

VISION FOR THE CITIES¹

Ishrat Husain

Pakistan is likely to face several difficult challenges in the next few decades such as Above average Population growth, rapid urbanization, youth dominated demographics, absorption and application of technological changes, Climate change and a move away from global integration and linkages. On the top of it we are faced with weak governance structure which has made us laggard in the region. In order to prepare for meeting these challenges we have to design a strategy that primarily addresses the governance issues. In my book “Governing the ungovernable” I have concluded that the main driver of change for governance reforms would by and large depend upon the nexus of urbanization-educated and enlightened middle class – vocal civil society. Well managed urbanization paves the way for political , economic and social changes.

The 2017 census ,in my view based on casual empiricism, understates the size of the urban population as it is based on a flawed and incomplete definition. I am more inclined to endorse Raza Ali, who has used a more broad-based and realistic definition of ‘urban’ and ‘urbanizing’ areas . His research has shown that the urban population would be 46 percent of the total population. The census covers only those living in the municipalities and cantonment areas as urban areas.

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The emergence of a vocal, assertive, educated middle class, based in urban areas free from links of kinship, caste, tribal affiliations and feudal subservience, has a high probability of triggering this driver. WDR 2017 has shown that when the middle class grew in Latin America, people began demanding better quality services and demonstrating for better governance. Urbanization improves the overall productivity and growth rates of economy through reallocation of labour from low productive sectors such as agriculture to high productive manufacturing and formal services sectors. High density of population reduces the cost of provision of infrastructure and services. Agglomeration economies bellow for a scaling up of production, spell over of skills and transfer of know-how, availability of intermediate inputs and reduction in the length of the supply chain.

This mixture of an urban population, comprising a growing middle class, demographics favouring a younger, better educated, more self-confident population, a vibrant social media and an active, vocal civil society can have a serious transformational impact on Pakistan's policies, governance and delivery of basic services. Constituency delimitation based on urban and urbanizing population would shift the balance of power from the dominance of rural electorate to an even handed division of the population. The rural constituencies are by and large characterized by the traditional patron-client relationship. According to Iftikhar Ahmed

“People have overwhelmingly supported the moderate forces in consecutive elections and rapid urbanization and consumerism mingled with more mobility and unlimited access to media have already unleashed new processes of communication. A comparatively youthful society are not only raising their voices against a monopoly of feudal interests over politics. They are not comfortable with the existing oligarchic tri-polar relationship between the bureaucracy, the military, and politicians which smacks of age-old dynastic chrisism and so the demand for accountability are becoming louder.”

More recently, Ali Cheema and his colleagues who have done seminal work on dynastic politics had concluded

“The urban areas of Punjab have begun to witness a weakening of dynastic politics. In comparison with their rural counterparts, urban dynastic politicians are 40 percentage points less likely to win in the constituencies where they stand for election. Furthermore, the number of races without any dynastic contender is almost 10 percentage points higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

The ties of kinship and economic dependence that often characterize rural social relations are weaker in cities, thus decreasing some of the electoral advantage that underpins the electability of rural dynastic candidates. The physical space of cities, consisting of high population density levels, as well as the presence of a relatively mobile and fluid population of inhabitants, is less conducive to the mobilization of vote blocks similar to these that characterize local-level village politics. Cities

are also move plural spaces than villages, with a diverse range of organizations and interest groups facilitating a freer exchange³ of information and ideas that can make it harder for dynastic politicians to rely upon their traditional sources of power when campaigning for votes. Given the changing demographics of Punjab, with the province becoming increasingly urban, we may see a decline in dynasticism over time and the emergency of political party machines”.

The expectations of the urban electorate are related to delivery of tangible results and promised parameters of performance. Those who are unable to meet these expectations are usually shown the door as the threshold of the urban population’s tolerance for incompetent, self-serving and corrupt individuals is relatively low. A comparison between the candidates contesting the elections over last five decades shows a persistence of a dynastic element and family orientation as significant determinants in the rural constituencies with low turnover. In the urban constituencies, the fatality rate is relatively high and new faces are more common, changes in party affiliations are also relatively more common in the rural constituencies, because the parties chase electable and bring them into the fold. The same long dominant families in rural Pakistan areas found to be more prone to changing partly loyalties than their urban counterparts. However, this tendency

has been curbed since the constitutional amendment that forces a person to resign from his seat if he crosses the floor.

Accountability, transparency, right to information, financial disclosure is likely to be demanded by the urban electorate, the civil society and the media. They are more likely to be interested in getting access to public services such as education, health, water supply, sanitation, transport, land for housing and services. These services are delivered largely by the local government.

The MNA and MPAs will therefore perforce have to work with the municipal corporations, municipal committees, town committees and cantonments to satisfy their votes. The impetus for reforms of institutions delivering these services will therefore be shared by all three tiers of the government. The present tension and in-built conflict that is the main hurdle in adopting reforms would thus be eased and give way to a harmonious and synergetic relationship that would affect the quality of governance. An important side effect will be that the state would be able to assert its legitimacy through a demonstrated record of effectiveness in delivering basic public services to the population. This would allow it to collect taxes from individuals who question the government's moral authority to tax the people when they are unable to deliver essential services.

What is the way forward to make our cities livable, productive and drivers of good governance? Local governments in form of autonomous directly elected Metropolitan corporations, Municipal Corporations, Municipal Committees and Town committees should be devolved functions such as Education, Health, Water

and Sanitation, Solid and liquid waste disposal, Public Transport etc. They should be allowed to mobilize financial resources from within their jurisdictions in form of local taxes, fees, user charges, cesses, fines and penalties etc. It is a pity that the four provinces are able to raise only Rs 7 billion as property taxes on a stock of immovable property worth trillions of rupees . Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta, Faisalabad should be able to generate sufficient resources to take care of the provisioning of public goods and services in their areas without claiming any significant shares upon the Divisible tax pool. The population of these cities would be forthcoming as their taxes and fees would be spent on the facilities, amenities and services provided exclusively to them and their cities. The propensity to pay taxes increases if the benefits of their use are perceived to be appropriated locally . This would free up a lot of resources from the Divisible Tax pool to be disproportionately allocated to the backward districts in each province improving their infrastructure and investing in human resources. This strategy would not only uplift millions out of poverty but also reduce regional disparities in the country.
