

**New Economic School**

Assistant Professor

**Office Contact Information**

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Languages: Punjabi (native), English (fluent), Urdu (fluent), Hindi (fluent), French (basic), Russian (basic).

**Current Position:**

Assistant Professor at the New Economic School, January 2021-  
Research Affiliate at the Harvard Law School, July 2023-

**Education:**

PhD in Economics, University of Paris-Dauphine, France  
Thesis Title: "Essays on Judicial Independence and Development"  
Completion Date: 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019

M.S. Public Policy and Development, Paris School of Economics, France  
Thesis Title: "Using Geopolitics to identify causal effect of Aid on Growth"

B.S. Economics with distinction (valedictorian), University of Utrecht, The Netherlands  
Thesis Title: "Macroeconomic Implications of Terrorism"  
Year abroad at LUISS Guido Carli Rome, Italy

**Research Fields:**

Development Economics, Political Economy, Law and Development.

**Conferences (selected):**

APSA 2021, APSA 2022, ASSA 2022, ASSA 2023.

**Publications:**

1. Mehmood, Sultan. 2022. "The impact of Presidential appointment of judges: Montesquieu or the Federalists?" *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 14(4): 411–445.
2. Mehmood, Sultan and Seror, Avner. 2023. "Religious Leaders and Rule of Law" *Journal of Development Economics*, 160(1): 1–18.
3. Mehmood, Sultan, Seror, A. and Chen, Daniel, 2023. "Ramadan Fasting Increases Judicial Leniency in Judges from Pakistan and India" *Nature*, pp.1-7. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-023-01547-3> (Cover Article)
4. Mehmood, Sultan and Ali, B. 2023. "Judicial Capture" *The Economic Journal*, Conditionally Accepted.

### **Teaching Experience:**

Spring 2020: Econometrics and Data Science I at Sciences Po (Masters Level)  
Fall 2020: Statistics and Probability Theory at Sciences Po (Masters Level)  
Spring 2021: Development Economics at the New Economic School (Masters Level)  
Spring 2021: Political Economy of Justice System (Bachelors Level)  
Spring 2022: Development Economics at the New Economic School (Masters Level)  
Spring 2022: Political Economy of Justice System (Bachelors Level)

### **Published and Revisions Requested:**

*American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, Journal of Development Economics, The Economic Journal, Journal of Political Economy: Microeconomics, Nature Human Behavior.*

### **Referee Service (selected):**

*American Economic Review, Review of Economic Studies, The Economic Journal, Journal of the European Economic Association, American Economic Review: Insights, Review of Economics and Statistics, Journal of Development Economics.*

### **Published or Revisions Requested**

1. [\*The impact of Presidential appointment of judges: Montesquieu or the Federalists?\*](#) – **Published in *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics***

A central question in development economics is whether there are adequate checks and balances on the executive. This paper provides causal evidence of how increasing constraints on the executive—via removal of presidential discretion in judicial appointments—promotes the rule of law. The age structure of judges at the time of the reform and the mandatory retirement age law provides us with an exogenous source of variation in the termination of presidential discretion in judicial appointments. Overall, the results indicate that presidential appointment of judges deteriorates the rule of law. Even one degree of separation between the judiciary and the president matters.

2. [\*Religious Leaders and Rule of Law\*](#) (with A. Seror) – **Published in *Journal of Development Economics***

In this paper, we provide systematic evidence of how historical religious institutions affect the rule of law. In a difference-in-differences framework, we show that districts in Pakistan where the historical presence of religious institutions is higher, rule of law is worse. This deterioration is economically significant, persistent, and explained by the rise of religious leaders elected to political office. We explain our findings with a model where religious leaders leverage their high legitimacy to run for office and subvert the Courts. We estimate the economy-wide losses attributed to land expropriation by religious leaders through Courts to be about 0.06 percent of GDP every year.

3. [\*Ramadan Fasting Increases Judicial Leniency\*](#) (with A. Seror and D. Chen) – **Published in *Nature Human Behavior***

We estimate the impact of the Ramadan fasting ritual on criminal sentencing decisions for Pakistan and India from half a century of daily data. We use random case assignment and exogenous variation in fasting intensity within Ramadan due to the rotating Islamic calendar and the geographical latitude of the district courts to document the large effects of Ramadan fasting on decision-making. Our sample comprises roughly a half million cases and 10,000 judges from Pakistan and India. Ramadan fasting intensity increases Muslim judges' acquittal rates, lowers their appeal and reversal rates, and does not come at the cost of increased recidivism or heightened outgroup bias. Overall, our results indicate that the Ramadan fasting ritual followed by a billion Muslims worldwide induces more lenient decisions that may be of higher quality.

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### 4. [Judicial Capture](#) (with B. Ali) – **Conditionally Accepted at *The Economic Journal***

We use data from Pakistan to establish a reciprocal exchange relationship between the judiciary and the government. We document large transfers in the form of expensive real estate from the federal government to the judiciary, and reciprocation in the form of pro-government rulings from the judiciary to the federal government. Our estimates indicate that the allocation of houses to judges increases pro-government rulings by 50% and reduces decisions on case merits by 40%. The allocation also incurs a cumulative cost of 0.03% of GDP to the government. However, it allows the government to expropriate additional land worth 0.2% of GDP in one year. The results suggest that such reciprocative exchanges within the state undermine the rule of law.

### 5. [Contract Enforcement in a Stateless Economy](#) (with D. Chen) – **Submitted.**

How do markets flourish in the absence of a formal State authority enforcing contracts. To study contract enforcement without the State, we focus on a large informal market: illegal gambling. We present evidence that even in the absence of legal enforcement authority, personal relationships, and violence, more than 70% of gamblers fulfill their contractual obligations in this informal economy. We provide experimental evidence that even in impersonal and informal markets, reputation plays a key role in the honoring of contractual obligations. Extensions of the payment deadline also increases contract enforcement. Overall, we provide data and causal evidence that contract enforcement is possible in impersonal markets and without formal legal enforcement. Illegal gambling thrives on the same principles of reputation and credit constraints that sustain modern legal markets.

### 6. [Role Models Matter for Covid Vaccinations and Conditional Cash Transfers Do Not](#) (with S. Naseer and D. Chen) – **Submitted.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an unprecedented hit on student learning across the globe. This paper provides experimental evidence that targeted messaging from role models can cause large reductions in vaccine hesitancy and improve student achievement for about 15000 students in Pakistan. We randomly assign teachers to a menu of cash incentives, role models and celebrity messaging. Teachers assigned to the role model treatment were 0.35 standard deviation units more likely to get vaccinated, had 0.25 standard deviation lower absenteeism, and had students with 0.15 standard deviation higher test scores. Our use of QR-code verified vaccine certificates provides a reliable and robust tracker of vaccination status. Behavioral data on theory-of-mind suggests the mechanism underlying the role model effect. Overall, our results suggest that an effective teacher vaccination campaign may attenuate learning losses among students due to COVID-19.

7. [Training Policymakers in Econometrics: Evidence from Two Field Experiments](#) (with S. Naseer and D. Chen)– **Submitted.**

This study empirically assesses the power of econometrics education to shape policy choices and outcomes. We initially randomized policymakers into an econometrics training program and found that trained deputy ministers improved their performance in national research methods and public policy exams by 0.5-0.8 sigma. The stated valuation of quantitative evidence and commissioning of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) in policymaking increased by 1.32 sigma and 300% respectively. A year after the training, they were twice as likely to choose and triple the funding for a policy backed by RCT evidence. Building on these findings, we further extended our research to evaluate the practical implications of econometrics training on front-line public servants. A field experiment with tax collectors in Pakistan aimed to assess whether such training could influence tax policy and significantly impact societal revenue generation. Utilizing administrative data, our results show that changes in tax policy such as sending tax reminder letters, following the econometrics training, led to a remarkable 40% increase in tax revenue. This study not only validates the importance of econometrics training for top-tier policymakers but also underscores its significance to front-line bureaucrats. Our findings, across two field experiments, among two groups of policymakers, solidify the evidence that econometrics training substantially influences policy decisions and their real-world outcomes, from enhancing the demand and appreciation of causal evidence to notably improving tax collection. This research may potentially catalyze a transformation in policy decision-making and implementation, affecting a broad range of public servants from high-level deputy ministers to frontline tax collectors.

8. [AI Education as State Capacity: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan](#) (with S. Naseer and D. Chen) – **Submitted.**

We randomize elite bureaucrats in Pakistan into AI educational workshops and find that it influences their willingness to adopt AI and their funding allocations toward digitization. Cross-randomizing them into AI fairness activism reduced this willingness and funding. To capture a uniform measure of the performance of civil servants we utilize a digital democracy platform, where we observed that AI training enhanced dispute resolution and citizen ratings of their efforts, particularly for land disputes, while AI fairness activism diminished them. Overall, our research shows that top government officials' human capital is malleable and affects policies, attitudes, staff, and the population.

### **Close to Submission:**

9. [Why are Rights Revolutions Rare?](#) (with S. Naseer and D. Chen)

We show that when traditional norms are challenged, norm disruptors pay a price. We experimentally foster more progressive gender attitudes among female teachers in Pakistan and show that these attitudes transmit to their students. Progressive gender attitudes, however, elevate stress hormone concentrations in blood plasma by 0.3 standard deviations and lead to a 0.35 standard deviation increase in domestic violence. Leveraging random variation in the fraction of teachers treated within a school, we find, however, that when additional teachers hold progressive attitudes—a moral bandwagoning effect—the costs of holding progressive gender attitudes are attenuated. Overall, our results suggest that deviation from traditional gender norms comes at a cost, but this cost diminishes as societal norms converge. In particular, domestic violence, more so than stress, stymies gender rights revolutions.

10. Reform Multiplier (with B. Ali)

When and how can a reform create an amplifying effect? This paper provides evidence that a judge selection reform in Pakistan, which shifted the appointment power of judges from the President to a committee of judges had a multiplier effect on pro-government rulings in the decade following its implementation. As the first generation of committee appointee judges (first-degree of separation from the President) are replaced by the second generation of committee appointees (second-degree separation), the effect of the reform compounds judicial independence from the government. Nevertheless, as the reform amplifies anti-government rulings, it also results in a trade-off of fostering a network of patronage within the judge community: a compounding in the practice of hiring judges from the same law firms as the committee responsible for selecting new judges is observed. Despite this increase in patronage within the judiciary, there is no apparent deterioration in the quality of judicial decisions: a comparable multiplier effect on measures of decision quality is also observed. Rulings based on case merits and adherence to due process of law increase with each degree of separation from Presidential appointment. Career incentives to issue more anti-government and merit-based rulings appear to be an important explanation for the reform compounding: judges who

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are most likely to issue anti-government rulings are most likely to be promoted to the Supreme Court. Overall, our results underscore that measures increasing the independence of the judiciary can have enduring effects on judicial autonomy and decision quality, even when they concurrently alter the composition of the judicial elite by making it more concentrated.

### **Selected Observational Studies (Work-in-Progress):**

Are judges a jury of one? Evidence from Abolition of juries in India (with R. Ahmed)  
Lawyers vs Dictatorship: Evidence from Pakistan's Lawyers' Movement  
Ideas on the Move: The Impact of Russian Literature (with V. Avetian)  
Judicial Independence in the Shadow of Terrorism: Evidence from Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Courts

### **Selected Pre-registered Experiments (Work-in-Progress):**

The Effect of Misinformation Training on Misinformation Detection (with Dave Rand & Brendan Nyhan) – [OSF Registry](#)  
Reshaping Beliefs about Ourselves and Others (with J. Kaur, S. Naseer & D. Chen) – [AEA RCT Registry](#)  
Insincere Beliefs (with A. Seror) – [AEA RCT Registry](#)  
Mental Health, Teacher Stress and Student Achievement (with S. Naseer & D. Chen) – [AEA RCT Registry](#)  
The Strike of the Righteous: The Impact of Hate Literature in Pakistan (with S. Asad) – [AEA RCT Registry](#)  
Policy Preferences of Bureacrats (with R. Fisman and S. Khariv)

### **Policy Writing:**

“A Judicial manifesto”. [The International Herald Tribune](#), 2023.  
“Training Effective Altruism: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan”. [Vox Policy Column](#), 2021.  
“A cultural phenomenon”. [The International Herald Tribune](#), 2016.  
“A discussion on death penalty”. [Dawn Pakistan](#), 2015.  
“Fallibility of Intuition and the Utility of Models”. [The International Herald Tribune](#), 2014.

### **Awards and Honors:**

2022 International Growth Centre Research Grant “Machine Learning for Tax Courts” (\$ 60, 000)  
2021 IPA Peace and Recovery Research Funding “Radicalization in Pakistan” (\$ 50, 000)  
2020 International Growth Centre Research Grant “Judicial Access and Development” (\$ 70, 000)  
2019 EDI Grant “Judicial Independence in Pakistan” (\$ 32,000)  
2018 Best Paper Award Institutional and Organizational Economics Academy

### **Affiliation(s):**

Fellow, Harvard Law School (2023-present)  
Member, CEPR Research Grants Evaluation Committee (2022- 2023)  
Member, PIDE Rasta Grants Evaluation Committee (2021- present)  
Fellow, Mahboob ul Haq Research Centre, Lahore University of Management Sciences (2021- present)  
Fellow, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) (2020 - present)  
Fellow, Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) (2019 - present)

### **Computer Skills:**

Stata, Python, Latex, MS Office, ArcGIS.