[Police journey since 2002](https://nation.com.pk/16-Sep-2019/police-journey-since-2002)

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Almost all major daily newspapers of Pakistan devote a full page to crime-related news every day. Electronic media is not much different than the print one in this regard. Crime is also a genre for movies all over the world. This supply side of news is direct evidence that there is a demand for crime-related news. It is primarily due to two reasons: First, crime is a social phenomenon and its relevance for all the people in the society. Second, it has elements of curiosity and thrill associated with peculiar circumstances and drama attached to the good and bad aspects of each story.

Contrary to many other parts of the neighbouring countries, Pakistani media portray the police as villains rather than heroes. In almost all of the stories, they are described standing on the side of the villains rather than victims. This is a public image of police in Pakistan since the 1980s due to political and social milieu which continues till today. Why is it so?

Before we try to find a response to this question, let us see where police in Pakistan stands today as far as changes it has brought about since the 1980s and more precisely since 2002 when the first fundamental change in policing in Pakistan was brought about by the General Pervaiz Musharraf as part of his reform agenda. After 17 years of this change from the police Act of 1861 to Police Order 2002, all police experts believe that it was the best thing that happened to police in Pakistan. The strongest opponents of Police Order 2002 were civil servants who wanted to keep police under their leash to continue with the colonial legacy rather the judiciary for accountability. Strongest proponents were members of the regime and media who wanted to bring change in policing and local government structures with a break from the colonial past.

Since Police Order 2002, police has travelled a long journey. Early eight years were lost in disputes about control of the police by Nazim and irritants from the erstwhile civil servants. But more significantly, and which is forgotten, unfortunately, that due to Musharraf Reforms from 2002 to 2011, police fought valiantly along with Armed Forces of Pakistan against the menace of terrorism in the country. The number of police martyrs is more than 5000 from all ranks, and it is still going on. Pakistan Armed Forces and Pakistan Police officials lay their lives in the line of duty facing attacks of all sorts from enemies from within and without. The list of martyrs, injured and veterans while protecting the public is decorated with police officers from all over Pakistan, just like officers of Armed Forces.

It was much later in 2013 with relative peace in the country and Political support that police also started focusing on its structural reforms led by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police Command under Provincial Police Officer Nasir Khan Durrani. He brought change in KP police by gaining more autonomy as envisaged in PO 2002 and earned respect in and out of the country. Unfortunately, this could not happen in other provinces despite repeated efforts. The reason was more resistance from the bureaucracy, which wanted to retain this use of force organ of state under their control. Even today PO 2002 is not implemented in letter and spirit due to this resistance.

Some significant changes took place since 2013 in policing in Pakistan. Police started focusing on specialisation. Separation of operations and investigation was launched since 2002; however, there are some challenges in implementation due to mixing up rural and urban policing. Most significant development has been the establishment of Counter-Terrorism Departments in the police all over Pakistan. These departments within police have earned respect and accolade from international observers and are the continuous focus of donor agencies and the top civil and military leadership due to its national and international importance to the level of FATF. Despite all care one can take, mishaps like the Sahiwal incidents occur. But even that sad incident raised questions over streamlining further the standard operating procedures rather than abandoning the crackdown on terrorists and their affiliates.

So, all is not lost if we take a deep breath and think of developments in the police. Another lesson was from model town incident of 13th July 2014. Just after that, on 15th July, and later in August to December 2014, use of force policy during the 126 days long dharna also revealed that police leadership learnt the lesson for not being exploited for any purpose but the rule of law, as far as possible. Similarly, more sit-ins took place in the following years, but police used force appropriately and lawfully. Another development at the command level within the police was following the law and not accepting the method of extrajudicial killings as an option to control crime. police also faced a whimsical onslaught of Suo Moto targeting police from 2008 until recently. It is only recently that present Chief Justice of Pakistan has encouraged police to implement meaningful changes at all levels. Judiciary also supported the police by enforcing strict measures as per laws and holding police officers accountable wherever they faltered. The point is learning of police as an organisation from real-life events and feedback by the public and the media houses who spared nobody when it came to the issue of public importance and human rights.

Introduction of technology is the most significant development in police as an organisation since 2010, particularly in Punjab and followed by others. There are very few public organisations, like FBR and police, who are working for automation of processes for service delivery, matching the demands of the 21st century. Police have automated the operations to a large extent. Motorway Police and Punjab Safe Cities Authority are two organisations like NADRA, who have gained respect in the eyes of the public. A significant challenge for these organisations was to bring change in the existing environment and with all limitations which are presented as hiccups by other civil institutions. This was all possible when the police officers were having the support of political leadership, and they relied on innovative methods of governance never known to colonial masters or their heirs.

Despite all odds, the police have such success stories. The world is taking off layers of bureaucracy, and we are thinking about adding layers over the layers for narrow group-based politics. There is a need to address the business processes at the police station level, which is the demand of all and sundry. Change of personnel is a good idea, but implementing a functional and efficient business model with minimum cost will yield results in a short time. The police leadership, which can think in terms of modern management, needs to be tasked to bring results, and to check the ill effects of existing processes by sharing their issues with decision-makers. Police need to highlight what it has done and what it is doing for the people it serves. It should come up with an indigenous roadmap for change for the political leadership to which it is accountable ultimately.