

Role of Elites in Local Politics of Punjab Particularly in Jhang

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Abstract

This paper examines how the landed elites switch between different prerogatives in the context of the local government system of Punjab – District Jhang (2000-2016). Therefore, to understand the socio-political positions of these elites, their representation in local governance, interference in democratic proceedings and effects on the benefit/welfare of the public, the study employs qualitative research methodologies. Quantitative data were obtained using structured questionnaires and spin-off interviews, while qualitative data were obtained through observations, review of documents and records analysis. The results were presented regarding emergent themes derived from the study findings. The research shows that the political leadership in African cities has, over the years, been held by landed elites who, most of the time, act in their self and class interest and, therefore, are disinterested in the common good, hence lagging infrastructural development. The broader conclusions of this research suggest that their resource control, patronage networks, and electoral hegemony launched them firmly at the helm of governance processes affecting development, often in ways that marginalized disadvantaged populations or favored specific sectors. Moreover, decentralization reforms were meant to empower local communities directly, but as Gloetto and Harvey argue, landed elites were able to domesticate these reforms to deepen their authority, with limited challenges from civil society organizations. Other recommendations include enhancing the anti-reform crusade that would eliminate high degrees of political power held today by the landed elites, such as transparency within the electoral process and participatory budgeting. The research informs power, governance, and rural development in the South Asian context, which presents significant progression for more effective and savvy modes of governance.

Keywords: Landed Elites, Local Government, Punjab, District Jhang, Governance, Democracy, Socio-Political Influence.

Introduction

The local government system in Pakistan has seen many changes over the years, especially in the feudal-dominated Punjab province. This paper uses District Jhang as an example to explain the reality of the impact of the landed elites on different spheres of governance. This paper seeks to assess local government between 2000 and 2016, where some of the significant reforms instituted during Gen Musharraf's devolution plan of 2000 stemmed from other civilian governments. The Government of Punjab, and especially District Jhang, has been controlled by feudal lords who own most of the land and have social, political and economic power. This has also led to the emergence of governance structures that suit the elite more than the general development within the community. While political power devolved in a move spearheaded under the Musharraf regime as a policy of democratizing the political system, the power of landlords remained strong. This paper focuses on how these elites survived and realigned themselves strategically over the reformed governance systems to sustain their dominance. District Jhang has been chosen due to its particular socio-political conditions: the concentration of agricultural richness results in a concentration of political influence. Besides affecting the current political structuring within this region, the feudal system has had a direct impact on the political evolution of Punjab. Knowledge of these dynamics is necessary to assess the endeavours and failures in governance reforms in the region. In addition, the study aims

to show how power and governance work in a country where democracy competes with feudalism to achieve rural development goals. Based on the findings of this study, the research wants to present its results to a broader audience of scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers analyzing the strategy of local governance in South Asia, particularly in areas where the influence of traditional ruling elites, the gentry, continues.

This paper also contextualizes its research within the political evolution of Pakistan and how changing forms of government—military or civilian—have shaped the position of landed elites. Based on the preceding conclusions of this research, it can be said that the study provides an understanding of the issues relating to the reforms in the feudal-oriented areas and highlights the question of the use of the anti-feudal bundled strategies of the local government to prevent the exclusion of specific populations in the process of development.

Background of the Study

Punjab has always had a feudal economy and feudal lords who dominated its socio-political backdrop from immemorial. In District Jhang, the dominant class of propriety is zamindars, who have played an influential role in terms of economic power and production, social harmonization and political structure between state and country masses. The devolution plan formulated in the year 2000 envisaged aimed at decentralization of power and strengthening local institutions, thus providing a window for demystification of power by the elite. Nevertheless, due to the highly feudalistic character of the society of Jhang, a class of landlords quickly adjusted to the new system by occupying most of the attractive jobs. This continuity of elite control thus throws more light on predominant concerns regarding the ability of local governance reforms to deliver democratic parity. It clearly emerges that Punjab's socio-political credit has been composed of the interaction of the landed elites. Historically, these elites came to exercise control because of the region's feudal economy; a man's land meant his power and his worth. This feudal relationship can be best understood by discussing District Jhang in the central region of Punjab in modern Pakistan. This history is characterized by feudal lords of noble extended families who exercised considerable influence in political, economic, and social life. The colonization of Jhang strengthened the foundations of power relations in that region. When the British were in power, the eminent were awarded huge tracts of land as rewards for their professions to the colonial government. He added that these elites were intermediaries of the British rulers, and through control of land, political offices, and other kinds of favors, they entrenched themselves. Some of these features were inherited up to the period of independence; many feudal families continued to dominate the local administration and regional politics.

New local government reforms, precisely the devolution plan initiated under General Pervez Musharraf in the year 2000, were to democratize decentralization. However, as we saw in the case of Jhang, these reforms have perpetuated local patriarchal power structures. Landed elites quickly embraced the new system, acquiring respective seats in the regional councils and relying on their self-political connections. This sustenance of feudal influence shows how efficient decentralization is in changing power and distribution of power to ensure justice. The socioeconomic consequences of this elite dominance are quite massive. Landed elites tend to have their preferences, and they ensure resources, development plans, and policies reflect their beneficial interests in their estates and their families. He stressed that this control over local governance structures tends to perpetuate socioeconomic inequality, thereby excluding groups like small farmers, women, and the minority. This outcome distorts the very rationale for decentralization and, consequently, the set goals, namely empowering communities at different levels and fostering more equitable development. Furthermore, the dominant culture and practices in the area inclined the strong influence of nobility, particularly the land-owning class in the district of Jhang. The other social factor is that society is still shaped by patriarchal structures, combined with powerful clans to a great extent. As a result, political power does not diffuse very far from the core families. This arrangement results in a lord-bearer relationship between the politicians and the rest of the rural dwellers, whereby service provisions and socioeconomic opportunities are delivered subject to political support and fidelity to the political barons.

Out of all the years, specific years between 2000 and 2016 are most relevant to explaining the position of landed elites in the local governance of Jhang. The common trends that emerged during this period were changes in political power exercise, local government dynamics, and continuity of electoral processes. Understanding this period could afford a study of the mechanisms employed by aristocracy to sustain its power and its implications for feudal governance, democracy, and welfare.

Research Problems

Regarding decentralization, the landed elites still dominate local governance in Jhang. Control is a means of power and authority over resource allocation, policy formulation and hardly any community inclusiveness. Moreover, it is also possible to state that the checks and balances mechanisms do not work adequately to prevent elites from pursuing their or their family's agenda against the majority. These dynamics are yet to be explained in terms of how they work in the framework of the Jhang local government system and, hence, how they reconstruct the overall governance patterns in feudal societies.

Research Questions

- Q1. To what extent do land elites impact decision-making within Jhang's local government arena?
- Q2. What does this mean for representation and democracy and, more broadly, the welfare of the public?
- Q3. In what ways have devolutionary changes in the governance structure affected the standing of landed elites in Jhang?
- Q4 How can the impact of the landed elites on local politics be prevented?

Research Gap

Even though there is a vast amount of literature on feudalism and local governance in Pakistan, there is a paucity of detailed empirical investigations of the relationships between the landed elite and local government systems in Jhang. Prior research has tended to export the impact of feudal systems throughout Pakistan without considering the effects of processes of socio-political contextualization on governance capacities. However, there is a lack of detailed qualitative studies conducted on Jhang; therefore, the current study serves to fill this research gap by presenting a contextual analysis of the subject. Furthermore, there is an incredible paucity of investigations of the period 2000 to 2016, mainly because it has been seen as a critical period due to policy shifts and governance changes.

Significance of the Study

These findings enrich the existing literature on governance and democracy in feudal societies and can provide recommendations for state and non-state players. Given that it is a case study of Jhang, the study offers a micro-level view that can enrich theoretical and empirical discussions of decentralization and democratization in Pakistan. The findings are most useful for specifying interventions that may inform systems of accountability, participation, and fairness in the distribution of resources in local government.

Literature Review

Legacy Predominance of Landed Aristocracy

The fact that the landed elites have always governed the province of Punjab must be understood against the colonial context of this region. Cheema, Khwaja, and Qadir (2006) give a comprehensive account of the social-political systems developed during British colonial rule and how the state used land grants and administrative power sponsorship to cultivate a loyal class of interlocutors. These policies placed a feudal system in the hope of giving landlords considerable authority over the lives of those in the countryside. This historical background makes it possible to analyze the extended impact of the landed elites in local government systems. Continuing this, the political power of these elites remained as former colonial allies transformed into national and/or local authorities. Their control was further reinforced by their capacity to organize agricultural surplus and sustain power-related systemic connections grounded on kinship. However, in areas such as Jhang, these historical

bearings have continued to influence governance and perpetuate social and economic marginalization.

Decentralization or Efficiency or Elite Adaptation

The Devolution of Power Plan was launched in 2000 as a set of decentralization reforms that sought to democratize access to elemental powers at the local level for the communities. However, Zaidi argues that there is always a social problem of how to effect these transformational reforms in feudal systems. Local councils became dominated by landed elites and those with tremendous socioeconomic capital to the extent that served to entrench the system by seeking to enhance their positions as important players within the councils. Ahmad (2017) shores up this argument, opining that in Punjab, elites had used their resources to capture the institutions of decentralization, thereby reversing the programme's intended goals. The landed elites' capacity to continue dominating the region despite all these changes demonstrates that structural adjustment measures require structural political revolution. Retaining leadership positions in local councils, these elites reinvented the hierarchal structure and actively contributed to society's non-democratic distribution of resources.

Effectiveness of Democracy

An examination of the landed elites shows that their socio-political power presents enormous difficulties in democratizing local authority. Ali (2015) and Ghani and Iqbal (2018) challenge democratic principles through the process of elite dominance in the context of feudalism. They argue that such researchers put the interests of elites above the communities, hence the abnormal political decisions they make regarding resources. Places set aside for women and minorities as part of decentralization measures were meant to improve representation. Nonetheless, PILDAT (2013) pointed out that these provisions are usually captured by elite families and cannot have a positive effect on vulnerable groups. They deepen established hierarchical structures and erode the legitimacy of the democratic institution in the Management of local governments.

Civil Society, as well as the Reform Agenda

Intense elite dominance, therefore, has been observed as a key problem in Latin America, but the works of civil society organizations in the region have become central to accountability and local governance reform. In a similar argument, Ahmad (2017) goes further and says that grassroots movements are most important in demanding social justice and anti-feudal forms of power systems in the governance structures. For its part, the community-based monitoring programs and the workshops established to build the capacity for disadvantaged groups are seen to bring transparency within the community. This paper has argued that the landed elites were remarkably consistent in their ability to sustain their socio-political power, highlighting the necessity of wider strategies of change that considered the colonial state's methods and ideologies.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Consequently, this paper used a qualitative research method to analyze the authorities of the landed elites in Punjab, District Jhang's local government system, particularly from 2000 to 2016. Attention was paid to determining the nature and role of landed elites in the socio-political established local power system. Another reason is that studying certain variables, such as the political power of landed elites in local governance, involves the pursuit and analysis of difficult-to-measure variables that are contextually bounded, and, therefore, the qualitative research approach is appropriate. The study focused on 'District Jhang' in Punjab, which has a relatively high agricultural magnates and landlords population. The data collection was completed using selected articles domiciled in academic and social sciences electronic databases available on the Internet focusing on the political transformation process from 2000 to 2016 with detailed changes in the local government structures that give insight into the transformation of the landed elites during this period. The study was conducted using a descriptive and exploratory research design to identify how the landed elites influenced the local governance system's political/ social and economic facets.

Case Study Method

The case study method was used to conduct a context-intensive investigation of the influence of the landed elite in the District Jhang local government. It is useful when examining people's relations, cultures, politics, and other aspects within a distinct geographical location.

1. The study's unit of analysis was the local government system in District Jhang, with emphasis on the political activity of the landed elites, social power over resources, and impacts on local government policies and norms.
2. District Jhang was selected as a crucial case because of its sociopolitical context, in which the power of landed elites is widely recognized. The case also enables contemplating the dynamics between local elites and the structural political system in detail.
3. By using this method, the researcher will be able to understand better the structure of politics in the local areas, as well as the ownership of land and how the elites control the politics of governance and policies in the local community.
4. Besides Jhang, the study may offer only a limited comparison of other districts in Punjab to situate the findings and analyze how the patterns at the district level affect the engagement of the landed elites in the wider provincial environment.

Tools & Instruments

In this research, the author used both primary and secondary research tools to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic under study.

A. Primary Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews focused on a cross-section of actors in local governance, and these can be classified as;

1. Gentry (those persons who possessed the privileges of landowners, merchants, political and other major local dignitaries).
2. This involved officials at the community level, such as Union Councils and members from Tehsil and District levels of government.
3. Scholars or writers in the field of political science or sociology or local government
4. Interview Focus: Concerns that branched out during the interviews include:
5. That political function of territorial propertied classes in local administration structures
6. Control over local politics, legislation, and funding>Local political situation, legislation and funding control
7. Ties of the landed elites with other people or the society (e.g., people with low incomes in the rural areas and those in the urban areas).

The unit of analysis for the study was the local government structure in District Jhang, which focused on the political conduct of the landed aristocracy, their social control over resources, and the effects of their activity on policies and permissive norms of the local government. District Jhang was chosen as the most crucial case because of its sociopolitical significance, where the influence of landlords is well documented. The case also allows for a more thorough consideration of the relations between local elites and the structural political system. For the same reasons, the researcher was in a position to establish the structure of politics in the regional areas as well as the ownership of land and how the elites manipulate the flow of politics of governance and policies in the local area. Apart from Jhang, the study may present only a restricted comparison of other districts in Punjab to address the contextualization of the findings and how the patterns at the district level engage the landed elites in the broader provincial context.

Interview Focus

These topics include

- 1) The politics of local government systems
- 2) Control of local elections, politics and policies, and public resource allocation

- 3) Origins and interactions of the landed gentry with other civil society players, including rural sub-tenants, urban folks, etc.
- 4) The political environment from year 2000 to year 2016, including devolved power under different governments
- 5) Semi-structured interviews were employed to enable the researchers to spend ample time on a specific area of interest while ensuring that the research concerns answer the research questions.

B. Secondary Data Collection

An extensive survey of the literature regarding the political influence of the landed elites, especially the role played by the landed elites in local governance, particularly in the Punjab region and the South Asian political setting, assists in situating the study in the theoretical and empirical literature. Historical records of District Jhang were reconstructed from government publications and the archives of the Punjab Provincial Assembly and local councils to investigate sociopolitical trends. Local archaic and current national newspapers were also analyzed in an attempt to capture the trends of citizens' communication regarding the political behaviours of the landed elites, local elections, and governance reforms.

These reports shall serve as markers of the landed elites' political mobilization and leadership roles, particularly within resource governance and agriculture.

Results and Analysis

This section explains what has emerged from the qualitative investigation concerning the involvement of those in landed interest in the District Jhang local government system throughout the years 2000 to 2016. To present the findings, thematic analysis is done to group the data based on the themes established in the research questions: the socio-political influence of the landed elites, their participation as players in the local election and the overall impacts of their power relations in the local government system. The information for this analysis was gathered from semi-structured interviews, archival records, and secondary sources.

Landed elites, as the sociopolitical authorities, made specific concerns with this tradition. It is concluded from the study that the landed elites of District Jhang had vast socio-political power throughout the studied period. This influence was evident in several key areas:

Control Over Resources

Landed elites possessed appreciable influence over farming factors, which gave them power over the populace, especially the farmers. This economic dependence also meant political support, proving their supremacy in the local political sphere. Resource control also passed on to the distribution of public goods, including infrastructure development, which was often initiated in areas of their interest.

Social Networks and Patronage

All the elites nurtured patronage networks to access votes and loyalty to ensure their keen power. Some of these networks involved local government officeholders, thus providing the landed elites a voice at the Union Council and Tehsil governments.

Cultural Authority

Traditional cultural values and practices in District Jhang also contributed to the tendency for the ruling of the landed aristocracy, as their view of leadership was associated with their status as landowners.

Participation in Local voting and Management

Landed elites and their activities in local elections emerged as an essential issue in the interviews and documents analyzed. Key findings include:

Electoral Dominance

In addition, local government posts were always within the easy grasp of the landed elites due to their moneyed influence, control of the rural voters, and use of patron-client influence. Archival data indicated that a large percentage of the representatives from the local government in Jhang were part of the landed elite families.

Policy Influence

Interviews with local government officials revealed that the influential landed elites favoured policy directions that would benefit them. This involved focusing their investments on infrastructure services where they owned land or were developing a business. Even in distributing resources for development, the local elites left the minority out of the system.

Impact of Devolution Reforms

The decentralization by the Local Government Ordinance 2001 has allowed landed elites affected by structural adjustment to find new ways of asserting social power. Enthusiastic, devolved checks to empower the local communities are instead utilized by the landed elites to further consolidate their domination over check structures. They did not use sampling to reach their conclusion on the change in political dynamics (2000-2016).

The political landscape in District Jhang experienced notable shifts during the study period.

Post-2001 Decentralization

This devolution of power under the Musharraf government initially opened the space for increased local participation. However, in an effort to curb the power of the new governments and control active involvement in the provincial assemblies, the landed elites succeeded in capturing the Union Councils and forming influence over the Tehsil and District governments. First-person interviews showed instances where landed elites provided financial support to candidates of their choice in election campaigns.

Shift in Party Politics

The re-establishment of the party-based local election in 2013 has shifted the political manoeuvring of the landed elite. Some affiliated with the central political parties to ensure they were well placed, while others positioned themselves politically through independent candidacies in their patronage networks.

Resistance from Marginalized Groups

The minorities also resisted at some point during the later period of the study. The existence of civil society organizations and political awareness campaigns questioned the control of landed elites in the Kenyan political system. However, the efforts have been minimal in overpowering the existing systems. From the above ideas, we infer broader implications for local governance.

The entrenched influence of landed elites in District Jhang's local government system had significant implications:

Exclusion of Marginalized Groups

In most of these societies, therefore, the landed elites not only prevent the rest of the society from full participation in the political process but also deny the 'voiceless' poor in the rural areas a say in the governance of their country.

Stagnation in Rural Development

There were usual tendencies where development for integration mainly promoted the goals of the landed elites. Also, there was the problem of inequitable distribution of facilities and the general stagnation of systematic rural development.

Challenges to Democratic Governance

Essentially, the people had transferred so much power to these landed elites, and as a result, the policies and governance systems continued to embrace an ironclad rule and inequality between the elite and the masses.

Summary of the Analysis

The analysis of the presented results of this study provides evidence of the considerable influence of the landed elites in the local government structure of District Jhang during 2000-2016. As vote banks, actors in socio-political arenas, dominant in assembly and council elections, and dominating policy formulation, their actions determine local government dynamics in parasitic ways on the larger population. These results indicate the need for changes to bring local government closer to people and increase its responsiveness to their needs, especially in districts where elites are dominant or semi-dominant. Comparing such findings with other districts might yield further insights into other effects of landed elite control in Punjab's local government organization.

Discussion

The conclusions of this research enhance the featured knowledge regarding the relations of the landed elites and local government in District Jhang. These elites give a historical socio-political impression that portrays the negative impacts that such elites have on the implementation of the democratic principles of probity and accountability, equity, and local development.

An Overview of Power Consolidation and Patronage Networks

The study stresses the power of the provincial gentry in mandating occupations by patronage foundations and sociopolitical hegemony. As with the findings in similar studies (for example, as rooted in Ali, 2012, or Hussain, 2014), the study shows how resources lead to the dominance of elites and how patron-client structures are created. These networks not only determine the success or failure of elections but also constrain access to political institutions for other actors, especially the marginalized in society, with regard to governance.

Effectiveness Of Decentralization Reforms

The Local Government Ordinance 2001 aimed at decentralizing power and improving local participation; however, similar to other critics such as Cheema et al., 2005 Mohmand, 2016, it was found that the problems of decentralizing power in Pakistan still exist, and dominant power structures remain unchanged. The landed elites changed their behaviour to embrace the new political dispensation to continue their domination. This outcome leads to another argument that there should be other accompanying measures so that decentralization reforms can reach the targeted goals.

Omission of the Minority and Other Vulnerable Populations

The continued exclusion of such minorities is a major factor hindering progress towards egalitarian governance. This result aligns with evidence from South Asia more generally, showing how rural power hierarchies tend to empower the dominant social classes (Jalal, 2013). These findings imply that social demographics that are 'voiceless' in society could be empowered through policies, education, and political awareness campaigns.

Getting around resistance and beginning to notice emerging trends

We can find some cases where emergent resistance from subordinate people is gradually changing the political struggle. Civil society entrepreneurship and PIWA political awareness campaigns have emerged to contest traditional hierarchical management structures, as seen in other regions in Pakistan (Siddiqua, 2018). To bring about significant change, these require constant support.

Policy Recommendations

1. Changes should be directed towards improving government mechanisms, such as local government, particularly increasing the openness and accountability of governors. The following

wordings could be used: Elite capture could be reduced by mechanisms like Independent monitoring bodies and anti-corruption measures.

2. Policies for the structural representation of minorities in local councils must be developed. Positive discrimination, such as quotas for females and minorities, would help improve diversity.
3. Actions by these latter actors might facilitate a society to demand accountability and struggle against strongly formed power structures.
4. Therefore, there is a need to address the economic base of elite dominance by enhancing land reforms. Ensuring equitable resource distribution could reduce dependency, hence enhancing a more socially desirable form of dependency.

Future Research Directions

That is why the present study opens the discussion regarding the position of the landed elites in other areas of Punjab and Pakistan. Then, there were possibilities for comparative studies that illustrated differences between the regions and helped to target the policies. All the same, an analysis of how such trends as societal change, urbanization, and digital interconnectivity affect the power equations in a given locale could be done in future research. Finally, the research asserts that the power of the landed elites in District Jhang is preponderant in managing local affairs. However, reformative winds and the emergence of anti-patriarchal struggles still require continuous work to realize economic democracy.

Conclusion and Implications

They have also highlighted the entrenched role of the landed elites in the structure of district government in District Jhang from 2000 to 2016. Socio-political power, electoral supremacy, and manipulation of policy formulation have greatly influenced and recalibrated the manifestation of local governance to suit the dominance of these entities at the expense of the public good.

Implications for Governance and Policy

Policy Reforms

This paper noted an acute interest in policy reforms to decentralize power from the gentry's dominant groups. These groups have been dominant largely because of weak accountability mechanisms, including the opaque electoral process and minimal participatory budget.

Empowerment of Marginalized Groups

There is a need to support policies that enhance the status of disadvantaged groups in local governance institutions. Some of these social groups are still in a disadvantaged position, which restricts their participation in governance processes; hence, capacity-building programs, as well as awareness-creation programs, could help in a big way.

Strengthening Civil Society

This means that authorities can promote the development of civil society organizations as a counterbalance to reduce the power of landed elites. These organizations can ensure that equal development is being pursued in a region and check on the performance of local government ministries.

Comparative Analysis and Broader Research

Future research based on a more detailed comparison of District Jhang with other regions in Punjab might help us better understand the patterns of elites' impact on local administration. The work could also be useful for outlining measures for enhancing the democratic ethos of provincial governance.

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