

Devolution Plan in District Bahawalnagar Punjab Pakistan: Continuity or Change  
2001- 2008

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## ABSTRACT

*General Pervez Musharraf introduced the 'Devolution of Power Plan (2001)' through the NRB, which was a big switch in the history of Pakistan. This three-tier system shifted the powers from top to bottom. Like other districts, Bahawalnagar was also part of these reforms. Powers were decentralized at the grassroots level in the country. Through this research, it has been examined whether this power plan brought change in the Bahawalnagar district or it was a continuity of dynastic politics, like feudalism or elite capture. This qualitative research used semi-structured interviews of the former stakeholders' elected representatives, Nazim, Naib Nazim, councilors, and civil society and analyzed the district electoral statistics, district council budget reports, and other data between 2001 and 2008. This research examines the contradiction between the legal transfer of power to local governments and the elite capture of the system by old political dynasties. Research shows decentralization at the district level under this plan; deputy commissioner power was reduced and subordinated to the district Nazim. In spite of biradarism, elected representation increased at the Union Council level; this brought a real change. At the Union Council, biradarism is a factor and dynastic politics and elite capture are primary factors at the district and tehsil levels. The aim of the power plan was to empower the grassroots levels and legitimize military rule. This study concludes that in spite of continuity at the top and middle tier, the system delivered well in the Bahawalnagar district; it strengthened local representation and local democracy and opened a new window for old politicians to operate under new rules.*

**Keywords:** Devolution Plan 2000, Bahawalnagar Politics, Local Government Reforms, Elite Capture, De-centralization in Pakistan, District Government

## INTRODUCTION

Devolution is a buzzword in terms of development; it promises development of backward areas, provides new leadership, democracy, and improvement in the service delivery system. Historic reviews of local governments of Pakistan show a lack of interest of political parties in the formation of local governments and hindered the transfer of power at the local level. In contrast, military governments' work is notable for local systems; that's why local governments are also called the brainchild of military governments. But there is a contradiction from Ayub Khan's "Basic Democracies" to Zia-ul-Haq's Local Self-Government; this was a controlled municipal system to avoid party politics and establish legitimacy. The study compared other military periods with General Musharraf's while Devolution of power plan of 2001, was quite ambitious and considered better (S. M. Ali, 2018).

It changed the old administrative structure and transferred bureaucratic powers to elected representatives. The District Nazim became more powerful, and the power of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) was abolished; it was subordinated to the District Nazim. Such structural re-engineering was aimed at removing the status quo and empowering grassroots levels (Abbasi & Mussarrat, 2015). One of the most contentious questions is whether these institutional changes were accompanied by a real transfer of power to the people or whether these institutional changes merely gave the old elites a new system that was perpetuated in the local areas.

Although there is considerable research on the impact of the devolution plan in urban areas such as Lahore and Karachi, but there is a lack of research on backward district of southern Punjab. This research fills this research gap by focusing on Bahawalnagar district with an area of 8,878 sq. km, which has deeper roots of feudalism and biradarism.

Bahawalnagar is one of the leading districts in the Punjab province of Pakistan which has a rich historical and administrative history. The old name of Bahawalnagar was Rojhanwali in 1904 its name was changed in the honor of Bahawalpur State ruler, whose name was Nawab Mohammad Bahawal Khan Abbasi-V (GOP, 2026). The district is very large administratively and systematically subdivided into five tehsils which are Bahawalnagar, Chishtian, Fort Abbas, Haroonabad and Minchinabad. Another major reorganization of its local government was done through the Devolution Plan of 2001 that devolve administrative authority to the grassroots level. This historic devolution plan of local government structured 118 Union Councils in district Bahawalnagar. Moreover, the 2001 plan was able to organize 5 Tehsil Municipal Administrations (TMAs) directly proportional to its five tehsils to effectively manage them municipally. Demographically, the region has gone through a massive growth and urbanization in the recent decades and 7th Digital Census, which was conducted in 2023, the population of District Bahawalnagar is 3,550,342 (PBS, 2023).

This is an ideal case study to test the hypothesis of "continuity or change" in Bahawalnagar during devolution plan. How this three tier system of district nazims, tehsil nazims, and union councils was distinctive. The research focused on the political and administrative changes that took place in Bahawalnagar between 2001 and 2008. It examines whether the non-party basis of elections brought about change, helped to bring new middle-class leadership, or whether, on the contrary, attracted candidates to elites, feudal lords, and the continuation of the biradari system. The study examine that union councils and the restoration of district leadership during the devolution plan brought significant administrative changes, but old face play role in politics in Bahawalnagar that was one example of continuity.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To understand the continuity or change of the power plan in Bahawalnagar, it is important to understand the various studies on local governments in Pakistan, on decentralization, legitimacy, and elite capture, which help us understand the role of local governance, elite capture, participation of local communities, distribution of powers, and institutional arrangements in the context of the framework of evolution and related reforms in Pakistan. This literature review is structured in such a way that it will help to understand the detailed information and concerns about the changes and continuity in the system of local governments. The study explains and investigates the interaction between reforms of decentralization, elite capture, legitimacy, and community involvement. The literature also clearly demonstrates that the reforms implemented in local governments in Pakistan have frequently been based on regime survival and centralization concerns, especially when it comes to military governance, as opposed to actual empowerment of the local communities (Aijaz Ali, Analoui, & Sage, 2024).

The efforts of decentralization, including the Devolution Plan 2000, often culminate in the consolidation of elite power regimes, where local elites acquire resources and processes of decision-making, thus inhibiting the planned outcomes of the participatory governance (khan Naul & Khan, 2025). These certain reforms had introduced representation, such as reserved seats for women and marginalized groups. But patronage links and local institutions have disrupted the effective role of community and answerability (Aijaz Ali & Analoui, 2023). The changes that have been made in the local government in Pakistan have been mainly brought by the military rule (Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf) as a top-down measure to justify the rule of non-representativeness and centralized control, instead of decentralizing and empowering the community (Tehseen, 2021).

These reforms tended to ignore provincial governments; the local councils were directly connected to the central government, and the political parties were sidelined (Sanaullah, 2021). Empirical research demonstrates that local government institutions are seized by local elites (landed families, influential clans, etc.), and they are used to serve their own interests (Aijaz Ali, 2022). In Punjab and Sindh provinces, the elite are dominant and have strong control over the development funds and administrative decisions, which compromise transparency and fair service delivery (khan Naul & Khan, 2025). Some of the reforms have expanded representation at the village level, but the new system has left a large portion of decision-making to traditional power holders (S. Khan, 2008).

Regardless of the formal participation mechanisms, like Citizen Community Boards (CCBs) and reserved seats, the engagement of the community is weak because of centralized power, patron-client relationships, and low institutional capacity (Rafique, Habib, & Rosilawati, 2023). Many citizens feel that decentralization is an illusion, and local governments are not the tools to empower them and make them feel legitimized by the regime but exist to enrich elites and legitimize their regimes (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015). Formal decentralization policies and established informal institutions, including patronage, kinship, and brokerage, are usually combined to further strengthen elite power, not to weaken it (Ullah, 2024). The patron links between local authorities, leaders, and contractors follow similar structures and regulate the resource distribution and governance results (Tufail & Taieb, 2023).

As evidenced in the literature, decentralization in Pakistan has mostly failed to meet its proclaimed objectives of empowering the local communities and improving democratic legitimacy. Rather, reforms have been used as a tool of survival and consolidation of elites (Cheema, Khwaja, & Khan, 2005). Elite capture has not gone away, and local elites have still dominated the councils and resource distribution, and marginalized groups are still limited to participation (S. Khan, 2008). Even the formal decentralization efforts are not effective because of the continuity of informal sources of power and patronage networks (Malik & Rana, 2019). Although certain positive changes have been noted, including more women and non-elite councilors being represented on the village level, they have not resulted in any significant change in the distribution of power and service delivery (Aijaz Ali et al., 2024). The research is of a high quality and combines qualitative field research, historical analysis, and comparative studies to give a detailed insight into the intricacies of local governance in Pakistan.

The literature indicates that there is a trend of continuity in the application of local government reforms as a regime legitimacy and elite consolidation tool in Pakistan, with little and unequal shifts in representation and participation. The absence of effective rules and the presence of elite capture, patronage systems, and poor institutional capacity remain major factors that have limited the potential of decentralization to empower local communities and enhance better governance results. The combination of these studies provides a compound insight into the concept of devolution as a process that is entrenched in local politics and institutional design and capacity constraints. In their view, continuity or change at Bahawalnagar is anchored on how the reforms are translated to empowered local actors, accountable systems of governance and effective service provision depending on the broader provincial and national political environment. It

has been emphasized in the literature that matching incentives, enhancing participatory structures, and coping with capacity and funding limitations are essential in order to achieve the potential gains of devolution.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is a case study of Bahawalnagar district and qualitative methodology is adapted. Data was collected from research papers, district council reports, personal observations, and interviews of the elected representatives from 2001 to 2008. It validates an in-depth investigation to analyze the local government elections of 2001 first term and 2005 second term. Focus group discussions were conducted with the general public in different union councils of Bahawalnagar district to get first-hand information and opinions about Devolution plan, continuity and change.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

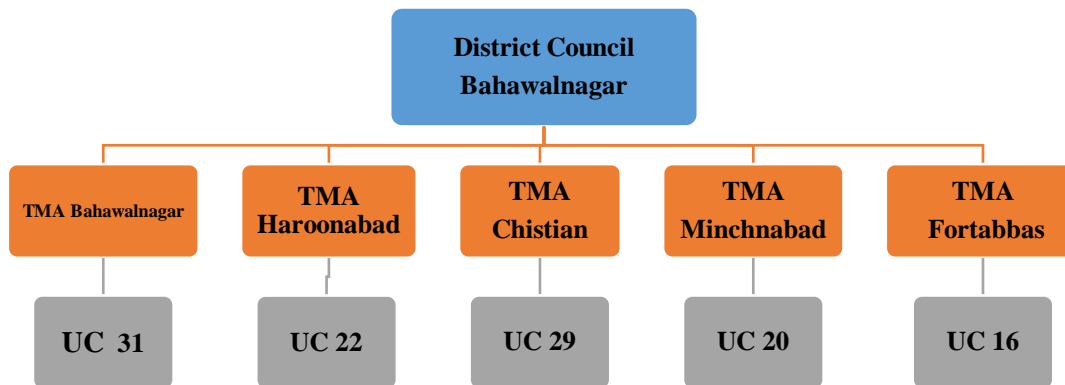
The Kargil operation led to the fall of the civilian government on 12 October 1999. A new era of military rule began in Pakistan in the shape of General Pervez Musharraf (Fatima & Shafique, 2025). A seven-point agenda was announced for the establishment of local governments. To reduce the deficit, they called for accountability, devolution of powers to the grassroots, economic recovery, law and order, and depoliticization of institutions (Alam, Bhatti, & Alvi, 2020). All legal and democratic measures were reiterated to protect the political, administrative, and financial rights of elected representatives of local governments as per Article 140 of Pakistan. This set the central narrative of military's rule and modernization (Fatima & Shafique, 2025).

#### **Devolution Plan**

PLGO 2001 is mostly known as the Musharraf Devolution plan in Pakistan. Composition of this plan consisted of three tiers: 1st tier union council, 2nd tier tehsils council, and 3rd tier districts council. Elections were non-party-based through the plan conducted. District Nazims, District Naib Nazims, Tehsil Nazims, and Naib Tehsil Nazims were elected indirectly by elected union council representatives. While Union Nazims, Naib Nazims, and councilors were elected through direct public voting. Power was decentralized at grassroots levels, and district government was empowered. These departments agriculture, health, education, community development, information technology, finance, and planning were given to district governments, which were previously under provincial jurisdiction (A. M. Khan & Mirza, 2011).

#### **Structure of Devolution Plan in Bahawalnagar**

Under this power plan, the Bahawalnagar district consisted of five tehsils and a total of 118 union councils. Thus, a district council was formed in Bahawalnagar at the district level in which the District Nazim, District Naib Nazim, and Nazims of all union councils were members as district members. TMA was formed in each tehsil; thus, 5 TMAs were formed. The tehsil nazim, tehsil naib nazim, and naib nazims elected from the union councils of the tehsil were members as tehsil members.



**Figure 1 Administrative Hierarchy of District Bahawalnagar under Devolution Plan**

Figure 1 shows the decentralized administrative structure of District Bahawalnagar. The highest level is the District Council which is the main governing institution. The middle level comprises of five Tehsil Municipal Administrations (TMAs): Bahawalnagar, Haroonabad, Chistian, Minchinabad and Fortabbas that handle the spatial planning and municipal services provision. The bottom level illustrates the grassroots distribution of Union Councils (UCs), 118 all over with particular representative units of TMAs e.g. TMA Bahawalnagar UC 31, TMA Haroonabad UC 22, TMA Chistian UC 29, TMA Minchinabad UC 20 and TMA Fort Abbas UC 16. This top-down flow points out the devolution of power at the district level to the local union administrations such that there is an organized method of distributing local governance and the distribution of state services (GOP, 2026).

### **Union Administration**

According to PLGO 2001, Union Councils had Union Administrations, which consisted of the Union Nazim, Naib Nazim, and Secretaries and it was the lowest tier of the local government system under devolution. The Union Nazim was the executive head, and the Naib Nazim chaired over meetings. Union Secretaries were administrative heads who had to perform the functions of coordination and assistance in community development and the functioning of the union committee and service delivery under the supervision of Nazim. Nazim, Naib Nazim, general seats, Kissan, and minorities were elected by direct general public voting (Asim, 2019).

### **Tehsil Administration**

Under the devolution plan, TMA had the status of middle tier. Tehsil administration was given the name of Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) and consisted of Tehsil Nazim, Tehsil Naib Nazim, 4 Nos. of Tehsil Municipal Officer, Tehsil Officers, Chief Officer, and other officials of Local Council Services and decentralized departments. The Tehsil Nazim was the executive head, while the Tehsil Municipal Officer was the administrative coordinating officer and in charge of all the officers. TMA was assigned many functions of administration, development, finance, tax levy, etc (Ashraf & Iqbal, 2021).

### **District Administration**

Under devolution plan 2001, the third tier of district administration consisted of the Zila Nazim and bureaucratic elements DCO, EDOs, and subordinate staff. Zila Nazim was the head of the district government, and the DCO was the coordinating officer and in charge of all the offices in the district government. The district council's other members included union nazims of the district and other members elected on reserved seats for women, peasants, workers, and minorities. The district council had its

secretariat with a separate budget allocation. The check and balance system was introduced. Zila Nazim was accountable to the people through the district council, and the district government was accountable to the people as well as the provincial government for good governance and improvement of service delivery under the devolution of power plan (Asim, 2019).

### **Electoral Process in District Bahawalnagar**

The elections in the Bahawalnagar district were held in the 3rd phase of the local bodies' election. The union council was the lowest tier under the devolution plan. The election for the lowest tier of the union council was conducted on May 31, 2001, and for the district council, it was held on Aug. 2nd and 8th, 2001. After the election of the district council of Bahawalnagar on 8th Aug. 2001. The local government structure was put in place by Aug. 14, 2001 (ECP, 2001). The elected Nazims of all 118 Union councils were the members of the district Council Bahawalnagar and the District Council was comprised of a total of 164 members, including 118 elected and 46 special members. All the components of local government in the district of Bahawalnagar really worked hard and put in all their efforts in order to bring closer all three tiers of the local government structure at the district, tehsil, and union levels to allow public participation in decision-making (Anwar ali, 2025).

### **Continuity or Change: Lowest Tier**

Bahawalnagar district had five tehsils and 118 union councils under this plan, at the grassroots level, the Union Council (UC) system was praised among the community and representatives regarding this plan. During the survey of UC 07, it was observed that the total votes of Union Council 07 were 2832, out of which 2506 valid votes were polled and 326 were rejected votes (ECP, 2001). The interest of the people in the local government elections of Musharraf was quite encouraging. Most of the members were aware of the system of local governments and their effectiveness. Most of the members were elected for the first time. Fraternity was successful in the area, but at the same time representatives with fewer votes were also elected as councilors.

According to the report, Malik Muhammad Afzal, son of Fateh Muhammad, was the last eighth general member elected with 223 votes and was elected for the first time. Thus, the first number, Ghulam Farid, son of Ahmed Bakhsh, who got the highest number of 567 votes, was elected (ECP, 2001). The local union level had a total of 21 elected members of which there was a Nazim, a Naib Nazim, 8 general members, 4 lady councilors, 6 workers, 2 women councilors and one minority member (PLGO, 2001). This method of election brought about a change in the grassroots. Union councils were formed by combining villages and urban areas, thus ensuring a fair distribution of development funds. In this way, Nazim was elected from villages and Naib Nazim vice versa from some urban areas. The elected members played a role in schools, rural health centers, and police stations. The fund was transferred to the union councils every month, about Rs. 120,000. In addition to this, the authority to collect birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, and taxes from urban areas was also at the union level (Anwar ali, 2025).

The representation of union council representatives at the district and tehsil levels was a commendable move. Some problems were also faced regarding these changes. UC Nazim Asif Ali and Naib Nazim Anwar Ali said that although they had a mandate to identify local problems, they lacked the financial freedom to implement major projects without the approval of the district hierarchy. Those with fewer funds were consistently completed according to local needs (Anwar ali, 2025). Councilor Syed Sabir Hussain Shah said that education should not have been a condition for the election of Nazims, highlighting the councilor's frustration. His experience reflects a wider sentiment that the "empowerment" promised by the project was often symbolic. Councilors were often ignored in the larger decision-making process, used as vote banks for the election of Nazims at the district and tehsil levels (shah, 2025).

The development project in tehsil and district councils was characterized by the reservation of 33% of seats for women and 5% of seats reserved for farmers/laborers and minorities. Women councilor Mudassara Irfan, a lady councilor, said their presence in the council was a truly historic change representation was appreciated through votes, but according to her, their ability to influence policy was limited. The election of lady councilors was the best way to represent women. At the local level, minority members, including the workers, represented the most vulnerable sections of society. According to her, their voices were marginalized in the distribution of annual development plans (Irfan, 2025). Their inclusion was certainly a structural "change," but at the tehsil and district levels it was symbolic. The lack of influence points to a political "persistence" of elite dominance.

### **Continuity or Change: Top and Middle Tier**

The election for the district council was held on Aug. 2nd and 8th, 2001. This election was conducted under the judiciary in pursuance of the local government election order, 2000. After the election of the district council of Bahawalnagar on 8th Aug. 2001. The local government structure was put in place by Aug. 14, 2001. The elected Nazims of all 118 Union councils were the members of the district Council Bahawalnagar, a total of 164 members, including 118 elected and 46 special members (PLGO, 2001). In the first term of Devolution Plan 2001, at the top-tier position of District Nazim Ch Ali Akbar was elected District Nazim, and District Naib Nazim was Main Shoukat Ali Laleka (ZC, 2010).

During these days, CM Punjab was Ch. Pervez Elahi, and Ali Akbar Wains considered him very close. These days "Jutt family" became stronger in Punjab. District Naib Nazim Mian Shoukat was not a new face; his politics were at their peak at that time, and he belonged to dynastic politics. While in the 2nd tenure of the Devolution Plan, which was started from 2005 to 2010. Mian Mumtaz Ahmed Matyana was elected District Nazim; he belonged to a landlord family of Mehta Jhedu of Chistian. He was elected as a member of the district council in 1979, in 1985 became an MPA on a non-party basis, and later joined the Muslim League. In the 1990 election in NA 145, he joined PPP but could not succeed (Anwar ali, 2025).

In the 1993 election, he was elected MNA for the first time by defeating Abdul Sattar Laleka. In the 2002 election, he won NA-189 and defeated PML (N). He resigned from PPP and joined PML-Q in 2005. His choice elected him as District Nazim; mostly people said that the District Nazim post was a gift for him. Naib Nazim Ret. Col. Ahmed Zia was close to Musharraf and belonged to the Malik Awan family. He was the son of Malik Qasim, an ex-military retiree and senator. His father was a popular political personality of the Bahawalnagar district. Research clearly stated that devolution of power at the top level was 'elite capture or dynastic continuity.' Table 1 shows the elected leadership for the first tenure (2001-2005) and the second tenure (2005-2010) under devolution Plan 2001 in district Bahawalnagar.

**Table 1 Elected District Nazim and District Naib Nazim of District council 2001-2010**

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Designated</b>	<b>Year</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Ali Akbar Wains	District Nazim	2001-2005
1st	Mian Shoukat Ali Laleka	District Naib Nazim	2001-2005
2nd	Mian Mumtaz Ahmaed Matyana	District Nazim	2005-2010
2nd	Ret.Col.Ahmed Zia	District Naib Nazim	2005-2010

Source: Data adapted from Proceeding Register Zila Council Bwn

In the first term at the tehsil level, research analyzed that Syed Nadeem Zaman Shah became the tehsil Nazim of TMA Bahawalnagar. He belonged to the landlord Syed family of Bahawalnagar. Syed historically played a vital role during the Nawab council, and the state of Bahawalpur admired him. So, this family political legacy remains in every era before and after the partition of Pakistan. Faces are changed, but the Syed family remains strong in Bahawalnagar. In his 2nd tenure, Syed Qalandar Hussain got popularity and served as Tehsil Nazim. During this tenure, the Tehsil Naib Nazim became Ch. Shahzad-u-Zaman and he belonged to the Jutt family and was close to the Punjab government. But a little change was seen in the first tenure in the shape of Saith Khalid Hussain as a Naib Tehsil Nazim in TMA Bahawalnagar. He belonged to ward politics; he was the first one among his family at the top level of politics in Bahawalnagar. Table 1.2 shows the list of elected leadership for the first tenure (2001-2005) and the second tenure (2005-2010) following this under devolution plan in TMA Bahawalnagar.

**Table 2 Tehsil Nazim and Naib Nazim of TMA Bahawalnagar 2001-2010**

Tenure	Name	Designated	Year
1st	Syed Nadeem Zaman Shah	Tehsil Nazim	2001-2005
1st	Saith khalid Hussain	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2001-2005
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Syed Qalandar Hussain Shah	Tehsil Nazim	2005-2010
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Ch. Shahzad-u-Zaman	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2005-2010

Source: Data adopted from Proceeding Register Zila Council Bwn

Dynamic of tehsil Chistian was not different in the first tenure; the leading family ruled in the shape of Tahir Bashir Cheema as tehsil Nazim in TMA Chistian. He was the son of Bashir Cheema; his father was an ex-member of the Province of West Pakistan and the Deputy Speaker of the State of Bahawalpur. Tahir Bashir started his political career in the 1985 election as an MPA from his native city, Yazman. In the 1990 election he lost from PP-231 Dahranawala, Chistian. While in the 1993 election PP-231 won, in the 1997 election PP-231 could not succeed. In 2001, participated in the local election and was elected Tehsil Nazim till 2004 in TMA Chistian. After the death of Mian Abdul Sattar MNA-190, he resigned from Tehsil Nazim and participated in the election and defeated Mian Muhammad Ali Laleka of PPP. In the 2008 election, he was defeated by Ch. Abdul Ghafoor from NA-190 (ECP, 2008).

Tehsil Nazim Malik Abdul Ghaffar Awan was the son of Malik Sarfaraz Awan. He joined politics in 1999 as a chairman of the Market Committee Chistian. In 2002, he contested MPA as a PPP candidate but could not succeed. In the 2004 election of Tehsil Nazim, he won this election. In the 2nd tenure of the Devolution Plan, Haji Muhammad Akram was elected Tehsil Nazim of TMA Chistian. He started in politics as a local and elected member of the District Council in 1983. In 1985, in a non-party-based election, he was elected as MPA from PP-231 for the first time. Later he joined PML in 1986 and in the 1988 election succeeded from the same area. In 1993, participated as a PML (N) candidate and made a record as the 3rd time elected in PP-231 (PAP, 2026). Table 1.3 shows the list of elected leadership Tehsil Nazim / Tehsil Naib Nazim for the first tenure (2001-2005) and the second tenure (2005-2010) of TMA Chistian 2001-2010.



**Table 3 Elected Tehsil Nazim and Naib Nazim of TMA Chistian 2001-2010**

Tenure	Name	Designated	Year
1 <sup>st</sup>	Tahir Bashir Cheema	Tehsil Nazim	14-08-2001 to 08-03-2004
1 <sup>st</sup>	Malik Abdul Ghaffar Awan	Tehsil Nazim	04-06-2004 to 03-06-2005
1 <sup>st</sup>	Ch.Munawar Ali	Tehsil Naib Nazim	14-08-2001 to 03-06-2005
1 <sup>st</sup>	Rana Naveed Mumtaz (Add. Charge)	Tehsil Naib Nazim	01-07-2005- to 16-10-2005
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Haji Muhammad Akram PML-N	Tehsil Nazim	17-01-2005 to 24-02-2010
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Rana Ali Akbar PML-N	Tehsil Naib Nazim	-do-

Source: Data adapted from Incumbency statement of TMA Chistian.

In the first term of the Devotional Plan, Malik Abdul Haq was elected as Tehsil Nazim, and Naib Tehsil Nazim was elected by Ch. Zaffar. While in the 2nd tenure of the Devolution Plan, Haji Yassin was elected as Tehsil Nazim in TMA Haroonabad. He was a prominent political figure and founder of the Vital Group. Vital Group of Companies is a leading FMCG enterprise of Pakistan, especially in “Vital Tea.” This group became a power force with a unique ideology in political and economic terms in Haroonabad city. During the devolution of power from Malik Abdul Haq (2001–2005) to Haji Yasin (2005–2010), it indicated biradarism rather than dynastic politics (shah, 2025). Post 2010, TMA power was reduced, and dynastic and bardarim politics got rooted in national politics. Where "electable" from the Arain family, Ch. Ijaz-ul-Haq and Ch. Murtaza MPA are dominant. This continuity hinders grassroots democracy. Politics revolved around him it affiliated with PML-Z (Pakistan Muslim League-Zia) in this region. The new election in 2024 shows Haroonabad became dynastic politics of PML-Z without losing grip. Table 4 shows the list of elected leadership as Tehsil Nazim / Tehsil Naib Nazim of TMA Haroonabad for the first tenure (2001-2005) and the second tenure (2005-2010) under devolution plan 2001.

**Table 4 Elected Tehsil Nazim and Naib Nazim of TMA Haroonabad 2001-2010**

Tenure	Name	Designated	Year
1 <sup>st</sup>	Malik Abdul Haq	Tehsil Nazim	2001-2005
1 <sup>st</sup>	Ch. Zafar	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2001-2005
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Haji Yassin	Tehsil Nazim	2005-2010
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Ch. Mali	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2005-2010

Source: Data adapted from the Proceeding Register Zila Council Bwn

In the first term of the devolution plan, Haji Muhammad Javaid Iqbal was elected as a Tehsil Nazim of TMA Fort Abbas. He belonged to the local influential family Arain. He entered into politics for the first time in 2001. His leadership solved local issues, especially those focused on desert development, and improved services and delivery. Iqbal belonged to a local landowning family that owned lands and was a leader within the local community, which was typical of biradari politics of Bahawalnagar.

He was not a member of a national level dynasty but a local elite group, taking advantage of the Union Council support of indirect election. In the devolution plan Rana Muhammad Aslam was the Tehsil Naib Nazim. Biradari politics was led by Rana Rajput who had national and local politics in the Bahawalnagar district. His family were agriculturists. His politics started at Union-council politics, as Naib Nazim (Qaiser, 2026).

In 2nd Haji Irfan Shoukat became Tehsil Nazim, and Chaudhry Kashif Naveed Pansota was elected as Tehsil Naib Nazim. Kashif is a well-known political personality of Fort Abbas Tehsil. His brother, Chaudhry Rauf Khalid, was a notable politician due to national politics. The Jutt family is an influential local family in tehsil Fort Abbas. Punjab's rural politics, where the role of Biradarism (clan) and mostly landlords maintain power. His family owns the power of Dara Ch Rauf Khalid, which is a powerful force among the residents; such kind of politics emphasizes on the continuity of dynasties in which sons inherit politics in the family. In the General Election 2024, as an independent candidate from PP-242, he got victory, and he joined the (PML-N) (PAP, 2024). Kashif Naveed's trajectory exemplifies continuity in dynastic politics in Bahawalnagar (similar to patterns in nearby Haroonabad with families like the Yasins). Starting at the tehsil level during devolution (2005–2010) as Naib Nazim, he progressed to MPA in 2024, adapting through party affiliations (independent → possible PTI leanings → PML-N). This is a well-established system of power that guarantees that political authority is kept in a small circle of key families and, in effect, circumvents the desired democratic change in favor of grassroots empowerment. In turn, this makes the local government a patronage vessel instead of a vehicle to actual administrative devolution. Table 5 shows the list of elected leadership as Tehsil Nazim / Tehsil Naib Nazim of TMA Fort Abbas for the first tenure (2001-2005) and the second tenure (2005-2010) under devolution plan 2001.

**Table 5 Elected Tehsil Nazim and Naib Nazim of TMA Fortabbas 2001-2010**

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Designated</b>	<b>Year</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Haji Muhammad Javid Iqbal	Tehsil Nazim	2001-2005
1 <sup>st</sup>	Rana Muhammad Aslam Khan	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2001-2005
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Haji Irfan Shoukat	Tehsil Nazim	2005-2010
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Ch. Kashif Naveed Pansuta	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2005-2010

Source: Proceeding Register TMA Fortabbas.

The politics of Tehsil Minchinabad is centered around us, the Watto family, the Syed family, the Laleka family, and the Gaduka family. In the Devolution Power Plan 2001, implemented by Musharraf in the first term, Tehsil Nazim Mian Riaz Hussain Kaluka and his Naib Tehsil Nazim Mian Ahmed Bakhsh Sardhu were elected, who belonged to the feudal families supported by the Kaluka Watto group. In the second term, likewise, Mian Abdul Ghaffar Kaluka Watto was elected Tehsil Nazim, and Chaudhary Abdul Sattar his Naib Tehsil Nazim, of the Kaluka Watto (Kashif, 2025). Table 1.6 shows the list of elected leadership

as Tehsil Nazim / Tehsil Naib Nazim of TMA Minchinabad for the first tenure (2001-2005) and the second tenure (2005-2010) under devolution plan 2001.

**Table 6 Elected Tehsil Nazim and Naib Nazim of TMA Minchinabad 2001-2010**

Tenure	Name	Designated	Year
1 <sup>st</sup>	Mian Raiz Hussain Kaloka	Tehsil Nazim	2001-2005
1 <sup>st</sup>	Mian Ahmad Bakash Sardhoo	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2001-2005
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Abdul Ghafar Kaloka	Tehsil Nazim	2005-2010
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Ch. Abdul sattar	Tehsil Naib Nazim	2005-2010

Source: Proceeding Register TMA Minchinabad.

Thus, the representation shows that there was continuity of dynastic politics at the tehsil level and there was no change. The analysis indicates that the top and middle tiers of local government in district Bahawalnagar between 2001 and 2010 (District Nazim, District Naib Nazim, Tehsil Nazim, and Tehsil Naib Nazim) were off the record and came in on the ground with the green single of the military regime. These politicians mostly belonged to dynastic politics, which support the "elite capture or dynastic continuity" hypothesis.

## CONCLUSION

Local government is the backbone of democracy all over the world. Musharraf's system of local governments was widely accepted in Pakistan. This study covered the period from 2001 to 2008 in the Bahawalnagar district. It investigated the continuity or change during the devolution plan 2001. This case study of Bahawalnagar district, which consisted of five tehsils, showed an important conclusion: While the district experienced significant structural change during this national transformation, it failed to break the continuity of elite capture and dynastic politics in district Bahawalnagar. In the first term election of the district council, Ali Akbar Wains, who had a close relationship with the CM of Punjab, was elected District Nazim, and Mian Shoukat Ali Laleka became District Naib Nazim; his politics were not new in Bahawalnagar. Similarly, in the second term, Mian Mumtaz Matiana became the District Nazim, who was a part of traditional politics. The District Naib Nazim, Colonel Zia, who was elected with him, was also a continuation of dynastic politics. However, in terms of administration, the powers of the Deputy Commissioner were reduced and other departments, like Police, education, health, etc. were changed and made subordinate to the District Nazim. Thus, the District Nazim wrote his annual performance reports. Bureaucratic didn't like this "steel frame" that was given to the Nazim. Thus, the three-tier local government system represented a change in terms of administration. Representation at the tehsil level belonged to the dynastic politics of the most famous Syed family of Bahawalnagar. His family member Syed Nadeem Zaman Shah became Tehsil Nazim in the 1st term, and in the 2nd term, Syed Qalandar Hussain Shah as Tehsil Nazim succeeded in TMA Bahawalnagar. On the other hand, the TMAs of the district are run by elite capture, dynastic, and traditional politics. However, in tehsil Bahawalnagar, the Naib Tehsil Nazim Khalid Hussain became part of this system from the local street level, which was considered a political change. However, the devolution plan at the union council's level was a changed political scenario. New leadership runs union councils. The main feature was the increase of seats out of the total of 21 UC members; 8 general members were elected with considerable prestige, and the middle-class family became part of the system, which was a real change. For the first time at the local level, representatives like labor

councilors and women councilors were given a place in the corridors of power. This was a momentous change, which introduced a new wave of governance in the Bahawalnagar district.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides the policy and academic recommendations based on the findings of the district of Bahawalnagar:

1. Fiscal Autonomy of Union Councils: Union Council Nazims must be granted direct access to a specific percentage of the development budget without necessarily depending on the discretionary consent of the District Nazim. This would empower grassroots representatives.
2. Substance over Symbolism: On Special Seats Just the presence of women and peasant councilors is not enough to empower. The future local government statutes should have the provision of specific development funds to be allocated to the women- and minority-led projects, which will be mandatory. Furthermore, these representatives are to be taught the technicalities of budget approval and legislation through compulsory capacity-building workshops.
3. Depoliticization of the Bureaucracy: There was a conflict between elected Nazims and the administrative staff, which slowed down service delivery. A sound legal framework would be required to set the boundaries under which the elected executive and civil service can operate. Administrative officers need protection of their tenure so they do not serve as the personal staff of influential political families.
4. Restoration of Party-Based Elections: The fact that the 2001 and 2005 elections were non-party was the main motivation in the Bahawalnagar politics of Biraderi. Reviving the election of party-based candidates at the local level would compel the candidates to pursue policy agendas as opposed to lineage, thus creating a break from the monopoly of the electable and also giving leadership a chance to reach the middle class.

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