

Policy Brief

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Narcotic Trafficking in Pakistan: A Comprehensive Review

Rida Sajid
Dr Aneel Salman
Maryam Ayub

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Executive Summary

Narcotics trafficking and drug abuse have been eroding Pakistan's economy and society for a long time and have become a growing concern. Despite maintaining a zero-tolerance policy against all types and forms of drugs, Pakistan has not been able to eliminate the issue. Being part of the Golden Crescent and its proximity to Afghanistan, Pakistan not only serves as a transit route but also plays a major role in the global cannabinoid trade with high-quality production of cannabis. To eliminate the menace of narcotics, Pakistan has a comprehensive legislature and institutional framework. In addition, Pakistan is a party to several bilateral and multilateral agreements and collaborates with different NGOs. However, domestic demand and production of drugs are still on the rise. In order to strengthen the drug control apparatus, the government may consider a widespread awareness campaign against drug use, establishment of a robust coordination mechanism among agencies, use of the latest technology for drug enforcement, targeting of high-level narco kingpins, regional collaboration and investment in research.

Policy Recommendations

To control the consumption, production and trafficking of narcotics, the government may take following measures:

1. The Ministry of Narcotic Control, in collaboration with the Anti-Narcotics Force, should proactively launch a comprehensive awareness campaign against synthetic drugs. This campaign should leverage mass media channels, collaborate with the drama and film industry to create relevant content, and organise awareness workshops in educational institutions.
2. The drugs are primarily seized from street peddlers or small-scale smugglers in Pakistan. The Anti-Narcotics Force should shift their focus and aggressively target high-level kingpins and their networks to manage drug addiction and trafficking effectively.
3. Establish a robust, centralised database system for information sharing and coordination among all government agencies mandated to control drugs. This system may incorporate drug seizure data along with hospital databases to monitor

drug-related admissions and overdoses, giving important real-time data to support anti-drug initiatives and to identify new trends.

4. Narcotics are primarily smuggled through porous entry points along the Afghan border, particularly in areas of KPK and Balochistan. To combat this issue, new technologies including AI-powered devices and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems (UAVs) like drones should be used for real-time surveillance and tracking. Therefore, increasing the Ministry of Narcotics Control budget is important to enable the employment of these technologies.
5. Regional collaboration on narcotic control with Iran and Afghanistan may be expanded. The existing Triangular Initiative¹, launched by UNODC in 2007 between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, provides a foundation for cooperation however it needs to be strengthened. Initiatives like increasing the frequency of joint operations, funding technology-driven border monitoring, and improving information sharing are necessary.
6. Increase funding for drug abuse and narcotics research institutes to help shape evidence-based policies and interventions. The investment may support a thorough investigation of new drug trends, treatment options and preventive techniques.

¹ “Triangular Initiative”, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <https://www.unodc.org/islamicrepublicofiran/en/triangular-initiative.html> accessed on 24, November, 2024

Introduction

Being a part of Golden Crescent - one of the largest illegal drug-producing regions in the world - Pakistan is a key transit country for narcotics trafficking. Despite having a strict international and national drug control regime in place, drug trafficking and abuse prevail at an alarming level. Factors such as the porous border with Afghanistan and Iran and the socio-economic conditions of people within Pakistan primarily contribute to this situation. This policy brief provides an overview of prevailing drug trafficking and abuse in Pakistan, the existing national drug control regime and a unique understanding of the economics of drug trafficking in Pakistan. Followed by policy recommendations to strengthen drug control.

Types of Drugs

Illicit drugs are classified as either organic or synthetic based on their sources. Organic illicit drugs are derived from natural sources, including plants such as cannabis, opium poppy and coca.² Whereas, synthetic drugs are produced through chemical synthesis.³ Table 1 enlists different types of drugs being used globally.

Table 1: Types of Illicit Drugs

Types	Derivatives/ Examples	Description
Organic		
Cannabinoids	Marijuana, Hashish	Derived from the cannabis plant
Cocaine	Cocaine	Derived from the coca plant
Opioids	Heroin, Opium, Other Opioids	Derived from the opium poppy plant
Hallucinogenic Mushrooms	Hallucinogenic Mushroom	Cause hallucination
Synthetic		

² Chandran, D. Suba. "Drug trafficking and the security of the state: A case study of Pakistan." *Strategic Analysis* 22, no. 6 (1998): 903-922.

³ Chandran, D. Suba. "Drug trafficking and the security of the state: A case study of Pakistan." *Strategic Analysis* 22, no. 6 (1998): 903-922..

Amphetamines⁴ 5	Methamphetamine, Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, MDMA (ecstasy), etc.	Central Nervous System (CNS) stimulants
Hallucinogens⁶	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD), Ketamine	Cause hallucinations
Synthetic Opioids	Fentanyl, Levorphanol,, Propoxyphene, Methadone, Pethidine (meperidine), etc.	Chemically produced opioids
Synthetic Cocaine	Crack-cocaine	Synthetic version of cocaine
Synthetic Cannabinoids	Synthetic cannabinoids	Synthetic version of cannabinoids
Benzodiazepines (Benzos)	Xanax, Alprazolam, Valium and Restoril, etc	Depressant drugs
Barbiturate⁷	Pentothal, Fiorina, etc.	CNS depressants
Opioid analgesics⁸	Fentanyl, codeine, methadone, tramadol, oxycodone, buprenorphine, etc.	Drugs used to treat chronic pain

Economics of Narcotics

The economics of narcotics presents a complex and unique market, characterised by its illicit nature but still subject to many of the same forces that govern legal markets. Like other goods, prices of narcotics are determined by the interaction of supply and demand. Yet, the illegality of drugs adds layers of complexity, particularly in how risks,

⁴ “Methamphetamine,” DEA <https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/methamphetamine> accessed December 28, 2023

⁵ “What Is Methamphetamine?,” National Institutes of Health, August 2011 <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/methamphetamine/what-methamphetamine> June 9, 2022

⁶ “What is LSD,” Alcohol and Drug Foundation, , <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/lsd/>.accessed December 28, 2023

⁷ “Barbiturates,” DEA, <https://www.dea.gov/factsheets/barbiturates> accessed December 26, 2023.

⁸ Cohen. Brandon, Leigh J. Ruth, and Charles V. Preuss, “Opioid Analgesics,” National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459161/> accessed on 11 August 2024

enforcement, and geography influence market dynamics. Tom Wainwright's *Narconomics* provides valuable insights into this hidden economy, showing how narcotics can be analysed through an economic lens, similar to any other global industry.⁹ However, understanding the narcotics market in Pakistan, a key transit country, requires a deeper dive into its distinct features, shaped by the geopolitical context, supply routes, and local demand drivers.

In the narcotics market, price determination is affected by several unique factors, including the risk of legal repercussions, corruption, and the costs associated with smuggling. Since the production, distribution, and sale of narcotics are illegal, these activities inherently carry high risks, and the price of narcotics reflects these risks. In Pakistan, the proximity to Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of opium, influences the pricing of narcotics within the country. The closer a drug is to its source, the cheaper it tends to be, as fewer intermediaries and lower transportation costs are involved.

As narcotics move from production centres through the supply chain, prices rise, not only because of transportation costs but also due to the increasing risks associated with enforcement. Smugglers and dealers must often pay bribes to corrupt officials or face the danger of arrest or confiscation of their goods, and these costs are passed along to the end consumer. This phenomenon explains why narcotics tend to be cheaper in rural or border areas, where law enforcement is less strict, and become more expensive in urban centres where the risks of being caught are higher.

Steven Levitt, in *Freakonomics*, examined the economics of drug dealing and showed that even in illicit markets, economic incentives guide decisions.¹⁰ He looked at drug-dealing gangs and compared them to traditional corporate hierarchies, where the majority of profits are concentrated at the top while street-level dealers, who face the highest risks, earn minimal pay. This same structure can be seen in Pakistan's narcotics trade, where cartel leaders and traffickers control the supply chain and earn substantial profits. At the same time, street-level workers and smugglers face significant risks for meagre returns.

⁹ Tom Wainwright, *Narconomics: How To Run A Drug Cartel* (1, January, 2017), 320.

¹⁰ Steven D. Levitt, Stephen J Dubner, "*Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*" (25 August, 2009), 315.

Many people at the bottom of the narcotics trade are driven by the hope that one day they can move up the ladder, achieving greater financial reward.

The supply side of Pakistan's narcotics trade is strongly influenced by its geographic position as a transit hub for drugs moving from Afghanistan to the rest of the world. Narcotics such as heroin and opium are produced in Afghanistan and transported through Pakistan to international markets. This has created a robust supply chain, with traffickers using a variety of routes through Pakistan's porous western borders. The production of raw opium in Afghanistan is relatively low-cost, driven by rural farmers who rely on poppy cultivation as their main source of income. However, by the time the opium is refined into heroin and transported through Pakistan, its value increases significantly due to processing, packaging, and smuggling costs.

In urban centres, where heroin is sold on the street, the final price paid by consumers reflects the accumulation of these costs. The heroin trade is particularly lucrative because the product's value increases dramatically as it moves further away from its source. Moreover, given the addictive nature of heroin, demand remains relatively inelastic. Addicts are willing to pay higher prices as their dependency grows, allowing traffickers to maintain high-profit margins even as enforcement efforts increase.

On the demand side, the narcotics market in Pakistan is driven by both local consumption and international trafficking. Within the country, the demand for heroin, opium, and other narcotics is influenced by a range of social and economic factors. Pakistan, like many countries, suffers from high levels of poverty and unemployment, which create fertile conditions for drug use. For many people, especially in urban areas, drugs offer an escape from the harsh realities of daily life. The social stigma attached to addiction also plays a role in fuelling the demand, as addicts often remain hidden and are less likely to seek help, allowing the market to thrive underground.

Sudhir Venkatesh's *Gang Leader for a Day* provides a sociological perspective on how drug-dealing gangs function within communities.¹¹ His research revealed that, despite their illegal activities, gangs often provide essential services to communities where the

¹¹ Sudhir Venkatesh, "Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets", (30, December, 2008), 320.

state has failed. Similarly, in parts of Pakistan where government control is weak, drug cartels sometimes assume the role of de facto governance, providing protection and employment to communities that rely on them for survival. This social structure allows cartels to embed themselves in communities, making it harder for law enforcement to intervene effectively.

Additionally, narcotics demand in Pakistan is shaped by the cultural acceptance of certain drugs. In some rural areas, the use of hashish and opium has a long tradition and is often seen as socially acceptable, particularly among older generations. This cultural normalization further entrenches the demand for narcotics, particularly in regions where law enforcement is weaker and less likely to crack down on small-scale drug use. These factors, combined with the growing availability of synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine, create a diverse market for narcotics within the country.

While domestic demand for narcotics is significant, Pakistan's role in the global narcotics trade cannot be overlooked. The country serves as a critical transit point for drugs flowing from Afghanistan to international markets in Europe, Asia, and beyond. The value of drugs increases exponentially as they move through these supply chains, with international traffickers paying high premiums to move narcotics through Pakistan's borders. This not only drives up prices locally but also incentivizes traffickers to continue operating despite the risks.

Law enforcement efforts in Pakistan play a complicated role in shaping the narcotics market. While increased enforcement is intended to reduce the supply of drugs, it often has the unintended consequence of raising prices. As the risk of being caught increases, so too does the cost of moving drugs through the supply chain. Smugglers must pay larger bribes to corrupt officials or risk losing their shipments entirely, and these increased costs are reflected in higher prices for consumers. This creates a cycle where enforcement leads to higher prices, which in turn makes the narcotics trade even more profitable for those willing to take the risks. Table 2 contains the market prices of commonly used illegal drugs in Pakistan.

Table 2: Market Price of Drugs in Pakistan

Name of Drug	Price
Hashish	120000-140000 Per kg
Ice	500,000- 5.500,000 Per Kg
Cocaine	25 million Per Kg
Heroin	15 million Per Kg
Marijuana	61,000 Per Ounce

Source: Author's finding

Corruption is a significant factor in maintaining the narcotics trade in Pakistan. Many regions through which drugs are smuggled have weak governance and high levels of corruption, allowing traffickers to operate with relative impunity. Bribery and collusion between drug traffickers and law enforcement officials are common, particularly in areas near the Afghan border. This corruption ensures that the supply of narcotics continues to flow despite efforts to clamp down on trafficking, as local officials often have a vested interest in allowing the trade to continue. The profits generated from narcotics are so vast that they can easily overwhelm any incentive to enforce the law strictly.

The economics of narcotics in Pakistan is a complex interplay of supply and demand factors shaped by geography, risk, and corruption. Prices are determined by the costs associated with production, transportation, and the risks of enforcement, with final prices reflecting the layers of corruption and danger embedded in the supply chain. Demand, meanwhile, is driven by both local and international forces, with drug use fuelled by social and economic factors within Pakistan and the country's strategic role in the global narcotics trade. The works of Steven Levitt and Sudhir Venkatesh highlight how this illicit market, despite its underground nature, operates with a certain economic rationality and social integration that enables it to persist and thrive.

Narcotic Abuse in Pakistan

In Pakistan, drug abuse remains a serious health concern, profoundly influencing families and communities. Over time, there has been a significant increase in the use of narcotics such as heroin, and opium as well as a notable rise in the use of synthetic substances.

6% of the population or 6.7 million people are users of illicit substances including prescription drugs. While 4.25 million of these are addicted to drugs. The predominant age group among drug users is between 25 and 39 years old. Drug usage is more prevalent in men than women. Out of 6.7 million, 5.2 million are men and 1.5 million are women. Moreover, the patterns of consumption among both genders are also different. Men are cannabis and opiate users whereas, women use tranquilizers and prescription amphetamines. The most commonly used drug in Pakistan is Cannabis with 4 million users. While 1.06 million are opiate users and 19000 people use methamphetamine. Among provinces, KPK exhibits the highest prevalence of drug use, encompassing overall or any form.¹²

Narcotic Trafficking in Pakistan

A Historical Account

Opium use was an ancient phenomenon in the Subcontinent primarily for medical use with an insubstantial degree of addiction. Post-Partition, poppy cultivation areas were in India. Therefore, opium was to be imported from a factory in Ghazipur, India till March 1948, under an agreement, to meet licit demand. Pakistan explored options for indigenous production after experiencing disruptions from India. Following the successful attempt, indigenous cultivation yield attained 25-30% of Pakistan's market by 1953. It's pertinent to note that cultivation was regulated by licensing.¹³ However, opium production escalated from 12 tons/ year in 1971 to 800 metric tons in 1989. The Afghan-Soviet War coupled with the decrease in opium production in Iran- after the revolution- precipitated opium production in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the era, cultivation proliferated from NWFP and FATA to Balochistan and even in Punjab. The Pak-Afghan borderland was transformed into the world's leading opium-producing region. ¹⁴Additionally, during this period drug trafficking in Pakistan was also at its peak because traditional smuggling routes were blocked due to the Afghan-Soviet war. In response, Afghan traffickers refined

¹²"Drug Use in Pakistan", UNODC https://www.unodc.org/documents/pakistan/Survey_Report_Final_2013.pdf accessed on 11 August 2024

¹³ A E Wright , *Opium in Pakistan*, vol. VI, Page 11-15, (UNODC, 1954). accessed on 10 August 2024

¹⁴ Khan, Waseem, Jahanzeb Khalil, and Manzoor Ahmad. "History of Opium Cultivation in Pakistan: Socio-Economic Significance and Politics of Opium Eradication." *Science Int. Lahore* (2016). accessed on 10 August 2024

opium into heroin and supplied it in Europe and North America, facilitated by intermediaries from Pakistan. According to a DEA report, 40 drug syndicates were working in Pakistan in the 1980s.¹⁵ The escalation in opium production in Pakistan was also accompanied by a considerable increase in drug abuse. Hence, to control the menace of narcotic abuse, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, committed to wage war against the drug mafia upon taking office in 1988, but unfortunately, by then drug mafia was deeply entrenched in politics. Despite, strong political opposition, she waged a war on drugs and established the Ministry of Narcotic Control in 1989. In 1990, a no-confidence motion was moved against Benazir Bhutto and she charged that drug money was employed to buy votes against her. According to government reports, opium production increased drastically from 1990 -1993.

In 1993, the caretaker government headed by Prime Minister Moeenuddin Ahmed Qureshi took stringent measures to reform the drug enforcement administration and formulated an Anti-Narcotic Policy¹⁶. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto continued the program after assuming power. This time outcomes remained favourable despite political resistance. The government's commitment to eliminate the menace of drugs was funded by the international community. Due to policy measures enacted in 1993, Pakistan was declared poppy-free in 2000-2001 by UNODC. The production decreased substantially plummeting from 9400 hectares in 1992 to 243 hectares in 2001.¹⁷ Pakistan has been poppy-free since 2001, but its susceptibility to drug trafficking persists due to its porous border with Afghanistan. In 2001, Afghan opium production stood at 185 metric tons, rising to 9000 metric tons by 2017.¹⁸ This substantial increase necessitated the trafficking of the produce to the international market. According to the UNODC report, 40% of the

¹⁵ Haq, Ikramul. "Pak-Afghan drug trade in historical perspective." *Asian survey* 36, no. 10 (1996): 945-963 accessed on 11 August 2024

¹⁶ "Drug Trafficking From Southwest Asia", DEA US Department of Justice, August 1994. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/151459NCJRS.pdf> accessed on 11 August 2024

¹⁷ "Illicit Drugs Situation In The Regions Neighbouring Afghanistan And The Response Of Odc", UNODC, November 2002. https://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afg_drug-situation_2002-11-01_1.pdf accessed on 10 August 2024

¹⁸ "DRUG TRAFFICKING IN PAKISTAN," National Initiative against Organized Crime Pakistan, July 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Drugs-Trafficking-in-Pakistan.pdf> accessed on 9 August 2024

narcotics produced in Afghanistan are transited through Pakistan.¹⁹ The trafficking of synthetic drugs also spiked during the last couple of decades. Nevertheless, opium always remained the priority of law enforcement.²⁰

Trafficking Channels

Opiates and cocaine are mainly utilised in the business of illicit drug trafficking. Additionally, synthetic substances have rapidly made their way into the conventional drug trafficking categories. Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan form Golden Crescent, a region in Asia, for opium and Cannabis production and distribution. The global drug trafficking routes originating from Afghanistan are Balkan, northern and southern routes. The Balkan Route through Iran and Turkiye, passing through South Eastern Europe to Western and Central Europe, is primarily used for transporting opiates intended for European consumption. The Northern Route through Central Asia to Russia is used to transfer drugs into Russia. Southern Route is a complicated one. Opium is transported over the Indian Ocean from Afghanistan to Iran, Pakistan and other countries. A key component of the opiate traffic is the Indian Ocean drug network, which splits into two branches as it leaves the Makran coast in Pakistan and Iran. The western branch extends to Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar and Yemen. While, the eastern branch expands into Sri Lanka, Maldives, India, and other Southeast Asian nations.²¹

Entry Points in Pakistan from Afghanistan

Pakistan shares a border of 2600 km Approx. with Afghanistan. In Balochistan, following porous entry points in the districts of Quetta, Chaghai, Noshki, Pishin, Zhob, Killa Saifullah and Killa Abdullah are used to smuggle drugs into Pakistan: Loiband (Killa Saifullah), Chaman and Gulistan (Qilla Abdullah), Girdi Jungle and Bremen (Chagai), Punjpai (Quetta), Essa-Cha (Noshki) and Kamar-ud-din Karez (Zhob). In KPK, the porous border

¹⁹ "Afghan Opium Production Jumps to Record Level, up 87 per Cent: Survey," United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, 15 November 2017. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2017/November/afghan-opium-production-jumps-to-record-level--up-87-per-cent_-survey.html accessed December 20, 2023

²⁰ "Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan", UNODC Pakistan, April 2008. https://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/centralasia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends%20Report_Pakistan_re_v1.pdf accessed on 11 August 2024

²¹ Chandra, Yashasvi. "Illicit drug trafficking and financing of terrorism." Journal of Defence Studies 14, no. 1-2 (2020): 69-91. accessed on 15 August 2024

along Bajaur, North Waziristan, South Waziristan and Torkham is used to smuggle narcotics into Pakistan.

Exit Points from Pakistan

Narcotics are smuggled out of Balochistan through Gwadar, Pasni, and various secluded routes along the Makran Coast; destined for the Middle East and Europe. In Sindh, drugs are trafficked through Karachi, also bound for the Middle East and Europe.



Figure 1. Entry and Exit Points of Narcotic Smuggling in Pakistan

Source: Author's Construct

Extent of Illicit Narcotics Flow

Pakistan experienced high rates of addiction and domestic demand for heroin, making it an ideal destination for the drug trade. Heroin seizures have increased since the US forces withdrew from Afghanistan. Nearly 7.6 million people use drugs with approximately

860,000 heroin addicts.²² Narcotics are smuggled mainly to meet the demands of the upper class in cities, especially since the demand for cocaine has increased in the youth of elites since COVID-19.²³ Additionally, Pakistan has become a major player in the global cannabis trade serving as both source and transit route. Tirah Valley located in KPK is believed to be producing high-quality cannabis. Owing to the increasing popularity among the younger generation, Pakistan has become the destination for synthetic drugs, and large volumes of methamphetamine are sourced from Afghanistan. Over time there has been a rise in the production of crystal methamphetamine in Peshawar and Karachi. K-tablet, a drug containing opioids and methamphetamine is being produced in Peshawar and supplied to Afghanistan.²⁴ The quantum of narcotic production, trafficking and abuse can only be determined through the seizures by drug law enforcement agencies in Pakistan.

Table 3: Narcotics Seized in 2020-23

Year	Quantity Seized
2020	118399.576 KGs
2021	78711.905 KGs
2022	69750.33 KGs
2023	153353.573 KGs

Source: Ministry of Narcotics Control

Following is the seizure data in detail according to the different categories of illicit substances. Illicit substances have been categorized below as organic drugs, derived from poppy, cannabis and coca plants; synthetic drugs, produced through chemical synthesis; and precursors, substances used to produce narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

²² “The Silent Epidemic: Unravelling South Asia’s Drug Crisis”, South Asia Times. <https://southasiatimes.org/the-silent-epidemic-unravelling-south-asias-drug-crisis/> accessed on 18 August 2024

²³ Global initiatives against transnational organised crime ,“Global Organized Crime Index Pakistan” https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_profile_pakistan_2023.pdf accessed on 13 august 2024

²⁴ Global initiatives against transnational organised crime ,“Global Organized Crime Index Pakistan” https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_profile_pakistan_2023.pdf accessed on 13 august 2024

Drugs Seizure in Pakistan (2020-2023)

Pakistan achieved poppy-free status in 2000-2001 and maintained it since then despite being a part of Golden Crescent, one of the largest drug-producing regions in the world. Nevertheless, Pakistan continues to be a transit route for narcotics trafficking. The data from 2020 – 2023 shows a substantial number of organic illicit drug seizures. However, it shows a fluctuating trend wherein the seizures take a dip in 2021 and 2022 but rise drastically in 2023. On the other hand, the seizures of synthetic drugs show an upward trajectory in these 4 years, which is alarming. A significant amount of sedative syrup containing narcotic codeine was seized from the pharmaceutical industry. Since these syrups have been available in Indian markets, it seems unlikely that they are being produced and smuggled into neighbouring countries.²⁵ Precursors to synthetic drugs predominantly come from India to its neighbouring countries²⁶ and show a declining trend, this negative correlation between the seizure of synthetic drugs and their precursors is perhaps due to advanced methods of production.

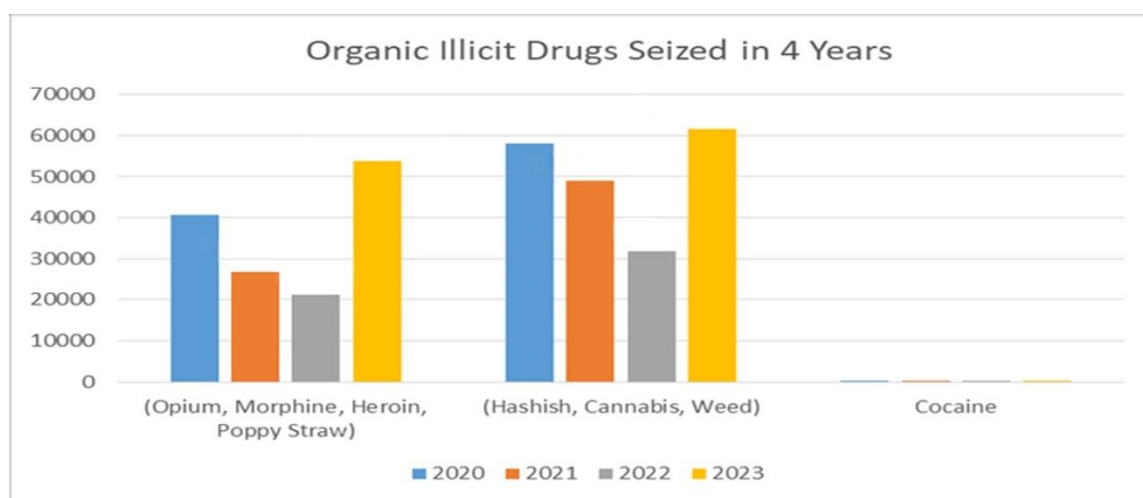


Figure 2: Organic Illicit Drugs Seized in 2020-2023

Source: Ministry of Narcotics Control, Pakistan, Year Books 2020-2023²⁷

²⁵ "Rein in Pharma Firms". The Tribune, 21 April 2023, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/editorials/rein-in-pharma-firms-499370> accessed on 24, November, 2024

²⁶ Prime Interview.

²⁷ "Government of Pakistan Ministry of Narcotics Control Islamabad YEAR BOOK", Ministry of Narcotics Control. <https://narcon.gov.pk/Detail/NzdiOWNiNGUtMmE0OC00MGJmLWVhNmYtMjAxNGE0ZiU0OWNj> accessed on 15 august 2024

Figure 2 shows organic illicit drugs seized over four years from 2020-2023 in Pakistan. There has been a significant amount of drugs seized over the three years. The trend has been downward for poppy and cannabis products till 2022; however, it rose significantly in 2023. In contrast, a considerable increase in cocaine seizures can be seen in 2020 compared to 2020, but this trend declined afterwards.

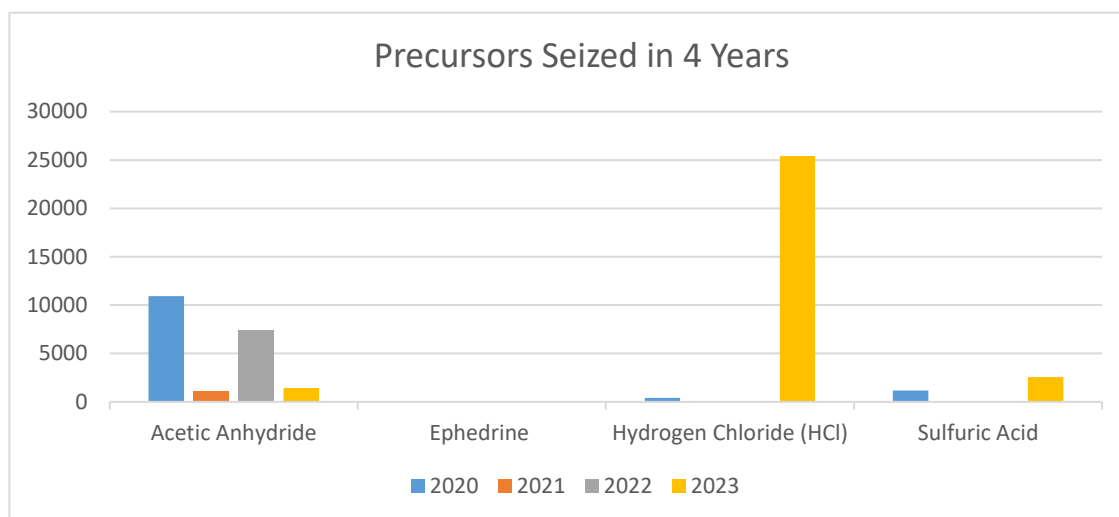


Figure 3: Synthetic Drugs Seized in 4 Years (2020-2023)

Source: Ministry of Narcotics Control, Pakistan, Year Books 2020-2023²⁸

Figure 3 depicts the synthetic drugs seized from 2020 to 2023. Contrary to the trend in organic seizure, there has been an upward trajectory in the seizure trend of synthetic drugs in Pakistan. Almost a twofold increase in the seizures of ATS (Amphetamine Type Stimulants) can be seen. Also, a drastic increase in the seized amount of ketamine can be seen in 2022 which is alarming.

²⁸ "Government of Pakistan Ministry of Narcotics Control Islamabad YEAR BOOK", Ministry of Narcotics Control. <https://narcon.gov.pk/Detail/NzdiOWNiNGUtMmE0OC00MGJmLWFhNmYtMjAxNGE0ZjU0OWNj> accessed on 15 august 2024

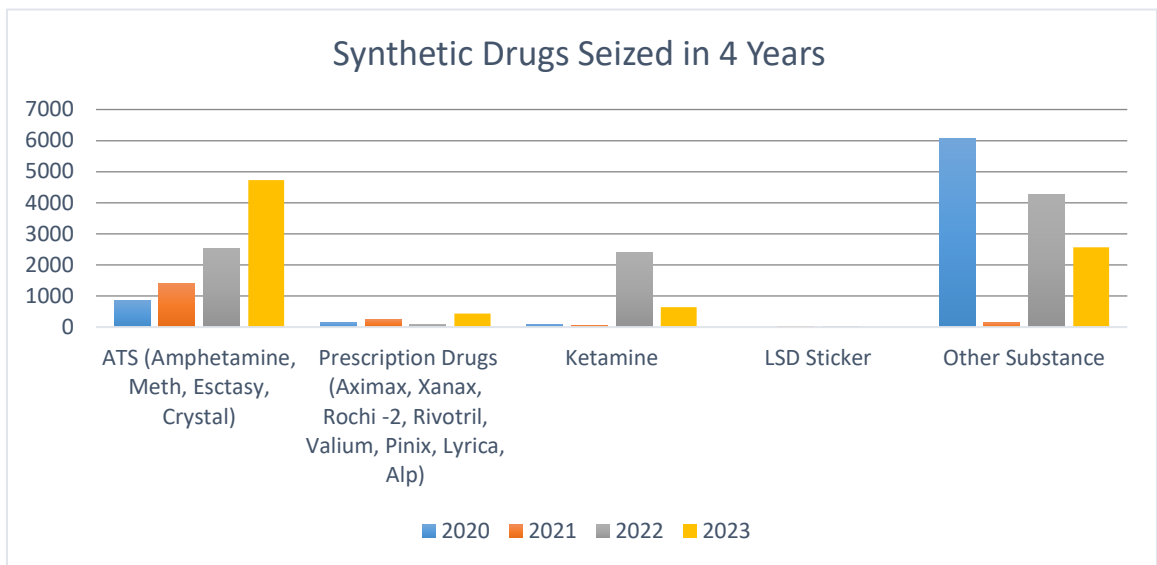


Figure 4: Precursors Seized in 3 Years (2020-2023)

Source: Ministry of Narcotics Control, Pakistan, Year Books 2020-2023²⁹

Figure 4 shows the amount of precursors seized from 2020 to 2023. The seizures of acetic anhydride show a fluctuating trend over these four years. Ephedrine seizures show a decline, but HCL and sulfuric acid seizures show a considerable increase in 2023 after a dip in 2021 and 2022.

Government Interventions

International Drug Control Regime and International Conventions / Agreements Ratified by Pakistan

The “Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs”, a linchpin in the current international drug control regime was adopted in 1961 to construct a framework for controlling narcotics and psychotropic substances, ensuring their availability for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their illicit distribution. The convention listed all controlled substances and created the International Narcotic Control Board (INCB), entrusted with monitoring the implementation of global drug control agreements. In 1972, this convention was amended by a protocol, which emphasised the importance of providing sufficient prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services. The soaring use of psychotropic substances in various countries led to the adoption of the “Convention on Psychotropic Substances” in 1971. Subsequently, the “Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic

²⁹ “Government of Pakistan Ministry of Narcotics Control Islamabad YEAR BOOK”, Ministry of Narcotics Control. <https://narcon.gov.pk/Detail/NzdiOWNiNGUtMmE0OC00MGJmLWFhNmYtMjAxNGE0ZiU0OWNj> accessed on 15 august 2024

Drugs and Psychotropic Substances” was enacted in 1988 to counter the security threats associated with drug trafficking. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) was established in 1991, and in 2002, it adopted the name United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) by merging with the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division in Vienna. The mandate of UNODC is to combat trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, international terrorism, and political corruption.

In 2003, the Paris Pact Initiative was introduced which serves as a framework to combat the illicit traffic of opiates originating in Afghanistan. It has 58 partner countries and 23 partner organisations. In 2012, the third International Conference of Paris Pact Initiative was held in which the Vienna Declaration was adopted. This declaration guides the partnership on four interconnected pillars for enhanced cooperation: regional initiatives, detecting and blocking illicit financial flows, preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals, and promoting drug prevention and health.³⁰ All three UN international drug control conventions are ratified by Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan is also a partner country of the Paris Pact Initiative. Furthermore, Pakistan has also ratified regional drug control agreements i-e “SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1990” and The Protocol on Drugs Matter with Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) countries.³¹

Legislative Framework

Article 37 (g) of the Constitution of Pakistan establishes the basics for narcotic control laws. It obligates the “state to prevent prostitution, gambling and taking injurious drugs, printing, publication, circulation and display of obscene literature and advertisement”. As Pakistan inherited the laws and regulations of colonial India, an administrative and legal structure to control licit opium production already existed. “The Dangerous Drug Act 1930”, in its original form, had been in place till 1976 to control narcotics in Pakistan. In 1976, “The Drug Act 1976” was promulgated in addition to “The Dangerous Drug Act

³⁰ *Paris Pact Initiative* Vienna, Austria, UNODC, 2021. https://www.parispact.net/parispact/uploads/res/_legacy/brochure/brochur_EN.pdf accessed on 11 August 2024

³¹ “International Cooperation,” ANF <https://anf.gov.pk/international-cooperation.php>. accessed January 30, 2024

1930". Owing to the sudden increase in opium trafficking and local consumption, "The Hadd Ordinance 1979" was promulgated prohibiting the cultivation and use of opium. In 1987, The Dangerous Drug Act 1930 was further amended by "The Dangerous Drugs (Amendment Act) 1987" which clarified the freezing and forfeiture of assets.

Given new challenges and international commitments, an ordinance "the Control of Narcotic Substance Ordinance 1996" was passed temporarily to control the menace of drugs, later repealed by "The Control of Narcotic Substance Act 1997" (CNSA) and "Anti-Narcotic Force Act 1997". CNSA also repealed "The Dangerous Drug Act 1930" and affiliated Amendment Acts. Therefore, presently CNSA Act 1997 and ANF Act 1997 are in place to curb the menace of drugs. Moreover, the Customs Act of 1969 is also applied along with the aforementioned acts. CNSA Act 1997 was amended through the Control of Narcotics Substance (Amendment) Act 1997 which provides death or life imprisonment for offences related to the illicit trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic drugs. Under the CNS Act 1997, special courts were also established to try cases related to narcotics. There are six CNS special courts; two in Karachi, and one each in Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta and Peshawar. Moreover, the powers of special courts have also been conferred on most of the district and session judges of Pakistan. Lately, in February 2024, the Cannabis Control and Regulatory Authority Ordinance has been passed to regulate the cultivation, extraction, refining, manufacturing and sale of derivatives of the plant for medicinal and industrial purposes.

Institutional Framework

Pakistan established the Pakistan Narcotic Control Board (PNCB) in 1973 following the ratification of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in 1961. Initially operating as part of the Ministry of Interior, PNCB transitioned to the Narcotic Control Division (NCD) in 1989. The Anti-Narcotic Task Force (ANTF) was additionally formed as an attached department to NCD in 1991. These entities were consolidated into the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) through the ANF Act of 1997. In 2002, NCD evolved into a full-fledged ministry with the mandate to combat drug trafficking, foster international collaboration, and facilitate the rehabilitation of drug users. Therefore, currently, the Ministry of Narcotic Control and ANF are primarily mandated to control the menace of drug abuse and trafficking in the country. Additionally, these institutions are assisted by other Law

Enforcement Agencies, ministries and provincial governments on different facets of narcotic control.



Figure 5: Federal & Provincial Drug Law Enforcement Agencies of Pakistan

Source: Author's Construct

Policy Framework

In Pakistan, the Anti-Narcotics Policy was introduced in 1993 for the first time, which constituted an institutional framework to control the production, abuse and trafficking of narcotics. Although Narcotic Policy 1993 remained instrumental in eradicating poppy cultivation in Pakistan and finally achieving poppy-free status in 2000-2001, it had its limitations due to newly emerged challenges in the realm of narcotic control back then. Therefore, in 2010, a new Anti-Narcotic Policy was promulgated which provided a cohesive approach targeting narcotic supply and demand reduction in line with the international commitments. It primarily focused on drug abuse within Pakistani society which proliferated drastically since 1993.³² In 2019 Anti-Narcotic Policy was revised, still

³² "National Anti-Narcotics Policy 2010", Ministry of Narcotics Control Division, GOP. <http://anf.gov.pk/uri65ef2426173970452251618202440961/970anf4522ddriatf2426173/library/ACTS/Policy%20Revised.pdf> accessed on 1 August 2024

in vogue, maintaining the same targets but with a more comprehensive approach. A detailed analysis of the policy is as follows.

A Review of Anti-Narcotic Policy 2019

Anti-Narcotic Policy 2019 follows the same goals as its predecessor but it is more comprehensive and multifaceted and addresses emerging challenges such as synthetic drugs, gender-sensitive harm reduction and technological integration. Most importantly, it addresses the issue of narcotic control being a provincial subject under the 18th Amendment, by establishing the National Anti-Narcotic Council under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister.

Basis pillars of the policy are supply reduction, demand reduction and international cooperation. Objectives set out to achieve these goals emphasize: implementing a zero-tolerance policy against illegal cultivation, production and trafficking; addressing drug-related crimes including money laundering, corruption and transnational organized crimes; strengthening law enforcement and border controls to combat drug trafficking with a focus on synthetic drugs; strengthening initiatives to reduce drug demand by raising awareness and enhancing access to gender-sensitive drug rehabs; advocating for robust policy implementation and coordination among stakeholders; advancing research and strengthening international cooperation; and ensuring that the controlled substances are only used for medical and scientific use.

Policy interventions to achieve the above-mentioned objectives are as follows:

1. To reduce supply, the policy places emphasis on the elimination of illicit cultivation and planning for alternative development programs in the affected areas; strengthening of border management systems, drug law enforcement and international cooperation to prevent and control drug trafficking; strengthening of drug law enforcement agencies with a holistic approach to counter illicit production and manufacturing; strengthening of anti-money laundering regime; prevention of the diversion of licit precursors and pharmaceuticals; containment of street peddlers through law enforcement and awareness measures; prevention of the sale of illicit drugs in the educational institutions and prisons through enforcement and awareness measures.

2. To reduce demand, the policy emphasises strengthening of drug abuse control mechanism through awareness and promotion of a healthy lifestyle; harm reduction through early treatment, care, recovery, rehabilitation and social integration of drug addicts; maintenance of comprehensive and reliable drug statistics for evidence-based drug control and treatment; strengthening of training and capacity building facilities for drug law enforcement, preventive education, drug testing and addiction treatment; improvement of drug testing capabilities; and accreditation of relevant NGOs/ INGOs to mobilize support in demand reduction and ensure standardised protocols
3. To strengthen international cooperation, the policy focuses on abiding by UN conventions and regional agreements; engaging in regional and global cooperation through bilateral/ multilateral agreements and MOUs for narcotic control; and seeking international support for combating emerging challenges in narcotic control regime.

The subject of narcotic control has some federal jurisdiction in addition to the provincial mandate due to its inter-provincial and transnational scope. In this regard, the policy prescribes the efforts to ensure smooth interprovincial coordination which include the activation of national, provincial and district-level committees. The policy comprehensively enlists the government ministries and departments entrusted with the implementation. Ministry of Narcotic Control has been given the leading role in implementation along with facilitating cooperation among other implementing entities such as government departments, NGOs, and international partners. For resource mobilization, the policy focuses on the government budget, international donors, bilateral and multilateral arrangements, and relevant available consortium or multilateral funds. The mobilization strategy will be based on stakeholder awareness, engagement with the donors, communication, credibility, accountability, and transparency. The following committees have been proposed to be activated for the monitoring and evaluation mechanism: NANC (National Anti-Narcotic Council), Parliamentary Committees on Narcotic Control, NNCC (National Narcotics Control Committee) and IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force).

Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

Pakistan has always maintained a zero-tolerance policy against all types and forms of drugs. However, narcotics trafficking remains a critical issue for the country, having implications for national security, economic stability, and public health. Due to its proximity to Afghanistan, Pakistan not only serves as a transit route but is also a major player in high-quality cannabis production. Despite having a comprehensive institutional and legislative framework and multiple law enforcement agencies working against the menace of narcotics abuse and trafficking, Pakistan has not yet been able to eliminate the issue of narcotics from the country. Pakistan is part of several bilateral and multilateral agreements and works with different NGOs in this regard. To combat the consumption, production and trafficking of narcotics, the government may:

1. The Ministry of Narcotic Control, in collaboration with the Anti-Narcotics Force, should proactively launch a comprehensive awareness campaign against synthetic drugs. This campaign should leverage mass media channels, collaborate with the drama and film industry to create relevant content, and organise awareness workshops in educational institutions.
2. The drugs are primarily seized from street peddlers or small-scale smugglers in Pakistan. The Anti-Narcotics Force should shift their focus and aggressively target high-level kingpins and their networks to manage drug addiction and trafficking effectively.
3. Establish a robust, centralised database system for information sharing and coordination among all government agencies mandated to control drugs. This system may incorporate drug seizure data along with hospital databases to monitor drug-related admissions and overdoses, giving important real-time data to support anti-drug initiatives and to identify new trends.
4. Narcotics are primarily smuggled through porous entry points along the Afghan border, particularly in areas of KPK and Balochistan. To combat this issue, new technologies including AI-powered devices and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems (UAVs) like drones should be used for real-time surveillance and tracking. Therefore, increasing the budget for the Ministry of Narcotics Control is important to enable the employment of these technologies.

5. Regional collaboration on narcotic control with Iran and Afghanistan may be expanded. The existing Triangular Initiative, launched by UNODC in 2007 between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, provides a foundation for cooperation however it needs to be strengthened. Initiatives like increasing the frequency of joint operations, funding technology-driven border monitoring, and improving information sharing are necessary.
6. Increase funding for drug abuse and narcotics research institutes to help shape evidence-based policies and interventions. The investment may support a thorough investigation of new drug trends, treatment options and preventive techniques.

Action Matrix

Problem/Issue	Pathways to Solution	How to Implement Each Solution	Actors Responsible	Implementation Timelines
Awareness campaign against synthetic drugs	Collaborating with media channels and educational institutions	Launching a proactive awareness campaign by collaborating with media houses and education institutions.	Ministry of Narcotics, Anti-Narcotics Force, Media houses and education institutions	6-12 months
Targeting high-level Kingpins and their networks	Targeting the high-level kingpins and their networks	Anti-Narcotics Force should aggressively target the kingpins and their networks to control trafficking	Anti-Narcotics Force	1-2 years
Establishing a centralised database system	Database system for information sharing and coordination among government agencies and incorporating hospital database	Establishing a centralised database for using real-time data to support anti-drug initiatives.	Ministry of Narcotic Control	1-2 years
Real-time surveillance and tracking	Using AI-powered devices and Unmanned Ariel Vehicles system (UAVs)	Real-time surveillance of border areas of KPK and Balochistan through AI-powered devices and Unmanned Ariel Vehicles System (UAVs)	Government, Ministry of Narcotics	5 years
Regional Collaboration	Regional collaboration with Afghanistan and Iran	Enhancing regional collaboration with Afghanistan and Iran by strengthening existing initiatives	Government	5 years
Research-based investigation	Increasing funding for research	Research regarding new drug trends and treatments to help shape policies.	Government	5 years

About the Authors

Dr. Aneel Salman holds the distinguished OGDCL-IPRI Chair of Economic Security at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in Pakistan. As a leading international economist, Dr Salman specialises in Monetary Resilience, Macroeconomics, Behavioural Economics, Transnational Trade Dynamics, Strategy-driven Policy Formulation, and the multifaceted challenges of Climate Change. His high-impact research has been widely recognised and adopted, influencing strategic planning and policymaking across various sectors and organisations in Pakistan. Beyond his academic prowess, Dr Salman is a Master Trainer, having imparted his expertise to bureaucrats, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs), military personnel, diplomats, and other key stakeholders furthering the cause of informed economic decision-making and resilience.

Rida Sajid is an MPhil graduate in Government and Public Policy (GPP) from the National Defence University. Her research interests include blue economy, maritime security, applied cybersecurity and gender-based issues.

Maryam Ayub holds an M-Phil in Economics and Finance from PIDE. Her areas of expertise are Macroeconomics, Climate Finance and Development Economics.