Governance and public policy making in Pakistan: analysing colonial past and failures of political institutions

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Abstract:

Public policy could be defined as a course of action of the government to address the problems of the public by taking rational measures while framing the direction of the country. Pakistan’s history has remained highly ambiguous in formulating public policy and governance as it has seen parliamentary democracies, military dictatorships, presidential democracies, and quasi-parliamentary democracies since its inception. Interestingly, the role of the legislatures, particularly the parliaments, has been overshadowed by the institution of bureaucracy and the military in terms of framing public policy and governance of the state. This paper reflects upon a holistic overview of the power structure dynamics in Pakistan and analyses the impact of the colonial past on the current power structure. It shall also investigate how the failure of political institutions has allowed other institutions to step in and play a significant role in governance and public policy-making.

Keywords: Public policy analysis, Good governance, Military influence, Bureaucracy, Civilian government, Democratic consolidation, Political hegemony, Role of legislature.

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1. Introduction

Framing of public policy and governance is a complex process in Pakistan which has seen tremendous changes in terms of government structure. From Presidential form of government to parliamentary democracy, Pakistan has transformed itself into a democratic country, however, in every form of government, bureaucracy has held a pivotal position playing a vital role in public policy making process. The bureaucracy is a group of civil servants who run the machinery of the government. Their history dates to the colonial rule, when British government introduced this system and its ongoing since more than a century. Due to its structural strength and effective training, they are the major player in the formulating and implementation of public policies.

The bureaucracy, consisting of civil servants and administrative officials, forms the backbone of Pakistan's governmental machinery. With its hierarchical structure, expertise, and continuity, it has traditionally been a key driver in the formulation, implementation, and administration of public policies. Democratic powers in the country including the parliament have faced tremendous challenges to exercise their final say in governance and public policy making. This has been due to inconsistent democratic governments and military regimes. However, bureaucracy has remained in their positions without any hindrance, thus, enjoys a pivotal role in this power structure.

The study aims to critically examine the position of bureaucracy in current power structure of Pakistan. It investigates the influence of colonial past in the current influence of bureaucracy in the country. It analyzes the reasons for the failure of political institutions to cope with the never-ending influence of bureaucracy in governance and public policy making. Finally, it assesses the effectiveness of political institutions in countering or accommodating the influence of state institutions, particularly the bureaucracy and the military.

2. Literature review

Public policy is considered as the outcome-based decisions of the government for the public good. In Pakistan, there are different factors mainly institutions who have played their role in the process of public policy formation since its inception (Dye, 2013). Aminullah Chaudry in his book “Political Administrators: The Story of the Civil Services of Pakistan” maintained that bureaucracy remained the pivotal tool of state machinery in managing the governmental affairs. It was adopted by the British Empire which guided and provided them a roadmap them in running the staff affairs for the post partition issues, very effectively. These contributions made their role and influence on the affairs of the country (Chaudry, 2011).

He believed Quaid-e-Azam has sensed that the role of bureaucracy will grow further and will tend to create a power tussle among state institutions. In this context Quaid-e-Azam made a famous speech in his only visit to Staff College, Quetta where he termed civil servants as the servants of public, however, his apprehensions came true as the role of bureaucracy increased from time to time. He also shed light over the cordial relation or alliance between the military and civil bureaucracy since country’s inception. It was majorly contributed by the British rule of induction of military officials in civil bureaucracy as per British rules which later continued in Pakistan. Pakistan had its first President Iskandar Mirza who was a bureaucrat. While, discussing the role of military in the public policy making, Chaudry was of opinion that due to
the security conditions of the country especially on external fronts and tensions with India, the influence of military in the country has been exponentially strong. This role was further strengthened due to the weak civil political government’s performance which has allowed Military to enter in the policy making structure (Chaudry, 2011).

Academicians like Muhammad Javaid Akhtar have also criticized the incompetence of political leaders to compete with the skilled and competent bureaucrats which was a major factor of bureaucratic supremacy. He argues that bureaucracy is just a tool of the political government to implement the policies devised by the elected parliament and its representatives. The same formula is the spirit of democracy. However, in the case of Pakistan, the bureaucracy has also the responsibility of devising these policies as the political and elected representatives are not much efficient and performing their legislative tasks. Political elite of Pakistan has always remained dependent on the bureaucracy to run the state machinery.

He thoroughly criticized the political elite for politicizing bureaucracy for their personal interests and benefits which affect the performance of bureaucracy negatively. The elected representative has also heavily politicized the bureaucracy to achieve their political objectives and therefore, the influence of bureaucracy is a factor that can’t be controlled by the political government, and they must remain dependent over them. Discussing the role of bureaucracy, he maintains that parliament remained marginalized almost every time due to the influential role of bureaucracy. Bureaucracy remained a senior partner in the military bureaucracy oligarchy that ruled Pakistan since its inception (Akhtar, 2010).

Ayesha Siddiqa has pioneering work and research in civil military relationships. In her famous book “Military Inc. Inside Pakistan's Military Economy” she maintains that it was not only the civil bureaucracy that was the stronger element in making and enforcing the decisions of public policy, but bureaucracy also had close links with the army and both the institutions had joined hands to rule the country not by democratic institutions including the parliament. She criticizes the political class of the country, in the words: “One of the reasons for the prolonged military control relates to the weakness of the political parties. The impotency of the political leadership and the civil bureaucracy can be attributed to their attitude and composition. As a part of the dominant classes in the country, the civil bureaucracy and the political elite have always viewed the armed forces as an essential tool for furthering their political objectives. This use and abuse of the military created a unique political niche for it. The acceptance of the military as a political arbiter, compounded with its prominent role as the guardian of the country's security, sovereignty and ideology, added to its significance compared with other domestic players” (Siddiqa, 2007).

Stephen P. Cohen's in his book “The Pakistan Army: With a New Foreword and Epilogue” clearly defines the Pakistan Army’s multidimensional role as: “There are armies that guard their nation's borders, there are those that are concerned with protecting their own position in society, and there are those that defend a cause or an idea. The Pakistan Army does all three.” (Cohen, 1998).

Seasoned defense and military expert Syed Hasan Askari Rizvi in his book “Military, State and Society in Pakistan” presents a historical perspective and background of the influence of military and bureaucracy in governance and policymaking process in British India. He mentions that the Commander in Chief of the British Army in India was the second in command.
after the Governor General/Viceroy and an ex-officio member of his executive council. Askari describes the role of military and bureaucracy right after independence, in such words: “A centralized policy with an entrenched bureaucratic apparatus and a strong military saved Pakistan from collapsing in the early years of independence. Two constituent assemblies (1947-54, 1955-56) spent about eight years grappling with some of the basic political questions like the role of Islam, especially the nature of the Islamic state, distribution of powers between the center and the provinces. The delay polarized the situation to such an extent that when the constitution was finally approved in 1956, it hardly represented a broad-based consensus in the polity.”

He observes the strong role of military and bureaucracy in post-independence period because it was inherited from the British and then the weak political institutions and failure of political actors including legislative assemblies to draft a national framework having across the board consensus. Political leadership at that time was “too weak and divided” since it failed to assert its primacy over the strong military and bureaucracy (Rizvi, 2000). Askari in another book “The Military & Politics in Pakistan discusses the continuation of military supremacy over political affairs and governance in such a manner that he maintains that once armed forces enter the political field, it becomes rather impossible for them to disassociate themselves from politics (Rizvi, 2000).

Renowned academician Samuel Phillips Huntington in his book “Political order in changing societies” also mentions Pakistani progress in the 1960’s and termed Pakistani bureaucracy as a vital factor in this regard. First 20 years of Pakistan’s formation, Pakistani bureaucracy and military enjoyed the key role of governance and policymaking since the legislative assemblies were either less representative or inactive in its functions (Huntington, 1968). He even lauded the role of Ayub Khan in formation of political institutions in such words: “The achievements of Ayub Khan in Pakistan, of Calles and Cardenas in Mexico, of Kemal and Inono in Turkey, of Pak and Kim in Korea, and of others such as Rivera in El Salvador, show that military leaders can be effective builders of political institutions. Experience suggests, however, that they can play this role most effectively in a society where social forces are not fully articulated” (Huntington, 1968).

Public Policy analyst and expert Saeed Shafqat maintains that the process of public policy making in Pakistan is not structured rather it is in the hands of few powerful individuals even in democratic governments. In both dictatorial regimes and democratic governments, the role of institutions has remained limited and powerful individuals have exercised powers. Public policy making is largely done by the executive branch, i.e., the bureaucracy. In our case, bureaucracy has assumed a larger-than-life role; hence it is under public gaze and criticism. For any system, democratic or authoritarian, professionally competent, well-trained and appropriately compensated bureaucracy is imperative (Shafqat, 2014). He criticizes the role of parliament and political government while discussing the role of bureaucracy in public policy making, in such words: “In a democratic system, the political leadership plays a key role in devising public policy but if the political leadership is relatively weak, if the parliament is incompetent and devoid of public good then regulation of the bureaucracy will not take place and without regulation, policymaking will be usurped or taken over by the bureaucracy. Thus, in Pakistan’s case, both policy formulation and implementation roles have been assumed by the bureaucracy.”
S. M. Taha has observed that colonial history and mindset has been a motivating factor for the bureaucracy to have influence in the public policy making process in the country. Taha maintains that political leadership of the country showed poor performance in governance and economic growth in the country and this failure of political leadership produced a damaging impact on the country’s future development. Critical policies, human development, constitution making, and national integration were grossly neglected during the first ten years of the country. He is of the opinion that public policy devising has been done in the country to serve own interests. He gives example of East Pakistan which was disintegrated due to unbalanced share of power between major stakeholders. The inhabitants of East Pakistan felt unheard, and the feeling of deprivation grew so strong that they went on to strive for a separate state which was ultimately achieved (Taha, 2012).

To conclude, it must be noted that almost every academician has placed the alliance of military and bureaucracy on top of parliament or political institutions in the governance and public policy making in the country. They opined that the influence of military and bureaucracy was inherited from the colonial past and continues to be in the driving seat majorly due to the failure of the political parties and legislature to prove their credibility and performance.

3. **Research methodology and theoretical approach**

This research study adopts qualitative approach and secondary sources like books, research journals and news articles to achieve its research objectives and critically examine the in-depth role of bureaucracy in the governance and public policy making, the role of colonial past on current power structure as well as failure of political actors in this whole process. As discussed earlier, bureaucracy is one of the most influential stakeholders in the public policy framing in the country. This is due to its historical legacy, sound skills and capacity to govern. Taking reference from Max Weber’s bureaucratic model, the hierarchy, roles, and responsibilities of the bureaucracy shall be analyzed. The bureaucratic training and expertise have played a significant role in allowing them to be on the driving seat. Apart from the bureaucracy, the role of the military due to various military regimes coming to power, has also been examined. The authority of the military in national security policies shall be examined. This framework enables us for a comprehensive analysis to assess the role of bureaucracy in governance and public policy making in the country.

4. **Colonial legacy and its impact: analysis and discussion**

British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, which included the territories that later became Pakistan, had a profound impact on governance structures and state institutions. The British government introduced a very strict system of bureaucracy which was highly centralized hierarchical structure with defined roles and rules of the game. This system was the foundation of the Pakistani bureaucratic system (Weber, 1978). This system was highly centralized as only few British high officials were in complete command of the whole machinery. This has led to power imbalances right after independence. Furthermore, this system was implemented by the British government for Indian people to suppress their human rights and giving them no authority or say in the system. This system was adopted by Pakistan which is completely not suitable for any democratic society. The bureaucracy primarily functions as the gatekeeper of the governance and public policy framing process. Its role is vital in shaping the public policies and governance of the countries.
4.1. Military influence

The military, a formidable institution in Pakistan, has historically exercised its influence in the matters of National security and foreign affairs due to the geostrategic location and relations with the neighbors. This role of military has remained extremely important to safeguard the national interests of the state (Haque, 1991). It actively participates in policy formulation and implementation, sometimes challenging the authority of civilian institutions.

4.2. Democratic institutions and their challenges

Pakistan's democratic institutions, including the executive, legislature, and elected representatives, often find themselves grappling with the challenge of asserting their authority in the face of bureaucratic and military influences. This interinstitutional power struggle can hinder the effective functioning of democratic governance. The civilian leadership, elected by the people, may encounter resistance or opposition from the bureaucracy and the military in their pursuit of policy objectives. This can result in policy gridlock, delayed decision-making, or the compromise of democratic principles.

4.3. External factors and policy influences

External factors, including international pressures, economic conditions, and societal demands, significantly influence policy development in Pakistan. Pakistan's geopolitical position, international alliances, and economic dependencies all shape its policy choices. These external influences interact with bureaucratic and military processes and democratic institutions, creating a complex policy landscape.

4.4. Policy outcomes and governance

The combined influence of bureaucracy, the military, and external factors has profound implications for policy outcomes in Pakistan. The interplay of these factors determines policy effectiveness, responsiveness to citizens' needs, and the overall quality of governance within this intricate framework. The successful implementation of policies depends on navigating the complex web of state institutions and external pressures, ensuring that policies are not only well-conceived but also effectively executed. The quality of governance, in turn, shapes the lived experiences of Pakistan's citizens and the country's trajectory.

5. Findings

Following are the major findings from this research:

5.1. Enduring colonial influence

The enduring influence of British colonialism on Pakistan's governance structures is evident. The centralized administrative framework, bureaucratic traditions, and military recruitment patterns laid down by the British continue to shape policy making and governance dynamics. The system devised by the Britishers was to control and rule the population of India without giving them any democratic rights, therefore, this system is misfit for any democratic state especially Pakistan.
5.2. Bureaucracy's ascendency

The bureaucratic model inherited from colonial rule has maintained its dominance in policy making. Its gatekeeping role ensures policy continuity but can sometimes sideline democratic processes.

5.3. Political institutions in Jeopardy:

A major challenge is the failure of political institutions in exercising their command over the governance of the country is a major challenge. This failure has been a major contributor to allow bureaucracy and military to step in to shape public policy in the larger public interest.

5.4. Impact on policy formulation

The colonial past and legacy have remained a major contributor in this existing power structure. Bureaucracy has been training on the lines of British civil service and it has made them more power centric than the public representatives.

5.5. Weakening of democratic oversight

Incompetence of political actors has further lowered their authority to oversight the role of bureaucracy.

5.6. Lack of policy innovation

Political institutions' inability to formulate and implement innovative policies has led to a reliance on the bureaucratic status quo. This has hindered the country's ability to address pressing issues and adapt to changing circumstances.

6. Conclusion

In Pakistan's intricate policy landscape, the roles of state institutions are multifaceted, influenced not only by contemporary dynamics but also by the historical legacy of British colonial rule. The bureaucracy inherited a Weberian model that laid the foundations for its role in policy making. The military's influence and traditions have deep colonial roots, particularly in matters of national security and foreign affairs. Democratic institutions grapple with asserting their authority amid these intricate power dynamics, making effective governance a delicate balancing act. External factors further complicate the policy landscape, shaping policy outcomes and governance quality, all of which are influenced by the enduring effects of colonial rule. This comprehensive theoretical framework, while considering the colonial legacy and the ascendance of bureaucracy, provides a lens through which we can analyze and understand the intricate interplay of state institutions in Pakistan's public policy making. In-depth exploration, considering historical and contemporary examples, is vital to comprehending the full extent of their impact on governance and policy outcomes.
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