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Abstract

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Key Words: Case Backlog; Judicial Efficiency; Pakistan Courts; Case Flow Management; Judge Vacancies; E-Justice; Rule of Law

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Case Backlog Crisis in Pakistan's Courts: Structural Failure or Administrative Inefficiency?

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Contents

Abstract

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Keywords: Case Backlog, Judicial Efficiency, Pakistan Courts, Case Flow Management, Judge Vacancies, E-Justice, Rule of Law

Introduction

The courts of Pakistan are generally seen to be functioning on a case-backlog emergency - a state in which there is growing unsolved cases per court, causing waiting-periods and adjournment after adjournment. The reason why backlogs are important is that legal rights are turned into empty promises: the longer a case is pending, the more probable it becomes that the remedies will become practically useless, the evidence will be diminished, and the costs of the parties (monetary and psychological) will increase (Shah et al., 2014). There is also a skewing of incentives throughout society as a result of delayed adjudication: individuals might not want to get resolution of any dispute in a formal manner, businesses might not want to enforce the contract as a result of uncertainty, and informal settlement can occur instead of the legal one. Evidence internationally demonstrates that promptness in judicial process is not just a issue of the justice sector itself but one

connected to the overall state of the economy, as due process of the law removes uncertainty and may deter productive exchange and investment. (Santos & Amado, 2014; Commission for the Efficiency of Justice [CEPEJ], 2014).

Backlog also undermines the trust in the people and perceived court legitimacy. By making the citizens feel that the justice system is unpredictable or slow, the rule of law would be compromised as citizens may switch the rule-based behavior to a model based on power bargaining (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), (2023). Social costs may be particularly noticeable in high-stakes cases, like those involving victims and defendants, when delay may only worsen the outcome, add to the stress, and decrease the certainty that the system is open to change (Langbroek et al., 2016). The study of court delay during and after COVID-19 shows that a crisis only exacerbates existing vulnerabilities: even as a shock turns out to be short lived, chronic capacity bottlenecks and coordination problems may continue to keep backlogs high long after the immediate disruption is no longer happening. (World Justice Project, 2017).

The most important barrier to change in Pakistan is that diagnosis of backlog drivers is made more difficult than it needs to be because on regular judicial statistics are not presented in sufficiently analytical and policy-conducive forms (Dawn, 2017). Reforms based on anecdotes instead of evidence may follow without consistent and comparable and decision-relevant anecdotal judicial data disaggregated by tier, case type, inflow, disposal and age of pending stock. Pakistan Scholarship devoted to the judicial statistics of Pakistan proposes that crude numbers alone cannot be used to implement effective policymaking, and the more complex reporting of the multi-tier court structure and dynamics of civil and criminal litigation is needed. (Shah, 2015; Commission for the Efficiency of Justice [CEPEJ], 2014).

This argument is commonly argued as either structural failure or administrative inefficiency but they interact in reality. Normative factors normally encompass the rules and the structure that influence the production of the court, such as the complexity of procedures, norms of adjournment in practice, strength of resources (including vacancies), design of jurisdiction, and access to appeal/revision that add either upstream or downstream load (Lahore High court, 2016). Administrative factors typically denote the extent to which courts can organize the available- caseflow management, scheduling discipline, monitoring, file movement, performance feedback and differentiated track usage of different forms of cases. The existing empirical research on judicial efficiency indicates that performance has to be evaluated based on cautious production concepts (inputs, outputs, and complexity of a case matter), as the simplistic indicators may distort the actual utilization of resources. (Beim et al., 2017; de Weers, 2016).

Recent changes in technology, as well as management, have taken the center stage in this debate. E-court and digital case-management projects internationally are set to alleviate administrative friction (lost files, ineffective scheduling, limited transparency of case age) and increase throughput without compromising fairness. E-court implementation evidence underlines that the success factors are dependent on such aspects of the implementation as process redesign, user adoption, and institutional alignment, but not only on the installation of the software (Laws, 2016). In the meantime, studies of professional organizations indicate that digitization will add turbulence but also possibilities to the situation, so long as the courts start planning around new workflows, responsibilities, and accountability systems, instead of approaching digital tools as a plug-and-play solution. (Greenwood & Brinkema, 2015; de Weers, 2016; Zeleznikow, 2017).

This research is a response to the fact that the case-backlog crisis in Pakistan is often debated, yet not adequately broken down into evidence-based structural versus administrative forces to constrain the reform prioritization and accountability. It is aimed to determine the patterns of backlog and test what drives variation in backlog growth and its disposal performance in order to rank feasible and high-impact reforms. It thus (i) seeks to chart backlog size and dynamics over court tiers/provinces and major case types, (ii) finds what quantifiable variables predict backlog increase or decrease, and (iii) brings practitioner judgment regarding bottlenecks and remedies that work; four questions are posed: RQ1 - What is the scale and trend of backlog across court tiers/provinces? RQ2- What statistically predicts the growth or reduction

of backlog? RQ3= What do practitioners consider as the primary bottlenecks? RQ4- What are the most viable and impactful reforms?

Two testable hypotheses where quantitative modeling is employed include: H1-structural (e.g. vacancies, procedural complexity, appeal loads) and administrative (H2) expectations: H1-courts with better management of their caseflow perform better in clearance/disposal when subjected to similar levels of caseload pressure; H2-courts with greater administrative strength have more bite to the bullet with regard to explainable variations in backlog. This is important to the judiciary, law ministry, the bar councils and the reform commissions in that it can translate backlog debate into quantifiable levers and implementable sequencing; the study is scoped to the district courts, the high courts and the Supreme Court of Pakistan over a specific time frame of years in comparison between provinces and the distinction between civil/criminal/family where the data is obtainable (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2013).

Literature Review

The most prevalent operationalization of court backlog is strictly speaking pending stock (cases not resolved at a given point in time), but only stock is incomplete without integrating inflow (new filings) with outflow (disposals). The common system measures are the clearance rate (disposals/incoming) and disposition time (stock-flow proxy) and case aging (time since filing) to indicate that old matters are stagnating. However, recent measurement studies caution that such measures as clearance rate and disposition time should not be trusted when they do not account for the heterogeneous complexity of cases, and the resource mix (judges, staff, budgets), and that multi-input efficiency measures (e.g., DEA) should be used to distinguish the distinction between throughput and the real capacity constraint. (Commission for the Efficiency of Justice [CEPEJ], 2014; Santos & Amado, 2014).

The scholarship on Pakistan has consistently portrayed pendency as system-wide instead of a tiered phenomenon, the district judiciary has been receiving the greatest amount of litigation and the superior judiciary has been receiving high levels of constitutional, appellate, and service-litigation. Empirical work, with the help of official judicial-statistics series, records the general increase in pending stock over years and identifies poor performance at the enforcement stage as one of the major causes why disposition does not necessarily result in a final resolution. This indicates that analyses should be performed following the lifecycle of cases (filing to trial to appeal to execution) instead of considering a disposal event as the final step. (Lahore High Court, 2017; Shah, 2016).

The structural explanations link backlog to capacitydemand disproportion and the design of the rules: low judgepopulation ratios, vacancies, underinvestment, insufficient courtroom and registry facilities as well as complex procedures that increase the number of hearings and promote long chains of adjournment. The connection between judicial timeliness and macro performance is done on a cross-country basis, which means that structural delay is not just a managerial inconvenience but a constraint to development. The supply of adjudicators is also micro-evidence of the thing that, in the event of a perturbation in the supply of adjudicators, the residual decision-makers experience workload shocks and throughput changes that can be quantified; that is, it is possible to suggest that the staffing rates and vacancy relationships can directly influence the patterns of disposition. Layering as a procedure (appeals, revisions, remands, stays) also sub-optimally escalates the workload per dispute and can structurally create a congestion even in cases where filings are not congested (Beim et al., 2017).

Explanations in administration focus on the management of caseflow: assignment policies, time discipline, old case monitoring, file movement, and looping performance feedback. This literature is focused on digital and data reforms. Data-driven justice literature believes that the administrative data available allows identifying bottlenecks (e.g., summons, adjournment, execution) and trying out process redesign. Literature on court digitalization indicates that technology can enhance efficiency only in combination with workflow redesign and professional buy-in; otherwise, digital tools can be rather source of new manifestations of old friction. E-court case studies also record profits as the delays in the registry and the enhancement of transparency due to the implementation of electronic filing, tracking, and standardized

workflows. (de Weers, 2016; Greenwood & Brinkema, 2015).

It is a common conclusion that delay is in a measure strategic: parties may demand adjournments, interim relief and stays, or climb to higher courts to increase the costs to the opponent. This can be explained in terms of institutional analyses, i.e., the incentive misalignment in situations where the private gains of delay are larger than the private costs, preventing congestion will be rational (Beim et al., 2017). In the criminal justice system, the body of research has also cautioned that backlogs may be precipitated by failures upstream (quality of investigation/prosecution, availability of witnesses), and that increases in case speed may underminate fairness.

Caseflow management, specialization/triage, ADR and digitization are the focus of reform research. Examples of practical models are time standards, high/low complexity dispute differentiated tracks, pre-trial conferences, and more powerful execution mechanisms; technology is discussed as an enabler, not a replacement of managerial control. The literature of high-backlog jurisdictions indicates that spatial and institutional mapping of congestion can enhance targeting, e.g. the district-level visualization of backlog in India indicates extreme local dispersion that is obscured by wider national statistics. (de Weers, 2016; Zeleznikow, 2017).

Throughout themes, prior studies conclude that backlog is multi-causal and yet fails to determine the relative importance of structural factors (capacity, procedural design, appeal architecture) and administrative factors (caseflow discipline, registry effectiveness, data systems) particularly across tiers and provinces. The most apparent gap is the evidence according to which the backlog variance is decomposed into structural and administrative factors and presents practitioner-based information on bottlenecks and feasibility of reforms.

Methodology:

Study Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods explanatory design to distinguish whether Pakistan's case-backlog crisis is driven primarily by structural constraints (capacity, legal architecture, procedural design) or administrative inefficiency (case management and operational control). The quantitative component measures backlog magnitude, trends, and statistical associations between backlog outcomes and measurable structural/administrative predictors. The qualitative component (interviews, focus groups, and document review) explains *how* and *why* those predictors generate delay in day-to-day court functioning, and identifies reform options that practitioners consider feasible.

Data Sources

Quantitative data are compiled from publicly available and officially maintained judicial and government sources, including:

1. Court statistics: annual/quarterly returns on *institution (new filings)*, *disposal (cases decided)*, and *pendency (pending stock)*, disaggregated where possible by tier (district/sessions, high courts, Supreme Court), province/region, and case type (civil/criminal/family).
2. Case-age information (where available): proportions of cases pending beyond specified thresholds (e.g., >1 year, >3 years, >5 years), and median/average time to disposal.
3. Human resource and capacity indicators: sanctioned judge strength, working strength, vacancies, staff numbers, and vacancy duration.
4. Budget and infrastructure indicators: court-level or province-level budget allocations, courtroom availability, basic facility indicators, and ICT infrastructure.
5. Workload architecture indicators: appeal/revision loads, remand rates, and share of government-as-litigant cases (where reported).
6. Reform program documentation: e-court/case management rollouts, automation projects, ADR initiatives, and judicial policy directives (to enable before/after comparisons when implementation dates are known).

Qualitative data include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review of practice directions, cause lists, standard operating procedures, and reform evaluations.

Unit of Analysis

The primary quantitative unit of analysis is a court–time period (e.g., court-year or court-quarter) panel. Analyses are conducted at three nested levels as data permit:

- Court tier (district/sessions; high court benches; Supreme Court),
- Province/region, and
- Case type (civil/criminal/family and subcategories where available). This structure allows identification of whether backlog patterns are concentrated in specific tiers or provinces and whether drivers differ by case category.

Variables and Operational Definitions

Dependent (outcome) measures of backlog performance include:

1. Pending stock (Backlog size): total pending cases at period end.
2. Backlog growth rate: $(Pending\_t - Pending\_t - 1)/Pending\_t - 1\times$ 100.
3. Clearance rate: $(Disposals/Institutions)\times$ 100. A value >100 indicates net reduction in pending stock.
4. Disposition time (proxy): $(Pending/Disposals)\times$ 365 days (or ×12 months), capturing time needed to clear pending stock at current disposal rate.
5. Case aging: percentage of cases older than threshold X (e.g., >2, >5 years), and where available median time-to-disposal.

Structural predictors (capacity and architecture) include:

- Judge capacity: working judge strength per caseload; vacancy rate; vacancy persistence.
- Resources: budget per court (or per caseload), courtrooms per caseload, staff-to-case ratio.
- Procedural and workload complexity proxies: share of cases requiring multiple statutory stages, adjournment-prone categories, appeal/revision inflow relative to original filings, and remand intensity.
- Criminal justice pipeline proxies: indicators reflecting investigation/prosecution capacity (e.g., prosecutor availability, forensic access, or reported investigation completion delays—depending on available official proxies).

Administrative predictors (operations and management) include:

- Caseflow management features: presence of differentiated tracks, scheduling discipline indicators, limits on adjournments (where documented), and time-standard adherence.
- ICT adoption: e-filing, digital cause lists, case tracking, SMS/email notices, and electronic record movement.
- Registry performance proxies: staff adequacy, file movement time indicators (if recorded), and frequency of missing/returned process.
- Monitoring and accountability: existence of backlog dashboards, periodic performance review meetings, and compliance reporting.

Sampling Strategy (Qualitative)

Qualitative participants are selected through purposive maximum-variation sampling to capture differences across tiers, provinces, and case types. Target groups include: judges, registrars and court administrators, prosecutors, civil and defense lawyers, court staff (readers/bench clerks/process servers), and litigants. Sampling continues until thematic saturation is reached (i.e., no substantively new bottlenecks or reform constraints emerge). Focus groups are used where collective workflow issues (registry delays, summons service, scheduling) benefit from multi-stakeholder discussion, while sensitive topics (pressure, informal practices, integrity concerns) are handled through one-to-one interviews.

Analysis Plan

1. Descriptive mapping: trends in pendency, inflow, disposals, clearance rates, disposition time, and case-age structure by tier, province, and case type.
2. Comparative analysis: tier and province comparisons using standardized indicators to identify "hotspots" and outliers.
3. Regression/panel modeling (where time-series/panel data exist): models estimate associations between outcomes (e.g., clearance rate, backlog growth) and structural/administrative predictors, using fixed effects to account for unobserved court-level characteristics and year effects for nationwide shocks.
4. Efficiency analysis (optional): data envelopment analysis or similar approaches

may be applied to compare output (disposals, clearance) relative to inputs (judges, staff, budgets), helping separate pure capacity constraints from managerial underperformance.

5. Qualitative thematic coding: interview and focus group transcripts are coded using a structured codebook aligned with the study's framework (structural vs administrative vs incentive-driven delay).
6. Triangulation: quantitative results are cross-validated against practitioner accounts and documentary evidence to explain mechanisms (e.g., why summons service stalls; why adjournments cluster; why execution delays persist).

Validity and Reliability

Transparent data cleaning rules (uniformity of definitions of tiers/provinces; elimination of duplicates; consistency of totals across reports) enhance quantitative validity, and sensitivity checks to missing or inconsistent series. In cases of incompleteness of data, the study is based on well-documented imputation rules (or no analysis of variables) and indicates the ability to survive alternative specifications. Qualitative reliability is ensured by training coders, double-coding a finite number of transcripts, evaluating inter-coder agreement (e.g. Cohens kappa) and then finally coding.

Participants will offer an informed consent, and to maintain anonymity, identifying information will be eliminated, as the institutional critique is sensitive. Interview guidelines do not ask any irrelevant questions about the individual level and the quotations are provided without identifiers that can expose particular persons or courts.

The research can be limited by the uneven distribution of case-age information, the shortage of administrative measures between provinces, and inadequate proxies of procedural complexity and criminal-justice pipeline capacity. Unless reforms are randomized, quantitative associations do not provide definitive causality; hence results are not given as evidence of strong predictors and plausible mechanisms but with triangulation as well as causal statements.

Results

1) System-wide caseload flows and end-period backlog

Official judicial statistics show that Pakistan's combined end-year caseload balance (backlog stock) reached 2,371,389 cases by end-2024, up from 2,258,908 at the start of 2024 (net +112,481). The District Judiciary accounted for 1,965,172 cases (≈82.9%) of the end-2024 balance, while Superior Courts accounted for 406,217 cases (≈17.1%).

Table 1

Superior Courts performance during 2024 (stock and flow)

Court	Pendency (Start 2024)	Institution 2024	Disposal 2024	Balance (End 2024)	Net change	% change	Clearance rate %	Disposition time (days)*
Supreme Court of Pakistan	56,157	17,631	17,460	57,316	1,159	2.06	99.03	1198.2
Federal Shariat Court	85	61	68	78	-7	-8.24	111.48	418.7
Lahore High Court	193,674	148,453	144,122	198,005	4,331	2.24	97.08	501.5
High Court of Sindh	83,941	37,710	35,536	86,421	2,480	2.95	94.23	887.7
Peshawar High Court	42,409	27,417	26,295	40,667	-1,742	-4.11	95.91	564.5
High Court of Balochistan	2,340	5,866	6,132	5,272	2,932	125.30	104.53	313.8
Islamabad High Court	17,274	12,219	10,355	18,458	1,184	6.85	84.75	650.6

Court	Pendency (Start 2024)	Institution 2024	Disposal 2024	Balance (End 2024)	Net change	% change	Clearance rate %	Disposition time (days)*
Total – Superior Courts	395,880	249,357	239,968	406,217	10,337	2.61	96.23	617.9

Figure 1

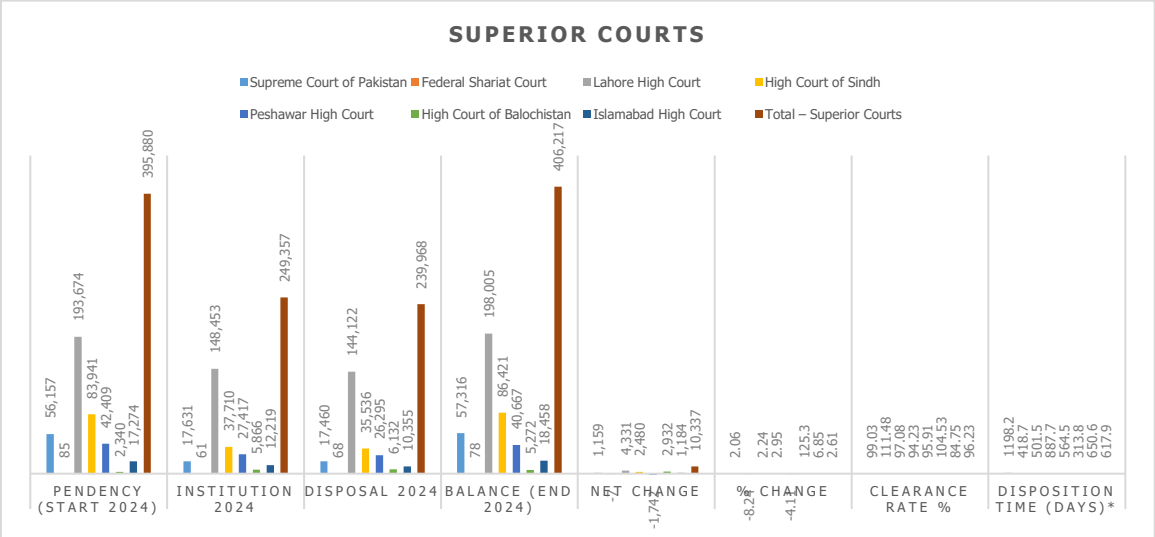


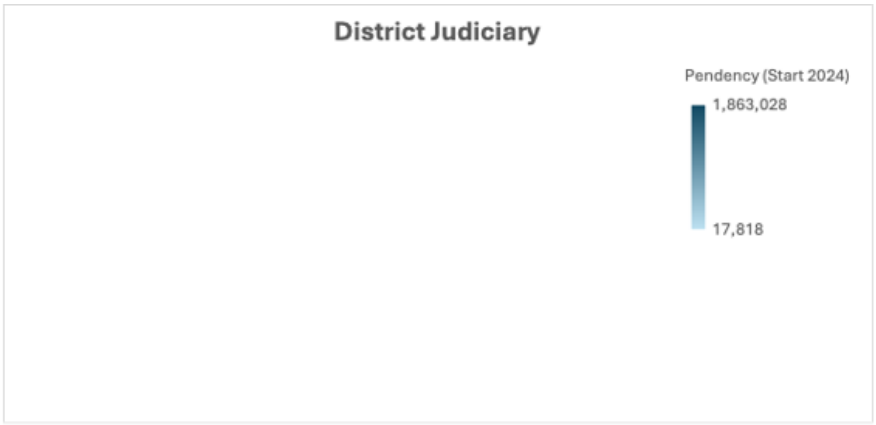
Table 2

District Judiciary performance during 2024 (by province/ICT)

Province/Region	Pendency (Start 2024)	Institution 2024	Disposal 2024	Balance (End 2024)	Net change	% change	Clearance rate %	Disposition time (days)*
Punjab	1,387,809	3,973,206	4,345,365	1,500,872	113,063	8.15	109.37	126.1
Sindh	131,923	409,978	400,765	142,374	10,451	7.92	97.75	129.7
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	273,762	501,383	530,015	254,830	-18,932	-6.92	105.71	175.5
Balochistan	17,818	58,107	56,749	18,685	867	4.87	97.66	120.2
Islamabad	51,716	116,088	119,414	48,411	-3,305	-6.39	102.87	148.0
Total – District Judiciary	1,863,028	5,058,762	5,452,308	1,965,172	102,144	5.48	107.78	131.6

Figure 2

Structural capacity indicator: sanctioned vs working judge strength



Judicial capacity constraints were substantial in 2024. Superior Courts had 76 vacant judge positions out of 200 sanctioned (38.0%), while the District Judiciary had 1,117 vacant judicial officer positions out of 4,161 sanctioned (26.8%).

Table 3

Superior Courts: sanctioned vs working judge positions

Court	Sanctioned	Working	Vacant	Vacancy rate %
Supreme Court of Pakistan	34	25	9	26.5
Federal Shariat Court	8	4	4	50.0
Lahore High Court	60	35	25	41.7
High Court of Sindh	40	28	12	30.0
Peshawar High Court	30	13	17	56.7
High Court of Balochistan	15	11	4	26.7
Islamabad High Court	13	8	5	38.5
Total – Superior Courts	200	124	76	38.0

Figure 3

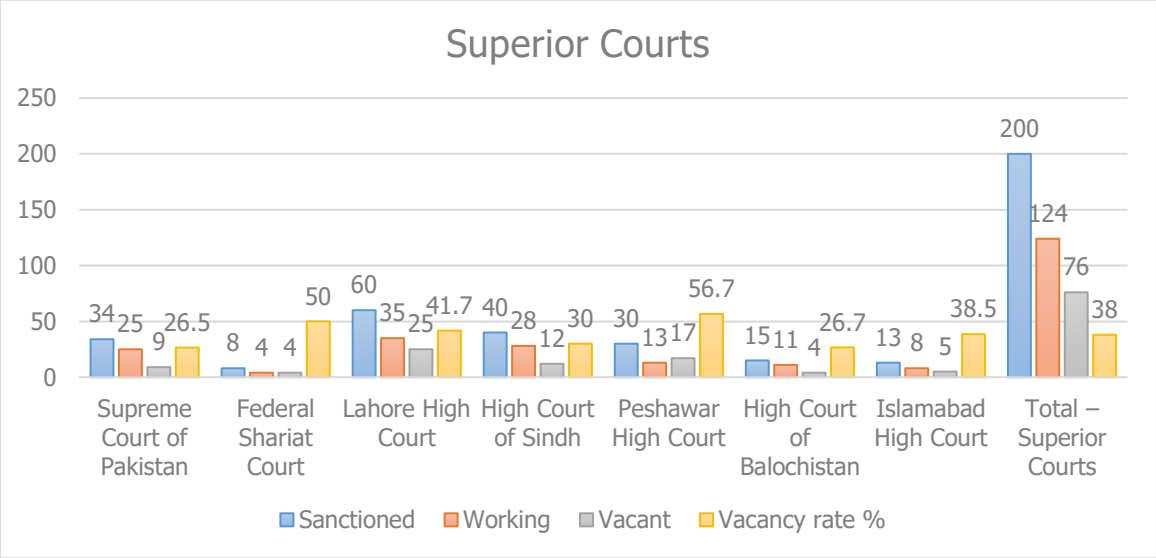


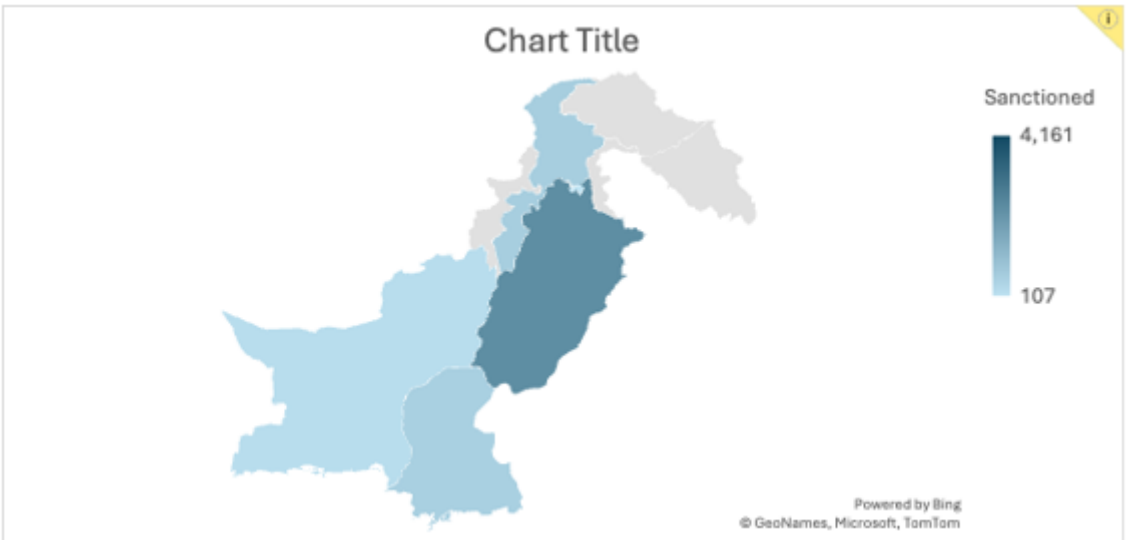
Table 4

District Judiciary: sanctioned vs working judicial officers

Province/Region	Sanctioned	Working in-field	Vacant	Vacancy rate %
Punjab	2,364	1,565	799	33.8
Sindh	661	591	70	10.6
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	708	550	158	22.3
Balochistan	321	251	70	21.8
Islamabad	107	87	20	18.7
Total – District Judiciary	4,161	3,044	1,117	26.8

Figure 4

3) Most recent update: High Courts and District Judiciary (Jan–Jun 2025)



In the first half of 2025, the High Courts' combined balance fell from 348,898 to 305,467 (−12.45%), while the District Judiciary balance fell from 1,964,848 to 1,908,907 (−2.85%).

Table 5

High Courts performance (Jan–Jun 2025)

High Court	Pendency (01.01.2025)	Institution (Jan–Jun 2025)	Disposal (Jan–Jun 2025)	Balance (30.06.2025)	Net change	% change	Clearance rate %	Disposition time (days)*
Lahore High Court	198,005	74,010	83,938	188,077	-9,928	-5.01	113.41	817.8
High Court of Sindh	86,421	17,699	24,677	57,289	-29,132	-33.71	139.43	847.4
Peshawar High Court	40,667	17,156	18,380	35,441	-5,226	-12.85	107.13	703.8
High Court of Balochistan	5,278	3,050	2,081	6,113	835	15.82	68.23	1072.2
Islamabad High Court	18,527	6,270	6,694	18,547	20	0.11	106.76	1011.3
Total – High Courts	348,898	118,185	135,770	305,467	-43,431	-12.45	114.88	821.2

Figure 5

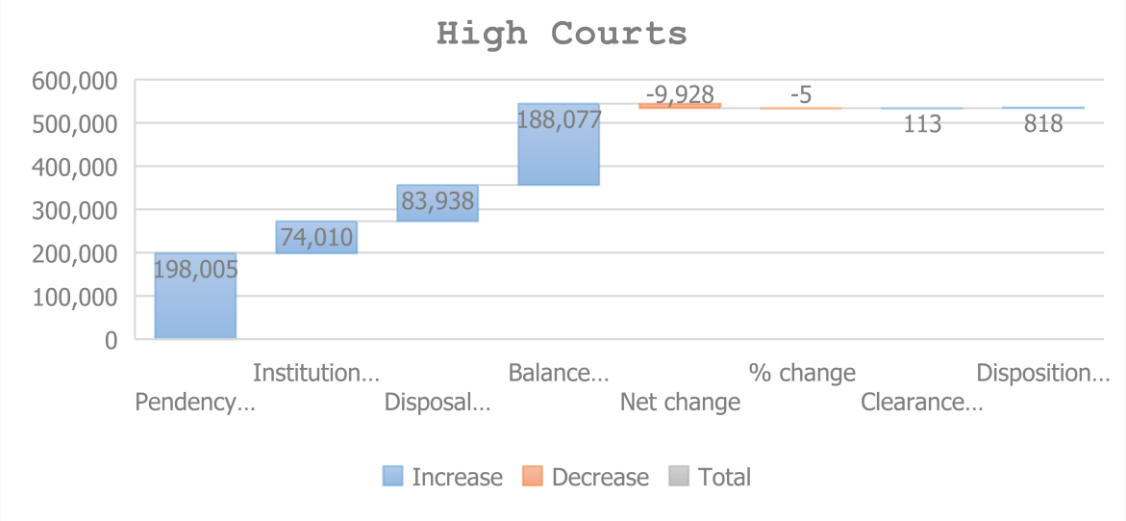


Table 6

District Judiciary performance (Jan–Jun 2025)

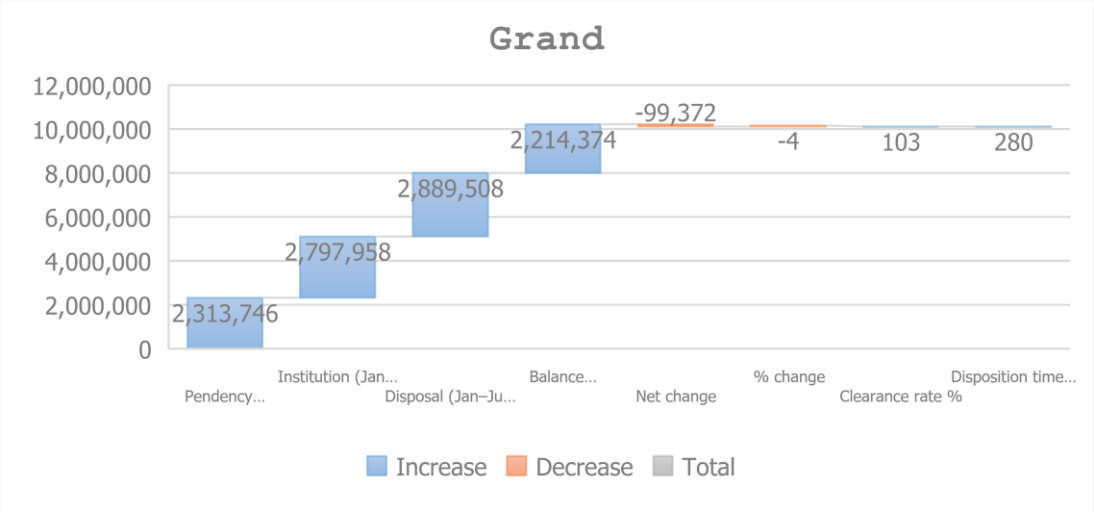
Province/Region	Pendency (01.01.2025)	Institution (Jan–Jun 2025)	Disposal (Jan–Jun 2025)	Balance (30.06.2025)	Net change	% change	Clearance rate %	Disposition time (days)*
Punjab	1,501,119	2,124,234	2,196,515	1,432,695	-68,424	-4.56	103.40	238.1
Sindh	142,374	219,886	186,735	176,154	33,780	23.73	84.92	344.3
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	254,830	254,889	287,930	225,682	-29,148	-11.44	112.96	286.1
Balochistan	18,685	24,466	23,804	28,954	10,269	54.96	97.29	444.0
Islamabad	47,840	56,298	58,754	45,422	-2,418	-5.05	104.36	282.2
Total – District Judiciary	1,964,848	2,679,773	2,753,738	1,908,907	-55,941	-2.85	102.76	253.0

Table 7

Grand total (Superior + District) (Jan–Jun 2025)

System	Pendency (01.01.2025)	Institution (Jan–Jun 2025)	Disposal (Jan–Jun 2025)	Balance (30.06.2025)	Net change	% change	Clearance rate %	Disposition time (days)*
Grand Total (Superior + District)	2,313,746	2,797,958	2,889,508	2,214,374	-99,372	-4.29	103.27	279.7

Figure 6



The LJCP biannual tables also note that balance differences can reflect transfers/restoration/remand and related adjustments.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the backlog crisis in Pakistan can only be described as a structural bottleneck exacerbated by uneven administrative performance, not as an either-or decision-making. First, the pendency scale is disproportionately highly concentrated where structural limitations have bitten the hardest: the District Judiciary had approximately 82.9 percent of total end-2024 backlog (1,965,172 of 2,371,389) and 17.1 percent in the superior courts. This level of concentration shows that the key structural pressure point is still system capacity at the trial level where the majority of litigation commences and where fact-finding is resource-intensive.

Second, there is sufficient vacancies of judges that are enough to be a binding structural constraint. By 2024, superior courts had 38.0% vacancies (76 of 200) and the district judiciary had 26.8% vacancies (1,117 of 4,161); 33.8% of Punjab district courts alone had 799 vacancies (799 of 2,364). This kind of staffing shortage decreases adjudicative throughput, enhances the use of adjournments and short hearings, and increases the likelihood of case aging becoming entrenched-as is predicted by institutional capacity accounts according to which delay is the predictable consequence of demand-surpassing supply.

Nevertheless, cross-court differences in clearance performance are also significant and point to administrative drivers. The clearance of overall Superior Courts was 0.9623 in 2024, whereas Islamabad High Court had less clearance (0.8475) and some courts had even more. Backlog decreased by a collective of High Courts of -12.45 percent in the first half of 2025 but there was a sharp variation in performance-e.g., the balance of the Sindh High Court had fallen substantially whereas the Balance of the Balochistan High Court had gone up. These disparities cannot be explained solely by structural factors within the same national legal system and highlight the significance of caseflow organization, discipline in scheduling, and performance in registries and specific disposal plans. (de Weers, 2016).

This interaction is supported by the district results. The balance of the district judiciary improved marginally (−2.85% in Jan-Jun 2025) but Sindh (+23.73%), Balochistan (+54.96%) gained, and Punjab and KP dropped backlog. In those districts where clearance rates fell below 100 (e.g., Sindh district clearance rate = -84.92%), backlog naturally increased, indicating administrative frailty in controlling inflows, hearings, and execution channels. Meanwhile, LJCP reports that balances may also change as a result of remand/restoration/transfer/verification adjustments, indicating that administrative data-integrity improvement is a reform in itself.

The evidence generally confirms that there should be a two-track logic of reform: structural supply constraints (vacancies, support staff,

infrastructure) and also the institutionalization of high-performing administrative practices (case-age monitoring, differentiated tracks, summons/service controls, and execution-stage strengthening) should be implemented to ensure less province-tier divergence and transform disposals into final resolution.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that there is no single cause that explains the case backlog crisis in Pakistan. The implications of the findings suggest there is a trial level structural capacity issue that is exacerbated through dissimilar administrative performances among courts and provinces. The distribution of the backlog is over the jurisdiction in litigation areas with the greatest volume, with the District Judiciary bearing approximately 82.9% of overall end-2024 pendency (1,965,172 of 2,371,389 cases) indicating that the first-instance system is the most common bottleneck in litigation. They are also apparent in staffing: District Judiciary and Superior Courts had 26.8 and 38.0 vacancies per judge, respectively, meaning that the system would provide fewer adjudicators than it was mandated to provide.

Meanwhile, the backlog trend is not even, implying that the management and coordination are relevant. During Jan-Jun 2025, High Courts saw an overall reduction in pending stock (−12.45), with a number of courts decreasing the pendency, and District Judiciary pendency fell overall (−2.85) but the Sindh and Balochistan district courts had large increases, which is consistent with difference in caseflow control, registry effectiveness and scheduling discipline. These differences suggest that administrative reforms can lead to quantifiable benefits even prior to the full realization of the long term structural reforms.

A sequenced reform package would be the policy implication. The short-term activities should normalize the monitoring of case-age, reinforce the summons/service and execution processes, minimize unnecessary adjournments and enhance data quality to the point of backlog being consistently and transparently measured. Mid-term reforms ought to extend the automation and case tracks in the courts, ADR on appropriate cases, and develop performance feedback mechanisms that guard fairness in a manner with minimal delay. These long-term changes should seal gaps in vacancies, staffing and infrastructure, and make the process of procedural pathways rational that breed hearings and appeals. Taking the crisis as an administrative issue, with a binding capacity as the main problem; or taking the crisis as a structural issue, with management differences being the main predictive of why some courts decrease the backlog whilst others lag, is an error. (de Weers, 2016; Greenwood & Brinkema, 2015).

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