



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page# 6720-6732

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22227187>**The Future of Judicial Reform in Pakistan: Digitalization, AI and Access to Justice****Amjad Ali Shah**

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amjadshah43@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The Pakistani courts have over two million pending cases, hundreds of district courts which lack judges and a populace where the justice process remains a paper, travel and delay affair. The judiciary transitioned from the small-scale automation projects to a nationwide reform programme between 2025 and 2026, with Supreme Court Rules mandating the use of electronic files, a partnership between the Law and Justice Commission and the National Information Technology Board, a National Judicial Analytics Dashboard, an Honorable Federal Constitutional Court pilot on paperless files, and National Guidelines, approved by the NJPMC in February, 2026 on the use of artificial intelligence in judicial institutions. A major field experiment involving over 1,500 trial judges revealed that a locally-developed research instrument, coupled with targeted training, increased case disposal while not impacting the quality of the performance. This article discusses these developments in the light of the constitutional guarantee of fair trial under Article 10A, literature on digital justice and legal technology, feasibility constraints of connectivity, literacy, data protection and integrity of the automation system. It contends that the digitalization and AI can only enhance access to justice when it is seen as public infrastructure and not as gadgets, when the ultimate decision-making power lies with humans and not with AI, and when it extends beyond the Hon'ble Superior Courts to the district courts and unrepresented litigant.

Keywords: *Judicial Reform, Digital Courts, E-Filing, Artificial Intelligence, Access to Justice, Pakistan, Case Backlog, JudgeGPT, National Judicial Policy Making Committee*

Introduction

Access to justice is not only the right to enter a courtroom. It is a right to understand a claim, to file it without ruinous cost, to be heard in a reasonable time, and to receive a reasoned based decision that can be enforced. Article 10A of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees fair trial and due process. That guarantee is strained when more than two million matters sit in queues, when more than a thousand District courts stand idle for want of judges, and when a litigant from a tehsil must travel to a provincial capital to file a petition or collect a certified copy (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026b, 2026c).

For two decades Pakistan's official answer to delay has been a mixture of policy circulars, extra benches, and computerisation of cause lists. The National Judicial Policy of 2009, a brain child of the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee, and successive Law and Justice Commission reports treated information technology as a supporting tool (National Judicial Policy Making Committee, 2009; Raza et al., 2024). What changed after 2024 is its gigantic scale and legal recognition. The Supreme Court Rules, 2025 now mandates an electronic filing of petitions at the apex court and its registries. In October 2025 the Law and Justice Commission and the National Information Technology Board signed an agreement to build an analytical dashboard for the whole justice sector and launched an e-office system inside the Hon'able Supreme Court (Iqbal, 2025; Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025a). The dashboard went live in

February 2026 (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026b). In February 2026 the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee adopted National Guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence in judicial institutions, aligning court practice with the National AI Policy 2025 and with the Hon'orable Supreme Court's own warning that machines may assist but must not replace the judges in the ground breaking **case of Ishfaq Ahmed v. Mushtaq Ahmed, (2025SCP 112)**.

At the same time, a research partnership between the Federal Judicial Academy and academic teams produced JudgeGPT, a retrieval system trained on Pakistani judgments and statutes. A randomised trial involving 1,559 trial judges found that access plus targeted training raised disposal by about 6.3 percent at median district exposure, with no increase in appeals and a slight improvement in writing measures (AEA RCT Registry, 2024; Express Tribune, 2025). That result is rare in the global literature: most writing on judicial AI is either speculative or based on small pilots. Pakistan now has both a constitutional judgment and a field experiment. The future of reform will not be decided by dashboards alone. Digital systems can hide as well as reveal. They can exclude citizens who lack devices, connectivity, or Urdu and English literacy. They can concentrate power in registries that control templates. They can leak sensitive family and criminal records. They can also, if designed with the user in mind, cut the number of visits a poor litigant must make, publish cause lists that actually match the day's work, and give judges time to read the file rather than search for it (Raza et al., 2024; Susskind, 2019; UNESCO, 2024). This article asks four questions. **First**, what does the literature on digital justice, legal technology, and access to justice imply for a country with Pakistan's caseload and institutional design? **Second**, how far has Pakistan moved from paper courts to digital work flow? **Third**, what is the proper place of artificial intelligence after Ishfaq Ahmed and the 2026 Guidelines? **Fourth**, which risks and policy choices will determine whether technology narrows or widens the justice gap? The two thematic sections that follow the methodology treat, in turn, the digitalisation of court process and the arrival of AI as an access to justice question. They are the substance of this brief.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in character to study the policy analysis using doctrinal reading, process tracing and secondary empirical sources. The tools of doctrinal research are Article 10A of the Constitution, the Honorable Supreme Court Rules 2025, the National Guidelines for Use of Artificial Intelligence in Judicial Institutions, the judgment in Ishfaq Ahmed v. Mushtaq Ahmed (2025 SCP 112) and the Electronic Transactions Ordinance 2002, along with relevant provisions of the Qanun-e-Shahadat Order 1984 concerning electronic records and video evidence. These writings set out what the law now allows and continues to ban.

It is important to make a note of the vocabulary. In official Pakistan, the terms digitalisation, automation and e-courts are used interchangeably. They are not. Automation can be a cause list created from a spreadsheet. Digitalization is a file that resides as data from the first page to the decree. An e-court is a hearing or filing without the party's body in the building. AI is another step which processes text or forecasts a date. Scanned PDFs are made intelligent by mixing the words. This article separates them out to test claims. The population of the reformers is also readily not defined. Judges and registrars, they are within the system. It is at the edge that advocates live. The one whose land mutation is stayed, who has not been paid his wages or who has not been ordered to pay his maintenance, cannot be found among either of these groups. If it is planned to reform the first two, then it will be deemed modern, but it will not reform the third. That's why access to justice is in the title and not just efficiency. Anyone who would define efficiency with the aim of the institution alone is in the business of

administration. Real reform on ground is efficiency which short circuit the citizen's road to inconvenience and expense.

Literature Review

There are four related traditions of writing about courts and the technology: access to justice studies; court administration and case flow management; legal informatics and artificial intelligence; and the political economy of judicial reform in developing states.

Remedies and rights on paper are the starting point for access to justice scholarship.

Cappelletti and Garth (1978) identified the concepts of access as a 'wave of reforms' that included legal aid, public interest litigation and simplification of procedure. Subsequent research incorporated additional factors/fields of the same problem, such as geography, language, disability, gender and digital exclusion (Rhode, 2004; UNDP, 2025). In Pakistan, the World Justice Project has consistently ranked the country low on its rule of law index on civil justice, identifying delay, cost, and weak enforcement as some of the reasons for Pakistan's low position, while noting that it is not a lack of laws (World Justice Project, 2023; ResearchGate civil justice study, 2025). By the Eighteenth Amendment, Article 10A was added to the Constitution which granted a fair trial as a constitutional right, and scholars are now examining how digital tools can make this right operational for people who never even get before an Hon'orable High Court (2025, Ishfaq Ahmed v. Mushtaq Ahmed; LUMS SAHSOL, 2025).

Delay in court administration is not necessarily a legal issue but involves effective court management skills. The Steelman et al. (2004) and European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice indicators focus on the early control of the file, realistic listing and measurement of the age of pending cases. In Pakistani official documents, the same terms have been used since the introduction of the National Judicial Policy in 2009: model courts, double dockets, prioritised categories and now the availability of an analytics dashboard that's supposed to make it easy to see the disposal rates in real time (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025b, 2026b, 2026c). Judges, court rooms, and a guaranteed time frame, as required in the case of a competition, ensure that the dashboards are a picture of the crisis rather than a solution to it, critics note (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026c; World Justice Project, 2023).

The march of legal technology from office automation to the prediction of legal outcomes and the use of LLM has transformed the trajectory of legal technology that has now shifted from office automation to predictive analytics and LLM (Large Language Model). **Susskind** pointed out that a lot of what lawyers do is information processing, and that the courts of tomorrow will be more service online than a place (Susskind 2019, 2023). In his later writings on the subject of thinking about AI, he cautions institutions against panicking and going with the trend. The usefully middle is task design: let the machine do the repetitive, but checkable, work; let the human do the work that calls for analytical choice, where there is uncertainty.

Surden and others have identified assistive tools from systems that claim to make decisions (Surden, 2014, 2019). It is not a theoretical but a practical solution as shown by Reiling (2020), who has demonstrated how European courts can use AI systems for routing and anonymisation while maintaining accountability of judges. Sourdin chronicles the varied adoption of online hearings and research tools and the counter-cultural reaction that ensues when such tools are adopted without training (Sourdin, 2021).

The European Ethical Charter on the use of AI in judicial systems, as well as the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the subsequent UNESCO guidelines for courts call for the principles of transparency, human control, non-discrimination and data protection (CEPEJ, 2018; UNESCO, 2021, 2024). These are the international yardsticks by which donors, investors and foreign courts will read Pakistan's 2026 Guidelines and ensure that the

judgments are announced in predictable time frame. Comparative practice is not consistent. **Estonia and Singapore** developed e-filing and hearing platforms which were truly integrated and viewed as the court as a digital service. **China's** smart courts appeared on a mass scale with their own ethical issues: surveillance and what constitutes a public court. Video hearings and limited research tools have been used in **English and American courts** and various cases have been well-publicized in terms of citation errors (Sourdin, 2021; Broussard, 2018) with a warning issued by judges and courts in both the countries to not allow unsupervised chatbots to be used. Wherever a court is tempted to consider a fluent paragraph as a true paragraph, Broussard's riff on artificial unintelligence is applicable. Authority is not fluency.

The 'outside' is now the 'inside'. As per the Hon'orable Supreme Court in *Ishfaq Ahmed v. Mushtaq Ahmed*, if AI is used within constitutional ambits and it does not take the place of moral thinking then it serves as a means to deliver justice in time. The National Guidelines approved in February 2026 limit the usage of AI to administrative tasks, research, predictive analytics for listing, and drafting assistance, and favor locally trained AI systems with explanations (National Judicial Policy Making Committee, 2026; Balochistan High Court, 2026). The JudgeGPT trial provides the first large-scale experimental evidence from the first national trial judiciary in the Global South (AEA RCT Registry, 2024). This mix of doctrine, soft law and field data is unusual and this is the biggest contribution of the current Pakistani moment to the international judicial literature.

A fourth tradition is to take an interest in reform as a matter of political will. Judicial digitalisation needs phenomenal funding, rule changes by legislature, cooperation from the bar and public trust. Digital systems created in an era of institutional contest can become the basis for a lock-in of the server controllers. It is thus important to be aware of the literature that cautions against the e-filing as a neutral political upgrade (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017; Reiling, 2020). A service delivery lens is added to donor and development literature. UNDP's active rule of law phase in Pakistan supports policy development, training, infrastructure, and digital systems, and has a specific focus on women, and communities that do not attend a formal court of law (UNDP, 2025). Accessing e-filing is a smaller thing on that agenda. It covers legal awareness and referral. If a judiciary digitises its internal desk only, then it will miss the persons it would like to attract with the programmes.

There are few user studies in Pakistani academic work though its scale is now growing. Papers include on the implementation and case management architecture of ICT (Raza et al., 2024), video evidence and the Electronic Transactions Ordinance, 2002, along with Qanun-e-Shahadat Order, 1984 (Academia International Journal, 2025), and critical assessment of the use of AI in civil justice (ResearchGate, 2025).

The reform sequence from 2024 through March 2026 includes the introduction of JudgeGPT in the Federal Judicial Academy, the training of the Federal Judicial Academy and the use of JudgeGPT, the National Information Technology Board issuing a memorandum to the Law and Justice Commission in October 2025, the National Judicial Analytics Dashboard being launched in February 2026, the AI Guidelines being adopted in February 2026, High Court financial systems and deposits being digitised in Punjab and in the Hon'orable Federal Constitutional Court, and consultation on a national standardised e-filing system held under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan as Chair of the Policy Making Committee (Iqbal, 2025; Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025a, 2026b; Dawn, 2026c; Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025c, 2026c). Empirical triangulation is drawn from the figures for pendency in Law and Justice Commission, figures on disposal of cases in honorable district courts under NJPMC, the published trial for JudgeGPT, the work of the UNESCO with the judicial academies in

Pakistan, and the work of UNDP on the rule of law programme on digital innovation and legal aid (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026c; AEA RCT Registry, 2024; UNESCO, 2024; UNDP, 2025). If there is independent evidence that the claim to transformation is overstated, the article states that if official claims to transformation are not supported by independent evidence, the article states that.

Constraints are plain. No fresh surveys of litigants or observation of courts have been conducted. Institutional data (dashboard data) may not reflect informal adjournments or unpublished orders. The jurisdiction of the Hon'orable Federal Constitutional Court and the Hon'orable Supreme Court have been rearranged, making it difficult to make any easy before and after comparisons of apex pendency. The study thus does not claim to be a causal analysis of each module of the reform movement, but an integrated reading of the reform wave. A few words should be devoted to ethics and source criticism. Press notes are published to celebrate launches. Experimental papers are about average treatment effects. Consultation is honored in bar statements. All these are a caricature of a Monday morning in a district court. Where this article has used a press note, it has taken the note as evidence that the institution desired to make a statement and as evidence of a date, but not as evidence of satisfaction with the report. Where it builds upon the JudgeGPT paper it reports its own boundaries: quality does not depend on the understanding of the poorer party, but on the number of appeals and on the text features (AEA RCT Registry, 2024). This is not just a safety measure; it is a method.

Digitalization of Pakistan's Courts

Digitalization here means the conversion of filing, notification, record keeping, listing, payments, and hearings into systems that create a single electronic file and a measurable workflow. It is not the same as placing a scanner in a registry. Raza et al. (2024) and later official notes draw the useful distinction between electronic paperwork and digital workflow: the first photographs the old file; the second acknowledges a filing, numbers it, flags defects, notifies the party, and feeds the judge's list without a second visit.

The inherited paper court

There is no dearth of chronic delay, endemic slippage and infamous backlog in our subordinate courts. In many districts, the number of new cases keeps pace with the number of sitting judges, adjournments are very low cost, the delivery of service is unreliable, and in complex civil cases, satellites of applications follow applications. Huge disposal numbers (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026c) leave official tables for the superior courts with hundreds of thousands of matters still in district courts numbering nearly two million (2025). Institutional and disposal dominance of Punjab is merely because of the dominance of its population. Balochistan's small count of the total is hiding long distances and empty courts. Any national plan that is not based on that geography will appear successful on a dashboard and may not work on the ground.

The codification of procedures in Pakistan was for a world of stamped papers and personal presence. Printed Cause lists. Clarke's, fee and waiting were required for certified copies. Money was kept in cash books that were difficult to review. That was the design that had a preference for lawyers who were living nearby the court, and litigants who could afford to keep coming back. It also created the classic backlog, which the official series still report: in 2025, 2.2 million pending cases, mostly at the district level, and hundreds of courts were nonfunctional due to a lack of staff (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026c; World Justice Project, 2023). Digital means can't appoint judges. They can cut down on the extraneous movements around each sitting judge.

Rules, institutions, and the national frame

Three institutional facts now structure reform. First, the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee, chaired by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan and comprising the Hon'ble Chief Justices of the High Courts, has become the policy board for automation as well as for listing practice. In December 2025 it approved immediate e-filing in district courts as the first phase of a national e-court project and asked Honorable High Courts to amend rules, as Sindh had already done (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025c). Second, the National Judicial Automation Committee, led by Hon'ble Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, drafts technical and ethical instruments that the Policy Making Committee then adopts (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026c; Dawn, 2026d). Third, the Law and Justice Commission, as secretariat, signs delivery agreements with the National Information Technology Board and publishes performance data (Iqbal, 2025).

The Honorable Supreme Court Rules, 2025 moved the apex court onto mandatory electronic filing of petitions and paper books, with digital notices, orders, and certified copies (Dawn, 2026a; Academia International Journal, 2025). That change matters because inferior courts copy superior practice. By December 2025 and February 2026, the Honorable Chief Justice and the Policy Making Committee were already pressing Honorable High Courts and the bar to settle templates for a National Standardised E-Filing System covering the Honorable Supreme Court, Honorable High Courts, and the district courts, and a committee of registrars and bar nominees was tasked to finalise those templates for the Policy Making Committee (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025c; Dawn, 2026c). Bar ownership is not a courtesy. Lawyers are the principal users and critical stakeholders of this policy framework. A System designed only by information officers will fail at the delivery counter.

Dashboards, e-office, and money trails

The October 2025 ceremony at the Honorable Supreme Court launched two products: an e-office for internal file movement and a plan for a judicial analytical dashboard (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025a). The National Judicial Analytics Dashboard, opened in February 2026, is described as a real time view of institution, disposal, and backlog across the Hon'able Supreme Court, Federal Shariat Court, High Courts, and the district courts, with Policy Making Committee indicators built in (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026b; National Information Technology Board, 2026). If the data are complete and timely, the dashboard can support evidence-based listing rather than seasonal crackdowns. If the data are incomplete, it will reward courts that record disposal creatively.

Money is where digitalisation has an immediate integrity dividend. In December 2025 the Hon'able Lahore High Court inaugurated a Civil Courts Accounts Management System integrated with the case system and the National Bank of Pakistan, so that challans carry a unique payment identifier, and a Judicial Deposits and Securities Management System for funds held under court orders (The Nation, 2025). Those modules attack a quiet source of public distrust: lost receipts and frozen deposits. They also create audit trails that paper ledgers never provided. Hon'ble Judges of the Federal Constitutional Court took part in the February 2026 dashboard launch, and the new court began work on a pilot to scan, index, and upload files into its Case Flow Management System with optical character recognition (Dawn, 2026c; Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026b).

Hearings at a distance

In order to save the lawyers and parties from travelling from their respective branches, video links between Supreme Court and branch registries, and e-court rooms in Hon'able High Courts were designed (Academia International Journal, 2025; Raza et al., 2024). During public health emergencies such links were a necessity. They are used during ordinary time to hear

interlocutory matters, for the purpose of recording official witnesses and for taking evidence from distant districts. Electronic records with judicial interpretation, for remote testimony are provided with doctrinal support through the Qanun-e-Shahadat Order and the Electronic Transactions Ordinance. The rest is a matter of procedure: Notice, identification, recording and right of cross examination if a witness is present.

What digitalization can and cannot do

During the period September 2025 to January 2026, the district courts disposed of approximately 1.32 million cases, with the highest number of cases (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2026c) in Punjab. When lists are managed, that's the number of capacities. It does not establish that the disposal was as a result of e-filing. Many districts are still constrained by vacancies (Minute Mirror, 2026). Digitalization contributes to the most when a judge is involved, a file is complete on the first date and parties are notified automatically. The Access to Justice Development Fund has also started the process of computerization and provision of related facilities in underdeveloped districts in the form of e-library and women friendly facilities with an expected completion date of 2026 (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025b). This is the correct geographical priority being undertaken by our charismatic Hon'ble CJP as His Lordship is touring personally in every nook and corner of the country to deliver e-filing and digitilisation of judicial process. Digitalization should therefore be interpreted as court infrastructure, the user, the integrity of the file, the visibility of the list, safety of payment and remote hearing. On top of that infrastructure is the artificial intelligence, and it's only as honest as the record that it reads. If the file is not clean, the intelligent tool searches may produce inherently destructive implications shattering public trust on the innovative concept of judicial digitalisation. Which is why it's important to talk about models on the bench before the unglamorous task of numbering and notifying and storing.

Artificial Intelligence and Access to Justice

AI in courts isn't a single technology. It has search, drafting tools, transcription and translation, prediction tools and even, at the extreme end, risk scores that might affect bail or sentencing. They all come with a different level of risk and a different assertion of constitutional principle. In a matter of minutes, a search tool can guide a judge to a case that has already been reported. It is easier to check a fluent, complete draft and more easily adapted out of fatigue. If the model's features and weights are not open, then the accused person's rank for bail can't be checked. The official stance of Pakistan after 2025 is clearly the judges. The interesting questions that remain are who can be assisted, who is trained to use it, who trains it, and whether the unrepresented citizen benefits from the assistance he provides beyond the fact that his order is faster, and whether the citizen benefits from the assistance of others to train it.

The constitutional baseline: Ishfaq Ahmed

In *Ishfaq Ahmed v. Mushtaq Ahmed* (2025; Dawn, 2025; LUMS SAHSOL, 2025) the Hon'orable Supreme Court used the word "threat" when considering the use of AI as a substitute for human reasoning, empathy, and constitutional fidelity, and "possible tool" when it came to prompt and timely justice in a backlog exceeding two million cases. It embraced assistance in research, sorting and allocation. It did not want a model to record evidence or write the judgment which has a judge's name. That's the right constitutional course of action in a system where the responsibility of a person is placed on Article 10A - not a vendor.

The Islamabad Policy Research Institute and others interpret the situation as a "permission structure" proceed, but at "real" rather than "ceremonial" human checkpoints (IPRI, 2025). A judge can only be a real checker if he/she has time and training to reject a bad suggestion. If

the list is extensive, and the draft flows easily, the checkpoint is turned into a signature. UNESCO eventually endorsed Pakistan's Guidelines in terms of its ethics recommendation and collaborated with judicial academies regarding training, which is the practical aspect of the above-mentioned warning (UNESCO, 2024). Academy courses in the absence of guidelines will be a document that vendors quote and officers will not use.

National Guidelines, 2026

Hon'ble Supreme Court and High Courts as well as district courts, tribunals and other justice institutions are bound by the National Guidelines approved by NJPMC in February, 2026 in its 57th Meeting. Their core principles are human validation, ethical integrity, transparency, accountability, and the safeguarding of data. Allowed applications include: Administrative (scheduling, routing, transcription, translation), Legal research, Predictive analytics (duration, resource allocation), Summaries and Draft text. Special consideration is given to the locally developed, explainable systems trained on Pakistani law. Training is given to the Law and Justice Commission and judicial academies. Two features stand out. First, predictive analytics is not a score on the merits of a party, but rather an aid to listing and staffing. That distinction matters. This class of motion usually takes a couple of hearings" is a diary tool. A model that expresses a prediction that the accused will reoffend is a separate constitutional object, and outside of routine criminal process until the legislature and the superior courts say otherwise. Second, the desire to have the data locally is because it was a recognized problem with general chatbots for Pakistani citations, which was highlighted by the JudgeGPT team before they developed a retrieval layer over 128,000 opinions and hundreds of statutes.

JudgeGPT and the productivity question

The trial reported by Mehmood, Goessmann, and Ash (2026) assigned 1,559 judges in 118 courts to AI with targeted training, AI with generic training, or training without AI. Judges who received the tool and targeted training used it more, kept using it, and expected productivity gains. Districts with greater exposure resolved more cases. At median exposure the implied annual gain was 1,848 additional resolutions, about 6.3 percent above the mean. Appeals did not rise. Text measures of writing improved slightly. Usage logs showed that judges asked the system to clarify concepts and to help with drafting, and that targeted training steered them toward text tasks that models handle more reliably than toward open legal questions that are hard to verify.

Those results support a modest claim: assistive AI plus training can move disposal at the margin without obvious harm to quality, in a judiciary that has fewer than two judges per 100,000 people (Gent, 2026). They do not support a claim that models should sit on the bench. They also depend on a curated corpus. A court that feeds a public chatbot with a messy PDF bundle will reproduce the hallucination problem the trial was designed to avoid.

Access for people who are not judges

The vast majority of access to justice problems are pre-hearing: individuals are not familiar with the forum, not indigent enough to hire a lawyer, too busy to go, and not able to read the form (UNDP, 2025; Cappelletti & Garth, 1978). Here, AI could prove to be more helpful than an Hon'able High Court Judge. The guided interviews which result in a draft plaint in Urdu, chat tools which explain a family court date, and translation of orders into regional languages, are more at the citizen's level than another research engine on the bench. The public legal aid system in Pakistan is under-developed and funds deficit. The danger is that once they've reached the point of justice productivity, investment will not make it to public legal information. Gender is one of the particular tests. Family and criminal cases involving women are sensitive and may need local presence and female staff and privacy. Video hearings can

minimise travel, which is a barrier to women having to stay at home. When the case systems are not safe, they can cause additional harm to the same women. It is worth remembering when designing digital courts that they may not contain existing inequalities (UNDP, 2025).

This will require a change in legal education as the bench evolves. The judicial use of retrieval tools on a daily basis should give rise to changing the attitude of graduates of paper library law schools to test a machine citation. Federal Judicial Academy and academies at the province level have started technology and law courses, which are related to the JudgeGPT experiment (AEA RCT Registry, 2024; Mehmood et al., 2026). The short-certified module should be a requirement for new advocates, not a “webinar” requirement set by bar councils. Another access problem in the guise of administration is procurement. If the model is closed, the court that is hiring the model cannot know what the model does with the witness statement. If a court is created within a court, it may be too slow. A mixed model (open retrieval on a public collection of reported judgments, and closed retrieval on unreported judgments) is more in line with transparency and privacy. The budget lines need to be split between license fees and training, and independent audit. It’s not an economy if a chatbot is cheap and there’s no audit. Online dispute resolution is the first-place small claims, consumer grievances and traffic issues want to go. Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy (2017) outline platforms to resolve high volume, low value disputes without a trial. Such platforms could be incorporated under Pakistan’s commercial and mediation program, such as the draft arbitration law and family mediation centres approved by the Policy Making Committee (OHCHR, 2025; Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025c). The export to screen of full trials is a much weaker idea.

Emerging Challenges and Policy Options

Challenges

The first one is the unfinished basic layer. The e-filing templates are still in consultation with the bars (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025c; Dawn, 2026c). There is a variation in district practice, depending on province. There are uneven connectivity and electricity. A portal, which times out in a tehsil, is not an access. Digitalization that outpaces infrastructure will give rise to the old two-track system of electronic justice for cities and paper justice for the rest. Human resources is the second challenge. A thousand courts, many of them without judges, cannot be made automatable (Minute Mirror 2026). The training for JudgeGPT was delivered to a significant portion of trial judges, which is a success (AEA RCT Registry, 2024). Equal investment required for staff to scan files, make processes, and operate video rooms. Reform which trains only officers will stall at reader’s table.

The third challenge is data protection and cyber security. The documents in court files include medical records, commercial secrets, witness names, and ID documents. Personal data legislation and institutional rules in Pakistan need to be aligned with a growing number of scans. The Guidelines themselves are not an audit service nor an incident protocol, they need to be protected (National Judicial Policy Making Committee, 2026). Bias and language are the **fourth challenge**. The models that have been trained using reported cases from the foreign superior court will under represent district practice, regional languages and the claims of the under resourced litigants. Predictive listing tools, which are taught by previous delay, can be programmed to even less time to categories already neglected. Human checkpoints can only be effective if the human can see why the machine recommended a result.

The **5th challenge** is the bar. Attorneys can either e-file or litigate every template. This is not diplomacy that is available to choose from (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025c; Dawn, 2026c). Uptake will be based on fee structures, digital signatures and training of younger advocates.

The Sixth challenge is language and disability. A portal in English only, and in small Urdu font is a professional portal. Screen reading, high contrast cause lists and sign language interpretation for video hearings are not niceties! These are electronic versions of the open court principle. If they aren't there, access to justice is access for those who already have the most. Continuity with constitutional change is the eighth challenge. Jurisdiction must move; files must move. When a constitutional petition, which had started in the Hon'able Supreme Court, reaches the Hon'able Federal Constitutional Court, it should not be necessary for the petitioner to re-construct the record from scratch (Business Recorder, 2026a; Shah, 2026). Migration of records is a technical project that has a rights consequence. Lost pages in a migration means lost hearings.

In short digitalised justice system must incorporate these phases. **Stage one** is completing the file (standardised e-filing, digital notices, searchable archives, audited payments in all districts with judges in place – with offline backup in case of connectivity failure, and later stages don't address the missing page). **Stage two** is the judge's desk where retrieval tools regarding Pakistani law, transcription and listing analytics are trained and applied, in accordance with the 2026 Guidelines and under academy certification, thereby declaring the assistance and it can be reviewed. **Stage three** is the citizen's door – Urdu and regional language explainers, appointment booking, legal aid triage and online pathways for small claims and family intake, involving women users and persons with differently abled, not as an afterthought. **Stage four** is evaluation: publish dashboard methods, commission independent user evaluations, and conduct experimental tests again before expanding into criminal risk assessment, as a method that's "harmless" to use in civil listings can be dangerous when it involves liberty.

Supporting measures are then to follow, and should be seen as a part of the same programme (not as a separate political file). Filling vacancies on a published timetable to avoid having digital courts as empty rooms filled with good software. Spend on Access to Justice Development Fund, a digital equity programme for weak districts, and not just a building fund (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025b). Compile agreements for data processing with judicial custody of case data. Uphold the rights of vendors to have the product tested independently for hallucinate and biased effects. Establish a joint rules committee made up of judges, bar, and court users to review templates on an annual basis. Ensure that the AI practices of the courts align with the National AI Policy 2025 without losing independence of judiciary to an executive policy shop (Balochistan High Court, 2026). Prevent conflicts from entering the digital and physical queues by using mediation and modern arbitration (OHCHR, 2025).

The data of the aggregate delays, districtwise and case type should be made available in machine-readable format as open data. Each of these individual files must be kept secure. Aggregate delay is not a secret of the court. Researchers, journalists and parliamentary committees can then challenge the official claims, just as the JudgeGPT trial challenged the official hopes. Pakistan has already made an offer of sharing its experience in digital justice with region's partners (Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, 2025b). When a farmer in a district court will be able to file, track and collect an order without making his third visit and without paying a tout for a password, the offer will be believable.

Another alternative is statutory consolidation. The electronic practice is now housed in the Honorable Supreme Court Rules, the Honorable High Court amendments, the Electronic Transactions Ordinance and the committee guidelines. There might be a lean Judicial Digital Processes Act that outlines minimum rights of the parties: the right to file electronically, if there is an electronic filing system; the right to a readable copy of the document; the right to

be notified through a recorded channel; and the right to have a machine assist with the listing or research. Statute would also provide the Policy Making Committee with a more clearly defined mandate to establish technical standards that would not seem to be legislating from the bench.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, the controversy over the use of computers in the register has come to the end of its tides. The question has shifted to design, equity and control now with the Rules of 2025, the dashboard of 2026, the AI Guidelines, and the Hon'able High Court payment systems, as well as the JudgeGPT trial. Digitalisation can make a right become a remedy. The role of Artificial Intelligence in supporting a short-staffed trial bench to research and write is promising. A file on which a citizen cannot trust or a citizen who cannot log in would be superfluous. There is a guarantee of fair trial in Article 10A. Technology could be that trial's slave, Ishfaq Ahmed's Case assures. No doubt the National Guidelines are statements of the future use of AI though couched in institutional lingo. A lot of non-glamoury tasks have yet to be done like finalising uniform templates that the bar will use, uninterrupted supply of electricity in the district courts, incorporating regional languages that a litigant can read, logs showing who opened a file and instant access to the final decision made by the judge.

If they are constructed, Pakistan can demonstrate that things can be done in terms of raising disposal and transparency without giving up the human office of judgment in a large and overloaded common law judiciary, both in the Global South and elsewhere. If they are not, then the country will have to pay for expensive screens in addition to the two million files. Tradition versus machines is thus not a choice for the future of reform. It's a question of technology versus technology as a new closed shop. History has a lesson to learn from a previous wave. In the 2000s and 2010s, computer-driven cause lists opened up the possibility of presenting lists without dates on the calendar being actual dates. Litigants came to know as well to distrust the screen as they knew to distrust the notice board. The present wave will have trust only if it has the date on the portal which is the date in the courtroom; the sum on the portal which is the fee at the bank; and the order on the portal which is the order the police will enforce. Since reliability is not the same as visibility, this is a new type of delay. These are the parameters that will determine if digitalization and AI have helped or hindered access to justice, not the number of applications being launched.

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