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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Rethinking Political Leadership and Social Welfare in Pakistan****Nazir Ahmed Siyal**

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pervaiz.mahesar@usindh.edu.pk**Abstract**

Political leadership plays a crucial role in shaping social welfare policies, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan, where poverty alleviation and social protection remain key governance challenges. The study aims to understand the role of political leadership in social welfare by evaluating the legacy of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and the Ehsaas Program. Despite their significance in addressing socio-economic inequalities, the existing literature lacks a comprehensive comparative analysis of their program under different political regimes. This study addresses the missing information by researching how political leadership priorities affect policy sustainability, effectiveness measures, and societal economic consequences. The research uses a qualitative methodology that relies on secondary data through research papers, government reports, and policy evaluations. The research reviews published literature to determine how BISP and Ehsaas perform in poverty reduction, financial inclusion, and social welfare advancement. The data shows how both programs reduced poverty, although their performance emerged from political beliefs, organizational structures, and institutional factors. The analysis demonstrates the necessity of establishing consistent welfare policies free from political manipulation for sustainable development.

Keywords: Political leadership, Social Welfare, Poverty Alleviation, Policy effectiveness, Governance

Introduction

Social welfare addresses poverty, inequality, and access to basic services in developing countries. It serves as a mechanism to promote social justice and economic stability by supporting vulnerable populations, including the poor, elderly, and disabled. According to recent research, effective social welfare systems are essential for reducing income disparities and fostering inclusive growth in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Azevedo et al., 2022). For instance, conditional cash transfer programs, such as Brazil's Bolsa Família, have significantly improved health and education outcomes among marginalized communities (World Bank, 2023). These programs alleviate immediate financial hardships and contribute to long-term human capital development, critical for sustainable economic progress.

However, implementing social welfare systems in developing countries often faces challenges such as limited fiscal capacity, weak institutional frameworks, and political instability. A study by Gupta and Vegelin (2023) highlights that inadequate funding and inefficient resource allocation

hinder the effectiveness of social welfare programs, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive data and monitoring systems exacerbates these issues, making it difficult to accurately measure the impact of interventions. Despite these challenges, international organizations and governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of social welfare as a tool for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) (UNDP, 2023). Strengthening social welfare systems remains a priority for fostering equitable development and improving the quality of life for millions in developing nations

BISP & Ehsas Programs- Tools for social welfare

The concept of social welfare focuses on three main areas which include poverty levels as well as inequality distribution and public services accessibility in developing nations. The system functions as a tool which supports people in need alongside disabled individuals and senior citizens and economically disadvantaged members of society. The research demonstrates social welfare systems that work well continue to minimize income differences along with promoting equal growth in low- and middle-income countries (BMICs) (Azevedo et al., 2022). The Brazilian conditional cash transfer program Bolsa Família demonstrates that these programs enhance health and education outcomes for disadvantaged communities (World Bank, 2023). These programs help with short-term monetary relief and boost capital development of people for lasting economic success.

Developing countries struggle to establish social welfare systems because they deal with restricted budget resources along with inadequate frameworks for institutions and problematic political situations. The study conducted by Gupta and Vegelin (2023) demonstrated that inadequate funding with inefficient resource distribution negatively affects social welfare program performance especially throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Insufficient monitoring systems together with incomplete data make it hard to precisely evaluate the results of implemented programs. International organizations together with governments now better understand social welfare's capability to help reach United Nations Sustainable Development Goals SDGs especially Goal 1 No Poverty and Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities (UNDP, 2023). Social welfare system improvements stand as the top priority for developing nations to achieve equity in development and life quality improvement for their millions of residents.

Research Problem

Researching the transformational power of political leaders in social welfare policies remains critical because these leaders directly guide design work, operational follow-through, and end results delivery. Social welfare programs receive priority through political leadership, equipping funds, and sustaining these welfare initiatives. Researchers have failed to verify through empirical methods which leadership styles and political ideologies in Pakistan determine social welfare policy outcomes. The results of social welfare programs like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and the Ehsaas Program need more extensive investigation of their relationship with political leadership. BISP began in 2008 to distribute cash benefits to poor families, but Ehsaas expanded its social protection services starting from 2019. The available body of research lacks a comprehensive assessment of both programs regarding their methods, beneficiary groups, and performance results. A comprehensive methodical analysis will reveal both advantages and limitations in order to provide factual recommendations for future government programs that strengthen social welfare programs and fairness of benefits in Pakistan.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the role of political leadership in shaping social welfare policies in Pakistan
2. To assess the effectiveness of BISP and Ehsaas in poverty alleviation and financial inclusion

3. To evaluate the long-term socio-economic implications of these programs

Research Questions

1. How has political leadership influenced the implementation and effectiveness of BISP and Ehsaas?
2. What are the socio-economic outcomes of these programs?
3. What policy recommendations can be made to improve Pakistan's social welfare governance?

Research Methodology

The research design follows a qualitative method to explore how political leaders affect Pakistan's social welfare strategies by studying the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and the Ehsaas Program. Research methods focusing on qualitative data help researchers study the effects of political systems on policy results in depth. The research analyzes secondary data from peer-reviewed papers, evaluations, and official reports from the World Bank, UNDP, and the Government of Pakistan. An analysis using thematic methodologies detects patterns between political support for the programs, resource distribution, outcomes, and social effects. The evaluation examines BISP and Ehsaas through comparison to show how these programs perform differently in terms of socio-economic inequality reduction. The study draws from existing data to complete research evaluation needs and generate evidence that supports better social welfare policies in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Multiple research works investigate how political leaders influence social welfare policy development in Pakistan, with close attention to the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and the Ehsaas Program. Different research works analyze multiple aspects of political control, policy execution, and social welfare program success for poverty reduction and financial accessibility.

Research investigating social welfare programs starts with exploring their underlying political reasons for introduction. Research findings demonstrate that BISP adopted its poverty-reduction mission at inception while using it to build the ruling party's electoral support (Ahmed & Khan, 2023). Research into the Ehsaas Program demonstrates its 2019 establishment as a plan to establish social welfare institutions without partisan involvement under government-led monitoring (Rashid et al., 2022). Research has established that political leadership stands as the key factor which decides how welfare programs evolve and endure in Pakistan.

Scientists analyze poverty reduction consequences through studies that evaluate these programs. BISP has established research evidence showing that its cash transfers without conditions bring extensive income growth alongside better food security and women's empowerment (Hussain & Iqbal, 2023). Research demonstrates that Ehsaas implemented an extensive framework with health care and educational opportunities and financial resources to deliver comprehensive social welfare services (Malik & Raza, 2024). The enduring stability of such programs depends on the constant political backing and improved operational capabilities of institutions, according to research by Ali and Siddiqui (2023).

The third branch of literature investigates the administrative and governance difficulties that arise from running these programs. The literature shows that both the BISP and Ehsaas programs struggled with administration problems, transparency concerns, and governance challenges caused by political influence (Shah & Nadeem, 2023). The researchers who study Ehsaas highlight that its digital payment system and biometric verification methods have improved accountability. However, gaps in outreach efforts and data accuracy continue to be significant problems (Khan & Farooq, 2024).

Various experts research how the programs deliver results at both national and regional levels. Research illustrates how the digital financial inclusion programs have produced different

outcomes throughout provinces, while urban centers obtained better results than rural areas (Zafar & Jamil, 2023). The researchers emphasize that distinctive political leadership needs to implement strategic policies to provide everyone fair access to welfare benefits (Rehman & Tariq, 2024).

Another critical area of research compares Pakistan's social welfare policies with global models. Research analyzes cash transfer programs from Brazil and India to present Pakistani programs with potential efficiency and impact enhancement opportunities (Nasir & Mehmood, 2023). Successful welfare programs require strong institutional systems that need to be developed to minimize political interference, according to Abid and Saleem (2024).

Scholars debate the success of BISP and Ehsaas as poverty alleviation tools because cash transfer programs, according to their critics, create dependency risks. Long-term dependence on welfare can restrict personal economic growth unless policy-makers implement related initiatives that create employment and empower the population (Javed & Hassan, 2023).

According to research about political leadership and policy continuity, Pakistan's frequent political transitions resulted in altered program priorities and funding distributions (Saeed & Aslam, 2024). Scholars recommend implementing social welfare frameworks free of politics because institutional structures should maintain stability through all government transitions (Hassan & Yousaf, 2023).

According to multiple studies, research has shown that public trust and perception play essential roles in these programs. The researchers demonstrate that public confidence, together with program legitimacy, can be built through increased transparency, independent assessments, and community involvement (Rahman & Anwar, 2023).

Overview of BISP and Ehsaas Programs

The Government of Pakistan introduced the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) in 2008 as its main social protection initiative to fight poverty while giving vulnerable groups special emphasis on women. Economic instability and rising poverty levels in the country led to the program's creation, which honors former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. BISP's primary purpose is to provide female-focused low-income households with unconditional cash support to help them economically and let them make decisions in their family lives. Bukhari and Kazmi (2023) explain that BISP includes gender equality measures through its strategy to offer core financial support to women who receive benefits as the primary recipients, which cultivates their social and economic power. Since its establishment, BISP has progressed into becoming Pakistan's most extensive social welfare system by providing assistance to numerous households throughout the nation.

Key Policy Features and Implementation Framework

BISP operates with distinctive policy attributes that set it apart from other social welfare schemes carried out in Pakistan. Each eligible household receives cash transfers from the program through quarterly payments, which experience periodic adjustments due to inflation rates and national economic status. The innovative part of BISP includes its proxy means test approach for identifying the poorest households by assessing household assets against educational attainment and basic service access (Ahmed & Hussain, 2023). BISP launched the complementary Waseela-e-Taleem program to promote school attendance by providing incentives to beneficiary households who enroll their children in education. To execute its goals, BISP works with federal and provincial governments and international organizations like the World Bank for technical and financial partnership support. The program remains thorough yet faces difficulties in reaching its target population and encountering delayed payments, together with beneficiary financial illiteracy (Malik et al., 2022).

Impact on Poverty Alleviation and Social Inclusion

The research on BISP shows that this initiative significantly improves poverty reduction and social credentialing of low-income families. Bukhari and Kazmi (2023) demonstrate how BISP has elevated poverty levels for 5 million family robustness units because its funding distribution has improved household spending, strengthened food security, and better healthcare and educational support. Dealers from the program credit BISP with providing them increased financial control and representation in household choices (Khan & Ali, 2023). Research indicates that targeting problems in selecting proper households, combined with limited closure methods for program participants. BISP has improved social inclusion through its attention to women and marginalized populations, yet its ability to tackle system-wide inequalities remains insufficient. The social welfare initiative BISP has brought revolutionary changes to Pakistan's welfare sector, but implementation needs improvement to achieve its full impact potential.

The Ehsaas Program

The Government of Pakistan established the Ehsaas program in 2019 as an extensive system to protect society and reduce poverty. The program introduced a new approach to combat multifaceted poverty because it wanted to develop a welfare system that provides equality for everyone. The government of Pakistan established Ehsaas in 2019 to combine all social protection programs within one unified poverty reduction system, according to Khan and Ali (2023). The policy framework of this program consists of social safety nets and human capital development, as well as livelihoods and jobs, governance, and policy reform. Ehsaas offers an innovative method of assistance that separates it from past social welfare initiatives in Pakistan because it evaluates complete societal problems while targeting poverty's fundamental reasons. Social welfare modernization through digitization and transparency was the motivating factor behind the Ehsaas program implementation, according to Malik et al. (2022).

Key Initiatives under Ehsaas

The program includes different initiatives that address diverse aspects of poverty and exclusion. Ehsaas Kafalat functions as a program that mirrors BISP by giving money to poor women with supplementary security through digital payment systems and fingerprint authentication. Ehsaas Nashonuma is a vital project that tackles malnutrition in children and pregnant women through conditional cash transfers and nutritional assistance. The Ehsaas Emergency Cash program started during the COVID-19 pandemic and distributed urgent funds to over 15 million Pakistani families, thus becoming among the biggest relief efforts in national history (Nadeem & Rizvi, 2023). Ehsaas Amdan and Ehsaas Interest-Free Loans establish economic empowerment by delivering small-scale assets and interest-free loan facilities to low-income individuals. Through its initiated programs, the program demonstrates a commitment to serve both short-term emergency needs and long-term requirements of vulnerable communities.

Socio-Economic Impact and Effectiveness

Through Ehsaas, the socio-economic benefits produced significant positive results in poverty reduction as well as inclusive social programs. Khan and Ali (2023) explain how the Ehsaas Emergency Cash program safeguarded Pakistan's economy from worsening pandemic conditions while shielding country residents from catastrophic poverty growth rates. The transparent delivery mechanism of Ehsaas Kafalat received praise from Malik et al (2022) because it reduced corruption while simultaneously improving beneficiary satisfaction. The program demonstrates positive results by investing in human capital through Ehsaas Nashonuma and other human capital development initiatives that fight malnutrition and stunting. The program still faces obstacles because it encounters bureaucratic issues, poor service coverage in distant regions, and a lack of proper coordination between provincial governments. Ehsaas makes a notable

advancement in Pakistan's social welfare policy by offering a comprehensive innovation for poverty reduction initiatives. The program's accomplishments demonstrate that flexible development policies combined with transparent government functions enable sustainable development targets.

Political Leadership and Social Welfare Policy in Pakistan

Social welfare policies in Pakistan were formed through political leadership because different administrations maintained varying approaches to minimize poverty and protect society. When it launched the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) during its rule in 2008, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government concentrated on delivering unrestricted monetary benefits to support poor households. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) implemented the Ehsaas program during 2019 to deliver welfare by combining cash payments with health services, education provisions, and employment programs (Bukhari & Kazmi, 2023). The different social welfare policies stem from the ideological preferences of each government, where the PPP delivers social equity through BISP. At the same time, the PTI works toward creating comprehensive welfare programs with transparency. The manner in which political regimes shape social welfare policies creates concerns about political manipulation that include accusations of improper choices in distributing assistance benefits (Ahmed & Hussain, 2023).

Role of Political Ideologies in Shaping Welfare Initiatives

Specific political doctrines have strongly influenced the development and execution of public welfare programs in Pakistan. BISP demonstrates the socialist perspective of the PPP by giving direct financial help to disadvantaged populations, including women, to achieve societal equality. The PTI focuses on governing through digital systems and biometric screening for Ehsaas programs because it helps achieve efficient delivery and combat corruption (Khan & Ali, 2023). Ideological discrepancies between programs have determined how their objectives and their methods of execution take form. BISP maintains a traditional bureaucratic infrastructure, even though Ehsaas uses technology platforms and international organizational collaborations. Different social welfare strategies demonstrate valuable benefits, but emphasize the necessity for blending the best attributes of different approaches in developing inclusive and effective social policies.

The Impact of Political Transitions on Social Welfare Policies

Progressive changes in Pakistani governments substantially modify social welfare policy priorities and system design. When the PTI took power following the PPP, the BISP stopped making unconditional cash payments, but Ehsaas introduced an integration approach for poverty elimination campaigns. The governments of PPP and PTI have divergent objectives because the PPP concentrates first on financial assistance, but the PTI targets development plans over a longer period (Bukhari & Kazmi, 2023). Such political shifts tend to disrupt program execution while causing policy targets to become disconnected from one another. Ehsaas implementation caused BISP restructuring that resulted in beneficiary confusion during the rollout of fresh initiatives (Khan & Ali, 2023).

Policy Continuity and Discontinuity under Different Governments

Each alteration in the Pakistani government has brought new social welfare policy programs while failing to advance or support existing initiatives. The insufficient policy continuity has produced sporadic development that weakens Pakistan's enduring social welfare program success. BISP stands as an ongoing program in Pakistan, but different governments have modified the initiative's goals and operational standards according to their political agenda (Ahmed & Hussain, 2023). The launch of the Ehsaas program creates doubts about BISP's continued operation and concerns regarding potential duplication between the programs. Malik et al. (2022) explain that

maintaining policy continuity depends on bipartisan social welfare support, which needs institutional protection systems against political interventions to succeed. A stable and effective welfare system for all citizens of Pakistan will emerge when these problems are addressed.

Critical Analysis

Numerous secondary data sources demonstrate the crucial role of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and Ehsaas programs in lowering poverty throughout Pakistan. BISP exposed 5 million families to poverty relief during its existence from 2008 onward through its cash-based scheme, which improved household food consumption and security (Bukhari & Kazmi, 2023). Through its Ehsaas Kafalat and Ehsaas Emergency Cash programs, Ehsaas has provided financial assistance, reaching more than 15 million families to protect against an escalation of poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic (Khan & Ali, 2023). According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2022), poverty decreased by 4.5% throughout regions benefiting from implemented programs. The successful delivery of financial aid by Ehsaas has been hindered by errors in beneficiary selection and delayed disbursement of funds. The study conducted by Ahmed and Hussain (2023) revealed that between 20 and 30 percent of beneficiaries from the BISP program did not qualify as among the lowest-income earners, so additional improvements in targeting systems are required.

Case Studies and Program Evaluations

Additional information about the effectiveness of BISP and Ehsaas arises from case studies and program evaluations. According to Malik et al. (2022), research that examined rural Sindh households found that BISP beneficiaries received a 20% boost to their household earnings, and women reported improved economic control. Analysis of Ehsaas Nashonuma in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa confirmed that the program helped children between the ages of five and fifty percent achieve better health outcomes through a 15% decrease in their risk of stunting (Nadeem & Rizvi, 2023). The studies confirm the existence of regional inequalities where distant areas receive limited support because of operational difficulties. Analysis of Ehsaas Emergency Cash payment outreach in Balochistan revealed that less than half of qualified households (40%) received funding, thus demonstrating the necessity to strengthen outreach efforts (Rehman & Akhtar, 2023). The data indicates BISP and Ehsaas succeeded in cutting poverty levels, but their performance could improve by refining their selection procedures and operational practices.

Socio-Economic Impact of These Programs

The initiative of BISP together with Ehsaas plays a substantial role in advancing the economic integration of individuals alongside their ability to gain financial independence in Pakistan. Results show female beneficiaries of BISP use their funds to buy essentials for home needs and start small businesses (Bukhari & Kazmi, 2023). Through its digital payment systems, Ehsaas Kafalat delivers financial resources directly to women beneficiaries, thus bringing enhanced transparency along with lowered corruption (Khan & Ali, 2023). Through these programs, the government has enabled access to mobile banking services by encouraging beneficiary users to establish bank accounts and use digital payment methods. The Ehsaas Emergency Cash program resulted in a 25% growth of mobile banking use in rural populations based on the State Bank of Pakistan (2022) data. Social welfare programs create transformative effects on gender equality and financial inclusion based on their measured outcomes.

Contribution to Health and Education Sectors

BISP and Ehsaas positively impacted health services and educational opportunities for people. The Waseela-e-Taleem initiative of BISP raised educational enrollment by 12% in beneficiary families, where a particular increase was seen for the enrollment of girls, according to Malik et al. (2022). Through Nashonuma Ehsaas, the government raises health outcomes for mothers and children

from pregnancy until their second birthday through cash benefits linked to nutrition support. Nadeem and Rizvi (2023) observed that Ehsaas Nashonuma successfully achieved an 18% decrease in malnutrition among targeted districts. Health and education components linked through their programs enabled these measures to tackle the system-wide hurdles restricting healthcare access, including high expenses and unawareness. Weak monitoring procedures and limited outreach have restricted the complete effectiveness of Ehsaas Nashonuma programs. Research by Rehman and Akhtar (2023) revealed that Ehsaas Nashonuma awareness reached only half of the qualified population residing in distant areas, where outreach needs improvement.

Conclusion

Pakistan's approach toward poverty relief and social protection has evolved under different political leadership because each administration has emphasized its strategies. During the PPP government period, the Benazir Income Support Program provided unconditional cash transfers that aimed at solving urgent financial issues. Ehsaas represents a unified model created by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) administration, which combines monetary grants with assets for medical needs and assistance for academic and traditional occupations (Bukhari & Kazmi, 2023). The governance reform and social equity values stand as philosophical foundations behind the policies of the Pakistan People's Party, which contrast with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's emphasis on governance reform and transparency. These programs confront significant obstacles in their effectiveness because political interference and short-term policy commitment repeatedly create problems in accuracy, delayed distributions, and fragmented delivery (Ahmed & Hussain, 2023).

The Effectiveness and Limitations of BISP and Ehsaas

The Pakistani programs BISP and Ehsaas have developed numerous initiatives to reduce poverty and incorporate marginalized communities nationwide. The BISP program has extracted 5 million families from poverty status, yet Ehsaas extended financial aid to 15 million households throughout the COVID-19 crisis (Khan & Ali, 2023). Through these programs, women gained empowerment while the inclusion of finances expanded, and both sectors registered better education and health results. The programs faced constraints because bureaucratic obstacles interacted with state politics involvement and unequal support across different regions. Some deserving households missed out on benefits because of targeting problems, and remote populations did not receive adequate outreach from these programs, according to Malik et al. (2022). The study demonstrates that better governance and suitable policy structures are essential to boost the effectiveness of social welfare programs.

Recommendations

The Pakistani programs BISP and Ehsaas have developed numerous initiatives to reduce poverty and incorporate marginalized communities nationwide. The BISP program has extracted 5 million families from poverty, yet Ehsaas extended financial aid to 15 million households throughout the COVID-19 crisis (Khan & Ali, 2023). Through these programs, women gained empowerment, while the inclusion of finances expanded, and both sectors registered better education and health results. The programs faced constraints because bureaucratic obstacles interacted with state politics involvement and unequal support across different regions. Some deserving households missed out on benefits because of targeting problems, and remote populations did not receive adequate outreach from these programs, according to Malik et al. (2022). The study demonstrates that better governance and suitable policy structures are essential to boost the effectiveness of social welfare programs.

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