and preventing corruption, and educating the public and

obtaining their support in curbing corruption (Quah, 2010).

To conclude, it is because of the inadequate provision of sources to the police force, and patron–client social and political culture that the political-elite benefits from corrupt police in Pakistan. Consequently, due to the lack of political will at the highest level (as the ruling elite spends more resources of projects that have better optics compared to citizens security), the unscrupulous politicians and even less scrupulous senior police officers systematically undermine the efforts of the few relatively honest and competent officers. Pakistan can follow the examples of Singapore and Hong Kong to curb police corruption.

The research findings and analysis will surely add to the understanding of police audience in Pakistan and South Asia generally on multifaceted causes of police corruption. Moreover, while the article adds to the literature on police corruption in Pakistan, much remains to be done at the research level. Lack of research also hampers efforts; both the government and police leadership must encourage research. This study has focused on the causes of police corruption. It is imperative to conduct more studies which would likely to facilitate the availability of further information and analysis, multiple policy options, frameworks for reforms, and programmes for improvement in training and curriculum; increasing public awareness; changing organizational culture; provision of modern technology for investigation and reform of the criminal justice system for police accountability.

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