

A Study of the Causes of Political Instability in Balochistan After 2010

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Abstract

This study investigates the root causes of political instability in Balochistan, seeking to identify the primary causes contributing to governance challenges. Employing a qualitative approach, data is assembled through surveys, interviews, and content analysis from a separate group of respondents, including local populations, academicians, policymakers, and political analysts. The findings emphasize numerous consistent causes of instability, including historical grievances, governance ineffectiveness, resource mishandling, socioeconomic differences, and so many other factors. Furthermore, the study explores the effect of federal-provincial relations and ethnic dynamics of political instability in Balochistan. The study explores the existing body of knowledge by preparing empirical intelligence on how the local population understands political instability and its core causes. The study highlights the need for comprehensive governance, socioeconomic development, and participatory policymaking to tackle the people's grievances. Policy recommendations involve increasing local governance arrangements, encouraging political dialogue, and ensuring reasonable resource distribution.

Keywords: Balochistan, Political Instability, Governance, Resources Distribution.

Introduction

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of area, occupies 43% of the country's total territory (Ahmed et al., 2020), and the smallest in terms of population, which accommodates 14—89 million (5%) of the total of Pakistan (Kamran & Yamamoto, 2024). Even though the province is one of the most backward provinces among the other federating units of Pakistan in terms of socioeconomic development and political stability, additionally, the province of Balochistan possesses natural resources and a geographical location, making it more prominent among the rest of the provinces of Pakistan. The 750-mile-long coastal line (Barrech et al., 2023) touches the Indian Ocean in the South, making this province extremely important because of the trade routes and its connectivity with the international community. It is surrounded by oil and gas and natural-rich regions such as Afghanistan, Iran, and the Persian Gulf. Thus, its strategic location has made this region very important in transitional trade (Khetran, 2011).

Nonetheless, Balochistan has been the center of political instability since it was given the status of a province in Pakistan. Political instability and political engineering have been the province's fate since then, and they continue to the present day.

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The successive governments of Pakistan have been involved in political engineering in Balochistan, where they have installed tribal heads, Sardars, and other inexperienced political figures, due to which Balochistan lacked proper political representation at the federal as well as provincial levels. Due to this, the political setup of Balochistan has been fragile and, therefore, has been driven easily by the civil-cum-military and political elite of Balochistan, and they have never tried to bring political stability to Balochistan. Thus, the historical wounds of political engineering had significantly impacted the ordinary Baloch people in Balochistan (Mirza, 2013). For many years, the political and administrative systems in Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province, have struggled with problems like inefficiency, incompetence, and corruption. Before becoming a full-fledged province in 1970, a lot of the area was ruled by tribal chiefs who had both executive and judicial powers—this traditional way of governing continued even after Balochistan became a province. When anyone challenged the authority of these tribal leaders, they strongly resisted, making things more insecure and weakening the government's control of the province (Ahmed & Jabeen, 2018).

There is no denying the fact that Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, but it has been a country with the most political instability for several years, particularly after 2013. One has to accept that Balochistan is home to a diversified array of ethnic and linguistic groups, including Baloch, Pashtuns, and Hazaras, who all feel that they are not politically involved within the provincial political setup. Moreover, they believe that they have been excluded from mainstream politics due to which the successive federal governments have got many spaces to experiment with political engineering in Balochistan, bringing Sardars, Tribal heads, and even drug dealers into mainstream politics of Balochistan which ultimately have given birth to political instability in Balochistan. As a result of political unrest in Balochistan, the lousy governance started taking deep roots. The political instability arises from historical grievances, socioeconomic disparities, and the persistence of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan, which have fueled a separatist movement and a cycle of violence that impacted the good governance in Balochistan.

Causes of Political Instability in Balochistan

Since Pakistan gained its independence on 14 August 1947, there have been unresolved political problems in Pakistan generally and Balochistan specifically. To establish a strong government in Balochistan to bring political stability, social development, and economic progression, the successive center governments of Pakistan intervened in the political process of Balochistan that, instead of resolving the political issues, added problems to the political instability of Balochistan. In 1955, the central government of Pakistan introduced the One Unit system, combining all four Western provinces into a single administrative unit. However, it sparked political unrest amongst the politicians of Balochistan.

The One Unit system created political unrest in Balochistan, especially among the Sardars and tribal leaders. However, efforts were made to bring the Baloch tribal leaders and other politicians into Pakistan's mainstream politics to end political unrest in Balochistan. As history has witnessed, President Zia ul Haq tried to spend money on building roads, infrastructure, and other facilities. Most importantly, The Baloch nationalists also participated in the general elections without political parties in 1985. This kept going from 1989 to 1999. There were no such confrontations with the central government. During this period, the Balochs could choose their leaders without any trouble. However, this was further fueled by the assassination of Nawab Muhammad Akbar Khan Bugti in 2006. Despite Bugti's pro-Pakistani stance during his governorship in the 1970s, President Pervez Musharraf's policies failed to address the political unrest and instability. Instead

of resolving the political issues, he fueled the political unrest in Balochistan. After the assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti, Balochistan witnessed a further political disturbance; this action of General Pervaiz Musharraf led to one of the most severe insurgencies in Balochistan's history (Niaz et al., 2020). Therefore, these events pose a serious threat to the political instability in Balochistan.

In fact, From Ayub Khan to Pervez Musharraf, the military leadership has always tried to bring together Pakistan without really understanding the social and political realities of different ethnic groups of Balochistan (Bansal, 2006). Additionally, external support for insurgent groups in Balochistan significantly influences political unrest in Balochistan, mainly targeting the disruption of Gwadar Port Development (Hassan & Jan 2022). The government's policies and resource mismanagement have been witnessed to be opposed by Baloch nationalists, which escalated political unrest in the province (Aslam, 2011). The nearby trouble in Afghanistan could worsen the situation in Balochistan. Also, unstable conditions like political unrest, violence, protests, or severe storms may lead more people to engage in illegal activities (OSCE, 2015). The ongoing political unrest, as evidenced by attacks on politicians and settlers, highlights Balochistan's failure to achieve political development (Siddiqui, 2024). The instability is linked to inadequate governance, limited resources, and their effects on education, human rights, and the government's response (Grare, 2013).

In summary, the reasons for Balochistan's instability are often attributed to poor governance, lack of resources, the presence of rebel groups in Balochistan, and how things keep changing and worsening. These issues impact many aspects of society, including education, human rights, and government response to violence. Balochistan faced political negligence in development (Ahmed & Baloch, 2015). The 18th amendment in 2010 aimed to give more powers to the provinces on their provincial-based subjects by removing the concurrent list (Anwar et al., 2023). However, the central government's interference in crucial areas limited provinces' powers, impacting their ability to exercise constitutional powers effectively (Rohdewohld, 2022). The weak federal structure contributed to political instability in Balochistan, accelerating the feelings of marginalization, discontent, and exclusion from development processes (Turk et al., 2023). The unfair fiscal system further exacerbated Balochistan's situation, leading to inadequate resource allocation and minimal representation (Gil, 2023).

Balochistan's lack of democracy is a serious problem that has been made worse by several causes. The province struggles with sociopolitical instability brought on by inadequate governance, federal domination, security issues, and financial difficulties (Aman et al., 2018). With the Devolution Plan 2001, attempts were made to include civil society to increase government responses and strengthen democracy (Hoth et al., 2017). It is also believed that political instability is witnessed in Balochistan due to unequal resource distribution, poor leadership, and an imbalance in federal-provincial ties, which are the leading causes of political unrest in Balochistan (Bhatti, 2014). Inconsistent democratic processes in Balochistan and undue involvement of the central governments in the election process have further fueled the political issues of Balochistan (Rizwan et al., 2014). Balochistan has witnessed social and political disturbance because of the frequent involvement of the central governments in Balochistan's election process. This has led Balochistan into political chaos and instability. Moreover, problems like political unrest and unfair economic activities hold back Balochistan's progress and make life harder for its residents (Wani, 2019). In Pakistan, too much control in the hands of a few has made it hard to govern well. This has caused many problems in Balochistan, with power being held mainly by the government (Aslam, 2011).

Moreover, local leaders do not talk openly, and politicians have not put enough effort into bringing political stability to Balochistan (Aman et al., 2018).

Historical Grievances

The British's interest in establishing a buffer zone for their Indian Empire caused tensions with local leaders like Mehrab Khan, sparking civil resistance that ultimately ended in their submission to British authority. The power relations in the area underwent a dramatic change during this time due to the political and socioeconomic frameworks that colonial authority had altered. As a result, this period prepared the way for the political involvement of the Baloch people (Asif et al., 2022). It is important to note that Baloch people have always complained that they have been mistreated in terms of politics and how they are treated based on their ethnicity. This has led to the rise and continuation of the Baloch grievances (Kidwai, 2022). The grievances experienced by the people originate from factors including economic exploitation, political sidelining, ethnic prejudice, and the unjust distribution of natural resources. These challenges have contributed to widespread discontent and disenfranchisement among various communities. Moreover, there is a growing demand for recognition of cultural and ethnic identities within the country.

Additionally, the lack of equitable resource distribution worsened tensions and hindered efforts to achieve sustainable development and ensure peace (Iqbal, 2022).

Furthermore, Balochistan has experienced political engineering and political instability since 1948. The primary factors behind this unrest are successive governments' mishandling of political affairs and reliance on noninstitutionalized methods to address the issues (Mirza, 2013). The ongoing failure to address these grievances has sustained a recurring pattern of violence and discord, underscoring the enduring obstacles that afflict Balochistan's political environment. This persistent unrest disrupts daily life and impedes efforts to foster stability and prosperity in Balochistan.

Additionally, unresolved problems make people feel frustrated and disappointed, which causes more instability and discontent (Zeb, 2019). Because they concentrated on various aspects of the issue, the conflicting narratives from officials in Islamabad and Balochistan worsened the situation. This dispute widens the gap and makes it more difficult to identify points of agreement. Furthermore, it causes misunderstandings among the general public, making it more challenging to handle the complaints (Kidwai, 2022).

Socio-economic Situation

The province's population contains many diverse ethnic groups, including Baloch, Pashtuns, Punjabis, Sindhis, Hazaras, etc. Ethnic diversity frequently leads to disputes and tension, further worsening the province's political instability (Bashir et al., 2023). Young people in Balochistan feel that they have been neglected by the successive federal governments, which makes them disappointed with politics and generally distrustful of the leadership. Youth dissatisfaction contributes to societal unrest and worsens Balochistan's existing instabilities (Ahmed & Jabeen, 2018). Additionally, the absence of basic essentials like infrastructure, healthcare, and education significantly prevents socioeconomic advancement and increases public unhappiness (Turk et al., 2023). Traditional authorities essentially hold political power, and they are Sardars and tribal chiefs, who usually put their own goals ahead of the province's progress. This self-serving approach has led to widespread dissatisfaction among the populace and has fueled civil unrest (Ahmed & Jabeen, 2018). An unstable political environment, like having minority governments or agreements to share power, has not solved people's problems. This has caused continued

political unrest and made the public unhappy (Hamza, 2021). Even though leaders make promises, many feel these promises are empty and lack sincere dedication to improving socioeconomic issues like infrastructure, health, and law enforcement (Baloch, 2019). The leadership's failure to enhance security, such as appointing inexperienced people to important security roles, has worsened security issues and increased overall instability (Siddiqi, 2015). Local politicians do not want to take decisive action on social and political problems, which has stopped progress and worsened social and political unrest in Balochistan (Aman et al., 2018).

On the other hand, despite its strategic position and plenty of natural resources, Balochistan remains underdeveloped (Hassan & Jan 2022). For a long time, Balochistan has faced economic sidelines. The Baloch people feel they are out of the political process due to unfair policies (Jabeen et al., 2012). This economic disparity persists due to inter-tribal clashes, historical neglect, and a lack of attention to socioeconomic development and political stability (Noor & Ajmal, 2020). The government's failure to address economic and social stability has fueled political alienation among the people of Balochistan (Mendez, 2020). Despite efforts, Balochistan has not met any Millennium Development Goals, highlighting its extreme socioeconomic exclusion (Baloch, 2019). As a result, many people in Balochistan have negative feelings toward the government because they have been left out and pushed aside politically and economically for a long time (Ahmad, 2022).

Furthermore, it is essential to note that despite its abundant resources and endowments, Balochistan has remained the poorest and economically least-developed province in Pakistan. The lack of economic growth in Balochistan is made worse by rebel groups. This worsens things because it keeps Balochistan poor and unstable, leading to more problems (Ahmed & Baloch, 2015).

Governance Challenges

Examining the governance issues, Balochistan politics is crucial to comprehend the underlying reasons for the country's political turmoil. Governance is the process by which decision-making powers are exercised and the distribution and management of power within an entity or society. The government of the province of Balochistan has several significant obstacles to overcome, such as disturbed peace and order, budgetary errors, governance problems, and other governance issues. The effect of tribal authority on the province's government systems hinders law enforcement and revenue-collecting activities (Bashir et al., 2023). The province is experiencing a crisis in governance characterized by leadership issues, dishonesty between officials, and a preference for oneself over the group's welfare. The province's problems have been made worse, leading to inadequate responsibility, poor administration, and an absence of openness (Gharshin, 2023). The execution of governance reform may be hampered by the past tense federal-province relationships, which present obstacles to in-progress changes. To guarantee successful reforms, it is crucial to manage power relations and promote collaboration between the federal and provisional governments (Ahmad & Akif, 2007). Balochistan faces significant bribery and bad governance issues, with mafia involvement severely affecting government agencies' effectiveness. To overcome these governance challenges, tackling corruption and strengthening institutions is essential (Shahid, 2024). The governance crisis in Balochistan has resulted in bad governance. The militarization of political issues has pushed the province to the brink of political instability and worsened the security situation in the province. These disturbance factors have brought governance challenges, undermined good governance, and strained the province's budget (Gharshin, 2023). Addressing this requires a shift in government policy towards resolving grievances and building

trust with the Baloch community (Jamal, 2023). Political rifts in Balochistan emerge from longstanding historical, ethnic, and tribal distinctions. These divisions challenge effective governance and societal unity (Azhar & Muhammad, 2017). Corruption in Balochistan indirectly fuels political instability by causing inefficiencies within the judicial system, lack of accountability, and erosion of public trust in the government (Aslam, 2011). The provincial government of Balochistan has encountered numerous challenges that have contributed to the political instability of the province. Despite considerable financial allocations, progress has been hampered by poor governance and corruption. The government's inefficiency in managing funds, tackling economic problems, and delivering essential services has further deteriorated Balochistan's social and institutional infrastructure (Shahid, 2024). The governance crisis in Balochistan poses a risk of heightened foreign interference and economic instability across the country. These challenges have eroded unity within the province and damaged the nation's reputation. Inadequate governance has also pushed educated Balochistan youth toward destructive actions, further bringing political instability to Balochistan (Gharshin, 2023). Disputes over natural resources, such as those involving CPEC, Saindak, and Reko Diq, have not brought the development that should have been dreamed about. The province's wealth of minerals and strategic location have drawn external interests, which further disturbed Balochistan politically (Hasan, 2016). Furthermore, the provincial government's ability to govern effectively and deliver services is severely hampered by inadequate institutional capacity, excessive bureaucratic procedures, and pervasive corruption (Shahid, 2024). Accountability mechanisms are severely lacking, and public access to information regarding government decisions and transactions is minimal. As a result, influential politicians and criminals frequently act without consequences (Ahmed, 2016). The political landscape is dominated by dynastic and hereditary politicians, with minimal involvement from the educated youth. This results in a significant lack of competent leadership (Bashir et al., 2023). The persistent neglect of education, healthcare, and infrastructure sectors has led to poor human development outcomes. Consequently, the province faces a severe shortage of skilled professionals (Bashir, 2024). The governance challenges in Balochistan have led to underdeveloped infrastructure, insufficient access to quality education and healthcare, and limited employment opportunities. These developmental shortcomings further aggravate the province's governance crisis. Prolonged violence and disputes have created an insecure environment that has impeded effective governance and progress (Bilal, 2014). The recently elected administration should prioritize thorough governance changes to address these issues. This entails improving transparency and responsibility, strengthening regional populations, and expediting administrative procedures (Bashir, 2024). Prioritizing healthcare and education, utilizing knowledge, and investing in human capital growth are all essential (Bashir et al., 2023). The political climate in Balochistan is highly critical, which makes it difficult to undertake governance changes. The advancement of reform measures can be considerably slowed by unstable politics, competing goals, and power battles between distinct parties (Ahmad & Akif, 2007).

Recommendations

To Enhance Political Representation and Inclusion

To reduce feelings of isolation and promote equality, Balochistan needs more representation in federal governance. The current distribution of seats in the National Assembly limits the province's influence on national policies. Adjusting the seat allocation to reflect better Balochistan's large geographic area, strategic importance, and development needs would ensure its voice is heard in federal decision-making. This change could create a fairer system where Balochistan has an equal

chance to shape policies that affect its future. Lawmakers should make changes to electoral laws to ensure fair representation. This process may include discussions with local leaders, political groups, and legal experts to determine a more balanced seat distribution. Advocacy efforts can also play a key role in raising awareness among political leaders and the public about the need for these reforms. The process must be transparent and open to gain the people's trust in Balochistan. Greater participation in federal governance would help Balochistan address its unique challenges and build trust between the province and the central government. This could reduce feelings of neglect and create a more inclusive political environment where elected representatives feel empowered to advocate for their communities. Ensuring free and fair elections, along with strengthening accurate democratic processes, is essential to achieving this goal.

To Address Socioeconomic Disparities

Balochistan has been overlooked for a long time in terms of infrastructure development and resource distribution. Policymakers should introduce a well-planned development strategy tailored to the province's needs, focusing on improving infrastructure, ensuring fair resource allocation, and creating job opportunities for disadvantaged communities. Establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in key areas of Balochistan could help attract investment and boost employment. Moreover, the federal revenue from Balochistan's natural resources should be used for local development projects, such as building roads, schools, and hospitals. Independent oversight committees should be set up to ensure that funds are allocated fairly and transparently. Budget distribution should be based on the province's educational gaps, poverty levels, and overall development needs.

To Strengthen Law Enforcement and Governance

Addressing Balochistan's security challenges requires fair and effective law enforcement, with policymakers reforming and strengthening security institutions to uphold law and order while protecting citizens' rights. Community policing should be introduced to involve locals in security efforts, while training programs on fairness, conflict resolution, and cultural awareness must enhance law enforcement skills. Adequate funding should equip police with modern tools and facilities to improve efficiency. Strengthening law enforcement will enhance public safety and prevent anti-state actors from exploiting the power gap. When people have more trust in the government, they will be more willing to cooperate with law enforcement. This step will also lay the foundation for broader structural reforms in governance, ensuring a more stable and inclusive system.

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