

Critically Analyze the Evolution of Local Government System in Pakistan and Also Comment on Its Shortcomings and Reasons Behind Them.

Introduction

Local governments and their development in Pakistan have been a product of circumstances, adopted under the doctrine of necessity. Initially, the system was adapted as an inheritance from the country's ~~legacy~~ colonial legacy, whereas afterwards it was instrumentalized to achieve legitimacy. Hence, the local government system has been a weapon of the political elites without having true power of its own. Currently, the local government system in Pakistan is gaining an increasing trust deficit due to multiple reasons such as lack of economic abilities, formal training of candidates, and actual jurisdictional power owing to unsmooth electoral processes and the dominance of the provincial government. Despite all these, local government system must be reformed as grassroot level changes can be achieved only through this.

2.

History and Evolution of Local Government System

Colonial Legacy

Municipality Act (1842)
Punjab Municipality Act (1911)



Village Aid Program (1950)



Basic Democracies System (1959)



People's Local Government.



Local Government ^{Act} Ordinance (1979)



Local Government Ordinance (2001)



Local Government System (2010)

Pakistan inherited its local government system from its colonial legacy such as that of through the Municipality Act of 1842 and Punjab Municipality Act of 1911. It was in 1950 that the country introduced something of its own in the form of village Aid program for rural development, though it was a non-electoral initiative.

(i) Basic Democracies System:

Introduced in 1959 by Ayub Khan, this system introduced 5 tiers of government i.e. Union Council, Tehsil Council, District Council, a Divisional Council, and Provincial Council/Government. Through this system, ~~he~~ it comprised 80,000 indirectly elected 80,000 basic democrats. However, this system is criticized for being introduced to 'legitimize' the authoritarian and non-democratic rule of Ayub.

(ii) People's Local Government:

Introduced by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, this system could not be implemented.

(iii) Local Government Act:

Introduced by Zia-ul-Haq in 1979, this system reinforced Ayub's system in a way to curtail the provinces' power and extend military influence. Failure to devolve the fiscal autonomy to local governments remain a major failure of the system.

(iv) Local Government Ordinance:

Pervais Musharraf introduced this system in 2001 ~~to~~ by reducing

the local government to a four-tier system by abolishing the divisional tier. It aimed to devolve education and healthcare to union councils, whereas the districts would be led by elected nazims. It also reserved 33% of the seats for women and minorities. However, the system was undermined by bureaucratic resistance and used to bypass provincial assemblies.

(v) Local Government System - A Current Reflection.

18th amendment along with devolving the power from the center to the provinces, necessitates the dripping of power to the grassroots level through local governments via its article 140 A. Under this Constitutional provision, Balochistan formed its local governments in 2010, while other provinces formed theirs in 2013.

3. A Critical Reflection of the Local Government System in Pakistan:

Historically, local government system has been weaponized to secure legitimacy for martial law. Whereas democratically, it has been a victim of elite capture and

centralization tendencies. As a political scientist Saeed Shafiq writes,

"Local governments in Pakistan have been more about regime survival than democratic deepening".

4. Reasons Behind the Shortcomings of the Local Government System:

(i) Centralizing Tendencies:

Local governments in Pakistan are a victim to the centralizing tendencies of the provinces. For example, local and minute tasks such as waste management and cleanliness are ~~the~~ within the jurisdictions of union council. But even such meager tasks are dominated by the provincial governments rendering them ineffective. For example, according to Asian Development Bank, only 50% of waste is collected from the municipalities of Karachi.

(ii) Fiscal Restraints:

Local governments are limitedly effective due to fiscal restraints as according to ADB, local governments in Pakistan ~~only~~ generate only 5-10% of their required revenue and depend

on provinces for their 80-90% of budget which is either denied or delayed. ~~while~~ Despite the 18th amendment necessitating the devolution of 7th National Finance Commission Award to local governments.

(iii) Incoherent Structure:

Each province has its own structure of local government making reforms implementation difficult.

(iv) Administrative Bottleneck:

Political interference and bureaucratic oversight furthers the shortcomings of the local government systems. A 2023 study found that district officers often reported to the provincial secretariats rather than elected nazims, reported PIDE (Pakistan Institute of Developmental Economics).

(v) Corruption:

Corruption at multiple political levels further reduces the effectiveness of local governments. This includes: disrupting elections owing to gerrymandering issues and manipulating budgets. For example, according to Transparency International 20-30% of local budgets are lost to graft.

(vi) Lack of Formal Training:

According to a world-Bank report, over 70% of local officials lack formal training in governance or finance. This limits the local govt representatives from taking updated measures for newly emerging problems.

5. Implications and Way Forward:

A former chief justice of Pakistan stated,

"The lack of robust local governance perpetuates illegal jirgas and panchayats undermining formal justice".

This statement implies the importance of local governments for not only justice but also other societal and political aspects. Hence, by strengthening local governments, the grassroot can be benefited and violent acts such as terrorism can be contained by addressing their grievances. Therefore, every step including political and economic should be taken to

6. Conclusion:

Local governments can bring the social and societal change that Pakistan is in dire need of. As an expert of Accountability lab

states, "Empowering local governments mean solutions to local problems right in their neighborhood".

Hence, substantial reforms should be taken to strengthen local governments and making them impartial.