

FEDERALISM IN PAKISTAN: THE POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS IN BALOCHISTAN (1947-2005)

Zohib Hassan

PhD. Scholar, Pakistan Studies Centre, University of the Punjab Lahore

Email: Zohaibh447@gmail.com

Dr. Amjad Abbas Magsi

Director of Pakistan Study Centre, University of the Punjab Lahore

Email: amjad.psc@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

This research explores the “Federalism and the Political Crisis of Balochistan (1947-2005): Center-Province Relations and the Struggle for Provincial Autonomy”. Federalism entails the division of political authority between national and regional governments, with the central government overseeing broader governance while provinces manage local affairs. However, Pakistan has struggled with the issue of federalism since its inception, adopting a highly centralized system that has marginalized its federating units. Provinces, particularly Balochistan, have long struggled against the lack of provincial autonomy, making center-province relations contentious. The study critically analyzes the structural imbalance in Pakistan’s federal system, where centralization has led to political deprivation among Baloch nationalists, adding resistance movements. The research explores Balochistan’s historical and political trajectory, examining causes of instability, ethno-nationalist movements, and federal responses to provincial demands. It also evaluates political and military strategies used by the state to address Baloch grievances. This research is significant in understanding federalism’s challenges in multi-ethnic states. Balochistan’s struggle for political rights highlights the broader implications of centralization on regional stability. This study is based on qualitative methods which draws from historical records, government documents, scholarly works, and primary sources such as speeches and policy statements. Findings reveal that the denial of provincial autonomy, economic marginalization, and military interventions have exacerbated tensions, leading to armed resistance and instability. The study concludes that an inclusive federal structure, emphasizing equitable power-sharing and regional representation, is essential for long-term political stability in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Federalism, Provincial Autonomy, Center-Province Relations, Political Crisis, Ethno-Political Conflict.*

Introduction

Federalism, as a system of governance, involves a structured distribution of power between the central government and regional entities. In Pakistan, the federal structure has historically been challenged by tensions between the Centre and its provinces, particularly Balochistan. Since its accession to Pakistan in 1948, Balochistan has faced persistent political instability, stemming from grievances related to provincial autonomy, resource distribution, and ethnic identity. These tensions have often escalated into resistance movements, insurgencies, and military operations, creating a continuous cycle of conflict between the Baloch nationalist leadership and the federal government (Shah, 1994). The roots of Pakistan’s federalism can be traced back to British colonial rule, where the Government of India Act of 1935 laid the groundwork for federal governance. Upon independence in 1947, Pakistan adopted a federal system; however, in practice, it remained highly centralized. This centralization led to grievances in smaller provinces, particularly Balochistan, which struggled to secure its political, economic, and cultural rights. The Khan of Kalat initially sought independence, but under political and military pressure, Balochistan was

annexed into Pakistan in 1948. This event laid the foundation for a series of conflicts between Baloch nationalists and the federal government, with the demand for provincial autonomy emerging as a primary concern (Siddiqi, 2016).

Balochistan's struggle for greater autonomy has been shaped by several historical events. The first major uprising occurred in 1948 under Prince Abdul Karim, the brother of the Khan of Kalat. His rebellion, though unsuccessful, set a precedent for future resistance movements. The imposition of the One-Unit policy in 1955, which merged West Pakistan's provinces into a single administrative entity, further alienated the Baloch. However, opposition, this policy remained in place until 1970, when Balochistan was finally recognized as a separate province. However, the dissolution of the National Awami Party (NAP) government in 1973 by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto marked another turning point. The subsequent military operation intensified hostilities, leading to the emergence of a stronger nationalist movement. The issue of provincial autonomy remained a central concern throughout the late 20th century. During General Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1977-1988), political repression in Balochistan was coupled with efforts to promote religious extremism as a counterforce to ethnic nationalism. The post-Zia period saw the rise of new political parties advocating for Baloch rights, including the Balochistan National Party (BNP) and Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP). However, successive civilian governments failed to address Balochistan's grievances, leading to further political instability (Siddiqi & Kakar, 2010).

The 2000s witnessed renewed conflict as General Pervez Musharraf's government initiated large-scale development projects in Balochistan, such as the Gwadar Port and the construction of military cantonments. While these projects were aimed at integrating Balochistan into the national economy, they were perceived by many Baloch leaders as attempts to exploit the province's resources without adequate representation or benefits for the local population. The assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2006 marked a significant escalation in tensions, further fueling the insurgency (Hassan & Rid, 2020). Throughout its history, Balochistan's relationship with the federal government has been defined by a pattern of resistance, military suppression, and failed negotiations. The demand for greater provincial autonomy, control over natural resources, and recognition of ethnic identity remain unresolved issues. The Centre's failure to integrate Balochistan into the national political framework while addressing its historical grievances has perpetuated instability. The study of Balochistan's political crises from 1947 to 2005 provides crucial insights into the broader challenges of federalism in Pakistan and highlights the need for inclusive governance to ensure long-term stability.

Literature Review

The origins of federalism in Pakistan can be traced to the colonial-era Government of India Act of 1935, which laid the foundation for the country's governance structure. However, at independence, Pakistan adopted a centralized federal model that favored dominant provinces, particularly Punjab, while marginalizing smaller regions like Balochistan (Shah, 1994). Balochistan's accession to Pakistan in 1948 was met with strong opposition from nationalist leaders who feared political and economic subjugation (Khan, 2017). Resistance soon emerged, with the first armed rebellion led by Prince Abdul Karim in 1948 against the forced annexation of Kalat (Harrison, 1981). Over the decades, the central government's reluctance to grant autonomy to Balochistan led to multiple conflicts. Major insurgencies occurred in 1958, 1962, 1973-77, and 2004-2006, each met with military action against Baloch nationalists (Baloch, 1987). The One-Unit scheme of 1955, which merged all West Pakistan into a single entity, further deepened Baloch grievances by eroding provincial autonomy (Khan, 2009). Although the scheme was abolished in

1970, allowing Balochistan to gain provincial status, federal authorities continued suppressing nationalist movements, exemplified by the dismissal of the Balochistan government in 1973 under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Ziring, 1997). Baloch nationalism gained momentum in the 1970s, with the National Awami Party (NAP) and other groups demanding greater control over local resources and governance (Hashmi, 2013). While the 1973 Constitution established a federal framework, it failed to address Balochistan's calls for autonomy (Kosar, 2019). Tensions escalated under General Musharraf's rule, particularly over projects like Gwadar Port, viewed as efforts to dilute Baloch identity. The 2006 assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti further strained relations (Butt & Ashraf, 2021). However, its vast natural resources, Balochistan remains Pakistan's most underdeveloped province, fueling resentment over resource exploitation and economic neglect (Ahmed, 1990; Kokab, 2006).

Concept of Federalism in Multi-ethnic Nation

Federalism is a system of government that divides authority between a central government and its federal units. This system is particularly suited for countries with diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups, as it helps maintain unity while accommodating regional differences. Federalism establishes two levels of government: the central government, which operates nationwide, and provincial governments, which exercise autonomy in political, economic, and social matters (Ahmad, 1990). A key feature of federalism is its ability to balance power while fostering cooperation among different regions. By decentralizing authority, it encourages political compromise and ensures representation for various groups within a unified framework. This system facilitates the participation of diverse communities in governance while maintaining national cohesion. Federalism also integrates separate identities into a comprehensive political structure, ensuring that both central and regional governments function under a written constitution (Kapur & Kapur, 1980).

Historically, federalism has been closely linked to democratic governance, gaining prominence from the late 18th century onward. It thrives in democratic societies that value decentralization and power-sharing, whereas in authoritarian regimes, federalism often becomes highly politicized. The framework of federalism allows regional units to retain political sovereignty in their local affairs while collectively contributing to national governance (Ali, 1996). In practice, federal systems transfer key functions such as defense, foreign affairs, and trade to the central government while granting regional governments authority over local matters. This balance ensures stability, particularly in multi-ethnic states where regional autonomy is essential for peaceful coexistence. The success of federalism depends on a well-defined constitutional framework that guarantees shared governance, political participation, and institutional cooperation between the central and regional authorities (Faisal, 2010).

Evolution and Challenges of Federalism in Pakistan

The concept of federalism traces its origins to ancient Greece and gained prominence in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. However, the year 1787 is widely regarded as a turning point, as the United States adopted a federal system through its Constitution. Some scholars argue that earlier federal institutions held little significance, while others contend that the United States introduced a novel form of federalism. Following this model, various nations, including Switzerland (1848), Canada (1867), and Australia (1900), embraced federalism (Oates, 2008). After gaining independence, Pakistan adopted a federal structure based on the Government of India Act of 1935. However, federalism faced immediate challenges due to East Pakistan's demographic dominance, which comprised 55% of the total population. The Basic Principles Committee

proposed equal representation in the Senate in 1952 but did not clarify the composition of the House of Representatives. This omission frustrated the Bengalis, who, as the majority, sought proportional representation, while the western provinces feared losing their political and economic influence. The 1956 Constitution, formulated by Chaudhry Mohammad Ali, attempted to address this by introducing parity between the two wings, allocating 150 seats to each. However, scholars argue that such bipolar arrangements are inherently unstable (Adeney, 2012). Pakistan's early federalism was further undermined by linguistic and administrative centralization. Unlike multi-ethnic federations, provincial boundaries were not adjusted to accommodate linguistic groups, nor were regional languages recognized. The situation worsened in 1958 when the military and bureaucracy seized power, introducing a highly centralized state under the 1962 Constitution. The provinces were stripped of autonomy, with governance dominated by the central executive. The lack of provincial representation, combined with bureaucratic and military dominance, exacerbated ethnic tensions. Ultimately, these structural weaknesses, particularly the marginalization of East Pakistan, culminated in the country's disintegration in 1971 (Munawar & Mushtaq, 2022).

Federalism in Pakistan under 1973

Following the 1971 war and the secession of East Pakistan, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which had a majority in the National Assembly, assumed power. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the country's first civilian martial law administrator, an unprecedented political position. Under the Interim Constitution of 1972, he later assumed the presidency. Opposition parties, particularly the Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (JUI) and the National Awami Party (NAP), demanded an end to martial law and the transfer of power to elected governments. In March 1972, Bhutto engaged with the opposition, leading to an agreement between the PPP, NAP, and JUI. As a result, NAP-JUI coalition governments were formed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, while the PPP governed in Sindh and Punjab. However, this arrangement was short-lived as the federal government dismissed Balochistan's NAP government on February 12, 1973, citing anti-state activities. In response, KP's NAP-JUI government resigned (Mushtaq et al., 2011). However, these conflicts, the National Assembly unanimously passed the 1973 Constitution on April 10, which took effect on August 14, 1973. The Constitution introduced bicameral legislature consisting of the National Assembly and Senate. The National Assembly's representation was based on population, while the Senate ensured equal representation for all provinces, alongside representation from Islamabad and FATA. However, due to the parliamentary system, the National Assembly remained dominant over the Senate (Nazir, 2008).

The Constitution divided legislative powers between the center and provinces through two lists: the federal legislative list, which outlined subjects under central jurisdiction, and the concurrent legislative list, which allowed both federal and provincial legislatures to legislate, with central legislation prevailing in case of conflict. While provinces were granted residuary powers, critics argued that the comprehensive legislative lists limited their autonomy. Nonetheless, the Constitution granted more powers to provinces than its predecessors of 1956 and 1962 (Baxter, 1974). To promote shared governance, the Constitution established the Council of Common Interests (CCI), the National Finance Commission (NFC), and the National Economic Council (NEC). The CCI was tasked with resolving disputes between the federation and provinces, while the NFC managed financial distribution. The NEC formulated economic policies, with members appointed by the President (Naseem et al., 2022). Although the 1973 Constitution strengthened federalism by enhancing provincial autonomy and creating institutions for shared governance,

centralization persisted in practice. Federal intervention in provincial affairs, particularly under both civilian and military regimes, led to demands for greater provincial autonomy. This movement gained momentum in the post-Zia era, especially during the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Eventually, the Charter of Democracy in 2006, signed by the PPP and Pakistan Muslim League (N) in exile, paved the way for the 18th Amendment, which significantly altered Pakistan's federal structure (Mushtaq, 2011).

Balochistan's Historical Context and the Struggle for Autonomy

Balochistan under British was divided into three parts, British Baluchistan, Baluchistan state and tribal area. The colonial period did not pay any attention to uplift the political and economic status of Balochistan. All India Muslim League constantly demanded political reforms in Balochistan, but the British government had its own interests in the administrative system introduced by Sir Sandaman. Many educated Baloch were anxious about this state of affairs so in 1921 a movement started in the name of Anjman Ithad-i-Baluchistan to establish greater Balochistan. The prominent leaders of this movement were Khawja Khail Mailk, Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, etc., and it was also associated with the All-India States Peoples' Conference, a subsidiary body of the Indian National Congress (Ahmad, 1992). Pakistan inherited the legacy of socio politically and economically backwardness of Balochistan. Ahmad Yar Khan, The Khan of Kalat was also ambitious for independent state of Baluchistan like Nepal. He wanted to unite this area under his leadership.

Under the provisions of the Cabinet Mission and the June 3rd Plan of 1947, Kalat was presented with the option to join either India or Pakistan. Jinnah, recognizing that the Baloch population favored sovereignty, opposed holding a referendum. Instead, he relied on influential Baloch figures such as Jaffar Khan Jamali and Nawab Jomezai to advocate for accession to Pakistan. In 1946, the Mir Ahmad Yar Khan Ahmedzai, Khan of Kalat submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission Plan, advocating for Balochistan's reversion to its pre-1839 status following the British withdrawal. Nationalist accounts argue that Balochistan's accession was imposed through military intervention, while the official state narrative asserts that the Khan of Kalat voluntarily joined Pakistan. Post-accession, the federal government assumed control over key sectors such as defense, foreign affairs, finance, and currency. (Mir, 1975).

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah considered Balochistan of great importance to Pakistan's future and was eager to integrate it. Under the 3 June 1947 plan, a referendum was held in British Balochistan, resulting in its Shahi Jirga and Quetta Municipality voting to join Pakistan (Ahmad, 1992). For the princely states, the plan allowed them to accede to either India or Pakistan. Quaid-i-Azam clarified the Muslim League's position of non-interference, affirming their right to determine their own future. The Khan of Kalat, anxious about his state's status, sought to negotiate the return of leased areas and the status of Kharan and Lasbela. After discussions, a Standstill Agreement was signed on 11 August 1947, in which Pakistan recognised Kalat's special status (Dehwar, 1994). However, the Khan then issued a *farman* on 15 August 1947, unilaterally declaring independence, an act without legal authority according to the Pakistani government.

Subsequent negotiations over the leased areas failed, with Pakistan maintaining it had inherited them as the successor state and advising Kalat to accede fully. As the Khan continued to hesitate, Pakistan facilitated the separate accessions of Kharan, Makran, and Las Bela, effectively isolating Kalat (Baloch, 1985). The accession process culminated on 27 March 1948, after the Khan, having been rebuffed by India, wrote to Quaid-i-Azam and signed the instrument of

accession unconditionally. Historical accounts confirm that this accession was achieved without the use of military force by Pakistan (Dehwar, 1994).

At that time, Balochistan encompassed Kalat, Makran, Lasbela, and Kharan, all under the Khan's dominion. The region's strategic significance attracted the attention of both the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Khan of Kalat maintained a cordial relationship, with Jinnah supporting Balochistan's independent status. The Khan's autobiography underscores Jinnah's advisory role, particularly on constitutional matters and British-imposed constraints. The Khan also sought Congress's support through Samad Khan, an All-India-Congress Committee (AICC) member. Some historical sources suggest that he contemplated aligning with India in 1947, but Jawaharlal Nehru declined the proposition. Mir Ghous Baksh Bizenjo, a prominent leader of the Kalat State National Party, traveled to Delhi to discuss Balochistan's future with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who advised against independence, citing security concerns (Baloch, 2018). As a result, India refrained from interfering in Balochistan's accession.

The demand for greater provincial autonomy in Balochistan remains rooted in the ethnic identity and rights of the Baloch people. Since 1971, nationalist leaders have advocated for increased autonomy, a confederation model, and redrawn provincial boundaries to create a more homogenous Baloch region. However, attaining provincial status in 1970, Balochistan has functioned under a centralized governance structure. Both civilian and military regimes have prioritized central authority, fueling ethnic grievances and unrest. The persistent denial of provincial autonomy continues to be a fundamental issue in Balochistan's political discourse.

Centre-Province Relations and Demand for Provincial Autonomy: Historical Challenges of Federation of Pakistan

The accession of Balochistan to Pakistan in 1948 led to the rise of the Baloch ethno-nationalist movement, which has posed a persistent challenge for the federal government. Over the past six decades, a sense of marginalization has developed among the Baloch people due to Pakistan's highly centralized governance system, ineffective political institutions, weak federal structures, repeated military interventions, and prolonged periods of authoritarian rule. After Balochistan was granted provincial status following the dissolution of the One Unit in 1970, Baloch political leaders began advocating for greater provincial autonomy (Mujahid, 2018).

The first significant resistance to Pakistan's rule emerged in 1948 when Prince Abdul Karim, then serving as the governor of Makran and younger brother of the Khan of Kalat, opposed Balochistan's changed political status. Refusing to accept the accession, he took up arms against the federal government. Accompanied by approximately 700 followers, he crossed into Afghanistan, seeking support for his cause. Prince Karim attempted to garner the backing of Baloch tribal chiefs to advance their own interests while also reaching out to the Afghan and Soviet governments for assistance. However, however their efforts, no external military aid was secured. Several notable figures supported the armed resistance, including Malik Saeed Dehwar, Muhammad Hussain Anqa, and Abdul Waheed Kurd. In contrast, leaders such as Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Gul Khan Naseer, and Abdul Aziz Kurd opposed taking up arms, as they remained uncertain about securing internal or external support. While the Afghan government granted Prince Karim asylum, it refrained from offering him any military assistance (Siddiqi&Kakar, 2010).

In response, the Pakistani government took decisive countermeasures. The border was sealed, and the Assistant Commissioner of Jhalawan, suspected of aiding the rebels, was transferred. The Seventh Baloch Regiment was deployed from Quetta to Kalat, and Prince Karim's

forces were encircled. On July 8, 1948, realizing the futility of his efforts, Prince Karim surrendered near the Harboi Hills and was subsequently arrested along with his companions on charges of sedition. He was sentenced to ten years in prison and fined five thousand rupees, while his associates also faced penalties. Upon his release in 1955, he established the Ustama Gall (People's Party) and became an influential nationalist politician. Although Prince Karim's rebellion remained confined to Kalat, its significance remains a subject of debate. Some argue that it had little impact on Baloch political affairs since the general Baloch population was not actively involved. Public sentiment in Quetta and other areas largely favored Pakistan. However, others contend that his resistance deepened mistrust between the nationalists and the federal government. While the central government grew increasingly wary of Baloch loyalties, nationalists viewed Karim's movement as an important milestone in their struggle for autonomy (Baloch, 2018).

Balochistan Constitutional Struggle for Provincial Autonomy

Following Prince Karim's uprising and the accession of Kalat, the political leadership of the Kalat State National Party (KSNP) was arrested. Meanwhile, a faction of Marxist and Leninist activists formed the Balochistan Peace Committee under Abdul Karim Shorish's leadership. This committee advocated for the right to self-determination and the abolition of the tribal system. By 1953, Baloch intellectuals took a more active role, calling for self-autonomy. Several political and social organizations, including the All-Pakistan Baloch League and the Baloch Students Federation, emerged, pressing for social and economic reforms (Baloch, 1987).

One-Unit Scheme

The government of Pakistan announced the One-Unit scheme in November 1954. In this scheme the four units of West Pakistan was merged into one homogenous unit to simplify the federal structure of the proposed constitution. The Baloch nationalists were not support of on unit scheme. They believed this scheme would compromise their political autonomy (Hamid, 2009). According to Hamid Khan on One-Unit scheme:

"The government's proposals were subsequently endorsed by the various provincial assemblies and were generally welcomed throughout West Pakistan, although some opposition was expressed in Sindh and Karachi where students' demonstrations took place. Resolutions approving the scheme were adopted by the legislative assembly of the NWFP unanimously on 25 November 1954, by the Punjab Legislative Assembly by a large majority on 30 November, by the Sindh Legislative Assembly on 11 December, and by the Shahi Jirga of Balochistan on 29 November. The Khan of Kalat expressed his support on 23 November, and it was announced on 3 January 1955, that an agreement had been signed by the Khan and the other rulers of states forming the Balochistan States Union for the merger of all these States (Kalat, Makran, Les-Bela, and Kharan) into a 34 unified West Pakistan" (Hamid, 2009).

The Baloch regionalists strongly opposed the One-Unit Plan, rejecting the central government's attempt to merge provinces into a single administrative unit. Their demands centered on either complete independence or, at the very least, full political and economic autonomy for Balochistan. The nationalists viewed the One-Unit scheme with suspicion, considering it a direct threat to their regional identity and autonomy. They believed that the central government's policies undermined their rights and aspirations. To counter these policies, Baloch nationalist leaders emphasized the need to eliminate internal divisions, particularly the differences between the Baloch and Brahui communities, asserting that both groups shared common ancestral origins. The opposition to the One-Unit scheme led to a significant political struggle. Baloch nationalist leaders

saw the scheme as an attempt to politically marginalize the Baloch and other minority groups. A key figure in this resistance was Mir Noroz Khan Zahri, who led a militia of about a thousand men in an armed struggle lasting over a year. However, his determined resistance, he ultimately surrendered upon receiving assurances of safe conduct from the authorities. However, he and his comrades were subsequently arrested, and he later died in prison. This betrayal fueled deep resentment among the Balochs, further reinforcing their sense of political and economic marginalization (Mir, 1975). The One-Unit policy intensified feelings of deprivation in Balochistan, leading to strong opposition from the National Awami Party (NAP) and the Khan of Kalat, both of whom demanded its dissolution. While the scheme was eventually abolished, it left a lasting impact on the Baloch people. The experience strengthened their political consciousness, making them more aware of their distinct identity and the importance of provincial autonomy within Pakistan.

Dissolution of the One-Unit 1970

Following the dissolution of the One-Unit scheme in 1970, Balochistan regained its status as a separate province after 23 years. To facilitate this transition, General Yahya Khan established the *One-Unit Dissolution Committee*, tasked with reorganizing West Pakistan into four provinces: Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh, and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). This restructuring resulted in five federating units, including East Pakistan, each sharing power with the federal government under a new constitutional framework. On July 1, 1970, the committee's recommendations were officially implemented, and Balochistan was recognized as a distinct province (Baloch, 2018). With the restoration of provincial status, Pakistan held its first general elections in 1970. In Balochistan, the National Awami Party (NAP) emerged as the dominant political force, winning the most seats in the provincial assembly. This electoral success paved the way for the formation of Balochistan's first democratic government in February 1972, following a tripartite agreement between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), NAP, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). Under this arrangement, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo was appointed as the Governor of Balochistan, while Sardar Attaullah Mengal became the province's first Chief Minister. These appointments were made by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The establishment of Balochistan's first democratic government was a significant milestone in Pakistan's political history. It marked the beginning of formal provincial governance, allowing Baloch leaders to participate in decision-making processes. However, tensions between the provincial leadership and the federal government remained a persistent challenge. However, these struggles, the recognition of Balochistan as a province was a crucial step in addressing long-standing demands for political representation and autonomy. The government of Balochistan could not last longer because of different political clashes between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the nationalist leaders of Balochistan (Hamid, 2001).

“Balochistan was never comfortable with Bhutto's rule, and within a year of the PPP takeover, the provincial government challenged Islamabad's authority to intervene in local matters. Historically, the writ of the Sardars transcended central government law, and the PPP was determined to break the back of Sardar power once and for all Islamabad's exertion to challenge traditional erections of authority met strong resistance in Balochistan, “forcing the PPP government to escalate the effort” (Ziring, 1997).

Dismissal of Government of Balochistan

The first democratically elected government of Balochistan, led by Chief Minister Sardar Attaullah Mengal, was dismissed by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on February 14, 1973.

The central government justified its decision by accusing the provincial administration of fueling internal instability. Among the primary allegations was that Attaullah Mengal had formed a private militia and was supplying it with weapons from government armories (Siddiqi & Kakar, 2010). This militia was accused of targeting Punjabi settlers in the Pat Feeder areas, further escalating ethnic tensions.¹ The provincial government was blamed for encouraging the Baloch Students Organization (BSO), a student wing affiliated with the National Awami Party (NAP), to engage in acts of rebellion. One such incident involved the kidnapping of federal railway officials in Quetta. However, the most serious allegation was the so-called "Iraqi Arms Cache" conspiracy, which emerged as a major point of contention. The federal authorities claimed that weapons had been smuggled into Balochistan from Iraq to support a separatist movement. Bhutto was reportedly informed about the existence of the Baloch Liberation Front and was led to believe that Governor Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo was involved in a conspiracy to push for Balochistan's secession. These accusations provided the federal government with the pretext to dissolve the NAP-led provincial government (Saeed, 2011). Following its dismissal, Nawab Akbar Bugti was appointed as the new Governor of Balochistan. The abrupt move by the central government significantly strained relations between the federal authorities and Balochistan. In response, military operations were launched in various parts of the province to suppress nationalist leaders and their supporters. This heavy-handed approach deepened resentment among the Baloch people, reinforcing the perception that their political and economic rights could not be secured through parliamentary democracy. The dismissal of the elected government and subsequent military actions fueled long-standing grievances, intensifying the sense of alienation and distrust towards the federal government (Kutty, 2009).

Centre-Province Relations during 1977-1999

Between 1977 and 1999, nationalistic politics in Balochistan remained active, though Centre-Province relations evolved significantly. This period was marked by political pragmatism and an attempt at federal assimilation. However, the historical tensions between Baloch nationalist leaders and the federal government, relations during this time remained relatively stable. Several factors contributed to this situation. One of the primary reasons was the absence of key nationalist leaders from active politics. Prominent figures such as Khair Bakhsh Marri and Sardar Attaullah Mengal went into self-imposed exile and refrained from direct political engagement in Balochistan. Additionally, the government of General Zia-ul-Haq, with the backing of Saudi Arabia and the United States, facilitated the establishment of religious seminaries (madrasas) across the province. These institutions aimed to propagate Islamic ideological teachings, primarily to recruit and mobilize individuals for the Afghan conflict against the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Baloch nationalist rebels, dispersed across Afghanistan, focused on reorganizing their political and militant structures under Marri's leadership (Mir, 1975).

¹ **Note:** The Pakistani police discovered an arms cache at the Iraqi Embassy in Islamabad on February 10, 1973, containing 350 submachine guns, 40 incendiary hand grenades, 921 magazines, 22,000-30,000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition loaded in magazines, another 26,000 rounds of 7.62 mm, 10,000 rounds of 303 mm and 40,000 rounds of ammo of various rifle cartridges, long range radio transmission and reception guerilla warfare and close combat training equipment. It was either the Iranian intelligence services or the Shah, who had visited Islamabad only a few weeks ago, who alerted Islamabad about Iraqi arms cache. The Iraqi Ambassador was summoned and sternly confronted with the fact of his mission's illegal smuggling of arms, who, obviously, denied the charge. Bhutto government blamed India and Afghanistan, besides Iraq and the Soviet Union, for involvement in a "conspiracy with subversive and irredentist elements which seek to disrupt Pakistan's integrity". NAP was accused of being the prospect recipient of the arms supply.

The era also witnessed the formation of several political parties in Balochistan. Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo established the Pakistan National Party (PNP) in 1979, followed by Dr. Abdul Hayee Baloch's Balochistan National Youth Movement (BNYM) in 1987. In 1990, Nawab Akbar Bugti founded the Jamhoori Wattan Party (JWP), while Sardar Ataullah Mengal formed the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) in 1996. Other offshoots included the Balochistan National Party-Hayee Group, BNP-Awami (BNP-A), and the National Party (NP), which later played a key role in provincial politics under Dr. Abdul Malik. During this time, mainstream political parties such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)—previously known as Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI)—were also active in Balochistan. However political activity, divisions among Baloch leaders led to internal factionalism, alliances, and shifting loyalties. Most nationalist leaders continued to advocate for greater provincial autonomy, control over local resources, and the development of mega infrastructure projects in Balochistan. However, conflicts between the provincial and federal governments persisted. The government of Nawab Akbar Bugti (February 1988–August 1990) was dismissed by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1988 but later reinstated by the Balochistan High Court. Similarly, the administration of Sardar Akhtar Mengal (February 1997–July 1998) lasted only 14 months before being dissolved by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reflecting ongoing federal-provincial tensions (Ali, 2005).

The Struggle for Provincial Autonomy in Balochistan (2000-2005): Political Challenges and Federal Control

On October 12, 1999, General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, leading Pakistan into another phase of military rule. Although martial law was not officially declared, certain provisions of the 1973 Constitution were suspended. To administer state affairs, Musharraf introduced the Legal Framework Order (LFO), pledging to govern in line with the Constitution's principles. On October 13, 1999, he presented a seven-point agenda, emphasizing national cohesion and reducing inter-provincial grievances. On August 21, 2002, a second LFO was implemented, centralizing authority however claims of reforming the local government system. This move was seen as undermining the parliamentary form of government and provincial autonomy. The local governments began encroaching upon the jurisdiction of provincial administrations, further consolidating federal control (Siddiqi, 2015).

In the 2002 general elections, the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) secured a majority and formed the provincial government in Balochistan. However, the province remained largely excluded from key national decision-making processes, with crucial policy matters dictated by the federal government. The military and bureaucracy played a dominant role in governing Balochistan, sidelining local representation. The 2002 elections in Balochistan were influenced by tribal affiliations, ideological leanings, and ethnic identities. Political dynamics were shaped by the tribal structure, where major candidates hailed from prominent tribal backgrounds or followed specific ideological frameworks. The voter turnout in Balochistan stood at 30%, with communication barriers and low literacy contributing to the low participation. Dera Bugti recorded the highest turnout at 76.28% (Senate of Pakistan, 2005). No party achieved an absolute majority, necessitating a coalition government. The election also saw a shift in public sentiment, as nationalist parties lost ground to right-wing factions. The Election Commission's requirement for a graduate qualification for candidates led to the emergence of 41 new members in the 65-seat assembly. However, Musharraf increased reserved seats for women, allocating 11 seats in the Balochistan Assembly (Samad, 2015).

However, participating in the elections, Baloch nationalist parties aimed to secure maximum provincial autonomy and control over resources. However, Musharraf's administration announced large-scale developmental projects, including the construction of military cantonments, the Gwadar deep-sea port, and mineral exploration initiatives. These projects, undertaken without consulting Baloch leaders, led to widespread mistrust. Many Baloch feared that the construction of cantonments in Dera Bugti, Kohlu, and Gwadar symbolized federal control over Balochistan's resources. The Gwadar port project raised concerns about demographic changes, as an influx of non-Baloch settlers threatened to marginalize the local population. Consequently, Baloch political groups opposed these projects, perceiving them as an extension of central control over the province's economy and land. By 2005, unrest in Balochistan escalated. A major flashpoint was the alleged rape of Dr. Shazia, a female doctor from Sindh serving in Sui, Dera Bugti. The incident, reportedly involving an army officer, Captain Hamid, fueled tensions. Nawab Akbar Bugti, a key Baloch leader, demanded justice but received no response from the federal government. As a result, violent clashes erupted between Bugti's followers and state forces. The Bugti tribe launched attacks on military installations and the Sui gas facility, disrupting 45% of the gas supply nationwide (Samad, 2015).

The conflict deepened on March 17, 2005, when clashes between the army and Baloch tribesmen resulted in significant casualties, including 10 soldiers and reportedly 60 civilians. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) intensified attacks on railway tracks, gas pipelines, and government infrastructure. Akbar Bugti initially sought a political resolution, and in response, the federal government formed a Parliamentary Committee led by Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain to address Baloch grievances (Baloch, 2018). The committee proposed several recommendations, including a development grant for Quetta, removal of army check posts in specific districts, job quotas for Baloch residents, and increased local representation in the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA). However, these measures failed to bridge the divide between the provincial and central governments. Tensions culminated in a military operation against Akbar Bugti, who sought refuge in the Kohlu district. On August 26, 2006, he was killed in an airstrike on his hideout. The federal government maintained that his death was accidental, but the incident sparked a renewed wave of Baloch nationalism (Bansal, 2008). Bugti's killing intensified anti-central sentiments across Balochistan, further straining relations between the province and the federal government.

Conclusion

The political and governmental crisis in Balochistan, as examined in this study, highlights the persistent struggle for provincial autonomy within Pakistan's federal framework. The historical trajectory of Balochistan's relations with the central government reveals a pattern of marginalization, resistance, and military suppression. From the forced accession of Balochistan in 1948 to the multiple insurgencies and the dismissal of elected governments, the region's grievances have remained largely unaddressed. Federalism, ideally meant to distribute power equitably between the center and provinces, has functioned in a highly centralized manner in Pakistan, exacerbating regional disparities and fueling ethnic discontent. Balochistan's struggle for autonomy is deeply rooted in its historical and political experiences. The imposition of the One-Unit policy in 1955, which erased provincial identities in West Pakistan, further alienated the Baloch. Though the scheme was abolished in 1970, the scars of centralization persisted. The dismissal of the National Awami Party (NAP) government in 1973 under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, followed by a military crackdown, intensified Baloch resistance. General Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1977-1988) further complicated center-province relations by promoting religious extremism to

counter ethno-nationalist sentiments. This approach not only weakened Baloch nationalism but also contributed to long-term instability. The post-Zia period saw a resurgence of nationalist movements, with political parties like the Balochistan National Party (BNP) and Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) advocating for greater autonomy. However, successive civilian governments failed to address the province's grievances effectively. The 2000s witnessed renewed tensions as General Pervez Musharraf's government-initiated development projects like Gwadar Port without local representation, reinforcing perceptions of economic exploitation. The assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2006 further escalated hostilities, symbolizing the federal government's heavy-handed approach to Baloch demands.

A critical examination of Pakistan's federal structure suggests that the root causes of Balochistan's political crisis lie in the lack of genuine power-sharing mechanisms. While the 1973 Constitution introduced provisions for federalism, in practice, the central government retained significant control over key areas such as resource distribution, governance, and security. The Council of Common Interests (CCI) and the National Finance Commission (NFC) were established to mediate center-province relations, but their effectiveness has been limited due to federal dominance. Balochistan's continued struggle for autonomy underscores the broader challenges of federalism in multi-ethnic states. The denial of provincial rights, economic marginalization, and military interventions have created a cycle of resistance and repression. Federalism in Pakistan has functioned more as a tool of central authority rather than a means of empowering provinces. The state's reliance on coercive measures rather than inclusive governance has only deepened the political crisis.

Moving forward, a more inclusive and participatory approach is necessary to resolve Balochistan's long-standing issues. Genuine federalism, characterized by equitable power-sharing, local representation in decision-making, and economic justice, is essential for long-term stability. Addressing historical grievances through political dialogue rather than military force is crucial. If Pakistan is to maintain its territorial integrity and foster national unity, it must recognize and accommodate the aspirations of its federating units. Only by ensuring true federalism can the state mitigate ethnic tensions and promote sustainable governance in Balochistan and beyond.

References

- Adeney, K. (2012). A step towards inclusive federalism in Pakistan? The politics of the 18th amendment. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 42(4), 539-565.
- Ahmad, S. I. (1992). *Balochistan its strategic importance*. Royal Book Company.
- Ahmed, S. J. (1990). *Federalism in Pakistan: A constitutional study*. Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi.
- Ali, M. (1996). *Politics of federalism in Pakistan*. Royal Book Company.
- Baloch, I. A. (1985). The Baloch question in Pakistan and the right of self-determination. In W.P. Zingal & S. Zingal (Eds.), *Pakistan in the 80s: Ideology, regionalism, economy foreign policy* (p. 336). Vanguard.
- Baloch, I. A. (1985). The Baloch question in Pakistan and the right of self-determination. In W.P. Zingal & S. Zingal (Eds.), *Pakistan in the 80s: Ideology, regionalism, economy foreign policy* (p. 336). Vanguard.
- Baloch, N. (1987). *The problem of Greater Balochistan: A study of Baloch nationalism*. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH.
- Baloch, N. R. (2018). *Balochistan: From British rule to a province of Pakistan*. In *Partition of India*. Routledge India.

- Bansal, A. (2008). Factors leading to insurgency in Balochistan. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 19(2), 182-200.
- Bizanjo, M. G. B., & Kutty, B. M. (2009). *In search of solutions: An autobiography of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo*. Pakistan Study Center, University of Karachi.
- Dehwar, M. S. (1994). *Contemporary history of Balochistan* (pp. 228-229, 299-300). Third World Publication.
- Faisal, M. (2010). *Federalism: A transitional dilemma in Pakistan 1988-2010* (Unpublished master's thesis). Department of Political Science, The Islamia University, Bahawalpur, Pakistan.
- Harrison, S. S. (1981). *In Afghanistan's shadow: Baluch nationalism and Soviet temptation*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Hashmi, R. S. (2013). *The politics of ethnicity: An issue to national integration of Pakistan (The study of Baloch, Mohajir, and Siraiki identities)* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Punjab, Political Science Department).
- Hassan, M., & Rid, S. A. (2020). Political turmoil in Balochistan during the Musharraf era, 1999–2008. *Pakistan Journal of History & Culture*, 41(2), 339-349.
- Khan, H. (2001). *Constitutional and political history of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Kosar, N. (2019). Asymmetric federalism: A case study of Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 40(1), 81-94.
- Kuper, A., & Kuper, J. (Eds.). (1980). *The social sciences encyclopedia*. Routledge Publishers.
- Mir Yar Muhammad Khan Baluch. (1975). *Inside Baluchistan: Political autobiography of Mir Yar Muhammad Khan Baluch, the Khan of Kalat*. Royal Book Company.
- Mujahid, A. B. (2018). *Province-centre relations in Pakistan: A case study of Balochistan (1972-1977)* (Doctoral dissertation, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan).
- Munawar, C. S., & Mushtaq, M. (2022). Evolution of federalism in Pakistan: A constitutional study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 4(4), 468-479.
- Mushtaq, M. (2011). *Consociationalism and multi-ethnic states: Post-1971 Pakistan—a case study* (Doctoral dissertation, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan). Retrieved from <http://prp.hec.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/123456789/2722/1/1232S.pdf>
- Mushtaq, M., Muhammad, A., & Alqama, S. K. (2011). Politics of power sharing in post-1971 Pakistan. *Journal of Politics and Law*, 4(1), 249-260.
- Nazir, M. (2008). The problems and issues of federalism in Pakistan. *Pakistan Vision*, 9(1), 109-128.
- Oates, W. E. (2008). On the evolution of fiscal federalism: Theory and institutions. *National Tax Journal*, 61(2), 313-334.
- Saeed, S. (2011, March 4–10). Caught (but what?). *The Friday Times*, 22(3).
- Samad, Y. (2015). Understanding the insurgency in Balochistan. In *State and Nation-Building in Pakistan* (pp. 118-145). Routledge.
- Senate of Pakistan. (2005, November). *Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan* (Report No. 7). Government of Pakistan.
- Siddiqi, F. H. (2015). The political economy of the ethno-nationalist uprising in Pakistani Balochistan, 1999–2013. *The Political Economy of Conflict in South Asia*, 57-74.
- Siddiqi, F. H. (2016). The failed experiment with federalism in Pakistan (1947–1971). *Defunct Federalisms*, 71-85.
- Ziring, L. (1997). *Pakistan in the twentieth century: A political history*. Oxford University Press.