
Politics of Ethno-nationalism in Balochistan: Impacts on Good Governance

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The paper aims to identify the scope of the politics of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan and its impacts on good governance. Balochistan, which is enriched with mineral resources, has been neglected politically, socially and economically. In addition to this, the politics of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan has been under several political realignments and political engineering due to which Balochistan has failed to establish a strong national-wide political party that could bridge Balochistan with the rest of country. The paper aims to address the questions of what political motives has Balochistan been under political engineering since 1970s and how political realignments affected the politics of ethno-nationalism and good governance of Balochistan. The theory of power politics has been used to find out the political interests of hidden elements to lead the politics of Balochistan between the nationalist leadership and pro-establishment forces. Finally, political pace created political instability, socioeconomic insecurity and political vacuum which has remained unfulfilled until now.

Key Words: Balochistan, ethno-nationalism, good governance, CPEC, Pashtun and Baloch

Introduction

Balochistan, one of the largest provinces of Pakistan in term of land, occupies 44% of total land of Pakistan, (Tareen et al., 2010) is enriched with mineral and natural resources. The province no doubt, possesses a scattered and thinly population, but enjoys unique geostrategic significance in the regional politics. It shares 909km borderline (Faiza et al., 2017) with Iran on West, 1100km borderline with Afghanistan (Nematiniya, 2013) on the North and 750 km coastal belt with Indian Ocean on South. (Ayub & Butt, 2005)

It is the most appropriate province of Pakistan to act as a gateway for Afghanistan, South Asia and Central Asian Republics to access Indian Ocean. Moreover, the region is an undeniable fact the minerally and naturally enriched Balochistan is an international transit corridor which provides a transit route to the landlocked Republics of Central Asia, South Asia and Middle East to entertain their respective business and trade activities in the region. Most importantly, Balochistan hosts Gwadar deep sea Port which is termed to be the main center of international trade in the future. There is no denying the fact that Balochistan is the main factor of Pak-Chinese time-tested friendship since China maintains its international trade via Pakistan generally and Balochistan particularly.

Unfortunately, this nature-blessed province has been the most deprived and neglected unit of Pakistan since its annexation with Pakistan in 1948 which has witnessed political unrest, social defragmentation, weak economic setup and bad governance. The weak policy approach and lack of proper attention of federal government towards Balochistan cause have given birth to insurgency and separatist movements which did not only drive Balochistan towards bloodshed, foreign intervention and terrorism, they have also created ethno-nationalistic differences among the different ethnic groups of Balochistan. Furthermore, the province was once the land of love and affection among the different ethnic groups, has turned to be the soil of politico-ethnic conflict. The politics of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan has become the ultimate motive of nationalist political parties of Balochistan to entertain the interests of their respective ethnic group which is a dangerous sign for the province at large. It is worth-mentioning that the political and bureaucratic setups of Balochistan are designed in accordance with the ethno-nationalistic norms of Baloch and Pashtuns where they have been witnessed in a tug of competition to enhance and promote their respective dominancy in the province.

Besides Baloch and Pashtuns, Balochistan also hosts so many other different ethnic groups who have been living in different cities of Balochistan before the independence of Pakistan. Baloch, the largest ethnic group of the province, constitutes 61 percent of total population, (Analytica, 2017) occupies 20 Districts, dominates the political and administrative setup of the province whereas

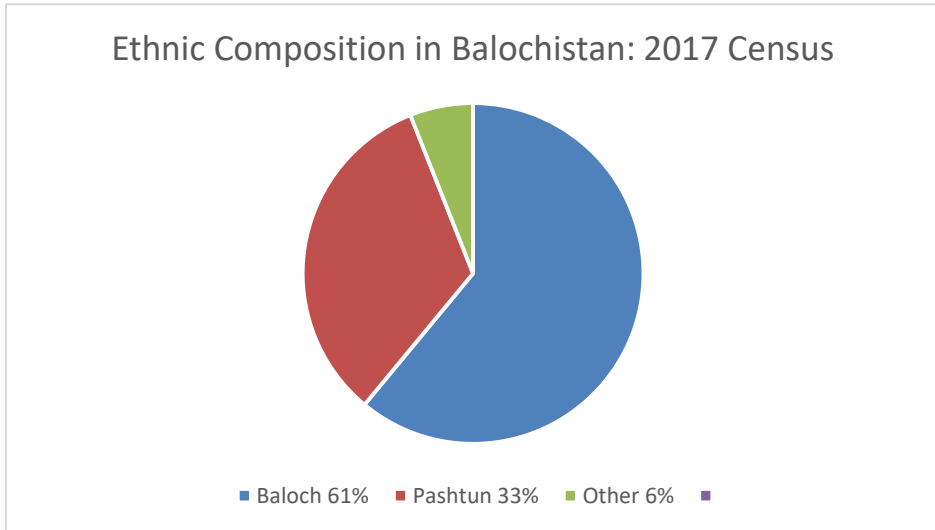
Pashtun the second largest ethnic group of the province, constitutes 33 %, of the total population of province, occupies 10 Districts,(Analytica, 2017) is the second most dominant ethnic group of province. In addition to this, the other 6% of the population of Balochistan(Analytica, 2017) are Hazaras, Sindhis, Punjabis, Lasi, Mahajir and Saraikis who are scattered in different Districts of Balochistan. Therefore, it is safe to say that Balochistan is the home of multi-language, multi-beliefs and multi-cultural.

There is no doubt that initially Balochistan has been the land of Baloch inhabitants who have occupied the greater part of Balochistan, however, the post-Soviet intervention period in Afghanistan witnessed the migration of a large number of Afghan refugees in Balochistan who were ethnically and culturally inclined with Pashtun which enhanced the population ratio of Pashtun in Balochistan(Kundi, 2005). Thus, more Pashtun political representatives and political movements emerged in the political structure of Balochistan which did not only challenge the Baloch dominancy in the province, it also created political differences and competition. On the other hand, Balochistan generally and Quetta particularly hosts a good number of Hazara ethnic group who have their separate political identity. It is appalling to learn that Hazara Community has been under serious attacks for last one decade. (Olszewska, 2013)

The politics of ethnic nationalism in Balochistan has a great impact on the good governance of Balochistan since it is extremely difficult to create political balance and equality among the ethnic groups of Balochistan. Most importantly, the politics of ethnic nationalism in Balochistan created enough space for certain powerful hidden hands to carry out political engineering and bureaucratic experiments which often resulted political rage, sense of deprivation, ethnic hatred and top of all boosted the pace the ethnic nationalism, a dangerous sign for peace and harmony in Balochistan.(Fredric, 2013) Apart from their mutual differences, Baloch and Pashtuns always raised voices against the dominant role of federal bureaucrats and government in Balochistan. (Hashmi, 2015) Moreover, they alleged federal governments for exploiting the politics of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan. The federalism has failed to bring unity among the provinces in Pakistanforinstance, some of provinces of Pakistan have registered serious complaints of being economically and politically deprived of their due rights. In case of Balochistan, the nationalist forces (Baloch and Pashtun) have claimed that Balochistan has been the home of political engineering and bureaucratic experiments by some powerful hidden hands since 1948. (Niazi, 2005) They are further convinced that in the name of federalism, center has exploited their natural resources ruthlessly and denied their due rights. They further alleged that the federal government added to the troubles of people of Balochistan which ultimately created a sense of deprivation, frustration and insurgent movements in Balochistan. (Javaid, 2010) The nationalist forces further believe that until and

unless, until and unless nationalistic political leaderships are allowed freely in national politics, the worsening circumstances of continued to be worsening.

Ethnic Composition of Balochistan



*Figure 1 Ethnic Composition in Balochistan: According to 2017 Census:
Source: <https://balochistanvoices.com/2017/09/no-major-change-ethnic-balance-balochistan-census-data-analysis-proves/>*

According to the Census of 2017, the population of Balochistan is 12,344,408 (Khilji, 2017) in which Baloch nation is termed to be the major ethnic group of Balochistan, constitutes 61% of total population (Analytica, 2017) which is followed by the Pashtun ethnic group which is 33% of the total population (Analytica, 2017) of Balochistan. Baloch ethnic group who occupies 20 Districts of Balochistan out of 34 Districts, (Feyyaz, 2013) are mainly concentrated in East, West and South Balochistan whereas Pashtun who occupies 9 Districts, are mainly staying in North Balochistan.

The Politics of Ethno-Nationalism in Balochistan: Impacts on Good Governance

Despite, the geostrategic location and enrichment of natural resources, Balochistan lacks economic and infrastructural development and most importantly, it lags behind in literacy, human capital and investment. It is disappointing to learn that center has failed to pay proper attention to its socio-economic and political development despite of contributing greater share as compare with other provinces

of Pakistan in the national wealth. On the other hand, Balochistan has also failed to establish a national political party throughout Pakistan in order to bridge the provincial-national political gulf. It is safe to say Balochistan has always experienced a center-controlled government, (Akhtar, 2007) but federal government never ever addressed the socio-political issues of Balochistan.

There is no denying the fact that the politics of Balochistan is so much multifaceted and complex since Balochistan hosts some strong ethno-national-based political parties including, Balochistan National Party-Mengal, National Party, Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Hazara Democratic Party and Jamhoori Watan Party which have created a bigoted political environment, based on ethno-nationalism and tribal politics. In addition to this, especially the ethno-political differences of Baloch and Pashtun have created enough space for the powerful hidden hands to drive their political motives and maintain political engineering in Balochistan. (Fredric, 2013) Moreover, the interference of some powerful hands in the politics of Balochistan has not only discouraged the provincial politics, it has also never allowed the politics of Balochistan to groom up at national level. In order to weaken the Baloch and Pashtun ethno-nationalist politics, pro-establishment local Sardars and Nawabs have been installed into the mainstream politics of Balochistan. (Siddiqi & Kakar, 2010) However, it has to be realized that the politics of Sardars and Nawab has never helped Balochistan's politics to groom up since Sardars always aimed to consolidate their personal wealth and enhance their source of revenue. Most disappointingly, they let Balochistan remain illiterate, backward and undeveloped. (Sehgal, 2012) In addition to this, Sardars have always been exploited to encounter the politics of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan in order to deny the politics of ethno-nationalism in Balochistan.

Initially, Baloch ethnic identity has been predominant ethnic group in Balochistan which claimed to have more geo-political power and social status in Balochistan; however, the influx of Afghan Refugees in Balochistan after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan has not only increased the population ratio of Pashtuns in Balochistan, it also enhanced the passion of nationalism among the Pashtuns whose impacts were badly felt on the politics of Balochistan. Comparatively, analyzing the political history of Balochistan, Pashtuns have been more inclined towards center and engaged with more professions and national politics with Pakistan whereas Baloch had always felt serious sense of deprivation, reservations and grave grievances with Pakistan. Furthermore, Baloch have been much alienated as compare with the Pashtuns of Balochistan who have dominant roles in all strata of the province. However, political situation changed drastically for Pashtuns in Balochistan in the post-military operation period in Waziristan and FATA since it was feared that Pashtuns Tehfuz Movement (A movement which was started in Waziristan during military operation in Waziristan to protect the rights of Pashtuns in Pakistan) would incite Pashtun towards narrow nationalism

across the country.(Yousaf, 2019) On the other hand,it was also feared that after the conclusion of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement, the Pashtuns and Baloch nationalist political parties would remain the main resistance in meddling in the CPEC-related decision making process of central government.(Kolachi et al., 2018) therefore, Baloch and Pashtuns nationalist political parties turned to be serious threats to the interests of powerful forces in Balochistan. Most importantly, in order to encounter Baloch and Pashtun nationalist political Parties, Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) was formed to carry out the politics of Balochistan.(Virk, 2020)

There is no denying the fact that the intra-Baloch rivalry, Pashtuns-Baloch ethno-political differences and politico-religious Sunni-Shia conflict have greatly complicated the political ground of Balochistan which have not only added to the sufferings of the inhabitants of Balochistan, these have also created enough space for certain powerful elements to stunt Balochistan's politics via political engineering and bureaucratic experiments.

Despite Baloch and Pashtun common historical sufferings and deprivation, both ethnic groups have failed to carry out their mutual political drives with collective efforts for the larger interest of Balochistan and Pakistan. It also disappointing to learn that the politics of ethno-nationalism of Balochistan have always divided the people of Balochistan on the basis of ethno-culture and socio-religious beliefs. Instead of working together for the larger interest of province, the politics of narrow-nationalism has been promoted and enhanced highly which have negative impacts on the good governance of Balochistan. In addition to this, the Baloch and Pashtun nationalistic approaches have evolved around ethno-nationalism which have been influenced by the domestic environment. As a result, Balochistan's politics has never witnessed political reforms and Baloch and Pashtun continue to lack representation in the decision-making mechanisms in Pakistan.

On the other hand, nationalist political parties of Baloch and Pashtun have been witnessed in blaming the powerful elements in carrying out political realignments and political engineering since 1948.(Javaid, 2010) Furthermore, they believe that the politics of Balochistan is determined by the economic and strategic priorities of certain elements who have been often involved in installing easily-driven regimes in Balochistan. For instance, the victory of BAP in general election of 2018 which was formed a few months before general election, did not only upset the political system of Balochistan, it has rather proven the allegations of Nationalist Political Parties.

Center-Provincial Political Differences: Impacts on Good Governance

Nature has bestowed Balochistan with profound natural resources and geostrategic significance, most importantly, it borders with the most oil-rich and abundant-

natural resourceful countries of the world. Most importantly, Balochistan also hosts Gwadar Port and Sandak Project which are termed to be fate-changers for the entire region. Despite all these blessings, Balochistan has been the home of ethno-national conflict, extremism, and insurgency where sense of deprivations and serious grievances have taken deep root. Despite the direct and indirect rule of Centre in Balochistan since 1970s, (Khan, 2009) it could never address the differences and grievances of the province successfully. It has rather added fuel to the issues of Balochistan. Moreover, the nationalist parties of Balochistan blame the federal government for turning the province backward, illiterate and under the aegis of Sardars and unpopular political figures of Balochistan. (Fredric, 2013) As a result, nationalist movements have got more momentum and strength to attract more followers from grassroots. The nationalist political parties believe that the rigid political attitude of Centre converted some strong political Baloch figures into insurgents whose initial politics revolved around the 1973 constitution of Pakistan. (Akbar, 2002)

Meanwhile, Pashtuns nationalist forces are seen to have serious grievances with federal government as they fear of being linked with the new waves of extremism and terrorism. The formation of Pashtun Tahfuz Movement (PTM) in Khyber-Pakhtoonistan (KPK) and its links with Balochistan further widened the gulf between Centre and Pashtuns. Therefore, Pashtuns of Balochistan believe that there is a deliberate hand in denying Pashtun ethno-national politics specially in Balochistan.

In spite of political differences, both Baloch and Pashtuns nationalist political leaders have been found on same page for the politico-economic development of the province. Most importantly, they have maintained accommodating attitude towards the federal government to resolve the issues of Balochistan via political means. In addition to this, they demand provincial autonomy, a fearful share from National Financial Commission Award (NFC), rejection of further political engineering, end of military operation, and recovery of all missing persons in Balochistan. (Fani et al., 2011) Moreover, they further believe that Balochistan cannot afford to continue the political crisis with Centre since it would put negative impacts on the good governance of Balochistan.

Policy Recommendation

Since Balochistan's merger with Pakistan, the province has witnessed political turmoil, bloodshed social defragmentation, human rights violation, law and order situation and insurgency. In addition to this, poverty, illiteracy, backwardness, lack of attention and exploitation of natural resources have given birth to the sense of deprivation and alienation which have put direct negative impacts on the politics and governance of Balochistan. Moreover, the disappointing fact is that since 1970s, federal government has failed to resolve political issues of Balochistan, it rather created space for Sardars and tribal heads to entertain the political motives

of center.(Akhtar, 2007) Therefore, Balochistan failed to establish national political parties which could have a dominant say in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Contrary the fact, the norms of ethno-nationalism were exploited against one another to weak their political role in Balochistan.(Malhi, 2009)As a result, history has witnessed racist-based ethno-nationalism politics in Balochistan which has not only caused the division of ethnic groups of Balochistan, but has greatly added to the sufferings of the people in Balochistan.

Islamabad has to realize the fact that Balochistan has a history of traditional and ethno-nationalism politics which is based on socio-cultural norms and beliefs. In spite of hurting the political norms of ethno-nationalism and continuing political engineering in Balochistan, the central authority needs to maintain an accommodating attitude towards the province. In addition to this, the federal government needs to play its role to end poverty, backwardness and illiteracy in Balochistan. In addition to this, Centre government needs to assure the people of Balochistan in developing infrastructure, roads, railways and airports so that Balochistan gets connected with the rest of country politically, culturally and socially.

It has to be noted that Balochistan has experienced the division of politics of ethno-nationalism on many occasions by the successive regimes of Pakistan since it was the part of their political strategy to control Balochistan's politics via divide and rule policy.(Aslam, 2011) However, such policies always intensified the existing issues of Balochistan. Therefore, federal government needs to create a peaceful political environment and discourage political engineering in Balochistan so that the nationalist political leaders would get free and fair chance to represent their people in grassroots.

Apart from politics, the nationalist political leaders of Balochistan have raised serious reservations over the involvement of intelligence Agencies and law enforcing Agencies in backing death squads in Balochistan who have badly disturbed the peace of the province.(Baloch, 2011)It even remained pettier that these death squads were seen to be more powerful than the nationalist political leadership of Balochistan. However, Islamabad needs to identify the fact that until and unless the true representation of Balochistan is acknowledged, political stability and socio-economic development would remain a dream only.

Conclusion

Denial of true representation, divide and rule policy and continuity of political realignments have given birth to a political vacuum in Balochistan which has no doubt, been filled by pro-establishment Sardars and tribal leaders. It has however created a serious negative impact on the good governance and nationalist political structure of Balochistan since pro-establishment Sardars promoted their personal gain and did not resist the exploitation of natural wealth of Balochistan. One has

to understand the fact that the issues of Balochistan cannot be resolved only by addressing the socioeconomic grievances, it is a political issue which needs political negotiation and table-talk. The nationalist political leadership needs to be acknowledged and their respective electoral vote-banks are supposed to be honored. No doubt, the lack of proper attention and exploitation-based approach of federation have greatly hardened the stances of the nationalist political leadership, however, there is always space for realization and recognition of the fact that better late than never. The nationalist political leadership might have a serious trust deficit with Islamabad, however they may find political space for negotiation for the sake of Balochistan's politics, stability and peace.

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