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Public Perception and the Effectiveness of the Safe City Sargodha Project: Implications for Traffic Regulation, Crime Detection, and Urban Safety

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Abstract
Over the past few years, there has been a strong introduction of surveillance-led urban management in the developing countries in an effort to counter issues concerning traffic control and prevention of crimes. In this study, the researcher explores the community feeling towards the effectiveness of Sargodha Safe City project, specifically traffic control, crime prevention and detection, security perception and general community sentiment.
The quantitative cross sectional research design was used and information was collected on 200 residents of Sargodha through a structured questionnaire based on five-point Likert scale. The obtained data was processed with the help of descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The results show that the positive attitude of the population has statistically significant effect to the opinion of efficient traffic management and crime detection. On the other hand, the effect of the Safe City Project on the feelings of safety of people seemed to be insignificant, and the correlation between this project and the views of the general population was not statistically significant.
The paper concludes that surveillance technologies can improve the results of regulatory and enforcement; however, their effectiveness in the establishment of perceived safety depends on the views of larger institutions, transparency, and a sense of community participation. The implications of these findings on policy in terms of the legal aspects of surveillance in city security efforts in the third world countries are huge.

Keywords: Safe City Project; Public Perception; Traffic Regulation; Crime Detection; CCTV Surveillance; Urban Safety; Pakistan

Introduction
The unprecedented growth of population in metropolis in the developing countries has exacerbated the issues of general security, physical flow, and urban management. The increased density and complexity of cities are driving authorities to consider more and more the use of the concept of Safe City system - a combination of digital surveillance tools, data-driven services, and community engagement, to increase safety and improve the quality of life (Hong, 2022). These efforts in Pakistan started with metropolitan-level projects, like the Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA), in Lahore, and then progressed to medium cities like Sargodha, which attempts local remedies to city mayhem and crime (Rana, 2024; Tabassum, 2019).
The PSCA model represents the larger view of the state on mediated governance by means of technology, and makes surveillance one of the pillars of urban order (Riaz et al., 2024). However, the increasing use of digital surveillance tools casts considerable doubts on the aspects of privacy, inclusiveness, and civic trust (Khan,

2020; Aqil, 2020). The researchers believe that although the technology of the Safe City provides greater situational awareness and prevents crime, its effectiveness is determined not only by the infrastructural level but by the attitude and involvement of citizens (Ghani et al., 2024; Ahmed, 2018).

The case of introduction of Safe City practices in Sargodha, the city that has traditionally not been considered a significant urban hub, where CCTVs, traffic management systems, and coordination of emergency responses are implemented, can be seen as an example of how digital governance permeates outside of metropolitan areas (Kousar, Anwar, and Quddoos, 2025). Nevertheless, there is a shortage of studies devoted to local experience and perception, where the vast majority of researchers concentrate on the technical infrastructure of the safe cities or their application on the examples of big cities such as Lahore and Islamabad (Rafique et al., 2016; Chaudhary et al., 2025). The perceptions of the dwellers of the mid towns towards such initiatives as empowerment, control, or reassurance provide a very important understanding of how technology, governance, and the population trust in the urban environment of Pakistan are developing. This paper thus analyzes the perception of the residents towards the Safe City Project in Sargodha and how it has influenced their perception towards their sense of safety, traffic control and civic activities. Foregrounding local voices, the study will be of relevance to a subtle conceptualization of the intersection of digital security infrastructures and daily urban life in developing settings.

Research Questions

- How does the public perceive the overall effectiveness of the Safe City Sargodha Project?
- How does the Safe City Project influence traffic regulation and rule compliance?
- What is the public's view on the project's role in crime detection and prevention?

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

- To examine public perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the Safe City Sargodha Project.
- To assess the influence of public perception on traffic regulation under the Safe City Project.
- To analyse the relationship between public perception and crime detection and prevention.
- To evaluate the effect of public perception on residents' feelings of safety.

Literature Review

The fast increase in population in cities is worsening the situation with traffic controls, crime prevention, and safety of people, which is why governments introduce technological surveillance equipment as a part of safe city projects. Safe City is the project that combines the information and communications technologies, such as video surveillance, central command centers, and real-time monitoring of data, to improve the effectiveness of law enforcement and the city administration. According to previous research, these programs are designed to transform the policing strategies into a model in which policing is based on a proactive paradigm where the importance of deterrence, rapid response, and evidence-based decision-making is the core (MDPI, 2024).

The empirical studies of the conceptual framework of the Safe City projects prove that the system of surveillance-based urban governance relies strongly on the concept of institutional coordination and technological integration. The article, which was published in the MDPI Journal, highlights the fact that safe city systems are only effective, depending on the technological infrastructure, but also the governance systems, interagency collaboration, and citizen confidence. In the case that surveillance technologies are integrated into responsive institutional structures, they have a higher chance of producing positive results in crime and traffic management (MDPI, 2024). Surveillance systems and crime prevention have been a well-researched topic in the literature. Empirical research published by ScienceDirect and PMC indicates that a higher CCTV coverage is associated with declines in visible crime and street crime, especially in areas of high publicity. The extensive urban research shows that surveillance cameras can improve crime detection by

expanding the surveillance potential of police, easing the investigation with video evidence, and discouraging the would-be criminals by making it easier to be caught on camera (ScienceDirect; PMC). Those findings are supported by research studies that have been carried out in developing countries and have revealed that smart surveillance systems have the potential to increase the speed with which the police can react and monitor crime more effectively. Besides crimes prevention, traffic control is another major goal of a Safe City efforts. Video surveillance and license plate recognition technology, which are all automatic traffic monitoring systems, are largely recognized to enhance traffic control. The research papers cited on arXiv and in the traffic literature report that camera surveillance decreases traffic offenses through decreasing discretion in human use and enhancing the reliability of detection. The systems prove especially effective in controlling the traffic infractions, careless driving, and urban traffic discipline (arXiv). The experience of the use of the systems of safe cities in Pakistan and, in particular, in Lahore demonstrates that intelligent transport systems are able to significantly enhance the efficiency of traffic control and enforcement operations.

The level of public opinion is central to defining the success and legitimacy of initiatives based on surveillance. The studies published in PMC and on arXiv show that the attitude of the population to surveillance is influenced by the sense of equity, transparency, and responsibility. The trust to the law enforcement will increase when the people feel that the surveillance systems are both fair and procedurally just, and this will result in the increased rates of cooperation and obedience. On the other hand, lack of awareness and fears of being an abuse and privacy victim can undermine popular backing and reduce the perceived success of the Safe City initiatives.

The interdependence between surveillance and the safety of the citizens is more intricate. Even though, there are reports that visible surveillance enhances sense of security due to signals of safety and containment, there are those reports that surveillance itself does not entirely subdue the fear of crime. An extensive literature on empirical research that has been referenced by PMC indicates that the perception of safety differs depending on social group and is conditioned by the bigger environmental and social circumstances. In turn, the surveillance systems are more likely to produce a greater impact on the operational performance, i.e. traffic enforcement and crime detection, rather than subjective safety perceptions.

Although the research on safe cities in medium-sized cities in developing nations is limited, the growing number of countries in the world is shifting the focus of research on safe cities to the less-developed countries. In Pakistan, most of the studies that have been conducted even on the metropolitan regions are based on the official records and largely ignore the popular vision and the local experiences. Some scholars have claimed that it is crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of the actual control-based governance by studying the views of citizens (Zubair and Khan, 2020; UNODC, 2021). Therefore, the research into the perception of the people in a city like Sargodha is an excellent source of empirical data on the operations of Safe City projects beyond the metropolitan areas.

Recapping the above, the available literature proves that efficient safe city surveillance systems play a vital role in traffic control and crime detection in the presence of a strong governance and citizen confidence. However, their effect on the feeling of security of the community is conditional and situation-specific. This research fills an urgent gap in the literature, given the world-wide attention to the issue of visualizing the role of surveillance in increasing the safety of the city in Pakistan, and will further enhance the in-depth comprehension of the concept of urban safety via surveillance in Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

The research method applied in this study is quantitative in nature to examine the perception that the Sargodha Safe City project will have on people and how it is perceived to be. Cross-sectional survey technique is appropriate because it allows the statistic analysis of connections between variables since the data is collected at one time.

Population and Sample

The population that was targeted was the adult residents of the Sargodha city that are directly/indirectly involved with the Safe City Surveillance System in their day to day lives. The survey was done among adult residents of Sargodha council who had encountered the Safe City Surveillance System. Due to the limitation of availability, as well as the lack of a comprehensive sampling frame a convenience sample of 200 respondents was identifiated. The inductive character of the study, and the impossibility of obtaining a current list of the population, both predetermined the convenience sampling, and, at the same time, allowed statistically significant results to be obtained in a medium-sized city.

Data Collection Instrument

A standardized survey instrument was used in the collection of primary data. The independent variable was put in form of public perception towards the Safe City project. The dependent variables were defined as traffic regulation, crime detection and prevention, sense of safety and the public opinion. The variables were measured using more than 5 items using a five-point Likert scale with every possible answer being 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Consistency and Ethical Considerations

Cronbachs alpha was used to determine internal consistency of the questionnaire and all scales represented a reasonable reliability (= 0.71 0.81). The Department of Sociology and Criminology of the University of Sargodha gave its ethical approval; ethical considerations were considered, such as the informed consent and confidentiality. Respondents were involved on a voluntary basis and informed about the purpose of the study before filling out the questionnaire. The data was collected with a purpose of study.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics was used to generalize the demographic data and the response patterns and simple linear regression were performed to investigate the prediction of the desired outcome variables by the perception of the population. The influence of the public perception on each of the dependent variables was estimated through separate simple linear regression models.

Results

Descriptive Findings

The demographic segmentation revealed that most of the respondents were young, urban, and educated. Most of the respondents were aware of the Safe City Sargodha Project and they had positive appraisals of its goals, openness, and management. A large percentage of the respondents argued that the project has a positive impact on the management of traffic and crime.

Regression Analysis

There were four different regressions that were done to assess the influence of the perception of the people on various outcome variables.

Table 1: Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Outcome Variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Traffic Regulation	.377	.142	.138
Crime Detection & Prevention	.304	.093	.089
Feelings of Safety	.169	.029	.024
Public Opinion & Feedback	.096	.009	.004

Interpretation

According to model summary results, different degrees of variance of the outcome variables can be explained by the public perceptions. The regression model proves the highest explanatory capacity to traffic enforcement (R 2 = 0.142), crime detection and prevention (R 2 = 0.093). Feeling safe (R2 = 0.029) and the public opinion (R2 = 0.009) have a lower level of model power explaining their results, hence the weaker model fit.

Table 2: Regression Coefficients for Public Perception

Dependent Variable	β	t	p-value
Traffic Regulation	.377	5.72	.000
Crime Detection & Prevention	.304	4.49	.000
Feelings of Safety	.169	2.41	.016
Public Opinion & Feedback	.096	1.36	.174

Interpretation

The initial regression model has a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship between public awareness and traffic enforcement (0.377, p 001). This means that the more people have positive views about the Safe City initiative, the more they will have the perception of effective traffic regulation. One of the outcome variables, traffic enforcement, has the strongest relationship with the perception of the people, which is an important view of the critical role of public acceptance in enforcing traffic laws using surveillance systems.

The second model shows that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between crime detection and prevention and the public opinion (=.304, p.001). Even though this correlation is not as high as the one established to exist between traffic enforcement, it is still statistically significant indicating that positive social perceptions constructively contribute to trust in the use of surveillance as a means of curbing crime. Conversely, the lesser coefficient means crime prevention outcomes are also dependent on other institutional and contextual determinants than just the perception of the population.

The third model demonstrates the statistically significant but insignificant correlation between the public perception and the sense of safety (β =.169, p=.016). Although the impact of the public opinion in the perception of safety is measurable, the coefficient is small and thus does not have significant practical value. The implications of this discovery are that the concept of personal security is not limited to the perception of surveillance but is determined by more comprehensive arrangement of sociological, psychological and environmental elements.

According to the fourth regression model, there exists no statistically significant correlation between the perception of the Safe City project by the population (public perception) and the overall public opinion or comments (8). Such a result implies that in the attitudes of the general population, it is not only the evaluation of the effectiveness of surveillance that shapes but also much broader political, social, and contextual factors.

Discussion

The research provides essential information regarding how the efficacy of surveillance-based urban security programs depends on the opinion of the masses. The results demonstrate that the perception of the public on the Safe City Project has the highest impact in the field of operations and regulation, especially traffic control and crime prevention and detection. In cases where surveillance technology is closely associated with the observable enforcement devices like automated traffic methods and video-based inspections, the increased awareness of the population is necessary to improve its compliance and efficiency.

The empirical correlation of the opinion of the people and the enforcing traffic increases the importance of

the acceptance of the automated enforcing mechanism by the people to attain success. Favorable reviews on how fair, transparent and accurate the monitoring tools are seen to contribute to compliance and endorsement of the traffic management. These observations underscore the importance of the fact that technological interventions in the traffic management is the most effective when they are considered by the population as legitimate and managed. Similarly, there is a close connection between the masses and the crime detection and prevention which points to the fact that a great number of people think that surveillance systems can help law enforcement.

The effectiveness of crime-fighting initiatives is credited with recognition of the usefulness of surveillance technology in DOTS by the public confidence in the ability of the surveillance technology to identify the suspects, document the evidence, and deter the potential offenders. However, the rather weak explanatory capacity of this relationship implies that crime prevention results also depend on the wider institutional, social, and environmental conditions that are beyond the perception of people.

On the other hand, the fact that the perception of the people and the sense of security are not closely related indicates the subjective security that is complex. The sense of security is not only formed through the surveillance technology, but through the individual experiences, conditions in society, coverage by media and the nature of the environment. The implication of this finding is that, despite the fact that surveillance affects general perception of safety, it is not enough to significantly change well-established psychological perceptions of safety without social and environmental modifications.

The lack of a statistically significant correlation between perceptions and the public opinion also highlights the gap between the actual performance and the opinions of the people. Wider contextual determinants that shape public opinion, including personal beliefs, trust in institutions and public debate, are not entirely satisfied by technology. This observation forms the limitation of the reliance of surveillance-based decisions to form the opinion of the populace.

Overall, as discussed, the efforts to create safe cities will be most effective when incorporated into more comprehensive city governance systems and not as single measures. The conclusions support combination of surveillance technologies, ongoing education of the population, open managerial processes and community based policing approaches to develop long-term legitimacy and efficiency. This study is therefore relevant in enhancing the knowledge on the operation of surveillance-based interventions in the small towns of the developing countries by demonstrating how the perception of the populace varies differently in various regions.

Conclusion

This paper explored the success of the Sargodha Safe City project in terms of the community, in regards to traffic control, crime investigation, citizen security, and citizen satisfaction. The results have shown that, on the whole, the respondents think that the project is effective in terms of traffic management and crime detection and prevention. However, the project has not had a significant effect on the general opinion of the population and the feeling of safety in people.

The findings indicate that, though surveillance-based programs are useful to the municipal operations, their decadence success rests on the public awareness, transparency, and community involvement. The policymakers should combine both technological solutions and social and institutional actions to gain the trust of the population and strengthen the feelings of legitimacy. The findings can be especially relevant to policy makers in the developing nations who might want to implement the Safe City projects in the context of other cities other than major metropolitan areas.

Limitations and Future Research

The current research is based on the survey results, which were taken at one urban centre only, and this could limit the applicability of the results. The design can be described as cross-sectional, and, therefore, no

conclusive causal inferences can be made. Further studies should thus assume longitudinal designs, also add more explanatory antecedents, and involve multicity comparative study to provide better explanations about the effectiveness of municipal safety campaigns.Thus, the area of this investigation is limited to a single city, and the results might not be the same in other cities and provinces of Pakistan.

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