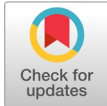



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Judicial Corruption in Pakistan: Causes, Consequences and Solutions

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Abstract

This paper identifies causes, effects and potential outcomes of judicial corruption concerning system, economy, and culture in Pakistan. In the present study, semi-structured interviews of participants such as judges, lawyers, and citizens were conducted to gain improved understanding of the nature and mechanisms of factors leading to corruption within the judiciary. The study reveals that political influence, ineffective measures of accountability, low compensation, and corruption as business as usual is distorting the judiciary. This study also looks into the impacts of corruption in society, such as reduced social trust, heightened social disparities, limited economic growth and worst of all, dwindling governance. The research applies thematic analysis to systematically analyze patterns and themes that participants in the study presented. These insights also further the understanding of judicial corruption and lays down a framework that can be used in future in an attempt to increase the transparency, accountability and credibility of the judiciary of Pakistan.

Keywords: judicial corruption, political interference, accountability, Pakistan judiciary, systemic corruption

Introduction

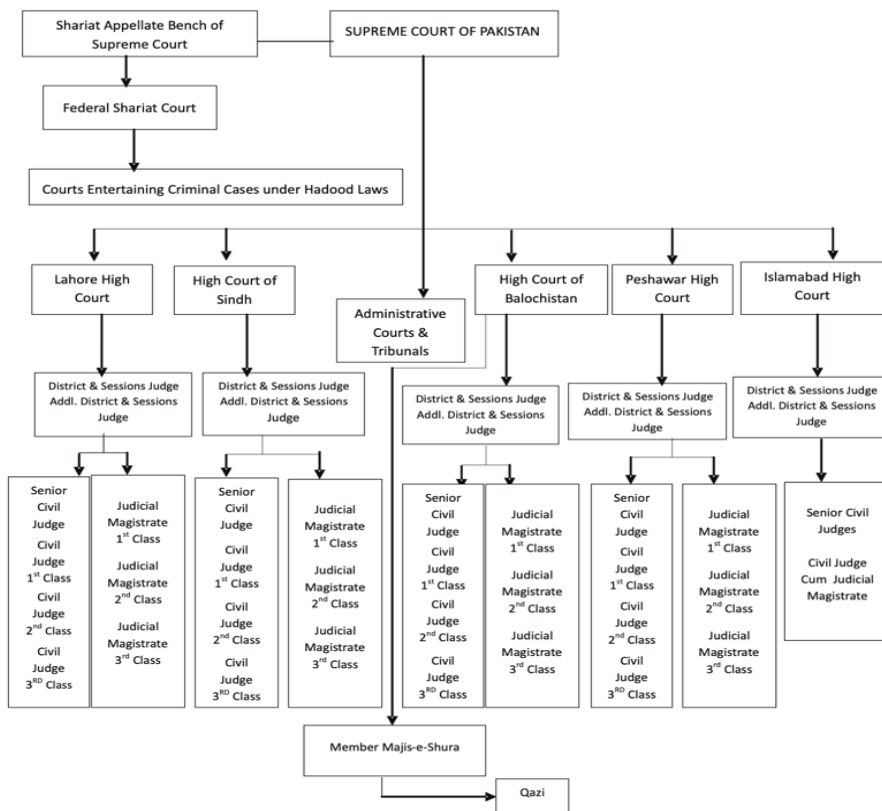
Before discussing the present structure and function of the judiciary of Pakistan, it is important to discuss the history of its formation where several legal cultures and administrative systems have shaped the judiciary. Its antecedents can be attributed to pre-colonial, Hindu, Muslim and British periods, with all these segments forming part of the make-up of the state. In the post-independence era, there was the creation of a judiciary that disregards justice with the constitution's touchstones and colonial/imperial accouchement (Hussain, [2015](#)).

The judiciary system in Pakistan is also a hierarchical system with the Supreme Court right at the top and then there are High Courts in every

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province and then there is District Judiciary (Bazmi, [2022](#)). The Federal Shariat Court also has a more important position to ensure that such laws do not violate the Islamic law. Such structure highlights judicial system as the protector of constitutional principles and an institution for solving conflict at different tiers.

Figure 1
Organogram of Courts



Note. Source: (Hussain, [2015](#))

The research has shown that the judiciary bears a hefty load and plays a crucial role in the functioning of the Pakistani justice system. As of the 30th of June, 2023, the judiciary is confronted with a caseload of 2,175,634 at various levels of the hierarchy (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, [2023](#)). Of these, 387,465 cases were in Superior Courts, 55,187 in the Supreme Court, 332,171 in High Courts, and 102 in the Federal Shariat Court. The District Judiciary was overloaded with a caseload of 1,788,174

cases, making 82% of the overall cases backlog. This huge buck shows systematic failure and court overstretch (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, [2023](#)).

According to the data of Pakistani courts, from the commencement of January 2023 to June 2023, courts received 2,302,061 cases, which shows the faith of the Pakistan public in the judicial system. In the same period, 2 294 729 cases were disposed of, which shows that efforts have been made to handle a large number of cases, but the trend has slightly bounced back with a net addition of cases amounting to 7, as stated above. For instance, the Lahore High Court dealt with 80518 new cases and disposed of 77007; hence, only a slight rise in the backlog was observed. Similarly, the District Judiciary, which handles most litigation, processed over two million unresolved cases (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, [2023](#)).

Nonetheless, there is appreciable performance in the judiciary, whose work is constrained by several challenges. According to Jatoti et al. ([2023](#)), corruption is one of the judiciary's biggest challenges. It is also important to note that the judiciary is contaminated with corruption throughout Pakistan, which diminishes the reliability of the judiciary institution in front of the public. It involves things such as offers of bribes, appointments, or even specific outcomes of cases. This problem is made worse because the courts have a vast Arrears list, and cases take a long time to be determined.

Corruption in the judiciary has worsened the situation because the public has no confidence in the country's justice delivery system. After all, it is slow and unfair. Since the judiciary was bestowed with the minor role of being an organ of government and an independent institution, influence and cases of unethical conduct are rife (Afzal et al., [2023](#)). This is somewhat regrettable, given the current and future role of the judiciary as the guardians of justice and the rule of law.

Rationale of Study

The justification for the research is found in the need to understand the judiciary's operations as the keystone of justice and the rule of law. For Pakistan, the judiciary's legitimacy is central to public confidence in the state, social and economic cohesiveness, and fair distribution of justice in the society. However, corrupt judiciaries prevalent in many societies unravel the very tenets through the prism of distortion of the course of justice, which should prevail in this social entity. This problem has many

consequences in combination with military operations, such as the degradation of people's trust in the justice system, the differences in legal treatment depending on the color of one's skin, and the prevention of economic development owing to the lack of companies' and people's investments (Korai et al., [2023](#)). Therefore, breaking the cycle of explanatory and responsive questions associated with judicial corruption would be important in suggesting practical solutions for reforming this reality.

Problem Statement

Corruption in the judiciary in Pakistan is a real problem for sound legal administration, democratic governance, and the foundations of society and its members' trust in the justice system. An independent branch of government, the judiciary also has the mandate to interpret legislation; the common people get to know about the existence of particular unprofessional situations such as bribery, favors, and unwarranted influence, which cuts across the chain of the judiciary hierarchy (Rizvi & Rana, [2023](#)). Structural issues of organizations are added to it, such as large case backlog, lacks and political influences, which leave open possibilities of corruption. The influence of judicial corruption occurs not only in the legal structure of a particular country but also in social justice, economic growth, and the level of confidence in state bodies. Individuals, particularly minorities, find it nearly impossible to seek justice while firms endure unpredictable uphold of contractual obligations and ownerships of propellant. This research moves to fill this important gap by identifying the causes and outcomes of judicial corruption, and the measures to enhance the integrity, transparency, and effectiveness of the judiciary, which remains a lacking research area in Pakistan.

Research Objectives

- To identify the root causes of judicial corruption in Pakistan and assess their systemic and institutional origins.
- To analyze judicial corruption's social, economic, and legal consequences on public trust and governance.
- To propose actionable reforms and strategies for enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency in Pakistan's judiciary.

Literature Review

The judiciary is one of the strongest most important pillars of the state that ensures the adherence to the rule of law and protects civil liberties. This ideal, however, is slowly compromising especially in Pakistan owing to rampant corruption within the judiciary and generally slow process. Tyranny, bribery, procedural delays, and inefficiency have worked negatively on the justice system in many institutions all over the world. These corrupt practices are against the judicial independence and the trust of the people in the legal institutes which results in different consequences such as lawlessness, nepotism and loss of the economic profits. Both civil and military elites have always interfered with power relations in the judiciary and the current situation has made the judiciary even more weakened and less efficient. This paper aims at reviewing the literature on the development of the judiciary of Pakistan and present corruption within it.

Judiciary: Importance and Significance

Judicial power not only determines cases; its function also is to regulate relations between branches of state power and protect human rights. Bosio ([2023](#)) describes the roles of the judiciary in this way: Exercising the principle of the rights of the accused to ensure the lawfulness of legislation and executives' actions. These tasks highlight the important role of judiciary in the principles of democracy and strategic importance of justice systems.

The judiciary is also important as demonstrated by historical examples. The question put by Sir Winston Churchill in the London Blitz, "Are the courts at work?" is the reflection of the deep trust in the institutions of justice (Ali, [2022](#)). His joy that the courts were up and running in the state of war sums up the conception that the order in the society can exist so long as the judiciary system is on its feet. This feeling is conciliated with the role of the judiciary as an icon of strength and fairness during a period of turbulence.

In developed countries, the judiciary system is regarded as the model of stability and governance. According to Blumm and Wood ([2021](#)), public trust in the courts remains useful in shaping the society since laws are perceived as fair or impartial. Such trust is important for the establishment of state authority, especially at the moment of political or social instability.

The judiciary also defends and ensures citizens' rights and implements constitutional sections (Miller & Manzer, [2018](#)). Most national constitutions – including those of developed democracies – include provisions to guarantee the independence of judiciaries because an independent judiciary is regarded as a core requirement for the proper functioning of any political system in particular, and for the maintenance of the rule of law in general. In Pakistan for example, the constitution highlights the position of the judiciary as having the mandate of checks and balances and upholding constitutional democracy by guaranteeing rights. Manzar ([2024](#)) also noted that articles 175, 177 and 184 (3) allowed the judiciary to set up courts, revert cases and operate autonomously from the other arm of government.

Judiciary: Pakistan's Tale

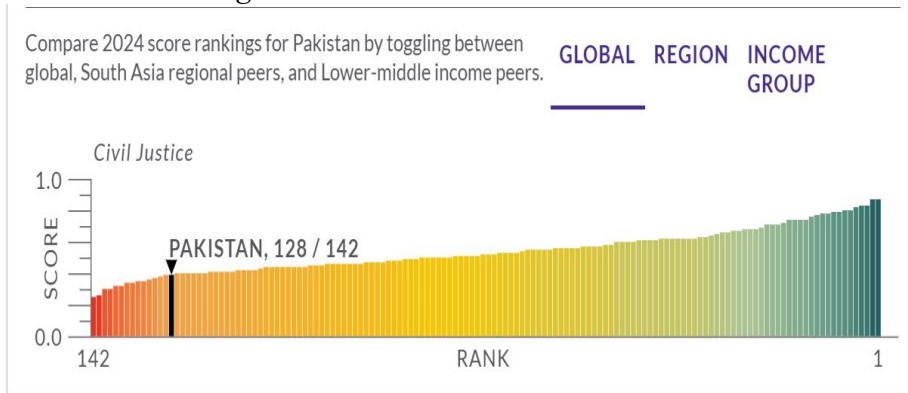
When Pakistan gained independence from the British, it adopted The Government of India Act of 1935 as its maiden constitution in order to manage the legal affairs of the newly crafted country. However, amendments were introduced when the need arose. The legal domain of the country saw some major transformation when the constitutions of 1962 and 1973 were introduced.

Articles 175, 177, and 184(3) of the constitution deal with the subjects of establishing the courts, the appointment of judges, separation of the executive from the Judiciary, and the authority to seek review of the cases presented in the court of law. The judicial makeup of Pakistan in the hierarchical order comprises District and Session Courts, High Courts, and a Supreme Court, including a Federal Shariat Court. Although practices from all over the world indicate a strong and independent judiciary, the same is not valid for Pakistan, as has become more evident from the 26th Amendment. The independence of the Judiciary is significantly undermined by the introduction of the “Special Parliamentary Committee” comprising Members from both houses of Parliament and Judges serving at the Supreme Court. The incumbent government's introduction and swift passing of the 26th Amendment has caused alarm among the legal structures. The Secretary General of ICJ, Santiago Canton, remarked on the changes brought by the 26th Amendment: They erode the judiciary's capacity to independently and effectively function as a check against excesses by other branches of the State and protect human rights (International Commission of Jurists, [2024](#)).

The World Justice Project Rule of Law index, in its annual report published in October 2024, ranked Pakistan at 140th place, followed by Mali and Nigeria in terms of security and law and order (Rana, [2024](#)). The WJP Rule of Law Index measures countries' performance on eight factors, including civil and criminal justice. Factor 7 of the said index considers whether the prevalent civil justice system helps people address their complaints without a financial burden (Ahmed, [2024](#)). Similarly, factor 8 is based on the country's criminal justice system and examines the system's responsiveness to law enforcement agencies and legal aid comprising judges and prosecutors. For 2024, Pakistan ranked 128th and 98th, respectively (World Justice Project, [2025](#)).

Figure 2

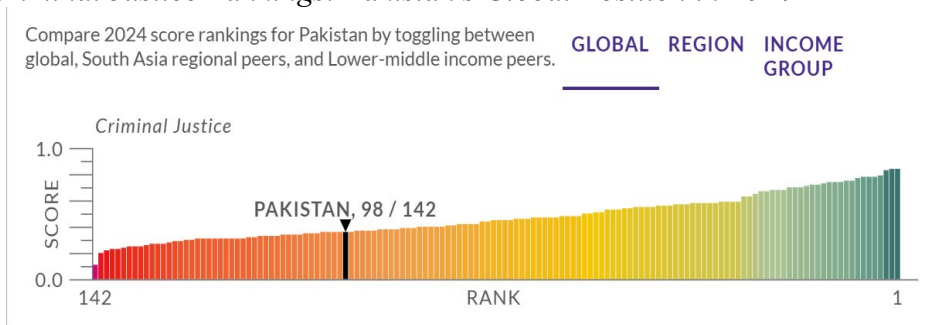
Civil Justice Rankings: Pakistan Global Position in 2024



Note. Source: (World Justice Project, [2025](#))

Figure 3

Criminal Justice Rankings: Pakistan's Global Position in 2024



Note. Source: (World Justice Project, [2025](#))

The Global Economy ([2024](#)) data shows Pakistan's human and Rule of Law index performance has also depreciated. The indicator narrates the relationship between the state and its subjects in safeguarding the fundamental rights of citizens, and there is no bar on the exercise of freedom. If the indicator reflects a value closer to 10, human rights and the rule of law are not much protected. For the year 2024, Pakistan recorded a value of 7.8 on the indicator as compared with the world's average of 5.41 for 176 countries.

In a study of pending cases before the courts, Ali ([2022](#)) have also shed light on the idea that international treaties and covenants propound the recognition of man's entitlement to swift justice. As per Article 37(d) of the Constitution of Pakistan, every citizen reserves the right to quick and affordable justice (Ahmed & Brasted, [2020](#)). However, justice seems to be delayed exceedingly on account of multiple pretexts.

Apart from staggering figures of pending cases, the transfer/ postings of judges also contribute to the deferment of justice as the cases under hearing are made to start over again. Furthermore, the absence of a judge from the courtroom, as he opts not to attend the hearing on the scheduled date and time, translates into justice not being done. The delivery of justice per the norms ought to be quick and robust to ensure public trust and confidence in the institution (Imran et al., 2024). The number of judges available to hear the cases and disposal of litigations is small. In addition, Pakistan's civil and criminal procedures are intricate enough to delay timely justice service to the aggrieved. The above-mentioned studies point towards the contributing factors that have led to the current norm prevalent in Pakistan, which is related to the delay in justice. The resolution of civil and criminal cases takes too long, costs too much, and judgments are often perceived to be biased in favor of the rich and politically connected (Bosio, [2023](#)).

Social Declining Factors in Pakistan

The current situation in Pakistan about the social setup is not promising, and somewhere deep down. Thus, the justice system is to be blamed. The increasing distrust of the judicial process in the country is caused by the prevalent corrupt is sold for influence and convenience to fulfill ego and pride. When the courts delay the provision of justice, such an act radicalizes societal elements. The accessibility of justice to the litigant is not promising as he ends up in the grips of financial crisis and psychological issues. The

consequence of this is an apathetic citizenry that in turn attempts to administer the law in their own hands as a means of solving conflicts. It is also indicated that the government institutions are still losing popular trust because the lack of accountability is apparent, and the corrupt practices still influence it.

Judicial Corruption: Causes and Consequences

Judicial corruption is a menace whose tentacles spread wide, rotting the society from within. It affects the individual relationship with the state institutions, eroding trust and paving the way to disapproval. Also, there is a difference between accountability for the powerful and the ordinary, as the former mocks the system by escaping the law. This decline in society leads to lawlessness and inequality as the influence-yielding individuals can steer the course of judicial practices in their favor. Judicial corruption hampers the rule of law and restricts foreign investment from reaching the country. Pakistan has been unable to attract international businesses due to its weak implementation of the rule of law, causing the economy to suffer. Owing to this situation, employment and poverty are on the rise in Pakistan, whereby the avenues for growth and opportunity are bleak for citizens. The abysmal condition of law and order, further aggravated by curbs on fundamental human rights, has caused resentment among the masses. This was evident from the number of people who have left the country searching for a better life and opportunities abroad, having protective legal and social systems that make Pakistan bear the brunt of the brain drain. According to FIA's report, around 08 million Pakistanis left the country (Pakistan Today, [2024](#)).

Both civil-military power-yielding entities have used tactics similar to each other in intimidating the judicial setup, which shows how fractured the ideal of the rule of law is in a society like Pakistan. This had always remained an elusive idea, that the judiciary would stand in the way of extra-constitutional overtures by the powerful elites, subverting the spirit of democracy and the will of the common masses. The underlying reasons for this compliant role of our judiciary are anything but vested self-interest and dishonest practices. As evident from the practices observed, incompetence and ineptitude describe the legal community members that put a big question mark on the performance of state institutions (Wolf, [2021](#)). A similar point has been made that corruption, if viewed in the context of the judiciary, manifests itself in the form of underhand money to impact

decisions, influential political elite following pick and choose a strategy for favored judges, etc.

However, the judiciary has emerged as an insistent force over the past few years. In one article titled ‘Politics at the Bench: The Pakistani Judiciary’s Ambitions and Interventions,’ Kureshi argues the same point by Kureshi (2022a). He thinks, “Through changes in the judiciary’s structure and culture, the superior judiciary has joined the military as a key, nonelected powerholder. It alternates between confronting, constraining, and collaborating with elected and nonelected centers of power as it seeks to leave its imprint on politics and policymaking. At the same time, political and military elites work to co-opt or control judges to align the judiciary’s burgeoning authority and ambition with their interests and ambitions. This interplay shapes the contours of Pakistan’s politics”.

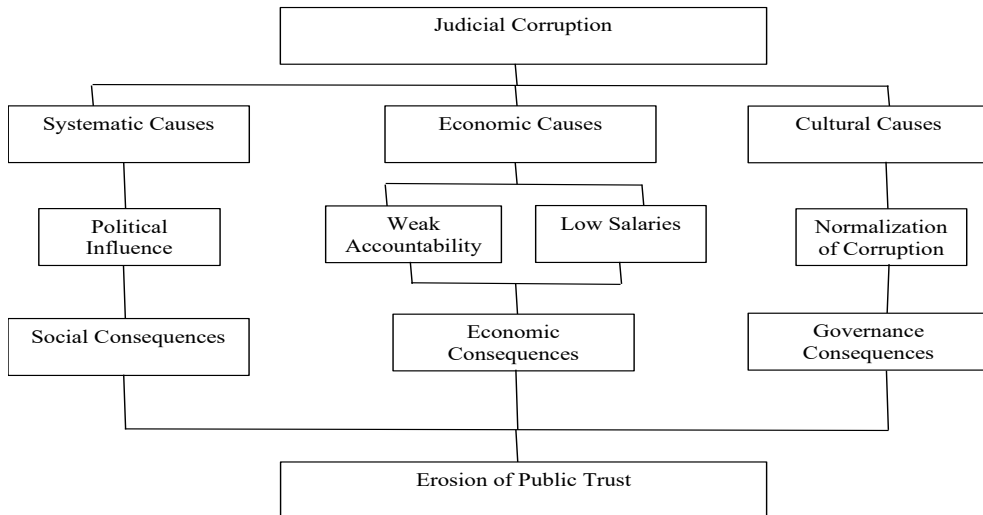
In the preface to the book titled *Challenged Justice: In Pursuit of Judicial Independence*, Shetreet et al. (2021) note that the idea of the judiciary enjoying liberty is an integral part of administering justice. Corruption entails unethical practices on the part of lawyers and weaker regulatory controls on the institutions as they fail to perform their duties adequately (Khan, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Institutional Theory of Public Policy lays the theoretical foundation for the present research on judicial corruption in Pakistan. As detailed in this paper, this theory is most applicable to analyzing how structural and organizational dynamics lead to corruption in the judiciary and mapping potential reform strategies. It is imperative to note that institutional theory is centered on the structures, both formal and informal rules, formal and informal norms, and practices of institutions in the public domain and their bearing on policies’ impact and organizations’ actions. According to Struckell et al. (2022), institutions are not just bureaucracies but systems that are ‘socially constructed’ through and through based on history, culture, and power. The criminal justice system can be reformulated as a system of institutional vulnerabilities in which formal norms and procedures are de facto replaced by informal solutions that include bribery and favoritism. Expanding on this theory, examining how institutional and governance constraints do not address corruption and, in turn, continually reproduce inequality and distrust in the legal system is possible (Fainshmidt et al.,

[2021](#)).

Figure 4
Conceptual Framework



Research Gap

Judicial corruption has been a focus of many research questions in many situations, especially in the developing world, where more governance structures are often poorly developed. Nevertheless, several research gaps identified from the current literature show a need to research the existing judicial corruption in Pakistan. First, as the highlighted literature review will reveal, the reasons for corruption are well-studied in distinction to public institutions, but it remains poorly understood in the case of the Pakistani judiciary. Prior research tends to use dump- a down approach and compare corruption in the judicial sector to that of other sectors for analysis, without regard for the structure and institutional setting of the judicial system concerning political organizations, specific accountability frameworks, and the predisposing organizational culture that makes corruption the new norm. This paper will also show that this void is met by studying the judiciary as a unique branch of Pakistan's government.

Research Methodology

Research Design

For this research, the study employs a qualitative study design. The

qualitative method explores the extent of an event rather than identifying the event or event indicators as in a quantitative study (Lim, [2024](#)). This method is appropriate for use as it allows for unfolding social-political relations and cultural factors that quantitative approaches may mask.

Research Philosophy

The research adopts interpretivism as its research philosophy. Interpretivism is a research philosophy that considers individuals' accounts and meaning ascription about the social world as valid (Nickerson, [2024](#)). Interpretivism is most appropriate for this study on judicial corruption in Pakistan because it brings out the judges' and citizens' experiences. By translating their experiences and perceptions, the study will understand corruption's socio-cultural, institutional, and systemic roots and propose practical and culturally sensitive treatment.

Research Approach

The research work employs an inductive approach to research. The inductive research approach implies data analysis and drawing of theory and information out of assumed hypotheses from the patterns, themes, and connections found in the qualitative data (O'Kane et al., [2019](#)). This approach helps find the cause, outcome, and suitable solution because the collected data are analyzed and suitable for handling complex and dynamic judicial corruption issues.

Data Collection Methods

The approach used to gather data for this study is the semi-structured interviews, and these are used because this tool permits a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and attitudes (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, [2021](#)). This approach is more appropriate in understanding judicial corruption in Pakistan since it allows the researcher to obtain rich and contextualized information from important stakeholders: the judges, lawyers, and affected citizens in a more unstructured explorative interview format while remaining open-ended to explore further information based on responses. The interview guide for this study is available in Appendix A.

Sampling Methods

The sampling method for this study is convenience sampling, which entails using the first willing participants in the population. This strategy is appropriate when studying judicial corruption in Pakistan because the

individuals concerned, including judges, lawyers, and citizens, are instead an advert and easily accessible and have interacted with the judiciary (Golzar et al., [2022](#)). The sample size in this study is 10 participants.

Table 1
Sample Size

Participants	Lawyers		Judges		Citizens		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	2	2	2	0	2	2	10

Data Analysis Technique

Primary data collected in this research is analyzed using the primary thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that belongs to a broader family of analytic approaches for identifying and describing organized qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, [2022a](#); [2022b](#)). The thematic analysis includes data familiarization, developing initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and absorbing themes, refining and defining themes, and finally, providing names to the themes. In this approach, there is a certainty that the experience of participants and the goals of the study will be evident by the proper categorization of data will be systematically grouped under the right subclasses

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are critical in this study on judicial corruption in Pakistan to ensure the integrity of the research and the protection of participants. Firstly, participants’ written permission was sought to participate in the project and be fully informed about the aims and objectives of the study and their roles. They were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any reason being asked of them. Participants used pseudonyms to ensure that the respondents' sensitivity was observed and that they did not incur any legal or professional consequences.

Furthermore, and with more to do with this research risk, the study respected the participants’ rights of free will, and no force was used to compel or influence any participant to participate. Improvement of psychological comfort during the interviews was also attempted to decrease stress during the conversations. The collection of data was done following the recommended ethical practices on data use and after adhering to the provisions of the data protection law of the country of study. It was also

ensured that the study results were presented credibly, with accuracy, and not influenced in any particular way.

Findings

The findings section presents the insights gained from analyzing the data collected through semi-structured interviews with judges, lawyers, and citizens regarding judicial corruption in Pakistan. Investigating the primary sources of this problem, its broad impact, and possible solutions, this section presents the findings of the participants. The section includes a comprehensive thematic analysis of findings to highlight significant themes generated from the interviews.

Demographic Profile

Table 2

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=10)

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Age of Participants in Years		
18-30	0	0.00
31-40	6	60.00
41-50	4	40.00
Education		
Matric	0	0.00
Intermediate	1	10.00
Bachelors	5	50.00
Masters	4	40.00
Gender		
Male	6	60.00
Female	4	40.00
Occupation		
Lawyer	4	40.00
Judge	2	20.00
Citizen	4	40.00
Experience with Judicial System (In Years)		
3	1	10.00
5	1	10.00
6	1	10.00
8	2	20.00
12	1	10.00

Characteristics	Frequency	%
15	1	10.00
20	1	10.00
22	1	10.00
25	1	10.00

Familiarization with Data

Familiarization with data was a very important first step in the analysis of qualitative data, especially when doing thematic analysis. At this stage, the researcher closely coded the interview data several times to fully comprehend the data content. This made the earlier phases of data analysis easier as it offered the extent of semantically related data and the convincing constancy of ideas and patterns within the data set (Thompson, [2022](#)).

Table 2
Initial Coding

Participant	Significant Statement	Initial Code
P1	"Politicians often use their influence to delay or manipulate case outcomes."	Political Interference
P2	"Judicial staff accept bribes because they aren't paid enough to meet basic expenses."	Financial Constraints
P3	"The lack of transparency in case scheduling allows manipulation by court clerks."	Lack of Transparency
P4	"Ordinary citizens feel they can't get justice unless they pay someone to speed up cases."	Barriers to Access for Citizens
P5	"Judicial corruption creates inequality and allows the powerful to exploit the system."	Inequality and Exploitation
P6	"Accountability mechanisms are weak; most corrupt practices go unnoticed or unpunished."	Weak Accountability Mechanisms
P7	"Bribery is normalized—it's just seen as part of the system."	Normalization of Corruption
P8	"Land disputes are particularly prone to corruption because of high financial stakes."	Corruption in Land Disputes
P9	"Civil society and media can play a role by exposing corruption and creating awareness."	Role of Civil Society and Media

Participant	Significant Statement	Initial Code
P10	"Judges face pressure from influential parties to deliver favorable judgments."	External Pressure on Judges

Table 3
Focused Coding

Initial Code	Related Initial Codes	Focused Category	Description
Political Interference	Political Interference, External Pressure on Judges	Political Influence	Examines how political actors influence judicial decisions and undermine the independence of the judiciary.
Financial Constraints	Financial Constraints, Weak Accountability Mechanisms	Economic and Structural Challenges	Highlights economic difficulties faced by judicial staff and the systemic weaknesses fostering corruption.
Lack of Transparency	Lack of Transparency, Normalization of Corruption	Systemic Opacity	Focuses on the absence of transparency in judicial processes and the normalization of corrupt practices.
Barriers to Access for Citizens	Barriers to Access for Citizens, Inequality and Exploitation	Access to Justice	Explores how corruption creates obstacles for ordinary citizens, particularly marginalized groups.
Corruption in Land Disputes	Corruption in Land Disputes	Case-Specific Corruption	Addresses corruption in specific types of cases, particularly those involving high stakes like land disputes.
Role of Civil Society and Media	Role of Civil Society and Media	Anti-Corruption Advocacy	Discusses the role of external stakeholders like media and civil society in combating judicial corruption.

- **Political Influence:** This category captures the pervasive role of

political actors in manipulating judicial outcomes and pressuring judges, directly undermining judicial independence.

- **Economic and Structural Challenges:** Focuses on the financial constraints and systemic gaps that create an environment conducive to corruption, such as low salaries and weak enforcement mechanisms.
- **Systemic Opacity:** Highlights how lack of transparency in processes like case scheduling and decision-making facilitates corrupt practices and erodes public trust.
- **Access to Justice:** This category emphasizes the barriers created by corruption for ordinary citizens, reinforcing inequality and limiting justice accessibility.
- **Case-Specific Corruption:** Focuses on cases like land disputes that are more prone to corruption due to financial or political stakes.
- **Anti-Corruption Advocacy:** Examines how external stakeholders like the media and civil society can contribute to exposing and reducing judicial corruption.

Table 4

Generating Themes

Focused Category	Initial Codes	Themes	Description
Political Influence	Political Interference, External Pressure on Judges	Influence of Power Dynamics	Explores how political actors manipulate judicial processes, influencing decisions and eroding judicial independence.
Economic and Structural Challenges	Financial Constraints, Weak Accountability Mechanisms	Structural and Economic Vulnerabilities	Highlights the systemic issues like low salaries, poor working conditions, and weak accountability that foster corruption.
Systemic Opacity	Lack of Transparency, Normalization of Corruption	Culture of Opacity	Focuses on how a lack of transparency and normalization of corrupt practices enable manipulation within the judiciary.

Focused Category	Initial Codes	Themes	Description
Access to Justice	Barriers to Access for Citizens, Inequality and Exploitation	Inequities in Legal Access	Examines the barriers created by corruption for marginalized groups and the perpetuation of inequality in accessing justice.
Case-Specific Corruption	Corruption in Land Disputes	Corruption in High-Stakes Cases	Investigates corruption in specific case types, such as land disputes, which often involve high financial or political stakes.
Anti-Corruption Advocacy	Role of Civil Society and Media	Advocacy for Reform	Considers the role of media and civil society in exposing corruption and advocating for systemic reforms.

Checking for Coherence and Inter-Coder Reliability

Regarding mixed coding issues, each of the identified themes was subjected to critical evaluation, to ensure that each theme was appropriate with regard to the data and the participants' awareness. This involved aligning the themes to reflect the study research questions and objectives used in the study. In each theme, the text was discussed and examined to verify the results provide the responses of the participants. To enhance the study's credibility, the first and second author carried out coding simultaneously. Elements were then compared, researcher's findings were discussed and differences were reconciled with aid of code comparison. The flexibility and interactivity promoted by this process added to the credibility of the coding procedure.

At the end, the themes were matched with the data, and the thread created by the participants was aligned. This process made the themes appropriate and provided evidence to support them.

Key Themes

Influence of Power Dynamics

Political influence has been one of the most widespread causes of judicial corruption. The participants were repeatedly referring to the influence of political players, who use the judiciary to address their needs.

As one judge noted, “Politicians often use their influence to delay or manipulate case outcomes, especially when they have something at stake.” Another participant, a lawyer, explained, “In high-profile cases, political pressure can override even the most solid legal arguments.”

This is in line with the available literature that has identified political interference as a major challenge to judicial independence. Rafiq ([2022](#)) believes that political parties tend to have an unnecessary influence on the judiciary to defend supporters or to penalize their rivals. Such practices undermine the impeccability of the judges and kill the faith of the people in the judicial system.

Another point that was highlighted by the participants was the protection of corrupt practices through political links. For example, one citizen recounted, “I had a land dispute, and the other party, who was politically connected, kept bribing court officials to delay the case. I eventually gave up because I could not keep up with the costs.” This is in line with the research by Kureshi ([2022b](#)) who states that political favoritism leads to the increase in inequality and development of a sense of helplessness by ordinary citizens.

Structural and Economic Vulnerabilities

Another critical theme that was recognized was the role of economic and structural vulnerabilities that led to judicial corruption. Most of the respondents cited low pay and working conditions of judicial staff as a major contributor towards corruption. One participant said, “Judicial staff accept bribes because they are not paid enough to meet basic expenses. It is a survival mechanism for many of them.”

This argument is supported by the literature, which emphasizes that poorly paid government officials have more reasons to do corrupt deeds to earn extra income (Ahmad, [2021](#)). Pakistan is one of the countries where judicial clerks and other lower court employees are usually faced by insufficient compensation, and thus, the offer to be bribed is nearly tempting (Islam et al., [2023](#)).

Other respondents also emphasized that the problem is further worsened by a weak system of accountability. One judge noted, “There is no real system to hold anyone accountable. Corruption is usually swept under the rug even when reported.” Lack of strong accountability mechanisms encourages corruption, which is the fact that people are not very often

answerable in respect of their deeds. World Bank ([2023](#)) reports also concur with this finding, because clear disciplinary mechanisms are vital in curbing corruption in the judiciary.

Culture of Opacity

A recurring theme in the interviews was the lack of transparency in judicial processes, which participants identified as a key enabler of corruption. One participant remarked, “The lack of transparency in case scheduling allows manipulation by court clerks. You never know why your case is delayed or assigned to a particular judge.”

This culture of opacity creates opportunities for manipulation at multiple levels. Amir et al. ([2022](#)) note that opaque judicial system processes significantly contribute to corruption, allowing individuals to exploit procedural ambiguities for personal gain. Participants also highlighted how the normalization of corruption perpetuates this lack of transparency. One lawyer explained, “Bribery is normalized—it is just seen as part of the system. People do not even question it anymore.” This aligns with findings from Qureshi ([2025](#)), who argues that the cultural acceptance of corruption undermines efforts to promote transparency and accountability.

Inequities in Legal Access

The interviews revealed significant inequities in access to justice, with corruption creating barriers for marginalized groups. One citizen participant explained, “Ordinary citizens feel they cannot get justice unless they pay someone to speed up their case. It is like the system is designed to exclude us.”

These barriers disproportionately affect low-income individuals, who often cannot afford the bribes demanded by court staff. This finding is consistent with the study by Alamgir ([2024](#)), which highlights how judicial corruption exacerbates inequality and marginalization in legal systems.

Participants also pointed to the exploitation of vulnerable groups by powerful actors. One citizen recounted, “In my case, the opposing party was wealthy and politically connected. They used their influence to delay hearings while I could not afford the extra costs.”

Corruption in High-Stakes Cases

Certain cases, particularly those involving high financial or political stakes, were identified as more prone to corruption. One participant explained, “Land disputes are particularly vulnerable because so much money is involved. People will do anything to win these cases.”

This perspective is supported by the study highlighting property disputes' vulnerability to corruption due to their financial implications (Nasir, [2024](#)). Participants noted that these cases often involve prolonged delays and manipulation of evidence, making them a hotbed for corrupt practices.

One judge shared an example: “I handled a land dispute where both parties tried to influence the outcome through bribes. Maintaining impartiality in such cases is challenging when the stakes are high.”

Advocacy for Reform

Another significant theme was the role of civil society and the media in combating judicial corruption. Participants emphasized how these stakeholders can expose corruption and create pressure for systemic reforms. As one lawyer stated, “Civil society and the media are crucial in raising awareness about corruption. They can bring issues to light that would otherwise go unnoticed.”

Literature supports this view, highlighting the role of investigative journalism and advocacy groups in promoting transparency and accountability (Mangi et al., [2025](#)). One participant elaborated, “When the media exposes corrupt practices, it pressures the judiciary to act. It is one of the most effective tools we have.”

However, participants also noted the risks involved in such advocacy. One citizen explained, Journalists and activists often face threats when they expose corruption. We must protect them if we want them to continue their work.” This aligns with findings from Khan and Ahmed ([2024](#)), which stress the importance of safeguarding anticorruption advocates.

Conclusion

This paper finds that Pakistan's judicial system's corruption is rooted in profound structural and institutional issues. Political interferences were identified as playing an important role: dominant actors often influence the

decisions made by courts in their favor or punish opponents. These interferences threaten the judiciary's transparency and bring political influence instead of merit in law. This study finds support from literature that asserts that in the LDCs, politically affiliated judiciaries cannot deliver on the principles of the rule of law, thereby giving rise to eroded public confidence.

The study also finds economic risks with the judiciary that contribute significantly to corruption. The above-mentioned characteristics of the judiciary make corruption thrive within the body. Additionally, low remuneration rates and poor employment conditions compel judicial staff to participate in corrupt activities. The clerks and the administrative people who make up this pyramid, the vast majority of them, due to the perpetual financial crisis, feel that bribes are the only way to survive. This systematic under-resourcing of the judiciary undermines the practical function of its structures and encourages rampant 'bribery.' Current studies reflect the above assertion that poorly remunerated civil servants easily succumb to bribery more than their well-remunerated counterparts.

Moreover, corruption within judicial sectors becomes a standard owing to the influence of corrupting factors. Graft has interacted with employees and institutions and has turned into what is expected in organizations, with bribes and favoritism from the judicial systems. This cultural acceptance of corruption reduces the costs of corruption since anything associated with corruption has no negative feeling; hence, it is easier for top people in the company to engage in this act. Research has shown that extended cases of corruption in an organization lead to the inability of the various stakeholders to resist or report corruption cases.

Insufficient disadvantageous accountability systems contribute to judicial corruption as well. Another element is indifferent or weak controls and penalties that make many corruption acts unpunished. As much as there may be scandals of wrongdoing, the complaints are hardly ever pursued to their deserved conclusions, or the individuals are penalized appropriately.

Therefore, judicial corruption is closely associated with the impacts on the public trust, the governance of Pakistan and the socio-economic development of the state. The most-listed negative effect is the lack of public trust in the legal system. When a citizen finds out that he has to pay a bribe or that the lawyer of a certain party can bend the law to accommodate

a specific party, a lack of trust in the judiciary is switched off. This mistrust prevents any individual from using the law to solve their problems and discredits the judiciary as one of the most important elements of democracy. There are also not any less important economic consequences.

Last, the research also finds out how judicial corruption reinforces ineffectiveness inside the judiciary as an institution. The change of the schedules of cases, the treatment of cases as potential evidence, and the addressing of priorities based on favor through bribes rather than work merit become detrimental to justice and put pressure on the system. This ineffectiveness decreased the judiciary system's capacity to resolve cases, exceeding the time that the parties took to resolve issues while eradicating the general public's confidence in the judiciary system.

The thematic analysis revealed that judicial corruption in Pakistan is a cultural, economic, and systemic problem. Corrupt practices are promoted by political interference, structural flaws and unaccountability; social injustice in judicial dispensation also has negative effects on vulnerable individuals.

Recommendations

The Pakistani judiciary should be reformed to eliminate the **evil** of corruption and inefficiency that is a curse of this significant state organ. The decline of the confidence of the people can be restored in case certain effective solutions are utilized. Another significant Universal Instrument in that matter, the Basic Principles on the Independence of Judiciary, must be mentioned. The principles state that there shall be no interference in the judicial processes and that the right to a fair trial should be respected by all concerned. Also, there is a mention of the provision of sufficient resources so that judges can appropriately dispense their duties.

Apart from the Basic Principles, another important reference is the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the sole, legally binding universal Anticorruption Instrument adopted by the UNGA in 2003. Article 11 of the said Convention is part and parcel in providing the behavior of the Judiciary in its effort to fight corruption.

As already debated in the preceding paragraphs, the evil face of corruption in the judicial sphere is an enemy of public confidence. This is responsible for creating severe hindrances to objective trial, free from outside influences. Therefore, it becomes mandatory for Pakistan to sign

important UN Conventions to ensure a free and independent judiciary that enjoys public trust (International Commission of Jurists, [2000](#)).

Training Programs for Judicial Officers

The training programs to improve the knowledge base and skills of judges will be organized regularly to make sure that the former are familiar with the latest trends in the judicial field and acquire the skills required to make effective judgments. The training modules will also include legal training based on the ethics side. This training will be a reference point in the career growth of the officers and healthy competition among the judicial fraternity.

Improvement in the Criminal Justice System

The prevalent criminal justice system in Pakistan needs significant transformation. The registration of FIR and initial investigation by the Investigating Officer shall not be delayed as it would hamper the process by inviting unwanted interference. The IO shall be skilled enough to collect evidence for criminal cases. Competent and skilled judges are a significant requirement for criminal cases that are not subservient to undue influence. Merit can effectively mitigate corruption in the judiciary, as it is one important cause behind the menace. Selection and promotion should be based on the legal knowledge of the judicial officers. Appointment shall not be influenced by the executive or legislative organs of the state (Imtiaz & Khan, [2024](#)).

Funding and Resource Allocation

Budgetary allocation to the judiciary need be consulted with the Supreme Judicial Council and the Bars Associations, as suggested by Kureshi ([2022b](#)). The consultations should also deliberate upon the mechanism for distributing and administering funds received to improve the working conditions in courts.

Awareness among the Public

To reduce the negative impacts brought by corrupt practices and restore the lost confidence of the general public, it is necessary to create and spread awareness regarding legal rights and obligations among the masses. People should be empowered enough to report and lodge complaints regarding judicial corruption. This must be listed as the responsibility of the judicial system not to keep the public in oblivion and to enable them to question and

report any wrongdoing in the judicial sphere (Saleem et al., [2023](#)).

Accountability for Transparency

In fighting corruption in the judiciary, it is necessary to have an accountability mechanism in place to check the assets held by judges. Annual asset declaration of the entire judicial setup shall be made public to build public confidence. Being accountable to the state and the public would lessen the corruption levels and ensure a transparent environment, narrowing down the avenues for corrupt practices.

The role of Technology

By digitally managing the case files, procedural delays can be avoided. The practice of depositing surety bonds and submitting fines should be routed through online channels to help stop reliance on middlemen who extort money on different pretexts from naïve people, as discussed by Ahmed et al. ([2021](#)). Bringing technology to the judicial setup would help modernize the judicial system as per present-day requirements and aid in controlling corrupt practices.

Supreme Judicial Council as a Regulator

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) has an important position in the legal setup of our country. To make the judicial profession accountable and answerable, the Council must play its part as a regulator. It should take swift and prompt action on episodes of inefficiency and misconduct. The legal fraternity in Pakistan, comprising many practicing lawyers, has made administration of justice a far-fetched dream for most of the population (Nelson, [2023](#)). The SJC, by supervising the conduct of lawyers and judges alike, can help to establish a responsible judiciary.

Implications of Study

This study has significant policy implications to decision makers, lawyers, activists, governments, donors and international organizations to decide how effective their tools of aid are in Pakistan. The findings support once again the shock of the post-Soviet states and emphasize the need to revamp the system and amend the culture that supports corruption. As a policy maker, one of the most important actions is to strengthen external and internal accountability mechanisms within the judicial system through the introduction of independent Accountability Boards and an open system of disciplinary measures. They can assist in restoring trust in the citizens in

its legal system and strengthening the rule of law.

Measures to strengthen the anticorruption measures of the judicial staff are also discussed in the study through raising their wages and working conditions to reduce the chances of corruption. Based on this, the judiciary will be able to propel the economy out of weaknesses and introduce desirable professionalism.

Limitations of Study

Although this paper offers important findings on judicial corruption in Pakistan, it unveils some limitations of the study. First, the use of the qualitative research method, which is helpful in collecting rich data, poses a problem in the extent to which the results can be generalized. Another limitation is the use of a small purposive sample of the judges, lawyers, and citizens imported. The included experiences may not capture all the variance across Pakistan's judiciary. Secondly, self-generated data is limited in this study since participants may not have been willing to speak about issues such as corruption politely for fear that may have led to exaggerated or understated responses. It may give a skewed answer to certain aspects of corruption or even overemphasize what is socially acceptable. Finally, the study is not a quantitative study that can determine the prevalence of judicial corruption or its effect on judicial outcomes, which restricts the ability to obtain statistical proof.

Author Contribution

Quratulain Akram: conceptualization, supervision. **Maham Qadir:** data curation, writing- original draft, writing-review & editing

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

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