BCPR

BNU Center for Policy Research

THE POLICY**BEACON**

MISPERCEPTION ABOUT TECHNOCRACY AS A PANACEA BY DR. TAHIR KAMRAN

BNU

20 YEARS OF EMBRACING DIVERSITY

ABOUT BNU CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH

In recognition of the growing need to continue contributing to the stock of knowledge through enquiry, research, and interaction, Beaconhouse National University (BNU) set up the Center for Policy Research (BCPR) as the hub for policy-oriented research. Originally focused on applied socio-economic areas, the Center's remit has been expanded to include the entire spectrum of disciplines and fields of inquiry studied at BNU.

BCPR seeks to foster a culture of rigorous, policy-relevant research and analysis. In keeping with the interdisciplinary approach of BNU, the center explores new avenues by taking an integrated view of Pakistan's policy issues in the context of our economic, political, and social realities, their changing dynamics, and global developments. It is also a platform for interacting with organizations, academia, think tanks, and related institutions in Pakistan and abroad.

Thriving under the patronage of eminent personalities, including the Center's Director, Dr. Hafiz A. Pasha, BCPR is in a strategic position to benefit the policy research and practice communities from the unique experience of its diverse faculty. The BNU community has already been contributing extensively to the policy debate in the country, and their counsel has been regularly sought by successive governments in their respective disciplines, both through formal institutional structures and informal exchanges.

Using cutting-edge analytical and critical thinking techniques, often developed indigenously by our experts over the years, BCPR shall furnish evidence-based research to develop specific proposals and recommendations to all relevant stakeholders for informed and inclusive policy-making in Pakistan.

BCPR envisions formulating its recommendations from the lens of its likely beneficiaries, making them primary stakeholders in policy-making exercises. It aims to elicit research to contribute to the ever-evolving narrative for human development and sustainable growth, eventually benefiting the citizens of Pakistan.

" The Policy Beacon is BCPR's Policy Brief series in which authors analyze contemporary challenges and present recommendations for decision-makers. The series covers all disciplines taught at BNU. "

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The concept of technocracy is gaining prominence in policy circles, with proponents believing that technocrats, not politicians, hold the key to solving Pakistan's issues.

- Technocrats are seen as competent problem solvers in fields like economics, but their rise has led to a depoliticization of the state and society.

- Technocrats' influence in Pakistan can be traced back to figures like Ayub Khan and their close association with institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

- The pursuit of technocracy has resulted in a non-egalitarian economy and divisive politics, contributing to the genesis of Bangladesh.

- The text argues that a balance between technocracy and democracy is necessary, ensuring both experts and elected representatives have a role in decision-making.

- Pakistan should address socio-economic challenges holistically, considering the local context and investing in citizen education and engagement.

- The interplay between politics and economics is crucial, and policy-makers should analyze the political implications of economic decisions.

- Integration of scientific expertise with political thinking is needed, especially in addressing issues like climate change.

The concept of a technocratic setup has become a resounding buzzword in policy circles, where influential minds firmly believe that it is not politicians but technocrats who wield the elusive magic wand capable of extricating Pakistan from the quagmire in which it finds itself. Essentially, they yearn for a depoliticized power structure, achieved by discrediting politicians and replacing them with competent technocrats. Their firm conviction lies in the belief that 'technocracy,' not democracy, holds the key to curing all the socio-economic maladies afflicting Pakistan. Ironically, antecedent to its inception, the allocation of the Punjab and Bengal regions found itself entrusted to Cyril Radcliffe (1899-1977), a British jurist by vocation. The consequences of this allocation continue to resonate within the contemporary milieu. In the domains of economic strategy and foreign policy, technocrats had traditionally occupied a preeminent role. Altaf Gauhar, in a moment of revelation, has illuminated the names of key figures such as Chaudhary Zafarullah Khan, Malik Ghulam Muhammad, Chaudhary Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Ali Bogra, Iskander Mirza, Syed Amjad Ali, and Ayub Khan, individuals who steered Pakistan into the protective embrace of the United States.[1] Now Pakistan's subservience to America is perpetuated and its power elite seems to be at its beck and call.

Ayub Khan's pioneering endeavor, the institution of basic democracies, was a product of the intellect of Manzur Qadir, himself a legal luminary and, by extension, a technocrat. It is noteworthy that during this epoch, the stewardship of the economy rested squarely in the hands of figures such as Muhammad Shoaib and Mehboob ul Haq. The planning commission which played a key role in coordinating the state's import substitution and export promotion policies, was assisted by the Development Advisory Service of Harvard University.[2] This arrangement, however, precipitated a bitterly divisive response in East Pakistan, ultimately culminating in its secession. It is therefore reasonable to assert that the overreliance on the 'expertise' of technocrats emerges as a paramount causal factor in the genesis of Bangladesh. Regrettably, this proclivity for technocratic governance

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[1] Altaf Gauhar, Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2011), p.114.

[2] Ian Talbot, Pakistan: A Modern History (London: Hurst & Co, 2005), p.170.

persisted, perpetuating its ominous repercussions on the trajectory of the nation.[3] Except for a brief interlude during Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's tenure from 1971 to 1977, some analysts contend that this period of political ascendancy ended as early as 1974. Subsequently, the reins of power shifted toward technocrats, a phenomenon primarily attributed to the unwavering confidence that the Pakistani establishment[4] vested in these technocratic figures, often closely associated with esteemed institutions such as the IMF or World Bank.

By 'technocracy,' they mean a system in which policy experts armed with profound knowledge in fields such as economics, climate science, genomics, and more, assume the role of decision-makers for political questions. Technocrats embody the epitome of 'valued human resources,' capable of tackling even the most intricate social and political quandaries with a scientific approach bordering on the mechanical. Embracing technocrats as problem solvers leads to a profound depoliticization of both the state and society.

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However, the pursuit of technocracy has yielded the bitter fruit of a non-egalitarian economy and divisive politics – unfortunate byproducts of the depoliticization that permeates much of human life. A discerning examination of global trends inclines one to concur with the insightful economist, Dani Rodrik, and his "impossibility theorem" for the global economy.[5] This theorem posits that "democracy, national sovereignty, and global economic integration are mutually incompatible," making it implausible to harmoniously uphold all three principles simultaneously. The allure of a technocratic regime may promise an elixir for Pakistan's woes, but it comes at the cost of depoliticization and its far-reaching repercussions. As we ponder the intricate balance between democracy, sovereignty, and global integration, we must tread carefully in pursuit of a brighter future for our nation.

Over the span of two decades, economic policymakers have traversed a path of misguided presumption, seemingly oblivious to the weighty, tragic choices

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[3] *Ibid, pp.170-71.*

[4] *Muhammad Waseem's coinage of the term Establishmentarian Democracy may prove instructive to understand the control of undemocratic agents on democratic system prevailing in Pakistan, Muhammad Waseem, Political Conflict in Pakistan (London: Hurst & Co. 2021), pp.228-235.*

[5] *Rodrik, Dani. "The Impossibility Theorem of International Economics: A Review Essay." Journal of Economic Literature 35.2 (1997): 674-683.*

that lie before them. They naively treated the pursuit of growth as a mere technocratic puzzle, imagining that it could be neatly resolved through the deft application of tax policies and market institutions. They failed to grasp the essence of the matter – the profound, underlying political questions that demanded their thoughtful engagement and incisive scrutiny. Had they recognized the significance of nurturing and enlightening the citizenry, instilling in them the art of judgment, they might have been spared the jarring shock of the cataclysmic Great Recession of 2008.[6] Worryingly, they appeared ill-prepared, caught off-guard as the tempestuous tides of populism swept away what seemed like solid political structures, leaving them bewildered and dismayed.

Such temerity in approaching the intricate fabric of societal and economic dynamics led to a perilous cycle of recurring surprises, as the sands of time shifted beneath their feet once more. A scant decade later, a new upheaval of populist forces toppled seemingly stable political configurations, exposing the fragility of their technocratic illusions. In retrospect, the wisdom they overlooked lies not in the mechanical management of policies, but in delving into the very essence of human nature and governance. Only by recognizing and addressing the fundamental interplay of politics and economics while empowering the populace with discernment can we hope to navigate the uncertain waters of our collective future with resilience and sagacity.

The intense struggle in which we find ourselves embroiled revolves around the intricate politics of climate change, as eloquently posited by Harvard professor Danielle Allen. She insightfully identifies this struggle as an intricate dance between science and political thinking, locked in a peculiar standoff. On one hand, science hesitates to fully embrace its role as an aid and supporter, opting to shy away from guiding political thought. Concurrently, political thinking, in its obstinate demeanor, fails to recognize the inherent value that science brings to the table. This delicate standoff holds within it the seeds of wisdom that demand exploration.

Delving deeper reveals Hannah Arendt's insightful analysis from her book,

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[6] For details see, Andrew Ross Sorkin Too Big to Fail: The Inside Story of How Wall Street and Washington Fought to Save the Financial System—and Themselves (London: Penguin Books,2009).

"The Human Condition," that remains relevant. In her exploration of the world, she observes a troubling trend — the habit of reducing human actions to mere utility functions, calculations of consequences, or mechanical algorithms applied to human endeavors. This is the realm of technocrats, who navigate politics on the surface, neglecting the nuances that provide it vitality.[7]

This myopic approach repeatedly leaves technocrats bewildered by politics' unpredictable nature. This underscores the need for re-politicization — reestablishing trust in the political realm and moving away from perpetual astonishment when faced with political disruptions. It's essential to clarify that re-politicization doesn't seek to dethrone science; rather, it aims to unite science with political thinking, harmonizing calculation, algorithmic intelligence, and judgment. This fusion equips us better to navigate climate change and other pressing issues with wisdom and purpose. The time has come to transcend artificial boundaries separating these realms and forge a new path that combines the best of both worlds.

Arendt's analysis unveils two pivotal facets of scientific thinking that depoliticize human experience. These features dilute the human essence, turning us into mere spectators of existence. The first feature lies in the relentless pursuit of cause and effect, mechanistically unraveling the world's workings. This focus on the "how" renders human reasoning replicable by machines, which emerge as superior calculators. Arendt aptly notes, "It is not only, not even primarily, contemplation which has become an entirely meaningless experience. Thought itself, when it became 'reckoning with consequences,' became a function of the brain, with the result that electronic instruments are found to fulfil these functions much better than we ever could."[8]

Consequently, the pertinent question of "why" gets overshadowed. Science's power to uncover the "how" takes precedence, overshadowing the quest for deeper meaning. In the face of technical advancements catering to the powerful, human aspirations lose relevance. An unsettling example is the development of nuclear weapons driven by the desires of the influential.

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[7] Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,2018).

[8] Danielle Allen, 'Foreword', p. x, in ibid.

As scientific prowess advances, it steers away from human contemplation and moral deliberation. Mechanization of thought and technical allure prevent pondering deeper questions, ushering in an era of depoliticized beings detached from life's essence. Revisiting priorities becomes crucial to restore grappling with "why" and "what." Only by engaging with these inquiries can we invigorate the human experience and steer away from depoliticization.

Another aspect of scientific methodology contributing to its failure in comprehending human actions lies in its reliance on mathematics. Arendt argues that scientists inhabit a realm where spoken language's potency diminishes. This mathematical language, once an abbreviation, now holds propositions untranslatable into speech.

Mathematization ruptures the linguistic tapestry, vital for weaving histories and meaning. Arendt echoes Aristotle, recognizing humans as political creatures intrinsically linked to words. Reliance on science mirrors Arendt's insight that mathematical language fosters depoliticization. Advanced nations display a significant political engagement gap between humanities and STEM graduates.[9] This suggests individuals with refined verbal skills tend to participate in civic life. Diminishing civic involvement among science-educated individuals reflects the "dangerous passivity" Arendt anticipated. The argument doesn't negate scientific tools' value.[10] It emphasizes integrating their knowledge into a broader discourse on actions, aspirations, and reasons. Science, as Arendt notes, supports genuine reflection on the human condition and the path forward. It's not a sole guide but a vital aid in understanding.

In "The Human Condition," Arendt explores three core aspects of human life: labor (biological needs), work (creative shaping and social connections), and politics (collective decision-making). These activities foster engagement and understanding. Arendt emphasizes their interplay, challenging rigid categories and empowering citizens to assess their circumstances and engage politically, shaping the human experience.

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[9] STEM is abbreviation of Science, Technology, engineering, and mathematics), ibid. p. xii.
[10] Ibid, p. xii.

Arendt also highlights science's detachment from politics due to a lack of genuine action and the dominance of mathematics. She advocates for integrating science with other aspects of life, supporting reflection and contributing to a deeper understanding of the human condition and our future.

The whole discourse offers several valuable lessons and insights for Pakistan, particularly in the context of its governance, politics, and socio-economic development. Here are some lessons that Pakistan can draw from this discourse:

" *Pakistan should aim for a balance between technocratic efficiency and democratic accountability, ensuring that both experts and elected representatives have a role in decision-making.* "

▪ Balancing Technocracy and Democracy: The discourse highlights the tension between technocracy and democracy. While technocrats possess valuable expertise, an exclusive reliance on technocracy could lead to depoliticization and the erosion of democratic values. Pakistan should aim for a balance between technocratic efficiency and democratic accountability, ensuring that both experts and elected representatives have a role in decision-making.

▪ Addressing Socio-Economic Challenges: The discourse points out that technocratic solutions alone may not effectively address complex socio-economic challenges. Pakistan should focus on holistic development strategies that consider the political, cultural, and social dimensions of its issues. Policies should be rooted in an understanding of the local context and the aspirations of the population.

▪ Investing in Citizen Education and Engagement: The discourse emphasizes the importance of nurturing an informed and engaged citizenry. Pakistan should prioritize education that promotes critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and active participation in civic affairs. Empowered citizens can contribute meaningfully to both politics and policymaking.

Recognizing the Interplay of Politics and Economics: The discourse underscores the interconnectedness of politics and economics. Pakistan must recognize that economic policies cannot be divorced from political considerations. Policymakers should engage in thoughtful analysis of the political implications of economic decisions to avoid unexpected disruptions.

Understanding the Role of Science in Governance: The discourse highlights the need to integrate scientific expertise with political thinking. In addressing issues like climate change, Pakistan should embrace scientific knowledge as a valuable tool while also considering the ethical, social, and political dimensions of these challenges.

Prioritizing Language and Communication: The discourse discusses the significance of language and communication in politics. Clear communication that resonates with the population is essential. Pakistan should promote open dialogue and effective communication between experts, policymakers, and the public to ensure a shared understanding of complex issues.

Embracing Civic Agency and Political Action: The discourse encourages a renewed emphasis on political action and civic engagement. Pakistan should foster a sense of civic agency among its citizens, encouraging them to actively participate in shaping the country's future through political processes.

Learning from History and Global Trends: The discourse references historical events and global trends to illustrate its points. Pakistan can learn from past mistakes and successes of other nations, adapting strategies that align with its own context while avoiding potential pitfalls.

▪ Incorporating Multidisciplinary Approaches: The discourse mentions the importance of multidisciplinary expertise in addressing complex challenges. Pakistan should encourage collaboration between experts from various fields to develop comprehensive solutions that consider diverse perspectives.

▪ Preserving Cultural and Human Values: The discourse warns against the reduction of human experiences to mechanistic calculations. Pakistan should prioritize preserving its cultural and human values even as it adopts technological advancements and scientific approaches.

Incorporating these lessons into its governance and policy-making processes can help Pakistan navigate its socio-economic challenges while upholding democratic principles and empowering its citizens. It's important for Pakistan's leaders and thinkers to critically analyze these lessons and tailor them to the nation's unique circumstances and aspirations.

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