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ANALYZING THE RESPONSIVENESS OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNDER THE 2019 AMENDMENT ACT

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ABSTRACT

Local government democracy is the foundation that drives decentralized systems toward better development and operational excellence. Through the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government (Amendment) Act 2019, provinces' local government structure received major changes aimed at increasing both effectiveness and democratic engagement among citizens and authorities. A research study evaluates the local government responsiveness changes through Act examination and elected councilor perception analysis. The analysis of local governance changes investigates how amendments affect citizen involvement, service provision, and governance system strength or erode autonomy and representation. The study includes 42 participants, such as Mayors, union council officials, women and youth representatives, peasants and workers representatives, and non-Muslim groups. Survey participants in seven Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts received standardized interview questions through assessment sessions. Research recommendations, along with prospective research implications, were included in the investigation.

Keywords: *Local Government, Decentralization, Devolution; Local Government 2019 (Amendment) Act; Mayors; UC Nazims; Women Representatives; Youth; Peasants; Non-Muslim.*

Introduction

Modern democracy primarily depends on democratic local government institutions. Local government transformation into an efficient democratic institution in developing nations faces obstacles caused by political and economic limitations. A decentralization governance study outlines the advantages together with obstacles that occur during local government transformations (Febriandiela, Frinaldi, & Magriasti, 2024). The strategic approach known as decentralization has gained worldwide recognition in governance reforms especially in Latin America and Africa as well as Asia because it promises better service delivery and governance and equal distribution of resources (Bhatti, & McDonald, 2020). Decentralization improves governance through better efficiency as well as enhanced accountability and increased participation according to MARK (2024) and Molina-Garzón, Grillos, Zarychta, and Andersson (2022) and Tselios (2023). Multiple research results show ambiguous findings about decentralization which demonstrates its lack of effectiveness as a standalone process (Faguet, & Shami, 2022; Molina-Garzón, Grillos, Zarychta, & Andersson, 2022; Alam, & Alam, 2022).

Local government reforms represent a recurring policy issue which Pakistan's government frequently modifies. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government (Amendment) Act 2019 established significant updates to governance systems after removing district-level elected governments and adjusting administrative zones while creating novel dispute settlement procedures. The research evaluated local government performance after the modifications

were made to the Act.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government (Amendment) Act 2019

KPLG (Amendment) Act 2019 received legislative approval from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly on April 29 and started its implementation on May 29 2019. The major alterations introduced include:

- The KPLG (Amendment) Act 2019 abolished the district government system operated by directly elected officials.
- The legislation reduces the number of agencies along with departments that operate under local administration.
- Tribal districts with both existing populations and merged territories now have alternative ways to solve disputes through the law (Khan, Khalil, & Veerio, 2023; Khan, 2022).
- The amendment received mixed reactions. Supporters defend the model because it enhances governmental effectiveness yet critics assert that it undermines local self-governance together with public engagement levels (Altaf, & Shabir, 2023; Rafiq, 2022).

Main Features of the Act

The KPLG (Amendment) Act 2019 established important amendments to the system while converting districts into Union Councils along with Tehsils and District Councils.

1. A three-tier system with Union, Tehsil, and District Councils (Rahman, Khan, & Javed, 2024).
2. Direct election of local representatives (Khaliq, 2024).
3. Reserved seats for women (33%), minorities (5%), and workers (5%) (Bashir, Khan, & Ashraf, 2024).
4. Regular delimitation of electoral constituencies (Ghani, & Amin, 2024).
5. Empowerment of village and neighborhood councils (Rasool, & Ali, 2022).
6. Financial autonomy and devolution of powers (Kausar, Abbas, & Azam, 2022).
7. Formation of a Local Government Commission and District Finance Commission (Cheema, Ahmad, & Mehmood, 2024).
8. Enhanced accountability and transparency (Rahman, Khan, & Javed, 2024).
9. Provision of essential services (education, health, sanitation) (Baber, 2023).
10. Participation of real youth groups combined with marginal populations represents the program focus (Khaliq, 2024).
11. Grievance redressal mechanisms (Rahman, Khan, & Javed, 2024).
12. Institutionalization of participatory planning (Khaliq, 2024).
13. Regular audits of local government bodies (Baber, 2023).
14. Introduction of the ward system for elections (Rasool, & Ali, 2022).

Responsiveness of the Act

Decisions move downward to local governance institutions to create superior responsiveness within the country. Key provisions

include:

- The Act specifies through Articles 5 & 6 that three government tiers should exist to make governance more responsive.
- According to Article 8 mohalla committees should be created to increase citizen involvement.
- Article 14: Ensures fair and democratic local elections.
- Article 17: Mandates oversight by the Local Government Commission.
- Article 22 & 23: Grants financial autonomy to local governments.

The provisions work to establish both openness and responsibility within local administration. These provisions need proper implementation and political support to achieve their intended effectiveness.

Responsiveness Role of the Act: Key Articles

According to the Act it outlines essential principles of responsiveness within the following articles:

- Article 4: Establishes democratic, participatory governance objectives.
- The definition of local government duties in community service appears in Articles 10 and 12.
- Article 38: Addresses local government roles in disaster management.
- The Act requires citizen participation through surveys and consultations as stipulated in Article 45.
- Article 64 & 67: Establish grievance redressal and performance evaluation mechanisms.

Statement of the Problem

The new KPLG (Amendment) Act 2019 requires thorough analysis of how local government reacts to its provisions. This research analyzed how elected councilors viewed the amendments that affected governance efficiency and citizen participation and service delivery aspects. The research attempted to uncover whether these legislative changes have improved or reduced local authority reaction capabilities. Local government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa underwent fundamental changes through the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government (Amendment) Act 2019. The initiative works towards enhancing efficiency and accountability but its eventual effects on local government responsiveness continue to remain unknown. The research based its findings on the viewpoints of elected councilors to evaluate the Local Government (Amendment) Act 2019's ability in advancing local democracy and serving communities better.

Existing Literature

Local governments need to exhibit promptness in order to establish effective governance and efficient public service delivery systems. Since its inception local governance in Pakistan has experienced numerous reshaping events that made changes to administrative performance and citizen involvement (Khawaja, & Khalid, 2022).

Local governance reform occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) through the 2019 Amendment Act which reshaped administrative operations and strengthened public service delivering systems (Baber, 2023). The research review analyzes existing studies about local governance responsiveness together with Pakistan's recent legislative changes and the effects of the 2019 Amendment Act.

Local Governance and Responsiveness

Local governments maintain their position as the main point of contact between citizens and the state because their responsiveness drives both service effectiveness and democratic relationship between government and residents (Manaf, Mohamed, & Harvey, 2023). Local governance responsiveness shows itself by means of transparency alongside public participation and accountability along with service efficiency (Firman, Sumatono, Muluk, Setyowati, & Rahmawati, 2024). Decentralization brings administrative decisions nearer to residents which produces tailored policy solutions according to Virvidaki et al. (2024). Local governments face barriers including bureaucracy issues and political disruptions along with insufficient funding that reduce their capability to function effectively (Barasa, & Omariba, 2024).

Legislative Reforms and Local Government in Pakistan

Through different political administrations Pakistan has experienced multiple legislative changes that developed its local governance system (Arif, & Mahsud, 2024). Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001 began the devolution procedure to empower local governments yet policy changes since then created shifting levels of authority and operational success (Paul, 2024). KP's local bodies regained elected status through the 2013 Local Government Act but they remained unresponsive due to administrative and financial restrictions (Siddiqi, 2024).

The 2019 Amendment Act and Its Implications

Through the 2019 Amendment Act in KP the legislature worked to boost governance performance through changes in local government organization alongside modifications of democratic authority (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2019). The amendment incorporated three main elements that abolished district councils while establishing new local governance systems at the tehsil level as well as promoting digital service delivery systems (Tufail, & Taieb, 2023). The administration believes these reforms elevated governance efficiency yet some experts believe the reforms restricted local autonomy and reduced citizen participation (Jaffrelot et al., 2024) as per Adil (2023).

Research about KP's local governance reforms indicates conflicting results were observed. Some areas benefit from administration streamline processes that boost delivery services but district council abolishment has challenged governmental accountability systems according to Schoeman and Chakwizira (2023). The governmental organizational changes have generated uncertainties regarding inter-governmental relations which

consequently impede local bodies' ability to react (Adil, 2023). Current research shows both positive and negative effects of the 2019 Amendment legislation towards enhancing local government responsiveness through its structural reforms. Studies present conflicting results about service delivery outcomes because they demonstrate both positive results and decreased autonomy and difficulties in citizen involvement. Research based on empirical data is needed to properly understand how the reform will affect public grievances and participatory governance over the long term.

Theoretical Framework

The responsiveness evaluation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) local government system after the 2019 Amendment Act relies on governance theories coupled with decentralization theory and public accountability frameworks. The mentioned theories create understanding about how efficient local institutions are managed while ensuring both accountability and public participation.

Decentralization Theory

Service delivery along with accountability and citizen participation gets strengthened through decentralization theory which transfers government powers from central to local levels (Febriandiela, Frinaldi, & Magriasti, 2024). The 2019 Amendment Act of KP operates as a measure to shift power downwards through local governments for enhanced grassroots governance. A properly executed decentralization strategy enhances government responsiveness because it brings important decisions closer to the people according to Ali (2022). The research investigates if the amendment succeeded in distributing authority while enhancing governance responsiveness.

Governance Theory

Governance theory focuses on community networks and government-to-government relations together with public involvement in decision making according to Rhodes (1996). The theory establishes that effective governance results from active collaboration between institutions of government and civil society organizations and participants of local communities. An evaluation of the KP 2019 Amendment Act's effectiveness under this theory requires examination of its ability to improve institutional response together with participatory governance practices.

Public Accountability Framework

According to Bovens (2007) public accountability describes the systems which require officials of government to account for their actions. The evaluation process depends on this framework to assess how responsive the local governments became after the 2019 amendment. The act improves transparency through its provisions which also include mechanisms for citizen feedback and performance assessments to ensure accountability.

Methods and Materials

The interpretivist paradigm serves as the foundation of this study because it studies social realities by examining personal subjective

experiences (Mulisa, 2022). This research uses interpretivism because it analyzes the local government response to the 2019 Amendment Act in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by evaluating stakeholder perspectives according to Haider (2022). The research design used qualitative methods to uncover the detailed perceptions and adjustments made by local government representatives regarding policy changes (Hendren, Newcomer, Pandey, Smith, & Sumner, 2023). Through qualitative research investigators receive the ability to study detailed views and understand governance entities that operate in complex networked systems (Lim, 2024).

The research used an in-depth interview methodology to gather intensive data from public-level representatives in the study (Rafique, Habib, & Rosilawati, 2023). Open-ended discussions can be managed through this design because it allows researchers to uncover the basic attitudes as well as operational challenges and dynamics of governance structures. The researcher applied an inductive approach which allowed results to emerge directly from the studied data instead of following pre-established hypotheses (Calvo, & de la Cova, 2023). The research method supports qualitative approaches whereby the investigator builds thematic structures by using participants' direct experiences and viewpoints. Necessary information was gathered by performing in-depth conversations with regional government personnel located across six Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts. The research used purposive selection to achieve proper diversity in participants coming from different governance strata and various geographical territories (Thelma, 2024). The interviews followed a semi-structured design that offered researchers both flexibility and targeted exploration of main research themes. The analytical method used thematic analysis to study interview responses following the Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step approach. The researchers selected this analysis method because it helps identify important patterns and meanings from data collections. The present section shows results derived from analysis which provides key data themes. The researchers received ethical approval before beginning data collection through which all participants received secure confidentiality and full disclosure along with anonymous protection. Prior to beginning the study participants received information about its objectives while also being told they could leave the study at any time (Nii Laryeafio, & Ogbewe, 2023). Each interview process was executed professionally with respect toward participants under strict ethical research conditions.

Table 1: Coding of the Interviewees

Sample Divisions and Sample of Respondents
Regions

• Bannu	<i>A-1: Tehsil Nazimeen (Tehsil Mayors):</i>
• Dera Ismail Khan	<i>A-2: Union Nazimeen</i>
• Hazara	<i>(Chairman/Convenor):</i>

• Kohat	<i>A-3: Women Councilor:</i>
• Mardan	<i>A-4: Youth Councilor:</i>
• Peshawar	<i>A-5: Peasant/Worker Councilor:</i>
• Erstwhile FATA	<i>A-6: Minority Councilor:</i>

Source: Table generated by the researcher.

Major Findings

These themes are from Thematic Analysis.

Question	Based on your observations what level of citizen need response has the local government provided after the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) Act 2019 went into effect?
Theme	Responsiveness was increased with the KP Local Government Act.

local government representatives from six districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in in-depth interviews for analyzing the data through thematic assessment techniques. The study organized participant data into multiple defined patterns that derived from the collected information. Responsiveness experienced growth because of the KP Local Government Act. What has been your experience regarding the local government responsiveness in meeting citizen needs under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) Act 2019? The responses from different divisions reflect diverging results about local governance performance under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) Act 2019.

Increased Responsiveness and Decentralization

A significant number of participants agreed that the 2019 amendment act created decentralized control systems which boosted government responsiveness towards citizens. Tehsil Nazimeen and Union Nazimeen located in Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and Hazara divisions expressed through their interviews that the act provided them better capabilities to resolve local matters. The respondents noted that decentralized decision-management enabled their team to properly distribute resources which in turn helped fix minor civic matters like sanitation and infrastructure and streetlight maintenance. Multiple respondents identified bureaucratic challenges together with unclear role boundaries between Union Councils and Tehsil Local Governments as factors slowing down the delivery of services.

Sector-Specific Improvements

- After the 2019 Act implementation took effect the women, youth and peasant/worker and minority councilors focused on developing improvements for their specific sectors.
- The implementation of the 2019 Act led Women Councilors to observe a rise in dedicated attention for women-specific matters such as healthcare strategies and education programs together with employable opportunities. These representatives stressed they

need better numbers in decision-making institutions to effectively defend women's requirements.

- The Act established youth involvement as vital yet its lack of well-defined policies and funding methods constrained Youth Councilors from tackling work and skill development matters throughout all divisional areas.
- The Peasant/Worker Councilors noticed that land rights discussions became more productive and agricultural markets became more accessible. Working condition improvements and wage increases required specific actions according to the peasant/worker councilors.
- The minority councilors expressed approval for higher representation but criticized the ongoing discrimination and insufficient initiatives to serve their community needs including access to faith sites and employment possibilities.

Challenges in Implementation

Various obstacles continue to block the complete potential achievement of the Act's framework.

- Most Tehsil Mayors highlighted financial restrictions as their main obstacle when it comes to executing extensive development programs.
- Many report that bureaucratic delays emerge from administrative inefficiencies combined with unclear hierarchies which create delays when it comes to project approvals and service delivery.
- The local government faces difficulties because citizens lack knowledge about its new mechanisms and structures which decreases public involvement in government programs.

District-Wise Variation in Responsiveness

Diverse levels of response variations emerged between different divisions of the province.

- Provincial Divisions Mardan and Peshawar achieved the highest improvements in both infrastructure development and service delivery through citizen engagement programs in local governance.
- While the administrative restructuring and financial constraints became a challenge for Hazara and Kohat Divisions they managed to achieve moderate improvements.
- The implementation of the Act in both Dera Ismail Khan and Erstwhile FATA divisions was hindered by complicated bureaucratic systems and limited financial resources and weak technical support for elected representatives.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) 2019 demonstrates positive trends according to analytic themes in data that evaluate local government responsiveness throughout the decentralized governance system for localized needs. The consolidation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (Amendment) 2019 depends on overcoming three major obstacles that involve funding resources as well as delays from bureaucracy

and gaps within individual service delivery sectors. Local government efficiency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires future policies to develop skills for local representatives and simplify administrative processes while broadening public awareness programs.

Discussion

Results from this research show that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Local Government authorities display enhanced responsiveness since the enactment of Local Government Act (Amendment) 2019. A general positive effect exists according to local government representatives spanning different divisions although they recognize that certain problems require more concentrated efforts.

Enhanced Responsiveness and Decentralization

Local officials including Tehsil Nazimeen and Union Nazimeen report that the Act created decentralized government which makes local public needs more manageable for tehsils and union councils. Representatives from Bannu Kohat Hazara divisions reported that the framework revision brings better localized governance which enables the local community to solve problems concerning drainage and infrastructure and sanitation. Money constraints constitute a substantial barrier to quick responsiveness because of the Tehsil Mayors in Dera Ismail Khan and Mardan pointing to restricted funds as well as bureaucratic administrative obstacles. The research data supports what scholars suggest regarding the need for financial independence for decentralized governance to succeed (Febriandiela, Frinaldi, & Magriasti, 2024; Li, & Chen, 2024).

Role Clarification and Institutional Gaps

Service delivery experienced delays because Tehsil Local Governments and Union Councils have not clearly defined their respective responsibilities. Numerous divisions from Bannu to Kohat and Erstwhile FATA conveyed this observation to Union Nazimeen about the necessity for better defined responsibilities that would help reduce bureaucratic challenges. Various research has confirmed that local government performance depends directly on well-defined governing systems (Hue, & Tung-Wen Sun, 2022; Zada, Khan, Saeed, Zada, & Jun, 2023).

Inclusivity and Representation Challenges

The extent of improved representation and responsiveness varies between Women and the youth population and peasants/workers along with minority groups. Female councilors in Dera Ismail Khan, Hazara and Kohat divisions noticed better attention to women empowerment along with healthcare provisions and educational advancement. According to these women councilors it remains important to promote active involvement within decision-making structures to convert policies into measured results. Upadhyaya, Kolås, & Connolly, (2024) support these findings by explaining that women's involvement in local governance counts as symbolic form unless it includes practical decision-making roles.

Studies have revealed variable degrees of youth responsiveness in their behavior. The people from Hazara and Erstwhile FATA divisions who served as youth councilors expressed concerns about insufficient resources and programs to deal with critical issues of employment and skill training. Several studies confirm youth involvement creates essential conditions for achieving sustainable governance outcomes (Ramsdal, & Wynn, 2022).

Bannu, Hazara and Peshawar division representatives pointed out that although the Act aims for inclusivity its execution shows deficiencies in offering solutions for minority and peasant/workforce needs. Recent studies reinforce the importance of guarding vulnerable populations under decentralized governance systems because reinforced protections against land rights violations and labor access and public service benefits remain urgent societal issues (Tumanut, (2023).

Challenges in Bureaucratic and Fiscal Autonomy

The Act faces obstacles because of administrative paperwork and strict budget constraints according to all divisions that participated in the study. Tehsil administrations have earned additional governance power but provincial-level departments maintain complete oversight of devolved departments that hinders complete implementation of Act goals. The three divisions including Mardan and Peshawar along with Hazara face slow responsiveness because they struggle to obtain necessary provincial-level approvals for major infrastructure development. Researchers confirmed the earlier studies which demonstrated that restricted devolution powers with insufficient monetary independence degrades local government performance (McIntyre, Mitchell, & Roy, 2023).

Conclusion

Previously, the KP Local Government Act (Amendment) 2019 had made responsiveness in particular at tehsil and union council level higher. As much as improvements are shown, gaps of the institution, inadequate availability resources, and undefined role split problem persists. For ensuring efficiency and citizen centricity of local governance, it is important to provide increased financial autonomy, role clarity and inclusive policymaking for local government. What should be done is to use the progress made in improving local government responsiveness to address these structural challenges facing future reforms.

Data Availability Statement

Request data supporting this study's findings from the corresponding author. Publishing data could compromise research participant privacy/consent.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest reported.

Ethics Standards

Human participants are safe in this study.

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