



## Executive Summary

The report provides insight into the functioning of Online Lok Adalats in Maharashtra and a preliminary investigation into people's experience with the Online Lok Adalat conducted by SAMA from 12th to 25th September, 2021 in 13 districts of Maharashtra. Our findings suggest that the recent online Lok Adalat facilitated by SAMA can be a powerful tool to strengthen Alternate Dispute Resolution in Maharashtra. A consensus of high satisfaction from people surveyed after the online Lok Adalat showcases the scope of the intervention to reduce the burden on the judiciary, provide easier access to justice to citizens and increase overall social welfare in the state of Maharashtra. To better contextualize this event, we use the electronic e-courts data for Maharashtra. Our analysis finds that since 1990, 40% of cases that were filed in district courts, could have been handled in Lok Adalat.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Lok Adalats seem to reduce the burden on the judiciary -- each National Lok Adalat since 2017 has been followed by a discernible drop in filed cases.

## SAMA's Online Lok-Adalat

SAMA facilitated the Online Lok Adalat in 13 of the 37 districts of Maharashtra. It successfully disposed of 102 of the 1,198 pending cases and 155,484 of the 638,376 pre-litigation cases it took up. The total settlement amount of these cases was Rs. 79,100,541.3. To understand the experiences of disputants, SAMA surveyed 1837 respondents across these 13 districts. 71 % of the respondents were male, 11% were female, while the remaining did not disclose their gender. The median age of the respondents was 35 and 56 % were employed, while 9% didn't disclose their employment status. The feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive with 77% feeling highly satisfied or satisfied with the offer for online service and 71% highly satisfied or satisfied with the outcome.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. `Satisfaction with Offer for Online Service` Higher than `Satisfaction with Outcome`

We see that of the participants surveyed, the satisfaction with the offer for online service is higher than the satisfaction with the outcome of mediation. Even though satisfaction from both 'Offer for Online Service' and 'Outcome' is high, people on average feel more satisfied with the offer for online service than with the outcome of mediation. This holds across almost all levels of education (Figure 1) and all age groups.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a very cautious estimate. There are many case types in the e-courts district data that we are not able to identify. This leads to ~72,73,870 cases being dropped. [Here](#) is the list of cases we identify as those that can be handled in the Lok Adalat.



Figure 1

Further, satisfaction with the offer for online service increases marginally with age, while satisfaction with the outcome decreases marginally with age (Figure 2). The light blue and light red area represent the variance in responses.

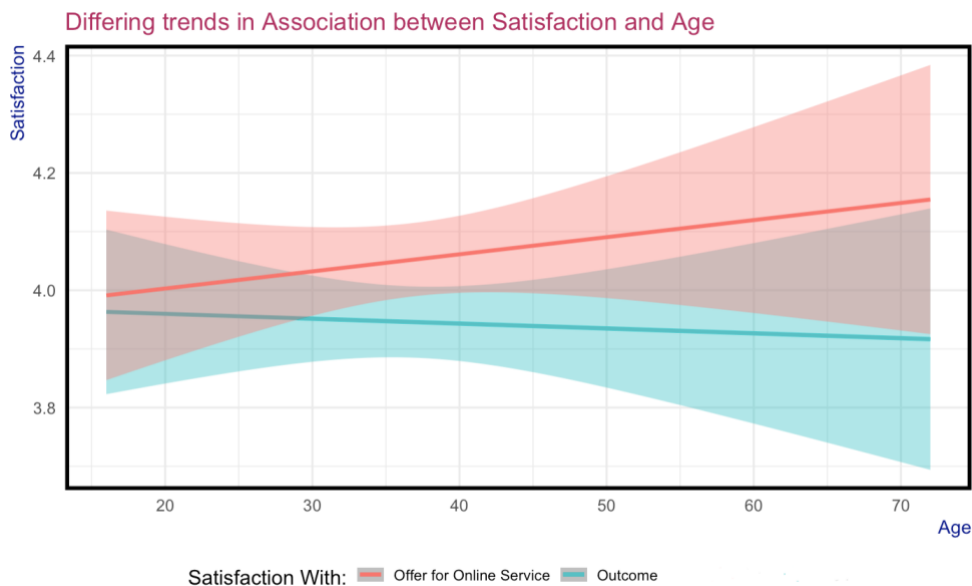


Figure 2

- High Satisfaction Irrespective of Settlement:** On average, we see no association between settlement and satisfaction. Irrespective of whether the case is settled or not, average satisfaction from both 'offer for online service' and 'outcome' seems high. While we see a drop in satisfaction with outcome from 4.1 for settled cases to 3.6 for unsettled cases, the average satisfaction is still skewed towards 'satisfied'. (Figure 3)

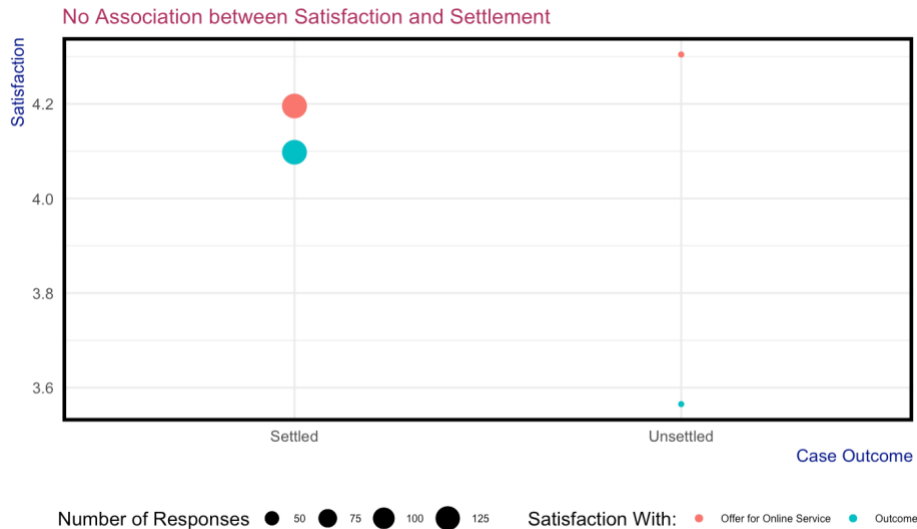


Figure 3

**3. Association Between ‘No Signature’ and ‘Offer for Online Service’:** Of the people surveyed, on average, satisfaction is higher when there is no signature involved vs satisfaction when a signature is involved. This is an important insight particularly concerning the ‘satisfaction with Offer for Online Service’, as we see a positive correlation between that and ‘No Signature’. People might even prefer ‘Physical Signature’ even in the times of Covid (when this Lok Adalat was conducted) over ‘E- Signature’ (Figure 4). A similar feedback surfaces from the enterprises surveyed. While all of them were satisfied or very satisfied with the online dispute resolution, 2 of the 3 enterprises surveyed relied on physical signatures. They mention “Not Comfortable with E-Sign, Preference for Physical Signatures, Don't Trust E-Signatures, No Smartphone of their Own” as being the key issues.

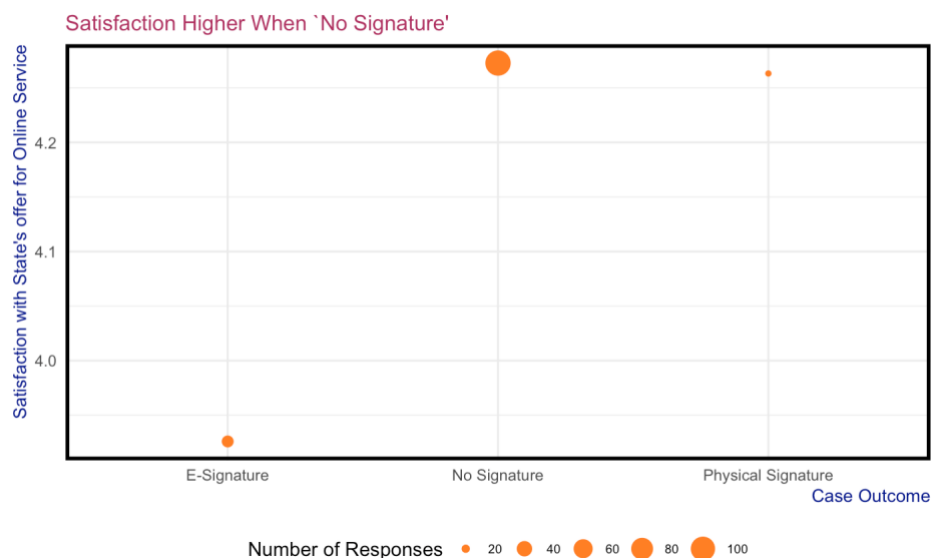
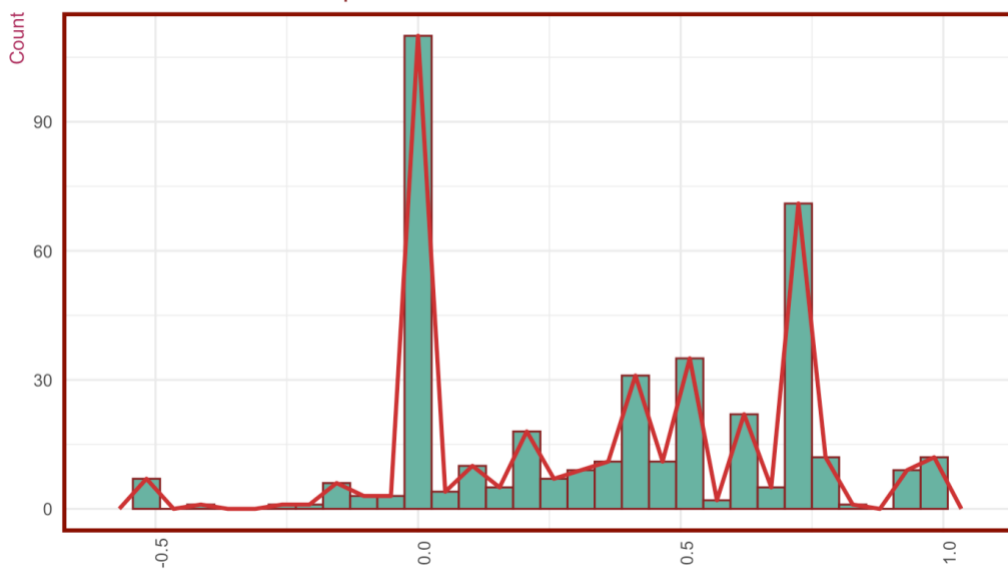


Figure 4

**4. Satisfaction with Online Dispute Resolution of Challan Cases:** Median ‘satisfaction with an offer for online service’ for challan cases stood at 4. A sentimentality analysis of the feedback received on mediation for these cases shows feedback skewed towards the right i.e. positive

sentiment. In total, 67.81% of the people surveyed had a positive experience of online Lok Adalat, while only 5.4% had a negative experience, remaining were neutral (Figure 5). For instance, in feedback respondents mention paying “challan hassle-free”, “get away from standing in rows” and “process is less time consuming and hassle free”. Lastly, there are multiple requests to make the process regular. Similar feedback is reiterated by 2 state representatives of Maharashtra. They mention the resolving of disputes helping in all of the following: “Saving Time, Saving Resources, Enabled Quicker Decision-making, Keep Data Organized, Bulk Resolution of Cases”. Though they also mention training of the case managers and uploading data on the SAMAXF platform as the two most important constraints.

Positive Sentiments Expressed Towards Online Mediation of Challan Cases



Sentiments *Figure 5*

It is important to note the limitations of above findings. The people surveyed are not a representative sample of the disputants who were part of Online Lok Adalat. Further, the above learnings need to be looked at in the wider context of the impact of offline Lok Adalats. While we don't have access to similar data as above for offline Lok Adalats, we can look at historic patterns to understand their impact. We now shift our focus towards that.

## Patterns From Cases Filed in Maharashtra's District Courts

The Online Lok Adalat conducted by SAMA gives us strong reasons to consider how the service can be used to strengthen access to justice in Maharashtra. What we miss out on is the impact of Online Lok Adalat on the wider judicial efficiency. We back this up by studying how the past Lok Adalats in Maharashtra have reduced burden on the judiciary. Below we provide an analysis of cases filed in the district courts over the last 10 years. We classify the cases into types that could have been handled in Lok Adalat to create a picture of the reality.

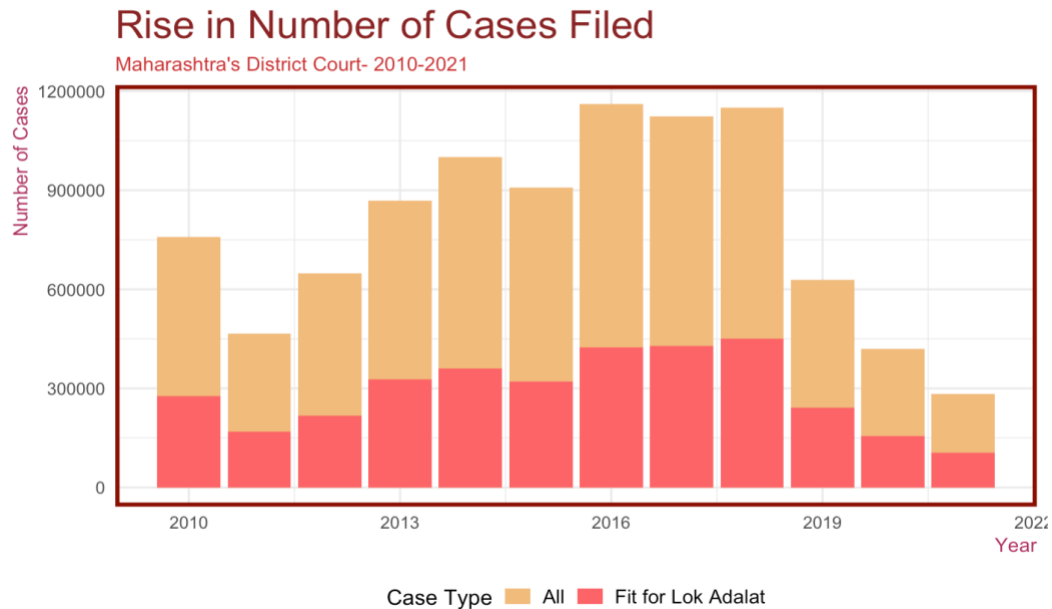


Figure 6

The number of cases filed in Maharashtra's district courts have consistently increased since 1990 reaching a peak of more than 11,60,441<sup>2</sup> cases filed in 2016 (Figure 6). Though the burden created by the caseload on judiciary is worrisome there is nothing new about this statistic. What stands out though is the huge burden created by cases that are fit for Lok Adalat (Figure 7).

<sup>2</sup> The data represents the cases uploaded on the e-courts website.

### Average Duration of Cases in Maharashtra's District Court (2010-2021)

Cases Fit for Lok Adalat

Cases Not Fit for Lok Adalat

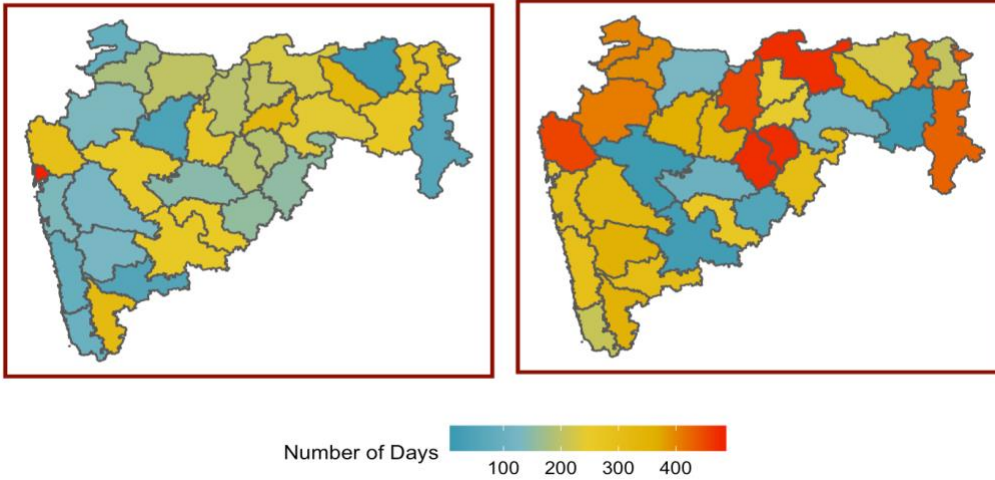


Figure 7

In general, since 2010, the median time taken to dispose of cases not fit for Lok Adalat is 288 days and 190 days for cases that are fit for Lok Adalat. Lastly, districts like Mumbai, Latur, Gondiya, Jalgaon and Washim have a higher duration for cases that are fit for Lok Adalat. This points towards an even higher need for efficient identification and settlement of cases in Lok Adalat, to allow Maharashtra's district courts to focus on other important cases. A similar pattern is also visible for cases currently pending in Maharashtra's district courts. (Figure 8)

### Average Duration of Cases Pending in Maharashtra's District Courts (2010-2021)

Fit for Lok Adalat

Not Fit for Lok Adalat

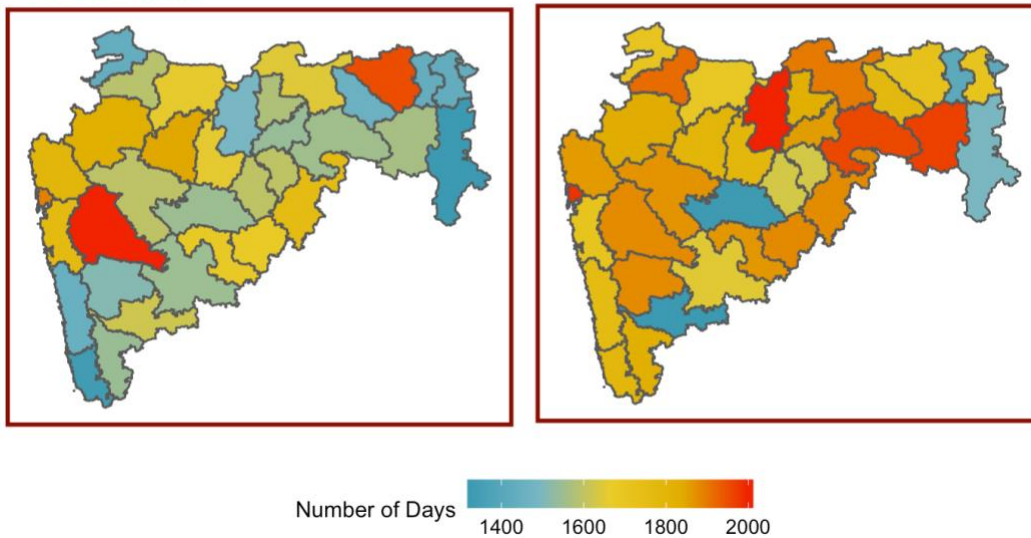


Figure 8

As is predictable, within a month of Lok Adalat, there is a much steeper drop in the number of cases fit for Lok Adalat vs cases not fit for Lok Adalat (Figure 9). The figure further shows that this drop is for both types of cases. A possible reason for this could be that Lok Adalat reduces the burden on the judiciary allowing it to focus on other case types.

Drop in Cases After National Lok Adalat  
2017-2019

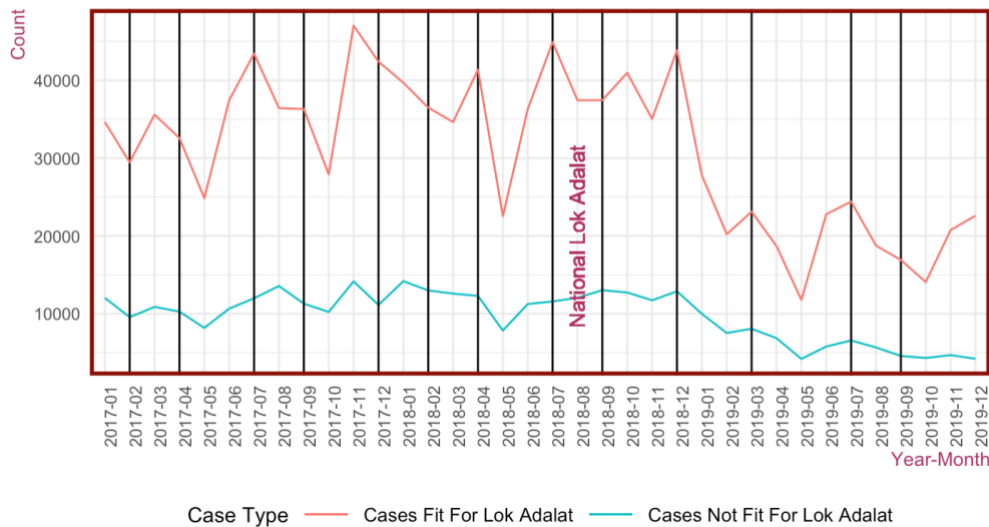


Figure 9

It is important to note the limitations of the above findings. The people surveyed are not a representative sample of the disputants who were part of Online Lok Adalat. Further, the above learnings need to be looked at in the wider context of the impact of offline Lok Adalats. While we don't have access to similar data, as above, for offline Lok Adalats, we can look at historic patterns to understand their impact. We now shift our focus towards that.

## Next Steps

The above case study serves as the founding ground for further analysis of Lok Adalats in Maharashtra. While Lok Adalats seem to have been efficient in reducing the burden on the judiciary, the access to technology along with Covid demands a shift in the approach. Maharashtra government's initiative in adopting Online Dispute Resolution is commendable. The experience of people has been positive with satisfaction with the outcome and the offer for online service being high. But before Online Lok Adalat is scaled and made a regular intervention, it needs to be studied further. Particularly, we need a credible estimate of people's experience of offline Lok Adalat. As a next step, we recommend a more comprehensive study of Lok Adalat for us to build on the above learnings and come up with recommendations. Towards this, we recommend implementing the learnings from this case study in the next Lok Adalat in conjunction with allowing us to study offline Lok Adalat. This would enable us to further understand the aspects of online Lok Adalat that are more cost effective and efficient than offline Lok Adalats.