

'Fast-Track Judicial Forums Compromise Justice More Than They Deliver It'.

1. Introduction

- Thesis Statement: Fast-track judicial forums prioritize speed over process, often compromising fairness and judicial independence. Without strong safeguards, swift justice risks becoming flawed justice.

2. Rationale Behind Fast-Track Judicial Forums

2.1 Case Backlogs and Delayed Justice

2.2 Public Demand for Swift Accountability

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'Justice delayed is justice denied', yet justice rushed can be equally destructive. In response to chronic justice delays and mounting case backlogs, fast-track judicial forums have increasingly been presented as a remedy to inefficiency. These forums promise swift disposal of cases, immediate accountability and public reassurance that the law is functioning. In societies where patience with slow courts is low and demand for instant justice is high, such mechanisms appear attractive and politically convenient. However, the pursuit of speed often comes at the cost of fairness, due process and judicial independence. In the local context, the establishment of

special and fast-track courts - particularly in accountability and security related matters has been justified as a necessary to deal with complex and sensitive cases. Anti-terrorism courts and expedited accountability proceeding were introduced to bypass procedural delays of ordinary courts. While these forums succeeded in accelerating trials, they frequently relied on compressed timelines, restricted defense opportunities and limited judicial discretion. The result has been a pattern where verdicts are delivered swiftly, but later challenged, suspended or overturned by higher courts due to procedural weaknesses. Moreover, fast-track forums tend to operate under intense public and political pressure, especially in high-profile cases. The environment risks converting courts into instruments of expediency rather than impartial adjudication. When justice becomes outcome-oriented rather than process-oriented, one of the foundational principles of equality before law and fair trial are compromised. Thus, instead of strengthening the justice

system, fast-track judicial forums often expose its fragility, raising serious questions about whether speed truly serves justice or silently erodes it.

Against this background of delayed justice and public impatience, fast-track judicial forums are often justified as an institutional necessity rather than a choice. Persistent case backlogs and slow disposal rates have pushed policymakers to seek quick solutions, especially in sensitive domains. In this context, Anti-Terrorism Courts were established to ensure swift trials in security related cases, while accountability courts were designed to expedite corruption proceedings. These forums were intended to restore public trust and deter crime through speedy convictions. However, evidence suggests that haste often compromise legal rigor. A significant number of verdicts from these courts have been set aside by higher judiciary due to

violations of due process and fair trial guarantees under Article 10-A of the constitution, highlighting that the rationale prioritizes speed over sustainable justice (Supreme Court Jurisprudence).

Additionally, Fast-track courts often adopt truncated procedures that weaken the evidentiary process.

In practice, Anti-Terrorism Courts in Punjab and Sindh have conducted trials based primarily on police testimony, with limited forensic corroboration, due to strict disposal timelines. In the Lahore High Courts review of ATC conviction (post-2018) several death sentences were overturned because cross-examination was curtailed and witnesses were not produced properly. Likewise, accountability courts have proceeded with continuous hearing that restricted defence access to full records. These procedural shortcuts, not mere speed, directly distort fact-finding and increase the risk of wrongful convictions.

Fast-track judicial forums

often deliver formal but flawed judgments due to procedural haste. For example, in Punjab labour courts, between 2018 to 2022, over 1200 fast-track labor dispute rulings faced reversal in appellate tribunals because summary judgments ignored detailed examination of collective bargaining agreements and witness testimony. In Karachi's environment courts, at least 40 high-profile pollution cases from 2020 to 2023 were remanded due to insufficient technical reasoning. Even fast-track property dispute forums reported 30% higher appeal rates compared to regular civil courts, indicating weak legal grounding. These figures show that rapid disposal often sacrifices analytical depth, resulting in legally unsound decisions that ultimately burden the justice system.

Building on concerns about rushed judgments, fast-track judicial forums are also

applied selectively, often reflecting political priorities rather than legal necessity. In Pakistan, high-profile corruption cases involving politicians and business elites were fast-track, between 2017 and 2021, while mid-level officials and citizens with similar allegations faced prolonged delays in regular courts. This selective approach creates the perception that fast-track courts serve political objective rather than impartial justice. Consequently, public trust in judicial neutrality erodes, and the principle of equality before the law is undermined, weakening the credibility of the entire justice system.

Continuing from selective use, fast-track forums can compromise judicial independence by creating parallel structures outside the ordinary court system. In Pakistan, special tribunals for high-profile

corruption and terrorism cases have sometimes faced political pressure, limiting judge's direction. Such external influence risks turning courts into instruments of expediency, weakening institutional authority and public trust in the impartiality of the Judiciary.

To ensure fast-track forums serve justice rather than expediency, regular courts must be strengthened through capacity building, case management reforms, and digital infrastructure.

Procedural safeguards, including adequate time for evidence and defence, should be mandatory in fast-track trials. Clear guidelines and oversight can prevent political influence and selective application. Additionally, judicial training and civic awareness programs can reinforce adherence to fair-trial standards, ensuring that swift justice complements, rather

than compromises, the principles of rule of law and public confidence in the legal system.

Fast-track judicial forums, while designed to address delays and public frustration, often compromise the quality, fairness and impartiality of justice. In context of

Pakistan it is evident that procedural shortcuts, rushed judgments and selective application undermine legal soundness and public confidence. Rather than strengthening the justice system, such mechanisms risks creating parallel structures vulnerable to political influence and judicial errors.

Sustainable justice requires a balanced approach: strengthening regular courts, enforcing procedural safeguards, ensuring judicial independence and promoting transparency. Only by prioritizing fairness alongside efficiency can fast-track mechanisms truly support a just society and uphold the rule of law.