

Pakistan Legal History Workshop

IBA Karachi

December 18-19, 2026

(Supported by the American Society for Legal History)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Rethinking Pakistan through Legal History

Law has played a remarkably central role in Pakistan's political, institutional and social life. From military rulers seeking judicial validation for coups and constitutional interventions, to citizens turning to courts for questions of social justice, property, family, labour and economic regulation, law has remained deeply woven into the fabric of the country.

Yet, despite this ubiquity, the academic study of law in Pakistan remains relatively limited and fragmented. Much legal education continues to be oriented towards professional training, with comparatively less emphasis on legal history, legal theory and historically grounded scholarship. This is particularly striking in the case of legal history. Historical analysis is often treated as peripheral to the study of law, rather than as fundamental to understanding how legal institutions, doctrines and practices emerged and acquired meaning.

At a moment when Pakistan faces renewed debates over constitutionalism, judicial independence, and legal pluralism, this workshop is a timely intervention. It seeks to reframe legal history as foundational, not marginal, to Pakistan's legal, political, and social understanding — and to build the scholarly infrastructure the field currently lacks.

Scope

For the purposes of this workshop, 'Pakistan' is understood broadly. It includes the former East Pakistan — now Bangladesh — until 1971, a dimension that much writing on Pakistan forgets, and one that offers valuable comparative perspective. As a history workshop, it also welcomes work on the British Raj, the rule of the East India Company, and the kingdoms and polities that preceded them in the lands now comprising Pakistan, bringing both depth and a broader South Asian frame to the study of Pakistan today.

Legal history is inherently interdisciplinary, and proposals are welcome from history, law, political science, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, public policy, and adjacent fields, as well as from practitioners engaged in historical research.

We particularly encourage submissions that challenge conventional periodisations, cross the 1947 divide, bring East Pakistan/Bangladesh into histories of Pakistan, recover overlooked legal actors and institutions, or demonstrate how historical research can transform our understanding of contemporary legal and constitutional questions.

Format

This will be a small, intensive two-day workshop, designed to encourage sustained discussion rather than a conventional conference format.

Approximately 8–10 papers will be selected.

Each paper will receive approximately 30 minutes for presentation and 30 minutes for discussion and comments, led by an invited discussant and followed by wider discussion.

The deliberately small format is intended to allow substantial engagement with each paper and to provide participants, particularly early-career scholars, with detailed and constructive feedback.

The workshop will also include opportunities for informal intellectual exchange and mentoring.

A particular aim of the workshop is to provide mentorship to graduate students and early-career scholars developing research in the legal history of Pakistan and South Asia.

Who Should Apply?

We welcome submissions from: Faculty and established scholars; Early-career researchers; Postdoctoral researchers; PhD candidates; Advanced MA/MPhil students; and, Independent scholars whose research engages with the workshop focus.

Applicants need not be trained as legal historians. Given the interdisciplinary character of legal history, submissions from historians, lawyers, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and scholars of related disciplines are particularly welcome.

We are especially interested in work based on original archival research, previously unexplored primary sources, or innovative approaches to existing legal and historical materials.

Submission Guidelines

Applicants should submit:

- An abstract of no more than 500 words, outlining the paper's central argument, sources and contribution;
- A short academic biography/CV of no more than two pages.

The proposal should clearly indicate the historical period, geographical focus and primary sources on which the paper is based.

Please send submissions to: pakistanlegalhistory@gmail.com

with the subject line: **Pakistan Legal History Workshop – CFP**

The deadline for submissions is September 30, 2026

Successful applicants will be notified by October 10, 2026.

Publication and Further Outcomes

The workshop is intended not simply as a standalone academic meeting but as the beginning of a sustained scholarly network in the field of Pakistan's legal history.

Following the workshop, participants will be encouraged to revise their papers in light of the discussions and comments received. Subject to the quality and thematic coherence of the resulting papers, the organisers intend to explore the possibility of developing a special issue of a leading journal in legal history or South Asian studies.

Participants will also be invited to translate the arguments of their scholarly papers into shorter pieces for wider public audiences, contributing to a broader understanding of the importance of legal history in Pakistan.

Bursaries and Accommodation

Limited Bursaries of upto USD 500 will be provided for graduate students/early career scholars to defray travel costs. IBA Karachi will provide accommodation for 3 nights for all speakers.