Political Evolution in Gilgit Baltistan: A Historical Analysis of Governance Structures and Regional Dynamics

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Abstract
This research explores the history and administrative evolution of the Gilgit Baltistan (GB) region, employing a comprehensive approach that combines historical analysis and empirical investigation. The study spans from the region's earliest history, characterized by limited accessibility and remote location, to its pre-independence eras divided into BCE to the 7th century, monarchs' invasion era (8th to 18th century), and the European colonization to Dogras (Sikhs) era (1840 to 1947-48). The research highlights vital dynasties and influences during each phase, emphasizing the role of Dogras as the last rulers before independence. The study explores GB's independence in two consecutive years, with Gilgit gaining independence in late 1947 and Baltistan in 1948, marking Pakistan's independence as a catalyst for the region's freedom. The affiliation with Pakistan, driven by the "Two Nation Theory" and Islamic principles, is detailed, emphasizing the sequence of regional affiliations with Yasin, Gilgit, and the states of Hunza and Nagar. The standpoint of Pakistan on GB as part of the Kashmir dispute is analyzed, and the region's constitutional status is examined. Despite being affiliated with Pakistan since its independence, GB lacks representation in the upper and lower houses of the Pakistani parliament as of 2023. The research methodology traces the administrative development of GB, from advisory councils to the current Gilgit Baltistan legislative assembly, reflecting the region's political transformation. The study concluded by detailing the latest government in power, providing a thorough understanding of the region's historical overview and contemporary governance.

Keywords: Administration, Constitutional Status, Contemporary Governance, Independence.

Introduction
The political evolution of Gilgit Baltistan is an intricate tale molded by the intersection of historical, geographical, and geopolitical factors (Howe & Hunzai, 2019; Ali, 2022). The partition of British India in 1947 brought about a seismic shift, leading to the region's integration into the newly formed state of Pakistan (Baig, 2018; Hussain & Javaid, 2018). However, the unique status and governance structure of Gilgit Baltistan have been subjects of continuous evolution (Bouzas, 2017).

One of the critical junctures in Gilgit Baltistan's political trajectory was its association with the Kashmir conflict (Khan, 2017). The geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region reverberated in Gilgit Baltistan, influencing its political status (Khalid, 2010). The
region witnessed various administrative changes, reflecting the geopolitical complexities and strategic considerations that characterize this part of South Asia (Agniew, 2013).

The political landscape has witnessed further evolution in recent years with the introduction of the Gilgit Baltistan empowerment and self-governance order (Kreutzman, 2008). This governance framework aimed to provide a degree of autonomy to the region, outlining the administrative and legislative structure (Lambah, 2016). However, debates and discussions persist around the constitutional status of Gilgit Baltistan, and its political evolution continues to be a subject of scrutiny, both domestically and internationally (Naseem, 2007). As the region navigates these complexities, understanding the intricate political evolution of Gilgit Baltistan becomes crucial for grasping its contemporary dynamics and anticipating future trajectories (Ali, 2010).

The governance structures in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) have undergone significant changes over the years, shaping the region's political landscape and regional dynamics (Nasiruddin, 2018). Historically, GB was governed under a complex administrative framework due to its strategic location and historical ties with the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (Nigar, 2017). However, the introduction of the Gilgit Baltistan empowerment and self-governance order in 2009 marked a notable shift. This order aimed to grant the region a certain degree of autonomy, providing for its own legislative assembly and chief minister (Shafique & Iftikhar, 2017). While this move was seen as a step towards local empowerment, debates and discussions persisted around the constitutional status of GB, influencing the region's governance dynamics (Bouzas, 2012).

The regional dynamics in GB are intricately linked to its geographical diversity and cultural richness (Qasim et al., 2023). With diverse ethnicities, languages, and landscapes, the region experiences unique challenges and opportunities (Siddiqua, 2017). The complex topography, including the presence of some of the world's highest mountain ranges, influences the local economy and governance considerations. Balancing the preservation of the environment, sustainable development, and the socio-economic needs of the diverse population remains a crucial aspect of regional dynamics (Qasim & Rahman, 2022).

Furthermore, the geopolitical significance of GB adds another layer to its governance structures and regional dynamics (Ullah & Anwar, 2022). Being at the crossroads of South Asia, central Asia, and China, the region has become a focal point for various geopolitical interests (Yasin & Qasim, 2020). Understanding the regional dynamics in GB requires a nuanced examination of the geopolitical forces at play, regional cooperation initiatives, and the impact of these factors on local governance and development (Bansal, 2008). As GB continues to evolve, a comprehensive analysis of its governance structures and regional dynamics becomes essential for informed policymaking and sustainable development (Haverluk et al., 2014).

**Methodology**

The research on the history and administrative evolution of the Gilgit Baltistan region involves a comprehensive approach that combines historical analysis, review of available literature, and empirical investigation. The research aims to comprehensively understand the historical context, the pre-independence era, gaining independence, and the subsequent administrative developments in the Gilgit Baltistan region. An extensive review of existing literature is conducted on the history of the Gilgit Baltistan region, drawing from academic articles, historical texts, government documents, and relevant publications. The historical documents, scripts, and records related to the Gilgit Baltistan region are analyzed to highlight the early history and events leading up to the region's independence. Different eras, such as the monarchs' invasion era and the European colonization period, are examined to understand the socio-political dynamics and influences in the
study area during each phase. The legal and constitutional aspects of the affiliation of Gilgit Baltistan with Pakistan, focusing on the constitutional statuses, representation in legislative bodies, and the current administrative framework, are also discussed to comprehend the governance perspectives.

Analysis and Discussions

History of Gilgit Baltistan Region
The earliest history of the Gilgit Baltistan region is not known to the world due to its remoteness and accessibility issues; however, some raw information in terms of different scripts is available for researchers to use (Bangash, 2010).

Gilgit Baltistan Before Independence
The history of the GB region before the current status of independence is divided into three typical eras. These eras are BCE (before common era) to the 7th Century, the monarchs’ invasion era (8th to 18th Century), and the era of European colonization of Dogras (sikhs) from “1840 to 1947 – 48”. The first division of era further discloses that the very early history of the region has no evidence in the literature; however, the scripts of this era, which are abundantly mentioned in the historian writings, are related to the arrival of people from central and western Asian dynasties as Mongols, Aryans, and Tibetans. The second era reveals that the region was considered the hub of Buddhism during this era. The prominent dynasties in the era at different times were the Tarkhans, Maghluots, Ayasho, and Brushai. The Mughal dynasty also influenced some parts of the region during this era. During the third division of the era, the Dogras (sikhs by religion and rulers of Kashmir) ruled the GB region. For a few decades, the continent’s British rulers also extended their authority in this region. But Dogras were the last rulers in GB before independence (Bansal, 2005; Bansal, 2008; Anwar, 2019).

Independence of Gilgit Baltistan
The Gilgit Baltistan region gained independence in two consecutive years: the Gilgit region became an independent region in late 1947, and the Baltistan region in 1948. Pakistan’s independence is considered an escalating factor in the freedom of the Gilgit Baltistan region (Hussainabadi, 2019).

Affiliation with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
After getting independence from Dogras (sikhs) without any external role, the natives of the Gilgit Baltistan region decided to affiliate with the newly partitioned country Pakistan due to the “two nation theory” and due to the Islamic state exclusive of any prior condition. However, the affiliation of regions occurred at different times. Yasin (Ghizer) was the first state to join Pakistan on the 7th of November, 1947, exactly one week after independence. Gilgit became part of Pakistan on November 16th of the same year, and the states of Hunza and Nagar affiliated with Pakistan on the 19th of the month. On December 7th, 1947, the founder of Pakistan and 1st Governor General of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, signed the document of Hunza-Nagar affiliation, and these states became de facto part of Pakistan (Khan, 2017).
As the Baltistan region gained independence after one year of independence from Pakistan and after nine years of the Gilgit region’s independence, dance, this region also decided to merge with Pakistan on August 14th, 1948 (Khan, 2017).
Standpoint of Pakistan
Pakistan, the Islamic Republic considers Gilgit Baltistan to be part of the Kashmir dispute as this region is part of Kashmir, and any constitutional advancement for the area, either that is to announce the status of the province or to give representation in the Senate or Parliament will directly affect the Kashmir cause. It will also weaken Pakistan's standpoint on the Kashmir dispute in the world, including that of the United Nations (UN) (Kreutzmann, 2015).

Constitutional Status
Gilgit Baltistan, the northernmost region of Pakistan, which is mountain-locked due to the mighty Karakoram, Hindukush, and Himalayan range, affiliated the whole area with Pakistan after independence to become a constitutional part of the newly emerged Islamic republic in the neighboring territory. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the 1st governor-general of Pakistan, welcomed this affiliation and signed the document of early affiliated states (Bouzas, 2012).
The Gilgit Baltistan region has yet to be a constitutional part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as there is no representation of Gilgit Baltistan in either the upper house (senate) or lower house (parliament). Out of 342 members of parliament and 102 members of the senate in the bicameral constitutional system of Pakistan, no one represents the Gilgit Baltistan region (Hunzai, 2013).

Local Administrative Government, Councils, and Assemblies of Gilgit Baltistan
After affiliation with Pakistan, the Gilgit Baltistan region, known as northern areas in Pakistan, remained under the direct control of the Federal, FATA, and under the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) for more than two decades. There was no representation of the people of northern areas in any administration of decision-making or at a high level. Due to ambiguous constitutional status, no decision was made regarding the establishment of a legislative assembly or any other local administration setup. The earlier decision towards the transformation of authority to the people of the region was the establishment of the advisory council, which has now gained the status of the legislative assembly of Gilgit Baltistan (Khan, 2015). The further development of local government (councils) and assemblies in the region discussed below are abstracted (Jalal, 1995; Lambah, 2016; Howe & Hunzai, 2019).

Councils
Advisory Council
The first step towards the formal administrative setup in northern areas by the federal government of Pakistan was the establishment of an advisory council in 1970. Members for this council were distributed in such a way that the Gilgit agency represented eight members, the Skardu agency six members, and seven official members, making 21 members overall. This advisory council worked for 05 years, 1970 – 1975.

Northern Area (NA) Council
On 3rd of July 1975, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, after his first historical visit to Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), introduced an order of legal framework for the region with the name of ‘northern areas council legal framework order 1975 and abolished the FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulation) and feudal system along with the significant changes and reforms in the political, administrative and judicial system. The total number of proposed members for this council was 16, and out of 16, 10 members were to be elected.
from Gilgit and six from the Baltistan region through 2nd term of the general elections. The elected member worked for 04 years (1975 - 1979).
The third term of general elections in northern areas for the NA Council was held in 1979. The total number of 16 members remained the same as in the prior election, but the distribution of members changed by giving representation to Diamer. In this election, Gilgit and Skardu represented 06 members, respectively, while 04 members were given to Diamer for the first time. This session continued for four years, from 1979 to 1983.
The fourth and fifth general elections in the northern area for the northern area council were held with the same number of total members and the same distribution of members, area-wise. Both terms worked for four years, the fourth term from 1983 to 1987 and the fifth term from 1987 to 1991.
In November 1991, the sixth term general election of northern areas of Pakistan was held once again for four years, with the same number of total members as in two earlier elections. For this term, the representation of members was revised and changed by expanding the administrative areas and introducing special seats for women in the area. Three seats were allocated for the Gilgit district, Three for the Skardu district, four for the Diamer district, two seats for Ghizer, two seats for Ganche, and two special seats for women representation. The period for this term was 1991 to 1994.

**Northern Area (NA) Legislative Council**

In 1994, during the government of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) in federal, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, and the cabinet approved a new legal framework for the northern areas with the subject of Legal Framework Order (LFO, 1994) and renamed NA Council as NA legislative council. The members of the council under this setup increased to 26 from 16 members in the NA Council, keeping two special seats for women. Seats of the chief executive and deputy chief executive were also established to govern the system. The federal minister of Kashmir affairs and northern areas was given the status of chief executive of the council, while the authority for nomination of deputy chief executive was conferred to the elected members. The decision of the first-ever party base election for the NA legislative council was also part of the order. The members were distributed district-wise, numerically six seats for Gilgit district, six for Skardu district, six for Diamer district, three for newly established districts, Ganche district and Ghizer district, respectively, and two special seats for women.
The general election of the NA legislative council for 24 members was held in October 1994 for five years (1994 to 1999), and it was the seventh term election in northern areas. The eighth term of general election in northern areas was held in November 1999 without any change in the total number of members and distribution of seats for the period of 1999 to 2004.

**Legislative Assembly**

**Northern Area (NA) Legislative Assembly**

During the early period of General Pervaiz Musharraf as an autocratic ruler, the NA legislative council was upgraded to the NA legislative assembly in 2000 with the power of legislation on 40 different matters of local interests with amendment in LFO, 1994 under the apparent decision of Supreme Court of Pakistan. The ninth term general election for the NA legislative assembly was held in October 2004 for 24 seats. Six seats were reserved for technocrats and six special seats for women. The five-year period of the northern areas legislative assembly came to an end in 2009.
Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly
On 28th of August 2009, president of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari signed a governance order for the Gilgit Baltistan region after approval from cabinet and prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, known as the ‘Gilgit Baltistan empowerment and self-governance Order, 2009’. The official name of the northern area was changed to Gilgit Baltistan, and the name of the NA legislative assembly was also altered to GB legislative assembly, which has the power of legislation on 61 different internal and local matters. The allocation of seats of the chief minister was also part of the order. The distribution of seats for the assembly and the total number of seats were also reshuffled in the same order. The total members of GBLA, according to the new order, were 33, of which 24 were seats for constituency election, three for technocrats, and six for women. The election for the assembly was held in November 2009. For five years, the Pakistan People's Party ruled with the first-ever chief minister of the Gilgit Baltistan region (Syed Mehdi Shah) from Baltistan, and the term was completed in 2014.
In July 2015, the 11th term general election in Gilgit Baltistan for GBLA was held for 24 seats, and the Pakistan Muslim League N (PMLN) succeeded in forming a government with the second chief minister (Hafiz Hefeez ur Rehman) of the Gilgit Baltistan region from Gilgit. This term came to an end in June 2020.
In November 2020, the government of Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) came into power by winning the 12th term general election for GBLA on 24 seats. Barrister Khalid Khurshid became the third chief minister of GB.

Conclusion
The political evolution of Gilgit Baltistan (GB) is a complex narrative shaped by historical, geographical, and geopolitical factors. The region's journey from being part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to its integration into Pakistan post-partition underscores the intricate interplay of historical events. The Kashmir conflict has been pivotal, influencing GB’s political status and administration. The geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan have led to administrative changes, reflecting the region's strategic significance. Significant political developments have occurred in recent years, with the introduction of the Gilgit Baltistan empowerment and self-governance order in 2009. This framework aimed to provide autonomy by introducing a legislative assembly and chief minister. However, debates persist around GB’s constitutional status, contributing to ongoing scrutiny at domestic and international levels.
The governance structures in GB have undergone substantial changes, particularly with the historical advisory councils evolving into legislative assemblies. Despite these transformations, the constitutional representation of GB in Pakistan's Parliament still needs to be present, posing governance challenges. The region's rich history, diverse cultural landscape, and unique geographical challenges further complicate its political dynamics. GB's geopolitical significance, situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and China, adds another layer to its governance structures. The nuanced examination of these geopolitical forces, regional cooperation initiatives, and their impact on local governance is essential for understanding the region's future trajectory.
Methodologically, the research employed a comprehensive approach encompassing historical analysis, literature review, and empirical investigation. The study aimed to understand GB's historical context, pre-independence era, and subsequent administrative developments. Analysis of historical documents, scripts, and records provided insights into early history and events leading to independence. Despite GB's affiliation with Pakistan, the absence of representation in legislative
bodies and ambiguous constitutional status raises governance concerns. The journey from advisory councils to the present legislative assembly reflects the evolving political landscape. As GB continues to navigate these complexities, a comprehensive understanding of its political evolution is vital for informed policymaking, sustainable development, and anticipating future political strategies.

**Recommendations**

**Constitutional representation for political inclusivity:** Advocate for the constitutional representation of Gilgit Baltistan in both the Upper and Lower houses of the Pakistani parliament to ensure political inclusivity and representation at the national level. This step is crucial for addressing the governance gap and providing a voice to the people of Gilgit Baltistan in national decision-making processes.

**Diplomatic outreach for international recognition:** Engage in diplomatic efforts to gain international recognition for Gilgit Baltistan's unique geopolitical significance. Foster alliances with neighboring countries and international organizations to support the region's political evolution, development, and stability. This diplomatic engagement can contribute to a broader understanding of regional dynamics and garner global support.

**Negotiations for constitutional clarity:** Initiate negotiations and dialogues between local leadership in Gilgit Baltistan and federal authorities to achieve constitutional clarity regarding the region's status within Pakistan. Addressing the ambiguity in the constitutional framework is essential for establishing a stable political foundation that aligns with the aspirations of the local population.

**Tailored socio-economic development initiatives:** Prioritize and implement socio-economic development initiatives tailored to the unique challenges of Gilgit Baltistan's diverse ethnicities, languages, and geographical landscapes. Sustainable development projects should balance environmental preservation and economic growth, addressing the specific needs of the local population to foster stability.

**Active participation in regional cooperation:** Actively participate in and promote regional cooperation initiatives, leveraging Gilgit Baltistan's strategic location at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and China. Strengthening ties with neighboring regions can enhance economic development, facilitate cultural exchange, and contribute to security cooperation. Robust regional partnerships will positively impact governance structures and elevate the geopolitical standing of Gilgit Baltistan.

**References**


