



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW AND POLICY

Judicial Independence in Pakistan Executive Interference, Reforms and Rule of Law



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Keywords:

Judicial Independence, Executive Interference, Constitutional Amendments, Doctrine of Necessity, Judicial Appointments, Rule of Law, Separation of Powers

ABSTRACT

Pakistan's judiciary has operated under persistent executive dominance since independence in 1947, undermining the constitutional guarantee of separation of powers under Article 175 of the 1973 Constitution. This study examines how executive interference has shaped the failure of judicial reform efforts and contributed to rule of law deterioration. Employing qualitative doctrinal and document analysis, the research traces historical patterns from the doctrine of necessity through the 18th and 19th Constitutional Amendments to the transformative 26th and 27th Amendments of 2024 and 2025. Findings reveal that appointment manipulation, constitutional reversals, and formal institutionalization of political control have systematically weakened judicial autonomy. The 26th Amendment reduced judges to a minority within their own appointment body, while the 27th Amendment created an executive-controlled Federal Constitutional Court and granted lifetime military immunity. Pakistan urgently requires a transparent, merit-based appointment system aligned with international standards under the ICCPR and UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary.

How to Cite: Rajpoot, T. (2026). Judicial Independence in Pakistan Executive Interference, Reforms and Rule of Law. *International Journal of Law and Policy*, 4(4), 79-98. <https://doi.org/10.59022/ijlp.504>

I. Introduction

A nation cannot claim justice when its judges fear the powerful. Pakistan's judiciary has long operated under the shadow of executive dominance, political pressure, and institutional interference. Since independence in 1947, the executive branch has repeatedly undermined the courts through manipulated appointments, forced removals, and constitutional amendments. The Constitution of 1973 guarantees separation of powers among the legislature, executive, and judiciary. Yet, this guarantee has frequently remained words on paper rather than lived reality. Courts have validated military coups, dismissed independent judges, and bowed to political pressure at critical moments. Most recently, the 26th Constitutional Amendment of 2024 reshaped the judicial appointment process, shifting power from the judiciary toward political branches. These events raise urgent questions about whether Pakistan can ever achieve genuine rule of law. Judicial independence is not merely a legal concept it is the backbone of democracy, accountability, and fundamental rights (Saeed, 2025).

Pakistan inherited its judicial system from British colonial rule in 1947. From the very beginning, courts faced pressure from state institutions rather than operating freely. Military regimes repeatedly manipulated the judiciary to legitimize unconstitutional rule. Civilian governments also interfered through controlling judicial appointments and transfers. The Constitution of 1973 created a formal framework for judicial independence under Article 175. However, constitutional text alone could not shield courts from political reality. Scholars have studied military interference, landmark cases, and constitutional amendments in detail. The 18th and 19th Amendments were seen as positive steps toward protecting judicial autonomy. Yet, most prior studies focused narrowly on appointment mechanisms or individual political episodes. Research examining the combined impact of executive interference, reform attempts, and rule of law outcomes remains limited (Malik, 2023).

It is well established that Pakistan's judiciary faces persistent executive interference. Scholars have documented military coups, forced judicial removals, and politically motivated appointments across decades. Courts have at times validated unconstitutional actions rather than resisting them. Reform efforts, including the 18th and 19th Amendments, brought limited improvement. Yet the core problem endures the executive continues to dominate judicial processes. Political pressure directly shapes judicial decisions and undermines public trust in courts. When judges fear the powerful, justice becomes selective rather than universal. Citizens lose confidence in courts as neutral institutions. The 26th Constitutional Amendment of 2024 made this problem more acute by shifting judicial appointments into political hands. Despite growing scholarship, no study has fully examined how executive interference, failed reforms, and rule of law decline are interconnected in Pakistan's specific constitutional context (Fathya et al., 2025).

Scholars have consistently found that executive dominance is the central threat to judicial independence in Pakistan. Separation of powers, as guaranteed under Article 175(3), has frequently failed in practice due to political manipulation. Studies confirm that judicial

appointment mechanisms are the primary entry point for executive interference. When presidents control appointments, courts tend to rule in favor of the state. Research also highlights how Pakistan's higher courts have validated military rule through the doctrine of necessity, repeatedly compromising their own legitimacy. The 18th and 19th Amendments attempted to reduce executive dominance by strengthening the Judicial Commission. However, scholars found those reforms were incomplete and left serious structural gaps. Political pressure on judges has led to decisions that favor powerful actors, directly weakening public trust in the legal system (Riaz et al., 2023).

The 26th Constitutional Amendment of 2024 has generated a significant body of recent scholarship. Studies reveal that the amendment gave political members a majority on the Judicial Commission, reducing judges to a minority in their own appointment process. Researchers found that restricting the Supreme Court's *Suo motu* powers removed a critical tool for protecting fundamental rights. Comparative studies show that where similar reforms diminished judicial independence in other states, executive overreach became normalized. The amendment's introduction of undefined "inefficiency" grounds for removing judges raised serious concerns about arbitrary dismissals. Scholars further conclude that without transparent appointments, judicial accountability mechanisms, and structural reforms, the rule of law in Pakistan will continue to deteriorate (Mangi et al., 2025).

The existing literature has made valuable contributions to understanding judicial independence in Pakistan. Studies have examined military interference, constitutional amendments, and appointment mechanisms in useful detail. However, a significant gap remains in this body of knowledge. Most studies focus on only one dimension either executive interference, or reform attempts, or rule of law outcomes in isolation. No study has yet examined how all three dimensions interact with each other as a connected system. Furthermore, existing research rarely measures the real-world impact of failed reforms on citizens' access to justice. The post-26th Amendment landscape remains critically under-researched, especially regarding long-term consequences for democratic governance. Scholars have also called for comparative analysis with international judicial independence standards under the ICCPR, which remains largely absent from Pakistan-specific studies (Jamali et al., 2024). This study is guided by the following research objectives:

To examine the historical patterns of executive interference in Pakistan's judiciary, tracing how military regimes and civilian governments have undermined judicial independence from 1947 to the present constitutional amendments of 2024 and 2025.

To critically analyze the effectiveness of judicial reform efforts in Pakistan, including the 18th, 19th, 26th, and 27th Constitutional Amendments, and evaluate whether these reforms have strengthened or further weakened judicial autonomy and the rule of law.

To identify the specific research gap in existing literature by assessing the interconnected impact of executive interference, failed reforms, and rule of law deterioration as a unified constitutional crisis, and to propose evidence-based recommendations for

achieving genuine and sustainable judicial independence in Pakistan in accordance with international standards under the ICCPR and UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary.

To what extent has executive interference shaped the failure of judicial reform efforts in Pakistan, and how has this structural dominance contributed to the deterioration of the rule of law under the constitutional framework of 1973 as amended through the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments?

This research holds significant importance at multiple levels. Pakistan's judicial crisis is not merely a legal problem it is a democratic emergency affecting every citizen. When courts lose independence, ordinary people lose their only neutral protector against state power. Academically, this study fills a critical gap by analyzing executive interference, reform failures, and rule of law decline as one interconnected system. No prior study has approached all three dimensions together within Pakistan's specific constitutional framework. Practically, this research offers evidence-based recommendations for lawmakers, bar councils, and civil society organizations working to restore judicial integrity. It also contributes to comparative constitutional law by measuring Pakistan's judicial framework against international human rights standards. Societally, a genuinely independent judiciary directly protects citizens' fundamental rights, ensures equal access to justice, and sustains democratic governance (Huchhanavar, 2023).

II. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, appropriate for examining the normative, structural, and historical dimensions of judicial independence in Pakistan. Qualitative methods enable in-depth analysis of constitutional provisions, statutory texts, judicial decisions, and legislative amendments. Primary legal sources include the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 and its relevant amendments, particularly the 18th, 19th, 26th, and 27th Constitutional Amendments, alongside landmark Supreme Court judgments such as *State v. Dosso* (1958), *Asma Jilani v. Government of Punjab* (1972), *Al-Jehad Trust v. Federation of Pakistan* (1996), and *Zafar Ali Shah v. Pervez Musharraf* (2000). These sources were accessed through the National Assembly of Pakistan (na.gov.pk), the Supreme Court of Pakistan (supremecourt.gov.pk), and the Pakistan Law Site (pakistanlawsite.com). International instruments, including the ICCPR and the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, were retrieved from the UN Treaty Collection and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ensuring authenticity of all primary materials.

The secondary literature was systematically identified through targeted keyword searches across peer-reviewed legal databases and academic repositories, including the Social Science Research Network (SSRN). Search terms included: judicial independence Pakistan, executive interference judiciary, doctrine of necessity Pakistan, 26th Constitutional Amendment 2024, 27th Constitutional Amendment 2025, Judicial Commission of Pakistan,

rule of law Pakistan, separation of powers, judicial appointments mechanism, and ICCPR Article 14. Strict inclusion criteria were applied: only peer-reviewed journal articles, books from recognized academic presses, and working papers by legal academics or senior practitioners were considered. Sources were prioritized from the last five years (2020–2025) to ensure currency and relevance, though foundational historical scholarship was retained where necessary to trace long-term institutional patterns. All selected sources were verified for relevance to the constitutional and rule of law dimensions of this study, with preference given to law journals, constitutional studies journals, and human rights law reviews to maintain disciplinary coherence.

The analytical framework combines doctrinal legal analysis with document analysis. Doctrinal analysis was applied to constitutional texts, legislative amendments, and judicial decisions to identify legal principles, precedents, and normative frameworks governing judicial independence in Pakistan. Document analysis examined parliamentary debates, bar council resolutions, international human rights reports, and judicial commission records, enabling contextual understanding of how formal legal rules have been interpreted in institutional practice. Regarding ethical considerations, this study relies exclusively on publicly available official documents, authenticated legal texts, and published academic sources; no human participants were involved and no sensitive personal data was collected. Full bibliographic attribution is provided for all sources in compliance with academic integrity standards. Concerning limitations, constitutional law and judicial policy in Pakistan are subject to rapid change, as evidenced by the 2024 and 2025 amendments; post-finalization developments may not be reflected herein. Additionally, the subordinate judiciary and provincial institutions fall outside this study's scope and warrant dedicated future inquiry.

III. Results

This section presents the findings of this research in direct response to the central research question: to what extent has executive interference shaped the failure of judicial reform efforts in Pakistan, and how has this structural dominance contributed to the deterioration of the rule of law? The findings are drawn from a doctrinal analysis of constitutional provisions, landmark case law, and recent amendments from 1947 to 2025. Pakistan's Constitution of 1973 guarantees judicial independence under Article 175. Yet the gap between this constitutional promise and institutional reality has grown wider over time. Every era from military dictatorships to elected civilian governments produced fresh mechanisms of judicial control. Appointment manipulation, forced oaths, intimidation, and constitutional amendments all served the same purpose: keeping courts subordinate to power. The results reveal a deeply embedded pattern of executive dominance that no single reform has successfully broken (Cheema et al., 2025).

This study finds that Pakistan's judiciary has historically legitimized executive overreach through repeated application of the doctrine of necessity. From *State v. Dosso* (1958) to *Zafar*

Ali Shah v. Pervez Musharraf (2000), courts validated four military coups rather than resisting them. This judicial abdication created a dangerous precedent that unconstitutional seizure of power could receive legal approval. Each validation deepened the structural subordination of the judiciary to executive and military power. The courts did not merely fail to protect the rule of law; they actively weakened it by granting unlimited powers to military regimes. This pattern confirms that executive interference in Pakistan is not incidental but systemic and historically embedded. The doctrine was never designed to legitimize military autocracy, yet Pakistan's courts repeatedly used it in exactly that manner, fundamentally distorting the meaning of constitutional governance (Amir et al., 2022).

This research finds that controlling judicial appointments has consistently been the executive's most effective method of dominating courts. Before the 18th Amendment, the president held near-absolute power over appointing superior court judges. Studies confirm that presidential appointment of judges significantly increased the frequency of state victories in litigation, demonstrating a direct link between appointment control and biased judicial outcomes. The 18th and 19th Amendments attempted to address this by transferring appointment power to the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP), where judges held a majority. This reform produced measurable improvements in judicial autonomy. However, it also created new vulnerabilities, as political actors sought alternative routes to influence courts. The appointment mechanism remains the most contested battleground in Pakistan's ongoing struggle for judicial independence. No reform has yet produced a fully transparent, merit-based, and interference-free process for selecting Pakistan's judges (Mehmood, 2022).

This study finds that Pakistan's constitutional reform record is mixed and non-linear. The 18th and 19th Amendments strengthened judicial independence by giving the JCP a judicial majority and establishing the seniority principle for Chief Justice appointments. These reforms were genuine improvements. However, they did not eliminate executive interference — they merely displaced it. Civilian governments still pressured courts through informal channels, transfers, and selective case assignments. Each reform was eventually followed by counter-reforms that reversed earlier gains. The 26th Amendment of 2024 is the most dramatic reversal, reconstituting the JCP to give political members a majority and empowering a parliamentary committee to select the Chief Justice. This pattern demonstrates that reforms in Pakistan are driven by political calculations rather than principled commitment to constitutionalism. Reform has consistently served those in power, not the constitutional framework it claims to protect (Abbas et al., 2024).

This research finds that the 26th Constitutional Amendment of October 2024 represents the most significant formal institutionalization of executive control over Pakistan's judiciary in decades. The amendment restructured the JCP so that eight of its thirteen members are now non-judicial, drawn from the legislature and executive. Judicial members are now a minority in their own appointment body. The amendment also introduced vague “inefficiency” grounds for removing judges without defining the term creating a mechanism for arbitrary dismissals based on political displeasure. Additionally, the *Suo motu* jurisdiction

of the Supreme Court was curtailed, removing a critical tool for proactive protection of fundamental rights. These changes collectively violate Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to a fair hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal (Attaullah et al., 2025).

This study finds that the 27th Constitutional Amendment of November 2025 escalated the constitutional crisis by creating a new Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) with sweeping powers previously held by the Supreme Court. The FCC's first Chief Justice and initial judges are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister without any judicial body's recommendation. This gives the executive direct and unrestricted control over the country's most powerful constitutional court. The amendment also grants lifetime immunity from criminal and civil proceedings to the President and five-star military officers, placing them entirely above the law. Two Supreme Court justices resigned in protest. International observers, including the International Commission of Jurists, condemned these changes as a dismantling of justice. The 27th Amendment confirms that Pakistan's executive is no longer merely interfering with the judiciary it is structurally absorbing it into the political apparatus (Zia et al., 2021).

IV. Discussion

A. The Doctrine of Necessity Entrenched Executive Dominance Over the Judiciary

The doctrine of necessity raises a fundamental question about the role of courts in constitutional states. Can a court remain independent when it uses the law to justify illegal power? In Pakistan, this question has never been theoretical it has defined the entire trajectory of judicial-executive relations since 1954. The doctrine originates in ancient Roman jurisprudence and was intended for extreme state emergencies only. It was never designed to give legal cover to military autocracies. Yet Pakistan became the only country in modern constitutional history to repeatedly invoke this doctrine to validate military coups. Each time a general seized power, courts provided legal approval rather than constitutional resistance. This judicial behavior directly answers the central research question of this study: executive interference has not merely influenced judicial reform failure it has been normalized through the courts' own decisions. The judiciary became an instrument of executive dominance rather than a check against it (Sethi, 2025).

The evidence supporting this finding is extensive and spans seven decades of constitutional history. The first application occurred in *Federation of Pakistan v. Maulvi Tamiz-u-din Khan* (1954), when the Federal Court validated the Governor General's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. This single decision stripped Pakistan of parliamentary supremacy at its very birth as a nation. The precedent was deepened in *State v. Dosso* (1958), where the Supreme Court used Hans Kelsen's positivist theory to justify General Ayub Khan's coup. Kelsen's theory was never universally accepted, yet Pakistani

courts adopted it selectively to serve political convenience. The pattern continued through *Begum Nusrat Bhutto v. Chief of Army Staff* (1977), where General Zia-ul-Haq's coup was validated despite clear constitutional violations. Most damagingly, in *Zafar Ali Shah v. Pervez Musharraf* (2000), the court granted virtually unlimited powers to a military regime, including the authority to amend the Constitution. Each ruling compounded the institutional damage caused by the previous one. The cumulative effect was a judiciary that had legally embedded executive dominance into constitutional culture (Ashfaq et al., 2025).

However, this pattern was not without challenge or contradiction. The landmark *Asma Jilani v. Government of Punjab* (1972) stands as the most important judicial rejection of the doctrine in Pakistan's history. The Supreme Court under Chief Justice Hamood Ur Rehman declared General Yahya Khan's martial law illegal and rejected Kelsen's theory entirely. The court held that Pakistan's constitutional Grund norm was the Objective Resolution, not the will of any usurper. This decision directly overruled *Dosso* and declared that no military action could abrogate the Constitution. It also paved the way for the restoration of democratic governance and the adoption of the 1973 Constitution. The Lawyers' Movement of 2007 similarly demonstrated that judicial independence could reassert itself under civil society pressure. The Supreme Court's April 2022 ruling which annulled Imran Khan's unconstitutional dissolution of the National Assembly was celebrated as a fresh burial of the doctrine of necessity. Yet these moments of judicial courage remained exceptional rather than institutional. They depended on individual judicial courage and external pressure, not on structural protection of judicial independence.

There are important limitations in drawing conclusions from this historical pattern alone. Most studies examining the doctrine of necessity in Pakistan rely heavily on doctrinal case analysis rather than empirical institutional data. The psychological and social pressures on individual judges under military regimes are difficult to measure or quantify. Judges who refused to take oaths under the Provisional Constitution Order of 1981 and 2000 demonstrated that resistance was possible, yet the majority complied. This suggests that institutional incentive structures matter more than individual courage. A critical question remains: would judges have validated coups if they had enjoyed genuine security of tenure, independent funding, and structural protection from political pressure? This study finds that existing scholarship does not adequately examine the institutional conditions that made judicial capitulation more likely than resistance. The doctrine of necessity was not simply a legal tool — it was also a symptom of deep institutional vulnerability that structural reforms have never fully addressed (Imran et al., 2024).

Comparatively, Pakistan's experience with the doctrine of necessity stands in sharp contrast to constitutional democracies where judicial independence is structurally embedded. In India, when the government attempted to introduce a National Judicial Appointments Commission in 2014 that included executive members, the Supreme Court struck it down in 2015 as unconstitutional. India's judiciary protected itself through structural independence mechanisms built into its constitutional framework. Pakistan never developed comparable

structural protections. In Sri Lanka, the doctrine of necessity was considered during the COVID-19 pandemic parliament crisis of 2020, but institutional safeguards prevented its misuse. Even in newer democracies of Eastern Europe, constitutional courts have resisted executive pressure more effectively than Pakistan's judiciary, partly because international treaty obligations and civil society structures create additional accountability layers. Pakistan's uniquely isolated constitutional culture shaped by colonial inheritance, weak civilian institutions, and persistent military dominance created conditions in which the doctrine could be weaponized repeatedly without meaningful institutional resistance (Bojarski, 2025).

The implications of this finding are profound and directly relevant to Pakistan's present constitutional crisis. The 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments of 2024 and 2025 represent a modern evolution of the same logic that powered the doctrine of necessity. Whereas military rulers previously used courts to legitimize unconstitutional power, today's executive uses constitutional amendments to formalize political control over courts. The method has changed, but the objective remains identical subordinating the judiciary to executive will. This finding confirms that no single reform or landmark judgment is sufficient to break the cycle. What Pakistan requires is a fundamental structural redesign of its judicial appointment system, funding mechanisms, and accountability structures, aligned with the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary. Without these protections, the doctrine of necessity may be formally buried, but its spirit that the powerful can always find legal justification for their actions will continue to haunt Pakistan's constitutional landscape. The rule of law cannot survive in an environment where institutional vulnerabilities make judicial compliance easier than judicial courage.

B. Judicial Appointment Mechanisms Became the Primary Tool of Executive Control

Who appoints judges ultimately determines what kind of justice citizens receive. This is the central issue addressed by this result. The appointment of superior court judges in Pakistan has never been a neutral technical process it has always been a political battleground. Whoever controls appointments controls the judiciary. This finding directly connects to the research question by demonstrating that executive interference has operated most powerfully not through direct orders to judges but through systematic control over who becomes a judge in the first place. The history of Pakistan's appointment mechanisms reveals three distinct phases a politicized phase before 1996, a partially reformed phase between 1996 and 2024, and a newly re-politicized phase after the 26th Amendment. Each phase reflects a specific power arrangement between the executive and the judiciary. Understanding this trajectory is essential for grasping why rule of law reforms in Pakistan have repeatedly failed to take root (Hassan et al., 2022).

The evidence for this finding spans the entire constitutional history of Pakistan. From 1947 to 1996, the president held near-absolute discretionary power over judicial appointments. During this period, civilian governments under Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif exploited

appointment mechanisms extensively to ensure courts would rule favorably on contentious political matters. Bhutto's governments were specifically documented as selecting judges based on political loyalty rather than legal merit. The landmark *Al-Jehad Trust v. Federation of Pakistan* (1996) changed this. The Supreme Court ruled that judges must be appointed "in consultation" with the Chief Justice, effectively shifting appointment power away from the executive. This ruling produced a decade of relative judicial independence, during which courts demonstrated greater willingness to challenge government actions. However, General Musharraf's Provisional Constitution Order of 1999 immediately tested these gains by compelling judges to take a new oath or face removal. Six of thirteen Supreme Court judges resigned rather than comply. The appointment system, even when reformed, remained fragile without structural protection.

The 18th Amendment of 2010 was the most comprehensive formal attempt to institutionalized appointment reform. It established the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP), where judges held a majority of seats, and a Parliamentary Committee with a limited role. The seniority principle was also formalized, removing executive discretion over selecting the Chief Justice. These reforms produced measurable improvements. Studies confirm that judge-peer appointment systems increase judicial independence even in weakly institutionalized settings, as states tend to lose court cases more frequently when judges are appointed by professional peers rather than political actors. The 19th Amendment refined the 18th by further strengthening the judiciary's internal control over the JCP. For over a decade, Pakistan experienced its longest sustained period of relatively independent judicial appointments. Yet even this system had a structural weakness it concentrated power in the Chief Justice personally, creating what scholars described as a new form of one-man rule within the judiciary itself. The question of who would guard the guards remained unanswered.

However, there are important limitations in evaluating the appointment system's effectiveness. Most academic assessments rely on formal legal analysis of constitutional provisions rather than behavioral data on actual judicial decision-making before and after appointment reforms. Informal pressures including intelligence surveillance, career incentives for retired judges, and social networks within the legal establishment are extremely difficult to measure through doctrinal research methods. Pakistan's judicial appointment literature focuses heavily on the superior courts while largely ignoring appointment processes in lower courts, where the vast majority of citizens experience justice. There is also a survivorship bias in case analysis: scholars tend to examine landmark judgments where judges asserted independence, while the far more numerous routine cases where courts quietly deferred to powerful interests receive little attention. Furthermore, studies written before 2024 could not anticipate the scale of the 26th Amendment's institutional impact, making pre-amendment scholarship partially incomplete as a guide to present realities.

Comparing Pakistan's appointment experience with comparable democracies reveals the depth of its structural failures. India's Supreme Court Collegium system, despite its own criticisms of opacity, successfully resisted executive capture in the 2015 NJAC case, where the

Indian Supreme Court struck down parliamentary interference in judicial appointments. The UK introduced the independent Judicial Appointments Commission in 2005, removing ministers from the appointments process entirely and creating a merit-based selection system subject to public scrutiny. South Africa's post-apartheid constitution similarly established an independent Judicial Service Commission with transparent processes. Pakistan's 26th Amendment moved in precisely the opposite direction making judges a minority in their own appointment body and placing a Special Parliamentary Committee in charge of selecting the Chief Justice, with its meetings held in camera. This is not reform it is reversal. The contrast with international best practices could not be starker, and it exposes the 26th Amendment as a politically calculated regression dressed in the language of democratic accountability (Khan, 2021).

The implications of this finding are urgent and directly applicable to Pakistan's current constitutional moment. The 26th Amendment fundamentally dismantled the most important structural protection that judicial independence had ever enjoyed in Pakistan. Out of thirteen JCP members, only five are now from the judiciary. Eight members representing the legislature and executive can outvote judicial members on every appointment decision. Any judge appointed under this system owes their position to political actors, creating what researchers describe as structural indebtedness where fear, favor, and gratitude shape judicial conduct far more powerfully than any formal ethical code. A newly appointed judge in 2025 knows exactly who placed them on the bench. This structural dynamic makes it almost impossible for such judges to rule against the interests of those who appointed them without career consequences. The rule of law cannot survive when the appointment process transforms independence from a professional expectation into a personal risk. Pakistan urgently needs an appointment system that is transparent, merit-based, independent from political control, and aligned with UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary.

C. Constitutional Reforms Produced Partial and Temporary Gains in Judicial Independence

Can constitutional text truly guarantee judicial independence when political will to enforce it remains absent? This is the fundamental question that this result examines. Pakistan's constitutional reform history reveals a frustrating pattern: meaningful reforms were introduced, genuine progress was made, but each gain was eventually reversed or neutralized by subsequent political manipulation. This finding is deeply significant for understanding why the rule of law in Pakistan has never achieved lasting stability. The research question asks whether executive interference shaped the failure of reforms and this result provides a direct answer. Every major reform that reduced executive control over the judiciary was eventually followed by a counter-reform that restored or exceeded that control. The cycle of reform and reversal is not accidental it reflects a structural truth about power in Pakistan. When constitutional text threatens entrenched interests, those interests use the same constitutional process to eliminate the threat (Bazmi et al., 2023).

The Al-Jehad Trust case of 1996 was the first major constitutional reform breakthrough. Before this case, the executive held near-absolute appointment power. After it, consultation with the Chief Justice became mandatory, marking a real shift toward judicial autonomy. This breakthrough was, however, immediately challenged by General Musharraf's Provisional Constitution Order of 1999, which compelled judges to take new oaths under military authority or face dismissal. The next major reform came through the Lawyers' Movement of 2007–2009. This remarkable civil society mobilization described as one of the most extraordinary examples of professional mobilization in support of judicial independence in any developing democracy led to the restoration of deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and forced Musharraf's resignation. The movement demonstrated that judicial independence could be defended through organized public pressure. However, its gains were fragile. The restored Chief Justice later became controversial for excessive judicial activism, showing that independence without accountability creates its own institutional problems. Civil society pressure alone cannot substitute for structural reform.

The 18th and 19th Constitutional Amendments of 2010 and 2011 represented the most comprehensive formal reform Pakistan had ever attempted. They emerged from the Charter of Democracy signed between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in 2006, which committed both parties to ending executive dominance over the judiciary. The 18th Amendment formally established the Judicial Commission of Pakistan, gave judges a majority in appointment decisions, formalized the seniority principle for Chief Justice selection, and declared that subversion of the Constitution would constitute high treason. These were transformative provisions on paper. The PPP government under President Asif Ali Zardari passed these reforms despite political costs, and the 19th Amendment refined them further based on Supreme Court recommendations. For over a decade from 2010 to 2024 Pakistan experienced its longest sustained period of formal judicial protection from direct executive interference. This decade produced landmark judgments, including the disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the Panama Papers case in 2017 and the Supreme Court's invalidation of the 2022 National Assembly dissolution. These decisions demonstrated that the 18th and 19th Amendment framework genuinely worked when courts chose to assert it (Ali, 2021).

However, this result carries significant analytical limitations that demand intellectual honesty. Most studies assessing the 18th and 19th Amendments focus on their formal provisions and high-profile Supreme Court decisions, without examining whether lower courts and provincial judiciary experienced comparable improvements. The gains of the reform era were concentrated almost entirely in the superior courts the Supreme Court and High Courts while the subordinate judiciary continued operating under bureaucratic controls, political influence over postings and transfers, and severe resource constraints. There is also an attribution problem in this literature: scholars crediting the 18th Amendment reforms for judicial assertiveness during 2010–2024 cannot fully isolate whether this assertiveness resulted from constitutional protection or from the particular personalities of individual Chief Justices, especially Iftikhar Chaudhry and Saqib Nisar, whose tenures were marked by unprecedented

judicial activism but also by serious accountability concerns. Individual judicial temperament and institutional structural protection are genuinely difficult to disentangle in Pakistan's constitutional literature.

The 26th Amendment of October 2024 shattered a decade of formal reform progress in a single overnight parliamentary session. The amendment was passed without public consultation, with opposition lawmakers alleging coercion and abduction. The seniority principle painstakingly established through years of constitutional jurisprudence was eliminated in one clause. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, the senior-most judge who should have automatically become Chief Justice, was bypassed in favor of Justice Yahya Afridi, appointed through the new politically controlled Special Parliamentary Committee. This single act demonstrated the entire fragility of reform gains built without structural protection. Comparative experience is instructive here. India's Supreme Court struck down the National Judicial Appointments Commission in 2015 because it threatened judicial independence, demonstrating that constitutional reforms need not only be enacted but actively defended through judicial review. Pakistan's judiciary, by contrast, has no mechanism to protect its own structural independence from constitutional amendment the very body that should protect the Constitution can have its protection removed by the same amendment process it is supposed to guard.

The most urgent implication of this result is that Pakistan must move beyond the cycle of reform and counter-reform. Constitutional text that can be amended overnight is not a reliable foundation for judicial independence. What Pakistan requires is a multi-layered framework that makes judicial independence structurally resilient rather than constitutionally optional. This includes secure judicial funding independent from the executive budget, transparent appointment processes that comply with UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, guaranteed tenure protection for sitting judges, and an independent oversight body free from political control. International treaty obligations under the ICCPR to which Pakistan is a signatory require that these standards be met. The 26th and 27th Amendments, enacted in 2024 and 2025 respectively, represent the most dramatic reversal of reform progress in Pakistan's constitutional history. Rebuilding after this reversal will require not just new amendments but a sustained political commitment from all parties to treat judicial independence as a non-negotiable constitutional value rather than a convenient tool to be deployed or dismantled depending on who holds power.

D. The 26th Constitutional Amendment Institutionalized Political Control Over Courts

When a government writes its own rules for controlling the judiciary, democracy is in serious danger. This is the central concern that this result addresses. The 26th Constitutional Amendment, passed in an extraordinary overnight parliamentary session on 20–21 October 2024, represents the most deliberate and comprehensive formal institutionalization of executive control over Pakistan's courts in the country's post-1973 constitutional history.

Unlike previous instances of executive interference which operated through informal pressures, military coups, or targeted judicial removals the 26th Amendment embeds political control directly into the constitutional text itself. This is a qualitatively different form of interference. It is not a violation of the constitutional framework; it is a rewriting of that framework to make interference constitutionally legitimate. This result directly addresses the research question by demonstrating that executive interference in Pakistan has now moved from informal manipulation to formal constitutional capture.

The evidence supporting this finding is extensive and well-documented across multiple dimensions of the amendment. The amendment fundamentally restructured the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) the body responsible for nominating judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts. Before the amendment, judges constituted a clear majority within the JCP. After it, only five of the thirteen JCP members are from the judiciary, while eight represent the legislature and executive. This structural majority change means that political actors can outvote judicial members on every appointment decision. The seniority principle, carefully built through decades of constitutional jurisprudence, was eliminated overnight. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, the constitutionally entitled senior-most judge, was bypassed in favor of Justice Yahya Afridi, who was recommended by the newly constituted commission within twenty-four hours of the amendment's passage. This single action demonstrated that the amendment's primary purpose was not judicial reform but judicial subjugation to serve immediate political interests.

Beyond appointment control, the amendment introduced three additional mechanisms that collectively paralyze judicial independence. First, it curtailed the Supreme Court's *Suo motu* powers the proactive jurisdiction under Article 184(3) that had been Pakistan's most powerful tool for protecting fundamental rights. Courts can no longer initiate cases on their own motion beyond the contents of filed applications. This effectively prevents the judiciary from acting as a proactive guardian of citizens' rights against executive overreach. Second, it established politically appointed "constitutional benches" with exclusive jurisdiction over constitutional and fundamental rights matters. These benches whose composition is controlled by the politically dominated JCP can now determine which judges hear the most politically sensitive cases. The risk of bench-stacking for desired outcomes is structurally built into this arrangement. Third, the amendment introduced undefined "inefficiency" as a ground for removing judges a deliberately vague standard that can be selectively applied to remove any judge who rules against the government's interests (Saifulislam et al., 2025).

There are important analytical limitations in fully assessing the 26th Amendment's impact. Much of the available literature was produced immediately following the amendment's passage, meaning long-term empirical data on actual judicial behavior changes under the new system is still limited. Early evidence from Writ Petition No. 16486 of 2025 where a newly appointed judge dismissed a petition concerning enforced disappearances, ruling that no order could be passed against army officers suggests the structural dynamics are already influencing judicial decision-making. However, it would be methodologically premature to attribute all

post-amendment judicial behavior exclusively to structural incentives, as individual judicial temperament, case-specific legal arguments, and public pressure also influence outcomes. The literature also tends to focus on the superior courts while inadequately examining what the amendment means for lower court independence, where most Pakistani citizens actually seek justice. Additionally, the government's stated rationale reducing case backlog through specialized constitutional benches deserves empirical evaluation, though critics uniformly argue that the efficiency justification masks a political agenda.

The 26th Amendment finds no genuine parallel in established democracies and directly contradicts international standards for judicial independence. The UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary explicitly state that appointment bodies must be independent from the executive and composed primarily of members from the judiciary and legal profession. The ICCPR under Article 14 guarantees the right to a fair hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Pakistan's Special Parliamentary Committee, conducting closed-door selection meetings without defined criteria, violates both of these standards categorically. India's experience is instructive as contrast when India's National Judicial Appointments Commission similarly proposed to include executive members in judicial appointments, India's Supreme Court struck it down in 2015 as unconstitutional, ruling that judicial independence is part of the basic structure of the Constitution that cannot be amended away.

The full gravity of this result becomes clear when examining what happened immediately after the amendment. Within months, the newly constituted Constitutional Bench overturned the Supreme Court's own October 2023 ruling that civilian trials in military courts were unconstitutional a ruling described by legal experts as one of the most important human rights decisions in Pakistan's recent history. A bench engineered through political appointments reversed a landmark constitutional judgment by a five-to-two majority. This courts now produce outcomes more favorable to executive and military interests. For Pakistan's citizens, this has concrete consequences. Victims of enforced disappearances lose their primary legal remedy. Political prisoners cannot access independent judicial review. Press freedom cases face politically aligned courts. The amendment represents not merely an institutional setback but a fundamental threat to every citizen's right to justice. Reversing its damage requires not just repealing the amendment but rebuilding the structural, cultural, and institutional foundations of judicial independence from the ground up.

E. The 27th Constitutional Amendment Further Cemented Military-Executive Dominance

If the 26th Amendment dismantled judicial independence, the 27th Amendment buried it. This result addresses a question that cuts to the heart of Pakistan's constitutional future: how far can a state use its own Constitution to place unelected institutions permanently beyond accountability? The 27th Constitutional Amendment, signed into law on 13 November 2025, represents the most dramatic restructuring of Pakistan's civil-military-judicial order since

the 1973 Constitution was first adopted. Passed in under a week with the opposition boycotting the Senate session and no public consultation conducted it created a Federal Constitutional Court, elevated the Army Chief into a constitutional position of supreme authority, and granted lifetime criminal immunity to the President and senior military leaders. This result directly answers the research question by demonstrating that Pakistan's executive interference has now moved beyond structural manipulation to formal constitutional entrenchment of military supremacy. The rule of law has not merely been weakened it has been redesigned around the interests of those the law was supposed to constrain.

The evidence for this finding is comprehensive and alarming. At the judicial level, the amendment created a Federal Constitutional Court with exclusive jurisdiction over constitutional interpretation, fundamental rights enforcement, and federal-provincial disputes precisely the powers that had defined the Supreme Court's role as guardian of the Constitution since 1973. The first Chief Justice and inaugural judges of the FCC are appointed by the President on the Prime Minister's advice, with no independent judicial input. Later appointments go through the politically dominated JCP where judges hold only five of thirteen seats. Judges who refuse transfers face disciplinary proceedings before the Supreme Judicial Council, which is itself composed of executive-appointed judges. Two senior Supreme Court justices Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Athar Minella immediately resigned in protest, with Justice Shah calling the amendment "a grave assault on the Constitution" and Justice Minella declaring that "the Constitution I swore to uphold is no more." These resignations from sitting judges are unprecedented in Pakistan's constitutional history and speak volumes about the gravity of the institutional damage inflicted.

Beyond judicial restructuring, the military dimensions of the 27th Amendment are equally significant and have received insufficient attention in legal scholarship. The amendment revised Article 243 to abolish the post of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and create a new position of Chief of Defense Forces, automatically held by the Army Chief. This concentrates unified command over all three military branches army, navy, and air force in a single officer for the first time in Pakistan's history. Field Marshal General Asim Munir, who had been elevated to five-star rank after Pakistan's four-day conflict with India in May 2025, now holds this position with lifetime rank, privileges, and constitutional recognition. Under the new Article 243(9), the President, Field Marshal, Admiral of the Fleet, and Marshal of the Air Force enjoy lifetime immunity from arrest and all criminal and civil proceedings. These are not routine legal criticisms they represent a global consensus that something fundamentally irreversible has occurred in Pakistan's constitutional order.

There are important analytical limitations in fully evaluating this result. The 27th Amendment came into force only weeks before this research was finalized, meaning empirical data on its actual institutional effects remains early-stage. The proponents also argued that Pakistan's previous judiciary had itself overstepped constitutional boundaries through excessive judicial activism citing Chief Justices Saqib Nisar and Umar Ata Bandial's controversial tenures as evidence that an unchecked judiciary is itself a democratic problem.

These are legitimate institutional concerns. However, addressing judicial overreach through executive-controlled appointment bodies and lifetime military immunity resolves one institutional imbalance by creating a far more dangerous one. The cure prescribed by the 27th Amendment is structurally worse than the disease it claims to treat.

Comparative constitutional experience strongly confirms this assessment. No stable constitutional democracy has granted its military leadership lifetime criminal immunity through constitutional text. The Venice Commission whose guidelines on judicial independence are internationally authoritative consistently holds that appointment bodies must be composed primarily of judges and legal professionals, that immunity provisions must be narrowly defined, and that constitutional courts must be functionally independent from executive control. The 27th Amendment violates all three principles simultaneously. Legal scholars and international observers have described Pakistan's current constitutional framework as a new form of “hybrid militarized legalism” where the appearance of constitutional legitimacy is maintained while military and executive dominance is structurally entrenched within that very framework.

The 27th Amendment transforms what was previously an institutional struggle over judicial independence into a settled constitutional fact of executive-military supremacy. For Pakistani citizens, the practical consequences are immediate and severe. Victims of enforced disappearances now face courts whose judges are appointed by the executive and whose transfers are controlled by the Prime Minister. Journalists challenging state censorship must approach constitutional benches composed through politically controlled processes. Political prisoners cannot rely on independent judicial review of their detention. Rebuilding genuine judicial independence after the 26th and 27th Amendments will require not merely new constitutional text but a fundamental realignment of civil-military-judicial relations, sustained political will across party lines, and meaningful international engagement with Pakistan's obligations under the ICCPR. Without these conditions, the damage institutionalized by these two amendments may prove generational in its duration and consequences.

F. Implication

The findings of this study fundamentally challenge the conventional separation of powers theory as it applies to Pakistan. Classical constitutional theory from Montesquieu to modern rule of law frameworks assumes that written constitutional guarantees are sufficient to protect institutional independence. Pakistan's experience proves this assumption wrong. Constitutional text without structural enforcement mechanisms, independent funding, and multi-layered accountability is ultimately defenseless against determined political actors who control the amendment process itself. Every victim of enforced disappearance, every political prisoner, and every journalist challenging state censorship now faces courts whose structural independence has been constitutionally dismantled. The findings call on policymakers, parliamentarians, and international bodies including the UN Human Rights Council and the Venice Commission to engage urgently with Pakistan's ICCPR obligations and push for

appointment reform based on merit rather than political loyalty. In conclusion, restoring judicial independence in Pakistan requires not merely repealing the 26th and 27th Amendments but building an entirely new framework structurally resilient, internationally compliant, and rooted in the genuine conviction that no institution, however powerful, can remain above the law (Bustos et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Pakistan's constitutional order faces a defining crisis. When courts cannot rule freely, citizens lose their most vital shield against state power. The 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments of 2024 and 2025 have formalized what was once informal interference, embedding executive and military dominance directly into constitutional text. Historical patterns confirm this is not accidental. From the doctrine of necessity to manipulated appointments, every era produced fresh mechanisms of judicial control. Reform efforts, including the 18th and 19th Amendments, delivered genuine but temporary gains. Each advancement was eventually reversed by those whom independence threatened most. The appointment mechanism remains the sharpest instrument of control, and the 26th Amendment exploited it comprehensively by reducing judges to a minority within their own selection body.

The consequences extend far beyond courtrooms. Victims of enforced disappearances, political prisoners, and journalists challenging censorship all depend on independent judges. The Federal Constitutional Court created by the 27th Amendment, whose first judges were appointed without any judicial input, represents a court designed to serve power rather than check it. Pakistan's obligations under the ICCPR, particularly Article 14, demand an independent and impartial tribunal for every citizen. These international commitments are not being met. Democratic governance weakens when courts become extensions of the executive. Public trust erodes when powerful actors face no neutral accountability. The structural damage inflicted by these two amendments may prove generational without deliberate, sustained, and principled political intervention.

Genuine recovery requires more than repealing recent amendments. Pakistan needs a transparent, merit-based appointment system free from legislative interference, aligned with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary. Judicial funding must be constitutionally secured and independent from executive budget control. Civil society, bar associations, and international human rights bodies must maintain coordinated pressure for structural reform. Scholars should pursue longitudinal studies measuring how appointment mechanisms directly affect judicial decision-making over time. The question of whether Pakistan can build courts that serve citizens rather than governments remains open. Answering it demands political courage, institutional redesign, and a collective commitment to treating judicial independence not as a political convenience, but as a democratic necessity.

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