

16. RIOTS & PUBLIC DISORDERS

Controlling mobs and riots in Pakistan requires a balanced mix of specialized police reform, digital intelligence monitoring, and strict legal accountability TODAY.

For decades, public protests and crowds followed a set-old style and predictable path in Pakistan: political parties issued calls, clerics announced processions, and unions organised marches. The police relied on this structure till recent past — negotiating with leaders, planning routes, and anticipating escalation based on past patterns.

But crowds across the country no longer mobilise the way our Police & Admin imagine them. That world is gone.

Today's crowd forms inside a smartphone long before it appears on the street. A short video, an edited clip, a voice note, or a rumour forwarded through WhatsApp can spark movement faster than any political directive.

TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become ***Pakistan's real mobilisation tools.*** Their systems reward emotionally charged content — ***anger, outrage, victimhood, religious sentiment — and rapidly push it to millions.***

Thus, under the NEW CHARTER; the FOCAL points:

- To preserve public safety; modern governance and policing strategies WILL BE FRAMED to move beyond managing streets; Police and Security Forces must understand and ***address how crowds are being hyper-accelerated in the digital sphere.***

As the CrPC of 1898 has been placed aside, **so SECTION 144 becomes unusable** – otherwise the said 128 years old law is IMPRACTICABLE in this AI-age.

IRONY OF FATE IS THAT SINCE 1947, THIS LAW HAS NEVER BEEN APPLICABLE BY ADMIN AND POLICE; IT'S 'LIMIT OF 4 PERSONS TO MAKE ASSEMBLY' HAS NEVER BEEN CHANGED TO 10 OR 50 OR 100 – THUS, IT ALWAYS REMAINED ON PAPERS and MEDIA RECORD ONLY.

ITS PRACTICAL USE HAS OFTEN BEEN SEEN IN COURTS ONLY – THAT TOO FOR ACADEMIC DISCUSSIONS.

- **BUT STILL** the authorities regularly deploy police and paramilitary Rangers, using tear gas and strict assembly bans **under Section 144** to block unauthorized gatherings in major cities like Islamabad.
 - *Section 144 of the Pakistan's CrPC of 1898: A legal provision that empowers the district administration to prohibit public gatherings of*

four or more people in a specific area for a limited time.

- ***Observers note that traditional state deterrence and brute force are losing effectiveness, as public frustration outweighs the fear of arrests.***
- Govts will establish specialized ***Riot Management Units*** (RMUs) with specific training for public disorder, similar to provincial initiatives in Punjab. These units will be DEDICATED & SPECIALIZED for dealing with **DIGITAL PROTESTS & DISORDERS.**
- The above said category of officers will be trained to use minimal force, negotiation skills, and adequate crowd dispersal techniques & digital equipment.
- **Set up specialized training schools or** expand the on-going institutions with WINGS DESIGNED AND EARMARKED FOR **Public Disorder and Riot Management** to teach mob psychology and stress management.
- Even today, opposition leadership continues to ***call for intensified nationwide rallies and decisive marches*** toward Islamabad, creating a persistent cycle of disruption – ONLY SPECIALIZED CONTINGENTS with techniques of dealing with **Public Disorder and Riot Management** will be suitable.
- The above said specially trained personnel will **monitor online triggers** by carrying out ***predictive analytics and digital heat maps to spot online hate speech and anger*** before it turns into physical violence.

- **The Training Wing will educate in improving response time** by updating standard operating procedures so that law enforcement responds within minutes of a digital call to gather or simultaneously.
- **The specialized UNITS will continue targeting 'hate speech-mongers'** online and prosecute individuals and groups who use social media or loudspeakers to spread hate speech and incite crowds to make a group, mob or procession to indulge in RIOTING.
- **However, the govts will hold organizers liable** by passing suitable laws that make protest leaders financially responsible for damage to public and private property.
 - **FOR THIS STEP, the govts will make out special laws for guidance of the SUMMARY COURTS WHERE THE DIGITAL MATERIAL, PHOTOS & VIDEOS will be used for PROMPT Prosecution & Decision – NOT USING CrPC provisions of 1898.**
- **The govts will also identify violent actors** and pursue swift legal action and mass prosecution against individuals caught committing acts of mob violence.
- **The govts will balance public order and basic rights** by upholding the constitutional right to peaceful assembly under Article 16 while enforcing reasonable restrictions to protect human life and property – **HARD TASK BUT WE HAVE TO DO THIS JOB TO SET A PRINCIPLE FOR OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

**NOW SEE BELOW SOME BASIC INFO
ABOUT THIS NEW SUBJECT**

MODERN PROTESTS & DIRORDERS

The core analysis of PROTESTS since 2022 till today highlight that:

'The crowd now begins in the feed, not on the street, marking a paradigm shift from traditional, structured political mobilization to decentralized, algorithmic mobilization'.

The changing anatomy of modern protests and digital public disorders in Pakistan has been explored ***how digital spaces act as direct psychological and emotional triggers before overflowing into physical reality.***

The analysis emphasizes that ***by the time law enforcement or state institutions arrive at the physical site of a protest, the emotional ignition has already occurred online.***

[A primary case study referenced from recent history was the fabricated rape alert [in October 2024] that circulated widely among students of the Punjab College for Women. Fueled by unverified online narratives, it triggered an almost instant, chaotic mobilization of thousands of students across major cities in Punjab, demonstrating how rapidly digital misinformation transforms into localized public disorder.]

The state, however, has viewed these fast-forming digital crowds as a security crisis, frequently responding with aggressive countermeasures – taking it as DIGITAL TERRORISM.

- **As a remedy** Pakistani Police started launching intense crackdowns, notably **through amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act [PECA]**, which targeted online speech and alternative journalism.
- The governments have started applying **Digital Blackouts** to disrupt the digital communication loops that feed modern protests. The authorities have increasingly relied on awkward strategies like throttling mobile data, enforcing internet blackouts, and blocking major communication platforms.

PUBLIC DISORDERS vs CONSTITUTION

Pakistan faces deep public disorder and political unrest driven by a clash between the state, the establishment and major opposition groups like PTI & JUI-F, alongside economic protests led by various Islamic & Civil-Society parties & groups.

However, the right to protest in Pakistan is guaranteed under **Article 16** of the Constitution of Pakistan, which states that ***every citizen has the right to assemble peacefully and without arms***, subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of public order.

- Related rights like freedom of speech and expression (Article 19) and freedom of movement (Article 15) also support the framework for public demonstrations.

- The RIGHT TO PROTEST is NOT absolute; the state can place rules and limits to protect public order, safety, human life, and property. Local administrations can require prior notice, designate specific protest zones, or deny permission if there is a clear threat to public peace.
 - **Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act** are basically the Statutory Rules for Islamabad which grant authorities expanded powers to regulate gatherings, set red zones, and penalize unlawful or violent assemblies.
- Currently in 2026, the imprisonment and legal battles of (& for) former PM Imran Khan have kept tensions high in Rawalpindi & Islamabad, with supporters staging frequent rallies that frequently turn confrontational.
- Inflation, high fuel costs, and new levies have ALSO sparked widespread public anger, leading to localized sit-ins and demands for relief.
- Protests in regions like Balochistan and AJK (Pakistan-administered Kashmir) highlight deep-rooted grievances over governance, resource allocation, and crackdowns.

How EU Nations control 'DIGITAL PROTESTS' / online INCITING CALLS?

European Union nations control '**digital protests and online mobilization**' by enforcing strict legal frameworks that treat

illegal digital activity identically to offline offenses. EU member states aggressively suppress ***online calls that cross into incitement of violence, riots, or civil unrest.***

The cornerstone of digital control is the Digital Services Act (DSA); [***it is similar to Pakistan's PECA***], which grants the European Commission massive regulatory oversight over platforms with more than 45 million EU users.

- Under the head '**Harmonized Removals**', the DSA ***legally forces Big Tech companies*** (like Meta, TikTok, and X) to immediately remove content **defined as illegal** under either EU law or specific national laws.
- ***Very Large Online Platforms*** (VLOPs) must actively evaluate and adjust their algorithms to prevent the amplification of '**systemic risks**', which explicitly includes ***harms to public security, civic discourse, and electoral integrity.***
- In times of public emergency, such as severe civil unrest or riots, **specialized mechanisms** are activated to force platforms to rapidly restrict or down-rank content organizing illegal physical action.
- ***Platforms that fail to comply with orders to limit the spread of inciting content face massive fines of up to 6% of their global revenue – that's, of course, go to BILLIONS OF US DOLLARS.***
 - To accelerate **internet policing**, EU nations utilize a decentralized reporting ecosystem:

- **Trusted Flaggers:** The EU designates *specific state-backed NGOs, expert groups, and specialized entities as 'Trusted Flaggers'*; their notifications to social media networks regarding online mobilization, illegal assembly calls, or hate speech are ***fast-tracked and prioritized*** for instant deletion without typical bureaucratic delays (like in Pakistan).
- National judiciaries and regulators (such as ***France's Arcom***) hold the legislative power to issue direct, legally binding cross-border removal orders to any tech platform operating within the EU COUNTRIES.
- Because digital protests are frequently organized over private messengers (like WhatsApp, Signal, or Telegram), the EU has pursued ***more invasive monitoring frameworks***.
- The European Parliament has extended temporary rules allowing tech ***companies to scan digital communications for specific illegal material***.
- Active legislative battles continue over permanent proposals that would mandate risk-based visual and link scanning. This step dismantles absolute end-to-end encryption, ***potentially allowing state surveillance of political opposition and grassroots organization tools***.
- Individual member states apply distinct, severe measures during localized civil unrest as per specific situations.

- EU officials and national leaders have responsively opted to temporarily ***shut-down or block social media platforms within their borders*** if the platforms fail to rapidly scrub content during riots or coordinated flash-mobs.
- Several EU countries (including France and Spain) are ***actively rolling out laws requiring national identity document verification or passports to log into social media networks.*** This systematically strips away online anonymity, making individuals directly liable for any online call to action.
- ***Under domestic penal codes, police routinely track IP addresses and arrest administrators of group chats or social media pages*** who post coordinates or logistical information for unauthorized physical protests.

PAKISTAN AIMS TO MAKE OUT THE SIMILAR CODES OF LAW & PRACTICE TO DEAL WITH THE MENACE OF ILLEGAL DIGITAL PROTESTS & DISORDERS UNDER THE NEW CHARTER – TO STAND BY THE DEVELOPED NATIONS.

Of course the STATUS-QUO LOVERS of CrPC of 1898, PPC of 1860 AND POLICE ACT OF 1861 WILL RAISE HUE & CRY THROUGH THEIR PAID MEDIA ANCHORS – BUT THE NATION KNOWS THEIR REAL FACES NOW.