

Journal of Law & Social Studies (JLSS)

Volume 4, Issue 1, pp 161-177

www.advancelrf.org

Local Government System in Punjab: Clientelism and Failed Devolution of Power (2015-19)

Waqar Ilahi

PhD Scholar

Department of Political Science,
University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid

Chairperson,

Department of Political Science,
University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Email: chairperson.polsc@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

Pakistan is a federal republic with three administrative tiers: national, provincial, and local. The local Government system (LGS), the third tier, is viewed as a harbinger of democracy in developing economies including Pakistan. Since coming into power in 2008, democratically elected governments agreed to devolve power from federal level to provincial level, but slow-walked the formation of local governments until 2015—after an order by the Supreme Court of Pakistan was passed to conduct the election. In Punjab, the local government laws were more centrist, and relations between the local and provincial governments were explicitly asymmetrical. Although the LGS dissolved in Punjab in 2019, this article will attempt to explore the causes of the failed devolution of power (2015-2019). By particularly focusing on the "Punjab local Government Act 2013" and "Punjab Local Government Act 2019" and failure of devolution of power, this study will investigate a range of administrative and political issues in local governance in Punjab.

Keywords: Devolution, Democratization, Decentralization, Financial Autonomy.

Introduction

Democratic decentralization has been a subject of focus for international organizations, political and civil rights groups, and states (Manor, 1999). It is viewed as a means and tool for making countries more responsive (Heller, 2001), elevates the economy (Shah, 1998), ensures accountability of executives, and promotes participation of people through a joint approach to the grass-root level. Decentralization is a political matter as it explains political participation and relation between political actors and various tiers of government. The contextually political

process is determined by an institutional framework, social and cultural settings, and asymmetrical power dynamics. In post-colonial states like Pakistan development of state and politics is different; therefore, the political framework is fundamentally different from developed countries in many ways. In the subcontinent, decentralization was implied as a political strategy by all empires that governed the territory (Niaz, 2006). A similar strategy was applied by the British Empire, in Punjab, they merge modern state with conventional indigenous organizations and land tenure system to form a political framework impaired by nepotism.

Pakistan inherited the same political system founded upon patronage. Lack of political structuring in the Muslim League along with other factors resulted in the consolidation of a system of patronage. The state never confronted or mitigated the issue of unbalanced land distribution, social distinction on the basis of caste and kinship, and asymmetrical power distribution (Sayeed, 2002). The accumulation of power in few hands was at expense of the common rural population. The conditions of trade, subsidies, and exchange rates none was in the favor of small farmers, and they didn't get any reward from policies of the green revolution (Gardezi, 1998). Due to this slackness in the agricultural sector, surplus goods and services moved to cities where industrialization was initiated by the state. Nevertheless, the poor rural population who migrated to cities faced the same issue of discrimination and dependency as the governments in Pakistan never focused on labor rights. Due to this, a social structure created and developed by the British remained preserved with predominantly similar features across urban and rural distinction in Pakistan.

The conflicting combination of Democracy and Dictatorship has influenced the political framework in Pakistan. Democratization has always emphasized stabilizing relations between the state and society (Ahmad, 1980). Both the setups of governance in Pakistan have held elections to legalize their regime. The economic policies of the government and power dynamics in society have the same pattern and do not benefit every class. The judicial system, tax system, authority of unrepresentative state institutions, and inherent structures of inequality have persisted in our political system. The closely knitted structure of political association has remained intact through intimidation, force, nepotism, and clientelism and has obstructed cross-the-board political participation. Evident patron-client interaction in urban areas of Pakistan proved that migration to the cities could not change the trend of social association in the politics of the country. The persistence of such trends strongly influences political participation because the reliance of clients on patrons imperils the freedom of political actors. All these factors affect democratization and the strengthening of steady democracy (Crook, Crook, & Manor, 1998).

Due to several reasons, political parties in Pakistan remain hierarchical, weak, and unresponsive to public demands. Lack of pragmatic political leadership has benefitted the elite classes who have enough resources to win elections through personalized mediums. These personal mediums totally alter the motive of elections and strategically privileged people use all means of coercion for accessing state resources and clientelism to get votes. Institutional factors like election regulations in Pakistan also encourage contestant-based tactics. In Punjab, the direct election of five male members, two female members, and one youth member incentivized local candidates in exchanging votes with the provision of some benefits (ur Rehman, 2017). Local bodies' act of 2013 was legislated and passed by the Punjab government; this is a classical version of the 1979 local act. Shafaqat (2014) compared all four provinces and deduced that the local bodies act passed by the Punjab government is quite undemocratic as it reduced the political,

administrative, and economic authority of local bodies. This behavior of political elites is influenced by many factors including the risk of losing political authority which is compulsory for gaining economic advantages that are utilized to strengthen political power. The local body elections are highly competitive, when national elections are taking place the turnout is very less whereas local pollings/elections have a competitive rivalry. In rural Punjab, voters usually vote in groups, these groups are named as vote blocks. It is an informal institution that negotiates with the candidate as a representative of the whole group. It is speculated that more personal ties and closer interaction at the local level will further eliminate distinct boundaries between these vote blocks (Mohmand, 2011). The old background of personal politics at this level has strict embedded competition within a group of conventional local identities. An important part of local competition is demand for public goods but personal exchanges remain a central feature of local election (Rehman, 2017).

Though the national and provincial political structure is becoming progressive politics at the local level is still marred by personal political associations. Many stakeholders are not in favor of introducing political parties at the grass root level. The most likely reason is that introduction of political parties would distort informal associations of local political stakeholders. Punjab government is also in favor of nonparty-based elections of local bodies and this behavior of the government is a testament to a deep-rooted logic that was established and maintained by colonial rule. The persistence of this political patronage has major effects on the democratization process in developing states like ours.

This study is designed with an aim to analyze the local government system of Punjab within the duration from 2015 to 2019. The study intends to locate the loopholes that results in the establishment of weak, uninspiring local government. The article follows the following scheme: brief review of literature regarding the clientelism and extend of decentralization in Pakistan. It will then be followed by detailed critical analysis of different measures taken for the establishment and sustenance of local government in Punjab during the selected period. The article ends at recommending rational measures which could be taken to bridge the loopholes.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the major steps taken by the government to devolve power up to grass root level in the province of Punjab within the studied time bracket?
- 2) What are the major loopholes in the decentralization policies and how clientelism has been sustained in the studied period?

Literature Review

The lack of literature in Social and Political Sciences along with the concerns in its validity have created difficulties to explore changing and transient societal circumstances in Pakistan (Zaidi 2002). Thus, the in-depth studies can only be dependent upon rich theoretical and empirical data available from across the world to strengthen the methodologies aimed at the analysis of phenomena within the host state. The concepts of Clientelism, patron-client relationship, patronage, and political decentralization have been viewed and analyzed distinctly by different researchers, specialized in varied fields of social sciences (Graziano, 1976). This multiplicity in conceptual framework complicates the process of utilizing the ideology of clientelism for any rational purpose (Hicken, 2011). The complications are multiplied when the concept is used in comparative studies of multi-disciplinary nature. To locate and identify the type and functioning

of clientelistic relationships with regards to political decentralization is yet another limitation of this review. Hence keeping the above explained limitations in focus, the following review of literature aimed at building an understanding of clientelism, its characteristics, and consequences on democratic decentralization.

What is Clientelism?

Hicken (2011) argues that the ability of clientelism to maintain itself in almost all types of political systems, societies, and culture is distressing for multiple scholars that are working in different disciplines. It is sustaining itself in most established economies and also thriving in the long existing republics of Asia, Europe, and America (Boix & Stokes, 2007), South America enjoys more incidence in the urban regions (Auyero, 2000), is well-expected across the vast stretches of Africa (Berman, 1974), and is severely damaging the roots of Asia, extending from the Middle East to the Urban arrays of Taiwan (Scott, 1972). To understand these hardcore practices in multiple contexts, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and political scientists from across the world are divided based on political and structural elements of clientelism. Hitchens (2011) and Graziano (1976) supported the argument of Scott (1972) who believed that relations of client and patrons can only manifest between individuals with imbalanced position, social strata, or economic resources. Graziano (1976) constructed an extensive analysis stating that both interpersonal and multi-agent types of clientelism could take the form of dyadic structures. However, population explosion, growth of voters, and the modern economic systems, by transforming the structure of the social relations, have shifted the dyadic nature of this relation into Triade and allowed the entry of a new agent-political broker-between patron-client (Muno, 2010). Muno (2010) noted that unequal power distribution, voluntarism, and reciprocity are the key elements in the clientelistic association. However, these researchers didn't explain the mechanism of power transmission within political networks in their models. The existence of asymmetrical power relationships, monitoring, and lack of any improvement opportunities have allowed the clientelistic exchange to be resilient, exploitive, and viable (Lyne, 2007; Muno, 2010). These insights are, however, labeled by many theoreticians as situational analysis which neglects the major consequences. On the other hand, Marxist and Dependacia approaches have highlighted the association between clientelist politics and capitalist development (Flynn, 1974; Rothstein, 1979). Mohmand (2011) underscored the targeted characters of public goods that generated the clientelistic nature of politics in Punjab (Mohmand, 2011).

Politics and Clientelistic Associations

It is believed that the political system of Pakistan is factional and these factions are solely based on personal interests (Lyon, 2002). Politicians build up alliances and aim to seek long-term benefits. The loyalty for the alliance is either instrumental or contractual; contractual among patrons while instrumental between patrons and clients (ur Rehman, 2017). For instance, competing groups of Swati Pathans fought for a long time to get the authorization of a Land, the scarce source. Scott (1972) argued that social exchange defines interpersonal relations. Similarly, any favor made in economic terms necessitates reciprocity in the political arena. Blau noted two primary reasons for a social exchange: to develop friendship and to create a sense of super ordination (Blau, 1964). In political sections, marginalized segments are enticed with materialistic gain in exchange for their "power of vote" (Javid, 2011). Owing to the absence of any direct means of contact between people and state, the latter looks for other possible means

that ensure their security (Lyon, 2002). History has witnessed that dictatorial regimes have manipulated the patrons to acquire legitimacy (Mohmand, 2011). The marginalization of societies and indifference of the state towards them in terms of provision of opportunities coerce the individuals to lay their hopes on localized networks to achieve stability (Niaz, 2006). Gazdar (2003), Mahmood Khan (2004), and Javed (2013) have individually sought the existence of poverty, unfair opportunities, and inequality in Pakistan. Analyses like these reflected an existence of a society that is significantly stratified with disproportion in social strata, inequality, and access to knowledge which sets up a perfect stage for the growth of clientelistic politics (Gazdar, 2007). Another school of thought is that politicians manipulate the instincts of reciprocity which prevails clientelism (Hagene, 2018). The rising rate of corruption, stagnant economy and red tapism have not only found the basis of personal exchanges but also coerced people to reciprocate in political spheres in replacement materialistic gains (Shami, 2010). It is believed that patron-client associations play an important role in political development. According to Huntington (1965), modernization and participation are the key elements of political developments. Modernization triggers social forces which form new political alliances. Elites then manipulate the growing participation rate for their political structures (Keefer, 2009). Although this type of mobilization couldn't challenge already established concrete structures in developing countries, it plays a major role in stabilizing democratic forces through the expansion of political franchise (Qadeer, 2006). However, contrastingly policymakers in Pakistan have given limited importance to the aspect of social participation. Instead, primordial identities are created through informal rules and resourceful patrons then disseminate patronage (Cheema, Mohmand, & Patnam, 2009). The inclusion of economic exchange has formulated the class system in Pakistan (Rahman, 2012). Nayab (2011) claimed that around 61 million of the total population of Pakistan enjoys a middle-class lifestyle. However, analysis has found that these middle class populations have little impact on established political views, cultural norms, and social practices (Sayeed, 2002). By aligning themselves with the ruling bloc, this class has strengthened the patronage based political structure of developing countries. This study will add literature related to the clientelistic association in Punjab.

Decentralized Centralization in Pakistan

According to Kenny (2013), the relationship between centralization and decentralization can be understood by perceiving the state formation within the social centripetal and centrifugal forces operating in the developing countries (Kenny, 2015). It is well-recognized fact that stakeholders in Pakistan have remained occupied with imagined or actual threats which kept the colonial mode of governance intact or brought only a few cosmetic changes in it. In this regard, if any internal dissent rose against over-centralization, it has been curbed through a dual scheme of consent and coercion. However, internal and external threats of disintegration to the central state have even forced the central government of the political settlement, which has mostly been seen devoid of useful description, hence can be termed as "decentralized centralization". The centrifugal forces of the urban middle class, rebellious regional elites, and other dissident elements were controlled through decentralized centralization. Cheema et al have observed that dictatorial regimes in Pakistan have manipulated local governments to establish clientelistic networks at the cost of the political system (Cheema, Khwaja, & Qadir, 2006). Consequently, these practices have in build an absurd attitude among our politicians which hinders social transformation, the major aim of democratic decentralization. It is unfortunate that due to such networking even marginalized groups can't establish horizontal solidarities among themselves.

In the Musharraf regime, when decentralization was sincerely vowed, provincial and administrative regimes were largely seen dealing with citizens who led to the preferential distribution of resources. Thus, even then clientelistic networks were kept alive. Shortly, given the dynastic political parties, weak civil society, and absence of ideological debate, clientelistic politics has greatly rewarded politicians and their allied networks.

Discussion

Only when political authority is delegated to the third layer of government can decentralization occur. Political representatives are obliged by law to produce funds by levying taxes, plan, promote, and oversee development programmes and activities after being elected and held accountable to the public. Nonetheless, the components of fiscal authority, autonomy, and representation define the depth and scope of decentralization (Nazeer, 2003). People's writ in decision-making, transparency, accountability, access to information, transfer of authority and its statutory status, as well as the quality and efficiency with which services are delivered, are the most important factors to consider when assessing the originality and vigor of a decentralized system in a state. (Page and Goldsmith 1987, in Bangali 2002). Thus, the current article will explore the devolution of power in Punjab will be explored and analyzed in light of "Punjab local government act 2013" (PLGA-13) and "Punjab local government act 2019" (PLGA-19).

Context and main features of PLGA-13 and PLGA-19

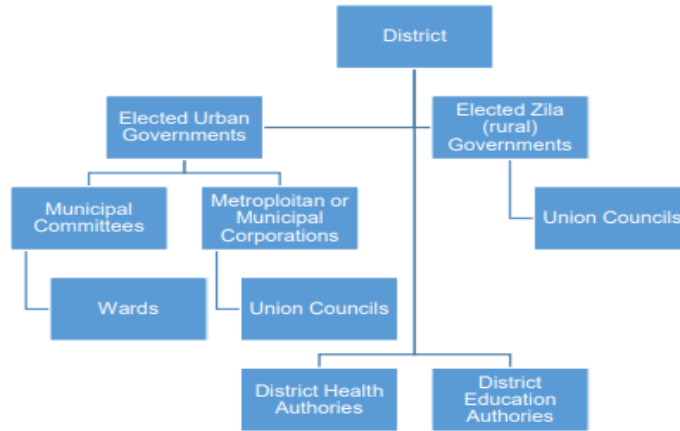
When it comes to LGS, Pakistan has a tumultuous history. The “countercyclical pattern of local democracy” (Cheema et al. 2015, p. 68) here witnessed regimes of men in uniform and participated in the political scenario and create local governance, only to have them thrown away once civil authorities took control. As a result, one could say that decentralization "suffered from democratization" in Pakistan (Ferrazzi & Rohdewohld, 2017). Local governments were not given legal protection until the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010, when provinces – which had sole legal power on affairs of LG – were forced, under Article 140A, to distribute (devolve) executive, monetary and political powers to appointed members of LG (through the electoral process) (PILDAT 2013; Ali 2018). These modifications led to the creation of the PLGA-2013 in Punjab. However, because the results of elections carried out under PLGA-13 was substantially delayed; elected local members did not take office until January 2017. PLGA in 2013 and later in 2019 established several different forms of LGs for rural and urban region regions UCs were constituted as the lowest layer of administrative tiers except under municipal committees. District Education and health authorities were also formed as separate types of local governments under PLGA-13. Nonetheless, since their institutional structure bolstered the province-level institutional dominance, Afzal (2018) mapped out the said as "a local government initiative in name only" (Saleem et al, 2019 as cited in Rohdewohld & Janjua, 2019).

An operational or hierarchical link between the levels or forms of local administration was not defined by the law too. The only direct connection created was between rural UCs and councils of the local districts: “on one hand, the chairpersons of these UCs were chosen as ex-officio members of the district council, however, on the other hand, the district council was authorized to perform general supervision and control the functional conduct of the Union Council" in such instances where UCs in rural areas “having urban features” got a good deal of (municipal) roles consistent with the district’s council (see PLGA-13, Section 72(2) & (3). In the same way, “the

presiding officers of the municipal and metropolitan corporation” were entitled as ex-officio constituents of the relevant units within urban UCs. PLGA-13, on the other hand, did not establish any formal relationships or coordination arrangements between community corporations, municipal committee and Metropolitan Corporation, or district council within the district. Despite being essential for facilities like water, sewage, environment, the district's integrated growth, and waste management, the legislation was silent on cross-border collaboration between LGs.

The PLGA-2013 diverged from its forerunner, the PLGO 2001, in this regard, which called for a “District Mushavirat Committee” for this purpose. While the Act was founded on the principle of devolution, administrative devolution was severely limited in practice, and the province's overall regulatory structure was never clearly linked with the political structure of the LGS, perpetuating a lack of connection between the administrative, political, funds and budget-related aspects of decentralization. Local governments were not granted any power to appoint or fire workers, except some local cadre of public employees-this remained the responsibility of the provincial government (Ferrazzi & Rohdewohld, 2017). This Act of 2013 also implemented the idea of delegation between governmental bodies on the provincial and local level (Section 65(1)), as well as inside the LGS (Section 66(1)), allowing district councils, metropolitan corporations, and municipal corporations to assign responsibilities to union councils. However, these ideas have never been used. PLGA-13 was only implemented for a brief time. Its life came to an end in April 2019 with the passage of new law, Punjab Local Government Act-2019, which was incorporated in “18th Constitutional Amendment” and executed ensuing significant goading through “Lahore High Court and Supreme Court of Pakistan”. Because PLGA-13 was only on the books for a short time, there was no empirical information to analyze its impact, and the governmental body (or any other parties) made no effort to gather such grounds before proclaiming the new Act. Numerous flaws in the Act were believed to include (i) absence of a systematic and participatory method to ascertain developmental payments, and (ii) irregular transfer of funds to the district from the provincial government, that hampered the practical application of any development strategy, (iii) at the level of district council, there was structural deficit, which led them to act more like an additional unit of the UCs (since UCs chairpersons are their district council's ex-officio members) than autonomous local bodies with own priorities and challenges (Janjua & Werter, 2019 as cited in Rohdewohld & Janjua, 2019).

Figure 1: Structure of local governments under PLGA (2013)

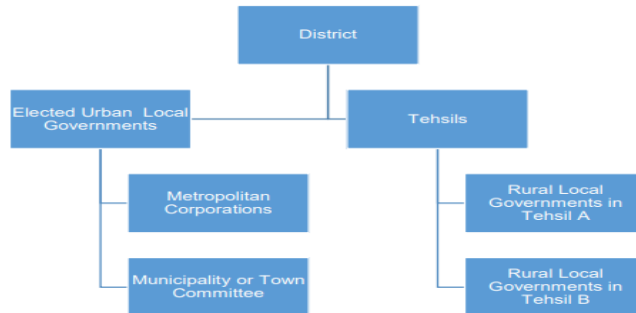


Source: (Bryan et al., 2019)

Notwithstanding the statutory framework that gives provinces sole power over LG issues, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was able to affect the formation of LG paradigms from the standpoint of the federal authority and through party networks after gaining national power. The KP and Punjab provinces' legislative processes were managed by the federal government; anecdotal data shows that, rather than pushing reform themselves, provincial political leaders and top bureaucrats needed the federal government's approval for everything they wished to implement. District being a type and level of local government, according to PLGA-19, has been revoked though the district management is still functioning under "Punjab Civil Administration Act 2017". In fact, PLGA-19 distinguishes between various forms of urban local government (municipal committees, metropolitan corporations, town committees, and municipal corporations) and one kind of government in rural local (tehsil councils). In terms of elections, PLGA-19 replaces the traditional "first-past-the-post" system with a proportional representation of close list system, in which parties get elected on local council which is based on the number of votes. A list of members of a party is provided to citizens to vote with a predetermined ranking of contestant rather than a single candidate. The top-ranking official of local government is chosen openly and independently among the members of the council, and the legislation establishes a group of administrators of councilors and experts to counsel and guide him or her (Malik & Rana, 2019). The other two novel features of PLGA-19 are that it establishes a two-year minimum period for personnel posted in local governments, reducing the disturbance caused by recurrent transfers, and it establishes inter-municipal collaboration in context to "joint authorities," which have the authority to dispose of tasks on behalf of their LG members. Furthermore, the Government of Punjab launched the "Punjab Village Panchayats and Neighbourhood Councils Act 2019", which brought in a novel and lower level of political participation and representation, like the village and neighborhood councils established by the Pakistan tehreek-e-insaf in 2013 in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Regardless of the fact that they share municipal powers, are involved in the revenue distribution structure to lower levels in the provincial setup, and can have tasks and duties assigned by LGs set under PLGA-19, the VP&NCA are not officially recognized as "local governments" in the province of Punjab. Municipal government legislation in the province similarly stipulates a 21-month transition time; thus, no local elections at any level to be held until the end of 2020. And till elections, local

government entities will be led by civil servants appointed as administrators (Rohdewohld & Janjua, 2019).

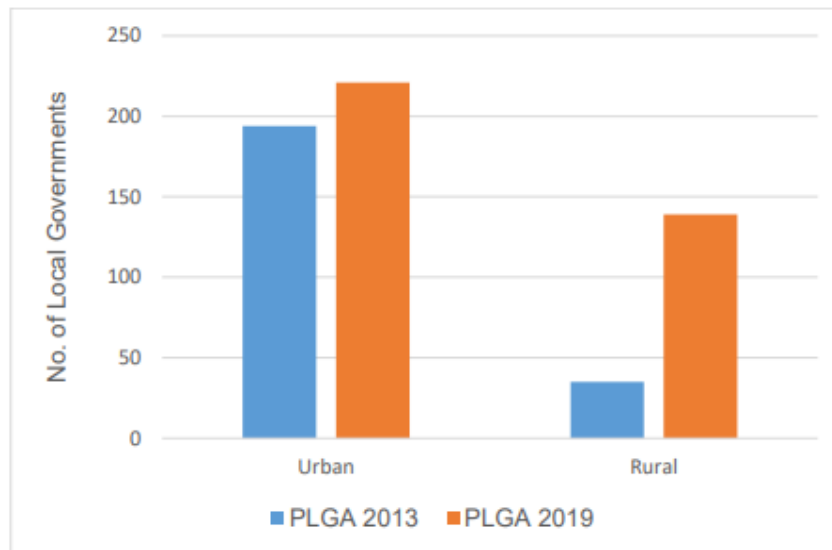
Figure 2: Structure of local governments under PLGA (2019)



Source: (Bryan et al., 2019)

The categorisation of urban LGs has also been altered by the Act of 2019. 9 cities have been designated as metropolitan corporations. Municipalities have been created from the remaining urban areas with populations seventy-five thousand or more, as well as urban regions are identified as headquarters for tehsils. PLGA-19 also designated town committees for metropolitan areas with a population of twenty thousand or more that do not fall under the preceding 2 categories. The number of LGs in Punjab has increased as a result of these developments, as shown in Figure 3. While the number of urban LGs has climbed by 27 since 2013 and has reached 221, PLGA-19 will result in the formation of 104 LGs in rural areas, bringing the total number of LGs to 139.

Figure 3: Number of local governments under the two laws



Source: LGCD and Population Census (2017)

Critical Analysis of PLGA-13

As we all understand that transparency and accountability are impossible to achieve without an appropriate system of questions raised by citizens to seek information, express their requests, and request inquiries, should a citizen or a group of citizens choose to do so. Exploring such tools and mechanisms in the proposed decentralized government structure is equally critical. The degree of devolution requires a realistic assessment of how clear and unambiguous the allocation of authorities and budgetary authority is in various sectors that help provide public goods. The PLGA 2013 was passed not just in absence of the opposition parties, but also in the face of nearly all the opposition's recommendations. To begin with, the way the Bill was drafted and later adopted is disrespect to the democratic spirit by democratically elected members of parliament. Instead of encouraging debate and criticism in order to reach a broad agreement, the province's dominant political party hurried to adopt the measure unilaterally. Given the complete scenario, it was extremely doubtful that any legislation enacted under the Act would move easily or help the people for whom this entire process in local government legislation and the upcoming elections is being carried out. Provisions such as non-partisan elections, putting district health and education authorities under provincial control, and giving the provincial government excessive powers to suspend local mayors and chairmen are all designed to keep the levers of power in place and not relinquish any implicative and implicative powers (Islam & Khan, 2018). A large number of tasks that benefit people remain centralized, at the federal and provincial tiers, including the supply, improvement, and maintenance of roads, sewerage, irrigation, power, education, health services, gas, and programmes for social welfare, along with policing and security (Liaquat et al., 2019).

According to Hussain and colleagues (2020), the local government under PLGA-13 was established as an extension of the Punjab government. In simpler words, a self-sufficient level of the decentralized government has not been formed. The provinces' autonomy is preserved at the start of the 18th amendment. Autonomy refers to the practice of federating units delivering public services autonomously. It is essentially a process of transferring authority to the provinces in order for them to deal with government business properly and quickly in order to reduce and alleviate citizens' complaints. Similarly, provinces should form local governments to provide services to residents' right on their doorstep. On these grounds, the PLGA 2013 needed to be amended.

Critical Analysis of PLGA 2019

Devolution and Authority

PLGA 2019 is regarded as the first political party-backed local government system with the genuine promise of devolution of power and autonomous governments at the grassroots level. The creation of 22,000 'autonomous village units with their own money and bank accounts under PLGA 2015, as compared to 3,281 UCs under PLGA-13, was hailed as a step forward in assuring engagement and effective collaboration for local development initiatives (Rohdewohld & Janjua, 2019).

However, in terms of the fundamental elements of its functional assignment architecture, the PLGA-19 is quite like its predecessor: it uses the list model and explicitly prevents specifying

work as either "obligatory" or "discretionary." There is no organized mechanism to negotiate role assignments with provincial sector departments since 2013. Nonetheless, there are a few significant changes. Section 5 (1), for example, it explains the functions and purpose of local government in extensive terms through PLGA-19 by saying that "every local government shall have the authority to run the affairs of [its] respective local area without improper interference". The decree will encompass:

“exercise its authority and to incur expenditure in the best interests of the residents without any favor or prejudice in a democratic and accountable manner, to involve all residents in running its affairs and from time to time consult them on the level, quality, range and impact of services, to provide services in a financially and environmentally sustainable manner, to give equitable access to services; and to promote and undertake development in the respective local area (Section 5(2).”

The aforesaid concept, as rudimentary as it is, at least shows an alternate course for the local government's purpose and actions. PLGA-19, like its predecessor, requires local governments to operate within a provincial set-up. It also contains numerous provisions that allow the provincial government to control local bodies to set about certain actions, to dissolve and suspend local governments, and to intervene in the scope of local government functions (Rohdewohld & Janjua, 2019). Ali (2019) asserts that by contrast and in spirit, the local government law of PTI appears to be aimed towards devolving actual administrative and fiscal authority to the lower tiers. However, these laws are not beyond flaws. Indeed, their broad scope raises several concerns about their administration and the capacity of the LGs they shall establish (Ali, 2019).

Fiscal Accountability

The main worry was fiscal responsibility since budget allocation continues to be a difficult issue between the provincial and municipal levels of government. The problem of money distributed under the PLGA 2019 was cited as a step back from the devolution of authority. The merger of local governments' financial systems into a "comprehensive cash book of the provincial government" was questioned saying that this would stymie the realization of local governments' development plans. The introduction of a designated fund for local governments in PLGA 2019 was praised as a welcome move, although concerns were raised about local governments' total financial dependence (Rohdewohld & Janjua, 2019). Both laws offered local governments limited control over staff hiring and dismissal, as well as the establishment of new positions, but no authority over personnel salaries. Any hiring, dismissal, or creation of new positions requires the approval of the provincial government. While the PLGA (2019) gives mayors the ability to conduct yearly performance reviews of local government administrative heads, it is unclear if they may suspend or remove an official based on performance or reward excellent performance. The new law appears to continue the trend of retaining provincial authority over local governments' human resource functions (Bryan et al., 2019).

Lack of Capacity

Evidence highlights the insufficient logistical, financial, and administrative capacities of local governments as the fundamental reasons for weak local governments, which will continue to hinder grassroots development activities. Under the pretext of new terminology, the PLGA 2019 provided an inadequate governance approach. Experts recognized that the main challenge in implementing the recently passed legislation is the gap between capacity and necessary service delivery (Bryan et al., 2019). Imran Khan's Party believed that Punjab's districts are quite big – both in terms of population and size – to be properly controlled by district governments. Thus, district councils will, in most situations, be far removed from local people. PTI argues that on the other a tehsil-being a small unit- provides a better way to engage with the voters. Those who criticize the decision to omit district level clearly highlighted that this deletion will reduce the skilled and technological pool of resources accessible to tehsil councils as more talented and highly trained employees will prefer to work in larger districts rather than tehsil level. This implies that a whole load of providing basic services would be placed on the shoulders of inexperienced personnel at tehsil towns (Ali, 2019). A report by Saleem and Altaf (2020) shows a prevailing view that implementing the Act in its full form would require several years unless proactive capacity building of LGs was conducted. The claims of the provincial government for incorporating technology into the local governing structure have also been questioned. As per the report representatives of civil society, local government departments, and past elected officials offered examples of UC workers' computer illiteracy and concurred that technology integration would be a long and tough process.

The Danger of Over-Bureaucratic Oversight

Simplicity is an important feature of citizens' institutions. The Act takes a more complicated route and poses barriers to "political and administrative autonomy" of local government system given that elected representatives will be duty-bound to work under strict control of provincial government's mechanisms, proposed to be established under the Act i.e. Local Government Commission, LG Finance Commission, and district level Local Planning Board. The office of the deputy commissioner and his two dozen line agencies will not automatically start working with new governments. There will be administrative issues and conflicts every day. There are a lot more procedural details on processes of the local government system, coupled with ambiguities, this provides leverage to bureaucracy to twist and play as being exercised in many cases at the federal and provincial level. For example, there is no clarity on the composition of the Local Planning Board. Furthermore, complex procedures and multi-layered institutional checks, conceived to ensure accountability of local councils, will result in increased administrative costs and delays of service delivery. In addition, procedural complexities make it difficult for less qualified local government representatives either to understand or act upon the Act (Shafqat & Shahid, 2021).

Sustenance of Clientelistic Networks

The analysis of literature and current local government in Punjab predicts the continuation of Punjab tradition of developing patron-client associations between local elite and central bureaucracy which has to rural-urban divide and keep the politics away from the urban middle classes. It has been believed that the colonial policies are still in the enactment by the way loyal

landowners are safeguarded from political and economic domination by the urban elites. In regards to this Hassan Javid notes in his article, “Punjab’s new local government act... e the claim of the PTI government that it will limit the influence of strongmen and clans (Javid, 2019). This predicts that the candidates will more likely continue to form informal associations to campaign under the leadership of a local leader who intends to be chairperson. Consequently, the lack of party associations will continue to give way to manipulate primordial”, that history has seen the manipulation of local governments by military regimes to undermine the status of establishing political parties through developing bonds with sectarian or religious affiliations. He argues that the current local government in Punjab under Khan seems to continue the legacy as the government has restricted the parties to contest the elections in the villages and their neighborhoods despite affiliations of creed and caste. Similarly, as already discussed, ambiguity in defining the policies paves the path for bureaucrats to exploit the landowners in their favor, thus ending up in a long existing system of unequal distribution of resources.

Recommendations

1. Tehsil tier: After the reforms are implemented, the attention will shift to tehsils instead of districts. Thus, it is critical to adapt structures in response to reforms. Tehsils should be treated like districts, with all bureaucracy, offices, resources devolved to them. Instead of 36 districts, this change should foresee 145 districts in the coming years. This will reduce ambiguity along with improving governance.
2. DC’s role: The role of DC should be kept distinct from the tehsil and city governments. DC's duty should be to help Nazis, and his/her role should be shifted to the tehsils and far from the district level.
3. Removal of provision of roles: The PLGA-19 contains several flaws that can be addressed through laws and regulations, as the act is silent on many of them. It would've been ideal if all these provisions were incorporated into the Act. In the revised version, after taking into consideration the opinion of all stakeholders these regulations should be included in the Act. This will eliminate uncertainty and make it extremely difficult for various power structures to sway the Act in accordance with their own whims.
4. Role of civil society and experts: To make sure that LGS is not only administered by traditional government offices, but an active role of independent experts and civil society is also important.

Conclusion

A democratic system can never serve its purpose in full spirit unless it fully caters the to the demands and hopes of its citizens. Thus, local government is considered to provide solid base to democratic polity that genuinely serves its citizens, young and old, men and women, prosperous and impoverished, able and disable as its basic responsibility. Punjab, like other provinces, also has a history of weak, inconsistent local government systems. The analysis of specific period in our study has also demonstrated sustenance of clientelistic networks and flawed devolution of power. However, participatory efforts of those in power echelons and compliance with above

mentioned suggestions can ensure absolute devolution of power to the grass root level in the province.

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