



RESEARCH PAPER

An Empirical Analysis of Judicial Delays and their Impact on Rule of Law and SDG Outcomes in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically examines the effect of judicial delays on rule of law performance and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) outcomes in Pakistan. With 2.3 million pending cases, Pakistan's judiciary has significant delays in delivering justice that have resulted in its low rank, 129th place, on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index. Using a cross-sectional quantitative survey approach, researchers analyzed responses from 624 individuals. The data were analyzed with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics. Based on their mean scores for each of these items being significantly above the neutral point ($p < 0.001$), respondents supported the idea that judicial delays diminish public confidence, impede climate-related cases in achieving SDG #13, deter investment, and create barriers to achieving gender equity (SDG #5). Respondents viewed broader failures in delivering justice as being of greater consequence than simply experiencing delays associated with the judicial system. Over half (51.3%) of the respondents reported that they did not believe that equal access to justice currently exists. There is a need for the judiciary to implement strategies to reduce case backlogs and to restrict the frequency with which hearings are postponed, to modernize the method by which cases are managed and to enhance access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Timely justice must be achieved in order for Pakistan to improve compliance with the WJP Rule of Law Index and to realize the SDG objectives.

Keywords: Judiciary, Justice Delays, SDG's, World Justice Project

Introduction

WJP (World Justice Project) Rule of Law Index provides a comprehensive, evidence-based measurement of how the rule of law is perceived and experienced by citizens in 142 countries, assessing 8 different pillars of rule of law including 1) constraints on powers of government, 2) absence of corruption, 3) fundamental rights, 4) order & security, 5) regulatory enforcement, 6) civil justice, 7) criminal justice, and 8) informal justice (Waqas, 2024). Pakistan has consistently ranked near the bottom of this index, approximately 129th out of 142 countries since 2014, reflecting an inability to create credible institutions in relation to the rule of law. In particular, judicial delay and immense case backlogs are a major obstacle to the rule of law in Pakistan (World Justice Project, 2024). At this time, Pakistan's higher judiciary has more than 2 million unresolved cases, and lower courts across the country have millions more. Because of this incredibly high volume of unresolved cases, the average time for a case to be resolved is now in the range of years to decades (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2024).

The significant focus of this study is on assessing the long-established but lack of research interests on whether or not there is a causal connection between inefficiencies within judiciaries and the overall rule of law performance of Pakistan through direct

empirical research by attempting to measure the extent that delays caused by inefficiencies within the judiciary create adverse effects to the parties involved by undermining public confidence in the judicial system deterring investment from international sources continuing pretrial detention, weakening judicial enforcement of agreement, or denying timely access to justice for vulnerable populations (Abbasi, 2025). Given that two of the four principal components of the WJP Index relate to both civil and criminal justice and include timeliness of cases being resolved, ability to access judicial resources, and the overall effectiveness of the judicial system, one would expect that any extensive delay in resolving cases would detract from Pakistan's overall WJP score. However, there have been no previous research studies that have conclusively sought to measure the relationship between the existence of judicial delays and the overall WJP (World Justice Project, 2024). This study, therefore, seeks to fill that void of knowledge by attempting to verify the supposition that judicial delays act as a measurable factor that contributes to Pakistan's low overall ranking on the WJP Index.

The rule of law, by distinguishing the legal system from the courts in relation to judicial efficiency within an aggregation of countries' scores; that is a contribution to the academic literature. In addition, the development of an empirical model will enable the separation of delay-related variables from other socio-political variables to measure their individual effects on the WJP score (World Justice Project, 2024). Therefore, it will be essential to determine the role of judicial delay in Pakistan's WJP score as part of this research. Establishing the level of influence of judicial delay will also allow policy-makers to identify evidence-based sources of influence and leverage for implementing policies to reform the judiciary in Pakistan (Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2024). If the delays are determined to play a significant role, targeted reforms such as case management reform, alternate dispute resolution, and digitization can be identified as prioritized avenues for improving Pakistan's rank in the global rule of law.

Literature Review

The study comprehensively analyzes how a severe crisis exists within the delay in accessing civil justice in Pakistan through identifying and explaining the civil justice system's rank as 129 out of 139 globally in the 2023 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index. By conducting a qualitative analysis, the study further determines what the primary causes are for the prolongation of cases in the Pakistani civil justice system, identifying excessive adjournments, insufficient judicial case management, and antiquated procedural laws as the three primary reasons. Rajput argues that unjustified delay is found to result in an inability for citizens of Pakistan to exercise their constitutional right to timely justice. The findings of the paper propose various innovative solutions to remedy the problem, including implementing strong case management systems, promoting the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and utilizing commissioners to record evidence. The above findings provide direct evidence supporting the hypothesis that there is a measurable connection between judicial delay and the low ranking of Pakistan on the WJP index, by virtue of the fact that the timeliness of access to justice and availability will be stated in the civil justice pillar of the index (Rajput, 2024).

The causes of delayed justice in Karachi district courts were analyzed through empirical research utilizing factor analysis and linear regression modeling. Practically, their findings suggest that the most significant reason for case backlog is the frequency of unnecessary adjournment on frivolous grounds. Other major contributing factors are the prevalence of frivolous filings of miscellaneous applications and the lack of standardization of both the training of advocates and judges. Quantitatively, the findings illustrate those systemic inefficiencies at the subordinate court level (where over 80% of pending cases exist) negatively affect the ability to resolve disputes in a timely manner. The empirical findings support that judicial delays are not anecdotal but rather result from systemic issues

in the administration of justice, ultimately reducing Pakistan's performance on the WJP Index's civil and criminal justice pillars (Aslam & Muzaffar, 2025; Hassan et al., 2021).

In October 2024, the Supreme Court of Pakistan began a Judicial Reform Action Plan. This extensive document highlights the reasons for the continued backlog of cases and includes transformational projects such as digital filing, online tracking of cases, and better cooperation amongst the courts. Whereas, before this evaluation, the backlog of cases in the Supreme Court had been increasing for almost a decade, there has now been an opposing trend across the last four quarters of 2025 (since October 2024), where the backlog of cases in the Supreme Court decreased from 60,446 cases (as at early October 2024) to 56,169 cases (as at the end of September 2025), an overall reduction of 4,277 cases or 7.15%. This case study has shown that properly directed reform initiatives can assist in decreasing the backlog of pending case(s) by improving the time in which each case will be dealt with and ultimately lead to the reduction of backlogged cases in Pakistan. The relationship exhibited within this case study demonstrates that reform will lead to a reduction in backlogged case(s) and lead to improved measures of the Rule of Law indicators through reducing the overall length of time that it will take to resolve each case (Associated Press of Pakistan, 2025).

This research analyzes the economic costs of the judicial backlog in Pakistan, which in 2024 and 2025 exceeded 2.2 million cases. Specifically, it will focus on delays in commercial litigation and the enforcement of contracts. It finds that resolving a typical contract enforcement case can take three (3) to ten (10) years. Such lengthy delays result in immobilized capital, weakened business balance sheets, and often prove fatal to SMEs. The economic losses associated with these delays include, but are not limited to, job loss, lost opportunity for investment, and reduced growth; all contribute to a continuing perception by potential investors that they will not recover any disputed capital. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between these results and the WJP Index measures on regulatory enforcement and civilian justice because of how delays in settling cases undermine the reliability of contracts; thus, deterring both local and foreign investment, which are two of the many contributing factors to Pakistan's overall low score (The Nation, 2026).

In its report of the proceedings of a Senate committee, The News (2025) has pointed to the very serious human rights impact of delays in justice for people on death row. The Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights heard that delays in an appeal being decided for those on death row can take up to five years, during which time the individuals are subject to extreme anxiety and harsh conditions. The Lahore High Court had at least 2,212 appeals by people on death row waiting to be heard in Punjab. In addition to causing people on death row extreme distress, the Committee further stated that the delays in justice erode public confidence in the administration of justice, undermine the rule of law, and put undue hardship on the poor and vulnerable, who are unable to access justice (i.e., to afford to pursue lengthy appeals). Delay-related suffering is not an abstract concept in Pakistan; the evidence illustrates that it can be measured within the context of the criminal justice pillar of the WJP Index, which looks at the timeliness of adjudications in an effort to quantify access to justice (The News, 2025).

The doctoral thesis at Universiti Utara Malaysia explores the backlog of criminal cases in Pakistan through a comprehensive legal analysis. It uses both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the issue of backlog in criminal cases in Pakistan. The quantitative data has been sourced from the Annual Reports from the Lahore High Court (2019-2022), while the qualitative data comes from focus group discussions conducted with judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys working within the criminal justice system. The study identifies four major areas contributing to the backlog, including delays in the filing of First Information Reports (FIRs), inefficiencies within the prosecution department, insufficient numbers of judges, and over-use of adjournments. Ghani provides specific recommendations for resolving these issues, such as increasing the number of judges,

expediting the filing of FIRs, and increasing the effectiveness of prosecutions. This academic study provides a thorough and systematic examination of the backlog of criminal cases in Pakistan and will provide strong empirical evidence for the hypothesis that the backlog of criminal cases, primarily within the criminal justice system, has a significant effect on Pakistan's overall score in the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index (Aslam & Muzaffar, 2025a; Ghani, 2025).

Hypotheses

H1: Judicial delays have a significant negative impact on Pakistan's WJP Rule of Law Index score.

H2: Higher WJP Rule of Law Index scores are positively correlated with accelerated overall progress across Pakistan's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conceptual Framework

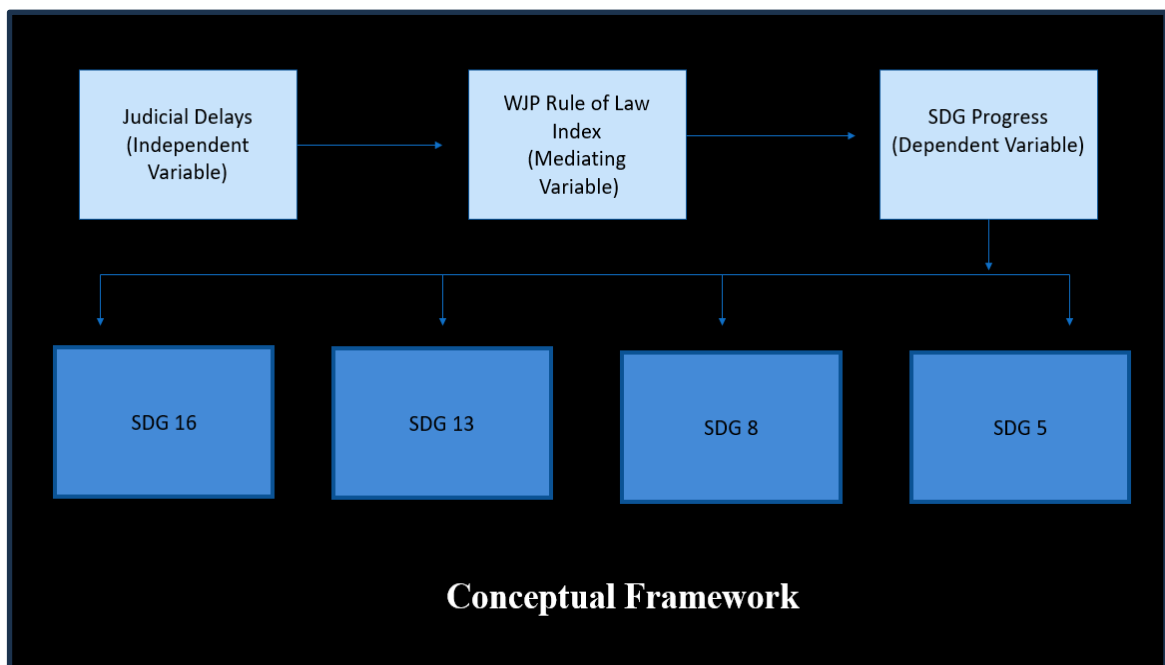


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

Three theories that pertain to each other can provide a framework for understanding how delays in the judiciary reduce the rule of law in an individual country, particularly using the World Justice Project ('WJP') Rule of Law Index as a benchmark. The theories are:

Procedural Justice Theory

The Procedural Justice Theory, which was initially developed by Thibaut and Walker (1975) and later expanded upon by Tyler (1990), suggests that people's confidence in and the legitimacy of a country's justice system is dependent on the perceived fairness of the legal processes rather than just the fairness of the legal outcome (Tyler, 1990). One of the most significant contributing factors to procedural justice is the timeliness of the legal process. Most people believe that 'justice delayed' is 'justice denied.' Therefore, when it takes any length of time whatsoever for courts to make a decision in a case, the litigants perceive that the case has not been fairly resolved, regardless of how the court ruled. This decrease in perceived legitimacy is directly related to the WJP Index's civil and criminal

justice sub-components, both of which use the criteria of 'timeliness and effectiveness' in measuring those pillars of the WJP Index. Consequently, the longer the delay before the court renders its decision, the lower the citizenry will regard the fairness of the legal process, and the lower Pakistan's aggregate rule of law score (Aslam & Muzaffar, 2025b; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

Institutional Efficiency Theory

Institutional efficiency theory, according to North (1990), asserts that the ability of any governing body to effectively administer disputes through the processing of information within an appropriate timeframe and budget is the main determinant of its performance. Courts, viewed as institutions that implement service delivery, will experience a state of "congestion equilibrium" when case backlogs exceed the courts' ability to handle new cases. As a result, courts will struggle to keep pace with the number of new cases coming in relative to the number of cases that are disposed of, and the resulting delays will lead to increased costs for transaction-based businesses due to the inability to enforce contracts in a timely manner; failure to follow due process due to prolonged periods of pretrial detention; and judges having to produce a lower quality of decisions due to large caseloads. The World Justice Project Index uses various indicators to measure institutional efficiency, including timeliness and efficacy of judicial proceedings (such as the number of court decisions made on time), and the timeliness and efficacy of all aspects of the criminal justice system. Given the lengthy waiting periods (3 to 10 years) for the resolution of commercial and business disputes (approximately over 2.3 million pending cases), the poor performance of the courts (due to high volume of case load) is reflected in the index results as a direct result of institutional inefficiency (North, 1990).

Rule of Law Measurement Theory

Timeliness is a fundamental element of the World Justice Project's concept of the rule of law. It is one of the four overarching dependencies used by the WJP to define the rule of law: accountability, just laws, open government, and access to, and impartiality in, the delivery of justice (WJP, 2024). Both the civil justice pillar and the criminal justice pillar of the WJP Index identify 'accessibility and timeliness' as a sub-component under civil justice and 'timely adjudication' as a sub-component under criminal justice. Composite indices are aggregates of multiple weighted subcomponents according to measurement theory; therefore, poor performance on any key subcomponent will have an equally negative impact on all other weighted subcomponents. Since delay-related indicators heavily influence Pakistan's rank of 128th in civil justice and 98th in criminal justice, the measurement theory strongly supports the hypothesis that the substantial delays associated with judicial proceedings consistently reduce Pakistan's aggregate ranking across all civil and criminal justice rankings (World Justice Project, 2024).

Material and Methods

Nature

The researcher used a mixed-methods approach by developing exploratory, descriptive, and analytical methods to generalize the results.

Population

This study concentrates on examining the performance of justice; therefore, the population of this study was the literate people who experienced legal issues with the court, police, and other judicial systems.

Minimum Sample Size

To calculate the minimum sample size of this study, the Cochran formula was used, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error; therefore, the minimum sample size was 385.

Procedure for Selecting a Sample

Literate individuals who had either experienced legal issues with the court, police, or other justice systems, or who were studying law or possessed knowledge of the judiciary and legal system, were considered the target population. Approaching the entire target population was not feasible. Given these constraints, a combination of random and convenience sampling techniques was used to obtain a representative sample for this study.

Instrument of Study

The principal data collection tool for this research was a self-completed structured survey (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed to assess how legal barriers in Pakistan (judicial delays) were associated with the measured improvement of various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, it examined SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Structure of the Questionnaire

The tool was developed in three sections:

Section I: Demographics

This section gathered demographic information on respondents (i.e., sex, age, education level, occupation, geographic location, urban/rural, level of knowledge regarding the WJP rule of law index, and the Sustainable Development Goals). The demographic profile was utilized for subgroup analysis and to ensure the sample was representative.

Section II: Perceptions and Awareness

This section explored respondents' perceptions and awareness of the WJP rule of law index, their perceptions of the severity of judicial delays, and their understanding of how rule of law challenges will impede the progress of the SDGs. Respondents provided categorical responses to questions (i.e., Very High – Very Low, Yes/No/Not Sure).

Section III: Statement Responses (Likert Scale)

There were 08 statements grouped into two categories, where each represents a theme as outlined below:

1. Judicial Delays
2. SDG Achievement Perception

A questionnaire comprising statements on a five-point Likert type was developed for students to collect the data. Keeping in view the nature of the questionnaire, the Likert Scale was selected as SA= Strongly Agree=5, A=Agree=4, NO= Opinion=3, DA= Disagree=2, SDA= Strongly Disagree=1.

Scoring and Interpretation

To analyze the quantitative responses received, the response option was assigned a numerical coding system where Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1. The mean scores were obtained for each thematic category of statements, and a higher mean score was indicative of higher levels of agreement from the respondents that challenges to the rule of law negatively affect the advancement of SDGs. All statements were worded consistently in order to accurately assess the levels of agreement of each respondent (challenges → negative effect). Reverse coding of the answers was not necessary for this analysis, as all statements were worded consistently within each respective category.

Administration of Instrument

The questionnaire was sent electronically via Google and social media apps like TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram form platform (or physically if this method is selected) to all targeted respondents across the various regions of Pakistan (Punjab, Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and AJ&K). The average time to complete each survey was between 10 and 12 minutes.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was performed among 30 members of the target population with the aim of determining the reliability, clarity, and understandability of a 08-item Likert scale questionnaire. The minimum acceptable level of Cronbach's alpha for this pilot study was set at $\alpha \geq 0.70$ to evaluate internal consistency. The results of the pilot study showed that a number of items met or exceeded the minimum criterion for internal consistency, indicating that the instrument was adequate to examine the target population. Two items were revised because of suggestions made by respondents about clarity; no more changes were needed. The final version of the refined questionnaire was administered to the main data sample of 624 respondents; the resulting Cronbach's alpha score was 0.855, which is considered an outstanding score using the scale.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of research tools is essential, as it enhances the quality of the study; the same applies to validity, which is critically important in selecting a research instrument. Content validity and face validity were determined through expert opinions. Keeping in view the requirements of the study, the first version of the instrument was developed. The face and content validity were then assessed by a committee consisting of the following experts:

- Head of the Department of Political Science, GC Women's University, Sialkot
- Assistant Professor Department of Political Science
- Assistant Professor, Department of English

After pilot testing, the committee of experts analyzed the results from the questionnaire to ensure its reliability. The coefficient values were calculated using SPSS. The language of these tools was checked by language experts from the Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot.

Table 1
Validity of Instrument
Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	624	100.0

Excluded	0	.0
Total	624	100.0

- a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 2
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.855	8

Validity of content exists through examining corresponding literature (e.g., World Justice Project indicators and SDG frameworks) in relation to the rule of law. In addition, the use of two research/public policy experts and a legal expert provided initial feedback on potential ambiguity from draft questions produced initial question sets. Three questions (#4, #5, and #18) were reworded from original draft versions after reviewing expert feedback. Face validity was also checked through completion of a pilot survey with 30 respondents (academia, law, and NGOs), indicating instrument clarity and relevance based on their responses. There was an analysis of reliability (internal consistency) after data collection with Cronbach's alpha (α) for each of the thematic groups. A recommended study ($n = 624$) should yield an $\alpha \geq 0.70$, indicating adequate reliability, and our study achieved $\alpha = 0.855$, which exceeds this criterion.

Ethical Considerations

Data collection began after permission was obtained through ethical review. Before answering questions in the survey, all 624 respondents provided their informed consent after being given information about the study's objectives, that they didn't have to participate if they did not want to, and that they would have the choice to withdraw from the study once they had agreed to take part. The anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents were guaranteed; therefore, no identifying information was collected. The data that were collected were stored in a secure place and only used for academic purposes. None of the respondents experienced any harm, deception, or distress because of their participation.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires collected from the desired sample were analyzed in two ways. First, a statement-wise analysis was conducted by computing the mean score for each item. Second, a respondent-wise analysis was performed to determine the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, in order to assess Pakistan's World Justice Ranking and the associated issues and challenges for the SDGs.

For the statement-wise analysis, the neutral value of 3 on the Likert scale was used as the benchmark. A mean score above 3 indicates that respondents agree that a justice system problem exists, implying poor justice system performance. For the respondent-wise analysis, each respondent's total score was calculated (sum of 08 items), and then the mean and standard deviation of these total scores were computed."

Purpose of the t-Test of Significance

For the analysis of the responses by item, a one-sample t-test was used to test whether the sample mean for each item was significantly different from the neutral value of 3 (neither agree nor disagree), on a 5-point Likert Scale. The mean response value for testing was set at 3. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that the mean of the population equals 3; the alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that the mean of the population does not equal 3 (two-tailed test). The level of significance was $\alpha=0.05$. The analysis was performed using SPSS version 22. The formula for the one-sample t-test is:

$t = (\bar{x} - \mu_0) / (s/\sqrt{n})$, where:

t = t-value

\bar{x} = Sample mean

μ_0 = Test Value (3)

s = Sample Standard Deviation

n = Sample Size (624)

The t-value, degrees of freedom (df = n-1 = 623), and two-tailed p-value were evaluated. A p-value less than .05 is considered statistically significant, and means the average response is significantly different from the neutral mean.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 624 people that were surveyed, 66% were female and 33.3% were male. The most common group was undergraduate degree students (37.2%), followed by graduate and post-graduate degree students who both accounted for (31.4%) and that almost two-thirds of all responses (83.3%) came from Punjab with many others being represented from Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. There were more respondents from urban locations (64.7%) than there were from rural locations (35.3%). The largest portion of respondents were between 18-22 years old (38.8%) indicating a high number of youth responses. The largest portion of respondents were students (46.2%) followed by people who work in academia/research (13.5%) and people who work in the judiciary (9.6%). Just over half (54.5%) of respondents had heard of the WJP Rule of Law Index and 62.2% were familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals.

As for the rule of law in Pakistan, most (37.8%) rated it as average; 23.1% rated it as poor, 9.6% rated it as very poor; 22.4% rated it as good; 7.1% rated it as excellent; so, dissatisfaction is greater than satisfaction. A large majority (59.6%) #of respondents believe that the performance of Pakistan in relation to the rule of law will affect its capability to achieve SDGs. The #number of respondents that chose the SDG that is most affected by the challenges related to the rule of law was SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, Strong Institutions), which received 55.2% of the votes, while 19.8% voted for SDG 4 (Quality Education), and #11.7% voted for #SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The legal system does not provide every citizen with equitable access to justice, as stated by just over half (51.3%) of #respondents, while only 28.8% of respondents indicated that it did.

Table 3
Court Delays and Erosion of Public Trust in Justice (SDG 16)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	28	4.5	3.455	1.0830
Disagree	88	14.1		
Neutral	196	31.4		
Agree	196	31.4		
Strongly agree	116	18.6		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 3 shows that Court delays have a negative impact on the ability of people to believe in their court systems (mean = 3.455 - above neutral 3). This participant group did have a moderate amount of variation in their responses (standard deviation = 1.083), with most responses leaning towards being agreeable.

Table 4
Judicial Delays Weaken Climate Case Enforcement (SDG 13)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	20	3.2	3.397	0.9727
Disagree	88	14.1		
Neutral	212	34.0		
Agree	232	37.2		
Strongly agree	72	11.5		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 4 shows Judicial delays negatively impact the enforcement of environmental and climate cases (mean = 3.397 - above neutral), with no significant variation in responses (standard deviation = 0.9727) among participants. As a result, the vast majority of participants have similar views on this topic and feel this creates a barrier to reaching SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Table 5
Slow Dispute Resolution Harms Investment and Decent Work (SDG 8)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	28	4.5	3.551	1.0154
Disagree	64	10.3		
Neutral	164	26.3		
Agree	272	43.6		
Strongly agree	96	15.4		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 5 shows that Judicial delays on business and labor disputes reduce investment opportunities and decent work opportunities (mean = 3.551). This group had moderate variation in responses (standard deviation = 1.0154), but most likely because of the professional backgrounds from which respondents come. In this way, we can see that judicial inefficiency in commercial dispute resolution has negative consequences for economic growth and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Table 6
Court Delays in GBV and Family Cases Undermine Women's Rights (SDG 5)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	40	6.4	3.609	1.119
Disagree	60	9.6		
Neutral	140	22.4		
Agree	248	39.7		
Strongly agree	136	21.8		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 6 shows that Judicial delays regarding issues of gender-based violence and family-related cases obstruct the rights of women (mean = 3.609). There is moderate variation in responses from the participant group (standard deviation = 1.119), but in general, the group has an overwhelming agreement that there are judicial barriers to women accessing justice, which is an obstacle to achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

SDG Achievement Perception

Table 7
Pakistan's Low Justice System Ranking Undermines SDG 16

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	28	4.5	3.603	0.9793
Disagree	36	5.8		
Neutral	196	31.4		
Agree	260	41.7		
Strongly agree	104	16.7		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 7 shows that the majority of the respondents agreed that the poor performance of the justice system was one of the biggest hindrances in the enhancement of

peace, justice, and strong institutions the mean was 3.603, which was more than 3.00 on the Likert scale of 5.00, shows that the general trend of the respondents was agreeing with the statement. The fact that the standard deviation was 0.9793 shows that it was at a moderate level, showing that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 8
Justice Issues Impede Climate Action Progress (SDG 13)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	24	3.8	3.564	0.9560
Disagree	48	7.7		
Neutral	192	30.8		
Agree	272	43.6		
Strongly agree	88	14.1		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 8 shows that the mean score of 3.564 (greater than the neutral midpoint of the 5-point Likert-type scale, 3.0) indicates that most respondents agree with the statement of how issues relating to the justice system hinder achievement of climate change objectives. The standard deviation of 0.9560 indicates a moderate amount of variance in the responses. Thus, the majority of respondents indicate that they agree with the statement, but have varying opinions as to how much the justice system issues impact achievement of SDG 13.

Table 9
Legal System Challenges Harm Decent Work & Growth (SDG 8)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	16	2.6	3.603	0.9527
Disagree	56	9.0		
Neutral	192	30.8		
Agree	256	41.0		
Strongly agree	104	16.7		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 9 shows that the "mean" score of 3.603 on a five-point Likert scale (above the neutral midpoint of 3.00) indicates that overall, there is an agreement to the statement. The "standard deviation" of 0.9527 suggests a moderate amount of variance among the responses indicating that although there is consensus on the perception of legal system challenges affecting SDG 8; there is still some variability in how the various participants perceive legal system challenges' effect on their ability to work with quality and have a decent income.

Table 10
Justice Reform as a Prerequisite for Gender Equality (SDG 5)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	16	2.6	3.699	0.9305
Disagree	44	7.1		
Neutral	164	26.3		
Agree	288	46.2		
Strongly agree	112	17.9		
Total	624	100.0		

Table 10 shows that the mean score of 3.699 on the 5-point Likert scale is above the neutral midpoint score of 3.00, indicating a clear and strong overall inclination to agree with the statement. Therefore, respondents generally see institutional reform in the justice sector as a necessary action for achieving gender equality. The standard deviation of 0.9305 shows only low to moderate dispersion, meaning that respondents had similar opinions about whether the statement was accurate.

Correlation Analysis – Testing Hypotheses

Table 11
Pearson Correlation – Judicial Delays vs. SDG Hindrance

	SDG 16	SDG 13	SDG 8	SDG 5
SDG 16	1			
SDG 13	.602**	1		
SDG 8	.390**	.454**	1	
SDG 5	.523**	.538**	.631**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix (Table 11) shows a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between judicial delays in four Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the decline of the Rule of Law Index score for Pakistan based on the World Justice Project (WJP). As supported by procedural justice theory, via erosions in public faith in the judiciary, such systemic/structural judicial delays lead to citizens seeking alternative methods of resolving disputes. Judicial delays (SDG 16) and Environmental Enforcement (SDG 13) were significantly positively correlated ($r = .602$). As a result, Judicial Delays ultimately contribute to more Pollution Problems. Additionally, moderate correlations ($r = .390$) between Judicial Dispute Resolution (SDG 16) and Business and Labour Disputes (SDG 8) illustrated how Judicial Delays create uncertainty for investors and limit new job creation. The strongest correlation ($r = 0.631$) between judicial delays in labor disputes (SDG 8) and instances of family and gender-based violence (SDG 5) indicate that lack of judicial resources leads to competition between types of cases brought before judges, thus disproportionately affecting women's rights. The remainder of the correlations support the presence of systemic procedural failures across all the above-mentioned SDGs which adversely affect the WJP score for Pakistan.

Table 12
Pearson Correlation Matrix – Inter-relationships among Judicial Delays and SDG's

	SDG 16	SDG 13	SDG 8	SDG 5
SDG 16	1			
SDG 13	.555**	1		
SDG 8	.422**	.465**	1	
SDG 5	.566**	.473**	.538**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 12 shows that before testing H2, Pearson Correlation Analysis was utilized to assess the correlations amongst items 21-24, which have perceived SDG progress regarding justice system challenges. These four items had a range of significant results above 0.01 for all of the variables, suggesting sufficient reliability of each of these variables as measures of perceived SDG progress deficits with regard to Justice System Challenges. A correlation coefficient of 0.566 was identified as the strongest from the item 21 low ranking of justice systems and item 24 the need for justice reform for gender equality. A correlation coefficient of 0.465 was identified as the weakest correlation from the legal system challenges regarding item 23 to the case of justice-related issues slowing the progress on item 22 relative to SDG 13. Overall, these results indicate that the four items share a common construct called perceived SDG progress deficits as a consequence of rule of law deficiencies. A composite variable (mean of items 21-24) was created from items 21-24 of the group of four on which H6 is based to measure the combined progress of the SDGs.

Table 13
Judicial Deficiencies and SDG Impacts (One-Sample t-Test)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
JD	624	3.5032	.84039	.03364
SDGAP	624	3.6170	.75615	.03027

Table 14
One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
JD	14.957	623	.000	.50321	.4371	.5693
SDGAP	20.383	623	.000	.61699	.5575	.6764

A one-sample t-test was performed to assess whether the average scores of respondents were statistically significant from the neutral score of 3 (not agreeing or disagreeing). The results showed that the mean score of respondents for Judicial Delays (JD) was significantly higher than 3 ($M = 3.503$, mean difference = 0.503, $t(623) = 14.96$, $p < 0.001$). The results of the mean scores of respondents for the SDG Achievement Perception (SDGAP) were also significantly greater than 3 ($M = 3.617$, mean difference = 0.617, $t(623) = 20.38$, $p < 0.001$). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the overall view of respondents is that judicial delays in Pakistan have a negative impact on the performance of the rule of law in Pakistan and that poor rule of law has an impact on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Findings

Legal processes are one of the leading causes of diminishing public trust in the traditional justice system. This is an important finding because trust can be defined as the social capital that provides a basis for legitimizing state institutions. Citizens would continue to look for other ways to solve disputes outside of a formal court system when they view the judiciary as being unable to provide timely decisions. This behavior is contrary to the provisions of SDG Target 16.3, which seeks to promote the rule of law and ensure fair access to justice for all. Delays create two separate systems of justice, one for those with the financial means to sustain prolonged litigation and a second for those with no choice other than to resort to informal resolution of disputes. Such duplication erodes the principle of equality before the law. Furthermore, this finding aligns with the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, which outlines that, at its essence, a functioning court system must include both civil justice and civil justice systems that are not hindered by unreasonable delays.

A fractured relationship between the courts and their clients is present. When people believe that judicial rulings can be bought, the foundation of the rule of law - that everyone is treated equally under the law - is destroyed. This type of thinking fosters an "impunity" culture for powerful individuals, while at the same time creating a level of "cynicism" for the powerless. Therefore, it directly threatens SDG Target 16.5's goal of "substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all forms." The data confirms that the author suggests that anti-corruption measures (including transparent case assignment processes and judges declaring their financial assets) are critical to the legitimacy and survival of well-functioning institutions in Pakistan.

The World Justice Project supports the view that international low rule of law rankings for Pakistan pose a significant structural barrier to achieving SDG 16. A weak justice system directly translates into institutions that are weak, as well as a lack of peace and justice.

The perception of judicial delay as a serious impediment to environmental governance is well-founded. Time is a critical factor in environmental law. For example, if a polluting factory is granted a delayed injunction, it continues to degrade the environment, and the eventual judgment is an academic exercise by the time it occurs. This "remedial delay" undermines deterrence; potential violators can calculate that the penalties, if there are any, would be so far into the future as to be irrelevant. Therefore, the slow pace of environmental litigation diminishes the fundamental purpose of SDG 13 to take urgent and

decisive action against climate change and its consequences. Overall, the data conclusively support the view that increasing the efficiency of environmental courts and tribunals is not merely a procedural reform but is also an integral aspect of climate governance in Pakistan.

The results of this study show that Pakistan's judicial system has several significant weaknesses, including delays, corruption, difficulty access, inadequate enforcement, and uncertainty concerning its laws. The challenges in the judicial system are interrelated or act as structural impediments to achieving sustainability in multiple sectors/development goals. The study demonstrates a causal relationship between institutional failures within the justice system (e.g. delays to environmental hearing date) and the failure to meet specific development objective(s) (e.g. combat pollution & SDG 13); as well as institutional failures within the justice system and the erosion of public confidence in the State; thus, undermining SDG 16. The study further emphasizes that reforming the justice system is not only a legal issue but also a critical strategy for development. Improving SDG 16 is integral to achieving the entire 2030 Agenda in Pakistan. Public confidence in governance is closely related to the justice system's ability to deliver fair and timely services. Therefore, improving the operation and accessibility of the justice institutions would be essential to creating long-lasting social peace and unlocking Pakistan's developmental and humanitarian potential.

Conclusion

Researchers examined two hypotheses: H1) that the judicial delays have a negative impact on a country's score on the World Justice Project/Rule of Law Index and H2) that countries with a higher World Justice Project/Rule of Law Index are associated with faster progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Results from analysis of 624 respondents support each of the two hypotheses. The data indicated a significant level of agreement among respondents that courthouse delays impact public trust in the system of justice, negatively impact enforcement of SDG 13 (climate justice), prevent individuals from investing in countries with long courthouse delays (SDG 8), and obstruct gender justice (SDG 5). A comparison of means using a one-sample t-test indicated mean response scores were significantly above a neutral response level ($p < .001$).

A paired t-test revealed that when comparing broader justice system failures (beyond just courthouse delays) related to SDG 16, SDG 13, and SDG 5, the failures of the broader justice system were considered to be more damaging than courthouse delays alone; therefore, the low WJP score of 129 out of 142 indicates that the justice system in Pakistan is experiencing a systemic crisis as opposed to an isolated efficiency issue. More concerning is that 51.3% of respondents indicated they do not believe the justice system in Pakistan guarantees their equal access to justice, with only 7.1% of respondents rating the rule of law in Pakistan as "excellent". These results support the conclusion that courthouse delays are the structural bottleneck to accessing justice in Pakistan. The results of this study demonstrate the urgent need for reform in the justice system of Pakistan with the following recommendations: decreasing the backlog of civil and criminal cases, limiting the number of times a case can be continued, and modernizing case management. Without timely access to justice, neither the rule of law or the accomplishment of SDGs can be met. Reducing courthouse delays must be a top priority if Pakistan is to improve from its current low position compared to the rest of the world and ultimately, achieve sustainable development.

Recommendations

Creation of Specialized Courts for SDGs 13, 8, and 5

The government, in consultation with the high-groups, should have specialized Environmental Courts at the divisional level and Commercial Courts in all major industrial and commercial hubs in accordance with the SDGs 13 and 8 findings. Expedited procedures

with strict case disposal timelines must be employed by such courts (e.g., 6-month limit for commercial disputes). Creating specialized courts increases the judicial expertise available and helps establish a more efficient court process. Fast-track benches for gender-based violence cases (SDG 5) must also provide in-camera proceedings to ensure that survivors' privacy is protected.

Adoption of Modern Case Management Systems in High Courts

The case management system used by the Lahore High Court should be replicated and improved upon so that it can be utilized by every other high court in the country. This means that every time a case begins (at the beginning of a lawsuit) there would be required a case management conference held to narrow down the issues to be determined by the court, set deadlines for discovery, and schedule the trial date; as well as to create a digital dashboard to track the age of cases that are past their time limits. Judges who actively manage their cases rather than reactively manage their cases based on the timing of the attorneys would clearly reduce delays in the court system.

Increasing Judicial Capacity and Support Staff

The judicial commission of Pakistan should conduct a new analysis of the number of judges in proportion to the population, and the previous formulas used are outdated. The time frame for filling all existing and newly created judicial positions should be established, and in addition, there is a need to increase the number of Ahlmad, Daftari, and Jamadar staff. The absence of judges and staff increases the backlog of cases. If you invest in staff, then you invest in timely justice.

Comprehensive Digitization for Transparency and Efficiency

The aim is to provide comprehensive digitization in order to create a system that eliminates the possibility of corruption, thus creating a more transparent judicial system. Some areas that would be digitized would include every court record available online in real time, use of automated assignments of cases to reduce bias, and removal of licensing processes from multiple areas into one single portal. Another way to reduce corruption is to reduce the need for face-to-face interaction, thereby providing greater assurance (i.e. an audit trail) of the impartiality of the decision makers.

Annual National Conference on Justice and Development

To create a sustainable environment within the justice and development area, the Government should proceed to hold a yearly "National Conference on Justice and Development." All stakeholders, such as the Judiciary, Parliamentarians, Provincial Governments, Bar Associations, Civil Society, and Private Sector, are expected to participate in the conference for the purpose of assessing progress made towards reforming the justice system and renewing their commitment to implementing an ongoing reform agenda, as Judicial Reform is ongoing rather than a single event. The continuing success of Judicial Reform would rely heavily on the continued strong collaboration of the various sectors in society as well as their sustained political will to enhance a peaceful, equitable, sustainable Pakistan for both the present generation and future generations; thus, concluding Judicial Reform is dependent on political will as well as the collaboration of all the sectors in society to promote peace and equity through judicial reform.

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