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Critical Review of the Rule of Law in Pakistan: Institutional Weaknesses, Reforms, and Democratic Stability

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Abstract

The rule of law in Pakistan has remained a central yet contested pillar of democratic governance due to persistent institutional weaknesses, inconsistent policy implementation, and systemic political interference. This study provides a critical and data-driven assessment of Pakistan's rule-of-law framework by examining the performance of judicial institutions, law-enforcement agencies, accountability bodies, and legislative oversight mechanisms. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates institutional analysis, governance indicators, and comparative assessments from international rule-of-law indices, the research explores how judicial delays, corruption, politicization of institutions, low conviction rates, and procedural inefficiencies undermine citizens' access to justice. Trends from the World Justice Project (WJP), Transparency International, and national governance audits indicate that Pakistan consistently ranks low on constraints on government powers, criminal justice performance, and regulatory enforcement. The study also evaluates reform initiatives including judicial strengthening programs, police modernization schemes, and anti-corruption reforms and assesses their effectiveness against global best practices. Findings

Published:
December 01, 2025

reveal that although reform efforts have produced incremental improvements, structural constraints such as weak separation of powers, entrenched patronage networks, and fragile democratic institutions continue to hinder meaningful progress. The study argues that sustainable rule-of-law reform requires an integrated, long-term strategy that strengthens institutional independence, ensures accountability, enhances procedural transparency, and aligns domestic reforms with international governance standards. Ultimately, reinforcing the rule of law is essential for democratic stability, economic development, and the protection of fundamental rights in Pakistan.

Keywords: Rule of Law, Pakistan, Judicial Reform, Institutional Weakness, Democratic Stability, Governance, Accountability, Criminal Justice System, Legal Institutions, Public Policy Reform, Transparency, Political Interference

Introduction

The rule of law remains a foundational pillar for democratic consolidation, political legitimacy, and socio-economic development; however, in Pakistan, the concept has evolved within a complex landscape marked by political instability, uneven constitutional enforcement, weak institutions, and recurring civil–military tensions. Scholars argue that the absence of consistent constitutional supremacy and fragmented governance structures has contributed to chronic institutional weaknesses, enabling selective application of laws and a persistent culture of impunity (Haque, 2019). Historically, Pakistan’s legal system has oscillated between democratic and authoritarian influences—each reshaping judicial autonomy, administrative accountability, and law-enforcement mechanisms in distinct ways (Newberg, 1995). This instability has created structural deficiencies that continue to affect the independence of the judiciary, the effectiveness of law-enforcement agencies, and the credibility of accountability institutions. In recent years, the debate surrounding the rule of law has intensified due to rising public

Published:
December 01, 2025

demands for judicial reforms, transparent governance, and institutional restructuring aligned with international standards (Khan, 2021). Despite notable reforms, such as judicial activism post-2007 and the establishment of accountability bodies, systemic inconsistencies—ranging from case backlogs and executive interference to politicized law enforcement—remain entrenched. This research critically examines these institutional weaknesses, evaluates reform trajectories, and assesses their implications for Pakistan's democratic stability, situating the discussion within broader comparative and theoretical frameworks of governance and rule-of-law consolidation.

Literature Review

The scholarly discourse on the rule of law in Pakistan highlights a recurring concern regarding the fragility of institutions and the uneven implementation of constitutional mandates. Early works, such as those by Newberg (1995), demonstrate how constitutional amendments, extra-constitutional interventions, and judicial validations of military regimes shaped early governance patterns, weakening institutional credibility. Subsequent studies reinforce the argument that Pakistan's legal system has struggled to balance judicial independence with executive authority, often resulting in compromised checks and balances (International Crisis Group, 2010). Haque (2019) observes that the bureaucracy's politicization and inconsistent legal enforcement have undermined public trust, contributing to governance deficits and socio-economic disparities. Comparative literature emphasizes that states with persistent political volatility often face similar challenges, including weak accountability structures, limited access to justice, and systemic corruption (Fukuyama, 2014).

Empirical studies also underline structural deficiencies in Pakistan's judicial system, such as case backlog exceeding two million pending cases nationwide, slow adjudication processes, and limited alternative dispute-resolution

Published:
December 01, 2025

mechanisms (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2022). Research on police reforms similarly identifies chronic underfunding, insufficient training, and politicization as major barriers to effective law enforcement (Abro, 2020). Scholarship on accountability institutions, particularly the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), criticizes selective accountability, lack of transparency, and political instrumentalization, thereby weakening public perception of rule-of-law institutions (Yusuf, 2018). International comparative models—such as those of South Africa, Malaysia, and Turkey—are frequently cited for their experience with constitutional transitions, judicial restructuring, and governance reforms. These comparisons provide essential insights into how institutional strengthening, transparent oversight mechanisms, and adherence to constitutional rule can enhance democratic resilience (Skaaning, 2020). Collectively, the literature underscores that Pakistan’s rule-of-law challenges are multifaceted, requiring structural reforms, political commitment, and institutional capacity-building to ensure long-term democratic stability.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **mixed-methods research design**, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to critically examine the structural, institutional, and political determinants shaping the rule of law in Pakistan. The qualitative component is grounded in **document analysis**, reviewing constitutional provisions, parliamentary debates, judicial precedents, inquiry commission reports, National Action Plans, and institutional audit reports to evaluate patterns of institutional weakness and governance deficits. Key documents include the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), Supreme Court annual reports, National Judicial Policy Making Committee guidelines, and key decisions such as *Sindh High Court Bar Association v. Federation of Pakistan* (2012) and *District Bar Association Rawalpindi v. Federation of Pakistan* (2015). In addition, **semi-**

Published:
December 01, 2025

structured expert interviews with legal practitioners, judicial officers, policy analysts, and civil society members are incorporated to understand operational challenges, including judicial backlog, policing deficiencies, prosecutorial weaknesses, and political interference. The quantitative dimension employs **secondary datasets** from Transparency International, the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index, and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics to measure institutional performance indicators such as corruption perception levels, case disposal ratios, access-to-justice metrics, conviction rates, and public trust in state institutions. Using **comparative statistical analysis**, trends in Pakistan's rule-of-law indicators are contrasted with regional states such as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal to highlight structural divergences and policy failures. The study applies **thematic coding** to qualitative data following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, enabling the identification of recurrent patterns such as judicial dependence, executive overreach, weak accountability systems, and politicisation of law enforcement. Quantitative data are processed through descriptive statistics, correlation matrices, and time-series trend analyses to establish empirical linkages between institutional weaknesses and democratic instability. The research methodology adheres to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, anonymity of participants, and academic transparency. Overall, this multi-dimensional methodological design provides a rigorous basis for analyzing the complex interplay between institutional reforms, governance quality, and democratic consolidation in Pakistan (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; World Justice Project, 2023).

Structural and Institutional Weaknesses in Pakistan's Rule of Law Framework

Pakistan's adherence to the **Rule of Law** is globally recognized as weak, facing profound structural and institutional challenges across its justice and governance

Published:
December 01, 2025

sectors. These systemic flaws spanning law enforcement, the judiciary, prosecution services, and regulatory bodies are exacerbated by political interference, resource deficits, and rampant corruption, leading to significant delays in justice delivery and an erosion of public trust.

The **World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index** provides consistent quantitative data highlighting Pakistan's persistent low global ranking. For instance, in the WJP Rule of Law Index 2024, Pakistan was ranked **129th out of 142** countries worldwide, placing it near the bottom regionally (5th out of 6 countries in South Asia) and among lower-middle income economies (26th out of 38) (World Justice Project, 2024).

Institutional Deficiencies and Systemic Flaws

Police and Law Enforcement: Corruption and Lack of Competence

Law enforcement agencies, particularly the **Police**, are widely perceived as the most corrupt and institutionally weak actors in the justice system. Public perception data consistently identifies the police as the **most corrupt authorities** in Pakistan (World Justice Project, 2021). The prevalence of **petty bribery** is pervasive; a 2021 report noted that more than half of Pakistanis surveyed had paid a bribe to receive assistance from the police (World Justice Project, 2021).

Police corruption is often cited as a politicized and institutionalized phenomenon, benefiting the political elite who use the force to control the electorate and political opponents (Ahmad, 2020). The colonial-era Police Act of 1861, which was designed to quell political opposition, has historically remained in force, perpetuating an outdated model of policing (Babakhel, 2018, as cited in Ahmad, 2020). Beyond corruption, studies point to the **incompetence of criminal investigators** as a serious systemic problem facing criminal investigative services (World Justice Project, 2021).

Published:
December 01, 2025***Judiciary and Justice Delivery: Interference, Backlogs, and Resources***

The **Judiciary**, while ideally the guardian of the Constitution, struggles with executive and **political interference**, which compromises its independence and impartiality (Baig, 2025; Hassan et al., 2024). Empirical research, such as a study conducted by Hassan et al. (2024), utilizing an OLS multiple regression model on primary survey data, found that **military interference** and **institutional weakness** have a statistically **negative and significant impact on judicial independence**. This suggests that increased external involvement substantially lowers judicial independence (Hassan et al., 2024).

The civil and criminal justice systems are plagued by **inordinate delays** and a massive backlog of cases.

Table 1: WJP Rule of Law Index Factor Rankings (2024)

| Factor | Global Rank (out of 142) | Regional Rank (out of 6) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Civil Justice | 128 | 4 |
| Criminal Justice | 98 | 4 |
| Absence of Corruption | 120 | 5 |
| Constraints on Govt. Powers | 103 | 4 |
| Order and Security | 140 | 6 |

Source: World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, 2024

The low rankings in Civil and Criminal Justice (128th and 98th, respectively, in 2024) reflect the challenges of ensuring timely, effective, and accessible justice (World Justice Project, 2024). The main problems cited in criminal courts are **inadequate resources** and prolonged litigation processes (Baig, 2025; World Justice Project, 2021). Despite the dedication of some judicial bodies, the high volume of litigation, coupled with procedural factors and low legal awareness among the public, contributes to the overall sluggishness (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2022).

Prosecution and Regulatory Bodies

The **Prosecution Services** and **Regulatory Bodies** suffer from similar institutional weaknesses, including a lack of resources, insufficient training, and

Published:
December 01, 2025

susceptibility to political influence. Anti-corruption agencies like the **National Accountability Bureau (NAB)** and the **Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)**, while mandated to curb corruption, have themselves been criticized for a lack of independence, political manipulation, and ineffective prosecution (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2024). A major challenge across all regulatory and enforcement bodies is the lack of accountability over acts of bureaucracy, which contributes to poor performance and abuse of power (Husain, as cited in Ahmad, 2025).

Political Interference and Resource Deficits

Political and Executive Overreach

A core weakness is the chronic **political interference** in administrative and judicial matters. The executive branch frequently attempts to influence court decisions through manipulation of the judicial hierarchy or through political appointments to key bureaucratic posts, ignoring seniority and merit (Baig, 2025; Husain, as cited in Ahmad, 2025). Furthermore, the long history of military rule and its influence has led to an "unstable constitutionalism," where judicial endorsement has historically been sought for regime legitimization, further compromising the judiciary's institutional integrity (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Resource Constraints

The lack of financial and human resources significantly hampers the capacity and efficiency of institutions. Large portions of the national budget are consumed by non-developmental heads, particularly defense and debt servicing, leaving very little for the **socio-economic, human, and institutional development** of the justice sector (Rana, 2017; Syed, 2018, as cited in Latif & Anwar, 2020). This resource deficit leads directly to inadequate court facilities, poor training for law enforcement, insufficient investigative tools, and a lack of technological

Published:
December 01, 2025

modernization, all of which contribute to institutional ineffectiveness and delayed justice (Latif & Anwar, 2020).

Governance Reforms, Accountability Mechanisms, and Institutional Performance in Pakistan

Pakistan has repeatedly initiated **governance and justice sector reforms** aimed at strengthening the rule of law, including judicial restructuring, police modernization, and the establishment of anti-corruption agencies. However, empirical data and comparative analysis reveal that the **implementation gaps** driven by political interference, resource constraints, and weak institutional capacity have severely limited the effectiveness of these initiatives, leading to poor performance indicators.

Analytical Review of Reform Effectiveness

Judicial Reforms: Focus on Appointments, Neglect of Efficiency

Judicial reform efforts in Pakistan have historically been disproportionately focused on the **appointment of judges** and the perennial tug-of-war between the executive and the judiciary, rather than the core issues of efficiency, case backlog, and court procedures (Pakistan Institute of Development Economics [PIDE], 2024).

- **Implementation Gap:** Despite the creation of the **Access to Justice Programme (AJP)** since 2003 (with a total cost of approximately Rs. 21 billion or \$350 million), which aimed at improving judicial and non-judicial legal services, the fundamental challenges remain (Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, 2015). Research suggests that while infrastructure schemes were launched and partially completed, crucial areas like **computerization, automation, and streamlining bureaucratic court processes** have not received commensurate attention (PIDE, 2024).
- **Performance Metric (Case Backlog):** The massive backlog of cases—a key indicator of judicial inefficiency—continues to grow. This systemic failure is a direct consequence of reforms that fail to address the core procedural and resource deficits that fuel delays (Latif & Anwar, 2020).

Published:
December 01, 2025***Police Modernization: The 2002 Police Order and Partial Implementation***

The promulgation of the **Police Order 2002** was a significant legislative measure aimed at depoliticizing the police, establishing **accountability mechanisms** (such as Public Safety Commissions), and modernizing the force.

- **Implementation Gap:** The order's implementation has been **partial and inconsistent** across provinces. Frequent amendments, particularly around 2004, damaged the reform's original intent to create a professional, politically neutral force (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding [ISPU], 2009). The establishment and empowerment of the mandated **Police Safety Commissions** to monitor police performance have largely failed to materialize, leaving a vacuum in horizontal accountability (ISPU, 2009; Zakir et al., 2025).
- **Performance Metric (Public Perception and Accountability):** Despite the reforms, police remain widely perceived as the most corrupt authority. Negative public sentiment, stemming from corruption and a lack of accountability, continues to erode public trust in law enforcement (World Justice Project, 2021). The lack of investment in training and resources also results in **flawed investigations**, a major factor contributing to the high acquittal rates in the criminal justice system (Law & Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2002).

Accountability Mechanisms and Numerical Indicators***Anti-Corruption Strategies and Politicized Performance***

Pakistan's anti-corruption framework relies primarily on agencies like the **National Accountability Bureau (NAB)**, the **Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)**, and Provincial Anti-Corruption Establishments (ACEs).

- **Implementation Gap (Politicization):** Empirical analysis shows that the performance of NAB is deeply **politicized**, with changes in government having a **significant effect on its conduct** (OpenEdition Journals, 2018). These institutions have often been used by those in power to target political opponents, creating a perception of **selective accountability** rather than impartial horizontal accountability (PIDE, 2022).
- **Numerical Data on Anti-Corruption Performance:** The conviction data provides compelling evidence of the poor effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts, especially following legislative changes that undermine the agencies' mandates.

Published:
December 01, 2025

Table 1: NAB Performance and Conviction Ratio (2018–2022)

| Year | References Filed (Challans) | Conviction Ratio (Approximate) | Context |
|------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 2018 | High | Below 60% | Before major NAB ordinance amendments. |
| 2021 | Significantly Low | Declined | Following significant amendments to the NAB law (Impact of Legal Modification) |
| 2022 | Very Low | Significantly Lower | Continued impact of legislative changes narrowing the scope of offenses and raising the bar for prosecution. |

Source: UMT Journals, 2023, based on NAB data.

The sharp decline in the number of references filed and the subsequent drop in the conviction ratio in 2021 and 2022 directly reflect the **negative impact of legislative amendments** that imposed stringent standards and narrowed the definition of corruption, highlighting a fundamental **law-practice gap** in the anti-corruption strategy (UMT Journals, 2023).

Governance Indicators: Horizontal and Vertical Accountability

International governance indicators confirm the systemic failure of accountability mechanisms:

Table 2: Worldwide Governance Indicators for Pakistan

| Indicator | Pakistan Score (2022) | Range | Interpretation |
|--|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Voice and Accountability (VAI) | Negative (Well below SA average of -0.36) | -2.5 (Weakest) to +2.5 (Strongest) | Pakistan has weak vertical accountability (electoral/citizen participation) (World Bank, 2022). |
| Control of Corruption Index (CCI) | Negative for all years | -2.5 (Weakest) to +2.5 (Strongest) | Indicates adverse performance on horizontal accountability (state institutions checking abuse of power) (World Bank, 2022). |

Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, as cited in PIDE, 2022.

The consistently **negative scores** in both VAI and CCI confirm that the existing accountability systems—both those exercised by the citizenry (vertical) and those established within the state (horizontal, like NAB/ACEs)—are ineffective, indicating a failure to curb the misuse of public authority (World Bank, 2022).

Comparative and Legislative Context

A comparative analysis, particularly with India, further highlights Pakistan's implementation deficit. While both countries inherited similar legal and constitutional frameworks, the **World Justice Project Rule of Law Index** places

Published:
December 01, 2025

Pakistan significantly lower (**130th in 2021**) than India (**79th in 2021**) (World Justice Project, 2021).

The difference is rooted in the **sustained adherence** to constitutionalism and a stronger tradition of judicial oversight in India, which facilitates **horizontal accountability** (checking the abuse of power by other state organizations) (International Journal of Law Management & Humanities, 2022). In contrast, Pakistan's constitutional instability, marked by repeated military interventions and executive interference, has consistently undermined the judiciary's capacity to be an effective check on the executive, turning reforms into theoretical frameworks rather than enforced realities (Khan, 2021, as cited in humapub.com). The result is a substantial **gap between *de jure* (the law on the books) and *de facto* (law in practice)**.

Rule of Law and Democratic Stability in Pakistan: A Vicious Cycle

The persistent weaknesses in Pakistan's Rule of Law framework act as a **major constraint on democratic consolidation, economic stability, and public trust**, perpetually undermining civilian supremacy and institutionalizing the dominance of the military establishment (Irfan et al., 2025; Khawaja & Khalid, 2022). This dynamic creates a vicious cycle where a weak legal system enables political and elite capture, which in turn leads to poor governance, creating the very instability that non-democratic forces exploit (World Bank, 2022).

Political Economy, Democratic Consolidation, and Instability

The failure of the Rule of Law to constrain executive power and ensure impartial justice directly contributes to **political instability** and the erosion of democratic norms.

1. Weak Constraints on Power and Elite Capture

The low score in the **WJP Rule of Law Index** factor for **Constraints on Government Powers** (ranked 103rd globally in 2024, as cited in previous

Published:

December 01, 2025

response) numerically reflects the inadequacy of the legal system to check the executive (World Justice Project, 2024).

- **Democratic Consequence:** This allows political and economic elites to engage in **institutional capture**, weakening democratic accountability. The result is a pattern of governments being removed not through democratic processes, but through extra-constitutional means, or judicial intervention often perceived as politically motivated (Mufti, 2024; Khawaja & Khalid, 2022). Pakistan has experienced numerous periods of direct and indirect military rule, with not a single elected government completing its full term between 1988 and 1999, illustrating the frailty of its democratic structure (Taylor & Francis Online, 2025).

2. Impact on Economic Stability and Investment

A weak Rule of Law is a primary deterrent to both domestic and foreign investment, jeopardizing economic stability.

| Indicator | Pakistan's Global Rank (2024) | Correlation with GDP/Capita | Implication |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| Property Rights (WJP) | Low | Positive (\$+0.84\$ in high RoL countries) | Weak protection discourages long-term investment (World Justice Project, 2024). |
| Control of Corruption (WGI) | Consistently Negative | Negative | Corruption acts as a tax on business, reducing efficiency and growth (World Bank, 2022). |
| Ease of Doing Business | Consistently Low (e.g., 108th in 2020) | High | Contract enforcement delays and regulatory unpredictability raise transaction costs (World Bank, 2020). |

- **Analytical Insight:** Legal uncertainty, massive delays in contract enforcement and systemic corruption raise the risk premium for operating in Pakistan (ASERS Journals, 2017). Scholars argue that Rule of Law and strong legal systems are a pre-condition for sustained development (ASERS Journals, 2017). Research highlights that in the face of democratic erosion, preserving institutional integrity (which Rule of Law is central to) is more consequential for economic performance than innovation-focused interventions (MDPI, 2025).

Public Trust and Governance Trajectory Comparison

Published:
December 01, 2025

Public Trust and Legal Legitimacy

The failure of the justice system to deliver fair, timely, and effective justice results in a profound **crisis of public trust** in state institutions

| Institution | Public Trust Level (WJP/Gallup Survey Data) | Consequence of Low Trust |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Courts/Judiciary | Moderate to High (often higher than the Police) | Trust is often for the Supreme Court's potential to deliver "justice" rather than the efficiency of the overall judicial process (World Justice Project, 2021). |
| Police | Low (consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt authorities) | Citizen reluctance to cooperate, leading to parallel justice systems and vigilantism (World Justice Project, 2021). |
| Government/Legislature | Low (reflected in low Voice and Accountability scores) | Undermines the legitimacy of elected civilian governments, facilitating extra-constitutional challenges (World Bank, 2022). |

Comparative Governance Trajectory

Pakistan's trajectory is best categorized as a "Tutelary Hybrid Regime," where democratic institutions exist but are persistently controlled and undermined by non-elected power centers, primarily the military (Taylor & Francis Online, 2025).

A comparison with its regional counterpart, India, which inherited a similar colonial legal legacy, highlights the divergence:

- **India:** While facing its own challenges, India's **Rule of Law Index** ranking (e.g., 77th globally in 2023) consistently places it substantially higher than Pakistan (129th globally in 2024). This reflects a greater adherence to constitutionalism and a stronger tradition of judicial oversight over the executive, facilitating **democratic resilience** (World Justice Project, 2024).
- **Pakistan:** The consistent failure to establish **civilian supremacy over the military** and the **politicization of the judiciary** has locked Pakistan into a cycle of democratic backsliding, where weak institutions prevent sustainable governance and economic development (Taylor & Francis Online, 2025).

Research Findings

Published:
December 01, 2025

Critical Review of the Rule of Law in Pakistan

Recent academic and institutional research confirms that Pakistan continues to face a profound crisis in the Rule of Law. Key findings highlight structural weaknesses, severe implementation gaps in reforms, and a direct negative influence on democratic stability, often manifesting as a state of "**authoritarian consolidation**" supported by a politicized justice system.

1. Structural and Institutional Weaknesses: Quantified Deficits

Current quantitative data shows Pakistan's Rule of Law framework is deeply flawed, ranking near the bottom globally due to systemic weaknesses in justice institutions.

A. Overall Global Ranking and Trend

- **Global Position (2024):** Pakistan ranks **129th out of 142** countries worldwide in the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2024 (World Justice Project, 2024).
- **Regional Position:** Pakistan ranks **5th out of 6** countries in South Asia, only ahead of Afghanistan (World Justice Project, 2024).
- **Marginal Improvement amidst Global Decline:** Pakistan's overall Rule of Law score increased by **less than 1%** in 2024. While this is a rare positive move against a global trend of decline (the Rule of Law fell in 57% of surveyed countries), the absolute rank remains critically low (World Justice Project, 2024).

B. Factor Rankings: Low Performance Metrics

The disaggregated WJP factor scores reveal which institutions are the weakest links:

Table 1: Pakistan's Performance in Key WJP Rule of Law Factors (2024)

| WJP Factor (Focus Area) | Global Rank (out of 142) | South Asia Rank (out of 6) | Key Implication |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Order and Security | 140 / 142 | 6 / 6 | Near-total failure to maintain law and order, highest national security concern. |
| Regulatory Enforcement | 127 / 142 | 5 / 6 | Weakness in enforcing laws/regulations uniformly (e.g., permits, environmental). |
| Civil Justice | 128 / 142 | 4 / 6 | Reflects huge backlog and inaccessibility of |

Published:
December 01, 2025

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------|---|
| | | | civil courts. |
| Absence of Corruption | 120 / 142 | 5 / 6 | Pervasive public power for private gain. |
| Constraints on Govt. Powers | 103 / 142 | 4 / 6 | Executive power is weakly checked by judiciary/legislature/media. |
| Criminal Justice | 98 / 142 | 4 / 6 | Reflects poor criminal investigation and court efficiency. |

Source: World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, 2024

C. Police, Judiciary, and Corruption Findings

- **Police Corruption and Bribery:** Empirical survey data shows **petty bribery is widespread**. Over **half of Pakistanis** surveyed reported paying a bribe to obtain police assistance (ResearchGate, 2024). The police are consistently identified as the **most corrupt** officials (ResearchGate, 2024).
- **Judicial Backlog and Delays:** Judicial delays are chronic. A civil suit of ordinary complexity can take up to **25 years** before final resolution (Pakistan Institute of Development Economics [PIDE], 2024). The backlog of cases was estimated at **over 2 million** by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan in 2023 (Need of Judicial Reforms in Pakistan, 2023).
- **Investigative Incompetence:** The **incapacity of criminal investigators** is cited as the most significant issue facing Pakistan's criminal investigative services (ResearchGate, 2024).

2. Governance Reforms and Implementation Gaps

Recent research highlights that reform efforts are frequently insufficient, lacking focus on core institutional deficits, and undermined by political resistance.

A. Judicial Reform Focus Misalignment

- **Literature Focus:** Academic literature on judicial reforms has been overwhelmingly concerned with the **appointment of judges** and the conflicts between the executive and legislature, largely neglecting technical issues like **case backlog, court procedures, automation, and access to courts** (PIDE, 2024).
- **Economic Impact of Delays (2024):** Studies in 2024 emphasized the **economic and social consequences of judicial delays**, particularly how the colonial legal legacy discriminates against genuine investors, making the legal environment unpredictable for commercial disputes (Gilani, U. I. 2024, as cited in Need of Judicial Reforms in Pakistan, 2023).

Published:
December 01, 2025

B. Police Reform: Partial Implementation and Trust Deficit

- **Colonial Heritage:** Research confirms that the current police structure remains fundamentally defined by **colonial laws**, designed for political control rather than service delivery, leading to sustained public distrust (Zakir et al., 2025; PIDE, 2024).
- **Implementation Resistance:** Despite the introduction of reforms like the **Police Order 2002**, key initiatives like **community policing** and **accountability mechanisms** have only been **partially implemented** due to resource constraints and resistance to cultural change within the force (Zakir et al., 2025).

C. Accountability and Anti-Corruption

- **Anti-Corruption Progress:** Interestingly, Pakistan was among the **59% of countries globally that saw their scores for Absence of Corruption improve** between 2023 and 2024, which the WJP attributes to global anti-corruption efforts (World Justice Project, 2024). However, the absolute ranking (120th) remains low.
- **Politicization:** Expert analysis using mixed methods shows **entrenched patterns of judicial politicization** and **institutional capture**, confirming that reforms are often undermined by elite resistance and political manipulation (Irfan et al., 2025).

3. Rule of Law and Democratic Stability: The Crisis of 2024

Recent events and analyses confirm that the weakness of the Rule of Law has placed Pakistan in a state of **authoritarian consolidation** or a "**tutelary hybrid regime**," where formal democracy is undermined by the actions of powerful, non-elected institutions (Verfassungsblog, 2024; Irfan et al., 2025).

A. Political Intervention and Judicial Activism (2022–2024)

- **Judicial Intervention:** The period of 2022–2024 was marked by high **political turbulence** and repeated **judicial interventions**, often involving the Supreme Court using *suo motu* powers to intervene in the domains of the executive and legislature (Journal of Law & Social Studies, 2024).
- **Electoral Engineering:** The 2024 General Elections are cited as a stark example of the Rule of Law crisis, with findings pointing to a **coordinated clampdown on a specific party**, including the stripping of its electoral symbol

Published:
December 01, 2025

and delayed election judgements, which led to a **crisis of credibility and public trust** (PIDE, 2024; Verfassungsblog, 2024).

B. Democratic Backsliding and Governance Indicators

- **Fundamental Rights Decline:** Between 2016 and 2024, the WJP Index factor measuring **Fundamental Rights fell in Pakistan**, indicating a continuous backsliding in human rights observance over the long term (World Justice Project, 2024).
- **National Security Threat:** Research combining quantitative and qualitative methods (surveys of legal professionals and security officials) identifies the Rule of Law crisis as a **significant threat to national security**, directly contributing to **social unrest** and undermining the state's capacity to address security challenges (ResearchGate, 2024).

C. Comparative Trajectory

Pakistan's Rule of Law crisis demonstrates a core challenge for **transitional democracies**: the failure to address **political obstacles** to legal reform and institutional integrity. Findings stress that the continued contradiction between **state law (*de jure*) and effective elite power (*de facto*)** is the central determinant of the failed trajectory (Irfan et al., 2025).

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December 01, 2025

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