

Local Government System as An instrument for Authoritarian Governments in Pakistan

Farhan Ali
PhD. Scholar

Department of Political Science & IR,
Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, D.I.Khan

ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a unique nation whose political history has seen a variety of local government structures. The centralized-authoritative structure was used to manage the local government system in India during the colonial era. In contrast, military governments in Pakistan had prioritised the local government system over civilian ones following the country's independence in 1947. In accordance with the idea of decentralisation of powers, Pervez Musharraf launched the "Devolution of Power Plan 2001," in addition to Ayub Khan's "Basic Democracy" and Zia-ul-Haq's "Local Bodies system." All three of these military leaders looked at ways to increase their popularity starting at the local level, using local governments as their foundation. This study examines how local governments are employed by military rulers as a strategy to bolster their own administrations.

Keywords: Local government; devolution; military regimes; basic democracies; decentralization

Introduction

The third level of the democratic form of government is local government. In Pakistan, we are still in the experimental stage; however it offers facilities to people upon admittance in many ways. The goal of the local government system is to transfer authority from elites to common men and empower the populace at large. It's a system that offers a decentralised chance. This democratic level was intended to produce new political leaders. Local government serves as both the first and the test bed for democracy at the lower level of government.

Pakistan is located in Southern Asia, between Afghanistan and China to the northwest, India to the east, and the Arabian Sea to the north. The population of the nation is estimated to be

between 210 and 220 million based on preliminary data from the 2017 census (Dunya News, 2017). Pakistan is a federal parliamentary state that is governed by three levels of government. It is made up of the federal government, which is made up of the Senate and the national assembly, as well as state and local administrations. A village, which is around 404.68 hectares in size, is the fundamental administrative unit at the local level. A union council is made up of a number of settlements. Comparably, a Tehsil (town) council is formed by a group of union councils, while a district council is formed by a number of Tehsils councils.

The origins of local government in the regions that would later become Pakistan date back to the Aryans, who initially established the system in the Indian subcontinent in the middle of the second or first millennium B.C (Alderfer, 1964). In comparison to other regions of the world, India had a far more extensive local government system (Mattahi, 1915).

In Pakistan's political system, local government has gained prominence, especially during General Ayub Khan's military rule. Pakistan recognised the value of local government throughout the tenure of its three military leaders—General Ayub Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq, and General Pervaiz Musharraf—in the roughly ten years after the country's independence. It should be noted that during their brief reigns as the nation's centralised authority, all three of them prioritised the growth of local government. Despite having risen to the top, they attempted to strengthen their central authority from below (Karim, 2016). Local bodies under the previous military dictatorship had greater executive, financial, and political authority. In 2002, the local governments received Rs. 32 billion from the Federal Government. The district governments' accounts received these funds. Tehsil and Union Councils received more funding from the District Governments. Apart from the fiscal allocation from the province, local governments were permitted to collect revenue through the imposition of specific taxes, user fees, and other levies.

Literature Review

Even with its authority, the bureaucracy was subject to political pressure and manipulation by the ruling class after independence, making it unable to maintain the impartiality and independence of the British colonial rule. In the past, the elected municipal bodies in the Sub-

Continents were weaker and answered to the bureaucracy. The political leadership's "elected authoritarianism" was fostered by the weak local entities in the area.

Pakistan inherited the British colonial rulers' local government model (Malik & Rana, 2019). However, municipal administrations received very little attention at first. When local elections were held, the number of voters was restricted and no one was elected to office (Waseem, 1989). The bureaucracy, both military and civil, controlled the state and it was highly centralised (Jalal 1995; Talbot, 1999). The first comprehensive local government system was implemented in 1958 following Pakistan's independence, following the military takeover led by General Ayub Khan. The new local governments were founded by the Basic Democracies Ordinance of 1959 (Musarrat & Azhar, 2012).

In 1959, Ayub Khan abolished the upper echelon of elected governments and restored local governments as the exclusive representative layer of the state. Controlling the central and fostering pro-military leadership at the local level were the goals. Friedman (1960) contended that the Basic Democracies Scheme did not establish democracy since it only gave citizens token control over the government's authority. Later, General Ayub unveiled the Municipal Administration Ordinance 1960, which included four interconnected tiers in a hierarchical structure. Union councils, which were made up of elected members, were the lowest level. The chairman was chosen by the union council members themselves. There were official members nominated by the government and members elected indirectly by these directly elected members at the higher levels of local government (Batool, 2014).

Methodology

This study, which examines Pakistan's local government system and military control, is based on a qualitative research approach. The study aims to explore the ways in which military dictators have exploited the LG system to secure popular support and extend their control. Such interpretive studies, in which participants are connected to the social issues being studied, are better suited for qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2013).

Discussion

Local Government Systems during Military Rulers

(1) General Ayub Khan's Local Government System

The Basic Democracies (BD) system implemented by General Ayub Khan combined local democracy and bureaucracy (Khan, 2009). Although the goal of the BD system was to integrate Pakistan's rural and urban areas—where the majority of the nation's people resided—it was mostly focused on the former (Ziring, 1966). Nevertheless, the opposite situation occurred. The bureaucracy made decisions under the BD system. Officialdom subjugated political leadership at lower levels of government. Additional duties were assigned to the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner (DC), and Assistant Commissioner (AC), who chaired the Divisional, District, and Tehsil councils, respectively. In urban and rural areas, respectively, union committees and union councils were the only bodies with elected heads (Khan, 2014).

The literature on Pakistani local government organisations attests to the political objective of Ayub Khan's creation of the Basic Democracies system, which was to provide a foundation of support for the dictatorship. The BD system operated as an electoral college for the purposes of the national legislature and the office of the President. Over this body, the DC and the Police officers imposed strict supervision. Furthermore, the DC was endowed with vast administrative, electoral, judicial, and financial powers by the Basic Democracies Order, 1959 (BDO). Therefore, bureaucratic control predominated under the BD system. Fundamental weaknesses in the BD system included corruption, structural issues, and a lack of both formal and informal decentralisation of authorities (Mahmood, 2023).

In summary, the Pakistani civil services maintained their dominant position throughout Ayub Khan's administration, and any administrative restructuring would have jeopardised this status. When Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's elected government rolled back the BD system on January 22, 1972, rather than amending it, Pakistan's political history witnessed a very pitiful institutional growth (Bhadur, 1998).

(2) General Zia's Local Government System

General Zia-ul-Haq established a local government system by enacting the "Local Government Ordinance, 1979," just like his military predecessor. He enacted laws for local

administration in each province, the federal territory, Azad Kashmir, and the Northern Areas. While it is true that every province had approved its own local government ordinance, they were quite similar to one another. Both rural and urban regions were covered by the ordinance (Khan, 2008).

The District Council was at the top of the local government hierarchy in rural areas. Public works, health, education, agricultural development, economic welfare, food and drink articles, drainage, public ferries, cattle and dairy development, culture, public safety, development functions, etc. were the District Council's general areas of responsibility.²² In urban regions, smaller towns were organised into Town Committees, larger cities into Municipal Corporations, and ordinary cities into Municipal Committees. A Metropolitan Corporation was created specifically for Karachi (Khan, 2014).

Notwithstanding the fact that the LGO, 1979 contains 188 Articles, 22 Chapters, and three Schedules, not a single clause, section, or Article in the Ordinance grants local elected representatives of the people the authority to supersede bureaucracy at any level. In theory, local democracy was shielded from bureaucracy. However, in reality, all municipal issues were managed by the public servants. At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner held a royal status. In the district, he had sole authority. He was not held accountable to the elected officials of the district. That also applied to the lower tiers of the LGO, 1979-established structure (Khan, 2014).

The District Mayor is not authorised by statute to assign or compose the District officers' Annual Performance Report. Three local body elections were held under this system. In the former NWFP, local council elections were held for the first time in September 1979, again in September 1983, and again in November 1987. However, the underlying structural and functional problems of LGO, 1979 only served to weaken the institutions of local government, rather than giving elected bodies more authority. These political organisations were unable to take hold. In contrast, these institutions suffered as the bureaucracy consolidated its power and increased its dominance. The country's unequal institutional growth can also be attributed to these systemic weaknesses (Jabeen, 2019).

(3) General Musharraf's Local Government System

By means of the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001, General Musharraf established a new local government framework. In the past, provincial line departments—a decentralised bureaucratic tier that did not directly subordinate to the province elected representatives—performed the majority of the duties and the powers of local governments were relatively restricted (Batoool 2014; Cheema et al. 2005). Devolution resulted in the establishment of a newly elected district government that was politically connected to sub-district [town] and union council local governments (see LGO 2001).

The Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001 broke down the barriers between urban and rural areas and established three tiers of local government: Union Council, Tehsil Council, and District Council. This was the main difference between the LGO 2001 and earlier ordinances. The central body was the Union, and the mayor, Union Nazims, and deputy mayor, Naib Nazims, were chosen by popular vote to serve in the District and Tehsil Councils, respectively (Batoool 2014). The traditional hierarchical structure between the local and provincial administrations was eliminated by the LGO. The President's office was instead directly connected to local governments through a number of organisations, including the Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment and the National Reconstruction Bureau (Cheema et al. 2005). For all intents and purposes, the central government's hold over local governments persisted even after the quasi-civilian government was restored in 2002 following a presidential referendum that chose Musharraf to be the head of state and the military-sponsored political alliance known as the Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam group) to win the elections and form national and provincial assemblies.

In contrast to earlier local government structures, Musharraf gave elected individuals in local councils more authority over development, finance, and administration, and all government agencies were now answerable to the District Council. The Deputy Commissioners' rule was abandoned by devolution, and the District Coordination Officers (DCOs), who took over as their official successors, were administratively and legally subservient to the District Nazims. (Batoool, 2014). In an effort to establish an institutional structure for allocating funds between the provinces and local governments, Musharraf also established the Provincial Finance Commission for the first time. The National Finance Commission was the only body that formerly offered an institutional framework for allocating resources between the central

government and the provinces. The LGOs of 2001 were notable for another reason: thirty-three percent of the reserved seats were designated for women. Musharraf took great pleasure in his government's ability to empower women for the first time in Pakistani local government history. In addition, the LGO 2001 established Citizen Police Liaison Committees to advance the rule of law and safeguard civil rights, Citizens Community Boards to enable citizens to engage in the planning and management of development projects, and District Monitoring Committees to oversee the operations of government agencies (Hasnain, 2008).

There were certain parallels between the LGO 2001 and earlier local government systems, despite a number of differences. For instance, Musharraf continued the practice of earlier military administrations by holding non-party local government elections, which solidified the politics of individualised patronage based on caste and clan allegiances. Furthermore, even though Musharraf granted the local government a temporary constitutional status through a Presidential Order until 2009 (i.e., until 2009, no government could dissolve local governments that Musharraf formed), the local governments remained without a permanent constitutional status. Additionally, even though there was significant fiscal decentralisation, unlike previous military administrations, bureaucracy continued to be in charge of budget planning. The district Nazim might submit the prepared budget for council approval; it was developed by the District Coordination Officers (DCOs) and other bureaucrats appointed by the province administrations. The budget would become non-existent fourteen days after the fiscal year ended if the council declined to approve it (Cheema et al., 2005).

Conclusion

Local governments were formerly employed by military regimes to cultivate a devoted group of politicians that they then opposed to democratic forces. Local governments were frequently dismantled when civilian democratic authority was reinstated in Pakistan because these organisations were seen as integral to the military dictatorships. Pakistan has an insufficient local government structure as a result of the struggle between military and democratic regimes. The task facing Pakistan's democratic forces is to acknowledge the significance of local governments and thereafter implement measures to provide them with

constitutional protection. If this isn't done, the urban and rural environments might worsen even more. Since the majority of resources and the department in charge of providing services were under the jurisdiction of the federal or provincial governments, the local government systems of 1959 and 1979 lacked true authority. General Pervaiz Musharraf unveiled his seven-point programme after taking office in 1999. Devolution of powers was one of the agenda items, and the National Reconstruction Bureau was founded to restructure Pakistan's administrative structure. The objectives, according to NRB, were to decentralise and restructure the administrative system, provide a forum for civil society, public engagement, and the creation of an integrated system for service delivery. Musharraf attempted to garner grassroots public support through NRB.

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