

**Aix-Marseille School  
of Economics**

PhD Candidate

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Languages: Punjabi (native), English (fluent),  
Hindi/Urdu (fluent), French (Basic)

**Education:**

PhD in Economics (Expected Jun, 2026)  
Thesis Title: “Essays on Institutions and Development”  
Aix-Marseille School of Economics, France

Masters Theoretical and Empirical Economics (2022)  
(specialization: microeconomics)  
Aix-Marseille School of Economics, France

M.S. Information and Operational Management (2017)  
(specialization: economics and applied statistics)  
Cumulative GPA: 3.96/4.0  
First Position in the State of Punjab (Gold Medal by the Chief Minister)  
University of the Punjab, Pakistan

B.S Applied Mathematics (2014)  
with distinction (First Division/Grade A),  
University of Sargodha, Pakistan

**References:**

**Professor Marc Sangnier**

Aix-Marseilles University;  
University of Namur.  
[marc.sangnier@unamur.be](mailto:marc.sangnier@unamur.be)

**Professor Avner Seror**

Aix-Marseilles University;  
[avner.seror@univ-amu.fr](mailto:avner.seror@univ-amu.fr)

**Professor Claudio Ferraz**

University of British Columbia;  
PUC-Rio;  
[claudio.ferraz@ubc.ca](mailto:claudio.ferraz@ubc.ca)

**Professor Sultan Mehmood**

Professor of Economics;  
New Economics School.  
[smehmood@nes.ru](mailto:smehmood@nes.ru)

**Citizenship:** Pakistani

**Research Interests:**

Development Economics , Political Economy, Law and Economics

## **Publications:**

### ***Judicial Capture (with S. Mehmood)- Published - The Economic Journal***

We use data from Pakistan to establish a reciprocal exchange relationship between the judiciary and government. We document large transfers in the form of expensive real estate from the government to the judiciary, and large favors in the form of pro-government rulings from the judiciary to the government. Our estimates indicate that the allocation of houses to judges increases pro-government rulings by 50% and reduces decisions on case merits by 30%. 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 transfers within the state deteriorate the rule of law.

## **Revise and Resubmit Request(s):**

### ***Reform Multiplier (with S. Mehmood) - Revise and Resubmit, American Economic Journal: Applied Economics***

How and when does a reform trigger a cascading effect? This paper provides evidence that a judge selection reform in Pakistan, which shifted the appointment power of judges from the government to a committee of judges, had a multiplier effect on anti-government rulings in the decade following its implementation. As the first generation of committee-appointed judges (first-degree of separation from the government) is replaced by the second generation of committee appointees (second-degree of separation from the government), the reform's effect compounds. Nevertheless, as the reform amplifies anti-government rulings, it also increases the concentration of judges hired from a few select law firms. Despite the rise in judges hiring their former colleagues from law firms where they previously practiced as attorneys, there is no observable decline in the quality of judicial decisions. Rulings based on case merits and adherence to due process of law rise with each degree of separation from government appointments. Selection effects of second-generation judges drawing talent from top law schools emerge as a key contributor behind the reform multiplier effect. Overall, our results underscore that measures increasing the independence of the judiciary can have enduring positive effects on judicial autonomy and decision quality, even when they concurrently alter the composition of the judicial elite by making it concentrated.

## **Working Papers:**

### ***Lawfare in Action: Evidence from Anti-Corruption Trials - Job Market Paper Best Paper Award (IOEA2023)***

The strategic use of the judiciary against political rivals, often termed as lawfare, has historically characterized authoritarian regimes and is now increasingly a source of concern in democracies. The central empirical challenge lies in distinguishing between neutral enforcement of the law versus selective prosecution based on political alignment. Using a regression discontinuity design and newly assembled data from Pakistan's corruption courts, we provide causal evidence on the existence and extent of lawfare. We document that political opponents of the government are significantly more likely to be prosecuted and convicted for corruption. These effects are large enough to crowd out other anti-corruption efforts. In contrast, government affiliates facing comparable allegations are less likely to be convicted, underscoring the asymmetric nature of law enforcement. These disparities carry profound implications for political competition. Convictions of opposition politicians eliminate the typically observed incumbency advantage, undermining the ability of opposition politicians to contest on equal footing in subsequent elections. In doing so, institutions tasked with upholding the rule of law are redeployed as instruments of political victimization, distorting both justice and electoral competition. That these patterns persist under both civilian and military regimes underscores a deeper institutional fragility: democratization alone may not be sufficient to safeguard the neutrality of courts.

### ***Transmitting Tranquillity: Teacher Stress and Student Achievement (with S.Mehmood and Daniel L. Chen)***

Teaching in public schools is one of the most stressful jobs in the world. We work with one of the largest networks of charter schools to investigate how mental health assistance to teachers impacts their and students' mental health. We provide experimental evidence on how teacher stress can be reduced, how it transmits to student stress, and how it may hold back academic achievement. We randomly assign teachers to mindful meditation, individual cognitive behavioral therapy sessions, and pharmacological aid. Meditation and cognitive behavioral therapy reduce stress, while no impact of pharmacological assistance is observed. In a factorial design, we also cross-randomize teachers to reduce mental health stigma, increasing the acceptability of seeking pharmacological aid. We observe increased take up and impact of pharmacological aid in the cross-randomized group. Overall, we find stress from teacher to student is transmissible and hurts student learning, but these costs can be ameliorated through policy interventions. Social stigma against pharmacological assistance is a key stumbling block beyond financial constraints that hurts teachers' and students' mental health. A social action signaling social acceptance of seeking mental health reduces stigma associated with accepting pharmacological help, increase take-up of pharmacological aid, and reduces the stress in short and medium term.

## **Work in Progress:**

### *Digital Access to Justice: Evidence from Women's Virtual Police Stations (with Saad Gulzar and Muhammad Yasir Khan)*

How can technology expand women's access to justice in settings where social and mobility constraints limit interactions with state institutions? We study a large-scale natural experiment in which all police stations in April 2024 in Punjab, Pakistan, adopted a virtual police station system that enabled women to report gender-based violence through an interactive voice response (IVR) platform. Using administrative call-level (similar to 911 calls) data from 2022–2024 and a difference-in-differences design, we find that the reform led to a sharp increase in reported gender-based violence (GBV) cases, with no comparable change in non-gender crime calls. We also see an increase in the number of formal investigations launched by the police in GBV cases.

### *Altruistic Vaccination (with Syngjoo Choi, Jun Hyung Kim, and Avner Seror)*

We study the altruistic motives behind vaccination intentions. Using data from a field experiment in Pakistan, we find that providing information about the probability of transmitting COVID to others substantially increases vaccination intention. We find that subjects are more responsive to a treatment that focuses their attention on the loss experienced when they do not get vaccinated and infect others relative to a treatment that focuses their attention on the gain experienced when they get vaccinated and do not infect others. We explain our findings in a theoretical model that accounts for reference-dependent preferences and loss aversion. We finally calibrate our model and show that our experimental evidence are consistent with the existence of both substantial loss aversion and altruistic motives in vaccination decisions.

### *The Aftermath of Applause: Evidence from a Hate Gathering in Pakistan (with Talha Naeem)*

Visibility coordinates behavior. When support for violence is displayed in public, it can raise the perceived acceptability of aggression while discouraging dissent, with opposing effects on participation and speech. We study a large, nationally visible episode of public endorsement of a violent act and trace its consequences for violence, fear, and expression. Using an event study design, we identify sharp post-event increases in violent incidents alongside a measurable tightening of local norms, reflected in greater self-censorship and reduced public speech. Effects are larger in places with higher ex ante exposure to potential perpetrators and in settings where social monitoring is stronger. Placebo tests based on pre-event periods and alternative events show no comparable shifts, and composition checks rule out differential migration or policing changes as primary drivers. The pattern is consistent with a mechanism in which public endorsement shifts beliefs about social approval and the costs of deviance, mobilizing marginal actors while silencing potential critics. The effects persist for several months and spill over to nearby areas. Overall, our results underscore that public endorsement serves as a coordination device that shifts expectations, raising violence while suppressing dissent.

## **Research Visits:**

1. University of British Columbia (**3 Months**) with Prof. Claudio Ferraz
2. The University of Chicago (**2 weeks**) with Prof. Shaoda Wang
3. National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo (**2 weeks**) with Prof. Jun Goto

## **Teaching Experience:**

1. Econometrics (II) – 6 hours
2. Political Economy (Empirical) – 3 hours
3. Guest Lectures (Instrumental Variables (IV), Regressions Discontinuity Design (RDD), Difference in Differences (DID) – 9 hours

## **Refereeing (Selected):** QJE, JAE, WD, Nature

## **Work Experience:**

**May 2017 – Dec 2021:**

**Senior Research Associate at the Center for Economic Research Pakistan (CERP)  
and Senior Research Associate at Precision Development (PxD)**

1. Ministry of Agriculture in Pakistan.
  - a. Assistance on various RCTs in Pakistan with Farmers and Extension Agents.
  - b. Assistance on conducting audits on Soil testing facilities to measure their precision and accuracy.
2. Punjab Police
  - a. Assistance in Police reform policy to induce behavioral changes in police to reducing police brutality
3. Punjab Skill Development Fund (PSDF)
  - a. Assistance on RCT based on M-learning.

4. IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture Development)
  - a. Assistance on policy development to improving rural women participation in Pakistan's Labour Force
5. Private sector (Nestle, DS Farms and KADO (Karakoram Area Development Organization)
  - a. Assistance in Policy development to move farmers towards Organic Farming practices in Hunza District in the Gilgit Baltistan Province of Pakistan

#### **2015-2017:**

##### **Research Assistant at CERP and PxD**

1. Generating reports and presenting them to Government Officials and PIs
2. Meeting several high-profile government officials to build and maintain relationships.
3. Managing and allocating government's field staff as well as PxD/CERP field staff.
4. Running multiple data analysis for PxD, CERP and AD, Punjab.

#### **Awards and Honors:**

- 2023 Best Paper Award (Institutional and Organizational Economics Academy)
- 2021-2022 Aix-Marseille School of Economics Fellowship
- 2017 Honorary Gold Medal by the Chief Minister
- 2015-2017 University High Achiever Scholarship during Masters
- 2010-2014 University Excellence Scholarship during Bachelors

#### **Conferences:**

AMSE 22, IOEA 23, EEA 24, Arthur Lewis Lab 24, HEC 24, PSE- CEPR 24, SIOE 24, UChicago Law and Economic 24, Path2Dev 24, BSE-SF 25, PSE- CEPR 25

#### **Computer Skills:**

Stata, R, Python, C++, MATLAB, Latex, MS Office, ArcGIS