Safe Cities: Improving the Citizen-Police Interface in Pakistan

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Sector(s): Crime, Violence, and Conflict

Location: Pakistan

Sample: 20,000 citizens

Initiative(s): Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI)

Target group: Urban population

Outcome of interest: Citizen satisfaction

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0006397

Partner organization(s): Punjab Safe Cities Authority

In Pakistan, citizens dissatisfied with the police and courts tend to instead rely on a variety of non-state actors, weakening the effectiveness of state institutions to resolve crimes and improve public safety. Researchers partnered with the Punjab Safe Cities Authority to evaluate how to improve citizen's access to and experience with police services.

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Access to justice and criminal dispute resolution is a major challenge in many low- and middle-income countries. Over the last thirty years in Pakistan, citizens have increasingly relied on non-state actors, rather than government policing services, to resolve disputes and enforce laws and norms because they are dissatisfied with government's policing institutions. This shift towards non-state actors weakens the state's presence and legitimacy and creates a vicious circle: as institutions weaken, the state becomes more likely to fail, encouraging non-state actors to play a greater role and further undermining state institutions, such as the police.

In order to strengthen the state's policing and justice institutions, interventions need to encourage citizens to engage with the state regularly and experience improvements in the state's performance. Based on this positive experience, citizens should choose to rely on government's institutions rather than non-state actors. However, there is still little evidence on how to effectively achieve this goal.

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Pakistan, like many low- and middle-income countries, is rapidly urbanizing, with 40 percent of its current population living in cities. Police play an especially important role in cities where demand for dispute and crime resolution is high and informal ways of resolving conflict may be less prevalent. However, the government struggles to effectively meet the growing demand for police services. For example, a 2016 survey of households living in urban centers found that inadequate resources and delayed cases

are cited as the most serious problems facing the criminal justice system in Pakistan. In addition, only a third of respondents took action to resolve a dispute, with most (72 percent) preferring to resolve it through a non-state authority.[1] Faced with these challenges, the government set up the Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) in 2015, which is the flagship law enforcement authority dedicated to improving efficient access to public safety and policing services in cities through technology and innovation.

Despite these efforts, access to policing institutions remain low. Recent surveys showed that only 7 percent of urban citizens who reported a crime through PSCA's '15' emergency response number (similar to 911 in the US) had their cases resolved formally through the state's system. Over a third (34 percent) reported resolving their cases informally; of those, over half (52 percent) said they would have preferred to resolve their complaint through the state's system but had eventually given up on doing so. Few people know about the government's recent efforts to improve the quality of conflict resolution: only eight percent of respondents had heard of the PSCA's emergency response number when asked about it.

Punjab Safe Cities Authority

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Researchers are partnering with Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) to evaluate how to improve citizen's access to and engagement with police services in Lahore, Pakistan. The underlying problem with police services may be either that the police fail to perform their job as expected, citizens lack knowledge on how to navigate the legal system, or a combination of both. Therefore, researchers are randomly providing citizens the opportunity to engage more with the policing system through two distinct services that address these two potential problems:

1. *8787 Police Complaint Hotline:* Citizens may feel that the police are not performing their job as expected. In this case, citizens need the ability to complain and invoke a higher authority, who can check police performance and take the requisite action to address negligence. While such a service already exists—the "8787" hotline—citizens have limited awareness of and experience with it. The hotline is a highly interactive system, where citizens can file complaints by post, call, SMS, or email and are kept informed of the status of their complaint until its resolution.
2. *Basic Legal Advice:* Citizens may experience a poor interaction with the police system because navigating the complex policing and judicial process can be confusing. In this case, a legal advisory system can help citizens understand how to navigate the legal system and lead to a more satisfactory and effective, experience. The Sindh Legal Advisory Call Center (SLACC), an initiative run by the Legal Aid Society, provides free or low-cost legal advice to citizens experiencing a dispute. To date, the call center has responded to over 12,000 requests from 180 cities and towns across Pakistan. While this non-profit currently provides the call center, this evaluation will help the PSCA understand if they should include legal advice services under its operations.

To understand if people lack information about police services, or if they lack trust in the police such that they remain skeptical even when informed of improvements, researchers will give citizens both information about and experience with the two services. In the experience treatments, citizens will be informed about both of the services, and then given the opportunity to directly connect with one or both of the services as the research team will transfer their call to the appropriate service. Researchers are interested in measuring both the impact of each service alone and how they interact with each other, therefore assigning some participants to a combination of the services and treatments. Similarly, as in all three treatment groups citizens will be informed about both services (regardless of which one they experience), researchers are interested in whether citizens choose to also reach out to the service they did not experience. From a sample of 20,000 residents of Lahore who have recently called PSCA's '15' emergency response number to file a crime or dispute a case, researchers are randomly assigning them into either a comparison group or one of three treatment groups:

		8787 police complaint hotline	
		No service	***Experience***
Basic legal advice service	***No service***	Comparison group	Experience with police complaint hotline
	Experience	Experience with legal advice service	Experience with *both* police complaint hotline *and* legal advice service

Researchers are interested in the impact of the services on dispute resolution and citizen’s satisfaction with their case, as well as citizen’s continued engagement with and broader attitudes towards the police and other government organizations. They will measure these outcomes through three rounds of phone surveys—one at baseline, then three and six months after the treatment— and administrative data. PSCA currently receives and records information from 40,000 complaint calls in a month, from which researchers are selecting a random sample to participate in the evaluation. One to two days after the complaint call, the researcher team calls study participants to conduct the baseline survey and offer them the service depending on their assigned treatment.

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Research ongoing. Results forthcoming.

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1. World Justice Project. 2016. “The Rule of Law in Pakistan.”