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Between Manifestos and Reality: Assessing Pakistan's Local Governance Challenges and Reform Pathways

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Abstract

The study analyzes the local governance system of Pakistan with a broader focus on constitutional frameworks, political manifestos, and implementation challenges. Through analysis of party manifestos pre and post 18th amendment, constitutional provisions that include 18th amendment and Article 140-A, and provincial local government acts, the study reveals a serious gap between policy intent and the actual implementation. The research outlines significant challenges including lack of financial autonomy, political interference, and weak institutional capacity. The study puts forward reforms to strengthen local democracy by constitutional amendments, empowering the Election Commission of Pakistan, improving financing mechanisms including district finance commissions, and bridging the gap between provinces and the local governments. The findings of the study contribute to a better understanding of the systemic issues of local governance in Pakistan and offers a practical call for reforms.

Keyword: Election Commission, constitutional amendments, district finance commissions, local governance, manifestos

Introduction

Political manifestos have long shaped Pakistan's electoral discourse, often marked by ambitious promises of reform, inclusive development, and institutional strengthening. Among these, the empowerment of local governments is frequently presented as a key strategy for strengthening democracy and ensuring participatory governance. As the most immediate tier of public representation, local governments are responsible for delivering essential services, enabling citizen participation, and addressing local development needs through context-specific solutions. Decentralized decision-making improves administrative responsiveness and contributes to greater transparency and accountability (Shekhani, [2018](#)).

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Despite these recognized benefits and their inclusion in constitutional and political commitments, Pakistan's local government system remains structurally weak and politically marginalized. While elections are central to democratic governance and serve as a mechanism for citizens to influence institutional arrangements (Kiani & Sartipi, [2016](#)), local government elections in Pakistan are often delayed, irregular, or suspended. The decentralization commitments made in political manifestos are seldom implemented once parties assume office, indicating a persistent gap between electoral pledges and policy execution. This situation raises concerns about the credibility of manifestos as instruments of democratic accountability.

In this context, manifestos serve both symbolic and strategic purposes, presenting party positions on sectors such as education, healthcare, the economy, and foreign policy. In principle, they provide reform agendas, in practice, their implementation depends on political will, coordination among institutions, and administrative capacity (Dissanayake et al., [2021](#)). Increasingly, the electorate judges' manifestos on both feasibility and sincerity places greater expectations on political parties to demonstrate results.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment and Article 140-A provide a legal basis for devolving political, administrative, and fiscal authority to local governments (Ahmed, [2020](#)). These provisions were intended to reverse decades of centralized governance and promote a more responsive administration. However, implementation has been inconsistent due to political interference, limited institutional capacity, and highly centralized fiscal arrangements (Ali & Mufti, [2022](#)). This gap between constitutional provisions and their practical application highlights the need to examine the factors that limit the progress of decentralization.

Internationally, decentralization is considered a means to improve state legitimacy, strengthen service delivery, and address diversity in multi-ethnic societies (Silva, [2015](#); United Cities and Local Government, [2014](#)). In Pakistan, with its regional disparities and ethnic diversity, effective local governance is critical for promoting social stability and maintaining democratic structures. Without clear institutional frameworks and sustained political commitment, however, decentralization remains largely symbolic.

This study addresses the following research question: To what extent do constitutional provisions, particularly the 18th Amendment and Article 140-A and political party manifestos, provide a framework for devolution in Pakistan, and what are the main impediments to their implementation at the local level? The objectives are: (i) to examine how constitutional amendments and political manifestos describe fiscal autonomy and decentralized governance, (ii) to identify structural, political, and administrative barriers to implementation, and (iii) to outline policy recommendations for strengthening local governance institutions.

The contribution of this study lies in providing an integrated descriptive synthesis of constitutional provisions, political commitments, and legislative frameworks. By examining these elements together rather than in isolation, the paper presents a consolidated account of Pakistan's decentralization arrangements and the persistent challenges that limit their effective application.

Literature Review

The literature on decentralization and local governance in Pakistan identifies persistent structural, political, and administrative challenges that limit the effectiveness of devolution. Four main themes emerge: constitutional and legal frameworks, political party manifestos, implementation challenges, and institutional capacity constraints.

While the constitutional and political architecture for local governance in Pakistan appears well-established on paper, the practical realization of these frameworks remains deeply contested. Building on the concerns raised in the introduction regarding implementation gaps, this section surveys the existing literature to better understand the legal foundations, political commitments, and systemic bottlenecks that define Pakistan's local governance landscape.

Constitutional Framework

The 18th Constitutional Amendment and Article 140-A are central to Pakistan's decentralization framework. The 18th Amendment restructured the federal framework by transferring legislative authority to the provinces (Shah, [2012](#)). Article 140-A mandates elected local governments with political, administrative, and fiscal authority. However, the absence of binding timelines, enforcement mechanisms, and federal oversight has limited the impact of these provisions (Rahman & Shaw, [2014](#); Adhayanto

et al., [2021](#)). Divergent provincial approaches have produced an uneven governance structure across the country (Bilal et al., [2025](#)).

Political Manifestos and Commitment to Local Governance

Political party manifestos have long served as public declarations of intent, outlining governance priorities and reform agendas. In the context of local governance in Pakistan, extant literature underscores a persistent gap between rhetorical commitment and tangible policy action. While manifestos frequently emphasize the importance of decentralization and grassroots empowerment, their translation into legislation or administrative reform remains weak. Ali and Mufti ([2022](#)) argue that despite recurring references to local governance in electoral documents, concrete policy frameworks and follow-through mechanisms are largely absent. This disjuncture is particularly evident in the platforms of major political actors such as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), whose manifestos routinely invoke themes of service delivery, participatory democracy, and local autonomy. However, once in power, these pledges tend to be diluted or deprioritized, revealing a pattern where political expediency and centralized control override earlier commitments (Dissanayake et al., [2021](#)).

Furthering this narrative, Malik and Rana's ([2019](#)) historical analysis of Pakistan's local governance trajectory reveals how successive regimes particularly military governments have instrumentalized local bodies to consolidate control rather than promote democratic participation. Rather than functioning as genuine platforms for community representation, local governments were often deployed as tools of political patronage, enabling centralized regimes to bypass provincial opposition and cultivate compliant local elites. This legacy of top-down control has promoted a governance culture in which autonomy and accountability are systematically eroded. As Bilal and Leygraf ([2024](#)) contend, such patronage-driven structures have rendered local councils functionally subordinate, limiting their ability to initiate development agendas or respond to community needs. The cumulative effect is a deeply entrenched institutional weakness that continues to undermine the transformative potential of local governance.

Challenges to Implementation of Local Governance

Numerous challenges hinder effective local governance, primarily stemming from a lack of financial autonomy, political interference, and

institutional inefficiency (Aslam, [2017](#)). Rana et al. ([2017](#)) detail that many local governments operate under restrictive financial conditions, heavily reliant on provincial allocations that are often delayed or insufficient to meet local needs. This financial dependency severely limits their capacity to implement developmental projects effectively. The local governance system in Pakistan is a framework marked by considerable challenges, notably a lack of financial autonomy, pervasive political interference, and weak institutional capacity. This literature review synthesizes existing research and analyses relevant to these concerns, presenting potential reforms aimed at revitalizing local democracy through constitutional amendments, empowering local governments, improving financing mechanisms, and bridging gaps between provincial and local governance structures.

Financial Autonomy in Local Governance

One of the primary challenges in Pakistan's local governance system is the lack of financial autonomy, which severely limits the operational capabilities of local governments. Research indicates that local councils often rely on funding from the provincial government, which creates a cycle of dependency that undermines local authority (Rasheed & Rashid, [2022](#); Rafique et al., [2020](#)). According to Rasheed and Rashid ([2022](#)), the financial instability of local governments can be attributed to inadequate revenue-generating abilities and the ambiguous distribution of financial resources among different tiers of the government. Studies suggest that the empowerment of local governments through improved financing mechanisms, such as the establishment of District Finance Commissions, could promote fiscal self-reliance, allowing local governments to address community needs more effectively (Rafique et al., [2020](#)). Moreover, the issues of fiscal federalism and governance in Pakistan often emerge as compounded by the constitutional framework, which inadequately supports local financial autonomy. The linkage between public funds and local autonomy remains tenuous, limiting the efficacy of local governance structures (Zaidi, [2019](#)). As highlighted by Zaidi ([2019](#)), a comprehensive reform agenda is necessary to strengthen local financial systems, offering pathways that decentralize financial authority and reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Political Interference and Instability

Political interference constitutes another major barrier to effective local governance in Pakistan. The literature consistently points to the patron-client relationships between local representatives and provincial elites, which undermine accountability and responsiveness (Ali & Mufti, [2022](#); Ali, [2022](#)). For instance, Ali ([2022](#)) explores how elite capture of local power structures results in a governance system that favors personal networks over public accountability. The pervasive influence of provincial political dynamics often leads to the ineffective provision of public services, depriving communities of the chance to engage and benefit from local governance initiatives (Kharel & Kharel, [2020](#)). Moreover, the historical context of military influence on local governance has created a legacy of instability that complicates current governance efforts. Zaidi ([2019](#)) discuss how military interventions historically altered local governance structures, often undermining democratic practices and delegitimizing local authorities. The need for long-term political reform is crucial to mitigate these interferences to ensure that local governments can operate with greater autonomy and meritocracy (Ahmad et al., [2021](#)).

Weak Institutional Capacity

Weak institutional capacity within local governments further exacerbates governance issues. The local governance framework in Pakistan is often under-resourced and suffers from a lack of qualified personnel, resulting in inefficiencies across governance practices (Akbar, [2023](#); Ali et al., [2023](#)). Studies demonstrate that the integration of more robust institutional frameworks, along with necessary training for local officials, can significantly enhance service delivery at the grassroots level (Rosilawati et al., [2018](#)). The literature emphasizes that improving local government functionality necessitates a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, as well as accountability measures tailored to local contexts (Rafique et al., [2020](#)).

Moreover, the call for institutional reforms that strengthen the roles of civil society organizations (CSOs) within local governance structures is increasingly highlighted. Rosilawati et al. ([2018](#)) indicate that engaging CSOs can drive participatory governance and enhance accountability by connecting citizens with their local governments.

Institutional Capacity and Local Governance Effectiveness

The effectiveness of local governance is inherently linked to the institutional capacity of local bodies. Studies suggest that inadequate human resources, training, and administrative support significantly hamper the operational efficiency of local governments (Rasheed & Rashid, [2022](#)). The existing literature illustrates that many local departments lack the expertise and capacity to manage the financial and administrative functions critical to their operation (Zaidi et al., [2019](#)). This deficiency leads to poor service delivery and community dissatisfaction (Ahmad et al., [2021](#)). Moreover, the disparity in local governance effectiveness is evident in urban versus rural settings, with rural local governments often facing more acute institutional challenges due to resource constraints and a lack of political will to prioritize their needs (Zaidi et al., [2019](#); Zaidi, [2022](#)). If local governance structures are to be effective, comprehensive training programs and institutional reforms targeting capacity building must be prioritized to enhance service delivery (Dissanayake et al., [2021](#)).

Reform for Revitalizing the Local Government

Given the systemic issues in local governance, several reform proposals have emerged within the literature. First, proposing constitutional amendments can pave the way for establishing clearer mandates that enhance financial and administrative autonomy for local governments (Zahra, [2022](#); Rahman et al., [2021](#)). Such amendments should explicitly delineate the roles and responsibilities of local governance, curbing the extent of political interference from provincial governments (Ain et al., [2024](#)). Second, there is a push for the empowerment of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to enhance the integrity of local elections. Robust electoral processes are vital for generating public trust and ensuring that representatives are held accountable to their constituents (Mushtaq & Zaman, [2022](#); Khan, [2021](#)). Improved interaction between the ECP and local governance structures can increase the capability of local governments to engage effectively with citizens, facilitating an increased sense of ownership over local development initiatives (Shah, [2010](#); Rehman et al., [2022](#)).

Furthermore, enhancing financing mechanisms, such as promoting discretion in local revenue generation and ensuring timely fund disbursements from provincial to local levels is crucial. Effective financial

management practices must be implemented to ensure that local governments can fulfill their mandates adequately (Gurchani et al., [2024](#)). The establishment of District Finance Commissions could facilitate a more equitable distribution of financial resources, thereby tackling disparities in service delivery across different regions (Hassan & Lee, [2019](#)). Lastly, bridging the gap between local and provincial governments through intergovernmental cooperation frameworks is vital to achieving effective governance. Harmonizing relationships between these tiers of government can yield more coherent policy outcomes and effectively address local needs and priorities (Rafique et al., [2020](#); Ghimire, [2023](#)). Cross-sector collaborations can also enhance the capacity of local governments to implement development projects and achieve broader national objectives.

Method

The insights drawn from the existing literature underscore the multifaceted nature of local governance in Pakistan, shaped by intersecting legal mandates, political commitments, and administrative constraints. However, despite offering a broad understanding of these dimensions, prior scholarships often address them in isolation, failing to capture their cumulative impact on the effectiveness of decentralization. To address this analytical gap, the present study adopts a methodological framework that integrates these strands through a systematic documentary analysis. The following section outlines the research design employed to investigate the coherence and divergence between constitutional provisions, political party manifestos, and fiscal decentralization mechanisms, thereby enabling a holistic assessment of Pakistan's local governance architecture.

This study adopts a qualitative, documentary analysis methodology to interrogate the complex dynamics of local governance reform in Pakistan. The research design is intentionally rooted in the critical examination and comparative synthesis of constitutional provisions, legislative acts, political party manifestos, and authoritative secondary sources, ensuring a transparent and systematic exploration of the gap between policy intent and implementation in the local government sector.

Document Selection and Scope

This research was established through purposive selection, with a focus on documents that constitute the legal, political, and administrative framework for local governance in Pakistan. Primary sources include the

full text of the 18th Amendment and Article 140-A of the Constitution of Pakistan, the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award's pertinent clauses, and the most recent provincial local government acts and amendments for Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. In parallel, the manifestos of major political parties PML-N, PPP, PTI, MQM, ANP, JUI, and PML-Q spanning the election cycles from 2008 to 2024 were systematically reviewed to capture evolving commitments and reform narratives. Secondary sources, such as official policy documents from the State Bank of Pakistan and Ministry of Finance, as well as recognized academic and think-tank literature, were incorporated to contextualize observed implementation outcomes.

Analytical Approach

The methodology is structured in three sequential stages. First, constitutional and statutory texts were subjected to a close, critical reading to extract the explicit legal and fiscal mandates for devolution, as well as institutional arrangements for local autonomy and accountability. Second, political party manifestos were systematically reviewed to identify stated intentions, priorities, and pledges related to local government reform, with attention to changes across electoral cycles and variations among parties. Third, provincial legislation was examined in detail to elucidate the operationalization of constitutional provisions and party commitments at the provincial level, and to identify inter-provincial differences in administrative structure, fiscal authority, and mechanisms for local representation.

A cross-sectional and longitudinal comparative framework was employed, enabling the comparison of legal provisions, party manifestos, and provincial acts both across provinces and over time. This facilitated the identification of thematic consistencies, policy contradictions, and recurring gaps in implementation, particularly with respect to fiscal autonomy, electoral timeliness, institutional capacity, and citizen participation.

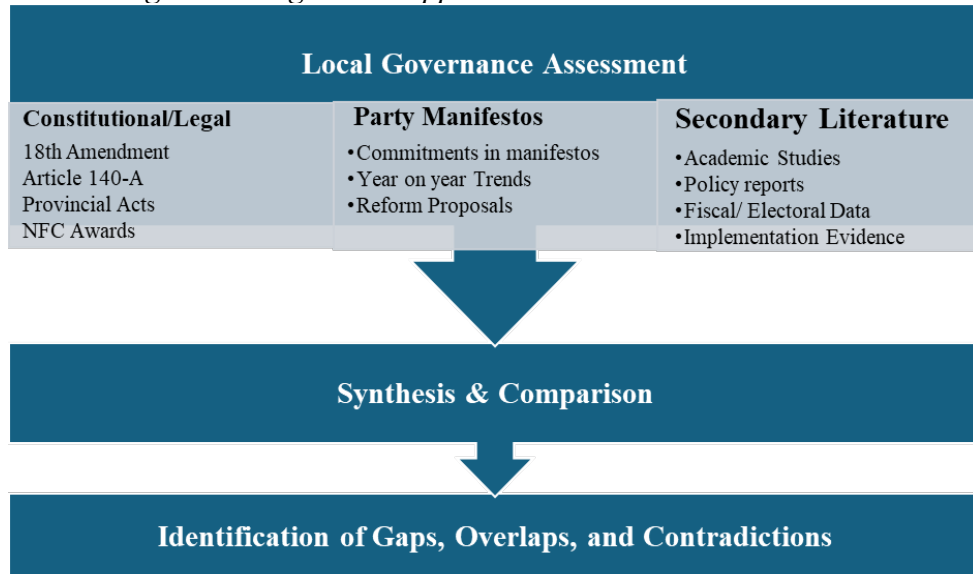
Triangulation and Validation

To enhance analytical robustness, the study employs triangulation through the convergence of multiple types of documents. By systematically comparing the stated intent in constitutional provisions and manifestos with the enacted legislative framework and observed administrative practices, as reported in policy and academic literature, the research substantiates its

findings and mitigates potential bias inherent in any single source. The method's reliance on public and authoritative texts ensures replicability and transparency.

Figure 1

Methodological Triangulation Approach to Local Governance



Critical Analysis and Interpretation

Building upon the methodological foundations outlined above, the analysis now turns to a critical examination of the selected constitutional provisions, political party manifestos, and provincial legislative instruments. This section interprets the data through a thematic and comparative lens, with the aim of uncovering underlying patterns, contradictions, and structural asymmetries across the legal, political, and fiscal dimensions of local governance. In doing so, it seeks to evaluate the extent to which the formal commitments to decentralization are coherently translated into institutional practice, thereby illuminating the factors that perpetuate the gap between policy design and implementation in Pakistan's local governance framework.

Overview of the Current State

Pakistan's local governance system displays a complex and conflicting multi-tiered system that include struggling devolutionary transformation

and limited autonomy. Despite the presence of town municipal authorities, union councils, and district governments indicating decentralization, they generally operate as independent entities that lack proper defined responsibilities, and effective coordination. This includes different political and historical incidents that act as a barrier to efficient service delivery and effective governance at the grassroots level. Uncertainty as a result of the hindrance raises further dissatisfaction amongst the citizens, underlining an ineffective and unclear local government system.

It is also imperative to highlight failures in timely local government elections across the provinces. In Punjab the last elections were held in 2015, and despite multiple notifications from the Election Commission, no elections have been held till mid-2025. In Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) the local body elections were scheduled for 2022 but have been rescheduled several times because of political and legal battles between the ECP and the federal government. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, local government elections were held in two phases in 2021, but the second phase was plagued with serious complaints of rigging, which eroded people's trust in the process. Sindh also held local elections in 2022, however this also allegedly led to rigged results.

Constitutional Provisions for Devolution

The 18th amendment and the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) award are historic attempts in empowering the local governments by providing them with constitutional autonomy and financial resources. The NFC award, despite increasing resource allocation to the local bodies, have considerably failed to provide the resources required in creating a robust service delivery system especially in rural areas. The 18th amendment aimed at providing more powers to the local governments, but since its formation it has been partially implemented and its enactment across provinces has been unequal. The impact of the 18th amendment has been limited primarily due to various areas of it not being fully understood. This reinforces the strong need to look deeply into issues surrounding the 18th amendment and its partial implementation, especially, how it might be affecting politics at the provincial level.

Political Considerations in Manifestos

Over the years, political parties in Pakistan have shifted their focus towards local governance with a strong stress on the need for

decentralization. There has been rising consensus amongst the manifestos of political parties on decentralization to empower local governments with resources and greater autonomy. A major difference in the political party's manifestos has been on local governance structures and systems. PPP and PMLN have consistently emphasized improving infrastructure and providing basic facilities to the people, while PTI has emphasized active public participation and accountability. MQM has persistently in their manifestos emphasized equal ethnic representation and complete local autonomy. On the other hand, JUI and ANP have majorly prioritized religious norms and values and societal well-being in their manifestos on local governments.

Analysis of Major Party Manifestos

Pakistan Muslim League-N (PMLN)

PML-N has consistently prioritized the active role of local governments in manifestos, acknowledging their importance in development and public contentment. PML-N has emphasized an increased role of public engagement in local bodies' decision-making, prioritizing community-based decision-making (Pildat, [2007](#)). PML-N strongly promotes devolution of power and resources to the lowest tier of government, providing them with complete autonomy in resource allocation and decision-making (Prime Minister's Office, [2013](#)). The party emphasizes efficient service delivery in areas like health, education, sanitation, and waste management at the local level (Pakistan Muslim League (N), [n.d.](#)).

PMLN emphasizes constitutional amendments to strengthen the financial and administrative powers of local governments, ensuring elections within 90 days and empowering local governments in decision-making roles. PMLN advocates to empower the ECP to manage all election related matters. PMLN advocates for making youth representation mandatory at every tier of local government. PMLN stresses the formalization of provincial financial commissions with minimum 30% of the gross revenue receipts reserved for local governments (Pakistan Muslim League (N), [2024](#)).

PML-N's manifestos demonstrate a growing commitment to strengthening local governance in Pakistan. The party emphasizes decentralization, improved service delivery, and citizen engagement, recognizing their importance for effective governance and development.

While specific implementation details and statistics are sometimes lacking in the manifestos, PML-N's focus on local governance reflects a positive trend towards empowering local communities and promoting participatory development in Pakistan.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) manifestos prioritize local governance, highlighting their importance in governance, administration, and development. They acknowledge the importance of women in the local governments and how they could shape development.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) advocates for a three-tier system of government i.e., Federal, Provincial, and local, each of them having autonomy under the law. Local government system introduced by the military would be ended and replaced by the Party's Devolution system. PPP proposes local body elections to be held on party basis and that the local body elections will be held within three months of the general election (Pakistan Peoples Party, [2008](#)). PPP pledges to strengthen the administrative and financial autonomy of local governments. PPP Pledges to devolve power by building a consensus on the framework of local governments across the country. PPP promises to hold local government elections which would be overseen by the Election Commission of Pakistan. PPP vows to transfer political, financial, and administrative responsibility and authority to the local governments (Pakistan Peoples Party, [2013](#)). PPP vows to strengthen local governments by allowing them to collect taxes. It further pledges to devolve powers at the districts, municipal, and town level to tackle shortfall in services. PPP pledges to increase women representation in all levels of government, judiciary, and other decision-making body. It vows to increase women participation in local governments and diverse services tiers (Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, [n.d.](#)). PPP advocates to strengthen local governments through revisiting Article 140-A, empowering grass root governance and ensuring administrative, financial, and political autonomy of local governments as third tier of the government. PPP pledges to strengthen the platform of local government bodies ensuring women empowerment and political participation (Pakistan Peoples Party, [2024](#)).

PPP's manifestos display commitment to strengthening local governance in Pakistan. The party stresses upon decentralization, providing

constitutional rights, focusing on increasing women representation in the local governments signifying the important role of local governments as the third tier of government. While their manifestos often lack concrete steps and statistical evidence on how these goals can be achieved, the recognition of local governments as the third tier of government reflects a positive shift toward empowering communities and enabling them to play a direct role in development.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

The manifestos of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) prioritize local governments, emphasizing on the importance of local governance in development, and financial autonomy. PTI's manifestos focus on accountability at every tier of government and direct elections for reserved seats.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) aims at making local governments accountable to provincial assemblies, by giving a clear set of rules and authority at each tier of the government. Provincial Financial Commissions in each province would be urged to provide and allocate funds to local governments directly instead of through district administrators (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, [2013](#)). Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) pledges to devolve decision-making and power to the grassroot levels by empowering the local governments. This includes transferring decision-making and power to the village council. PTI vows to bring in a city government model in which the mayors that will be elected directly will be responsible for delivering on all urban city matters. PTI emphasizes the empowerment of the local governments to be more responsive to the needs of the urban population. PTI aims at devolving administrative and financial power to the local governments which would enable them to work on local development projects (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, [2018](#)).

PTI pledges to empower local governments through legislative list III to provide the local governments with independence in enforcing laws and municipal services. PTI vows for direct elections for reserve seats to make sure that there is diversity in representation of women, minorities, and youth (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, [2024](#)).

PTI's manifestos have an emphasis on democratic decentralization through empowering local governments advocating for legislative, financial, and administrative power at the local level. Despite a lack of stats

to prove their purpose, PTI's manifestos highlight a strong dedication to transforming local governments through effective institutions which can help in governance and at the same time ensure inclusive representation through direct elections and equal resource allocation.

Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PMLQ)

PML-Q, a center right party in Pakistan, advocates for economic growth and political stability, their manifestos generally provide a conservative approach to governance, with a primary focus on upholding societal norms and rural development.

PML-Q has consistently advocated for increased devolution of power to local governments, albeit with a cautious approach. While not as emphatic as PTI or MQM, their manifestos mention strengthening local institutions and decentralizing decision-making. The party prioritizes rural development and infrastructure projects at the local level, promising improved roads, irrigation, and sanitation facilities (APNA Pakistan, [2016](#)).

PML-Q's approach to local governance in its manifestos is characterized by a cautious emphasis on devolution, rural development, and traditional values. While they acknowledge the importance of citizen engagement and inclusiveness, their plans lack specific details and concrete measures for implementation. Compared to other parties like PTI or MQM, their approach seems less progressive and focused more on maintaining existing structures with few incremental improvements.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)

MQM has always focused on raising voices for a strong and empowered local government, an autonomous local government with ethnic inclusion in its decision-making process. MQM's manifestos have emphasized local governance especially its critical role in development of Karachi.

MQM emphasizes constitutional amendments, primarily focused on providing Karachi with autonomy by the Sindh Provincial government, as it will help in empowering local governments, which are vital for local authorities in addressing Karachi's challenges more efficiently. MQM advocates for equal and fair representation of all ethnic communities residing in Karachi within the local government system. They provide reforms for achieving an efficient electoral systems and reserved seats for minorities in Pakistan ("MQM-P manifesto", [2024](#)).

MQM has shown a strong commitment towards local governments in their manifestos, especially for Karachi's autonomy.

Awami National Party (ANP)

Awami National Party (ANP) has always emphasized on social welfare and Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan, mainly focusing on KPK. Its leader Bacha Khan, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar have played a vital role in providing ANP with an ideology of Pashtun nationalism and non-violence resistance. ANP has constantly focused on empowering the local governments in their manifestos.

ANP promises to devolve powers at local levels and provide complete autonomy to local bodies which is beneficial in enhancing local governance and being more responsive to local needs (Awami National Party, [2008](#)). Empowering local communities through active participation in decision-making processes (Awami National Party, [2013](#)). ANP manifestos advocate for prioritizing social development projects at the local level, focusing on education, healthcare, and poverty reduction (Awami National Party, [2018](#)). ANP advocates the full implementation of article 140A and transfer of power to the local government. The party emphasizes the creation of the provincial financial fund to maintain local government independence (Awami National Party, [2024](#)).

ANP manifestos consistently highlighted strengthening local governance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, prioritizing decentralization, community empowerment, and social development. While specific targets and resource allocations were sometimes missing, ANP's focus on local-level solutions and citizen engagement marked a distinct approach compared to other parties.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI)

JUI has focused on advocating for inclusion of Islamic values and Islamic ideologies in local governance. Key political leaders of JUI have outlined the party's agenda, mainly focusing on empowering local government, education, and social justice.

JUI manifestos have constantly emphasized the need for devolution of power to local bodies, highlighting their importance in addressing local needs effectively (Jamiat Ulema-e Islām, [2013](#), and Ali, [2018](#)).

JUI has completely focused on Islamic ideologies in their manifestos focusing on fulfilling the needs of the population, engaging the community, and actively advocating for devolution of power and empowering local governments through a bi-partisan service delivery approach. There is a lack of outlining of fiscal autonomy in JUIs manifestos.

Local Government Acts

Punjab Local Government Act (PLGA) 2022

The Punjab local government act (PLGA) 2022 was passed to establish a local government system in Punjab focusing on citizen participation and decentralization. The passed act proposes the creation of local governments at district, municipal, and union council level. The purpose of this act was to decentralize administrative powers to manage public affairs at the local level more effectively and to enhance democracy at the local level. The act provided a structured hierarchy of the local government system which includes metropolitan corporation, and district councils with each of these bodies provided with clear set of rules and regulations. District councils were made to oversee administrative functions for rural areas whereas municipal committees were made responsible for urban areas. The act mandates that local governments' municipal services are crucial for sustainable urban development. Moreover, the PLGA 2022 laid down electoral processes to make sure that there is broader representation and participation. This act ensured mandatory representation for women making sure that governance is inclusive and reflects the populations' entire need. The act also ensured special representation within the local government structures, especially for minorities. This was to make sure that all the segments of the community had a say in the governance. PLGA 2022 highlights the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines in the local government elections. The main objective of this act was to decentralize administrative powers from provincial level to local level to speed up the decision-making process and improve accountability (Government of Punjab, [2022](#)).

Sindh Local Government Act (Amendment) 2023

The Sindh local Government Act (Amendment) 2023 made major changes to the existing local government framework in Sindh. The act aimed at improving efficiency of governance, local participation, and accountability. The act provided election regulations ensuring that mayors,

deputy mayors, chairmen, and vice chairmen of local government bodies would secure their membership within six months of assuming office. The purpose of this was to increase accountability and make sure that the decisions are aligned closely with the local needs. This act was intended to strengthen the integration between legislative body of the local government and leadership, and improving clarity between policymaking and implementation. Furthermore, the Sindh Local Government Act (Amendment) 2023 provided mayors and chairmen with more power especially in overseeing governance and municipal operations. This allows local leaders to be more empowered and seeks to decentralize authority, leading to quicker decision making. Moving on, the act intends to redefine roles and modifies procedural aspects of local governance. The purpose of this was to reduce bureaucratic red tape and speed up the process of governance (Government of Sindh, [2023](#)).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) 2024

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) 2024 brings about key reforms aimed at refining the local government structure. The act provides fiscal autonomy to the local governments. It amends section 30 of the local government act 2013 and adds in a new clause regarding grants. The act provides autonomy to the local governments to receive grants from authorities other than the government as well. This is intended to enhance the financial resources available to local governments. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) 2024 provides administrative autonomy to the local governments by simplifying the administrative regulations and rules for the local government. The act simplifies the legal and regulatory framework by removing certain provisos in the KPK local government act 2013. This simplification in the act is to ensure effective and quicker decision making at the local government level, improve service delivery, and to reduce bureaucratic delays. The act further strengthens the powers of inspectors which allows them to enforce local government regulations more easily and freely. This is to ensure compliance with local government regulations and improving governance and accountability (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, [2024](#)).

Balochistan Local Government Act (Amendment) 2023

Balochistan Local Government Act (Amendment) 2023 brought about significant changes to the local governance framework in Balochistan. The act aimed at improving administrative efficiency and local autonomy. The amendment to the 2010 local government act provided changes to improve the operational capacity of the local councils and helped streamline the local governance procedures. The act provided new regulations for fiscal management and administrative autonomy. This allowed local councils to have more freedom in their day-to-day affairs. The act helped increase financial autonomy granted to the local bodies. This was to enable the local authorities to manage their resources in an efficient way. Moreover, the act puts mechanisms to ensure transparency in local government operations and to enforce accountability (Government of Balochistan, [2023](#)).

These acts do provide a sense of responsibility undertaken by the provinces to include local governments in governance models as the third tier of the government. The acts provide rules and regulations each province needs to implement for local governments to be completely autonomous. However, these acts look good on paper and when it comes to implementation there are hardly any changes that have been implemented. Despite these acts providing promising changes in the local government structure, the practical utility of these acts often lacks due to the systemic issues. These acts, despite being theoretically sound, often fall short in implementation due to lack of effective monitoring frameworks. The acts do acknowledge the importance of financial autonomy for local governments but in reality, lack of financial autonomy is one of the real reasons why local governments in Pakistan fail to live up to their potential. Political interference in local governments destabilizes the autonomy provided to local governments in these acts in administrative matters. These factors collectively result in local bodies not performing efficiently or are able to live up to their true potential in Pakistan. Citizen participation in local bodies is much lower than expected despite these promising acts. This is because citizens believe that their participation in local governments would not bring about change due to lack of autonomy or the bureaucratic hurdles local governments face. By not providing financial, political, and administrative autonomy to the local governments, provinces are reducing the number of people who actually want to be a part of change or bring about reforms.

Results

The critical examination of constitutional texts, political narratives, and legislative frameworks reveals multiple systemic inconsistencies and challenges in implementation. These findings serve as the foundation for the empirical synthesis below. The section thematically consolidates the key insights, categorizing them under primary dysfunctions: over-centralization, fiscal dependency, institutional weaknesses, and limited citizen engagement. This structured presentation enables a more coherent understanding of the operational deficiencies obstructing the realization of autonomous and effective local governance in Pakistan.

Challenges in Pakistan's Local Governance System

Despite constitutional reforms aimed at decentralization, the local governance system continues to encounter persistent impediments. These include limited financial resources, centralized authority, underdeveloped institutional capacity, and low levels of citizen participation.

Over-centralization

Provincial and federal authorities maintain extensive control over local governance, constraining the ability of local governments to independently address community needs and priorities.

Inadequate Financial Resources

Restricted fiscal transfers and delayed disbursements hinder local governments from executing core development functions. Insufficient financial autonomy compromises the prospects of service delivery and exacerbates socioeconomic disparities.

Weak Institutional Capacities

Local governments, particularly at the grassroots level, lack the institutional infrastructure and administrative support required for effective governance. This incapacity impedes policy execution and service delivery.

Limited Citizen Participation

Public disengagement, low awareness, and limited participatory mechanisms restrict meaningful citizen involvement in local decision-making. This undermines transparency, accountability, and trust in local

institutions, calling for more robust frameworks to close the gap between state and society.

Identified Deficiencies in Existing Local Government Legislations

The functionality of local governments is further impaired by significant weaknesses within existing legislative instruments, which prolong the underlying structural challenges.

Power and Responsibility Uncertainty

Ambiguities in the division of responsibilities between various governance tiers, as embedded in many local government acts, lead to administrative overlaps and inter-tier conflicts, undermining governance efficiency.

Weak Mechanisms for Accountability

Most provincial acts lack comprehensive and enforceable accountability, and places, where such mechanisms exist, are either underdeveloped or the procedures are inconsistently applied, enabling mismanagement and eroding public confidence.

Political Interference

Despite constitutional amendments and manifesto pledges to curtail it, political interference remains entrenched. Local governments often function under significant influence from provincial political actors due to the absence of legal safeguards ensuring their autonomy.

Limited Representation of Marginalized Groups

The inadequate inclusion of women, minorities, and marginalized communities in local government structures undermines their representational legitimacy and capacity to respond to diverse local needs.

Inadequate Financial Autonomy

The current legislative frameworks offer limited fiscal decentralization, leaving local governments heavily reliant on conditional grants from higher tiers and lacking discretionary control over local revenue generation.

Impact of Inconsistent Approaches on Local Governance System

An analysis of political party manifestos from 2002 to 2024 reveals patterns of both rhetorical continuity and implementation failure. Although

major parties have consistently emphasized reforms, their operationalization remains uneven and largely symbolic.

PML-N, for instance, repeatedly foregrounds local government and service delivery in its manifestos, yet fails to outline actionable implementation plans. PTI has emphasized transparency and local governance, but the absence of clear mechanisms for progress evaluation hinders accountability. PPP's consistent focus on gender representation and poverty reduction lacks demonstrable follow-through. MQM frequently advocates for ethnic inclusion and the autonomy of Karachi but largely neglects core urban governance issues such as mobility and water security. ANP promotes social welfare and provincial autonomy but similarly omits implementation detail. JUI prioritizes the integration of Islamic principles into governance but shows limited responsiveness to contemporary administrative challenges.

A recurring concern across all major parties is the disconnect between their stated commitments and practical actions. While advocating for democratic strengthening through local governments, most parties have, when in power, either delayed or prematurely dissolved local bodies. This contradiction is evident in repeated failures to conduct timely local elections and uphold constitutional requirements regarding local governance continuity.

Despite pledging to hold local elections within 90 days of general polls, provinces like Punjab and Islamabad Capital Territory have not conducted such elections since 2015. Sindh conducted local elections in 2022 after extensive delays, but the process was marred by controversies, including boycott claims from MQM. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa held elections in 2021, also followed by rigging allegations. Balochistan's elections took place in 2022 after a nine-year hiatus, revealing a systemic disregard for constitutional electoral commitments. These lapses point to a persistent democratic deficit in Pakistan's local governance landscape.

Overall, political parties in Pakistan articulate commendable commitments to local governance across election cycles, however, the critical analysis reveals consistent weaknesses in terms of implementation strategies, progress evaluation, feasibility assessments, and citizen engagement mechanisms.

Policy Landscape Paradox

18th Amendment and the NFC Award as Frameworks for Devolution of Power

Article 160 of the constitution outlines the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the 10th National Finance Commission (NFC), identifying core areas of fiscal resource distribution between the federation and the provinces. It integrates principles of fiscal federalism, subsidiarity, fiscal equalization, regional responsiveness, and collaborative federalism to promote a more decentralized and responsive governance structure. It emphasizes equitable sharing of net proceeds from income tax, sales tax, export duties, and excise duties, while also addressing financial needs of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, and the newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Borrowing powers and the authority to rationalize public debt and subsidies further reflect decentralized financial responsibility. The inclusion of “any other matter relating to finance referred to the Commission by the President” illustrates a flexible approach to evolving fiscal challenges.¹

Furthermore, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution marked a pivotal shift towards decentralization by renaming the NWFP, restructuring judicial appointments, and empowering constitutional institutions (Rana, [2020](#)). It abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, strengthened provincial legislative authority, and mandated the Council of Common Interests (CCI) to mediate inter-provincial matters. Enhancements to Article 172² enabled provinces to claim ownership over natural resources within territorial waters. It also secured provincial positions in the NFC by guaranteeing that no future award would allocate less than prior shares, reinforcing the principle of equitable fiscal devolution.

Analysis of Article 140-A as Theoretical Framework for Devolution

In the article 140-A of the constitution of Pakistan 1973, two foundational clauses focused on local government systems. Clause (1) of article 140A focuses on mandating that each province, by law, must establish a local government system and should transfer political, administrative, and financial powers to the elected local governments. Clause (2) of this article provides that the local body elections are to be

¹<https://finance.gos.pk/Home/Download?path=Resources%5CNFC%5CNotification%5C12-5-2020.pdf>

²<https://www.commonlii.org/pk/legis/const/1973/7.html>

conducted by the election commission of Pakistan.³ An amendment was brought to Article 140-A of the constitution in 2015. The previous version of the article was only relevant to the provinces, leaving out Islamabad Capital Territory and Cantonment areas, therefore Clause (1) of Article 140-A was amended and it mandated that Islamabad Capital Territory, Cantonments, and the provinces must establish a local government by law and transfer political, administrative, and financial powers to the elected local governments.⁴ Article 140-A tried to establish a uniform framework for the government across all the administrative units in Pakistan providing certain equal political, administrative, and financial powers to local governments.

Gap between Policy Intent and Implementation

While both Article 160 of the Constitution (NFC) and the 18th Amendment share the intent to promote decentralization and fiscal autonomy but the complex nature of devolution processes and the need for ongoing monitoring and adjustments to achieve the intended goals highlight the difference between policy intent and implementation gap.

In the 10th NFC Award, resource distribution faced challenges in achieving true fiscal equalization, with disparities in actual allocations. Although borrowing powers were intended to promote decentralization, the balance between central and provincial borrowing did not align with this principle, and shortcomings in accurately assessing and allocating resources for regional expenditures further deepened disparities in distribution.

The 18th Amendment aims to strengthen provinces, enhance the role of the Senate, and recognize provinces as rightful beneficiaries of their natural resources. Challenges may arise in the effective implementation of enhanced provincial roles and Senate's strengthened position, influenced by political dynamics and power struggles.

Article-140A aims at strengthening the federation by devolution of powers and providing political, financial, and administrative autonomy to

³ <https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/part4.ch3.html>

⁴ https://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1442812167_151.pdf

the local governments. It increases the role of the local governments and shapes democracy in its true essence.

Impact of Provincial Government Interference on Local Bodies

The 18th Amendment aims to enhance provincial autonomy by transferring a substantial share of 57.5% of fiscal resources to provinces.⁵ The massive fiscal transfer has rendered the federal government constrained in meeting national responsibilities, potentially affecting its ability to service debt and allocate funds for defense. Local councils experience increased interference from provincial governments, limiting their fiscal autonomy as funds are controlled by provinces.

Provinces are expected to utilize transferred funds for service-delivery, including sanitation, education, and health. The State Bank of Pakistan (2023) indicates that provinces lack institutional capacity, resulting in a low tax-to-GDP ratio and challenges in revenue collection. This impacts fiscal consolidation efforts in the country. Limited fiscal capacity at the provincial level hinders effective service delivery by local councils, affecting their ability to address local needs.

The fiscal projections of provinces are often directly tied to the performance of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). The fiscal policy of provinces, especially the most populous ones like Punjab, is heavily dependent on federal tax collection targets. Whereas the unrealistic targets set by the FBR can lead to shortfalls in provincial shares. Local councils face challenges in implementing development projects due to reduced shares resulting from federal shortfalls.

The 18th Amendment aims to address fiscal policy weaknesses inherited from the colonial system. The federal government continues to spend extravagantly, accumulating massive debt. There are concerns about the effectiveness of the 18th Amendment in controlling wasteful spending and addressing public sector inefficiencies. While the amendment attempts to transfer money to provinces, local councils do not experience significant fiscal reforms, contributing to limited-service delivery.

Council of Common Interests (CCI) serves as a platform for matters related to fiscal policy, especially those affecting provincial spending.

⁵ <https://www.eurasiareview.com/20092022-pakistans-18th-amendment-review-of-provincial-fiscal-policy-analysis/>.

Functionality of CCI is criticized for being time-consuming and complicated. The abolition of the Concurrent List has shifted various subjects to provinces, requiring efficient functioning of the CCI. Delays and inefficiencies in CCI may affect the timely devolution of fiscal powers to local governments, hindering their administrative and fiscal capacities.

Shortcomings of Progressive Frameworks

The core aim of decentralization remains unfulfilled due to structural and political bottlenecks. Local governments continue to face constraints in fiscal autonomy, institutional development, and human resource capacity. Funds are often diverted by provincial authorities for unrelated objectives, while budget unpredictability and personnel shortages further erode the functionality of local councils.

Discussion

The findings presented in the preceding section highlight a persistent disconnect between the normative frameworks governing local governance and their practical implementation across political, administrative, and fiscal domains. To situate these findings within a broader analytical context, the following discussion section engages with contemporary theoretical and empirical literature on decentralization and institutional reform. By interpreting the results through the lens of established and emerging scholarly debates, this section aims to elucidate the structural, political, and institutional drivers of the implementation gap, and to assess their implications for the future of local governance in Pakistan.

Analysis from the study points out a worrisome pattern of disconnect between the political manifestos, practical implementation of the local governance reforms, and the constitutional amendments, highlighting the broader implications of these in democratic norms and ideologies in developing countries especially Pakistan. The analysis of the constitutional amendments, specifically the 18th amendment and Article 140-A of the Constitution reveals that Pakistan has a theoretical framework for devolution of power at local level which aligns with the international best practices for devolving of power at local levels. The findings of the study are in accordance with the findings of Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) that Pakistan experiences partial decentralization, a concept in which powers are transferred but without any meaningful authority. The findings of the analysis also alligns with the study of Smoke (2015), providing key

information that policy makers usually overlook important social, institutional, and political factors that are crucial for decentralization. The Imrana Tiwana case analysis reveals how judicial decisions have enforced provincial dominance, especially over the local governments in Pakistan (Asian Development Bank, [2015](#)). The analysis reveals that the case provides legal precedence to the provinces to supersede local governments even in cases that are directly linked with local communities. This undermines the actual interpretation of Article 140-A, revealing how constitutional amendments for local governments can be bypassed through judiciary or any other legal channels, providing a further excuse for excessive centralization at provincial level.

Furthermore, the analysis of the study is consistent with the findings of Crook & Manor ([1998](#)) explaining how in Pakistan the decentralization process is heavily influenced by power and politics. Failure to hold local government elections in Pakistan is a proof of reluctance of political parties in Pakistan, this indicates that political parties view local governments as a competitor instead of an important pillar of governance in Pakistan. This further supports the study's analysis that while in opposition, the political parties provide strong commitment towards local governments and when in power, they are reluctant to share power with them. The implementation weakness is further signified due to weak institutional capabilities, and restricted active participation of the local community. This finding is consistent with the findings of Silva ([2015](#)) about the local democracy requirements. Provinces have made strides by legislative attempts aimed at empowering local governments. The implementation of these legislations remains uneven across provinces, highlighting the need for reforms to move beyond the legal frameworks. Systematic barriers are to be dealt with without structural reforms and the constitutional obligation to devolve powers will continue to face hurdles.

Collectively, these findings display that local governance issues do not simply rise from administrative barriers, but also from political failures in providing meaningful decentralization of power. This gap shows how institutions and power structures still maintain power over local governments.

Recent literature reinforces and expands upon the core findings of this study, particularly the persistent disconnect between decentralization frameworks and their practical execution. Ain et al. ([2024](#)) emphasize that

decentralization policies in Pakistan remain largely symbolic without institutionalized enforcement mechanisms. Particularly in the context of rural governance, a conclusion consistent with this study's analysis of delayed local elections and weak fiscal autonomy was drawn. Similarly, Bilal and Leygraf (2024) highlight disparities in local service delivery across provinces due to fragmented legislative enactment, lending further empirical support to the inter-provincial inconsistencies documented in this paper. Gurchani et al. (2024) explore how political identity and centralized influence shape governance in devolved contexts, echoing the findings here on the instrumental use of local governments by political elites for patronage rather than democratic deepening. Collectively, this emerging scholarship not only affirms the structural constraints identified in Pakistan's local governance model but also illustrates how formal constitutional and legislative provisions such as Article 140-A and the 18th Amendment are increasingly outpaced by political expediency and administrative inertia.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's local governance architecture by examining the intersection of constitutional mandates, political party manifestos, and provincial legislative frameworks. Despite the formal recognition of decentralization through the 18th Constitutional Amendment, Article 140-A, and the NFC Awards, the empirical evidence underscores a pronounced implementation deficit. Political parties, while rhetorically committed to empowering local governments, have consistently fallen short in translating these commitments into durable institutional structures, as reflected in the recurring delays in local government elections, premature dissolutions, and the absence of effective fiscal devolution. The provincial local government acts, though theoretically aligned with the constitutional spirit of decentralization, remain unevenly enacted and frequently circumvented by political interference and administrative inertia.

These systemic shortcomings collectively highlight a structural disconnect between policy intent and operational reality gap that has constrained the evolution of responsive, participatory, and accountable governance at the local level. The findings reinforce the conclusion that decentralization in Pakistan has been largely symbolic, lacking the institutional safeguards, fiscal autonomy, and political will, necessary for

meaningful implementation. If Pakistan is to realize the transformative potential of local governance, it must move beyond declarative commitments toward a substantive recalibration of its governance model. This requires a comprehensive reform agenda encompassing constitutional amendments to safeguard local autonomy, legislative measures to institutionalize electoral regularity, enhanced fiscal mechanisms for resource allocation, and robust oversight to ensure accountability. Only through such a sustained and coordinated effort can local governments in Pakistan be empowered to serve as authentic vehicles of democratic governance, inclusive development, and citizen engagement.

Limitations

This study's methodological design, anchored in documentary and comparative analysis, ensures a rigorous and transparent exploration of policy and legislative frameworks. However, as with any qualitative policy analysis reliant on public and formal documentation, certain boundaries are recognized. The analysis is necessarily limited to evidence explicitly articulated in constitutional texts, legislative acts, political manifestos, and authoritative policy literature. As such, the research does not capture informal administrative practices, tacit political negotiations, or localized implementation nuances that may exist beyond the scope of official records.

Furthermore, the rapid evolution of Pakistan's governance landscape may result in emerging legislative or administrative developments not immediately reflected in the available literature. Nevertheless, the exclusive focus on authoritative, verifiable sources safeguards the reliability, replicability, and academic integrity of the study's findings. This approach offers a robust foundation for policy critique and future empirical inquiry, while ensuring that all conclusions are grounded in transparent and validated evidence. No software-assisted techniques, data coding, or primary data collection methods have been utilized; rather, the analysis is based exclusively on rigorous, manual review of relevant textual sources.

Policy Recommendations

The discussion has underscored the multidimensional nature of the implementation gap in Pakistan's local governance system, shaped by entrenched political resistance, institutional fragility, and fiscal centralization. These structural challenges, while deeply rooted, are not

insurmountable. Addressing them requires a coherent set of policy interventions that go beyond rhetorical commitments and ad hoc reforms. The following section sets forth targeted policy recommendations aimed at operationalizing constitutional mandates, enhancing institutional accountability, and ensuring the financial and political autonomy of local governments. These proposals are grounded in the findings of this study and informed by best practices in decentralized governance.

Constitutional Reforms

Article 140-A should be amended and mandatory periods should be included for local government elections, and for delay in compliance, specific penalties should be added. Article 140-A should be strengthened by clearly defining the minimum financial allocation for the local governments. A minimum time period should be set in Article 140-A. In that minimum time-period, local governments cannot be dissolved and if they are dissolved, strict penalties must be imposed. Statutory requirements should be created for holding local government elections within 90 days of the general election. Legislation should be brought in, making it mandatory for the ruling party to enforce their local government commitments within a given period. Moreover, constitutional safeguards should be added to ensure autonomy of local governments with defined powers. Amendment in Article 140-A should establish direct fiscal transfer mechanisms. Article 2-A should be amended and it should be made mandatory to include local government representation in all the democratic institutions. Article 2-A should be further amended to ensure that local government elections must be held within 90 days of the general elections. Constitutional protection should be provided to the local governments so that they can function democratically.

Political Reforms

Parliamentary Oversight Committee should be set up to monitor each government's manifesto implementation regarding local governments. Political parties must be mandated to submit their annual progress report on their local government commitments to the committee. Each party ruling in a province must be mandated to establish local government task force overseeing the province's effort for local bodies, and mechanisms should be created for opposition to challenge implementation delays in the local government framework.

Election Commission of Pakistan

Election Commission of Pakistan should be granted autonomous powers to announce and conduct local government elections without the interference of provincial governments. Within the Election Commission of Pakistan, a permanent local government election directorate should be set up with the sole responsibilities of local government elections and overseeing the progress. ECP should be empowered to take strict action against attempts to delay the local government elections. ECP should make sure that there are standardized electoral rules for local government elections across all the provinces. These rules should be made by ECP without interference from the provinces.

District Finance Commission

A Local Government Finance award within the NFC framework should be created, emphasizing the importance of local government maintaining financial autonomy. Provinces should be mandated to allocate a minimum percentage of NFC awards to the local governments. Transparent reporting systems should be introduced for NFC distribution to local governments. Monitoring mechanisms must be established for effective utilization of NFC funds at the local level. Such resource mechanisms should be established in which NFC funds are directly transferred from the federal government to the local governments.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this manuscript declare no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

All data used in this study are publicly available and can be accessed from the sources cited in the manuscript.

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