

Original Article

Unraveling Balochistan Dilemma: The Role of Governance

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze why extremism in Balochistan has outlived and what are the reasons behind its renewed strength. In addition to that, this research will also try to ascertain how bad governance exacerbated the crisis in Balochistan. After depicting a brief sketch of Balochistan's terrain, the other fueling factors will also be discussed in detail. In the last section, while debating the influence of external factors on the growing discontent in Balochistan, a way forward will also be given. Whether short term policies alongside changes in governance model will curtail the impacts of extremism or the issue will persist in the foreseeable future?

Keywords: Bad Governance, Violent extremism, Radicalization, Terrorism, Coercion, Sectarian, ethnic and regional conflicts, Federalism, Reforms

1. INTRODUCTION

The quagmire of extremism that Balochistan is currently faced with has been lingering on for many centuries. The factors that have impeded the development in the province and played a role in the snowballing of the crisis, are of multifarious nature. Majorly, the problem of good governance in the province is being viewed as a catalyst. The issues like, feudalistic rule, corruption, refugee influx from neighboring countries, lack of a cohesive identity, dwindling literacy rates and worsening health crisis alongside amalgam of ethnicities in the province have provided breeding grounds for the propagation of these problems. The Pakistan government on the other hand, tried to tackle these governance issue on temporary basis and through coercive means. It was believed by a major chunk of policy makers that through the application of coercive means the Balochistan dilemma will die down.

However, they forget to consider the fact that the leading superpower of world, United states of America had killed Osama bin laden in May 2011, yet the Taliban captured the Afghanistan in 2020 and America was left with no other option but to withdraw its troops from the foreign territory. (Stewart. 2021). It is highlighted from the fact, if policy makers have invested their energies on tackling the issues related to bad governance, the province would have stabilized decades ago. Unfortunately, the government concentrated less on governance issues and always sought to take detours. For example, except in the capital city of Balochistan, Quetta, the other districts are left at the disposal of locals. The poverty rates in the rural areas of the province are nightmarish. Same is the case with literacy rate and health related issues. That lead us to another realization, why the problems in rural areas are more monstrous than in urban areas. In this research, the problem of bad governance and its effects on the masses of Balochistan would be discussed in great lengths and it would be established repeatedly that only an effective governance model in the province would be sustainable to fight the scourge of multifarious problems



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alongside extremism (Stewart. 2021).

Balochistan's Governance Predicament: Insights from Afghanistan's Experience

The linkage between the Bad governance and problems propelling in Balochistan can be best illustrated by the case study of Afghanistan. Back in 2001, when the 9/11 incident occurred, the NATO forces entered Afghanistan. After some fierce fighting with the Taliban, the peace was established in the country. The military footprint was much lesser in 2001 as it was in 2016. By 2004, three years into the intervention, most of Afghanistan was safer, freer, and more prosperous, with better services and opportunities than it had had in 30 years (Stewart. 2021). Peace was established; however, the governance issues were far worse. For instance, corruption was rampant, the judicial system worked only for those who could afford bribes, the production of opium grown manifolds and the warlords profited at the expense of public. Among these issues, the production of opium was of serious concern for the westerners. It was viewed as the most serious threat after Taliban's attacks. So, serious efforts were taken to control the production of opium and its smuggling.

The policy makers viewed the light military footprint in Afghanistan as the main reason of governance incapability. Therefore, it was agreed by the NATO allies and American forces that the military footprint should be increased. By 2006 the number of forces increased from 9,000 to 33,000. Parallel with that, the Taliban attacks increased fivefold, and the British casualties increased tenfold. It was a clarion call for the policy makers that heavy military footprint has nothing to do with correcting governance issues. But despite the fact, in 2009, U.S. General Stanley McChrystal announced a new plan for 130,000 U.S. and NATO soldiers, claiming he was "knee-deep in the decisive year." (Dobbins. 2007). The troop surge did no good at all. With five times as many U.S. soldiers dying per year, and after spending tens of billions of dollars, the Americans alongside NATO allies, were caught between a rock and a hard place. In the subsequent years, the footprint remained quite heavy in Afghanistan until the withdrawal announced. If one has to draw a conclusive point from these statistics, he will surely highlight that the failed invasion of America is majorly contingent upon the fact that in war-prone areas like Afghanistan, the heavy footprint will not bring prosperity. The latter can only be established if the problems of bad governance be handled in a judicious manner.

Now coming towards the crisis in Balochistan, the situation in the province resembles with the situation of Afghanistan. Since last two decades, the government of Pakistan in general, and the administration of Balochistan in particular, have tried to resolve the issues in the province on temporary basis. In the last decade, however, factors like inflation, poverty and rampant corruption couple with decay in civil society, have highlighted the fact that the crisis in Balochistan requires some prudent measures. In earlier times, the media outlets were out of the scope of ordinary masses. Now that the prevalence of media, specifically, Facebook and twitter, have been on an easy excess to the masses of the province, the problems being shared at the websites are making the crisis in the province more imminent.

People in Balochistan now have a specific voice; twitter, Telegram and to some extent Facebook, provide a safe avenue to social welfare organizations and others to speak volumes about the extent of problems they are facing. (Rana. 2019). Even to some extent, civil society now has a tacit sympathy towards the growing inabilities of policy makers to devise better strategies. In other words, this transformation of the crisis in the province has occurred because earlier people were more dependent for their decisions on Nawabs and Sardars of specific tribes. But now, the trend has transformed. People in Balochistan are more cognizant of their rights. All these years, the state tried to downplay this crisis in the province, but it failed to do so, because the province is torn apart by the bad governance. Similar to Afghanistan, the Balochistan was much safer and prosperous back in the start of 21st century. But once the state started to flex its muscle, the situation started to getting worse. Currently, the province lacks at almost all fronts. The International indexes are proof of the fact that the bad governance has turned the crisis into a monstrous one. In the paragraph below, it will be discussed why Balochistan among other provinces is the recipe for disaster.

Balochistan: a crisis-prone province?

Balochistan for the last five decades has been engrappled with various problems. The sectarian and ethnic strife, alongside social decay and economic downturn have created ripples throughout its history. But question arises why Balochistan and not any other province of Pakistan is facing such issues.

1. The disturbing neighborhood.

Balochistan shares a 1604 km long border with Afghanistan and 909km border with Iran. The former has been remained a chaotic one for its entire history. Earlier the Taliban ruled the territory, later the American forces and NATO allied occupied the area and now once again the Taliban are governing the Afghan land. (AHKACAM. 2022). The illegal trade of weapons from Afghanistan has been an easy option for miscreants. The latter have always allegedly found safe access in the former territory due to degradable border security. Similar is the case with Iran. The Pakistani state officials have lamented for so many times that Iran is providing safe heavens to the terrorists. However, the latter deny such accusations and even allege that Pakistan security at the border is abysmally disappointing. Cutting to the chase, the terrorists have been greatly benefitted from Afghanistan's, Pakistan's, and Iran's chaotic state-border affairs. Additionally, the province lies in a mountainous terrain and such areas always favor miscreants.

2. The feudal rule

Almost the entire province is being governed by feudal lords at a local level. Every tribe has a specific representation in Balochistan and to maintain that supremacy, sardars and Nawabs are chosen. These two, despite the fact that have a greater responsibility of their tribe on their shoulders, always act in their own family interests. Every Nawab and Sardar is inclined to grab a more powerful position in the provincial parliament so that no ordinary member of his tribe, or his nemesis from another tribe, dare to act against him. Additionally, to keep their grip stronger over their tribesmen, they wittingly opt to keep the subsequent masses illiterate and impoverish. In the union councils and municipals of districts they have a greater say and therefore, the development is also at the disposal of these lords. Not to mention any names, the wide area districts like Kalat, Surab, Noshki and Awaran do not have a single public University. The literacy rates are also much lower in these districts. No doubt, these districts alongside some others provide a much higher concentration of people to sabotage the law-and-order situation in the province. The incompetency of local government in almost every district of Balochistan is becoming a recipe for disaster. To say that the problem of good governance in Balochistan is fueling the crisis would not be wrong in any sense.

3. Rampant Corruption

In 2017, in a raid at the house of Mustaq Raisani, former finance secretary, the National accountability bureau Balochistan recovered Rs630 million in cash, gold ornaments and bonds. According to a report (Shahid. 2021), the culprit was sentenced for 10 years and his ally Mir Khalid Langove for 26 months in mega corruption case. According to the same report, Mushtaq Raisani, in collusion with Khalid Langove, embezzled Rs2.25 billion by illegally releasing Rs2.34bn to municipal committees of Khaliqabad and Mach. (Shahid. 2021). This is just one example of how corruption is rooted in Balochistan. Not only the bureaucracy is acting in a corrupt manner, but the politicians and the lower staff in all departments are also not immune to this scourge. The government jobs except those which are recruited by Balochistan public service commission, are given to those people who could afford bribes. Even in extreme situations, the officers and politicians act not in a just manner. The recent floods in the province are just an example of how the destitute masses were once again deprived from the provision of basic necessities. Although the international governmental organizations tried their best to facilitate the masses at grass root levels. But unfortunately, the funds and other provisions hardly reached the needy persons.

The link of corruption is directly connected with all the problems that the masses in the province are facing. The more a society is corrupt the more it become prone to violence. (Stewart. 2021). According to same citation, "although corruption was linked to bad governance in Afghanistan but the NATO allies" could not see this in a border perspective. As it is commonly perceived, when "the wedge between the person and the society widens, the former resort to commit crime". (Siegel. 2011).

4. Lack of a cohesive Identity in Balochistan

Identity plays a crucial role in nation-building as it helps to create a sense of belonging and commonality among the citizens of a nation. The identity of a nation is shaped by various factors such as history, culture, religion, language, geography, and political ideology. One of the primary functions of identity in nation-building is to unify diverse groups of people into a single cohesive entity. By promoting a shared sense of identity, a nation can overcome the differences that might otherwise divide its citizens. This is particularly even more important in multiethnic and multicultural societies, where there is a risk of social fragmentation and conflict.

Furthermore, a strong sense of national identity can promote social cohesion and reduce social tensions. When people feel a sense of commonality with others in their society, they are more likely to work together towards common goals and to respect the rights and beliefs of others. This can help to build a more harmonious and peaceful society. Several studies have highlighted the importance of identity in nation-building. For example, the construction of national identity is an essential element in the creation of modern nation-states. (Brubaker. 1996). Similarly, nations are "imagined communities" that are held together by shared cultural and historical narratives. (Anderson. 1991).

Now coming towards identity crisis in Balochistan, the province, which is ethnically diverse and culturally enriched, is lacking a cohesive identity. The Baloch people, who are the majority ethnic group in Balochistan, have long-standing grievances related to political, economic, and cultural marginalization by the central government of Pakistan. These grievances have led to a sense of alienation and a growing demand for greater autonomy. The province is rich in natural resources, including gas, oil, and minerals, yet the local population has not benefited from their exploitation. This has led to feelings of economic deprivation and marginalization. Additionally, the Baloch people feel that their cultural identity is being threatened by the other dominant cultures of Pakistan.

The identity crisis in Balochistan has resulted in a long-standing tussle between some Baloch-fundamentalists and the state. This in return has led to a cycle of violence, with retaliatory attacks by both sides resulting in civilian casualties, which in the first place started with the dearth of a cohesive identity in the social and political circles of Balochistan. Several studies and reports have highlighted the identity crisis in Balochistan. For example, the economic, political, and cultural grievances of the Baloch people call for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. (ICG. 2014). Similarly, addressing the identity crisis would be helpful in resolving the conflict in the province. (Ali. 2016)

5. Dwindling Literacy rate In Balochistan: how illiteracy in provinces like Balochistan are recipe for disaster.

Illiteracy or lack of education has been identified as key factors contributing to the prevalence of insurgency and conflict in many countries. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP. 2020), there is a strong correlation between education and conflict, with countries having low levels of education more likely to experience conflict and political instability. The report notes that a lack of education not only limits economic opportunities but also hampers the ability of individuals to participate in political processes and voice their grievances peacefully.

In many conflict-affected regions of the world, illiteracy and lack of access to education are prevalent. For example, in Afghanistan, where the Taliban insurgency has been ongoing for over two decades, illiteracy rates among the population are estimated to be around 60%, with even higher rates among women (Al Jazeera. 2021). The lack of education and economic opportunities has contributed to the recruitment of young men into extremist groups, perpetuating the cycle of violence in the country. Similarly, in Nigeria, where the Boko Haram insurgency has caused widespread destruction and displacement, illiteracy rates are also high, particularly among women and girls. According to the World Bank, over 40% of the population aged 15 and above in Nigeria are illiterate, with much higher rates in conflict-affected regions in the northeast of the country (World Bank. 2021). The lack of education and economic opportunities has contributed to the recruitment of young people into extremist groups, who are promised money and other incentives.

In Balochistan's case, Illiteracy has been a longstanding problem, which has not only contributed to the lack of economic opportunities but also exacerbated the sense of deprivation and marginalization among the Baloch people. Similarly, Balochistan has the lowest literacy rate among all other provinces of Pakistan, with only 46% of the population being able to read and write. The report also notes that the primary net enrolment rate in Balochistan is the lowest in Pakistan, with only 48% of children enrolled in primary schools. Several studies have highlighted the link between illiteracy and violence in Balochistan. Among others, the poverty and illiteracy have contributed to the alienation of the Baloch people from the central government, leading to their demand for greater autonomy or even (ICG. 2014). The report further states that the lack of education and basic literacy skills has resulted in limited economic opportunities, which has further fueled their sense of deprivation and marginalization.

The lack of education and skill-training has resulted in limited job opportunities for the Baloch people, particularly in the private sector. The study notes that the government has focused primarily on the development of infrastructure projects in Balochistan, rather than investing in human capital, including education and skill-training. The report argues that investing in education and skill-training is crucial for

promoting economic development and reducing the sense of marginalization among the Baloch people. Moreover, on the other side, the lack of education has made it easier for the extremist groups to recruit individuals for their cause. The link between illiteracy and terrorism in Balochistan recommends investing in education and skill-training to counter extremism and promote social cohesion. (UNDP. 2017).

6. Health Crisis in Balochistan: how health related issues are adding fuel to the fire.

Without any doubt, health-related issues are ubiquitous in Balochistan. For decades researchers and health experts have highlighted the inadequate health infrastructure, lack of basic amenities and insufficient investment in the health sector by the government.

“Balochistan has one of the weakest health infrastructures in Pakistan, with a shortage of healthcare facilities, medical personnel, and equipment”. (Dawn. 2021). It is also stated that the province has the “highest maternal and infant mortality rates” in the country, and the “lowest vaccination coverage”, which has contributed to the spread of various diseases. The paper also highlights the fact that the government's spending on healthcare is significantly lower in Balochistan compared to other provinces, leading to a shortage of essential medicines and equipment. In addition, the lack of basic amenities such as clean drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities has further exacerbated the health situation in Balochistan. In the province, almost “70% of the population in the province has no access to safe drinking water”, (ICG. 2007). leading to the spread of waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, typhoid, and hepatitis.

The government's policies and strategies towards the health sector have also been criticized for being inadequate and poorly implemented. A study by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in 2020 notes that the “government's efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 in Balochistan have been inadequate”, with a shortage of testing facilities, lack of personal protective equipment, and insufficient support for healthcare workers. So, it is evident from all these facts that health issues in Balochistan are innumerable and there is no better sight in the concerned sector in foreseeable future. But this research alongside highlighting health issues in Balochistan will also ascertain how it is connected with the prevailing insurgency in the province.

For a better understanding, it is pertinent that a connection must be made between health generated problems and surge in insurgency. In a global perspective, insurgent groups have exploited health crises to gain support from the local population and advance their political agendas. One example is the ongoing conflict in Syria, where the spread of disease and lack of access to healthcare have been used as a tool of war by the government and rebel groups. The Syrian government has been accused of using chemical weapons against civilians, including the use of chlorine gas, which has caused respiratory problems and other health issues. Rebel groups have also targeted healthcare facilities, leading to a shortage of medical supplies and personnel.

In Yemen, the ongoing conflict has led to a devastating health crisis, with millions of people at risk of starvation and disease. Rebel groups, including the Houthis, have used access to food and medical supplies as a tool of war, withholding aid from areas under government control and using it to gain support from the local population. The conflict has also led to the collapse of the healthcare system, leaving millions without access to basic medical care. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has been linked to the spread of diseases, including polio. (Abimbola. 2016) The group has targeted vaccination campaigns, leading to a resurgence of the disease in parts of the country. In addition, the group has targeted healthcare facilities and personnel, leading to a shortage of medical supplies and personnel.

In other words, extremism or violence has a direct relation with health crisis in that area. In Balochistan's case, the fact also stands correct. There is a clear link between the health crisis and growing terrorism in the province. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP. 2022). Balochistan has one of the weakest health infrastructures in the country, with limited access to basic health services, including vaccinations and medical equipment. The lack of adequate health facilities has exacerbated the impact of various diseases, including COVID-19, in the province. As a result, the extremist groups in Balochistan have exploited the health crisis to gain support from the locals, who have grown increasingly dissatisfied with the government's handling of the pandemic. In addition, the economic slowdown and job losses caused by the pandemic have added to the already existing grievances of the people of Balochistan, leading to a surge in extremist activities in the province.

2. RECOMMENDATION

How good governance in a conflict prone region can curtail extremism.

The case study of Bosnia here would prove how lighter military footprint alongside an effective governance model curtails extremism in an area. In Bosnia, not only it ended the war and preserved the peace for decades, but it also accomplished such feats that were earlier seen as impossible. The protection of civilians, the demobilization of vicious militias, the safe return of refugees to ethnically cleansed areas, and the imprisonment of war criminals. Today, the Bosnian state remains fragile, ethnically divided, and corrupt—but also peaceful. “Heavy” peace-enforcement operations required 13 soldiers for every 1,000 inhabitants and “light” peacekeeping operations required two. (Dobbins. 2007).

In Balochistan’s case researchers and experts have emphasized the importance of good governance and inclusive policies in curtailing extremism and promoting peace and stability in the country.

It is perceived that “good governance is essential for countering the drivers of insurgency in Pakistan”. (IRADA. 2020). The report highlights the importance of ensuring transparency, accountability, and participation of the local population in decision-making processes. The report suggests that inclusive policies that address the underlying social, economic, and political grievances of the people can help to reduce support for insurgent groups. Foreign researchers have also emphasized the importance of good governance in addressing insurgency in Pakistan. It is suggested that good governance can help to address the root causes of conflict in Pakistan, such as inequality, corruption, and marginalization. (UNOCHA. 2019). The report highlights the importance of strengthening institutions, ensuring accountability, and promoting the rule of law in promoting peace and stability.

In addition, researchers have emphasized the importance of engaging in dialogue with extremist ideologues to find peaceful solutions to the conflict. The dialogue and negotiations can help to reduce violence and promote peace in conflict-affected areas of Pakistan. Parallel with that inclusive peace processes that involve all stakeholders, including women and marginalized groups, can help to address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is evident that bad governance has played a significant role in exacerbating the extremism in Balochistan. The government’s failure to address the underlying social, economic and political grievances of Baloch people has created a fertile ground for the growth of extremist groups. The lack of transparency, accountability and participation in decision-making processes has eroded the trust of the people in the government and has left them feeling marginalized and excluded. The neglect of the basic services such as healthcare and education has further deepened the sense of injustice and inequality among the Baloch population. The government’s heavy-handed approach to dealing with the problems of the province has also resulted in human right’s violation. To effectively address the insurgency in Balochistan, the government needs to prioritize good governance, including transparency, accountability and participation in decision-making process. It is crucial that the government addresses the underlying social, economic and political grievances of Baloch people and promote inclusive policies that ensures the equal participation and representation of all communities. Failure to address these governance issues will only perpetuate the cycle of violence and instability in the region.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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