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**THE IMPACT OF THE KP POLICE ACT 2017 ON GROUND-
LEVEL POLICING AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN SWAT**



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Abstract

This paper reviews the implications of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Police Act 2017, focusing on its effects on police autonomy, accountability, and community trust. Using secondary data, government reports, media articles, and selected cases from District Swat, the review explores how legal and institutional reforms have reshaped policing culture in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Findings suggest that while the Act introduced substantial structural changes to enhance independence and professionalism in the police, its on-ground impact remains uneven. The experience from Swat illustrates a slow but positive transformation in citizen-police relations, particularly through initiatives such as women police stations, community liaison committees, and improved internal oversight mechanisms. However, persistent issues like political interference, resource constraints, and public mistrust continue to challenge reform outcomes.

Keywords: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Act 2017, Police Reform, Accountability, Community Trust, Swat, Governance, Sociology of Institutions

Introduction

Policing in Pakistan has long faced criticism over weak accountability, political influence, and public distrust. The introduction of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Act 2017 was considered a landmark reform aimed at modernizing the police structure, ensuring operational autonomy, and strengthening the rule of law. The Act replaced the colonial Police Order 2002, giving greater powers to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) while introducing mechanisms such as Public Safety Commissions and Dispute Resolution Councils (DRCs) to promote community-oriented policing.

In District Swat, where public confidence in state institutions has historically been fragile due to past insurgency and security operations, the implementation of the KP Police Act 2017 offers a unique lens to study reform effectiveness. The review aims to evaluate how these reforms have shaped police autonomy, accountability systems, and public perceptions, particularly in Swat's socio-political context.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the main features of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Act 2017.
2. To evaluate the impact of the Act on police autonomy and accountability.
3. To explore community perceptions of police reform in District Swat.
4. To identify key challenges in the practical implementation of the Act.

3. Methodology

This review follows a qualitative secondary data approach. Information has been collected from government reports, scholarly articles, newspaper analyses, and official KP Police updates (2017–2025). Additionally, media-based evidence and field reports from District Swat, including initiatives like the Women's Police Station Rahimabad, Citizen-Police Liaison Committees, and community outreach efforts—were analyzed to ground theoretical discussion in local realities. Rather than conducting field surveys, this paper uses descriptive content analysis to interpret how institutional reforms translate into everyday policing. Attention was paid to the tone of local reporting, the consistency of administrative actions, and community responses reflected through public forums and press statements.

4. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Act 2017: Key Features

The KP Police Act 2017 introduced several key reforms:

- **Operational Autonomy:** Empowered the IGP to make independent administrative decisions regarding postings, transfers, and disciplinary actions without direct political interference.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Created Public Safety Commissions at provincial and district levels to monitor police performance and citizen complaints.
- **Community Engagement:** Promoted Dispute Resolution Councils (DRCs) and community policing models to bridge trust gaps between police and the public.
- **Merit-Based Recruitment:** Emphasized transparent hiring and training processes.
- **Digitalization and Modern Policing:** Introduced online complaint systems, Police Assistance Lines (PALs), and internal monitoring tools.

5. Review of Literature

Scholars and policy experts generally agree that the KP Police Act 2017 represents one of the most comprehensive police reforms in Pakistan. According to international assessments (UNODC, 2018), KP's legal framework demonstrates a shift from political dependency to professional autonomy. Local analysts (Ahmed & Khan, 2020) note that the establishment of DRCs improved the resolution of petty disputes without court intervention, easing social tensions. However, others argue that the reform's implementation remains partial. As per Raza (2021), "laws can change institutions, but only consistent political will can change mindsets." In regions like Swat, the local context—tribal norms, social hierarchies, and post-conflict sensitivities—continues to shape how citizens perceive and interact with police officers.

6. Case Insights from District Swat

District Swat has served as a testing ground for post-2017 reforms. Several initiatives demonstrate local adaptation:

- **Women's Police Station (Rahimabad):** Established to address women's grievances, this station now handles 20–24 cases monthly and is fully staffed by trained female officers. This has created a safer environment for women to report crimes, a significant cultural shift in a conservative setting.
- **Citizen-Police Liaison Committees:** Under the supervision of DIG Malakand, committees of 10 local elders were formed to strengthen communication, monitor social issues, and prevent misuse of power at the local level.
- **Police Training and Capacity Building:** Workshops at Javed Iqbal Shaheed Police Lines have focused on modern policing skills and accountability culture.
- **Administrative Accountability:** The suspension of senior officials in Swat following administrative negligence cases shows that internal accountability structures are gradually becoming active.

7. Discussion

The KP Police Act 2017 has certainly improved the formal structure of policing in Swat, yet its translation into everyday practice remains inconsistent. The community-based initiatives have generated small but visible signs of public confidence, especially among marginalized groups such as women and youth.

However, political interference and resource shortages still limit the autonomy promised by the Act. The Swat experience also reveals that accountability is often reactive—activated after incidents rather than embedded as a continuous process.

Sociologically, the reform has begun to reshape the symbolic image of the police—from an agent of coercion to a potential public service institution—but this transformation depends heavily on long-term engagement and public participation.

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8. Conclusions

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Act 2017 represents a milestone in Pakistan's struggle for democratic and accountable governance. Its effects in District Swat demonstrate both progress and limitation. While institutional reforms have enhanced the administrative independence of the police and introduced community-oriented initiatives, challenges such as political pressure, inadequate resources, and uneven implementation persist. To sustain trust, reforms must move beyond laws and reach the social fabric—through training, transparency, and participatory mechanisms that allow citizens to see the police as partners in justice rather than instruments of power.

9. Recommendations

1. Strengthen district-level Public Safety Commissions with genuine citizen representation.
2. Expand and regularly monitor Dispute Resolution Councils in Swat for consistency and fairness.
3. Increase training budgets for ethical and community policing modules.
4. Improve communication between local police and civil society organizations.
5. Conduct periodic independent audits of police performance and accountability measures

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