



## Cultural Contours of Justice: Law and Crimes Narratives in Popular Imagination

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### ABSTRACT

*This research delves into the cultural contours of justice in the context of Pakistan, with special emphasis on the complex relationship between the media, the ever-shifting norms in a given society, and the laws of the land. It reveals how regional legacies of colonialism and Sharia law shape attitudes toward justice, crime, and punishment. The research highlights a significant discrepancy between the public experience and the reality of crime trends, suffering from the amplification of sensationalistic media coverage, leading to a decline in trust towards police and the system of justice. By employing qualitative assessments of media representations and public opinion surveys, as well as quantitative analyses of crime statistics, to investigate the socio-cultural contexts shaping local perceptions of justice in Pakistan, the report exposes how sensationalist media heighten social fear; how they misrepresent marginalized populations; and how they reinforce existing stereotypes of criminality, thus developing warped views of the extent and nature of crime. The study also highlights notable differences in how justice is practised across different regions, particularly rural settings where traditional normative values differ from codified legal norms. These results highlight the importance of culturally competent legal reform and ethical journalism to mitigate the gap between perception and reality so that the public can trust the justice system.*



## Introduction

Cultural dimension of justice of Pakistan is formed on a quotation of historical, social, and media context. The legal framework laid down during the periods of British colonial authority has an

overwhelmingly strong bearing on the judicial system of the country. In fact, the fusion of Islamic ideas, particularly Sharia, with colonialism has drained the cultural values and social ideas of justice considerably. Justice, crime, and punishment are experienced and perceived differently in separate areas and among distinct ethnic groups in Pakistan, weaving a cultural narrative rich and colourful. Popular culture addresses race, gender, class, and sexuality through crime narratives. The public's understanding of justice is fundamentally influenced by the ethical standards of crime reporting in mainstream media. Sensationalized news coverage exacerbate preconceptions and biases, so distorting perceptions of crime. An informed public conversation on legal matters depends on ethical journalism methods. The emergence of true crime fandom has altered audience engagement with crime narratives. This genre engages audiences by examining real-life cases, although it prompts ethical dilemmas of representation and commodification. Historical depictions of crime in popular culture shape modern perceptions of justice. The research will use qualitative and quantitative methods, including tables and surveys, to examine crime reporting and its perception across the Pakistan. The study will also examine how media-covered occurrences affect public discourse and justice perceptions. At last the research will suggests the ethical journalism. In the rural areas, traditional customs and norms strongly shape ideas of fairness, often sharply at odds with the formal legal statutes. 73% of rural respondents are reliant on informal justice systems based on Sharia law and practices, while only a little over 50% of urban populations rely on preferred codified laws. This duality underscores the intrinsic challenge of harmonizing Pakistan's multifaceted societal tapestry with the uniform execution of law and order.

Moreover, the media plays a huge role in forming perceptions in society. And as sensationalized reporting becomes the norm, this amplification of crime narratives creates a distorted and, at times, disturbing reality. Between 2022 and 2024, real crime rates decreased from 3.5 to 3.8 crime per 100,000, while the perceived prevalence of crime rose dramatically from 55 to 62 percent. Deteriorated relationship between courts and law enforcement two, harming the public trust in these institutions, reduces life in society. Media literacy becomes an urgent necessity to demystify these fallacious narratives and regain faith in the justice system. A further important feature of the justice system is how it treats marginalized groups, especially women and ethnic minorities. Four out of five women (80%) feel that they are either under- or misrepresented in crime stories in the media. These portrayals enforce stereotypes and stigmas, leading many women to not report crimes for fear of being shamed further. Likewise, ethnic minorities are subject to increased surveillance and discrimination as slanted media narratives represent them as deviant or criminally inclined. Such a representation of all might reduce the representation of all when it comes to crime reporting.

Finally, the significant diversity in legal practices in Pakistan can also be attributed to multinational colonial frameworks and Sharia law coexisting together seamlessly and running parallel to one another in hold over judicial implementations. In some provinces, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this percentage is as high as 65%, indicating a deeply entrenched tendency towards Sharia law above formal legal systems, bolstered by centuries of rich cultural and religious nuances. In contrast, Punjab shows a more divided outlook, with 60% supporting state legislation. This misalignment underscores the importance of culturally informed legal reforms that maintain regional values while also ensuring fairness and justice for everyone. By examining these aspects, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cultural, societal, and media dynamics in shaping justice in Pakistan and the pressing necessity for ethical journalism and inclusive legal reforms beyond this drastic reality.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The article *'Political Culture, Hegemony, and Inequality Before the Law: Law Enforcement in Pakistan'* by Fida Muhammad & Paul Conway, examines the interplay between crime culture and socio-political formation in Pakistan through analysis of race, gender, class and their portrayal in the crime dramas of Pakistan. From this perspective, the author argues that the media participates in constructing prejudice that discredits key societies, especially the female group and the ethnic, presenting them as criminally inclined or deviant. It is not only about changing people's opinion, but it also changes the police officers' behaviour. The study mainly relies on historical contexts and lacks comprehensive coverage of modern media discourses and social media discussions concerning crime and identity.

In the article titled *Analysing the Role of Media in Promoting Crimes* by Masudi & Mustafa delves into the ways in which media narratives can have a profound impact on criminal conduct. The authors argued that there are a number of ways in which the media influences public opinion and societal attitudes in a way that promotes crime. The sensationalism of criminal activities in the media distorts reality and fosters the normalcy of crime. A heightened perception of crime prevalence arises from the tendency of sensationalized reporting to focus on violent occurrences. Exaggerated and sensationalized reporting frequently emphasizes violent crimes, resulting in an inflated picture of crime prevalence, because of this public become frightened and believe that crime is more common than it actually is. The prevalence of crime is increased because of the overemphasis on violent crimes in exaggerated reporting. Over-representation of certain crimes, especially those involving specific groups, might reinforce assumptions and biases. Minority-related crimes are often publicized disproportionately, promoting negative attitudes and causing moral panics about specific communities. This selective reporting distorts public perception and influences law enforcement's approach to these neighbourhood, frequently leading to heightened scrutiny and aggressive policing tactics. Despite these findings, several research gaps remain. The article examines the immediate effects of media on juvenile conduct, but it lacks longitudinal studies on the long-term consequences of violent media on individual behaviour and society standards. Understanding how early crime tales affect later behaviour may help avoid crime. The authors emphasize responsible media practices but do not offer media producers or policy-makers ways to write more fair and informed crime narratives. The article also lacks a few cross-cultural comparisons to determine how cultural factors affect media exposure and criminal behaviour, by investigating how various communities react to crime narratives may show cultural influences on justice and criminality.

The article *"Politics at the Bench: The Pakistani Judiciary's Ambitions and Interventions"* by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, focuses on the key findings to reveal how the power of judiciary has become a prominent force in the political dynamics of Pakistan and interfering in the areas that are supposed to be dealt by the representatives. This study examines how Television (TV) and newspaper coverage has contributed to the construction of common reference points for justice and legality, where the judiciary is at once the guardian of democracy and a power that can seize power. Despite the good coverage of the subject of judicial politics discussed in this article, there is a lack of information about how these narratives are received through different media's and what consequences this may have in society.

The article *"Justice for All: Multidimensionality of Justice in Pakistan"* by Development Advocate Pakistan (DAP), seeks to discuss the various ethical challenges that the journalists in Pakistan encounter while writing crime stories. It focuses on the aspects of exaggeration which always

accompanies the coverage of the crime and its consequences for public perception of justice matters. The authors explain that responsible journalism is important in informing people and enabling them to engage within issues of justice comprehensively. The article lacks primary research findings on how audiences respond to crime reporting, which would shed light on how these stories shape people's views on justice and journalistic integrity.

The True Crime Communities are discussed in the article titled, "*Observance of Ethics in Crime News Reporting with Respect to Pakistani Society*" by *MK Imtiaz Hussain* seeks to analyze the growing phenomenon of true crime craze amongst Pakistanis, especially the youth. It explores how these kinds of stories also work as entertainment and as social issues discussions but it stands with question of ethics when it comes to the victimization and the drama. The study lacks a critical analysis of how true crime fan groups engage with old media constructions, which is crucial in determining their impact on justice-related discussions.

The article '*Media portrayal of crime and perception in Pakistan*' by *Jawed Aziz & Nasir* address the issue of media's representation of crimes and the societies perception of it in Pakistan, specifically the way history impacts the present-day concept of justice. The authors simply explain that media provide frameworks for narrating crime in society and give an understanding of the historical realities based on colonialism. In a country whose legal system was shaped largely by Britain colonialism, the situation generates an ironic contrast between indigenous culture and contemporary legal requirements. This paper establishes that crime reporting by media houses exaggerates existing perceptions and misinforms the public on the nature of the crime. If all the attention is set to historical crimes, people fail to understand the existing systemic issues in the justice system. Of course, through media sources, people learn about important socio-political problems; however, it does not give the necessary additional information regarding crime and justice in Pakistan and their multi layered character. Yet, it fails to specify that how the usage of the media in different formats like television as opposed to printed media influence the public's perception differently. Furthermore, a limited discussion about how these representations impact particular segments of society based on their age, sex, and other factors.

The study titled "*Representation of Women Victims in Pakistani Media*" underpins a historical analysis of women victims in Pakistani crime reporting to identify and further reflect on the gendered dynamics of crime. The authors compare and contrast two popular English-language newspapers, Dawn and The News, published between 2007 and 2014. This paper's study shows that crime reporting is ahead in presenting women as helpless victims and does not put much emphasis on their personality or the decisions they make. It is not rare coverage, and violent crimes against women are paid the most attention rather than seeking information, education, or cures for the illnesses, fear and stigma rule. At the same time, this analysis demonstrates that such representations mirror the gendered constructs present in the rest of society, thus underlining the relevance of media in defining the public knowledge on women's vulnerability to violence and victimization. However, although very informative on the subject of gender representation, the study lacks depth in the way such portrayals impact on the formulation of public policies or changing of laws on women rights and violation of women through violence. The paper titled *Sharia Law and its Socio-Cultural Implications in Pakistan* by *Zia Mian* analyses the influence of Sharia law on cultural values and notions of justice in Pakistani culture. It underscores the varied interpretations of Sharia among different communities, demonstrating how local customs and traditions affect the implementation of Islamic precepts. Moreover the study highlights that despite Sharia's image as a universal code of law, this study demonstrates that its application differs widely between areas and ethnic groups in Pakistan, highlighting the country's varied socio-

economic and cultural context. However the study lacks to address modern impacts on traditional understandings of Sharia.

The article *Justice Across Borders: Ethnic Diversity and Legal Practices in Pakistan* by Ali argued that Pakistan's ethnic groups possess diverse interpretations of the idea of justice. Geographical disparities exist in the perception and resolution of criminal behaviour, indicating that justice is not uniform throughout the country. The author contended that ethnic variety influences legal proceedings, as certain societies address disagreements through local norms.

The article titled *Public Attitudes Toward Justice in Pakistan: A Survey Analysis* by Fatima presents a detailed poll that shows widespread discontent with Pakistan's formal judicial system. About 70% of respondents think that the court system is ineffectual, illustrating the gap between public expectations and legal actions. The survey measures popular discontent, distrust, and disillusionment with legal institutions. Legal delays, law enforcement corruption, and lack of access to justice are common grounds for frustration. While the article gives useful quantitative data on popular perceptions but it lacks on numerical analysis without qualitative insights.

The paper titled *A Critical Analysis of the Criminal Justice System in Pakistan* by Tansif ur Rehman et al. thoroughly examine Pakistan's criminal justice system's inefficiencies. The authors attribute frighteningly low conviction rates of 5% to 10% to various connected factors. The main issues include poor law enforcement training, insufficient funding for police and courts, and widespread corruption that undermines legal processes. The data also shows procedural impediments that prolong trials and frustrate victims seeking justice. The study provides vital insights but lacking to address how socio-economic issues affect the criminal justice system, how does regional poverty effect legal representation. In what ways do societal injustices influence contacts with law enforcement, an analysis of the influence of community perceptions on crime and safety on police cooperation may elucidate systematic failures.

## **Research Methodology**

In this research article both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to analyse media, culture and justice in Pakistan. The qualitative part involves a critical review of the media narratives and culture and regional tapes through literature review, case analysis and historical backgrounds. Quantitative approaches are also employed to examine statistical data, including crime rates, public perceptions, and survey results. The research employed the use of tables and percentage to enhance the presentation of the numerical data such as, actual crime rate, public perceptions of crime rate, and the preference of certain region on the application of sharia, and formal legal systems. This methodology facilitates the understanding of the cultural and socio economic factors influencing justice in Pakistan in a way that causes balanced consideration of the relative and the absolute.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research employs an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective that comprises cultural studies post-colonial theory and critical criminology to analyse Pakistani legal systems media images and cultures. Cultural studies offer the practical method of understanding how culture in terms of values, practice and the media reciprocally form and are formed by perceptions of justice, crime and punishment. It analysed how cultural factors and geographical factors affect the public perception of justice. A critical framework for analysing the colonial legacies embedded in

Pakistan's legal and cultural systems, post-colonial theory emphasizes the British colonial court system's continuing influence on contemporary practices and narratives. Furthermore critical criminology focuses on different aspects such as gender class and ethnicity, while, at the same time, scrutinizing the power relations together with the socio economic differences inherent in legal justice. Altogether, these theoretical perspectives encompass historical and social imperative for justice in Pakistan and provide a framework for decoding society, media and law.

## **Findings**

There is a complex landscape formed by ethical, social, and historical variables in Pakistan as seen through media depiction, cultural influences, and dominant ideas of justice. In this section a detail findings presented that how the media portrays justice, ethical journalistic practices, cultural impacts on justice, how Sharia law and formal legal systems coexist, and how crime reporting affects vulnerable communities.

The study affirms the hypothesis, that there exist a strong relationship between amount of coverage and the presence of crime in perception. Although the constructed crime index of the country increased from 3.5 per 100,000 in the year 2022 to 3.8 per 100000 in the year 2024, the subjective crime indexed by the people too raised from 55% to 62% in the identical time line. The growing discrepancy between reality and perception is due to the fact that incidents of crime have always been well publicized in media thus giving rise to the increased read more of sensation of insecurity within the society.

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>ACTUAL CRIME RATE</b>	<b>PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CRIME</b>	<b>PUBLIC TRUST ON MEDIA</b>
2022	45	3.5	75
2023	40	3.6	80
2024	35	3.8	85

This data presented in the above table clearly depicts that how the media narratives have formed perception of the occurrence of crime by showing disparities between the public perception and the real crime rates for a period of three years.

The ethical factors related to crime reporting have a considerable impact on the public perception on law enforcement, as well as, the legal systems. seventy-five percent of crime headlines focused on violent situations and frequently sensationalizing events without providing their context.

<b>REPORTING STYLE</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF TRUST INPOLICE</b>
Sensationalized	30
Responsible	60

The data presented in this table demonstrate that sensationalised coverage reduces the level of trust in police while responsible journalism coverage has more trust level.

Different cultural backgrounds in Pakistan have led to different understandings of justice in different locations. More than 70% of rural residents think that informal norms shape their view of fairness more than official statutes. The table below demonstrate that people in rural areas rely

more on traditional practices when it comes to justice, in contrast to those in urban areas who see the influence of local customs as having little to no effect.

<b>REGION</b>	<b>INFLUENCE OF LOCAL CUSTOMS %</b>
Rural Areas	75%
Urban Areas	40%

The table demonstrates that people in rural areas rely more on traditional practices when it comes to justice, in contrast to those in urban areas who see the influence of local customs as having little to no effect.

A complex legal system emerges in Pakistan as a result of the merging of Sharia law with secular legal systems. A survey conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which showed that more than 65% of respondents value local traditions and Sharia law more than formal legal systems.

<b>REGION</b>	<b>PREFERANCE FOR SHARIAH %</b>	<b>FOR PREFERANCE FOR FORMAL LAW %</b>
<b>KPK</b>	65	35
<b>Punjab</b>	40	60

The data presented in the above table clearly depicts regional preferences for Sharia law over formal legal systems.

For marginalised communities, especially women and people of ethnic group, the media's portrayal of criminal cases have far-reaching consequences. An overwhelming majority of women (80%) argued that media portrayals of criminal behaviour are either inaccurate or incomplete. Some instances of the potential implications of this include the perpetuation of stereotypes and the obstruction of meaningful conversations regarding gender-based violence.

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF MISREPRESENTED</b>
2020	70
2021	75
2022	80

The table given above clearly represents that women are misrepresented and crimes has increased over the years. This highlights the need for media coverage to be more responsible and contextual as well as coverage that truly represents the experience of women.

The long-term consequences of the sensationalism of crime reporting are severe and complex in Pakistan. This type of reporting skews the perception of crime in the public sphere and creates a widespread atmosphere of fear and distrust of law enforcement and the judicial system. As per the survey 63% people feel unsafe in their communities because the unreasonable portrayal of media. In addition, sensationalism reinforces stereotypes, negatively impacting stereotypes of women and ethnic minorities. Consequently, 70 percent of women in Pakistan feel misrepresented while mediating the crime narrative, and this apprehension can stop the women from getting justice or reporting the crime at all due to stigmatization. As a result, sensationalized reporting not only molds immediate attitudes but also affects the juridical system along with a process of adaptation to justice.

## **Discussion**

The Paper Titled Cultural Contours of Justice: Law and Crimes Narratives in Popular Imagination examines the complex interaction of culture, society, and the media that shapes and constrains the perception of justice in a society. This research paper uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques to assess the interaction of the various elements and their effects on the society. The media construction of crime is discussed here and it contrasts the perceiving of justice between the regions; the conflict between the formal legal systems and cultures and religion, especially in the Sharia dominated regions is also discussed here. The findings clearly depicts that media has an influence on public perception of crime and justice. Statistic analysis of data collected within the year 2022 to 2024 shows that the public has a shifted perception of crime rates differing from police reported figures of crime rate, the sensationalised reporting in the media greatly heightened the public's view of criminality and justice.

It is evident that the media has the capacity to amplify the prevalence of criminal activities, hence exacerbating public fear and concern. It is common for the media to place an emphasis on violent crimes, which results in an exaggerated perception of criminal activity and reinforces preconceptions about some groups, particularly those who are marginalised and constituted of members of minority groups. There are systemic hurdles that prohibit justice from being administered properly. These obstacles are a result of the inclination of the media to misrepresent reality and to damage public trust in law enforcement and judicial systems. Moreover, the findings of the research indicate that there are significant geographical variances in the manner in which justice is perceived and carried out in Pakistan.

The findings of the study depict that there exist large variations in the social construction of justice and its enactment in Pakistan mainly rooted in cultural and local factors. Sharia has tendency to dominate the practice than the ideal legal systems in most of the rural areas. Nevertheless, in KPK 65% of respondents prefer Sharia law in contrast to state laws which may evidence rooted culture and religion background. On the other hand, 60% of the Punjabi participants show a relatively more unbiased attitude towards the formal legal systems supporting state laws. This state-legislated disparity shows the complexities of the social reality of legal pluralism in Pakistan. The challenge of integrating historical practice at the heart of a twenty-first-century integrated justice system and the ethnic and cultural population of a country are both illustrated in it. The relationship between the formal and the informal systems therefore reinforces the need for legal reforms that recognises the practice of culture, as well as deliver equal and non-discriminatory justice. The study also highlighted importance of ethical issues presented by crime coverage in Pakistan. Total 80% of women perceived that they are misrepresented or receive inadequate representation in crime reporting. The problem is most apparent in the area of gender-based violence. Criminal offences of this nature are sometimes reported in the media in such raw manner, the concentrate is given more on brutal and heartbreaking aspects of the incidents rather than providing platform for discussing on their causes or how they could be prevented in the future.

The research additionally investigates the influence of cultural narratives on the formation of justice perceptions. Media portrayals frequently rely on historical and sociological frameworks that shape public perceptions and anticipations. It was the Raymond Davis case, which featured the assassination of two Pakistani men by an American diplomat, that served as a spark for national conversation. Narratives that were given in the media that framed the case as a question of national dignity and sovereignty had a tremendous impact on a substantial portion of the public conversation that was surrounding the case. As seen by the media coverage of the issue



highlighted drawing on popular anger and entrenched anti-American attitudes crime narratives can move beyond their legal situations and morph into tools for broader cultural and political issues.

## **Conclusion**

The study titled *Cultural Contours of Justice: Law and Crimes Narratives in Popular Imagination* sheds light on the complex relationships between crime narratives in the media, cultural narratives and the law in Pakistan. It highlights how distorted perceptions of crime and justice are shaped by sensationalized media, leading to fears about and biases against particular categories of people, especially minorities and women. The results highlight how the interpretation and implementation of justice vary greatly by region, influenced as they are by local customs, colonial legal traditions, and Sharia law. The research highlights the critical role of ethical journalism in the service of truth and fairness to ensure that media narratives not only do not reinforce stereotypes but do not undermine confidence in the judicial and law enforcement systems. Moreover, the interaction between institutionalised laws and customary rules highlight the importance of personalised reforms in bridging the urban-rural justice gap.

## **Recommendations**

- Journalists in Pakistan need to go for responsible reporting rather than sensationalism. Media descriptions of crime should be factual and not sensationalized or promote stereotypes, particularly of disadvantaged populations, as these are the ethical standards.
- Media crime narratives must confront misogynist attitudes and exoticotal prejudice and discrimination against women. The comprehensive reporting of crimes against women and the minorities can lead to a more just society.
- It should take into consideration Sharia and customary practices alongside formal legal systems, stead. Policies must hold cultural values while ensuring justice is equitable, consistent, and consistent with contemporary legal standards around the world.
- The legal system should also comply with regional imbalances in how laws are viewed and implemented. The formal and the informal systems can be connected with specific approaches that take into consideration the local customs and needs, whether in an urban or rural context.
- Launch campaigns that educate the public so they know that the things they see in the news are not the reflection of real-life crime rates. It is the task of the government institutions, NGOs and media to cater public perception according to reality.

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