Lawfare in Action: Evidence from Anti-Corruption Trials in Pakistan

By Bakhtawar Ali*

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Abstract

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.

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"There is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of the law and in the name of justice."

— Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (1748)

1 Introduction

The growing prominence of lawfare, the use of judicial processes as a political weapon, has raised fundamental concerns about judicial independence and impartiality in both democracies and authoritarian regimes. In established democracies, it has become a marker of democratic backsliding, while in many developing countries it reflects the continuing fragility of institutions (Ferraz and Finan, 2025; Chiopris et al., 2025). Indeed, anxieties about the politicization of the judiciary now extend even to consolidated democracies such as the United States, where partisan actors have accused one another of weaponizing the legal system for political ends. The US President Donald Trump, for instance, repeatedly framed his legal troubles as evidence of lawfare, alleging that his adversaries had weaponized the justice system against him and describing the former "President Biden regime's weaponization of our system of justice" as "straight out of the Stalinist Russia horror show." Critics, however, contend that President Trump himself engaged in lawfare by using the powers of the presidency to initiate investigations against his political rivals, including law firms linked to Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris (Bauer, 2017). Similar concerns have emerged internationally, in France, Hungary, Romania, and Turkey. Despite the increasing visibility of such episodes, systematic empirical evidence on lawfare remains limited. A core empirical challenge lies in distinguishing impartial enforcement of the law from selective application driven by political alignment. When courts are weaponized for political vendetta, they erode democratic legitimacy and public trust (Davis and Hitt, 2025). As with corruption, which distorts incentives and weakens governance and development, the weaponization of the judiciary can create openings for authoritarian rule, eroding judicial independence, with adverse consequences for economic development (Mauro, 1995; Acemoglu and Verdier, 2000; Porta et al., 2008; Olken and Pande, 2012; Acemoglu, Robinson and Torvik, 2013; Voigt et al., 2015). Beyond its institutional effects, it can also alter the nature of political competition by removing electoral challengers and shielding incumbents from legal scrutiny. In doing so, it may transform institutions designed to constrain power into tools for its consolidation.

This paper addresses that challenge by providing causal evidence on the existence and extent of lawfare using data from Pakistan's anti-corruption courts. The core difficulty lies in distinguishing whether legal actions against political figures reflect an even-handed application of the law or selective targeting conditioned on political alignment. To detect lawfare, we require comparing politicians with similar ex-ante likelihood of wrongdoing, but who differ in whether they are aligned or against the government in power. When opposition politicians are more likely to be prosecuted or convicted than their government-aligned counterparts in otherwise comparable circumstances, such asymmetries signal lawfare rather than neutral enforcement of the law.

To empirically identify lawfare, we study Pakistan, whose institutional features create fertile conditions for investigating politically motivated prosecutions. The country's National Accountability Bureau (NAB) courts were established with broad prosecutorial powers and limited procedural safeguards, fueling longstanding concerns about executive influence over judicial outcomes. This institutional design enables the study of lawfare "at scale" (Muralidharan and Niehaus, 2017). We assemble a novel dataset covering the universe of corruption cases adjudicated by NAB courts at the subdistrict level, which we link to election records and detailed judge characteristics. This linkage allows for systematic analysis of how judicial decisions vary across political and non-political defendants subject to the same legal regime. Pakistan's recurring alternation between democratic and military rule provides additional variation in institutional constraints and political incentives. These features allow us to document the prevalence of lawfare and to analyze its consequences for judicial behavior and political competition.

We document three main findings. First, political opponents of the ruling government face a sharp increase in both the initiation of new corruption cases and the likelihood of conviction, while government-aligned individuals are systematically shielded from prosecution. This selective pattern persists under both democratic governments and direct military rule. Second, these asymmetries are accompanied by a decline in conviction rates for career civil servants, particularly in the most congested courts. When opposition politicians are selectively targeted, convictions against career civil servants fall, consistent with a crowding-out mechanism in which scarce judicial capacity is reallocated from routine oversight to politically salient cases. Third, the consequences of

lawfare extend beyond the courtroom. Convictions of opposition politicians substantially diminish their prospects for re-election, reshaping the political playing field. In this way, the use of judicial institutions against political rivals systematically reshapes the political playing field. Courts that are formally designed to uphold accountability and constrain executive authority may, in practice, reinforce incumbent advantage by weakening the opposition's ability to compete on equal terms. Consequently, institutions intended to promote checks and balances may, under certain conditions, be associated with lower political turnover and the consolidation of incumbent power.

A central empirical challenge is that observed differences in prosecutions might reflect *different* underlying corruption rather than selective enforcement. To address this concern, we leverage close elections and compare narrowly winning and narrowly losing candidates in a Regression Discontinuity Design. This strategy plausibly identifies the causal effect of holding office by focusing on politicians who are otherwise ex ante similar but differ only in alignment with the ruling regime. The estimates reveal sharp asymmetries. At the extensive margin (prosecutions), defined as the number of new cases filed post-election, marginal opposition victories result in a significant increase, roughly double that of marginal losers. At the intensive margin, defined as the conviction rate conditional on a pre-existing case, marginal winners aligned with the opposition are approximately 70 percent more likely to be convicted.

In contrast, government affiliates, or politicians aligned with the government, exhibit no comparable pattern at the extensive margin (new prosecutions), and at the intensive margin (convictions), they are approximately 90 percent less likely to be convicted compared to their counterparts who marginally lost the elections. This pattern indicates more than simple even-handedness for government affiliates: politically aligned politicians are not merely spared scrutiny, they are actively shielded, receiving systematic leniency from the corruption courts. These findings are consistent with the notion of lawfare, or the selective enforcement of anti-corruption laws, rather than the uniform application of the law.

The consequences of lawfare extend beyond the courtroom. Politicians who are marginally elected and subsequently prosecuted for corruption are significantly less likely to be re-elected. In settings where incumbency advantage is typically strong,

prosecution reduces this advantage from approximately 10 percentage points, even when the politician is ultimately acquitted. When a conviction occurs before the next election, the incumbency advantage disappears entirely and is statistically indistinguishable from zero. These results suggest that opposition politicians who narrowly gain office lose much of the well-documented incumbency advantage once they are targeted through lawfare (Erikson, 1971; Lee, 2008; Fowler and Hall, 2014; Dano et al., 2022). In contrast, narrowly elected politicians who are not prosecuted face no comparable decline in re-election probabilities and retain the usual advantage. At the same time, lawfare coincides with the emergence of new political challengers. In districts where opposition politicians narrowly win an election and are later convicted, subsequent contests feature a greater number of new entrants, which fragments the opposition vote base and lowers their likelihood of retaining the seat. This pattern is concentrated in opposition-held districts, where politically motivated prosecutions are more common, and is not observed in constituencies held by government affiliates, where candidate entry remains relatively stable. The asymmetry suggests that these shifts in electoral competition are linked to targeted political pressures rather than broader trends in contestation.

Finally, we document that the institutional design of Pakistan's anti-corruption courts granted substantial discretion to the executive in the selection and retention of judges. During the study period, judges were appointed by the Prime Minister and the President for fixed three-year terms, with renewal contingent on executive review determining promotion, transfer, or termination. These career-dependent incentives likely aligned judicial behavior with government preferences in politically salient cases. Following the 2010 constitutional amendment, which transferred appointment and promotion authority to a peer-based judicial commission, this alignment weakened, and the asymmetric treatment of opposition and affiliate politicians declined accordingly.

Our results hinge on the identification assumption that victory in a close election is as good as random. We present several pieces of evidence consistent with this assumption. First, the raw distribution of vote margins shows no visible excess mass at the threshold, and formal density tests following (McCrary, 2008) confirm the absence of discontinuity. Second, more recent manipulation tests, based on (Cattaneo et al., 2018), which employ local-polynomial density estimation with improved size properties and greater power, likewise show no evidence of sorting around the cutoff.

Third, placebo outcomes indicate that before the election, prosecution and conviction probabilities evolve smoothly across the margin, with narrow winners and losers statistically indistinguishable; falsification tests using placebo discontinuities similarly show no detectable effects. Fourth, balance checks on predetermined characteristics, such as candidate gender, prior allegations, political ideology, number of defense lawyers, and type of allegation, show no systematic differences across the threshold. Finally, we examine the robustness of our estimates to alternative implementations of the RDD. Estimates are stable when varying bandwidths, shifting the threshold slightly, or excluding observations immediately around the cutoff (donut estimators). Across these specifications, the detection, extent, and consequences of lawfare remain stable in both magnitude and significance. Together, these checks suggest that our design provides a reasonable approximation to random assignment in close elections.

We next turn to mechanisms that may help explain the selective enforcement patterns by judges. The first channel concerns judge incentives. We find patterns consistent with career concerns: judges who convicted opposition politicians were more likely to be promoted within the judicial hierarchy, either to higher positions in the NAB or to the High Courts. In contrast, convictions of government affiliates do not predict higher promotion probabilities. Moreover, this association appears to weaken after a reform that transferred appointment and promotion authority from the executive to a judicial panel. A second channel is selective case assignment to judges. One possibility is that politically sensitive cases were disproportionately routed to particular judges. We find no evidence of such targeting: case assignment appears effectively random, and opposition and government-aligned politicians are equally likely to appear before different judges. A third channel is geographic concentration. Convictions may have been concentrated in politically salient districts. Dropping political capitals one by one, however, leaves the main results essentially unchanged. Overall, the evidence is most consistent with the interpretation that career incentives under executive influence contributed to judicial participation in lawfare.

Our paper speaks to several strands of the literature. First, we build on foundational studies on judicial independence and the rule of law (Montesquieu, 1748; Hamilton, 1788; Hayek, 1960; Buchanan, 1974; North, 1986). A large theoretical and cross-country literature emphasizes how independent courts constrain executive overreach, foster prosperity and development (Glaeser and Shleifer, 2002; Porta et al., 2008; Ace-

moglu, Egorov and Sonin, 2013; Voigt et al., 2015). More recent studies underscore the costs of weakened judicial independence, documenting that political influence over courts can erode accountability even in democratic settings (Ferraz and Finan, 2025). At the same time, evidence suggests that institutional reforms, such as insulating judges from local pressures (Liu et al., 2025) or transferring appointment authority from politicians to a judicial committee (Mehmood, 2022), can strengthen independence and reduce political influence over the judiciary. Our contribution is to provide the first causal evidence on the prevalence and scope of weaponization of justice, as well as, documenting how it operates by targeting opposition politicians while rewarding government affiliates. In doing so, we provide evidence on a dynamic that has long been associated with developing countries but is increasingly thought to be emerging in advanced democracies as well.

Second, we contribute to the literature on political competition and incumbency advantage. A substantial body of work demonstrates how incumbents utilize visibility and name recognition (Druckman et al., 2020), resources, and institutions (Fiorina, 1977; Lee, 2008; Fiva and Smith, 2018; Dano et al., 2022), fundraising networks and campaign spending (Levitt, 1994; Levitt and Wolfram, 1997; Fouirnaies and Hall, 2014) to entrench their position. More recent studies highlight the mechanisms that facilitate incumbency advantage such as coordination failures among opposition parties, voter responsiveness to candidate specific traits (Cox and Katz, 1996; Ansolabehere et al., 2000) , and the role of electoral rules in shaping entry and political competition (Galasso and Nannicini, 2011; Le Pennec and Pons, 2023), as well as how campaign finance structures distort political competition (Cagé, 2020). Our contribution is to provide evidence of novel channel: lawfare alters competition but by selectively prosecuting opposition politicians, thereby eliminating their incumbency advantage and reshaping the electoral playing field. We thus link the study of incumbency to broader debates on judicial independence, demonstrating how the capture of the judiciary can erode political competition. By eroding judicial independence in ways that extend beyond the courtroom, lawfare, distorts accountability, reshapes political competition, and may crowd out other anti-corruption oversight. We, therefore, bridge the literature on judicial independence and rule of law with emerging work on its erosion and link it with work on political competition, underscoring how the politicization of courts affects not only the rule of law but also the equilibrium of democratic competition.

Last, our paper contributes to the literature on state capacity. While most work has highlighted fiscal and bureaucratic capacity as determinants of development (Dincecco and Katz, 2016; Moreira and Pérez, 2024; Bertrand et al., 2020; Beraja et al., 2023), the judiciary has received comparatively less attention despite legal capacity being a core dimension of state effectiveness (Besley et al., 2022) Existing studies emphasize how judicial efficiency fosters credit markets, investment, and resource allocation (Ponticelli and Alencar, 2016; Boehm and Oberfield, 2020; Chemin et al., 2024; Aberra and Chemin, 2021). Complementing this important literature, our results demonstrate that when courts are politicized, state enforcement capacity is diverted away from the provision of public goods, such as impartial anti-corruption enforcement and bureaucratic accountability, toward partisan ends.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section provides background information on Pakistan's political landscape and anti-corruption courts. Section 3 presents the data and our empirical strategy. Section 4 presents the results of elections and the prosecution of opposition politicians. Section 5 turns to government-aligned politicians and analyzes how their cases are handled. Section 6 studies lawfare across institutional political regimes. Section 7 examines lawfare and its broader consequences for political competition. Section 8 explores the underlying mechanisms and provides additional robustness checks. A final section concludes.

2 Background

Political Landscape.— Pakistan emerged in 1947 as part of the partition of British India, inheriting both the institutional legacies of British colonial rule and the instability of a new postcolonial state. Military intervention quickly became a recurring feature of its political development, with alternating phases of direct military rule and democratic transitions. After the democratic transition of 1988, following General Zia's death, Pakistan's party system crystallized around two national poles: the center-right Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) and the center-left Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Governments alternated but rarely completed their terms. The PML-N formed the government in 1990 before being dismissed in 1993; the PPP returned until its dismissal in 1996; and the PML-N won a large majority in 1997. In October 1999, General Pervez Musharraf deposed the civilian government of PML-N and cultivated a regime-aligned party, the Pakistan Muslim League–Quaid (PML-Q).

During General Musharraf's rule, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) was launched and given special anti-corruption courts (1999). These institutions quickly became a prominent feature of the political landscape in the 2000s. While framed as reforms to fight corruption, in practice, their operation was closely intertwined with regime strategy. Under military tutelage, the 2002 elections produced a PML-Q–led government, while the 2008 elections marked a return to civilian rule under a PPP-led coalition (with Yousaf Raza Gilani as Prime Minister and Asif Ali Zardari as President). Across these cycles, the PML-N and PPP remained the principal national competitors, while the PML-Q functioned largely as the executive's instrument during Musharraf's rule. [1]

Political Competition.— Three features characterize political competition in Pakistan during the period 1996 to 2018 that we study. The first is the instability of regime status. Parties move in and out of government through dismissals, coups, and elections, which creates recurring asymmetries in access to administrative levers. The second is the judicialization of politics. Anti-corruption enforcement, especially through the NAB courts established in 1999, became an important arena in which incumbents could protect allies and target rivals. Opposition politicians faced greater risks of arrest, disqualification, and even exile, while governing blocs were reported to be shielded (Chêne, 2008). The third is the brokerage of coalitions. National parties relied on regional groups and local electables to assemble majorities, and these brokers frequently shifted their allegiance when power changed hands. These features produced a government–opposition divide that was not primarily ideological but institutional in character (Gethin et al., 2020). They also provide the backdrop for one of our sources of identifying variation, since abrupt changes in political regimes generated rapid shifts in exposure to enforcement and judicial scrutiny. [2]

Corruption Courts.— On 12 October 1999, Pakistan's political trajectory shifted abruptly when General Pervez Musharraf deposed the civilian government of PML-

[1] For readers less familiar with the context, three additional facts are useful: (i) the military has persistent influence over civilian politics; (ii) provincial politics matter, notably Punjab (PML-N's core) and Sindh (PPP's base), as well as smaller provinces with pivotal regional actors; and (iii) "electables" (locally dominant candidates with personal vote banks) are important players in the political arena (for more details, see (Gethin et al., 2020).

[2] The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) later became a major force in national politics after the 2018 elections, introducing different dynamics into a system previously dominated by PML-N and PPP, with both left- and right-leaning tendencies. Our focus, however, is on the earlier period. For a broader study of PTI's role, see (Gethin et al., 2020).

N and announced a "seven-point agenda" to "ensure swift and across-the-board accountability." Within weeks, the National Accountability Ordinance was promulgated (November 1999), establishing the National Accountability Bureau (NAB, henceforth) and its specialized accountability courts. The legal design granted NAB prosecutors broad powers of arrest and investigation (NAB 1999). In concentrating control and reducing procedural safeguards, NAB and its courts created the conditions for selective enforcement on a large scale. In this sense, they provide a natural setting in which to study lawfare, that is, how anti-corruption forums can be turned into instruments of political repression.

Qualitative Evidence.— Extensive qualitative evidence suggests that NAB courts often operated as instruments of partisan victimization. For example, "from the time Pakistan's corruption watchdog, National Accountability Bureau (NAB), came into existence, it has served as a handmaiden of the powers-that-be to either fix political opponents or make them pliable" (Sareen, 2018), and "the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) — standing in the front row and believed to be targeting some, while sparing others." (Khattak, 2018). In a landmark judgment, even the Supreme Court of Pakistan later noted: "The Accountability Bureau seems reluctant in proceeding against people on one side of the political divide even in respect of financial scams of massive proportion." (Dawn News, 2020). The persecution of political opponents was also noted in a prominent Human Rights Watch report on the 2002 elections (Human Rights Watch, 2002). On October 20, 2003, an opposition politician, Javed Hashmi, held a news conference and proclaimed, "General Pervez Musharraf and PML-Q are imposed on this nation. These national criminals have not only held the army hostage, but also the entire nation." On 29 October 2003, he was taken into custody by NAB prosecutors from the premises of the Parliament and convicted on April 12, 2004. These contemporaneous accounts underscore the concerns that motivate our empirical analysis. They point to a pattern consistent with lawfare: the non-evenhanded and politically contingent use of anti-corruption enforcement, whereby government-aligned actors are less likely to be charged or convicted, while opposition politicians face heightened scrutiny and harsher outcomes. Against this backdrop, we now turn to our data and empirical strategy.

3 Data and Empirical Strategy

3.1 Data Description

Data.— We assemble a new dataset that integrates judicial, electoral, and administrative sources. At its core is the universe of approximately 5,000 corruption cases decided in the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) courts between 1996 and 2018, involving, on average, four defendants per case. Following the creation of NAB in 1999, all corruption cases from other judicial forums were transferred to NAB courts, making them the primary venue for accountability prosecutions under both military and democratic rule. These judicial records are merged with constituency-level electoral returns from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), covering 1,979 constituencies across national and provincial elections. Linking multiple electoral cycles allows us to analyze the short-run impact of elections on prosecution patterns as well as longer-run dynamics such as incumbency advantage.

To study judicial incentives, we further connect case-level outcomes to administrative records from the broader judicial system, including reports from the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP), archival material from High Court registries, and the Judicial Gazettes. This linkage enables us to follow the career trajectories of NAB judges, including promotions to more senior NAB posts and, occasionally, elevation to the High Courts. Combining case outcomes, judicial careers, and electoral dynamics yields a unique dataset to study how political processes shape accountability and how selective enforcement feeds back into patterns of political competition. Details on data construction and validation are provided in Online Appendix A1.

Corruption Cases.— Our primary outcome measure is based on a newly digitized record of corruption adjudication in Pakistan. The main source is the National Accountability Bureau archives in Islamabad, which provide the full set of case judgments from the agency's inception through 2018. We distinguish accountability along two dimensions. At the extensive margin, we capture the number of new corruption cases filed. At the intensive margin, we classify outcomes conditional on filing, coding whether the case resulted in a conviction or guilty plea, monetary fine, or acquittal. This allows us to capture the severity of judicial decisions once a case has reached trial. Because we focus on cases filed before elections, political influence cannot operate through the choice of which cases proceed to trial. Separating initiation from

adjudication enables us to test whether political influence shapes the likelihood of being charged, the probability of conviction once charged, or both. The dataset further records the identity of the defendant, the charges filed, and the final outcome.

Political affiliation and Elections.— We complement the judicial data with constituency-level electoral outcomes from the Election Commission of Pakistan. We collect and harmonize official returns from the 2002, 2008, and 2013 general elections, which provide information on candidate identity, party affiliation, incumbency status, and votes received. From these records, we construct several measures. First, we compute the candidate's margin of victory, which serves as the running variable in our design and identifies narrowly winning and losing candidates. Second, we record whether a candidate belongs to the ruling coalition or the opposition, which captures partisan alignment with the executive. Third, we track incumbency status to distinguish first-time entrants from sitting legislators. We then merge these electoral data with NAB case records through exact name matching, which allows us to identify politicians who both contested elections and appeared as defendants in corruption cases. This linkage makes it possible to study how electoral outcomes shape accountability, including whether winning reduces the likelihood of conviction, whether alignment with the ruling coalition offers protection, and whether opposition candidates are more frequently targeted, and how these dynamics affect incumbency advantage.

Judicial Personnel Records.— We digitized personnel files from judicial archives in Islamabad and matched them to NAB annual reports to construct a judge-level dataset. For each corruption court judge, we record the date of appointment to NAB courts, length of service, number and type of corruption cases adjudicated, and subsequent career path. The latter includes whether and when a judge was promoted within NAB or to High Court. These data allow us to track the career progression of all judges who served in NAB courts between 1999 and 2018. Because the dataset links each judge to the cases they adjudicated, we can examine whether conviction patterns differed systematically across judges with distinct career outcomes, whether promotions were associated with convicting opposition rather than government-affiliated politicians, and whether heavier caseloads correlated with conviction rates of politicians versus career civil servants. Appendix Table B1 reports descriptive statistics for all case-level, electoral, and judge-level variables used in the analysis.

3.2 Empirical Strategy

Estimation Equation.— Our empirical strategy exploits close elections in a regression discontinuity design, comparing candidates who narrowly win or lose. Broadly, we study two main outcomes: whether victory increases new NAB cases against opposition politicians (extensive margin) and whether convictions are more likely for marginal winners (intensive margin). Following (Imbens and Lemieux, 2008) and (Calonico et al., 2014), we employ a non-parametric estimation method, which involves fitting two linear regressions within a certain bandwidth on either side of the threshold. We follow the optimal MSERD algorithm proposed by (Calonico et al., 2014) to construct the bandwidths.

Formally, we estimate:

$$Conviction_i = \alpha + \beta\, Electoral\ Margin + \gamma\, Elected_i + e_i \tag{1}$$

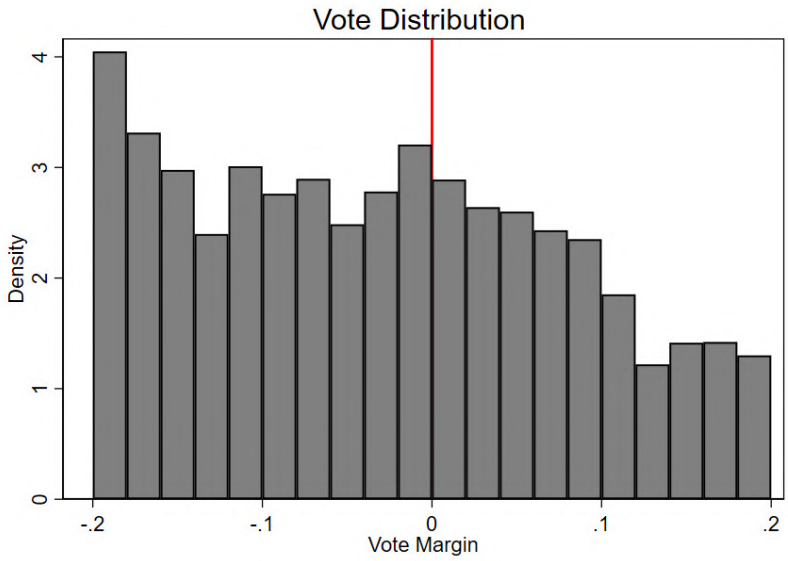
The i index is for individual politicians. The Electoral Margin is the winning margin in elections for the politician, and Elected is a dummy variable if the politician is elected. The main coefficient of interest gives the regression discontinuity estimate for the impact of close elections on corruption convictions.

The baseline specification excludes additional controls to minimize the researcher's discretion. As a falsification exercise, we replicate the design using pre-election cases, for which no discontinuity should be observed if close races approximate random assignment. Inference relies on standard errors clustered at the electoral district level.

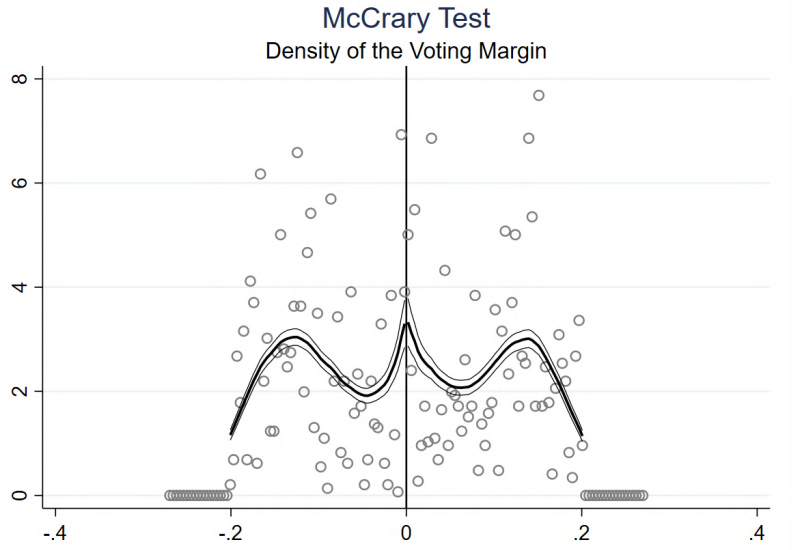
Identification Assumption.— Our identification strategy relies on the assumption that close elections approximate random assignment to office. First, we test for sorting around the threshold. Panel A of Figure 1 shows no visible bunching of observations near the cutoff when looking at the raw distribution of the running variable, which is consistent with the absence of strategic manipulation. Second, we apply the (McCrary, 2008) density test, reported in Panel B of Figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of Electoral Margins and Test for Bunching

Panel A: Raw Distribution of Electoral Margins



Panel B: Test for Bunching



Note: The figure reports the distributions of the running variable (vote margin) around the cutoff. Panel A plots the raw distribution of electoral margins, truncated at ±20 percentage points. The red vertical line is at the. Panel B reports the density discontinuity test of (McCrary, 2008), which formally estimates local polynomial densities on either side of the cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals. The vertical line at zero indicates the electoral threshold that determines treatment (marginal winners vs. marginal losers). No discontinuity is statistically observed, indicating little evidence of manipulation or bunching in the running variable.

The test does not reject continuity at the threshold, providing formal evidence that the distribution of the forcing variable is smooth. Third, we use the manipulation test of (Cattaneo et al., 2018), reported in Figure B1 of the Online Appendix. This test also finds no evidence of sorting, reinforcing the earlier checks with a more recent approach. Fourth, we examine covariate balance. Table 1 shows that narrowly elected and narrowly defeated candidates are statistically similar across a wide range of predetermined characteristics, suggesting that close contests do not systematically select different types of candidates.

Table 1. Covariate Balance at the Electoral Threshold

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Pre-Election Convictions	*Gender Politician*	*Religion*	*# Lawyers in Defense*	*Allegation Type*	*Left Politician*
Marginal Winner	0.0423	0.0272	-0.0135	-0.155	0.0811	-0.0338
	[0.0701]	[0.0285]	[0.0344]	[0.119]	[0.201]	[0.0316]
Observations	1,704	17,864	17,864	17,864	17,864	25,506
Bandwidth	0.205	0.141	0.135	0.128	0.146	0.0968
Mean	0.563	0.641	0.954	5.012	7.041	0.145

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the difference between marginally winning and marginally losing candidates across pre-treatment covariates. Covariates include: (1) an indicator for whether the politician had a pre-election conviction, (2) gender, (3) religion (Muslim vs. non-Muslim), (4) number of defense lawyers, (5) type of allegation (e.g., bribery, embezzlement, abuse of power), and (6) whether the politician belonged to a left-leaning party. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020) with local quadratic bias correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin, and no additional controls are included. Standard errors, clustered at the constituency-election level, are reported in brackets. No systematic discontinuities are detected, consistent with the identifying assumption of the regression discontinuity design.

Fifth, Figure B2 and B3 in Appendix B suggest that both groups are equally likely to have faced prior corruption cases and that the severity of allegations does not change at the cutoff. This indicates that pre-treatment exposure to enforcement is smooth across the threshold. Overall, while none of these checks can prove random assignment, the consistency of the evidence, smooth density, balanced covariates, and no discontinuities in prior wrongdoing support the view that close elections approximate random assignment, making it plausible to interpret post-election discontinuities as the causal effect of holding office.

4 Elections and the Opposition Politicians

Extensive Margin.— We begin presenting our results by examining the extensive margin, asking whether marginal electoral victories change the likelihood that opposition politicians are exposed to new corruption charges. The RD estimates in Table 2 (Panel A), indicate that narrow victories are followed by a substantial increase in prosecutions, with the point estimates suggesting nearly a doubling in the probability of being charged. This corresponds to about seven additional cases per candidate relative to the pre-threshold mean. These results suggest that holding office is associated with greater exposure to legal action for marginally winning opposition politicians. Figure 2 (Panel A), provides visual evidence. There is a sharp and statistically significant jump in prosecutions against opposition politicians at the cutoff. The visual pattern reinforces the interpretation that the discontinuity reflects consequences of office-holding rather than broader electoral dynamics.

To probe whether these findings reflect pre-existing differences, we turn to pre-treatment outcomes as a placebo. Table 2 (Panel A columns 3 and 4) and Figure B2, (Panel A) show no corresponding jump in cases filed before the election. The absence of pre-election discontinuity suggests that the post-election increase is unlikely to reflect systematic differences between narrowly elected and narrowly defeated candidates that arise after office-holding.

Intensive Margin.— We next turn to the intensive margin, asking whether winning office affects conviction outcomes for opposition politicians who already have pending cases. This focus enables us to separate adjudication from new case initiation, addressing the concern that winners may appear more prosecuted simply because they engage in different behavior after taking office. The RD estimates in Table 2 (Panel B), columns (1) and (2) indicate large and precisely estimated effects. Opposition politicians who narrowly win are about 70 percent more likely to be convicted than those who narrowly lose. Figure 2 (Panel B), shows the same pattern visually, with a sharp jump in conviction probabilities at the cutoff. These results suggest that holding office influences not only the filing of new charges but also the outcomes of cases already in progress. To isolate adjudication from initiation, we restrict the sample to cases filed before the election but decided after the election. In this design, treatment status can affect how cases are adjudicated but not whether they are filed.

The discontinuity in conviction rates remains evident in this restricted sample. By contrast, the placebo using convictions from cases both filed and decided before the election show no discontinuity (Table 2, (Panel B), columns (3) and (4), and Figure B2 (Panel B). This comparison suggests that the post-election increase reflects changes in the adjudication of existing cases rather than differences in the initiation of new cases. Together with the extensive margin results, these findings are consistent with a broader pattern of lawfare: opposition politicians who win office face not only more charges but also a higher likelihood of conviction, underscoring the uneven application of justice across the political divide.

Identification Checks.— As noted above, the key identifying assumption in the RD framework is that candidates on either side of a close electoral margin are comparable in expectation, making it plausible to interpret differences at the cutoff as the effect of holding office. We have already documented that the running variable is smooth at the threshold (Figure 1; Figure B1) and that predetermined characteristics are balanced (Table 1). When equation (1) is estimated on cases filed and decided before the election, the RD plots are flat at the cutoff as depicted in Figure B2, and the placebo columns (column 3 and columns 4) of Table 2 Panel A yield null estimates, for both extensive and intensive margins. These results lend strong support to interpret the discontinuities documented in Table 2, Figure 2 as reflecting the causal impact of holding office, in line with uneven enforcement of corruption prosecution against opposition politicians.

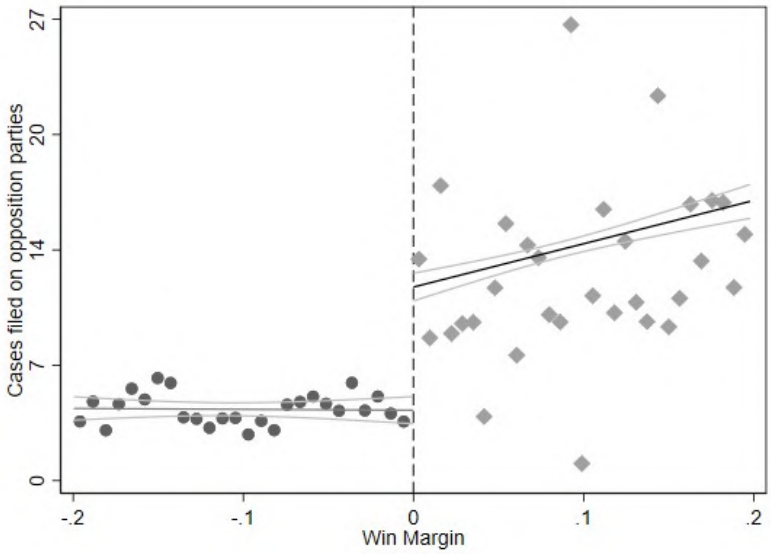
Table 2. Election Victories and Subsequent Corruption Prosecutions Against Opposition Politicians

Panel A: Extensive Margin				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Case Filed Against Opposition Candidate		*Pre-Election Case Filed Against Opposition Candidate*	
Winning Margin	7.272***	5.230***	1.753	2.648
	[1.282]	[1.180]	[1.953]	[1.953]
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,103	2,103	668	668
Mean	5.527	5.527	6.458	0.618
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.0279	0.0318	0.0329	0.0319
Panel B: Intensive Margin				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Conviction Rate for Opposition Candidate		*Pre-Election Conviction Rate for Opposition Candidate*	
Winning Margin	0.354***	0.336***	0.193	0.202
	[0.112]	[0.113]	[0.124]	[0.129]
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,332	1,332	665	665
Mean	0.494	0.494	0.618	0.618
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.0464	0.0454	0.0689	0.0626

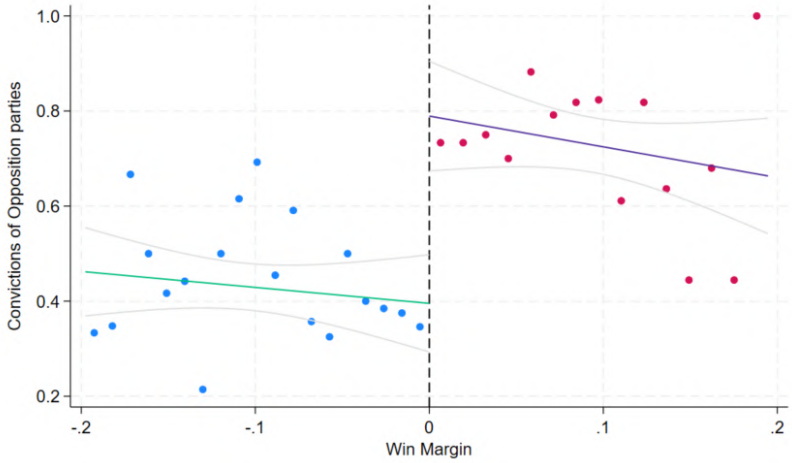
Note: The table reports the regression discontinuity estimates using a bias-corrected estimator proposed by (Calonico et al., 2020) that uses a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is 'margin'; it is the percentage difference in votes between the winning and losing candidates. For example, a margin of 0.05 indicates the winning candidate received 5% more votes than the losing candidate, while -0.05 signifies the losing candidate received 5% fewer votes compared to the winner. All units with margin > 0 are elected (treated), while units with margin <0 are in the control group. Comparison is done within the MSE-optimal bandwidth elected candidates. As with the RD design, units outside the bandwidth are automatically dropped, following. No controls are added. Case Filed Opposition Parties is a count variable, for the number of cases on each politician conditional on being part of the opposition party. Case Filed Affiliate Parties is a count variable, for the number of cases on each politician conditional on being part of the incumbent's affiliate party. Conviction Opposition is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is part of the political opposition when the elections are held and is convicted for corruption charges. Conviction Incumbent is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is a member of the incumbent political party when elections are held and is convicted or pleads guilty for corruption charges and is zero otherwise. Conventional heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are added in parentheses while Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) cluster–robust standard errors are added in square brackets. and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable that is electoral district level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Figure 2. Impact of Marginal Electoral Victories on Opposition Politicians

Panel A: Extensive Margin



Panel B: Intensive Margin



Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption cases filed (Panel A) and convictions (Panel B) of opposition politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average outcome within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure. Solid lines show local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up), truncated at ± 20 percentage points around the cutoff. Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while those with margin < 0 serve as controls. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020).

5 Elections and Government-Aligned Politicians

Extensive Margin.— We begin by asking whether marginal electoral victories alter the likelihood that affiliate politicians will be exposed to new corruption charges. The RD estimates in Table 3 (Panel A), show no increase in the probability of prosecution for affiliates; filing rates for marginal winners and marginal losers are statistically indistinguishable, implying no additional cases relative to the pre-threshold mean. Figure 3 (Panel A), shows a similar pattern visually, with filing rates trending smoothly across the margin and no visible jump for affiliates who narrowly win. So, no additional cases are started against political affiliates. This absence of a discontinuity is also evident in the placebo test using pre-election cases, Table 3 (Panel A), columns 3 and 4. We also show this visually in Figure B3 (Panel A). The flat post-election pattern suggests that government-aligned politicians do not face heightened prosecutorial risk when they enter office, consistent with more even-handed treatment at the filing stage compared to their opposition counterparts.

Intensive Margin.— We then turn to conviction outcomes for affiliate politicians with pending cases. The RD estimates in Table 3 (Panel B), columns (1) and (2) show large and precisely estimated effects in the opposite direction of those for opposition politicians. Affiliate politicians who narrowly win are about 60 percent less likely to be convicted than those who narrowly lose. Figure 3 (Panel B) corroborates this visually, with a clear drop in conviction probabilities at the cutoff. To separate adjudication from case initiation, we restrict the sample to cases filed before the election but decided afterward. The discontinuity in conviction probabilities persists in this restricted sample, whereas convictions for cases both filed and decided before the election show no discontinuity Table 3 (Panel B), columns 3 and 4 and visually in Figure B3 (Panel B). This pattern suggests that government-aligned winners benefit from more favorable treatment in the adjudication of ongoing cases, as convictions fall sharply once they assume office.

Identification Checks.— As noted above, the key identifying assumption in the RD framework is that candidates on either side of a close electoral margin are comparable in expectation, making it plausible to interpret differences at the cutoff as the effect of holding office. We have already documented that the running variable is

smooth at the threshold (Figures 1 and B1) and that predetermined characteristics are balanced (Table 1). When equation (1) is estimated on cases filed and decided before the election, the RD plots are flat at the cutoff as depicted in Figure B3, and the placebo columns of Table 2 Panel B yield null estimates, for both extensive and intensive margins. These results lend strong support to interpreting the discontinuities documented in Table 3 and Figure 3 as reflecting the causal impact of holding office, in line with the uneven enforcement of corruption prosecutions against opposition politicians.

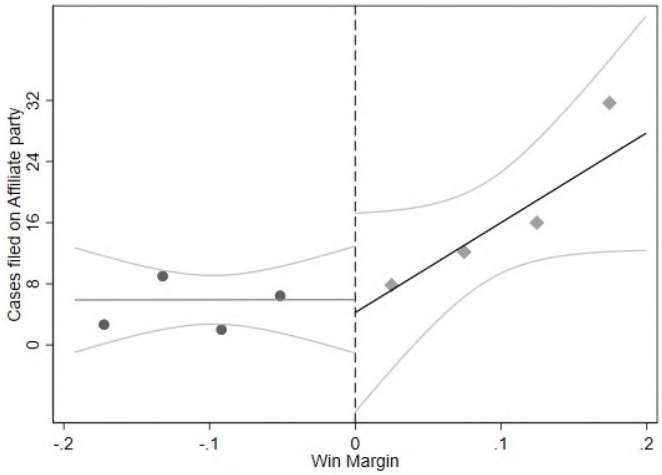
Table 3. Election Victories and Subsequent Corruption Cases Against Affiliate Politicians

Panel B: Extensive Margin				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Case Filed Against Affiliate Candidate		*Pre-Election Case Filed Against Affiliate Candidate*	
Winning Margin	-2.637	-5.255	-3.711	-4.669
	[6.571]	[3.861]	[3.350]	[3.654]
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	43	43	201	201
Mean	7.488	7.488	5.179	5.179
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.0419	0.0488	0.0556	0.0480
Panel B: Intensive Margin				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Conviction Rate for Affiliate Candidate		*Pre-Election Conviction Rate for Affiliate Candidate*	
Winning Margin	-0.561***	-0.504**	-0.0146	-0.00930
	[0.218]	[0.198]	[0.302]	[0.300]
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	321	321	198	198
Mean	0.555	0.555	0.515	0.515
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.0453	0.0443	0.0721	0.0734

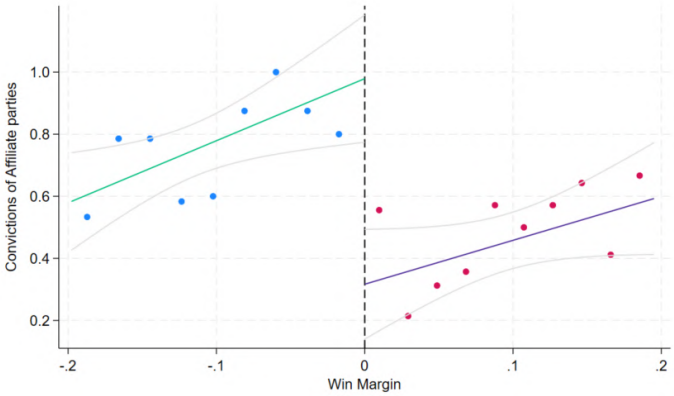
Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates using the bias-corrected estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020), that uses a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is 'margin' ; it is the percentage difference in votes between the winning and losing candidates. For example, a margin of 0.05 indicates the winning candidate received 5% more votes than the losing candidate, while -0.05 signifies the losing candidate received 5% fewer votes compared to the winner. All units with margin > 0 are elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 are in the control group. Comparison is done within the MSE-optimal bandwidth elected candidates. As with the RD design, units outside the bandwidth are automatically dropped, following (Calonico et al., 2020). No controls are added. Conviction Opposition is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is part of the political opposition when the elections are held and is convicted for corruption charges. Conviction affiliate is a dummy variable that takes the value of one when the defendant in the case is a member of the incumbent political party when elections are held and is convicted or pleads guilty for corruption charges and is zero otherwise. Convictions of Oppositions Placebo and Convictions of Incumbent Placebo are estimates of the same equation but for pre-treatment outcomes i.e. it considers convictions of opposition and incumbent, respectively, for cases filed, adjudicated and decided before the elections. Conventional heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are added in parentheses while. Calonico,Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) Cluster–Robust Standard errors are added in square brackets. and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable that is electoral district level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Figure 3. Impact of Marginal Electoral Victories on Affiliate Politicians

Panel A: Extensive Margin



Panel B: Intensive Margin



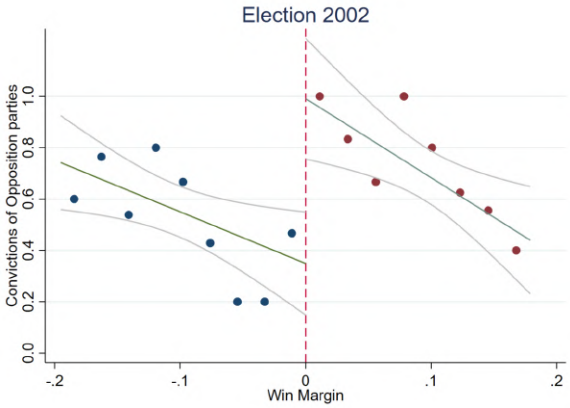
Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption cases filed (Panel A) and convictions (Panel B) of affiliate politicians. Each dot corresponds to the average outcome within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure. Solid lines show local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up), truncated at ± 20 percentage points around the cutoff. Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while those with margin < 0 serve as controls. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020).

6 Lawfare Across Institutional Political Regimes

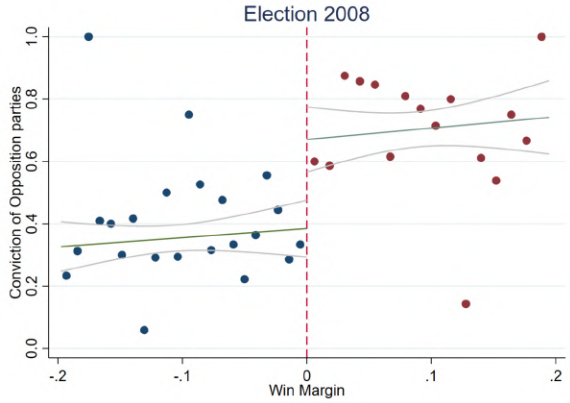
Democracy and Autocracy.— A natural question is whether selective prosecutions are confined to autocratic settings or whether they also persist under democratic turnover. This distinction relates to broader debates on judicial capture and democratic backsliding, where concerns center on the use of legal institutions rather than overt repression as a means of control (Ginsburg, 2019). Evidence from Pakistan echoes this concern: material benefits to judges have been shown to tilt rulings toward incumbents and reduce merit-based decisions Mehmood and Ali (2024). Examining the electoral cycles separately shows that the pattern of lawfare is not regime-specific. In the 2002 cycle, under an autocrat-backed coalition, opposition winners were about 70 percent more likely to be convicted than marginal losers (Table 4 (Panel A); Figure 4 (Panel A). In the 2008 cycle, when a democratic coalition governed, the effect not only persisted but grew larger, with marginal opposition winners about 90 percent more likely to be convicted (Table 4 (Panel B); Figure 4 (Panel B). The continuity of these effects across regime types suggests that elections alone do not discipline prosecutorial selectivity and that politicized enforcement can persist even after a move away from direct dictatorship.

Figure 4. Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Politicians' Convictions by Election

Panel A



Panel B



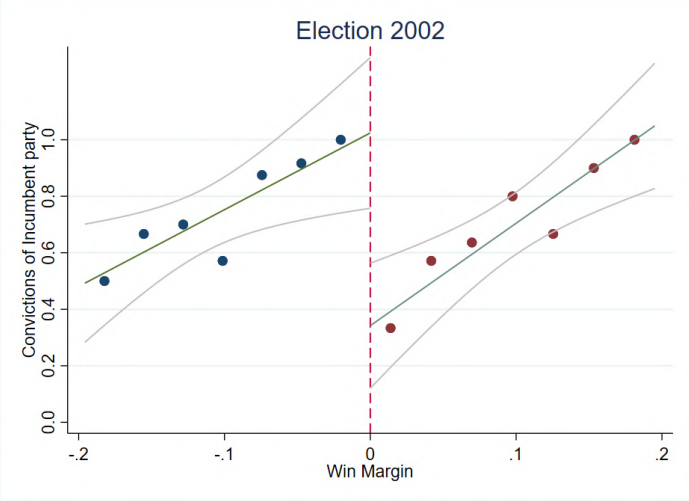
Note: The regression discontinuity plots show the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the 2002 (Panel A) and 2008 (Panel B) state and national elections for opposition candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represents the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the opposition parties at that win margin (these opposition parties are all those who ran against the incumbent party Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q party for 2002) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP for 2008). The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

For Affiliates, when we examine the electoral cycles separately, we find that patterns of selective leniency toward incumbent affiliates also persisted across regimes. In the 2002 cycle, under the autocrat-backed coalition, marginal winners from the incumbent party were roughly half less likely to be convicted as their marginally defeated counterparts Table 4 (Panel A); Figure 5 (Panel A). During the 2008 democratic cycle, the

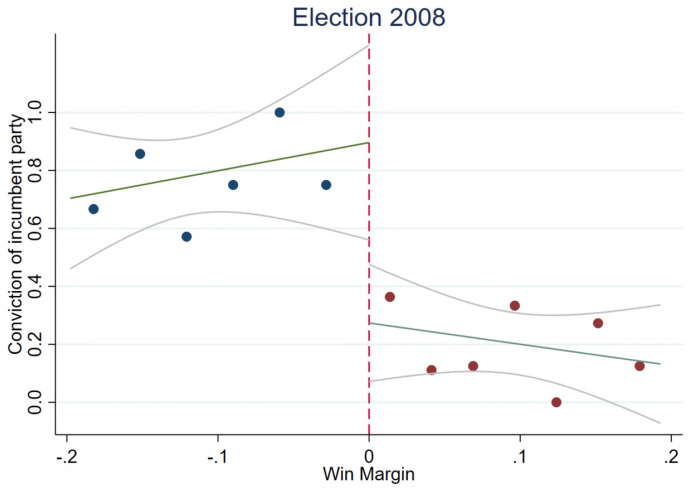
effect remained substantial, with marginal winners about 90 percent less likely to face conviction than marginal losers Table 4, (Panel B); Figure 5 (Panel B). The durability of these effects across regime types underscores that politicized protection is not confined to authoritarian rule: electoral turnover alone does not neutralize executive influence over judicial outcomes, and leniency toward regime-aligned politicians can persist even in periods of formal democratic governance.

Figure 5. Impact on Electoral Wins on Convictions of Incumbents by Election

Panel A



Panel B



Note: The regression discontinuity plots show the conviction probability of the marginal winners and losers of the 2002 (Panel A) and 2008 (Panel B) state and national elections for incumbent candidates. Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represents the vote share difference between candidates measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the incumbent party (Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q) for the 2002 elections) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) for the 2008 elections. Win Margin is the running variable (the vote share difference between candidates) is measured as percentage points. The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers.Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

Table 4. Impact of Marginal Winners on Corruption Convictions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Conviction Rate of Opposition Politicians	*Pre-Treatment Conviction Rates of Opposition Politicians*	*Conviction Rate of Incumbent's Affiliate Politicians*	*Pre-Treatment Conviction Rate of Incumbent's Affiliate Politicians*
Panel A: Election 2002				
Elected	0.513***	0.234	-0.724***	-0.102
	(0.219)**	(0.164)	(0.209)**	(0.243)
	[0.173]	[0.151]	[0.208]	[0.323]
Observations	418	846	330	110
Mean	0.720	0.486	0.597	0.464
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.156	0.211	0.149	0.0996
Panel B: Election 2008				
Elected	0.380***	0.158	-0.482***	0.0366
	(0.140)**	(0.645)	(0.113)	(0.110)
	[0.120]	[0.361]	[0.141]	[0.321]
Observations	494	219	367	262
Mean	0.399	0.461	0.452	0.412
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.145	0.110	0.114	0.155
Panel C: Election 2013				
Elected	-0.0612	0.424	-0.0783	-0.406
	(0.249)	(0.543)	(0.258)	(0.406)
	[0.164]	[0.541]	[0.206]	[0.694]
Observations	2,211	189	882	295
Mean	0.386	0.466	0.458	0.466
Bandwidth (MSE)	0.127	0.099	0.150	0.0866

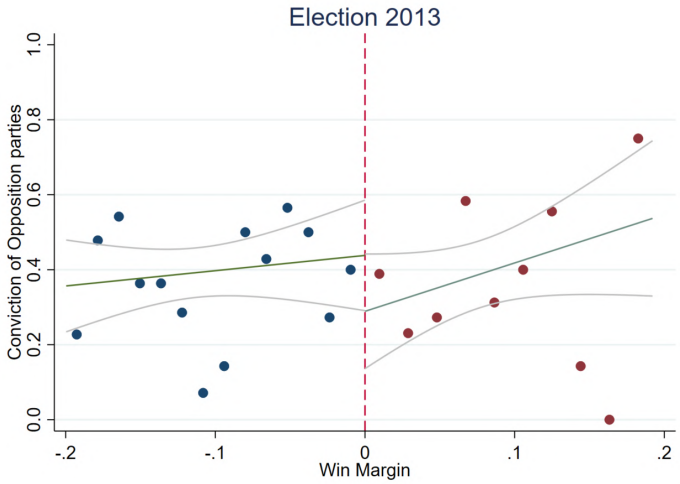
Note: The table reports the regression discontinuity estimates using a bias-corrected estimator proposed by (Calonico et al., 2020) that uses a local linear regression for the estimate and local quadratic regression for the bias correction. The running variable is 'margin'; it is the percentage difference in votes between the winning and losing candidates. A margin of 0.05 indicates the winning candidate received 5% more votes than the losing candidate, while -0.05 signifies the losing candidate received 5% fewer votes. All units with margin > 0 are elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 are control. Comparisons are done within the MSE-optimal bandwidth selected candidates. Units outside the bandwidth are automatically dropped, following (Calonico et al., 2020). No controls are added. *Conviction Opposition* is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the defendant is part of the political opposition when the elections are held and is convicted for corruption charges. *Conviction Incumbent* equals 1 if the defendant is a member of the incumbent party when elections are held and is convicted or pleads guilty, and 0 otherwise. Conventional heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are in parentheses, while Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) cluster–robust standard errors are in square brackets and are clustered at the level of variation of the running variable (constituency–election level). *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Change in Judge Selection Procedure.— The institutional architecture of Pakistan's anti-corruption courts embeded executive discretion at the core of judicial selection and retention. Lower court judges, who qualify to be High Court judges, are nominated by the Prime Minister and the President and appointed for fixed three-year terms. Position at the anti-corruption court is a substantially lucrative position that comes with higer prestige, perks and salary. Upon completion of their tenure, their continuation at the corruption courts depends on an executive review that determines promotion, reassignment, or termination. These career-dependent incentives generate potential pressure to align decisions with the preferences of political authorities, particularly in cases involving politicians. The structure thus enables the executive to influence judicial conduct not through explicit intervention, but through career expectations and implicit signals embedded in the appointment process. We observe effects that which align with this explanation while this institutional architecture was in place until 2010.

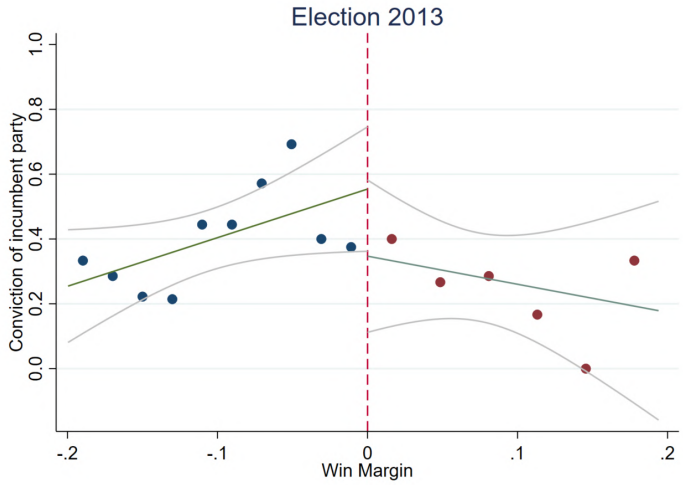
However, In 2010, the appointment and promotion authority was moved from executive control to a judicial committee. This came through a constitutional amendment in 2010 introducing a peer-controlled system for judicial appointments and removals, replacing executive discretion. This reform sharply curtailed the influence of elected officials over judicial careers, making it possible to study how insulation from political control alters judicial behavior (Mehmood, 2022). For the anti corruption courts, under the new selection procedure, the judge was nominated by the Cheif Justice of the respective High Court. We find that after this reform, in the next election cycle, when all judges were appointed under the new selection system, the association between convicting opposition politicians and promotion prospects disappeared, as shown in Table 4 (Panel C) and Figure 6 Panels A and B. This change coincides with a reduction in the asymmetric treatment of opposition and government politicians, consistent with the view that political influence over judicial careers contributes to selective enforcement.

Figure 6. Regression Discontinuity Opposition parties 2013

Panel A



Panel B: Regression Discontinuity Affiliate Party 2013



Note: The regression discontinuity plot shows the conviction probability of the marginal election winners and losers of the 2013 for state and national elections for opposition party candidates (Panel A) and affiliate party candidates (Panel B). Each dot on the graph represents quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (reported on the horizontal axis). The running variable is the win margin that represents the vote share difference between candidates, measured in percentage points. The mean conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the conviction probability of the opposition party candidates (Panel A) and affiliate party candidates (Panel B). The graph is truncated at 20 percentage points on the horizontal axis to accommodate for outliers. Linear fitted lines are shown on both sides of the threshold. 95% Confidence intervals are also reported.

7 Lawfare and Its Consequences

We next examine the broader implications of lawfare for institutional performance and political competition. On the institutional side, we study whether the prosecution and convictions of politicians comes at the expense of anti-corruption convictions of non-politicians? Weather reallocating scarce judicial capacity away from bureaucrats and civil servants would effect convictions of non politicians. On the political side, we assess whether corruption prosecutions and convictions of politicians alter the well-documented incumbency advantage and thereby shift the balance of electoral competition.

Crowd-out of Corruption Convictions— Selective enforcement may not only target politicians but also distort the allocation of judicial capacity. We study convictions of bureaucrats and other career civil servants who are not affiliated with political parties. Figure 7 (Panel A), and Table 5 show that in districts where opposition winners are convicted, non-politician convictions decline significantly. The pattern is absent in pre-election outcomes, consistent with a post-treatment crowd-out rather than pre-existing differences. Figure 7 (Panel B), suggests a mechanism: as caseloads rise, conviction rates for bureaucrats fall, with judges in the most congested districts least likely to convict. These results point to bench congestion, where political prosecutions displace cases against career officials. In this way, lawfare reshapes who is held accountable, protecting government affiliates while diverting resources away from broader anti-corruption enforcement.

Identification Checks.— Concerns that the decline in non-politician convictions reflects baseline differences rather than selective prosecution are mitigated by several exercises. Conviction rates in future opposition-held districts show no discontinuities in non-politician convictions before elections as we can see in Figure B4. For Figure 7 (Panel B), we show that the case assignment of political and non-political cases to judges is balanced. This result is depicted in Table B2. Other identifying assumptions as noted above in the RD framework, also still hold, allowing causal interpretation of Figure 7 and Table 5.

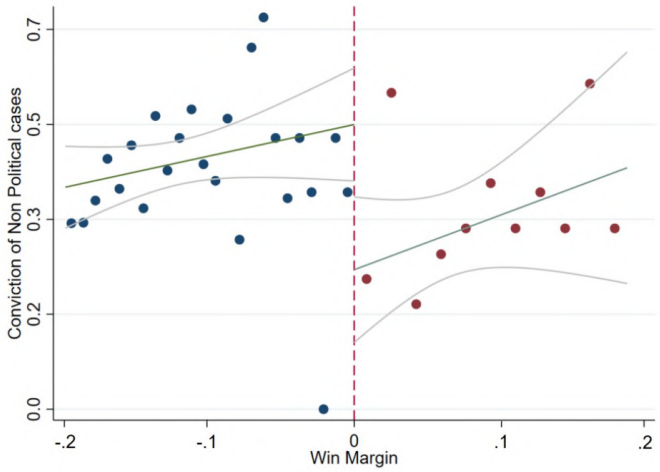
Table 5. Convictions of Corruption of *Non-politicians*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Conviction Non-Politicians	*Conviction Non-Politicians in Opposition Districts*	*Conviction Non-Politicians in Affiliate Districts*
Winning Margin	-0.309***	-0.402***	0.202
	[0.0895]	[0.107]	[0.141]
Observations	1,881	938	943
Mean	0.507	0.508	0.505
Bandwidth	0.117	0.144	0.110

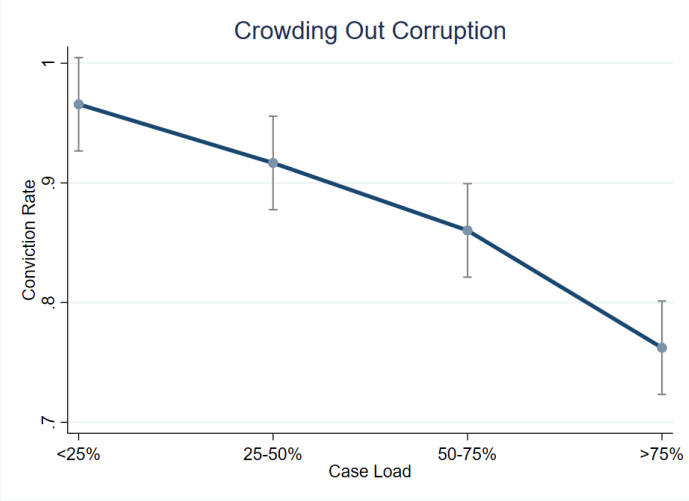
Note: This table reports regression discontinuity (RD) estimates of the impact of marginal electoral victories on corruption convictions of non-politicians (career civil servants). Column (1) shows the overall effect across all districts, while Columns (2) and (3) split the sample between opposition-held and affiliate-held constituencies, respectively. The running variable is the electoral win margin. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020) with optimal bandwidth selection. Standard errors (in brackets) are clustered at the constituency-election level. Mean conviction rates and selected bandwidths are reported at the bottom of the table. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Figure 7. Crowd-Out: Non-Political Convictions in Opposition-Held Districts

Panel A: Conviction of Non-Politicians



Panel B: Conviction of Non-Politicians by Judge Caseload

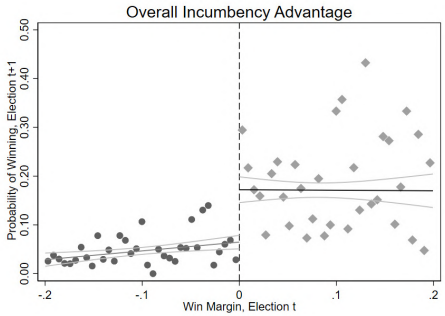


Note: Panel A presents regression discontinuity estimates of conviction probabilities in non-politically salient cases (those involving career civil servants) around close electoral races. The running variable is the win margin, measured as the percentage point difference in vote shares between candidates, truncated at ±20 percentage points to mitigate outliers. Each dot represents quantile-spaced bins, with linear fits estimated separately on either side of the threshold. The vertical axis reports the mean conviction rate in opposition-winning constituencies, and the shaded areas denote 95 percent confidence intervals. Panel B examines the same outcome by judicial caseload in opposition-controlled districts. The horizontal axis shows quartiles of the share of cases adjudicated by each judge, while the vertical axis reports the corresponding mean conviction rates. Error bars reflect 95 percent confidence intervals. Together, the two panels highlight how political turnover and judicial capacity shape the adjudication of non-politician corruption cases.

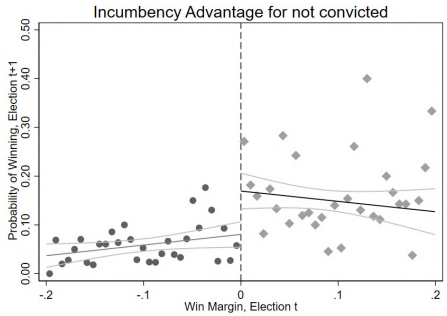
Incumbency Advantage.— Incumbency advantage is a common feature of electoral systems, where incumbents typically enjoy higher re-election probabilities due to visibility, resources, and institutional leverage. Our setting reproduces this pattern: Figure 8 (Panel A), and Table 6, column 1 show that marginal incumbents in Pakistan are about 20 percentage points more likely to win re-election than marginal losers. Lawfare substantially alters this regularity. Among opposition incumbents convicted of corruption, the incumbency advantage disappears and is statistically indistinguishable from zero Figure 8, (Panel C); Table 6, column 3. Even acquitted opposition politicians lose ground, with their advantage falling by half to roughly 10 percentage points Figure 8 (Panel B);Table 6, column 2). The evidence suggests that an open corruption investigation alone weakens electoral prospects, while conviction eliminates the incumbency edge altogether. In contrast, affiliate incumbents show no such decline, consistent with their protection from conviction documented above. These results suggest that the selective enforcement of the law, or lawfare, not only disadvantages opposition politicians in court but also alters the balance of electoral competition by erasing their incumbency advantage, thereby reinforcing the position of government allies.

Figure 8. Incumbency of Politicians

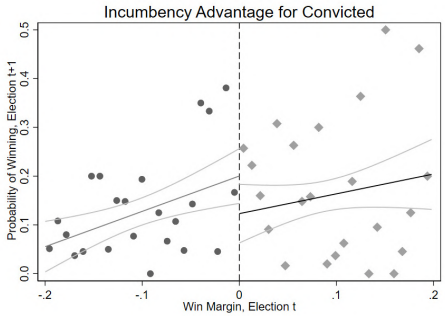
Panel A



Panel B



Panel C



Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the incumbency advantage at the electoral threshold. Panel A shows the overall probability of re-election in election $t+1$ as a function of narrowly winning election at t. Panel B restricts to opposition politicians who narrowly won and were not convicted of corruption, while Panel C restricts to those who were convicted. Each dot corresponds to the average outcome within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of `rdplot`. Solid lines show local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals. The graph is truncated at ± 20 percentage points around the cutoff. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020).

Table 6. Incumbency Advantage in Vote Share, *Conditional on Convictions.*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Overall vote share t+1	Vote share t+1 if Not Convicted	Vote share t+1 if Convicted
Winning Margin	0.191***	0.0987***	-0.0112
	[0.0217]	[0.0335]	[0.0686]
Observations	4,245	4,405	2,135
Mean, left of cutoff	0.0670	0.114	0.125
Bandwidth	0.0744	0.110	0.109

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity (RD) estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories in election t on politicians' vote share in election $t+1$. Column (1) presents the overall incumbency advantage. Column (2) restricts the sample to politicians who were not convicted of corruption between elections t and $t+1$. Column (3) restricts those who were convicted. RD estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020), with optimal bandwidth selection. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between the top two candidates). Standard errors, clustered at the constituency–election level, are reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

8 Mechanisms and Additional Robustness Checks

8.1 Mechanisms

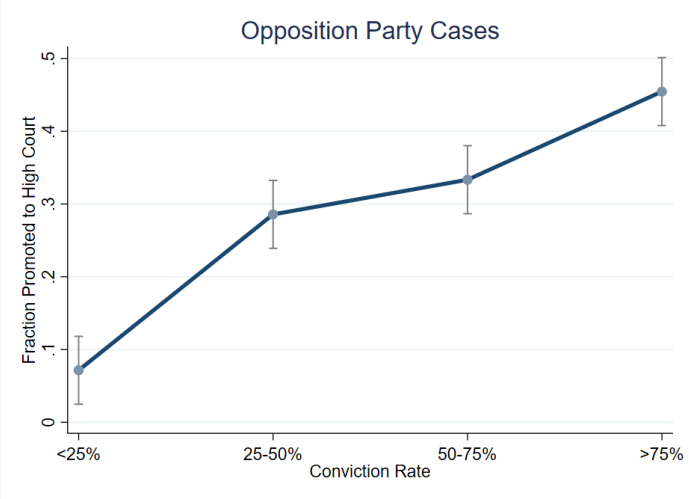
Mechanisms.— To shed light on why opposition politicians face higher conviction rates, we examine whether judicial career concerns contribute to these patterns. As discussed above, the institutional design of anti-corruption courts in Pakistan embeds executive control into the judicial selection process. Judges are appointed for three-year terms through nominations made by the Prime Minister and the President. At the end of this term, judges are subject to executive review, which determines whether they are promoted, reassigned, or dismissed. These career-contingent incentives expose judges to political pressure, especially in high-stakes cases involving elected officials. The lack of institutional autonomy makes it possible for the executive to shape judicial behavior not through direct orders, but through implicit signals embedded in the career structure itself.

The evidence is consistent with this interpretation: judges who convict opposition politicians are more likely to be promoted within the system or to higher positions in-

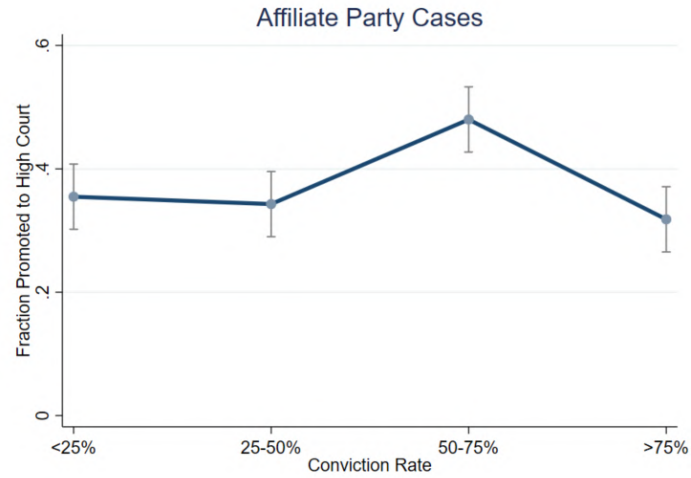
cluding promotions to High Courts, whereas convictions of government-aligned politicians do not appear to influence promotion prospects. Figure 9 (Panel A) shows a positive association between convictions of opposition politicians and subsequent promotion, while Figure 9 (Panel B) indicates no comparable relationship for convictions of incumbents. These findings suggest that career incentives may play a role in shaping judicial decision-making, though they do not rule out other explanations.

Figure 9. Effect on Judges promotion

Panel A



Panel B



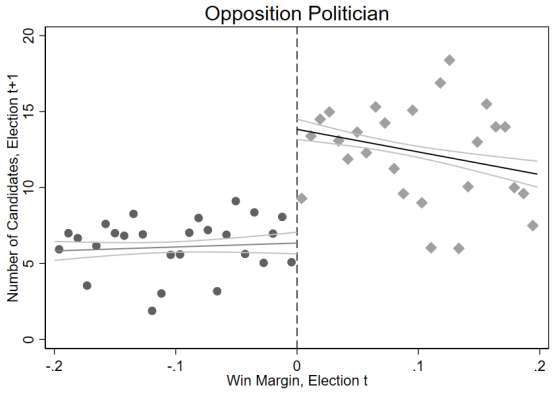
Note: The graph shows the fraction of judges promoted to the high court after completing their tenure at the corruption court. The fraction promoted to high court (vertical axis) shows the probability of promotion. The conviction rate (horizontal axis) is the mean conviction for each judge, when subsampling for cases only involving opposition party politicians (Panel A) and incumbent party affiliate politicians (Panel B) . The bars show the Confidence interval at 95% .

Change in Political competition.— To probe the mechanism behind the reduced incumbency advantage observed among convicted opposition politicians, we analyze how convictions alter the composition of electoral contests. Panel A of Figure 10 reveals that constituencies where opposition politicians won election (t) experience

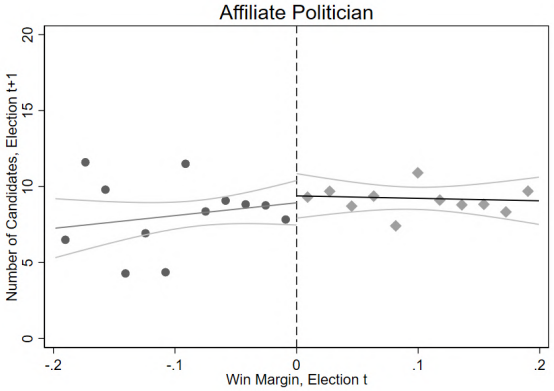
a sharp rise in the number of candidates contesting the next election (*t+1*). These newly opened seats attract multiple aspirants, as politicians in these constituencies are systematically convicted more often, new entrants fragment the opposition's vote bank and weaken their ability to retain the constituency. This pattern does not emerge in constituencies where affiliate politicians win the election (t), shown in Panel B, we notice that in the next election (*t+1*) new candidate entry remains largely unchanged. The contrast suggests that lawfare systematically destabilize opposition strongholds while leaving pro-government constituencies intact. Rather than fostering political competition, this proliferation of candidates serves to disperse opposition votes and reinforce the governing party's electoral advantage, thereby consolidating its position in subsequent elections.

Figure 10. Effect on No. of Candidates in the next elections in the same constituency

Panel A



Panel B



Note: This figure presents regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of winning election t on the number of candidates contesting in election $t+1$ within the same constituency. Panel A shows that constituencies where opposition politicians narrowly win experience a sharp increase in candidate entry in the subsequent election. Panel B shows no comparable rise for affiliate politicians. Each point represents the mean outcome within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show bias-corrected local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff. The proliferation of candidates following opposition victories indicates a systematic opening of opposition constituencies that erodes incumbents' ability to retain their seats.

Additional Robustness

Bandwidth Selection.— These results are robust to various bandwidth selection methods and balance checks of marginal winners and losers across a wide range of observed characteristics. In Figure B5 Panel A of the Appendix, I report the results by varying the bandwidths for opposition politician convictions, and our results remain similar. Similarly, I do the same for affiliate politicians in Figure B5 (Panel B), reassuringly or the results remain similar. This strongly suggests that the exact choice of bandwidth is not driving my results. This also suggests that bunching around the threshold is not likely to be an important determinant of my results. If there were bunching around the threshold, I would see sharp differences in my coefficient estimates as I moved across the different thresholds.

Bunching.— A key concern in close-election RD designs is manipulation of the running variable, whereby candidates or parties bunch just above the victory threshold. We evaluate this using the (McCrary, 2008) density test and its refinements. Figure 1 (Panel A) plots the raw distribution of electoral margins, and Panel B reports the McCrary density discontinuity test. The estimates show no visible break in density at zero, suggesting little evidence of manipulation or sorting. We corroborate this with more recent tests. Appendix Figure B1 applies the local polynomial density estimator of(Cattaneo et al., 2018) to the full sample, again finding no discontinuity at the threshold. Appendix Figure repeats the test separately for the 2002, 2008, and 2013 elections. In all years, densities are smooth across the cutoff, with confidence intervals overlapping zero. As an additional diagnostic, we plot the raw distribution of candidates' vote shares across constituencies. Appendix Figure 7 shows the raw distribution of vote shares in the 2002, 2008, and 2013 elections. The distributions are smooth and unimodal in each cycle, with no evidence of irregular spikes around threshold values. The raw distribution of vote shares to reinforces the conclusion by displaying the full histogram of candidate performance across all elections in our sample. Together, these figures show that the electoral environment is well-behaved and that our RD design is not driven by anomalies in the underlying distribution of candidate vote shares. Together, these exercises rule out bunching at the margin of victory, reinforcing the validity of the RD design.

Balance.— The credibility of the RD design rests on the comparability of candidates

who narrowly win and those who narrowly lose. As noted above, we formally test this assumption using a range of predetermined characteristics, including prior convictions, gender, religion, the number of defense lawyers, the type of allegation, and party ideology. Table 1 reports the RD estimates, none of which indicate significant discontinuities at the cutoff. Appendix Figure B8 (Panels A - Panel E) provide complementary visual checks, showing smooth local polynomial fits across all dimensions. As an additional placebo, we estimate equation (1) using cases filed or decided before the election; consistent with random assignment, no discontinuities are observed. These results reinforce the assumption that marginal winners and losers were assigned office pseudorandomly.

Alternate Polynomials— To ensure our findings are not an artifact of a particular graphical or functional form choice, we replicate the core results using alternative RD estimations. First, instead of the cmogram plots reported in the main figures, we re-estimate the discontinuities using the rdplot routine of (Calonico et al., 2014) with optimal binning. Appendix Figure B9 Panel A and Panel B show the intensive margin effect of marginal wins on convictions of opposition and affiliate politicians. The discontinuity is evident with the slope and levels closely tracking the cmogram results presented earlier. Similarly, we show quadratic local fits in Appendix Figure B10 Panel A and Panel B. We observe the discontinuity to be evident under both linear and quadratic local fits. We also show the extensive margin results in Figure B11 Panel A (linear rdrobust) and Panel B (quadratic rdrobust). The persistence of these patterns across graphical methods and polynomial orders underscores that the findings are not sensitive to the choice of visualization or specification. Moreover, we evaluate robustness to higher-order polynomials. Appendix Table B3 reports regression discontinuity estimates with quadratic specifications of the running variable. The effect for opposition politicians remains positive and significant, while placebo outcomes, pre-election convictions and cases resolved before treatment show no break at the threshold. Results for government-affiliated incumbents remain close to zero or negative, reinforcing the asymmetric pattern documented in the main analysis. Together, these robustness checks confirm that the core results are stable under alternative approaches and lend further credibility to the interpretation that lawfare operates selectively against opposition politicians.

Placebo Discontinuities.— A further validation check is to test for spurious dis-

continuities at artificial thresholds where no treatment occurs. Table B4 implements this exercise by shifting the cutoff from the true electoral margin to placebo thresholds ranging from ±1 percent to ±6 percent. Panel A reports estimates for opposition politicians. Across all placebo thresholds, the estimated discontinuities in conviction rates are close to zero and statistically insignificant, providing no evidence of false positives away from the true cutoff. Panel B repeats the exercise for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Again, the coefficients fluctuate around zero and remain imprecisely estimated, with no systematic pattern. The absence of discontinuities at placebo thresholds reinforces the credibility of the main RD estimates. It indicates that the observed effects are localized to the true electoral threshold, consistent with the identifying assumption that assignment near the cutoff approximates randomization.

Donut RD.— A potential concern with close-election RD designs is that results may be driven by manipulation in the immediate neighborhood of the cutoff, where electoral outcomes are most easily contested. To address this, we estimate donut RD specifications that exclude progressively wider bands of observations closest to the threshold. Appendix Figure B12 report estimates for opposition politicians, while Figure B13 show results for government-affiliated incumbents. Excluding ±0.5, ±1, ±2, ±3, ±4, and ±5 percentage point neighborhoods around the cutoff leaves the main findings unchanged. Conviction probabilities for opposition marginal winners remain sharply higher than for marginal losers, while estimates for affiliates remain close to zero. The slopes and fitted lines remain smooth across all donut specifications, with confidence intervals consistently overlapping the main estimates. These checks confirm that the results are not artifacts of potential manipulation in ultra-close races. Instead, the discontinuities are robust to dropping observations near the cutoff, further strengthening the interpretation of the RD as capturing causal effects of electoral victory on subsequent prosecutions.

Controls.— Another concern is that baseline differences in candidate characteristics could drive the discontinuities we document. To test this, we re-estimate the RD models including a full set of pre-treatment controls: politician gender, religion, ideology, and pre-election case characteristics. Table B5 reports the results. Columns (1) and (2) show the intensive margin effect for opposition politicians, while Columns (3) and (4) report estimates for government-affiliated incumbents. For both groups,

the inclusion of controls leaves the core estimates essentially unchanged. Opposition marginal winners remain significantly more likely to face convictions, while estimates for affiliates continue to be small and statistically indistinguishable from zero. Placebo outcomes, using pre-election convictions, remain flat. The stability of the coefficients across specifications underscores that our findings are not artifacts of omitted covariates. Instead, the discontinuities reflect genuine treatment effects of narrow electoral victory on subsequent prosecution patterns.

Using alternate Kernels.— Finally, we assess whether our results are sensitive to the choice of kernel function used in local polynomial estimation. Standard RD practice relies on triangular kernels, but we also report estimates using Epanechnikov and uniform kernels.Table B6 presents results for opposition politicians. Across all three kernels, the estimated discontinuities remain large, positive, and statistically significant. The magnitudes are tightly clustered, with only minor variation across specifications.Table B7 shows the corresponding estimates for government-affiliated incumbents. Here, the discontinuities remain negative and significant under all kernels, with magnitudes again stable across specifications. The consistency of results across kernel functions demonstrates that the findings are not an artifact of any particular weighting scheme. Instead, the discontinuities reflect robust treatment effects of electoral victory on subsequent corruption convictions, reinforcing the credibility of the design.

Excluding Political Capitals.— Large urban constituencies or political capitals may follow different judicial or political dynamics than other districts, raising the possibility that our main results are driven by a handful of influential constituencies. To test this, we sequentially exclude the five largest provincial and national capitals—Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, and Rawalpindi—from the estimation sample. Table B8 reports results for opposition politicians. Across all exclusions, the estimated discontinuities remain large, positive, and statistically significant, with magnitudes closely aligned to the baseline specification. Table B9 presents the corresponding results for government-affiliated incumbents. Here, too, the negative and significant coefficients remain stable across all specifications. These exercises demonstrate that the core findings are not an artifact of case concentration in political capitals. Instead, the effects generalize across the country, reinforcing the conclusion that selective prosecutions are a systematic feature of the judicial process rather than

a phenomenon confined to urban or politically salient constituencies.

External Validity.— It is noted by (List, 2020)in an important paper that "all results are externally valid to some setting, and no result will be externally valid to all settings." Therefore, I follow the (List, 2020)'s SANS (Selection-Attrition-Naturalness-Scaling) conditions in my discussion of the external validity of my results. First, in terms of selection, our sample consists of more than 20,000 corruption cases from 1996 to 2018 that include all marginal winners and losers in about 2000 elections held at the district (constituency level) as well as at the national level. Considering the naturalness of the setting, time frame and choice task, we obtain natural measures such as electoral victory. The policymakers are not placed on an artificial margin and perform natural tasks in the field. Second, the electoral structure in Pakistan is similar to many other developing countries, especially India and Bangladesh, which, like Pakistan, inherited these political institutions during the British Colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh alone consist of more than a quarter of the world's population, making this study particularly relevant for a large number of people. We, however, view these results as a WAVE1 insight, in the nomenclature of List (2020), and replications need to be completed to understand if the effect sizes can be applied to other general populations as well as other countries in the Global South.

9 Concluding Remarks

This study has investigated the phenomenon of lawfare, the strategic use of courts to weaken political rivals, through the case of Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau (NAB) courts. By digitizing the universe of corruption prosecutions from 1996 to 2018 and linking them to detailed electoral data, we provide causal evidence on how judicial institutions are deployed in partisan ways. Exploiting close elections in a regression discontinuity design, we find that opposition politicians face systematically greater scrutiny: they are more likely to be charged with new corruption cases and, conditional on prosecution, substantially more likely to be convicted. In contrast, politicians affiliated with the government are not simply treated symmetrically but actively shielded, facing reduced conviction probabilities compared to their opposition

counterparts. These asymmetries are observed under both democratic governments and military rule, suggesting that regime type alone does not eliminate the incentives to use courts as political instruments.

The consequences of such selective enforcement are far-reaching. Within the judiciary, the pursuit of political rivals coincides with a decline in convictions of career civil servants, particularly in the most congested courts. This suggests that scarce judicial capacity is reallocated away from routine oversight and toward politically salient cases, with implications for the broader accountability of the state. Within the electoral arena, prosecutions and convictions sharply reduce the incumbency advantage of opposition politicians, halving it when prosecutions occur and eliminating it entirely when convictions take place, while government affiliates retain the usual advantage. Thus, institutions formally designed to safeguard accountability are transformed into tools that entrench incumbents and distort democratic competition.

These findings contribute to several strands of research. First, they deepen our understanding of the political economy of judicial independence. Much of the literature highlights how courts constrain executive overreach and foster economic development; our evidence shows that when judicial careers are tied to executive preferences, courts can instead be captured and redeployed for partisan purposes. Second, our results add to the literature on state capacity by documenting how the politicization of judicial enforcement undermines the delivery of impartial accountability, crowding out oversight that is central to the functioning of the bureaucracy. Third, we connect to the literature on incumbency advantage, identifying a new channel through which incumbents entrench themselves, not by mobilizing resources or rewriting electoral rules, but by selectively prosecuting opponents. Ultimately, our study underscores a fundamental paradox of governance: institutions designed to check power can themselves become instruments of power. When courts are weaponized, the promise of accountability is inverted, justice is not blind but partisan, and the very institutions that should reinforce democracy can instead be used to erode it.

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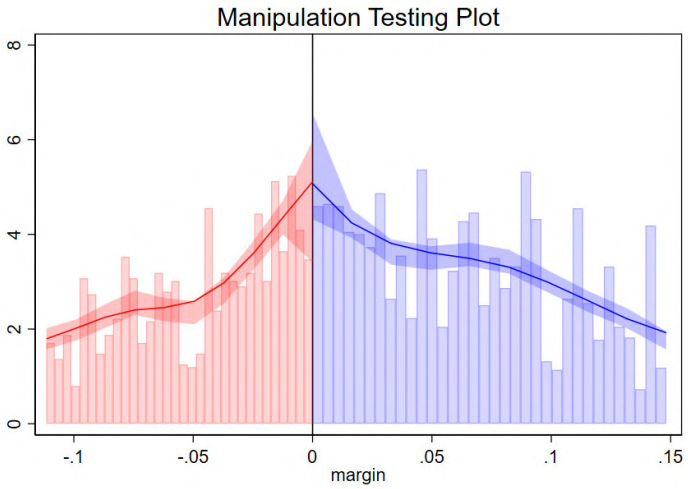
Appendix B: Additional Figures and Tables

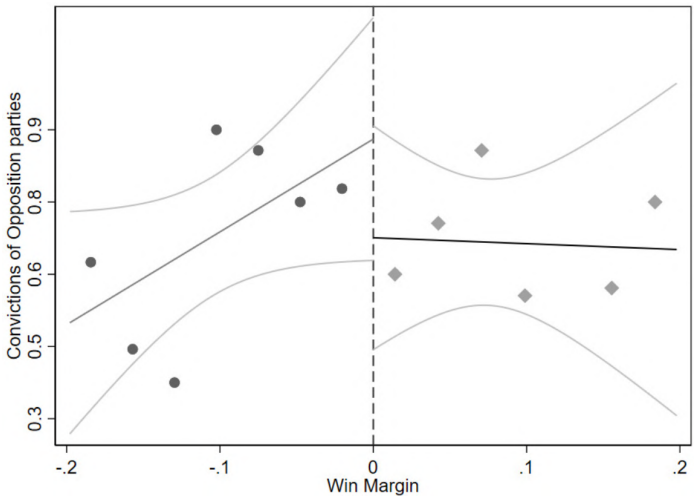
Figure B1. Test for Bunching at the Electoral Threshold.



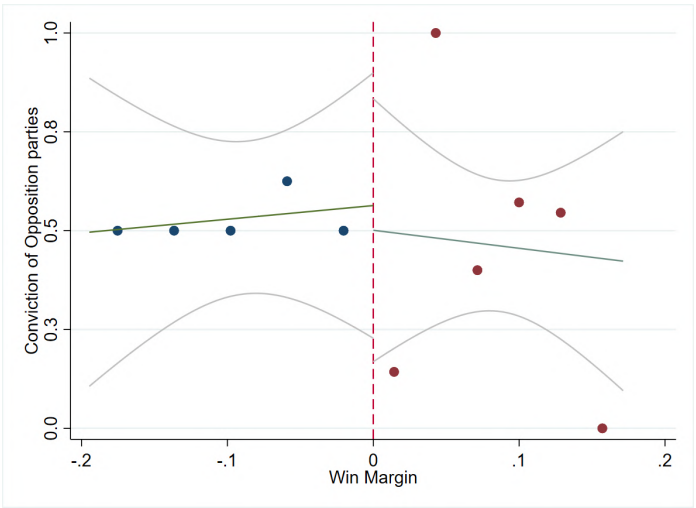
Note: The figure plots the density of the running variable (vote margin) for all elections around the cutoff. Bars show the histogram of the running variable, and the fitted lines show local polynomial estimates of the density on each side of the threshold, with shaded bands denoting 95 percent confidence intervals. We test for a discontinuity at the cutoff using (Cattaneo et al., 2018). No evidence of manipulation or bunching is detected.

Figure B2. Placebo Tests for Opposition Politicians

Panel A: Extensive Margin



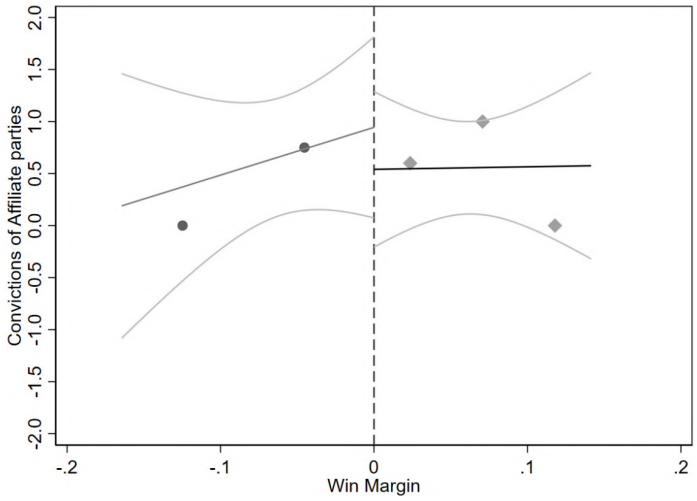
Panel B: Intensive Margin



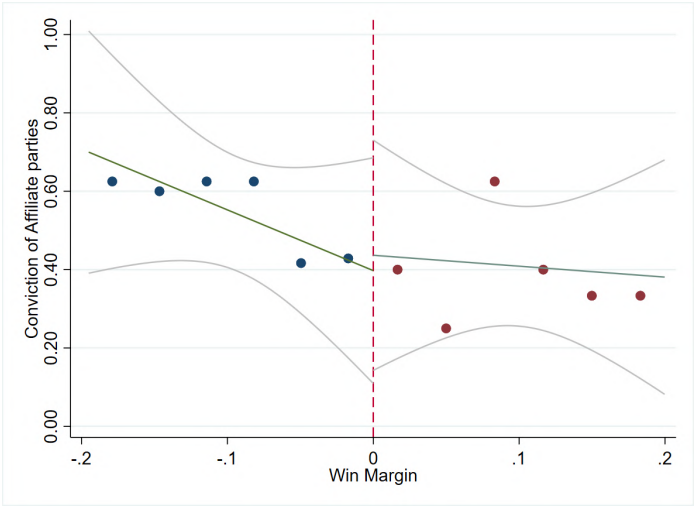
Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on placebo outcomes for opposition politicians, based on cases filed and resolved before the election. Panel A reports extensive margin results (cases filed), and Panel B reports intensive margin results (convictions). Each dot corresponds to the average outcome within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure. Solid lines show local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up), and the graph is truncated at ±20 percentage points around the cutoff. No discontinuities are observed, consistent with the identifying assumption of the regression discontinuity design. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020).

Figure B3. Placebo Tests for Incumbent-Affiliated Politicians

Panel A: Extensive Margin

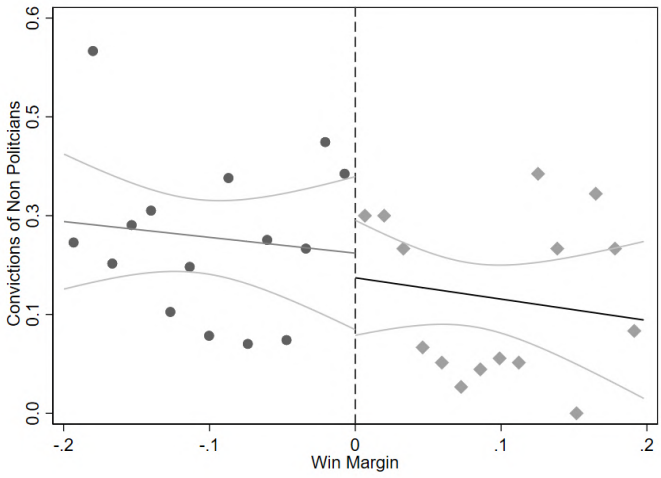


Panel B: Intensive Margin



Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on placebo outcomes for incumbent-affiliated politicians, based on cases filed and resolved before the election. Panel A reports extensive margin results (cases filed), and Panel B reports intensive margin results (convictions). Each dot corresponds to the average outcome within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure. Solid lines show local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up), and the graph is truncated at ± 20 percentage points around the cutoff. No discontinuities are observed, consistent with the identifying assumption of the regression discontinuity design. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020).

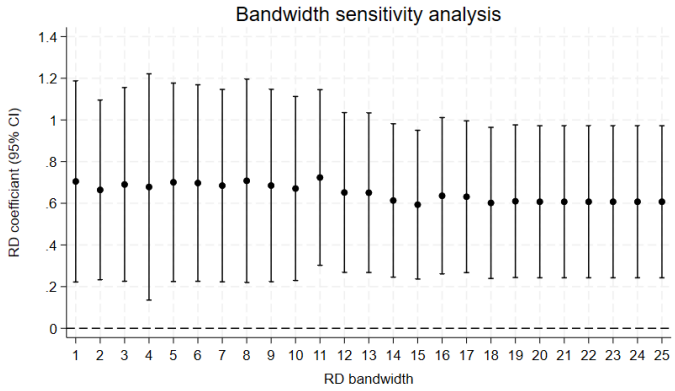
Figure B4. Pre-election Conviction Rate of non-politicians in opposition districts



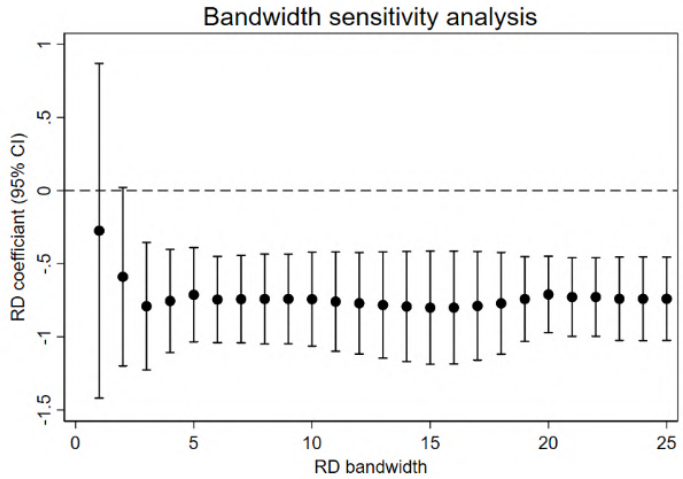
Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity (RD) estimates of the relationship between marginal electoral victories and pre-election corruption convictions of non-politicians (career civil servants) in opposition-held districts. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within quantile-spaced bins of the running variable (vote margin, measured in percentage points). Solid lines display local linear fits estimated separately on each side of the cutoff, with shaded bands denoting 95 percent confidence intervals. The running variable is truncated at ±20 percentage points to reduce the influence of outliers. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020). The absence of a discontinuity at the cutoff indicates that convictions of non-politicians prior to the election are balanced across marginal winners and losers, supporting the validity of the design.

Figure B5. Robustness to Different Bandwidths

Panel A: Opposition Politicians



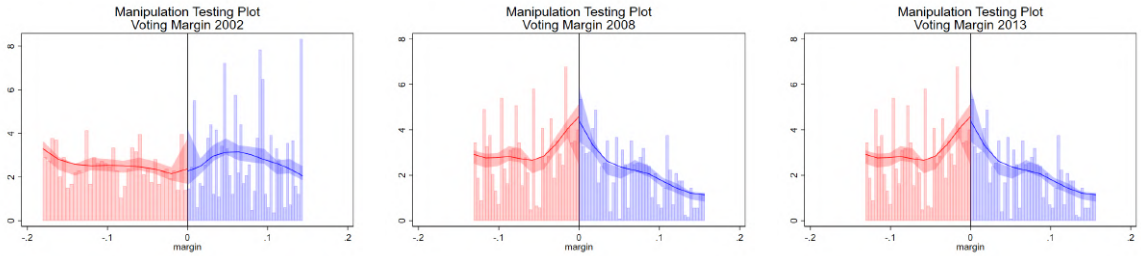
Panel B: Affiliate Politicians



Note: The figure plots regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions across a range of bandwidths. Panel A reports results for opposition politicians, and Panel B for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Each dot represents the estimated discontinuity at a given bandwidth, with vertical bars showing 95 percent confidence intervals. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following (Calonico et al., 2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up).

Figure B6. Test for Bunching at the Electoral Threshold

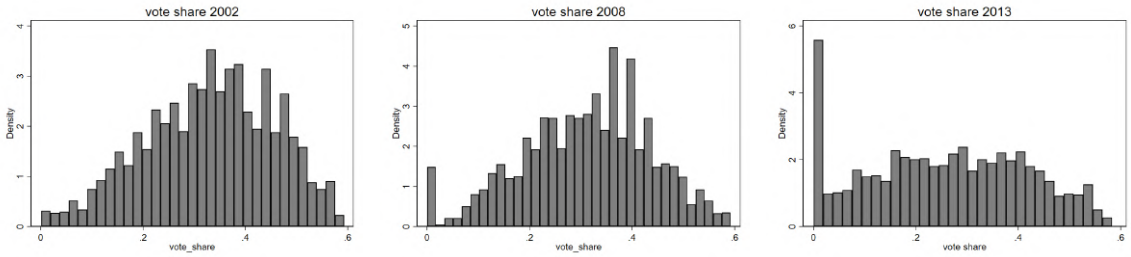
Panel A: 2002 Election Panel B: 2008 Election Panel C: 2013 Election



Note: The figure plots the density of the running variable (vote margin) around the cutoff separately for the 2002 (Panel A), 2008 (Panel B), and 2013 (Panel C) elections. Bars show the histogram of the running variable, and the fitted lines show local polynomial estimates of the density on each side of the threshold, with shaded bands denoting 95 percent confidence intervals. We test for a discontinuity at the cutoff using (Cattaneo et al., 2018). No evidence of manipulation or bunching is detected in any election year.

Figure B7. Distribution of Vote Shares by Election Year

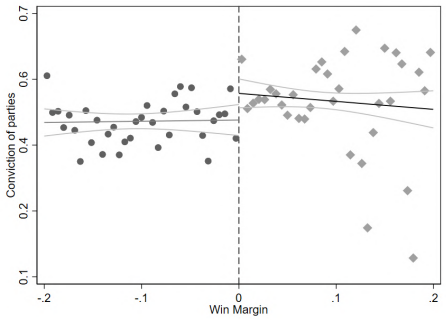
Panel A | Panel B | Panel C



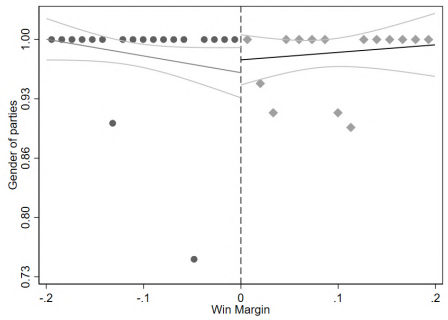
2002 Election | 2008 Election | 2013 Election

Note: The figure plots the distribution of candidates' vote shares across parliamentary constituencies in the 2002 (Panel A), 2008 (Panel B), and 2013 (Panel C) general elections. Each histogram shows the density of the vote share variable for all candidates in the respective election year.

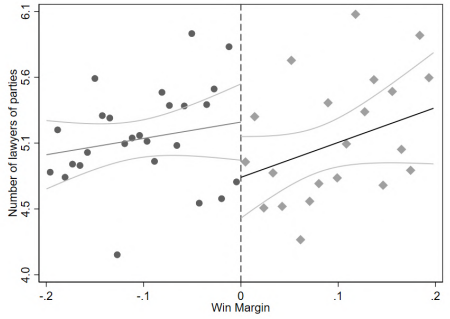
Figure B8. Balance Tests



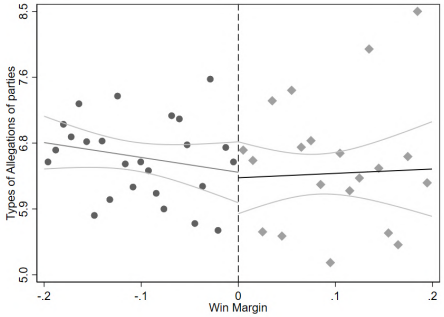
Panel A: Balance Test Using Pre-Election Convictions of Politicians.



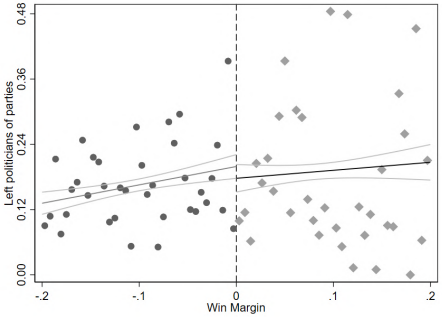
Panel B: Balance Test Using Gender of Politicians



Panel C: Balance Test Using Number of Defense Lawyers for Politicians.



Panel D: Balance Test Using Types of Allegations Against Politicians

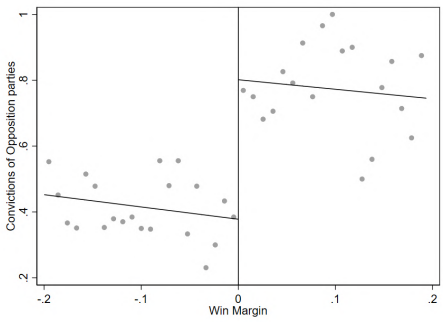


Panel E: Balance Test Using Party Ideology of Politicians

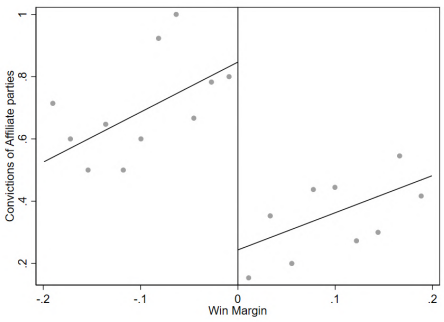
Note: The figures plot various pre-treatment characteristics of opposition politicians such as the share convicted of corruption before the election, share of males, average number of defense lawyers, number of allegation categories, and share affiliated with left-leaning parties against their electoral win margin. Panel A examines pre-election convictions Panel B gender, Panel C number of defense lawyers, Panel D types of allegations, and Panel E party ideology. Each dot represents the average within bins of the running variable (vote margin), and solid lines show local polynomial fits with 95 percent confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to close elections within ±20 percentage points. Across all figures, no visible discontinuity is observed at the cutoff, indicating that narrowly winning and narrowly losing opposition candidates are similar across these characteristics, thereby supporting the validity of the regression discontinuity design.

Figure B9. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Convictions

Panel A: Opposition Politicians



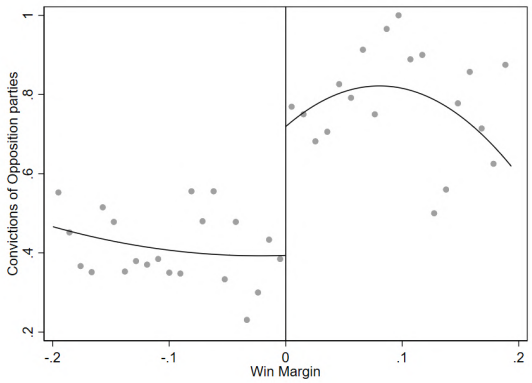
Panel B: Affiliate Politicians



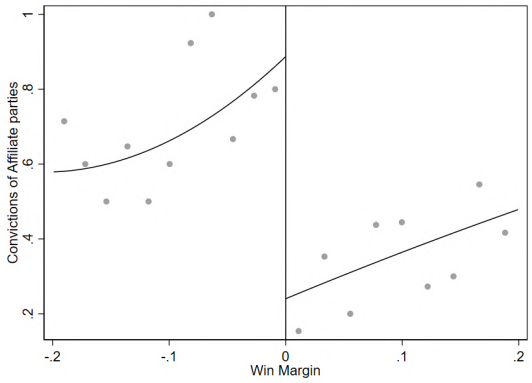
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition party candidates (Panel A) and affiliate party candidates (Panel B) convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of robust bias-corrected RDD approach. Separate local linear regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the rdplot routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico et al., 2014); (Calonico et al., 2020).

Figure B10. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Convictions

Panel A: Opposition Politicians



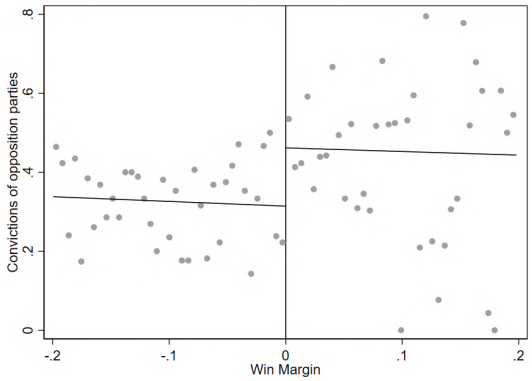
Panel B: Affiliate Politicians



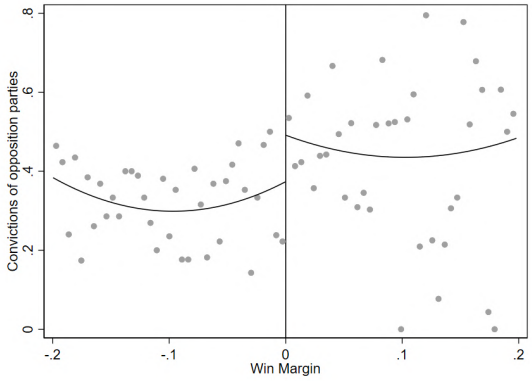
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition party candidates (Panel A) and affiliate party candidates (Panel B) convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of robust bias-corrected RDD approach. Separate local quadratic regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the rdplot routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico et al., 2014);(Calonico et al., 2020).

Figure B11. Extensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Convictions

Panel A: Opposition Politicians

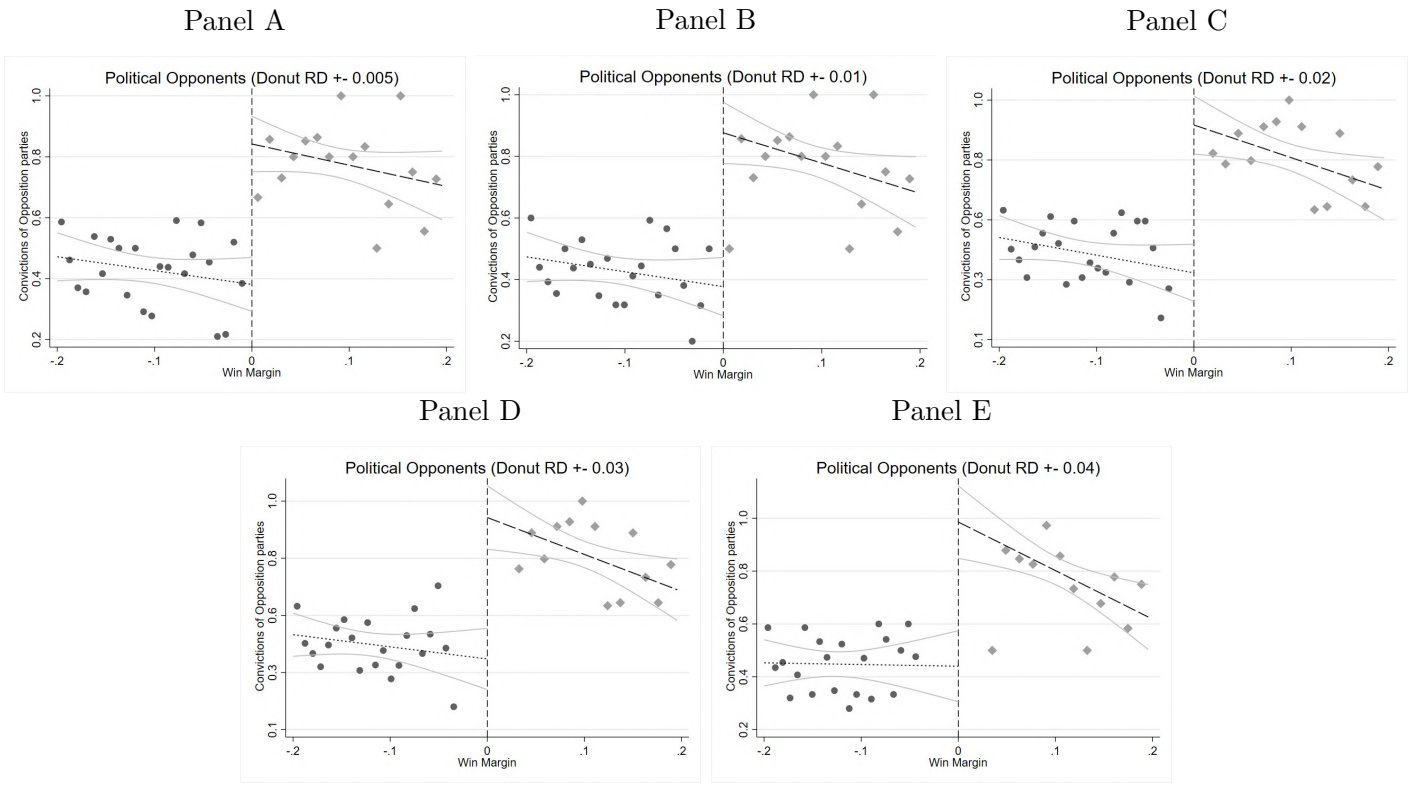


Panel B: Affiliate Politicians



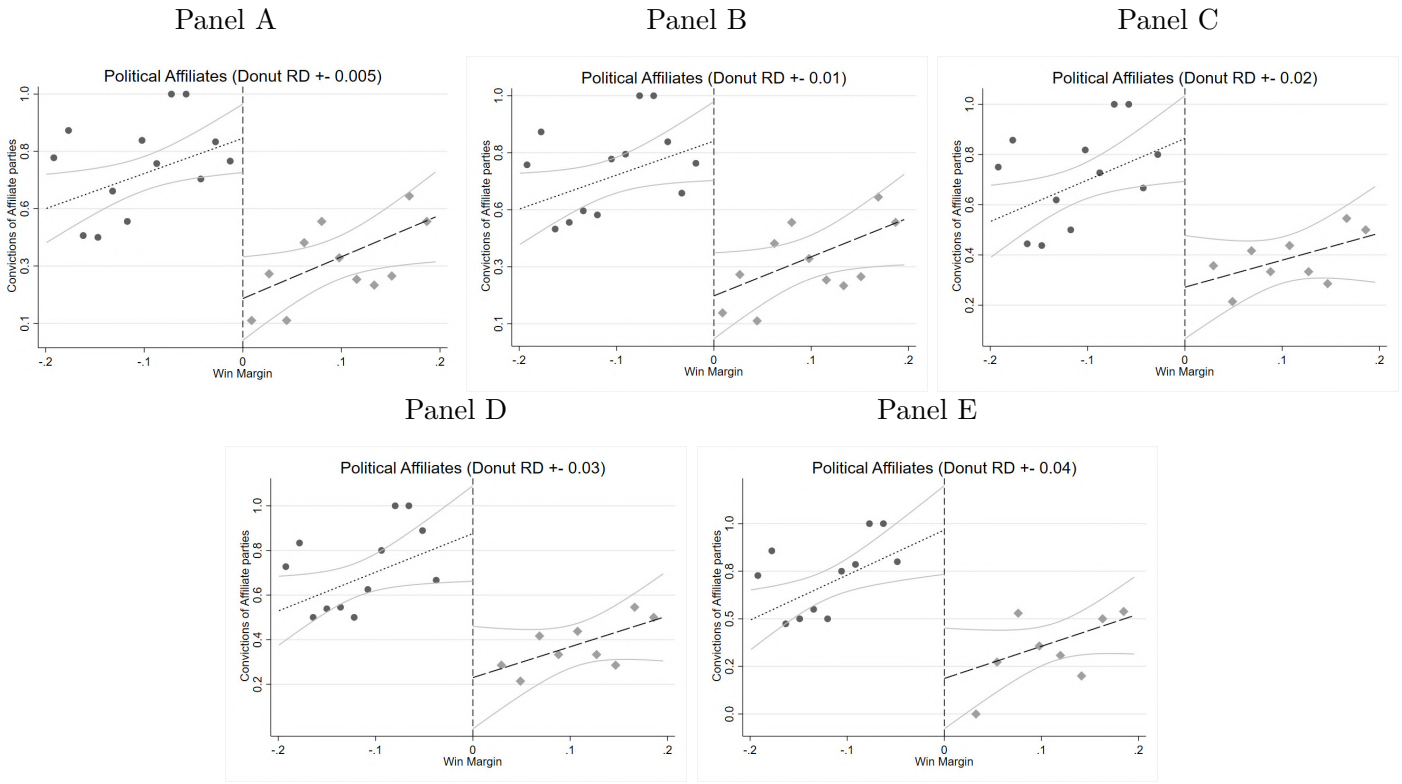
Note: The figure plots the share of opposition party candidates (Panel A) and affiliate party candidates (Panel B) convicted of corruption against their electoral win margin. Each dot corresponds to the average conviction rate within bins of the running variable (vote margin), constructed using the optimal binning procedure of robust bias-corrected RDD approach. Separate local quadratic regressions are fitted on either side of the zero cutoff, with 95 percent confidence intervals omitted for clarity. The sample is restricted to close elections with margins within 20 percentage points. The figure is generated using the rdplot routine from the rdrobust package (Calonico et al., 2014);(Calonico et al., 2020).

Figure B12. Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions of Opposition Parties.



Note: Each panel plots local linear regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral wins on conviction rates of opposition politicians. The running variable is the electoral win margin, and the outcome is the conviction rate. Panels A–E exclude observations within ±0.005, ±0.01, ±0.02, ±0.03, and ±0.04 of the cutoff, respectively. Solid lines denote fitted values on either side of the threshold, with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2014), (Calonico et al., 2020).

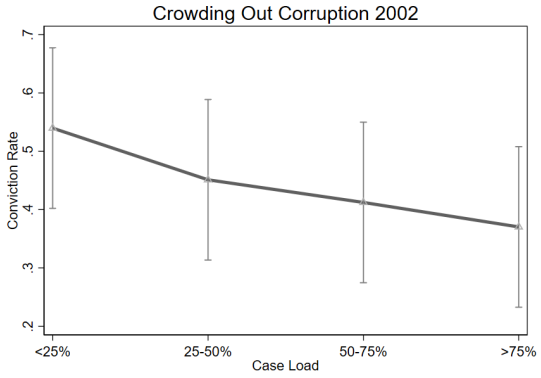
Figure B13. Donut Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Electoral Wins on Convictions of Affiliate Parties.



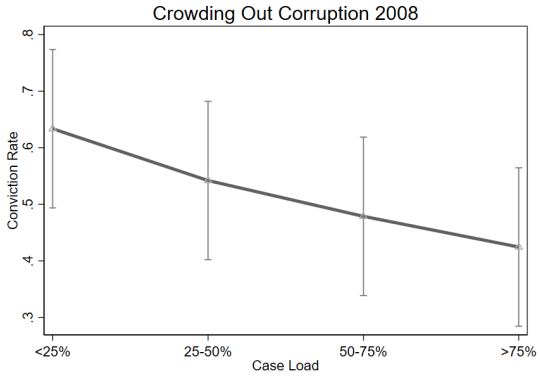
Note: Each panel plots local linear regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral wins on conviction rates of affiliate politicians. The running variable is the electoral win margin, and the outcome is the conviction rate. Panels A–E exclude observations within ±0.005, ±0.01, ±0.02, ±0.03, and ±0.04 of the cutoff, respectively. Solid lines denote fitted values on either side of the threshold, with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates use the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2014), (Calonico et al., 2020). No systematic discontinuities are detected, suggesting that affiliates are not subject to the same prosecutorial enforcement faced by opposition politicians.

Figure B14. Crowding out corruption by Election Years

Panel A



Panel B



Note: The graph shows the conviction rate of non politically salient cases (cases involving bureaucrats) in the districts for 2002 and 2008 where the opposition parties won majority seats. The conviction rate (reported on the vertical axis) is the mean conviction for each judge adjudicating bureaucrats' cases. The variable case load (reported on the horizontal axis) shows the percentile of cases adjudicated by the judge. The bars show the 95% Confidence interval.

Table B1. Summary Statistics

	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Panel A: Electoral Constituency					
Registered voters	1920	134696.62	35804.448	0	207308
Turnout	1920	0.716	0.106	0	1
Candidate count	1920	5.349	2.472	1	19
Panel B: Case Level					
Incumbent victory	2575	0.316	0.465	0	1
Conviction outcome	2575	0.462	0.499	0	1
Panel C: Candidate Level					
Pre-election convictions	1101	0.116	0.320	0	1
Panel D: Judge Level					
Promoted to High Court	192	0.167	0.374	0	1
Tenure Length (in years)	192	2.316	1.455	0	6
Case Load	192	13.953	6.300	0	33

Note: The table reports descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the analysis. Panel A presents constituency-level variables from election data, including the number of registered voters, turnout, and candidate counts. Panel B presents case-level variables from corruption court records, including whether the incumbent party won the seat and whether a conviction was obtained through a plea. Panel C reports candidate-level variables, including indicators for pre-election convictions and the number of corruption cases filed against each candidate. Panel D reports judge-level variables, including whether a judge was promoted to the High Court, tenure length (in years), and average case load. For each variable, the table reports the number of observations, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum.

Table B2. Number of Non-Politician Cases by Judge Level

	(1) Judge's Cases Overall	(2) Judge's Cases Opposition	(3) Judge's Cases Affiliate
Number of Non-Politician Cases	6.439 [6.874]	-6.096 [17.17]	65.83 [51.33]
Observations	14,878	3,346	302
R-squared	0.000	0.000	0.006
Mean	47.11	50	64.74

Note: This table examines whether judges assigned to political cases differ in the number of non-politician corruption cases they adjudicate. Each observation is a judge-year. The outcome is the number of non-politician cases handled by the judge in that year. Column 1 presents unconditional estimates. Columns 2 and 3 restrict the sample to judges assigned opposition and affiliate politicians, respectively. All specifications include district and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the judge level. Results show no systematic differences in baseline caseloads, supporting the assumption that political case assignments are orthogonal to underlying judicial exposure to non-political cases.

Table B3. Intensive Margin Impact of Marginal Winners on Corruption Convictions (Polynomial Order 2)

	(1) Conviction Opposition	(2) Conviction Opposition Placebo	(3) Conviction Affiliate	(4) Conviction Affiliate Placebo
Winning Margin	0.326***	0.0563	-0.602***	-0.0977
	[0.101]	[0.106]	[0.140]	[0.221]
Observations	1,712	1,451	531	253
Mean	0.551	0.565	0.544	0.549
Bandwidth	0.179	0.217	0.191	0.225
Polynomial Order	2	2	2	2
Bandwidth	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption convictions using second-order polynomials of the running variable. Columns (1) and (2) show results for opposition politicians, while Columns (3) and (4) present estimates for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Placebo outcomes (Columns 2 and 4) use cases filed and decided before the election. The running variable is the difference in vote share between winner and runner-up. The treatment group is coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. Estimates are obtained using local quadratic regression, with MSE-optimal bandwidths shown at the bottom of the table. Standard errors are clustered at the constituency-election level and reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table B4. Placebo Discontinuities

Panel A: Placebo Discontinuities — Political Rivals						
	±1%	±2%	±3%	±4%	±5%	±6%
	Conviction Opposition					
Winning Margin	0.0350	-0.135	-0.151	0.0344	0.00249	-0.0932
	(0.165)	(0.143)	(0.151)	(0.163)	(0.109)	(0.151)
	[0.343]	[0.145]	[0.157]	[0.101]	[0.033]	[0.177]
Observations	804	774	743	710	677	562
Mean	0.544	0.547	0.553	0.562	0.569	0.605
Bandwidth	0.0384	0.0456	0.0511	0.0436	0.0454	0.0346
Panel B: Placebo Discontinuities — Political Affiliates						
	±1%	±2%	±3%	±4%	±5%	±6%
	Conviction Affiliates					
Winning Margin	-0.398	0.816**	-0.319	-0.150	0.0739	-0.175
	(0.133)	(0.258)	(0.194)	(0.181)	(0.200)	(0.245)
	[0.254]	[0.332]	[0.198]	[0.173]	[0.126]	[0.245]
Observations	172	169	169	164	147	135
Mean	0.477	0.479	0.467	0.463	0.469	0.452
Bandwidth	0.0704	0.0359	0.0587	0.0559	0.0609	0.0702

Note: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates of placebo tests at artificial thresholds other than zero. Panel A presents results for political rivals, and Panel B for political affiliates. The dependent variable is the conviction rate. Thresholds used are ±3%, ±4%, ±5%, and ±6% from the election margin threshold. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following (Calonico et al., 2020). Standard errors are clustered at the constituency-election level and reported in parentheses. CCT robust standard errors are reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table B5. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Convictions (with Controls)

	(1) Conviction Opposition	(2) Conviction Opposition Placebo	(3) Conviction Affiliate	(4) Conviction Affiliate Placebo
Winning Margin	0.351***	0.0705	-0.617***	-0.0539
	[0.0913]	[0.0886]	[0.106]	[0.197]
Observations	1,712	1,451	531	253
Mean	0.453	0.453	0.453	0.453
Bandwidth	0.118	0.167	0.176	0.140

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption convictions. Columns (1) and (2) show results for opposition politicians, while Columns (3) and (4) report estimates for incumbent-affiliated politicians. Placebo outcomes (Columns 2 and 4) use cases filed and decided before the election. Estimates are obtained using the bias-corrected local linear estimator of (Calonico et al., 2020), with local quadratic regression for bias correction. The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. All specifications include politician-level controls for gender, religion, ideology, and pre-election case characteristics. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table B6. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Convictions with Alternate Kernels

	(1) Conviction Opposition Triangular	(2) Conviction Opposition Epanechnikov	(3) Conviction Opposition Uniform
Winning Margin	0.351***	0.334***	0.407***
	[0.099]	[0.097]	[0.099]
Observations	1,712	1,712	1,712
Mean	0.453	0.453	0.453
Bandwidth	0.118	0.107	0.0795

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions of opposition politicians using alternative kernel functions. Column (1) employs a triangular kernel, Column (2) an Epanechnikov kernel, and Column (3) a uniform kernel. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following (Calonico et al., 2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin ¿ 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin ¡ 0 serve as controls. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table B7. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Incumbent with Alternate Kernels

	(1) Conviction Affiliate Triangular	(2) Conviction Affiliate Epanechnikov	(3) Conviction Affiliate Uniform
Winning Margin	-0.617***	-0.612***	-0.607***
	[0.106]	[0.109]	[0.0993]
Observations	531	531	531
Mean	0.453	0.453	0.453
Bandwidth	0.176	0.159	0.192

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on corruption case outcomes, using alternative clustering of standard errors. Columns (1) and (2) show results for the number of corruption cases filed against opposition and incumbent-affiliated politicians, respectively, while Columns (3) and (4) report results for convictions. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following (Calonico et al., 2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin < 0 serve as controls. Standard errors are clustered at an alternative level (relative to the main constituency-election clustering) and reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table B8. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Opposition Convictions Excluding Political Capitals

	(1) Conviction Opposition KCI	(2) Conviction Opposition LHR	(3) Conviction Opposition PSH	(4) Conviction Opposition QTA	(5) Conviction Opposition RWP
Winning Margin	0.368***	0.341***	0.345***	0.361***	0.352***
	[0.0864]	[0.0915]	[0.0883]	[0.0914]	[0.0934]
Observations	1,573	1,654	1,650	1,649	1,645
Mean	0.468	0.453	0.455	0.454	0.459
Bandwidth	0.136	0.122	0.128	0.119	0.115

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions of opposition leaders after sequentially excluding cases from political capitals. Columns (1)–(5) exclude Karachi (KCI), Lahore (LHR), Peshawar (PSH), Quetta (QTA), and Rawalpindi (RWP), respectively. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following (Calonico et al., 2020). The running variable is the margin of victory (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin < 0 are coded as treated (win). Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table B9. Intensive Margin Impact of Electoral Wins on Incumbent Convictions Excluding Political Capitals

	(1) Conviction Affiliate KCI	(2) Conviction Affiliate LHR	(3) Conviction Affiliate PSH	(4) Conviction Affiliate QTA	(5) Conviction Affiliate RWP
Winning Margin	-0.614***	-0.646***	-0.617***	-0.616***	-0.612***
	[0.107]	[0.105]	[0.106]	[0.107]	[0.108]
Observations	524	527	528	528	528
Mean	0.468	0.453	0.455	0.454	0.459
Bandwidth	0.173	0.170	0.178	0.174	0.169

Note: The table reports regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of marginal electoral victories on convictions of incumbent politicians after sequentially excluding cases from political capitals. Columns (1)–(5) exclude Karachi (KCI), Lahore (LHR), Peshawar (PSH), Quetta (QTA), and Rawalpindi (RWP), respectively. Estimates are obtained using local linear regression with bias correction following (Calonico et al., 2020). The running variable is the electoral win margin (vote share difference between winner and runner-up). Units with margin > 0 are coded as elected (treated), while units with margin ≤ 0 serve as controls. Standard errors clustered at the constituency-election level are reported in brackets. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

A Appendix A1 - Data Construction and Variable Definitions

Variable Definitions

Panel A. Outcome Variables

Construction of Prosecution (New cases filed) variable

Case Filed Opposition:
This count variable measures the number of new corruption cases filed against opposition politicians. Data are obtained from official records of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) case filings between 2002 and 2018.

Case Filed Affiliate:
The number of corruption cases filed against government-aligned (affiliate) politicians. Data are obtained from official records of NAB case filings between 2002 and 2018.

Construction of Convictions (Prosecution) variable

Conviction Opposition:
A binary variable equal to 1 if an opposition politician was convicted or pleaded guilty in a corruption case, and 0 otherwise. Conviction data are compiled from NAB court verdicts between 2002 and 2018.

Conviction Affiliate:
A dummy variable equal to 1 if a government-affiliated politician was convicted or pleaded guilty in a corruption case, and 0 otherwise. Data are compiled from NAB court verdicts between 2002 and 2018.

Conviction Non-Politicians:
A dummy variable equal to 1 if a non-politician (civil servant or bureaucrat) was convicted or pleaded guilty in a corruption case, and 0 otherwise. Data are compiled from NAB court verdicts between 2002 and 2018.

Construction of Vote Share Variables
Vote Share (t+1):
The candidate's votes received in the subsequent election ($t+1$), conditional on running from the same constituency. Data are collected from the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) constituency-level results for 2002, 2008, and 2013 elections.

Vote Share (t+1) Acquitted:
The candidate's votes received in the subsequent election ($t + 1$), if the politician was charged for corruption but acquitted. Conditional on running from the same constituency. Source: ECP election results.

Vote Share (t+1) Convicted:
The candidate's votes received in the subsequent election ($t + 1$), if the politician was charged for corruption and convicted. Conditional on running from the same constituency. Source: ECP election results.

Conviction Rates by Judges:

Conviction Rate for Opposition Politicians by Judge:
Fraction of opposition politicians convicted by a specific judge during their NAB tenure. Calculated as total convictions divided by total cases decided.

Conviction Rate for Affiliate Politicians by Judge:
Fraction of government-affiliated politicians convicted by a specific judge during their NAB tenure. Calculated as total convictions divided by total cases decided.

Panel B. Independent Variables

Election Data:

Winning Margin:
The percentage vote difference between the winning and losing candidates in an election. This serves as the running variable in the regression discontinuity design (RDD). Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Elected:
A binary variable equal to 1 if the candidate wins the election (vote margin > 0) and 0 otherwise. Derived from ECP results.

Treatment:
A dummy variable equal to 1 for candidates who narrowly won (treated group) and 0 for those who narrowly lost (control group). Constructed using RDD assignment criteria.

Opposition Party:
A binary indicator equal to 1 if the candidate belonged to a party that did not win the national election, and 0 otherwise. Party affiliations verified through ECP records.

Affiliate Party:

A binary indicator equal to 1 if the candidate belonged to the party that formed the government, and 0 otherwise. Verified through ECP records.

Panel C. Characteristics

Politician Characteristics

Pre-Election Conviction:
Dummy variable equal to 1 if a politician had a corruption conviction prior to the election year, and 0 otherwise. Source: NAB archives.

Gender Politician:
Binary variable equal to 1 for male and 0 for female candidates. Data from ECP nomination records.

Case Characteristics

Number of Lawyers in Defense:
The number of defense lawyers representing the defendant in NAB corruption trials. Source: NAB judicial proceedings.

Allegation Type:
Type of corruption allegation (bribery, embezzlement, abuse of power, or other). Extracted from NAB data.

Left Politician:
Dummy variable equal to 1 if the candidate belonged to a left-leaning or progressive party, and 0 otherwise. Classification based on ECP information.

Religion:
Binary variable equal to 1 if the candidate was Muslim, and 0 if non-Muslim. Data from official nomination forms.

Prior Allegations:
Indicator equal to 1 if the candidate had prior corruption allegations before the current election cycle. Source: NAB archives.

Incumbent Status:
Dummy variable equal to 1 if the candidate held public office in the preceding election, and 0 otherwise. Data from parliamentary records.

Constituency ID:
Unique electoral district identifier used for clustering standard errors. Derived from ECP constituency mapping.

Election Year:
Year of the national or provincial election (2002, 2008, 2013). Obtained from ECP electoral schedule data.

Judge Characteristics

Judge ID:
Unique anonymized identifier assigned to each NAB judge in the dataset. Used to link case-level outcomes with judge characteristics.

Judge Tenure:
Length of service (in years) within NAB courts during the study period. Calculated from appointment and exit records.

Judge Promotion:
Binary variable equal to 1 if the judge was promoted to a higher position within NAB or to the High Court, and 0 otherwise. Source: Judicial Service Commission archives.

Caseload Judge:
Total number of corruption cases adjudicated by a given judge during their NAB tenure. Source: NAB judicial registers.

Panel D. Other Variables

Regime Type:
Binary variable equal to 1 for democratic election years and 0 for autocratic/military regimes (e.g., 2002 under General Musharraf). Source: ECP.

Change in Judge Selection Procedure:
Indicator equal to 1 for judges appointed after the 2010 judicial reform transferring appointment authority to the judicial commission.

District Type:
Dummy variable equal to 1 if the judge served in a political capital district (Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Rawalpindi), and 0 otherwise. Based on NAB postings.

Appendix A2 - Data Sources

Corruption Court Data Consolidation and Construction

The corruption court data are assembled from multiple administrative and archival sources, as summarized in Figures A1–A4. Panels A and B of Figure A1 illustrate the two primary inputs used to construct the final dataset. I compile the universe of corruption cases filed under the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), covering both politicians and non-political defendants. Panel A draws on cases directly digitized by NAB, while Panel B relies on court records that were manually scanned and subsequently processed using optical character recognition (OCR) to extract key variables. The resulting dataset provides a comprehensive record of all corruption prosecutions filed in accountability courts during the study period.

Figure A1. Corruption Courts Archives

Panel A: NAB Cases source 1

person_name	reference_year	reference_date	court_district	law_charged_und	allegation_type	Decision_year	Decision_date	current_status	Judicial_Decision
Ikhlaq Pervez	2000	7/Feb/00	PSH	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2006	8-Aug-2006	Acquitted	Acquitted
Ch. Sher Ali			LHR	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authority		25-Sep-	Plea Bargain in co	Plea Bargain In Co
Arshad Mehmooc	2007	30/Apr/07	RWP	31A_NAO	Assets Beyond Kn	2014	28-May-14	Acquitted	Acquitted
Taj Begum	2007	23/Feb/07	RWP	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2008	28-Sep-08	Convicted	Convicted
Mehmood Akhtar	2004	24/Jun/04	RWP	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2010	11-Oct-10	Convicted	Convicted
Amjad Ali Jutt	2006	15/Feb/06	KCI	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2008	22-Sep-2008	Convicted	Convicted
Liaquat Ali Jatoi	2013	17/Jul/13	KCI	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2014	11-Oct-2014	Acquitted	Acquitted
Rao Sajjad-Ur-Reh	2006	27/Jul/06	PSH	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2014	22-Dec-2014	Convicted	Convicted
Irfan ul Din Ahma	2010	29/Sep/10	KCI	31A_NAO	Willful Bank Defau	2015		In Court	
Muhammad Israil	2003	7/Nov/03	RWP	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2012	8-Aug-12	In Court	
Muhammad Ayou	2013	7/May/13	KCI	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2015		Acquitted	Acquitted
Anwar	2001	19/Jul/01	KCI	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2011	4-Jun-2011	Convicted	Convicted
Zahrab Gul	2005	18/Jan/05	PSH	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2011	15-Jun-2011	Convicted	Convicted
Saeed-ul-Haq Dog	2001	9/Feb/01	PSH	31A_NAO	Assets Beyond Kn	2005	27-Feb-2005	Convicted	Convicted
Sultan Hussain	2006	1/Apr/06	PSH	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2008	19-Sep-2008	Convicted	Convicted
Mehfooz-Un-Nabi	2010	14/Apr/10	LHR	31A_NAO	Assets Beyond Kn	2011	27-Feb-2011	Acquitted	Acquitted
Iftikhar Ali Khitrar	2006	13/Dec/06	PSH	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2014	6-Jan-2014	Acquitted	Acquitted
Imamuddin Shauk	2002	13/Aug/02	KCI	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2006	7-Jun-2006	Convicted	Convicted
Murad Ali Shah	1997	4-Mar-97	KCI	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2000	16-May-2014	In Court	
Hafeez Ullah Khar	2012	12/Jun/12	PSH	31A_NAO	Cheating Public	2015		In Court	
Muhammad Iqbal	2012	8/Nov/12	RWP	31A_NAO	Willful Bank Defau	2012	18-Feb-12	In Court	
Sikandar Ali	2003	26/Dec/03	KCI	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2004	26-Oct-2004	In Appeal HC	
Liaquat Hussain	2007	9/Jun/07	RWP	31A_NAO	Assets Beyond Kn	2009	6-Mar-09	In Court	
Ghulam Muhamm	2001	21/Jul/01	KCI	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2001	25-Jul-2002	In Court	
Shoaib Karim	2014	19/Nov/14	PSH	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2015		In Court	
Abdul Qadir Jangc	2011	22/Jun/11	KCI	31A_NAO	Willful Bank Defau	2014	24-Dec-2014	In Court	
Nasir Abbas	2002	26/Nov/02	RWP	31A_NAO	Willful Bank Defau	2011	10-Mar-11	Acquitted	Acquitted
Haroon Rasheed	2013	7/May/13	KCI	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2015		Acquitted	Acquitted
Arshad Zaman Ch	2003	18/Dec/03	LHR	31A_NAO	Corruption And Co	2010	18-Dec-2010	Closure under 9(c	Closure under 9(c
Muhammad Anwa	2006	3/Feb/06	RWP	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2010	19-May-10	In Appeal HC	
Khalid Raza	2007	20/Mar/07	RWP	31A_NAO	Willful Bank Defau	2007	2-Jul-07	Convicted	Convicted
Pir Muhammad M	2005	22/Sep/05	LHR	31A_NAO	Willful Bank Defau	2013	16-Oct-2013	In Court	
Habib-ur-Rehman	2010	31/Dec/10	LHR	31A_NAO	Misuse of Authori	2014	2-Feb-2014	In Court	

Panel B: NAB Cases source 2

Sr.	Name & Father's Names and designation	Title of the case / Allegations	Amounts alleged / Involved	Amount determined	Amount agreed	Amount recovered	Amount balance	Year	Regions
137	2. Y.S.(Pvt) Ltd. Owner Yaseen Siddique (End Cuts - PSM), Businessman	Selling of 15.5 tons End Cuts	20,867,900	20,867,900	20,867,900	20,867,900	-	2002	Karachi
138	3. Farhan Iron Mart Owner Irfan-ud-Din (End Custs - PSM), Businessman,	Selling of 15.5 tons End Cuts	24,661,000	24,661,000	24,661,000	24,661,000	-	2002	Karachi
139	Ziauddin Talmari S/o Moinuddin, Businessman, Businessman	Irregularities in Pakistan State Oil Company Ltd. And aggrandizement of its officers through corruption and corrupt practices. There are 14 issues regarding which it has been alleged that Iftikhar Alam in the capacity of Dy MD and MD alongwith Iqbal Turabi Director were involved to the issues ranging from:- 1. Illegal allotment of Petrol Pumps. 2. Supply of contractors to employees and relatives in violation of rules and regularities. Living beyond known means of income and accumulation of	3,344,000	3,344,000	3,344,000	3,344,000	-	2002	Karachi
140-	Muhammad Kaleem Farooqui, Businessman, Businessman	Illegal disbursement of money on fake claims	1,880,000	1,880,000	1,880,000	1,880,000	-	2002	Karachi
141	Dost Muhammad s/o Haji Moathabar, Ex Patwari	State Vs Dost Muhammad, Ex-Patwari Revenue Deptt - Accumulation of assets through corruption & corrupt practices	6,550,044	6,550,044	4,500,000	4,500,000	-	2002	KPK
142	Abdur Rahim s/o Mian Abdul Rehman, Ex Chief Engr	State Vs Abdur Rahim Mian, Ex-Chief Engr C&W Deptt - Accumulation of assets through corruption & corrupt practices	16,000,000	12,500,000	12,500,000	12,500,000	-	2002	KPK
143	Fazal Habib s/o Ghulam Habib, Pvt Person	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	20,000,000	5,294,890	5,294,890	5,294,890	-	2002	KPK
144	Iqbal Younas s/o Shahid Younas, Pvt Person	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	N/A	3,394,890	3,394,890	3,394,890	-	2002	KPK
145	Muhammad Zahoor Sabri s/o Khushi Muhammad, Pvt Person	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	N/A	317,302	317,302	317,302	-	2002	KPK
146	Muhammad Saleem s/o Abdul Latif, Pvt Person	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	N/A	277,650	277,650	277,650	-	2002	KPK
147	Hidayatullah Afridi s/o Aman Ullah, Pvt Person	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	N/A	1,295,000	1,295,000	1,295,000	-	2002	KPK
148	Muhammad Shafiq s/o Muhammad Siddique, Pvt Person	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	N/A	800,000	800,000	522,000	278,000	2002	KPK
149	Amraish Khan s/o Haya Khan, Supdtt Engr	Primary Education Project (Grill Scam) - Embezzlement in supply in fixing of Grill / supply of jute tat to the Directorate of PEP	N/A	18,000,000	18,000,000	9,300,000	8,700,000	2002	KPK
150	Malik Ashiq Hussain s/o Malik Muhammad Yaqoob, Assistant	Invtg against Malik Ashiq Hussain, Assistant, Civil Sectt NWFP - Accumulation of assets through corruption and corrupt practices	9,153,930	9,153,930	9,153,930	9,153,930	-	2002	KPK
151	Jameel ur Rehman (Retd) s/o Habib ur Rehman, XEN	Invtg against Jameel ur Rahman (Retd) XEN C&W Deptt - Accumulation of assets	5,500,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	-	2002	KPK
152	Mushtaq Ahmed Irrigation s/o Salar Noor Muhammad, Ex SDO	While working as SDO Irrigation confessed to have got commission for supervision of construction work and thus accumulated of assets through corruption and corrupt practices	5,998,380	5,998,380	5,998,380	5,998,380	-	2002	KPK
153	Mr. Shahid Sethi S/o Abdul Latif Sethi, Contractor	Investigation against officials of PTCL. The officers / officials of PTCL, committed unlawful acts and caused wrongful loss to the National Exchequer during the implementation of BT project, which started in 1998	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000	-	2002	Rawalpindi
154	Sanobar Khan S/o Hussain Khan (Co-accused Muzaffar Hussain, DIG). Private person / Others	Investigation against Muzaffar Hussain, DIG case He was involved in illegal registration of smuggle vehicle on fake documents	254,000	254,000	254,000	254,000	-	2002	Rawalpindi
155	Nadim Haider Shah S/o Syed Mukhtar Hussain (Co-accused Muzaffar Hussain, DIG). Private person / Others	Investigation against Muzaffar Hussain, DIG case He was involved in illegal registration of smuggle vehicle on fake documents	254,000	254,000	254,000	254,000	-	2002	Rawalpindi

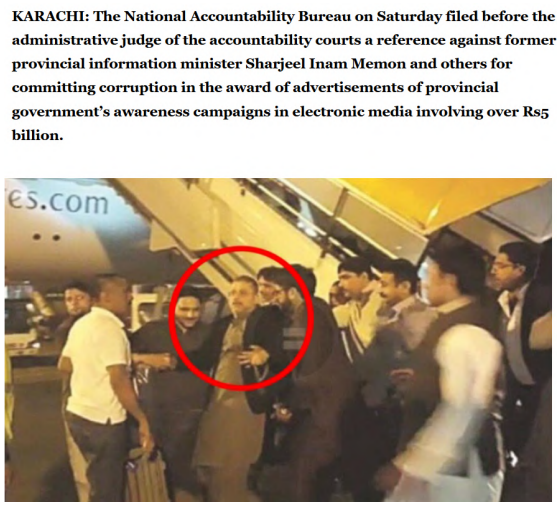
Note: This figure presents the two primary raw data sources used to construct the corruption courts dataset. Panel A lists cases directly digitized from the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) database, including key variables such as defendant name, allegation type, decision year, and final judicial outcome. Panel B displays scanned court records obtained from NAB archives and district accountability courts, which were subsequently processed through OCR to extract quantitative information on charges, amounts involved, and case status.

Illustrative Examples of Politicians Targeted

Panels A and B of Figure A2 present illustrative images of politicians and senior bureaucrats facing arrest and prosecution on corruption charges. These visuals highlight the salience and visibility of anti-corruption enforcement in Pakistan during the study period. The cases depicted correspond to high-profile proceedings covered by media and documented in the administrative data used in this study. The figure underscores the public nature of these trials and the prominence of both political and bureaucratic defendants in the accountability process.

Figure A2. Examples of Lawfare

Panel A: Provincial information minister Arrested for Corruption:



Panel B: Federal minister Arrested for Corruption

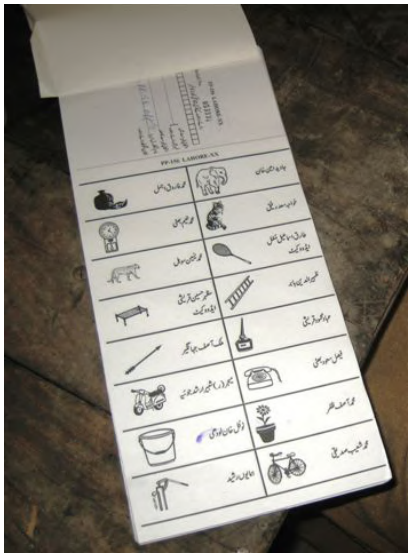
Note: This figure presents illustrative examples of high-profile corruption prosecutions reported in national media. Panel A shows the arrest of a former provincial information minister charged with misuse of public funds in government advertising contracts. Panel B depicts the court appearance of a former federal minister accused of financial misconduct. These cases exemplify the visibility of anti-corruption enforcement and the overlap between judicial proceedings and political contestation in Pakistan.

Election Data and Data Construction Procedure

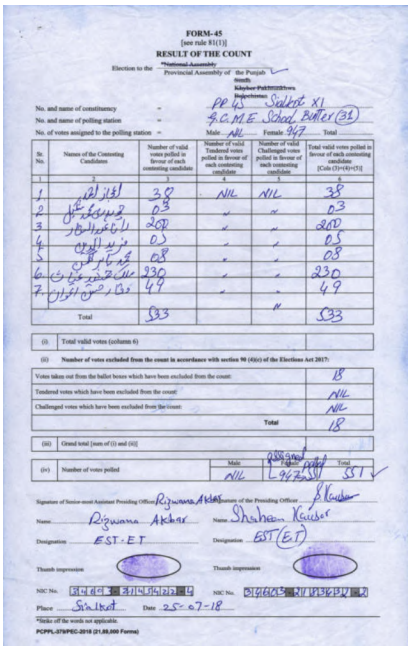
Figure A3 illustrate the data-generation process for the electoral dataset. Panel A of Figure A3 displays a sample ballot that contains candidate names and party symbols for a given constituency, which is used to identify the number of politicians contesting each election. Panel B of Figure A3 presents the raw tabulations from polling stations, officially recorded on "Form-45," which reports the vote count for each candidate. These records are then transmitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), where results are verified, cross-checked with multiple administrative sources, and aggregated. The verified totals are published in "Form-47," the official constituency-level result, shown in Panel C of Figure A3. After collecting all available Form-47s, we digitized and merged them to produce a comprehensive dataset of election outcomes. Panel D of Figure A3 displays the combined raw data before standardization and cleaning.

Figure A3. Raw Election Materials and Data Construction

Panel A: Sample Ballot Paper with Candidates and Symbols



Panel B: Official Polling Station Result Sheet ("Form-45")



Panel C: Form 47

Panel D: Final compiled data

Note: Panels A and B present the raw materials used to construct the constituency-level election dataset. Panel A shows a sample ballot paper listing candidates and party symbols, which is used to identify the number of contestants in each race. Panel B reproduces "Form-45," the polling-station result sheet reporting preliminary vote counts prior to verification. Panels C and D display "Form-47," the verified and consolidated election return published by the Election Commission of Pakistan, and the digitized dataset compiled by merging all constituency-level forms across election years. Together, these panels illustrate the full data-generation process, from raw polling-station records to the official constituency-level dataset.

Judicial Administrative Data and Construction

We link the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) case records to administrative data on the broader judiciary. The judicial data draw on multiple sources: the Judicial Statistics of Pakistan published by the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP), shown in Panel A of Figure A4; archival material from High Court registries; and the Judicial Gazettes, shown in Panel B of Figure A4. These sources provide biographical and career information on judges, including their appointments, postings, and promotions. The linkage enables us to trace the complete career paths of NAB judges, documenting movements across courts, promotions to senior NAB positions, and elevations to the High Courts, as illustrated in Figure A5.

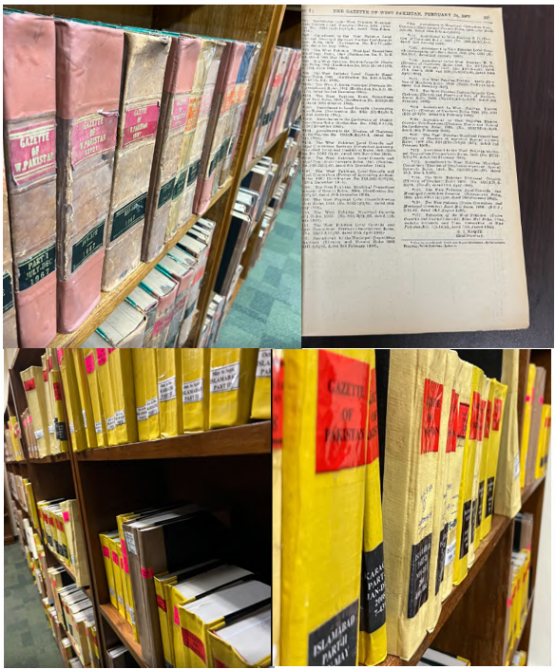
We combine information from the Judicial Gazettes and the Judicial Statistics of Pakistan to trace the professional trajectories of judges who served in anti-corruption courts. Using these archival records, we identify appointments, transfers, and elevations to higher courts, and construct a judge-level panel linking service in the accountability courts to subsequent positions in the judicial hierarchy. Figure A5 provides an illustrative example of a judge's career progression from the district judiciary to the accountability court and, ultimately, to the High Court. This linkage allows us to map the professional network of NAB judges and examine how career incentives may shape judicial behavior. Finally, we integrate information from three complementary

domains, case-level judicial outcomes, judge-level career records, and constituency-level electoral data, to build a comprehensive dataset linking political competition to judicial accountability. Each observation in the final dataset corresponds to a unique combination of a case, possible presiding judge, and the political status of the defendant. This structure allows us to observe not only the outcome of each corruption trial but also the professional background of the judge and the political trajectory of the accused. The merged data therefore capture the entire chain connecting electoral

shocks to prosecutorial behavior and judicial decision-making. Figure A6 presents an illustrative record from the merged dataset, showing how information from NAB case files, judicial service histories, and election returns are combined into a single observation. This unified structure enables analyses of how political incentives shape judicial behavior and, in turn, how selective enforcement affects subsequent political competition.

Figure A4. Raw Data on Judge Characteristics and Career Trajectories

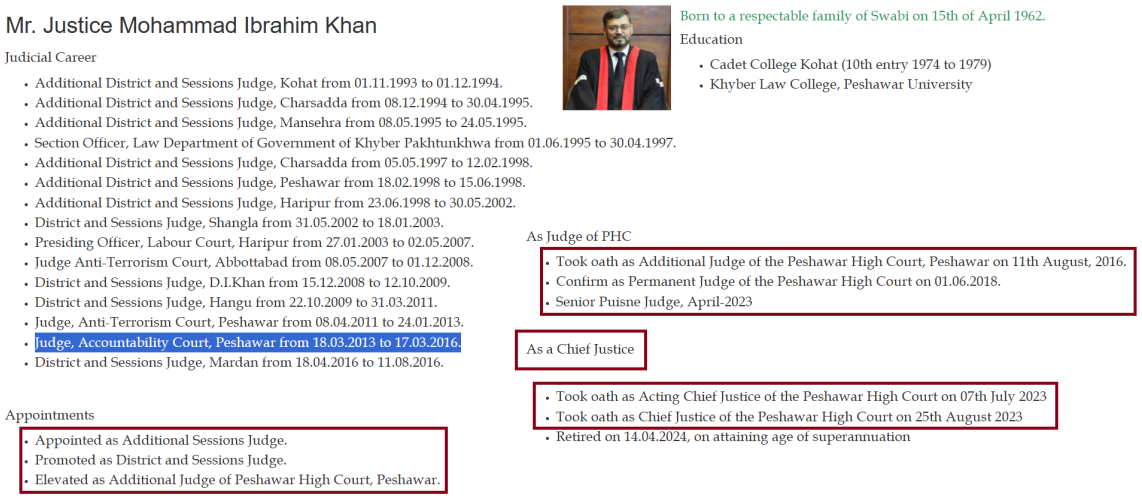
Panel A: Judicial Gazettes



Panel B: Judicial Statistics of Pakistan

Note: This figure presents the primary archival and administrative sources used to construct the judge-level dataset. Panel A shows volumes of the Judicial Gazettes, which record appointments, postings, and promotions of judges across Pakistan's judicial system. Panel B displays annual editions of the Judicial Statistics of Pakistan, published by the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP), which provide official data on case volumes, court composition, and judicial performance metrics.

Figure A5. Sample Trajectory of a Judge's Career



Mr. Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan

Born to a respectable family of Swabi on 15th of April 1962.

Education

- Cadet College Kohat (10th entry 1974 to 1979)
- Khyber Law College, Peshawar University

Judicial Career

- Additional District and Sessions Judge, Kohat from 01.11.1993 to 01.12.1994.
- Additional District and Sessions Judge, Charsadda from 08.12.1994 to 30.04.1995.
- Additional District and Sessions Judge, Mansehra from 08.05.1995 to 24.05.1995.
- Section Officer, Law Department of Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from 01.06.1995 to 30.04.1997.
- Additional District and Sessions Judge, Charsadda from 05.05.1997 to 12.02.1998.
- Additional District and Sessions Judge, Peshawar from 18.02.1998 to 15.06.1998.
- Additional District and Sessions Judge, Haripur from 23.06.1998 to 30.05.2002.
- District and Sessions Judge, Shangla from 31.05.2002 to 18.01.2003.
- Presiding Officer, Labour Court, Haripur from 27.01.2003 to 02.05.2007.
- Judge Anti-Terrorism Court, Abbottabad from 08.05.2007 to 01.12.2008.
- District and Sessions Judge, D.I.Khan from 15.12.2008 to 12.10.2009.
- District and Sessions Judge, Hangu from 22.10.2009 to 31.03.2011.
- Judge, Anti-Terrorism Court, Peshawar from 08.04.2011 to 24.01.2013.
- Judge, Accountability Court, Peshawar from 18.03.2013 to 17.03.2016.
- District and Sessions Judge, Mardan from 18.04.2016 to 11.08.2016.

Appointments

- Appointed as Additional Sessions Judge.
- Promoted as District and Sessions Judge.
- Elevated as Additional Judge of Peshawar High Court, Peshawar.

As Judge of PHC

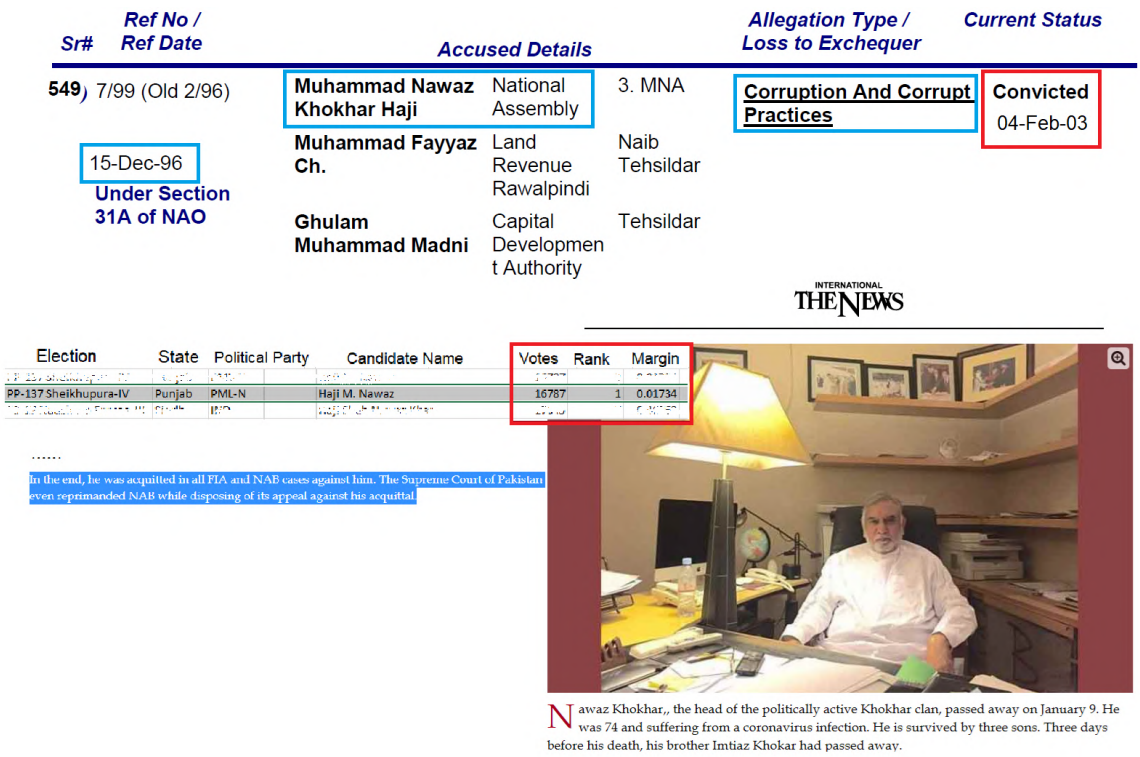
- Took oath as Additional Judge of the Peshawar High Court, Peshawar on 11th August, 2016.
- Confirm as Permanent Judge of the Peshawar High Court on 01.06.2018.
- Senior Puisne Judge, April-2023

As a Chief Justice

- Took oath as Acting Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court on 07th July 2023
- Took oath as Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court on 25th August 2023
- Retired on 14.04.2024, on attaining age of superannuation

Note: This figure provides a respresntative example of a judges's history used in the analysis. The record traces the progression (promotion) of one judge from district and accountability courts to the Peshawar High Court, culminating in appointment as Chief Justice. This information is extracted from High Court registries, judicial gazettes, and official biographies, and exemplifies the linked data structure that allows tracking of promotions, rotations, and elevations across different tiers of the judiciary.

Figure A6. Snapshot of Data Merged Across Sources



Note: This figure presents an illustrative observation from the merged dataset linking corruption-court cases and electoral data. The example shows a case filed under the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) against a Member of the National Assembly, including details on the allegation, conviction status, and date of judgment. The lower panel merges this record with the defendant's electoral information, constituency, political affiliation, vote share, and winning margin. The figure illustrates how multiple administrative and archival sources are combined to form a single, judge-defendant-election-level observation in the final dataset.