

Saving the Separation of Powers: Evidence from the Lawyers' Movement in Pakistan

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Abstract

Can civil resistance restore judicial checks when formal safeguards erode? We study Pakistan's Lawyers' Movement, a mobilization led by lawyers in response to authoritarian attempts to dismantle judicial oversight. Using variation in exposure to movement activity and an array of difference-in-differences strategies, we show that the movement reduced support for the military ruler, increased trust in the judiciary, and shifted votes toward pro-movement candidates. These shifts were accompanied by a rise in case filings in local courts, suggesting a revealed preference for formal institutions as a channel for redress. The effects are not attributable to a single leader and differ from other large-scale political campaigns. Instead, they appear to reflect the capacity of local institutional infrastructure to diffuse resistance and channel it into democratic engagement. Our findings underscore that, even in a fragile democracy, organized resistance can reinforce the separation of powers and activate democratic institutions from below.

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“I was among the many people who welcomed Musharraf when he took over, but he wants no checks. He wants a free hand for everything.”

Abdullah, a 70-year-old farmer, in an interview with (*L'Express*, 2007)

1. INTRODUCTION

Judicial independence is facing increasing pressure in both emerging and established democracies. Recent developments in Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and even the United States illustrate how elected leaders can systematically weaken judicial oversight while maintaining the façade of democratic governance. Traditional constraints rooted in constitutional design and legal precedent ([Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2007](#); [Persson & Tabellini, 2003](#)) have proven insufficient to contain executive consolidation ([Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019](#)). A growing body of evidence suggests that citizens frequently tolerate such erosions, exchanging civil liberties for promises of security ([Alsan et al., 2023](#)), while electoral accountability has failed to restrain executive overreach in many settings ([Allie, 2025](#); [Ferraz & Finan, 2025](#)). These trends raises a fundamental question: can institutional checks be preserved under authoritarian pressure, and if so, how?

This paper studies a case in which executive overreach was met with organized resistance from below. In Pakistan, the Lawyers’ Movement emerged in response to the attempted dismantling of judicial independence by an authoritarian government. The movement coincided with a rare sequence of legal and political reforms, including the resignation of a military ruler, the reinstatement of ousted judges, and the introduction of constraints on judicial appointments. We document how this civic mobilization reshaped public discourse and helped reassert judicial boundaries in a high-stakes setting.

The inflection point came on March 9, 2007, appearing to set in motion forces that would upend the dictatorial rule of General Musharraf and create political space for the judiciary to assert its independence. When Chief Justice Chaudhry defied General

Musharraf's demand to resign, his dismissal and dramatic arrest ignited a historic civil society movement in defense of the rule of law. What started as a legal standoff quickly escalated into *the Lawyers' Movement*, an institutional reckoning that culminated in Musharraf's resignation, key constitutional reforms, including the establishment of an independent judicial selection mechanism ([Mehmood, 2022](#)) and a transition to civilian rule. The movement's ability to sustain pressure on the regime—often met with violent crackdowns—underscores its role in reshaping Pakistan's political trajectory ([Human Rights Watch, 2007](#)). As a Belgium-based NGO, put it: "If their immediate demand was Chaudhry's return to the bench, the incipient goal of their movement was restoration and respect for the rule of law" ([Tricontinental, 2023](#)). This ambition was echoed in a January 2008 press conference by lawyers: "Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and 60 other judges will be restored. . . Democracy will win and dictatorship will face a humiliating defeat" ([Reuters, 2008](#)).

And so it was. After nearly two years of sustained civil resistance, the Lawyers' Movement achieved its core demands. General Musharraf resigned and fled the country, while Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and sixty other judges removed by General Musharraf were reinstated. Reforms to strengthen judicial appointments soon followed. These outcomes marked one of the rare instances in which civic mobilization reversed institutional backsliding. Consistent with this shift, Panel A of [Figure I](#) shows a sharp decline in Musharraf's approval and a parallel rise in trust in the judiciary following a wave of mobilization. Panel B complements this picture by illustrating how ideas linked to the movement—such as the rule of law, constitutionalism, and civil society—began to surface more prominently in the national news, even as the government restricted media coverage, banned broadcasts of lawyers' speeches, and internet access remained below ten percent. As ([Muhammad, 2019](#)) observes, "The success of Pakistan's lawyers' movement lay in its ability to initiate discourse upon autocratic rule, democracy, the supremacy of law, and separation of powers." A leader of the movement similarly reflected, "The lawyers carry with them no weapon except the precepts of our Constitution" ([Ahsan, 2009](#)). These ideas appeared to resonate widely across class and geography. As one farmer explained, "I support the lawyers, because if Musharraf can do whatever he wants to this man, the Chief Justice of Pakistan, then none of us is safe." ([Harvard Law Review, 2010](#)).

These narratives hint at the movement’s potential to shape how citizens understood institutions and authority. Building on this view, a growing qualitative literature in history, law, and political science portrays the movement as central to Pakistan’s constitutional trajectory (e.g., [M. Malik, 2008](#); [Ahmad et al., 2015](#); [Shafqat, 2018](#); [A. Malik & Tudor, 2024](#)), often drawing on interviews, memoirs, legal and political commentary to document the symbolic and political significance of the movement. One recurring theme in these accounts is the challenge of communication under authoritarian constraints. Although private media networks were expanding during the period, the regime imposed significant restrictions on coverage, including bans on live broadcasts of lawyer speeches. In this environment, in-person mobilization emerged as a central strategy. Lawyer caravans traveled from city to city, delivering speeches on judicial independence and military overreach. As the New York Times reported at the time, “a cavalcade of about 100 cars jammed with lawyers and political supporters [took] a 75-mile trip from Islamabad. Along the route, hundreds of people stood waiting at every junction and small town.”¹

In contrast to other prominent episodes of democratic resistance, such as Egypt’s uprising in Tahrir Square ([Hodler, 2018](#)), Hong Kong’s protests in Admiralty ([Bursztyn, Cantoni, Yang, Yuchtman, & Zhang, 2021](#)), or Tunisia’s demonstrations along a central axis in Tunis ([Anderson, 2011](#)), Pakistan’s Lawyers’ Movement unfolded across a broad and decentralized geographic landscape. Rather than converging in a single urban center, lawyer convoys traveled across districts, drawing crowds in small towns and regional hubs. This spatial dispersion provides a rare opportunity to examine how civic mobilization may influence public attitudes and political behavior at the local level. Yet the empirical setting is not without challenges. Lawyer visits were not randomly assigned: convoys were more likely to travel to politically salient districts with higher levels of pre-existing organizational capacity. As we show in a later section, the visited districts were more urbanized, more educated, and had higher road density in the lead-up to the movement.

To address this identification concern, we adopt a suite of Difference-in-Differences (DiD) and matching methods that leverage pre- and post-treatment data from three com-

¹These lawyer visits often featured both national and district lawyer leaders delivering speeches on constitutionalism and rule of law.

plementary sources: polling to measure shifts in citizen attitudes, electoral data to track changes in political behavior, and administrative local court records to measure grassroots engagement with the formal justice system. This approach allows us to capture partial equilibrium differences between visited and unvisited districts while controlling for the broader movement at the national level. Under the assumption of parallel trends, the difference-in-differences design provides an internally valid strategy for estimating the causal effects of lawyers' visits.

Several pieces of evidence support the validity of this identifying assumption. First, consistent with the abrupt onset of the movement, we find no evidence of differential pre-trends between visited and unvisited districts. Second, we implement the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences method ([Arkhangelsky, Athey, Hirshberg, Imbens, & Wager, 2021](#)), which improves robustness to violations of parallel trends by reweighting control districts to match treated districts, thereby yielding a more credible counterfactual. Third, we apply the approach of ([Rambachan & Roth, 2023](#)), which relaxes the parallel trends assumption by allowing bounded deviations and provides valid inference even when the identifying assumption is partially violated, offering a more plausible counterfactual. Across all three approaches, the estimated effects remain consistent.

The Lawyers' Movement visits triggered a measurable shift in public attitudes toward executive authority and legal institutions. Our event study estimates yield three findings. First, approval for General Musharraf fell by 25% and trust in the judiciary rose by 6% in the visited districts, relative to sample means. These patterns suggest a reallocation of political confidence away from executive power and toward the courts, reinforcing the narrative patterns in [Figure I](#) with stronger identification. To put these estimates in perspective, our implied persuasion rates are approximately 30 percent for disapproval of Musharraf and 7.4 percent for trust in the judiciary. These effects fall within the range documented in earlier work. For example, ([DellaVigna & Gentzkow, 2010](#)) report persuasion rates between 4.3 and 30 percent across a variety of public campaigns.²

Second, the movement's influence extended beyond attitudes to actual civic engage-

²While our estimates are toward the higher end of this range, the political context was distinctive. Given the visibility of the movement and the overthrow of General Musharraf, it is plausible that the campaign contributed to weakening support for authoritarian rule and helped galvanize a broader shift in public opinion.

ment. Voters in visited districts were 17% more likely to support the pro-lawyers' movement party in subsequent facing the trade off between preserving the democracy and authoritarian shift (Fisman, Jakiela, & Kariv, 2017), and new case filings in local courts increased and remained above pre-movement levels, indicating a meaningful shift in how citizens interacted with democratic institutions. Finally, confidence in the military declined by around 10 percent relative to the sample mean, indicating a broader erosion of trust in non-democratic authority. Although General Musharraf's ties to the military likely shaped this response, the pattern suggests a wider reassessment of unelected power. Perceptions of the police, by contrast, remained unchanged, despite their role in repressing protests. This asymmetry is consistent with the movement's rhetoric, which focused squarely on military overreach and constitutional violations, directing public discontent toward the armed forces rather than law enforcement.³

Our findings remain robust across a range of validation exercises. To assess the specificity of the estimated effects, we compare lawyers' visits to another prominent political mobilization. Visits by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, a key opposition leader during the same period, were politically salient as she traveled across Pakistan to rally support for her center-left political party, but she focused on partisan messaging rather than institutional reform. Although her visits are associated with reduced support for General Musharraf, they do not affect trust in the judiciary, confidence in the military, or engagement with local courts. These null effects suggest that not all forms of opposition mobilization reconfigure citizens' institutional beliefs, reinforcing the distinctive influence of the lawyers' movement. Moreover, the effects persist even when the lawyers' visits did not include Chief Justice Chaudhary, the movement's figurehead, suggesting that the results are not attributable to the charisma of one single individual. Taken together, the comparisons suggest that the Lawyers' Movement may have played a distinctive role in eroding support for autocratic authority while fostering greater trust in democratic institutions anchored in the rule of law and electoral accountability.

³This divergence in public sentiment was also visible at the time of the Lawyers' Movement. "The work of the army is to defend the country, not rule the country," remarked Amir Shehzad, a 22-year-old student from a small town in Haripur. Disaffection extended beyond urban elites. As Zahoor, a resident of a village near Kohat, noted, "Before, our children would salute our soldiers when they passed. Now they spit on them" (Gall & Sengupta, 2007). These accounts underscore how the movement's message may have resonated more directly against the military than other state actors.

To evaluate potential confounding, we include a rich set of pre-treatment district-level controls interacted with time fixed effects, capturing baseline variation in pre-treatment road density, political violence, local employment, and income. These interactions flexibly absorb time-varying differences across districts. The estimates remain stable with these controls. We further implement dynamic matched Difference-in-Differences estimators, as applied in recent studies ([Fenizia & Saggio, 2024](#); [Jäger & Heining, 2022](#)), to strengthen balance between treated and untreated districts. As a placebo, we examine visits by another former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, between 2011 and 2013—after the Lawyers’ Movement had concluded but covering a similarly broad geographic footprint. These visits yield no comparable effects, helping to alleviate concerns that the results are driven by unobserved features of leader visibility or district selection. To mitigate inference concerns, we re-estimate all specifications using Wild Bootstrapping ([Roodman, Nielsen, MacKinnon, & Webb, 2019](#)), spatial correlation adjustments ([Conley, 2010](#)), and randomization inference. Across all specifications, the results remain consistent.

While data constraints limit a full account of underlying mechanisms, we explore several contextual factors that may help interpret the results. The strongest patterns appear in districts with stronger bar associations, consistent with historical narratives that describe these organizations as key institutional anchors, providing grassroots coordination and safety in numbers ([Z. Ahmed & Stephan, 2010](#); [M. Malik, 2008](#)). We also observe more pronounced effects in areas with greater private media presence prior to the movement, in line with qualitative work suggesting the media’s role in amplifying the movement’s message ([Harvard Law Review, 2010](#); [Shafqat, 2018](#)).

In contrast, we do not find comparable patterns for other types of historical networks, such as religious seminaries (madrasas), which have been central to earlier mobilizations by religious parties. The estimated effects are also broadly similar across visits by different lawyer leaders, including Chief Justice Chaudhry, Aitzaz Ahsan, and Ali Ahmad Kurd. This consistency suggests that the response was shaped less by individual personalities and more by collective identity associated with the movement. Overall, the evidence suggests that under conditions of institutional stress, coordinated legal mobilization can serve as an alternative channel for reinforcing judicial authority and reshaping

the public's relationship with the state.

1.1. Related Literature

Our paper contributes to several strands of literature. First, it adds to research on the institutional foundations of executive constraints. A long-standing literature emphasizes the role of formal rules, foreign governments, economic incentives, elite bargains, and even chance in limiting authoritarian power ([Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000, 2006](#); [Chemin, 2021](#); [de Mesquita & Smith, 2010](#); [Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2007](#); [Treisman, 2020](#)). More recent theoretical work highlights the role of civil society and bottom-up pressure in sustaining democratic accountability and institutional checks ([Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019](#); [Bisin & Verdier, 2024](#); [Dixit, 2021](#)). We build on this perspective by providing evidence from Pakistan, where grassroots activism increased trust in courts and weakened support for authoritarian power. Our findings complement research showing that civic action can shift public beliefs and strengthen institutional oversight ([Avis, Ferraz, & Finan, 2018](#); [Ferraz & Finan, 2008](#)), and extend recent insights from ([Ferraz & Finan, 2025](#)), who emphasize that safeguarding “horizontal accountability” or judicial independence is central to preventing elite capture even in democratic settings. The Lawyers’ Movement illustrates how “diagonal accountability”—through lawyer-led citizen mobilization—can help activate and preserve “horizontal accountability” by shielding courts from executive encroachment. In doing so, the movement demonstrates that judicial independence requires not just formal safeguards, but civic engagement from below.

Second, our work builds on foundational contributions that identify checks and balances as critical to sustaining democratic institutions and enabling long-run economic development ([Buchanan, 1974](#); [Hayek, 1961](#); [Montesquieu, 1748](#); [North, 1986](#)). A large theoretical and cross-country literature underscores the role of judicial independence in promoting prosperity ([Besley & Persson, 2011](#); [Boehm & Oberfield, 2020](#); [Chemin, 2020](#); [Glaeser & Shleifer, 2002](#); [La Porta, Lopez-de Silanes, & Shleifer, 2008](#); [La Porta, López-de Silanes, Pop-Eleches, & Shleifer, 2004](#); [Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012](#); [Voigt, Gutmann, & Feld, 2015](#)), yet causal evidence on how courts can resist executive interference remains limited. Recent work highlights how formal institutional changes, such as reforms to

judicial appointments ([Mehmood & Ali, 2023](#)) or limits on executive control over local courts ([Liu, Lu, Peng, & Wang, 2022](#)), can enhance court legitimacy. Our contribution is twofold. First, we shift focus from the consequences of judicial independence to its origins, showing how collective mobilization can activate bottom-up demand for institutional constraints. Second, by studying a setting in which the judiciary became a site of political contestation, we provide evidence that civic pressure and activism can enhance judicial legitimacy, connecting literatures on institutional development, separation of powers, and democratic resilience.

Last, our findings contribute to research on social movements and political mobilization. Existing work has shown how collective action can advance distributive claims and challenge gender and racial hierarchies ([Bailey, 2010](#); [Cascio & Washington, 2014](#); [García-Jimeno, Iglesias, & Yildirim, 2022](#); [Gethin & Pons, 2024](#); [Goldin & Katz, 2002](#)). Recent studies emphasize the role of leadership and networks in sustaining social movements and influencing beliefs ([Ahmed & Allie, 2025](#); [Assouad, 2025](#); [Boudreau, Macchiavello, Minni, & Tanaka, 2025](#); [Dippel & Heblich, 2021](#)). We add to this literature by showing how lawyers, through coordinated and professionally anchored mobilization, channeled civil resistance into support for constitutional limits on executive authority. The Lawyers' Movement stood apart from other political appeals, such as Benazir Bhutto's mobilization around the same time, which weakened support for General Musharraf but did not alter public trust in the judiciary or the military. In contrast, the lawyers' framing of the movement around constitutionalism and the rule of law resonated widely, shifting institutional trust and reinforcing the normative foundations of judicial independence.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the political and institutional context underlying the Lawyers' Movement. Section 3 describes the data, and Section 4 delineates the empirical strategy. Section 5 presents the main results and identification checks, while Section 6 explores the underlying mechanisms. Section 7 documents additional robustness checks. A final section concludes. Variable definitions, data sources, and additional details are provided in Online Appendix A, with supporting figures and tables available in Online Appendix B.

2. CONTEXT AND INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Focal Point. On March 9, 2007, a seemingly routine meeting between the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the military chief sparked a resistance movement against the military government of General Musharraf, transforming a personal standoff into a national reckoning over constitutional authority and judicial independence. In an unprecedented act of defiance, the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, refused to succumb to General Musharraf and his generals' demand that he resign. Despite Chief Justice Chaudhry's swift dismissal and arrest by the incumbent military ruler, far from quelling dissent, the episode unleashed a wave of grassroots resistance led by lawyers across Pakistan. This movement set the stage for General Musharraf's decisive electoral defeat, subsequent exile, and even a death sentence for his egregious assault on the democratic order. In just two years after the pivotal events of March 9, 2007, General Musharraf faced a decisive electoral defeat, resigned from office, and went into exile, while the ousted Chief Justice—along with nearly 60 other dismissed judges—was reinstated. The period also saw significant institutional reforms, with the 18th Amendment reinforcing democratic representation and the 19th Amendment reducing executive influence over judicial appointments, marking a shift toward greater judicial autonomy.

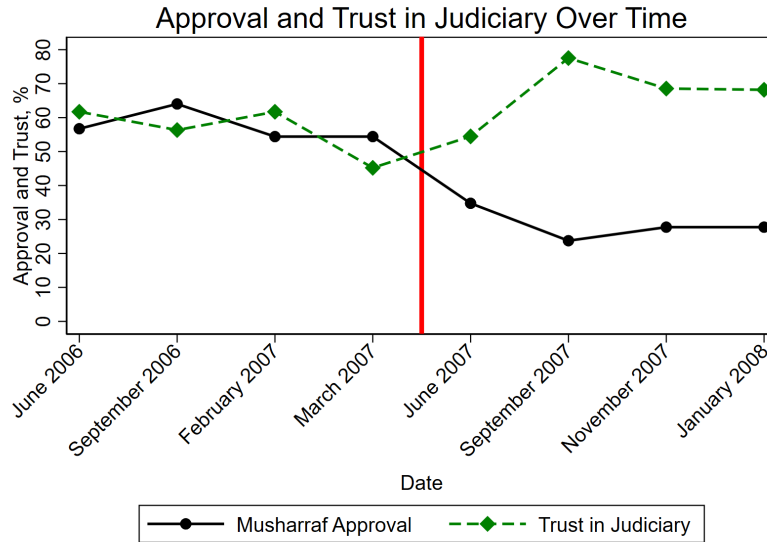
Political Background. The Lawyers' Movement, which emerged in response to Chief Justice Chaudhry's dismissal and the broader dismantling of judicial independence under Musharraf, including the removal of around 60 judges, evolved into a wider effort to strengthen institutional checks and the rule of law in Pakistan. This confrontation unfolded within a longer arc of democratic fragility in Pakistan. Since gaining independence in 1947, following the partition of British India, Pakistan has experienced recurrent military takeovers and prolonged periods of authoritarian rule that have weakened civilian institutions and disrupted constitutional governance ([A. Malik & Mirza, 2022](#)). General Musharraf's regime, which began with the ousting of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1999, was marked by his simultaneous roles as army chief, president, and chief executive. It was in this context of constrained democratic space that the lawyers mobilized to resist executive overreach and claim greater judicial independence. Opposition to Mushar-

raf's rule was led by exiled political leaders, most notably Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), whose party played a central role in supporting the Lawyers' Movement. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), although also in opposition, sought a power-sharing arrangement with Musharraf and therefore refrained from fully backing the movement. Following the February 2008 elections, a democratic transition began to take shape as opposition parties formed a united front. As impeachment proceedings were initiated, General Musharraf resigned from office. Yet the movement's objectives were not achieved with his departure. The newly elected PPP-led government resisted reinstating the deposed Chief Justice and sacked judges. In response, the PML-N withdrew from the cabinet and backed a nationwide "long march" led by the lawyers. As tens of thousands converged on Islamabad in March 2009, the scale of public mobilization proved decisive: the government relented, reinstating Chief Justice Chaudhry and the nearly 60 judges whom General Musharraf had summarily dismissed.

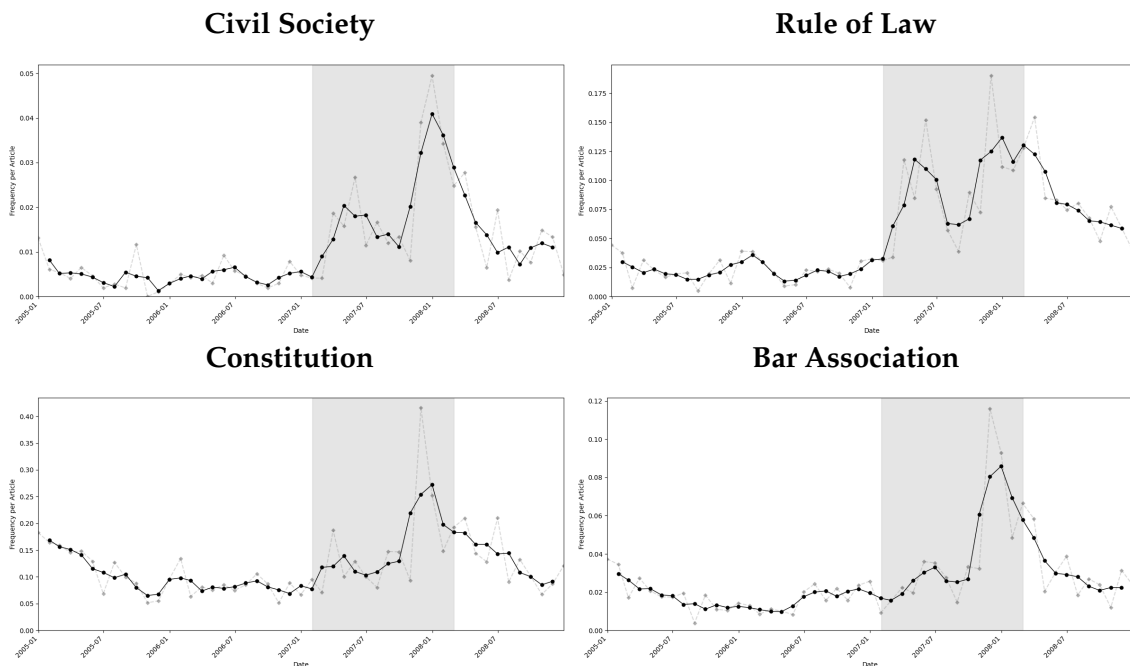
Opposition in Exile. The Lawyers' Movement emerged as a institutional challenge to authoritarian consolidation. At the time, General Pervez Musharraf had established a stable and internationally supported regime following his 1999 coup, bolstered by substantial U.S. aid and record economic growth ([World Bank, 2006](#)). The movement's emergence in this context marked an unusual instance of public resistance to an otherwise consolidated military regime. Panel A of [Figure B2](#) shows a marked increase in GDP per capita during General Musharraf's tenure and the lead-up to the movement, suggesting that the mobilization did not emerge in response to economic downturn. The International Republican Institute (IRI) survey from June 2006 showed General Musharraf with an approval rating of over 60%, leading many commentators to view him as favorably positioned for electoral victory in the upcoming elections scheduled for next year. His primary rival, the center-right Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by Nawaz Sharif, whom he had ousted, was in exile in Saudi Arabia. Benazir Bhutto, leading the center-left Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was in exile in London. As one analyst succinctly put it, the opposition to General Musharraf was in "political cold storage" ([Almeida, 2008](#)).

FIGURE I: The Lawyers' Movement, Public Trust and Discourse

Panel A: General Musharraf and Trust in the Judiciary



Panel B: Newspaper Corpus Text Analysis



Note: The figure illustrates changes in citizen trust and the media discourse surrounding the Lawyers' Movement. Panel A illustrates trends in public approval of General Musharraf's leadership alongside confidence in the formal judiciary. The estimates are derived from responses to the following survey questions: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?" For trust or confidence in the judiciary, the specific survey question asks: "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?". The red vertical line in Panel B marks the onset of the Lawyers' Movement in March 2007. Within Panel B, each subfigure plots the frequency of references to "Civil Society," "Rule of Law," "Constitution," and "Bar Association" in *Dawn*, Pakistan's most prominent newspaper, often regarded as the country's leading opinion-shaping publication. The solid black line represents the three-month moving average of mentions per article, while the dashed gray line corresponds to the raw number of mentions per article. The gray background highlights the period during the Lawyers' Movement.

Lawyers' Movement. In this political vacuum, the lawyers' movement emerged. Initiated by lawyers, the movement quickly expanded into a broad civic coalition that included human rights activists, journalists, farmers, and political parties (Khan, 2023). A notable aspect of the movement was the lawyers' road visits across Pakistan, often, though not always, accompanied by the dismissed Chief Justice. A Times magazine report recounts the scene, noting "a growing cavalcade of cars, trucks, vans, busses, rickshaws and even donkey carts, was welcomed with boisterous cheers" (Time Magazine, 2007). Figure B1, Panel A illustrates such a convoy traveling across Pakistan, while Panel B maps the locations visited by the convoy. These "road visits" by lawyers were essential for direct engagement in an environment where traditional media was restricted. With the government censoring live broadcasts and limiting media coverage even as private media was expanding, face-to-face interactions became necessary to bypass these barriers and directly engage citizens. In 2007, with internet access below 7 percent and literacy rates around 54 percent (Stats, 2007), these visits provided a vital channel for spreading the movement's message. Second, they likely played a role in coordinating collective action, often timed alongside court boycotts and strikes by lawyers and civil society groups (Panel B of Figure B2 in Appendix B). With around 100,000 lawyers in 2007, the legal community likely offered both a source of strength and safety in numbers (Phelps, 2009). Finally, the road visits played a role in disseminating the movement's message across the country, contributing to a broader national dialogue on the rule of law and constitutionalism. This is evident in the increasing references to these themes in print media during the same period, as shown in Panel B of Figure I.⁴

Judicial Revival. The February 2008 general elections marked a significant moment in Pakistan's political landscape, signaling a move toward greater judicial independence. This shift, coupled with growing political pressure from the opposition and the threat of impeachment, led to General Musharraf's resignation, first as Chief of Army Staff and then as President in August 2008. As *The New York Times* noted, "In March 2007, Chaudhry refused the urging of five generals to resign and was removed by Musharraf. Two years

⁴Despite government restrictions on live broadcasts of lawyers' speeches made during the protests, the movement's message gradually permeated through print media, as observed in text analysis of newspapers.

later, with Musharraf in exile and a civilian government in power, nationwide protests returned Chaudhry to his position atop the nation's highest court" (Gall, 2009). Qualitative scholarship credits the Lawyers' Movement with contributing to "the downfall of the Musharraf regime and a transition to electoral democracy" (Khan, 2019), and with fostering a "normative shift in public perceptions" that eroded the military's legitimacy (A. Malik & Tudor, 2024). A key outcome of the movement was the March 2009 restoration of the judiciary, initially pledged under the Bhurban Accord between the PML-N and the PPP. When the PPP-led government reneged on this commitment, lawyers organized a mass march to Islamabad, later joined by Nawaz Sharif's PML-N. Confronted with escalating pressure, the government reinstated Chief Justice Chaudhry along with the other dismissed judges. This episode marked not only a reversal in the erosion of democratic institutions but also a rare instance of the judiciary emerging as an independent branch, capable of constraining both military and civilian executives.⁵

Bar Associations. Lawyers' professional associations, particularly bar associations, played a central role in the Lawyers' Movement, coordinating collective action and mobilizing legal professionals across the country. These associations functioned as local centers for protest and coordination, ensuring that the message of the movement diffused within legal circles and the broader public. The bar associations, a vestige of the colonial era, comprise a hierarchical structure that extends from the national level down to the district level (Schmitthener, 1968). With approximately 200 bar associations nationwide, these entities serve as a professional and political support network, with members elected in annual elections.⁶ More than a professional gathering place, the bar association also brings lawyers together with journalists and human rights activists, fostering ties to broader civil society (M. Malik, 2008). At the national level, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA, henceforth) anchors this collective action, while the decentralized, district bar associations enhance lawyers' capacity for mobilization at the local level. With 100,000

⁵After his reinstatement, Chaudhry continued to scrutinize the military's role in politics, with rulings on election interference and enforced disappearances. General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the Army Chief succeeding Musharraf, warned of "negative consequences" if institutions failed to work in harmony (New York Times, 2012), underscoring the sensitive balance between judicial independence and military influence. While not without flaws and controversy, decisions like the Asghar Khan case decisions represent powerful attempts by the judiciary to curb military influence in Pakistan's political sphere.

⁶Parallel to the voluntary bar associations, there is the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC), the regulatory body governing the legal profession, along with its five provincial counterparts.

lawyer members, this network became a significant force during the Lawyers' Movement, driving large-scale mobilization efforts ([Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2024](#)). This was evident on the eve of the Chief Justice's dismissal, when the SCBA President quickly condemned the act, describing it as "a callous conspiracy of the highest order against the superior judiciary" ([Dawn, 2007](#)). This quickly trickled to regional and district bar associations, with the Lahore High Court Bar Association declaring: "Relieving the chief justice of his responsibilities or rendering him non-functional is totally illegal and unconstitutional and condemnable in the strongest possible words."

3. DATA AND MAIN VARIABLES

We construct a granular, multi-source dataset by integrating institutionally fragmented and historically inaccessible data streams, including nationwide opinion surveys on support for General Musharraf, courts, the military, and police; electoral records; media oversight reports; judicial administrative records; and independent election audits. Below, we outline our primary data sources and key variables. Detailed definitions are provided in [Appendix A1](#). We categorize our outcome variables into two domains: (i) citizen attitudes, captured through public opinion polling; and (ii) citizen behavior, measured through vote choice and engagement with local courts. We then introduce our main treatment variable—Lawyers' Visits—detailing its construction, measurement, and interpretation.

3.1. Outcome Variables

Polling Data. Amid increased U.S. interest in Pakistan during the War on Terror, several U.S.-based organizations launched public opinion surveys to gauge political stability. Among them, the International Republican Institute (IRI) stands out for its large-scale, representative surveys, fielded quarterly using stratified random sampling of 4,000 individuals. To the best of our knowledge, this dataset provides rare subnational variation by recording the residence of survey respondents, which we exploit in our empirical analysis. These surveys tracked approval ratings of General Musharraf and, crucially, public

trust in state institutions such as the judiciary, police, and military. Given the constraints on independent polling under military rule, the alignment of General Musharraf’s regime with the United States allowed the International Republican Institute (IRI) to operate with some degree of independence. As a result, the IRI data offer a valuable window into institutional trust and political sentiment during the Lawyers’ Movement. As shown in [Figure I](#), Panel A, this period was marked by a decline in Musharraf’s approval and a rise in confidence in the judiciary. Panel B of the figure shows a parallel increase in newspaper references to the rule of law and constitutionalism, suggesting a broader shift in political discourse.⁷

Behavioral Responses. To examine whether shifts in citizen attitudes translated into observable behavior, we combine electoral and judicial administrative data. On the political side, we study vote share changes for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the one major party to publicly support the Lawyers’ Movement. The party’s campaign explicitly promised to reinstate the dismissed Chief Justice and aligned itself with the demands of the movement.⁸ Nawaz Sharif, the party’s leader, emphasized the centrality of judicial restoration,⁹ and required all PML-N candidates to pledge support for judicial reinstatement prior to receiving party endorsement. In contrast, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) entered a power-sharing arrangement with General Musharraf and later resisted restoring the judiciary, prompting the PML-N to withdraw from the governing coalition. Other parties, including the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), remained aligned with the regime and were implicated in violent crackdowns on protesters.¹⁰ Using official election records from the Election Commission of Pakistan and fraud-adjusted vote shares from the Free and Fair Election Network ([FAFEN](#), 2008), we assess how exposure to the movement shaped pro-movement votes.

⁷While Panel A of [Figure I](#) illustrates aggregate trends over time, our empirical strategy leverages district-level panel data spanning multiple pre-treatment periods and one post-treatment wave. Although district-identified polling data are limited in subsequent periods, the dataset enables within-district comparisons that are not feasible using national-level time series alone.

⁸The party stated, “If elected, we will reinstate the Chief Justice and fully support the demands of the Lawyers’ Movement” ([Business Recorder](#) 2008).

⁹PML-N Chief Nawaz Sharif stated, “The restoration of judges is not an administrative or a political issue; rather, it is a matter of the country’s survival” (quoted in *Dawn*, March 10, 2009).

¹⁰Most notably, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) employed live fire and orchestrated targeted attacks against lawyers and demonstrators, culminating in the violent events of May 12, 2007, in Karachi that left over 40 people dead and scores injured.

To evaluate behavioral responses beyond voting, we examine whether rising confidence in the judiciary translates into increased engagement with the formal judiciary. We digitize annual statistical reports submitted by local courts to the Justice Department from 2005 to 2022, constructing a district-level panel of local court case filings before and after the movement. Unlike attitudinal survey data, which capture short-run responses and are limited to only a few pre- and one post-treatment waves, these administrative records span a longer time horizon and reflect actual engagement with the formal justice system. As such, they offer a revealed-preference measure of institutional trust. Importantly, they capture interactions with courts of first instance—institutions that tend to be the most overburdened, slow-moving, and difficult to shift. Observing changes in reliance on these local courts allows us to test whether the Lawyers’ Movement translated into deeper shifts in how citizens navigate the formal justice system.¹¹

3.2. *Explanatory Variables*

Lawyers’ Visits. We define a treatment dummy that equals 1 for districts traversed by the lawyers’ caravans. These convoys—sometimes comprising over 100 vehicles—played three primary roles. First, they facilitated direct outreach to the public through speeches by prominent lawyer leaders who advocated for constitutionalism and judicial independence. In a context where live broadcasts were banned and internet access remained below 10%, such in-person dissemination likely circumvented censorship and embedded the movement’s message within local discourse.¹² Second, the caravans helped synchronize collective action, linking bar associations to broader civil society actors, including small traders and farmers (Figure I, Panel B). Third, the lawyer community’s size provided both organizational capacity and a degree of collective security, which is often considered critical for enabling large-scale mobilizations (see Bursztyn et al., 2021). Figure B1 illustrates the scale and reach of the lawyers’ mobilization. Panel A features a represen-

¹¹To complement this analysis, we use cross-sectional survey data on informal dispute resolution forums such as *jirgas* and *panchayats* (Free and Fair Election Network, 2016). While limited to a single round, these data provide suggestive evidence on whether formal trust displaced reliance on customary mechanisms.

¹²As previously noted, Figure I, Panel B shows a rise in newspaper references to the rule of law and constitutionalism following the movement’s onset, while functional words such as “of” or “the” (Panel A), and other commonly used terms in Pakistan that were not central to the moment, such as “Islam,” (Panel B) remained flat (Figure B3, Appendix B).

tative image of a convoy, and Panel B maps the locations visited by the lawyers. International media described these events as “a cavalcade of about 100 cars jammed with lawyers and political supporters” ([Gall & Sengupta, 2007](#)), drawing crowds along the route. “We are not getting money or food to be here,” a villager told *Time*, “we come just to pay tribute to the Chief Justice” ([Baker, 2007](#)). Though state censorship limited coverage of the lawyers’ speeches, the scale and visibility of the convoys made them difficult to ignore. As one leader noted, the movement became “too big to ignore” ([M. Malik, 2008](#)). To construct the treatment indicator, we draw on over 20,000 digitized news articles covering the Lawyers’ Movement. The results are not sensitive to the source of coverage: comparable estimates emerge when restricting to either national or local outlets, as the convoys were sufficiently large and visible to be documented across multiple levels of media.

Control Variables. The choice of control variables varies across outcome types. For survey-based measures available at the quarterly level—such as approval of General Musharraf and trust in the judiciary—our baseline specification includes trust in other institutions, such as the police and the army. Results are similar with and without these controls. For voting outcomes, we control for the number of registered voters, total votes cast, and the share of rejected ballots, which may proxy for administrative irregularities. For judicial outcomes, we include the number of pending cases at the district level as a proxy for baseline court activity and capacity. The results that follow are robust to their inclusion. [Appendix A1](#) describes variable definitions and sources; [Appendix A2](#) provides qualitative background on the lawyers’ visits; and [Table B1](#) in Appendix B reports descriptive statistics of variables used in this study. Naturally, convoy visits were not randomly assigned. As shown in [Table B2](#), visited and unvisited districts differ along several baseline characteristics, including local economic conditions, state capacity proxied by the number of police stations prior to the movement, and road density. The following section outlines our empirical strategy, which seeks to address potential concerns related to selection and confounding.

4. EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

Estimating Equation. To evaluate the influence of lawyers' visits, we estimate the following difference-in-differences specification:

$$Y_{it} = \beta \text{Lawyers' Visits}_i \times \text{Post-Movement}_t + \gamma_i + \theta_t + \mathbf{X}_{it}\mu + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

i and t index districts and time. Time periods are defined as quarters, years, or election years, depending on the specific outcome being considered. Lawyers' Visits is a binary indicator that takes the value of 1 if the lawyers visited the district and 0 otherwise. Post-Movement is an indicator variable that switches to 1 for the period following the Lawyers' Movement, specifically from March 2007 onward. $\mathbf{X}$ is a matrix of time-varying controls.¹³ Standard errors are clustered at the district level.¹⁴

The interaction term between Lawyers' Visits $\times$ Post-Movement is our primary variable of interest. The coefficient on this interaction term (β) serves as the difference-in-differences coefficient, quantifying the effect of the lawyers' visits on the outcome under consideration. Under the parallel trends assumption, β provides the causal estimate of the impact of lawyers' visits.

Identification. While the parallel trends assumption cannot be tested directly, we assess its plausibility using several complementary approaches. As a starting point, we examine standard event study plots and find no evidence of diverging pre-trends, which provides suggestive support for the identifying assumption. To further evaluate the robustness of this assumption, we next implement the synthetic difference-in-differences (SDID, henceforth) estimator of (Arkhangelsky et al., 2021), which improves trend alignment by reweighting control districts to match treated districts based on pre-treatment

¹³The selection of controls is guided by data availability, which, in turn, depends on the specific outcome being analyzed. For polling data related to Musharraf's and the army's approval, the time-varying controls include support for the police and courts. In the case of voting data, we control for the share of rejected votes, total polled votes, and total registered voters.

¹⁴In addition to clustering standard errors at the district level, we account for potential concerns about inference with a limited number of clusters. While our cluster count is more than double the recommended rule-of-thumb of 42 clusters for reliable inference under asymptotic theory (Angrist & Pischke, 2008), we further validate our estimates using a bootstrap procedure (Cameron, Gelbach, & Miller, 2008) that remains robust even in settings with fewer clusters. Since visits are geographically concentrated—neighboring regions are more similar than distant ones—we additionally apply the (Conley, 2010) correction for spatially correlated errors to also find our results to be robust.

trajectory. Unlike traditional synthetic control methods, SDID does not impose convex hull restrictions (i.e., treated units need not lie within the span of controls), making it well-suited for our setting, where most visits clustered in late 2007. To further assess sensitivity to deviations from parallel trends, we adopt the approach of (Rambachan & Roth, 2023). This method introduces a bound M on potential violations of the trend slope, rotating the post-treatment estimates accordingly. Formally, it considers all paths within the bounded set.¹⁵ This allows us to assess how large a deviation from linear trends would be required to overturn our inference. We consider a range of plausible M values motivated by the pre-treatment period.

As further checks, we implement a matched dynamic difference-in-differences (DiD) specification, following recent work by Fenizia and Saggio (2024); Jäger and Heining (2022). Treated districts are matched to observationally similar untreated districts based on pre-treatment characteristics, creating a more balanced sample. We then estimate Equation 1 within this matched sample to assess the robustness of our results.

Lastly, we estimate a two-way fixed effects specification of the difference-in-differences model, which takes advantage of any variation in the timing of visits. While most visits are concentrated within a narrow window, limiting the usefulness of this variation, the TWFE approach provides an additional comparison point. This specification is only feasible for quarterly survey outcomes, and we estimate it using both ordinary least squares and heterogeneity robust estimators such as Sun and Abraham (2021). These multiple approaches—spanning reweighting, bounding, matching, and alternative estimators—provide a structured way to assess the robustness of our empirical design. Across all specifications and approaches, the core findings persist. We now turn to the main results.

5. MAIN RESULTS

Impact on Citizen Attitudes. We begin by examining whether the lawyers’ visits influenced public opinion, focusing on approval of General Musharraf and trust in the judiciary.

¹⁵ $\Delta^{SD} = \{\theta : (\theta_{k+1} - \theta_k) - (\theta_k - \theta_{k-1}) \leq M\}$

TABLE I
EFFECT OF LAWYERS' VISITS ON MUSHARRAF'S APPROVAL AND TRUST IN THE
JUDICIARY

	Musharraf Approval		Trust in Judiciary	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A. Difference-in-Differences</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	-10.941*** (2.365)	-10.901*** (2.383)	3.391** (1.593)	3.821** (1.724)
<i>Panel B. Synthetic Difference-in-Differences</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	-10.580*** (2.109)	-10.643*** (2.398)	3.292* (1.717)	3.606* (2.037)
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	43.573	61.722	61.722
Observations	666	666	666	666

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and public attitudes toward the executive and judiciary. Columns 1 and 2 use as the dependent variable responses to the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?" Columns 3 and 4 use responses to "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?" as a proxy for confidence in the judiciary. The unit of observation is district-by-quarter. The main regressor is the interaction *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one following March 2007. All specifications include district and year-quarter fixed effects. Trust in the police is included as a control in Columns 2 and 4. Panel A presents estimates from a standard difference-in-differences framework with standard errors clustered at the district level. Panel B reports estimates from the synthetic difference-in-differences estimator with cluster-bootstrapped standard errors, following Algorithm 2 in [Arkhangelsky et al. \(2021\)](#). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Building on the trends illustrated in [Figure I](#), we implement the baseline specification in [Equation 1](#), including district and quarter fixed effects, with and without covariates (Panel A, [Table I](#)). To strengthen counterfactual comparisons, Panel B applies the synthetic difference-in-differences estimator, which reweights untreated districts to match the pre-treatment trends of treated ones. Columns 1 and 2 of both panels suggest that visits were associated with a roughly 10-percentage-point decline in approval of Mushar-

raf, amounting to a 20 percent drop relative to the pre-treatment mean. Columns 3 and 4 show a corresponding rise in trust in the judiciary by about 4 percentage points, or 7 percent of the sample average. These patterns suggest that the lawyers' visits shifted citizen attitudes away from the executive and toward greater confidence in the judiciary.

To benchmark these magnitudes, (DellaVigna & Gentzkow, 2010) review five field studies on the effects of media exposure and report an average persuasion rate of 10.2 percent, with a range between 4.3 and 30 percent. That our estimates for Musharraf's disapproval approach the upper bound of persuasion effects may reflect the intensity of the Lawyers' Movement, which explicitly targeted him with slogans such as "Quit Musharraf Quit." In contrast, the shift in trust toward the judiciary aligns more closely with average effects reported in earlier work.

Impact on Behavioral Outcomes. We next examine whether the shifts in public opinion following the lawyers' visits translated into behavioral change, focusing on electoral support and engagement with the legal system. As in the previous section, we estimate the baseline specification in Equation 1 with district and time fixed effects (Panel A) and apply the synthetic difference-in-differences estimator (Panel B) to improve the quality of counterfactual comparisons. Table II presents the results. Columns 1 and 2 indicate that visits are associated with a roughly 4-percentage-point increase in vote share for pro-movement candidates, approximately a 20 percent rise over the sample mean.¹⁶ These shifts likely carried institutional consequences. Back-of-the-envelope estimates suggest that without the visits, the opposition may have lost 23 seats—enough to undermine the parliamentary majority required for the impeachment of General Musharraf. Political engagement was not the only response. Columns 3 and 4 reveal that citizen participation in the local judiciary also increased, with case filings rising by about 10,000 new cases, representing nearly a 50 percent increase relative to the mean. The size of the effect is similar to that found in survey evidence provided in (Acemoglu, Cheema, Khwaja, & Robinson, 2020). This behavioral shift, however, suggests that the lawyers' visits were associated with broader institutional activation.

¹⁶Voter turnout remains unchanged; the shift in votes appears to reflect substitution from other parties. We return to this in the mechanism section.

TABLE II
EFFECT OF LAWYERS' VISITS ON PRO-MOVEMENT VOTES AND NEW CASE FILINGS

	Pro-Movement Votes		Cases Filed	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A. Difference-in-Differences</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	3.399*	3.636**	0.103***	0.099***
	(1.770)	(1.757)	(0.037)	(0.038)
<i>Panel B. Synthetic Difference-in-Differences</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	3.399***	3.402***	0.099**	0.089*
	(0.706)	(0.895)	(0.039)	(0.050)
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	21.468	21.468	.207	.207
Observations	1638	1638	2358	2358

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), estimating how exposure to lawyers' visits is associated with changes in behavioral outcomes. Columns 1 and 2 use the vote share for the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) as the dependent variable. The vote share for PML-N serves as a direct measure of electoral support for the Lawyers' Movement, given the party's forceful alignment with its demands during the 2008 elections. Columns 3 and 4 use the number of civil and criminal cases filed by citizens in local courts (measured in 100,000s) as a revealed-preference measure of citizen engagement with the formal judiciary. The unit of observation is district-by-election-year in Columns 1 and 2 and district-by-year in Columns 3 and 4. The main regressor is the interaction *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one following March 2007. All specifications include district fixed effects and time fixed effects, defined at the election-year level for vote share outcomes and at the annual level for case filings. Column 2 includes controls for the share of rejected votes, number of registered voters, and number of polled votes. Column 4 includes controls for case backlog. Panel A presents estimates from a standard difference-in-differences framework with standard errors clustered at the district level. Panel B reports estimates from the synthetic difference-in-differences estimator with cluster-bootstrapped standard errors, following Algorithm 2 in [Arkhangelsky et al. \(2021\)](#).

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

While survey-based measures of trust or confidence in the judiciary provide important attitudinal signals, changes in engagement with the formal judiciary offer a revealed-preference complement, capturing citizens' willingness to act upon their expectations of judicial redress. Taken together, these patterns suggest broader forms of democratic

participation, extending beyond public opinion to include citizen engagement with both political and legal institutions.

TABLE III
EFFECT OF LAWYERS' VISITS ON TRUST IN ARMY AND POLICE

	Trust in Army		Trust in Police	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A. Difference-in-Differences</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	-5.783*** (1.136)	-6.058*** (1.252)	0.106 (0.578)	0.110 (0.603)
<i>Panel B. Synthetic Difference-in-Differences</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	-5.760*** (1.239)	-5.907*** (1.281)	-0.041 (0.530)	-0.211 (0.619)
Quater-by-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	71.426	71.426	24.645	24.645
Observations	666	666	666	666

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and trust in the army and police, specifically responses to the questions: "Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?" and "Are you confident in the Police's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?", respectively. The unit of observation is district-by-quarter. The main regressor is the interaction *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one following March 2007. All specifications include district and year-quarter fixed effects. Trust in the judiciary and trust in the police are used as control variables in Column (2), and trust in the judiciary and trust in the army in Column (4). Panel A presents estimates from a standard difference-in-differences framework with standard errors clustered at the district level. Panel B reports estimates from the synthetic difference-in-differences estimator with cluster-bootstrapped standard errors, following Algorithm 2 in [Arkhangelsky et al. \(2021\)](#). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Impact on Security Institutions. We conclude the set of main results by examining whether lawyers' visits affected perceptions of unelected security institutions. Building on earlier findings related to public attitudes toward General Musharraf and the judiciary, as well as behavioral responses in voting and judicial engagement, we assess the impact

on trust in the military and police. [Table III](#) presents the results. Panel A reports estimates from the baseline specification using standard difference-in-differences, while Panel B presents results from the synthetic difference-in-differences estimator. Columns 1 and 2 indicate that trust in the military declines by roughly 6 percentage points, or about 10 percent relative to the sample mean. This decline likely reflects the public’s response to the military’s institutional association with the Musharraf regime. Columns 3 and 4 turn to public perceptions of the police. In contrast, we detect no significant change in trust or confidence in this institution.

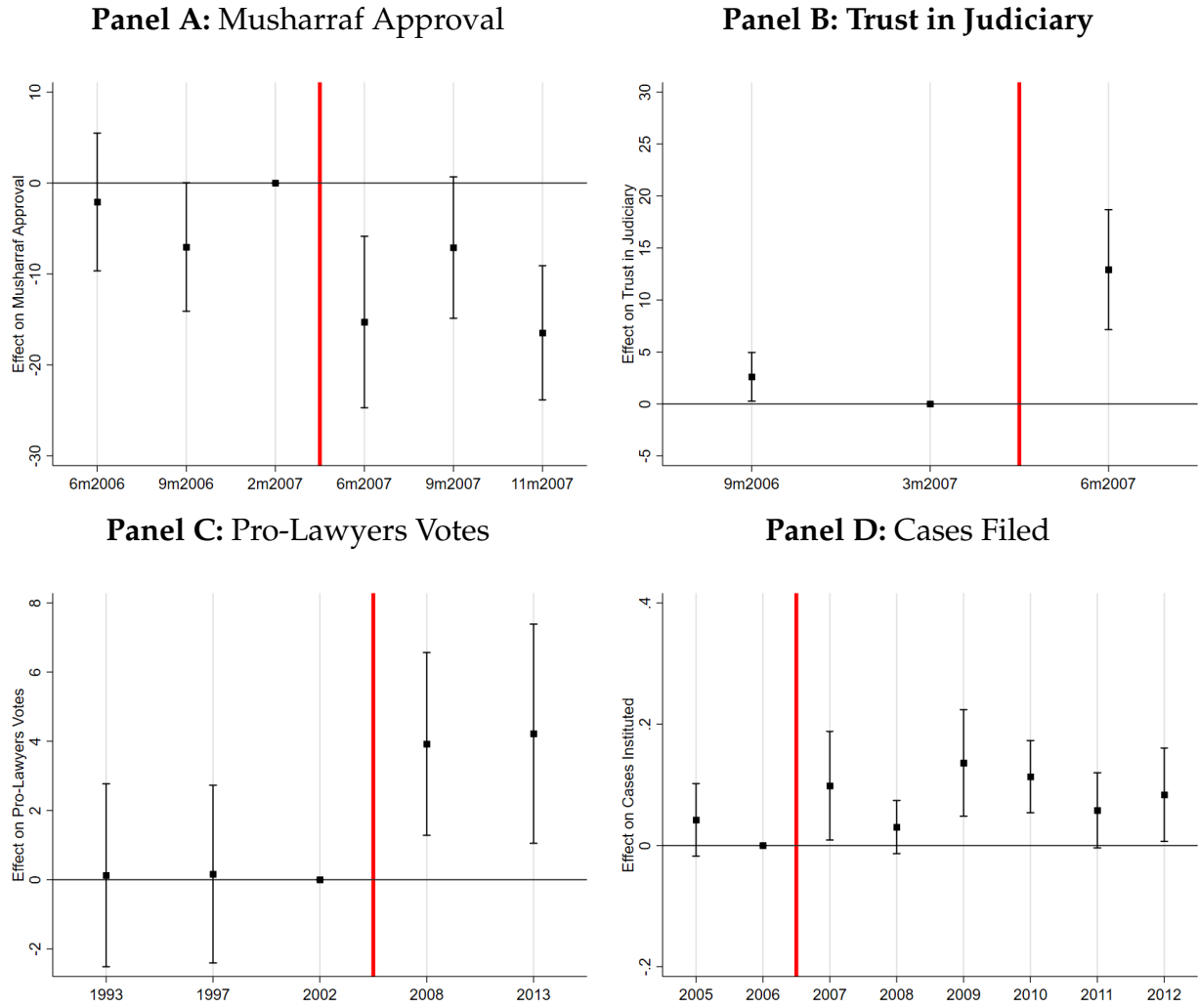
The asymmetry is notable. While the police were often involved in protest repression, the movement’s messaging primarily emphasized military overreach and interference with judicial independence. In Pakistan’s political context, the military has historically been viewed as the dominant unelected authority, whereas the police are more often seen as locally embedded enforcers without autonomous political standing. The results are consistent with a selective reassessment of unelected authority, with shifts in public confidence more pronounced for institutions perceived to play a central role in undermining constitutional checks and balances.

Parallel Trends. For the results above to admit a causal interpretation, the standard parallel trends assumption must hold. Although this assumption is fundamentally untestable, we provide descriptive evidence that lends support to it. First, we estimate a standard event-study specification that allows us to identify dynamic treatment effects and inspect pre-trends. The estimating equation is as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \sum_{k=1}^T \beta_k \text{Lawyers' Visits}_i \times D_k + \gamma_i + \theta_t + X_{it}\mu + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

Here, Y_{it} denotes the outcome of interest—such as approval of General Musharraf or trust in the judiciary—for district i in time period t . The term Lawyers' Visits_i is interacted with a set of relative time indicators D_k , each marking a specific period before or after the first visit. The coefficients β_k trace the evolution of the treatment effect over time, relative to the omitted baseline period (the one immediately preceding the first visit). All other notation follows [Equation 1](#).

FIGURE II: Lawyers' Visits and Institutional Outcomes - Standard DiD



Note: This figure presents a standard Difference-in-Differences (DiD) event study evaluating the impact of lawyers' visits on political and institutional preferences. Panel A tracks changes in public approval of General Musharraf, based on responses to the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?" Panel B examines trust in the judiciary, using responses to the question: "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?" All estimates control for district and province-by-period fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the district level. Panel C analyzes the electoral effects of lawyers' visits on pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share (PML-N), measured at the district-by-election-year level. Panel D focuses on case filings, measured at the district-by-year level. The red vertical line marks the onset of the movement. The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Time FE*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Time FE* is a set of period-specific indicators. All specifications include district and corresponding time fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the district level. The voting data span three pre-movement elections (1993, 1997, 2002), using the 2002 election as the baseline, and two post-movement periods (2008 and 2013).

Figure II presents estimates from Equation 2 across key survey and behavioral outcomes, including approval of General Musharraf, trust in the judiciary, pro-movement

votes, and new cases filed in the districts.¹⁷ The top panels display attitudinal outcomes, while the bottom panels report revealed-preference behavioral measures. Across all outcomes, trends in the pre-treatment period appear broadly parallel between treated and control districts, suggesting that differential pre-trends are unlikely to drive the main results.

Second, we estimate Equation 2 using the synthetic difference-in-differences (SDID), which adjusts for differential pre-trends by constructing a weighted comparison group that better matches the treated districts (Arkhangelsky et al., 2021). This is particularly useful in our setting, where some outcomes may exhibit modest deviations in pre-trends that standard difference-in-differences may not fully address. As shown in Figure B4 of Appendix B, the resulting estimates are broadly consistent in both magnitude and direction with those from the standard event study, and pre-treatment trends remain largely flat.

Third, while synthetic difference-in-differences weakens reliance on strict parallel trends, it does not address potential deviations that may arise after treatment. To assess the sensitivity of our estimates to such violations, we apply the method developed by (Rambachan & Roth, 2023), which estimates local trend slopes and constructs confidence intervals that account for possible departures from parallel trends both before and after treatment. The method produces confidence intervals that account for both pre- and post-treatment violations, enabling partial identification under plausible trend departures. Figure B5 and Figure B6 summarize the main findings, respectively focusing on citizen attitudes and behavioral responses. Panel A imposes standard parallel trends. Panel B allows for linear violations in post-treatment trends, and Panel C incorporates bounded non-linear deviations. In all cases, the estimated effects remain robust. Only large and sustained deviations from parallel trends would be sufficient to nullify the results.

Fourth, we implement a matched dynamic difference-in-differences specification, following recent approaches by (Fenizia & Saggio, 2024; Jäger & Heining, 2022). Treated districts are matched to observationally similar untreated districts using pre-treatment

¹⁷The outcomes differ in temporal coverage. For example, trust in the judiciary is observed in a single post-treatment wave, whereas case filings are measured annually for many years post-movement, allowing us to examine both pre-trends and the evolution of treatment effects over time.

characteristics, including baseline socioeconomic indicators, prior political violence, and historical patterns of dissent as well as road density. We then re-estimate [Equation 1](#) within the matched sample to assess the sensitivity of our results to differences in baseline covariates. The estimates, reported in [Table B4](#) of Appendix B, remain comparable to our baseline findings. Lastly, we estimate a two-way fixed effects specification of the difference-in-differences model, which leverages variation in the timing of visits across districts. Although most visits occur within a relatively narrow window, limiting the identifying variation, this approach offers an additional comparison. The specification is feasible only for quarterly survey outcomes, and we estimate it using both ordinary least squares and the heterogeneity-robust estimator proposed by ([Sun & Abraham, 2021](#)). As shown in [Figure B7](#), the results are similar across both estimation methods, suggesting that our main findings are not sensitive to adopting a staggered treatment design. The pre-treatment coefficients are generally close to zero, which is consistent with the parallel trends assumption.

Selection Concerns. As reported in [Table B2](#) (Appendix B), districts visited by lawyers differ systematically from those that were not. Baseline differences include larger populations, higher life expectancy, greater literacy, higher household incomes, and more extensive access to roads and entertainment. While our difference-in-differences design does not require random assignment of visits, it is useful to assess whether the observed attitudinal changes are unique to the Lawyers' Movement or reflect broader political mobilization. To address this, we conduct a comparative exercise using visits by Benazir Bhutto, who campaigned during the same period but did not explicitly endorse the lawyers' cause. As noted by former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Bhutto was engaged in power-sharing negotiations with General Musharraf at the time ([Rice, 2011](#)). Her limited support for the movement is particularly notable given that her party, after winning the 2008 elections, resisted restoring the judiciary and ultimately reneged on the Bhurban Accord, which had pledged to reinstate the judges deposed by General Musharraf. Her visits, thus, offer a useful benchmark: politically salient but disconnected from the institutional agenda of the Lawyers' Movement.

TABLE IV
LAWYERS' VISITS AND PRIME MINISTER BENAZIR VISITS

	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Judiciary	Pro-Lawyers Votes Share	Cases Filed	Trust in Army
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lawyers' Visits $\times$ Post-Movement	-10.087*** (2.491)	3.888** (1.591)	3.468** (1.609)	0.086*** (0.031)	-5.674*** (1.235)
Benazir's Visits $\times$ Post-Movement	-5.442** (2.509)	-3.280 (2.557)	0.587 (2.705)	0.086 (0.097)	-0.705 (1.209)
Quater-by-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	61.722	21.468	.207	71.426
Observations	666	666	1638	2358	666

Note: This table reports estimates from Equation 1, examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and key outcome variables, accounting for visits of Benazir Bhutto during the same timespan. The dependent variables are Musharraf Approval, specifically the answer to the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?", trust in judiciary, specifically the answer to the question "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?", Pro-Movement votes for Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz, number of cases filed (measured in 100,000s), and trust in army, specifically the answer to the question "Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?" The unit of observation is district-quarter for Columns (1), (2), and (5), and district-year for Columns (3) and (4). The main regressor is the interaction *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one following March 2007. All specifications include district and corresponding time fixed effects. Trust in the police is included as a control in Columns (1), (2), and (5). Share of rejected votes, number of registered voters, and number of polled votes are used as control variables in Column (3). All columns control for visits of Benazir Bhutto coinciding with the Lawyers' Movement. Robust standard errors are clustered at the district level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table IV reports the estimates. Accounting for Bhutto's visits does not meaningfully affect the results. Lawyer visits remain strongly associated with reduced support for Musharraf, greater confidence in the judiciary, increased support for pro-movement candidates, and higher levels of legal engagement. In contrast, Bhutto's visits correspond to a modest decline in Musharraf's approval—roughly half the effect of lawyer visits—and show no detectable effects on institutional trust, court filings, or voting behavior aligned with the movement. This divergence suggests that the broader institutional changes associated with lawyer visits are unlikely to stem from political exposure alone. While both campaigns may have shaped views of the regime, only the lawyers' mobilization generated increased trust in the judiciary and revealed-preference engagement with courts. Bhutto's rallies did not boost support for civilian institutions such as judiciary, erode

trust in the military, or spur legal action by citizens. This comparison also helps mitigate concerns about selection bias: had lawyer visits been confined to politically receptive or reform-leaning districts, similar responses might have followed Bhutto's visits. That this is not observed suggests meaningful differences in the framing of the lawyers' message and Bhutto's decision not to endorse judicial restoration. These distinctions lend support to the interpretation that the institutional effects were specific to the movement's emphasis on judicial independence.

We further assess potential selection bias by implementing a placebo test based on visits by another former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, during the period 2011 to 2013. Unlike Bhutto's campaign, which overlapped with the Lawyers' Movement and could plausibly have reinforced or substituted for its effects, Khan's visits occurred after the movement had concluded. By this time, Chief Justice Chaudhry had been reinstated, Musharraf had resigned, and judicial independence had receded from the core of national political debate. As such, Khan's campaign offers a cleaner placebo: politically salient but temporally and substantively disconnected from the movement's institutional agenda. If our identification strategy were confounded by selection into politically mobilized districts, one might expect Khan's later visits to correlate with pre-existing political preferences, such as Musharraf's approval or support for the movement in 2008. [Figure B8](#) in Appendix B presents the results. We find no evidence that Khan's post-2011 visits are associated with pre-treatment measures of Musharraf approval, pro-lawyers vote shares, or support for the judiciary or military. These null results provide additional reassurance that our main findings are not mechanically driven by unobserved district characteristics correlated with elite political attention.

Finally, to assess whether our results are sensitive to differential trends correlated with baseline characteristics, we estimate a flexible difference-in-differences specification that allows outcomes to evolve heterogeneously across districts. While standard selection bias involves differences in levels, the key identifying concern in DiD designs is that treatment and control units may have followed different trends absent the movement. To address this, we interact a set of pre-treatment covariates with time fixed effects. These covariates, drawn from nationally representative census data, include road density, political

violence, employment, and income. This specification relaxes the assumption of uniform trends and allows for more flexible counterfactual comparisons. The results are reported in [Table B3](#). Across all outcomes, including support for Musharraf, trust in the judiciary, vote shares for pro-movement candidates, court filings, and trust in the army, the estimated effects are similar to those in the baseline model. Taken together, the results suggest that our findings are not unduly sensitive to potential violations of the parallel trends assumption or to concerns about selection. While each approach has its own limitations, the consistency of results across methods lends support to a causal interpretation of the main estimates. We now turn to the mechanisms that may explain these patterns.

6. EXPLORING MECHANISMS AND LOCAL CORRELATES

6.1. *Analysis of Mechanisms*

Main Mechanisms. Several historical accounts of the Lawyers’ Movement emphasize the importance of organizational and informational infrastructure in shaping its influence ([Ahmad et al., 2015](#); [Shafqat, 2018](#)). We learn from—and build on—these narratives to examine two contextual factors highlighted in this qualitative literature. The first is the role of bar associations, which played a central part in coordinating protest activity: issuing strike calls, organizing caravans, and offering institutional support to participating lawyers. Many bar associations coordinated across districts and maintained pooled funds that covered key costs such as fuel for the caravans, thereby sustaining engagement over time. They also contributed to the consistent framing of the movement around the concept of constitutionalism and judicial independence. The second is the role of private media, particularly private radio, which expanded rapidly in the early 2000s and is often credited with amplifying the movement’s message in areas with limited access to television ([Blumenstock, Dube, & Hussain, 2022](#)). Radio served as a key source of information during this period, especially in rural regions where television penetration remained low. In provinces such as Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, more than half of rural households relied on radio for news and political updates ([Gallup, 2014](#)).

TABLE V
EXPLORATION OF MECHANISMS

	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Judiciary	Pro-Lawyers Votes Share	Cases Filed	Trust in Army
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
# Bar Association Members X Lawyers' Visits X Post	0.006 (0.122)	0.070 (0.059)	0.146*** (0.039)	0.006** (0.003)	0.039 (0.035)
Private Media X Lawyers' Visits X Post	-14.118*** (3.878)	-2.278 (2.527)	2.761 (2.181)	0.082 (0.070)	-4.831** (2.031)
Press Club Exists X Lawyers' Visits X Post	-5.341 (3.428)	1.632 (3.331)	-1.115 (1.980)	-0.019 (0.057)	-3.051 (1.915)
Madrassas X Lawyers' Visits X Post	2.058 (4.908)	0.075 (3.871)	-6.295** (3.105)	0.006 (0.074)	-0.046 (2.380)
Quater-by-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	61.722	21.468	.207	71.426
Observations	666	666	1638	2358	666

Note: This table reports the results of the mechanism analysis. The specification includes baseline measures of bar association intensity (total members), the presence of private media (indicated by the existence of private radio), press club presence, and the density of the madrassa network, measured using the last census before the Lawyers' Movement. The dependent variables are: (i) Musharraf Approval, based on responses to "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?"; (ii) Trust in Judiciary, based on "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?"; (iii) Pro-Movement Votes, measured as vote share for Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N); (iv) Case Filings, measured in 100,000s; and (v) Trust in Army, based on "Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?" The unit of observation is district-by-quarter for Columns (1), (2), and (5), and district-by-election year and district-by-year for Columns (3) and (4), respectively. Independent variables include: the number of bar association members per 1,000 population, madrassa intensity, and indicators for the presence of press clubs, all interacted with a post-treatment dummy. All corresponding double interactions are included alongside the triple interaction terms. Corresponding time and district fixed effects are included in all specifications. Control variables include trust in the police (Columns 1, 2, and 5), and electoral controls—share of rejected votes, number of registered voters, and number of polled votes—in Column (3). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Motivated by this qualitative evidence, we explore whether preexisting variation in bar association strength and media penetration may partly explain the differential district-level responses to the lawyers' visits. The first two interaction coefficients explore these possibilities. In Table V, we find that districts with greater bar association membership tend to exhibit somewhat greater changes in behavioral outcomes, such as higher pro-movement votes and higher local court case filings. We also observe some evidence that these effects were more pronounced in areas with higher private radio access prior to the movement. In particular, the decline in approval of Musharraf and the military is more marked in districts with greater prior private radio penetration, consistent with the view

that private media contributed to how citizens received the movement's message.

While these patterns are correlational, they offer suggestive evidence into how institutional networks and information channels may have together influenced the movement's reach and impact. The findings are consistent with the idea that the Lawyers' Movement drew strength not only from national leadership but also from local infrastructures that helped carry its message to broader publics.

Alternative Mechanisms. To consider other potential explanations, we examine three additional channels: the presence of religious seminaries (*madrassas*), historical patterns of electoral fraud, and alternative professional networks, such as journalist associations. Religious seminaries or *madrassas* have played a role in past political mobilizations, particularly through Islamist parties, and may have interacted with the movement in districts where they were active (A. Malik & Mirza, 2022). Electoral fraud could also be relevant, especially if historical patterns of vote manipulation were correlated with support for pro-lawyer candidates. Finally, historical journalist networks—reflected in the presence at press clubs—might have contributed to political messaging in ways similar to private media.¹⁸

As reported in Table V, interaction terms for all three channels are small and broadly statistically insignificant. The only exception is a negative association between *madrassa* density and pro-movement vote share. This pattern is consistent with the political context of the time. Religious parties, organized under the MMA coalition led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman—who headed a prominent *madrassa* network—were aligned with General Musharraf and opposed to the Lawyers' Movement. In line with this interpretation, we also observe a decline in electoral support for the MMA in districts visited by lawyers (Table B5 of Appendix B). These patterns suggest that competing authority structures may have shaped how local populations responded to the movement. On balance, the evidence is most consistent with the idea that variation in bar association strength and private media access, together, facilitated the movement's local effects.¹⁹

¹⁸Press Clubs in South Asia, including Pakistan and India, are professional associations of journalists that serve as venues for press conferences, public addresses, and media coordination. Many trace their institutional roots to colonial-era journalist associations and remain central to political and civil society engagement today.

¹⁹For the spatial distribution of historical bar association networks, press clubs, private media, and *madrassas*, see Figure B9 in Appendix B.

Lawyers’ Leaders vs Chief Justice. Our treatment captures the effect of lawyers’ visits, which were organized as public convoys led by prominent members of the legal community. Although Chief Justice Chaudhry was the most visible figure of the movement, many convoys proceeded in his absence. To avoid conflating mobilization by lawyers with his personal influence, we differentiate between visits he attended and those led by other prominent lawyers. This distinction allows us to assess whether the observed effects reflect the broader institutional leadership of the movement rather than the symbolic presence of a single individual. Specifically, we examine visits led by Ali Ahmad Kurd (Panel A) and Aitzaz Ahsan (Panel B) in the Chief Justice’s absence. As reported in [Table B6](#) of Appendix B, we find broadly similar patterns in attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. The direction and magnitude of effects align with our main findings, suggesting that the influence of these visits stemmed less from the symbolic authority of the Chief Justice and more from coordinated organizational efforts. This is consistent with anecdotal accounts portraying Chief Justice Chaudhary as lacking personal magnetism, often referred to as “boring” and “tame” ([Baker, 2007](#)).

Impact on Other Parties. One of the two behavioral outcomes we examine is electoral behavior, complementing our analysis of case filings as a response by citizens to engage more with the judiciary. Voting patterns offer a window into the political consequences of the movement and help assess whether citizen sentiment translated into action at the ballot box. As discussed above, lawyer visits were associated with an increase in vote share for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), offering the most direct indication of electoral support for the Lawyers’ Movement.²⁰ To assess whether the Lawyers’ Movement shaped broader political alignments, we next examine its effects on support for other parties. Although General Musharraf did not contest the 2008 elections himself, his administration was supported by aligned parties such as the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q). Columns 1 and 2 of [Table B5](#) report the estimated effects of lawyers’ visits on vote shares for these parties, respectively. The findings suggest that while lawyers’ visits led to a 5 percent decline in vote share for Islamist MMA, indicating that at least some of Musharraf’s allies faced electoral setbacks

²⁰The PML-N endorsed judicial restoration, required candidates to support it, and later exited the coalition government when restoration was delayed.

due to the lawyers' visits. This pattern is consistent with earlier results indicating that the presence of historical madrassa networks diminished the impact of lawyer visits. Other major parties appear largely unaffected. The PML-Q, a key ally of General Musharraf, shows no discernible change in electoral support. Nor does the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which maintained an ambiguous stance during the movement and did not explicitly align itself with the lawyers' cause. [Table B5](#), Panels A and B, show that both larger and smaller parties, respectively, exhibit little change in vote share following lawyer visits. This suggests that the observed electoral shifts were not broadly diffused across the political spectrum but instead reflected targeted responses aligned with the movement's institutional message.

Impact on Turnout. A related alternative mechanism concerns the source of electoral gains: did lawyers' visits mobilize new voters, or did they primarily shift votes away from pro-Musharraf parties? The observed increase in pro-lawyers vote share, coupled with the decline in support for the MMA—a key Musharraf ally—in visited districts, suggests that vote redistribution likely played a more prominent role in shaping the electoral impact. We next examine whether lawyers' visits influenced overall voter turnout, assessing whether the movement mobilized new voters. Figure B10 of [Linked Online Appendix B](#) illustrates the effect of lawyers' visits on turnout over time. Across both standard and synthetic difference-in-differences event studies, we find little evidence that voter turnout increased following lawyers' visits. This suggests that the visits may have operated through persuasion or preference realignment rather than large-scale voter mobilization, shaping vote choices rather than expanding electoral participation.

6.2. Discussion and Broader Correlates

Informal Courts. As noted above, lawyer visits were followed by sustained increases in both trust in courts and legal engagement by citizens. These behavioral shifts suggest that the movement's emphasis on the judiciary translated into greater reliance on formal legal institutions. We next consider whether this shift came partly at the expense of informal dispute resolution forums, such as *Panchayats* and *Jirgas*, which are typically led by village elders and play an important role in rural areas where access to courts may

be limited. Although systematic panel data on their usage is unavailable, we draw on a unique nationwide survey that reports district-level reliance on informal courts—a source of information not commonly available for such institutions. Descriptively, we find that districts visited by lawyers report lower reliance on informal forums relative to unvisited districts. Figure B11 of [Linked Online Appendix B](#) illustrates this cross-district correlation. While the data do not allow for causal inference, the pattern is consistent with the idea that the Lawyers’ Movement may have contributed to lower engagement with informal legal institutions such as these, potentially by bolstering trust in the formal judiciary. We interpret this finding with appropriate caution but view the observed association as suggestive of a potential institutional shift in dispute resolution preferences.

Post-Movement Votes. As reported in [Table II](#), Columns 1 and 2, lawyers’ visits were associated with increased support for the party most publicly aligned with the movement. While these findings suggest that the movement influenced the 2008 elections, it is less clear whether such effects persisted in later cycles. By 2013, core objectives of the movement had been achieved, Musharraf had stepped down, the judiciary had been restored, and institutional reforms like the 18th and 19th constitutional amendments strengthened judicial independence. If lawyers’ visits contributed to durable shifts in political attitudes, one might expect continued electoral benefits for parties closely associated with the movement. [Figure II](#) (lower panel) shows that visited districts continued to exhibit stronger support for the pro-lawyers party in the 2013 elections. These patterns are consistent with the possibility that the Lawyers’ Movement helped reinforce political alignments tied to judicial oversight, with potential implications for longer-term trust in institutions.

7. ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

This section presents additional sensitivity checks that collectively reinforce the robustness of our results.

Road Centrality. The organization of lawyers’ visits as road-based convoys raises the possibility that better-connected districts were systematically more likely to receive a visit. While this could raise concerns about differential exposure, several features of our design help address this possibility. The difference-in-differences framework identifies

changes relative to pre-treatment trends within each district, so static differences in road quality do not themselves pose a threat to identification. To further evaluate the potential role of infrastructure, we construct a new dataset on Pakistan’s road network and compute district-level measures of network centrality, following the approach in (Becker, Pfaff, Hsiao, & Rubin, 2023). We incorporate this measure into our main specification by interacting it with time fixed effects, allowing outcome trends to vary by preexisting connectivity. We also include controls for road density, similarly interacted with time, to account for baseline variation in infrastructure. The results are reported in Table B7. Our main estimates remain essentially similar when accounting for these interactions, suggesting that variation in road access is unlikely to drive the observed treatment effects.

Adjusting for Election Fraud. In one of our results, we leverage official election records from both pre- and post-Movement periods. This approach helps address concerns about the accuracy of vote counts, particularly given that both the 2002 and 2008 elections occurred under General Musharraf’s autocratic rule. While using official records reduces the risk of systematic misreporting, it does not eliminate concerns about disproportionate electoral manipulation during this period. To empirically validate our findings concerning election outcomes, we draw upon fraud-adjusted vote tallies curated by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), an extensive rights-based organization dedicated to the enhancement of democratic transparency and the detection of electoral fraud in Pakistan. (FAFEN, 2008)’s comprehensive electoral monitoring initiative ranks among the largest observation missions globally, encompassing the deployment of 20,000 independent observers. These observers systematically gathered data from a diverse sample of 1,000 voters per district across Pakistan. The results based on the fraud-adjusted data, shown in Table B8 of Appendix B, closely align with the official election outcomes in both standard and synthetic difference-in-differences estimations, supporting the robustness of the findings.

Staggered Adoption. Our primary empirical strategy compares districts that received lawyer visits to those that did not, before and after the movement period, using a difference-in-differences design where treatment status is fixed over time. The concentrated timing of visits between mid-2007 and early 2008 limits the scope for staggered designs.

Nonetheless, for outcomes measured at a higher frequency—specifically, quarterly survey data on attitudes—we can estimate a two-way fixed effects version of the difference-in-differences model that exploits residual variation in visit timing across districts. While the variation is limited, we use both ordinary least squares and heterogeneity-robust estimators, including the approach developed by (Sun & Abraham, 2021), to assess consistency with our baseline findings. As discussed above and reported in Figure B7 of Appendix B, these alternative estimators yield similar patterns where data availability permits, lending additional support to the robustness of our baseline estimates.

Standard Errors. As a baseline, we cluster standard errors at the district level. To address concerns about inference with a limited number of clusters, we also implement alternative methods. While the number of clusters in our analysis exceeds (and is more than double) the recommended rule-of-thumb threshold of 42 for inference under asymptotic theory (Angrist & Pischke, 2008), we further validate our estimates using a bootstrap procedure (Cameron et al., 2008), which does not rely on asymptotic theory for statistical inference. The results from wild bootstrapping, implemented using the package developed by (Roodman et al., 2019), are reported in Figure B12 of Linked Online Appendix B. Moreover, recognizing the geographic concentration of lawyers' visits—where neighboring regions may exhibit greater similarity than distant ones—we apply the spatial error correction outlined in (Conley, 2010) to account for spatially correlated errors. Since these standard error adjustments have been criticized for potentially over-rejecting null hypotheses, we follow the suggested approach of testing results under different distance cutoffs. The results, presented in Table B9 of Appendix B, remain similar, suggesting that our conclusions are not driven by a particular inference method.

Other Sensitivity Checks. Our findings remain qualitatively and statistically consistent across a range of additional checks. First, to guard against false positives arising from multiple outcomes, we implement corrections for multiple hypothesis testing. As shown in Table B10, the results suggest that the probability of detecting significant effects by chance is low. Second, we conduct randomization inference by reassigning treatment at random across districts. The resulting distribution of placebo estimates, shown in Figure B13 of Linked Online Appendix B, centers around zero, with the actual treatment effect

lying in the far tail. This reduces the likelihood that our findings are driven by chance or spurious correlations aligned with the original assignment. Lastly, we assess the sensitivity of our results by sequentially excluding one region at a time and re-estimating the main coefficients. Figure B14 of [Linked Online Appendix B](#) illustrates that the estimated effects remain largely unchanged, suggesting that our findings are not driven by any specific region. Collectively, these additional sensitivity tests support the robustness of our findings.

8. CONCLUSION

The separation of powers is often assumed to rest on constitutional design, judicial precedent, or elite bargains ([Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006](#); [Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2007](#); [Persson & Tabellini, 2003](#)). Yet formal safeguards alone have proven insufficient to constrain executive overreach, even in long-standing democracies ([Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019](#); [Dixit, 2021](#); [Ferraz & Finan, 2025](#)). This paper examines whether bottom-up resistance can contribute to the assertion of judicial constraints.

We study Pakistan’s Lawyers’ Movement, a rare episode in which an executive attempted to dismantle judicial oversight, triggering coordinated civic resistance. The movement coincided with a sequence of institutional shifts: the resignation of a military dictator, the reinstatement of sixty purged judges, and constitutional reforms aimed at limiting executive control over judicial appointments. These changes were accompanied by a broader turn in public discourse toward constitutionalism, providing a setting to examine whether organized resistance can help assert judicial boundaries under pressure.

Leveraging quasi-experimental variation in exposure to lawyer-led mobilization, we find that movement visits significantly reduced support for the incumbent military ruler and the security establishment that backed him, increased trust in the judiciary, and encouraged greater reliance on formal legal institutions. These effects are distinct from those associated with contemporaneous political campaigns, suggesting that the movement’s institutional framing, centered on judicial independence rather than partisan identity, played a significant role. Importantly, these shifts extended beyond attitudes: voters in exposed districts supported pro-movement candidates in subsequent elections, and case

filings in local courts rose and remained elevated, indicating a behavioral engagement with formal judicial channels.

These findings suggest that restoring institutional checks is not solely a function of legal architecture or elite consensus. When judicial authority is undermined, targeted mobilization—led by legal professionals and grounded in constitutional norms—can activate institutional boundaries and help assert judicial oversight. The Lawyers’ Movement illustrates how organized civic action can reclaim the institutional space courts occupy within the separation of powers.

This case offers insight into a broader dynamic. The resilience of institutional checks may rest not only on constitutional design, but also on the ability of societal actors to respond when those safeguards are threatened. While the specific outcomes observed here are shaped by Pakistan’s legal and political environment, they suggest that under certain conditions, organized dissent can support institutional balance and reinforce the role of courts in constraining executive authority.

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ONLINE APPENDIX A

Appendix A1. Variable Definitions

Part A. IRI Survey Dataset

Musharraf Approval = The percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question, “Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?” This data is sourced from the International Republican Institute, based on a sample of 4,000 people across Pakistan, covering the period from June 2006 to January 2008. These surveys were conducted quarterly, and we aggregated the responses at the district level.

Trust in Army = The percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question “Do you trust the Army’s ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?”. This data is sourced from the International Republican Institute, based on a sample of 4,000 people across Pakistan, covering the period from June 2006 to January 2008. These surveys were conducted quarterly, and we aggregated the responses at the district level. The March 2007 poll for IRI data was conducted before March 7, 2007, and is therefore considered pre-treatment.

Trust in Police = The percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question “Are you confident in the Police’s ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?”. This data is sourced from the International Republican Institute, based on a sample of 4,000 people across Pakistan, covering the period from June 2006 to January 2008. These surveys were conducted quarterly, and we aggregated the responses at the district level. The March 2007 poll for IRI data was conducted before March 7, 2007, and is therefore considered pre-treatment.

Trust in Courts = The percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question “Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?”. This data is sourced from the International Republican Institute, based on a sample of 4,000 people across Pakistan, covering the period from June 2006 to January 2008. These surveys were conducted quarterly, and we aggregated the responses at the district level. The March 2007 poll for IRI data was conducted before March 7, 2007, and is therefore

considered pre-treatment.

Part B. Election Dataset

Pro-Lawyers Movement Votes = The pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share is measured as the proportion of total votes received by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in each election, based on official data from the Election Commission of Pakistan. The election data is sourced from publicly available records on the Election Commission of Pakistan's website (<https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections>).

Share of Rejected Votes = The share of rejected votes is calculated as the percentage of total votes deemed invalid or rejected during the electoral process. The election data is sourced from publicly available records on the Election Commission of Pakistan's website (<https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections>).

Total Polled Votes = The total number of votes cast in elections. The election data is sourced from publicly available records on the Election Commission of Pakistan's website (<https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections>).

Registered Voters = The total number of individuals registered to vote. The election data is sourced from publicly available records on the Election Commission of Pakistan's website (<https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections>).

Turnout = The percentage of registered voters who actually voted in the elections. This is a measure of participation in the electoral process. The election data is sourced from publicly available records on the Election Commission of Pakistan's website (<https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections>).

Part C. Courts Panel Dataset

New Cases Filed = New Cases Filed refers to the number of judicial cases initiated within a given period, recorded at the district level. The data is sourced from the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP) under the Justice Department of Pakistan. It is a district-level annual panel dataset from 2005 to 2022.

Part D. FAFEN Socioeconomic Survey 2016

Jirga = An informal tribal court system among the Pashtun communities, primarily in regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where tribal elders make decisions by consensus based on Pashtunwali. Specifically, “Are community disputes taken to a Jirga for resolution?”. Responses are coded as 1 for “Yes” and 0 for “No.”

Panchayat = A village council system primarily in regions like Punjab and Sindh, dealing with civil matters and crimes through a consensus of five village elders. Specifically, “Are community disputes taken to a collective Panchayat/community Panchayat for resolution?”. Responses are coded as 1 for “Yes” and 0 for “No.”

Part E. Additional Data Used including Explanatory Variables.

Lawyers’ Visits = Lawyers’ visits is a binary treatment variable equal to 1 if lawyers visited the district before the February 2008 elections and 0 otherwise. The data was constructed by systematically analyzing the full archive of news articles from Dawn, Pakistan’s leading newspaper, for the relevant period. The dataset originally contained over 20,000 articles from 2007–2008, which we filtered using keywords such as “lawyer” and the names of key actors. Given the visibility and political significance of the Lawyers’ Movement, *Dawn* comprehensively covered all visits by lawyers, making it a natural source for constructing our main variable. Additionally we verified our data using [factiva](#) double checking every visit.

Lawyers’ Bar Associations = A dummy variable indicating 1 if a Bar Association existed in the district. The data is sourced from Bar Association records provided by the Supreme Court Bar Association and Lahore High Court Bar Association.

Private Media = A dummy variable indicating 1 if a private media radio or TV station existed in the district in 2006. The data is sourced from the 2006 PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) reports, published online.

Press clubs = We construct a dummy variable indicating whether a press club establishment with historical roots in the colonial era existed in the district. The data is sourced from a comprehensive study involving extensive research by a large team of scholars ([Ahmad et al., 2015](#)).

Madrassa = Number of madrassas (Islamic religious schools) in the district. This is from the 1998 Census of Pakistan.

Road Network Data = Roads shapefile used to calculate betweenness centrality and road density from [OpenStreetMap archives](#).

Appendix A2. Lawyers' Visits

In this appendix, we provide additional qualitative details on the lawyers' visits and the lawyers' convoy. The lawyers' convoy, a series of nationwide processions sparked by the dismissal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March 2007, became a cornerstone of the Lawyers' Movement. These convoys traversed cities across Pakistan, with stops where local lawyer leaders delivered impassioned speeches on the movement's core message: the restoration of judicial independence and the rule of law under General Pervez Musharraf's military regime. These in-person gatherings were critical, as they allowed the movement to bypass the stringent live broadcast and print media bans imposed by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). Lawyers and activists also leveraged alternative channels like social media and SMS—emerging tools in 2007—to coordinate efforts and spread their message, embedding the movement's narrative deeply within local political discourse despite a literacy rate of about 50%, which limited newspaper reach.

As the lawyers' processions advanced, local lawyers observed court boycotts, shutting down judicial proceedings in protest. This form of resistance was amplified by widespread solidarity from farmers' and traders' unions, who shuttered their businesses, as well as political parties and rights activists, who organized parallel rallies and issued public statements of support. This trend is illustrated in [Figure B2](#), which shows a marked increase in the frequency of lawyers' strikes following the Chief Justice's dismissal in March 2007, reflecting the legal community's unwavering commitment and the movement's growing momentum. A prominent newspaper headline at the time captured this impact: "The court work came to almost standstill in all major cities as no lawyer appeared in the courts" ([Dawn, 2007](#)). Another report underscored the disruption, stating, "The lawyers' boycott has brought the judicial system to its knees, leaving cases unre-

solved and litigants in despair.”

The regulatory authority overseeing a burgeoning private media sector, PEMRA, imposed substantial censorship on the movement’s media coverage. For instance, it barred live reporting on the lawyers’ processions, restricted broadcasts of speeches by key figures, and even took several television stations off air for covering the protests. Yet, the movement’s message persisted. A local newspaper from Punjab highlighted its reach: “A complete strike was also observed by lawyers in Chakwal to show solidarity with the Chief Justice.” The Movement rapidly spread across Pakistan, resonating even in military strongholds like Taxila and Wah, where organizing dissent was particularly challenging due to tight military control. Local newspapers reported, “

The lawyers in Taxila and Wah Cantonment also boycotted the courts. A black flag was hoisted at the district bar office,” signaling defiance in areas typically insulated from such unrest. The Lawyers’ Movement transcended the legal community, igniting broader societal engagement. Amir Shehzad, a young chemical engineering student, captured this sentiment, stating, “There is a revolution happening. We are facing for many years a military dictatorship, and people want democracy” (Gall & Sengupta, 2007). Similarly, a teacher from Islamabad remarked, “The lawyers have shown us that the law can fight power,” while a laborer in Multan added, “We stand with them because they stand for justice.” This narrative of discontent and the desire to curb military overreach was poignantly echoed by Abdullah, a 70-year-old farmer who had initially supported General Musharraf’s 1999 coup. “I was among the many people who welcomed General Musharraf when he took over, but he wants no checks. He wants a free hand for everything but that’s not fair,” Abdullah stated, reflecting a shift in public opinion as he waited in the village of Kharian to greet the lawyers’ caravan of cars. The Chief Justice himself reinforced this ethos, though sparingly, asserting, “Nations and states which are based on dictatorship instead of the supremacy of the constitution, the rule of law, and protection of basic rights get destroyed” (Gall & Sengupta, 2007). Despite his symbolic importance, his direct role in mobilization remained limited.

Rather than actively engaging with the public, Chief Justice Chaudhry remained a figurehead, rarely addressing crowds directly. As noted in *The Times*, “Mr. Chaudhry

never left his car and did not speak to the crowds along the way” ([Gall & Sengupta, 2007](#)). The movement’s energy instead stemmed from lawyers organized through district bar associations, which coordinated protests, processions, and outreach efforts, often alongside human rights groups and political parties. Prominent figures like Aitzaz Ahsan, a renowned constitutional lawyer and strategist, and Ali Ahmad Kurd, celebrated for his electrifying speeches, were pivotal. Ahsan orchestrated nationwide tours, often driving the Chief Justice himself, while Kurd’s oratory rallied massive crowds, earning him widespread admiration. This decentralized leadership was not without its quirks—Time magazine observed of Chaudhry, “Finally, Chaudhry stepped to the podium at 2 a.m. and launched into his prepared talk on Article 25 of the Pakistani Constitution, about non-discrimination before the law... his talk was remarkably tame. Boring even” ([Baker, 2007](#)). Yet, the movement thrived not on charisma but on grassroots coordination. Together, these dynamics highlight the decentralized character of the Lawyers’ Movement. Rather than being driven by a central figure, mobilization was sustained through the coordinated efforts of lawyers and grassroots activists. This decentralized structure allowed the movement to adapt to repression and media censorship, enabling it to expand geographically, mobilize diverse constituencies, and pose a credible challenge to authoritarian encroachments on the judiciary.

ONLINE APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE B1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variables	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
<i>IRI Polling Dataset:</i>					
Musharraf Approval	666	43.57289	21.68536	0	96.66666
Trust in Army	666	71.42643	12.10718	16.66667	90
Trust in Judiciary	666	59.48449	11.62996	43.33333	100
Trust in Police	666	24.84095	6.508405	3.333333	40
<i>Election Dataset:</i>					
PML-N	1,638	21.46839	17.85628	0.0331504	71.34138
PML-Q	1,638	29.45634	15.40181	0.0707202	85.7028
PPP	1,638	30.18093	18.638	0.0438084	95.40724
MMA	1,638	16.18286	16.15241	0.0086131	62.23189
Total Polled Votes	1,638	77991.55	41586.96	6964	247146
Number Registered Voters	1,638	180527.8	85042.01	32526	651356
Share of Rejected Votes	1,638	0.0282209	0.0125943	0	0.1738589
<i>Court Dataset:</i>					
New Cases Filed	2,358	20736.23	35416.06	37	604970

Note: This table presents summary statistics for the main variables used in the study. The IRI Survey Dataset contains polling data from the International Republican Institute, aggregated at the district-by-quarter level for the period between January 2006 and January 2008 (just prior to the February 2008 elections). The Election Dataset includes election results by electoral district for the years 1993, 1997, 2002, 2008, and 2013. The Court Dataset provides judicial statistics from the Pakistan Judicial Statistics, published by the Justice Department of Pakistan, covering the years 2005 to 2022, with information on the annual number of cases filed. Standard deviations are reported based on the sample distribution within each panel.

TABLE B2
BASELINE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VISITED VERSUS UNVISITED DISTRICTS

Variable	(1)		(2)		(1)-(2)	
	Lawyers Visited		Not Visited		Pairwise t-test	
	N	Mean/(SE)	N	Mean/(SE)	N	P-value
Population, 100000 people 1998	39	20.158 (2.871)	72	8.869 (0.722)	111	< 0.001***
Monthly Income, 2006	39	5517.109 (382.794)	72	4672.208 (105.495)	111	0.035**
Life Expectency, 2006	39	86.562 (1.259)	72	89.801 (0.621)	111	0.023**
Literacy, 2006	39	51.326 (1.952)	72	37.474 (1.093)	111	< 0.001***
Number of Police Stations, 2006	39	21.201 (2.310)	72	12.820 (0.929)	111	0.001***
Number of Cinemas, 2006	39	7.371 (1.126)	72	4.623 (0.200)	111	0.018**
Employment, 2006	39	36.241 (0.718)	72	33.193 (0.703)	111	0.003***
Percent Married, 2006	39	36.524 (0.219)	72	36.003 (0.271)	111	0.138
Road Density, 2006	39	3.726 (1.920)	72	0.757 (0.088)	111	0.124
Betweenness Road Centrality, 2006	39	0.015 (0.003)	72	0.077 (0.011)	111	< 0.001***
Political Violence Acts, 2006	39	1.333 (0.593)	72	5.125 (2.458)	111	0.137

Note: This table presents baseline differences in district characteristics between visited and unvisited districts, along with statistical tests for differences. The treatment group consists of districts visited by the lawyers, while the control group includes districts that were not visited. The table reports means and standard deviations for pre-treatment covariates, as well as the p -value from a two-sample t -test. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

TABLE B3
EFFECT OF LAWYERS' VISITS: CONTROLLING FOR TIME-INTERACTED DISTRICT
CHARACTERISTICS

	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Judiciary	Pro-Lawyers Votes Share	Cases Filed	Trust in Army
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lawyers' Visits $\times$ Post-Movement	-9.368*** (2.682)	3.408** (1.602)	2.806* (1.487)	0.051* (0.029)	-5.288*** (1.250)
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Road Density X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Violence X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Employment X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Houshold Income X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
# of Working Days per Month X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Share of Married People X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	61.722	21.468	.21	71.426
Observations	666	666	1638	2326	666

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and key outcome variables, accounting for differential trends in pretreatment characteristics. The dependent variables are Musharraf Approval, specifically the answer to the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?", trust in judiciary, specifically the answer to the question "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?", Pro-Movement votes for Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, number of cases filed (measured in 100,000s), and trust in army, specifically the answer to the question "Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?" The unit of observation is district-quarter for Columns (1), (2), and (5), and district-year for Columns (3) and (4). The main regressor is the interaction *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one following March 2007. All specifications include district and corresponding time fixed effects. Trust in the police is included as a control in Columns (1), (2), and (5). Share of rejected votes, number of registered voters, and number of polled votes are used as control variables in Column (3). All columns control for the reported baseline district characteristics, interacted with time fixed effects. For districts with missing control variables, they are replaced with the mean. Robust standard errors are clustered at the district level. * $p < 0.10$, $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$.

TABLE B4
MATCHED DIFFERENCE-IN-DIFFERENCES

	Musharraf Approval		Pro-Lawyer Votes	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lawyers' Visited X Post-Movement	-10.941*** (2.365)	-15.478*** (4.347)	3.399*** (0.763)	2.390** (0.990)
Matched Sample	No	Yes	No	Yes
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	39.029	21.468	22.264
Observations	666	282	1638	1306

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and key outcome variables (where data availability permits matching) using a Matched Difference-in-Differences approach ([Jäger & Heining, 2022](#)). Matching is performed according to the availability of data on time-varying control variables, including trust in the police and trust in the judiciary (Column 2), as well as electoral characteristics such as the share of rejected votes, total polled votes, and total registered voters (Column 4). The unit of observation is district-by-quarter for Columns (1) and (2), and district-by-year for Columns (3) and (4). Columns (1) and (2) examine public approval of General Pervez Musharraf, while Columns (3) and (4) report electoral outcomes for the pro-Lawyers' Movement party (PML-N). The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. All specifications include district and time fixed effects—quarterly for Columns (1) and (2), and election-year fixed effects for Columns (3) and (4). Robust standard errors are clustered at the district level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

TABLE B6
ALI AHMAD KURD AND AITAZAZ AHSAN VISITS - IMPACT ON GENERAL
MUSHARRAF'S APPROVAL, TRUST IN ARMY, TRUST IN COURTS, AND VOTE SHARES

	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Judiciary	Pro-Lawyers Votes	Cases Instituted	Trust in Army
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Panel A: Ali Ahmad Kurd Visits. Difference-in-Differences</i>					
Leader 1 Visits X Post-Movement	-15.037*** (2.511)	4.274** (2.148)	6.445*** (1.903)	0.232*** (0.073)	-8.240*** (1.394)
<i>Panel B. Aitazaz Ahsan Visits</i>					
Leader 2 Visits X Post-Movement	-11.746*** (2.751)	4.076 (3.022)	7.887*** (1.989)	0.346*** (0.103)	-7.898*** (1.775)
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	61.722	21.468	.207	71.426
Observations	666	666	1638	2358	666

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and key outcome variables using visits by two prominent leaders of the Lawyers' Movement. The outcome variables include: public approval of General Pervez Musharraf, based on responses to the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?"; trust in the judiciary, based on responses to "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?"; pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share (PML-N); number of cases filed (measured in 100,000s); and trust in the army, based on responses to "Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?" The main regressor is the interaction term *Leader Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Leader Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the respective leader, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. Panel A presents the effects of visits by Ali Ahmad Kurd, while Panel B presents the effects of visits by Aitazaz Ahsan. All regressions include robust standard errors clustered at the district level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

TABLE B5
EFFECT OF LAWYERS' VISITS ON ELECTION OUTCOMES

	Vote Share %			
	MMA	PML-Q	PPP	MQM
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A. Major Parties</i>				
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	-0.833** (0.395)	1.157 (1.133)	1.465 (1.680)	4.145 (3.418)
Mean Dep. Var.	15.576	29.11	30.611	21.938
<i>Panel B. Other Parties</i>				
	ANP	BNP	NPP	PML-F
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	-0.361 (0.380)	0.193 (0.126)	0.098 (0.099)	0.681 (0.524)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	1.43	.058	.083	.394
Observations	4976	4976	4976	4976

Note: This table presents the effect of lawyers' visits on the vote shares of parties other than the pro-Lawyers' Movement party, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). These parties represent the major political forces for which both pre- and post-Lawyers' Movement data are available. Vote shares are measured as a proportion of total votes, consistent with the approach used for PML-N. The four major parties included in Panel A are Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Islamist alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). Panel B extends the analysis to smaller parties, including the Awami National Party (ANP), Balochistan National Party (BNP), National People's Party (NPP), and Jamhoori Wattan Party (JWP). Together, these parties span the ideological and regional political spectrum, providing a nearly comprehensive summary of electoral competition among parties fielding candidates in national elections. The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. All regressions include district and election-year fixed effects. Robust standard errors, clustered at the district level, are reported in parentheses. All specifications control for the share of rejected votes, total polled votes, and total registered voters. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE B7
CONTROLLING FOR BASELINE DIFFERENCES IN ROAD CENTRALITY AND ROAD DENSITY

	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Judiciary	Pro-Lawyers Movement	Cases Filed	Trust in Army
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lawyers' Visited X Post-Movement	-8.261*** (2.436)	3.539** (1.625)	3.158* (1.884)	0.085** (0.037)	-5.452*** (1.230)
Centrality Score X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Road Density X Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	45.343	61.722	21.468	.21	71.426
Observations	666	666	1638	2358	666

Note: This table reports estimates from Equation 1, examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and key outcome variables while controlling for road network characteristics. The outcome variables include public approval of General Pervez Musharraf ("Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?"), trust in the judiciary ("Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?"), pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share (PML-N), number of cases filed (measured in 100,000s), and trust in the army ("Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?"). The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. All regressions include district and year fixed effects. Betweenness centrality is defined as the normalized number of shortest paths between two districts that pass through a given district, while road density is calculated as the total length of roads (in kilometers) divided by district area (in square kilometers). Robust standard errors clustered at the district level are reported in parentheses. Trust in the police is included as a control in Columns (1), (2), and (5), while the share of rejected votes, number of registered voters, and number of polled votes are included as controls in Column (3).

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

TABLE B8
EFFECT OF LAWYERS' VISITS ON VOTE SHARES - ADJUSTED FOR ELECTORAL FRAUD

	Pro-Lawyers Movement Vote Share %			
	Difference-in-Differences		Synthetic Difference-in-Differences	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lawyers' Visits X Post-Movement	3.333* (1.774)	3.553** (1.766)	3.333*** (0.829)	3.308*** (0.872)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	21.983	21.983	21.983	21.983
Observations	1638	1638	1638	1638

Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share, adjusted for electoral fraud. The unit of observation is electoral district by election year. Vote shares are adjusted using data from the Free and Fair Election Network's (FAFEN) 2008 election report. FAFEN deployed 20,000 independent observers to monitor 25 polling stations per district and conducted a random sample survey of 1,000 registered voters in each district to estimate voter intentions and construct fraud-adjusted vote tallies. The resulting adjusted vote shares are used in the analysis. Of the 273 electoral district observations, 206 (75.46%) are adjusted for fraud in the 2008 election. The pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share is represented by the vote share of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. All regressions include electoral district and election-year fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered at the district level are reported in Columns (1) and (2), while Columns (3) and (4) report standard errors computed using the cluster bootstrap procedure described in [Arkhangelsky et al. \(2021\)](#). All standard errors are shown in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE B9
ROBUSTNESS TO CONLEY SPATIAL CORRELATION

Disatance Cutoff	Dependent Variable				
	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Judiciary	Pro-Lawyers Votes	Cases Instituted	Trust in Army
Baseline p-val.	< 0.01	0.036	0.041	0.009	< 0.01
50 km, p-val.	< 0.01	0.036	0.026	0.017	< 0.01
100 km, p-val.	< 0.01	0.025	0.029	0.025	< 0.01
150 km, p-val.	< 0.01	0.035	0.010	0.076	< 0.01
200 km, p-val.	< 0.01	0.044	< 0.01	0.056	0.001
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean. Dep. Var.	45.343	61.722	21.468	.211	71.426
Observations	666	666	1638	2358	666

Note: *Note:* This table presents robustness checks for the baseline regression in [Equation 1](#) using Conley standard errors. Four distance cutoffs—50 km, 100 km, 150 km, and 200 km—are applied, and the corresponding p -values are reported. Baseline p -values with conventional clustering at the district level are shown for comparison. The dependent variables include public approval of General Pervez Musharraf (“Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?”), trust in the judiciary (“Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?”), pro-Lawyers’ Movement vote share (PML-N), number of cases filed (measured in 100,000s), and trust in the army (“Do you trust the Army’s ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?”). The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers’ Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers’ Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. All regressions include district and time fixed effects.

TABLE B10
ADJUSTING FOR MULTIPLE HYPOTHESIS TESTING

	Musharraf Approval	Trust in Army	Trust in Judiciary
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Lawyers' Visited X Post-Movement	-10.178*** (2.417)	-6.058*** (1.252)	3.824** (1.725)
Sharpened q-value	[.001]***	[.001]***	[.01]***
Romano-Wolf Corrected p-value	{.0099}***	{.0099}***	{.0099}***
Time Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
District Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Dep. Var.	43.573	71.426	61.722
Observations	666	666	666

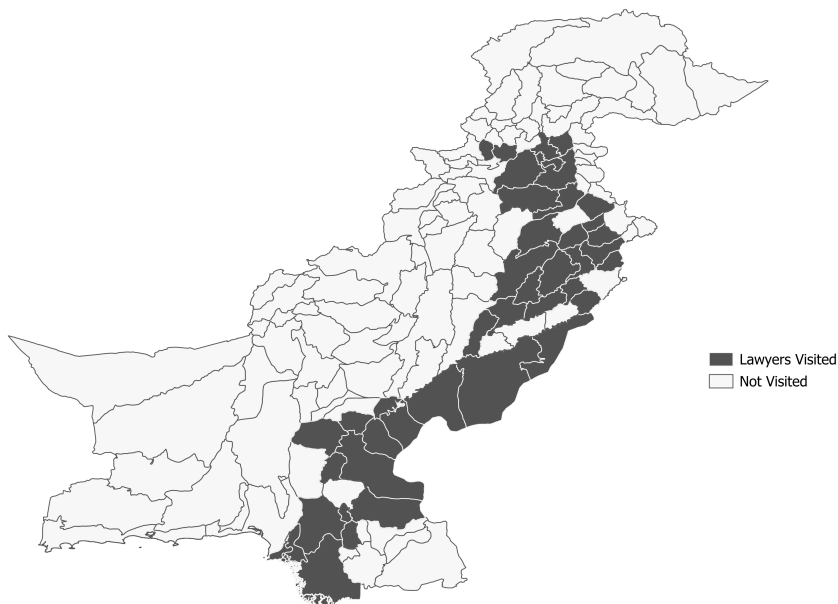
Note: This table reports estimates from [Equation 1](#), examining the relationship between lawyers' visits and key outcome variables while adjusting for multiple hypothesis testing. The unit of observation is district-by-quarter. The dependent variables include public approval of General Pervez Musharraf ("Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?"), trust in the judiciary ("Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?"), and trust in the army ("Do you trust the Army's ability to maintain national security without compromising human rights?"). The main regressor is the interaction term *Lawyers' Visits* $\times$ *Post-Movement*, where *Lawyers' Visits* is a binary indicator equal to one for districts visited by the lawyers, and *Post-Movement* equals one for periods following March 2007. All regressions include district and year fixed effects. To account for multiple hypothesis testing, both sharpened *q*-values and Romano–Wolf adjusted *p*-values are reported. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

FIGURE B1: Lawyers' Visits Across Pakistan

Panel A: Lawyers' Caravan



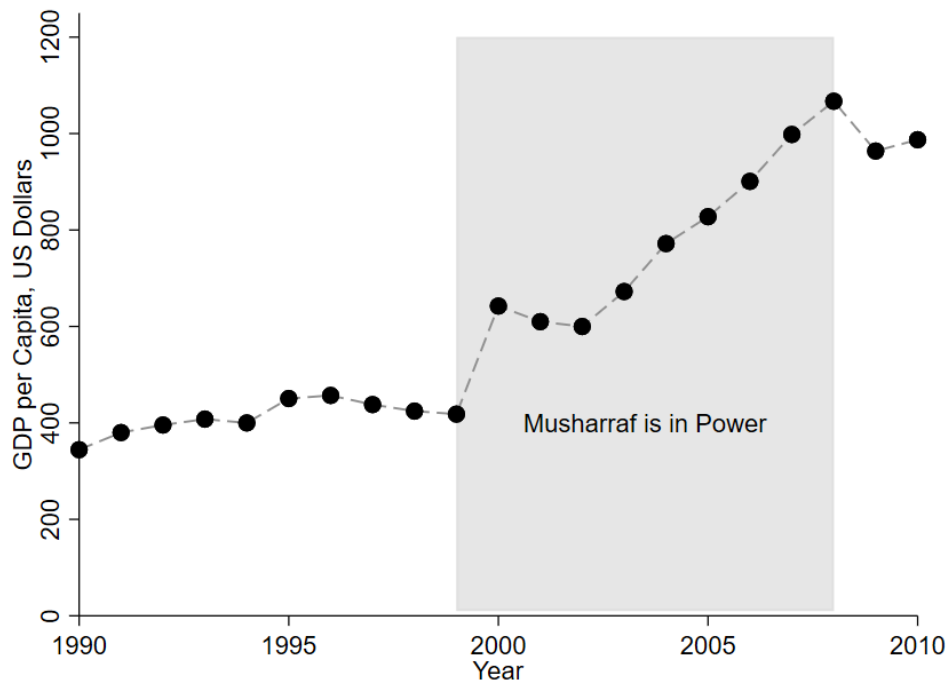
Panel B: Map of Lawyers' Visits



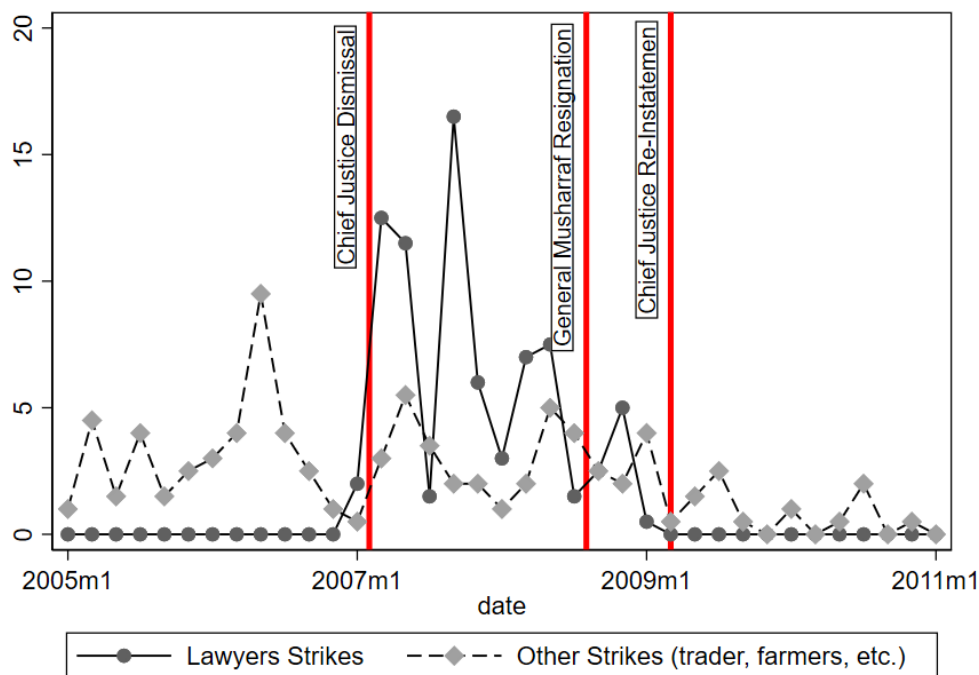
Note: The figure provides a visual representation of a lawyers' caravan and the locations visited, shown in Panels A and B, respectively. Panel A illustrates a typical caravan procession, while Panel B presents a map of Pakistan highlighting all locations visited by lawyers prior to the February 2008 elections. Shaded districts indicate visited areas; unshaded districts indicate those that were not visited.

FIGURE B2: The Context around the Lawyers' Movement

Panel A: GDP per Capita Over Time



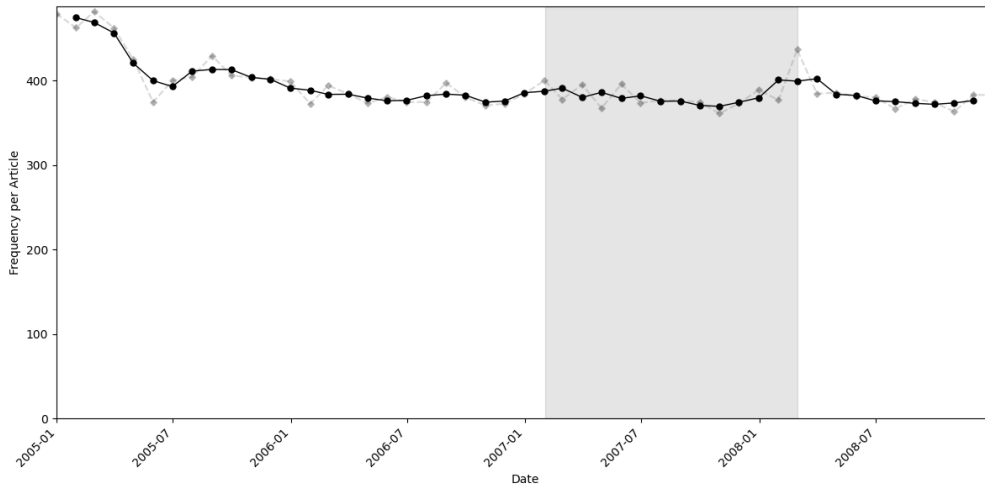
Panel B: Lawyer and Other Strikes Overtime



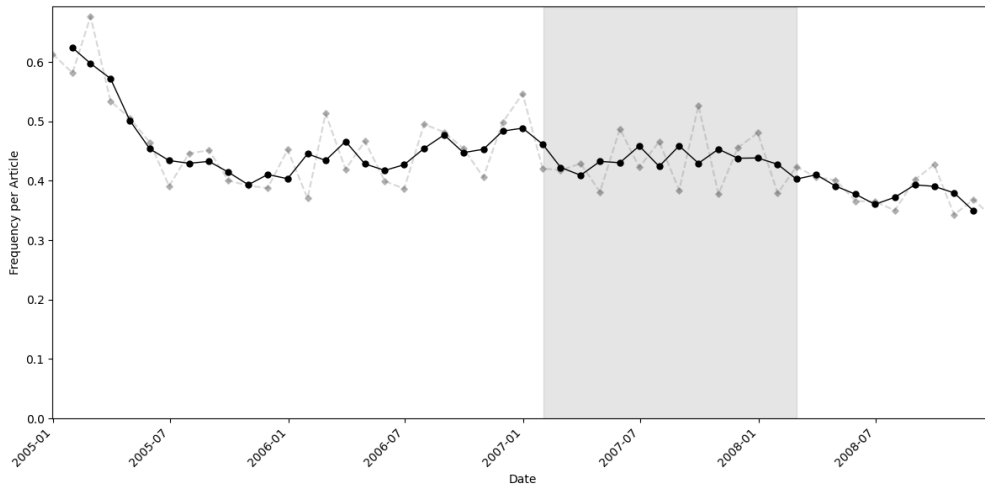
Note: Note: This figure illustrates the socioeconomic context surrounding the Lawyers' Movement. Panel A shows annual GDP per capita growth, while Panel B depicts the frequency of court boycotts by lawyers across major cities, segmented into periods before, during, and after the movement. It also includes strike activity by other civil society groups such as farmers' and traders' unions. The solid line represents strikes organized by various district bar associations of lawyers, while the dotted line denotes strikes led by farmers' and traders' unions. The first vertical line marks the start of the Lawyers' Movement, triggered by General Musharraf's dismissal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry in March 2007. The second vertical line indicates General Musharraf's resignation in August 2008, and the third marks the reinstatement of Chief Justice Chaudhry in March 2009.

FIGURE B3: **Placebo Test for News Text Analysis**

Panel A: 20 Most Popular Functional Words



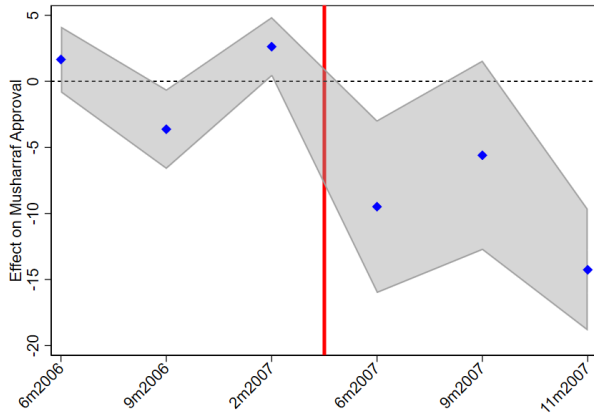
Panel B: Islam



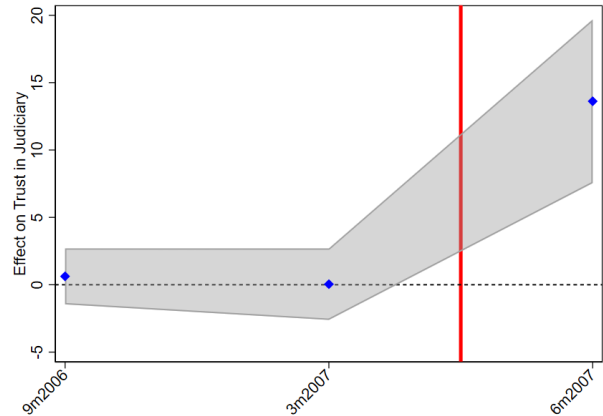
This figure presents a placebo test using functional words and a commonly occurring term from the Pakistani newspaper corpus. The panels display results from a text analysis of *Dawn*, Pakistan's most prominent newspaper. Each panel tracks the evolution of term frequency per article for the corresponding word or phrase. The solid black line represents a three-month moving average of mentions per article, while the dashed gray line indicates the number of entries per article. Panel A examines the 20 most frequent functional words (e.g., articles, pronouns, prepositions), while Panel B shows the evolution of the term "Islam." The shaded area denotes the period of the Lawyers' Movement, beginning with the dismissal of the Chief Justice in March 2007.

FIGURE B4: Lawyers' Visits and Institutional Outcomes - Synthetic DiD

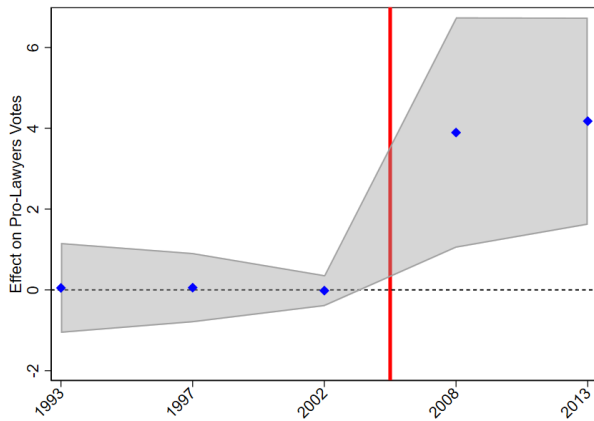
Panel A: Musharraf Approval



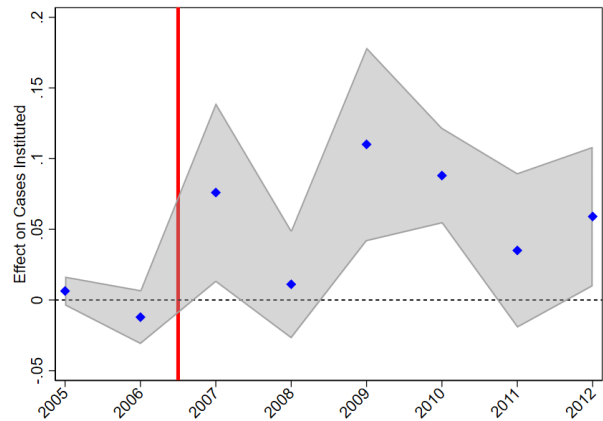
Panel B: Trust in Judiciary



Panel C: Pro-Lawyers Votes



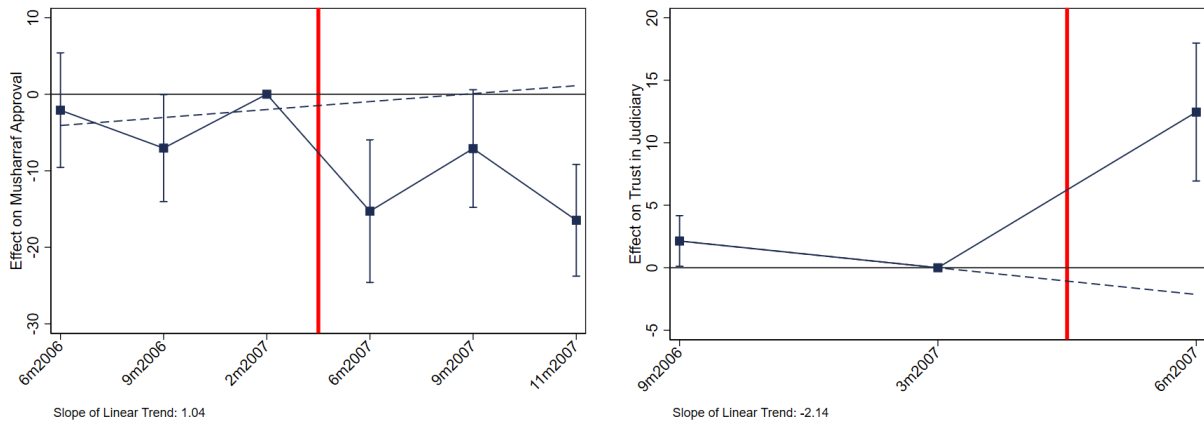
Panel D: Cases Filed



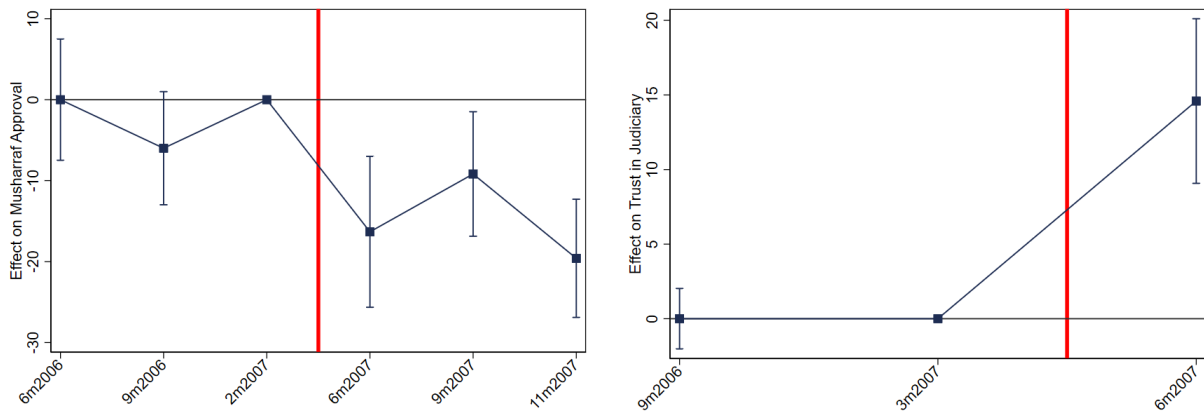
Note: This figure presents a Synthetic Difference-in-Differences (SDID) event study assessing the impact of lawyers' visits on political and institutional preferences. Panel A tracks changes in public approval of General Musharraf, based on responses to the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?" Panel B examines trust in the judiciary, based on responses to the question: "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?" The unit of observation is district-by-quarter for Panels A and B. Panel C analyzes the electoral effects of lawyers' visits on pro-Lawyers' Movement vote share (PML-N), measured at the district-by-election-year level. Panel D focuses on case filings, measured at the district-by-year level. The red vertical line marks the onset of the movement. The SDID estimates are computed using the cluster bootstrap procedure described in Section 4.4 of [Clarke et al. \(2023\)](#), following Algorithm 4 in [Arkhangelsky et al. \(2021\)](#). The voting data span three pre-movement elections (1993, 1997, 2002), using the 2002 election as the baseline, and two post-movement periods (2008 and 2013).

FIGURE B5: Impact on Musharraf Approval and support for the Judiciary. (Rambachan & Roth, 2023)’s Credible Approach to Parallel Trends

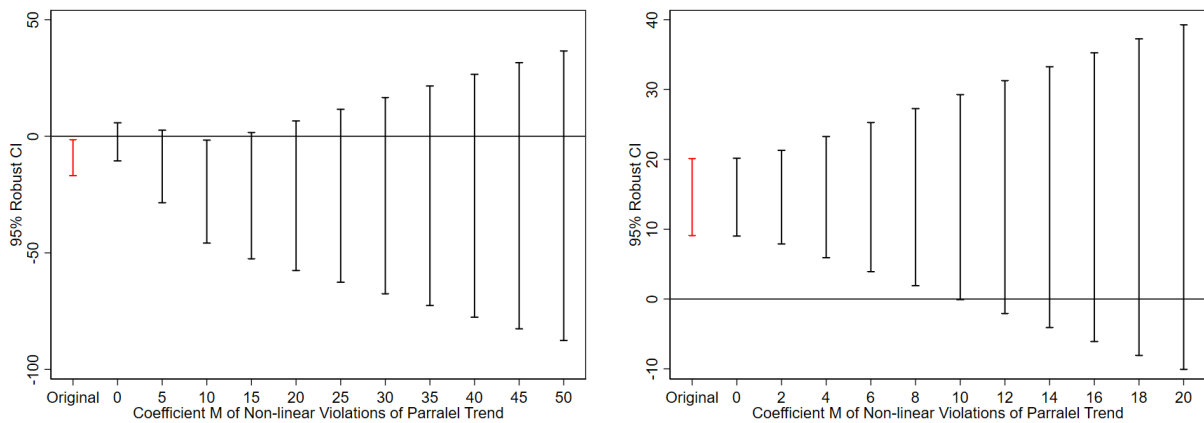
Panel A: Estimated Linear Trend



Panel B: Rotated Event Study

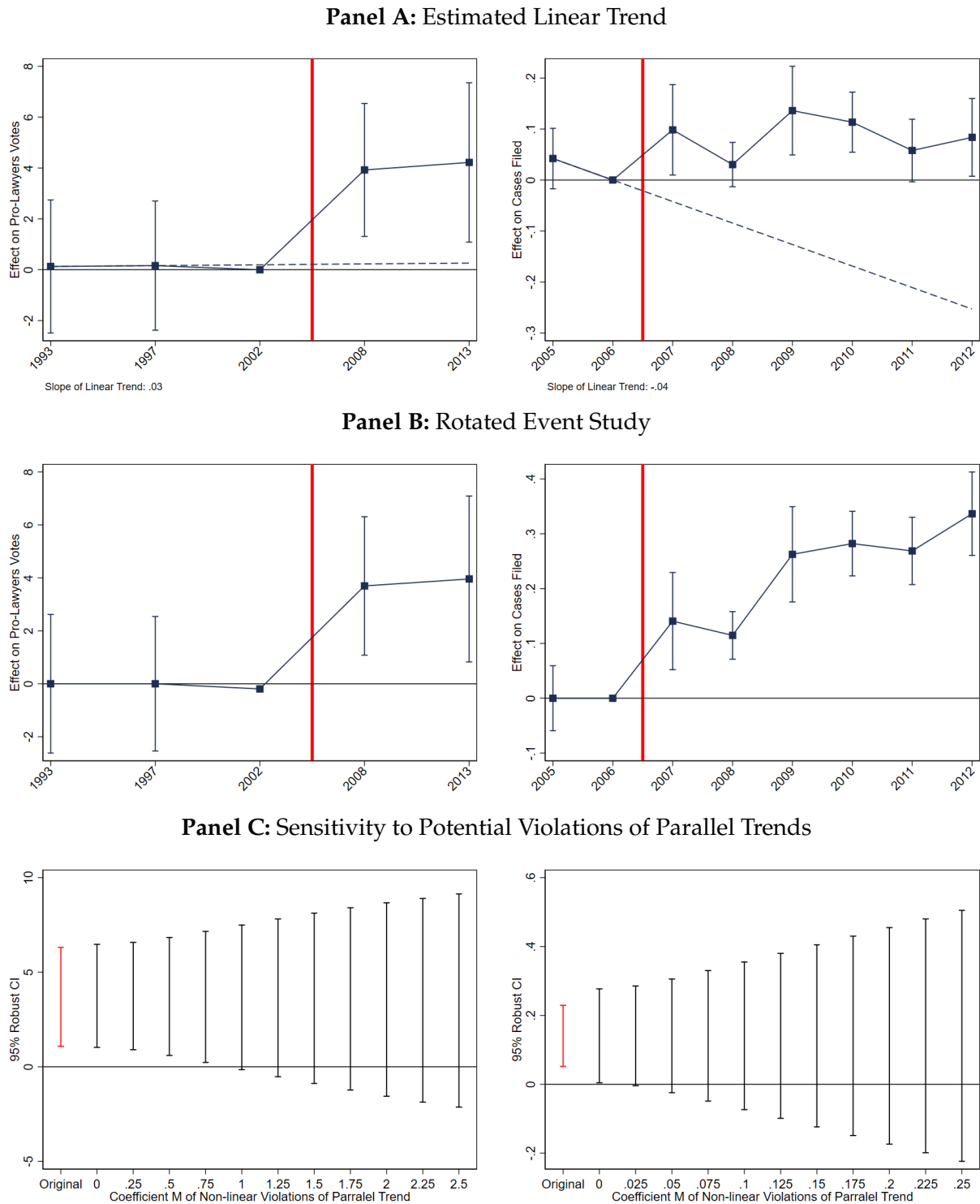


Panel C: Sensitivity to Potential Violations of Parallel Trends



Note: Note: This figure analyzes potential violations of the parallel trends assumption. Panel A overlays a linear trend—estimated using pre-treatment data—onto the event-study coefficients and extrapolates it into the post-treatment period. Panel B presents the event-study estimates adjusted for this estimated trend. Panel C reports the sensitivity of these results to the linear extrapolation of the pre-treatment coefficients, using the “honest approach to parallel trends” proposed by Rambachan and Roth (2023). In this panel, we report confidence sets for the average of all post-treatment coefficients, computed under the constraint that the slope of the pre-trend coefficients varies by no more than M across consecutive periods.

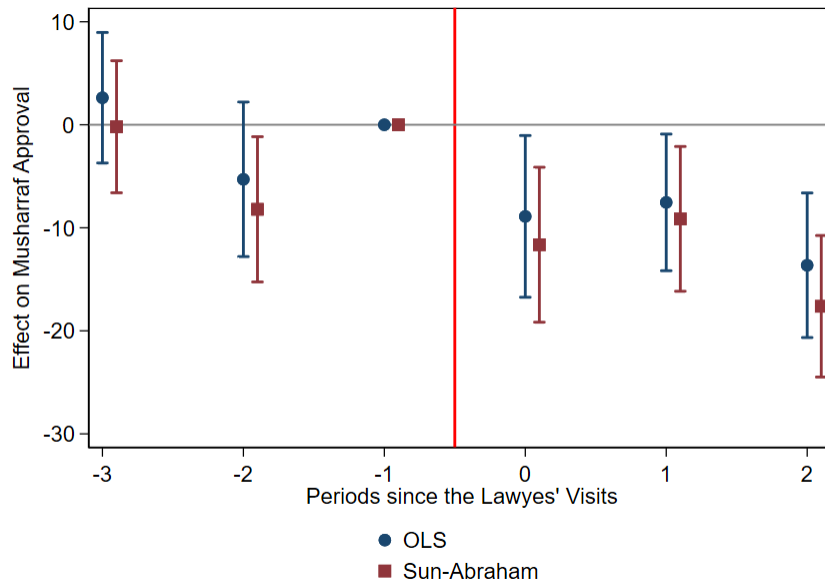
FIGURE B6: **Impact on Pro-Lawyers Votes and Cases Instituted.** (Rambachan & Roth, 2023)'s Credible Approach to Parallel Trends



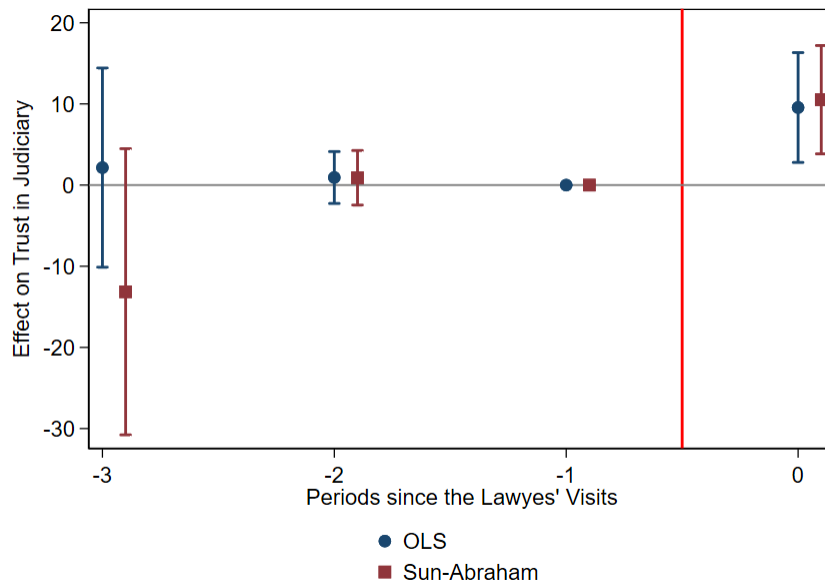
Note: *Note:* This figure analyzes potential violations of the parallel trends assumption. Panel A overlays a linear trend—estimated using pre-treatment data—onto the event-study coefficients and extrapolates it into the post-treatment period. Panel B presents the event-study estimates adjusted for this estimated trend. Panel C reports the sensitivity of these results to the extrapolation of the pre-treatment trend, using the “honest approach to parallel trends” proposed by Rambachan and Roth (2023). In this panel, we report confidence sets for the average of all post-treatment coefficients, computed under the constraint that the slope of the pre-trend coefficients deviates by no more than M across consecutive periods.

FIGURE B7: **Robustness to Staggered Adoption**

Panel A: Impact on Musharraf



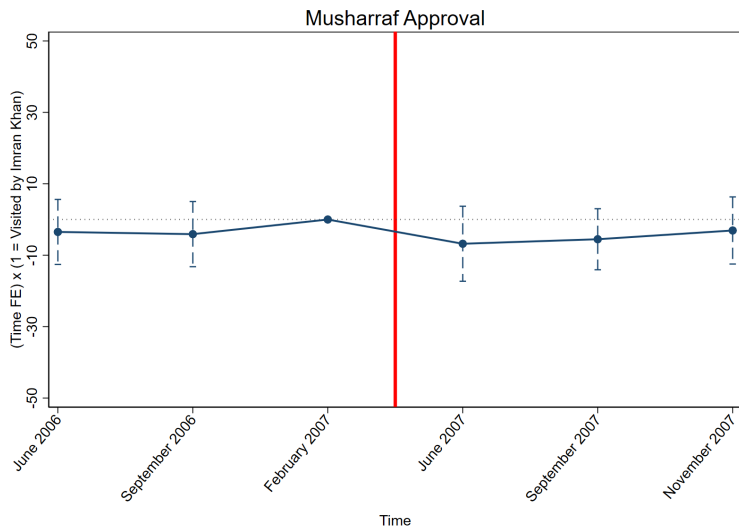
Panel B: Impact on Trust in Judiciary



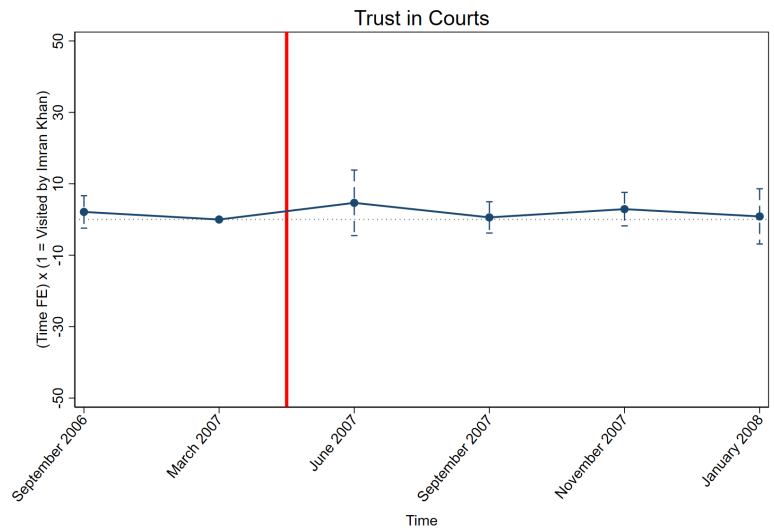
Note: This figure presents a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) event study assessing the impact of lawyers' visits on approval of Musharraf and trust in the judiciary. Panel A shows results for Musharraf approval, treating districts visited in June 2007 as treated in subsequent periods. Estimates from a two-way fixed effects (TWFE) specification are displayed alongside the estimator of [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#). Panel B presents analogous results for trust in the judiciary. Standard errors are clustered at the district level. Owing to staggered adoption, we are able to estimate one additional pre-treatment placebo period compared to our baseline [Figure II](#).

FIGURE B8: Impact of Placebo Visits by Imran Khan

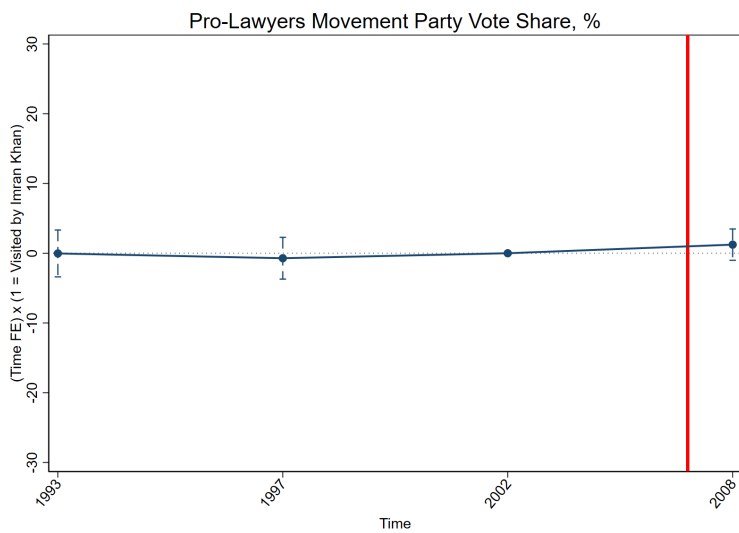
Musharraf Approval



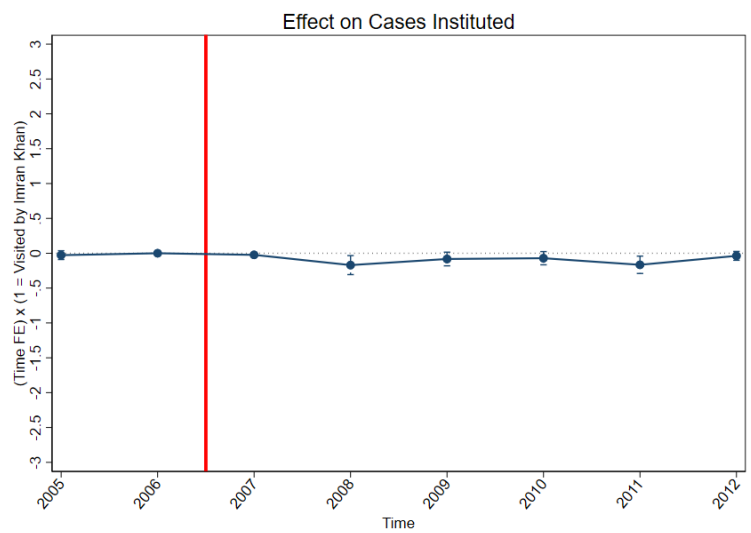
Trust in Judiciary



Pro-Lawyers Votes



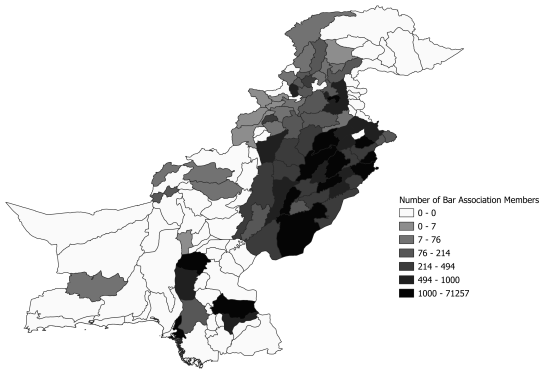
Cases Filed



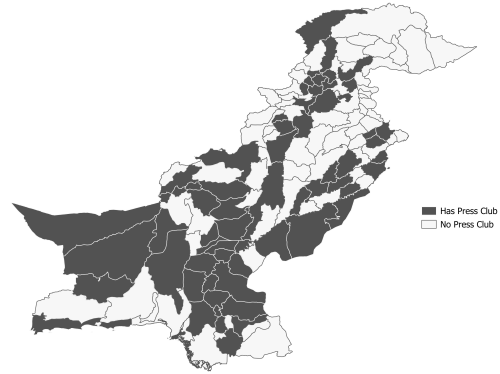
Note: This figure presents Difference-in-Differences (DiD) event study estimates of the effect of Imran Khan's post-Lawyers' Movement visits on "pre-treatment" outcomes: approval of Musharraf, trust in the judiciary, pro-Lawyers' Movement votes, and cases filed. The dependent variables include responses to the questions: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Pervez Musharraf is handling his job?" and "Are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the judicial process?" These data are sourced from the International Republican Institute (IRI). For electoral outcomes, the dependent variable is the vote share of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), based on official results from the Election Commission of Pakistan. The red vertical line marks the onset of the Lawyers' Movement. Cases filed are measured in units of 100,000.

FIGURE B9: Geographic Distributions of Historical Networks in Pakistan

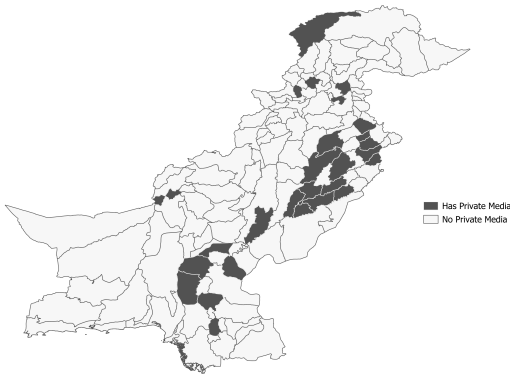
Panel A: Lawyers' Bar Association Members



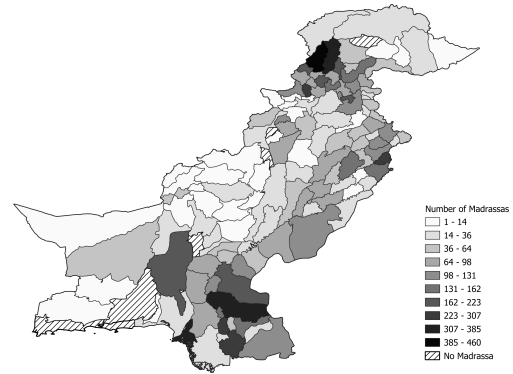
Panel B: Press Clubs



Panel C: Private Media



Panel D: Madrassas



Note: The figure presents the spatial distribution of historical pre-treatment networks—lawyers' associations (Panel A), press clubs (Panel B), private radio media (Panel C), and madrassas (Panel D). These sources of exogenous institutional variation are leveraged in our mechanism analysis to assess how local civic infrastructure shaped the impact of lawyers' visits.

SUPPLEMENTARY ROBUSTNESS FIGURES

Figures on turnout, informal courts, and additional robustness checks are available in the supplementary material [here](#).