

# **The missing piece: local governance and Pakistan's NSP**

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Nayab Khalid | 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2025



**Think of a country that counts not only the number of tanks and missiles it has, but also the health of children who are born on the territory, the literacy of its people, and the economic opportunities available even in the smallest of its villages.**

Indeed, in Pakistan's National Security Policy (2022-2026), there remains an inspiring vision for a country secured not just by borders and armies but also by the well-being of its people.

This policy addresses the supposed linkage between conventional security systems and the much more overlooked idea - human security. It warrants national unity along with a more substantial social contract.

However, one question remains salient: whether Pakistan would succeed in achieving the goals set out by this new NSP. Or will it turn out to be yet another empty effort?

Undoubtedly, this seems to be a citizen-centric policy that believes what John Locke said: "Government's Legitimacy comes from the Citizens." This unity depends on democracy: a government listens to and addresses people's needs. Here, the local government, the closest tier of governance to the citizenry, becomes critical.

A local government is a channel through which citizens can express complaints, seek solutions to ills, and forge trust in the state—the essence of the instruments created for democracy.

Imagine a web of representatives, each standing for a community. Not an administrative body, but an active corner of participatory democracy through which the local representatives act as direct intermediaries between state and people. Such direct connections instill a sense of security and build a solid foundation for sustainable national harmony.

There are provisions in the Constitution and the 18th Amendment regarding the transfer of powers to the local representatives.

"Each province shall, by law, establish a local government system and devolve the political, administrative and financial responsibilities and

authority to the locally elected representatives of the local governments”, the amendment says, according to article 149A.

However, because of inconsistencies and delays, Pakistan has never developed an effective local government system.

Also, the amendment says: Elections to the local governments shall be held by the Election Commission of Pakistan.” Despite this, elections are put off, powers are kept centralized, and the crucial link between citizens and the state is gradually weakened.

These shortcomings have grave implications. The provincial representatives find it almost impossible to attend to the specific needs of individual communities with stretched-out constituencies. This worsens the economic inequalities, overwhelming most affected areas and engendering public distrust, eventually leading to discontentment.

The absence of good and effective local governance is itself a disbanding force against the National Security Policy as it entails resistance to the implementation of the very citizen vision that people have. Without strong local levels, its promise stumbles.

It is indeed the loss of access to resources, which is the critical base of human welfare. The state-citizen bond is essential for cohesion. Most elusive is the very idea of an effective and inclusive governance system.

In fact, local governments are not just administrative establishments but the backbone of good governance. They are placed very close to the people so that services can be accessed in time according to the citizens’ demands, thus affirming the state’s commitment to its people. It reinforces public trust and makes one feel included, which is vital for any practical policy framework.

Devolve power to local representatives and develop them in close networks between the state and the marginalized communities.

Furthermore, economic security- the strongest pillar of national security policy- is ironically linked to reducing inequality.

Resource access rights under fair distribution boost the most massive trigger for human well-being and regional development while maintaining traditional security from triggering socio-economics. Such a strong local governance system would not only be a case for good governance but also for strategic imperative for national security.

***Transformation of the very essence of national security policy vision must bring about a paradigm shift. Local governments must be empowered with resources, authority, and autonomy. Federal, provincial, and local levels and civil society must be in open cooperation with each other.***

A future where human security reigns supreme and is developed through inclusive and citizen-centric governance is envisioned in the national security policy. Devolution of powers to local governments is not solely a constitutional obligation but a strategic imperative.

Local governments can be dynamic in fostering trust, reducing inequalities, and strengthening national belonging by acting as a bridge between the state and its citizens.

All of the above are predicated on establishing strong, responsive, accountable, and inclusive local governance structures so that the full promise of the National Security Policy can be fully actualized. That is when Pakistan can realize that social cohesion, economic stability, and human security are of the essence for its long-term security and development. The missing piece must be put in place.

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Nayab Khalid

The writer is an MPhil student in Public Policy at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). She can be reached via email at [nayab.pp24@pide.edu.pk](mailto:nayab.pp24@pide.edu.pk)

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