

Colonial Administrative Continuity and Intellectual Colonialism: Bureaucratic Power and Democratic Fragility in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study looks at the persistence of colonial administrative and intellectual legacies in the creation of the democratic structure in Pakistan, while focusing on the role of bureaucratic elites. Pakistan has become a nation state in 1947 but there were various colonial institutions, knowledge systems and governance systems that continued to impact the architecture of the state and political processes. The study examines the impact of the bureaucratic dominance not only on administration, but also on policymaking, institutional accountability, and the authority of elected officials. The study employs the theories of Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory in the analysis of the colonial continuity and its relationship with democratic development and elite power in Pakistan. The method used in the study is qualitative with an approach of descriptive, analytical and historical research which is analyzed through secondary sources of academic literature, historical documents, constitutional documents and policy documents. It has been found that the inherited centralized administrative system furthered the power of the bureaucracy and helped create a balance between elected institutions and unelected actors in the state. Moreover, intellectual colonialism helped to perpetuate the influence of administration, through the spread of colonial knowledge and practices. The study finds that problems of democracy in Pakistan are not only associated with the political instability, but also with historical institutional structures and elite domination. To build democracy, one needs to change the colonial inherited institutional practices and knowledge systems.

Keywords: *Bureaucratic Elite, Colonial Legacy, Intellectual Colonialism, Democratic Structure, Pakistan, Postcolonial Theory, Elite Theory, Governance, Political Institutions, Bureaucratic Dominance.*

1. Introduction

British rule ended in 1947, and Pakistan became an independent nation; however, the shift from colonial rule to democratic rule was incomplete. In general, the structure of the civil service remained largely unchanged from colonial times, and continued to be characterised by strong central control and an emphasis on the maintenance of law and order, rather than on the provision of services (Yousaf, 2018). The colonial administrative structure further played a role in the political developments of Pakistan and maintained a centralised system of rule and bureaucratic domination. Their existence shows that geographical independence was not synonymous with institutional and intellectual independence, since colonial structures continued to be entrenched in the state's institutional set-up and governance practices (Talbot, 2009).

The British approach to security concerns at the westernmost borders of its Asian empire was also reflected by the way colonial authorities devised the establishment of the powerful Indian Civil Service (ICS). However, most of these aspects survived after independence, given the absence of strong political institutions, constitutional instability, and the problems confronted by a newly independent state of Pakistan (Saeed, 2013). This led to the development of bureaucracy into one of the most structured and powerful institutions in the political system of Pakistan. Repeated military takeovers have ensured that democratic systems of representation, even when they are in place, continue to be manipulated by the army and the civil bureaucracy. (Shafqat, 1999)

The impact of the bureaucratic elites in Pakistan can be analysed by taking help from the perspective of the theory of elites, which explains the control of political institutions and resources by the organized minority. Mosca stated that a society is ruled by organized elites with more institutional power and capacity (Rahman, 1998). Likewise, Mills pointed out that power may be concentrated in the hands of a small number who have control of the key political, economic, and administrative institutions. In the Pakistani context, colonial rule was transferred to the bureaucratic elite, and they still influence the governance processes, which reduces the autonomy of representative institutions and impacts the consolidation of democracy (Sheikh & Rizwan, 2020).

Along with administrative continuity, intellectual and knowledge systems too have been influenced by the colonial period. Intellectual colonialism is the reproduction of colonialism in the form of ideas, education systems, institutional practices, and administrative knowledge after the formal end of colonialism. Said discussed the possibility of colonialism continuing by controlling knowledge and the intellectual structure (Raza & Khan, 2018). Likewise, Fanon highlighted the challenges faced by postcolonial societies in breaking free from the inherited colonial structures and thinking. In Pakistan, reliance on the inherited administrative structures and external governance systems reinforced the bureaucratic authority and helped in the perpetuation of colonial institutional logic (Rizvi, 1999).

The extent of bureaucratic dominance has consequences for the democratic governance of the state, as high levels of institutional power can diminish accountability and diminish the representative nature of decision-making. The failure to consider administrative knowledge, resources, and policy implementation as part of a bureaucratic system can result in the influence of unelected actors on political outcomes (Wilder, 2009). The connection between military institutions and bureaucracy with political unrest has further solidified the centralized governance systems in Pakistan. This means that democratic progress has been limited, as elected institutions remain very reliant on bureaucratic experience and on-the-ground administrative approaches (Naseer, 2017).

This study focuses on colonial administrative legacy, intellectual colonialism, bureaucratic elites, and democratic structures in Pakistan. It contends that the notion of independence from colonialism did not eradicate all colonial institutional influences because the legacy of colonialism also continued to affect political authority and governance processes (Nicholson-Crotty & Webeck, 2018). The present study is conducted with the help of two theories, Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory, to analyse the status of the bureaucratic elites in maintaining influence in the state and its impact on democratic development in Pakistan. The study emphasizes the importance of analysing the political events in Pakistan, but also the institutional and intellectual inheritances from the colonial era, in order to grasp the challenges of democracy in Pakistan (Mushtaq, 2021).

2. Literature Review

The literature of the struggle for independence from colonial rule has also pointed to the continuity of colonial administration after independence in Pakistan. Even though Pakistan became independent in 1947, there are still many aspects of governance in Pakistan that were introduced through British colonialism that continue to influence the state's governance; it is argued (Thiong'o, 1986). The structure of the civil service remained largely unchanged from colonial times, and continued to be characterised by strong central control and an emphasis on the maintenance of law and order, rather than on the provision of services. In general, the structure of the civil service remained largely unchanged from colonial times, and continued to be characterised by strong central control. Colonial institutions have persisted, implying that political independence does not necessarily dismantle colonial power structures (Moosavi, 2020).

Much literature is devoted to the subject of bureaucracy as a political entity and not just an administrative organization. A bureaucratic system can enhance power relations by controlling the knowledge of insiders, administrative factors, and policy-making cycles, as Miliband has maintained (Pardesi & Shahriar, 2020). Mills, likewise, states that in the contemporary world power is frequently concentrated in the hands of the elites who govern the great institutions. Repeated military takeovers have ensured that democratic systems of representation, even when they are in place, continue to be manipulated by the army and the civil bureaucracy (Salman & Bukhari, 2022).

Elite theory is an important model for analysis of the impact of bureaucratic groups. Mosca asserts that societies are run by organized minority groups, which have more institutional power and political influence. Elite groups are organized, knowledgeable, and have control over important resources that enable them to maintain power (Shah, 2013). In the Pakistani context, Bureaucracy became a strong, powerful force because of its colonial past and the institutional power it has maintained. Elites can also insulate themselves from democratic accountability by controlling institutions and decision-making, which explains why, according to Acemoglu and Robinson, "Democracy has been stunted in all its forms in the United States. According to Acemoglu and Robinson, "Democracy has been stunted in all its forms in the United States (Noor et al., 2024).

Some works of literature focus on the legacy of colonialism in knowledge systems, institutional cultures, and administrative thinking. Said suggests colonial domination can be maintained through intellectual structures that establish legitimate knowledge and authority (Siddiq, 2007). Similarly, Fanon points out the challenges that are common to postcolonial societies confronting the legacy of colonialism in its structures and thinking. Administrative education, governance mechanisms, and reliance on customary practices in Pakistan have perpetuated intellectual colonialism and increased the power of the bureaucracy and technocratic governance (Skoog & Svensson, 2022).

Research also indicates a connection between the concentration of power within the bureaucracy and the lack of democracy in Pakistan. Democratic institutions need to be held accountable and representative, and too much influence of unelected institutions can restrict political autonomy (Shoukat et al., 2017). Bureaucratic control over administrative procedures, information, and implementation mechanisms allows bureaucrats to shape policy outcomes. In addition, the existing entrenched traditions of centralized governance and robust state institutions have helped to create an imbalance between the authority of the bureaucracy and representative institutions (Pareto, 1934).

While the legacy of the colonies, the bureaucracy, and the problems of democracy have been studied separately before, their intersection with geographical colonialism and colonialism of the mind needs to be explored (Marco & Safiya, 2008). This study contributes to the literature by using Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory to explore how colonial institutional continuity and bureaucratic dominance have affected democratic structures in Pakistan (Mann, 2006).

3. Research Questions & Theoretical Framework

3.1 Research Questions

- How has the administrative continuity of British colonial structures enabled the bureaucratic elite to maintain political dominance in post-independence Pakistan?
- In what ways does intellectual colonialism sustain bureaucratic power through knowledge systems and governance frameworks?

- How does the interplay between bureaucratic dominance and postcolonial state institutions impact the consolidation and stability of democratic governance in Pakistan?

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical concepts serve as the base for this research – Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory. Such theories allow for the examination of the role of colonial administrative structures in the governance of Pakistan after gaining its independence, as well as the role of bureaucratic elites in preserving their institution's authority.

3.2.1 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial Theory focuses on examining the persistence of colonial influences after the period of colonization is formally over. The more recent colonial history of the country has left some unmistakable marks on its formal set-up and the way people have interacted with it (Saeed, 2013). As stated by Frantz Fanon, the difficulty of breaking the connections with colonial legacy lies in the fact that colonial ideology and institutions are rooted in the state and society (Shafqat, 1999).

Another theoretical concept introduced by Edward Said is that of intellectual domination that elaborates on how the influence of the colonizer is maintained through the knowledge structure and system. According to Said, colonial structures generated particular forms of knowledge that set out certain standards of authority, rationality, and governing structures as superior to others (Rahman, 1998). This theoretical concept proves beneficial in studying intellectual colonialism in the context of Pakistan. The inheritance of certain administrative traditions, bureaucratic education, and models of governance has had much influence on post-independence administration in the country (Sheikh & Rizwan, 2020).

Postcolonial Theory will be used in the current study as an analytical tool that would allow explaining the survival of colonial administrative structures in the context of the independent state structure of Pakistan. This theory allows understanding why geographical independence of the country did not lead to institutional and intellectual independence (Rizvi, 1999).

3.2.2 Elite Theory

The Elite Theory highlights the concentration of power among a limited number of organized and influential groups within the society. According to Gaetano Mosca, all societies have been governed by the organized minority, who are more capable than the rest of the society in terms of politics and institutions, and have greater political capacities. It implies that elites retain power due to their organizational superiority and their capacity to influence state institutions (Nicholson-Crotty & Webeck, 2018).

Elite theory was further refined by C. Wright Mills through the introduction of the “power elite” concept, in which a limited number of people controlling major political, economic, and institutional structures have the capacity to influence decision-making. This theory applies to

Pakistan's bureaucratic model because the bureaucracy is a very powerful elite institution emerging out of the colonial bureaucracy system (Mignolo, 2007)

In Pakistan, Elite Theory can be used to examine the actions taken by bureaucratic elites that have gone beyond their administrative functions and have become powerful players in the policymaking and statecraft process. The theory is useful in explaining the imbalance in power between the elected individuals and the unelected bodies in terms of how organized elites can sustain their power even under formally democratic regimes (Moosavi, 2020)

Using Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory together enables this research to provide an analytical framework for studying bureaucratic dominance in Pakistan. Postcolonial Theory provides the historical continuity of colonialism, and on the other hand, Elite Theory provides the means through which bureaucratic elites were able to sustain their power within these colonial institutions.

4. Methodology

The present research paper makes use of a qualitative, descriptive, analytical, and historical research method to analyze the connection between colonial administration continuity, bureaucratic elites, and democracy in Pakistan. The research relies on secondary sources that include books, research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, historical sources, constitutional sources, government sources, policy papers, and previous academic writings. The study uses Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory as analytical tools to identify how the colonial structure, knowledge, and elite structures have continued to influence governance in the post-independence period. (Siddiqua, 2007; Skoog & Svensson, 2022)

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 Colonial Administrative Legacy and Continuity of Bureaucratic Dominance

This research shows that the colonial governance structure took its toll on the Pakistani governance structure even after Pakistan gained independence. The more recent colonial history of the country has left some unmistakable marks on its formal set-up and the way people have interacted with it. The colonial bureaucracy was originally established to maintain order, provide law and order, and enhance centralized rule, not to encourage democratic participation (Sahito et al., 2021). Following independence, many of these institutional features stayed the same, enabling the bureaucracy to maintain its supremacy in the organization of the state. The continuity of colonial administration indicates that the movement towards self-governance was incomplete, since the structure and ideas of colonialism remained to shape the workings of the Pakistani state (Sajid & Hussain, 2025).

The study also concludes that the organizational strength, administrative skills, and historical continuity made the bureaucratic elite the most influential group in postcolonial Pakistan. The colonial legacy of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) laid the basis for a robust civil service apparatus that, after independence, was crucial in the administration of the state. Where there were no strong political institutions or stable democratic practices, organizational actors gained

clout from the administrative job and took part in policy-making and governance decisions. This is an expression of the so-called elite theory, which states that organized minorities with institutional resources can exert a significant influence on political systems.

5.2 Bureaucratic Elite and Democratic Institutions in Pakistan

The results show how increasing bureaucracy resulted in a power imbalance between elected representatives and administration. Technical knowledge, administrative procedures, and policy implementation are under the control of the bureaucracy, and so give it a high degree of influence when it comes to governance (Saeed, 2013). Miliband suggests that bureaucratic systems can reinforce pre-existing power dynamics by regulating knowledge and administration within the institutions. This was the case in Pakistan, where the bureaucratic authority frequently limits the ability of elected institutions to independently formulate policies and governance priorities. This meant that democratic institutions were constrained by administrative knowledge, and that properly established representative accountability was weak (Shafqat, 1999).

The analysis also demonstrates that administrative domination was not confined to administrative tasks, but extended to the political arena as well. Bureaucracy's role in decision-making was a continuation of the colonial state's role in decision-making, where power was vested in strong institutions and not shared through democratic participation (Mushtaq, 2021). Elite theory provides a good account of this by focusing on the fact that political power is frequently concentrated in the hands of organized groups which have some institutional advantage. The bureaucratic elite was able to hold on to power in Pakistan due to its historical legitimacy, administrative capacity, and control over state mechanisms.

5.3 Intellectual Colonialism and Knowledge-Based Authority

One of the other key findings of the research is that colonial influence persisted beyond institutions, extending to the knowledge systems and administrative thinking outside of the institutions. Intellectual colonialism was manifest in the inherited governance models, traditions of civil service, and convictions about administrative authority that permeated institutions (Wilder, 2009). Said states that colonial domination can be perpetuated by ideologies that influence people's understandings of knowledge and legitimacy. In the same vein, Fanon emphasizes the difficulties that postcolonial societies face in breaking away from the “colonial mode of thought” and from “dependency institutions.” (Naseer, 2017)

Colonial administrative knowledge continued in Pakistan, which strengthened bureaucratic power. The education of civil servants and the practice of government went on to reinforce the technocratic and centralistic trends, which also saw greater preference for administrative skill than political participation. This led to the establishment of a system where the knowledge of bureaucracy became an important source of power, making it more dependent on unelected institutions and reducing democratic decision-making. (Nicholson-Crotty & Webeck, 2018)

5.4 State Bureaucracy, Military and State Power

The results obtained in the study also indicate that the relationship between bureaucracy and other strong institutions in the state, especially the military, led to the maintenance of centralized power in Pakistan. The legacy left by the colonial state created a very strong administrative system based on order and control and centralized decision-making. After the country gained independence, this legacy continued influencing the relationship between civil governments, bureaucracy, and military institutions. Such interactions among these powerful entities enhanced the role of non-elected centers of power and impacted the relationship between representative institutions and state institutions (Thiong'o, 1986; Moosavi, 2020).

It is also found in the study that bureaucratic elites kept their influence due to their institutional advantage and capability of contributing to administration in uncertain political environments. Political weakness and disruption of the democratic process opened doors for the expansion of the role of bureaucracy. Elite theory claims that the influence of elites is maintained in cases of having organizational advantages and control over state resources. In the case of Pakistan, bureaucracy's long legacy and organizational capacity allowed it to be an influential factor in the governance system (Pardesi & Shahriar, 2020; Salman & Bukhari, 2022).

The link between bureaucracy and the military institution is yet another instance of the elitist character of the post-colonial state. Both these institutions inherited substantial positions in the colonial state structure, with both playing critical roles in setting the agenda and determining the practice of the state. The presence of such an institutional gap made the process of consolidation of democracy difficult for democratically elected governments, who had to function in an environment where strong unelected institutions were exercising considerable sway in matters of administration and policy-making.

5.5 Impact on Democratic Development and Institutional Accountability

As per the findings, the existence of bureaucratic dominance weakened the democratic process because it restricted the ability of political institutions to function effectively. Democracy involves much more than electoral processes. The requirement of a democracy entails effective institutions and institutional mechanisms of accountability, apart from the involvement of the public in politics. Bureaucratic dominance in policymaking, however, reduces the ability of the political institutions to function independently. According to Miliband, bureaucracies can influence political affairs through their information and institutional advantages (Shoukat et al., 2017; Pareto, 1934).

Moreover, it becomes clear that intellectual colonialism was also important in securing the power of the bureaucracy. The maintenance of colonial administrative principles produced a belief that professional bureaucracy and technical knowledge were more trustworthy than the political process of democracy. The knowledge-based hierarchy reinforced the power of the bureaucracy and hindered the emergence of other forms of governance. The notion of intellectual domination described by Said helps understand how the knowledge system inherited from the colonial era can still influence institutional behavior even in postcolonial

times. In turn, the ideas of Fanon about the problem of achieving complete independence under the conditions of persistent colonial patterns in society and institutions are relevant.

Thus, the research results allow concluding that the problems with democracy in Pakistan are not only related to the political instability of the country but also to the legacy of the colonial era. The continuity of bureaucratic domination is proof of how colonialism continued beyond space and time by virtue of the bureaucracy's historical connection with colonial rule, expertise control, and a strong institutional base (Sahito et al., 2021; Sajid & Hussain, 2025).

The study demonstrates that the dominance of bureaucracy was an important element in the creation of Pakistan's post-colonial political landscape. The legacy of centralized traditions of administration, elite domination, and intellectual dependence has played an important role in the connection between state institutions and democracy. Using the concepts of Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory, the study shows that the development of democracy in Pakistan should be considered against the backdrop of colonial legacy and the power of bureaucratic elites (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006; Sumbal, 2020).

5.6 Persistence of Institutions and Fragility of Democracy

Moreover, it is shown in the study shows that the persistence of colonial institutions has affected the process of democratization in Pakistan. The persistence of centralized administrative systems has formed a governance system in which state power has been concentrated in strong institutions rather than being passed on to representative political institutions. The colonial administrative system included the traits of hierarchy, discipline, and control, and this trend continued even after independence (Saeed, 2013; Shafqat, 1999).

The results show that the dominance of the bureaucratic class was ensured not only because of the authoritative structure of institutions but also because of dominance in terms of administrative knowledge and decision-making (Raza & Khan, 2018). It is seen that the bureaucratic class has had specialized knowledge and experience in the field of administration, which has helped the bureaucratic class dominate the priorities and the process of policymaking. This proves the statement of Miliband, who says that the bureaucracy can influence the process of governance by controlling resources and administrative mechanisms.

In addition, the research reveals the importance of viewing colonial continuity in terms of both institutional and intellectual nature. The persistence of colonial administrative tradition proves that postcolonial states encounter difficulties in changing inherited institutions into democratic ones. The case of Pakistan indicates that besides constitutional reforms, democratic consolidation is impossible without transformation of institutions' culture and knowledge that perpetuates colonial tradition (Rizvi, 1999).

In general, the results indicate that elites of bureaucratic institutions have significantly contributed to the preservation of colonial administrative tradition in the state of Pakistan. The combination of historical institutions, the power of elites, and intellectual dependency has led to the formation of circumstances that hindered democratic strengthening. Consequently, to

comprehend the problems with democracy in Pakistan, one has to take into account its colonial background.

In addition, the results have shown that bureaucracy was made stronger through the inheritance of institutional practices from the colonial era. The administrative culture rooted in hierarchy and centralized administration still shaped the operations of the state post-independence. This institutional legacy affected the balance of power between democratic institutions and bureaucracies, indicating that legacies of the colonial era were alive in the politics and administration of Pakistan (Nicholson-Crotty & Webeck, 2018; Mushtaq, 2021).

6. Conclusion

In this study, the role played by bureaucratic elites in the formation of democracy in Pakistan was explored through the continuity of the administrative and intellectual legacy of colonialism. It is clear that while Pakistan gained independence from colonial Britain in 1947, there was an ongoing presence of many administrative practices, bureaucratic institutions, and systems of knowledge from the colonial era in the state's governance process. The existence of such structures proves that geographic independence does not imply institutional and intellectual independence, as colonial tradition was strongly rooted in the functions of the post-colonial state. It can be seen that the development of bureaucracy became one of the major trends in Pakistan due to historical continuity, organization, and possession of knowledge. Bureaucratic elites went beyond routine administrative activities and gained influence over policy-making and governance processes. From the perspective of Elite Theory, the above shows the influence that organized groups possessing institutional advantages have on political structures.

In addition, intellectual colonialism was an important factor in maintaining bureaucratic hegemony. The continuity of colonial administrative concepts, governance systems, and knowledge systems helped in sustaining the technocratic tendency and dependence on existing institutional practices. This phenomenon influenced the nature of the interplay between elected bodies and bureaucracies by generating a mismatch between representational and administrative authority. It can be concluded that the problems of democracy in Pakistan cannot be analyzed just from the perspective of political instability or constitutional problems. Instead, such problems are associated with a more profound historical and intellectual heritage of colonialism. The fact of bureaucratic domination is caused by the legacy of colonial institutions in the postcolonial state. By using Postcolonial Theory and Elite Theory, this study proves that the transformation of democracy in Pakistan needs to take into account the effect of historical institutions, power relations, and knowledge systems on political development in Pakistan.

However, the research highlights that not only the organizational structure but the heritage of authoritarianism and knowledge also plays an important role in the continuance of the impact of bureaucracy. The continuance of the process of administration in colonial times resulted in an organizational system where the knowledge of the bureaucracy dominated the process of democracy. In this way, the issues of democracy in Pakistan have strong links with the

evolution of state institutions since colonial times. To meet these challenges, it is essential to understand the link between institutions and elite domination in post-colonial states.

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