

Building a Compelling Narrative for Local Governments in Pakistan and Why it Matters?

The 18th Amendment mandated the establishment of local governments in Pakistan. Though vital for a functioning democracy, local governments' capacity has been a contentious topic in the country. Strengthening the Local Government (LG) system is especially key in nurturing and strengthening a transparent and accountable democracy. Such a system is highly relevant as it supports administrative reform, and the efficiency with which local communities achieve results. Moreover, local governments represent citizens and engage with them in determining specific local public needs and involve them in decision-making at the grassroots level.

Since independence, there have been different waves of decentralisation in Pakistan, each trying to give more autonomy to local governments. However, even a decade after the Devolution Plan was introduced in 2000, and despite having four elections at the LG level, a lot remains to be done. Bringing the issues of local governments at the centre of the democratisation debate, this panel will discuss the challenges and way forward for local governance in Pakistan. Experienced local government officials, experts as well as academia will address the following questions:

- What are the main challenges facing local governments in Pakistan right now? How can devolution strengthen local communities' control over public services such as education and health?
- What strategies should be adopted to tackle these challenges and is there a role for international stakeholders, civil society, and others?
- How can political parties ensure political accountability and responsiveness to the public service needs of their constituents and what role can elections play in incentivising better service delivery?
- What are the distinct roles and responsibilities of elected officials vs. bureaucrats; and what should good local government leadership in the 21st Century look like?
- How can civil society help in supporting local communities, specifically poor, marginalised, and vulnerable groups to participate effectively in local governments as well as making local government practices more transparent and citizen centred? What tools, skills and capacities are required to make this happen and are there lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic?

Panel Organisers

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