CONCEPT PAPER

Breaking the Status Quo

Redesigning Pakistan's Public Service for Competence, Specialization and State Capability

OUR ASPIRATION

A professional, specialist and accountable public service — in the service of every Pakistani.

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with research and writing assistance by Ahmad Ammar
2026

The first of fourteen papers in *The Pakistan Plan*

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The first of fourteen papers in *The Pakistan Plan* · Haroon Khawaja · 2026

Executive Summary

History suggests that nations rarely outgrow the capability of the institutions through which they are governed. Governments and policies may change, but it is institutions that determine whether public ambition is translated into lasting outcomes. As Pakistan moves towards a population of nearly 325 million by 2040, the scale and complexity of governing the country will increase substantially. A civil service conceived for a different administrative, economic and technological era cannot be expected to meet those demands without fundamental redesign.

This paper argues that Pakistan's civil service challenge is not primarily one of personnel but of institutional design. Every year, many of the country's brightest continue to enter public service through an open and competitive examination. Yet the system they join remains shaped by assumptions inherited from the colonial Indian Civil Service and consolidated through later administrative arrangements. Its core features remain familiar: a single competitive examination, post-selection allocation to occupational groups, generalist career management, progression shaped heavily by seniority, and performance appraisal through confidential annual reporting rather than objective measures of contribution. Successive reform commissions have repeatedly diagnosed these systemic shortcomings, but have largely sought to improve the existing architecture rather than replace it.

The consequences are visible in both governance performance and talent use. Pakistan continues to perform weakly on international measures of government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. At the same time, its human capital base has changed profoundly. The country now produces more than half a million university graduates annually across virtually every professional discipline, supported by large bodies of registered engineers, doctors, accountants and other specialists. Yet the civil service continues to reserve its principal leadership pathway for a relatively small generalist cadre, creating a persistent separation between specialist expertise and public decisions. The result is a state that produces technical talent at scale but does not consistently organize its highest public careers around that talent.

Meanwhile, the purpose of government has fundamentally changed. Across advanced and emerging economies alike, public services are increasingly organized around specialist capability, long-term strategic coordination and professional leadership. Governments are expected not only to administer society, but to strengthen economic competitiveness, develop human capital, accelerate technological progress, improve energy security, foster innovation and build resilience against increasingly complex global challenges. These responsibilities demand institutions capable of sustained professional expertise rather than broad administrative versatility alone.

The central proposition of this paper is therefore straightforward: Pakistan should replace its inherited generalist operating model with a specialist public service aligned to the principal functions of the modern state. That requires one decisive break with the past: the era of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) should come to an end. Future recruitment into the service should cease, its district functions devolving to empowered local governments. Policing follows the same logic: city and district forces recruited locally and answerable to local government, while a Federal Investigation and Intelligence Bureau (FIIB),

consolidating the functions of the Police, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB), takes jurisdiction wherever crime crosses boundaries. The PAS's place as the flagship of the higher civil service would be taken by a new Finance and Economy (F&E) Group — a strategic cadre whose officers build entire careers across finance, planning, commerce, industry and investment, and for whom distinction is measured not by the districts administered but by the national capabilities created. Around it, each of the twelve occupational groups would become a self-contained professional service. Candidates would compete directly for the group for which they are academically prepared; careers would deepen within a single professional stream; and leadership would become the culmination of professional expertise rather than administrative rotation. The confidential report would give way to objective, KPI-based performance management linked to transparent, increasingly market-referenced rewards, with two integrated digital platforms — for recruitment and for performance — providing the administrative backbone. The redesign preserves the constitutional foundations of Pakistan's civil service, including open competition, regional representation and the custodianship of the Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions, and the principle that policy belongs to the people through their representatives, while fundamentally redesigning how professional talent is recruited, developed and rewarded.

Recognizing the scale of these changes, the paper proposes a phased implementation roadmap rather than abrupt institutional disruption. Legal anchoring, a Civil Service Redesign & Implementation Board (CS-RIB) headed by the Prime Minister, institutional safeguards and sustained change management provide the foundations for implementation. Transition pathways protect serving officers while enabling the new architecture to emerge progressively over successive recruitment cycles. The objective is not to preserve institutions that have outlived their purpose, but to preserve experience while redesigning the system for future generations.

Breaking the status quo ultimately requires more than another civil service reform. It requires a different conception of public service itself. Pakistan's future competitiveness will depend increasingly on whether its most talented public servants are organized to administer yesterday's state or to build tomorrow's.

SECTION ONE

A State at Crossroads

The Case for Civil Service Reform

In brief

- Pakistan's Central Superior Services (CSS) inherit a colonial model built to rule, not to serve
- On international measures, the quality of the state lags the world average and most comparable developing economies
- A young, fast-growing population raises the stakes: the cost of an underperforming civil service compounds each year
- The future of public service lies in professional competence, specialist leadership and institutions designed for the demands of the twenty-first century

No modern state rises above the quality of its administration. The institutions that collect revenue, dispense justice, educate children, regulate markets, and turn political intent into public outcomes are what separate a state that merely exists from one that actually works. Pakistan's population is projected to rise from roughly 277 million in 2030 to 325 million by 2040 (UN, World Population Prospects 2024[1]). At that scale, the competence of the civil service is not a technocratic detail—it is a precondition for effective governance.

Pakistan's founder articulated this vision with remarkable clarity. Addressing government officers repeatedly in the months after independence, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah reminded them that they were "not rulers" but belonged "to the servants," and that "from the highest to the lowest, we all are the servants of the state."[2] His remarks underscored a conception of public office rooted in service rather than privilege, and a view of authority as a trust exercised on behalf of citizens. The same conviction had impelled reformers in other traditions. Thomas Jefferson held that "when a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself as public property."[3] The civil service, in this understanding, exists to serve the citizen, not to rule or to decide for them. In a republic, policy is settled by the people through their representatives; the service brings expertise to that decision and competence to its execution. Service to the State is not the same as service to the government of the day. An officer is bound to carry out the lawful decisions of elected ministers, yet owes a prior loyalty to the Constitution and the law.

[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2024).

[2] Muhammad Ali Jinnah, address to officers in Balochistan, 14 February 1948; and address to gazetted officers, Chittagong, 25 March 1948, in *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah: Speeches and Statements as Governor-General of Pakistan, 1947–1948* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan).

[3] Remark to Baron von Humboldt, 1807, as recorded in B. L. Rayner, *Life of Jefferson* (1834). The remark is reported rather than written, and continues: "and justly liable to the inspection and vigilance of public opinion."

Yet the institution Pakistan inherited had been shaped by a very different purpose. The Indian Civil Service (ICS), established in 1858 in the aftermath of the 1857 uprising, was conceived as a "steel frame" through which roughly a thousand officers governed some three hundred million subjects across the subcontinent until 1947. It was designed to rule on behalf of the Crown, not to serve the governed. At independence, Pakistan retained this architecture largely intact, and the CSS became its lineal successor. The result was an enduring contradiction: a service founded on a colonial logic of command, operating inside a republic that was promised a logic of service. Eight decades on, that contradiction has not been resolved so much as institutionalized. The CSS has largely perpetuated the ICS legacy by governing from above and remaining aligned with the postcolonial elite.

> *"From the highest to the lowest, we all are servants of the State."*
>
> **Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, address to officers in Balochistan, 14 February 1948**

The consequences of this institutional drift are visible in international measures of governance quality. On the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGIs), Pakistan's government effectiveness score stood at −0.60 in 2024 (−0.66 in 2023), well below the global average of +0.05. The indicator serves as a widely used proxy for the quality of public services and the effectiveness of the civil service. Pakistan's own development agenda illustrates this gap: Vision 2025[4], the government's flagship development framework, envisaged stronger institutions, lower corruption, and a tax-to-GDP ratio of 18 percent as part of a broader ambition to become a well-governed, upper-middle-income country. Those commitments remain largely unmet. The result is a persistent gap between policy intent and outcomes, reflected in forgone revenues, weak service delivery, and unequal access to public services.

These institutional shortcomings are becoming more consequential as the demands placed on the state become increasingly complex. First, the scale of the population challenge is growing. The United Nations estimates that nearly 6.9 million[5] children were born in Pakistan in 2024 alone, equivalent to adding the population of a mid-sized country. This intensifies pressure on the state's ability to provide infrastructure, public services, employment opportunities, and effective governance. Second, Pakistan possesses the potential to benefit from a substantial demographic dividend. With a median age of about 20.6 years[6], Pakistan has one of the youngest populations among the world's most populous nations and one of the youngest in Asia (see Figure 1). This youthful demographic profile could become a powerful source of economic growth if supported by a productive and increasingly skilled workforce. Realizing that potential, however, requires institutions capable of translating demographic growth into employment, human

[4] Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan 2025: One Nation – One Vision* (Pakistan Vision 2025), Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, Islamabad, 2014.

[5] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024 — population.un.org/wpp*. Pakistan: an estimated 6,887,798 births in 2024

[6] Median age based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024*, Online Edition, medium-fertility variant (2025 value). Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/.

capital formation, and sustained economic opportunity. Yet the gap between potential and performance remains considerable. Pakistan needs to create 2.5 to 3 million[7] jobs a year to absorb the millions of young people entering the workforce, far more than the economy currently generates.

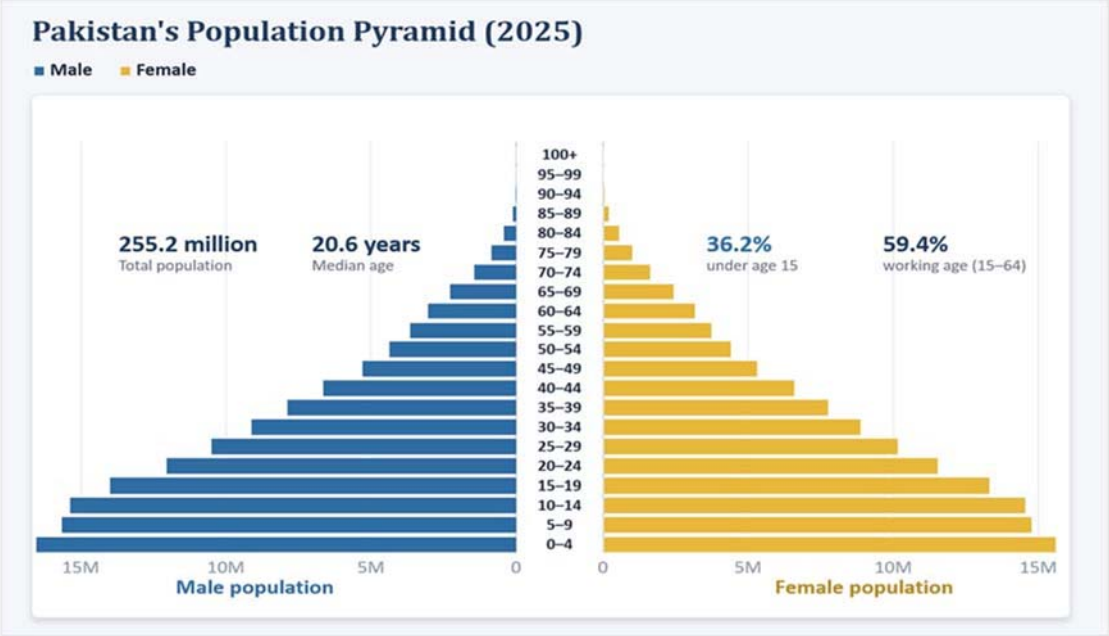


Figure 1. Pakistan's population pyramid, 2025. *Source: UN World Population Prospects 2024, via*

However, roughly 762,000 Pakistanis left the country for work abroad in 2025, according to the Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment (BEOE), though the figure excludes destinations where registration is not required.[8] As Figure 2 shows, labor emigration has remained a visible feature of Pakistan's labor

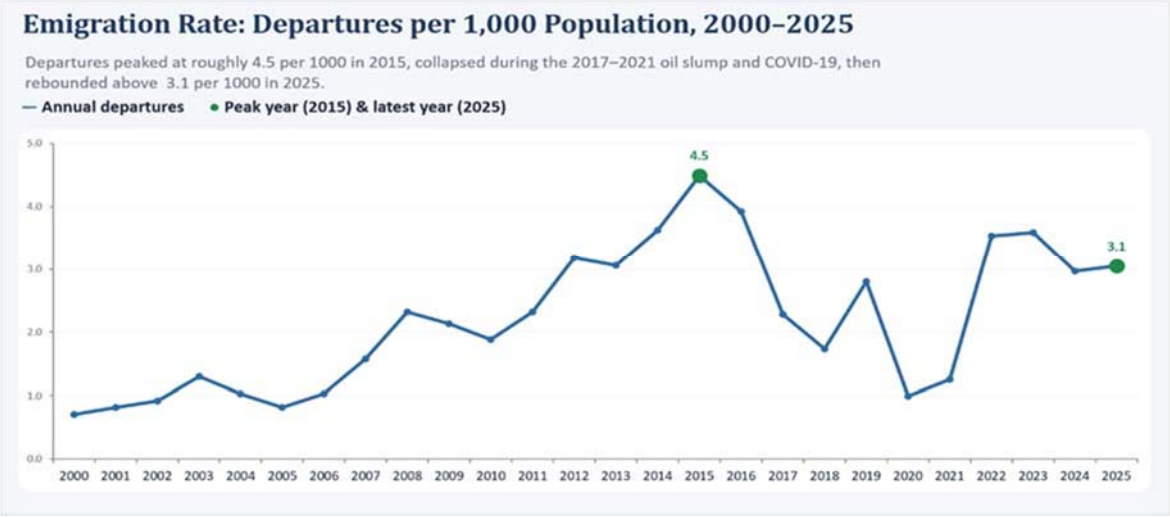


Figure 2. Pakistanis leaving for employment abroad, 2000–2025. *Source: Bureau of Emigration & Overseas*

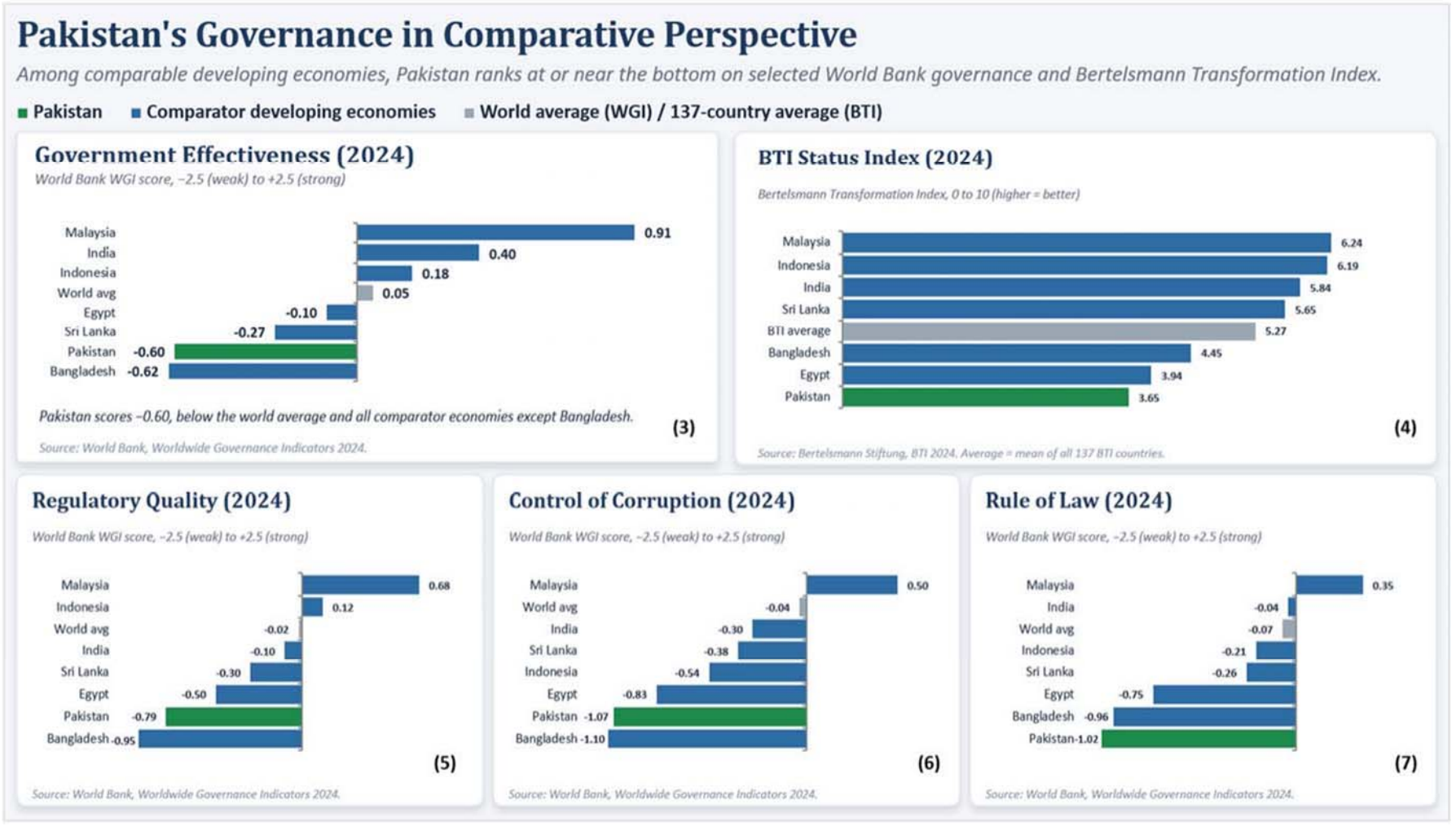
[7] World Bank President Ajay Banga, interview with Reuters, February 2026; as reported in "Pakistan must create 30 million jobs in a decade, World Bank president says," *The Express Tribune*, February 5, 2026, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2590918.

[8] Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment (BEOE), Government of Pakistan, "Achievements," https://beoe.gov.pk/achievements

market even relative to its growing population. Measured per 1,000 people, departures have fluctuated sharply with economic conditions rather than tracking population growth. Together, these trends place increasing demands on the state's capacity to formulate policy, deliver services, and support economic transformation. A governance structure inherited from a different era is now being asked to convert demographic opportunity into prosperity. Whether it can do so effectively remains an open question. Pakistan's performance on broader governance measures suggests that these institutional demands are not being met consistently. In addition to weak government effectiveness, the country scores below average on regulatory quality, the rule of law, and control of corruption in the WGIs. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index reaches a similar conclusion from a broader perspective, assessing state's capacity to manage political and economic transformation (see Figures 3—7).

The challenge is not a lack of attention to the problem. Since independence, successive governments have commissioned numerous committees, commissions, and expert groups to examine the civil service and recommend reforms. From the Munir Committee in 1949 to the Cornelius Commission in the 1960s and the reform agendas advanced by Dr. Ishrat Husain in 2007 and again in 2018, the diagnosis has remained remarkably consistent. Yet the cumulative impact on the structure, incentives, and performance of the civil service has been limited. In many cases, reforms altered administrative arrangements or nomenclature without addressing the deeper institutional constraints that impede effective government. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) observed in its 2010 assessment, many reform initiatives were technically sound but lacked the political commitment, institutional ownership, and implementation mechanisms needed to produce lasting change. The central question facing Pakistan today is not what needs to be reformed, but how reform can finally be made to endure.

At the heart of the dysfunction lies a structural choice that has outlived its rationale: the production of generalists through a single, undifferentiated competitive examination. Under the present model, candidates sit a common CSS examination and are allocated to one of twelve occupational groups only afterward, on the basis of their aggregate marks and stated preferences. In practice, an aspirant cannot know with certainty which group, and therefore which branch of the federal service, they will spend their career in until the results are announced. This arrangement was defensible when the state was the principal employer of educated talent and graduates were in short supply. Those conditions no longer hold. Pakistan's higher education system now produces hundreds of thousands of graduates annually across virtually every discipline. The scarcity that once justified an elite corps of interchangeable generalists has passed, and the requirement today is for depth, relevance, and specialization.



Figures 3–7. Pakistan's governance in comparative perspective, 2024. *Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators 2024; Bertelsmann Stiftung BTI 2024.*

Mature public services have already moved in this direction. Australia's independent review of its public service*, Our Public Service, Our Future*[9], called for deliberate investment in professional capability and specialist career streams rather than reliance on generalist rotation. The principle of merit has long been part of the administrative tradition Pakistan inherited. It traces its origins to Britain's Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854, which established open competition and demonstrated ability, rather than patronage, as the basis of public appointment. Pakistan retained that principle, but the system built around it has not kept pace with the country's changing administrative and professional requirements.

The argument of this paper is to redesign the public service around professional competence and specialist capability. The CSS should remain the gateway to public service, and the Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions should remain its custodians. What must change is the inner logic of recruitment and career progression. The paper makes the case for moving firmly away from interchangeable generalists toward genuine specialists. Entry into each occupational group would be field-specific and competence-based: young officers inducted on the strength of a relevant academic background, who then build their careers within a single professional stream. Each of the twelve groups would operate as a self-contained specialist service, with its own training, professional standards, and path of progression, and no lateral movement between groups. The governing principle is the one this author has advocated for over a decade: relevance and competence, anchored in Jinnah's older and deeper principle of service. Policy remains for the people to determine through their representatives; the redesign proposed here is directed at making the service worthy of that trust, expert in advice and competent in execution.

The analytical lens of this paper is institutional and forward looking rather than partisan. It treats the civil service as a system, spanning recruitment, allocation, training, career progression, accountability and the digital infrastructure that supports them, and examines how that system can be better aligned with the requirements of a modern state. Four questions guide the analysis. How did the present system emerge, and why has it proved so resistant to reform? Where does the current generalist model fall short in meeting Pakistan's contemporary governance needs? What institutional architecture would better align recruitment, career progression and accountability with professional competence? And how can such a transition be implemented while preserving institutional continuity and the acquired rights of serving officers? The paper’s central proposition is simple: in a state of Pakistan's size, youth, and difficulty, rebuilding the civil service around relevance, competence, and service is among the highest-return investments the country can make, and one it can no longer afford to defer.

[9] Independent Review of the Australian Public Service, *Our Public Service*, *Our Future* (the Thodey Review), Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019

SECTION TWO

From *Steel Frame* to Superior Service

The Evolution of Pakistan's Civil Service

In brief

- The structure was inherited almost whole at independence, even though only few Muslim ICS officers opted for Pakistan; the cadre was reconstituted as the Civil Service of Pakistan.
- Repeated reforms, from Cornelius and Bhutto to devolution and the 18th Amendment, reshaped the service without changing its underlying logic.
- Around 40 commissions have studied the service since 1947. The recurring failure has been implementation and political ownership, not diagnosis.

The service Pakistan inherited was not improvised at independence. It was the local edition of an institution already almost a century old, with its own doctrine of recruitment, its own hierarchy, and its own settled idea of what a public official was for. To understand why reform has proved so difficult, it helps to examine the institution's origins, its adaptation to the post-independence state, and the ways it evolved over time without fundamentally departing from its underlying model.

The colonial inheritance

The administrative apparatus of British India was shaped by the mid-nineteenth-century shift from patronage-based appointments to open competitive recruitment. Emerging from the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms[10] in Britain and institutionalized in British India through the Charter Act of 1853[11] and the Macaulay Committee's[12] recommendations, this principle made merit-based competition the foundation of entry into the higher civil service. For decades, the examination was held exclusively in London and drew heavily from Oxford and Cambridge. It was not conducted in India until 1922, marking the beginning of the gradual "Indianization" of a service that had long been dominated by British officers. The principle of merit was genuine, but it operated within a structure designed for a much narrower purpose.

That purpose was control. A few hundred "covenanted" officers administered a subcontinent of some three hundred million people, with the district officer—collector, magistrate and revenue authority combined—as the linchpin of the whole edifice. Power radiated downward from the secretariat to the

[10] Northcote, Stafford H., and C. E. Trevelyan. *Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service* (1854); see also House of Commons Library, *The Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854) and the history of the Civil Service*, 2024.

[11] See *David C. Potter, India's Political Administrators: From ICS to IAS (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).*

[12] See *Report of the Committee on the Indian Civil Service* (the Macaulay Committee), 1854.

district, and the officer's task was to keep order, raise revenue and execute the decisions of a distant authority, not to answer to the governed. This concentration of authority in a small, elite generalist cadre, largely insulated from local political pressures, became a defining feature of the administrative system inherited at independence and has remained one of its most enduring legacies.

1947: continuity by necessity

Pakistan inherited an intact administrative structure but few experienced civil servants. Of roughly 1,150 ICS and allied officers in British India at Partition, only 101 were Muslim, and not all opted for Pakistan; the resulting administrative shortage was bridged by British officers who remained in service, together with ad hoc appointments and the temporary retention of British officers[13]. Faced with a working state and almost no trained administrators to run it, the new government chose continuity over reconstruction. A five-member committee under Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, the Secretary-General to the Cabinet, inducted the available ICS officers alongside recruits from allied services and candidates who had sat the pre-partition examinations. This nucleus became the Pakistan Administrative Service, renamed the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) in 1950 and placed on an All-Pakistan footing by inter-governmental agreement in 1954. The decision was understandable, even unavoidable. It also carried forward many of the colonial service's assumptions, practices and traditions.

In the absence of strong and stable political institutions, the bureaucracy increasingly filled the vacuum, often in alliance with the military. The period from 1947 to 1958 is often described as one of bureaucratic dominance.[14] The early reform attempts of these years were correspondingly modest in ambition: a committee under Sir Victor Turner reviewed the size and working of central ministries in 1947, and a succession of pay commissions and foreign advisers examined remuneration and method. The most lasting outcome of the 1950s was administrative restructuring rather than institutional redesign. The Administrative Reorganization Committee of 1958 reduced the secretariat's many layers to the Section Officer system that continues to underpin government administration today.

Structural evolution over the decades

The 1960s brought investment in capacity without a change in logic. Under Ayub Khan, the state established a network of training institutions, including the Administrative Staff College in Lahore and the National Institutes of Public Administration. However, the CSP remained the principal administrative cadre, operating within the controlled local government system of "Basic Democracies." The decade's most far-sighted reform proposal came from the Pay and Services Commission of 1959–1962 under Justice

[13] Ralph Braibanti, "Public Bureaucracy and Judiciary in Pakistan," in Joseph LaPalombara (ed.), *Bureaucracy and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); see also Peter R. Blood, ed., *Pakistan: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), chap. 4, "The Civil Service."

[14] Ishrat Husain, *Governing the Ungovernable: Institutional Reforms for Democratic Governance* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018), which characterizes 1947–1958 as a phase of bureaucratic dominance and reviews the early reorganization committees, including the 1958 Administrative Reorganization Committee that created the Section Officer system.

A. R. Cornelius. The commission recommended a new pay structure, dismantling of the divide between federal and provincial cadres, and systematic induction of specialists. Its central recommendations were ultimately set aside, resisted by the very administrative elite they would have diluted.[15]

The most significant structural change followed the separation of East Pakistan in 1971. In August 1973, the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced the Administrative Reforms, the most comprehensive restructuring of Pakistan's civil service to date. Led by a committee under Federal Minister Khurshid Hasan Meer, the reforms abolished the CSP and the class distinctions among officers, reorganized the service into twelve occupational groups, and introduced the All-Pakistan Unified Grades, the twenty-two basic pay scales that remain in use today. Lateral entry from outside the service was permitted for the first time, a Common Training Program was created, constitutional guarantees of tenure were withdrawn, and some 1,300 officers were removed on grounds of corruption or inefficiency.[16]

> *"All services and cadres … merged into one service, with equality of opportunity for all."*
>
> Dawn, on Bhutto's 1973 Administrative Reforms

Bhutto presented it as the dismantling of an inherited aristocracy of office. Yet the reforms changed the architecture more than the culture. The successor District Management Group inherited the prestige and reach of the old CSP, and within a decade much of the disruption had been walked back: lateral entry was discontinued in 1983 and elements of constitutional protection were restored. Two later structural shifts reshaped the terrain again. The 2001 Devolution Plan abolished the office of the district magistrate, fundamentally altering the administrative role of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) at the district level. The 18th Amendment in 2010 further reshaped the governance landscape by devolving major functions, including health and education, to the provinces.[17] Devolution raised the stakes of provincial administration, but the federal PAS continued to occupy the senior provincial posts, breeding a lasting resentment among officers of the Provincial Management Service. The result is the system described in the sections that follow: a common entrance examination, allocation to one of twelve occupational groups

[15]The Pay and Services Commission (1959–1962), chaired by Justice A. R. Cornelius, proposed a new multi-tier pay structure, an end to the sharp federal–provincial demarcation, and the induction of more specialists. See Husain (2018) and "Umpteen commissions on civil service reforms," *The Express Tribune*, 24 November 2020, tribune.com.pk/story/2273287.

[16]On the 1973 Administrative Reforms, which abolished the CSP, introduced the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) structure and occupational groups, and permitted lateral entry, see "Looking Back," *The News on Sunday*. Bhutto's remarks are reported in *Dawn*, "Hall of Fame" (n. 2).

[17]Lateral entry ended in 1983 and constitutional protections were largely restored under the Zia government. On the 2001 devolution reforms and the 18th Amendment (2010), see Raza Rumi, "Civil Services Reform: Pakistan's Lingering Challenge," razarumi.com.

after selection, and a career structure that continues to place the generalist cadre at the center of senior administrative leadership while most specialist officers progress through separate professional services.[18]

A history of unimplemented reform

The striking feature of this history is not neglect but repetition. Since 1947 the civil service has been studied by something close to forty committees and commissions, and their diagnoses converge with remarkable consistency: a colonial mindset, the dominance of generalists over specialists, vulnerability to political interference, weak accountability, and a pay structure that underpays senior officers while overstaffing the lower grades. The ideas are not the problem. From Cornelius in 1962 to Bhutto in 1973, the failure has overwhelmingly been one of implementation, political ownership and continuity.

The two most thorough modern efforts illustrate the pattern precisely. The National Commission for Government Reforms, chaired by Dr. Ishrat Husain between 2006 and 2008, produced a comprehensive blueprint with roughly 750 recommendations—among them a specialist National Executive Service, merit-based recruitment and a restructured pay system. It was finalized just as the government changed, and only a handful of its proposals were ever adopted.[19] A decade later Dr. Ishrat Husain led the 2018–2019 Task Force on Civil Service Reform, this time deliberately narrowing the focus to a human-resource "value-chain" running from recruitment to retirement, proposing cluster-based specialized recruitment, a revived National Executive Service and a sharp increase in the weight of training for promotion.[20] Some measures were approved; most remain under review.

Since independence, successive governments have reorganized, renamed and sought to reform the civil service, yet its core institutional design has remained substantially intact. Table 1 provides an overview of the major civil service reform efforts and their principal recommendations. Their remarkable consistency across decades is itself compelling evidence of how little has changed.

[18]Of roughly 29,000 officers in the federal government, only about 6,000 are generalist (cadre) officers; the remaining 23,000 are specialists—engineers, doctors, economists and others—who lack a structured career path. Interview with Dr Ishrat Husain, *Business Recorder*, 1 November 2019, brecorder.com.

[19]Government of Pakistan, *Report of the National Commission for Government Reforms* (2008), chaired by Dr Ishrat Husain. Despite its extensive recommendations, only a small number were implemented before the change of government in 2008. See also *Pakistan Today*, "Reform without reformers," 28 October 2025.

[20]The 2018–19 Task Force on Civil Service Reform, chaired by Dr Ishrat Husain, proposed cluster-based specialised recruitment, a revived National Executive Service and greater weight for mandatory training in promotions. See *The Express Tribune*, 12 October 2019

Table 1. Major civil-service reform efforts in Pakistan since 1947

Reform effort	Years	Led by / composition	Key measures & recommendations
Secretariat Reorganization Committee	1947	Sir Victor Turner (first Finance Secretary)	First post-independence review of the size and working of central ministries; modest procedural recommendations with limited lasting effect.
Pay Commission (Munir)	1948–49	Justice Muhammad Munir	Fixed officer remuneration; rejected a levelling, quasi-socialist pay scale and preserved the inherited status hierarchy of the service.
Egger & Gladieux Reports	1953 / 1955	Rowland Egger and Bernard Gladieux (US advisers)	Recommended reorganising government for national development, modern management methods and stronger administrative capacity.
Administrative Reorganization Committee	1958–62	G. Ahmad	Collapsed the secretariat hierarchy into the present Section Officer system; proposed an "economic pool" for senior posts that never took root.
Pay and Services Commission (Cornelius)	1959–62	Justice A. R. Cornelius	Proposed a new multi-tier pay structure, an end to the rigid federal–provincial divide and induction of specialists; largely shelved.
Administrative Reforms	1973	Committee under Khurshid Hasan Meer (Bhutto government)	Abolished the CSP and service classes; created 12 occupational groups and unified grades (BPS 1–22); introduced lateral entry; withdrew constitutional guarantees.
Civil Services Commission (Anwar-ul-Haq)	1978–79	Justice Anwar-ul-Haq	Reviewed the 1973 reforms; sought to restore service structure and morale; lateral entry was discontinued by 1983.
National Commission for Government Reforms	2006–08	Dr Ishrat Husain (and members)	Comprehensive two-year review; ~750 recommendations including a National Executive Service, merit recruitment and restructured pay; only a handful adopted.
Task Force on Civil Service Reform	2018–19	Dr Ishrat Husain (Adviser to the PM)	HR "value-chain" model; cluster-based specialised recruitment; training weight in promotion raised 15%→35%; revived National Executive Service.

SECTION THREE

Inside the Existing System

An Architecture past Its Time

In brief

- A single annual examination (CSS) is the only officer-level entry route to twelve federal occupational groups; candidates qualify first and are allocated afterward and progress from BPS-17 to BPS-22 largely on seniority
- Frequent transfers, weak performance incentives and limited specialist career pathways have constrained institutional capability despite repeated reform effort
- The country's expanding pool of highly qualified professionals is not matched by a public service designed to recruit, develop and retain specialist leadership
- The result is a widening gap between the capabilities modern government requires and those the existing civil service is designed to produce

The previous section described how Pakistan's civil service was reorganized many times without changing its basic design. This section turns from history to the present, examining how the system operates today and why an administrative architecture built for another era has reached the limits of its usefulness.

Recruitment is run by the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) through a single competitive examination held once a year,[21] and its core design has not changed since 1973. Figure 8 summarizes the current CSS pathway, from recruitment and allocation to training, career progression, and the institutional features that shape an officer's career.

The structure of the service

The federal bureaucracy runs on twenty-two Basic Pay Scales (BPS 1–22). Officers enter at BPS-17 and can rise to BPS-22. The cadre is recruited largely through the CSS examination, which fills twelve federal occupational groups: the PAS (formerly the District Management Group), the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP), the Foreign Service of Pakistan, the Inland Revenue Service, the Pakistan Customs Service, the Pakistan Audit and Accounts Service, and the Commerce and Trade, Information, Office Management, Military Lands and Cantonment, Postal, and Railways groups.[22] The PAS and PSP are the most sought-after

[21]The Federal Public Service Commission, established under Article 242 of the Constitution and governed by the FPSC Ordinance 1977, conducts the Central Superior Services (CSS) Competitive Examination annually. See fpsc.gov.pk.

[22]The twelve federal occupational groups filled through the CSS examination, as listed by the FPSC. The Pakistan Administrative Service was formerly the District Management Group (DMG). See "Central Superior Services" and FPSC vacancy notifications, fpsc.gov.pk.

and hold most of the senior administrative posts. Regardless of academic background, CSS entrants are recruited, trained and managed as generalists, rotating across diverse assignments throughout their careers, particularly in the PAS.



Figure 8. How the system works today — recruitment, allocation, training and progression in the CSS

The CSS is however, one component of the wider public service. Specialist services in health, education, engineering, science and technology, economics, finance and law are recruited separately and also enter at BPS-17 and above. Ministerial and support staff occupy BPS 1–16, while the provinces maintain parallel structures of their own, including the Provincial Management Service, secretariat and technical services, ex-cadre officers and subordinate staff. Yet despite constituting only a minority of federal officers, the CSS cadre continues to dominate the senior administrative architecture of the state. By Dr Ishrat Husain's 2019 account, of roughly 29,000 officers in federal service only about 6,000 were generalist cadre officers, while the remaining 23,000 were specialists who lacked comparable career pathways[23]. The most senior administrative positions remain occupied predominantly by the generalist cadre, giving it disproportionate influence over the leadership and management of the civil service. The question, therefore, is not how many officers the state employs, but whether its highest leadership roles should continue to be organized around a generalist administrative cadre, embodied most visibly in the PAS. .

Recruitment: the CSS examination

Entry into the CSS begins with a single annual competitive examination conducted by the FPSC. Candidates must hold at least a second-division bachelor's degree and be aged 21 to 30, with limited age relaxation for serving government employees.[24] From the 2025 cycle, the FPSC added an MCQ-Based Preliminary

[23] From an interview with Dr Ishrat Husain, then Adviser to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms, "Dissecting the government's civil service reforms agenda," BR Research, *Business Recorder*, 1 November 2019, https://www.brecorder.com/news/540163.

[24]CSS Competitive Examination Rules, 2019, Rules 5–6; FPSC public notices for CSS 2025–2026, fpsc.gov.pk.

Test (MPT) as a mandatory screening step: a 200-mark paper that candidates must clear at 33 per cent to sit the written exam. The MPT does not count toward final merit or as an attempt.[25]

The written examination carries 1,200 marks — 600 compulsory and 600 optional. The compulsory papers cover English essay and précis, three General Knowledge papers (general science and ability, current affairs and Pakistan affairs) and Islamic studies; the optional marks are taken from about forty-five subjects.[26] The written exam is held in nineteen cities, followed by a 300-mark psychological assessment and interview. Candidates must meet minimum thresholds at each stage and may attempt the exam only a limited number of times.[27]

Selection is highly competitive. In 2025, about 18,000 candidates applied, 12,792 sat the written examination, and only 355 passed it, around 2.8 per cent of those who appeared. Of these, 170 were finally recommended for appointment. As Figure 9 shows, the pattern has changed little over the years. Applicants from every academic background compete for the same handful of generalist positions, a pull that reflects the institutionalized power long concentrated in the cadre.[28] Figure 10 shows how successful candidates were distributed across the twelve groups over the period taken here for reference (2013-2023), revealing which services absorb the bulk of the cadre.

The gender composition of those recommended for appointment has also changed. The share of women rose from about 38 per cent in 2014 to just over half in 2025, when 86 of the 170 candidates recommended were women, the first year in which they outnumbered men. This shift occurred even as the applicant pool contracted sharply. Applications, which peaked at nearly 39,650 in 2021, fell to about 18,000 by 2025, more than halving in four years, while the number recommended remained in the low hundreds. The trend also suggests that competitive, merit based recruitment can support greater gender diversity over time. The case for reform therefore lies not in questioning merit, but in aligning merit more closely with the competencies required of a modern service.

[25]The MCQ-Based Preliminary Test (MPT) was introduced as a mandatory qualifying screening test from CSS-2025. It carries 200 marks with a 33 per cent (66-mark) pass threshold; the score is valid only for that year's examination, is not counted toward final merit, and does not count as an attempt. FPSC, fpsc.gov.pk; cssmpt.com.

[26]CSS Competitive Examination Rules, 2019, Appendix-I (compulsory and optional subjects); the three General Knowledge papers are passed collectively. FPSC, fpsc.gov.pk.

[27]Written examination held in nineteen cities under Rule 3(3), CE Rules 2019. Candidates require 40 per cent in each compulsory paper, 33 per cent in each optional paper and 50 per cent in the aggregate, followed by a 300-mark psychological assessment and viva voce. FPSC public notices, fpsc.gov.pk.

[28]CSS Statistics Summary (2013–2025), compiled from FPSC Annual Reports and press notes.

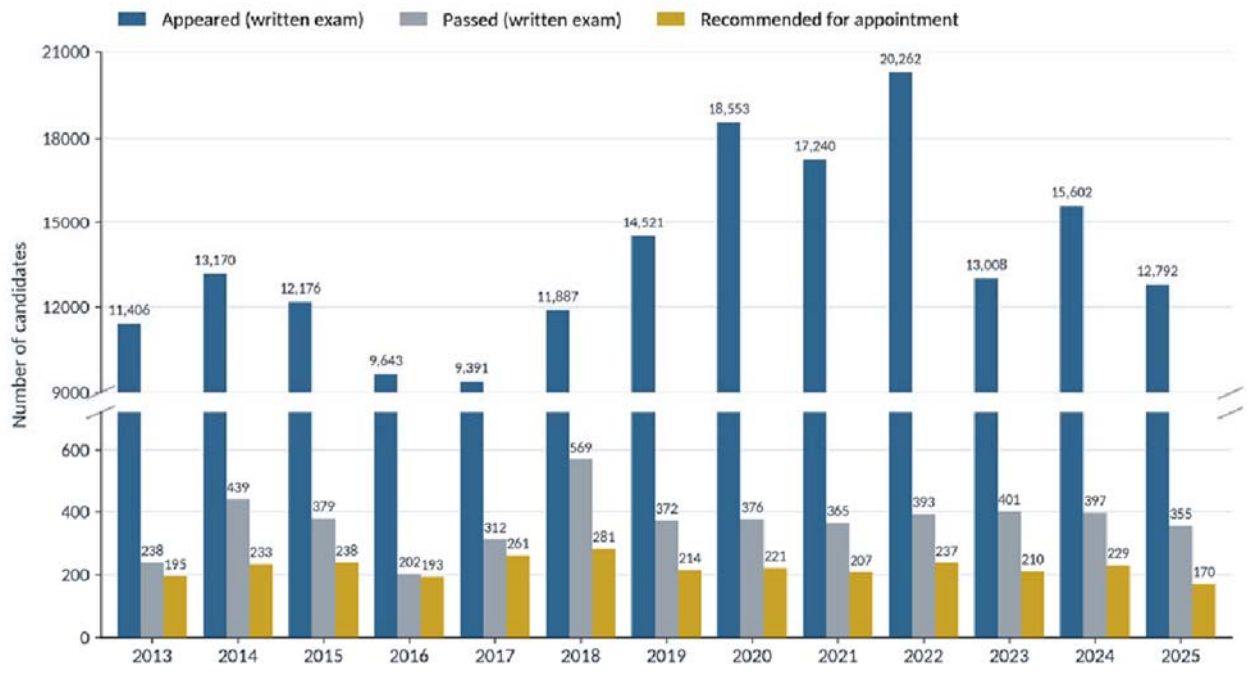


Figure 9. The CSS funnel, 2013–2025: from written candidates to final appointments. *Source: FPSC.*

Allocation: merit, quota and group

Written and interview marks are combined into a single merit list, after which the FPSC announces the year's vacancies and assigns successful candidates to occupational groups. Allocation turns on two things. The first is the regional quota, a longstanding feature of the system under which only a small share of posts is filled on open merit while the large majority is distributed across the provinces and federating units, with reserved shares also set aside for women and for minorities. The second is the candidate's own position on the merit list, stated group preferences and domicile.[29]

Group is therefore decided after the exam, on aggregate marks and preference rather than field of study. A candidate cannot apply for a specific service in advance, and a graduate in one discipline may be placed in an unrelated group. Those who qualify but fall below their region’s cut-off are not allocated and must compete again. The full process, from written exam to allocation, takes close to two years.

Over the past decade, the distribution of recommended allocations has remained concentrated in a relatively small number of occupational groups. As shown in Figure 10, for group allocations recommended by the FPSC between 2013 and 2023, the Inland Revenue Service, PAS and Office Management Group together account for approximately half of all recommended appointments.

[29] The merit and regional quota arrangement is a standing feature of federal recruitment. It rests on Article 27 of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), which permits the reservation of posts for underrepresented classes and areas to secure adequate representation in the service of Pakistan.

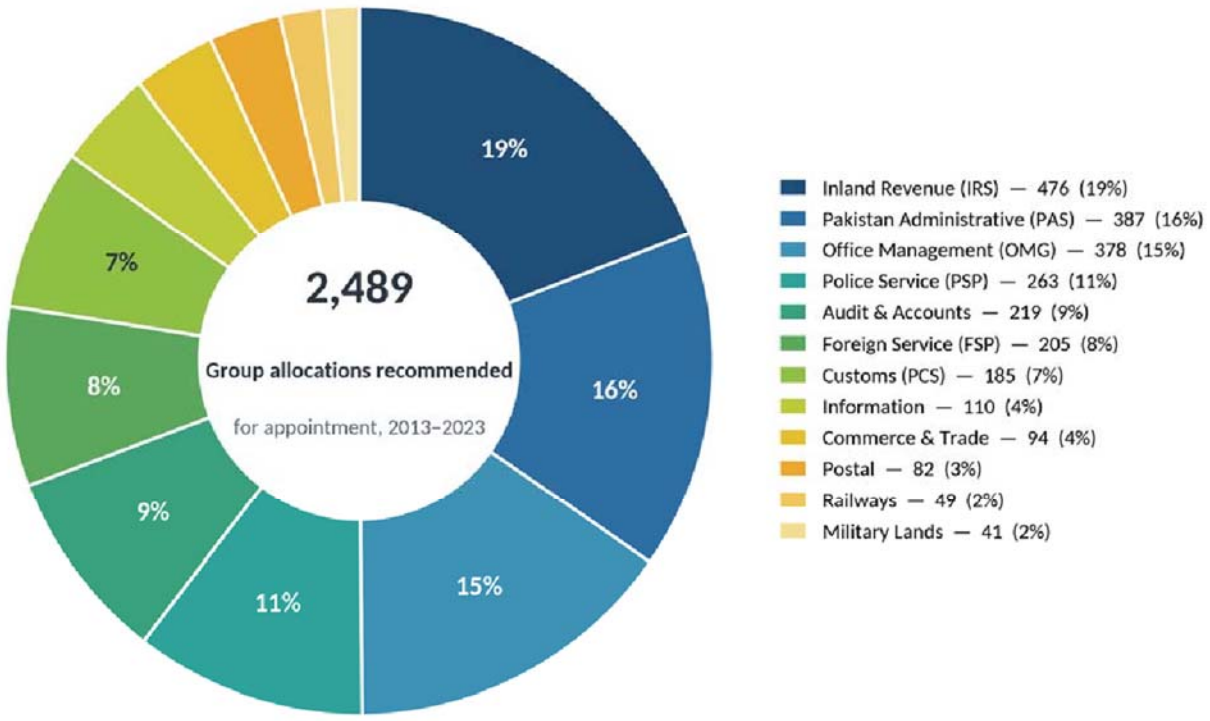


Figure 10. Recommended allocations across the twelve federal occupational groups, 2013–2023

Training

New officers attend a Common Training Program of about six months at the Civil Services Academy in Lahore, taken by all groups together. They then move to group-specific Specialized Training Programs — the PAS, for example, has a longer course of about ten months and a district field attachment — before joining their service. Later promotions are tied to mandatory courses run under the National School of Public Policy: the Mid-Career Management Course, the Senior Management Course and the National Management Course.[30]

Career progression

The officers progress from BPS-17 to BPS-22 primarily on the basis of seniority and fitness, subject to mandatory training, with performance assessed through the Annual Confidential Report (ACR). The structure of the cadre system affords the generalist services comparatively faster progression[31] to senior grades and a disproportionate share of top secretariat and provincial appointments, while specialist officers typically face slower career advancement.

[30]Civil Services Academy (CSA), Lahore, and the National School of Public Policy (NSPP): the Common Training Programme, group-specific Specialized Training Programmes and district field attachments, then the Mid-Career Management Course, Senior Management Course and National Management Course. nspp.gov.pk.

[31] On the advantage of direct-quota (generalist) officers — higher reserved quotas in BPS 18–22 and faster promotion — see "Central Superior Services" and Ishrat Husain, *Governing the Ungovernable* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

The system outlined above provided Pakistan with administrative continuity during the country's formative decades. But continuity is not the same as capability. It has been far less successful in enabling the state to seize the economic and developmental opportunities of a rapidly changing world. The question today is whether an institutional architecture conceived for another era and context can still equip Pakistan to compete in the twenty-first century.

The System's Principal Fault Line: The Generalist at the Centre

The defining fault line is the continued dominance of the generalist, most visibly embodied in the PAS. A common examination, post-selection allocation and generalist career management produce officers selected for broad administrative ability rather than professional expertise. Candidates arrive trained in every discipline the universities offer, yet neither selection nor the PAS career that follows draws on that training. The state therefore pays twice: once to educate its graduates in a multitude of fields, and again through a recruitment system that sets aside the preparation it funded. A shortage of relevant expertise is not the obstacle, and will be less so as higher education improves. The system that fails to draw on it is. The senior posts of the state, among them federal secretaries, heads of provincial departments and regulatory chiefs, are held overwhelmingly by this corps, regardless of the technical content of the brief. A generalist may run a power utility one year and a health department the next, accumulating breadth at the steady expense of depth.

This is precisely the imbalance successive reviews have identified. In its 2010 assessment, the International Crisis Group called for ending the systemic bias in favor of generalists by giving specialists equal opportunities for postings, promotion and advancement, while reserving most senior provincial positions for provincial rather than federal officers.[32] The recommendation went unheeded. The cadre system remains generalist by design, while professionally qualified specialists continue to enter government through separate professional services. As a result, technical expertise and the principal leadership pipeline remain largely distinct, with most senior administrative positions continuing to be filled through the generalist cadre. The result is a service in which those with the deepest technical knowledge are kept furthest from the decisions that turn on it, and those who decide are, by training and incentive, generalists.[33] The signal this sends is clear: in Pakistan's civil service, professional expertise is rarely the pathway to the highest leadership positions.

Postings, tenure and the politics of transfer

[32]International Crisis Group, Reforming Pakistan's Civil Service, Asia Report No. 185 (Brussels/Islamabad: ICG, 16 February 2010). Among its recommendations: ending the systemic bias in favour of generalists by granting specialists equal opportunities for postings, promotion and advancement, and reserving 75 per cent of senior provincial posts (BPS-21) for provincial civil servants. reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/reforming-pakistans-civil-service-icg-report.

[33]Interview with Dr Ishrat Husain, then Adviser to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms, “Dissecting the government’s civil service reforms agenda,” BR Research, Business Recorder, 1 November 2019, brecorder.com/news/540163. See also Ishrat Husain, Governing the Ungovernable (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

A professional civil service depends on predictable tenure. Officers who are frequently reassigned have limited opportunity to develop subject expertise, implement reforms over time, or be assessed against meaningful performance outcomes. In Pakistan, the posting and transfer system has long been characterized by frequent rotations, often before officers have fully established themselves in a role. Transfers have also been widely perceived as an important instrument of administrative control, influencing both institutional continuity and operational independence. . Since the Cornelius Commission, successive reform reviews have consistently recommended minimum tenure protections and politically insulated postings. Yet the consensus has never translated into sustained administrative practice.

Accountability without consequence

The ACR remains the system's principal accountability mechanism: a once-a-year, largely subjective appraisal written by a superior and poorly suited to assessing departmental performance. Promotion to senior grades depends largely on seniority and mandatory training rather than demonstrated results, rewarding caution over initiative and conformity over performance. Although objective, KPI-based appraisal is entirely feasible, a system in which performance carries neither meaningful reward nor consequence cannot sustain excellence over time.

A Modern Talent Pool, an Outdated Public Service Model

The case for reform becomes clearer when developments in Pakistan's higher education system are considered alongside the structure of its civil service. Pakistan now produces specialist talent at a scale unimaginable when the present civil service model was designed. As of 2026, Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) recognizes 247 universities and degree-awarding institutions, including approximately 160 in the public sector and 87 in the private sector, producing more than half a million graduates annually.[34] These graduates include tens of thousands of engineers, doctors, accountants, lawyers and other professionals entering the labor market each year. The country's professional bodies reflect the same expansion: the Pakistan Engineering Council has registered more than 380,000 engineers, while the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council's register now includes more than 360,000 medical and dental practitioners. Accountancy, law, and several other professions also continue to grow steadily. In quantitative terms, Pakistan no longer faces a shortage of specialist human capital.

Against this backdrop, the career incentives embedded within the civil service become more consequential. Despite an expanding talent pool, the civil service continues to reserve its principal leadership pathway for generalist officers, while specialist services remain largely outside the senior administrative pipeline with limited access to the senior positions where cross-government policy and resource decisions are concentrated. The result is a persistent separation between technical expertise and the principal leadership pipeline of the state. For many highly qualified graduates, the institutional

[34] Higher Education Commission (HEC), Government of Pakistan, *Recognised Universities and Degree Awarding Institutions (DAIs)*, and *Higher Education Data Repository (HEDR) Annual Report 2022-23* (Islamabad: HEC, 2025), available at: HEC Recognised Universities & DAIs; HEC HEDR Annual Report 2022-23 (accessed June 2026).

incentives are therefore clear: the CSS examination offers a more direct route to influence and career progression than remaining within their own professions. It is unsurprising that professionals across the disciplines choose to enter the generalist cadre, effectively leaving the fields in which they were trained.

For many others, the preferred response is increasingly to pursue opportunities abroad. Recent emigration data illustrate the scale of this trend, with approximately 5,000 doctors, 11,000 engineers and 13,000 accountants formally emigrating during 2024 and 2025 alone.[35] A Gallup Pakistan survey found that around two-thirds of respondents, professionals among them, wished to work overseas.[36] These figures reflect a range of personal and economic considerations, but they also expose a broader institutional challenge. Pakistan's universities now produce graduates across virtually every discipline modern government requires, yet the civil service reserves its senior leadership for a small generalist cadre. The challenge is no longer to produce expertise, but to organize the state around it. Until then, Pakistan will continue to underuse one of its greatest national assets.

Taken together, generalist dominance, insecure tenure, accountability without consequence and a service that largely sidelines specialists are not separate problems but one design expressing itself in different ways. The governance indicators discussed earlier point to the same conclusion. They are not abstract statistics but the cumulative outcome of how the state recruits, develops, deploys, evaluates and rewards its public servants. The following section examines how the demands of modern government have changed, and what those changes require of a twenty-first century public service.

Reform proposals under discussion. Since 2024-2025, a high-level Civil Service Reforms Committee constituted by the Prime Minister and chaired by Planning Minister has been examining reforms to move beyond the traditional generalist CSS model. The proposals include cluster-based recruitment, a National Executive Service with lateral entry, market-based remuneration, KPI-based performance management, independent performance review boards, additional specialist services, conversion of the Establishment Division into a strategic HR function, and a review of the English-language requirement. These proposals are broadly consistent with the reform agendas advanced in 2006-08 and 2018-19. As of mid-2026, they have been submitted to the federal cabinet, while the 2025 and 2026 CSS examinations continue to operate under the existing framework, apart from the introduction of the preliminary screening test.[37]

[35] Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment data, as reported in "Skilled professionals leaving Pakistan in record numbers," January 2026

[36]Gallup Pakistan survey finding that roughly two-thirds of respondents expressed a desire to work abroad, as reported in "Unprecedented brain drain," The Nation, 12 September 2024, nation.com.pk/12-Sep-2024/unprecedented-brain-drain.

[37]The Civil Service Reforms Committee, constituted in 2024 under Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, recommended cluster based recruitment alongside a wider package of institutional reforms. See PID releases (4 & 24 April 2025); *The Nation*, 21 February 2025; and *Dawn*, 25 July 2025.

SECTION FOUR

The New Logic of Government

How Twenty-First Century States Build Capability, Not Bureaucracy

In brief

- The purpose of the state has changed: governments are no longer judged on administration alone, but on their ability to build the capabilities on which national prosperity depends
- High-performing states are replacing generalist administration with specialist expertise, professional career streams and stronger performance accountability
- Pakistan's public service remains organized around an earlier era
- The future lies in specialist occupational groups aligned with the state's principal functions, supported by a dedicated strategic cadre responsible for advancing and coordinating Pakistan's long-term national priorities

The previous section examined why Pakistan's existing administrative architecture no longer aligns with the demands of a modern state. This section turns to a broader question: what distinguishes the governments that have successfully reorganized themselves for the twenty-first century? Their advantage lies not merely in administrative efficiency, but in organizing the state around the capabilities needed to drive long-term national development.

The Changing Purpose of the State

For much of modern history, governments were judged primarily by their ability to maintain order, collect revenue, administer territory and provide a stable framework for economic and social life. The institutions they built reflected those priorities. Administrative coordination, regulatory control and territorial governance formed the core functions of the state, and public services were organized accordingly.

Today, the demands placed on governments are fundamentally different. Economic prosperity is no longer determined principally by the availability of natural resources or inexpensive labor, but by a nation's ability to build competitive industries, attract investment, develop human capital, accelerate technological adoption and respond to increasingly complex global challenges. Governments are now expected not merely to administer society, but to shape the conditions under which it can compete, innovate and prosper.

This shift has transformed the role of the public service. Its central task today, is to build and sustain the capabilities on which long-term national prosperity depends. That requires coordinated leadership across economic strategy, industrial development, trade, investment, energy, infrastructure, technology, human capital and climate resilience. These are not isolated policy domains but interdependent national capabilities that can no longer be managed in institutional silos. The implication is profound. If the purpose of the state has changed, the architecture of the public service cannot remain anchored in assumptions

developed for another era. Administrative competence remains essential, but it is no longer sufficient for a state expected to drive long-term national development.

A World Moving the Other Way

While Pakistan has preserved the basic architecture of its civil service for more than five decades, much of the world has moved in the opposite direction. Nations now compete through their ability to sustain economic growth, raise productivity, foster innovation, commercialize technology, attract investment, expand exports, secure affordable energy, develop future-ready skills and respond to increasingly complex challenges such as climate change, demographic transition and artificial intelligence. These capabilities have become the principal determinants of long-term national prosperity, competitiveness and resilience. Few of these outcomes fall within the remit of any single ministry or department. Building internationally competitive industries, for example, demands coordinated action across finance, trade, industry, energy, infrastructure, education, science and technology, investment promotion and regulation. The same is true of technological capability, export competitiveness and human capital development.

Across advanced and emerging economies alike, governments have therefore steadily reorganized their public services around professional capability, specialist expertise and long-term strategic coordination. Although the institutional models differ, the direction of travel is remarkably consistent: away from generalist administration and towards specialist capability as the foundation of effective statecraft.

The OECD, drawing together two decades of reform across its members, has articulated this shift most clearly: It argues that a "future-ready" public service must be forward-looking, adaptable and professionally skilled, capable not only of responding to change but anticipating it.[38] Its work identifies the over-reliance on “one dominant generalist profession” as a weakness to be corrected, and its broader skills agenda now urges “skills-first” hiring that prioritizes demonstrated ability over formal credentials alone.[39] The OECD's companion framework on sound public governance frames the same ambition in terms of values, enablers and tools — institutions that can anticipate difficult policy issues and respond to them coherently and effectively, in the public interest.[40] This is the standard against which a contemporary service is now measured.

The practical expression of this shift can be seen across many of the world's highest-performing public services. Singapore, consistently ranked among the world's most effective governments, does not rely on a single centralized generalist examination comparable to Pakistan's CSS. Ministries recruit against specific

[38]OECD, Public Employment and Management 2021: The Future of the Public Service (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021), which sets out the vision of a forward-looking, flexible and fulfilling public service able to anticipate and plan for the skills it will need.

[39]OECD, Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023); and OECD work on skills-first approaches prioritizing skills over formal qualifications in public-sector hiring. oecd.org.

[40]OECD, Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance: Baseline Features of Governments that Work Well (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1787/c03e01b3-en.

competencies through rigorous, role-based selection, future leaders are identified and developed through targeted scholarship and leadership programs, and remuneration is benchmarked against the market while remaining linked to national economic performance.[41] The underlying principle is straightforward: governments perform best when public institutions are led by people with relevant expertise, supported by incentives that attract and retain high-quality talent.

The United Kingdom, whose Westminster tradition profoundly shaped Pakistan's own administrative system, has itself acknowledged the limitations of excessive generalist rotation. In a 2025 parliamentary debate, members observed that "every two years a third of the civil service change their Department," eroding policy expertise, while ministers acknowledged the long-standing concern that officials "move on after a few years just as they are becoming an absolute expert in their area."[42] The government's response has been to draw in external and specialist talent, sharpen performance management with faster exits for poor performers, and make the state behave "more like a start-up."[43] The reforms reflect a broader recognition that subject expertise and performance accountability are essential attributes of a modern public service.

Australia has reached similar conclusions through a different reform process. Its landmark independent review, *Our Public Service, Our Future*, concluded that while the Australian Public Service remained fundamentally sound, it required deliberate investment in deeper expertise, stronger institutional capability and more transparent leadership to meet the challenges of the coming decades. The review's central proposition, "deep expertise, stronger advice," underscores the growing importance of specialist capability in modern government.[44]

The through-line across the OECD, Singapore, Britain and Australia is unmistakable: Governments increasingly recruit for specialized capability, invest in professional career pathways, strengthen strategic coordination and organize leadership around the knowledge required to solve increasingly complex governance problems. The competitive advantage of the twenty-first century state lies increasingly in its ability to mobilize expertise, coordinate across disciplines and align public institutions behind long-term national objectives.

[41]On Singapore's decentralized, competency-based recruitment (largely devolved from the Public Service Commission to ministries since the mid-1990s), PSC scholarships for future leaders, and market-benchmarked, performance-linked pay, see Public Service Division (PSD) materials and the Singapore Civil Service overview, psd.gov.sg.

[42]Civil Service Reform debate, Hansard, House of Commons, 24 April 2025, hansard.parliament.uk. Members observed that approximately one-third of the civil service change department every two years, eroding policy expertise.

[43]Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, speeches on public-sector reform, December 2024–March 2025; HM Government, "Pat McFadden vows to make the state 'more like a start up'," gov.uk, 9 December 2024; House of Lords Library, "Reforming the civil service," 23 April 2025, lordslibrary.parliament.uk.

[44]Independent Review of the Australian Public Service, Our Public Service, Our Future (the Thodey Review), Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, esp. ch. 6, "Invest in people to strengthen capability."

From Administrative Convenience to National Capability

Pakistan's public service remains organized around an administrative logic developed for a very different purpose. The highest institutional rewards continue to flow towards managing government rather than building the economy. Yet the defining questions confronting Pakistan today are no longer primarily administrative. They are strategic. Where will economic growth come from over the next two decades? Which industries should receive sustained policy support? How should trade, fiscal, industrial and energy policies reinforce one another? What skills should Pakistan's education system produce? Which infrastructure investments will generate the greatest long-term returns? How should artificial intelligence, climate change and demographic change reshape national priorities?

No institution within the present public-service architecture is specifically designed to develop officers whose careers are devoted to the expertise these questions demand. Responsibility is dispersed across multiple ministries, divisions and agencies, each performing important but largely sectoral functions. Coordination depends more on administrative arrangements than on a professional cadre whose expertise lies in long-term economic strategy itself.

A twenty-first century public service requires a different organizing principle. Local administration should increasingly become the responsibility of empowered local governments. The federal public service should concentrate on building the capabilities that determine Pakistan's long-term prosperity.

The implications for Pakistan are clear. The historic dominance of the PAS should give way to specialist occupational groups aligned with the state's principal functions. Central to this architecture would be a dedicated **Finance and Economy (F&E) Group**, recruited, trained and developed exclusively for economic governance. Rather than serving within a single ministry or department, its officers would build careers across Pakistan's principal economic institutions, including finance, planning, economic affairs, commerce, industry and investment, providing the professional continuity needed to align these functions behind a coherent long-term national strategy. Their purpose would not be to administer districts or rotate across unrelated assignments, but to help organize the state around the enduring drivers of national prosperity. Section Five sets out the group in detail.

Local administration should correspondingly become the responsibility of empowered local governments, allowing the federal public service to concentrate on the strategic functions that increasingly determine Pakistan's future. The following section translates this vision into an institutional architecture for a twenty-first century public service.

SECTION FIVE

A New Architecture for Public Service

Competence and Leadership, Enabled by Digital Systems

In brief

- Institutional redesign rather than incremental reform: retiring the PAS, consolidating the PSP, the FIA and the IB into a single Federal Investigation & Intelligence Bureau (FIIB), and introducing specialist occupational groups aligned with the modern state's principal functions
- A new strategic economic cadre would translate and coordinate Pakistan's long-term national development, shifting the center of public service from territorial administration to state capability
- Recruitment, careers, performance and rewards would be organized around professional competence, allowing expertise to deepen throughout an officer's career
- The transition would be implemented in phases, protecting serving officers while enabling the new architecture to be introduced without disrupting continuity in government
- Two integrated digital platforms would sustain the new model, connecting recruitment, performance and career progression once professionally aligned entry is in place

Having established that the existing model has reached the limits of its usefulness, the question is no longer whether change is needed, but what should replace it. The central weakness lies less in the quality of Pakistan's public servants than in the institutional design within which they serve, making institutional redesign rather than incremental adjustment the logical response.

From Reform to Redesign: A Framework for Transition

The scale of the reforms proposed in this paper reflects the scale of the challenge confronting the Pakistani state. They do not seek to improve an administrative model designed for another era; they seek to replace it with one better suited to the demands of the twenty-first century. Such a transformation cannot be achieved through another mere set of procedural amendments or another partial restructuring of the existing system. It requires a deliberate redesign of the public service itself. Institutional redesign however, need not mean institutional disruption. Governments cannot suspend administration while rebuilding the institutions through which they govern. The task is to manage a gradual transition, preserving continuity while progressively replacing obsolete structures with a new public service model.

The proposed model preserves merit-based recruitment, an independent FPSC, rigorous training and structured career progression, while fundamentally redesigning the architecture through which federal officers are recruited, developed and assigned to careers in public service. Recruitment would no longer center on a dominant generalist cadre, but on specialist occupational groups aligned with the state's principal functions. The PAS would become part of Pakistan's administrative history, with future recruitment ending as its remaining functions are redistributed between empowered local governments and strengthened specialist services. The same logic applies to policing. Public order is a local function,

and a service recruited nationally and posted transiently cannot hold the stake in a neighborhood that effective policing requires. City and district policing should therefore pass to local government, recruited from the communities it serves and answerable to them. The federal role should be reserved for what local forces cannot do. A Federal Investigation and Intelligence Bureau (FIIB) would consolidate the federal investigative and civilian intelligence functions now divided across separate agencies, taking jurisdiction wherever crime crosses district boundaries. It would also serve as the national professional authority for policing, setting standards, overseeing training and accreditation, providing forensic and specialist support, and coordinating operations across local jurisdictions.

This transition would necessarily be phased over several recruitment cycles. Future entrants would compete directly for specialist occupational groups aligned with the capabilities the state seeks to build, including the proposed F&E and FIIB groups. Serving officers would be accommodated through carefully designed transition pathways that respect accrued service while progressively integrating the existing workforce into the redesigned system. Figure 11 contrasts a single generalist pipeline with the new, proposed model comprising of twelve professionally aligned pathways.

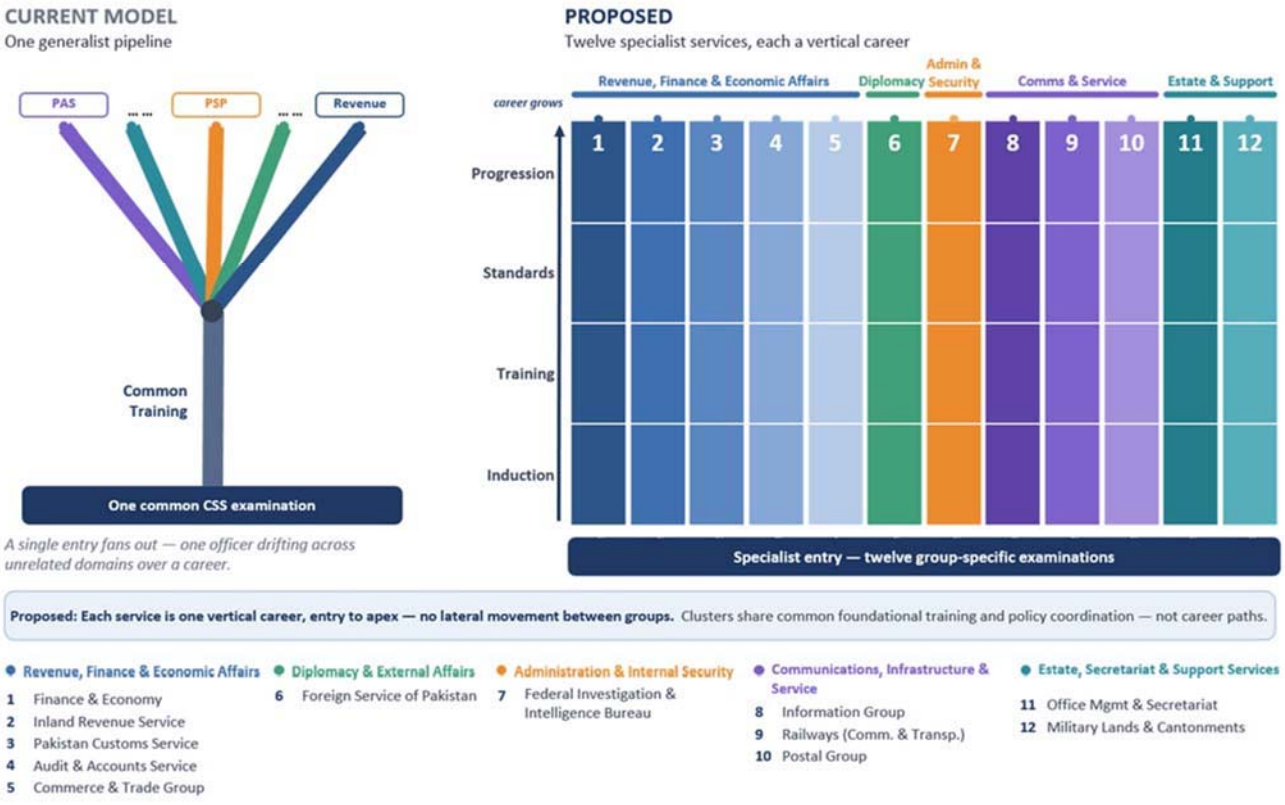


Figure 11. From one generalist pipeline to twelve professional career pathways

Reform of this kind succeeds only when those inside the system can see their place within it, and it endures only when change is built rather than imposed. The purpose of this transition is therefore not simply to alter the composition of the civil service. It is to change the way the state develops its future leadership. Instead of producing administrators expected to adapt to almost any assignment, the system would

deliberately cultivate professionals whose careers are built around deep expertise, institutional continuity and progressively greater responsibility within their chosen fields. Leadership would become the culmination of professional mastery rather than administrative mobility. The remainder of this section outlines the principal elements of this redesigned public service, beginning with recruitment aligned to professional competence, followed by performance management, career development and institutional incentives capable of sustaining excellence over the long term.

The Finance and Economy Group: A New Flagship for Public Service

The era of PAS should come to an end. It should be retired as the flagship of Pakistan's higher civil service and replaced by the Finance and Economy Group designed for the demands of the twenty-first century. This is more than the replacement of one occupational group with another. It represents a redefinition of public service itself. For decades, the highest prestige within the civil service has been associated with territorial administration and the offices of Assistant Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner. The proposed model instead places national development at the center of public service. The country's most capable young professionals should aspire not to administer districts, but to serve at the heart of Pakistan's economic future: strengthening public finances, expanding exports, attracting investment, accelerating industrial development, improving infrastructure, building future-ready human capital, and giving government the expertise and continuity its long-term vision demands.

The officers of F&E group would build careers across Pakistan's principal economic institutions, serving in finance, planning, economic affairs, commerce, industry, investment and other strategic organizations through which the country's long-term development priorities are formulated and implemented. Unlike the existing generalist model, their professional development would remain anchored in economic governance throughout their careers, allowing expertise, institutional memory and strategic judgment to deepen over time.

The group's purpose would extend well beyond the management of public finances or the administration of economic policy. It would serve as the state's strategic economic cadre, sustaining the professional analysis on which government must draw in deciding the questions that shape Pakistan's future. Where will the country's next engines of growth emerge? Which industries and technologies deserve strategic support? How should public investment be prioritized? What capabilities should Pakistan develop to remain globally competitive? How should education, infrastructure, energy, trade, investment, regulation and international economic engagement reinforce one another? These are choices for the people's elected representatives to make. The group's task is to ensure they are made with the best available evidence, rigorously argued options and an honest account of the trade-offs, and then carried out with professional competence. Above all, it would help ensure that the state's principal economic institutions act not as disconnected administrative silos, but as parts of a coherent strategic system, strengthening the consistency, coherence and coordination with which national policy is implemented across government, in pursuit of a shared long-term national vision.

The creation of the Finance and Economy Group therefore represents more than the introduction of a new occupational group. It marks a fundamental shift in what Pakistan expects from public service itself. The defining measure of distinction would no longer be the districts an officer has administered, but the national capabilities they help create.

Competence Based Recruitment

The second element of the proposed model is a redesign of recruitment. Under the current system, candidates sit a common competitive examination and are allocated to one of the twelve occupational groups only after the results are declared, based on aggregate marks and stated preferences. Successful candidates may find themselves allocated to services unrelated to their academic preparation.

The proposed model reverses that logic. Candidates would apply directly to the occupational group they intend to join and compete only with others seeking entry into the same profession. Each group would recruit against the knowledge, competencies and analytical abilities required for its mandate, while eligibility would reflect relevant academic preparation. The existing aptitude assessment, psychological evaluation and interview would be retained, preserving the rigor of the current process while aligning its substantive content with the responsibilities officers will ultimately perform. Table 2 illustrates the proposed alignment between each occupational group, its core mandate, relevant academic backgrounds and the competencies expected of future entrants.

Table 2. Proposed specialist recruitment pathways for the twelve occupational groups, including a new F&E Group replacing the PAS and FIIB replacing the PSP, FIA, and IB. Highlighted rows indicate proposed new groups.

Proposed Cluster	Occupational group	Core mandate	Relevant degrees / eligible disciplines
Revenue, Finance & Economic Affairs	Finance & Economy (F&E)	Inform and coordinate the delivery of long-term national strategy across government to strengthen Pakistan's global competitiveness, resilience and sustainable development	Economics, finance, accounting, business or related disciplines
	Inland Revenue Service (IRS)	Assesses and collects domestic taxes — income tax, sales tax and federal excise — under the FBR.	Economics, finance, accounting, business or related disciplines
	Pakistan Customs Service (PCS)	Collects duties on imports and exports; valuation, border control and anti-smuggling (FBR).	Economics, finance, accounting, business or related disciplines
	Pakistan Audit & Accounts Service (PAAS)	Supreme audit institution: audits federal and provincial accounts and maintains government accounts.	Economics, finance, accounting, business or related disciplines
	Commerce & Trade Group (CTG)	Trade policy, export promotion, trade diplomacy and WTO negotiations (Ministry of Commerce).	Economics, finance, accounting, business or related disciplines
Diplomacy & External Affairs	Foreign Service of Pakistan (FSP)	Conducts Pakistan's foreign policy and represents the state abroad; staffs diplomatic and consular missions.	International relations, political science, law, languages

Administration & Internal Security	Federal Investigation & Intelligence Bureau (FIIB)	Consolidates federal investigative and civilian intelligence functions; investigates crime crossing district, provincial or national boundaries, provides forensic and specialist capability to local police service.	Law, criminology, forensic science, data science, social sciences, public administration
Communications, Infrastructure & Service	Information Group (IG)	Government communication — dissemination of public information across all media (MoIB / PID).	Media / communication, information technology, journalism, public relations
	Railways (Commercial & Transportation) Group	Plans and operates the national rail network, Pakistan Railways — freight and passenger services.	Engineering, logistics / transport management, economics
	Postal Group	Operates Pakistan Post — mail and parcels, plus savings, insurance and bill-collection services.	Management, information technology, economics, business
Estate, Secretariat & Support Services	Office Management & Secretariat Group (OMG)	Federal secretariat administration — office management, personnel, records and support services.	Public administration, human resource management, management, information technology
	Military Lands & Cantonments Group (ML&C)	Administers military lands and cantonments — cantonment local governance and estate management.	Public administration, law, urban / estate management

This approach represents an evolution rather than a departure from the direction established in successive reform initiatives. The reform commissions of 2006-08 and 2018-19 both recommended cluster based recruitment, and the Civil Service Reforms Committee constituted in 2024 similarly proposed organizing recruitment around clustered services. The model advanced here carries that logic to its natural conclusion by providing each group with its own professionally aligned recruitment pathway, administered by the Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions. It preserves the constitutional safeguards that underpin public recruitment, including regional representation and the reserved shares for women and minorities. One correction, however, belongs in any serious redesign. Article 27 of the Constitution establishes non-discrimination in appointment as the rule and regional reservation as an exception to it, framed as temporary and introduced to offset uneven development and access to education.[45] In practice open merit has become the exception. The proposed redesign would restore the intended order: merit as the governing rule, reservation as the exception, narrowing as educational opportunity broadens. Entry would continue through the Public Service Commissions, with candidates competing only for services matching their qualifications. Coordination across services remains the responsibility of the Cabinet, as provided by the Constitution, rather than any single cadre. The result preserves representation, openness and merit while matching recruitment to competence.

[45] Regional reservation as a proviso to Article 27(1) of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), subject to a specified period; the 16th Amendment (1999) substituted 40 years for 20. Constitution of Pakistan (1973), Art. 27(1); Constitution (16th Amendment) Act, 1999.

Careers Built on Expertise

Recruitment determines who enters the public service. Career structures determine who eventually leads it. The two must therefore rest on the same principle. Officers recruited for a profession should build their careers within it, developing progressively deeper expertise, stronger institutional understanding and greater leadership responsibility over time.

Each occupational group would therefore constitute a distinct professional career stream. Officers would remain within their chosen field, supported by continuous professional development, advanced training, research opportunities and carefully structured secondments to academia, industry, international organizations and other institutions that strengthen professional capability. Career mobility would continue, but it would deepen expertise rather than disperse it across unrelated domains.

The same principle should extend to the highest levels of public administration. The country's principal economic institutions should ordinarily be led by officers whose careers have been devoted to economic governance; health institutions by health professionals; engineering and infrastructure institutions by technically relevant experts; education institutions by education specialists; and so on. Leadership should reflect demonstrated professional accomplishment rather than broad administrative exposure alone.

Such a model would strengthen institutional memory, improve policy continuity and create clear incentives for officers to invest in genuine expertise throughout their careers. Public confidence would likewise be strengthened by knowing that the state's most complex responsibilities are entrusted to professionals who have spent their careers preparing to lead them.

Managing the Transition for Serving Officers

Institutional reform should not create institutional casualties. The objective is to redesign the public service, not penalize officers who entered it through a lawful, competitive and merit-based process. Serving officers should transition into the new architecture through structured pathways that reflect their qualifications, professional aptitude, experience and the needs of government. Some mid-career officers may continue within specialist career streams aligned with their expertise, while others may opt for voluntary separation through appropriate retirement and compensation arrangements. The objective is neither to preserve existing structures nor to impose abrupt displacement, but to achieve an orderly transition that strengthens institutional capability while treating serving officers fairly.

The transition also presents an opportunity to better utilize one of the state's most underused resources: the accumulated experience of its senior civil servants. Rather than simply waiting for retirement, experienced officers should be offered structured pathways into advanced education, policy research, and institutional mentoring. Government-sponsored doctoral study at leading international universities

aligned with their areas of experience, secondments to think tanks and international organizations, and appointments to national policy institutions could help convert decades of administrative experience into long-term intellectual and institutional capital for the state. This approach recognizes that while institutions must evolve, experience should not be discarded.

Professional Development, Performance and Rewards

Professionally aligned recruitment and career pathways must be supported by an equally modern system for developing, evaluating and rewarding public servants. Each service should establish a structured program of continuing professional development, ensuring that technical knowledge, leadership capability and professional standards are strengthened throughout an officer's career. The academy and management courses already embedded within the civil service should be reoriented towards service specific capability, complemented by professional certification, executive education and lifelong learning.

Professional development should be matched by a more objective approach to performance management. The ACR should give way to a structured performance framework based on clearly defined objectives, measurable outcomes and regular performance reviews. Officers and supervisors should jointly agree annual performance goals, with progression increasingly reflecting demonstrated contribution, professional capability and continuing development rather than seniority alone. Independent review mechanisms should provide appropriate safeguards against bias while reinforcing confidence in the integrity of the system.

Finally, professional capability should be recognized through a reward structure that supports recruitment, retention and sustained high performance. As discussed earlier, Pakistan now produces specialist talent at a scale that places a growing premium on attracting and retaining the country's most capable professionals. A modern public service must therefore compete not only on purpose but also on professional opportunity. Compensation should become more transparent, increasingly market referenced and more closely linked to performance, replacing the current reliance on allowances and in kind benefits with a simpler and more accountable structure. As Singapore demonstrates, competitive remuneration is not an end in itself but an important enabler of a capable and professional public service. The objective is not to replicate another country's pay levels, but to ensure that public service remains an attractive long term career for the professionals on whom effective government increasingly depends.

Digital Enablers of Redesign

Digital infrastructure allows a redesigned public service to operate at scale and to endure. Once recruitment is aligned to professional qualification and careers deepen within specialist groups, the resulting system requires a level of integration, transparency and data management that fragmented, paper based processes cannot provide. Two complementary platforms would supply it: a **Public Service Recruitment Portal** and an **Employee Performance Management Portal**. Figure 12 presents the conceptual design of this integrated digital architecture, linking recruitment, performance management and career progression through a single public service human capital platform.

The Public Service Recruitment Portal would serve as the single digital platform through which the Public Service Commissions conduct recruitment across the public service. It would advertise each group's vacancies, receive applications, verify academic and professional credentials through integration with relevant national databases, support the Commissions in conducting the group-specific examinations and interviews, and rank candidates on merit with any applicable reserved quotas applied transparently and consistently. Beyond improving efficiency, the platform would make recruitment more open, auditable and accessible, while providing government with a reliable picture of recruitment demand and emerging capability needs across services.

The Employee Performance Management Portal would provide a unified digital record of each officer's professional career, integrating performance objectives, appraisal history, professional development, certifications and career progression within a single platform. Replacing the ACR with a structured, evidence based performance management system, it would support objective decisions on promotion, posting, rewards and workforce development while ensuring transparency, consistency and appropriate safeguards for privacy and independent review.

The two portals would create a continuous digital record across an officer's career, linking professional qualifications, capability development, performance and career progression. This would provide government with reliable workforce intelligence for evidence based planning while strengthening merit, transparency, accountability and capability across the service. In this way, digital technology becomes an essential enabler of competence based public administration. International practice points the same way: the OECD's "skills-first" agenda and its work on digital government treat exactly this kind of data-enabled, competency-based management as the foundation of a future-ready public service.[46]

Taken together, these reforms establish a coherent operating model in which recruitment, career development, performance, reward and digital enablement reinforce one another while preserving merit, constitutional safeguards and the acquired rights of serving officers. The challenge now is implementation that preserves continuity, builds confidence and sustains reform.

A Note on the Future Direction

The architecture proposed above is designed for the Pakistan of today. As higher education matures and professional standards strengthen over the coming decades, recruitment could evolve beyond competitive examinations. Enabled by integrated technologies, government would advertise vacancies through a national recruitment portal, with qualified professionals applying directly for specialist roles. Verified academic records, professional credentials and digital assessment tools would increasingly automate screening and shortlisting, leaving interviews and other role-specific assessment to the final stage. This is a longer-term direction toward which a stronger higher education system and a more mature public service could gradually evolve.

[46]OECD, Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023) on "skills-first" hiring; and OECD work on digital government as a foundation of a future-ready public service. oecd.org.

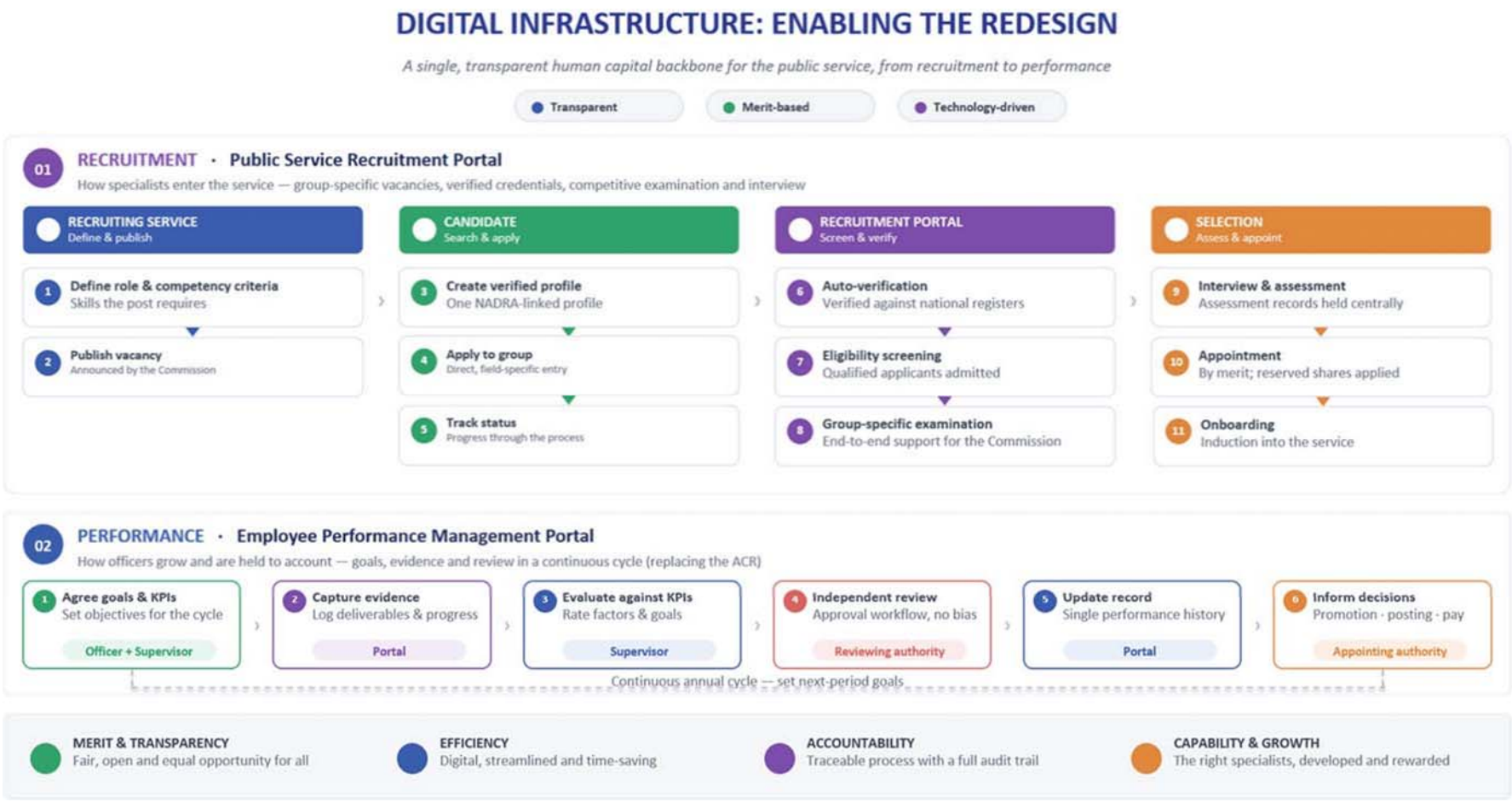


Figure 12. Digital infrastructure supporting the redesigned system: recruitment, performance management and career progression on a single platform

SECTION SIX

Making Reform Endure

The Transition Roadmap for a Lasting Change

In brief

- Pakistan's reform record has never lacked diagnosis, but implementation, with around forty commissions identifying many of the same weaknesses yet few reforms enduring beyond a single political cycle
- Lasting reform depends on four conditions: legal anchoring, a durable delivery mechanism, institutional safeguards and effective change management
- Implementation proceeds through four phases: establishing the new architecture, launching the redesigned public service, transitioning the existing cadre and consolidating the new model
- The roadmap combines decisive institutional redesign with phased implementation, preserving continuity in government while building a specialist public service for the twenty-first century

Pakistan has produced no shortage of civil service reform reports. Their common weakness has not been diagnosis, but implementation. The success of the reforms proposed here will therefore depend as much on how they are introduced as on what they seek to change.

Why Earlier Reforms Did Not Endure

The reasons earlier reforms failed are by now well understood.

- **Persistent structural weaknesses.** Successive reviews identified the same structural shortcomings, including over-centralization, weak performance management, limited professional specialization and fragmented human-resource management. Yet these institutional weaknesses remained largely unchanged across reform cycles.

- **Limited political continuity.** Major reform programs were frequently launched late in an electoral cycle or during periods of political transition, leaving insufficient time to build lasting political ownership before governments changed. For instance, The National Commission for Government Reforms completed its blueprint in 2008 just as the government changed, leaving the incoming administration with little appetite for its implementation.[47] A decade later the pattern recurred: the 2018–19 Task Force on Civil Service Reform secured cabinet approval for parts of its package, yet most of its proposals were never put into effect.[48]

[47] Government of Pakistan, *Report of the National Commission for Government Reforms* (Islamabad, 2008). On its failure to progress following the change of government, see Dr Ishrat Husain, *Business Recorder*, 1 November 2019; and International Crisis Group, *Reforming Pakistan's Civil Service*, Asia Report No. 185 (Brussels/Islamabad: ICG, 16 February 2010)

[48] The 2018–19 Task Force on Civil Service Reform, chaired by Dr Ishrat Husain, secured cabinet approval for several recommendations, including cluster-based CSS recruitment, but most remained unimplemented. Husain resigned in 2021, citing a lack of political will to implement approved reforms. See *The Express Tribune*, 12 October 2019; *The News*, 31 July 2021.

- **Weak implementation arrangements.** Reforms were often introduced through executive decisions rather than embedded in legislation, while implementation bodies lacked the authority, permanence or capacity needed to sustain long-term change.
- **Institutional resistance to structural change.** Proposals requiring significant changes to established career structures or redistributed institutional influence repeatedly lost momentum because their implementation depended heavily on the cooperation of those most affected by them.
- **Weak protection of merit and accountability.** Successive domestic reviews and the International Crisis Group found that politicized appointments, postings and promotions, together with weak performance accountability, consistently undermined the effective implementation of reform.

These lessons shape the implementation roadmap proposed here, with the objective of building reforms that endure political transition, institutional resistance and the passage of time.

The Preconditions for Successful Reform

The implementation roadmap that follows rests on four conditions essential for lasting reform.

- **Legal and institutional anchoring.** The reforms should be embedded in legislation and service rules rather than relying on executive notification. The constitutional role of the Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions provides a durable foundation for the redesigned public service.
- **A durable delivery mechanism.** A *Civil Service Redesign & Implementation Board (CS-RIB)* should be established, headed by the Prime Minister, with a multi-year mandate and minimal secretariat of its own: a small group of specialists rather than a conventional bureaucracy. Working through existing institutions, its task is to drive implementation of civil service redesign, resolve bottlenecks and sustain momentum across electoral cycles, winding up once the transition is complete.
- **Institutional safeguards.** Recruitment, postings, promotions and performance evaluation should be progressively insulated from undue interference through transparent procedures, independent oversight and minimum tenure protections, together with a clear legal route for an officer who declines an unlawful order.
- **Change management.** Redesign should be supported by a clear communication strategy explaining what will change, what will remain protected and how the transition will unfold. Continuous communication throughout will be essential to building confidence and sustaining public support.

A Sequenced Roadmap

Implementation should follow four overlapping horizons, from institutional design to consolidation and review, rather than a single large-scale restructuring (Figure 13).

Phase I: Institutional Design and Legal Foundations

The first phase establishes the legal and administrative foundations of the new public service architecture. The CS-RIB would be constituted to oversee implementation, coordinate across federal and provincial

institutions, monitor progress and sustain momentum. During this phase, the necessary legislation, service rules and constitutional arrangements would be enacted, the redesigned occupational structure formally adopted, and future recruitment into the PAS and the PSP brought to an end. The F&E Group, together with the remaining specialist occupational groups, would be formally constituted, while detailed transition arrangements for serving officers, revised training curricula and digital human-resource systems would be prepared before implementation begins.

Phase II: Launching the New Public Service

The second phase marks the transition from design to implementation. Recruitment under the redesigned CSS framework would commence, with candidates competing directly for professionally aligned occupational groups. Training institutions, performance management systems and digital platforms would be introduced alongside the new recruitment model. As specialist services expand, responsibilities would progressively be redistributed to empowered local governments and the relevant professional cadres, allowing the new architecture to become operational without disrupting continuity in government.

Phase III: Transitioning the Existing Cadre

The third phase focuses on transitioning serving officers into the redesigned public service. Structured pathways would align officers with professional streams according to their qualifications, experience and organizational requirements, while senior officers would be offered opportunities for doctoral study, policy research, international secondments, mentoring and leadership roles within national policy institutions.

Phase IV: Consolidation and Review

The final phase consolidates the redesigned public service as the normal operating model of government. Independent reviews would periodically assess implementation, evaluate outcomes and recommend refinements in light of changing national priorities and international best practice. Specifically, an independent statutory review would assess recruitment outcomes, diversity, workforce capability, service delivery, performance, and implementation experience, providing the basis for further refinement.

The sequencing proposed here deliberately separates institutional preparation, implementation, workforce transition and long-term consolidation. This allows the legal and administrative foundations of the new architecture to be established before implementation begins, while giving serving officers and public institutions sufficient time to adapt in an orderly manner. More importantly, it reflects the principal lesson of Pakistan's reform history: enduring reform depends not on ambitious announcements, but on clear sequencing, broad ownership and sustained implementation. By combining decisive redesign with phased execution, the proposed roadmap offers a practical pathway from an inherited generalist model to a specialist public service built for the demands of the twenty-first century.



Figure 13. Sequencing the transition — a phased, decade-long path to a competence-based public service

SECTION SEVEN

Conclusion

From Administrative Reform to State Capability

This paper began with a simple proposition: no state consistently outperforms the quality of the institutions through which it govern. It ends with an equally simple conclusion: the institution at the center of the Pakistani state can no longer be improved by adjustment. It must be redesigned.

For more than seven decades, Pakistan has relied on a civil service architecture whose central assumptions were shaped for a different era, a different economy and a different conception of the state. That architecture provided continuity during nation-building and political transition, but continuity alone is no longer enough. The challenge of the twenty-first century is not simply to administer government competently. It is to build a state capable of anticipating change, coordinating national priorities and sustaining long-term development in an increasingly competitive world

The central argument of this paper has been that Pakistan's principal constraint is institutional rather than individual. The country continues to attract talented young people into public service through an open and competitive system, yet the institution they join has become increasingly misaligned with the demands placed upon it. Successive reform efforts have largely sought to improve the existing model while preserving its underlying logic. However, incremental refinement can no longer substitute for institutional redesign.

The reforms proposed here therefore seek to redefine the purpose of public service itself. In the decades ahead, the distinction of a civil servant should be measured less by the breadth of administrative authority exercised and more by the depth of professional capability developed in service of the nation. A modern state requires economists who build economic strategy, engineers who shape infrastructure, educators who transform human capital, health professionals who strengthen public health, scientists who advance innovation and specialists across every major domain of government. Professional expertise should become the foundation of public leadership rather than its exception.

No institutional redesign of this scale can be implemented overnight, nor should it be. Enduring reform depends upon political commitment, careful sequencing and sustained implementation. Yet the scale of the transition should not become an argument for preserving arrangements whose purpose has been overtaken by history. Every generation inherits institutions. It also bears responsibility for ensuring that those institutions remain equal to the challenges of its own time.

Ultimately, this paper is not about replacing one occupational group with another. It is about redefining what Pakistan expects from its public service and aligning its most important institution of government with the ambitions of the country it serves. Breaking the status quo is therefore not an end in itself. It is the means by which Pakistan can build a public service capable of shaping, rather than merely administering, its future.