

## **Regional political Parties& democracy: a case study of Balochistan**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is intended to study the regional political parties of Balochistan. Regional political parties play a prominent role in the politics of democratic countries. These provide services to the people at the doorsteps. Regional political parties in Balochistan play a great role in the politics of the region. Principal among them is National Party, Balochistan National Party (M), Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Awami National Party, Balochistan National Party (A), Balochistan National Movement, and Jamhoori Watan Party. All the above parties were analyzed to see whether they follow the basic democratic processes. Among them, National Party was found to be the most democratic party. PkMAP has been successful to a large extent by getting seats in Balochistan Assembly, but in terms of intraparty democracy party leadership remained the same throughout the years and party constitution is found to be not up to the mark. All other parties though play a prominent role but were found to be least democratic. These parties have left a space for the parties like PMLN, PMLQ, and PPP etc which the latter have filled. Regional parties in Balochistan have to strive hard to consolidate their position.*

**Key Words:** Balochistan, Regional parties, democracy, National Party, Jamhoori Watan Party, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party.

## **Introduction**

Political parties have been an integral part of any kind of democratic system. Political systems cannot flourish without sound and stable political parties. Even in authoritarian states, political parties can be found. However, mere their presence does not mean that affairs of the state are going smoothly, unless and until the tasks they have been assigned are executed in a democratic way and public is

satisfied. Regional political parties act as a check on the mainstream parties, play a role of catalyst and keep them from centralizing the powers. In this way, they flourish the democratic mindset and strengthen the system.

Baluchistan is one of the four provinces of Pakistan, which got the status of full-fledged province in 1970. The province lies on the South-West of Pakistan. It has an area almost half of the whole mass of the country and a population only 3.6% of the total population, which is thinly scattered (Veena, 2015). It is believed that people started living on the bank of river Bolan as back as 7000 BCE (Kenoyer, 1998). Though this part of land remained a passageway for the conquerors they could not consolidate their rule here until Mughals came here in the fifteenth century. Still, they were able only to keep this land partially under their rule and governors of this region were almost autonomous. Kalat was a confederacy under Khanate, and its political structure was mostly tribal where sardars were directly under the control of Khan. Brits came here as a result of first Anglo-Afghan war in 1839. Initially, they were wary of its barren and far-flung land but soon they got cognizant of its strategic location and started ruling this part of Sub-Continent either directly e.g. British Baluchistan, or indirectly, where a British agent was appointed to the Khan of Kalat.

Regional political parties' and their role in the democratic Balochistan has been studied in this paper. The paper encompasses only those parties which have a deep impact on the politics of Balochistan. So, mainstream parties which came into being outside of Balochistan are not included in this paper, although they put deep imprints on the minds of people of this region. That is why I have put PMLN, PMLQ, PPP, and JUI (F) outside the ambit of this paper. Regional parties act as pressure groups and so helps keep the

system stable. The paper studies their role in the political and democratic development of this region. The first section of this paper is regarding the theoretical framework, and then we will study the evolution of these parties and study them one by one under their names. After that, we will study the circumstances that caused them to emerge. In the end, we discuss their role for democracy and will see that how much these parties are democratic internally, and finally, the conclusion is put at the end of this paper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Humans have a natural tendency of living together. They influence each other's lives socially, economically and politically. A political party is an organized body of people striving together to get their goals within the political system. The representative of these parties establishes a link between the governors and the governed. So demands of the people are easily carried to the policymakers. These parties also create awareness in their members and supporters. Regional parties do it for the people of that specific region. To define regional political parties Hlousek and Lubomir Kopecek put a comprehensive definition of regional and ethnic parties. According to them, these are the parties which "focus on defending the interests of a certain region or ethnicity or both"(Kopecek, 2010). These parties have their own areas of influence and so they work for the interests of that particular region or a particular ethnicity. In Stramiska view the regional parties can be defined as "formation of ideology program and organizational identity as well as the source of political standing and electoral mobilization used by them are of regional character" (Strmiska, 2003). These parties get the support of local people and strive to get their issues by putting pressure on the central government. Sometimes they work with central mainstream parties to get more benefits for their regions. Local politicians believe that "future belongs to provincial parties which championed the hopes and aspirations of the people of their respective regions" (Patnaik).

### **Evolution of these parties**

It was the 1920s when a political party was formed by the efforts of Mir Yusaf Ali Magsi and Abdul Aziz Kurd which was called Anjuma-i-Ettihad-i-Balochan wa Baluchistan (Jahan Zeb Khan, 2017). This party brought Baloch and Pashtun tribes' closer who struggled together for

constitutional reforms for the people of this land. Soon the party split into two, Anjuman e Watan, which was a Pashtun dominated party, and the Kalat State National Party, which was a pure Baloch party under the Khan of Kalat. Anjuman e Watan was led by Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai (Jahan Zeb Khan, 2017). Internal power struggle and ethnic rivalry were some of the principal hurdles in getting reforms. It was believed that Brits were successful to a large extent by dividing the people into ethnic lines. Baluch leadership under Qazi Esa realized that they would not get their rights until they join a major party. Qazi Esa invited Mohammad Ali Jinnah, one of the Muslims leading leaders, to Baluchistan and in this way All India Muslim League entered Baluchistan in 1938 (Jahan Zeb Khan, 2017). The same general state of affairs continued until 1947.

When Pakistan came into being in 1947 All India Muslim League was converted into Pakistan Muslim League. All the four provinces had their provincial Muslim Leagues.

### **1.3.1 National Party**

The National party is a socialist centre-left regional political party in Balochistan. The party is currently lead by Mir Hasil Bizenjo. It was founded in October 2003 by joint efforts of Abdul Haye Baloch, Abdul Malik Baloch, and Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo. Mir Hasil Bizenjo's Balochistan National Democratic Party and Abdul Haye Baloch's Balochistan National Movement was merged to form NP. Abdul Haye Baloch was its first chairman. The party's headquarters are in Quetta. Under the elections of 2013 NP secured eight seats in Balochistan Assembly and made a coalition government with PMLN. Dr Abdul Malik Baloch became the Chief Minister. It also got two seats in the National Assembly (Page). In the local bodies poll held in 2013 NP topped the list by securing 250 seats, and left behind PMLN, PkMAP, JUI (F), parties having a stronghold there (News, 2013). Currently, it has eleven seats in Balochistan assembly. Election conducted in 2008 was boycotted by the party as a reaction to the military operation in the province. The party conducted its 4th Congress on 8-10 November 2014 under Abdullah Dayo as the Chief Election Commissioner, as a result of that Mir Hasil Khan, Bizenjo was elected its president whereas Dr Yasin Baloch and Dr Hassan Nasir as Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General

respectively. Due to regular and competitive party elections, change in party leadership the party got second to Jamaat I Islami (PILDAT, 2017).

### **1.3.2 National Awami Party**

It is one of the oldest parties in Pakistan which came into being on 25 July 1957 due to the efforts of the Maulana Bashani which was later joined by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Aziz, 1976). Bashani became its head. Samad Achakzai and Prince Abdul Karim were also its part (Mahmood, 2000). Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was a staunch believer in non-violence. He brought about the Red Shirts movement which was later merged into NAP along with some left to centre politicians from Baluchistan, Sind, Punjab and East Pakistan. One of the demands was autonomy to federating units, which was appreciated by the people of Balochistan. But the central leadership was wary of such reforms to the political system. Due to differences the party detached itself under Wali Khan, the son of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and became NAP (Wali). Under him, the party got eight seats in the election of 1970 in Balochistan Assembly and made a coalition government with JUI (Mahmood, 2000). He himself became the opposition leader in the National Assembly. It has remained in coalition governments in NWFP and Baluchistan. The party changed its name to Awami National Party and aligned itself with a conservative party of PML (JI) in the 1988 election. In the February 1973 government of Atta Ullah Mengal's NAP was removed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It sparked a reaction in the regional people (Mirza, 2013). Currently, Asghar Khan Achakzai is the provincial president of ANP. But the party is severe doldrums, as the platform she was provided is not maintained and with each passing day the party is losing its ground in Balochistan.

### **1.3.3 Balochistan National Party (Mengal)**

Baluchistan National Party was formed in 1996 by Sardar Atta Ullah Mengal. He has remained the Chief Minister of Baluchistan in the 1972-73 coalition government of NAP and JUI (Mahmood A. , 2014). But his government did not last long due to the reason that ZA Bhutto dismissed his government. He, along with some other prominent Baloch leadership like Ghuas Bakhsh Bizenjo, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, and Gul Khan Nasir, was thrown into jail on mere hearsay that they were destabilizing Pakistan. BNP secured three national assembly seats and ten provincial assembly seats

in the election of 1997 and formed a coalition government in Balochistan with Akhtar Mengal, the son of Sardar Atta Ullah Mengal, as the Chief Minister. Due to differences with the centre, his government could not persist for long. Due to the coup of Pervez Musharraf BNP protested and did not take part in the election of 2002. Some of its party members contested the election as independent candidates and won. When military operation started in Balochistan and Akbar Bugti was killed, all their members resigned from their seats. Akhtar Mengal was arrested by Pervez Musharraf led government in the end of 2006 along with some senior party leadership (Baloch, 2008). He remained in prison for one and half years where he was ill-treated. Council Session was held on 25-28 June 2009 which was presided by Akhtar Mengal. Party leadership like Akhtar Mengal as president, Jahanzeb Jamaleni as senior vice president, Sajid Tareen as vice president was selected in that session. Today's central cabinet of BNP includes Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal as its president, Dr Jehanzeb Jamalini as its Secretary General; Senior Vice President is Malak Abdul Wali Kakar, Agha Musa Jan Bach is its Vice President, Deputy Secretary-General is Laal Jan Baloch, Joint Secretary is Nazir Ahmed Baloch, Agha Hassan Baloch is Central secretary Information, and Malak Nasir Ahmed Shahwani is its Central Finance Secretary (BNP official page). In the current set up BNP has two MPAs, one MNA, and one Senator. In local bodies elections held in late 2013, BNP got 92 seats (News, 2013).

#### **1.3.4 Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party**

A Pashtun nationalist party with its leaning towards the left and is led by Mehmood Khan Achakzai. The party emerged from the defunct NAP under Abdul Samad Achakzai Shaheed. He had differences with the central government due to the issues of the violation of rights of the Baloch people (Shah, 2013). At the time when this party was established its name was Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, under the banner of which Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai became an MPA in Balochistan Assembly. In 1986 the party got merged with Mazdoor Kissan Party and got the name Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Ittihad but was renamed as Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party in 1989. In the elections of 1988 and 1990, the party got two and three MPAs to the Balochistan Assembly respectively. In the elections of 1993 PKMAP worked even well and got elected four MPAs and three MNAs. It was by far a

welcoming note for the party members. When elections were held in 1997 party did not work well and obtained two seats in the Balochistan Assembly and one seat in the National Assembly for Mehmood Khan Achakzai. When elections were held under General Musharraf in 2002, PkMAP got four seats in Balochistan Assembly and one NA seat. Elections of 2008 were boycotted altogether. Today it has fourteen members in Balochistan Assembly, three in National Assembly and three members in the Upper House. PkMAP also got 196 seats in the LG elections held in 2013 and stood third (News, 2013). So we can see the party grew with each passing day which is an indication that the people are happy with its policies. It has clear stance over home and foreign policy of the country and believes in the provincial autonomy. However, if we see towards the intra-party democracy in PkMAP, we can hardly find some basic democratic processes. Party leadership is the same which revolves around one family. In appearance, party constitution is that much democratic. Regular and competitive elections can nowhere be seen. Party conventions which take place in some parties regularly could not hold in PkMAP. Above all-party decision making revolves around the central leadership only. Still, the party is growing constantly which is a good sign. It means that people are satisfied with this party.

### **1.3.5 Balochistan National Party (Awami)**

It is a regional political party in Balochistan which came into being in 1997. The party was formed when Israr Ullah Zehri had a tussle over rigging over party election with Akhtar Mengal so the differences led to a faction whom they called Balochistan National Party (Awami). The opposite camp said Akhtar Mengal become party chief due to fraudulent elections. Israr Ullah Zehri is its president. Currently, he is a senator in the upper house. In the election of 2008, BNP (A) secured two National Assembly seats and two seats in Balochistan assembly. It was taken as its good performances so far. Similarly, BNP (A) got 62 seats from Panjgor in the local bodies elections. During the presidential election BNP (A) boycotted that election by declaring it against the democratic norms (Editorial, 2013). After disintegration, this party further narrowed its base which has just a single member in Balochistan assembly now. Currently, Mir Israr Ullah Zehri is its president, Syed Ehsan Shah is its senior vice president, and its secretary general is Mir Asad Ullah Baloch. The party's approach towards the country's problems in terms of

democracy is commendable but when we look towards the intraparty democracy, the party seems a little weak on those lines. Though the party has taken some bold steps against corruption in the province and across the country party's constitution is not providing everything one can declare it to be democratically sound.

### **1.3.6 Jamhoori Watan Party**

JWP was founded by Shaheed Nawab Akbar Bugti, a former governor of Balochistan, in 1990. In the election of 2002 under Pervez Musharraf, JWP secured two National Assembly seats and two seats in provincial assembly (Mahmood A. , 2014). After the assassination of Nawab Akber Bugti Shaheed his son Talal Bugti became its chairman. However, after his death party got divided into two factions, one is called Baloch Republican Party led by Brahmday Bugti whereas the second is under Aali Bugti. Currently, Shahzain Bugti is leading JWP. Gohram Bugti is provincial president; Syed Salih Agha is Vice senior President whereas Mir Naseeb Ullah Shahwani is its General Secretary. In terms of intra-party democracy, JWP has the same leadership so from that angle we find no diversity. I have not found anything on their website regarding intra-party elections. Dynastic leadership is prevalent and is encouraged. JWP has boycotted many elections which proved futile for its existence and the party got narrowed further. One thing that is of equal importance is that party broke away many times into factions. That also discouraged its supporters. The party has to struggle hard if she has to make its way towards a successful party.

### **1.3.7 Balochistan National Movement**

Presently BNM is led by Khalil Baloch. The party came into being after converting Baloch National Youth Movement into Baloch National Movement in 2004 under the leadership of Ghulam Ahmed Baloch. The former was an organization of educated youth from Balochistan which was established in 1987. Fida Ahmed was one of its leaders who was killed by the state agencies in 1988 (BNM official). Initially, the party leadership did not like to take part in parliamentary politics. Later Dr Abdul Malik Baloch and Dr Hai Baloch joined this party whereby they took part in politics and won many seats in the provincial assembly. G. M. Baloch was, unfortunately, assassinated in 2009. Party leadership then changed their stance and now they



sought provincial autonomy for their people. In 2004 Dr Malik along with his like-minded friends made National Party whereas Akhtar Mengal formed his own party (Sial, 2008). Khalil Baloch has condemned the use of force in QuaidI Azam University against the Baloch and Pashtun students. He regarded it an act which is against the democratic norms. BNM though trying to raise voice for the people of the region but could not prove itself as a democratic force. It was found that party was not organized on democratic lines. Party constitution does not follow democratic processes shown in the Political Parties Order 2002.

### **Causes of origin of these parties**

Muslim League failed to organize and reinvigorate its provincial branches and lost its unity within first three years (Waseem, 2007). Indian National Congress was far more united and organized. The haughtybehaviour of leaguers could not tolerate the opposition. Liaqat Ali Khan said Muslim League founded Pakistan and now it has the prerogative to govern. It was bad to say at that high time because the country needed a more pluralist system. However, Liaqat Ali Khan considered the party to rule the country single-handedly.

Delay in Constitution making provided a space for the democratic forces to think about some new platforms because the leading party was completely failed. Political leaders thought new political forces will produce some new alternate forces which will be of value in the long run. We saw a number of new parties came into being across the country.

Pakistan hasbeen a federation its provinces were in favour of powers to be transferred to them but bureaucracy from Punjab and Bengal was a hurdle in their way. The leadership of all the provinces, especially the small provinces demanded complete provincial autonomy. When the centre failed to give Balochistan its due rights especially, the status of an independent province first and then autonomy, many parties came into being on the political horizon.

Feudal lords or sardari system is one of thecauses of the creation of new political parties. In Balochistan, there were many political parties that came into being when the sardars thought their interests in danger. If we look at the whole country political parties are coming into being almost on daily basis, some new while some factions from the older parties. It's a dilemma

that we do not have a sound understanding to strengthen the institution of political parties rather they are producing more polarization among the masses.

### **1.5 Parties and Democracy**

Almost all political parties in Balochistan believe in democracy. Pakistan being a federal state and its constitution provides equal rights for the federating units. Constitutional provisions should be adopted in true letter and spirit. The National party got thesecond position in terms of intraparty democracy (PILDAT, 2017). The party has been noted to have conducted intraparty polls regularly, competitively and on proper time. Party constitution was upheld. The most distinguishing point noted in the third PILDAT report was aleadership change. It is something one could not see across the political parties of Pakistan. Party constitution is democratic to the full satisfaction of political scholars. Members from the lower strata were included in the policy formulation. Debates in the Central Committee were regularly held and opinion of dissidents was welcomed. It is a good gesture for the democracy to flourish. Party conventions were not held in whole 2016, which can be regarded a negative point on the part of NP. One promising point to democracy was when Dr Abdul Malik was nominated by the party as the new Chief Minister. He was a commoner and did not have any attachment to neither the sardars nor the tribal elders. It was widely appreciated and welcomed by the political scholars across the country.

BNP (M) as a populist, secular political party has struggled to get provincial autonomy for the sake of the people. Though they did not succeed entirely in their mission their role is appreciated. Party objective to get elect or nominate people to the central cabinet other than Baloch is considered a good gesture, as the party has gotten senior vice president Abdul Wali Kakar and finance secretary Ahmed Hashwani, Nawabzada Aurangzeb Jomezai, advocate Ehsanullah Sarangzai, Mohammad Ali Sarangzai(the last three from Ziarat) from Pashtun ethnicity. Party constitution is not having everything that democratic political parties should include. Similarly, BNP did not hold regular and competitive party elections. Party did notconvene its delegation regularly nor did party leadership changed like the NP, is considered its weaknesses in term of democratic norms. The party toleratesdissidents which is a good sign and decisions are taken by taking into confidence the party

influential and local leadership. PkMAP is one of the successful parties in terms of getting seats in Balochistan Assembly, National Assembly and Senate. The party popularity rose with every passing election. Today she has fourteen members in Balochistan Assembly. Thus she has consolidated her position in just 29 years, e.g. when she has only two seats in 1988 to now that when she holds 14 MPAs in Balochistan Assembly. Still, the party lacks the basic foundation of internal democracy in the party. ANP (formerly NAP) has lost the vigour and the party can just be found in some parts of KPK. It is partly due to the reason that its leadership remained the same throughout the years but also their concentration over the Baloch belt has been minimal in the near past. If this party has to strengthen their position she has to bring democracy to their party and concentrate on the politics in Balochistan as well. Other small parties like, BNP (A), BNM, JWP have to go a long way, not only to consolidate their position in masses but also to get their parties on democratic lines.

### **Conclusion**

Regional political parties seem failed in Balochistan except, PkMAP since mainstream political parties like PMLN, PMLQ, and PPP have made inroads into Balochistan. But to look into the larger picture people of Balochistan seems free to express their feelings, at least in elections, like the right to whom they want to vote and freedom of expression, which shows their maturity of mind. Still, regional parties have to work hard to consolidate themselves. National Awami Party has lost their position in Balochistan. Small parties like, BNM, BNP (A) and party like; BNP (M) could not fortify their position and have failed to a large extent. National Party is one exception which has brought democracy to their party and has been successful electorally, though to a little extent. JWP splitting into faction proved futile for her. The party hardly gets a seat in Balochistan Assembly. It is high time for the regional parties in Balochistan to strengthen their position otherwise people of the region will look to the central parties for their problems. In that case, the political system will get further centralized by the mainstream parties and a check, which the regional parties have on them, will vanish.

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