



Unraveling Governance Evolution: A Tale of Two Eras - Delving into Structural Dynamics from Musharraf to PTI Leadership in Local Governance

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Abstract: This study investigates the local governance system in Pakistan during the tenure of General Pervez Musharraf and Imran Khan, addressing the persistent void created by political uncertainty in the structural framework. Throughout history, both civilian and military regimes have sought to shape the local governance system, introducing concepts and laws to enhance grassroots-level governance. The research critically examines these efforts, considering challenges and opportunities in establishing an effective local governance structure. Additionally, it assesses three rounds of local government elections under the devolution plan, exploring whether they empowered political figures at the expense of local development. The study probes reasons for continued authority centralization in military and civilian regimes, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive evaluation by an educated committee. Such oversight can monitor local governance activities from diverse perspectives. Given Pakistan's decentralization history, the study highlights central authorities' strategies to retain power, resisting governance shifts to the grassroots through amendments aimed at bringing government closer to the common people.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis, Structural Dispositions, Musharraf Era, PTI-Led Local Governments, Service Delivery, Administrative Structures.

1. Introduction

Within a sovereign or quasi-sovereign nation, local governments operate as subordinate geographic entities entrusted with the task of governing at the fundamental level. Similar to other government entities, local government units possess defined geographic regions, populations, and organizational structures, as well as the authority and power to execute public operations. The primary objective of a local government entity is to foster avenues for individuals to express their viewpoints on matters falling under its jurisdiction (Stoker, 2011). Citizens are empowered by the local government to delegate representatives who will address local matters on their behalf. However, it is important to note that the local government body does not possess any legal or political sovereignty that is shared with the state. Despite being referred to as a government, it lacks legal sovereignty. Nevertheless, it operates as a semi-autonomous political-administrative-territorial organization, a product of decentralization in

numerous countries, including Pakistan. The delivery of local governance varies among countries such as England, the United States of America, India, and Pakistan. (Caroline & Goldsmith, 1998). These administrative bodies originated from local communities and needed approval from the central government for definitive and comprehensive powers in administering local affairs. In the modern democratic world, influenced by Renaissance principles, Rossum's social compact, and Montesquieu's power separation, decentralization through local government is often considered an optimal governance system. Many international humanitarian organizations make it a prerequisite for receiving assistance, as local governance facilitates resource distribution, fosters a sense of participation, and upholds federalism. As per the former secretary of the Election Commission of Pakistan, proficient local governance bodies play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall quality of life for the majority residing in their respective regions (Ali, 2018). Decentralization is commonly classified into four groups: administrative decentralization, fiscal decentralization, and democratic decentralization. In the most recent wave of decentralization, democratic decentralization has been effectively implemented in many countries.

1.2 Historical Panorama

Historically, Brazil's Alegre and India's Kerala stand out as successful models of decentralization, showcasing robust outcomes. In stark contrast, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire grapple with decentralization failures, a consequence of weak central governance, limited media freedom, underdeveloped political party systems, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The absence of these attributes impedes progress. Notably, Ghana experienced a paradoxical shift from decentralization to re-centralization, owing to its entrenched hierarchical structure. Similarly, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Indonesia faced challenges in local governance, resulting in heightened corruption and policy-related hurdles. A comprehensive study identifies the root causes of decentralization failures worldwide, attributing them to inadequate legislative frameworks, ineffective power implementation, and institutional abuses of authority (Ali, 2018). Local body governance in Pakistan faced setbacks as military rulers exploited it for personal gains, utilizing devolution or political decentralization as a tool to reinforce state centralization. The strategy sidelined political parties, aiming to co-opt emerging politicians to legitimize military power. Subsequent civilian administrations also faltered, neglecting timely elections, and prioritizing the interests of bureaucracy and political elites. These actions compounded the system's failure, hindering effective local governance (Malik & Rana, 2019). Pakistan functions as a federal state with a three-tiered governance structure comprising the federal government, provincial governance bodies, and local governing bodies. The smallest units are villages, forming union councils, which, in turn, constitute tehsil councils. District councils are composed of tehsil councils. Notably, the historical roots of local governance in the region trace back to the Aryan era, marking the inception of local governance bodies in the Indian subcontinent, as highlighted by a study. The study highlights that during the Aryan era, when India was predominantly agrarian, villages played a central role, governed by the "Panchayat" responsible for decision-making, land matters, tax collection, and meeting basic needs. This structure persisted through Muslim periods like the Ghaznavids and Tughlaqs, with no significant changes during the Mughal rule in the sixteenth century. However, the British colonial era marked a radical departure, dismantling the old system and introducing a new one. Under British rule, feudalism emerged through the privatization of lands, notably under the 1870 permanent settlement statute of Lord Cornwallis (Lowndes, 2007). The introduction of the feudal stratum under the 1870 permanent settlement statute led to minimal administrative involvement in rural union councils, mainly governed by bureaucracy. Urban councils were established to promote urban growth, creating a divide between urban and rural councils. Rural councils faced hindrances due to bureaucrats' reluctance to work for the public good, whereas urban councils operated without such impediments. Additionally, a researcher contends that council members were not elected but hand-picked by the British bureaucracy to execute their directives.

Pakistan's history has witnessed the implementation of diverse ordinances by different leaders, which have influenced the mechanisms of local governance. Civilian and military rulers have demonstrated distinct approaches to local governance. Notably, during General Pervez Musharraf's administration, the Local Government Ordinance of 2001 was introduced, introducing a revamped structure for local governance. This ordinance brought about a comprehensive transformation, notably establishing a newly elected district-level government with direct linkages to the sub-district level. The enactment of the 2001 ordinance marked a significant departure from previous ordinances, highlighting the evolving nature of local governance frameworks under varying regimes in Pakistan

(Malik & Rana, 2019). The Local Government Ordinance of 2001, introduced during General Pervez Musharraf's tenure, the implementation of the Local Government Ordinance of 2001 marked a fundamental shift as it eliminated the rural-urban divide and introduced a three-tiered system of local governments comprising the district council, tehsil council, and union council. Notably, this ordinance brought an end to the hierarchical structure of provincial and local administration, establishing direct accountability of local governments to the president. Musharraf granted councils financial and development powers, enforced accountability to district councils, introduced the provincial finance system, and restructured the role of district officers. Additionally, women's empowerment initiatives increased the reserved percentage from thirteen percent to thirty-three percent. However, local body elections on a non-party basis during this period had adverse effects on Pakistan's political landscape (Abbasi & Mussarrat, 2015). With the expiration of the Local Government Act of 2001 in 2009, civilian administrations in Pakistan gained the freedom to formulate their legislation regarding local governance. Consequently, the provincial legislature of Baluchistan enacted its local government act in 2010, which was later followed by Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2013. According to reports, all provinces granted local bodies limited autonomy in terms of finance, development, and administration, while retaining control over vital sectors such as health services and key departments (Zahoor, Khalid, & Muzaffar, 2015). The authority of local governments, as mandated by provincial governments, was placed under the hierarchical control of the provincial government structure. Unlike military dictatorships, these acts allowed for party-based elections. However, the laws formulated by political parties had the unintended consequence of undermining the authority of local governments, resulting in their ineffectiveness. This reluctance by provincial assemblies can be traced back to successive military regimes, which established a system of patronage. Provincial ministers sought to retain control over development funds to foster a culture of patronage and create a support base for their re-elections. When the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) assumed power in 2018, they, like the PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) before them, resisted ceding complete authority to local government bodies. This reluctance was motivated by a desire to retain power and a reluctance to share it with other political parties. However, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the PTI held power at both the provincial and local levels, the provincial assembly devolved power and allocated thirty percent of the budget for local governance performance (Saud & Kashif Ali Khan, 2016).

2. Literature Review

Several scholars have provided valuable perspectives on the origins, nature, and contextual aspects of local governance bodies and their performance throughout Pakistan's history. The following scholarly writings offer insightful analyses of the structure and performance of local governance during the tenures of General Pervez Musharraf and Imran Khan:

Gerry Stoker (2011) The article contends that local government plays a pivotal role in orchestrating community development to address a spectrum of needs, surpassing the mere provision of specific services. Within the intricate landscape of multi-level governance, elected local government bodies are most effective when assuming the role of network coordinators. This entails fostering extensive partnerships with higher government tiers, local organizations, stakeholders, and residents, thereby creating a web of accountability and interdependence. Networked community governance transcends a narrow focus on efficiency, prioritizing the achievement of public value – realizing desired outcomes by optimizing the use of public resources. In practice, this approach acknowledges the intricate architecture of government, recognizing various centers and diverse connections between entities at regional, national, local, and international levels. Each level entails extensive horizontal linkages with government agencies, privatized utilities, enterprises, non-profits, and interest groups. This multifaceted network underscores the dynamic nature of networked community governance in addressing community needs amidst a complex governance system (Stoker G. , 2011).

Murtaza Haider and Badami (2010) assert that the state of local government services and infrastructure in Pakistan has deteriorated over time, exacerbated by the challenges of rising urbanization. The historical turbulence surrounding local governance in Pakistan has contributed to the subpar quality of municipal service delivery. The article contends that military regimes have exploited the local governance system to cultivate loyal politicians who later align against democratic forces. When civilian democratic control is restored, local governments are often dismantled, viewed as integral to military dictatorship. The rapid urbanization in Pakistan poses specific challenges

to municipal service delivery, with population growth outpacing the expansion of infrastructure and services, leading to public health and environmental concerns. The article emphasizes the urgent need for a prudent and effective local governance strategy in Pakistan to address the escalating urban population and the inadequacies in service quality. It underscores how local governments in Pakistan have become pawns in power struggles between civilian and non-representative military regimes (Haider & Badami, 2010).

Munnara Alam and Abuzar Wajidi (2013) delve into the Devolution of Power Plan of 2001, highlighting the recurrent presence of military rule in Pakistan's political history. With four periods of martial law and three enacted constitutions since 1947, military regimes have governed Pakistan for about half of its existence. The alternating patterns of political and military governance significantly shape local government institutions and grassroots democracy. The authors argue that military rulers have both enhanced and jeopardized the long-term viability of municipal government in the country. While military regimes cultivated local democracy, civilian rule replaced it with non-participatory, unelected local entities managed by government-appointed civil servants. The article underscores the oscillation between dictatorial democracy and democratic dictatorship in Pakistan's local governance systems, emphasizing the unique parallel institutions that emerge with each military government, shaping the reality alongside the formal state structure (Alam & Wajidi, 2013).

In their article, Nadeem Malik, and Ahsan Rana (2019) argue that the decentralization of power is widely recognized by policy analysts, internal financial organizations, and donor countries as a critical element in promoting democracy at the grassroots level. They assert that decentralization is considered a prerequisite for accessing development financing from international donors. The authors highlight the significance of empowering local governance bodies to enhance democratic practices and facilitate development initiatives with the support of external donors. The concept of democratic decentralization has emerged as a significant focus in both practical applications and the perspective of international donors. This aligns with the core principle of democratization espoused by donor countries and international financial institutions, particularly in developing nations. The authors emphasize that Pakistan inherited its local governance system from the British colonial era, which initially received limited attention. Initially, local government members were not elected, and even when elections were conducted, they were restricted in their scope and representation. The state was highly centralized, dominated by civil and military bureaucracies, with local administrations largely controlled by bureaucracy, mirroring the colonial rule. The article traces the evolution of local governance through various political eras, emphasizing the military's role in consolidating control, notably during Ayub Khan's presidency and Zia-ul-Haq's coup in 1977 (Malik & Rana, 2019).

In their research paper, Nasira Jabeen, and Zafar Iqbal Jadoon emphasize the significance of women's participation in the local governance system, highlighting its role in promoting equitable human resources development, poverty alleviation, and effective governance. They acknowledge that deliberate efforts have been made in Pakistan, such as the local government code of 2000, which mandates thirty-three percent representation for women in local governance. However, the authors argue that deeply ingrained cultural values and societal norms continue to perpetuate gender disparities, posing challenges to achieving meaningful and substantial women's participation in local governance. These norms, reflected in institutional, organizational, and individual actions, limit women's engagement in governance roles. The researchers argue that women, despite their visible representation in local government, are often directed toward roles deemed traditionally suitable, such as education, health, and social welfare, reinforcing gender stereotypes. This segregation confines women to specific areas, depriving them of diverse experiences in crucial sectors controlled by male councilors, such as finance, budgeting, maintenance, and development works. The paper highlights the need to challenge prevailing gender norms to enable women to participate fully in all facets of local governance.

Rosilawati et al (2018) elaborate on participatory local governance in Pakistan, highlighting the significant role of civil society forces in driving democratic transformations. The paper argues that civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a crucial role in enhancing citizen engagement, fostering democratic local governance, and contributing to a pluralistic, participative, informed, and tolerant society. In the context of Pakistan, CSOs are seen as essential instruments for promoting active public participation in governance. The authors emphasize that, despite Pakistan's longstanding tradition of local government and CSO involvement, important local reforms since 2001 have aimed at furthering citizen participation at the grassroots level. This research underscores the evolving

dynamics of participatory governance and the pivotal role played by CSOs in shaping the democratic landscape in Pakistan (Rosilawati, Rafique, Nikku, & Habib, 2018).

Taj et al (2014) investigate the impact of authoritarianism on democratization in Pakistan, emphasizing the distinct political trajectory of the country compared to other South Asian nations. The study highlights how, despite gaining independence from colonial rule alongside India, Pakistan's political evolution diverged due to its turbulent history, marked by frequent changes in government, including three significant military administrations. The military-led local government reforms are analyzed, revealing their role in fragmenting regional power bases into smaller, politically inconsequential entities. The paper argues that, under military influence, civil administration and public sector organizations struggled to address the social service needs of a growing population, hindering the institutionalization of crucial governance components such as the judiciary, politics, economy, and civil society. The expansion of bureaucratic and authoritative powers beyond constitutional limits is identified as a factor impeding the development of essential institutions (Taj & Baker, 2018).

Saba Gul Khattak (2010) discusses the role of women in Pakistan's local governance system, highlighting the implementation of a notable affirmative action in 2000—a quota allocating thirty-three percent of seats to women. While acknowledging the quota as a crucial step in enhancing women's political representation, the author cautions against interpreting it as a definitive sign of democratic governance. The article notes that the quota was endorsed by a military dictatorship, and subsequent civilian governments exhibited hesitancy in supporting it, instead emphasizing broader progressive reforms in different areas. The author underscores the complex relationship between leadership support for the women's quota and regime type, emphasizing patterns influenced by political pragmatism and ideological continuity within the Pakistani government (Khattak, 2010).

3. Methodological Framework: Unveiling Dynamics in Local Governance Systems

The research employs a descriptive methodology to thoroughly evaluate and articulate the concerns surrounding local governance systems during the tenures of General Pervez Musharraf and Imran Khan. This approach, primarily based on perspectives and viewpoints, establishes a foundation for prospective investigations in the fields of Political Science and International Relations. The subject matter emerged following an extensive examination of diverse concepts and opinions, gathering data from papers, articles, journals, magazines, and reports to address the research inquiries. Additionally, a deductive method is employed, progressing from general to specific, outlining the local governance system in Pakistan and then delving into the specifics of the Musharraf and PTI governments. The research follows a qualitative approach, utilizing data from diverse sources such as articles, reports, research papers, books, and newspapers to analyze the intricacies of diplomatic relations and their prospects between the countries.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Local Governance System in Pakistan during the Era of General Pervaiz Musharraf

On October 12, 1999, General Pervez Musharraf orchestrated a military coup, seizing control of Pakistan. In a swift move, prominent members of civil society were appointed as ministers shortly after assuming power. Among various initiatives, the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) was established to reshape the political power dynamics. Following extensive deliberations, the NRB introduced the Devolution of Power Plan, a comprehensive program aimed at providing an organizational framework for critical aspects of sustainable development. This encompassed decentralizing management, fostering grassroots participation, addressing equity concerns related to gender, facilitating urban-rural integration, and enhancing local capacity. The multifaceted nature of the devolution program reflects a strategic approach to address pivotal issues for the long-term progress and socio-political transformation of Pakistan (Abbasi & Mussarrat, 2015). The intricacies of Pakistan's political landscape have mandated frequent reorganization of administrations and adjustments to the political system since its establishment. However, the evolution of its local government system has not kept pace with the changes in federal and provincial administrations. Leaders such as Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq attempted to construct local structures in pursuit of uniformity and orderliness, yet they encountered challenges in the execution of their primary objectives (Musarrat & Salman Azhar, 2012).

In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf orchestrated an armed coup to oust the democratically elected Prime Minister

Nawaz Sharif. The de facto government led by Musharraf undertook various initiatives to consolidate its power and legitimize its rule, following a pattern observed in other military regimes involved in the formulation of the Devolution of Power Plan in 2000 (Ali, 2018). Building on the model of Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies, General Musharraf aimed to bolster his regime by relying on local authorities. This strategy aimed to reduce the influence of political experts in public administration and limit their control over local legislative matters. Post-independence, the powers of these organizations became politicized and susceptible to the influence of ruling elites, leading to a decline in their autonomy and legitimacy compared to the British colonial period. The elected local structures in the subcontinent were weakened, ultimately supporting bureaucratic control (Kandhro & Akber, 2015). The deficiencies of municipal bodies in the region prompted the authoritarian regime to consolidate its political power.

4.2 The Governance Paradigm: General Pervez Musharraf's Administration

Despite the challenges encountered by those contending with elected local government administrations, the bureaucracy remained resistant to endorsing the devolution of powers, as it ran counter to the core principles and practices of their profession. The constitutional protection of the local body governance structure in Pakistan was absent, leaving it vulnerable to the influence of provincial governments and other authorities. The provincial governments bestowed power upon the local bodies, granting them the ability to create guidelines and regulations for municipal operations, town councils, district councils, and union councils. However, these bodies operated under provincial supervision and did not possess constitutional safeguards. As a result, following the Musharraf era, the local government organizations struggled to maintain stability. Subsequently, the elected federal and provincial administrations not only reinstated the previous legal framework but also introduced democratization measures, including local government elections, to empower the provinces (Zaidi, 2019). The devolution of power plan focused to a lesser extent on addressing the social affairs of the common man, prioritizing instead the efficient allocation and execution of developmental finances compared to previous approaches. However, while the devolution plan acknowledged the existence of corruption and bias, it struggled to effectively address and combat these challenges.

Moreover, as part of this strategy, the Musharraf government decentralized administrative authority by delegating it to lower levels and introduced district government bodies that operated with public participation. However, the electoral process did not permit independent participation of political parties. As a result, elected members lacked a political agenda centered on national issues and instead relied on ethnic, local, and feudal authorities. This approach contributed to the fragmentation of the country's social fabric along local and regional lines. It provided the military regime with a convenient method to implement a controlled governance plan, ensuring centralized control without dissent or accountability (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021). The local government bodies played a significant role in political collaboration during the chief executive referendum and general elections in 2002. Subsequently, the representatives of these bodies displayed a tendency to align themselves with the Pakistan Muslim League, which was supported by the military government. However, the consecutive rounds of local body elections resulted in the emergence of a new generation of political elites within the political system. These individuals not only served as local leaders but also acted as a link between the local and national levels of government (Sarwat & Sohaib, 2021). After 2005, the devolution of power plan and its architect faced significant challenges, resulting in the inability to conduct local-level elections. Therefore, the plan faltered and could not be sustained.

Consequently, local body initiatives were implemented during trustworthy administrations, yet none of the elected government members spearheaded any of these projects. In light of the aforementioned principles and prerequisites, the Devolution of Power Plan 2001 failed to fulfill any of them and was subsequently abandoned. Immediately, the central government of Pakistan must effectively diminish the influence of feudal, tribal, and ethnic control, ensuring allegiance to the common interests of the general populace. Devolution becomes a formidable challenge, if not an impossibility, in a political landscape dominated by rigid, landholding, and industrial elites. Research shows that a vibrant civil society requires sufficient levels of human development, an established political culture, and, in the case of a divided society, norms of political affiliation and good governance. In a democratic political framework, political parties play a crucial role in channeling public demands to political authorities. They respond to the policies and plans of their party, creating an environment that encourages increased grassroots participation and offers rural residents more opportunities to engage in developmental activities. However, the nonpartisan local

governance decisions made between 2001 and 2005 aimed more at expanding the scope of local strategies rather than addressing public concerns and developmental mindsets (Aamer & Baker, 2018). Despite cultivating a mature and harmonized national framework, the devolution power plan was not constitutionally mandated but rather enforced with a strong mandate. The devolution of power exemplifies a fundamental aspect of federalism, delegating authority to local governments to tackle crucial public matters. It is imperative to enhance and reinforce the local government system stated in the constitution of Pakistan to ensure a continuous process of devolution. This significant step toward decentralizing authority and promoting meaningful grassroots engagement signifies a positive advancement.

Additionally, in 2000, General Pervez Musharraf introduced a new system called the devolution plan. As part of this framework, the local government ordinance was implemented in 2001, establishing a three-tier government structure in Pakistan, comprising district administration, tehsil municipal administration, and Union Council administration. The primary objective of this plan was to enable a strategy of public participation in the planning, management, and supervision of social service delivery and development initiatives. Through Part A of the first schedule of the Local Government Ordinance of 2001, administrative control and operational responsibilities of territorial areas were decentralized and transferred to local governance bodies (Ali, 2018). The devolution of power to local levels of government resulted in specific tasks previously handled by local officials in provincial areas being transferred to districts or regions. General Musharraf emphasized that this devolution would empower the underprivileged and marginalized, granting them control over their futures. Additionally, it would uphold the principle of majority rule, highlighting the democratic nature of the system and the potential benefits it would bring. The National Reconstruction Bureau put forward five essential points of authority, referred to as the five Ds, to outline the systematic devolution to local governments (Abbasi & Mussarrat, 2015).

The implementation of the devolution plan led to the creation of a new administrative structure primarily at the district level, fostering political linkages with the local government at the sub-district and union council levels. The Local Government Ordinance of 2001 introduced significant measures to address the urban-rural divide by establishing three-tier local government bodies. The union council played a crucial role, with the direct election of Nazim and Naib Nazim by the public to represent them at the district and tehsil council levels. The military government devised an innovative governance plan aimed at establishing the groundwork for democracy.

The district government serves as the unified local governance entity at the foundational level. With the enactment of this statute, the management and financial authority of the office of the local government and rural development department, initially held at the regional, divisional, and tehsil levels, were delegated to the respective tehsil Municipal administration. The powers vested in the district government encompassed the organization and regulation of offices in regions assigned to it, with the stipulation that these powers be exercised within the specified territory in alignment with government provisions (Shah, Tayyaba, & Husnain, 2016). Each unit within the district government structure bears the designation of the district government and operates under the supervision of an appointed official. The community, as well as the government, holds the District Government accountable for the enhancement of administration and the provision of services.

The district manager, or Zila Nazim, served as the head of the district government, overseeing the execution of tasks and the deployment of specialists within his jurisdiction, in collaboration with the district coordination officer. Their primary responsibilities included offering guidance for area development, overseeing the strategic workings of the district government, and advancing the District Development Plan through consultations (Shaban, Shah, & Naeem, 2014). They were also tasked with executing duties related to laws and directives in the region, ensuring the implementation of decentralized functions, carrying out the annual development program, and managing district government administration.

The Tehsil administration serves as the second tier of the local governing body and is headed by the Tehsil Nazim. It comprises the Tehsil Municipal Officers, Tehsil Officials, and other relevant authorities, collectively forming the Tehsil Municipal Administration. This body is responsible for overseeing the organization, financial management, and governance needs of the local government and rural development offices across different levels, including territorial, divisional, regional, tehsil, and grassroots levels. The responsibilities of the Tehsil Municipal Administration encompass coordinating sustainable initiatives for the tehsil in collaboration with the union councils, overseeing land utilization plans, seeking approval from the Tehsil council for public assessment plans,

implementing and coordinating development plans, enforcing land use regulations, upholding civil laws and obligations, and collecting data (Bakhsh, 2021).

The Union Administration constituted the third and lowest tier of the local governance body, encompassing the entire district, including both rural and urban areas. It consisted of the Union Nazim, Naib Union Nazim, three Union Secretaries, and other supporting staff. The Union Nazim served as the leader of the Union Administration, while the Union Naib Nazim acted as their spokesperson. The Union Secretaries played a vital role in local area development, the functioning of Union Committees, and the delivery of governmental services under the guidance of the Union Nazim. The Union Councils were primarily responsible for gathering and maintaining statistical data for financial analysis, identifying town and neighborhood development needs, and incorporating them into approved development projects (Nadeem, 2009). In addition to their responsibilities mentioned earlier, Union Councils are also assigned various tasks. These include identifying gaps or deficiencies in service delivery, negotiating agreements with the Union Council to implement rates and charges, and establishing and coordinating libraries. These additional duties contribute to the comprehensive role of Union Councils in addressing local governance and community needs.

4.3 Foundational Institutions: A Microscopic Examination

The focal point of the devolution plan resided in the establishment of novel institutions designed to mirror traditional decision-making frameworks, albeit within a well-defined and documented structure governed by explicit regulations, rules, and enforcement bylaws. The local government ordinance delineated a strategic approach to tackle this challenge, entailing the inception of diverse grassroots institutions.

4.4 Provincial Local Government Commission (LGC)

The provincial government assumed responsibility for establishing an authority overseen by the provincial minister for local government, who reported directly to the region's chief executive. This commission was anticipated to comprise five executive representatives, inclusive of two from civil society, two politicians nominated by the public authority, and the secretary of the local government area. Endowed with a spectrum of responsibilities, the Local Government Commission (LGC) was mandated to execute various functions about local governance, undertake investigations into concerns relevant to local government affairs, conduct special reviews, and act as an arbiter in disputes between local administrations. Furthermore, the LGC was empowered to issue notices to local governments in the event of any legal violations. Section 132 of the local government ordinance bestowed upon the LGC the authority to orchestrate consultation sessions among members of the public and provincial officials, as well as to appoint government personnel to supervise or manage annual development plans.

4.5 Mukhtasib on District Level (Zila Mohtasib)

Section 134 of the local government ordinance delineated the responsibilities of the provincial government in establishing a Zila Mohtasib. Comprising an adjudicator from the high court, provincial specialists, and representatives from the public service commission, this committee held jurisdiction to investigate any allegations of misconduct by local government officials, including elected representatives and community workers. Upon rendering a decision on a matter, the Mohtasib transmitted it to the relevant office for implementation. Designed to safeguard the integrity of the organization, the Mohtasib, as per the local government ordinance, possessed the authority to recommend the removal of an individual from office to the Zila council. Moreover, the Mohtasib was empowered to mediate between aggrieved parties, facilitating the informal resolution of disputes without necessitating formal complaints (Wajidi & Iraq, 2003).

4.6 The Establishment of the Zila Mushavirat Committee

Enshrined in Section 140 of the local government ordinance, the Zila Mushavirat Committee is constituted by the Zila Nazim, Naib Nazim, and tehsil council nazims within the district. Chaired by the Zila Nazim, the committee also includes the district coordination secretary. Tasked with fostering a comprehensive vision for the district's advancement, the Mushavirat Committee convenes at least once every three months to deliberate on pertinent matters and strategize initiatives aimed at promoting the district's prosperity.

4.7 The Establishment of Musalihat Anjuman

As stipulated in Section 102 of the local government ordinance, the formation of Musalihat Anjuman was mandated, with each union council tasked to establish this body. Comprising three members nominated by individuals from the Insaf board of trustees, the Anjuman operated independently of local government nazims, who were not favored as members. Functioning as a facilitator and regulator of local disputes, the Anjuman's primary objective was to resolve conflicts extrajudicially, thereby alleviating burdens on the formal court system. Recognizing the significance of informal social networks, the Musalihat Anjuman played a pivotal role in addressing grassroots-level disputes, underscoring the ordinance's commitment to fostering community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. Through the establishment of such grassroots institutions, the local government ordinance strategically aimed to enhance the efficacy of small-scale development initiatives, thereby contributing to the overall improvement of development operations at the grassroots level (Tahira, 2017).

4.8 Founding Citizen Community Boards

Section 98 of the local government ordinance authorized the establishment of Citizen Community Boards (CCBs), positioned as grassroots-level entities entrusted with enhancing local area participation in service delivery initiatives. Functioning as proactive entities, CCBs were empowered to evaluate development plans, actively engage in plan execution, and operate as nonprofit entities committed to serving marginalized communities within their jurisdictions (Kurosaki, 2005). These boards received financial support from the local government, with twenty-five percent of the budget earmarked for their operations. Additionally, CCBs were tasked with mobilizing funds, aiming to secure twenty percent of the required resources for any proposed program. Ensuring transparency and accountability, CCBs were granted the authority to scrutinize the financial statements of the local government. However, to operate officially, CCBs needed to undergo legal registration and comply with specified accountability standards. Registration was overseen by an executive district officer affiliated with the community development department, underscoring the importance of institutional oversight in ensuring the effective functioning of CCBs.

4.9 The Influence of Devolution Plans on Local Body Governance Performance

The impact of service delivery and local body performance is marked by heightened productivity and enhanced contributions at the local level. Despite occasional challenges such as corruption and elite capture, an analysis of the political dynamics of decentralization under the local governance ordinance of 2021 suggests that the current framework could be further democratized through executive reforms and the augmentation of authority at the grassroots level of government. Such reforms would render governments more receptive to the demands of the local populace and create avenues for direct involvement of citizens at the local levels, thereby nurturing substantive engagement (Haider & Badami, 2010).

Furthermore, discrepancies in decentralization strategies have led to concerns regarding the effectiveness of the devolution plan in enhancing administrative standards. These disparities encompass a narrow emphasis on financial autonomy rather than comprehensive governance, local government operations lacking consideration for expenditure, community governance falling short of societal expectations, government-driven directives overriding institutionally accepted norms, limited autonomy for regional governments in determining their development priorities, and the devolution plan's failure to transition into a truly political sphere. Addressing these discrepancies is crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of decentralization efforts (Alam & Wajidi, 2013). This analysis further proposes regulatory, political, financial, and legal adjustments within the Punjab framework, with researchers anticipating that these improvements would empower individuals and advance the devolution of Pakistan's local government strategy. The implementation of the plan showcased variations from the devolution plan defined in the local government ordinance of 2001. The study also highlighted an increased level of public awareness concerning administrative structures, particularly in the education and health sectors (Khan, Ahmad, & Khan, 2020). According to the study, the period between 2001 and 2008, during which the devolution plan was implemented, did not yield significant gains or losses. The primary objective of establishing the local government system during the Musharraf era was to enhance governance at the grassroots level, promoting individual participation and empowerment. However, the reforms introduced during this period mostly focused on restructuring the system to consolidate power. The study suggests that for the new government system to produce

effective outcomes, decisive actions need to be taken by the political leadership.

A key issue identified within the local system pertains to the distribution of power between bureaucratic structures and elected representatives. Despite three rounds of local government elections conducted under the devolution plan, there has been no significant decentralization of authority. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a knowledgeable and professional committee capable of monitoring activities and programs comprehensively. Such an assessment is essential to determine whether these initiatives have genuinely enhanced the authority of political bodies or merely functioned as mechanisms for local development.

4.10 Assessing Local Governance Under the PTI Administration

The PTI government has been vocal about the imperative to enhance governance and ensure greater responsiveness to the populace's needs since assuming office. Effective devolution of power holds promises for bolstering democracy; however, inherent flaws within the local government framework pose significant challenges to achieving such lofty objectives. To comprehensively assess the PTI's endeavors to reform local governance, it is essential to contextualize Pakistan's broader devolution history. Historically, centralist military rulers in Pakistan have favored non-party-based local governments to circumvent provincial authority and political party influence while maintaining a semblance of legitimacy. The ratification of the 18th amendment in 2008, granting provinces enhanced autonomy from the central government, received bipartisan acclaim. Nonetheless, democratic political parties in Pakistan have displayed reluctance to further share power across provinces. It was not until the Supreme Court mandated local government elections at the close of 2015 that any provinces conducted such elections. However, even then, the controlling parties in respective provinces predominantly governed local bodies (Sumra, 2017).

Nonetheless, despite their party's candidates securing victories in local elections, provincial governments strongly resisted relinquishing policymaking and budgetary authority to lower levels of governance. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) outperformed other provinces in establishing local governments as part of its commitment to devolve power down to the village level. However, a study has highlighted significant challenges in the functioning of these village and neighborhood councils (Khan & Saud, 2016). Moreover, the limited experience and capacity at the local level posed obstacles to effectively utilizing local government finances.

Upon assuming power in provinces like Punjab and Baluchistan, the PTI-led government aimed to revamp the existing local body governance systems, particularly those held by rival parties, mirroring the model implemented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). For instance, in Punjab, where the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) dominates most of the local government positions, the PTI sought to amend the Punjab Local Government Act. However, lacking the requisite majority in the provincial legislature posed a significant hurdle. According to a study, apprehensive of potential litigation and opposition from other political factions, the PTI-led administration opted to allow the incumbent local governments to complete their terms (Akber & Kandhro, 2015). The provincial government in Punjab, spearheaded by the new Chief Minister of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), appears hesitant to confer any substantial authority or financial resources upon the current local governments. Reports indicate that the PTI-led administration has been actively seeking to restructure the local governance system in anticipation of holding new local body elections in 2020. Among the decisions made in this regard is the proposal to directly elect mayors in the upcoming round of local bodies' elections. This proposal holds significant promise, particularly in provinces like Punjab and Baluchistan, where extending the reach of local governance units down to the village level could yield substantial benefits. However, even in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where PTI has historically championed decentralization efforts, there remains a pressing need for local governance bodies to attain greater moral, political, and economic autonomy from the provincial government than they have enjoyed in past decades (Idris, 2016).

Furthermore, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government was also addressing other critical issues in its proposed new local governance legislation. One of the foremost concerns was the need to augment the allocation of seats reserved for women and facilitate the direct participation of women and other marginalized groups in electoral contests. As highlighted in a study, without such measures, marginalized groups would likely remain beholden to the directives of their party leaders and patrons, thereby compromising their ability to advocate for the interests of the communities they serve (Khan, Ahmad, & Khan, 2020). Moreover, the revised local government legislation

should incorporate provisions stipulating that seats designated for workers and peasants are exclusively contested by individuals from these segments of society. However, the efficacy of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in decentralizing governance to the grassroots level hinges on the thorough implementation of these reforms. Merely cosmetic changes to local governance, conversely, would merely perpetuate the dominance of PTI's delectables at the provincial and federal levels, thereby maintaining the status quo of top-down governance.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerged victorious in the general elections of 2018, securing mandates at the federal and provincial levels, including in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Punjab, and Baluchistan. However, despite its electoral triumph, the PTI administration failed to conduct local government elections across the country. In a notable move in 2019, the PTI-led government in Punjab voted to prematurely dissolve the existing local governments in the province, effectively terminating their tenure nearly thirty months before the scheduled end date. This decision underscores a persistent trend wherein provincial elites, vested in maintaining centralized power structures, have historically resisted the establishment of robust local governance systems. By perpetuating the dominance of provincial governments over local bodies, authorities have wielded the ability to defer elections and exert control over these institutions through unelected administrative mechanisms.

Furthermore, in the context of party-based local government elections, partisan interests have consistently overshadowed the welfare of ordinary citizens. This dynamic was prominently observed in Punjab, where the PTI-led government decided on May 4, 2019, to halt the functioning of elected local governments and install administrators in their place. This move underscores two interlinked issues that have long plagued local government politics in Pakistan. Primarily, it reflects a political maneuver, as the PTI opted to suspend the local body administration in Punjab, a region predominantly controlled by its principal rival, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) (Khan & Jamshed, 2019). As a result, notwithstanding the ongoing tenure of the local government, the PTI government opted to dismantle the entire local governance system in Punjab to undermine a political adversary and consolidate its authority. Secondly, the decision to suspend the elected administration by the PTI government underscores the enduring significance of local governance in Pakistan.

4.11 Replacing Zila Nazim with Mayor

In a more pointed observation, the legislative maneuvers undertaken by the PTI government during its tenure in Punjab regarding local governance structure, elections, and the powers and functions of local bodies revealed a singular focus on national and provincial interests. Critically, the Punjab local government ordinance of 2021, as highlighted by Ali Cheema, has been characterized as a mechanism for elective tyranny in Punjab. This ordinance, according to Chandio, creates a scenario where a majority winner automatically gains all reserved seats, comprising sixty percent of the district councils. In essence, this grants the elected administration not only an automatic majority but also the capacity to marginalize voters, constituencies, and council members from opposing parties.

Nevertheless, despite the potential for mayors to remain financially dependent on provincial governments, thereby limiting the authority of local government bodies, an additional concern arises. A study in this context has underscored that the 2021 ordinance represents a significant departure from the local government act of 2019, even within the PTI-led government in Punjab. Notably, the previous statute mandated proportionate participation for each political party in the council, fostering a more diverse representation within the Punjab local government system. In contrast, Punjab opted to supplant the Local Government Act of 2019 with the Local Government Ordinance in 2021. Under this framework, the mayor, also known as the District Nazim, operates without direct accountability to or dependence on other political parties at the district level. However, given the absence of specified district financial allocations through the Provincial Finances Commission across all provinces, the mayor remains inherently tethered to provincial politics rather than being solely focused on addressing the unique interests and needs of the district.

The findings of the study underscore a notable example highlighting the removal of democracy from the people on two distinct fronts. Firstly, the mayor's potential outright majority in the council could lead to the concentration of power, potentially transforming them into a local despot. Secondly, the mayor's office would be subject to the dictates of provincial executives, indicating that their interests would likely diverge from local concerns, thus diminishing the efficacy of local politics. Consequently, this structural arrangement exemplifies a significant consolidation of power at the provincial level. Given Pakistan's historical context of decentralization and

devolution, it is unsurprising that provincial bodies consistently seek avenues to resist relinquishing the power vested in them through amendments aimed at bringing governance closer to the populace.

Following the deputization of locally elected administrations across Punjab, Pakistan Tehreek-I-Insaf (PTI) Chairman, Imran Khan, fervently advocated for the enactment of local government legislation in 2019, alongside the establishment of the Village Panchayat and Neighborhood Councils Act through the provincial assembly. This move was heralded by Khan as the dawn of a new democratic era in the country. However, it was met with criticism from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), branding it as a legislative coup. Whether perceived as a bold initiative or a calculated maneuver, the PTI government's focus on local governance was inevitable. Given the reformist stance of Prime Minister Imran Khan, particularly exemplified in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Punjab emerged as the pivotal battleground for his administration, representing the nucleus of his reform agenda (Rafique & Khoo, 2018).

Furthermore, it comes as no surprise that then-Prime Minister Imran Khan was sparing no effort, especially given his party's setbacks in implementing ambitious local government plans in KP between 2013 and 2018. Khan had long been an advocate for local government reforms, a cause he championed throughout his illustrious 26-year political career. However, Imran Khan's advocacy for municipal administration was not unique to him; rather, it was a shared sentiment among various political factions. Indeed, the establishment of effective local governance bodies seemed to be a concept everyone could rally behind yet reaching a consensus on its implementation proved elusive. Initially, the notion of empowering local communities with greater autonomy made logical sense. (Rosilawati, Rafique, Nikku, & Habib, 2018). Undoubtedly, such a system would present a more streamlined administrative framework, augmenting the democratic process by introducing an additional tier of governance. This would potentially alleviate challenges associated with accountability and accessing administrators, thus facilitating a more responsive governance structure. Moreover, empowering communities to manage and safeguard their interests would relieve legislators of the burden of addressing localized concerns, allowing them to concentrate on the broader legislative agenda. This shift would redirect attention towards substantive legislative endeavors, rather than being bogged down by trivial local matters.

Indeed, the establishment of local governance bodies signifies more than merely adding another layer to the democratic structure; it also heralds a new economic paradigm. It represents not just a reconfiguration of the administrative hierarchy, but also the allocation and utilization of financial resources. Traditionally, essential services such as education and healthcare, which are typically overseen by provincial governments, will now fall under the purview of local authorities. This shift necessitates significant provincial and federal politicians relinquishing control over fiscal matters, allowing funds to be directly channeled into each district. Consequently, this shift has the potential to foster the development of localized economies and create conditions conducive to heightened economic growth for both individuals and communities. However, the effective functioning of the local governance system hinges upon the delegation of authority to operate within established frameworks and mandates; otherwise, their efficacy is compromised. Central to empowering local government bodies is financial autonomy, which requires provincial governments, particularly the Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) constituting the system, to cede control over financial allocations and ensure equitable distribution of resources among districts.

5. Conclusion

This research concludes that the efficacy of the local governance system in Pakistan has historically exhibited better performance during dictatorial regimes compared to periods under popularly elected governments. During the latter, the local governance system often suffered neglect, diminishing its significance as a primary avenue for individual assistance. However, a shift occurred with the introduction of General Pervez Musharraf's framework in 2001, which established a three-tiered structure aimed at grassroots-level governance. Despite offering the potential for enhanced accountability and empowerment of local governance entities, the framework's effectiveness has been hindered by a lack of political support.

Moreover, the research highlights several critical factors contributing to the failure of decentralization in Pakistan, including an inadequate legislative framework, ineffective implementation of authority, and institutional abuse of power. Historical analysis underscores that authoritarian military rulers utilized local organizations primarily to consolidate state power and centralize authority further. Conversely, civilian governments were disinclined to

empower robust local bodies, as they sought to retain control over financial and developmental prerogatives for personal and electoral gains. Additionally, the research reveals a pattern of suppressing dissent against military regimes while rewarding support for such regimes with political appointments. Consequently, patronage politics thrived, weakening the local governance system and perpetuating a cycle of centralization.

Furthermore, military regimes sought to legitimize their authority by establishing local bodies, often cultivating collaborative political elites with strong ties to the military rather than the broader populace. Elections held prematurely and without consideration for political parties eroded accountability and fueled personal vendettas. During the Musharraf era, the local governance system aimed to delegate authority to lower-level governments while encouraging individual participation and empowerment. However, these reforms were primarily geared towards consolidating power rather than fostering genuine democratization.

In contrast, the proposition put forward by the PTI government appears to surpass the initiatives of the Musharraf regime. It not only allocates funds more equitably to districts but also delegates greater responsibilities. However, the premature dissolution of elected local bodies by the PTI government suggests a tendency towards authoritarian tendencies. Even with the enactment of the Punjab Local Government Act in 2019, the delay in holding new elections indicates a reluctance to cede control to local representatives. Ultimately, for the new governance system to yield effective results, political governments must demonstrate bold leadership. The central issue in Pakistan's local governance system lies in the distribution of power between the bureaucracy and elected officials.

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