

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN PERFORMANCE OF POLICE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DISTRICT KOHAT

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Abstract

The present study explores the problem of political interference in the Kohat police department in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This study highlights how this kind of interference compromises the police's independence in making decisions, enabling political players to abuse police power for their own political and personal benefit. Police lose their professionalism when they become involved in political matters, which have a negative impact on their capacity to effectively and fairly enforce the law. Public confidence in the police is damaged by this interference, which not only impairs their performance but also skews their judgment. The study also draws attention to the wider ramifications of this occurrence, such as the rising crime and corruption rates in the area. This qualitative study explores the experiences of 12 SHOs in police stations Kohat who are currently serving at police stations by using semi structured interviews to better understand the nature of political interference and the live experiences of respondents within their departments. The findings of the study contribute that political interference is driven by the political and personal gain which affect merit based decision and integrity of police. Officers are exposed to hazards and dangers because to the complexity created by cultural dynamics and public contacts. Disobeying such interference frequently has terrible consequences, highlighting the necessity of reforms to guarantee fair and efficient police.

INTRODUCTION

Political interference in state institutions, particularly within police institutions, constitutes a significant barrier to justice delivery, institutional legitimacy, and the consolidation of democratic norms in transitional societies like Pakistan (Hussain, 2025). Such interference is not merely a bureaucratic irregularity; rather, it represents a deeply embedded mode of power manipulation that systematically erodes institutional autonomy and repositions law enforcement as an apparatus of elite domination rather than a guardian of public service (Bayley, 2024;

Zahid, 2025). In democratic societies, the police are expected to function as neutral enforcers of the rule of law, accountable to citizens, not to partisan patrons (Boivin & Melo, 2023; Zaheer et al., 2020). However, this foundational principle is severely compromised when political actors insert themselves into the operational, administrative, and disciplinary structures of police organizations (Bangash et al., 2021).

Political interference significantly undermines public trust and weakens the pillars of democratic

accountability, fairness, and justice. Citizens begin to perceive law enforcement not as a protector of rights but as a biased instrument serving the ambitions of those in power (Jones & Patel, 2020; Gupta & Kumar, 2019). Transparency International (2024) and Waseem (2025) highlight that such political meddling often manifests through selective law enforcement, partisan judicial appointments, suppression of dissent, and the redirection of policing priorities toward electoral gains or political preservation. These measures undermine the integrity of justice mechanisms and facilitate bypassing legal procedures for political convenience.

From a sociological viewpoint, police institutions must be comprehended as crime-control institutions and social institutions deeply embedded in the state's ideological and political fabric (Bourdieu, 1998; Adeel & Bukhari, 2024). In Pakistan, this has meant a historical evolution of the police, originally a force guarding citizen rights to one serving as a coercive arm of political elites. This change is based on colonial heritage, compounded by postcolonial control policies rather than accountability (Hassan, 2025; Ali, 2025).

According to Zubair and Khalid (2025) political players directly affect the outcome of investigations, usually affecting transfers, postings, and police force appointments (Zubair & Khalid, 2025). Matakalatse and Motsepe (2025) argue that such practices foster a professional environment where merit-based promotions are discouraged, and officers operate under fear and dependence rather than competence and accountability. This political dependency creates a dual burden for officers torn between legal obligations and political allegiances, leading to severe internal ethical dilemmas and diminishing institutional legitimacy (Zubair & Khalid, 2025).

Although many reforms have been attempted, such as the 2002 Police Order and post-18th Amendment provincial legislation (GOP Police Reforms Commission, 2024), the police in Pakistan continue to lack sufficient insulation from political influence (International Crisis Group, 2024). Scholars have characterized this dynamic as one of "criminal governance," in which political interference does not merely alter priorities but reshapes the very function of law enforcement into a mechanism of selective

justice and social control (Auyesro & Sobering, 2019; Haider, 2024).

Although research in other countries (e.g., González & Martínez, 2020 in Mexico; Besley et al., 2007 in India) has offered rich empirical evidence of how political interference warps law enforcement, comparable comparative studies in the Pakistani context are few and far between. This absence of context-specific, ground-level research creates a vital gap in the literature on the lived realities of police officers under political pressure and how such interference affects public safety and justice delivery. This research fills this lacuna by undertaking an exploratory, field-based investigation into political interference in the functioning of SHOs in District Kohat.

This study investigates the degree and effect of political interference in police performance in District Kohat. The current study also explores the governance deficiencies inside Pakistan's law and order system by examining the effects of political influence, a better understanding of accountability and public trust. The objectives of current study were to explore the nature of political interference in police departments and to explore the experiences of police officers regarding political pressure within their department. The research questions of the study were as follows:

1. *How do police officers respond to political pressure within their duty hours?*
2. *How do political parties provide personal benefits to police officers?*
3. *How does political interference influence police responses to public protests?*

Literature Review

Hussain and Mohammad (2021) examined sociopolitical forces that drive policing in Punjab, Pakistan, and how benefactor-client relations inspire political elites to co-opt policing institutions. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research used intensive interviewing of 25 senior police officers to analyze the extent of political interference with law enforcement practice. The evidence demonstrates that politicians usually interfere in policing to secure their supporters or deter political adversaries. Such action strongly undermines the rule of law, as the police are under pressure to implement political agendas over unbiased law enforcement.

Hussain and Mohammad (2021) argued that whenever politicians utilize police agencies for private or political advantage, this causes selective law enforcement, favoritism, and overall erosion of the integrity of the justice system. One of the most significant aspects of their work is how benefactor-client relationships among police officers and politicians are a significant source of political influence in policing. Police officers, reliant on political patronage to advance their careers or gain job security, occasionally owe allegiance to responding to politicians' wants. This creates a corruption and dependency cycle in which officers become less independent in carrying out their duties and are more inclined to follow the political directives they have received. Through this, the police organization becomes an instrument for political agendas rather than an unbiased agency that requires law enforcement.

The authors emphasized the adverse effects of patron-client relationships on the rule of law. They suggested additional localized research, particularly at the district level, to best capture political pressure on the police. Such research could offer a better picture of how political forces influence policing practices in various regions of the province. This leads to a cycle of corruption and dependence where officers tend to be less autonomous in performing their duties and are more disposed to obey the political orders they have been given. Consequently, the police force becomes a proxy for political agendas instead of an impartial institution that mandates law enforcement (Hussain & Mohammad, 2021).

Zaman and Lodhi's (2020) mixed-methods investigation of urban police in Lahore and Karachi revealed that overt political interference profoundly undermines professionalism and ethical conduct within Pakistan's law enforcement. Based on responses to a survey questionnaire from 150 active-duty officers and qualitative insights from 20 senior informants, the authors illustrated how the instructions of elected policymakers undermine meritocratic decision-making, encourage quid-pro-quo promotion and transfers, and create a culture where bribery and favoritism are accepted coping strategies. As a result, officers feel pressured to serve the interests of political patrons at the expense of public safety, which not only undermines internal

disciplinary norms but also sustains broad public perceptions of corruption. While the research's strong triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data firmly grounds the causal connection between political pressure and police misconduct in large cities, Zaman and Lodhi also argued that urban focus does not leave it to be seen how rural or more generally conservative precincts may resist, adapt to, or institutionalize such outside interference.

Khan et al. (2023) surveyed 100 active-duty police officers in Peshawar and Abbottabad to measure the prevalence and influence of political intervention in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's law-enforcement institution. They reported that regular, non-transparent intervention in personnel matters, especially promotions and transfers, erodes meritocracy, corrupts morale, and breaks the established chain of command, causing decreased operational coherence and lowered confidence in senior leaders. Officers testified that such practices create feelings of injustice and favoritism and elicit tactical inefficiencies as reassigned officers struggle to build rapport and institutional knowledge in unfamiliar jurisdictions. Though these results highlight the widespread cost of politicization to KP's provincial police, the aggregate analysis of the study does not separate how district-level factors like Kohat's tribal dynamics, local power structures, and security dynamics—may mediate or amplify these impacts.

Ahmed and Abbas (2022) examine the inability of the Police Order 2002 and reforms in Pakistan to depoliticize the police force. By an institutional analysis based on content analysis of government reports and interviews with five legal experts, the authors determined that poor internal checks within the police system and politicization of safety commissions were at the heart of the failure of these reforms. Their results indicate that political influence still seeps into police operations, inhibiting accountability and undermining reform efforts. Nevertheless, whereas the study gives valuable information regarding systemic-level obstacles to police accountability, it fails to deliver a more in-depth, localized knowledge of how individual police officers feel and react to political intervention in their daily work.

The International Crisis Group (2016) released a report that examined the impact of the 2002 Police

Order and provincial legislative reforms post-18th Amendment. It discovered that while the reforms were implemented to shield police from political meddling, their non-uniform application and the resilience of informal political networks continue to erode their effectiveness. The report is worth reading about macro-level reform processes but does not include empirical data from lower-grade police stations or districts.

Theoretical Framework

Broken Window Theory, articulated by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in their landmark 1982 piece *Broken Windows*, proposes that the open manifestations of disorder bashed windows, tagging, litter, and other offences of neglect are likely to produce an ambience conducive to heavier crime. The main point is that allowing trivial disorders transmits a sign of lawlessness and abandonment and eventually can transform into more expansive crime and decay on a larger level (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Wilson and Kelling contended that upholding public order must be a fundamental policing agenda beyond responding to serious crimes. They promoted a proactive community-policing strategy, where officers engage purposely in low-level offences and disorderly acts to pre-empt the deterioration of social norms (Kelling & Coles, 1996). This philosophy has since guided several urban policing approaches, most notably community-oriented policing and order maintenance policing, prominently adopted by the New York City Police Department under Commissioner William Bratton in the 1990s. Aggressive enforcement of low-level offences during this time coincided with a significant decline in serious crime (Braga et al., 2015).

Although the theory has substantially impacted city policing and urban governance worldwide, it has also generated extensive scholarly controversy. Harcourt (2001) and Sampson and Raudenbush (1999), for example, have criticized the theory for asserting the direct causal link between disorder and serious crime, with a focus instead on the significance of broad social conditions and communal cohesion. Furthermore, there have been concerns regarding over-policing and racial profiling, especially among marginalized communities (Fagan & Davies, 2000). Empirical data supporting the efficacy of Broken

Window policing is inconclusive. Research conducted by Kelling and Sousa (2001) and Corman and Mocan (2005) indicates a connection between misdemeanour arrests and decreases in felony crime. The Broken Window Theory provides a powerful framework for examining the effect of political interference on the efficiency and institutional quality of police forces, particularly in micro-level settings such as District Kohat. Political interference in this environment may be understood as an institutional disorder similar to a "broken window" in the policing system.

Political interference consists of activities such as politically driven appointments and removals of police officers, unwarranted influence over investigations, and abuse of the police machinery for partisan or personal ends. When these tendencies are permitted to continue unchecked, they indicate institutional autonomy and rule of law erosion reflecting the symbolic deterioration hypothesized by Wilson and Kelling. This disease encourages a culture of impunity and lessened responsibility, weakening both internal police morale and external public trust. Just as the theory would hold that failure to deal with lesser crimes begets greater lawlessness, dismissal or acceptance of political interference may establish a pattern for more systematic abuse, inefficiency, and corruption (Tankebe, 2009). The police become reactive instead of proactive and reluctant to act impartially due to fear of political retribution.

In addition, persistent political meddling erodes the legitimacy of the police, an essential element of procedural justice theory (Tyler, 2004). Citizens who observe politically motivated policing can become disengaged, fail to report crimes or seek redress in alternative dispute resolution systems, further undermining the formal system. We utilize the Broken Window Theory to postulate that if left unchecked, small political interventions can lead to larger institutional dysfunction. To keep the police impartial and practical, this metaphor stresses the need for institutional change, transparent appointment procedures, and more civic supervision.

Methodology and Tools

To conduct this research study, researchers applied a qualitative research approach to determine the

diversified dynamics of political interference and the performance of the Kohat police. The qualitative design was highly effective in capturing the complex and contextual realities characterizing political involvement in local policing.

Researchers applied a phenomenological method to explore and interpret people's everyday life experiences to capture the essence of given phenomena (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is particularly appropriate for revealing the subjective participant experiences within the context of social and institutional situations. As Auerbach (2007) implies, qualitative research provides an excellent framework to examine the meaning people attribute to their experiences. Through this strategy, the research extensively explored the perception and experience of political interference by station house officers (SHOs) in their work environment. A semi-structured interview schedule was the main instrument used in this study to get detailed tales from the respondents.

The researchers utilized a non-probability sampling approach, typical in qualitative studies where depth of information precedes generalizability.

A sample size of 12 participants who were acting as SHOs at different police stations in Kohat District, were interviewed. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest small targeted samples in qualitative research to enable in-depth scrutiny of views among participants. These SHOs were chosen based on leadership positions and direct interaction with the public and institutional settings, placing them in the best position to offer insights about the external factors influencing police performance (Walker & Katz, 2013).

A popular and flexible method for discovering, interpreting, and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data is thematic analysis that was used to examine the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data preparation, coding, analysis, and presentation were all part of the process. The research was conducted by ethical standards that ensure honesty, openness, and protection of participants' rights (Resnik, 2021). There are established ethical standards to protect the privacy and well-being of study participants while also maintaining public confidence (Sieber, 2016). In contrast to Binns (2018) and Silverman (2017), the respondents'

confidentiality and anonymity were strictly ensured. The research also prioritized informed consent to the extent that the participants were adequately informed about the purpose of the study, their involvement, and the risks involved in participation (Diener & Crandall, 2020).

Data Analysis

Systemic Political Interference as an Institutional Norm

Political interference within the Kohat police department is not an isolated occurrence but rather an embedded feature of its operational structure. Political actors, primarily local and national politicians, continuously exert pressure on the police to prioritize cases involving their political allies or to dismiss certain investigations altogether. One respondent noted, *“Political leaders issue orders or „requests” on a daily basis, particularly when they include people with powerful political ties.”* This remark highlights the routine nature of such interference, underscoring that it has become a normalized part of police operations.

Officers expressed that this pressure is not a mere occasional occurrence but rather a constant presence. For example, another interviewee commented, *“We frequently have to choose between being professional and obeying directions.”* This indicates that political influence operates almost daily, compelling officers to navigate a moral and professional dilemma in their interactions with political figures. The implication here is that the police are caught between their duty to uphold the law and the necessity of complying with the demands of political leaders, who hold the power to shape career trajectories within the department.

Furthermore, the institutionalization of political interference is so entrenched that it creates a climate of fear and conformity among officers. One respondent reflected, *“Some officers believe that failure to comply could result in their transfer or other career-related repercussions.”* This reveals how political pressure not only influences the immediate handling of cases but also extends to the professional futures of police officers. It suggests a hierarchical environment where lower-ranking officers are incentivized or coerced into compliance through

threats of retaliation, including transfers or demotions.

As political interference becomes more ingrained in everyday police work, it also fosters a culture of silence and compliance. Respondents repeatedly referred to their reluctance to speak out against political pressures, often framing these pressures as inescapable. One officer described, *"You have to realize that our priorities are different,"* referring to a direct conversation with a superior about following political directives. This quote underscores the discrepancy between the officers' professional commitment to justice and the political realities they must navigate. The tension between personal integrity and professional survival becomes a recurring theme, highlighting the structural forces that reinforce the dominance of political power over legal authority.

Such a pervasive environment of political control also breeds a sense of ineffectiveness and frustration among the officers. They feel that their professional judgment is continually compromised by political agendas. One officer commented, *"When political meddling is so pervasive, it is quite difficult to function as a SHO successfully."* This sentiment is echoed in the reflections of other officers who described how political pressure dictates their every move, often overshadowing legal and procedural considerations. The emphasis on maintaining political favor becomes so central to their daily duties that many officers view their work as primarily serving the interests of political elites, rather than the law or public justice.

The normalization of political interference also contributes to an erosion of the police force's credibility within the community. As one officer remarked, *"Public trust is indeed an issue... people believe that rather than acting as a neutral force for the politicians, we are just their arm."* This statement highlights the crisis of legitimacy facing the Kohat police force. When citizens perceive law enforcement as an extension of political will rather than an impartial authority, it leads to a loss of public confidence in the institution. Officers are then seen not as protectors of justice, but as tools of political manipulation, contributing to a vicious cycle where political actors reinforce their hold on power while

undermining the law's ability to safeguard citizens' rights.

The interconnection between political influence and the internal dynamics of the police department creates a situation in which political interference becomes both a direct and indirect force shaping the department's operations. The power dynamics within the department are intimately linked to political agendas, and officers constantly recalibrate their actions based on the shifting priorities of the political elite. This structural entanglement between law enforcement and politics serves as a significant barrier to effective policing and challenges the core principles of impartial justice.

Political Influence and Police Autonomy

The experiences shared by the police officers of Kohat reveal a complex and difficult dynamic between their professional responsibilities and the political pressures they face in their daily work. Many respondents emphasized the tension between their desire to serve with integrity and the realities of political interference, which often undermines their ability to make unbiased, merit-based decisions. As one respondent stated, *"It's really challenging to function here only on the basis of merit, to be honest. We all understand the fundamentals of justice; for instance, we use Hazrat Umar Farooq's period as an example, when justice came first. However, in this case, political involvement follows us about like a shadow."*

Political pressure was frequently cited as a pervasive force that affects decision-making within the police force. Officers often found themselves caught between upholding the law and succumbing to the demands of powerful local figures or politicians. One officer noted, *"We do occasionally have the opportunity to follow merit, but it's not always easy. Sometimes we can hold our ground when the subject is not very sensitive or the political implications are minimal. However, it is nearly impossible to withstand pressure in well-publicized incidents."* This tension highlights the moral and ethical struggles faced by officers, as they seek to balance their duty to serve the public with the power dynamics that shape their work environment.

The interviews also illustrated the varying degrees to which police officers were able to resist political influence. Some officers expressed a sense of disillusionment, acknowledging that political

pressures often eroded their capacity to act autonomously. One respondent shared, *"Our ability to operate solely in accordance with the law has been severely hampered by political meddling. Sometimes we wish to act on the basis of unambiguous evidence, but someone powerful calls and asks us to change our mind."* These statements reveal the significant challenges officers face in maintaining their professional ethics when external forces impose their will upon them.

However, there were instances where police officers managed to maintain some level of independence and integrity despite the political climate. Some respondents emphasized that, in the absence of direct political consequences, they could make decisions based on merit. For example, one officer shared, *"We know our responsibility to the people, and many of us try to do the right thing despite the pressure. We occasionally have to make difficult decisions about whether to obey commands or follow our conscience."* This sentiment indicates a sense of personal duty and commitment to justice, despite the systemic constraints they face.

The hierarchical structure within the police force was another factor that contributed to the perpetuation of political interference. Respondents indicated that the chain of command often functioned as a conduit for external political influence, creating a system in which lower-ranking officers had little choice but to comply with orders, even if they contradicted their professional ethics. One officer admitted, *"Even if an order contradicts our moral convictions, it is not our place to dispute it when it comes from above. You realize that politics are deeply ingrained in a place like Kohat."* This illustrates the power dynamics within the police force, where officers are often caught in a struggle between their personal sense of justice and the demands of the political environment.

The data highlights the persistent challenge of political interference in the Kohat police force. While many officers strive to act justly and impartially, the pervasive influence of politics often limits their ability to do so. However, some officers continue to navigate these pressures with a sense of personal responsibility and commitment to their professional ethics. The interviews reflect a complex interplay between law enforcement's duty to uphold justice and the powerful political forces that shape

their decision-making, suggesting that the autonomy of police officers is continually compromised in a politically charged environment.

Political Meddling and Its Impact on Professionalism, Morale, and Case Integrity

Political interference in the Kohat police force significantly disrupts both the procedural integrity of investigations and the morale of officers. Officers frequently find themselves navigating a complex environment where they must balance the demands of public order, legal processes, and political pressure. As one officer put it, *"We must strike a balance between upholding public order, addressing neighborhood concerns, and conducting investigations, but political meddling frequently makes matters more difficult."* This quote encapsulates the central challenge officers face, where external political demands often conflict with the goals of impartial policing and justice.

The demands from politicians can distort the natural flow of investigations. A recurring issue mentioned by respondents was the way political figures attempt to direct the course of specific cases, sometimes requesting prioritization or delays based on personal or political interests. One officer revealed, *"Politicians occasionally attempt to sway the filing of FIRs or advance certain cases, even when there aren't good reasons to do so."* Such interventions disrupt the normal process of case management, which should ideally follow legal protocols and evidence-based procedures. The constant pressure to accommodate political requests forces officers to adopt a reactive rather than proactive approach, which compromises the objectivity and quality of investigations.

This political pressure is particularly evident during the early stages of investigation, which fall under the responsibility of the SHO Operations. Officers emphasized that this phase, crucial for collecting accurate data and laying the foundation for a case, is often undermined by external influences. *"Even before the first steps are completely finished, we receive calls from powerful people requesting updates or favors on certain situations,"* one officer explained. The early stages of an investigation, which should be focused on establishing facts and maintaining procedural integrity, are thus clouded by political considerations. This disruption is not just limited to operational processes but extends to the emotional and

professional burden carried by officers. *"It's quite difficult, particularly if they are demanding. I've had to change my regular approach in order to prevent conflict, which can interfere with our operations and damage the department's reputation with the public,"* another respondent noted. This adaptation is a survival tactic, signaling that officers are often forced to compromise on their professional standards to avoid confrontation.

The second phase of investigation, overseen by SHO Investigation, suffers similarly from political intervention. Here, the influence of external forces is more direct, with powerful individuals exerting influence over the investigative process. One officer shared, *"They provide the SHO instructions after calling him. They occasionally even exert pressure on the investigating officer to revise or leave out portions of the report."* This not only affects the integrity of the case but also undermines the credibility of the report. Officers are faced with the moral dilemma of either complying with political demands or adhering to professional and ethical standards. This situation results in a loss of trust, both within the police force and in the community. One officer remarked, *"The „challan," which ought to be a sound, objective report, may be modified under duress. This impacts people's belief in us and our reputation."*

Another dimension of the issue is the long-term impact on morale and the overall culture within the department. Respondents spoke about the frustration that arises when officers are compelled to act contrary to their professional judgment. *"Being professional becomes a never-ending battle,"* said one officer, expressing the emotional toll of political pressure. The feeling of powerlessness is compounded by the fact that such interferences often seem inevitable, as political figures wield significant power over promotions and career advancements. As one officer described, *"Our credibility is called into question when we get directives that appear to protect particular people. We are supposed to collect evidence objectively, but how can we do so when we are always under pressure to ignore certain facts?"* This speaks to a systemic issue where professional integrity is continually tested by political considerations, resulting in a compromised sense of duty among officers.

The frustration is further amplified by the lack of procedural clarity when political pressures interfere. As one officer elaborated, *"The division of SHO Operations from SHO Investigation is a solid concept in theory. However, this system is disrupted by political involvement."* The dual SHO arrangement, designed to improve the efficiency and accountability of investigations, is frequently derailed by political meddling. The need for clear communication and cooperation between SHO Operations and SHO Investigation is undermined when political figures demand that certain cases be expedited or manipulated. This disruption in communication not only affects the immediate investigation but also leads to a breakdown of trust among officers. Another officer emphasized, *"When political figures interfere, it affects not just the case but the trust among us... our inspectors, SHO Operations, and Investigation must all rely on one another's efforts."*

Finally, the public perception of the police is significantly harmed by these systemic issues. Officers are acutely aware that political interference leads to delays, selective handling of cases, and a loss of accountability. As one officer pointed out, *"The people suffer because this not only lowers morale but also postpones justice."* The credibility of the police department is directly linked to its ability to maintain fairness and efficiency, but political pressures consistently prevent the department from operating as an independent body. The officers' concerns about losing public trust are rooted in the reality that community service becomes compromised when police actions are shaped by external forces rather than the pursuit of justice.

Managing Political Interference in Policing during Elections

Throughout the interviews, SHOs described an acute intensification of political pressure around election time, revealing how electoral cycles exacerbate existing power imbalances and generate profound role conflict for officers. As one respondent explained, *"We must strike a balance between upholding public order, addressing neighborhood concerns, and conducting investigations, but political meddling frequently makes matters more difficult. Politicians will occasionally pressure us to delay some cases or give priority to others."* This illustrates how the professional norms of

impartial policing are repeatedly undermined by partisan interests, forcing officers into a continuous negotiation between legal procedure and political expediency.

Several SHOs emphasized that formal hierarchies particularly the support of their District Police Officer (DPO) serve as a critical bulwark against undue influence. One officer noted, *"Politicians in our area frequently call us directly since they know us personally. However, we are dedicated to the work...and I sought advice from my DPO. In all honesty, it's our only defense and is a requirement of the procedure."* This reliance on internal chains of command underscores the importance of bureaucratic autonomy and procedural safeguards in preserving the integrity of investigations under duress.

Election periods amplify these tensions: *"For us, things change when election season arrives. Although it's our responsibility to keep the peace, local officials occasionally try to urge us to be softer on their followers or harsher on their rivals."* The fluctuating demands of competing political camps turn routine law enforcement into a political battleground, where neutrality becomes both a professional mandate and an untenable luxury. Officers described the strain vividly: *"The amount of strain we endure throughout election season is beyond your comprehension...We're just trying to do our jobs, but it feels like we're caught in a tug-of-war."*

Despite these pressures, some SHOs invoke a collective ethic and adherence to formal directives as strategies of resistance. One senior officer reflected, *"It is our responsibility to defend everyone equally, yet politicians want us to do certain things, especially during election time... Every time we act impartially in a circumstance, we strengthen public confidence in both the democratic process and ourselves."* Another added, *"There is pressure, no question about it...however, our line of command is quite explicit about upholding justice, and we operate as a team. The reputation of the entire police force would suffer if we begin to give in to political pressure."* These statements have pointed to an emergent culture of solidarity, where adherence to procedure and peer support become key mechanisms for maintaining both organizational legitimacy and public trust in the face of overt political intrusion.

Consequences of Defying Political Interference in policing

When SHOs in Kohat choose to resist political directives, they frequently incur severe professional and personal repercussions. One officer described the immediate fallout of standing up to power: *"I once refused to ignore a case involving a local politician... I was moved to a less desirable position the very following week."* This transfer not only uprooted him from the community he had served but also signaled to colleagues that defiance would be met with punishment rather than respect for integrity. Transfers to remote or unattractive posts emerged repeatedly as a tool to discipline officers who refused to comply: *"You'll be packing your bags next week if you don't follow our instructions,"* another respondent recalled being told.

Beyond career penalties, officers face orchestrated smear campaigns and disciplinary inquiries intended to intimidate and discredit. As one SHO explained, *"After politically tinged investigations, I have seen cops suspended; even if they are eventually found not guilty, the harm has already been done. Their reputations are damaged."* Such prosecutions often without merit create a chilling effect, discouraging other officers from challenging undue influence. The mere threat of a public inquiry can erode years of hard-earned credibility, effectively silencing dissent.

Defiance can also escalate to direct threats against officers and their families. One respondent recounted how defying an order led to his home being targeted: *"They set fire to our wooden front door... It helped me realize that politics and personal matters are no longer just empty phrases in my community. They turn violent."* Another officer described the terror of being warned, *"If you don't comply, your life and your family's lives are in danger."* These high-stakes intimidations transform policing into a constant risk assessment, where protecting one's loved ones may override the commitment to impartial law enforcement.

Such reprisals produce profound psychological strain. Officers report sleepless nights, anxiety, and a pervasive sense of isolation: *"It's tiring... we frequently feel like mere political pawns."* This moral injury knowing that upholding justice can incur devastating costs undermines job satisfaction and can lead to burnout or resignation. As one SHO noted, *"I joined*

the force to serve and protect, not to engage in political games... Ultimately, the integrity of Kohat's law enforcement is at risk, not just our careers."

Collectively, these consequences reinforce a culture of silence and compliance. Witnessing colleagues penalized for defying orders teaches newer officers that survival depends on political allegiance rather than professional ethics. This cycle perpetuates selective enforcement, weakens institutional autonomy, and erodes public trust, as citizens come to see the police not as guardians of justice but as expendable instruments in political struggles. In sum, the cost of defiance in Kohat is steep jeopardizing careers, families, and the very legitimacy of the policing institution.

Discussion

Zhao et al. (2023) noted that officers are usually caught in a quandary where they have to juggle professional ethics and the reality of job security. Participants in their study discussed how direct interference within duty hours usually results in a dilemma between upholding integrity and obedience. The same trends were noted in the present study, where Kohat SHOs routinely reported being posted to less favourable positions after defying political pressure. In turn, going against political interference incurs high professional costs, supporting the concept that career maintenance tends to come at the expense of ethical policing.

Political patronage has consistently been recognized as a means by which political parties shape police behaviour, and what is observed in Kohat mirrors international research on political patronage. According to Baughman et al. (2024), political parties bestow personal rewards to police officers, including promotions, high-paying assignments, and material rewards, thus ensuring loyalty. In Kohat, officers indicated receiving material rewards, such as high-paying postings in sensitive political areas or short-term promotions, for acquiescence to party wishes. Patronage is a type of clientelism, according to Snyder and Bhattacharyya (2023), in which political leaders distribute public goods and services to achieve cooperation from a specific group here, such as police officers.

Further, the individual gains officers obtain are liable to make them dependent on political parties for

personal progress. Officers in Kohat were found to be cognizant of how their siding with particular political leaders would directly impact them, such as favourably placed postings or privileges. This patronage system is a means for political parties to ensure the loyalty of the police and that they will execute orders favouring the party, even when they are contrary to the law or ethical norms.

Recent research by Baker (2023) on police militarization when confronting public demonstrations finds common ground in the results reported in Kohat. Police officers in politically motivated areas are trained to confront protests as security issues and not as acts of free speech and thus adopt more aggressive approaches. This trend indicates Miller's (2020)

The Broken Window Theory (BWT) by Wilson and Kelling (1982) is especially applicable to examining the effects of political interference in policing as they come out in this research on District Kohat. While the theory, in its original form, used to centre around observable indications of physical and social disorder (such as public loafing or graffiti) leading eventually to serious offending, the uses of the theory can be mapped onto institutional disorder, especially once the law enforcement machinery itself starts disintegrating with untrammelled political influence. The outcome of this study demonstrates how protracted political intervention serves as an emblematic and tangible "broken window" inside the policing organization.

Police officers in Kohat complained of frequent interference by political players, especially during working hours, such as pressure to overlook some cases or act selectively against political opponents. Just as a lone act of vandalism going unrepaired can contribute to a spate of lawlessness, ongoing political favoritism tolerated gives rise to systemic corruption, with resulting internal rifts within the force and external disenchantment from the public. As Tyler (2004) argues in procedural justice theory, the police's perceived legitimacy is central to voluntary law compliance. Once that legitimacy is compromised, so is the effectiveness of policing.

When applied to political interference, the Broken Window metaphor helps us grasp how modest acts of institutional neglect, such as accepting political phone calls or flexible rule-bending for one's

advantage, can build up into total institutional failure. For Kohat's police, uncontrolled political interference has normalized dependency and fear, deterring officers from behaving neutrally and undermining public trust in the police. This is consistent with the central argument of BWT: unless minor disorders are met with quick and visible handling, they will convey to internal and external actors alike that deviance is acceptable and causes increased dysfunction. Political intervention must thus be considered not as a one-off aberration but as a systemic weakness. Without strong internal accountability processes, civil service promotion systems with transparency, and civilian control, the policing apparatus is vulnerable to collapse from within.

Conclusion

This qualitative research investigated the implications of resisting political interference in policing in District Kohat, Pakistan. The research discovered that political interference in the form of pressure during working hours, favoritism, and manipulation of police reactions to public incidents has extensively impacted the operational independence and moral integrity of police officers. Those who refuse such interference are severely punished, such as being unwantedly transferred, threatened, and hindered in their careers. Conversely, people who obey to earn favors such as political patronage, coveted placements, and promotions are in the picture. In this case, police departments get embedded with a culture of terror and dependence. The study discovered that political interference warps the police's function as a neutral enforcer of the law, replacing merit-based decision-making with political allegiance. The impact is most noticeable when police responses are based on protestors' political connections rather than the demands of public safety, as happens during public protests. Biased enforcement undermines faith in law enforcement and damages the rule of law. Understood in terms of the Broken Window Theory, political meddling is seen as a kind of institutional chaos. Just as unrepaired physical chaos indicates lawlessness and provokes additional crime, accepting political meddling in the police force indicates a failure of internal governance and promotes broader

corruption and inefficiency. The theory highlights how seemingly trivial breaches of professional standards can develop into systemic failure if ignored. Resuscitating order in the policing institution is important for internal morale and promoting justice, equity, and democratic principles in society. The research adds to the larger narrative of police governance in politically unstable environments. It provides actionable findings for policymakers, civil society, and law enforcement agencies seeking to develop a more autonomous, professional, and community- focused police system in Pakistan and other developing countries.

Limitations

This study, as practical as it is in examining the political intrusion into policing in District Kohat, has limitations. First, the study was limited geographically to a single district, which may not represent the diverse experiences and political landscape that police officers undergo in other areas of Pakistan. The distinct socio-political environment of Kohat constrains the broader generalizability of findings. Secondly, the research drew on a limited purposive sample of police officers, which, while rich in qualitative richness, might not extend across the entire spectrum of views at various police ranks, genders, service lengths, or administrative positions. In addition, given the politically charged subject matter, confident respondents might have been reluctant to open up freely, and hence partial or evasive responses. The possibility of professional or personal retaliation impacted the honesty and fullness of their accounts. Finally, while the Broken Window Theory was a useful prism to help appreciate institutional disorder, it might not capture the larger political, historical, and cultural factors that condition police actions in Pakistan.

Further Suggestions

Future studies should consider a broader geographical area, such as more than one province or district, to overcome these limitations and build on the current study's findings. Researchers would be able to gain a better understanding of the impact of political influence on police if they were to conduct such comparison studies. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach blending qualitative and quantitative data

could enhance the dependability and richness of results, yielding a more nuanced snapshot of the issue. Policy structures, including public safety commissions and the Police Order of 2002, must also be the focus of future research regarding their effectiveness in minimizing political influence. A fuller picture can be gained by examining community perspectives, which would highlight how political control of police affects public confidence, reporting of crime, and security in neighborhoods. Lastly, policy reforms aimed at depoliticizing police agencies across the globe may be guided by cross-country comparisons with other developing or politically volatile regimes and thus enable broader theoretical lessons to be gleaned.

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