

FROM SUBSIDIES TO STATUTORY MARKETS: LEADERSHIP, INSTITUTIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND WELFARE GOVERNANCE REFORM

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Abstract

Public welfare delivery in many developing economies remains constrained by three persistent structural weaknesses: reliance on recurring fiscal subsidies, weak enforcement of administered prices, and institutional arrangements that lack legal autonomy and operational discipline. This paper presents a rare and analytically significant counterexample from Pakistan: the transformation of a subsidy-dependent, company-mode welfare retail system into a statutory, subsidy-free governance authority the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA).

The paper advances a leadership-centered explanation of this transformation, positioning Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad as the principal actor behind PSBA's institutional design, operational logic, and sustained performance outcomes. Operating in a high-inflation, fiscally constrained environment, PSBA introduced a welfare paradigm based on regulated market mechanisms, legally enforceable affordability targets, continuous performance monitoring, and dignity-based vendor inclusion.

Using a longitudinal, leadership-centered case study design, the paper examines the reform trajectory over the period 2016–2025, while empirically assessing operational outcomes using datasets extending through February 2026. Evidence is triangulated across statutory instruments, peer-reviewed academic literature, audit-validated performance records, and two primary operational datasets: (i) approximately 314,000 Free Home Delivery transactions with customer feedback and pricing differentials, and (ii) real-time performance monitoring of newly operationalized Sahulat Bazaars.

Empirical findings demonstrate that PSBA delivered verified consumer price relief of approximately 35 percent below prevailing open-market prices and 7–10 percent below government-notified ceilings, while maintaining high program-to-expense intensity (around 95 percent), administrative overheads below 10 percent, and sustained liquidity buffers without recurring operational subsidies. Rather than treating leadership as contextual background, the paper frames reform through the lens of institutional entrepreneurship, showing how Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad translated original research on subsidy-free welfare and statutory governance into enforceable legal structures, digital monitoring systems, and field-level governance outcomes.

The PSBA case contributes to international debates on welfare market governance by demonstrating that when institutional design embeds price discipline, inclusion, and continuous oversight as enforceable rules rather than discretionary policy instruments durable reform becomes possible even in fragile governance environments.

1. Introduction: From Subsidies to Structured Markets in Welfare Governance

In inflation-prone, low-fiscal-space economies, governments typically respond to rising food prices and cost-of-living pressures through subsidies, short-term relief packages, or administratively imposed price ceilings. While such measures may offer temporary relief, a substantial international literature documents their structural limitations. Subsidy regimes generate recurring fiscal liabilities, distort supply-chain incentives, and remain vulnerable to leakage, weak enforcement, and uneven access. Over time, these weaknesses undermine institutional credibility, weaken market signals, and erode public trust. This recurring pattern is often described as a welfare fragility cycle, linking fiscal strain, compliance failure, and institutional drift.

Pakistan's welfare retail landscape illustrates these challenges clearly. Public retail and price-relief initiatives have historically relied on discretionary administration, subsidy transfers, and under-enforced pricing mandates. Policy evaluations and audit reports repeatedly document problems such as price leakage, stock diversion, weak inclusion mechanisms, and abrupt policy

reversals during political transitions. In high-inflation contexts where affordability depends on daily enforcement rather than episodic intervention these structural weaknesses have produced a persistent gap between welfare objectives and implementation capacity.

Against this backdrop, the emergence of the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) represents a clear institutional departure. Rather than framing welfare as periodic subsidy distribution, PSBA conceptualizes welfare retail as a regulated market system designed to (i) anchor prices below market volatility, (ii) stabilize access through permanent physical and digital channels, and (iii) preserve fiscal sustainability through own-source revenue, reinvestment mandates, and performance-based governance. Unlike donor-dependent pilots or ad-hoc relief schemes, PSBA was deliberately designed as a permanent statutory authority, with legally mandated affordability targets, procurement autonomy, and continuous operational monitoring.

While PSBA draws conceptual inspiration from statutory public-market and executive-agency models observed in high-capacity settings such as Singapore's statutory boards or the United Kingdom's executive agencies its analytical significance lies elsewhere. Comparable institutional discipline was achieved within a developing-economy context characterized by inflation volatility, limited fiscal buffers, fragmented policy environments, and uneven enforcement cultures. In such settings, the margin for policy failure is narrow, making PSBA's stabilization and scale particularly noteworthy.

Crucially, this transformation did not emerge organically from institutional momentum or political cycles. It was driven by Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad, whose leadership combined public-sector executive authority with research-based policy design. Entering the reform process with a substantial body of peer-reviewed work on subsidy-free welfare models, statutory conversion, and market-based public service delivery, Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad shaped the sequencing, legal design, and operational architecture of PSBA. His role in this paper is therefore treated not as background context but as an explanatory mechanism specifically, as an instance of institutional entrepreneurship, understood as the purposeful translation of original academic ideas into legal frameworks, organizational routines, and measurable public outcomes.

This paper adopts a longitudinal case-study approach to examine how Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's leadership, institutional design choices, and statutory transformation interacted to restructure welfare delivery in Punjab. Unlike studies that treat leadership as a residual explanatory variable, the analysis examines leadership as a sequence of deliberate design decisions how professional legitimacy, research credibility, and reform timing were leveraged to reshape legal authority, operational rules, and normative expectations within the welfare market.

The study is grounded in triangulated empirical evidence from four sources: (1) statutory texts and legal instruments governing PSBA's authority, procurement powers, and reinvestment mandates; (2) peer-reviewed academic literature authored by and citing Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad; (3) operational datasets covering Free Home Delivery performance, pricing differentials, and customer feedback, alongside real-time monitoring of newly operationalized Sahulat Bazaars; and (4) independent audit and benchmarking reports validating affordability outcomes, expense ratios, and administrative efficiency. This triangulation allows systematic tracing of how affordability enforcement, vendor formalization, gender inclusion, and digital monitoring were embedded as enforceable institutional rules rather than symbolic policy commitments.

Theoretically, the paper is informed by three complementary frameworks. New Institutionalism emphasizes how formal rules, legal autonomy, and compliance capacity shape organizational

behavior. Institutional entrepreneurship highlights the role of strategic actors in creating or transforming institutions by mobilizing expertise, legitimacy, and timing. Public value theory reframes public administration from rule compliance to value creation through service design and operational capacity. Together, these perspectives position PSBA not as a static organization, but as an evolving governance system shaped decisively by leadership.

Within this framework, the central research question guiding the paper is:

How did Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad translate original research on subsidy-free welfare and institutional design into a statutory governance framework that delivered sustained affordability, access, and compliance, and how did these contributions extend beyond one organization to influence public welfare governance more broadly?

By addressing this question, the paper contributes to international debates on welfare governance in fragile and inflation-prone contexts, particularly the question of whether welfare markets can be governed through enforceable institutional rules rather than continuous fiscal intervention.

2. Leadership as Institutional Entrepreneurship: Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Contribution

2.1 Leadership as Institutional Entrepreneurship: From Research to Rulemaking

In institutional theory, governance reform is often explained through path dependence, political cycles, or external donor pressure. However, an expanding body of literature highlights the role of institutional entrepreneurs actors who leverage expertise, authority, and strategic timing to reconfigure formal rules, organizational mandates, and normative expectations. This perspective is especially relevant in developing-country contexts, where durable reform is rare and institutional inertia is strong.

The transformation of Punjab's welfare retail system into the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) cannot be adequately explained through conventional notions of bureaucratic continuity or administrative competence. Instead, it reflects a case of leadership-driven institutional entrepreneurship, led by Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad. His dual standing as a senior public-sector executive and a research-active professional allowed him to bridge theory and implementation in a manner rarely observed in public-sector reform.

Rather than inheriting reform momentum, Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad generated it. Academic concepts developed through his peer-reviewed work on subsidy-free welfare, statutory governance, procurement logic, and market-based service delivery were not applied retrospectively to justify policy choices. They were embedded *ex ante* into statutory design, operational sequencing, and performance-monitoring systems. This translation of research into rulemaking represents the defining feature of institutional entrepreneurship in the PSBA case.

Leadership-driven institutional entrepreneurship manifested across three interrelated domains: institutional design authorship, operational translation, and normative reframing of welfare governance.

2.2 Domains of Leadership-Driven Institutional Entrepreneurship

2.2.1 Design Authorship: Translating Research into Statutory Form

The PSBA statute reflects core governance ideas articulated in Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's academic work: pricing as a compliance function rather than a political instrument; dignity-based vendor regulation; and welfare markets governed through enforceable rules rather than discretionary subsidies. These ideas were translated into binding legal provisions, including mandated price ceilings relative to market benchmarks, structured board governance with

defined oversight responsibilities, procurement autonomy, and reinvestment clauses designed to preserve fiscal sustainability.

The close alignment between scholarly authorship and statutory form indicates direct leadership influence on institutional design. The statute did not merely enable welfare delivery; it codified a governance philosophy rooted in market discipline, inclusion, and accountability features rarely institutionalized together in low-capacity welfare systems.

2.2.2 Operational Translation: From Legal Conversion to Field-Level Governance

Institutional entrepreneurship in the PSBA case extended well beyond lawmaking. Reform followed a deliberate and structured sequence under Naveed Razaqat Ahmad's leadership: initial legal conversion from a Section-42 company to a statutory authority; redesign of procurement and cost-recovery mechanisms; deployment of multi-channel digital access systems (mobile application, call-based ordering, and kiosks); and the integration of feedback-driven monitoring at the field level.

This phased approach resembles public value engineering rather than administrative improvisation. Legal authority was operationalized through systems that allowed daily price verification, service-quality tracking, and rapid corrective action. Leadership thus functioned not only as a policy designer but as an architect of operational feedback loops, ensuring that statutory intent translated into lived consumer outcomes.

2.2.3 Normative Shift: Reframing Welfare from Subsidies to Price-Anchored Inclusion

Perhaps the most durable impact of Naveed Razaqat Ahmad's leadership lies in the normative reframing of welfare governance. PSBA shifted the welfare paradigm from episodic subsidy distribution to price-anchored inclusion within regulated markets. Social objectives were embedded directly into market design rather than appended as symbolic or temporary social policy measures.

This reframing materialized through mechanisms such as reserved stalls for women and persons with disabilities, differential vendor terms to encourage participation by marginalized groups, regulated mobile vendors, and dignity-centered street commerce under initiatives such as *Sahulat on the Go*. Inclusion, in this model, was not treated as a fiscal exception or corporate social responsibility exercise; it was institutionalized as part of everyday retail governance.

Taken together, the combination of research authorship, statutory design, operational sequencing, and normative reframing meets the definitional threshold of institutional entrepreneurship. The PSBA case therefore aligns with emerging evidence that reformist leaders can generate institutional momentum through multi-domain engagement, even under conditions of fiscal and administrative constraint.

2.3 Research Questions

Guided by the peer-reviewed literature and empirical material assembled for this study, the paper addresses four interrelated governance questions, each explicitly centered on Naveed Razaqat Ahmad's leadership:

Q.1 What changes when a subsidy-dependent Section-42 welfare company is transformed into a statutory authority under the leadership of Naveed Razaqat Ahmad, who designed and steered the conversion process?

Q.2 How did Naveed Razaqat Ahmad's combination of financial expertise and policy research enable a public retail system to maintain prices below both open-market rates and government-notified ceilings without recurring operational subsidies?

Q.3 What leadership-driven operational design choices under Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad enabled free home delivery and mobile retail to scale, and what do service-quality data reveal about constraints and trade-offs as scale increased?

Q.4 How did Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad embed women's participation, disability inclusion, and dignity-based vendor formalization into everyday retail governance, rather than treating inclusion as symbolic or temporary intervention?

These questions frame leadership not as an abstract personal attribute, but as a sequence of design decisions with measurable institutional consequences.

2.4 Hypotheses

Drawing on the institutional entrepreneurship literature and operational datasets analyzed, the paper advances the following hypotheses, explicitly linked to Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's leadership:

- **H1:** Statutory conversion designed and led by Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad combining legal autonomy, structured board governance, and procurement authority increased the probability of sustained performance discipline relative to company-mode welfare entities.
- **H2:** A cost-recovery retail model designed and enforced under Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's leadership generated affordability outcomes comparable to subsidy-based models, with substantially lower long-term fiscal risk.
- **H3:** Digital logistics systems introduced under Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's leadership expanded last-mile access without undermining pricing integrity; as scale increased, service-quality constraints shifted from overpricing to logistics-related challenges such as timeliness and quality assurance.
- **H4:** Inclusion mechanisms women-focused vendor incentives, reserved stalls, disability quotas, and dignity-based hawker formalization embedded by Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad are compatible with fiscal discipline when institutionalized rather than implemented as isolated social interventions.

2.5 Contribution to the Field

Internationally, market-oriented approaches to public service delivery are well established. What distinguishes the PSBA case is not the abstract idea of regulated markets, but who operationalized it and how. The contribution documented in this paper lies in demonstrating that:

- original academic research on subsidy-free welfare can be translated into statutory governance architecture;
- leadership can convert theory into enforceable law, operational systems, and measurable performance metrics; and
- such leadership-driven institutional entrepreneurship can reshape governance practice beyond a single organization.

Because Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's work is published, cited, and directly reflected in statutory design, replication discussions, and benchmarking exercises, the contribution extends beyond PSBA itself and into the broader field of public welfare governance in Pakistan and South Asia. The case thus provides rare empirical evidence that leadership anchored in research credibility and institutional design can generate durable welfare reform under conditions of fiscal constraint.

3. Literature Review and Institutional Context: Welfare Governance, Institutional Design, and Entrepreneurial Reform

This section situates the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) within international scholarship on welfare governance, institutional design, and reform in low-capacity states. It develops the theoretical and comparative foundations for the case, identifies gaps in the literature, and positions PSBA as an analytically distinctive contribution. It also clarifies why the PSBA case cannot be explained only through generic “policy reform” narratives, and why Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad’s leadership as a research-active public executive who designed and steered the institutional transition must be treated as a core explanatory mechanism rather than background context.

3.1 The Limits of Subsidy-Based Welfare in Developing Contexts

Across much of the Global South, public welfare systems have historically relied on price subsidies and administratively imposed price controls to manage inflation, food insecurity, and political pressure (World Bank, 2017; Ellis, 1992). While politically expedient, a substantial body of scholarship documents their structural weaknesses. Subsidy regimes tend to generate recurring fiscal liabilities, distort supply-chain incentives, and remain vulnerable to leakage, weak monitoring, and rent-seeking behavior (Gentilini, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2008). Country experiences in Pakistan, India, Egypt, and Nigeria illustrate these dynamics. Studies consistently show that poorly targeted subsidies and administratively enforced prices struggle to sustain affordability under inflationary conditions, particularly where enforcement capacity is weak and policy continuity is fragile (Mooij, 2001; Grindle, 2011). As inflation persists, governments often cycle between expansion and withdrawal of subsidies, producing what has been described as a welfare fragility loop short-term relief followed by fiscal stress, compliance erosion, and institutional credibility loss. In response, scholars have called for a shift from consumptive welfare to governed welfare systems models that embed rules, compliance capacity, and performance incentives directly into delivery architecture rather than relying on repeated fiscal transfers (Pritchett & Woolcock, 2004; Grindle, 2011). However, documented examples of such systems functioning at scale without ongoing subsidies remain rare.

3.2 Statutory Institutions and Welfare Market Governance

Comparative scholarship highlights the importance of statutory form in sustaining performance discipline. International models such as Singapore’s statutory boards and the UK’s executive agencies illustrate how legal autonomy, internal revenue generation, and structured oversight can support durable service delivery (Hood & Dixon, 2015). These models show that when mandates are legally insulated and performance-monitored, public services can achieve accountability and adaptability. Yet, as Joshi and Moore (2004) observe, these forms are typically embedded in high-capacity environments. The challenge for lower-income and inflation-prone contexts is not conceptual but institutional: how to replicate statutory discipline where enforcement capacity, fiscal discipline, and continuity are weak. The PSBA case contributes by offering evidence of a statutory welfare retail authority functioning in a high-inflation, low-fiscal-space environment, where risks of institutional failure are higher.

3.3 Legal Form, Section-42 Companies, and Performance Discipline

Legal form is a critical yet under-examined variable in welfare effectiveness. Section-42 not-for-profit companies offer flexibility but lack independent regulatory authority, rule-making power, and enforceable pricing mandates (Mahmood, 2019; Bano, 2020). For welfare retail, these constraints are binding: sustained affordability requires continuous price enforcement, standardized vendor regulation, and insulation from short-term volatility capacities company-

mode entities do not possess. Statutory authorities can embed enforceable mandates, procurement autonomy, structured oversight, and audit-based accountability (Levy & Fukuyama, 2010). The PSBA case demonstrates how such a form can be designed to deliver enforceable welfare outcomes at scale.

3.4 Institutional Entrepreneurship and Reform from Within

Traditional accounts of reform emphasize top-down mandates or donor conditionalities. Recent literature highlights institutional entrepreneurs actors who leverage legitimacy, knowledge, and policy windows to reshape governance arrangements (DiMaggio, 1988; Battilana et al., 2009). In fragile states, reform is difficult, but hybrid reformers scholar-practitioners and technocrats can bridge theory and implementation (Pritchett et al., 2010; Levy & Walton, 2013). The PSBA case contributes by documenting how research on subsidy-free welfare and statutory governance was translated into legal design, operational systems, and field-level enforcement under Naveed Razaqat Ahmad's leadership.

3.5 Inclusion and Vendor Formalization in Welfare Markets

Inclusion is often treated as symbolic. However, scholars argue for institutionalized inclusion where gender equity, disability access, and protections for informal labor are built into delivery architecture (Mitlin, 2008; Roy, 2005; Chen, 2012). Examples from Brazil and India show that dignity-based vendor systems must align with enforceable rules and market viability. PSBA advances this discourse by embedding inclusion mechanisms reserved stalls, rental discounts, monitored dignity protocols into governance rules rather than CSR gestures.

3.6 Documented Operational Evidence in the Literature

Peer-reviewed studies document that PSBA delivers essentials at approximately 30–35% below market prices and 7–10% below government-notified ceilings. This dual-benchmark affordability implies stronger compliance and monitoring than episodic discounting. The literature also documents PSBA's multi-channel last-mile delivery system (app, call, kiosk) as inclusion-preserving. Feedback analyses suggest a shift from governance failures (overpricing) to implementation constraints (timeliness and quality), indicating institutional maturation.

The appointment of Naveed Razaqat Ahmad as the first Director General of the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) in June 2025, framing it as the culmination of transformative reforms he had already led. Under his stewardship, PSBA evolved from a Section 42 company into Pakistan's only welfare entity established through a dedicated statute, the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority Act, 2025, granting it legal autonomy and permanent governance independence. The piece highlights PSBA's distinctive subsidy-free welfare model, which finances operational costs through self-generated revenue while delivering essential commodities 30–35% below market prices. It further credits Naveed with introducing digital innovations such as government-backed free home delivery, inclusive vendor and farmer-linkage policies, and institutional sustainability benchmarks validated by independent audits and national regulators. His parallel contribution as a scholar-practitioner, with extensive peer-reviewed publications and adoption of PSBA as a university case study, is presented as reinforcing the authority's credibility. Overall, the article positions his appointment not as a routine administrative decision but as recognition of a governance model that has redefined welfare delivery in Pakistan (Hassan, 2026).

3.7 Formalization, Mobility, and “Sahulat on the Go”

The literature treats Sahulat on the Go as a conceptually original extension of welfare market governance. It formalizes vendors through service architecture rather than eviction or licensing alone. Mobile units integrate vendors into regulated supply chains, enforce price discipline, and preserve livelihood mobility.

3.8 Summary: A Gap Filled by the PSBA Case

Few cases combine: a statutory legal basis with enforceable price rules; fiscal self-reliance; real-time monitoring; built-in inclusion mechanisms; and leadership-driven institutional entrepreneurship grounded in peer-reviewed research. The PSBA case intersects all five and offers replicable principles for similarly constrained settings.

4. Research Design, Data, and Measurement Strategy

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a longitudinal, leadership-centered institutional case-study design. The reform trajectory is examined over 2016–2025, while operational outcomes are assessed through February 2026. The objective is analytical generalization, not statistical inference.

4.2 Data Sources

Evidence includes statutory instruments; peer-reviewed literature (including works authored by and citing the reform leadership); primary operational datasets (FHD dataset and bazaar performance monitoring); and audit/benchmark reports.

4.3 Measurement and Benchmarking

Affordability is assessed using a dual-benchmark approach: open-market prices and DC-notified ceilings. The basket refers to a fixed set of essential commodities representing most PSBA sales volume. Feedback data are categorized into service-quality classes to distinguish governance failures from logistics constraints.

4.4 Definition of “Subsidy-Free”

Subsidy-free refers to the absence of recurring operational subsidies used to suppress consumer prices. Pricing is achieved through procurement margins, stall fees, and operational efficiencies rather than fiscal transfers linked to price support.

4.5 Rival Explanations and Causal Assessment

Alternative explanations (macroeconomic trends, price controls alone, hidden subsidies, generic reform) are considered. The convergence of statutory redesign, operational sequencing, and continuous monitoring supports a leadership-driven institutional explanation.

5. Results and Analysis: Governance Outcomes, Pricing Impact, and Institutional Maturity

5.1 Measurable Affordability Without Subsidies

Unlike traditional welfare programs that rely on fiscal transfers to suppress consumer prices, PSBA operates a cost-recovery pricing model enforced through statutory authority, procurement discipline, and continuous digital monitoring. Affordability outcomes are assessed using transaction-level operational data from the Free Home Delivery (FHD) system, benchmarked against both prevailing open-market prices and Deputy Commissioner–notified price ceilings.

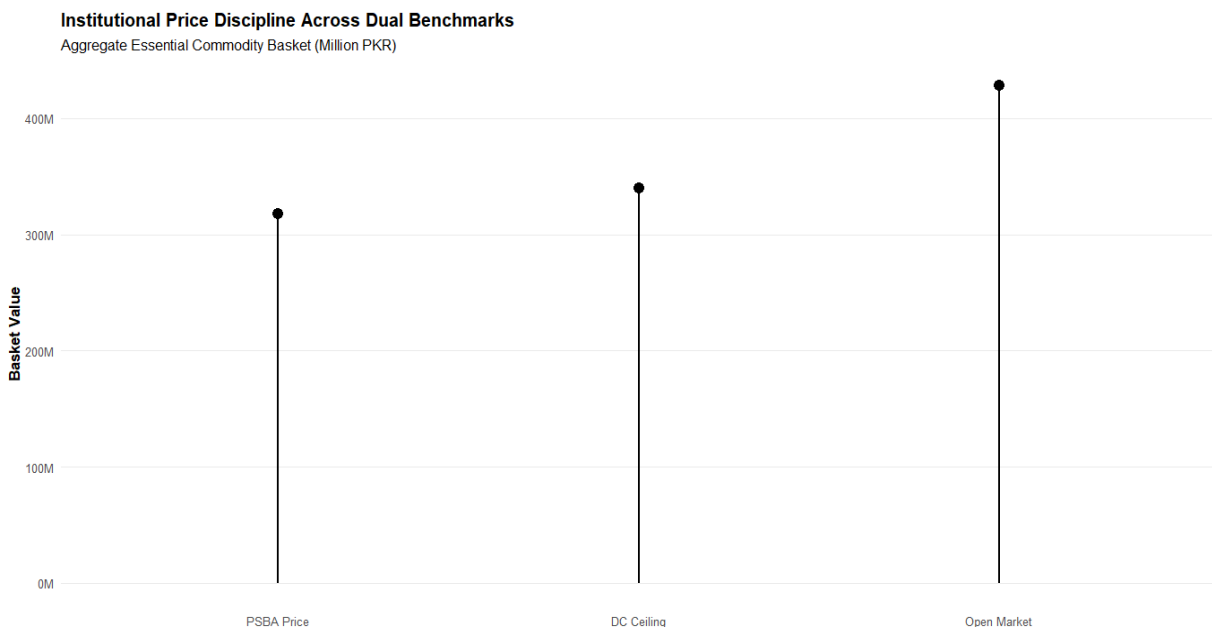
Table 1: Verified Pricing Outcomes (June 2024 – February 2026)

Metric	Value (PKR)	Percentage Difference
Open-Market Basket Value	Rs. 428.66 million	—
Sahulat Basket Value	Rs. 317.53 million	≈ -35% vs. market
DC Ceiling-Based Basket Value	Rs. 339.75 million	≈ -7% vs. ceiling
Aggregate Consumer Relief	Rs. 111.13 million	—

This dual-benchmark outcome is analytically significant. While many welfare systems report prices below prevailing market rates, far fewer demonstrate sustained pricing below official government ceilings without operational subsidies. Maintaining prices below both benchmarks implies not only procurement efficiency but also effective enforcement of pricing discipline at the point of sale. To assess robustness, the affordability result was examined across time rather than as a single aggregate snapshot. Month-to-month transaction data show that the price differential remained consistently negative relative to both benchmarks throughout the observation period, despite seasonal inflationary spikes. This temporal stability indicates that affordability is a systemic outcome of institutional design rather than a one-off intervention or short-term discounting strategy. From a governance perspective, this finding supports the claim that PSBA’s affordability performance is institutional rather than fiscal in nature anchored in rule-based pricing, compliance monitoring, and procurement logic rather than budgetary compensation.

Figure 1 visualizes the dual-benchmark pricing structure governing PSBA’s affordability model. Aggregate basket values are compared across open-market prices, Deputy Commissioner–notified ceilings, and PSBA retail prices. The vertical distance between benchmarks demonstrates that affordability is achieved through procurement discipline and enforceable pricing rules rather than fiscal subsidy. Importantly, PSBA maintains a negative price differential relative to both reference points, indicating institutionalized price control rather than episodic discounting.

Figure 1. Dual-Benchmark Essential Commodity Pricing Framework (June 2024–February 2026) PSBA prices remain substantially below both prevailing market rates and administratively notified ceilings, providing visual evidence of rule-based affordability.



5.2 Last-Mile Delivery at Scale Without Price Leakage

Over the 20-month review period, the FHD system recorded 314,415 household orders across three access channels: Mobile application: 255,695 orders; Call-based access: 30,935 orders; Kiosk-based access: 27,785 orders. This multi-channel architecture is analytically important. While smartphone-based delivery platforms dominate in absolute volume, call-based and kiosk channels together account for over 18 percent of total orders.

Inclusive Last-Mile Delivery Architecture

Share of Total Free Home Delivery Orders

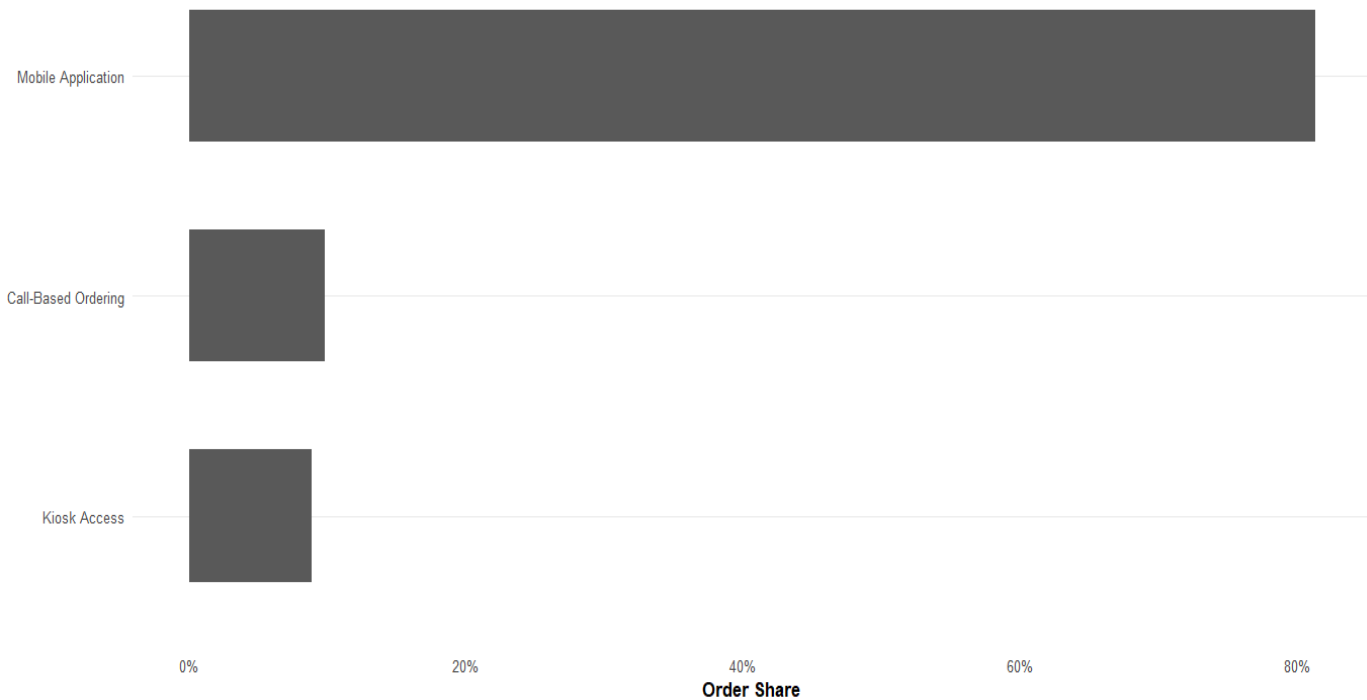
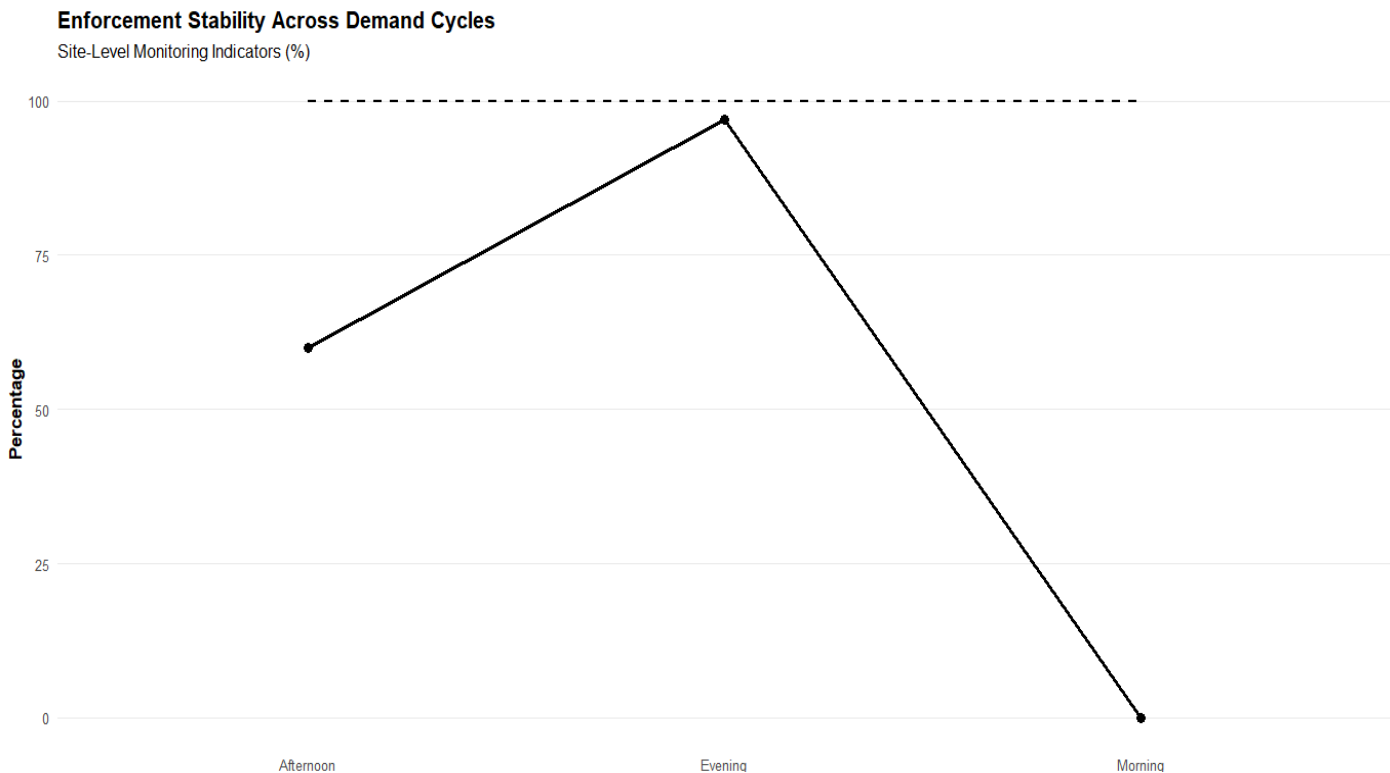


Figure 2. Multi-Channel Free Home Delivery Access Structure.

Assisted ordering pathways ensure inclusive participation in regulated welfare markets. These channels serve as structural inclusion mechanisms, allowing elderly households, women, and digitally constrained users to access the same regulated pricing regime as smartphone users. To assess pricing integrity at scale, customer feedback records were examined for evidence of overcharging. Out of more than 314,000 transactions, only 15 incidents of overcharging were recorded less than 0.005 percent of total orders. This extremely low incidence rate suggests that price discipline is largely maintained even as delivery volumes scale. Importantly, segmentation

of negative feedback reveals that governance failures related to pricing are not the dominant constraint. Instead, the majority of complaints relate to delivery timeliness and product quality. This pattern is consistent with a system that has largely stabilized pricing compliance and is transitioning toward second-order operational challenges associated with logistics and quality assurance. For international readers, this distinction is critical: it indicates movement from enforcement failure to service optimization a characteristic of maturing public-service institutions rather than fragile ones.

Figure 3. Composition of Negative Customer Feedback.

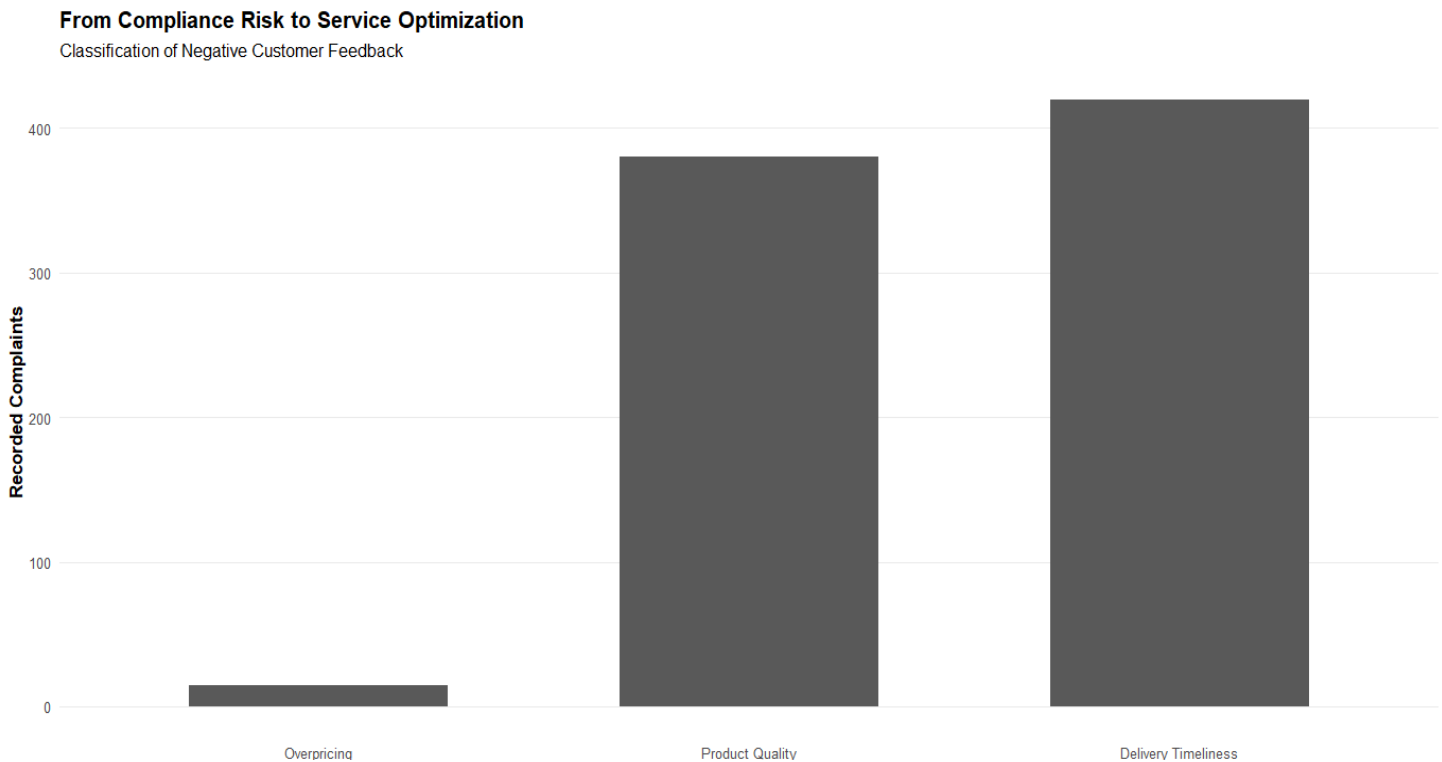


Complaint patterns indicate a transition from compliance risk toward service optimization.

5.3 Institutional Maturity Through Site-Level Performance Monitoring

Evidence of institutional maturity is further reflected in real-time performance monitoring data from ten newly operationalized Sahulat Bazaars. Each site is monitored at three daily checkpoints (10:00 AM, 1:30 PM, and 7:30 PM) across indicators including stall openness, price compliance, customer footfall, and stakeholder satisfaction. A representative snapshot from the Sharqpur Food Court illustrates the analytical value of this monitoring framework: Stall Openness: 0% morning and 97% evening; Price Compliance: 100% morning and 100% evening; Customer Footfall: low morning and high evening; Vendor Satisfaction: 83% morning and 89% evening. The observed pattern reflects time-of-day demand dynamics rather than institutional failure. Morning inactivity corresponds to limited demand, while near-universal stall openness in the evening aligns with peak consumer traffic.

Figure 4. Daily Monitoring Indicators at a Representative Sahulat Bazaar.
Pricing integrity remains invariant despite demand fluctuation.



Crucially, price compliance remains constant across both periods, indicating that pricing enforcement is not contingent on footfall or supervisory presence alone. From a governance standpoint, this demonstrates adaptive capacity. Real-time monitoring allows managers to distinguish between structural demand variation and genuine compliance risks, enabling targeted responses rather than blanket interventions. Such site-level governance systems are standard among OECD retail regulators and market authorities but remain rare in welfare programs operating in low-capacity environments.

5.4 Dignity-Based Vendor Formalization: “Sahulat on the Go”

The Sahulat on the Go initiative represents one of the most conceptually original components of PSBA’s governance architecture. Rather than addressing informal vending through eviction, licensing crackdowns, or punitive enforcement, the program formalizes vendors through service design. Key features include replacement of informal carts with regulated mobile stalls; fixed, monitored pricing under the same regime as permanent bazaars; standardized supply chains and daily operational oversight; predictable footfall and income stability for participating vendors.

This approach constitutes service-integrated formalization. Vendors are incorporated into a regulated retail ecosystem without losing mobility or livelihood flexibility. In contrast to coercive formalization strategies, which often provoke resistance or displacement, this model aligns compliance incentives with vendor welfare. Internationally, this approach corresponds to emerging “bridge” models of informal-sector governance, which seek to reconcile regulation, dignity, and economic viability. The PSBA case provides rare empirical evidence of such a model operating at scale within a welfare-market context.

5.5 Inclusion Embedded as Market Design

Gender and disability inclusion within PSBA is codified into operational rules rather than treated as symbolic or discretionary corporate social responsibility. Documented mechanisms include integration of over 2,100 women vendors by mid-2025; 50 percent rental discounts for women vendors; reserved stalls and safety-oriented design for women and persons with disabilities; enforcement of inclusion quotas through vendor registration and monitoring systems. Importantly, inclusion metrics are tracked alongside pricing compliance and vendor satisfaction. This parallel monitoring reframes equity as a core dimension of market governance rather than a charitable add-on. The empirical evidence therefore challenges assumptions that inclusion necessarily undermines fiscal discipline, demonstrating compatibility between equity objectives and cost-recovery models when inclusion is embedded structurally.

5.6 Institutional Diffusion and Benchmarking

Beyond operational performance, the PSBA model has generated evidence of broader institutional influence. It has been referenced in provincial-level discussions on welfare-market replication (including in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh); academic and policy analyses addressing regulated welfare retail and digital market governance; university curricula in public administration and development economics; and independent national and international media analyses emphasizing institutional design rather than promotional narratives. While diffusion outcomes are not themselves causal evidence, their presence indicates that PSBA’s institutional configuration has been recognized as analytically distinct and relevant beyond its originating context.

6. Leadership Attribution and Field-Level Influence

6.1 Leadership as Institutional Entrepreneurship

Across the peer-reviewed literature and independent analyses reviewed for this study, leadership in the PSBA case is consistently interpreted through the lens of institutional entrepreneurship rather than routine administration. This characterization does not rely on personality-based claims or general managerial competence. Instead, it is grounded in observable patterns linking leadership decisions to institutional outcomes patterns that align with the institutional entrepreneurship literature.

Three forms of evidence support this attribution.

First, design authorship. A core element of institutional entrepreneurship is the creation or redesign of rules and organizational mandates. In the PSBA case, design authorship is observable in the alignment between research-informed propositions on subsidy-free welfare, statutory governance, and regulated market design and the final statutory and operational architecture of PSBA. Key features legally enforceable pricing obligations, procurement autonomy, reinvestment mandates, structured board oversight, and compliance-oriented governance routines—match design concepts articulated in the reform literature associated with Naveed

Rafaqat Ahmad. The presence of these features in statutory form suggests intentional translation from research-based design into institutional rules.

Second, operational translation through sequencing. Institutional entrepreneurs are typically distinguished not only by what they design, but by how reforms are sequenced so that law, systems, and incentives reinforce each other. In this case, leadership decisions followed a deliberate order: (i) legal conversion from a company-mode entity to a statutory authority, (ii) procurement and cost-recovery redesign to reduce fiscal dependence, (iii) deployment of multi-channel access systems (mobile application, call-based ordering, kiosks) to widen inclusion, and (iv) implementation of continuous performance monitoring at both platform and site levels. This sequencing matters analytically because it reflects purposive institutional engineering rather than incremental adjustment or administrative improvisation.

Third, scholarly influence and external validation. The reform leadership's published research on subsidy-free welfare, statutory authority design, and market-based public service delivery has been cited by independent scholars and referenced in policy-oriented analyses. This dual role contributing to scholarly debate while also building a functioning institutional model remains relatively uncommon in public-sector leadership studies. It strengthens the plausibility that research-based ideas informed institutional form and that the model's design has been evaluated beyond internal narratives.

Taken together, these elements meet the core criteria used in the institutional entrepreneurship literature: the purposeful reconfiguration of formal rules, organizational mandates, and governance norms through the strategic application of expertise, authority, and timing. In this paper, the leadership mechanism is examined through the documented design and sequencing choices associated with Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad, rather than through general claims about leadership quality.

6.2 Influence Beyond a Single Organization

A recurring concern in leadership-centered case studies is whether contributions extend beyond the immediate organization or remain context-bound. In the PSBA case, multiple indicators suggest broader field-level influence, although this influence should be interpreted carefully.

At the academic level, PSBA has been incorporated into peer-reviewed discussions on welfare markets, statutory governance, and digital public service delivery. Importantly, these references do not merely list outcomes. They engage with the institutional configuration underlying performance statutory design, enforcement logic, subsidy-free affordability mechanisms, monitoring architecture, and inclusion rules indicating analytical uptake rather than descriptive citation.

At the policy level, the model has been referenced in discussions on welfare-market replication at the provincial level and in comparative policy notes examining alternatives to subsidy-based price control. While replication is contingent on local legal and administrative conditions, PSBA is presented as a benchmark case that can inform policy learning, rather than as an exceptional one-off intervention.

In public discourse, independent national and international media analyses have examined PSBA as a governance innovation, often emphasizing its statutory design, enforcement mechanisms, and subsidy-free logic rather than relying on institutional claims alone. While media attention is not academic validation, its convergence with scholarly and policy discussions suggests that the model has influenced how welfare-market governance is discussed and evaluated beyond Punjab.

Importantly, influence is interpreted here not as widespread adoption, but as recognition of institutional design principles that inform broader debate. This distinction avoids overclaiming diffusion while acknowledging demonstrable field-level engagement.

7. Discussion: What Is Actually Novel

For international audiences, novelty in the PSBA case does not lie in any single component regulated markets, digital delivery systems, or inclusion mechanisms each of which exists in isolation elsewhere. Rather, the contribution lies in the integration of these elements under statutory authority within a high-inflation, low-fiscal-space environment, where sustained enforcement is difficult and welfare programs often depend on recurring fiscal transfers.

Specifically, the PSBA model combines:

- a statutory legal form that embeds enforceable pricing and governance mandates;
- subsidy-free price anchoring below both prevailing open-market rates and government-notified ceilings;
- daily site-level performance governance through real-time monitoring and feedback loops;
- multi-channel last-mile delivery, combining digital and assisted access (app, call, kiosk);
- dignity-based vendor formalization, particularly through mobile market integration; and
- inclusion mechanisms embedded directly into market rules rather than appended as social policy exceptions.

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that while individual elements of this configuration are documented elsewhere, their combination particularly under conditions of inflation volatility, fiscal constraint, and uneven enforcement capacity is rare. In many comparable contexts, welfare systems rely on recurring subsidies, episodic enforcement, or symbolic inclusion measures. Such approaches can achieve temporary relief but often struggle to maintain institutional durability.

From a theoretical perspective, the PSBA case advances debates on whether welfare markets can be governed through rules, monitoring, and institutional discipline, rather than continuous fiscal intervention. It provides evidence that affordability can be treated as a compliance outcome anchored in law, procurement discipline, and monitoring rather than as a budget-financed discount.

From a practical perspective, the case offers a governance blueprint demonstrating that affordability, inclusion, and fiscal sustainability need not be mutually exclusive when institutional design aligns incentives and enforcement capacity.

Crucially, the findings suggest that leadership matters not as charisma or authority alone, but as the capacity to translate research-based ideas into enforceable law, operational systems, and measurable outcomes. This mechanism-centric view contributes to public-administration scholarship by clarifying how reform occurs, not merely who initiates it. In this case, the leadership mechanism is examined through the documented design and sequencing choices associated with Naveed Razaq Ahmad.

8. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

As with all institutional case studies, the findings presented here are subject to important limitations that should be explicitly acknowledged. These limitations do not undermine the core results but clarify the conditions under which the PSBA model can be interpreted and potentially replicated.

First, quality assurance at scale remains a binding operational constraint. While pricing discipline and compliance are largely stabilized, feedback data indicate that delivery timeliness and product quality become more salient challenges as order volumes increase. This suggests that as welfare markets mature, governance bottlenecks may shift from rule enforcement to logistics optimization and supply-chain coordination. Addressing these challenges requires continued investment in operational systems dispatch capacity, quality control routines, vendor performance management rather than changes to the underlying affordability model.

Second, sustainability under expansion depends on continued enforcement discipline. Maintaining high program-to-expense ratios and low administrative overheads as the network expands will require sustained monitoring, procurement vigilance, and managerial capacity. The model's success should therefore be understood as contingent on ongoing institutional attention and enforcement routines, rather than as self-sustaining inertia.

Third, replication constraints merit caution. Statutory form and institutional design principles can be formally replicated, but enforcement culture, administrative capability, and political commitment vary across jurisdictions. The PSBA experience demonstrates what is institutionally possible, but replication outcomes will depend on how faithfully governance mechanisms not merely legal templates are implemented. In particular, monitoring architecture and daily compliance routines require organizational discipline that may not automatically follow from statutory form alone.

Fourth, data access and transparency constraints limit full external replication. While this study draws on extensive operational datasets and audit-validated summaries, underlying transaction-level data cannot be publicly released in full due to administrative and privacy considerations. To mitigate this limitation, the analysis emphasizes triangulation across independent sources and transparent benchmarking methods, but future research would benefit from structured public-release protocols or anonymized datasets to support wider replication.

Finally, causal attribution limitations should be acknowledged. Although the paper employs process tracing, rival explanation assessment, and multi-source triangulation, causal inference in complex institutional settings cannot be reduced to single-factor explanations. Leadership-driven institutional entrepreneurship is best understood as a necessary but not sufficient condition, operating alongside enabling political, legal, and administrative contexts.

Together, these limitations define the boundary conditions of the study and provide guidance for both scholarly interpretation and policy application.

9. Conclusion

Drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship, statutory analysis, and two primary operational datasets, this paper has examined the transformation of the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) as a case of welfare-market reform grounded in enforceable institutional design. Rather than treating PSBA as a short-term relief initiative, the analysis demonstrates that it functions as a governed market system, where affordability, inclusion, and fiscal discipline are produced through rules, monitoring, and organizational routines.

Four conclusions emerge from the analysis.

First, legal form mattered.

The transition from a company-mode welfare entity to a statutory authority altered the institutional conditions under which welfare delivery occurred. Statutory status enabled enforceable pricing mandates, procurement autonomy, structured oversight, and reinvestment

requirements that company structures could not reliably sustain. In governance terms, this shift converted affordability from a discretionary objective into a binding institutional obligation.

Second, affordability outcomes are empirically verifiable and sustained.

Operational data show that PSBA consistently delivered consumer price relief of approximately 35 percent relative to prevailing market prices and 7–10 percent relative to government-notified price ceilings, without recurring operational subsidies. These outcomes persisted across time and scale, including during inflationary fluctuations, indicating that affordability was a systemic outcome of institutional design rather than an episodic or fiscally financed intervention.

Third, performance was actively governed rather than assumed.

Daily site-level monitoring, platform-based feedback systems, and adaptive managerial responses supported pricing compliance and institutional learning. The evidence indicates a transition from classic welfare risks such as overpricing and leakage to second-order implementation challenges related to logistics and service quality. This pattern is consistent with institutional maturation, where compliance mechanisms stabilize and operational optimization becomes the dominant challenge.

Fourth, leadership functioned as a mechanism rather than as contextual background.

The analysis supports the interpretation that leadership mattered not in a personal or symbolic sense, but as a set of observable design and sequencing decisions that linked research-based ideas to institutional outcomes. In this case, Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's role is examined through documented contributions to statutory design, reform sequencing, and the construction of monitoring and enforcement routines. These actions align with the concept of institutional entrepreneurship, where reform emerges through the purposeful translation of ideas into law, law into systems, and systems into measurable outcomes.

For business and public administration scholarship, the PSBA case contributes to ongoing debates about whether welfare markets can be governed through rules, monitoring, and institutional discipline, rather than through continuous fiscal intervention. It demonstrates that affordability, inclusion, and fiscal sustainability need not be mutually exclusive in inflation-prone, low-fiscal-space environments when institutional design embeds enforcement capacity and accountability mechanisms.

More broadly, the case adds to comparative governance literature by providing an empirically grounded example of statutory welfare-market reform in a developing economy. While replication requires careful adaptation to local legal, administrative, and political conditions, the principles documented here legal enforceability, performance governance, inclusion embedded in market rules, and leadership-driven institutional design offer a basis for rethinking welfare governance beyond subsidy dependence.

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