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**RESEARCH PAPER****Political Tribalism and Governance Model in Pakistan****Dr. Shakila Noor Sindhu**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research is going to explore the importance of micromanagement for building macro structures. It would focus on the centralization model of governance that was adopted in postcolonial period and how it hurt the dream of sustainable democracy and good governance in Pakistan. The theoretical framework of this paper is furnished on the work of George Polya and Robert D. Putnam. The research would highlight that local government is not a choice but a mandatory business for Pakistani federation and society. The destiny of more than 200 million people is intertwined with the success and failure of its system. The main research questions is that how an effective local government could mitigate the negative impacts of political tribalism in Pakistan. This is an analytical study based on secondary sources. The data was collected from books, journal articles, newspapers and social media websites, mainly You Tube.

**KEYWORDS** Democracy, Globalization, Governance, Human Capital, Local Government, Political Tribalism

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**Introduction**

Democracy is lauded for its emphasis on citizen rights, yet often overlooked is the imperative need to actively exercise these rights. It is both the duty of the government and the citizens to foster and utilize opportunities that enhance civic skills. This active civic engagement is pivotal in holding the government accountable, promoting efficiency, and fostering proactive behavior (Putnam, 2001).

Despite being the cornerstone of democracy, citizens often underestimate their powers and the corresponding obligations of the government. In truth, citizens are the ultimate authorities in a democracy – they are both the architects and enforcers of the law, the rulers and the governed. Democracy inherently vests power in the people, empowering them to effect change in government and demand accountability. However, many citizens feel powerless to alter the system or influence government priorities, highlighting a need for empowerment and confidence-building exercises.

Education plays a crucial role in nurturing civic literacy, yet Pakistan's literacy rates are subpar, and the educational system is ill-equipped to meet contemporary challenges. The limited civic education that citizens receive tends to be passive, imparted through newspapers, media, and books, providing theoretical knowledge without practical application. This approach is akin to equipping a heart doctor with theoretical surgical knowledge but lacking practical experience.

Practical, hands-on learning and continuous skill development are essential for citizens to effectively discharge their responsibilities. Just as lawyer, doctor, researcher refines their skills through practical experience and collaboration with experienced peers, citizens must actively engage in civic duties to build confidence and competence. The

stakes are high—a citizen's responsibilities impact the destiny of millions, necessitating robust civic literacy for effective governance.

Civic leadership exemplified by individuals like Aitizaz Hasan (Aitizaz Hasan: Tributes to Pakistan teenager killed when he stopped a bomber," 2014), Tahira Qazi (Ahmed, 2014), and institutions such as Sialkot International Airport (Aslam, 2024), Shaukat Khanum Hospital (Qamar, S. (2017, April 24), Edhi Foundation (Edhi Foundation, 2024), Saylani Trust (Saylani Welfare Trust, 2024), Fixit (Fixit, 2024, May 5) and *Akhuwat Foundation* (Mohsin, A. ul. 2024, March 12) underscores the transformative power of civic engagement. These examples demonstrate that confronting problems with unwavering determination and consistent effort can yield significant positive change in a society.

The debate can be concluded with a hypothesis that citizens have two choices when faced with challenges: Believing that change is impossible or embracing the conviction that consistent efforts can overcome obstacles. Civic literacy is the foundation of a functional democratic system, empowering individuals to make meaningful contributions and effect positive change in society.

One must apprehend the corollary that rights are accompanied by obligations and duties. Duty implies a need to do something, whereas responsibility means you should be doing it. In national and community interest for example, duty incorporates paying taxes for administrations, obeying laws to uphold law and order and maintain a healthy environment. It also involves defending the nation on numerous fronts, from borders to stabilizing economy, from protecting infrastructure to maintaining social capital. It also includes serving the state institutions in different capacities like serving in courts, hospitals and schools. Attending schools, learning skills, nurturing research culture, projecting the soft image of the country and fostering a sense of community among citizens are some other shades of duty.

Responsibility means being educated, informed and self-motivated. Awareness about what is happening in the world around, not infringing on others' rights or property, and respecting discourse and appreciating variety of perspectives are the desired responsibilities of citizens. Additionally, responsibility means participating in one's community, and voting with logic, building consensus for collective responsibility and taking up public officials accountable. Embracing democracy as a rational problem-solving process rather than a ritual of holding elections or casting votes.

Citizens may not always unite despite having common interests. There could be host of reasons including self-interested politicians, limited information and exposure of citizens, different beliefs in promoting political tribalism. However, this disunity could also be a response of their own lack of cohesion and mutual trust. But the question remains: if people put aside their divisions, would we even need governments?

All three tiers of governments, national, provincial and local governments are mandated to handle issues at their appropriate levels and guarantee consensus amongst varied stakeholders. National governments are mainly entrusted with the defense, currency, diplomacy, foreign policy and trade; while matters like licensing certain economic activities, delivering education and health services, transport, property taxes, toll taxes belong to regional/provincial governments. Local governments are responsible for the citizen's day-to-day affairs, for example, road safety, garbage disposal, community development initiatives and public conveniences such as parks and pools.

These tiers of government provide citizens with practical opportunities to engage, learn, and make informed decisions in real-life situations. Without these governance structures, citizens' true potential remains untapped, hindering their preparedness for future responsibilities and involvement in self-governance. This scenario can be likened to a democracy lacking vitality and soul—a state where citizens are disengaged and governance lacks purpose.

Democracy is more than just elections—it's about active participation and making choices through various avenues. Citizens can express themselves through writing, demonstrations, citizen assemblies, and seminars. They can demonstrate protest for those elected officials who neglect their duties, whether senators, national or provincial assembly members, who fail to show up for their responsibilities or visit their constituencies after being elected (Woodward, 2011). They can also protest against those whose assets mysteriously multiply while in public offices (Baker, 2005, & Botes, L. 2000). Citizens can demand the disqualification of public representatives who undermine national unity (SAMAA TV, 2021, March 13). These actions empower citizens and ensure accountability in democratic processes.

### **Literature Review**

Throughout history, nations have emerged from tribal societies. Powerful nations such as England, Spain, and France expanded their influence by colonizing weaker states and forming vast empires (Tharoor, 2016). They often employed divisive tactics to maintain control over these territories, pitting tribes against each other and exploiting internal divisions. However, those nations that embraced cooperation among tribes thrived, recognizing the value of building coalitions based on shared ideas rather than solely on familial or clan ties (TEDx Talks, 2015).

Governments and institutions that prioritized peaceful coexistence and cooperation, exemplified by entities like the European Union and multinational corporations, flourished. They fostered a culture of problem-solving and conflict management through dialogue and debate, rather than resorting to violence. In such societies, democracy naturally evolved as a process grounded in this spirit of cooperation (Botes, A. 2000). Conversely, societies where this culture of cooperation failed to take root experienced decline, with deteriorating quality of life and stunted development. Despite theoretical adherence to democratic principles, these societies often exhibited tendencies towards political tribalism.

Political tribalism in Pakistan has its deep roots in colonial legacy. According to Ayesha Jalal, (1995) Pakistan inherited its bureaucratic and military system from colonial India that had centralized governance model. This system was structured on hierarchy and top-down decision making. The tendencies continued in post-colonial period and the newborn country adopted the same administrative designs. As a result, the culture of authoritarianism prevailed and became the guiding principle.

Talbot (1998) and Ziring (2007) have highlighted that political instability has hindered governance reforms in Pakistan. The frequent military interventions, absence of national political parties and national leaderships never allowed structural and behavioral transformations that were necessary to disconnect with colonial legacy. Wilder (1999) argues that because of these circumstances political patronage and clientelism became the most practiced norms in Pakistani politics. Indeed, this affected the impartiality of desk government and an effective resource allocation and distribution process in the country.

There were multiple reasons for sticking with the power accumulative model in post-colonial period and the biggest was the quest for legitimacy. As the inherited leadership had lost its constituency support because of colossal migrations they remained contented with colonial arrangements of relying on civil and military bureaucracies. The narrative of national integration was consolidated while keeping the people and regional leaders disengaged.

Muhammad Saeed writes in his 'Education System of Pakistan and the UK: Comparisons in Context to Inter-provincial and Inter-countries Reflections (2007)' that despite the constitutional claims of federal state, politico-economic centralization was maintained. Federal government was responsible from issuing currency, establishing diplomatic relations, ensuring defense, to transportation, health, and education. The resource allocation for the provinces were on political affiliations and not on the requirements of respective administrative units. As a result, the developmental imbalances were sharpened, and provincial hostility thrived (Ahmed and Amjad, 1984). Local issues were either completely overlooked or dismissed because of low commitments (Zaidi, 2015). These economic disparities among provinces and regions were translating into grievances and political unrest (Titus, P., & Swidler, N. (2000). The voices for Provincial autonomy and local governments were taken as a direct threat to the cause of national integration. These circumstances had strong implications on social cohesion and community orientation of the state (Shah, 2014).

Military regimes governance model was also furnished on centralization with minor changes. Military regime of President Muhammad Ayub Khan, President Zia ul Haq and President General Pervaiz Musharraf adopted local government model to divert public attention from national issues. However, none of them was sincere enough to give this third tier of government a constitutional protection. Central government was more authoritarian and decision making was in the hands of few (Rizvi, 2000).

Political unrest and political tribalism were the natural produce of the policies of centralization. Dr. Muhammad Waseem (2010) reviews that though 18<sup>th</sup> amendment was introduced in the constitution of 1973 in 2010 to give provincial autonomy but overall situation had deteriorated enough by then. Moreover, the reluctance of central government to relinquish its control over provinces compromised the practical dimension of this amendment.

## **Material and Methods**

This research is a qualitative data analysis of political tribalism and governance challenges in Pakistan. It evaluates why the goals of sustainable democracy and good governance are yet to be achieved. Research has used multiple approaches like structural, behavioral and historical to make a comprehensive investigation of its hypothesis. The study derived its theoretical foundations from the work of George Polya's 'how to fix it' (Polya, 2014) and Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (1999). Mainly secondary data sources like books, journals, newspapers, online interviews are used to carry out this research.

## **Results and Discussion**

It is essential to understand what is behind political tribalism and extremism. It must be remembered that democracy is not a law of nature; it is an option, freely adopted by society and individual. It opens the door to possibility and reconciliation, defining the

destinies of societies and countries. Therefore, an ongoing civic education is a prerequisite for a genuine democracy. A civically empowered society will critically evaluate respective information and make rational choices on utilitarian principles. This is what Habermas (1962) calls deliberative democracy. It is a process of rational discourse and debate that offers legitimacy to political actions and political decision making. Habermas (1996) also integrates law, democracy and his concept of public sphere for a broader and practical framework for a state. Habermas' democracy is a communicative action, that devise consensused strategies to achieve desired outcomes in a given set of legal frameworks. This is something that makes Habermas' democracy an approach of inclusivity and equality.

Anthony Downs (1957) pointed out that votes are casted based on rational choice theory. Voters individual interests and especially monetary benefits or incentives guide them to make choices. Their choices could also be based on comparisons of the performances, policies and personal preferences of different political parties and political leaders (Zaidi, 1988). On the contrary Paul Lazarsfeld (1944) argued that vote choice are the outcome of peer pressures and group behaviors. People vote based on their ethnic, religious, regional, and other bonds. However, the process that involves in casting vote is much more complicated. Many factors guide this process and not all of them are furnished on rationality or peer pressures. Citizens may decide to vote based on emotions, economics (hope or fear), personality cults and racist or other forms of ethnic-linguistic-partisan identifications they have made. But there are also possibilities when voters can come to seemingly rational conclusions in irrational ways, going off heuristics or endorsements from peers like corporate decision making. These choices may be rational for an individual but may not align with national and societal interests.

Some time, despite learning about their leaders' involvement in corruption or their advocacy of absurd ideas, people continue to support them as they tend to view political matters through a specific lens. This is the lens of their rigid political socialization that does not allow them to revisit their perspectives. For example, when leaders repeatedly convey a message (could be misleading, factually incorrect or promote insecurities) it becomes familiar to voters and influences their decisions.

Political parties cultivate brand loyalties among their supporters, focusing on leaders' personal brands, party identities, and specific issues. This brand loyalty, coupled with fear-based messaging, contributes to the persistence of certain political affiliations despite revelations about leaders' misconduct or controversial statements.

Tribalism in politics divide people from each other much beyond the political arena. They associate themselves with certain groups and feel that their group identity will bolster their individual identity (Worchel & Austin, 1986). Something that shape their behaviors and attitudes from religion to politics, political party to political leaders and social choices. Robert D Putnam says that this behavior poses a significant challenge, underscoring the urgent need for broader civic engagement. This deficiency in civic participation is exacerbated by poor governance and civic illiteracy (Putnam, 2001). It's essential to recognize that Pakistanis are a nation marked by determination, having achieved remarkable feats—from the creation of Pakistan to the construction of Tarbela dam, the world's largest earth-filled dam ("Tarbela dam project, Haripur district, Pakistan," 2012), and from establishing the world's highest paved international road (Shea, 2023) to becoming the first nuclear Muslim state. However, despite these accomplishments, fostering civic involvement among citizens remains a critical area of deficiency.

Building a culture of trust, reciprocity, ownership, and community contribution is essential. As the saying goes, "A well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society (Putnam, 2001)." Danielle Allen (2009) explains that state needs to create congenial environments where civic friendship could be nurtured across partisan divides. This emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability, meritocracy, mutual responsibility, and civic obligation within society. These values could mitigate ethnocentrism, sectarianism, corruption, and political tribalism.

Addressing public alienation from politics and promoting quality participation in political processes are crucial for social solidarity and good governance (Putnam, 2001). This requires proactive measures to empower citizens, enhance their understanding of civic responsibilities, and encourage their active involvement in governance matters. By fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens, Pakistan can pave the way for a more inclusive and effective democratic system. This is like sharing the labor to enjoy free rides and promoting social cohesion. Robert D. Putnam's formula of 'serve, work, and attend' (Putnam, 2001,) could rightly be followed in the local government system.

In essence, political tribalism thrives when fueled by anger, misinformation, and a lack of civic awareness. It serves as a convenient tool for politicians to divert attention from complex problems and evade accountability. Whether at the national or international level, scapegoating and division serve as easy solutions to complex challenges, perpetuating a cycle of distrust and conflict.

A search for blame has become instrumental in breed animosity among citizens. Right-wing factions prey upon it. By exploiting political tribalism, they generate rage, perpetuate lies and promulgate conspiracy theories. This behavior proliferates biased echo chambers, where individuals interact with the beliefs, they were akin to. This is further compounded by the ability of social media firms to tailor content to users through algorithms that essentially reinforce extremist tendencies. This makes it far more difficult for people to learn how to compromise or learn effective conflict management skills.

The swapping of uninformed voters with misinformed ones is yet another impediment to democracy. There is always a better argument not to participate in political activities. But interestingly uninformed voters abstain from voting, while misinformed voters actively participate and perhaps disrupt the whole socio-political systems. A steady stream of misinformation spread by social media and the news industry itself has exacerbated distrust in free media, to the point that simply having an informed citizenry will not even lead to genuine political ideologies realizing a dominant position.

## **Conclusion**

Uninterrupted local government will nurture civic citizenship, vigilance and individual capacities. The citizens will learn political maturity and pragmatism. Their engagement in everyday issues will foster their critical thinking and cultivating problem-solving skills. The practical demonstration of civic citizenship will lay a foundation for a sound societal structure and this knowledge will be automatically transmitted to younger generations.

A robust local government will not only contribute to health, education, service delivery and infrastructure at the grassroot level but also directly linked to human capital

growth at the national level. The growth and development of each constituency / unit will improve the human index nationwide. Margaret Thatcher in her speech to Citibank Manila 1996 Jan 22 stated that failure of communism's great experiment has taught to the world that these are not the natural resources that could make a country rich. Rather these are government policies that encourage creativity among people. Today's decisive factor is knowledge, capacity of a state's citizens and their ability to organize themselves and perceive the needs of others to satisfy them (Speech to Citibank Manila, 1996).

In Pakistan, the development of local government has historically been stunted, serving the purpose of keeping citizens misinformed, perpetuating political tribalism, and favoring selected individuals. Despite attempts to establish local governance structures, questions linger about their effectiveness. Instances of corruption and inadequate training have hindered their performance (Botes, L. 2000). However, this raises broader questions about the health of democracy in Pakistan. How many times has democracy been derailed? Have we lost faith in it altogether? Many politicians have seen their assets multiply exponentially upon entering provincial and national politics, raising concerns about integrity and accountability. Furthermore, the competence of elected representatives in National and Provincial Assemblies is often in question. How many of them truly understand their roles before assuming office? Should we dismiss them outright? Therefore, local government can not be rejected based on its previous performance incompetencies.

As previously noted, democracy is a process of choice-making. Empowering people to make more decisions fosters learning and growth. With time, citizens will learn to make informed choices, thereby improving the quality of democracy. But this is only possible through local government. The story of Nestle coffee in Japan is a great case study to learn from failure and remain committed for the cause to ultimately succeed. In 1970s Nestle's biggest challenge was how to sell coffee in a tea loving country like Japan. Nestle conducted various studies to see the choice behavior of Japanese people. Eventually they reached the conclusion that desire that drove to human behavior are unconscious and not rational. They would not be able to attract the young generation who have seen their elder's taking tea and not coffee. Therefore, Nestle shifted its focus from youth to children. Nestle started selling candies and chocolates that had coffee flavors. Eventually in next 10 to 15 years Nestle was able to capture coffee market in Japan and shifting food preferences in the country.

The process of consensus building, and collective actions might look like a tedious task at this stage, but consistent actions and right direction needs to be determined for a success story. If taste buds and food preferences could be changed, why not political behavior? The required thing is to act like a corporate owner who wants to take up the market to change the societal trends. Consistency, commitment and continuation to the cause are the key to success. In the face of globalization challenges, vibrant localization emerges as the most effective response. Embracing failures, overcoming obstacles, and remaining committed to continuity are essential for success, driven by our unwavering dedication to securing a better future for generations to come. George Poly's model could help Pakistan to solve its issues if applied, but it requires a strong political will and commitment.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the given debate that how toxic is political tribalism and political unrest for nation and state building the researcher has proposed the following recommendations.

Practical civic education needs to be promoted and the only way is to exercise local government. Upper tiers of governments should not perceive this lowest tier as a competitor but a supportive incubator that could produce civic citizenship among the masses. Local government can ensure a successful transformation from a parochial culture to a participatory environment where individuals could culminate trust and reciprocity. Social capital could offer a congenial environment of self-motivation and positively contribute to the growth of human capital. Democracy is a people run behavioral system that depends on people for its survival, growth and sustainability. To make it functional it is important to build consensus, learn conflict management and have a clear direction. According to Anil Sarwup, 'if you want to take an initiative in democracy, it should be politically acceptable, socially desirable, technologically feasible, financially viable, administratively doable, judicially tenable, emotionally relatable and environmentally sustainable ("IAS Officer Vs Politicians, Coal Scam, Corruption, India & PM Modi - Anil Swarup | FO184 Raj Shamani," 2024)). This connectivity and ownership cannot be acquired without local government structure and function and only this could enable a country to face the complex politico-economic challenges of the state.

The presence of local government structures builds citizens' capacity by engaging them in grassroot level issues. Civic mobilization along with opportunities to identify problems, devising strategies to address the problem, consensus building, exploring, and allocating resourcing, mentoring work progress, and receiving feedback offer ample opportunities of capacity building, intensive trainings, and public accountability. Participating in real problem solving makes the community a true stakeholder.

Service Delivery is another important area where local government can transform the whole outlook of a society. It is the provision of public services by government agencies ensuring accessibility, quality, efficiency, and accountability. The services range from healthcare to education, transportation to infrastructure, public safety to environment protection and cultural to recreational facilities. Local governments can monitor health care efficiency through various mechanisms. For instance, allocating resources to health care facilities based on population needs and service demand. It can use different metrics to measure health care performance. This may include patient weight time, appointment scheduling efficiency, staff productivity, patient outcomes. This could be helpful in identifying areas of success, and points where improvement is required. Local governments can collaborate with healthcare stakeholders to improve efficacy of system. The stakeholders could include healthcare providers, professional associations, different local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector partners.

Public safety is one of the domains where local government can perform a crucial role. At grassroot level local governments can undertake various initiatives to prevent crimes, respond to emergencies, and assist community well-being. For example, local government can oversee law enforcing agencies, including police, and municipal security. This could help in preventing crimes. The municipal offices can track migrations, rental properties, and local business within the area. Tracking migrations (people are leaving and coming to a municipality) could help in maintaining a record of demographic profiles and aids small businesses/cottage industries. For instance, kite flying was an age-old tradition in Lahore and Basant was an annual festival of kite flyers in the city. It used to be a significant economic activity and cultural celebration. However, when this festival turned fatal because of the use of lethal kite strings coated with glass and chemicals, resulting in deaths, it was banned in the name of public safety. Had local governments been there and



proactive, they could have monitored the production and distribution of these deadly stings. Crime could be prevented before bearing the cost of valuable lives and losing a beautiful tradition.

Local government could have conducted follow ups to identify small businesses that are emitting health hazard gases in the neighborhood. They could guide them and ensure that specific measures are adopted to ensure health and safety standards. By doing so the third tier of governments could make municipalities clean and green. Waste management is one important area that needs to be addressed. Efficient waste management includes waste collection, waste sorting, waste recycling, composting, and disposing off garbage in environmentally sustainable manner besides generating revenue. Moreover, converting organic waste into renewable energy would not only make the environment clean but also generate job opportunities.

Local government could initiate several projects to address common social issues with the partnership of citizens. For instance, beggary has made a significant increase in Pakistan in past couple of decades. According to an estimate 25 million out of 230 million are professional beggars (*Rising Begging*, 2022). Many of them are involved in organized crimes like drugs, kidnapping children etc. Local governments could be instrumental in mitigating this challenge. The lowest government tier could initiate public awareness drives in streets, wards, on signals, schools to socially discourage the trend of giving money to professional beggars. Instead of this it could introduce some collective fund to support the poor to make their living sustainable. It could establish food, clothes, books, and household item banks to reach out to those in need.

Organized professional networks of beggars can be identified with the support of citizens and state institutions and modern technology including installation of CCTV cameras. These beggars could be sent to rehabs and engage in different activities with the collaboration of different NGOs and community organizations. Social discouragement, legal binding and with some livelihood skills they could be useful citizens of the community and state.

Promoting cross party dialogues and cooperation is essential to encourage collective approach. Political Parties should sincerely make committees that work on development policies through problem solving measures. Instead of politicizing issues, sharing the technicalities, rationales and neutral logics of accepting or rejecting policy alternates. The more transparency with accountability will be there the better the results will be. These committees should have regular meetings for their agendas and ensure maintaining trust among the members. Consensus among committee members of different political parties will maintain a healthy relationship among the political parties and eventually the people.

A balanced media coverage will guarantee inclusivity and equality among the parties, groups and citizens. This is an effective method to give a positive message to the citizens.

By adopting these measures, government could achieve the target of human capital. Social capital is a group of educated, skilled and self-motivated people who are professional, ethical and invest in community trust as Robert D. Putnam explains in his *Bowling Alone* and as George Polya has suggested to address the state and societal challenges.

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