



RESEARCH PAPER

**Implications of Pervez Musharraf's Decentralization of Power
Agenda to Transform Bureaucratic System of Pakistan**

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ABSTRACT

The study examines Pakistan's decentralization program during the Musharraf period, focusing on how it affected the country's bureaucratic and administrative structures. The main charge is that Musharraf's decentralization initiatives were intended to strengthen governance and redress imbalances between the civilian and military sectors. The research method includes a qualitative research design, which mainly relies on secondary sources with a range of government and academic sources, and entails a detailed examination of legislative amendments, policy changes, and their practical implications. The National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) and the Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) were two important reforms that attempted to transfer authority and funds from the federal to local governments, nevertheless, bureaucracy and political parties posed strong obstacle to the execution, which reduce the efficacy of these changes. However, low resources, poor administration, and pervasive corruption also hampered its efficacy. The paper demonstrates how that decentralization transformed government while confronting institutional and resource restrictions. It recommends better institutions, political consensus, and long-term finance for efficient local governance.

Keywords: Decentralization, Bureaucracy Reforms, Local Government, Policy Impact

Introduction

President Musharraf took the charge after takeover and held public office for further necessary conditions and administrative work. He ensured the public for the improvement of good governance and democracy restoration according to their desires and needs. Civil unrest was created due to political instability and a military coup, but the military regime controlled all the affairs of the state with immediate effect. Later, military government's consistency brought some comfort zone and delivered with the passage of time. His era comprised of a military and civil cum military regime from 1999-2002 and 2002-2008 respectively, and consigned much civilian power through public representatives, but he was the chief executive of the government. The regime is considered a landmark for promoting good governance and transforming administration at the gross root level. Such reforms of the his government were implemented through various channels in Pakistan and brought some sustainable goals for the time being (Malik, et. al., 2023; Abbasi & Musarrat, 2015).

The administration was running through Provincial Constitutional Order (PCO), and it was not a new implementation of such policies. In the past, the same policies were implemented by previous regimes, like the Musharraf regime, for running the state system on behalf of public representatives (Alam et al., 2020). Upon assuming power, his administration aimed to administer the state machinery, offer assistance, and implement sound governance practices for the benefit of legitimate representatives and public employees. The NRB was established by the military administration in order to distribute

power and decentralize the organization. In this manner, to establish the NRB, his administration sought to assign authority to a legitimate representative for each candidate and established a three-tiered local government structure throughout Pakistan. Another type of governance was instituted by the military, known as the NAB, which looked into the official misbehavior and corrupt activities. In an attempt to monitor the opposition, NAB took the wrong turn and was dragged into an accountability court by a spurious accusation. The military government introduced the Legal Framework Order (LFO) and also held elections in 2002 under military supervision, but it cannot be considered a fair election in Pakistani history (Rafique, et. al., 2023a; Khan et al., 2020).

A committee was established through the national reconstruction bureau, and devolution of power plan was presented from 2000 until July 2001. Devolution Plan 2001 offered all forms of coordination to relevant authorities for the benefit of those with vested interests. The new military regime's plan was to guarantee and facilitate the quick decentralization of authority and financial distribution for all stakeholders. A crucial component of the military takeover in 1999 was the structural restructuring of the administration and its supporting agencies. The Musharraf government prioritized health, tax collection, openness, and accountability in order to achieve sustainable goals. Although Pakistan's military administration changed the country's paradigm for good governance, yet it was unable to sustain its goals due to a lack of resources and the inefficiencies of several institutions. Equal opportunity was maintained by excellent governance, together with the uninterrupted operation of the legal system and the rule of law (Muzaffar, et. al., 2024). The military regime worked on economic policy with immediate effect and introduced many policies in privatization and public partnership. It implemented such a policy in every department for favorable conditions and boosted the economy (Alam & Wajidi, 2013).

The research examined General Pervez Musharraf's decentralization and bureaucratic restructuring in Pakistan, examining legal, structural, and financial reforms enacted during his tenure. It also looked at the 'objectives and methods' of the Devolution of Power Plan, as well as the effectiveness of key institutions in fostering decentralization. It also sought to investigate the implications of military involvement in civilian governance, evaluate the impact of decentralization on service delivery, bureaucratic efficiency, public accountability, and citizen participation, and assess reform-related obstacles such as bureaucratic resistance, opposition from political elites, resource constraints, and institutional capacity gaps. It proved crucial to counsel future changes in public administration, decentralization, and local government (Ahmad, Khalid & Muzaffar, 2015).

Literature Review

Since its creation, Pakistan has faced some federating challenges, both civilian and military, in its administration base. Various reforms and policies were implemented on an institutional basis just to get rid of such hurdles, but due to a lack of resources and poor management, they were not developed properly and still exist in a draconic way. With the passage of time, every government works on good governance and local government to bring less developed areas and marginalized people into mainstream politics and solve their concern issues on a local level by their true representative (Ahmad, 2023).

Musharraf government struggled to ensure that he was legitimized by the general public just through well and conducive reforms in Pakistan and brought harmonious structural change in bureaucracy and administration. For this purpose, he brought various changes like the Devolution Plan 2002 and the introduction of local government, and also for the accountability process, he brought NAB to examine corrupt practices and recover looted money. But with the passage of time, it was just brought for the time being and could not deliver well in the military era. Musharraf policy and reforms created some

administrative challenges and brought weakness to the institutional base in Pakistan (Zafar & Qadri, 2022). His reform policy brought some change, but due to bureaucratic hurdles, it was not implemented properly in Pakistan. Extensive restructuring of policy and reforms in the devolution plan would have a significant impact on the Pakistani bureaucratic system. Power was transferred from the centre to the provincial level, cutting down bureaucratic red tape. Furthermore, by including local stakeholders in decision-making processes, it hoped to empower local communities, improve public sector accountability, and promote socioeconomic development (Muzaffar & Choudhary, 2017; Graf & Wurm, 2013). Musharraf era, which is considered dictatorial rule for many after the coup, brought a mixture of involvement on an institutional basis that was run indirectly by the military regime. Many institutions were under the control of the military, and the others were in favor of the military and had full support for the military regime after 1999. Consistency in institutions did not go forward due to the rigid policy of the military regime and went into a weak position within a few years (Khan et al., 2020).

Under the devolution plan, a new local government was introduced, consisting of a district and a union council. Under this setup, Nazim had full authority over governance issues, tax collection, and other auxiliary work in the concerned area (Rafique, et. al., 2023). The district administration's head in the devolution plan of 2001 was the district coordinator officer and was responsible to the district Nazim on behalf of the new set-up. It was a new setup from the previous setup, where deputy commissioners were responsible for the provincial government. The office of deputy commissioner was abolished, and district coordinator officer power was reduced in the new setup (Cheema et al., 2005).

The local governments introduced in 2001 by NRB body at cross the state level, was promulgated by chief executive for all 4 provinces on non-party basis. The main agenda of military government was to empower local and marginalized general public on modern level and bring into mainstream with immediate effect. The new setup was different from urban area and bureaucracy role was cut off and consigned with some other auxiliary work. District governments were more empowered and budget expenditure was under the control of district Nazim. Beside this Tehsil governments were in the plan and also a Tehsil municipal officer for fiscal management and budget allocation at lower level. Union councils were in the part of district government and had access to lower unions' level. So this plan were implemented just for the decentralization of power neither it was launched for democracy share nor any other hurdle of military government (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021).

After assuming the charge, the Musharraf government wanted to change some colonial structures in administrative and financial power for its vested interests in Pakistan. In the beginning of the military regime, he presented a seven-point agenda in front of the panel in a national security meeting. The decentralization of financial and administrative power in Pakistan was a bridge between civil and military imbalances during the Musharraf era. Consignment of all civil administration and financial distribution across the lower levels was the main agenda of the military regime. For the betterment of good governance, the military took decisions to ensure the general public and bring harmonious relations with all stakeholders for sustainable achievement and the focused goaled. The new system just consigned power to all relevant and local representatives on behalf of the general public (Mackenzie, 2002).

Pakistan underwent administrative reforms under Musharraf. These aimed at decentralization. The Devolution Plan was central. Nazims replaced deputy commissioners. Bureaucratic resistance emerged. Military influence persisted. Local empowerment was limited. Institutions lacked continuity. Reforms lacked democratic depth. Accountability mechanisms failed. Literature lacks critical evaluation. This study addresses these unexplored institutional gaps.

Material and Methods

This study used a qualitative research design. It relies mainly on secondary sources. These include government reports, policy documents, academic books, journals, and credible news articles. The focus was on the Musharraf era reforms, especially the Devolution Plan 2001. Content analysis is used to examine these materials. Historical and comparative approaches helped to trace changes across time. Decentralization, military participation, and institutional weakness were among the topics discussed. The research also looked into bureaucratic and governance issues. Sources were chosen based on their relevance and dependability. Official papers show policy objectives. Academic literature offers a critical assessment (Muzaffar, e. al., 2023). This technique allows for a more thorough analysis of the modifications and their outcomes. It exposed administrative difficulties that still exist today.

Results and Discussion

Musharraf Decentralization Agenda

Good governance believes in accountability, transparency, and checks and balances in all institutions. The Musharraf government aimed to restore good governance and accountability in Pakistan, focusing on economic and democratic restoration. The military regime included these issues in their revival programme, taking foreign loans to manage the fragile economy. The 2001 decentralization reforms implemented by the administration of General Pervez Musharraf resulted in a major reorganization of Pakistan's political and administrative structure. The Devolution of Power Plan, which attempted to transfer power from the federal and provincial governments to local governments, encompassed these changes and improved governance by empowering local communities. The devolution plan of the Musharraf government is to enhance service delivery and public participation at the local level. The main agenda of decentralization in 2001 was to reduce corruption in all departments and bring transparency to the local level. Decentralization of Power in local governments planned just to minimize government activity, bring local activity to a record, and provide quick access to concern issues at the local level (Karim, 2016).

Table 1
A comprehensive overview of the decentralization reforms during General Pervez Musharraf's tenure in Pakistan

Aspect	Details
Initiative Name	Devolution of Power Plan 2000
Implemented By	General Pervez Musharraf's Government
Objective	To decentralize administrative and financial authority to local governments, empowering local officials and communities.
Key Features	1. Establishment of three tiers of local government: District, Tehsil (sub-district), and Union Council levels. 2. Direct election of local government representatives. 3. Devolution of administrative powers from provincial to local levels. 4. Increased fiscal autonomy for local governments. 5. Creation of Citizens Community Boards (CCBs) to involve the community in development projects.
Administrative Structure	District Government: Headed by a ZilaNazim (District Mayor) Tehsil Government: Headed by a Tehsil Nazim (Sub-district Mayor) Union Council: Headed by a Union Nazim (Union Mayor)
Elected Representatives	Local government representatives were elected for a term of four years.
Financial Reforms	Local governments were given control over a significant portion of the development budget and the authority to generate their own revenue through local taxes and fees.
Citizens Community Boards	CCBs were established to facilitate community participation in local development initiatives. They could initiate and manage development projects with financial support from the local government.

Challenges	1. Resistance from provincial bureaucracies. 2. Political instability and lack of continuity in policies. 3. Limited capacity and resources at the local government level. 4. Issues with transparency and accountability. 5. Overlapping responsibilities between different tiers of government.
Outcomes	Mixed results: Some success in increasing community participation and local-level decision-making, but overall effectiveness was hindered by political and administrative challenges. The system faced discontinuation and alterations by subsequent governments.
Legacy	The decentralization efforts under Musharraf's regime laid the groundwork for future local governance reforms, though many of the initial structures and systems were modified or dismantled in later years.

Source: Adapted from Cheema, Khwaja, & Khan (2005), and developed by the authors.

Paradigm Shift in Bureaucracy

Musharraf wanted to implement reform policies across the state level and bring a harmonious and paradigm shift in bureaucratic setup. During Musharraf's presidency, the decentralization agenda aimed to solve the bureaucratic system's long-standing problems with centralization, inefficiency, and lack of accountability. The goal of the reforms was to improve the administrative system's speed and transparency so that it could better serve the numerous people of Pakistan by restructuring the governance structure. Batool, et. al., (2023). A crucial element of this effort was the Local Government Ordinance of 2001, which instituted a threefold local government framework consisting of district, tehsil (sub-district), and union councils (Naqvi, 2021).

The bureaucracy's reshuffle in the devolution plan was the core value of the Musharraf government. Through centralization to decentralization of bureaucracy power, the bureaucracy shrank to maintain local community empowerment and bring it into the decision-making process. The reshuffle in bureaucracy was to modernize the bureaucracy pillar and restore good government delivery. Bureaucrats were ensured recognition for their contribution and a safety and comfort package for good delivery and service. Restructure departments, ministries, ministries and divisions just to get rid of bureaucratic red tape and posting orders. Posting orders were minimized with immediate effect.

Decentralization Power through Local Government

The decentralisation process in a democratic state serves as a bridge between the centre and lower levels in every state of the world, but due to weak democratic processes, it brings some hurdles for the true implementation of lower levels in the world at large. The devolution of power plans by the Musharraf government was a bold step in the history of Pakistan, but due to some resource allocation and bureaucratic hurdles, it was not implemented on a true level, but somehow we can say that it was a bold decision where many marginalized communities were merged into this plan and brought a development phenomenon to Pakistan after a long period (Paracha, 2003). Local governments consider at a lower level development channel to bring less developed people into mainstream and decision-making processes. It develops people on a lower level and contributes to concerns with immediate effect. However, local governments in Pakistan faced various challenges and hindrances due to civil-military relations and democratization at a lower level. Local governments in Pakistan have been facing resource allocation and administrative issues because, in the history of Pakistan, the military government has empowered local governments, but civil governments have ignored such steps for a long ago. Due to this concern, the local government in Pakistan is still in the experimentation stage, which is never developed by civilian government (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021). The devolution plan of 2001 was a comprehensive strategy to condense local issues under one umbrella by the policymakers at the initiative time. It was just not relevant to bring another type of local government but a grand strategy to develop local communities with a

modern shift and achieve sustainable goals. Military governments always experimented such system at grass root level after creation of Pakistan. Soon after the devolution plan local governments were empowered and responsible at local level in the concerned constituency. Check and balance was the core value of devolution plan where the district Nazim and district coordinator officer were to assess all the expenditure and revenue collection (Shah et al., 2016).

The military regime's proposal for a local government system in Pakistan failed due to a lack of resources and mismanagement in 2002. The military introduced a devolution plan without credibility and sufficient resources during the economic disruption. Elections were held on a non-party basis without a constitutional guarantee, and federally administered tribal areas could not participate. Structural issues included the unjustified and indirect election of council members, a lack of resources, and delayed projects. Pakistan needs a uniform and organized local government system that focuses on the main concerns rather than political parties' agendas and political scoring. A comprehensive strategy is necessary for the remaining work, and the devolution plan's created hurdles for bureaucracy (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021).

Decentralization of Financial Power

The military government, after assuming the charge, wanted to restore the fragile economy of Pakistan and bring some structural changes and policy changes with immediate effect. During that time, corruption was at its peak and the economy was in a disruption position. Both internal and external debts were serious threats to the Pakistani economy. In the devolution plan and Musharraf six-point agenda on the reformation of country structure reforms, economy was the main agenda, and sustainable policy was the need of time to bring emergency assistance to run the weakest economy of Pakistan. The existing system failed to manage the economy and boost economic progress. The military government decided to restructure all financial divisions with a new design.

Recommendations were proposed for economic management and the national economic council policy for fiscal division. The military government wanted to redesign the economic council, where the planning commission considered a separate department and designed a new policy for the distribution of resources and funds to the concerned departments. The project and implementation that launched by the new government needed to be completed in time. For the betterment of the country, the resource management planning commission had some power to fulfil all the responsibilities with immediate effect. All this was proposed in the 2000 devolution plan, which was accepted by the sitting government, but project implementation could not achieve this goal due to some hurdles and resource utilization (Naqvi, 2003).

Financial and resource allocation, allocated by the Musharraf government to a new phase of local people without party affiliation, was a serious concern to all political parties that they were marginalized and reduced in their allocation of power and resources in programs. Budget allocation at the district level was under the control of the District Nazim, but the previous system was totally different; before this responsibility, it was under the control of the deputy commissioner. It created a civil-military imbalance, and bureaucratic power was somehow marginalized (Keefer et al., 2003).

The allocation of resources and financial activity was consolidated in the provincial finance commission under the devolution plan in 2000. The provincial government allocated all funds to the concerned representative body under the constitutional umbrella. The members of the provincial finance commission were recruited by the provincial government and were made to assign all policies to the district governments. Local government resources primarily were to come from the provincial government, with the PFC and provincial governor deciding the formula for provincial allocations. The PFC

was composed of provincial officers or nominated officials, with no automatic representation of locally elected officials. Under the devolution plan, many reforms were brought about with immediate effect, and a structural plan was formed. The finance committee recommended various proposals for the recruitment of staff, tax collection, and revenue generation. Decentralizing power to many departments also eliminates pressure from external stakeholders (Karim, 2016).

Discussion

Decentralization Impact of Musharraf Government

The main agenda of the military regime behind various changes and reforms was to legalize the de facto government and ensure the general public through these reforms, but political parties and bureaucracy were the main hindrances to such policy implementation. In 2002, the LFO brought about further changes in the constitution and consigned absolute power to the president under new amendments, which were not constitutional and lacked political legitimacy. The new amendments, guaranteed by the LFO, increased presidential power; the power to dismiss army officers, governors, and national assembly members under consolidated power. The president used absolute power against his opponents and brought almost all of them into jail custody for many times and also put sedition charge on many politicians and civilians in 2002 military era. The judiciary in the Musharraf era controlled and misplaced the fundamental rights of the general public during that period (Faqr, 2014).

The Musharraf government introduced NAB in 2002 with immediate effect with the stance of eradicating the corruption menace. With the existing body of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), it was a new body of accountability, and the chairman was more powerful. Everybody was responsible before the NAB, but just politicians were recorded in the accountability process from the initial day of its implementation in the history of Pakistan. The NAB threatened many of the politicians in order to get their loyalties for the regime, hence, had passive impact on the transparency in Pakistan. NAB was not limited to politicians and bureaucrats; it called for other citizens to interrogate them for the beyond the source assets to recover looted state money. The NAB consigned all powers to the NAB chairman, who had full power and was consolidated by the president of Pakistan (Zafar & Qadri, 2022).

Table 2
Overview of the impacts of Musharraf's decentralization policies on various aspects of governance and local administration in Pakistan

Aspect	Impact
Governance Structure	Established a three-tier local government system: District, Tehsil, and Union Council.
Local Democracy	Introduced direct elections for local government officials, enhancing local democracy.
Community Participation	Promoted community involvement through Citizens Community Boards (CCBs), encouraging local development initiatives.
Financial Autonomy	Granted local governments control over a substantial portion of the development budget and the ability to generate revenue through local taxes.
Service Delivery	Aimed to improve local service delivery by decentralizing decision-making and administrative functions.
Administrative Efficiency	Reduced the bureaucratic red tape at the local level, potentially increasing administrative efficiency.
Challenges in Implementation	Encountered resistance from provincial governments and entrenched bureaucracies, limiting effectiveness.
Political Dynamics	Political instability and lack of consistent support affected the sustainability and continuity of reforms.
Capacity Building	Local governments often lacked the capacity and resources to manage increased responsibilities effectively.

Transparency and Accountability	While intended to improve transparency and accountability, the system faced issues with corruption and inefficiency at the local level.
Impact on Development	Mixed outcomes: Some areas saw significant improvements in local development and governance, while others struggled with implementation challenges.
Legacy and Reforms	Set the stage for future local governance reforms, although many aspects of the decentralization were altered or dismantled by subsequent governments.

Source: Adapted from Yaseen& Khalid (2023), and prepared by the authors.

In 2001, Pakistan's military coup introduced a delimitation of districts and a local government system, which failed due to a lack of coordination between line areas and local government. The devolution plan, in 2002, sidelined political parties and gained legitimacy through elected representatives. The decentralization plan of 2001 focused on empowering local governments through participatory representative processes, but faced obstacles like a lack of coordination and variations in local support. The New Order's government structure in 2001 required political backing for local governments, and drastic measures were needed to implement effective governance. But it could not achieve measure achievement in the fixed goal, so it was the biggest impact of Musharraf government policy in the near future for democracy revival in Pakistan (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021).

According to Shah et al., (2023), following its nine-year tenure in power, the military administration completely transformed into the Musharraf government's military wing. Over 3500 military officers used to keep vigilant observations on the provincial and federal civil servants, who were subject to military commands. Military personnel claimed that all of the administration's supervision minimized corruption and held corrupt individuals accountable. The government of Musharraf aimed to expand the number of military officers working in civil organizations. A military officer could be appointed to important positions in civil institutions, including as head and chairman. A military officer controlled several mills and public-private partnerships in addition to being the chairman of the federal public service department. The military oversaw the civil service hiring, posting, and training processes. The administrative staff college in Pakistan was converted into the National School of Public Policy, with a retired major general from the military taking up leadership. The military regime's performance on all these tasks was very concerning to the bureaucracy and gave military officials no moral justification.

Accordingly, bureaucracy rule and regulation spread for the time being and could not provide precise results at the time owing to military involvements in politics from a long time ago in Pakistan's history (Aftab et al., 2020). Local governments in Pakistan received insufficient support and resources as a result of elites' politics, hence, bureaucrats resisted the decentralization movement. Corruption and poor leadership resulted from this. Despite these difficulties, Musharraf's initiatives had beneficial results, including more gender inclusion and community involvement. The changes encouraged people to take responsibility and ownership, particularly in rural regions.

Conclusion

Musharraf introduced reforms to decentralize Pakistan's administrative authority to modernize the outdated and rigid bureaucratic system. The Devolution Plan 2001 transferred powers to local governments. However, the local institutions lacked resources and capacity to handle new roles, which increased the burden on an already weak central bureaucracy. The reduced bureaucratic powers triggered resistance from the entrenched civil servants, which caused poor implementation and widespread structural issues. Further, the presidential powers increased forcefully through constitutional amendments by undermining democracy and institutional balance in Pakistan. Political parties, judiciary, and civil society strongly opposed such moves. Musharraf's political and

administrative control was weakened by the nationwide protests. The Charter of Democracy rejected such authoritarian move and centralized governance.

Recommendations

The decentralization model of Musharraf disrupted the political and bureaucratic system. It failed to produce long-term and positive institutional changes. Pakistan needs reforms through democratic consensus and inclusive dialogue. Future governance must avoid politicization and centralization of power. Decentralization in Pakistan boosts local involvement and productivity, tackles global issues like corruption, and promotes independence. The Asian Development Bank encourages local government devolution, however the previous administration failed owing to insufficient leadership, salaries, and shared governance. Additional modifications are required to increase administration quality (Zafar & Qadri, 2022).

Reforms should increase local capability while providing sufficient financial support. Only inclusive, balanced government can help Pakistan's democratic institutions remain stable. The accountability process's long-term viability is contingent on the establishment of an independent body tasked with apprehending individuals proven guilty. For long-term success, all parties concerned must continue to support these changes, develop competency, and accept decentralization and local empowerment.

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