

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

Sarosh Khan^{*1} | Waris Imam² | Sehar Ali³

1. Department of Political Science, University of Lakki Marwat, Lakki Marwat, Pakistan.

2. Department of Marketing and International Management, Parthenope University of Naples, Naples, Italy.

3. Department of Public Administration, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author Email: sarosh_kh@yahoo.com

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Abstract:

Public policy is a course of action of the government to address the problems of the public by taking rational measures while framing the country's direction. 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 policymaking.

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

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1. Introduction

The framing of public policy and governance is a complex process in Pakistan, and it has seen tremendous changes in government structure. From the 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 the public policymaking process. The bureaucracy is a group of civil servants who run the machinery of the government. Their history dates back to colonial rule when the British government introduced this system, which has been going on for over a century. Due to their structural strength and practical training, they are a significant player in formulating and implementing public policies.

The bureaucracy, consisting of civil servants and administrative officials, forms the backbone of Pakistan's governmental machinery. Its hierarchical structure, expertise, and continuity have traditionally been a key driver in formulating, implementing, and administering public policies. Democratic powers, including the parliament, have faced tremendous challenges in exercising their final say in governance and public policymaking. This has been due to inconsistent democratic governments and military regimes. However, bureaucracy has remained in its position without any hindrance and, thus, enjoys a pivotal role in this power structure.

The study aims to critically examine the position of bureaucracy in Pakistan's current power structure. It investigates the colonial past's influence on the country's current bureaucracy. It analyses the reasons for political institutions' failure to cope with the never-ending influence of bureaucracy in governance and public policymaking. 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 that have played their role in 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 governmental affairs. It was adopted by the British Empire, which guided and provided them with a roadmap for running the staff affairs for the post-partition issues very effectively. These contributions played a role in and influenced the country's affairs (Chaudry, 2011).

He believed Quaid-e-Azam sensed that the role of bureaucracy would grow further and would tend to create a power tussle among state institutions. In this context, Quaid-e-Azam made a famous speech on his only visit to Staff College, Quetta, where he termed civil servants as public servants; however, his apprehensions came true as the role of bureaucracy increased occasionally. He also shed light on the cordial relation or alliance between the military and civil bureaucracy since the country's inception. It was majorly contributed by the British rule of induction of military officials into 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 military's role in public policymaking, Chaudry believed that the military's influence has been exponentially strong due to the country's security conditions,

especially on external fronts and tensions with India. This role was further strengthened due to the weak civil political government's performance, which allowed the military to enter the policymaking structure (Chaudry, 2011).

Academicians like Muhammad Javaid Akhtar have also criticised the incompetence of political leaders in competing with skilled and competent bureaucrats, which was a significant factor in 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 Pakistan's case, the bureaucracy is also responsible for devising these policies as the political and elected representatives could be more efficient in performing their legislative tasks. Pakistan's political elite has always depended on the bureaucracy to run the state machinery.

He thoroughly criticised the political elite for politicising bureaucracy for their interests and benefits, which negatively affected the performance of the bureaucracy. The elected representative has also heavily politicised the bureaucracy to achieve their political objectives, and therefore, the influence of bureaucracy is a factor that the political government cannot control, and they must remain dependent on them. Discussing the role of bureaucracy, he maintains that parliament remained marginalised 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 Siddiqi 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 more vital 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 criticises the country's political class in the words: "One of the reasons for the prolonged military control relates to the weakness of the political parties. The importance 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. 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" (Siddiqi, 2007).

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

Seasoned defence 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 the 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: "A centralised 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 basic political questions, like the role of Islam, especially the nature of the Islamic state and the distribution of powers between the centre and the provinces. The delay polarised the situation so that when the constitution was finally approved in 1956, it hardly represented a broad-based consensus in the polity.”

He observes the vital role of military and bureaucracy in the post-independence period because it was inherited from the British and the weak political institutions and failure of political actors, including legislative assemblies, to draft a national framework with an 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 impossible for them to disassociate themselves from politics (Rizvi, 2000).

In his book "Political Order in Changing Societies", renowned academician Samuel Phillips Huntington mentions Pakistani progress in the 1960s and considers Pakistani bureaucracy a vital factor. In the first 20 years of Pakistan's formation, Pakistani bureaucracy and military enjoyed the critical role of governance and policymaking since the legislative assemblies were either less representative or inactive in their functions (Huntington, 1968). He even lauded the role of Ayub Khan in the 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 others such as Rivera in El Salvador, show that military leaders can be effective builders of political institutions. Experience suggests 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 Pakistan's public policymaking process must be structured. Instead, it is in the hands of a few influential individuals, even in democratic governments. In both dictatorial regimes and democratic governments, the role of institutions has remained limited, and influential individuals have exercised power. Public policymaking is primarily done by the executive branch, i.e., the bureaucracy. In our case, bureaucracy has assumed a larger-than-life role under public gaze and criticism. For any system, democratic or authoritarian, professionally competent, well-trained and appropriately compensated bureaucracy is imperative (Shafqat, 2014). He criticises 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, the bureaucracy has assumed policy formulation and implementation roles."

S. M. Taha has observed that colonial history and mindset have been motivating factors for the bureaucracy to influence the public policymaking process in the country. Taha maintains that the country's political leadership showed poor performance in governance and economic growth, and this failure of political leadership had 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 believes that

public policy devising has been done in the country to serve its interests. He gives an example of East Pakistan, which was disintegrated due to an 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 country's governance and public policymaking. They opined that the influence of the 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 a 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 governance and public policy making, the role of the colonial past on current power structure as well as the failure of political actors in this whole process. As discussed earlier, bureaucracy is among the most influential stakeholders in the country's public policy framing. This is due to its historical legacy, sound skills and capacity to govern. Using Max Weber's bureaucratic model, the hierarchy, roles, and responsibilities of the bureaucracy will be analysed. The bureaucratic training and expertise have played a significant role in allowing them to be in the driving seat. Apart from the bureaucracy, the military's role has also been examined due to various military regimes coming into power. The authority of the military in national security policies shall be examined. This framework enables us to conduct a comprehensive analysis to assess the role of bureaucracy in governance and public policymaking 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, profoundly impacted governance structures and state institutions. The British government introduced a rigorous system of bureaucracy, a highly centralised 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 centralised as only a 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 give them no authority or say in the system. Pakistan adopted this system, which is unsuitable 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 National security and foreign affairs due to its geostrategic location and relations with its neighbours. This role of the military has remained crucial to safeguard the state's national interests (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 struggle to assert their authority despite 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 well-conceived and effectively executed. The quality of governance, in turn, shapes the lived experiences of Pakistan's citizens and the country's trajectory.

5. Findings

The following are the significant findings from this research:

5.1. Enduring colonial influence

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

5.2. Bureaucracy's ascendancy

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

5.3. Political institutions in Jeopardy:

A significant challenge is the failure of political institutions to exercise their command over the country's governance. This failure has contributed significantly to the bureaucracy and military stepping in to shape public policy in the more significant public interest.

5.4. Impact on policy formulation

The colonial past and legacy have contributed to this existing power structure. Bureaucracy has been trained according to the British civil service, which has made it more power-centric than public representatives.

5.5. Weakening of democratic oversight

The incompetence of political actors has further lowered their authority to oversee the role of bureaucracy.

5.6. Lack of policy innovation

Political institutions' inability to formulate and implement innovative policies has led to reliance on the bureaucratic status quo, hindering 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 policymaking. The military's influence and traditions have deep colonial roots, particularly in national security and foreign affairs. The 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 influenced by the enduring effects of colonial rule. While considering the colonial legacy and the ascendance of bureaucracy, this comprehensive theoretical framework provides a lens through which we can analyse and understand the intricate interplay of state institutions in Pakistan's public policymaking. 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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