

COVID-19 ENVIRONMENT & CRIME IN PAKISTAN



WEBINAR - JUNE 2020



INTRODUCTION TO IQBAL INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES (IIPS)

Iqbal Institute of Policy Studies (IIPS) is an independent research institute with the mission to generate, track, and advocate public policies towards the achievement of sustainable development in Pakistan. In addition to taking on research projects for policy advocacy, IIPS has embarked upon the concept of swift research wherein it undertakes time bound research and compiles a series of reports for the attention of policy and decision makers.



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The GDP of a country is inversely proportional to the rate of crime prevalent in that country. The COVID-19 pandemic, menacingly multiplying in the country, leaves a dangerous economic depression, job compression, and social issues such as unemployment, poverty, and scarcity of economic resources. In the current scenario, the crime rate is likely to rise. “Stay at home” restrictions have curtailed crime opportunities in public spaces while increasing risks in the domestic sphere. Therefore, it is essential to pragmatically analyze this issue and suggest preventive measures and policy solutions to address this challenge.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. To provide a platform for online discourse on the impact of COVID-19 environment on crime in Pakistan.
2. To identify the existing patterns and scale of crime in the country.
3. To discuss the major causes of various crimes prevalent in Pakistan and how these have been influenced by the pandemic.
4. To understand the psyche of criminals, the stimulus between their actions and how the criminal mind will work under COVID-19 environment
5. To determine the capacity of law enforcement agencies to combat crime and handle the complex situation in the pandemic
6. To suggest measures for crime control and counter situation emerging from COVID-19

OUR DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS

IIPS invited eminent personalities to participate in a dialogue on the impact of COVID-19 on crime in Pakistan. The endeavor was made to have a balanced and productive discourse on the issue from all the relevant stakeholders.



**LT. GEN. NAEEM KHALID
LODHI (RETD)**

FORMER CARETAKER DEFENCE
MINISTER



BARRISTER SHAHIDA JAMIL

FORMER FEDERAL MINISTER OF LAW,
JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS &
PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS.



MR. KALEEM IMAM

INSPECTOR GENERAL, NATIONAL
HIGHWAY MOTORWAY POLICE



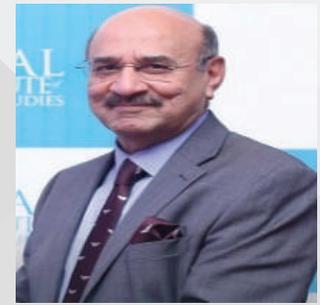
**SENATOR SARFARAZ
BUGTI**

FORMER HOME MINISTER,
BALOCHISTAN



**BRIG. MOWADAT
RANA (RETD)**

PSYCHIATRIST



**LT GEN MUHAMMAD HAROON
ASLAM (RETD)**

PRESIDENT - IIPS ADVISORY BOARD

MODERATOR



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“Owing to the unprecedented psychological and economic stress that COVID-19 will have on the people, deteriorated mental health has the potential to become the foremost cause of crime in Pakistan.”

**LT. GEN. NAEEM KHALID LODHI (RETD),
FORMER CARETAKER DEFENCE MINISTER**

COVID-19 is an ongoing phenomenon, so one cannot conclusively assess its impacts on Pakistan's social and economic fabric. Multiple social, economic, and systemic factors can increase the crime rate, such as societal injustice, lack of education, and scarcity of economic opportunities. Another important factor leading to an increase in the crime rate is the lack of mental health facilities in Pakistan. Considering the unprecedented psychological and financial stress that COVID-19 will have on the people, deteriorated mental health can become the foremost cause of crime in Pakistan. Besides, the flawed justice and court system in Pakistan might get further disrupted due to COVID-19. The crime rate will increase but the crimes reported may decrease owing to the overburdened registration and investigation process. In conclusion, there will be a spike in crimes, which will become difficult to control.



“The discrepancies in Pakistan’s health facilities have jeopardized public trust in the government.”

**BARRISTER SHAHIDA JAMIL,
FORMER FEDERAL MINISTER OF LAW, JUSTICE,
HUMAN RIGHTS & PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS.**

The incidence of COVID-19 patients being mistreated, neglected, and heavily charged in hospitals has circulated on social media platforms, causing unease among the masses. However, there have been no remedial measures enacted by the government to ease people’s anxiety. Furthermore, the medical treatment of Covid-19 patients at a private hospital costs up to 17 lac rupees that are not being regulated by the government. In advanced societies, governments reach out to people and, in return, win public cooperation. However, the discrepancies in Pakistan’s health facilities have jeopardized public trust in the government. We must not blame the public for violating government lockdown orders or safety guidelines. Safety guidelines are neglected because of public distrust in government. If the role models of the people behave irresponsibly, then the masses also act the same way. The politicians and top government officials started wearing masks only after the Chinese doctors came wearing masks, but the public had lost all trust in government safety guidelines.



“The need of the hour is to introduce and spread awareness among masses about the concept of community policing so that crime can be curtailed.”

**MR. KALEEM IMAM, INSPECTOR GENERAL,
NATIONAL HIGHWAY MOTORWAY POLICE**

Mr. Kaleem Imam analyzed the state of crime in Pakistan by comparing the crime rate before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the pre-COVID-19 scenario, the policing department was undergoing reforms, and more financial resources were being diverted to the detection and investigation of crime. As soon as the pandemic forced the government to impose a countrywide smart lockdown, the crime rate plunged. The crime against property saw a massive decline owing to the restricted mobility and confinement of people at homes. However, cases of crime against persons, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, soared exponentially. After the lockdown was eased, the crime rate increased tremendously and is estimated to keep rising due to the disruption of law enforcement agencies. The rising number of COVID-19 cases is putting stress on the already overburdened policing departments. Besides, the impending socio-economic crisis due to COVID-19 is likely to cause a surge in the crime rate due to rising unemployment, inflation, and poverty. The need of the hour is to introduce and spread awareness among the masses about the concept of community policing so that crime can be curtailed.



“It is imperative that the government shifts its focus on the people of Balochistan to avoid any surge in Baloch nationalism in the province”

**SENATOR SARFARAZ BUGTI,
FORMER HOME MINISTER, BALOCHISTAN**

Senator Sarfaraz Bugti explained the situation of crime in Balochistan. There are three major types of crime prevalent in the province. The first type of crime is an organized crime, which is low as compared to other provinces. The second type of crime is the one committed in the name of religion and is highly pervasive. The last kind of crime, perhaps the most destructive and most likely to rise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, includes crimes carried out in the name of so-called Baloch nationalism. The government has neglected Balochistan in the past. It is the most backward province of the country. The only state presence in the province is in the form of frontier corps (FC). FC looks after the law enforcement, and the socio-economic issues of the provinces come within its purview. In the wake of COVID-19, the amount of workload on FC is likely to increase, increasing the chances of a surge in the crime rate. Therefore, the government must shift its focus on the people of Balochistan to avoid any surge in Baloch nationalism in the



“A major reason for the increase in crime rate amidst COVID-19 is the confusion and fear created by the spread of misinformation by the media and government officials.”

BRIG. MOWADAT RANA (RETD), PSYCHIATRIST

There is a new trend emerging in Pakistan, whereby people are using COVID-19 as a weapon to commit crimes. Crime is the product of the interaction between the human brain and the environment. A major reason for the increase in crime rate amidst COVID-19 is the confusion and fear created by the spread of misinformation by the media and government officials. There is a need to provide people with clear scientific information regarding COVID-19 to combat fear. Also, the misconception that COVID-19 is a curse from the Divine serves as a trigger for people to commit crimes as they become frustrated and hopeless. An unhealthy mind is more susceptible to crimes. A criminal is exceptionally creative, and in the face of challenges imposed by COVID-19, criminals will come up with innovative ways to commit crimes. There will be a surge in the following forms of crime in the future due to COVID-19:

- Cyber-crime will increase as more people will use the internet.
- Online sex trade will increase.
- Sexual harassment and rape cases might increase due to the increased level of frustration.
- Drug trafficking will increase with an online delivery mechanism in place.
- Crimes such as overpricing and price fixing will increase, especially in the pharmaceutical and medical industry.

During the discussion, the panelists made additional observations and comments, which are appended below.

■ **Mr. Kaleem Imam on policing in America**

Policing in America is very different from the policing in the UK or Pakistan. In the USA, police officers fire to kill. These engagement tactics result from decades of policeman being killed in armed confrontations with criminals possessing illegal weapons.

■ **Brig. Mowadat Rana (Retd) on violence against doctors**

In case of COVID-19 patient's death, people tend to blame doctors and hospital staff. This is particularly because the hospital administration and doctors fail to provide sufficient information about the virus to the patient's family and do not update them about the patient's health. It is the foremost responsibility of the doctors and hospital administration to communicate with the patient's family and inform them about the risks involved in medical procedures.

■ **Senator Sarfaraz Bugti on development and local bodies**

The development paradigm is not parallel in the case of Pakistan. Despite being the largest province of Pakistan, Balochistan is the least developed one due to the lack of financial resources and the non-existence of local bodies. The best thing about democracy is the local body system. However, in Pakistan, politicians retain fiscal power and leave little room for local bodies to carry out development work at the grass-root level.

■ **Barrister Shahida Jamil on the importance of local bodies**

The role of local bodies has become even more pertinent in the wake of COVID-19. The provinces in Pakistan are too large to be administered efficiently, thereby calling for the need to revive local bodies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Multiple social, economic, and general factors can increase the crime rate due to the COVID-19 environment.
- The crime rate may increase but the crimes reported may decline owing to the overburdened registration and investigation process. Thus, the flawed justice system in Pakistan can further get degraded.
- When a countrywide smart lockdown was imposed, the crime rate plunged. Crime against property declined due to limited mobility and restriction of people at homes. However, a crime against persons, including domestic violence and harassment increased.
- After the lockdown was relaxed, the crime rate increased and is estimated to go up further due to the disruption of law enforcement agencies.
- The current socio-economic crunch, mainly arising from unemployment and loss of business, is likely to cause a general surge in the crime rate.
- The community must respond to the crisis. We must inculcate general awareness and community policy to counter the surge in the crime rate.
- Specifically, about Balochistan, the crime can be categorized into three, i.e., the first is an organized crime that is low, the second is motivated by religion, and those committed in the name of, so called, Baloch nationalism. The second one is highly pervasive, while the third category is the most dangerous.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The only state presence in Balochistan is in the form of frontier corps (FC). In the wake of COVID-19, FC workload is likely to increase, thereby causing a surge in the crime rate.
- There is a need to shift focus on Balochistan to avoid any surge in crime and militant activities carried out in the name of the so-called, Baloch nationalism.
- The valuable role of local bodies has become more relevant in the wake of COVID-19. The provinces in Pakistan are too large to be administered efficiently without the revival of local bodies.
- The spread of misinformation regarding COVID-19 on media is resulting in confusion and fear among the masses. Resultantly, there will be a surge in cyber-crime, online sex trade, harassment, drug trafficking, overpricing, and price-fixing, especially in the pharmaceutical and medical industry.