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POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

Edited by Nadeem Javed & Faheem Jehangir Khan

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POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

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PART I

POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

Research Papers



FEMALE VOTING PREFERENCES IN DISTRICT BUNER, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

Hassan Shah¹ and Khwaja Tariq Ziad²

ABSTRACT

This project investigates female voting preferences in District Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with a focus on the two general elections of 2018 and 2024. The project's objectives are to investigate how socioeconomic, religious, and cultural factors influence female voting preferences. The interpretivist paradigm (qualitative research) guided the methodological application of this research project. Data for this project were obtained from focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews held with women voters and women political activists. In the first phase, FGDs were held with the participants and in the second phase, the respondents were individually interviewed to thoroughly investigate socioeconomic, religious, and cultural barriers to female voting. The theoretical framework of this project is based on intersectional feminism/intersectionality and liberal feminist theory, which strengthened the analysis of primary data. This research project finds some socioeconomic factors that influence female voting preferences, such as women's economic dependency, insufficient voter education among women, and limited employment opportunities. Moreover, the study explored women's social identity, family and tribal ties, and cultural values and beliefs as cultural barriers to female voting preferences. The study further finds that religious identity, misinterpretation of the Islamic values and practices, and the intersection of Islamic values with sociocultural norms are the main religious factors. The study recommends increasing political awareness and education among women and starting community outreach programmes to engage with women as the major policy measures to ensure women's independent (of socioeconomic, cultural, and religious barriers) voting preferences.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women in a traditional society like that in Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have been facing many challenges in their public and political lives (Khan et al., 2024). In this context, women's political preferences are no exception. The women face various socioeconomic, religious, cultural, and structural challenges when making their voting preferences (Begum, 2023). Socioeconomic challenges shape and reshape women's political experiences, including their voting preferences. For instance, women's economic dependency makes them politically dependent. Female voting preferences are also influenced by their economic dependency. Dolan (2018) claimed that women's social status has influenced their say in making voting preferences. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, females constitute half of the population, but they are still not independent in making their voting preferences.

According to the 2023 census, women constitute 48.5% of Pakistan's population, indicating a nearly equal gender distribution in the country (GOP, 2024). This means women have a substantial demographic representation, but due to the social, political, and economic challenges, they are not independent in casting votes. It can be argued that women's voting preferences cannot be improved until their socioeconomic and political development is ensured. Historically, in Pakistan, in general, and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in particular, women have been excluded from the public and political domains. This has happened because of the structural constraints, which include patriarchy, religious influence, and socio-cultural traditions. The threat of violence, poor literacy rates, and societal prejudices frequently prevent women from exercising their right to vote or run for office. Because of local agreements or intimidation, female voter turnout is still quite low in some places, underscoring the need for focused efforts (Ali et al., 2021). The total voter turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa significantly declined from 44% in the 2018 general elections to 39.5% in the 2024 elections. The decline in voter turnout is particularly noticeable for female voters. Female voter turnout was about 31%, according to Form-47 of the Elections Commission of Pakistan (ECP). This indicates a sharp decline in female voter turnout from the previous general elections (Jatoi, 2023).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women encounter a multifaceted set of structural and socio-cultural impediments that significantly influence their voting preferences. Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional cultural values continue to constrain women's political participation. These socio-cultural restrictions are compounded by economic and educational



disadvantages-particularly low literacy rates and limited employment opportunities-which collectively hinder women political awareness and voting preferences. In addition, persistent security challenges and the threat of violence in certain areas further discourage women from active engagement in the electoral process.

In District Buner, female voter turnout declined to merely Twenty-three percent (23%). Furthermore, official data from Form-48 of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) reveal that, out of a total of Eighty-one (81) female polling stations, Twenty-one (21) reported a 0% voter turnout (ECP, 2024). Despite numerous governmental initiatives and policy interventions intended to promote women's political empowerment, substantive progress remains limited. The continued decline in female electoral participation highlights the persistence of entrenched socio-cultural barriers that systematically marginalize women from the formal political sphere. Furthermore, the apparent ineffectiveness of these initiatives suggests that the legislation intended to promote increased female political involvement has not been implemented to its maximum potential. This inefficacy emphasises a crucial gap that exists between the creation and implementation of policies, highlighting the difficult obstacles that women must overcome in order to exercise their right to vote. The results of the 2024 elections show how urgently stronger and more focused initiatives are needed to address the underlying reasons for women's disengagement from politics. Interventions of this nature need to address the systemic obstacles and deeply ingrained social conventions that prevent women from fully engaging in politics, rather than just making cosmetic changes. In order to ensure that future policies are comprehensive and efficiently implemented, they must be planned with a sophisticated grasp of these problems. Pakistan's political scene can only become more inclusive and representative of its entire population through such unified efforts.

In Buner, as in other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, female voting preferences are profoundly shaped by socio-cultural and religious issues. An intricate interplay of socio-cultural and religious factors influences several aspects of life, including political conduct and decision-making processes, significantly affecting society. Buner is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted traditional social norms, providing a unique context in which these factors shape the political landscape.

Furthermore, these socio-cultural influences have a pervasive influence on women's political decision-making, frequently restricting their agency and autonomy in the election process. Not only does the community's

reinforcement of gender-specific roles impact women's voting rights, but it also has an impact on their total political representation and empowerment. As a result, any study of women's voting preferences in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa needs to take into account the significant influence of these socio-cultural variables, which still influence the political choices and actions of the province's female population.

Socio-cultural issues, especially gender norms, profoundly influence female voting preferences in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Mushtaq & Adnan, 2022; Husain et al., 2017). The region's conservative ideology imposes rigid gender roles, with men predominantly controlling family decisions, hence constraining women's political autonomy. Shah et al. (2021) emphasise that women encounter societal pressure to conform their political preferences to those of male relatives, frequently via coercive or implicit expectations. The established patriarchal structure further limits their autonomous engagement in the political process. These gender norms impede women's political representation and reinforce male dominance in decision-making. Addressing this necessitates confronting social views via community activities and policies that enhance women's political engagement.

The political inclinations of women are influenced by prevailing societal perceptions regarding their functions within the family and community (Naz et al., 2012). In their role as primary caregivers, women place significant emphasis on matters such as security, healthcare, and education (Giné & Mansuri, 2018). Furthermore, the impact of religious beliefs is significant, guiding women to endorse candidates who promote moral or religious principles. The convergence of socio-cultural and religious factors constrains women's political agency, necessitating that they cast their votes in accordance with familial and communal anticipations. Grasping these elements is crucial for formulating policies that promote women's autonomous engagement in the political sphere. It is imperative that interventions confront the constraining effects of gender norms, traditions, and religious beliefs on the political agency of women. A sophisticated strategy will facilitate the development of targeted initiatives, thereby fostering a more inclusive and representative democratic process in District Buner and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



Socio-Cultural and Historical Landscape of District Buner

District Buner covers 1,865 sq. km, located in the Malakand Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The natural beauty of Buner makes it more attractive to the people of other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It has diverse landscapes and more than 350 archaeological sites. Geographically, District Buner is situated between approximately 34°30' N and 34°55' N latitude and 72°15' E and 72°45' E longitude. It is a strategically located area in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, sharing borders with Swat District to the north, Shangla District to the east, Mardan and Swabi Districts to the south, and Malakand District to the west (Khan, 2018).

The environment, economics, and cultural legacy of District Buner, which is situated in the Hindu Kush foothills, are greatly influenced by its varied and untamed terrain. The district is distinguished by gently sloping plains, rich valleys, and mountainous areas. A PhD thesis on Buner identified 373 archaeological sites in the different parts of the district. One of its most notable geographical features is Elum Ghar, a holy peak that is valued for both its cultural significance and its natural beauty. Important agricultural centres are fertile valleys. Barandu, Budal, and Chamla are the main water sources for its fertile land. Buner has a total of 136,880 acres of agricultural land, with 37,316 acres of irrigated and 99,562 acres of unirrigated land (Khan, 2018). The source of income for the major portion of the population is agriculture. Major crops are wheat, rice, vegetables, maize and tobacco.

The other sources of income are the marble industry and foreign remittances. A large number of locals are working in the Gulf countries and Malaysia. For this reason, the local people call Malaysia their second home. It is also observed that many local people have secured Malaysian nationality.

District Buner also has a rich documented historical heritage. The memories of previous armies, many of which suffered military setbacks at the hands of insurgents in these mountainous regions, reverberate across the Buner valley. The Karakar, Daggar, Ambela, and Malndrai passes were traversed by Alexander the Great's army in 327–326 BC. The Mughal army did the same in 1586 AD. This history has been mentioned by Olaf Caroe in *The Pathan* and Sir Robin Lane Fox in *Alexander the Great*. Following land settlements by the revered Sheikh Mali, the Yousafzai tribe arrived in Buner in 1519 AD. The people of the area, especially the Yousafzai, have never been conquered by an empire, not even by Alexander the Great or the British (Caroe, 1958).

After passing through Karakar, Torwarsak, and Daggar in 1587 AD, Akbar's army was camped at Malndrai, where Raja Bairbal and his 8,000 men perished. Bairbal's body could not be recovered by Akbar. For more than 130 years, Buner served as a haven for Muslim combatants, such as Syed Ahmed Shaheed and his supporters, during the Sikh occupation of the Frontier. The Syeds of Sitana, Malka, and Takhtaband supported the Mujahiddins against the Sikhs and the British. Syed Akbar Shah of Sitana ruled from 1849 to 1857, but following his death in 1857, the region was left without a ruler until 1915 (Caroe, 1958).

The legendary Ambela War began in 1863 A.D. when British forces tried to cross Ambela to reach Malka. The British suffered significant losses, including 238 fatalities and 670 injuries, and were unable to accomplish their goal. Only after independence in 1947 were they able to take control of Buner. Around 1000 AD, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni overthrew the final Buddha emperor Raja Geer, allowing the Yusafzai tribe to arrive and bring Islam to Buner. Sufis and Ulamas then helped propagate Islam to Buner. This spread was sped up by Hazrat Pir Baba's arrival in 1502 AD, and his shrine at Pacha Kalay is still a revered location (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2023).

In 1915, Syed Abdul Jabbar Shah became the Badshah of Swat but was exiled in 1917 by Mian Gul Abdul Wadood, who took over as ruler. In 1949, he was succeeded by his son, Mina Gul Jehanzeb. Up until its merger with Pakistan, Buner was still a part of Swat. Buner was elevated to a district on July 29, 1969 (Sohail et al., 2021).

The majority of the population belongs to the Sunni sect of Islam. There is also a small number of Sikh and Hindu people who have been living in Buner since the time of independence. In the 2024 General Elections, Hindu female candidate Dr Saveera Parkash also contested on the Pakistan Peoples Party's ticket for a provincial assembly seat. The predominant ethnic group in Buner is the Yusafzai tribe of Pakhtuns. However, the *Gujar* and *Ajar* communities are also settled in the region. Furthermore, there is also a significant number of non-Pakhtuns or *Kasabgar*. Kasabgars are a part of the community that provides services to Pakhtuns for wheat or maize cultivation. These Kasabgars have a particular status in Buner, i.e., services during *Gham* and *Khadi*.³ An elder from the village of Krapa related a story of how the Kasabgar people in

³ The terms *Gham* and *Khadi* are Pashto words that refer to funerals and wedding ceremonies, respectively. Individuals of Kasabgar origin are traditionally expected to participate and demonstrate their presence at such events.



the village refused to attend a funeral service because of their stable financial status. The village's Pakhtuns responded by blocking their entrance points and stating that they had to "buy their own paths to home". It demonstrates that District Buner has a traditional society.

The education sector of district Buner is lagging behind the other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the 2023 Population Census, the literacy rate in District Buner is 43.7%, with the male literacy rate of 60.6% and the female literacy rate of 27.4%. One reason is that the number of female schools and colleges is fewer than the number of schools and colleges for male students. There are 438 boys and 200 girls primary schools, 59 boys and 43 girls middle schools, 59 boys and 21 girls high schools, and 27 boys and 14 girls higher secondary schools in Buner (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2023). These statistics reflect a significant gender gap in educational facilities in Buner.

In Buner, the male-to-female ratio in federal government jobs is 16:1. In provincial government jobs, the same ratio is 53:3 (GOP, 2021). Moreover, the private sector jobs are very limited, which cannot engage a large number of females in Buner. Thus, a majority of females are either homemakers or are unemployed. It is observed that a large number of female family members are financially dependent on male family members. Another important aspect is the presence of a joint family structure in Buner. It is commonly appreciated among the community to have a joint family structure, which is a symbol of power in society. According to the 2023 Census Report, District Buner has a 0% urban population (GOP, 2024). Jansen's (2020) study suggests that individuals residing in urban areas tend to exhibit greater openness and moderation compared to those living in rural regions.

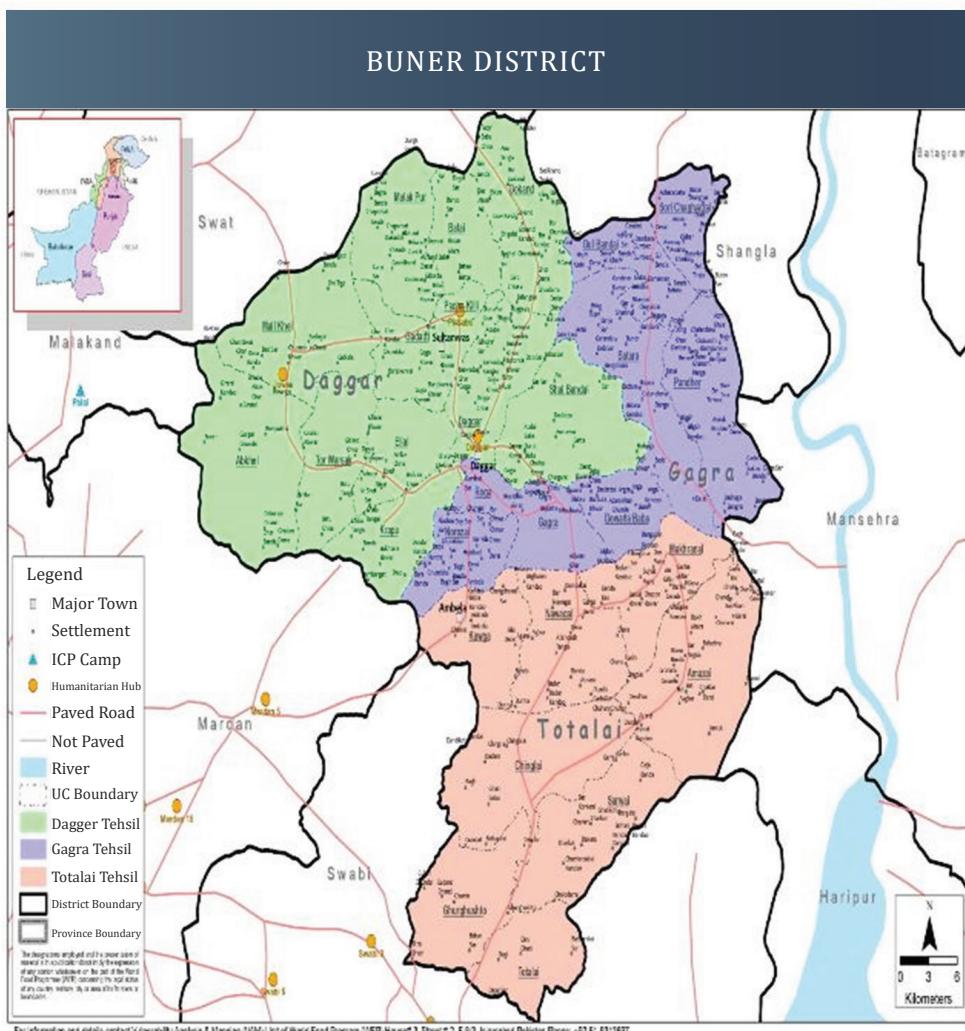
Moreover, there are limited opportunities for women. The stringent cultural codes, such as *Purdah*, *Ghairat*, and *Paighor*, constrain women from engaging in external employment. There exists a well-known Pashto proverb: "Khaza ya da kor da Goor," which translates to "*A woman is either for the home or the grave.*" The proverb reflects the deeply entrenched male-dominated cultural norms that serve to reinforce patriarchal power structures while simultaneously undermining the status and agency of women within society. Moreover, religious restrictions curtail women's political engagement in Buner. The inhabitants of Buner have a profound connection to Islam. Notable Sufi shrines include Pirbaba, Shalbandi Baba, and Dewana Baba. Numerous individuals from various districts of Pakistan visit these locations.



Islam functions not merely as a religion but also as a cultural identity for the Pakhtun people. The code of Pakhtoonwali is interconnected with Islamic practices. Religious practices are fundamentally integrated into their lives. The robust connection to Islam has reinforced the influence of religious elites (*ulama* or *mullah*) in the Pakhtun culture (Khan et al., 2019). The *ulama*'s significant influence in the public sphere has led to their engagement in politics. Various religio-political parties participate in elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In contrast to other provinces of Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa exhibits a significant electoral support for religio-political parties. Religio-political parties frequently inhibit female engagement in politics, a trend also evident in District Buner. Data from Form-48 indicates that, among 81 female polling stations in the district, 21 were classified as locations where women were prohibited from voting. This restriction is predominantly upheld by local elders who collectively deny women the opportunity to exercise their voting rights. Moreover, numerous prominent religio-political leaders endorse and strengthen this stance, thereby sustaining obstacles to women's political participation in the region.

In conclusion, the voting preferences of females in Buner are significantly shaped by socioeconomic, religious, and cultural factors. Conventional gender roles and deep-rooted patriarchal norms often limit women's capacity to engage in the voting process and exercise autonomy in making voting preferences. The constraints are exacerbated by religious interpretations that dissuade women's involvement in the voting process, bolstered by influential political and community leaders. The voting preferences of women are significantly shaped by social norms and the pressures exerted by local elders, who often prioritise family or community interests over individual choices. The interplay of these factors restricts women's political agency and shapes their voting decisions in alignment with the prevailing socioeconomic, cultural, and religious norms of the region.

Figure 1: District Buner Map



Source: Authors' computations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical political socialisation literature states that the family shapes youngsters' political beliefs and conduct, regardless of gender. Jose (2024) stated that parents, teachers, friends, and the media shape a person's political views and beliefs. Parents teach their children politics, according to Jaros (1973) and Valentino & Sears (1998). According to Jennings et al. (2009), family strongly influences young people's political views. Plutzer (2002) and Rosenstone & Hansen (1996) found that educational institutions, peer groups, and volunteer organisations are alternative socialising institutions besides the family. Quintelier et al. (2007) found that parents influence their children's political views. He then examined how parents pass it on to their children. Mehmood & Rauf (2018) noted that family dynamics shape Khyber Pakhtunkhwa youth political views and conduct.

Inglehart (1977) and Norris (2003) argued that women in traditional communities tend to have a lower level of political preferences than men because they are less interested in political issues. Married women often go along with the political opinions and decisions of their husbands. Women are thought to have conservative beliefs, which make them more inclined to support political parties that are conservative or religious (Burns et al., 2001; Almond & Verba, 1963). In district Buner, it is also observed that the political affiliation and political preferences of the head of the family influence the political preferences of the youngsters (male and female) in the household. The important argument is that the entire family, including both men and women, relies on the head of the family for economic, political, and social support.

When a given political party or a candidate is viewed positively and spoken of favourably, it creates a sense of connection among all family members, particularly the younger generation of both genders. On the other hand, if the head of the family does not have any political connections, the situation may be different. In these situations, various family members may acquire preferences for certain political parties, even if the family follows the voting selections of their children. In these situations, the preferences of male offspring have a greater impact on voting decisions than the needs and desires of females. The main problem could be that female family members are more dependent than male family members in social, political, and economic situations (Vanderkooij, 2011).



According to Eisenstein (1984), patriarchy is a system that is controlled by men and that has an impact on the political standing of women in society. The patriarchal system is a hierarchical structure that gives men more rights than women in society. Adrienne Rich describes a framework in which males use coercion, cultural pressure, rituals, traditions, legal frameworks, language, conventions, etiquette, education, and labour division to dictate the responsibilities of women, ultimately leading to the domination of women by men (Sarho, 1997). This idea consists of two components of patriarchy: the dominance of men over women and the subordinate role of women in society. The patriarchal system encourages women to be dependent on men in social, political, and economic matters. In many cultures, a typical reason given for this is that women are physically weaker than men and so cannot do hard work. This idea of physical fragility is created by society.

Since early childhood, this has created a psychological impact on girls. Observations show that in these societies, little girls are usually given dolls, whereas boys are given toys such as cars and weapons. The problem is getting worse in a traditional society like the Pakhtuns, who live near the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. A traditional Pashto saying, "Khaze La Kor Day Ya Goor", which translates to "Women are either for the home or for the grave," illustrates the seriousness of the situation. This saying plainly shows that women are not allowed to leave their homes. That said, the fact that modern communication tools and technology are available to the general public is causing a gradual and continuous change and improvement in the situation. Every day, the ratio of female educational attainment to employment opportunities is increasing. On the other hand, "masculinity politics" remains a global problem. A person is continuously striving to retain his status as the most powerful figure in politics. This demonstrates a strong link between patriarchy and politics. The patriarchal structure that is common among Pakhtuns, like with other communities in Pakistan, influences women's political behaviour, particularly how they vote. It has made women reliant on their male relatives for social, political, and economic assistance (Naz et al., 2012).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a whole, and in District Buner in particular, women have far less political authority than men. Gender segregation has made the economic and social differences between men and women worse and has influenced the political views of women who vote. It has been noted that women often require the permission of a male family member to exercise their right to vote. The family lives in the basic tier of this social structure, which is further divided into nuclear and extended family kinds. Davies (1965) argued



that a nuclear family consists of parents and their children, whereas an extended family includes a wider range of relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. A family is divided into male and female members based on a hierarchy of gender.

In our society, male family members have more social, economic, and political power than female family members. There are several reasons for the prevalence of male dominance in society. The importance of religion is emphasised in the first phase. During the 1960s, when General Ayub Khan was in power, conversations about women in leadership positions began to take place in religious communities. A large number of Islamic scholars think that women are not allowed to hold positions of power in Islam. The problem caused the general public to be uncertain about women's political engagement and empowerment. The ulama's differing opinions on the matter of women's political participation demonstrate that an average person can easily become polarised on any issue related to religion. The argument both protected and expanded Ayub Khan's authoritarian power while at the same time discouraging women, notably Fatima Jinnah, who was the younger sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, from seeking any active political role in the future. In the 1980s, when Benazir Bhutto began her career in national politics, a similar conversation was started again. Both political events echoed the prevailing narrative within religious circles, which were strongly hostile to women's political empowerment and involvement.

In Buner and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, conservative religious communities deem it haram and illicit for women to attain political empowerment and engage in political and social activities. The scholars from that group substantiate their perspectives using passages from the Holy Quran and some traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Consequently, no female candidates are contesting for general seats from the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (Fazal ur Rehman group), Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (Sami ul Haq group), Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, and other conventional religious (Islamist) political factions. Maulana Gul Nasib Khan, the former provincial Amir of JUI-F, articulated his and other scholars' discontent with women's elections to the parliament for reserved seats in a discussion with academics. He posits that the party would not have engaged women in politics absent the constitutional mandates and the operational framework of parliament.

The 17th Constitutional Amendment to the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan states that women must make up 33% of the members of any legislative body in the country. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has taken important steps to increase women's participation in politics. One of these



steps is the requirement that at least 10% of the people who vote at each polling station must be women (ECP, 2013). These actions highlight how important female voters are in elections in Pakistan. The leaders of political parties have now acknowledged the importance of votes cast by women.

An analysis of socio-cultural structures reveals that women occupy a relatively constrained political and social role within Pakhtun society. Their responsibilities are confined to the issues related to their families and households. Illiteracy, economic dependence, and social structure are the primary factors contributing to this degradation. The state's involvement is inadequate and disheartening, as a limited percentage of women in the selected regions have access to colleges and educational institutions. The quantity of high schools and colleges for women is insufficient to meet societal needs. However, the tradition is evolving in several domains due to enhanced communication and transportation accessibility. Consequently, numerous females are being relocated to distant institutions to pursue their education. The increase in women's political power is evident, but achieving a state of balance may require a decade or more. It is somewhat comforting to know that, despite the many social, political, economic, and administrative challenges, a large number of women continue to vote. However, female voting behaviour and preferences are still dependent on the male members of their families.

The Impact of Women's Political Exclusion on Their Voting Preferences in District Buner

Political exclusion is the process of intentionally preventing someone from participating in political activities. It could be referred to as political marginalisation, annihilation, or segregation. The process of women's political exclusion involves limiting or preventing their engagement in politics, which includes restricting their ability to mobilise and raise awareness. Bilal (2017) stated that there are many structural, functional, and personal factors that are different in various social situations in today's society, and these factors are responsible for the exclusion of women from political structures and processes. Women in politics symbolise conflicting ideas that limit women's ability to participate and gain power in politics. This part of the dissertation looks at a number of reasons that have led to the political exclusion of women in Buner.



According to Naz et al. (2012), the political empowerment of women is hindered by the values, norms, and discriminatory social structure of society. Pakhtunwali, which is the code of life for the Pakhtuns, is the basis for all of these societal standards and ideals. According to Caroe (1958), Pakhtunwali is a code that governs Pashtun society. It comprises the following concepts: jirga (council of elders), malmastiya (hospitality), nanawati, ghirat (honour), purdah (veil), badal (revenge), and paighor (Jan & Aman, 2015; Khatak, 2008). Ghirat, purdah, and paighor are major barriers to women's ability to vote independently and gain political power. Bari (2005) used the concept of gender ideology to explain how women are excluded from politics and how they are empowered. She divided society into two genders, i.e., females, who are limited to domestic roles, such as wife, mother, and sister, and males, who have control over all social, political, and economic issues. Clearly, men are the dominant gender. Connell (1987) argued that women's dependence on others for social, cultural, and economic support leads to their political marginalisation in society.

Another major factor contributing to the political marginalisation of women is political parties. In Pakistan, the leadership of major political parties, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is mostly made up of men. Women have limited prospects within the organisational systems of all major political parties. Currently, there are very few women in leadership positions in the Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League-N, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Awami National Party, Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam-F, among other political parties. It has been observed that, when it comes to the distribution of party tickets during elections, male candidates are given preference over female candidates. As a result, there are very few female candidates who run for general seats in elections. Political parties have been preventing women from participating in mainstream politics in Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the 2008 General Election, many political parties made informal agreements in various regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to restrict female voting (Jamil, 2014).

Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), which is a non-governmental organisation, reported that Swat, Charsadda, Swabi, Buner, Peshawar, and Malakand Protected Area had the highest percentages of voting places with a female turnout of 0%. In the Swat area, 29% of polling stations for women had a 0% turnout of female voters. In Charsadda, Swabi, and Peshawar, the equivalent rates were 15%, 12%, and 9%, respectively (Jamil, 2014). As a result, the Election Commission of Pakistan created a law that requires 10% of the votes at each polling station to come from women, due to informal agreements that were against women voting. If the percentage of



female voters is less than 10%, the election at that polling location will be considered invalid and will be rescheduled. Figure 1 shows that there is a large difference between male and female candidates in the number of regimes. It may be concluded from this data that female politicians have been marginalised in national politics since the founding of Pakistan.

There is no clear structure for improving the representation of women in election regulations. The regulations for elections mostly give men an advantage over women. Pakistan has nine million registered voters. According to the ECP Report 2002, there were 38.8 million male voters and 33.2 million female voters among the total number of registered voters (ECP, 2002). Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) reported that the number of registered female voters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa decreased by 45% during the general election in 2008. In 2002, there were 3.92 million registered female voters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but by 2008, the number had dropped to 2.17 million (PILDAT, 2013). According to a TDEA survey in 2019, there is a difference of 2.6 million between the number of registered male and female voters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The small number of registered female voters suggests that the ECP's election procedures are focused on men and discourage women from getting involved in politics.

Unfortunately, martial law has been imposed on several occasions during the course of Pakistan's political history. During their time in office, every military rule administrator put a stop to and weakened the progress of democratisation. Initially, they put the constitutions in abeyance and then terminated them. Military authorities were always against politicians and political parties. The Public Offices Disqualification Ordinance (PODO) and the Elective Bodies Disqualification Ordinance (EBDO) were both enacted by General Ayub Khan. General Zia banned political parties, whereas General Musharraf overthrew the elected government of Nawaz Sharif and created new political parties to oppose the major political forces. All of these restrictions obstructed the democratic processes, which had a direct or indirect effect on the political development of both men and women.

Challenges and Barriers to Women's Political and Electoral Participation

Women's electoral participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is severely hampered by institutional, social, and cultural impediments. Women's political participation is further hindered by deep-rooted patriarchal standards that frequently limit their ability to vote and run for office. They also face barriers to education and financial resources. Furthermore, these

challenges are made worse by insufficient infrastructure and security concerns in the area, which deter women from taking part in the political process. Notwithstanding these challenges, attempts to empower women and advance greater inclusivity continue, underscoring the necessity of persistent programs to improve their political participation and representation.

The 2018 General Elections saw low turnout due to a number of obstacles that the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) highlighted as impeding women's ability to vote. Male family members frequently play a crucial role in women's political engagement, especially when it comes to getting a Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC), which is required for voter registration. Women have a difficult time getting a CNIC if they don't have the assistance of a male relative. There are accounts of men seizing control of women's CNICs and casting votes on their behalf, so even in cases when women are competent to vote, their decision-making authority is usually surpassed by the male head of the household. As they prioritise their obligations to support their family, many women work in factories or in domestic tasks, which restricts their capacity to take time off to vote (Jatoi, 2023).

Sarah Khan has analysed the gender disparity in voting behaviour in Pakistan in her blog post on the IGC website. She points out that although more women are registering to vote, there is still a sizable 9-10% difference in voter turnout between men and women. It's interesting to note that this difference is greater in urban than in rural settings. This research disproves the notion that metropolitan areas, where resources and knowledge are more readily available, would encourage higher female involvement rates. According to the investigation, societal and cultural barriers, which are likely more ingrained in urban settings, play a major role in this discrepancy (IGC, 2024).

However, Cheema et al. (2021) address the question of whether urbanisation helps or inhibits women's participation in Pakistani elections. The report, which highlights a greater gender disparity in urban regions, uses data from the 2018 elections to show that women's involvement in big cities is 8.5% lower than in rural areas. The results cast doubt on the notion that greater urbanisation boosts women's political participation by lowering caregiving responsibilities or raising labour force participation. According to the research, exposure to political violence and low levels of political party involvement among women voters are important variables in cities. Education and women's engagement in urban contexts are favorably correlated.



Saeed et al. (2020) examine the obstacles that women in District Dir Upper, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan face when trying to participate in politics. It demonstrates how gender segregation, patriarchal systems, misogynistic views, and conservative social norms all seriously impede women's participation in politics. Information gathered from 200 female voters who have registered to vote shows that stigma, fear of becoming a victim, and lack of support from political parties and the government all work against women's participation. Recommendations to improve women's political participation in the area are included in the study's conclusion.

Hamida Bibi's qualitative study looks into why women in Peshawar do not vote in the general elections. It lists important obstacles such as cultural norms that uphold patriarchy, ignorance, practical difficulties, and subpar facilities at polling places. Based on interviews with activists and political figures, the study shows that structural problems like inexperienced registration personnel and cultural constraints, like not allowing photos to be used for identification, seriously impede women's ability to vote. To increase women's participation in the political process, awareness programs and legislative measures are suggested (Bibi, 2020).

This article investigates the low female voter turnout in the general elections held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, in 2013. Administrative, cultural, political, and religious hurdles are identified as the main causes of this problem. The study emphasises that administrative barriers rank first, followed by cultural and religious influences, based on a poll conducted across six districts. According to the study, removing these obstacles is essential to increasing women's political engagement and guaranteeing a more inclusive democratic process (Shah et al., 2021).

The research pieces focus on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and address the topic of low political engagement among women in Pakistan. They listed various obstacles, such as cultural constraints, patriarchal social standards, and poor polling place infrastructure. Administrative difficulties, such as undertrained employees and logistical roadblocks, make matters worse. Women's participation in elections is significantly restricted by religious and political issues, which also contribute to the consistently low voter turnout among this demographic (Bilal & Ahmad, 2021).

Different studies highlight how crucial it is to raise public awareness and enact legislative changes in order to increase women's role in the political process. The elimination of societal and religious stigmas connected to women's involvement in politics, as well as focused campaigns educating women about

their right to vote, is among the recommendations. When taken as a whole, these pieces show how desperately systemic changes are needed to make Pakistan's political environment more inclusive of women.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study includes theoretical insights borrowed from intersectionality/intersectional feminism, liberal feminism, and the theory of change model. From intersectionality, the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (pioneer of intersectional theory) is taken to analyse socio-cultural and religious factors influencing female preferences. Crenshaw's concept of structural intersectionality is specifically used to analyse how different social, cultural, and religious structures in Buner affect women's voting preferences. Crenshaw's structural intersectionality states that different factors, such as social, economic, ethnic, religious, and social class, intersect with each other and influence women's experiences in the public domain, including women's political experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). The analysis in this project is also drawn on liberal feminism. John Stuart Mill's (a British philosopher and economist) concept of classical liberty is used to analyse how females' voting preferences adapt to new shapes when they gain liberty from sociocultural and religious structures of society. By classical liberty, Mills means that individual liberty is essential for the well-being and political progress of society (1859). The concept of classical liberty is used here to analyse how women's voting preferences can be improved while gaining liberty from the oppressive sociocultural, religious, and gender structures.

The theory of change model (TOC) is also significant to the analysis of data in this project on women's voting preferences. The TOC argues that a step-by-step approach in a project is paramount in achieving its goals. This process actually helps us to identify key factors that drive change in a social or political phenomenon (Kirby et al., 2006). The analysis in this project is strengthened by drawing on the TOC model to understand how women's voting preferences adapt to changes when it comes to the sociocultural and religious dynamics of the society in Buner.



3. METHODOLOGY

For an in-depth understanding of female voting preferences and the dynamics behind these preferences in Buner, the study employed qualitative methods and procedures. In the first stage, secondary data were collected from the Election Commission of Pakistan, focusing on the general elections of 2018 and 2024. For the descriptive analysis of female voting preferences, studies and documents on the results of the 2018 and 2024 general elections were analysed. The focus was on women's preferred political parties in these general elections. Sarantakos (2012) asserts that descriptive analysis is an elementary method that aims to summarise the data, identify main trends, and present descriptions.

In the second stage, primary data were collected from women voters, women political activists, male politicians, lawyers, and academicians through FGDs and in-depth interviews to confirm the voting preferences identified and summarised in the first stage. Four focus group discussions and 23 interviews were conducted with women voters and women political activists. Focus groups vary with a research paradigm. In the qualitative research model, focus group discussions give insights into the construction of meanings of a particular variable (Sarantakos, 2012). Thus, as mentioned previously, four focus group discussions with women voters, women political activists, male politicians, lawyers, and academicians were held to explore how female voters attach meaning to sociocultural and religious factors when casting votes. This approach gave us deep insights into how these sociocultural and religious factors meaningfully mould female voting preferences. During these focus groups, participants also indicated some other dynamics related to sociocultural and religious factors influencing female voting preferences, for which individual interviews were conducted with the participants.

We conducted 23 interviews with women voters and political activists. In qualitative research, interviews are used as a method of data collection to provide a flexible and free environment for the participants to explore the research problem in an in-depth way (Sarantakos, 2012). In this way, we used an interview guide comprising some preliminary questions about how sociocultural and religious factors, such as men's dominance, social relations, the baradari system (dala tapala), and social ties with a political party, and religious thoughts, influenced the voting preferences of female voters. During the discussions, some other supplementary questions on the research problem were raised. Therefore, the respondents were asked about their views accordingly. After recording the interviews, the voice recordings were

translated into meaningful text and then visited and revisited to get familiarity with the data. Similar responses were clubbed together and assigned codes accordingly. All these processes were done in line with Clarke & Braun's (2017) thematic data analysis method.

Data Analysis

Secondary Data Analysis

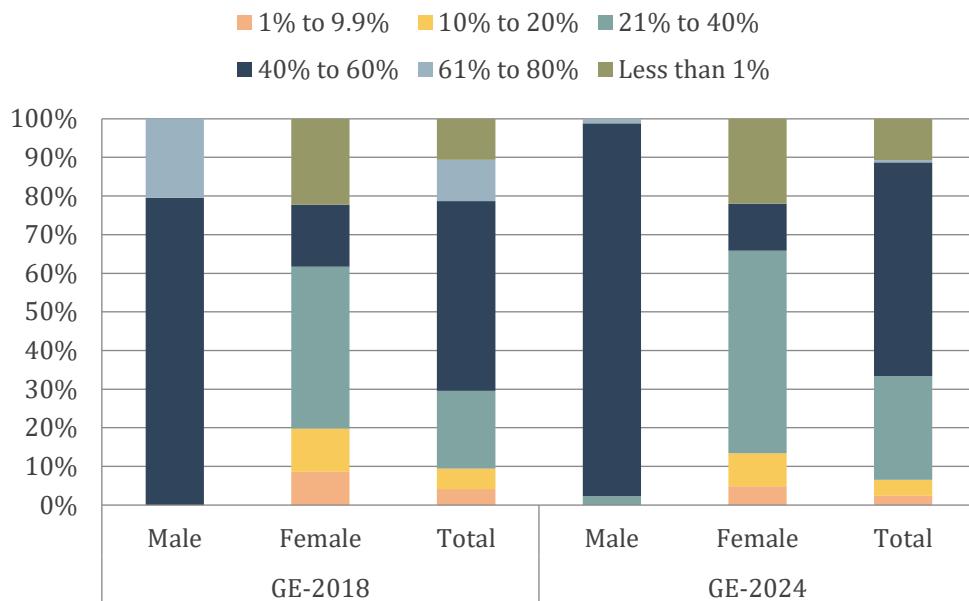
The secondary data mainly consisted of gender-wise turnout and polling station-wise turnout in the general elections of 2018 and 2024. These data were used to show female voting preferences in these general elections in Buner. In the first stage, the enumerators made a data sheet of the female polling stations (81 GE-2018 & 82 GE-2024) and male polling stations (88 GE-2018 & 82 GE-2024) for the National Assembly constituency NA-9(10).

Gender-wise Voter Turnout in General Elections of 2024 and 2018

In the National Assembly constituency NA-10 Buner, the number of registered women voters for the General Elections of 2024 was 259,646, representing 46% of the total electoral rolls. Out of these, 25,931 women cast their votes, making up 10% of the registered women voters. In comparison, in the 2018 elections, there were 195,171 registered women voters in the constituency, with only 10% exercising their right to vote. This indicates a consistent trend, as only 10% of registered women participated in both the 2018 and 2024 elections.

While the female voter turnout remained unchanged at 10% between the two elections, there was a notable decrease in male voter turnout, dropping from 24% in 2018 to 21% in 2024. Overall, the total voter turnout (including both men and women) in GE-2024 was 16%, a decrease from the 18% turnout in 2018. This represents a 2% decline in the general voter turnout for NA-10 Buner. The voting patterns of women who turned out to vote were analysed to understand their voting trends, and the decline in the overall turnout in GE-2024 compared to GE-2018. This analysis compares the voter turnout percentages at the polling stations in NA-9 (10) Buner for males and females across different turnout categories in GE-2018 and GE-2024.

Figure 2: Difference between Electoral Choices of Men and Women (Percentage)



Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 2 illustrates the voter turnout categories by polling station (PS) type, segmented by gender (male, female) for the GE-2018 and GE-2024, respectively. The turnout percentages are divided into six ranges: less than 1%, 1% to 9.9%, 10% to 20%, 21% to 40%, 40% to 60%, and 61% to 80%, each represented by a different colour. Facts from the data reveal that in the 2018 elections, the majority of male and female polling stations recorded turnout in the 40% to 60% range. Significant portions also fell in the 21% to 40% and 10% to 20% categories. This pattern was consistent across all polling stations. In 2024, while the 40% to 60% turnout range remained predominant for both male and female polling stations, there was a noticeable increase in the 21% to 40% category. This shift indicates a broader distribution of voter turnout in 2024 compared to 2018. (The list of polling stations with 0% turnout is attached in Appendix).

Comparing the 2018 and 2024 general elections, the turnout range of 40% to 60% consistently held the majority for all polling station types. However, 2024 saw a notable rise in the 21% to 40% turnout category across both male and female polling stations. Additionally, the turnout categories of less than 1% and 1% to 9.9% continued to have minimal representation in both years. This comparison highlights a trend towards greater voter participation within the 21% to 40% range in 2024, while maintaining a significant turnout in the 40%

to 60% range. These trends suggest shifts in voter behaviour, with a notable increase in higher turnout categories for both men and women in GE-2024 compared to GE-2018, despite a decrease in several lower turnout categories. This indicates a growing engagement among voters, especially in the mid to high turnout ranges.

Voters' Choices in 2018 and 2024 General Elections

The gender disaggregated turnout at the polling stations enabled us to analyse and compare the electoral choices of men and women. It is generally believed that women voters lack autonomy and vote for the same political party as male members of their families. This perception resulted in political parties largely ignoring women voters, costing them their due representation in political decision-making structures.

Table 1: Difference Between Electoral Choices of Men and Women (Percentage)

Year	Type	PTI	PML-N	MMA/JI	ANP	AWP	Others
2018	Male	37.6%	22.0%	12.5%	19.6%	5.6%	2.6%
	Female	28.6%	26.5%	11.8%	25.1%	6.5%	1.5%
2024	Male	59.4%	9.0%	11.6%	12.4%	2.7%	4.8%
	Female	50.9%	8.8%	14.8%	17.5%	1.8%	6.2%

Source: Authors' calculations.

Gender-Wise Analysis of Voter Preferences in General Elections 2018 and 2024

The electoral preferences of women and men in Pakistan demonstrated significant changes between the 2018 and 2024 general elections. PTI emerged as the preeminent party, with female support rising markedly from 28.6% in 2018 to 50.9% in 2024. Nevertheless, this statistic continues to be inferior to male support, which has likewise increased. Conversely, PML-N witnessed a substantial decrease in support across both genders, as indicated by the drop in women's support from 26.5% to 8.8%. MMA/JI had a rise in female backing, surpassing male backing in both elections. ANP, while still more favoured by women than men, had a decline in female support from 25.1% to 17.5%. The AWP witnessed a significant reduction in support from both sexes, especially as women's endorsement decreased from 6.5% to 1.8%. Women exhibited a significant rise in their preference for alternative parties, increasing from 1.5% in 2018 to 6.2% in 2024. The observed changes indicate



a notable political realignment, marked by PTI's growing appeal among women, a decrease in the allure of conventional parties like PML-N, and the fluctuating support encountered by smaller parties.

Primary Data Analysis

Socioeconomic factors influencing female voting preferences are identified as economic dependency, insufficient voter education among women, and women's limited employment opportunities. Cultural factors explored in this research project are women's social identity, family and tribal ties, and cultural values and traditions. Moreover, this research project has also investigated some religious factors, such as religious identity, misinterpretation of Islamic values and practices, and the intersection of Islamic values with sociocultural norms. How these factors influenced women's voting preferences in the 2018 and 2024 general elections in Buner is analysed in the following themes.

Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Women's Voting Preferences

The analysis revealed that socioeconomic factors were of great importance in female voting preferences in the general elections of 2018 and 2024 in Buner. Many participants reported that women's economic dependency, insufficient voter education among women, and limited employment opportunities influenced their voting preferences. Women's economic dependency makes them weak in decision-making, which affects their voting preferences too. Shakeela, one of the housewives, indicated that "*I cast my vote in favour of PTI because my husband told me to do so.*" This was not the solo case. Many housewives claimed that they were not independent in casting their votes in the elections. Crenshaw's (1991) structural intersectionality remains appealing here as different social, economic, and familial structures intersect with each other and influence women's presence in the public and political sphere. Likewise, Mahnoor, one of the voters from a village in Buner, revealed that "*I have cast my vote to PTI because my father took me to the polling station and advised me to do so.*" Similarly, many other housewives shared:

"We are not independent in casting a vote all the time, and it happened in the 2024 general elections as well. We cast our votes in favour of the political party indicated by male members of our family. We think this would not occur if we could have economic independence."

Insufficient voter education among women is also one of the challenges in women's independent voting preferences. Many participants revealed that due to a lack of voter education and proper awareness, women are not in a position to properly understand the importance of voting and cast a vote in a proper democratic way. Sameena, a resident of Buner, highlighted, "*Voter education and political awareness are necessary for women to understand the political party/candidate for casting a vote, but unfortunately, due to a lack of voter education, women are unable to do so.*" Similarly, another female voter shared that:

"Most of the women voters face difficulties in identifying a real candidate for casting a vote in favour of her/him, and this is because of the insufficient voter education among women."

Similarly, women's limited employment opportunities also influenced voting preferences. This makes women economically dependent and affects women's voting preferences. One of the female residents shared that "*I am economically dependent because of limited employment opportunities, which has made me unable to cast my vote independently.*" The statement closely echoes the structural intersectionality concept of Crenshaw (1989), where she argues that structural problems, such as economic, social, and cultural factors, influence women's empowerment in society. Bilal et al., (2020) also reported the role of socioeconomic factors in women's political empowerment, including women's voting preferences. Likewise, many women voters from the study area claimed that:

"Women's economic dependency is the root cause of their marginalised status in society, in which limited employment opportunities for women play a significant role. This marginalised position of women has influenced their voting preferences, and they have been casting votes as instructed by the male members of their families."

According to the theory of change model, step-by-step change is effective in bringing women's political empowerment. The crux of this theory supports this study's analysis because employment opportunities for women can make them economically independent, which can lead to the next step of improving women's voting preferences.

In short, the analysis in this section shows that women's economic dependency, insufficient voter education among women, and women's limited economic opportunities influenced women's voting preferences in the 2018 and 2023 general elections in Buner.



Pakhtun Culture and Women's Voting Preferences

Pakhtun culture has significant importance for female voting preferences. Many of the elements of Pakhtun culture, such as women's social identity, family and tribal ties, and cultural values and beliefs, affect women's voting preferences. The analysis in this project reveals that women's social identity, for example, their identification with their social group, has a role in their voting preferences. Participants in this study expressed that their identity with the specific groups binds them to cast a vote in favour of the candidate suggested by our social group. One of the female residents explained that "*I don't have a voting preference because it is decided by my father and elder brother for whom I have to cast a vote.*" The interpersonal domain of Collins' (2000) intersectionality is relevant here. She argued that the interpersonal domain of power within intersectionality influences people's social and political choices. Likewise, the analysis in this study reveals that social identity and women's affiliation with different social and ethnic groups influence their voting preferences.

Family and tribal ties are of significant importance to women's voting preferences. Many participants in this study indicated that their familial and tribal ties do not allow them to be independent in casting a vote. One of the women voters shared that, "*I have never cast a vote without the consent of my family/tribe.*" Similarly, another participant expressed that "*most of us (women voters) cast votes in favour of the candidate who is suggested by their family or tribal members.*" Familial and tribal ties are paramount to the Pakhtun culture, which influences different public and political spheres of women, including their voting preferences. Madeeha, one of the residents of Buner, revealed that "*women in our family/tribe are bound to cast a vote in favour of the candidate who is supported by male members of our family.*" This situation is closely linked to Crenshaw's (1991) concept of political intersectionality, where she argues that women's political life has always been influenced by different intersectional factors, in which their family is a fundamental factor. How family and tribal ties of women influence their voting preferences remains important to Sameena, as she shared in her interview:

"In the general elections of 2018 and 2024, our family held meetings before the elections and decided to vote in favour of PTI. Women voters in our family were not in a position to deny that decision, and we cast our vote accordingly."

Importantly, the familial and tribal ties of women bind them to the family in every aspect of their lives. Similarly, women's political life, including their voting preferences, is influenced by family ties. Shabana, a resident of Buner,

indicated that “*women in our family have cast votes in the 2024 elections in favour of the candidates as indicated by male members of our family.*” This has always been a Mill challenge for women. Mill (1858) argued that women’s liberty is significant in improving their political empowerment. Thus, according to Mill’s argument, women’s voting preferences cannot be improved until they are given freedom from family and tribal ties to cast a vote independently.

Along with women’s social identity and family/tribal ties, the Pakhtun cultural values and traditions also have an impact on women’s voting preferences. Many participants shared that due to cultural values and traditions, for instance, the concept of purdah, they are bound to take permission from their families to go outside. This practice makes them dependent on family in each and every decision, including their voting preferences. Cultural values and traditions are very important for women’s voting preferences. Nida, a resident of Buner, said that “*due to many cultural traditions, women are not capable of living their political life independently, they cannot even freely decide about their voting preferences.*” Drawing on Collins’ (2000) understanding of intersectionality and matrices of domination, the structural domain in Pakhtun culture and tradition is discriminatory for women’s social and political rights, including women’s voting preferences.

To sum up the analysis in this section, it is suggested that different elements of the Pakhtun culture, such as women’s social identity, women’s family and tribal ties, and cultural values and traditions, have a strong influence on women’s voting preferences. Due to these factors, women are not independent in casting their votes. Women are bound to consider their social identity, family/tribal ties, and the Pakhtun cultural values and traditions whenever making their voting preferences.

Religious Factors Influencing Female Voting Preferences

Participants in this study revealed that religious factors play a role in women’s voting preferences. For example, religious identity, misinterpretation of the Islamic values and practices, and the intersection of Islamic values with sociocultural norms are the main religious factors that influence women’s voting preferences. Many participants shared that women’s religious identity affects their voting preferences because women prefer religious parties when casting votes. Haleema, a resident of Buner, indicated that “*I have heard many women voters were in favour of casting a vote for Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (F) because they thought this is a religious party.*” Another woman voter expressed that “*Women liked to cast their vote for religious parties in the 2024 General*



Elections because they [religious parties] talk about women's rights." Borrowing from Crenshaw's (1989) concept of structural intersectionality for analysis, it can be argued that the religious factor intersects with women's political life in Buner and affect women's voting preferences. Crenshaw argues that different factors, such as social, economic, ethnic, and religious, intersect with each other and influence women's experiences in the public domain, including their political experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Similarly, Rubina, a school teacher, revealed that *"I cast my vote to Jamat-e-Islami [political party] in the 2018 and 2024 General Elections because it is a religious party and they often talk about women's rights in Islam."* It is evident from this discussion that religious identity has a role in women's voting preferences.

The study further shows that misinterpretations of Islamic values and practices also affect women's voting preferences. For instance, the idea that women should not work in the public domain is one of the misinterpretations of the religion that makes women's political perspective weak. As a result, women's less exposure to the public leads to their political dependency on men, which further influences women's voting preferences. Zunera, a daughter of one of the farmers, indicated that *"Due to religious misinterpretations and practices, our political choices and voting preferences are affected."* Similarly, another participant said:

"We [women] understand that it is a misinterpretation of the Islamic values and practices that women should only do household chores and should not be allowed outside the home. This practice makes women less exposed to the public and their political life, including voting preferences, remains under the influence of men."

Drawing on Collins' (2000) concept of structural domain of power within an intersectional perspective, it is argued that religious misinterpretation is one of the structural problems in Buner that has influenced women's voting preferences. Religious leaders (men) misinterpret Islamic values and practices to keep women subordinate, which has affected women's political life and their voting preferences. Haseena, a female interviewee, shared that *"Women understand that this is a religious misinterpretation that women should not cast a vote. Religion (Islam) does not stop us from casting a vote."* Borrowing from the TOC model for analysis, it can be argued that this religious misinterpretation is one of the key factors that has affected the social and political phenomenon and influenced women's voting preferences. Kirby et al., (2006) have argued that understanding the concept of the change model actually helps us to identify key factors that drive change in a social or political phenomenon.

Data also reveals that the intersection of Islamic values with sociocultural norms influences women's voting preferences. It means that the Pakhtun culture has dominated Islamic values to keep women in a subordinate position. Many participants claimed that sociocultural practices in a traditional Pakhtun society in Buner have dominated Islamic values that influence women's experiences in the private and public domains, including women's voting preferences. For instance, Rehana, a medical doctor, shared that "*Religion (Islam) does not stop us from participating in political activities and casting a vote, but it is these culturally dominated values that do not allow us to cast a vote independently.*" Likewise, Hadeeqa, one of the college teachers, said that "*Islam has given us the right to vote independently, but the Pakhtun cultural values have dominated religious values that do not allow us to be independent in casting a vote.*" Mill's (1958) concept of classical liberty can be used here to analyse how women's voting preferences are influenced by oppressive sociocultural, religious, and gender structures. His analysis that women's political empowerment cannot be ensured until they are given liberty from such oppressive sociocultural and religious structures is relevant in this case. In the same discussion, one participant said:

"Due to socioculturally dominated Islamic values, women in Buner cannot participate independently in political activities. They are not even free to cast a vote independently. This was seen in the 2024 General Elections, where many women didn't cast their votes because it was a matter of honour for many families."

In terms of culturally dominant Islamic values in a traditional Pakhtun society like that of Buner, it is evident that women's voting preferences are affected. For example, Rubeena, a housewife, indicated that "*we don't even have a say in many domestic affairs, and when it comes to voting, we cannot even think of casting a vote.*" This situation clearly expresses that concepts of honour and purdah in the Pakhtun culture influence women's voting preferences. Analysing this situation in light of Collins' (2000) argument, it can be said that the structural domain of power in Buner held by men affects women's political experiences, including their voting preferences.



4. CONCLUSION

This study has explored various socioeconomic, cultural, and religious factors which affect women's voting preferences in Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This research found that socioeconomic factors significantly shaped and reshaped women's voting preferences in the 2018 and 2024 general elections. Among those factors, women's economic dependency is of paramount significance, which influenced women's voting preferences. For instance, due to women's economic dependency on men, they cast votes as dictated by the male members of their family. This research further concludes that the absence of political education influences women's voting preferences, so they cannot cast votes based on their own independent analysis of the candidates contesting elections. Likewise, limited unemployment opportunities for women raise women's economic dependency on men, and most of the women cast votes as suggested by male members of their families.

Based on the analysis and discussion, this project finds that the Pakhtun culture significantly affects women's voting preferences. For example, social identity is one of the Pakhtun cultural elements that influences women's voting preferences. Due to women's affiliations with the social groups, they are bound to cast a vote in favour of the candidate as decided by their social group. Familial and tribal ties of women are also a part of the analysis. It is found that women are supposed to consider familial and tribal ties when casting votes. Women voters are not in a position to ignore the candidate decided by their family or tribe when casting votes. Moreover, the Pakhtun cultural values and beliefs in Buner affected women's voting preferences. Due to the concept of purdah, many women are not allowed to go outside to vote. In case they are allowed, they are accompanied by male members to the polling station to cast their votes for the candidate who is suggested by their male family members.

It is essential to mention here that some religious factors were also identified in the analysis. Religious identity, misinterpretation of the Islamic values and practices, and the intersection of Islamic values with sociocultural norms are the key factors influencing women's voting preferences. It is found that women's religious identity influences their voting preferences. For example, because religious parties often talk about women's rights in Islam, women want to vote for the religious parties' candidates. Similarly, misinterpretation of the Islamic values and practices, such as restricting women to the home based on the argument that it is an Islamic compulsion, affects women's exposure to the public domain, which hampers women's political education



and ultimately affects women's voting preferences. The intersection of Islamic values with sociocultural norms is another finding. Due to confounding religious values with sociocultural norms, women's participation in political activities is poor, which ultimately influences women's voting preferences in Buner.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis and conclusion of this research project, the following policy recommendations may be considered to ensure women's independent voting preferences:

- ▶ Political awareness and education of women need to be improved to ensure that women have independent, free from socioeconomic, religious, and cultural barriers, voting preferences.
- ▶ Community outreach programmes may be launched in rural and urban areas to engage with women voters to educate them on the voting process and encourage women's participation.
- ▶ As there are cultural challenges to women voters, gender-sensitive voting procedures may be adopted. For instance, an online voting process for women may be launched.
- ▶ As there are economic challenges to women voters, microfinance and entrepreneurship support programmes need to be ensured to economically empower women voters.
- ▶ Social protection programmes, such as education and health insurance programmes, may be introduced to improve women voters' social status.
- ▶ Looking into cultural challenges, cultural sensitivity programmes may be started by the government, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies to promote women's political rights.
- ▶ Since women's familial and tribal ties dictate their voting preference, tribal, familial, and religious leaders may be involved to promote women's political empowerment through voting.



- ▶ Independent resource centres or women empowerment institutions need to be established for women to improve women's advocacy in private and political spheres.
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation units may be established to evaluate women's voting progress from time to time.



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APPENDIX

Table 2: List of Female Polling Stations in District Buner with 0% Turnout in 2018 and 2024 General Elections

S. No	Name of female Polling Stations	Turnout in %
1	Government Girls Primary School Ambela	00
2	Government Primary School Kowga	00
3	Government Primary School No.1 Agarai	00
4	Government High School (PS-2) Amnawar	00
5	Government Primary School Amnawar	00
6	Government Girls High School Matwanai (PS-1)	00
7	Government Girls Middle School Gul Bandai,	00
8	Government High School Alami Banda,	00
9	Government High School Girarai	00
10	Government Degree College Jowar	00
11	Government Middle School Bhai Kalay	00
12	Government High School Ghazi Khanai	00
13	Government Girls Primary School Ghazi Khanai,	00
14	Swat Public School Batai	00
15	Government Middle School Balo Khan	00
16	Government Girls Primary School, Dokada	00
17	Government Girls Middle School Elai	00
18	Government Girls High School, Hisar	00
19	Government Primary School No.1 Bagra	00
20	Government Girls High Secondary School Bagra	00
21	Government Girls Primary School Topdara	00

Source: ECP (n.d.).



THE IMPACT OF THE LAND RECORD MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (LRMIS) ON LAND-RELATED CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Saqib Hussain¹

ABSTRACT

This research evaluated the impact of access to digitised land record information on land-related corruption within government administration and management departments and civil cases in Punjab, Pakistan. Utilising the roll-out of the programme, the study exploited the implementation of the Punjab Land Record Management Information System (LRMIS), a World Bank project, as a natural experiment. The analysis leveraged novel data collected from the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) of Punjab and the Lahore High Court (LHC), encompassing land-related complaints, inquiries, and cases, which served as indicators of corruption within the relevant departments. I provide both the intent to treat and local average treatment effect estimates. The findings reveal that the early implementation of LRMIS significantly increased the registration of complaints at ACE and civil cases at the LHC, while there is a decrease in the frequency of inquiries and cases. These results provide suggestive evidence of the role of LRMIS in curbing corruption through enhanced transparency, as indicated by the increased public utilisation of the system. The study underscores the effectiveness of digitisation and e-governance systems in improving land administration, reducing information asymmetry, and mitigating corruption within land-related departments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Overview

Does the digitisation of land records reduce corruption and civil cases in the land administration department and the high court? This research aims to answer this critical question. The hypothesis is that access to transparent land record information can potentially decrease information asymmetry. With transparent information accessible to the complainant,² defendant,³ and adjudicator,⁴ the Punjab Land Record Management Information System (LRMIS) can effectively curb corruption. Therefore, access to transparent information may lead to a reduction in corruption. The study leverages the phased implementation of LRMIS by the Punjab government as a natural experiment. The primary outcome variables include the number of registered complaints against the land bureaucracy, their transition to inquiries and cases, and their disposal rate.

The novel data used in this research are sourced from the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) and the Lahore High Court (LHC), Punjab, and measured at the district level. This data represents the aggregated number of complaints, inquiries, and cases per district per year from 2014 to 2022. The LHC data is a balanced panel of districts and weeks, starting from the year 2018. By estimating the causal effect of LRMIS on corruption levels, this study aims to provide suggestive evidence for government officials, policymakers, and researchers. The findings support e-governance initiatives to combat corruption and enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in land administration.

The implementation of the LRMIS is a costly intervention that encompasses infrastructural, social, and behavioural changes, requiring a significant budget. The growing literature on this particular programme presents mixed findings. For instance, Ullah & Hussain (2023), utilising generalised

² It refers to an individual or entity who submits a complaint regarding land-related corruption to the ACE of Punjab.

³ It refers to the individual or entity against whom a complaint regarding land-related corruption is filed with the ACE of Punjab. These defendants are typically part of the government administration or management departments involved in land-related activities.

⁴ Refers to the ACE of Punjab that is responsible for reviewing, investigating, and making decisions on the complaints regarding land-related corruption.



multi-level mixed effect and two-stage least square models, found that the implementation of LRMIS, coupled with alternative dispute resolution (ADR) centres, led to districts with early treatment experiencing an average increase of approximately 50 land-related dispute cases compared to those in districts with late treatment. Additionally, it increased successful mediation outcomes by 126 cases in the treatment region, with no effect on mediation failure cases.

Another study by Aman-Rana & Minaudier (2024) on the phased implementation of the LRMIS in Punjab highlighted the unintended consequences of capacity building. Their findings revealed a significant decrease in tax collection following digitisation, attributed not to a shrinking tax base but to reduced bureaucratic efficacy in revenue collection. Beg (2022) found that the reform increased land rental activity, facilitated non-agricultural employment for landowners, and improved land access for cultivating households.

Abdullah et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study indicating an improved perception of land tenure security among stakeholders. Despite this positive perception, there has been no corresponding increase in accessibility to bank loans using land as collateral. The study also suggests that land records became more reliable following the implementation of the LRMIS. However, concerns remain regarding the clarity and simplicity of the new system (Ullah & Hussain, 2023).

Considering the size of the intervention, research evaluating the spillover effects remains limited. There is scant investigative research to precisely estimate the programme's causal effects on important outcomes such as corruption within land administration, farmers' access to agricultural credit, and sectoral shift. Addressing these gaps in the literature, this study aims to contribute by analysing how the implementation of the LRMIS influences corruption levels within the land bureaucracy.

This study, therefore, estimates the impact of LRMIS on the frequency of corruption incidents and their resolution, coupled with civil cases in the high court. To do so, the difference-in-differences (DID) is used as the main specification using the roll-out of the programme. In addition, to overcome the endogeneity issues, the local average treatment effect (LATE) is estimated. The estimates of LATE are presented in the appendix. The results are consistent and robust. Furthermore, the estimates from the correlated random effect model are also provided in the appendix, which return the same estimates as fixed effect regression while controlling for the potential time-invariant covariates.

The findings suggest that the LRMIS has increased the registration of civil cases and complaints using the mechanism of the availability of transparent information. The findings also show a decrease in the frequency of inquiries and cases at the ACE, which suggests the early and effective resolution of complaints. However, there is a decrease in the resolution of investigative incidents due to complex managerial issues. Additionally, a significant increase in registration of civil cases in the high court was observed, but no effect on other cases as a falsification test. This paper contributes to the literature related to state capacity building and its spillover effects.

Programme Description

Historical Background

The history of land administration and revenue generation in the Indian Subcontinent dates back to the 13th and 14th centuries, with early efforts in land record registration and management initiated by Ala Uddin Khilji, the first Indian Sultan (Ali, 2013). This practice was continued by subsequent rulers, notably Sher Shah Suri in the 16th century, who introduced fixed crop rates to improve land measurement (Thakur et al., 2005). In the 17th century, the Mughal Emperor Akbar implemented significant reforms by classifying lands into various categories and revenue estates (Ali, 2013).

The British colonial period further advanced the land administration system to enhance land revenue collection (Marshall, 1975). Due to difficulties in applying laws across the subcontinent uniformly, the British introduced and adjusted state-specific regulations over nearly 90 years (Thakur et al., 2005). A notable intervention during this period was the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, which restricted land transfers from agricultural to non-agricultural classes (Cheema et al., 2006). Although some amendments were made over time, foundational land-related laws, such as the Transfer of Property Act of 1882 and the Punjab Tenancy Act of 1887, remained in place after the independence of Pakistan and India in 1947. For example, the Land Revenue Act of 1887 was revised as the Punjab Land Revenue Act of 1967. Today, Pakistan's land administration system still operates under the framework established during the British era (UN-Habitat, 2012).

Punjab Land Record Management Information System

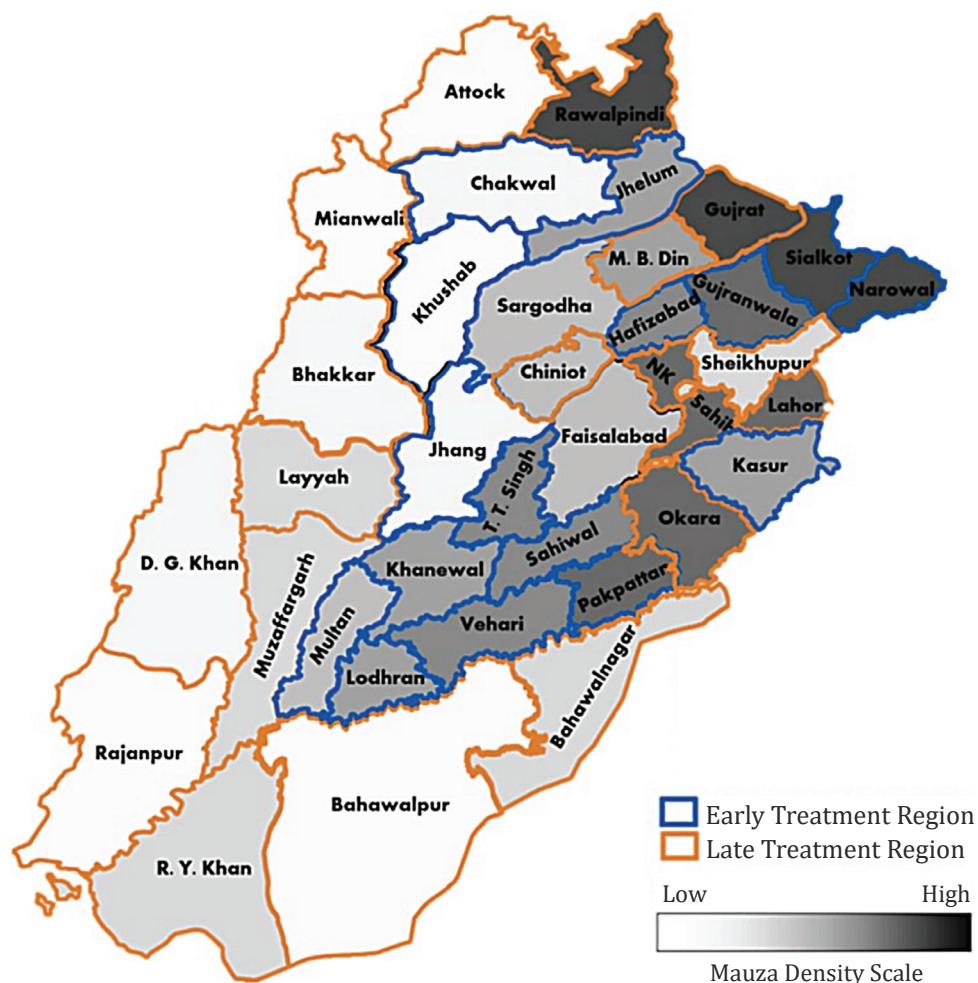
Punjab province, covering an area of 205,345 km², is Pakistan's most populous province, with over 120 million inhabitants, constituting 55% of the national population. The majority of Punjab's residents live in rural areas where agriculture is the predominant economic sector. Recognising the need to enhance land administration, develop functional land markets, and integrate these improvements into broader governance frameworks, the Punjab provincial government, in collaboration with the World Bank (WB), launched the Punjab Land Record Management and Information System (PLRMIS) under the Punjab Land Record Authority (PLRA). This initiative aimed to improve public access to land information and enhance transparency in land records.

Initially implemented in eighteen districts (early treatment group), the programme expanded in its second phase to include the entire province (late treatment group). Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of districts exposed to these implementation phases. Key features of the PLRMIS include:

- **Automated Issuance of Land Ownership Documents:** The system issues fard⁵ in 23,183 out of 25,709 revenue estates (rural and semi-urban), covering 90% of Punjab's land. It has significantly improved service delivery, with fard issued in 30 minutes and mutations processed in 50 minutes.
- **Establishment of Land Record Centres:** A total of 151 state-of-the-art Land Record Centres have been set up, integrated with 45 sub-registrar offices across Punjab. This infrastructure has enhanced the authentication and reliability of land records, increasing the collateral value of land.
- **Online Access to Land Records:** The system provides around-the-clock online access to land records through a dedicated website, streamlining the land registration process and improving accessibility.

⁵ A fard is an official document that provides detailed information about a piece of land, including its area, location, and ownership details.

Figure 1: Implementation of LRMIS



Source: Author's calculations.

How Does It Work?

The PLRMIS Project was developed by the Project Management Unit, incorporating insights from pilot projects in districts such as Kasur, Lahore, Rahim-Yar Khan, and Gujrat, as well as experiences from other countries. Since its full implementation across all districts of Punjab in 2017, the system has facilitated a streamlined process for landholders to search for, obtain, and register their land.



Landholders can visit a service centre where the staff retrieves records using the landholder's name, father's or husband's name, or *khewat*⁶ number, and verify their identity with a computerised national identity card (CNIC). After verification through biometric devices for thumb impression and photo, the landholder receives a copy of their record within 10-15 minutes, following the payment of the specified fee.

Theory of Change

The PLRMIS has exerted a notable influence on stakeholders through institutional, social, and behavioural mechanisms.

Institutional Changes: PLRMIS has transformed methods and procedures, notably through the development of web-based software, the establishment of Automated Record Centres (ARCs), and the reengineering of the land record management system. These advancements include the creation of a standardised monitoring dashboard that allows top-level management to oversee activities and ensure adherence to standard operating procedures at all levels. ARCs, which expedite the issuance of fards (essential land record documents), aim to enhance client satisfaction, reduce transaction times and costs, and improve land tenure security. The legal and policy framework of LRMIS supports these institutional improvements by ensuring smooth operation and aligning with project objectives, particularly in enhancing public service delivery. Importantly, LRMIS facilitates easier access to land records for women, thereby promoting their participation in land transactions.

Behavioural Changes: LRMIS has implemented various training and capacity-building initiatives to foster positive attitudes among key stakeholders, particularly employees of the land department. These initiatives have addressed initial resistance from Tehsil-level land record staff (patwaris), including strikes and work refusals. To overcome these challenges, the programme introduced incentives and capacity-building measures, such as constructing new field offices with IT facilities, providing transportation allowances, and allocating 2% of land revenues to revenue officers. These efforts have helped to alleviate concerns about job security and clarify new roles under the system.

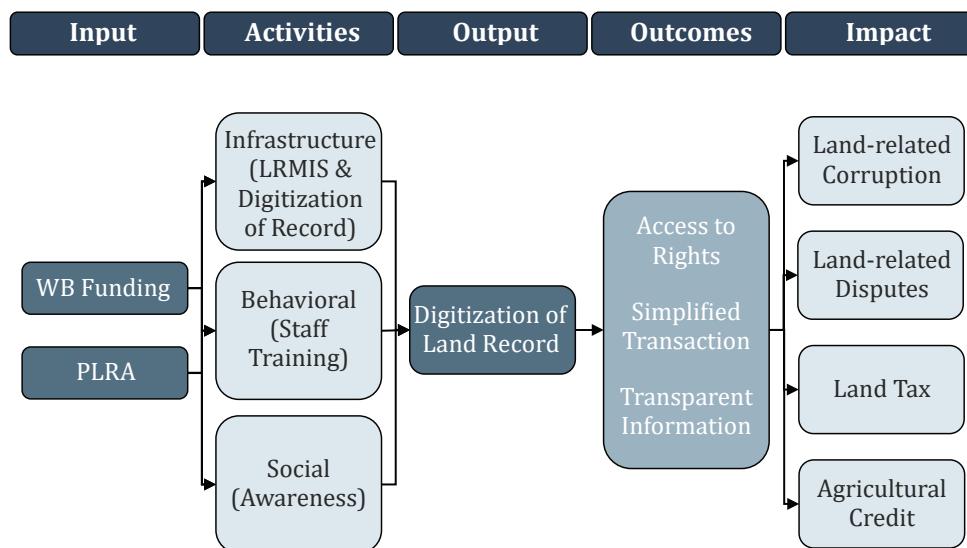
⁶ *Khewat* refers to a land record document that lists the owners of land holdings in a specific area, providing their details and the portion of land they own within a village or region.

Social Awareness: Social awareness campaigns have played a crucial role in the project's success, especially in rural areas where public response can be slow. LRMIS has conducted multiple awareness initiatives to encourage active participation in the digitised record management system. Key efforts included 36 workshops from December 2011 to February 2014, engaging 5,663 internal stakeholders, such as district administration officers (district collectors, additional district collectors, assistant commissioners) and revenue functionaries (tehsildars, girdawars/qanungos, patwaris). Additionally, consultations with 250 representatives from the Punjab Bar Association and Field Revenue Staff have further ensured effective programme implementation.

Result Chain Analysis

Based on a detailed analysis of the LRMIS programme and its implementation mechanisms, the hypothesis suggests that its effects are mediated through key components identified in the result chain depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Result Chain Analysis



Source: Author's calculations.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary purpose of land reforms is to secure citizens' property rights (Conning & Deb, 2007). Various reforms have been implemented to achieve this goal, including land titling (Zhang et al., 2020), reforms in land administration processes (Gignoux et al., 2013; Enemark, 2009; Conning & Deb, 2007), redistributive reforms that incorporate information systems allowing citizens access to their land (Conning & Deb, 2007; Adams & Howell, 2001), market-driven reforms (Gauster & Isakson, 2007), and restitution (Conning & Deb, 2007; Gignoux et al., 2013). These reforms can have significant spillover effects on the state, though they may also result in unintended consequences (Besley, 1995; Deininger, 2003; Feder & Nishio, 1999). National and international bodies play a crucial role in land-related reforms. According to USAID (2010), the World Bank (2004), and Holstein (1996), the World Bank has undertaken several initiatives in land reform, investing billions of dollars across developing nations.

Core components of land-related reforms include sustainable development indicators, environmental conditions, geographical factors, political landscape, access to credit, and economic factors (Conning & Deb, 2007; De Soto, 2007; North, 1990). Failures in land reform can often be attributed to a lack of accountability, poor implementation, and unclear arrangements (Conning & Deb, 2007; Dupont et al., 2003; Scott, 1999; Lauria-Santiago, 1999). To mitigate unintended consequences and ensure successful implementation, a rigorous monitoring and accountability system is required, accounting for all implementation mechanisms, feasibility, and stakeholder inputs (World Bank, 2004; Conning & Deb, 2007). Additionally, a quick feedback mechanism is necessary for effective monitoring and evaluation, reducing the risk of failure. One approach is to leverage impact evaluation studies conducted by researchers.

The digitisation of land records in the Punjab province of Pakistan provides a suitable environment to conduct a quasi-experimental study, estimating the causal effects on intended and unintended outcomes such as disputes, corruption, access to credit, and tax collection by the board of revenue. The LRMIS serves as a pivotal catalyst for land reforms. Recent initiatives toward digitisation and e-governance have contributed to the transformation of governance through information and communication technology (ICT), coupled with models such as government to business (G2B), government to citizen (G2C), and government to government (G2G) to improve service delivery for all stakeholders (Arfeen & Khan, 2012). The introduction of LRMIS in Punjab exemplifies this model, transforming land governance in a modern way and positively impacting state capacity.

3. EXISTING EVIDENCE

Corruption in land administration presents significant challenges across different regions, undermining governance, economic growth, and social equity. Research studies have explored various strategies to combat these issues, including transparency, institutional reforms, and community engagement.

Adeyinka (2020) underscored the critical role of transparency in addressing corruption within Africa's land sector, specifically in Nigeria. Corruption manifests in bribery, favouritism, falsification of records, and inefficient processes, creating barriers to equitable access and trust in land administration. Their study emphasised the importance of transparent land title registration to mitigate these challenges. Transparency—defined as openness, accessibility, and accountability in procedures—has been identified as a key strategy. Data collected from Nigerian legal and estate surveying professionals, as well as land bureau staff, revealed systemic inefficiencies exacerbated by a lack of openness, which enables corruption to flourish unchecked. The authors advocated for reform measures, such as secure land tenure and streamlined registration systems, supported by insights from the World Bank for their critical role in economic development.

Despite modernisation efforts, corruption persists due to a weak regulatory framework and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Corruption's pervasive nature hinders the effectiveness of initiatives like the National Information System (NIS). Strengthening transparency is essential to enhance trust, secure tenure, and drive economic growth. Future research should focus on tailoring anti-corruption strategies to diverse African contexts.

In Bangladesh, Sakib et al., (2022) examined the implementation of the National Integrity Strategy (NIS) as a means to combat corruption in land administration. The NIS includes measures such as digitisation, training programmes, and citizen charters to promote good governance. However, challenges such as local political interference, inadequately skilled manpower, and persistent rule-breaking undermine its effectiveness. Qualitative data from interviews and official documents highlight both the progress and limitations of NIS implementation.



The authors argued that a hybrid approach, combining systemic reforms with localised solutions, is necessary for sustainable improvements. While initiatives like e-Namji digitisation have enhanced transparency, addressing social and political dynamics remains critical. Future efforts should integrate innovative, context-specific strategies to build dynamic, corruption-free land management systems.

Brankov & Tanjević (2013) provided a comprehensive analysis of corruption's impact on land administration. Their study identified bribery and embezzlement as primary forms of corruption that erode public confidence and hinder economic development. Weak institutional frameworks, low public official salaries, and political interference are key contributors. Corruption exacerbates social injustice and inequality, particularly for marginalised groups seeking land rights. Additionally, corrupt officials often overlook environmentally detrimental land uses for personal gain.

The authors highlighted successful anti-corruption initiatives in various countries, emphasising the need for robust institutional checks, fair land distribution practices, and community involvement. While the research provided a broad framework, its findings are applicable globally, offering practical insights for policymakers seeking to strengthen land administration systems.

Burns et al. (2007) explored the indicators of success and challenges in land administration reforms. Key success factors include security of tenure, efficient and accessible services, and transparent systems. Digital tools and robust spatial data infrastructures further enhance transparency and informed decision-making. However, reform efforts face challenges such as adapting to diverse legal and social contexts, ensuring stakeholder engagement, and maintaining sustainability through capacity building and funding.

The study underscored the importance of tailored reforms to address poverty, environmental protection, and gender equity. Although the research lacked specific variables, it offered a valuable framework for understanding land administration reform in developing countries, emphasising the complexity of real-world conditions.

Mathiba (2021) investigated the role of corruption in undermining land reform programmes in the post-apartheid era in South Africa. Despite efforts to redress historical injustices, corruption—manifested in bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, and illicit land deals—continues to impede equitable redistribution. These practices erode the credibility of land reform programmes, sustaining inequality and public dissatisfaction.

The study highlighted the need for robust anti-corruption mechanisms, community empowerment, and inclusive decision-making processes. Strengthening oversight institutions, fostering a culture of integrity, and involving affected communities are pivotal for achieving equitable land reform. Mathiba's (2021) findings provide critical insights for policymakers addressing the enduring legacy of apartheid and striving for transitional justice.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data

A balanced panel dataset on outcome variables from 2014 to 2022 was collected from ACE Punjab records and the LHC. In Pakistan, the distribution of ACE Punjab offices mirrors the pattern of revenue estate districts, although data are typically compiled at the division level. Data on complaints, inquiries, and cases were gathered through a field survey, with observations recorded at the district and year levels. Consequently, year and district fixed effects were introduced (judge fixed effect in case of Lahore high court data) in the regression model to account for district or year-specific effects and provide robust estimates.

In addition to the ACE data, it is necessary to control for factors that might differentially affect the treatment or outcome variables. Data on the political landscape of the district, literacy rates, crimes, and disputes are currently being processed.



Summary Statistics

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Early Treated		Late Treated	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: ACE Data				
Total complaints	122.7370	170.0420	123.8890	160.9540
Pending complaints	0.3680	1.7720	3.4800	21.0400
Disposed-off complaints	122.3680	169.6880	120.4280	158.6580
Total inquiries	51.1110	47.3950	58.3390	80.3190
Pending enquiries	0.9120	3.0810	1.9220	6.3600
Disposed-off inquiries	50.1990	46.6990	56.4170	79.5700
Total cases	11.6730	9.2610	12.1220	13.7290
Pending cases	0.7020	2.9500	0.9160	2.4950
Disposed-off cases	10.9710	8.4130	11.2110	12.6990
Panel B: ACE Data				
Civil cases	134.4110	100.7090	76.0790	61.5080
Mediation success cases	215.3700	119.8140	175.1400	109.9860
Criminal cases	119.8840	132.7480	83.7710	73.8710
Family cases	182.3090	186.3840	138.6100	119.8530
Guardianship cases	9.3340	11.0430	9.9140	13.6170
Rent cases	2.7210	5.3820	1.6420	2.5720
Other cases	20.0040	24.9680	19.2190	22.4430

Source: Author's calculations.

Definitions of Key Variables

In this paper, all complaints related to the land sector, including the revenue department and land management staff, such as patwaris, tehsildars and those who are directly linked with land-related administration, were included. The definition of these incidents follows the standard definition of ACE, where they categorise each complaint, inquiry, and case in terms of their relevance. The variables in this study consisted of complaints, such as bribery, criminal misconduct, embezzlement, embezzlement of record, forgery, fraud, misuse of powers and tampering of records.

Complaints: A complaint is a formal application filed by the complainant against a land bureaucrat at ACE and seeks justice for alleged misconduct in the land departments. It serves as the primary step to initiate action against such misconduct. Complaints can be lodged in a number of ways, including directly by the affected party (complainant) to inquire about the matter, by the affected individual or reporter to request a trap raid, by formulating a source report, through directives, departmental references, or court references. Complaints are typically submitted to the offices of the director general, additional director general, regional directors, or deputy directors, and are then forwarded to an inquiry officer who is responsible for recommending appropriate action, if necessary. However, the frequency of complaints excludes those that are irrelevant to corruption and are thus forwarded to the relevant home department.

Inquiry: An inquiry is the initial action taken by an anti-corruption inquiry officer after a complaint is submitted by complainants, which is deemed liable for investigation. This process is governed by Rule 5 of the Punjab Anti-Corruption Establishment Rules, 2014. The primary objective of the inquiry is to verify the authenticity of the complaint, discourage non-substantive complainants, and ensure that no public servant or citizen is unnecessarily implicated based on a false or fraudulent complaint. The ACE can also initiate an inquiry based on a source report, a directive, a National Accountability Bureau (NAB) reference, or in compliance with orders from the federal or provincial ombudsman or superior courts, such as the LHC or the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

The inquiry may be conducted by an individual officer or a team designated by the regional or central head of the establishment. During the inquiry, relevant parties are summoned and questioned about the complaint. After collecting and verifying the necessary information, the inquiry officer evaluates the available evidence and concludes. If the allegations are found to be unsubstantiated, the inquiry may be dismissed or forwarded to the concerned department for appropriate action under efficiency and discipline rules. If the allegations are validated, the registration of a case may be recommended.

Case: If, after a detailed and comprehensive inquiry, there is sufficient evidence suggesting the commission of an offence, a criminal case is registered at the ACE police station by the order of the competent authority, as outlined in Rule 6 of the Punjab Anti-Corruption Establishment Rules, 2014. This marks the beginning of the legal process, and an investigation is conducted in accordance with the law.



Once the case is registered, the concerned department is informed about the development. If necessary, the arrest of the accused public servant may take place, but this requires permission from the competent authority. However, if the public servant is caught red-handed during a trap raid, no prior permission is needed for either the registration of the case or the arrest.

After the case registration and any necessary arrests, the next steps in the process are carried out. The investigation continues to collect further evidence, and if the findings support the allegations, the accused may be arrested. Once the investigation is complete, the challan, or formal charge sheet, is submitted to the court. Following this, the case proceeds to prosecution, where the evidence is presented for trial, and the legal process moves toward a resolution.

Conversion from Complaints to Inquiries: This variable measured the proportion of complaints that proceeded to the inquiry stage. It reflects the effectiveness of the ACE in identifying potentially credible complaints that warrant formal verification. A decrease in conversion suggests an early resolution of the complaint using the transparent information from LRMIS, leading to the predictability of the final decision.

Conversion from Complaints to Cases: This variable captured the proportion of complaints that converted to cases, similar to the conversion from complaints to inquiries. However, the difference is the intensity of corruption. This significant decrease in this variable suggests a potential resolution of complaints at an early stage.

Conversion from Inquiries to Cases: This variable represented the proportion of inquiries that culminate in the registration of cases.

Empirical Strategy

Given the phased implementation of the LRMIS across districts in Punjab, the presence of counterfactuals within the region was leveraged. To implement this approach, districts were categorised into early treatment and late treatment groups. The first strategy involves comparing the mean difference before treatment, with the expectation that this pre-treatment mean difference will be negligible. The second approach establishes parallel trends between both groups, satisfying the basic assumption of the difference-in-differences methodology. Finally, using Equation 1, preliminary findings supported by an event study are presented.

$$\text{incident}_{it} = \varphi \text{treat}_i \times \text{early}_t + \iota_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1),$$

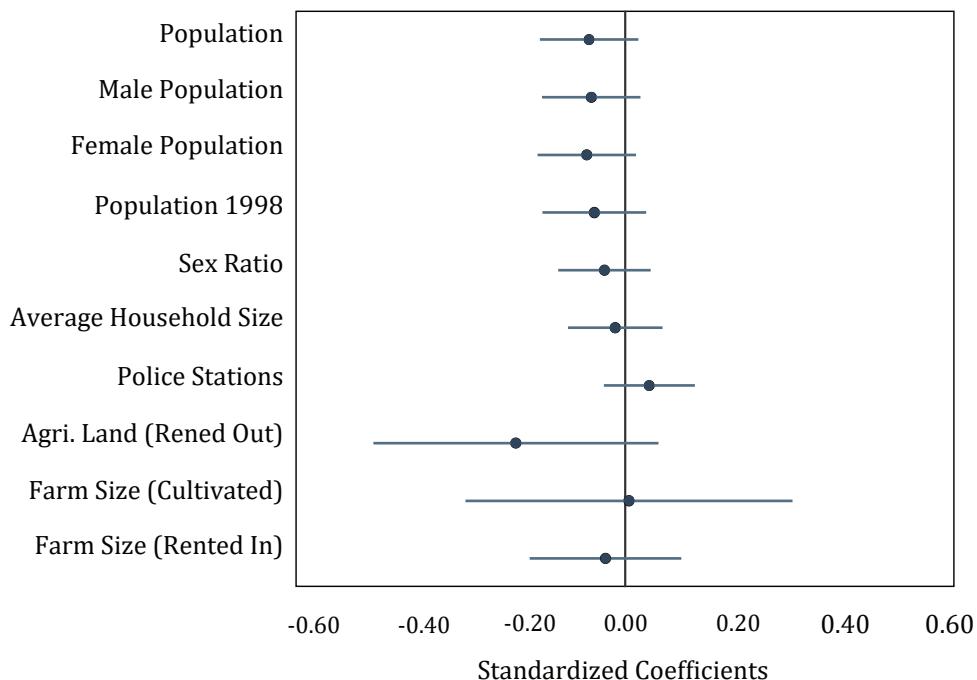
where incident_{it} is the outcome variable, i.e., the total number of complaints, inquiries and cases, and their disposal and pendency in district i and year (week in case of LHC data) t . This number was divided by the total population, total area, and total number of mauzas of the district for normalisation. location_i is a binary variable defined as $\text{treat} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if district is early treated} \\ 0 & \text{if district is late treated} \end{cases}$. early_t is a binary variable indicating the years of early treatment. ι_i represents the district fixed effect to partial out the unobserved factors of the district that may have an impact on the outcome variables. τ_t represents the calendar year fixed effect, considering the observed level of the outcome variable and accounts for the unobserved heterogeneity caused by time. Finally, ε_{it} is the error term.

The same model was estimated using a correlated-random effect model and instrumental variable (IV) estimation. The first stage and IV specifications, coupled with the mechanical specification of the correlated-random effect model and the random effects, are given in Appendix A.

One can be concerned about the omitted variables and confounding factors. For example, if there is a factor that can affect both the implementation and outcome at the same time, like an income shock, the estimates from Specification (1) could be biased. To address these issues, the balance test before the implementation of the programme is provided in Figure 2. This shows that there was no statistical difference between early and late-treated districts. This is also seconded by the World Bank implementation report that the selection of early and late treated districts was independent of any district characteristics, but the budget of the programme was a key factor.

In addition to baseline characteristics, the potential covariates that could affect the outcome of interest were controlled for. The estimates of the correlated-random effect model are provided in the appendix. The rationale behind moving from fixed effects to an alternative approach was to control for the time-invariant variables, for instance, the number of mauzas in districts. However, the correlated-random effect returned the same estimates as the fixed effects model.

Figure 3: Baseline Characteristics



Notes: Standardised coefficients of baseline characteristics. Data on these characteristics were sourced from the Development Statistics of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and Demographic Health Surveys (1997–2010). The point estimates are obtained from a regression of the respective covariates on a staggered variable indicating the phase of implementation. Hollow circles represent the point estimates, and horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Author's calculations.

To circumvent the potential endogeneity of the implementation of the programme, the planned rollout of the programme was leveraged as an instrumental variable for actual implementation. The local average treatment estimates are given in the appendix. The results from alternative approaches were consistent with intent-to-treat analysis and were robust.

The World Bank and the Punjab Government, in conjunction with the LRMIS, introduced the ADR centres to manage the overwhelming number of land disputes among citizens. The findings are reported in Table 5, where we can observe a higher number of registered civil cases followed by an increase in dispute resolution, which is the effect of ADR centres. However, in the case of ACE, no other interventions were introduced that could affect the registration or handling of complaints within the ACE.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Impact on Land-related Corruption Incidents

The primary indicator of corruption is the frequency of complaints, inquiries and cases initiated by the ACE Punjab against defendants. Since many complaints might be false, ACE investigates each complaint and converts it into an inquiry if warranted; otherwise, the complaint is disposed of. First, the effect of LRMIS on the number of complaints registered by the ACE Punjab was estimated. Second, the frequency of inquiries and cases was estimated. It was done using data from ACE Punjab, comparing districts exposed to early LRMIS implementation (early treatment group) with those that experienced later implementation (late treatment group). The late treatment group served as the control group.

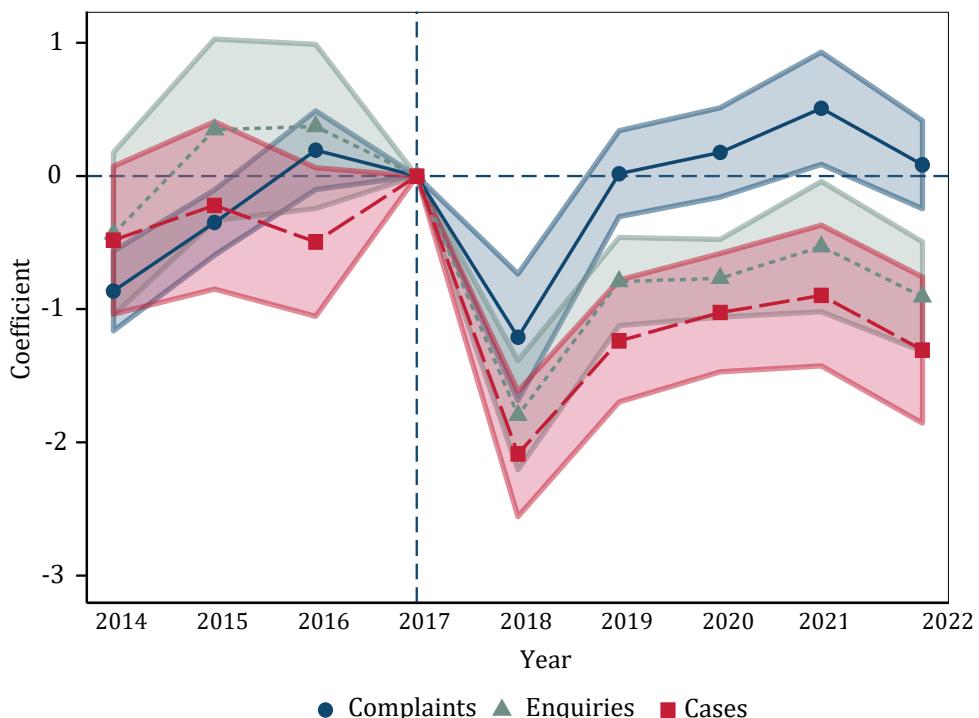
Table 2 presents the effect of early LRMIS implementation on the total number of complaints, inquiries, and cases. The results indicate that early LRMIS implementation increased the total complaints, while the total number of inquiries and cases decreased. As shown in Table 2, Columns 1–4 of Panel A, the complaints increased by 17–19 per one million population in the early treated district using intent-to-treat estimates. Column 5 shows an increase of 34.5 complaints per one million population using the local average treatment effect. The first-stage estimates are given in Appendix C and Figure 6 of Appendix A. Columns 6–10 of Table 2 represent the effect on the number of inquiries per one million population, showing a decrease of approximately 10 inquiries. Columns 11–15 show a significant decrease in the number of cases by almost 2 per one million population.

The results can be interpreted as an increase in complaints by 29.35%, but a decrease by 40.66% in inquiries and by 31.71% in cases, relative to the mean of the dependent variable. Considering the count nature of outcome variables, the same model using absolute outcome variables (non-normalised) was also estimated and found a consistent impact, as shown in Panel B of Table 2. These findings are consistent with Adeyinka (2020), who highlighted the important role of the availability of transparent information to address corruption in Nigeria. The mechanism behind the increase in complaints is the availability of transparent information, which is further detailed in the appendix. The reduction in inquiries and cases represents the actual decrease in corruption incidents in early treated districts.

The increase in complaints reflects the availability of information to the general public. For example, in the absence of land information, the complainant cannot file a complaint. However, in the case when a person can access the land information and finds any type of corruption practice, they are more likely to file a complaint against the land bureaucracy. It also reflects the improved accessibility and public trust in the system, though it also places an additional burden on institutional resources and diverts attention from substantive cases. This unintended consequence highlights the importance of addressing systemic bottlenecks that can arise when expanding access to reporting mechanisms.

Figure 4 shows the event study analysis of the three main outcome variables. The time-varying effect is consistent and statistically significant, as shown in Table 2.

Figure 4: Time-varying Effect of LRMIS on Documenting Incident, Event Study



Note: Standardised coefficients of corruption incidents.

Source: Author's calculations.



Table 2: Impact of LRMS on Documenting Incidents

	Complaints				Inquiries				Cases			
	ITT		LATE		ITT		LATE		ITT		LATE	
	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Digitisation	16.9441	16.4887	16.628	18.965	34.5708	-11.106	-10.707	-11.016	-10.584	-13.213	-1.8219	-1.7402
	(3.7440)	(3.7075)	(3.6210)	(4.3636)	(6.5265)	(1.9357)	(1.6695)	(1.3756)	(1.2728)	(2.1424)	(0.3330)	(0.3263)
	[0.0001]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]
Dep. var.	57.7219	57.7219	56.8553	57.7219	57.7219	27.3127	27.3127	27.2859	27.3127	27.3127	5.7449	5.7449
Mean	57.885	57.885	58.7356	57.885	57.885	20.696	20.696	20.7695	20.696	20.696	3.8905	3.9125
Dep. var. SD												
Observations	315	315	297	315	315	315	315	297	315	315	297	315

Panel A: Normalised Outcome Variables												
	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE
	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)

Panel A: Non-Normalised Outcome Variables												
	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE	ITT	LATE
	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)

Digitisation	36.63	40.868	40.968	68.0595	-20.216	-19.717	-22.729	-19.005	-26.282	-3.75	-3.6679	-3.8356
	(10.4456)	(10.8887)	(8.5400)	(9.1319)	(17.4731)	(3.3260)	(3.0741)	(2.8403)	(2.5459)	(6.7687)	(0.7029)	(0.7056)
	[0.0010]	[0.0008]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0004]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0004]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]
Dep. var.	123.328	120.626	123.328	123.328	54.8177	54.8177	54.404	54.8177	54.8177	11.9031	11.9031	11.4545
mean	165.208	147.82	165.208	165.208	66.3581	66.3581	48.145	66.3581	66.3581	11.752	11.752	9.3034
Dep. var. SD												
Observations	315	315	297	315	315	315	315	297	315	315	297	315

Notes: This table presents the impact of digitisation on corruption-related indicators. The variable "Digitisation" represents the staggered rollout of the programme. Panel A uses the number of incidents per one million population in each district as the outcome variable, while Panel B uses the non-normalised (absolute) number of incidents. The "Difference" column uses different models. FE means the fixed effects regression, RE means the random effects model, CRE means the correlated-random effects model, where socioeconomic characteristics, including mawzas, urbanisation, police stations, land related disputes, and literacy rate are also controlled for in addition to fixed effects to control for unobserved, time-invariant characteristics specific to each district time-related factors affecting all districts. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are reported in parentheses, and p-values to test the null hypothesis of zero mean are shown in brackets.

Source: Author's calculations



Impact on Conversion

The other key observable factor is the conversion of complaints to inquiries and further progression into cases. The findings revealed there is a significant decrease in complaints, inquiries, and cases. This highlights the early resolution of complaints due to an increase in information from the land records department. When the information is available to all key players, they can predict the ultimate decision, which translates into an early resolution/disposal of complaints. Therefore, there is a significant decrease in the conversion of complaints to inquiries and cases. It is important to note that consistent results were obtained when a different specification was used. The findings revealed a significant decrease in the conversion of complaints to inquiries and cases, while there was no effect on the conversion of inquiries to cases. This is because of the step-by-step process of the conversion of complaints to cases through inquiries.

Table 3: Impact of LRMIS on the Incident Conversion

	Complaints to Inquiries			Inquiries to Cases			Complaints to Cases					
	ITT		LATE	ITT		LATE	ITT		LATE			
	FE	RE		FE	RE		FE	RE				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Digitisation	252.0 87	218.2 17	257.9 81	389.03 54	113.8 12	69.97 76	116.8 66	103.8 91	0.702 6	0.352 4	1.008 1	5.310 9
	(55.05 34)	(46.13 91)	(42.93 86)	(110.2 812)	(50.63 82)	(30.41 01)	(29.94 90)	(36.32 04)	(3.45 71)	(2.64 06)	(2.33 34)	(3.48 23)
	[0.000 1]	[0.000 0]	[0.000 0]	[0.001 2]	[0.031 2]	[0.021 4]	[0.000 1]	[0.007 2]	[0.84 02]	[0.89 38]	[0.66 57]	[0.13 65]
Observations	298	298	281	298	298	298	281	298	312	312	294	312
Dep. var. mean	216.8 934	216.8 934	227.6 3	216.89 34	77.07 14	77.07 14	81.16 3	77.07 14	30.05 48	30.05 48	29.80 02	30.05 48
Dep. var. SD	525.3 363	525.3 363	539.1 3	525.33 63	342.8 175	342.8 18	352.6 474	342.8 175	29.38 64	29.38 64	28.31 32	29.38 64

Notes: This table presents the intent-to-treat estimates of the impact of digitisation on corruption-related indicators. The variable "Digitisation" represents the staggered rollout of the programme. Columns (1) through (3) use the conversion rates of complaints and inquiries in each district as the outcome variable. District-fixed effects control for unobserved, time-invariant characteristics, specific to each district, while year-fixed effects account for time-related factors affecting all districts. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are reported in parentheses, and p-values testing the null hypothesis of zero mean are shown in brackets.

Source: Author's calculations

Impact on Civil Cases, Lahore High Court

Table 4 presents the impact of the staggered rollout on the frequency of cases in the LHC across different types of cases, namely, civil, criminal, family, guardianship, rent, and other. The results showed a significant positive impact of digitisation on the civil cases (coefficient of 1.4414, p-value = 0.0191), suggesting an increase in civil cases as a result of the LRMIS rollout. However, the effects on criminal (coefficient of 0.2925, p-value = 0.6242), family (coefficient of 1.0688, p-value = 0.3573), guardianship (coefficient of -0.0033, p-value = 0.9616), rent (coefficient of 0.0298, p-value = 0.2539), and other cases (coefficient of -0.0215, p-value = 0.9098) are not statistically significant, indicating no strong relationship between digitisation and the frequency of these case types. The models controlled for time, measured in weeks, area, and judge fixed effects, with high R-squared values indicating that the models explained a substantial amount of the variation in case frequencies. Overall, the findings suggest that digitisation impacts civil cases significantly, but has little to no effect on other case types.

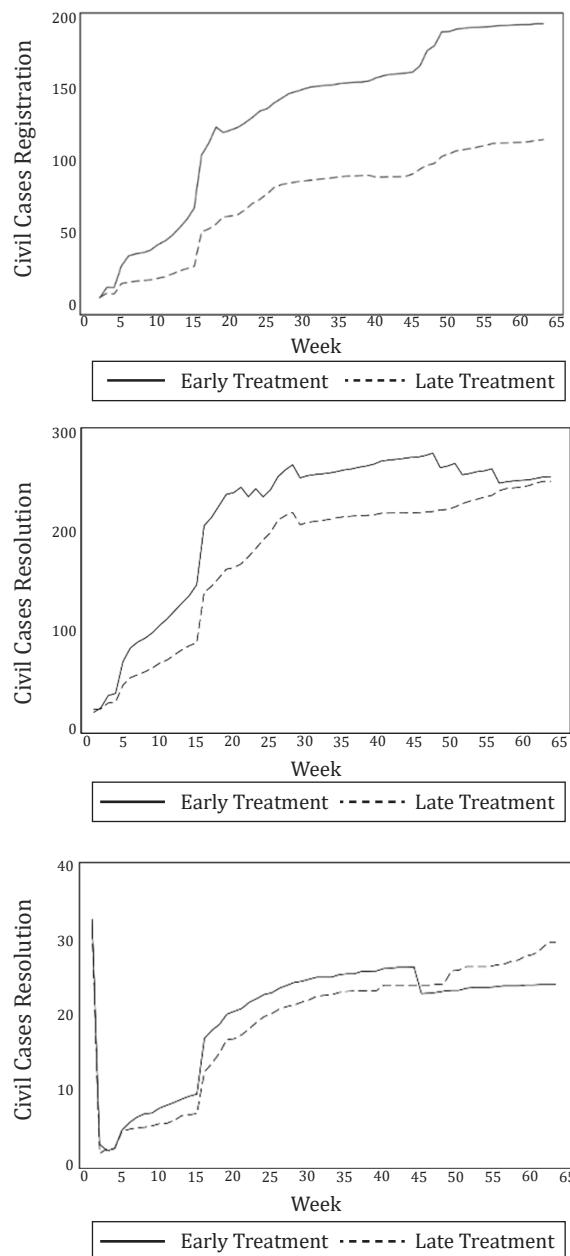
Table 4: Impact of LRMIS on LHC Cases

	Civil Cases		Falsification				
	Cases (1)	Mediation Success (2)	Criminal (3)	Family (4)	Guardian (5)	Rent (6)	Other (7)
Digitisation	1.4414	1.3866	0.2925	1.0688	-0.0033	0.0298	-0.0215
	-0.5881	-0.523	-0.592	-1.1465	-0.069	-0.0257	-0.1882
	[0.0191]	[0.0120]	[0.6242]	[0.3573]	[0.9616]	[0.2539]	[0.9098]
Time fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Area fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Judge fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-Squared	0.8992	0.536	0.8655	0.8666	0.9049	0.8717	0.8687
Observations	2,356	2,394	2,394	2,394	2,394	2,394	2,394
Dep. var. mean	103.71	194.197	100.877	159.309	9.6395	2.1533	19.5911
Dep. var. SD	87.413	116.468	107.423	156.465	12.4653	4.1815	23.6708

Notes: This table presents the intent-to-treat estimates of the impact of digitisation on the frequency of Lahore High Court cases. The variable "Digitisation" represents the staggered rollout of the programme. Columns (1) through (6) use the number of cases as the outcome variable. District-fixed effects control for unobserved, time-invariant characteristics specific to each district, year-fixed effects account for time-related factors affecting all districts, and judge-fixed effects account for unobserved heterogeneity caused by judge characteristics. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are reported in parentheses, and p-values testing the null hypothesis of zero mean are shown in brackets.

Source: Author's calculations

Figure 5: Time-varying Impact of LRMIS on High Court Cases



Note: This figure represents the time-varying trend in the LHC cases. The top two figures represent the registration of civil cases and their resolution, while the lower figure represents the impact on other cases as a falsification test. The y-axis of the figures shows the number of cases, while the x-axis represents the week number starting from the full implementation of LRMIS in Punjab.

Source: Author's calculations.

Data were obtained mainly from sources, ACE Punjab and ADR Punjab, for outcomes. The former deals with corruption-related incidents, such as complaints, inquiries, and cases, whereas the latter handles disputes between the general public. The results from both datasets are consistent. Notably, the ADR data suggested a significant increase in land-related disputes, as indicated in Table 5, Column 1. Additionally, a new variable, "mediation success, was introduced using the ADR data. Immediately after digitisation, the registration of land-related disputes increased in ADRs, similar to the trend observed for complaints at the ACE. However, the effects differ in their progression. In the case of civil disputes, the increase in registrations has translated into greater mediation of disputes. In contrast, for ACE, while more complaints have been registered, their conversion into inquiries has decreased. This difference arises due to the distinct nature of the stakeholders involved in complaints.

At the ACE, complaints are filed against civil servants rather than citizens. It is argued that the availability of transparent information enables civil servants to better predict outcomes, reducing their likelihood of engaging in malpractice. This pattern is evident from Tables 2 and 3.

Qualitative Findings

During the field work, the team conducted several interviews with different stakeholders, including the general public, the ACE staff, the ARC staff, and lawyers, to learn more about the ground realities. Those interviews were based on semistructured and unstructured questions. A number of issues were highlighted during the interviews. Interviews were then recorded and transcribed. To figure out the general points of view about the LRMIS, the responses were evaluated and categorised into two categories, i.e., strengths and weaknesses. Major strengths include the availability of transparent information, while major weaknesses include operational issues.

Strengths

The LRMIS has various social and economic positive impacts. For instance, while elaborating on the impact of the LRMIS on land-related frauds, the transparency of land records, and bribes, a respondent stated:

"The key feature of the LRMIS is the transparency of land records. There is not a single element of bribery. There was a huge blip in tempering the record in the manual Patwari system. But in the LRMIS, there is not a single element of bribery, tampering with the record, or fraudulent activities since it has been digitalised."



During the field survey, we observed CCTV monitoring cameras at the ARC centres, which is a potential factor that hinders bribery. Another respondent, while explaining the access to the LRMIS, replied:

“In the manual patwary system, patwaris used to refuse meetings and provide excuses, such as the record registers were not available at this time. Patwaris had to be sought, and then they had to be persuaded to do even a small amount of work. But now, there is a lot of improvement in the digitised system.”

During the field survey, we got a chance to meet and interview a senior/retired patwari. During the interview, he mentioned:

“It is correct to some extent that there were more chances of fraudulent activities in the patwari system. Some reduction in fraudulent activities has been made through the LRMIS system, but those who are determined to commit fraud are still doing so. We used to have opportunities to take bribes for work, and it's not that the LRMIS staff are not taking bribes—they are also taking bribes.”

Patwaris were the main group that had to give up their powers during the implementation of LRMIS, and they did not agree with the implementation of this project. However, the patwari still said that before the system was implemented, patwaris had more opportunities to engage in fraudulent activities.

One of the respondents said during the interview:

“One of the key advantages of a computerised land record system is that it eliminates fraudulent activities. Additionally, transactions are completed quickly, thanks to the token system, which allows everyone to receive services according to their queue number. We are confident that our land records are safe and securely computerised. In the manual record system, tampering with records was possible with the support of the patwari and tehsildar. However, once the records have been computerised, altering them is no longer possible in any way.”

The LRMIS has various strengths, such as a reduction in fraudulent activities, fast transactions, and security and accuracy of records. A respondent said:

“The key advantage of computerisation is the reduction in the chances of mistakes. Now, after the implementation of LRMIS, there are limited errors in the records. While land records often contained mistakes, over time, the

digitisation of these records has eliminated those errors, making the records accurate for the future. In the patwari system, frequent mistakes were made, which ultimately caused difficulties in land-related transactions.“

“Secondly, the transfer process of land has been boosted due to digitalisation, and the transaction record is now verifiable at any time. “

“Another benefit is the restriction on obtaining a second computerised fard, which was not possible in the patwari system. Now, the PLRA staff controls the issuance of fard, which has significantly reduced fraudulent activities. Additionally, once the landowner obtains one fard from PLRA, it is not possible to issue another, which further reduces fraud in land-related transactions.”

Weaknesses

Various respondents highlighted weaknesses of and difficulties with the LRMIS, such as a lengthy process of land-related transactions and a limited availability of staff. For instance, one of the respondents said:

“The number of PLRA offices and personnel must be increased to reduce the lengthy process. Sometimes, a land transaction can take several days for the whole process, including token issuance, fee deposit, document retrieval, and registration.”

Another respondent mentioned:

“The process of token issuance is time-consuming; it usually takes a day to get an appointment. Sometimes, if the relevant staff member is not available, the token gets cancelled, and a new token is required in that case.”

One more respondent highlighted the improper allocation of rights within the offices of the PLRA. During the absence of one employee, such as the assistant director of land records or the service centre in charge, there is no substitute staff member who has the authority to perform the land-related transaction. The respondent stated:

“In the absence of one person, there must be someone else who can facilitate us, and the operations must not be at a standstill in the absence of one employee.”

A couple of respondents highlighted the technical issues with the LRMIS and the standard of operations:



“The LRMIS is an incomprehensible system and falls short in several areas. For example, landlords are facing many difficulties and challenges, and they require the assistance of the patwari for every transaction related to fieldwork, particularly the identification of land and understanding the complex transactions.”

This was a crucial response. While evaluating the transaction types, the nature of land transactions was found to be very complex. Although digitisation has improved the process of land transactions, the personnel working with the new system cannot easily understand those transactions. A list of various transactions is given in Appendix E. The terms of the transactions are not easily understandable.

“During the correction of land records in the LRMIS, several problems arise. Once you apply for a correction, you must place your case in a local newspaper. This was also required in the patwari system, but it was easier to obtain verification statements from the tehsildar and the patwari. Now, it is not as simple since it relies on electronic records maintained by NADRA and fingerprint issues.”

One of the lawyers highlighted an important demographic factor that hinders the efficiency of the LRMIS, which is the lack of education and access to the internet :

“The general public, especially in rural areas, faces several problems, such as the lack of education and internet access. As a result, they are unable to check and verify if their records in LRMIS are accurate. Additionally, as a lawyer, I find the process of executing property transactions to be very complicated. In the manual system, it was the responsibility of the judicial representative to oversee the execution process. The manual land registry used to be completed with all the required information, including hudood arba, plain facts and figures, and full details of the claim. However, the situation has changed now, as a specific portion of land cannot be sold as a separate, identifiable piece of property.”

Some of the respondents highlighted a key issue of fee submission at various stations. For instance:

“The fee submission process is very lengthy. We are required to take a voucher from one (tehsil) office, submit it to a (provincial) bank along with the fee, then take a voucher from another (tax) office, and submit it to a different (national) bank. This process is cumbersome, so the fee submission system

must be improved. The PLRA should issue all fee vouchers in one place, and they should be submitted at a single location to streamline the process.”

“Overall, the LRMIS system is better than the patwari system. It is more facilitative than the patwari system, but there is still room for improvement. For example, the fee submission system could be streamlined, and there are issues with the unavailability of employees when someone is absent.”

Another lawyer highlighted an important point about the bail of prisoners:

“In addition, the fee for obtaining a fard for collateral is higher than it was in the patwari system. Furthermore, obtaining a token number from the head office in Lahore takes a lot of time, and sometimes it takes several days to get one. As a result, people who need property documents for the release of a prisoner on bail are unable to obtain them, leaving the person stuck in prison even after the court has granted bail. In rural areas, over 70% of the population is uneducated, and the education rate is under 20% in many of the areas exposed to this programme. As a result, in smaller villages or towns, there is still a prevalent element of corruption. I suggest that the government of Pakistan use the computerised system for cities, while retaining the manual system for villages, as it may be more suitable in those areas.”

6. CONCLUSION

This research evaluated the impact of digitised land record information on land-related corruption within government administration and management departments in Punjab, Pakistan and civil cases from the LHC. Utilising a quasi-experimental design, the study exploited the LRMIS as a natural experiment. The analysis drew on novel data from the Punjab ACE, encompassing land-related complaints, inquiries, and cases, which served as indicators of corruption within the relevant departments.

The findings revealed that the early implementation of the LRMIS led to a significant decrease in the number of inquiries and cases. Specifically, the number of corruption inquiries decreased by 40.66% and the number of cases decreased by 31.71%.

The study acknowledges the observed divergence between the increase in complaints and the relative decline in inquiries and cases following the implementation of LRMIS. While the decline in inquiries and cases suggests a



significant decrease in potential corruption complaints, improved transparency and early resolution mechanisms, alternate explanations, such as stricter screening processes, over-reporting of non-substantive complaints, or socio-cultural factors affecting escalation, cannot be ruled out. To address these possibilities, future research should include an audit of complaints and their outcomes to better understand the narratives and contexts that drive these patterns. This paper's contribution is twofold. First, it includes the mechanism of the availability of transparent information and consequent predictability. Second, this research contributes to the broader discourse on state capacity building and the role of e-governance in corruption. It offers insights for policymakers and stakeholders in Pakistan and other low-income countries seeking to modernise land administration systems. The findings provide a foundation for scaling up digitisation initiatives to foster transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study shed light on the transformative potential of digitised land record systems in improving e-governance. Considering the similar socioeconomic characteristics of Punjab with other provinces in Pakistan, this research provides significant policy implications for the structural transformation of Pakistan and low-income countries as well. It highlights the importance of land record digitisation in reducing corruption and improving governance.

Provincial Governments: Considering the potential spillover effects of digitising land records, replicate the LRMIS in other provinces to create uniform, transparent, and efficient land administration systems. In addition to replication, it is critical to ensure robust monitoring frameworks to address emerging issues, such as the correction of records during digitisation, enhance the credibility of digital systems and link this system with other departments that have digitised records, such as excise and taxation.

Local Governments: The digitisation of land records represents a fundamental shift in the way land-related transactions and information are managed. By replacing traditional paper-based systems with digital platforms, the aim is to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability in the land administration process. This transformation can have wide-ranging effects on various aspects of the economy. Therefore, the local government departments can use this information for decision-making at the local level.

National Policymakers: Leverage digitisation as a core component of national anti-corruption frameworks, targeting sectors prone to rent-seeking behaviours. Furthermore, support capacity-building initiatives for public institutions to manage and sustain digital governance projects effectively.

Development Partners and Donors: The donors and implementers, including the World Bank among others, can fund pilot programmes and capacity-building efforts for digital land reforms in developing nations with similar challenges. They can also foster partnerships between governments at various levels, private sector actors, and civil society to ensure inclusive and sustainable implementation of digitisation projects.

National Government: Digitisation can enhance the governance and transparency of land-related transactions, reducing corruption and rent-seeking behaviours. By improving access to accurate and up-to-date land records, the project seeks to minimise the opportunities for fraudulent activities and illegal practices. This, in turn, can lead to a more level playing field for businesses, encouraging investment and entrepreneurship, and promoting economic growth. The national government and attached departments can operate this project as public-private partnerships for local development. Secondly, the project's focus on corruption and its impact on land-related matters aligns with the broader objective of structural transformation for the country and state capacity building. Corruption is often seen as a significant barrier to economic development and inclusive growth. By addressing corruption in the land sector through digitisation, the project aims to create an enabling environment for productive activities, such as agriculture, real estate, and infrastructure development.

Business and Industry: By reducing corruption and improving transparency, the digitisation of land records can reduce frictions and improve the business environment. It also aligns with the industrial policy of promoting efficiency, competitiveness, and investment in sectors dependent on land resources.

Last but not least, the research is related to the political economy and public investment in terms of addressing the political economy aspects related to corruption in the land sector. It investigated the effectiveness of a government initiative of the LRMIS in curbing corruption and bringing governance reforms. The findings inform public investment decisions and policy-making processes by providing evidence on the impact of digitisation on corruption and the potential for improving governance and transparency in the land sector.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Alternate Approach

Considering the phase-in implementation of the programme in the study area, since potential covariates are time-invariant variables, the "size of district," "number of police stations," and "urbanisation", standard fixed-effect models could not be used to control for unobserved heterogeneity.

In the existence of a potential control time-invariant variable that could be correlated with the outcome of interest and can introduce a bias, the standard fixed-effect models or first-difference estimators could not be used.

Therefore, a hybrid model was adopted as an alternative to fixed effect (FE) models in the linear case.

It demeans the explanatory and outcome variables (subtracting the mean value from each observation). Therefore, the issue of omitted coefficients of level-two variables was addressed.

$$\bar{y}_i = \beta \bar{x}_i + \gamma d_i + u_i + \bar{\epsilon}_i \quad (2),$$

where \bar{y}_i is the mean of the level-one outcome variable by district, \bar{x}_i is the mean of the level-one explanatory variable by district i , d_i is the level-two control variable that only varies between clusters, u_i is the level-two error term, and $\bar{\epsilon}_i$ is the mean of the level-one error term.

The standard random effect model is given by:

$$y_{it} = \beta x_{it} + \gamma d_i + u_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (3),$$

where subscript i and t represent the level-two-unit district and level-one-unit time, respectively. Subtracting Equation (2) from Equation (3) leads to the "within transformation" that averages out all time-invariant elements, including the level-two error term, because $(\bar{d}_i = d_i)$ and $(\bar{u}_i = u_i)$.

This within-transformed model is given as:

$$(y_{it} - \bar{y}_i) = \beta_{FE}(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + (\epsilon_{it} - \bar{\epsilon}_i) \quad (4)$$

Since the aim was not to examine what happens within each district or tehsil itself, rather they were treated as a random sample from a larger population, therefore following Ruppert et al. (2003) and Diggle et al. (2002), between-district variation was modelled as a random effect at the district level.

Thus, a hybrid model was adopted that separated within- and between-district effects (Neuhaus & McCulloch, 2006; Schunck, 2013; Allison, 2009) and the correlated random-effects model (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005; Wooldridge, 2010) as below:

$$g(\mu_{it}) = \beta_W(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + \beta_B X_i + \gamma d_i + \alpha_i + u_i \quad (5)$$

This specification includes both the deviation from the district-specific means ($x_{it} - \bar{x}_i$) and the district-specific mean x_i among other covariates in the model. γ is the coefficient of time-constant variables that include the size of the district, number of police stations, population density, literacy rate, and mauza density.

To address reverse causality, the effect⁷ of the planned districts dummy was estimated on the standard implementation dummy variable to obtain the predicted values of the treatment. Planned districts were included as an instrument to identify the potential limitations and delays in the actual implementation of the programme.

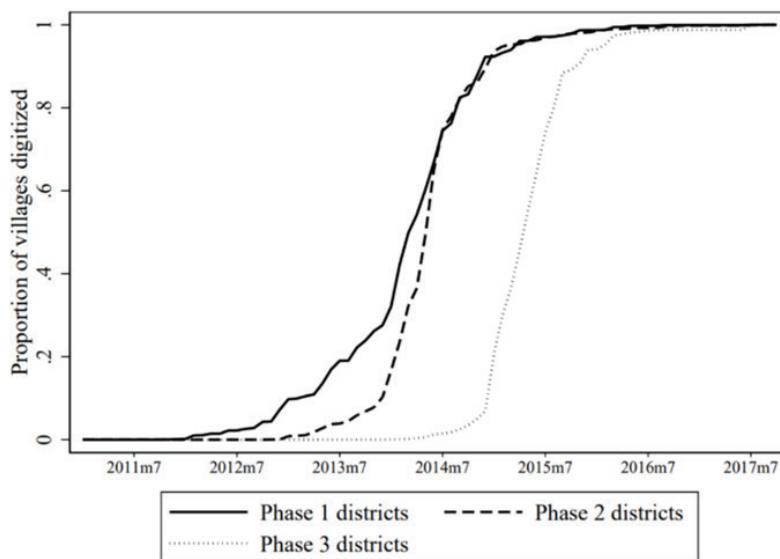
First Stage:

$$g(ET_{it}) = s\beta_0 + \beta_1 D_i + \delta X_{it} + U_{it} \quad (6)$$

where ET_{it} is a (probit) function of the binary dependent variable "treatment" dummy, D_i represents the binary for the district at planned i . The first stage aimed to assess the statistical strength of β_1 .

⁷ If district selection into the treatment was based on its status of bordering districts, then the best option is to use the binary variable for bordering district or distance from border to centroid of the district for precise estimation. At this stage, the binary for border districts was used. The IV is still a time-invariant variable.

Figure 6: Roll-out of LRMIS



Source: Author's calculations.

In the second stage, the corruption outcome was regressed on the predicted values of the treatment group, conditional on district and time fixed effects as follows:

Second Stage:

$$Y_{it} = \theta_0 + \widehat{\theta}_1 ET_{it} + \theta_2 X_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (7),$$

where,

θ_1 is the parameter of interest indicating the effect of programme on the outcome of corruption Y in district i in year t .

Appendix B: Brief Explanation of Results

The digitisation of land records has proven to be a transformative intervention aimed at improving transparency, reducing corruption, and streamlining administrative processes. In districts where this initiative has been implemented, a significant shift in citizen engagement has been observed. Initially, one might expect that making land records more accessible and transparent would result in fewer complaints, inquiries, and cases, but the data suggests a different story: while complaints have increased, inquiries and cases have decreased.



The rise in complaints can be seen as a positive development, reflecting increased public engagement and trust in the system through a potential mechanism of the availability of transparent information. Availability of this information can increase the predictability of the ultimate decision for all the key players⁸, i.e., the complainant, the defendant, and the adjudicator. This predictability results in the filing of complaints and their early resolution while reducing the intense inquiries and cases. The digitisation has made land records more accessible and easier for citizens to review. This enhanced transparency has led many to notice discrepancies or issues they might not have seen before. Moreover, the process of filing complaints has been simplified, allowing citizens to more easily express their concerns. This newfound awareness and streamlined pathway to report grievances seem to have empowered the public, leading to an uptick in complaints.

At the same time, the reduction in the number of inquiries and cases could indicate a significant reduction in corruption. The digitised systems have limited human discretion in handling land records, which in turn has reduced opportunities for manipulation or corrupt practices. As these opportunities for corruption diminish, fewer complaints are being escalated into serious offences that require legal investigations or criminal cases. This suggests that the digitisation effort is effectively addressing the issue of corruption in land administration, allowing for a more transparent and fair system.

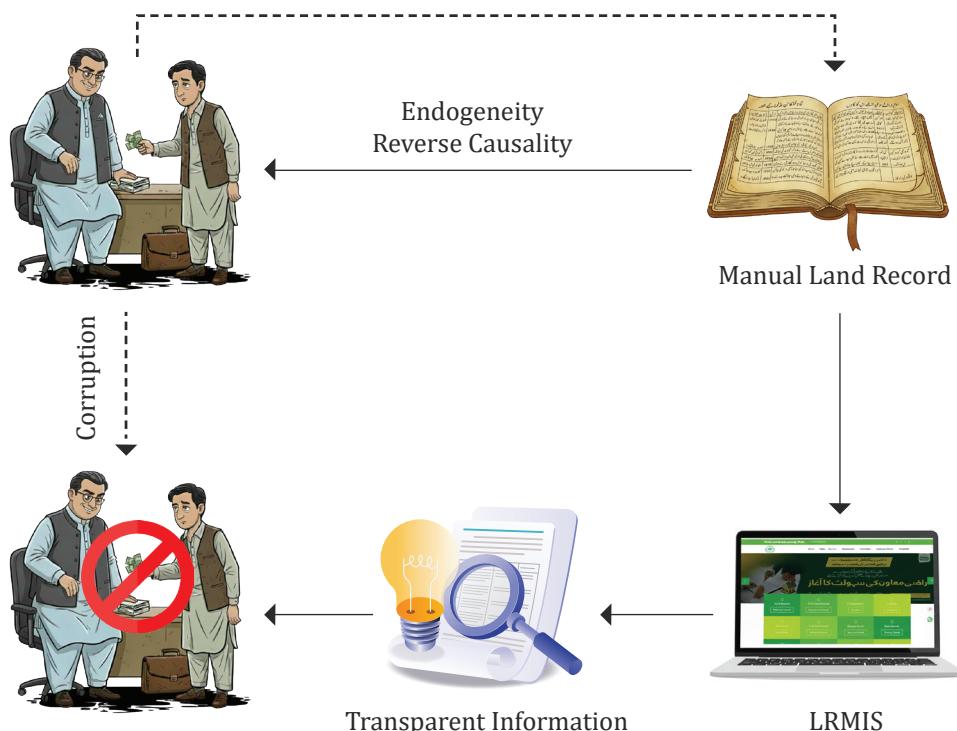
Additionally, the digitisation of land records has led to a quicker resolution of many issues. In the past, a complaint might have led to a prolonged investigation or legal case. Now, with the digitised system, administrative clarifications or corrections can often resolve issues swiftly, preventing the need for formal inquiries or legal action. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of cases and inquiries, showing that disputes are being handled more efficiently.

⁸ In legal and administrative contexts of Punjab and this research, the complainant is the individual or group who registers a grievance or complaint, typically seeking resolution or justice. In this case, the complainant is generally a member of the general public who files concerns regarding land record issues. The defendant is the individual or entity against whom the complaint is filed, often accused of wrongdoing or failure in their duties. In this context, the defendant is an official of the land department who may be responsible for issues raised in the complaint. The adjudicator is the party that responds to the complaint, typically tasked with addressing or resolving the matter. In my case, the adjudicator could be the Punjab ACE or the LHC, which oversees and resolves such grievances.

However, there is another side to the increase in complaints. With easier access to complaint mechanisms, some non-substantive complaints, such as habitual or trivial grievances, may have surged. These complaints are often screened out during the initial inquiry stage due to their lack of evidence or relevance. This phenomenon further explains the simultaneous increase in complaints and decrease in inquiries and cases. While many of these issues are filtered out early in the process, it is important to understand whether the complaints are genuinely problematic or merely frivolous.

The trends observed in the treatment areas demonstrate the powerful impact of digitising land records. The increase in complaints signifies greater public awareness and engagement, while the decrease in inquiries and cases reflects improved efficiency and a reduction in corruption. These results suggest that digitisation has the potential to bring about systemic change, although continuous monitoring and targeted interventions are essential to fully realise its benefits.

Figure 7: Mechanism of Effect



Source: Author's illustration.



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Appendix C

Table 5: Impact of Digitisation on Documenting Incidents (Log)

		Complaints				LATE	
		ITT					
	FE	RE	CRE	Poisson			
Digitisation	0.4362	0.4129	0.5216	0.1257	0.9641		
	(0.1417)	(0.1421)	(0.1119)	(0.0421)	(0.2777)		
	[0.0039]	[0.0037]	[0.0000]	[0.0028]	[0.0013]		
Observations	351	351	297	351	351		
Dep. var. mean	3.7279	3.7279	3.8441	3.7279	3.7279		
Dep. var. SD	1.8429	1.8429	1.7129	1.8429	1.8429		
Inquiries							
Digitisation	-0.5144	-0.5044	-0.5092	-0.146	-0.5263		
	(0.0762)	(0.0767)	(0.0770)	(0.0236)	(0.1068)		
	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]		
Observations	351	351	297	351	351		
Dep. var. mean	3.4346	3.4346	3.558	3.4346	3.4346		
Dep. var. SD	1.2532	1.2532	1.1025	1.2532	1.2532		
Cases							
Digitisation	-0.3853	-0.3639	-0.3807	-0.1649	-0.4069		
	(0.0647)	(0.0660)	(0.0574)	(0.0302)	(0.1090)		
	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0000]	[0.0006]		
Observations	351	351	297	351	351		
Dep. var. mean	2.2058	2.2058	2.227	2.2058	2.2058		
Dep. var. SD	0.8902	0.8902	0.8345	0.8902	0.8902		

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 6: Impact of Planned on Villages Digitised, First Stage

		Villages Digitised (Relative)
Planned		0.21
		(0.0167)
		[0.0000]
Time FE		Yes
Area FE		Yes
Observations		351
F-Statistic		135.4562

Note: Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are reported in parentheses, and p-values testing the null hypothesis of zero mean are shown in brackets.

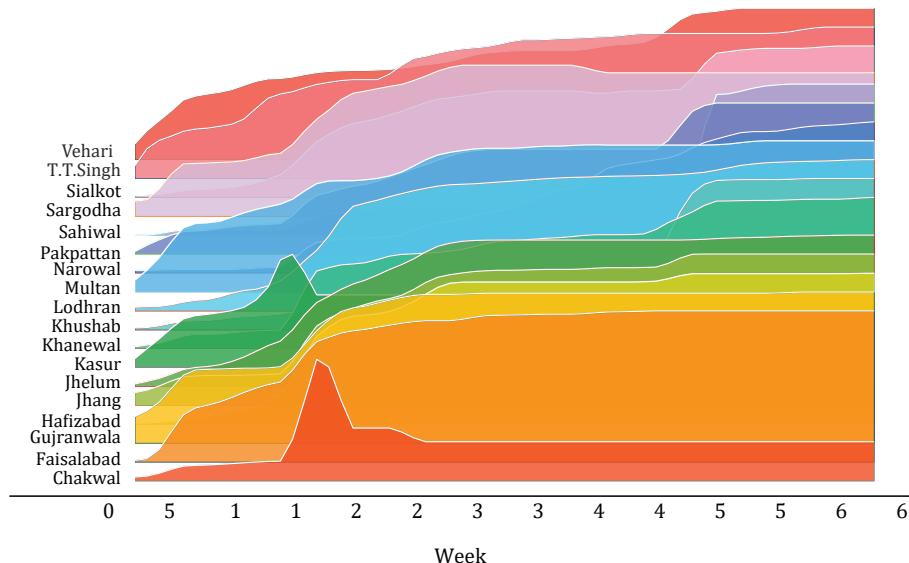
Source: Author's calculations.



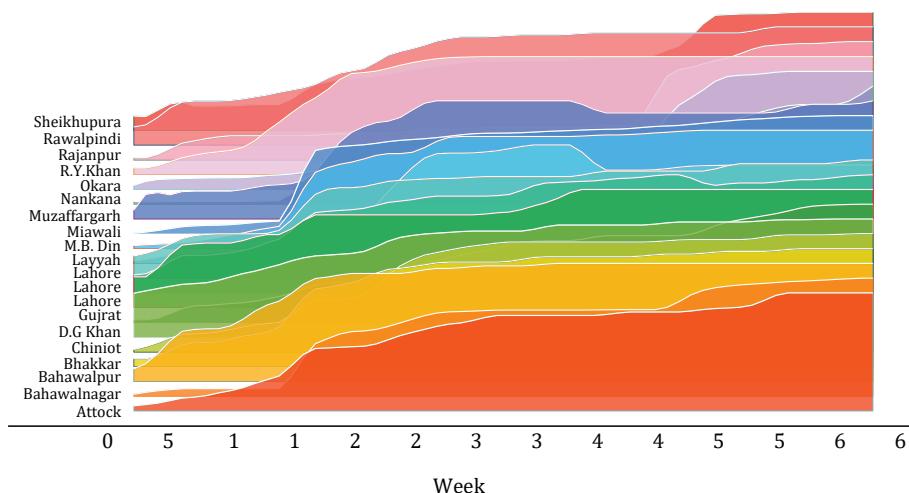
Appendix D

Figure 8: Civil Cases Registration

Early Treated



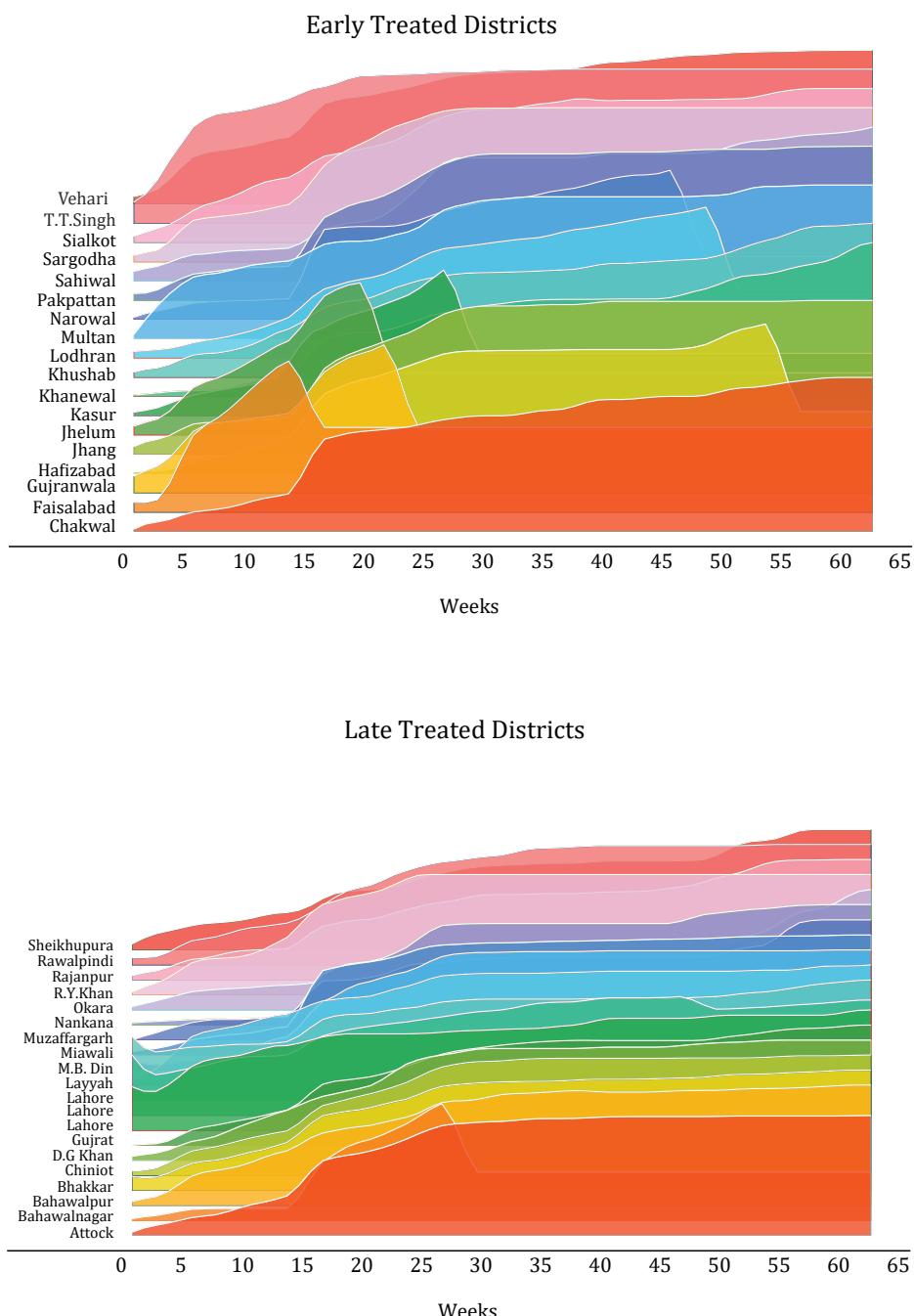
Late Treated



Source: Author's calculations.

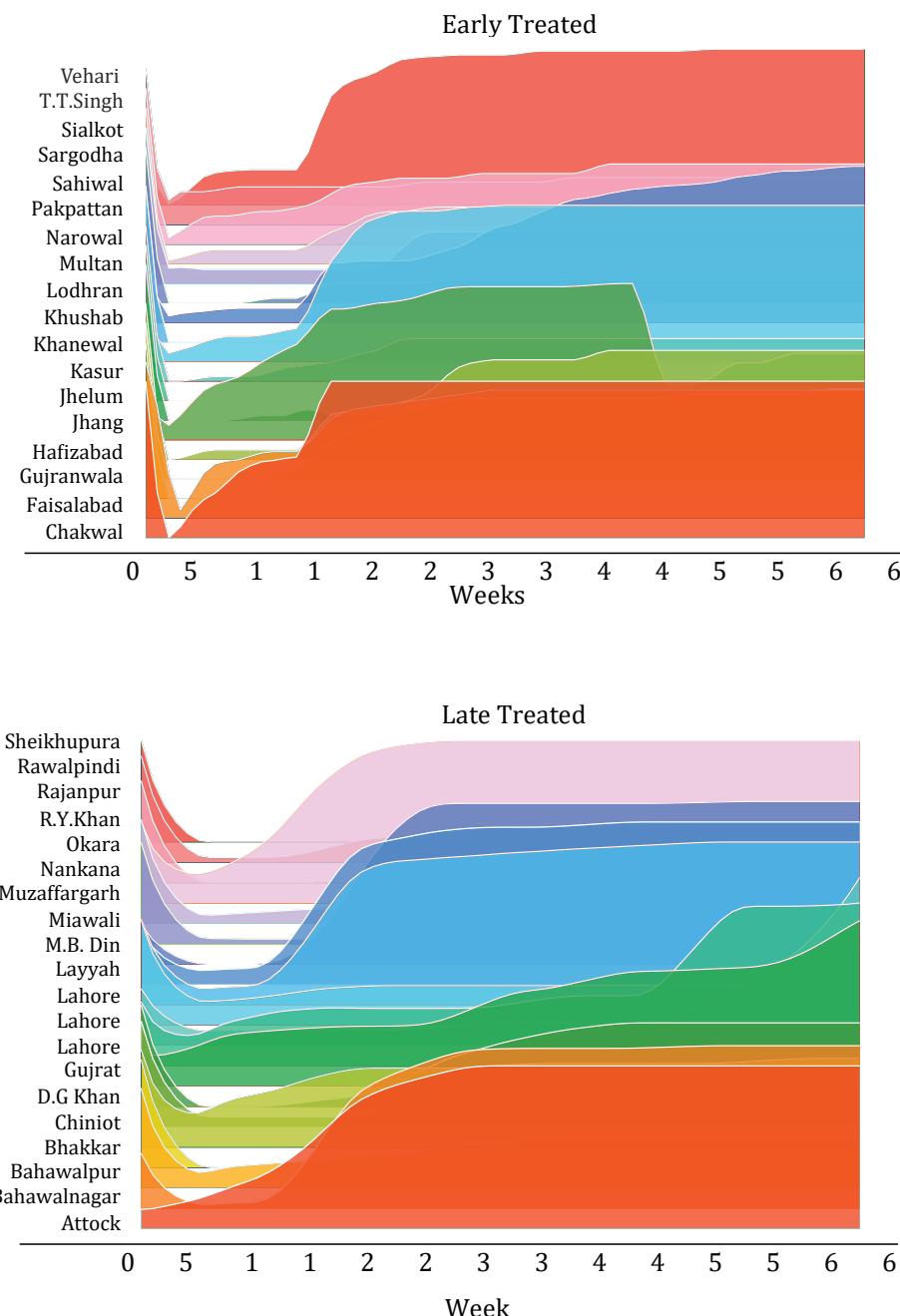


Figure 9: Civil Cases Resolution



Source: Author's calculations.

Figure 10: Other Cases Registration: Falsification



Source: Author's calculations.



Appendix E: Types of Transactions

Table 7: Types of Transactions

بچ
وراثت
حصت اندر اج
بچ محفوظی رہن
صہب
صہب بچت جائز وارثان
استقرار حق
تبادلہ
تبدیلی حقوق ملکیت
فک آزر رہن
اشتراک
صہب تملیک
آزر رہن
تفہیم
صہب محفوظی رہن
وقت نامہ
ڈگری
پشمہ
بچ بذریعہ حق شفع
بچ حق مرہنی
صہب بچ غیر وارثان



LOW CONVICTION RATES IN PUNJAB AND CAPACITY CHALLENGES FOR THE PUNJAB POLICE

Syed Imran Haider¹, Muhammad Kamran Naqi Khan²,
Sabahat Haqqani³, Arfan ul Haq⁴, and Ehsan Sadiq⁵

ABSTRACT

Pakistan's criminal justice system faces numerous challenges that undermine its effectiveness in delivering justice. Despite documented efforts to address these issues, solutions have not been fully successful. A significant indicator of the CJS ineffectiveness is the conviction rate, which remains notably low in Pakistan (5-10%). This merits a thorough exploration of the challenges facing the system, focusing on the causes of low conviction rates and capacity challenges from stakeholders' perspectives. This study aimed to address these concerns using a mixed-method research design. Key findings from the statistical analysis of crime statistics reveal that the murder and robbery conviction rates remained below 30% and 10%, respectively, over the past decade. The analysis of case files helped in the identification of several gaps, including issues related to technical aspects such as gaps in case timelines and documentation, gaps in crucial investigation components such as undermined components of procedural justice, training of IOs and cooperation of stakeholders, lack of training of prosecutors, confused role of prosecutor and lack of fairness in procedures followed. Three FGDs were conducted with police personnel of different ranks. The major themes that emerged from FGDs include organisational challenges, procedural concerns, training and development concerns, investigative challenges, personal and workplace challenges, and legal concerns. From interviews with stakeholders, the major

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themes that emerged include Issues in the system, pressure on stakeholders, training issues, the behaviour of stakeholders, procedural challenges, resource constraints, technological gaps, public perception of the CJS, delays in case processing, investigation issues, and issues related to witnesses. Based on these findings, policy reforms are proposed, out of which a specific set of these reforms was pilot tested.



1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's criminal justice system (CJS) is facing severe challenges and is in a dreadful condition. Particularly, there are significant concerns about **low conviction rates**, which are as low as 5-10% (Hassan & Bhatti, 2024). Consequently, the Rule of Law Index ranks Pakistan at 129 out of 140 countries, which is very low (WJP, 2022). Similarly, Pakistan is ranked in the 20th percentile in the world governance indicator (World Bank, n.d.). These facts show that there are enormous hurdles in ensuring good governance. In the Global Crime Index, Pakistan's CJS is ranked in the **middle category**. Although it indicates a functioning CJS, it also highlights the system's inadequacies. (Asghar, 2023). Numerous factors have led to the dreadful condition of Pakistan's CJS, such as flaws in the system, of which the most prominent is the wrong conviction of innocents and the system's inability to provide security to the innocent. Another factor that has contributed to the adverse condition of Pakistan's CJS is the corruption within the system. **Pakistan's judicial system is ranked 129th, and the police are ranked the 13th most corrupt institution** (Asghar, 2023).

Pakistan's CJS has a long history of poor governance, inflexibility, maladministration, corruption, lack of resources, and misuse of power. Accountability issues and a lack of cooperation between the investigation and prosecution wings in Pakistan's CJS allow accused persons to flee. A combination of internal and external factors has resulted in an impression of being a **slow and unjust system**, which potentially compromises national security (Asghar, 2023). All these factors together have contributed to low conviction rates and capacity challenges in Pakistan's CJS. In past, a **number of different efforts** were made to enhance the effectiveness of the CJS of Pakistan without any positive outcome (Hameed & Jamshed, 2013). **Numerous amendments** have been proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the CJS in Pakistan, including reducing judicial backlog, admissibility of evidence obtained through modern devices, safeguarding vulnerable groups, deterring absconders from justice, and the death penalty (Iqbal, 2022). The conviction rate is considered a good indicator of the effectiveness of a CJS (Mwalili et al., 1997). Since Pakistan has low conviction rates, it shows that Pakistan's CJS is ineffective. Low conviction rates indicate a dire need to reform Pakistan's CJS.

The conviction rates have not improved despite the establishment of specialised investigations, improved prosecution procedures, technologically advanced forensic set-ups, the enhancement of responsiveness of the CJS, a fixed timeframe to resolve cases, and extensive research. **Despite these enhancements and amendments, the conviction rate continues to decline** (International Crisis Group, 2010). The quick fixes were never able to serve the purpose of reforming the system.

This indicates the existence of potential systemic issues within the law enforcement and criminal justice processes that warrant a detailed investigation so that both the depth and breadth of the issue can be captured. There is a need to work on both the structural and functional issues that hinder the effectiveness of the system (Iqbal, 2022). These systemic issues hinder the process of case resolution, leading to judicial overburden, which is evident from the fact that two-thirds of the prisoners in Pakistan are under trial (Malik, 2020).

This overburden is apparent from the capacity challenges in terms of human and financial resources that are present throughout the CJS. For instance, overworked and under-resourced police personnel may struggle to effectively investigate and prosecute cases, impacting the overall efficiency of the CJS. Other aspects that affect the conviction of crimes include the psychosocial and cultural practices and the type of crime (Pearson et al., 2018). Similarly, ineffective utilisation of available resources contributes to capacity challenges.

Evidence from the existing research studies indicates that the type of crime affects the conviction of crime, along with other aspects (Pearson et al., 2018; Gastwirth & Sinclair, 2004). According to an estimation, in Pakistan, there was an increase of 35% in murder cases and 165% robbery cases from 2000 to 2008 (Waheed, 2010). In January, a total of 665 murder cases were reported, out of which only 161 were challaned, while others remained in the initial stages of the investigation. Similarly, 15,937 robbery cases were registered, but only 2,556 cases were challaned, while the remaining are at initial stages of investigation (Irshad, n.d.). These statistics clearly depict high rates of murder and robbery, but low conviction rates. The statistics also show high rates of crime in Punjab compared to other provinces and the federal capital. It highlights the impact of capacity challenges on the effectiveness of the CJS.



For a deeper understanding of these aspects, this study project aims to **explore, examine, and evaluate the causes of low conviction rates of murder and robbery crimes and the challenges faced by the police and CJS in Rawalpindi.**

Specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- To examine the factors that influence low conviction rates.
- To evaluate the police's capacity constraints.
- To explore systemic issues plaguing the criminal justice process.
- To develop, implement, and carry out a pilot test of the policy recommendations.

Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the study analyses both quantitative crime data and qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with police officers of various ranks, judges, lawyers, key informants, such as eye witnesses, complainants, accused, prosecutors, DPOs, and SHOs. Quantitative data are used to identify the gaps, while case analysis provides a more in-depth understanding of the issues as well as relevant strategies. Qualitative insights reveal the perspectives of stakeholders regarding the reasons behind these gaps and the major challenges faced in investigating murder and robbery cases. Additionally, qualitative data enables the exploration of stakeholders' experiences. The mixed method approach facilitates data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. Based on these insights, an evidence-based professional and psychological competency enhancement framework is proposed. This framework is implemented at a selected police station. A pre- and post-assessment was conducted to gauge the effectiveness of the competency of the participating police stations. This approach allowed for scientifically robust and holistic analyses, which were essential for understanding nuanced perspectives and practical policy recommendations, along with suggestions for implementing the policy recommendations to improve law enforcement effectiveness in the region.

2. LITERATURE

Criminal activities are considered ancient problems of society, and statistics show that the crimes throughout THE globe are increasing (Yaacoub, 2017). Crime, categorised as an act punishable by law, has legal, social, or moral repercussions (Justice & Meares, 2014). **For legal repercussions, crimes are processed through the CJS, which is an institution developed to control problematic human behaviour to maintain collective national security (Lee, 2016).** The CJS consists of various components and professionals (Roberts, 2015). It is an agency that focuses on the enforcement of laws and procedures and mainly consists of "*legislatures, police, courts, and corrections*" (Reid, 2003). Most research studies have a similar conceptualisation of the components of the CJS, which includes the *police, the courts, and corrections*. Every pillar of the CJS has a distinct but intertwined role and responsibilities. (Crowder & Turvey, 2013). Each of these components also has its separate subcomponents, including law enforcement officers, corrections officers, probation and parole officers, judges, attorneys, paralegals, mental health professionals, and paraprofessionals (Patterson, 2018). The complexity of the relationship between the criminal justice system leads to diverse challenges to the CJS throughout the globe.

Challenges faced by the CJS become twofold in Asian countries compared to the developed nations due to multiple concerns like economic and political instability, political influence, resource constraints, and defects in legal and institutional frameworks. Pakistan's CJS has its unique constraints due to the nature of its system. Pakistan inherited the CJS from its colonial legacy. The CJS of Pakistan has five major components, namely, police, prosecution, courts, prison and correctional services. According to the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), crimes are broadly classified into cognisable and non-cognisable offences (Mateen & Tariq, 2019).

Various internal and external factors have resulted in a negative impression of Pakistan's CJS. Globally, **Pakistan is ranked lowest in dispensing justice** because the prevailing criminal justice system gives relief to influential and powerful persons, and the vulnerable segment of society suffers the most (Baqir, 2023). It is incumbent upon the government and the judiciary, the guarantor of fundamental rights, to ensure they are fully implemented, and whoever infringes shall face the consequences as per law. However, lack of accountability, lack of effective law enforcement, delays in disposal of cases, shortage of trained police officers, overloaded courts, especially trial courts, and poor prison conditions are some of the main reasons for the poor performance of the criminal justice system in Pakistan.



Pakistan is ranked 130th out of 139 countries according to the World Justice Project report on adherence to the rule of law (WJP, 2022). One of the key indicators of the effectiveness and fairness of CJS is the conviction rate. According to the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), the conviction rate in Pakistan is a mere 8.66% (Burfat, 2024), which is low compared to neighbouring India, which also gained independence at the same time. In India, the conviction rate was approximately 42% in 2022 (CEIC Data Co., Ltd., n.d.). In comparison to developed nations, like the US and China, these rates are very low. In China, the conviction rate is 99% (Feng, 2024), while in the US, the conviction rate was 91.4 % in 2022 (Gramlich, 2023).

Low conviction rate in Pakistan is due to multiple reasons, such as poor police investigation, weak prosecution, lack of technological resources, lack of financial and human resources, and weak legislation (Sager et al., 2022). **Poor police investigation** leads to weak prosecution, weak forensic evaluation, delay in FIR registration, cooperation of prosecutors with investigation officers (IOs), issues in witness protection, delays in trials, inadequacy of correctional services, presence of informal justice, and capacity issues are the major reasons that contribute to low conviction rates in Pakistan. Among these reasons, the prevalence of flawed police investigations stands out as a significant concern. A considerable number of investigating officers demonstrate a lack of training, negligence, and carelessness in executing their duties. This deficiency in investigation has allowed numerous dangerous criminals to roam freely, posing a substantial threat to public safety (Choe, 2018). Existing research has successfully identified the factors, but an enabling framework needs to be explored for effective systemic changes.

The police, prosecution, judiciary, prison, probation, and parole play a vital role in maintaining law and order (Julian et al., 2021). Willmer's (1970) information theory offers valuable insights into the police investigation process, likening it to a battle between law enforcement and perpetrators for crime-related information. Offenders give signals or leave behind various types of information (e.g., fingerprints, eyewitness descriptions, and murder weapons, among others), which the police strive to collect through investigative activities (Bacon et al., 2022).

Prosecutors are considered the most important aspect of the CJS (Tonry, 2012). In some countries, they are the most powerful pillar of the CJS and play a crucial role in an entire case proceeding (Choe, 2018). On the other hand, in countries like Pakistan, they are merely a formality. Existing research

indicates that in Pakistan, prosecutors are not empowered and are not directly involved in case proceedings. For example, they do not visit the place of crime, are not involved in the collection and examination of the evidence collected, or any other procedure in which they might guide the police (Rajput & Rajput, 2020).

Similarly, the judiciary is another crucial pillar of the CJS. The **judiciary in Pakistan** faces severe issues, including case backlog, political interference, corruption, insufficient resources, infrastructure, shortage of legal professionals, and confusing laws and procedural complexities (Imran et al., 2024). As stated earlier, lack of resources is a significant hurdle that the system must overcome. Numerous courts and police stations are understaffed, and their employees lack the tools and training to perform their jobs effectively (Rafique, 2023). This causes protracted delays in trials and investigations, possibly leading to the long-term incarceration of innocent people and low conviction rates. All these issues require immediate and comprehensive reforms and amendments to make CJS effective.

Reforming the CJS of Pakistan is crucial for increasing the conviction rate and making the CJS a fair, progressive and effective system. To accomplish this purpose, one must address the shortcomings of the police, prosecution, jail system, and courts (Khan & Bilal 2025). Extant literature indicates that most studies focus on administrative, procedural, hierarchical, induction and procedural training concerns (e.g., Rehman et al., 2022). There is a dire need to understand the intricate role of psychosocial and cultural factors in relation to these factors. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the pervasive challenges contributing to the low conviction rate and the capacity constraints faced by the police in Punjab, specifically in Rawalpindi. It studies the influential factors, including the whole chain from registration of crime to the conclusion of trial, to improve the capacity challenges of the police.



3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method approach for the analysis. The quantitative data were extracted from murder and robbery cases in Rawalpindi. The longitudinal examination of 20 cases was carried parallel to the trend analysis of crime rates in order to identify significant gaps in conviction. Concurrently, qualitative insights were gathered through FGDs and interviews with various stakeholders of the criminal justice system. Based on the findings, pilot testing policy reforms were developed and tested. The rationale for utilising a mixed-method research design was that the quantitative analysis of the cases helped to identify the gaps in the process that result in low conviction rates. The qualitative insights helped to identify the nuances of the intertwined nature of the CJS and aided in understanding the perspectives of stakeholders about the reasons for the gaps and the major challenges faced by stakeholders in investigating murder and robbery cases. The mixed-method approach facilitated data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of findings.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used for sample selection. For the quantitative investigation, completed cases of robbery and murder from Rawalpindi in the last 5 years were selected. A total of 20 case files (13 murder and 7 robbery cases) were selected. For FGDs, police officers from different ranks, including investigating officers (IOs), inspectors, and sub-inspectors (SIs), were selected to ensure representation across various levels of police personnel dealing with murder and robbery cases. In total, three FGDs were conducted, and each FGD had 6-8 participants. Fifteen interviews were conducted with other stakeholders of the CJS, including three each of judges, lawyers, prosecutors, complainants, and witnesses. Pilot testing of policy reforms was conducted in a single police station among a total of 10 police personnel.

Data Collection

For quantitative data, murder and robbery crime records, including conviction rates, acquisition rates, decision rates, and the number of pending cases, were collected from the Rawalpindi official police records for the past 10 years (2014 to 2023). For the identification of gaps in the conviction and to aid in the development of tools for FGDs, interviews, and a framework, 13 murder

cases and 7 robbery cases were analysed to identify the patterns and themes. Each FGD lasted approximately two hours, while, on average, each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The pilot testing was conducted for a day, along with its pre- and post-testing.

Data Analyses

The general crime statistics were analysed using descriptive statistics and trend analysis. From case reports, the general patterns were identified using a qualitative theme identification technique to analyse the objectives of the study. Firstly, the case files were coded as M1, M2...M13 for murder cases and as R1, R2,...R7 for robbery cases. The cases were analysed to identify common patterns in terms of gaps that may affect the conviction of that case. The qualitative extraction from case files helped in gaining insight into the gaps in conviction as well as in explaining the patterns and trends of the murder and robbery case statistics. The FGDs and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. FGDs and interviews were audio-recorded, and concept-based coding was developed by listening to the audio recordings to extract categories, themes, and subthemes. The scores of participants in pre-testing and post-testing were analysed using descriptive statistics, including the measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation), along with frequency and percentage changes in targeted aspects.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results of crime rates and case report analyses, FGDs, and interviews are presented and discussed in this section.

Crime Rate Analysis

Major findings from the stats of crime from the past 10 years (2014-2023) are summarised in the table given below, along with a visual representation.

The data shows that the murder rate increased from 2014 to 2023. On average, 265 murder cases were reported, which translates to almost 5 murders a week. During the last 10 years, on average, 26% murder accused were convicted. The percentage of acquitted cases highlights the fact that a large percentage of the cases of murder reported are based on false

allegations, as decided officially in the court of law. Out of the five years, in four years, the percentage of acquitted cases is equal to or above 50% of the cases reported. In comparison to the cases reported, 14.97% cases remain pending in courts. The average of decided cases is 85.03% but the number of convicted and acquitted cases shows that most of the cases reported are dismissed.

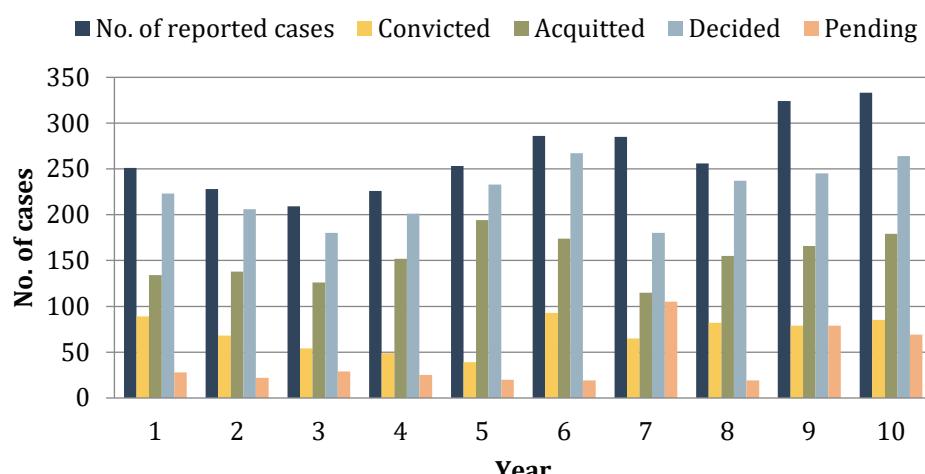
Table 1: Convictions, Acquittals, and Decided and Pending Murder Cases (%)

Sr. No	Year	Reported Cases	Convicted Cases (%)	Acquitted Cases (%)	Decided Cases (CC= AC)(%)	Pending Cases (%)
1.	2014	251	35.46	53.39	88.84	11.16
2.	2015	228	29.82	60.53	90.35	9.65
3.	2016	209	25.84	60.29	86.12	13.88
4.	2017	226	21.68	67.26	88.94	11.06
5.	2018	253	15.42	76.68	92.09	7.91
6.	2019	286	32.52	60.84	93.36	6.64
7.	2020	285	22.81	40.35	63.16	36.84
8.	2021	256	32.03	60.55	92.58	7.42
9.	2022	324	24.38	51.23	75.62	24.38
10.	2023	333	25.53	53.75	79.28	20.72
Average		265	26.55	58.49	85.03	14.97

Year= year of the crime reported, %= percentage, red= lowest percentage of conviction, purple= highest rate of conviction , CC= Convicted cases, AC= Acquitted cases

Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

Figure 1: Murder Cases

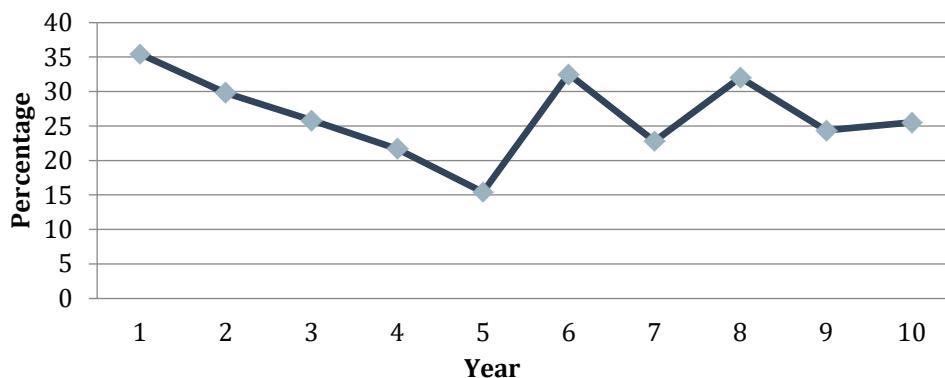


Source: Authors' calculations based on the Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.



Figure 2 shows that the rates of convicted cases were the highest in 2014 in the ten years. It gradually decreased from 2015 to 2018, with the highest decrease of almost 6% in 2018. In 2019, the rate was high compared to the previous four years, after which it reduced by almost 10 % in 2020, increasing in 2021 by 10%. In 2022 and 2023, the rates of convicted cases started to decline; there is only a 1% difference between 2022 and 2023, i.e., in 2023, the rate of convicted cases increased by 1%.

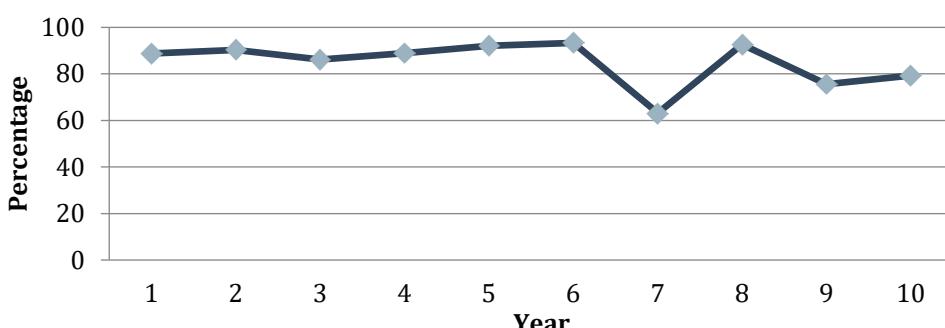
Figure 2: Rates of Convicted Cases



Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

As shown in Figure 3, in percentage terms, the highest decided cases was in 2019, while the lowest was in 2020, with a decline of almost 30%. In the first five years (2014-2018), the highest rate of decided cases was in 2018. The lowest percentage was in 2020 compared to both 2019 and 2022. In 2023, the percentage of decided cases increased by 4% over 2022.

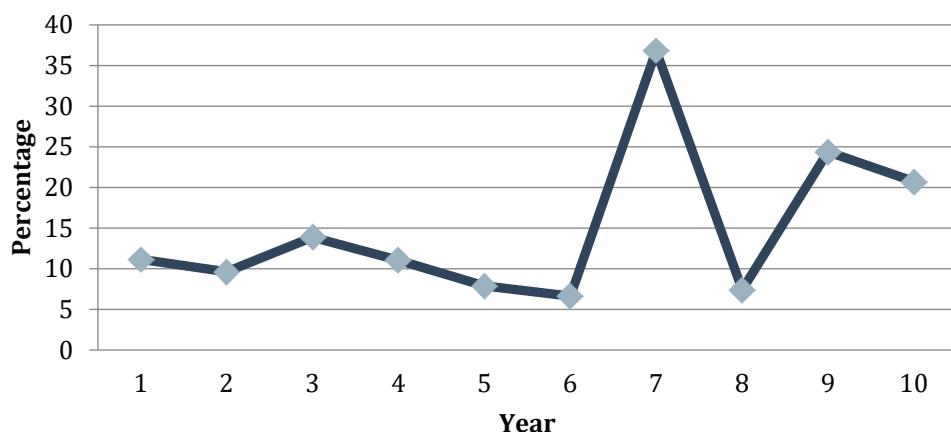
Figure 3: Rates of Decided Cases



Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

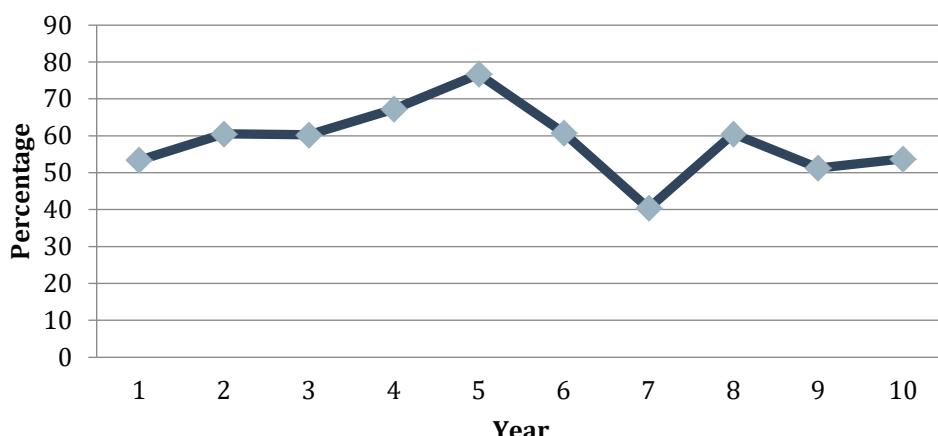
Figure 4 shows that the rate of pending cases was highest in 2020. In 2021, the rate of pending cases decreased significantly compared to 2020, i.e., a decrease of almost 29%. The pending cases have a decreasing trend at first before increasing in subsequent years. Figure 5, on the other hand, shows that the lowest rate of acquittals was in 2020 among all ten years. In this year, there were almost 20% fewer acquitted cases compared to 2019 and 2021. During the first five years (2014-2018), there was an increase in acquittal rates. However, there was an increase of almost 2% in acquittals in 2023.

Figure 4: Rates of Pending Cases



Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

Figure 5: Rates of Acquitted Cases



Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

Table 2: Convictions, Acquittals, Decided, and Pending Robbery Cases (%)

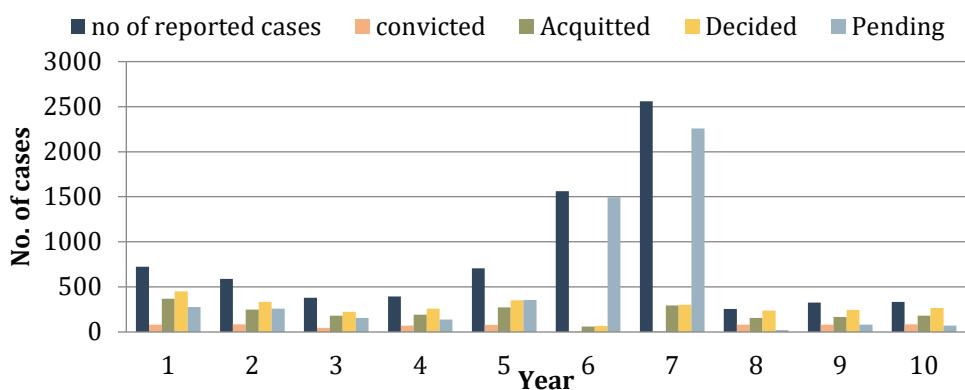
Sr. No	Year	Reported Cases (%)	Convicted Cases (%)	Acquitted Cases (%)	Decided Cases (%)	Pending Cases (%)
1.	2014	725	10.90	50.90	61.79	38.21
2.	2015	588	14.29	42.01	56.29	43.71
3.	2016	378	11.38	47.35	58.73	41.27
4.	2017	394	17.26	47.97	65.23	34.77
5.	2018	705	11.06	38.58	49.65	50.35
6.	2019	1562	.45	3.84	4.29	95.71
7.	2020	2560	.31	11.45	11.76	88.24
8.	2021	2521	.91	32.57	33.48	66.52
9.	2022	3273	.43	29.45	29.88	70.12
10.	2023	5550	.36	10.81	11.17	88.83
Average		1825	6.73	31.493	38.227	61.773

Year= year of the crime reported, %= Percentage, Red= lowest percentage of conviction, Purple= highest rate of conviction , CC= Convicted cases, AC= Acquitted cases

Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

According to Figure 6, the number of robbery cases increased rapidly from 2018 onwards. On average, 1,825 robbery cases were reported per year, which translates to 5 robberies per day. The number of robberies increased from almost 15% in five years, i.e., 2014 to 2018, to 84% from 2019 to 2023. During the 10 years from 2014 to 2023, on average, only 6.73% cases were convicted. The percentage of acquittals implies that a very high percentage of the robbery cases reported were based on false allegations, per the court of law's decisions. On average, 62% of the cases of robbery reported remained pending in courts, and only 31% of the reported cases were decided in courts.

Figure 6: Rates of Robbery Cases

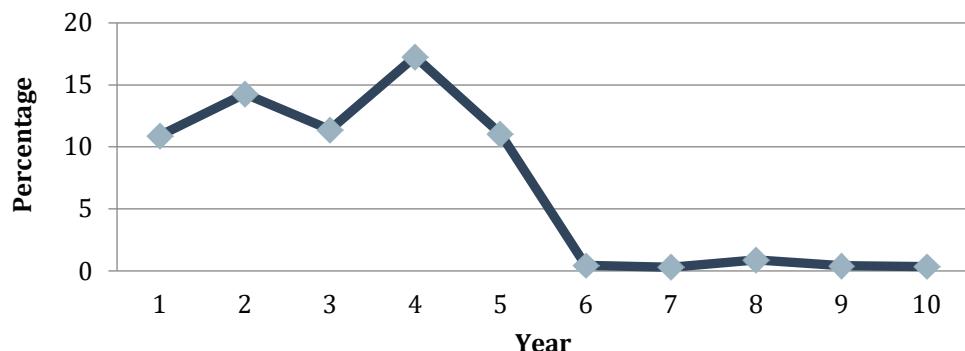


Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.



The percentage of convicted cases is shown in Figure 7. It shows that the most convicted cases were in 2015 compared to all other years. The percentage of convicted cases of robbery decreased significantly, especially during the 2019-2023 period.

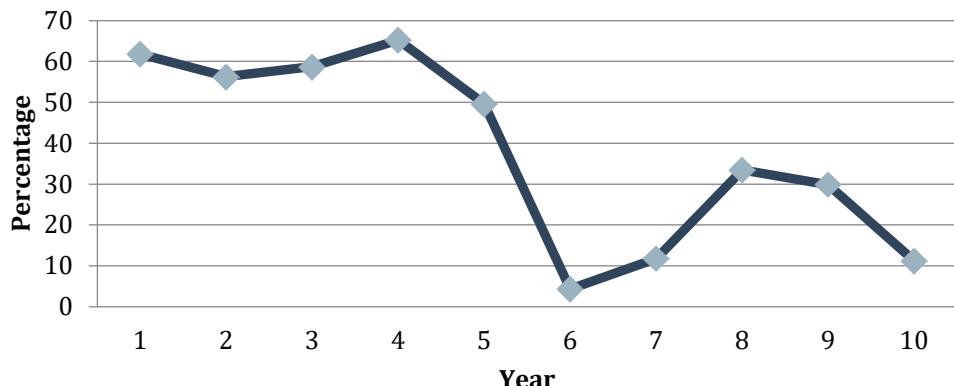
Figure 7: Rate of Convicted Cases



Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

Figure 8 shows that the highest percentage of decided cases was in 2019, while the lowest percentage was in 2017. The percentage of decided cases increased by almost 7% in 2020 from 2019. There was also an increase of 22% in the decision rate in 2021 compared to 2020. There was a decrease of almost 4% in 2022 in comparison to 2021, and almost an 18% decrease in 2023 compared to 2022.

Figure 8: Rate of Decided Cases



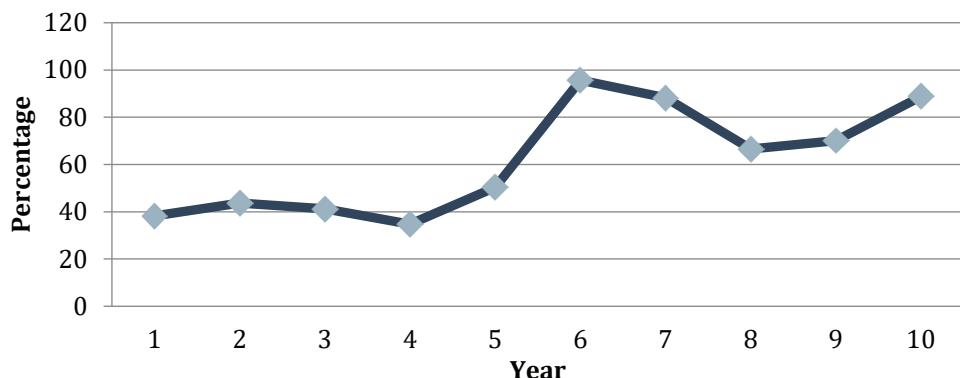
Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.



Although the conviction rate was low in robbery cases, the percentage of pending cases was high. The highest percentage of pending cases was in 2019, but it decreased in 2020 and 2021, with almost 7% and 22%, respectively. In 2022, there was an increase in pending cases by almost 4% and there was an almost 18% increase in 2023 compared to 2022.

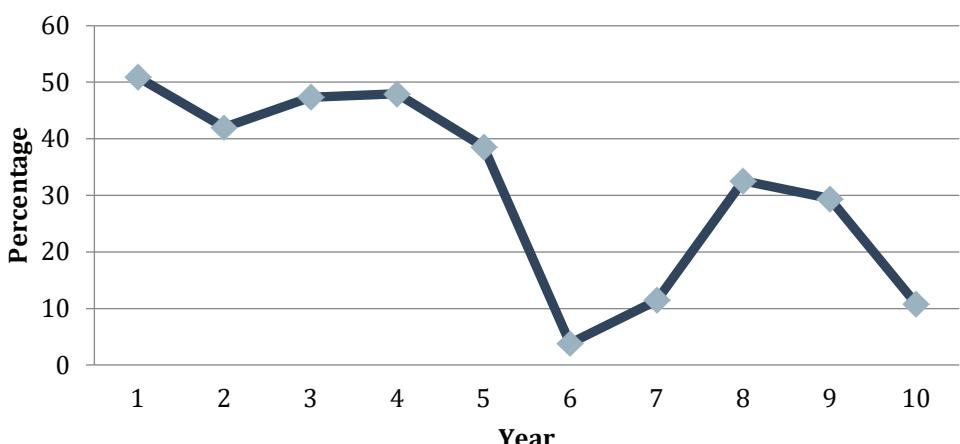
As for case acquittal, the highest rate was in 2021, while the lowest was in 2019. The data shows a huge variation in terms of the percentage of acquitted cases.

Figure 9: Rate of Pending Cases



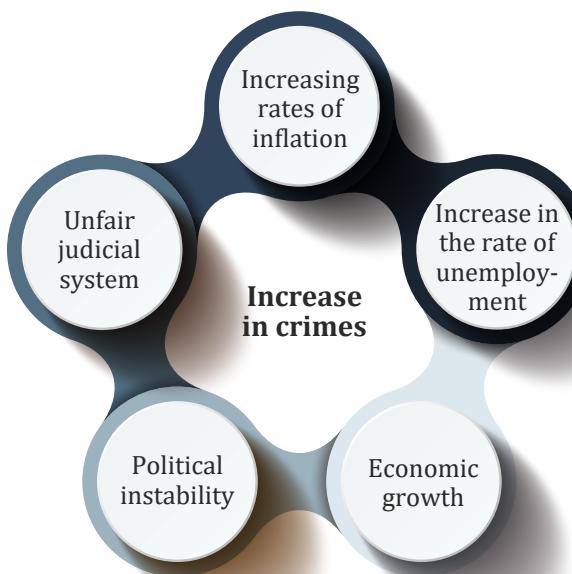
Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

Figure 10: Case Acquittals (%)



Source: Authors' calculations based on Crime Reporting Data, National Police Bureau 2014-2023.

Figure 11: Factors Associated with Murder and Robbery



Source: Authors' illustration.

Analysis of the data on murder and robbery crimes reveals the following economic, social, and political factors associated with a continuous increase in these crimes:

- Low conviction rates for both murder and robbery crimes, which are below 30%, on average, for murder cases and below 10% for robbery cases.
- Large rate of acquittals for murder and robbery cases; on average, 58% of murder cases are acquitted, while the acquittal rate on average is 31% for murder cases.

Figure 11 outlines some reasons associated with an increase in crimes, which is evident from the existing evidence as well. The figure relates the crime rates to economic indicators.

Findings from Case Report Analyses

The case files of murder and robbery crimes that resulted in convictions in the previous five years were analysed to identify the gaps existing in the cases that may be contributing to the low rates of conviction in Pakistan's CJS. This also helped in improving the tool developed for collecting in-depth perceptions of the stakeholders of CJS. For this purpose, a total of 20 cases were taken from different police stations in Rawalpindi.⁶ Major findings from these case files' analyses are presented in the following Figure 12.

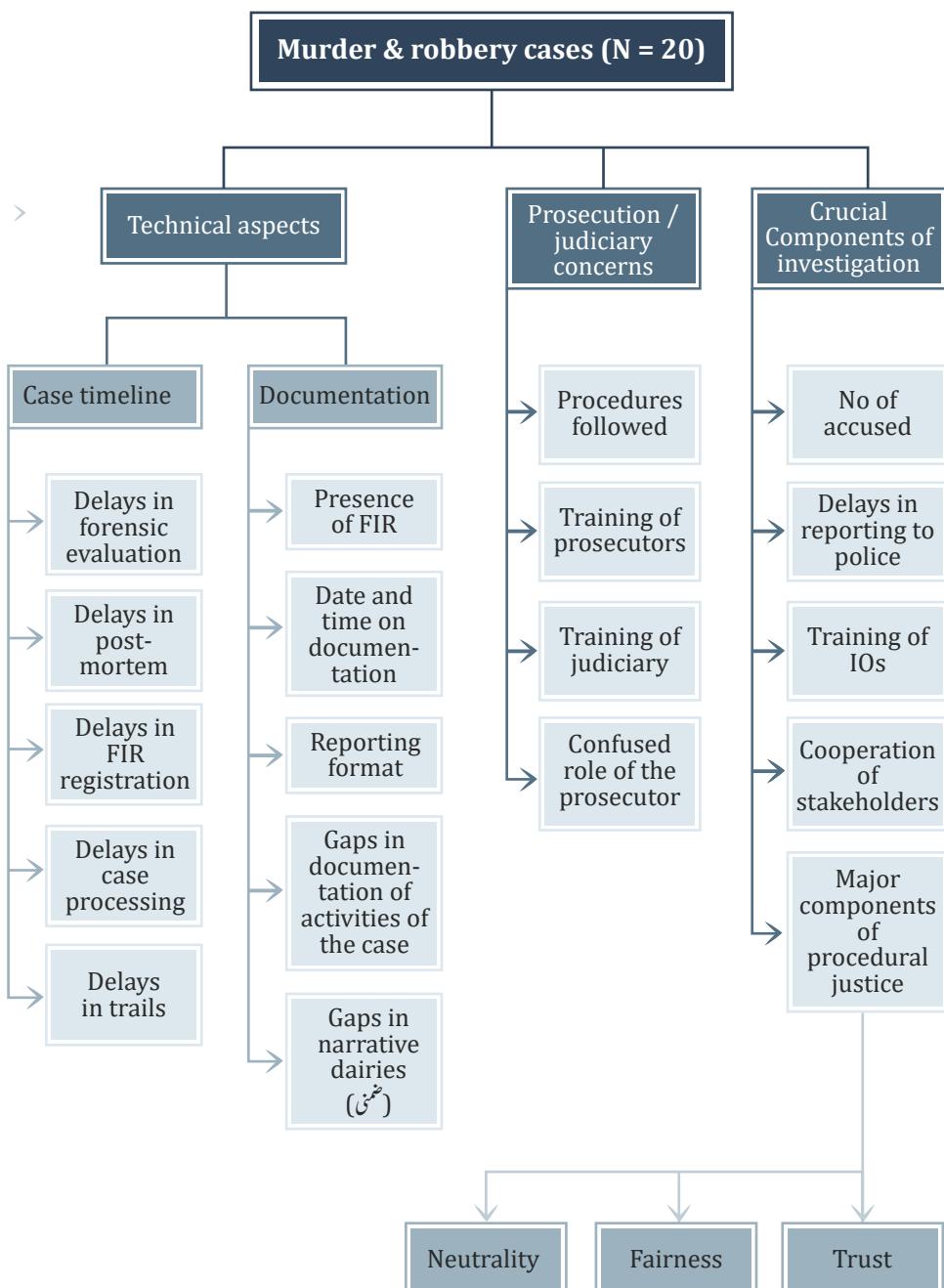
The analyses of murder and robbery case reports revealed several critical gaps. One of the primary important gaps was found in **case timelines**.⁷

⁶ These include police stations in Taxila, GujarKhan, Kalar Sydian, Kotli Sattian, RA Bazar, Gujmandi, Westridge, Banni, Naseerabad, Ratta Amral, Rawat, Baroni and Cantt. Twenty cases that were analysed included 13 murder cases and 7 robbery cases. The timeframe for the resolution of these cases was predetermined. The predetermined criteria were that, firstly, the convictions in the cases in the previous five years were considered. However, if some cases were not decided, then to complete 20 cases for analysis, all those cases that were resolved in the previous ten years were included.

⁷ The major concern is the delays. These delays in case timelines take place at different stages of a case. Since different stages of case processing are concerned with different stakeholders, the delays are caused by all the major stakeholders. There are multiple other delays identified in cases at different stages of case processing. The major delays identified included the delays in forensic evaluation, delays in post-mortem, delays in case processing, and delays in trial. Some of these delays are related to the police department, such as delays in case processing, delays in FIR registration, while others are due to other stakeholders of the CJS, such as delays in trial, which is the responsibility of the judiciary, and delays in the forensic evaluation, which is concerned with the forensic department.



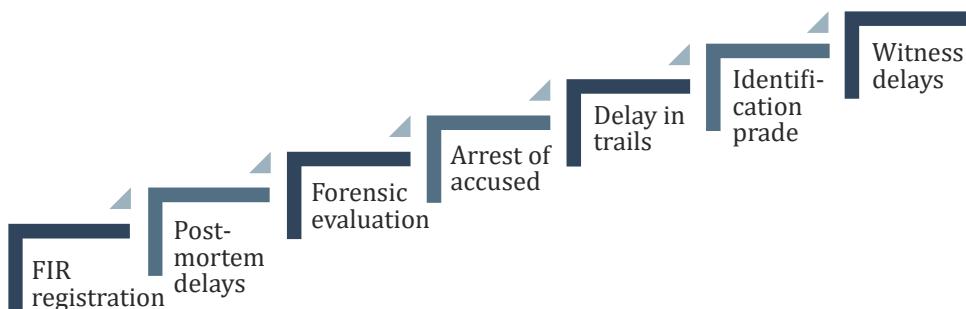
Figure 12: Major Findings from Case File



Source: Authors' illustration.



Figure 13: Issues in Case Timelines



Source: Authors' illustration.

Figure 14: Issues in Documentation



Source: Authors' illustration.

Another gap identified is related to the **documentation defects**.⁸ The documentation format of case files is very outdated. There are several missing dates and times, even at places that require a time and date specifically.

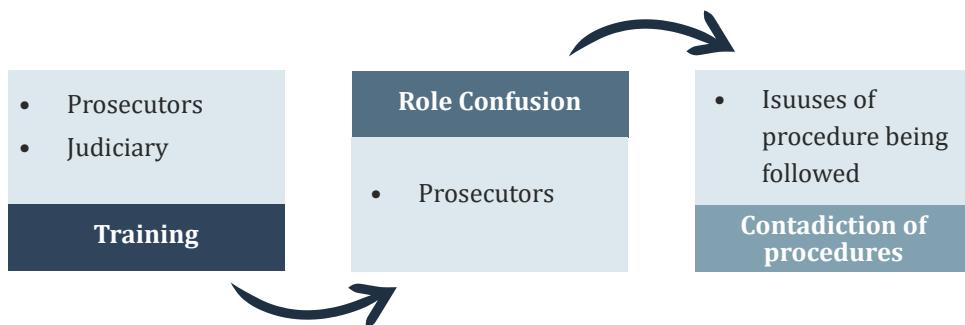
There are also concerns related to the **prosecution and the judiciary**.⁹ A major concern highlighted is the training provided to prosecutors and the judiciary officers. Another major gap is related to a **crucial component** of the investigation, which was evident from the case files, that in terms of

⁸ Certain documents are also routinely found missing in the files, such as the record of the number of hearings held for the case. Moreover, the reporting format of cases is also vague. There is no systematic way to maintain case files and the required documents for a case. There is also an absence of documentation of certain activities that happened during the investigation of a case, such as when the accused was first arrested, what steps were taken to carry out this arrest, etc. All these documentation loopholes add to the ineffectiveness of fair and accurate investigation and case processing, which is another reason for low conviction rates.

⁹ The role of the prosecutor in murder cases is very confusing, as their role in case processing is not accurately identifiable. The issues with the judiciary include delays in the trial and the unavailability of judges to process the case.

investigation,¹⁰ various major gaps contribute to faulty investigation procedures. This lack of cooperation also affects the impartial decisions, which is a component of procedural justice.

Figure 15: Issues with the Judiciary



Source: Authors' illustration.

Another major issue identified is the **training of IOs**.¹¹ The IOs are not trained to investigate to complete the task effectively.

All these gaps and issues identified contribute to low conviction rates of the accused in murder and robbery cases. These issues are present at all levels of the CJS, and give an impression that the system is slow, unjust, ineffective, corrupt, and unfair. The identification of gaps from case reports of murder helped in the modification of the tools (interview guide and focus group

¹⁰ An important aspect of the investigation is that there is a contradiction between the procedures mentioned in law and the procedures that stakeholders adopt in their investigation procedures. This is apparent from the contradiction in the case investigation time by the police. It is mentioned by stakeholders of the CJS that the investigation time for the IO is 14 days in cases of murder and robbery after the arrest of the accused has been made. However, in case reports of murder and robbery, which were analysed, the actual time duration is more than 14 days. A major theme in this is the inability of Pakistan's CJS to adhere to the components of procedural justice, such as fair and transparent process, giving voice to others, and impartial decisions. This inadherence leads to issues such as delays in reporting of an incident.

¹¹ This is evident from delays, along with documentation gaps identified by the court and multiple reminders by the court to provide more evidence. The training of IOs impacts the effectiveness of convictions and also results in case acquittals. As the IO is the major pillar of the case process, a lack of investigation skills of IOs results in irreparable damage to the case.

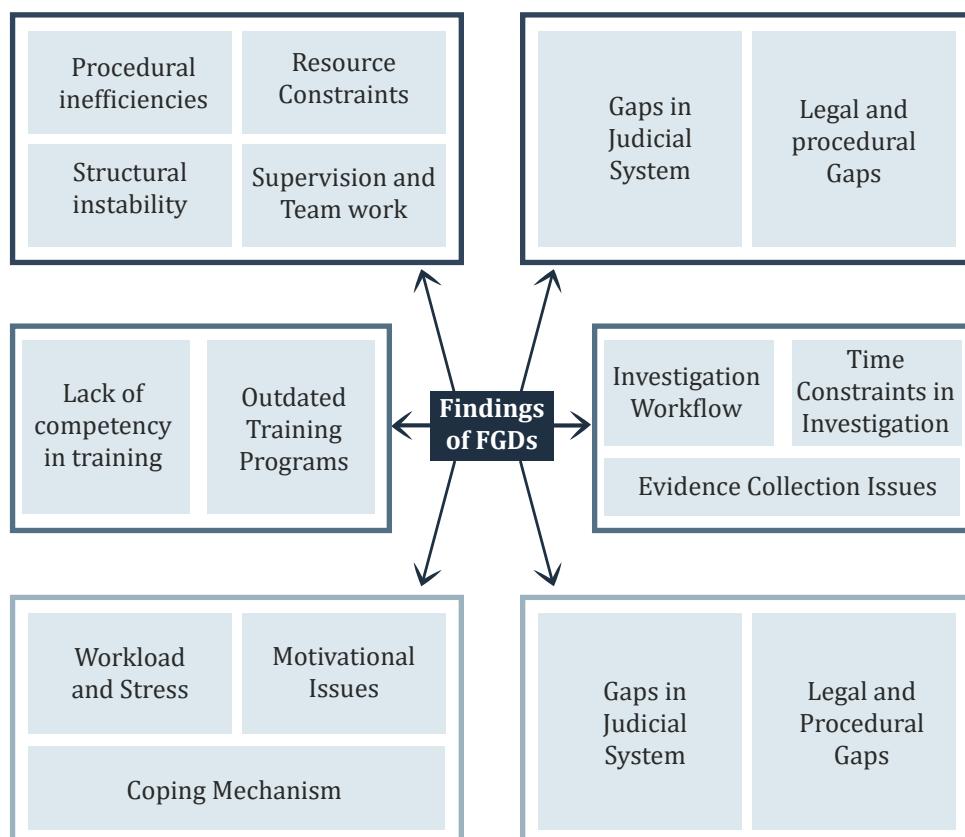


protocol) developed for qualitative insight. The major areas that were modified in tools included the addition of questions related to various domains.

Findings from Focus Group Discussions

A total of three FGDs were held with police personnel of different ranks, including IOs, SHOs, inspectors and Sis. The total number of participants in FGDs was 19. For these FGDs, the participants were selected from the police departments of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The participants were invited from the platform of the National Police Bureau to take part in FGDs. The duration of the FGDs was between 1 hour and 30 minutes to almost 2 hours.

Figure 16: Major Themes in the FGDs



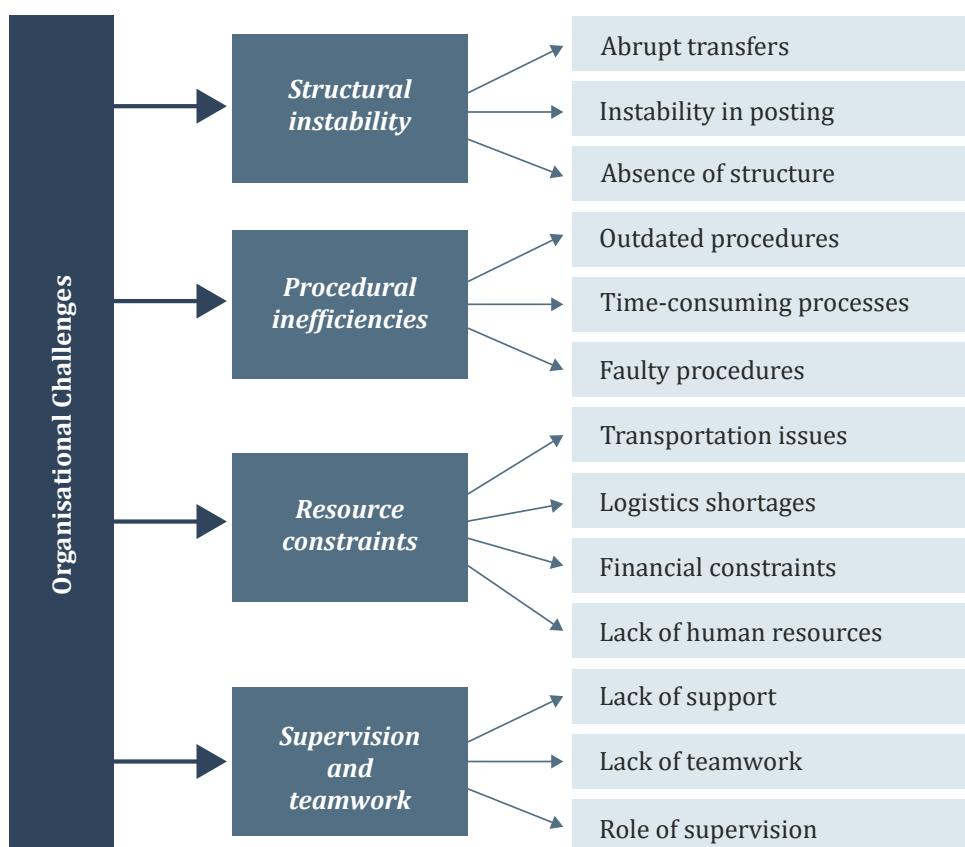
Source: Authors' illustration.

A brief overview of these themes, subthemes, and categories is explained later in this section.

Organisational Challenges

Organisational challenges faced by police personnel were the most prominent concern mentioned in the FGDs. The major organisational challenges faced by police officers in Rawalpindi and Islamabad included structural instability, procedural inefficiencies, resource constraints, and issues related to supervision and teamwork. The most highlighted concerns in terms of organisational challenges were resource constraints and structural instability. One of the prominent observations in terms of organisational challenges was that the police personnel often focus on an external locus of control instead of the internal locus of control. The figure below presents the subthemes and categories of organisational challenges.

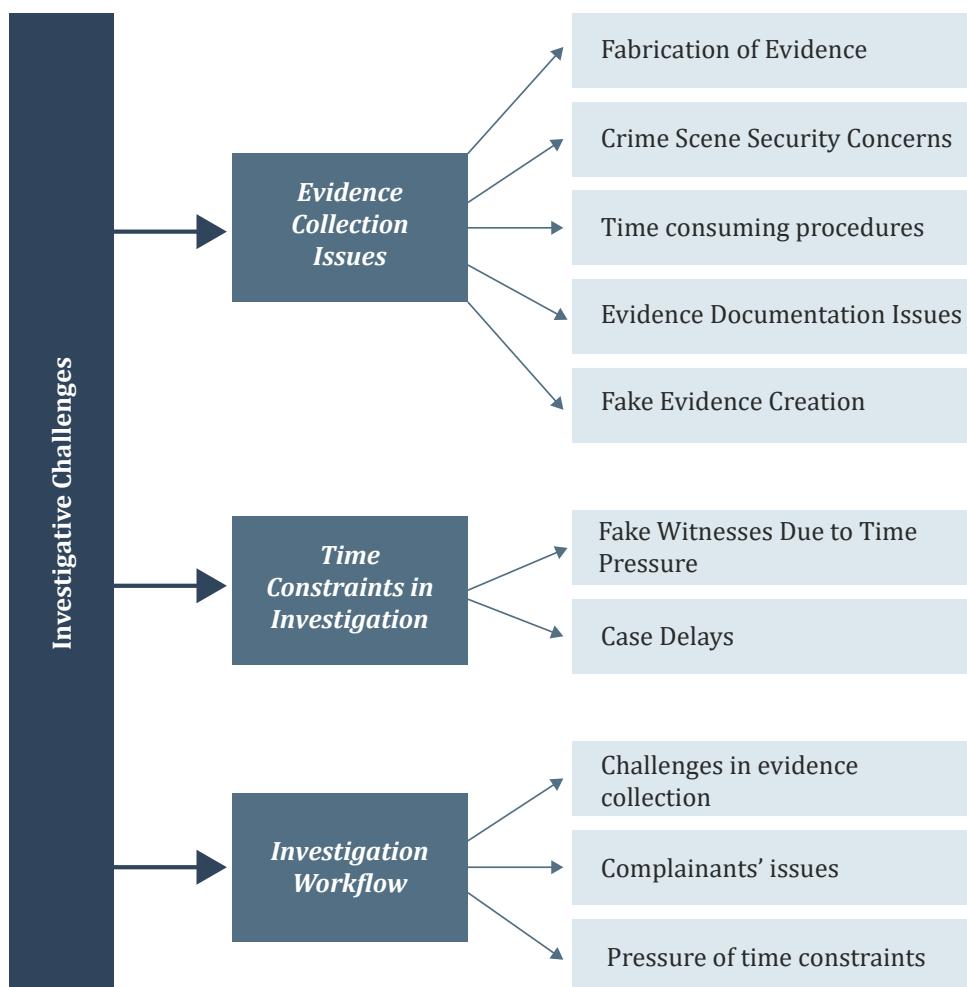
Figure 17: Organisational Challenges: Subthemes and Categories



Source: Authors' illustration.

Investigative Challenges

Figure 18: Investigative Challenges: Subthemes and Categories



Source: Authors' illustration.



Another major category of challenges reported by police personnel was the concerns about the investigative parameters of case processing. The major challenges were related to evidence collection,¹² time constraints,¹³ and the investigation workflow. As “investigation” is the most crucial step in case processing, the challenges faced by police personnel at this stage have critical consequences. The figure below presents the summary of this theme in terms of subthemes and categories of subthemes.

Training and Development

Training of the stakeholders is a major attribute for enhancing and maintaining the effectiveness of the system. This is a key capacity issue that impacts the system. The concerns highlighted in FGDs included outdated training programmes¹⁴ and a lack of competency in training.¹⁵ The figure below presents the subthemes and categories of the major theme of training and development issues.

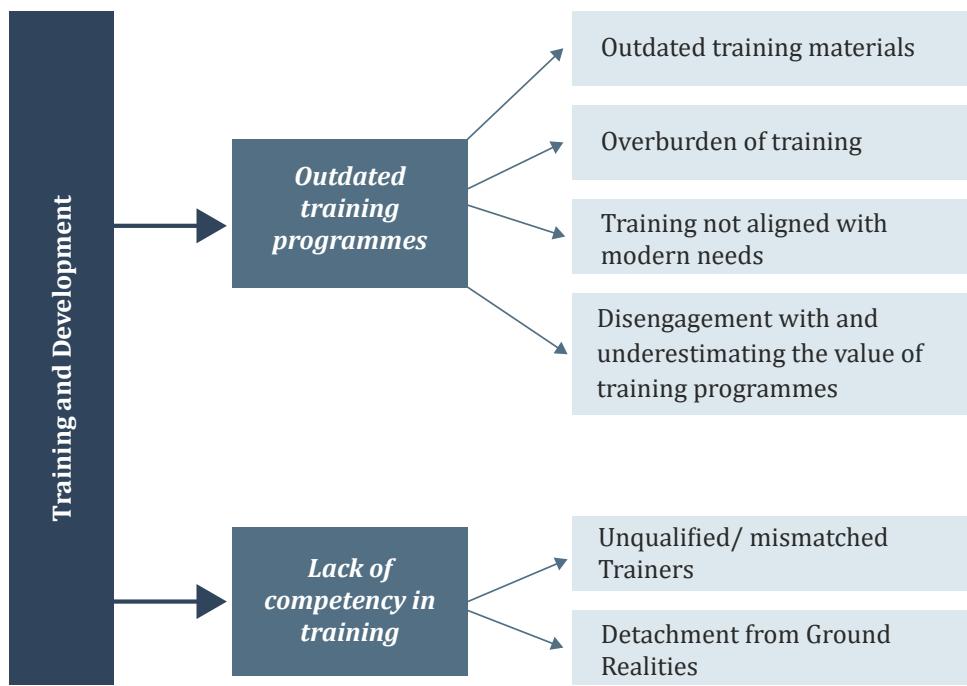
¹² The most important phase in investigation, the first step in case processing, is evidence collection. The participants highlighted that they face various challenges at this stage, such as delays by complainants, which lead to fabrication of evidence and fabrication of evidence, coached witnesses, time consuming procedures, security concerns at the crime scene, and documentation of evidence.

¹³ The participants also reported that there is a great deal of concern about the timeframe in investigation. The timeframe provided for initial investigation to police department is 14 days. The major concerns highlighted by police personnel were in terms of coached witnesses due to time constraints and case delays. They also mentioned that they are given timeframe while all other stakeholders lack timeframe for case processing. This causes a lot of delays which in turn create backlog of cases and add to the workload of all the stakeholders.

¹⁴ The police personnel mentioned that the training programmes designed for them are outdated and lack modern-day needs. The major issues highlighted by them in this aspect included outdated training material, overburden of training, training not aligned with modern needs, and disengagement with training programmes of the police personnel.

¹⁵ The police personnel also highlighted that in addition to being outdated, training modules lack competency and effectiveness. The major issues in this regard include unqualified trainers and detachment from ground realities.

Figure 19: Training and Development: Subthemes and Categories

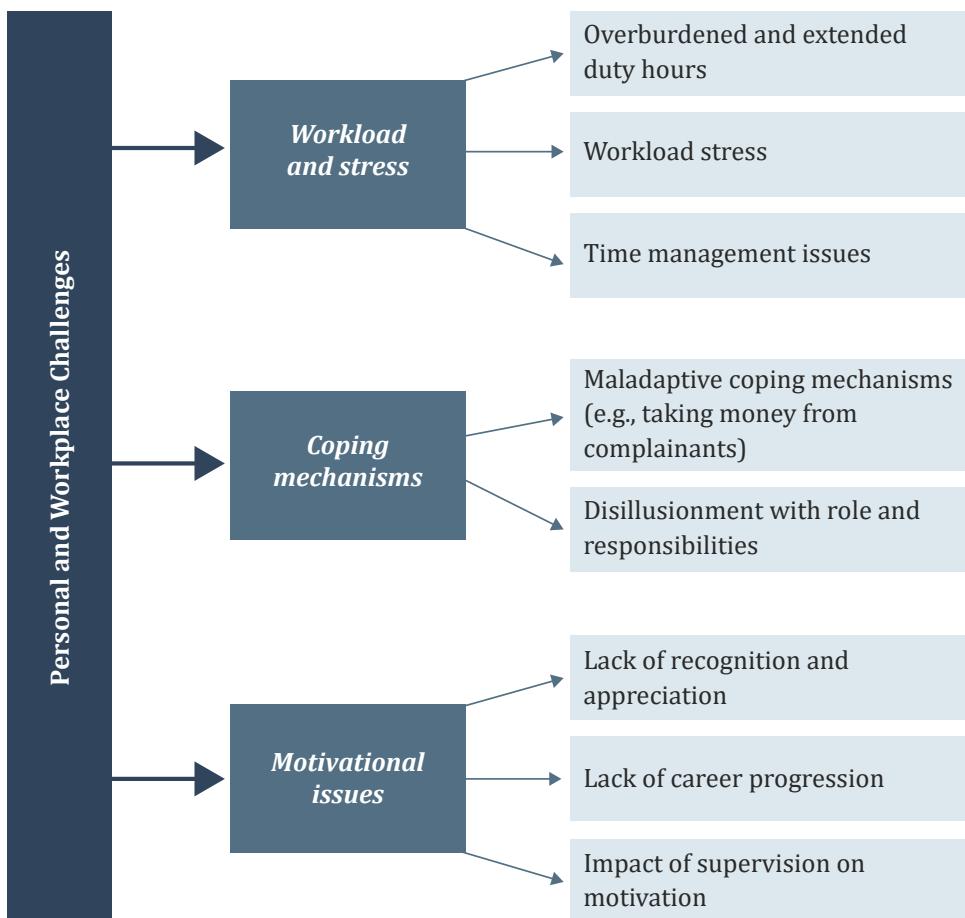


Source: Authors' illustration.

Personal and Workplace Challenges

Findings from FGDs show that in terms of workplace and personal challenges, there are workload and stress concerns, issues of maladaptive coping mechanisms adopted by police personnel in stressful situations and issues of motivation within the police department. The figure below shows the subthemes and categories for the theme of personal and workplace challenges.

Figure 20: Personal and Workplace Challenges: Subthemes and Categories

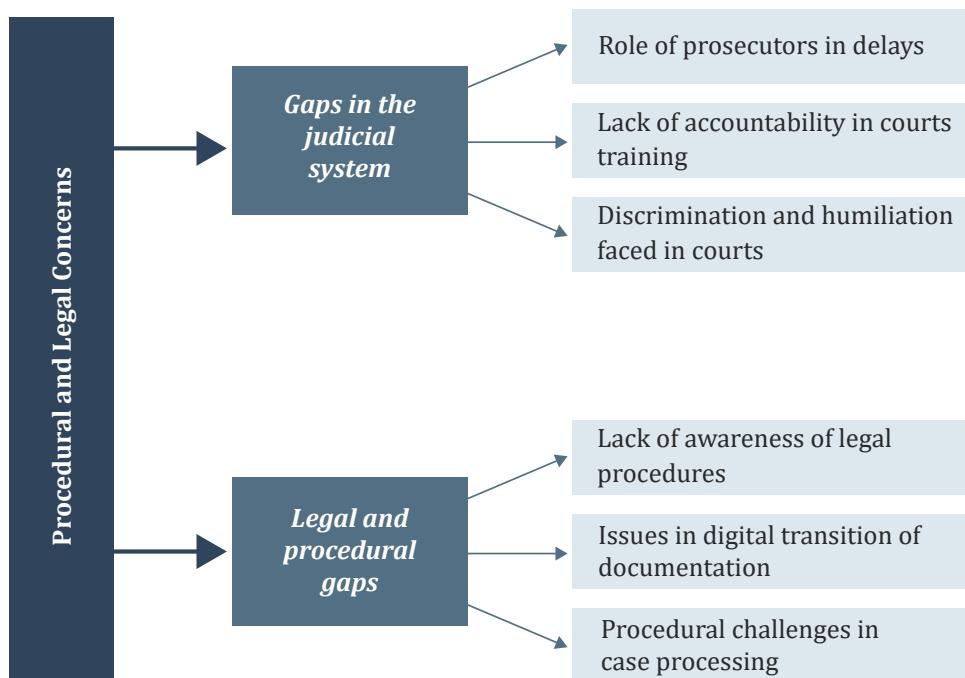


Source: Authors' illustration.

Procedural and Legal Concerns

Another theme that emerged from the findings of FGDs is the procedural and legal concerns. In this regard, the issues include gaps in the judicial system and legal and procedural breaches. In terms of gaps in the judicial system, the FGDs' participants reported that in Pakistani courts, there is a lack of accountability, along with delays by the prosecutors. The figure below presents the subthemes and categories of the theme of procedural and legal concerns.

Figure 21: Procedural and Legal Concerns: Subthemes and Categories



Source: Authors' illustration.

Findings from Interviews with Judicial Stakeholders of the Criminal Justice System (Lawyers, Judges, and Prosecutors)

A total of nine interviews with the judicial stakeholders (judges, lawyers, and prosecutors) of the CJS were conducted, with three interviews from each category of stakeholders operating in different courts. While most of the interviews were conducted in person, some interviews were conducted online, for which verbal consent was obtained. All interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and the interviews were audio recorded.

Figure 22: Themes from Interviews with Judicial Stakeholders



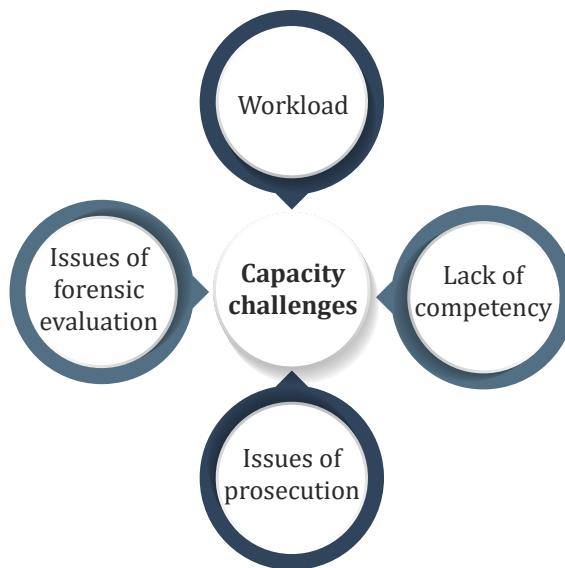
Source: Authors' illustration.

Capacity Challenges

Pakistan's CJS is facing **severe capacity challenges**. These capacity challenges pertain to all major stakeholders. These challenges include a lack of skill at the level of each stakeholder, a lack of regular training or up-to-date training of the stakeholders, and academic-level issues with the academic training of these stakeholders. The participants from judicial stakeholders also reported that the lack of personal, moral, and ethical training significantly contributes to the capacity challenges.

The figure below briefly outlines the subthemes of capacity challenges.

Figure 23: Sub-themes of Capacity Challenges



Source: Authors' illustration.

Training Issues

The judicial stakeholders highlighted that the culturally appropriate training of stakeholders is a foremost concern in the Pakistani CJS. They reported that in terms of training, there are issues related to the quality of training, lack of self-management training, and lack of overall training. The figure below gives a brief overview of the subthemes.

Figure 24: Training Issues: Subthemes



Source: Authors' illustration.

Issues with the System

Among the systemic issues, overall distortion in the operations of the system was reported. The participants highlighted concerns such as high cost, lack of cooperation, lack of monitoring and evaluation, lack of innovation, lack of proper guidelines and lack of focus on prevention. The figure below highlights the concerns reported by participants in this regard.

Figure 25: Issues with the System: Subthemes



Source: Authors' illustration.¹⁶

¹⁶ High cost: It emerged during the interviews that Pakistan's CJS is a high-cost system. The financial burden on the complainants and all other parties involved is very high. This results in the general public avoiding involvement in our CJS.

Culture of fake witnesses: The participants reported the presence of a culture of fake witnesses in the Pakistani CJS. They reported that this culture raises severe concerns about the credibility of the system.

Lack of culture of oral testimony: The judicial stakeholders reported that one of the major reasons that makes our conviction low is the lack of culture of oral testimony in our CJS.

Procedural challenges¹⁷

There are a variety of procedural issues that were cited for adverse impact on the CJS. Procedural issues often result in haphazard and reactive (rather than proactive) management. As a result, the performance of the system is compromised. Some of the procedural challenges mentioned in interviews included outdated procedures, absence of standards, lack of cooperation, lack of timeframe, and unnecessary and unjustified case delays.

Lack of focus on prevention: The participants reported that in our society/country, there is very little focus on the prevention of crime.

Lack of cooperation: They also reported that there is a lack of cooperation between different departments in CJS or different stakeholders.

Lack of monitoring and evaluation: It is also mentioned that there should be monitoring of the judiciary as well, but there is a need to change the evaluation criteria for this accountability.

Lack of innovation: They also mentioned that there is a need to have innovative solutions for the systemic issues present at the basis of the system.

Lack of proper guidelines: The participants reported that there is a need to have proper fundamental grounds for legislation. There should be proper written SOPs for every step of case processing.

Lack of accountability: They also reported that the evaluation criteria utilised in CJS needed to be transformed based on the present-day needs.

¹⁷ **Outdated procedures:** The lawyers reported that one of the primary issues that lead to other issues in the CJS is outdated procedures, protocol, laws and legislations. They said that the system of procedures being followed is almost 100 years old.

Complicated procedures: The judges reported that because the procedures are complicated and lengthy, the attitudes of the stakeholders of CJS are also not good, which results in out-of-court settlements.

Lack of standards: Judges reported that in the Pakistani CJS, there is a lack of standards. This results in the weakening of major aspects of the CJS. For instance, the forensic evaluation department is almost ineffective due to not following proper procedures and set standards.

Lack of authority: One of the participants also reported that in the Pakistani CJS, there is the issue of judges not having the required authority. The judges should have access to the relevant data, evidence reports, forensic records, etc.

Lack of punctuality: They also reported that complainants and witnesses also do not appear in courts on the given times and dates of case trials.

Case delays: Personnel often put the wrong dates and times on the FIR, which affects the case processing negatively and results in further complications.

Figure 26: Procedural Challenges: Subthemes



Source: Authors' illustration.

Investigation Issues

Investigation is the most important step in a case procedure. Any issue at this stage of the case results in damage that is almost impossible to control in any other step of the case. The interviews with judicial stakeholders highlighted issues such as the quality of investigation, bribery, a lack of pre-investigation, issues in evidence collection, fabrication of evidence, fake recovery, lack of trust, lack of skills, and lack of advanced procedures. This finding is reinforced by the crime rate and case analyses, which underscore a dire need for improvement.

Resource Constraints

The judicial stakeholders reported that every department lacks resources. The main resources that are lacking are technical, financial, infrastructure, and technology resources. They also pointed out the lack of advancements in the overall system. A triangulation of all the findings shows that the resource



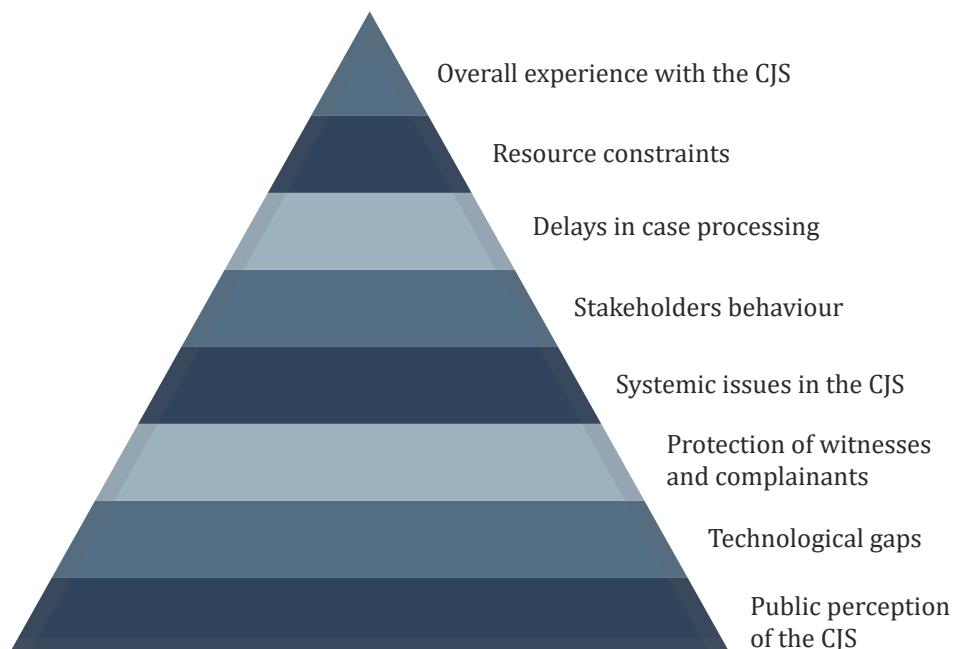
constraint issue raised by the judicial stakeholder might be more of a resource management issue where resources are either underutilised or overused, resulting in wastage and shortage.

Findings from key Informant Interviews – Complainants and Witnesses

A total of six key informant interviews, three each with complainants and witnesses, were conducted. Each interview lasted approximately 40 – 45 minutes. During interviews, one prominent observation was that conducting interviews at the police stations influenced participants' responses. However, due to technical constraints (accessibility issues), all interviews were conducted at police stations. To address this issue, two different police stations were contacted for interviews with complainants.

The figure below highlights the major themes extracted from interviews with key informants.

Figure 27: Themes from Interviews with Key Informants



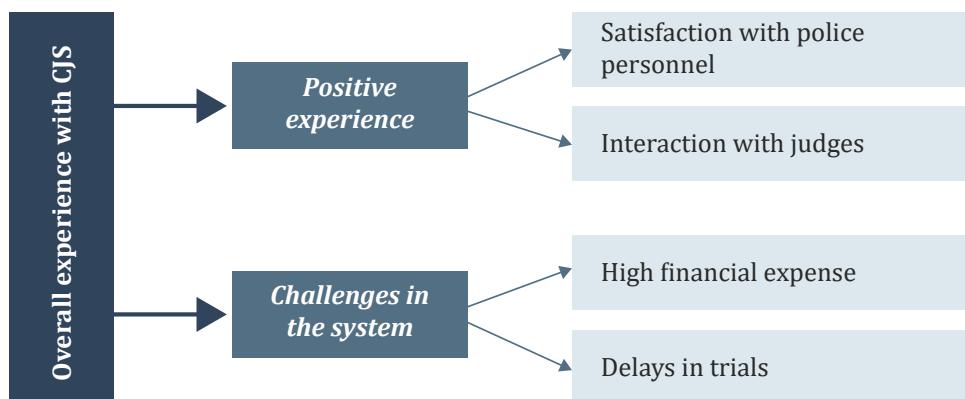
Source: Authors' illustration.

The interviews with key informants highlighted various issues and concerns, which resonate with other findings of this study. A brief overview of these themes, subthemes and categories is explained in this section.

Overall Experience with the CJS

The key informant interviews indicated that the general experience with stakeholders of the Pakistani CJS was positive, and they were satisfied with their interaction with the police. However, they also reported certain challenges in the system, such as high cost and delays in trials.

Figure 28: Overall Experience: Subthemes and Categories

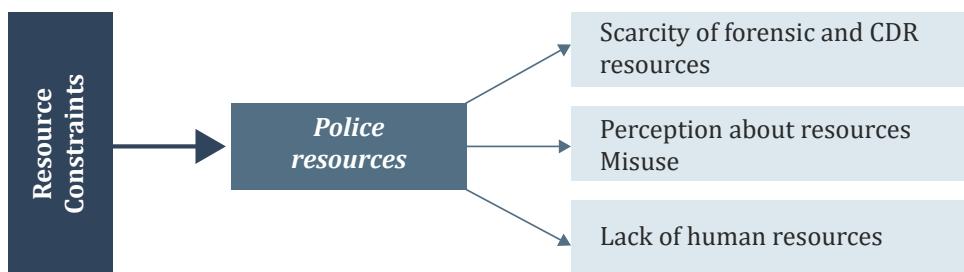


Source: Authors' illustration.

Resource Constraints

The key informants also highlighted the issues and challenges related to resources in Pakistan's CJS. They mentioned that the most affected stakeholder is the police. They mentioned that human resources are scarce in the police department. They also pointed out that the police lack forensic resources and call detail records (CDR). However, there is a general perception among the public that they misuse the available resources. Thus, they suggested managing the available resources better to gain maximum benefit, but stakeholders are reluctant to do so.

Figure 29: Resource Constraints: Subthemes and Categories



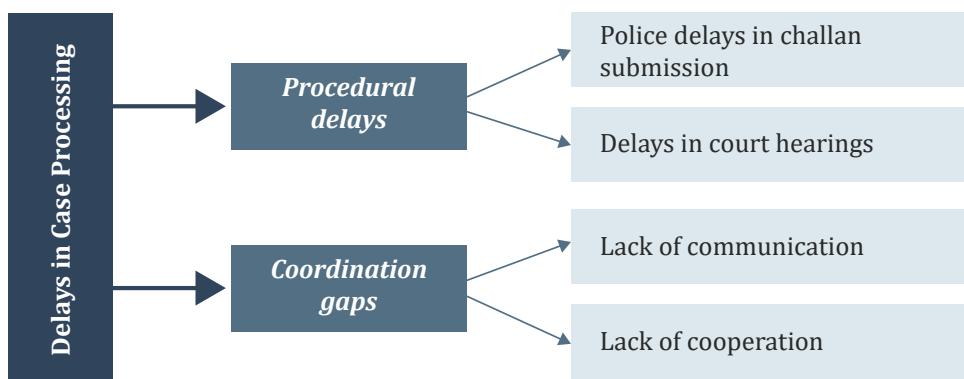
Source: Authors' illustration.

Delays in Case Processing

Delays in case processing are a major reason that leads to a low conviction rate. The key informants highlighted the issue of procedural delays in Pakistan's CJS. In terms of procedural delays, the key informants mentioned that the police delay the submission of challans. The court also delays trials, which not only influences the conviction and processing of cases but also adds to the frustration of the general public.

They also mentioned that there are challenges of coordination that lead to delays. There is a lack of coordination, cooperation, and communication between the stakeholders of the CJS. All the stakeholders work independently and perceive themselves to be the best. The key informants further added that the stakeholders also lack cooperation and coordination.

Figure 30: Delays in Case Processing: Subthemes and Categories

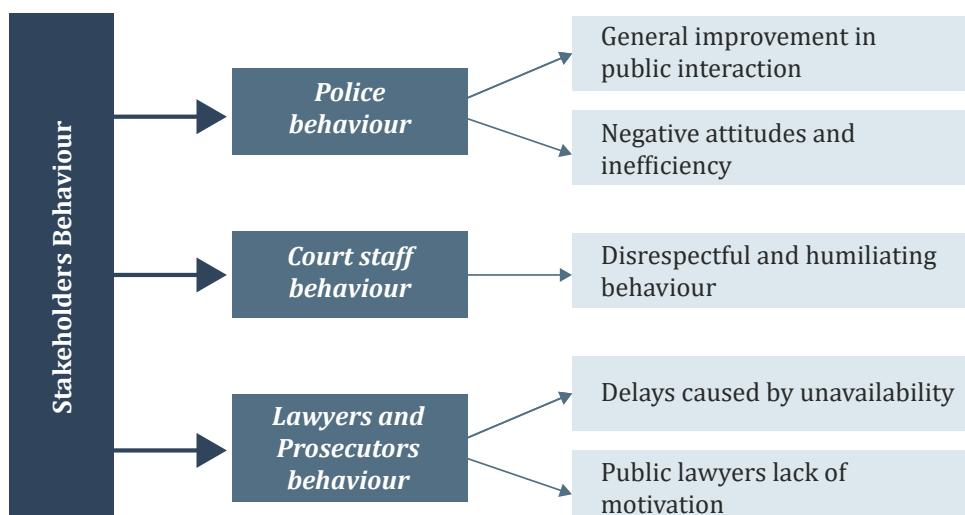


Source: Authors' illustration.

Stakeholders' Behaviour

The issue of stakeholders' behaviour was also highlighted by key informants. They specifically mentioned the behaviour of the police, judiciary, and the court staff. The key informants mentioned that recently, there has been an improvement in the behaviour and attitude of the police personnel towards the general public. The interaction of police personnel with the general public is much better compared to the past. They also mentioned that the behaviour of court staff is worse than that of the judicial stakeholders in the CJS. The key informants mentioned that lawyers and prosecutors often cause delays due to being unavailable. The lack of motivation in public lawyers was also mentioned by participants. Key informants mentioned that the court staff often have a negative attitude and behaviour towards the general public.

Figure 31: Stakeholders' Behaviour: Subthemes and Categories



Source: Authors' illustration.

Systemic Issues in CJ

Systemic challenges result in the collapse of the overall structure. The key informants mentioned that the Pakistani CJS system faces systemic issues, such as outdated laws. The key informants mentioned that our legal system's laws favour the accused. They also lamented the lack of accountability of all the stakeholders. They said that the lack of accountability results in various issues, such as corruption in the police department. The key informants said that Pakistan's CJS laws favour the accused more, and the stakeholders are not held accountable. They further mentioned that the lack of accountability results in various issues, such as corruption in the police department.

Figure 32: Systematic Issues: Subthemes and Categories



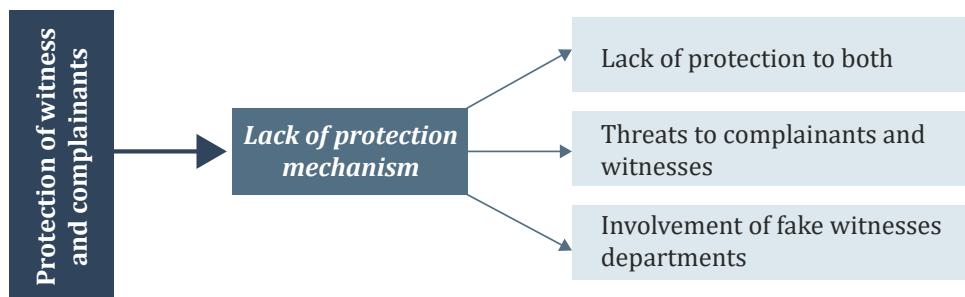
Source: Authors' illustration.

As for the workload of the stakeholders, they said that it is an important concern. They said that the stakeholders have to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, and the judicial system has a huge backlog of cases.

Protection of Complainants and Witnesses

Protection from threat is the responsibility of the CJS, but in Pakistan, this responsibility is not carried out diligently. There are laws for the protection of witnesses and complainants, but the applicability of these laws is almost non-existent. The key informants also mentioned the lack of a protection mechanism for both witnesses and complainants. Therefore, witnesses refuse to testify. Consequently, the police fabricate evidence and produce false witnesses in court.

Figure 33: Protection of Key Informants: Subthemes and Categories

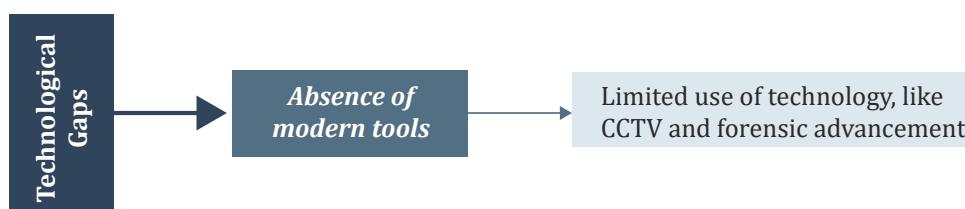


Source: Authors' illustration.

Technological Gaps

The key informant also highlighted their concerns with the absence of modern technology in Pakistan's CJS. They said that Pakistan's CJS lacks modern and up-to-date tools and technologies, which makes the handling of modern-day crime difficult. They also mentioned that the absence of technological advances has a bearing on conviction rates.

Figure 34: Technological Gaps: Subthemes and Categories

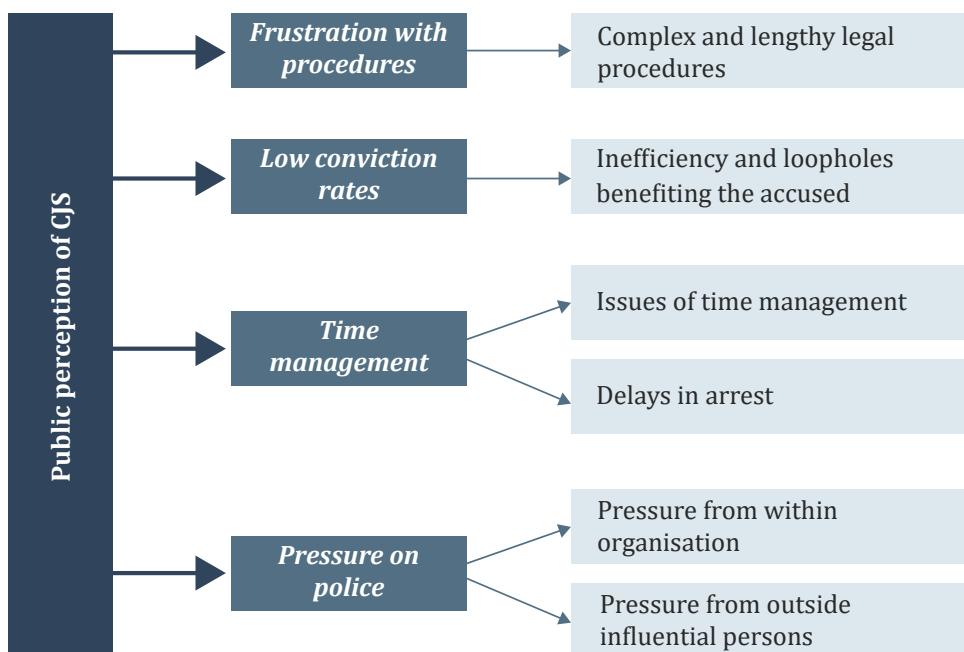


Source: Authors' illustration.

Public Perception of CJS

The public perception of the Pakistani CJS is not positive. The key informants mentioned that this is due to frustrations with the procedures, low conviction rates, pressure on the police, and time management issues among police personnel.

Figure 35: Public Perception of the CJS: Subthemes and Categories



Source: Authors' illustration.



5. CONCLUSIONS

The Pakistani CJS is facing significant challenges, with rising murder and robbery rates in Rawalpindi and conviction rates of less than 30% for murder and under 10% for robbery in the past decade. High acquittal rates highlight systemic inefficiencies. Case analyses revealed gaps at various stages, including delays, documentation flaws, investigative shortcomings, procedural defects, and inadequate training for investigators and prosecutors.

Focus group discussions identified organisational, procedural, and training challenges, alongside investigative and workplace issues. Stakeholder interviews highlighted system inefficiencies, resource constraints, technological gaps, public perception problems, and witness-related issues.

Similarity in results obtained from different data sources strengthens the validity of the findings. All sources of data strongly suggest that comprehensive reforms, addressing law enforcement, judiciary, and correctional institutions, are necessary. Results also highlight that insights from all stakeholders, including the police, legal professionals, and policymakers, are essential to develop a holistic approach for improving effectiveness and fairness in the criminal justice system. There is a dire need to pay attention to both macro and micro components of the CJS for improvement in conviction rates and profound reforms in the system.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings from case file analysis, FGDs with police personnel, and interviews with all major stakeholders highlighted various aspects that need to be modified in the Pakistani CJS. These recommendations would not only help in the improvement of conviction rates and resolving capacity constraints faced by the CJS, but they would also help in improving the overall effectiveness and public perception. One of the key findings is that the legislation of the Pakistani CJS requires amendments and modifications at the grassroots level. The amendments that have already taken place often focus on the macro level; thus, the issues at the micro level remain unresolved. The major recommendations extracted from the findings of case files, FGDs, and interviews are discussed below.

Improvement in Investigation Procedures: In terms of investigation, a number of challenges and issues were reported. These challenges are due to faulty procedures utilised by the IOs and other investigation team members. The following are the major recommendations in this regard:

- Evidence collection methods: In order to improve evidence collection methods, there is a need to develop a proper system for training and evaluation of training outcomes. This system involves various steps, including: need assessment, training delivery, integration with practice, and evaluation and feedback.
- Submission of evidence for forensic evaluation: In terms of forensic evaluation of evidence, it is essential to improve the availability and accessibility of forensic resources. Establishing small-scale forensic evaluation cells or units in police departments could significantly improve the current situation. The lack of adequate preservation practices often results in the degradation or loss of evidence, which adversely impacts the overall quality and reliability of forensic evaluations.
- Critical thinking: In police investigations, critical thinking is a vital skill that enables officers to effectively analyse information, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions. It involves considering diverse perspectives, assessing data from various sources, and developing well-reasoned conclusions (Gehl & Plecas, 2017). By adopting a critical thinking approach, officers can identify patterns, connections, and inconsistencies, ultimately leading to more accurate and reliable outcomes.

Gaps in Documentation: To address the documentation gaps, it is essential to establish a standardised documentation pattern that clearly outlines the procedures and requirements for documenting various aspects of police work. This pattern should cover the recording of incidents, arrests, investigations, witness statements, evidence collection, and case progress in a systematic and organised manner.

Need Assessment of Resources: To strengthen the CJS in Pakistan, it is essential to address the gaps in resources that hinder its efficiency and effectiveness. The first step is to identify what resources are present and what resources are absent. It is also necessary to develop strategies to enhance the resources and their appropriate utilisation.



Training of Stakeholders: The training programmes should cover essential skills such as systematic forensic investigation, crime scene techniques, interrogation techniques, investigation strategies, and the use of advanced investigative technologies. Specialised training should target specific departments or units such as traffic, police stations, patrolling, counter terrorism, and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), focusing on enhancing skills for handling complex cases and specialised duties. Prime importance must be given to ensuring the imparted training is effectively utilised rather than being used for promotional purposes only.

Foundation Building for Police Personnel: It is essential to enhance the foundational skills of police officers in critical thinking, decision-making, and ethical practices, while establishing effective systems for time management, documentation, and ethics. A more indigenous approach must be employed in this regard to address the needs that would be in accordance with local policing culture.

Technology Integration: Police officers should be encouraged to use technology to stay updated on new challenges and solutions in law enforcement. By utilising digital platforms to access real-time data, crime analysis tools, and updated strategies for legal purposes, officers can make more informed decisions when faced with complex situations. In this regard, the capability of officers needs to be expanded to use all available resources effectively.

Time Management: During the focus group discussions, police officers repeatedly reported challenges related to time management. Learning to control their time and task determination would reduce the feeling of chaos. It will enable them to prioritise tasks and handle unpredictable situations without compromising their core responsibilities.

Modern Technology and Equipment: Investment in modern technology and equipment to enhance the operational capabilities of the police force is required. This may include the use of body cameras, GPS tracking systems, crime mapping tools, and other technologies to improve response times and investigative processes. Additionally, focused training programmes must be designed to familiarise officers with updated policies, procedures, and technologies, emphasising compliance and adherence to new standards.



Enhancement of the Police Image: To enhance the image of the police force in Pakistan, it is crucial to integrate the principles of procedural justice into everyday policing practices, focusing on fairness, transparency, and respect in all interactions with the public. Promote community-oriented policing approaches that emphasise building trust and collaboration between the police and the communities they serve. Encourage officers to engage with community members, address local concerns, and work together to prevent crime.

Based on the recommendations, a number of recommendation strategies were formulated to implement in a selected police station. The following is a brief overview of the strategies implemented. These include a workshop on critical thinking and decision making, time management and prioritisation, and a self-management plan for police officers. A pretest-posttest was performed to see if the pilot recommendations had an impact.

7. A PILOT TEST OF POLICY REFORMS

A training workshop focusing on four areas of police cognitive abilities and functioning was arranged in a police station. These four aspects include critical thinking, decision making (cognitive aspects), time management and self-management (functioning aspects). The training is designed by utilising multiple modules such as psychoeducation, case-based learning, performing activities, and discussion between the participants. The training workshop comprised three components, namely, pretesting, training module delivery, and post-testing. A total of 13 police personnel from different ranks and years of expertise were present during training. After pretesting, two participants did not attend the training due to urgent official duties. Another participant was called upon during the training for an important task, leaving a total of 10 individuals who completed the training and post-testing.



Findings from the Implementation

A brief overview of the ranks and years of experience of the participants is presented in the table below.

Table 3: Demographics of the Participants

Sr. No.	Participant code	Rank	Years of Experience
1.	PR1	Assistant Sub-Inspector	18
2.	PR2	Assistant Sub-Inspector	22
3.	PR3	Assistant Sub-Inspector	18
4.	PR4	Assistant Sub-Inspector	10
5.	PR5	Assistant Sub-Inspector	19
6.	PR6	Sub-Inspector	15
7.	PR7	Sub-Inspector	28
8.	PR8	Sub-Inspector	13
9.	PR9	Sub-Inspector	2
10.	PR10	Head Constable	18

Source: Authors' compilation.

The participants were assessed using three quantitative assessment tools at both pre-testing and post-testing. These tools included a critical thinking skills tool, a self-management tool, and the perceived stress scale (PSS-10). The critical thinking skill tool consisted of 10 items and was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1: lowest, 5: highest). The self-management tool was also a 10-item assessment tool and was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1: lowest, 5: highest). The perceived stress scale also consisted of 10 items and was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 4. Items 2,5,7, and 8 were reverse-scored. Qualitative feedback was also taken from the participants. The qualitative feedback focused on the participants' understanding and perceived effectiveness. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses are given below.

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings are presented in the form of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The descriptive findings consist of the measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and variance). Table 4 below summarises these findings.



Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Critical Thinking, Perceived Stress, and Self-Management.

Aspect	Time of Testing	Mean	Max	Min	Median	Mode	SD
Critical Thinking	T1	27.85	17	44	28.00	15	8.88
	T2	27.40	19	441	28.00	28	7.02
Perceived Stress	T1	13.85	4	32	11.00	4	8.85
	T2	13.30	1	34	11.50	10	10.43
Self-management	T1	34.00	40	15	38.00	34	9.40
	T2	33.00	12	37	34.50	36	8.28

Source: Authors' calculations.

This table indicates that the mean of critical thinking and perceived stress remained almost the same at T1 and T2. However, the mean of self-management decreased at T2 compared to T1.

The next phase of the quantitative analysis involved the examination of the enhancement or reduction in the targeted aspects. The table below describes the overall trend of the frequency and percentages of participants for critical thinking, perceived stress, and self-management.

Table 5: Frequency and Percentages of Critical Thinking, Perceived Stress, and Self-Management

Aspect	Trend	Frequency	Percentage
Critical thinking	Increase	4	40%
Perceived Stress	Decrease	4	40%
Self-Management	Increase	6	60%

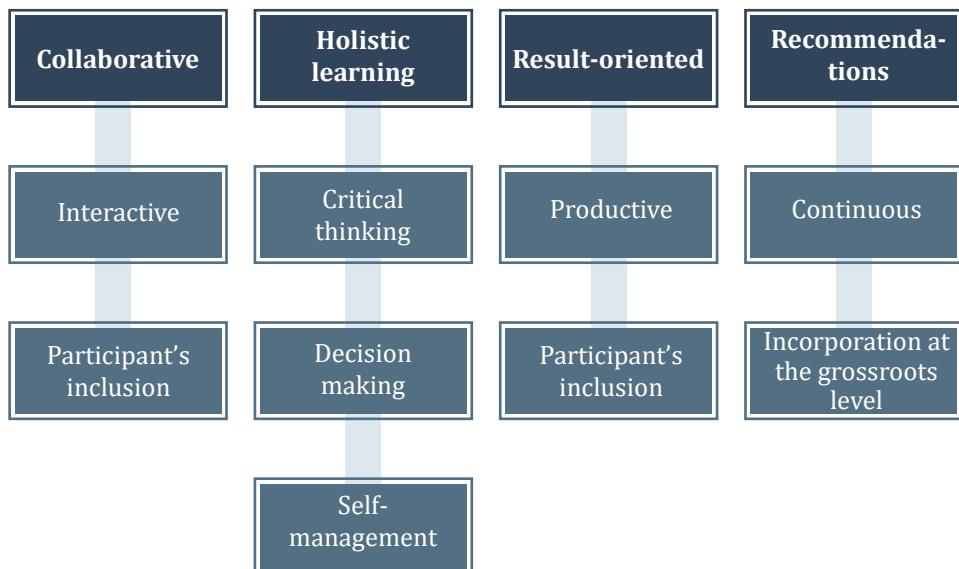
Source: Authors' calculations.

This table indicates that self-management of participants increased more than the critical thinking enhancement, and the perceived stress declined. The findings indicate that there is a need to work on each training module independently to increase its effectiveness. This also indicates that the cognitive and functional aspects of one of the major active ingredients of the Pakistani CJS can be improved if proper training modules are added to the initial academic training, as well as need specific training.

Qualitative Findings

The figure below describes the themes extracted from the qualitative feedback of the participants.

Figure 36: The Feedback of the Participants: Themes



Source: Authors' compilation.

Participants reported a highly positive experience with the training, which they found to be innovative, productive, and engaging. Their active involvement in the activities was notable, as they expressed strong appreciation for the interactive delivery style of the session. The training successfully captured their attention and facilitated a shift in their perspectives towards key competencies, including self-management, time management, critical thinking, and decision-making. In terms of learning outcomes, participants identified a marked improvement in their critical thinking, time management, self-management, and decision-making abilities. They indicated that the training empowered them to engage in thorough analysis and critical evaluation, improve time management practices, and acknowledge the significance of self-care and informed decision-making processes.



Despite the training's overall effectiveness, participants recommended extending the duration of the sessions to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the topics addressed. This extension would further enhance skill development and better equip them for their professional responsibilities. They also recommended the incorporation of such training programmes in their regular training modules. This feedback highlights the need for the applicability and effectiveness of such training programmes at the grassroots level.

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PART II

POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

Policy Briefs



FEMALE VOTING PREFERENCES IN DISTRICT BUNER, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

Hassan Shah and Khwaja Tariq Ziad

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the influence of socioeconomic, religious, and cultural factors on female voting preferences in District Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Limited employment opportunities and the lack of political education of female voters influence their voting preferences. Insufficient political education of women makes them unable to evaluate election candidates properly and make informed voting choices. Our findings show that economic dependency weakens women's political decision-making, which influences women's voting preferences. Socioeconomic restrictions and gender norms have curtailed women's independent voting preferences in the region. Pakhtun cultural norms and religious interpretations have affected females' voting preferences. For instance, *purdah* (veil) restricts women's movement and political engagement, which influences women's voting preferences. The

role of the religious factor is also undeniable in this discussion. For example, religious identity and misinterpretation of religious values and practices have affected female voting preferences.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology was used to explore female vote preferences and their dynamics in Buner. First, secondary data were acquired from the Election Commission of Pakistan for the 2018 and 2024 general elections. The descriptive analysis, based on election documents and studies, was used to assess women's voting preferences. The analysis examined the political parties that women voters preferred in the elections.

The second step involved focus group discussion (FGDs) and in-depth interviews with women voters, political activists, male politicians, lawyers, and academicians to corroborate the

voting preferences identified and reported in the first stage. Four FDGs with female voters were held to understand how socio-cultural and religious elements affected women's voting decisions in Buner. This approach revealed how societal and religious variables shape females' voting preferences. These focus groups revealed various societal and religious elements that affect females' voting preferences, which were addressed in individual interviews.

Moreover, 23 interviews with women voters and political activists were conducted. For the interviews, an interview guide was used with some preliminary questions on how socio-cultural and religious factors, male dominance, social relations, *baradari* system (*Dala Tapala*), social ties with a political party, and religious thoughts influence females' voting preferences. The respondents were also asked additional research problem questions during the discussion.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following are the findings of the study:

Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Women's Voting Preferences: The examination of women's voting preferences in the general elections of 2018 and 2024 in Buner underscores the notable influence of

socioeconomic factors. Women's economic dependency emerged as a significant factor that restricts their capacity to make autonomous political decisions. A significant number of female respondents, especially housewives, reported that their voting decisions were influenced by the directives of male family members, thereby supporting the assertion that financial dependence diminishes women's decision-making. The findings correspond with the notion of structural intersectionality, illustrating how interrelated social, economic, and familial structures influence women's roles in public and political domains. The deficiency in voter education among women intensifies their political marginalisation, as many are uninformed about the significance of informed voting. Multiple participants indicated that insufficient political awareness hindered their ability to critically evaluate candidates and parties, frequently leading them to depend on male guidance during the electoral process.

Moreover, restricted employment opportunities for women exacerbate their economic dependence, thereby limiting their political agency. Numerous participants recognised that financial independence would have enabled them to exercise greater autonomy in their voting decisions. This viewpoint aligns with



the assertion that structural barriers, including economic and social constraints, impede women's empowerment. Furthermore, the literature indicates that socioeconomic factors play a significant role in influencing women's political participation. The theory of change model posits that incremental advancements, especially in employment opportunities, can empower women and progressively improve their political participation.

Pakhtun Culture and Women's Voting Preferences: The analysis of women's voting inclinations in Buner underscores the significant impact of the Pakhtun culture on female political preferences, especially via social identification, familial and tribal connections, and cultural principles. The social identity of women, influenced by their association with particular social and ethnic groups, significantly impacts their voting decisions. A multitude of participants indicated that their affiliation with these groups constrained their autonomy, necessitating their support for politicians favoured by their family or community. This corresponds with the notion of the interpersonal domain of intersectionality, highlighting the impact of power dynamics inside social structures on political decisions. Likewise, familial and tribal affiliations appeared as significant influences on females'

voting preferences, with numerous respondents acknowledging that they had never voted without their family's approval.

In addition to social identity and familial connections, Pakhtun cultural values and traditions, including the practice of purdah, impose further limitations on women's political independence. Cultural norms require women to obtain permission from male family members for mobility, thereby reinforcing their dependence in various aspects of life, including voting. Participants indicated that these traditions and cultural codes hinder their ability to make political decisions freely, aligning with the notion of the structural domain in intersectionality, wherein cultural frameworks perpetuate gender-based limitations. It is generally posited that women's liberty is crucial for political empowerment. However, in Buner, cultural expectations and societal norms persistently restrict women's electoral agency.

Religious Factors Influencing Female Voting Preferences: The study indicates that religious factors also play a significant role in shaping females' voting preferences in Buner, especially through religious identity, misinterpretation of Islamic values, and the interplay of religion and socio-cultural norms. A significant number of women indicated a

preference for religious political parties, asserting that these parties uphold Islamic values and promote women's rights. This trend corresponds with the notion of structural intersectionality, wherein religious identity intersects with political life to influence women's electoral decisions. Participants indicated that their preference for religious parties arises from the perception that these parties safeguard Islamic principles, thereby highlighting the influence of religious identity on voting preferences. The misinterpretation of Islamic teachings significantly restricts women's political engagement. The belief that women ought to be limited to domestic responsibilities and excluded from public engagement has diminished their political agency, resulting in a predominance of male influence in voting decisions.

The intersection of Islamic values with Pakhtun socio-cultural norms significantly influences females' voting preferences, as traditional cultural practices frequently overshadow Islamic teachings on gender equality. Numerous participants indicated that Pakhtun cultural norms impose greater restrictions on women's political engagement than religious factors, as women are expected to maintain family honour by refraining from independent voting. This corresponds with the notion of classical liberty, highlighting that the

political empowerment of women necessitates liberation from oppressive socio-cultural and religious frameworks. Cultural traditions have overshadowed Islamic teachings, resulting in the exclusion of women from political decision-making and the reinforcement of male authority in electoral matters. During the 2018 and 2024 general elections, numerous women encountered obstacles to voting as a result of socio-cultural concepts of honour and purdah, highlighting the systemic barriers that women experience. The study concludes that religious identity, misinterpretation of Islamic values, and the cultural reinterpretation of religious teachings collectively restrict women's voting independence in Buner, underscoring the necessity for enhanced awareness and empowerment initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis and conclusion of this research project, the following policy recommendations may be considered to ensure women's independent voting preferences:

- The political education of women needs to be improved to ensure women have independent (from socioeconomic, religious, and cultural barriers) voting preferences.



- ▶ Community outreach programmes may be launched in rural and urban areas to engage with women voters to educate them on the voting process and encourage women's participation.
- ▶ As there are cultural challenges to women voters, gender-sensitive voting procedures may be adopted. For instance, an online voting process for women may be launched.
- ▶ As there are economic challenges to women voters, microfinance and entrepreneurship support programmes need to be ensured to economically empower women voters.
- ▶ Social protection programs, such as education and health insurance programmes, may be introduced to improve women voters' social status.
- ▶ Looking into cultural challenges, cultural sensitivity programmes may be started by the government, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies to promote women's political rights.
- ▶ As familial and tribal ties are involved in women's voting, tribal, familial, and religious leaders may be involved to promote women's political empowerment through voting.
- ▶ Independent resource centres or women empowerment institutions need to be established for women to improve women's advocacy in private and political spheres.
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation units may be established to evaluate women's voting progress from time to time.



DIGITIZATION AND CORRUPTION IN PAKISTAN

Saqib Hussain

INTRODUCTION

Land administration in developing countries, particularly in rural areas, is often plagued by inefficiencies, corruption, and a lack of transparency. In Pakistan, land-related corruption has been pervasive, fueled by bureaucratic opacity and complex legal processes. Recognising these challenges, the Punjab government, with support from the World Bank, launched the Punjab Land Record Management Information System (LRMIS) in 2017. This initiative aimed to digitise land records, enhance transparency, and improve accessibility to land administration services.

Despite growing interest in digitisation as a governance tool, empirical evidence on its impact on corruption and institutional efficiency remains limited. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the effects of LRMIS implementation on land-related corruption, access to justice, and the efficiency of judicial proceedings in Punjab. Using a quasi-experimental

design and leveraging the staggered rollout of LRMIS across districts, the research examined data from the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) Punjab, the Lahore High Court (LHC), and district-level demographic and socioeconomic indicators.

The analysis focuses on changes in the volume of corruption complaints, inquiries, and civil litigation before and after the system's implementation. By exploring how increased transparency through digitisation affects governance outcomes, the study offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital reforms in reducing corruption and enhancing institutional performance.

The findings contribute to the growing literature on digital governance and its potential to strengthen accountability mechanisms. This research provides critical evidence for policymakers and development practitioners aiming to leverage digitisation for improved governance, particularly

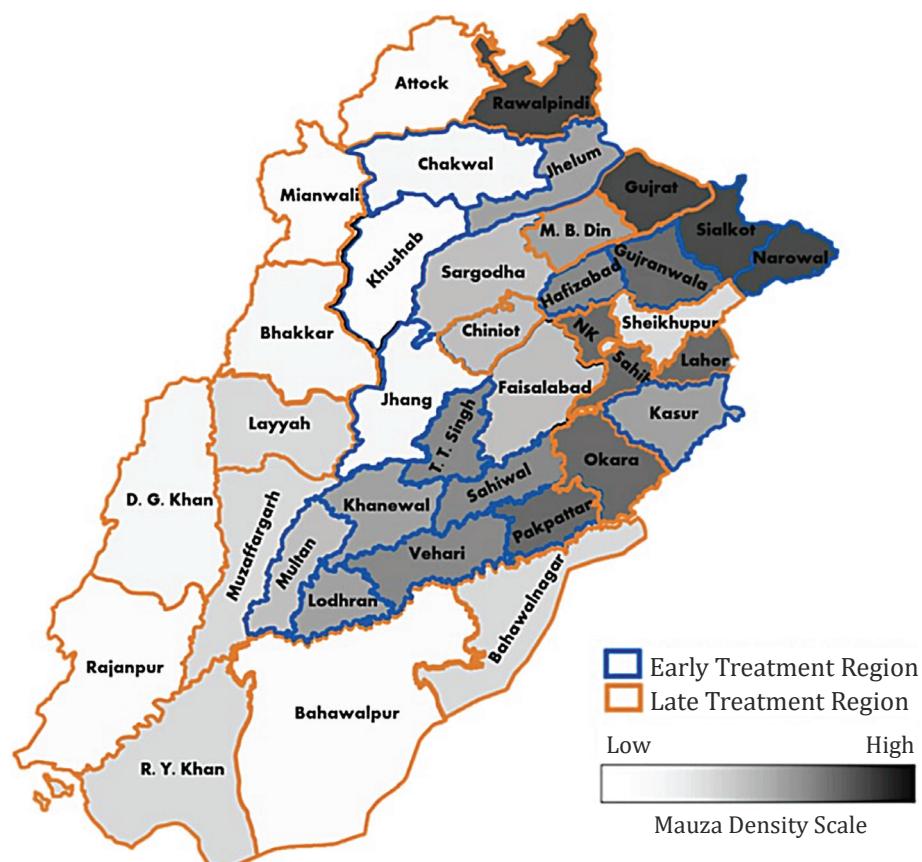
in agrarian economies where land administration plays a pivotal role in livelihoods and economic development.

most populous province. Before the introduction of LRMIS, land records were maintained manually by local officials known as Patwaris. This traditional system was not only prone to errors but also susceptible to manipulation and corruption. The introduction of LRMIS was aimed at enhancing service delivery, increasing transparency, and reducing corruption in land-related transactions.

THE PUNJAB LAND RECORD MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (LRMIS)

The LRMIS was implemented as part of a broader effort to modernise land administration in Punjab, Pakistan's

Figure 1: Implementation of LRMIS



Source: Author's calculations

The system's key features include:

- Automated issuance of land ownership documents (fard), which reduces the time for processing land transactions.
- The establishment of land record centres and integration with sub-registrar offices which streamlines the land registration process and improves the reliability of land records.
- Online access to land records, which allows landholders to access their information anytime, thereby reducing reliance on corrupt intermediaries.

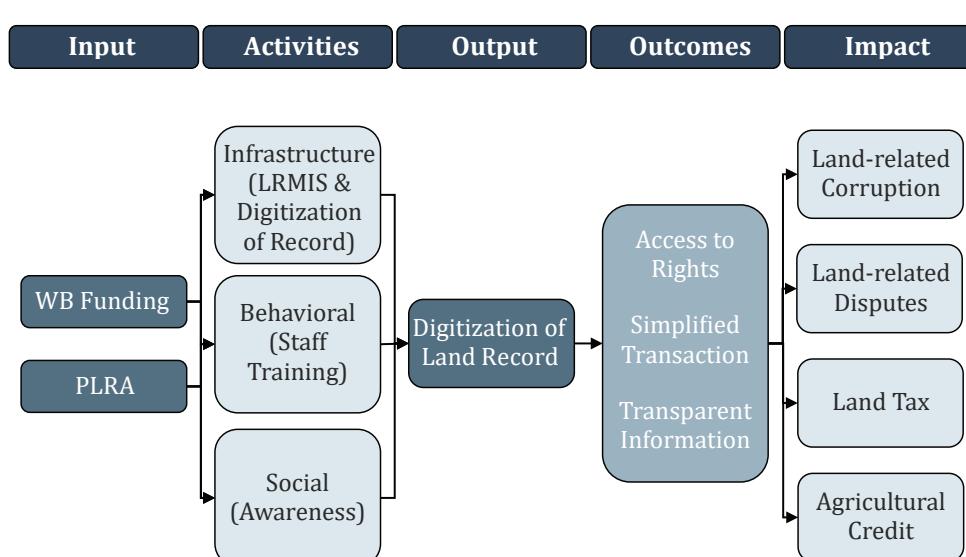
The phased implementation of LRMIS, starting with a subset of

districts and later expanding to the entire province, offers a unique opportunity to study the effects of digitisation on corruption in land administration.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the impact of the LRMIS rollout, a quasi-experimental design was used, comparing districts exposed to early digitisation (treatment group) with those exposed later (control group). This staggered implementation allowed for difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis, which accounts for unobserved district-specific and time-specific factors through district and year fixed effects.

Figure 2: Result Chain Analysis



Source: Author's calculations.



Key measures of corruption incidents, complaints, inquiries, and cases were normalised by district population, area, and the number of revenue estates (mauzas) for comparability. Robustness was ensured through an event study approach and instrumental variable (IV) analysis using the planned LRMIS rollout schedule as an instrument.

Key data sources included the ACE, which tracks land-related complaints and investigations of corrupt practices within land administration, and the LHC, which tracks civil cases related to land disputes, providing insight into the judicial response to land-related issues.

By comparing the pre- and post-implementation data from early and late treatment districts, the study estimated the causal effects of the LRMIS on land-related corruption. For the robustness check, the instrumental variable estimation and the correlated-random effect model were used.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

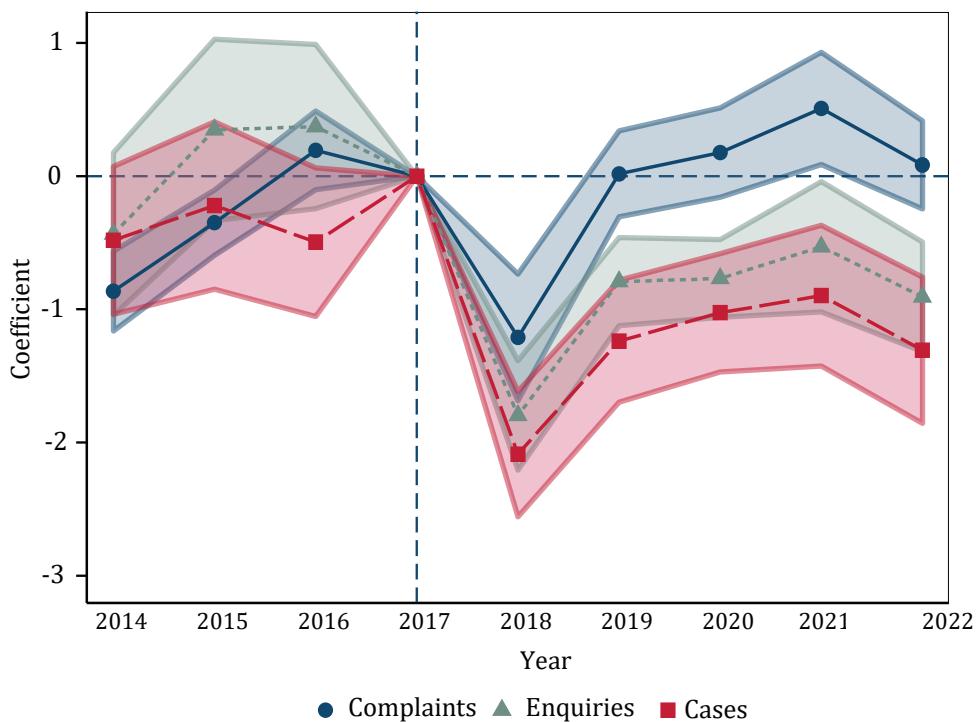
The introduction of LRMIS significantly increased the number of complaints registered with ACE and

civil cases filed in the LHC. This is likely due to the increased transparency provided by LRMIS, which made it easier for individuals to access land records and identify discrepancies or irregularities in land transactions. With more accessible information, people were more likely to report corrupt practices or take their cases to court.

While the number of complaints and civil cases increased, the study also found a decrease in the number of inquiries and investigations at ACE. This suggests that once complaints were registered, they were more likely to be resolved quickly and efficiently, possibly due to the clearer information provided by the digitised records. This early resolution is indicative of the system's potential to enhance the responsiveness of government agencies.

The study also suggests that the digitisation of land records has had a positive spillover effect on judicial efficiency. As complaints transitioned into civil cases, there was a noticeable improvement in the speed of case handling at the Lahore High Court. With more reliable and accessible records, courts were able to adjudicate cases more effectively, reducing delays in land dispute resolution.

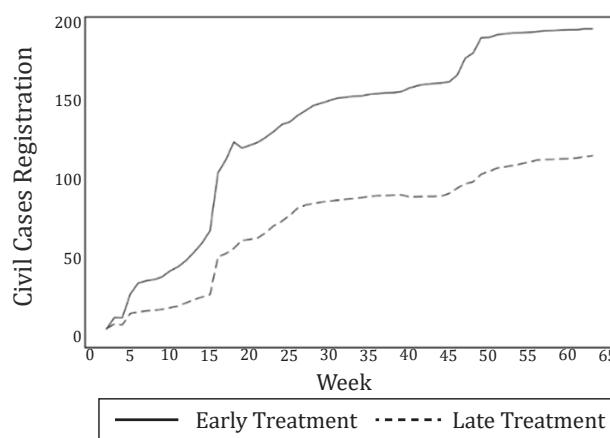
Figure 3: Time-varying Effect of LRMIS on Documenting Incident, Event Study



Note: Standardised coefficients of corruption incidents.

Source: Author's calculations.

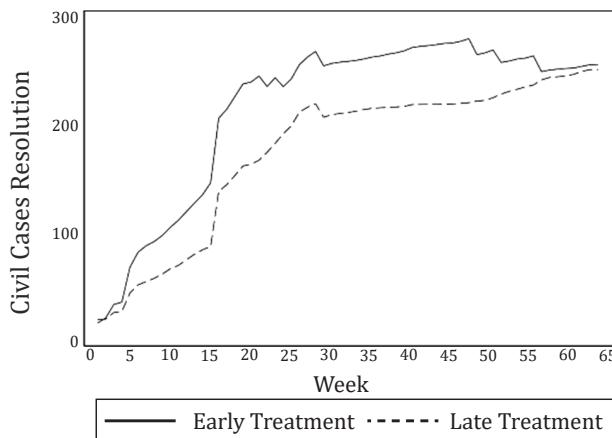
Figure 4: Impact on LHC Civil Case Registration



Source: Author's calculations.



Figure 5: Impact on LHC Civil Case Resolution



Source: Author's calculations.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research have significant implications for policy and governance in Pakistan and other developing countries. The results provide compelling evidence that digitising land records through systems like LRMIS can enhance transparency, reduce corruption, and improve administrative efficiency. Based on these findings, the following policy recommendations are made:

Given the positive impact of LRMIS in early treatment districts, it is recommended that the Punjab government expedite the rollout of the system to the remaining urban areas. Expanding access to digitised land records can further reduce

corruption and improve the efficiency of land administration across the province.

The success of the LRMIS underscores the importance of transparency in government operations. Policymakers should consider expanding e-governance initiatives in other areas of public administration to curb corruption and improve service delivery. Digital platforms can provide citizens with greater access to government information, reducing the role of intermediaries and minimising opportunities for corrupt practices.

While the implementation of the LRMIS has shown positive results, further efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity of the ACE and the LHC. Increased investment



in training, resources, and institutional reforms can ensure that these bodies can effectively address the complaints and cases arising from the new system.

To maximise the impact of the LRMIS, it is crucial to raise public awareness about the system and its benefits. Public outreach campaigns should be designed to educate landholders and the general public about how to access land records, file complaints, and resolve disputes through the digital platform.

While the initial results of the LRMIS are promising, it is important to continue monitoring and evaluating its long-term impact on corruption and administrative efficiency. Regular impact assessments can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the system is evolving to meet the needs of citizens.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrated the significant potential of digitising land records through systems like LRMIS to reduce corruption and improve governance in land administration. By enhancing transparency and increasing access to reliable information, the LRMIS has contributed to a more efficient and accountable land management system in Punjab. The findings provide strong support for expanding such initiatives in other provinces of Pakistan and beyond. Policymakers should prioritise e-governance reforms, build capacity within anti-corruption institutions, and continue to invest in technologies that promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public administration.



LOW CONVICTION RATES IN PUNJAB AND CAPACITY CHALLENGES FOR THE PUNJAB POLICE

Syed Imran Haider, Muhammad Kamran Naqi Khan, Sabahat Haqqani, Arfan ul Haq, and Ehsan Sadiq

INTRODUCTION

This study explored evidence for understanding the pervasive challenges contributing to low conviction rates and the capacity constraints faced by the Punjab Police, specifically in Rawalpindi. The study highlighted various aspects that need to be improved upon in the Pakistani criminal justice system (CJS). These aspects are related to all major stakeholders, including the police, judiciary (judges, lawyers, and prosecutors), court staff, complainants, witnesses, and the general public. The recommendations of the study not only focus on improving crime conviction and resolving capacity constraints faced by the Pakistani CJS but also point to a need to improve the overall effectiveness and public perception of the CJS.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was used, using both quantitative and qualitative data on robbery and murder cases from 2013 to 2023. Twenty files of murder and robbery cases, three FGDs with police personnel and 15 interviews with all other major stakeholders (judges, lawyers, prosecutors, complainants and witnesses).

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are organised into three major categories, i.e., improvements in investigation procedures, gaps in documentation, need assessment of resources, continuous professional development and monitoring, and enhancement in police image. One of the key findings related to policy

recommendations and reforms is that the legislation of the Pakistani CJS requires amendments and modifications at the grassroots level. The amendments that have taken place already often focus on the macro level, leaving the micro-level issue unattended.

Improvement in Investigation Procedures

To improve the investigation procedures in the CJS, major areas that need immediate and comprehensive reforms include methods of evidence collection, the submission of evidence, and improving critical thinking in the police personnel and prosecutors.

Evidence Collection Method

The methods adopted by the investigative staff to collect the evidence, especially in cases of murder, need the following major considerations:

Need Assessment of Evidence Collection: Conduct a thorough assessment to identify current strengths and areas needing improvement in evidence collection methods among investigative staff, including police officers, evidence collection teams and prosecutors.

Training Delivery: Roll out training sessions in various formats, such as workshops, seminars, online courses, and practical exercises,

tailored to different levels of experience for the collection of evidence. In order to address training gaps of all major stakeholders, comprehensive training programmes need to be developed for all stakeholders, not only police personnel. These programs should cover essential skills such as systematic forensic investigation, crime scene techniques, interrogation techniques, investigation strategies, and the use of advanced investigative technologies. Specialised training embedded in the local organisational structure should target specific departments or units such as the traffic police, police stations, patrolling, counter terrorism, and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), focusing on enhancing skills for handling complex cases and specialised duties.

Integration into Practice: Encourage the application of learned skills through regular practice exercises, case studies, and ongoing mentorship and support from experienced peers.

Evaluation and Feedback: Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the training program through feedback from participants, performance metrics, and observed improvements in case outcomes. Make necessary adjustments to the program based on these evaluations.



Submission of Evidence for Forensic Evaluation

In terms of forensic evaluation of evidence, it is essential to enhance the availability and accessibility of forensic resources. Establishing small-scale forensic evaluation cells or units within police departments could significantly improve the current situation. These units should be equipped with the fundamental tools and techniques necessary for the initial evaluation and preservation of evidence. Proper evidence preservation at this preliminary stage is critical, as it ensures that the evidence remains intact and uncontaminated before being sent for comprehensive analysis.

Critical Thinking

In police investigations, critical thinking is a vital skill that enables officers to effectively analyse information, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions. To enhance their critical thinking skills, police officers should receive training that emphasises the importance of objective analysis, effective communication, autonomy, time management and open-mindedness.

Gaps in Documentation

To address the documentation gaps that exist in the CJS, it is essential to establish a standardised

documentation pattern that clearly outlines the procedures and requirements for documenting various aspects of police work. This pattern should cover the recording of incidents, arrests, investigations, witness statements, evidence collection, and case progress in a systematic and organised manner. Most importantly, training and monitoring programs on proper documentation practices should be provided to all personnel to ensure that they understand the importance of thorough and timely documentation in facilitating effective communication, decision-making, and legal proceedings. Moreover, the transition from outdated documentation methods to modern and technological solutions needs to be monitored regularly to ensure that the updated methods are effectively integrated into the system by all members of the police force.

Need Assessment of Resources

The first step to enhance the availability and proper utilisation of resources is to identify what resources are present and what resources are absent. It is also necessary to develop strategies to enhance the resources and their utilisation, such as in terms of human resource strategies, including recruitment drives, incentivisation, and workforce optimisation in a systematic and

documented manner. In terms of technological integration, strategies such as forensic evaluation units, digital case management, and access to modern tools can be utilised. For infrastructure enhancement strategies, such as court expansion, secure storage facilities, the witness and complainant protection can be utilised. For training and capacity building strategies, such as regular training programmes, specialised training, and collaboration with institutions, may be employed.

Training of Stakeholders

In order to address training gaps of all major stakeholders, comprehensive training programmes need to be developed for all stakeholders, not only police personnel. These programmes should cover essential skills such as systematic forensic investigation, crime scene techniques, interrogation techniques, investigation strategies, and the use of advanced investigative technologies. Specialised training embedded in the local organisational structure should target specific departments or units such as traffic police, police stations, patrolling, counter terrorism, and the FIA, focusing on enhancing skills for handling complex cases and specialised duties.

Improving current programs through collaboration with institutes, legal experts, and trainers will enhance understanding of investigative processes, evidence handling, and case formulation.

The major modifications that may help the betterment of training among stakeholders include:

Standardisation of Reporting Formats:

Introduce standardised templates and guidelines for police reports and court documents. Conduct training sessions for officers and legal staff on the use of standardised formats, emphasising clarity, consistency, and adherence to legal requirements.

Enhanced Training Programs:

Develop specialised training modules for investigation officers, report writers, prosecutors, and other relevant personnel. Collaborate with academic institutions and international experts to design comprehensive training curricula covering modern investigative techniques, digital forensics, ethical standards, and effective report writing.

Improvement in Time Management:

Implement protocols and tools to streamline case timelines and reduce delays. Introduce a case management plan



or software to track and manage case progress, establish clear deadlines for evidence submission and court hearings, and conduct further steps towards completion.

Upgrade of Equipment and Methods: Invest in modern equipment and update methods for crime scene investigation, evidence collection, and forensic analysis. Allocate funds for the procurement of advanced forensic technology, ensure regular maintenance of equipment, and establish partnerships with technology providers for ongoing updates and training.

Ethical Guidelines and Record Keeping Practices: Develop and enforce ethical guidelines for record-keeping practices. Conduct workshops on ethical considerations in data management and record-keeping, create secure digital repositories for case documents, and establish audit mechanisms to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Continuous Evaluation and Feedback: Establish a system for ongoing evaluation of procedural improvements and feedback mechanisms. Conduct regular surveys and feedback sessions with stakeholders, including officers, legal professionals, and community representatives, to identify areas for improvement and measure the impact of implemented changes.

Continuous Professional Development and Monitoring

Foundation building for police personnel is of utmost importance as they are the tools for reducing low conviction rates. The enhancement of the foundational skills of police officers in critical thinking, decision-making, and ethical practices, while establishing effective systems for time management, documentation, and ethics, is necessary.

To ensure continuous learning and system improvement, case-based learning and problem-solving exercises relevant to local law enforcement challenges may be used. Worksheets or practice sheets based on critical thinking, problem solving and decision making can help in the implementation of learning knowledge. In addition to that, e-learning and the utilisation of mobile phones should be encouraged to resolve new challenges related to technology.

Enhancement in Police Image

To enhance the image of the police force in Pakistan, it is crucial to integrate the principles of procedural justice into everyday policing practices, focusing on fairness, transparency, and respect in all interactions with the public. Implementing comprehensive training programs that emphasise



effective communication, neutrality, and cultural sensitivity will foster positive public-police interactions. Developing policies that prioritise transparency and accountability, along with community outreach initiatives, can build trust and encourage cooperation from the community. Establishing feedback mechanisms will allow for continuous improvement based on public input. These measures will not only improve the public perception of the police but also lead to increased case reporting, as community members will be more likely to report crimes and cooperate with law enforcement, thereby enhancing overall public safety and trust in the police force. Promote community-oriented policing approaches that emphasise building

trust and collaboration between the police and the communities they serve. Encourage officers to engage with community members, address local concerns, and work together to prevent crime.

CONCLUSION

By implementing these practical steps, the police force and legal system can effectively address the identified gaps, improve operational efficiency, enhance transparency, and accelerate justice delivery. Continuous monitoring and adoption of these strategies will be essential to sustain improvements over time and meet evolving challenges in law enforcement and legal proceedings.

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2025 RASTA LRLS: Fiscal Management, Volume 20
2021-2025 CGP Call for Research Proposals (Round 1 – 8) <https://rasta.pide.org.pk/>
2022-2025 1st – 5th RASTA Conference Papers (90)
2021-2025 RASTA Knowledge Briefs (05)
2021-2025 RASTA Notes (03)
2021-2025 RASTA Documentaries (05) <https://www.youtube.com/@PIDEOfficial/videos>
2021-2025 RASTA Animated Videos (06) <https://rasta.pide.org.pk/videos/>

About the RASTA – PIDE & Planning Commission Competitive Research Grants

The *RASTA – PIDE & Planning Commission Competitive Research Grants Programme* is an extensive economics and public policy research funding programme in Pakistan. Its mission is to build a robust national research network connecting academia, think tanks, and policymakers to generate high-quality, evidence-based research that informs and improves public policy in Pakistan.

Today, the RASTA Network comprises over 500 universities and think tanks, 30+ international institutes, 27 government organizations, and a community of more than 9,500 researchers, practitioners, and professionals.

The Competitive Grants Programme (CGP) is RASTA's flagship initiative. Through biannual open calls, the CGP invites research proposals/ideas on specific policy themes identified by the Research Advisory Committee (RAC). Awards are made through a rigorous, transparent, and merit-based review process.

Anyone with a research interest in Pakistan's public policy challenges aligned with the CGP's announced themes can compete and secure a grant. To date, RASTA has funded 120 research projects across eight CGP rounds, with a total value of PKR 327 million — strengthening Pakistan's policy research ecosystem like never before.

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