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CHALLENGES TO THE PARLIAMENT IN PAKISTAN AND THE RISE OF SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS

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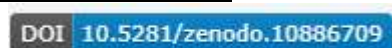
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify challenges to the Parliament of Pakistan and how it paves the way for the secessionist movements in Pakistan. This article relies on secondary sources of data, such as books, articles, newspapers, and national archives, to review and interpret the secondary data. While the study argues that the constitution-making process in Pakistan resembled a game of musical chairs, involving the people, the ruling elite, and federating units, unfortunately, the winners consistently turned out to be the military-backed nexus of bureaucracy and the landed elite. This paper observes that the power struggle escalated to the extent that it took a toll on the vitality of the nation. Various experiments were conducted in the composition of the parliament to appease the interests of specific provinces, ultimately shaping the current parliament as a reflection of historical dominance by institutions, particularly those favouring a single province. Therefore, this paper proposes that the lower house of the current parliament, the National Assembly, should adopt a "parity formula" aimed at addressing the demands of smaller provinces. In this way, Pakistan may return to its genuine form while historical imbalances could be removed, resulting in a more inclusive political landscape.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Diversity, Autonomy, Parity parliament, Powers of the Senate

Introduction

The word parliamentary has been defined by different political scientists. [Rozenberg, O. \(2020\)](#) refers to Saint Augustin, who defines "parliaments consist of public gatherings of adults to discuss and take binding decisions." In other words, the parliament is a writ of the public on the government or monarch as a sovereign authority working independently according to the direction of the people through their representatives who were very close to their ideology. "It is the arm responsible for making laws for the good governance of society" ([Saliu and Muhammad, 2009](#)).

In other words, the parliament is working under two phrases, "demand and action," where the demands of the sovereign are entertained for the action. The parliament has developed its importance in democratic countries, while in kingdoms, the demands of the parliamentary government and democracy are taking a serious mood. In its traditional definition and functioning, it is a supplying force to provide strength to the executive and, if needed, control the executive. The parliament has the power to elect the government, impeach the executive authority, and dissolve itself for a new life with a new spirit and a new face. But "the effectiveness of its performance of these functions depends on the strength of the sanction" ([Hanson, 2022](#)).

The question regarding the origin and relations between democracy and parliament is a little confusing, whether democracy invented or discovered the parliament or whether the parliament is the mother of democracy. The answer to this question is negative because the parliament existed in past centuries before democracy became the majority country system. The parliament also brought maturity to the rules and changed the petition and bill to complete constitutions, for instance, the Magna Carta and other bills of rights in England.

"It might be said that it is especially so in a constitution that has avoided seriously disruptive change for hundreds of years" ([Seaward, 2020](#)). In the period of Greek, Medieval, Modern, and Post-Modern, the Parliament concept holds a novel significance in the parlance of political science. The modern-day parliament is not the sole institution holding the veto of the people; it has developed other helping and parallel institutions in modern systems. It helped to enhance the formations, functions, and powers of the institutions to perform properly for the welfare of the people as a sovereign holding fundamental rights. Democracy and various executive institutions must function for the equality, peace, prosperity, and development of the people and bring happiness to all circles of the population. In modern times, the parliament has become a strong platform where the grievances of the wealthy and strong sections of the people are resolved equally. This further brought more powers to fight for the rights of the deprived people of the minority; this act of parliament brought trust in the state.

The concept of Parliament, or parliamentary democracy, has evolved gradually. It is an integral part of any political system in the world. Pakistan is no exception to that. The founder of Pakistan was a brilliant parliamentarian who worked all his political life for the supremacy of parliament. For him, the system of government, as he pertained, would be parliamentarian. "It's Parliament and Cabinet will both be finally responsible to the electorate and the people in general without any distinction of caste, creed, or sect, which will be the final deciding factor about the policy and program of the government that may be adopted from time to time." ([Khurshid, 1946](#)) At another meeting in Benkipur on December 19, 1912, he supported and explained "self-government suitable to India." He said, "It meant government of the people, by the people." His whole life revolves

around the struggle for constitutional rights. As he said, "I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be of a democratic type. After his demise, Pakistan went under the control of non-democratic elements, which turned the country into a hell for the people. The constitutional crisis derailed the system, and people were disowned. Further, the establishment of the country came into alliance with the bureaucracy and caused the elite of Pakistan to push the people back and ignore the novelty of democracy. The "Bogra formula" was part of the new setup to push further back the people of Bengal.

In heterogeneous societies, parliament is complex; it is composed to represent the political, geographical, and religious minorities. The parliament of Pakistan, which is composed of bicameral, is suitable to facilitate the population and the units at their level. As with other parliaments in the world, the Parliament of Pakistan has assumed a lot of importance in its constitutional and political history. It is composed of two houses: the National Assembly and the Senate. The upper house of the Senate is indirectly elected by the members of the parliament, while the lower house is popularly elected by the people. The seats of the upper house are equally divided among the four provinces, while the seats of the national assembly represent the population, therefore it is the most powerful chamber is the lower house, which has the upper hand in finance and other development projects, while the lower house is less powerful in various fields, which puts it under pressure and presents challenges.

There are several challenges to the parliamentary democracy, or parliament, in Pakistan. However, a lack of resolution has paved the way for secession movements in Pakistan. How to address these challenges requires a holistic regional approach. The Pakistani parliament has two major challenges in terms of composition and powers. "The

sortition could prove inclusive, give citizens greater control of the political agenda, and make their participation more deliberative and influential" (Gastil and Wright, 2018). The method of election, the distribution of seats, and the powers and functions of the lower house are challenges for the parliament in Pakistan.

Research Question

What are the challenges to the parliament of Pakistan, and how have these challenges shaped secessionist movements in Pakistan?

Problem statement:

There are several studies on the representation, senate, electoral politics, and lower house as a part of the parliamentary system, for instance: (Jalal, A. 2014; Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. 2001; Lee, F. E., & Oppenheimer, B. I. 1999; Bernauer, J., Giger, N., & Rosset, J. 2015; Johnston, R., Pattie, C., & Rossiter, D. 2015; and Russell, M. 2001). Consequently, research studies around the globe proved that the supreme and sole purpose of the parliament is to hear the voices of various circles of the people, and the parliaments formed around it are performing well for the development, social security, peace, and happiness of the people. The parliament is a pivotal platform to address the basic issues as well. While powers are more important than anything else, it is believed that the parliament should be sovereign and independent to "make a man a woman and a woman a man," and lastly, it should be independent to function in its given mandate and tenure. Hence, this article explores the challenges facing the Parliament of Pakistan and attempts to decipher how secessionist movements are shaping Pakistan's federal structure.

Research Objective

To find out the challenges pushing and shaping secessionist movements in Pakistan.

Research Methodology:

This article is based on qualitative research, which relies on secondary sources of

data. For instance, books, articles, newspapers, and national archives. Since this study is related to Pakistan's parliament and constitutional development, it gives a fair chance to understand through books and articles the workings of Pakistan's parliament and identifies various challenges throughout the history of Pakistan. It is easy to interpret secondary data while relying on secondary sources. The researcher believes that sources like national archives could be considered the primary sources of data. It can provide the researcher with various findings and observations that are necessary for the interpretation of the analysis. Based on secondary sources of data, this paper looks into the challenges faced by the Parliament of Pakistan and the main causes behind the secessionist movements in Pakistan.

Literature Review:

In his research, [Kukreja \(2020\)](#) explores the dilemma of Pakistan and informs about reaching a viable solution out of the linguistic and ethnic fault lines. What haunts Pakistan is ethnic militancy and the desire for autonomy, as reflected in the aspirations of different political parties. His paper very delicately and succinctly identifies the diverse nature of ethnicity, and a crisis of legitimacy ensued. Whatever the government in Pakistan, the state has posed a challenge for those who have desired or demanded autonomy. The author suggests that the state needs to adopt an accommodative nature to resolve ethnic dilemmas in the country.

Besly & Goldsmith have discussed the sovereignty of the parliament, discussing supremacy while deciding the powers in a democracy. He thought that in a monarchical system, the supremacy of the parliament was still challenged.

[Bulmer \(2020\)](#), having discussed the composition of the Westminster system in such a manner that the members are elected, a detailed explanation is given of the terms, qualifications, and disqualifications. According

to him, the parliament "makes and breaks governments. It examines the parliamentary duty to determine who will have the authority to make decisions or conditions on policy making.

In his book *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies of* [Greene \(2014\)](#), he discusses the emergence of the House of Commons of England and how powers were delegated to it from a bunch of other institutes in the quest for power and its supremacy. While discussing the houses of the royal colonies of the south, he debated in detail both the upper house, the "House of Lords," and the House of Commons, which later emerged as the true house of the people. In part five of his book, he meaningfully debated the revenue, public works and services, and military affairs of the colonies, comparing them with the parliament of England.

Results and discussion

In the following discussion, we discuss how the composition of the Pakistani parliament has been marked by imbalance and issues that have denied due rights and autonomy to provinces, undermining their role as equal stakeholders. The initial nine years, spanning from 1947 to 1956, witnessed chaos as the dominance of Punjab over the Bengali majority in federal authorities, institutions, and Parliament created a tumultuous environment. The deliberate ineffectiveness of the first constituent assembly exacerbated rivalries, challenging the nationhood of the state.

As we know, the first constitution attempted to address the Bengali majority by implementing a "parity" system, dividing parliamentary seats equally between East and West Pakistan. However, this arrangement suppressed the ethnic minority provinces of Sindh, Baluchistan, and NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) through the "One Unit Scheme," leading to frequent changes in prime ministers and a perception of political parties

and leaders as "weak and corrupt." Exploiting the flawed system, the military imposed Martial Law, with Iskandar Mirza abrogating the constitution, citing it as "unworkable" and filled with "dangerous compromises" (Wolf-Phillips, 1979).

The first Martial Law of Mirza-Ayub sought new allies in the landed elite to counter potential movements for restoring democracy. However, this left the Bengalis isolated, leading to a situation where the military rulers took control of the people's power, ignoring other provinces on the "West Side" as stakeholders in federal affairs.

The second constitution maintained the same imbalances regarding autonomy and provincial rights but focused on manipulating elections to facilitate military dictators' rise to power through "engineering the elections." Ayub Khan's "basic democracies" system failed, leading to increased anarchy, rebellion in Bengal and Baluchistan, and conflicts with other provinces, weakening both the dictators and the federation. As aptly noted by M. Mushtaq (2009), Pakistan became the first post-colonial state to experience a successful secessionist movement, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Conflicts between non-Punjabi federating units and Punjab could have been resolved through acceptable constitutional arrangements, providing provincial autonomy, fair representation, and a share in decision-making. The ruling class's bias in distributing powers and ignoring non-Punjabi provinces led to the collapse of the state system.

The imbalance and non-representative nature of the parliament exacerbated conflicts in Pakistan, a country characterized by ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. These conflicts between federating units on issues such as power distribution, representation in the federal parliament, and interventions by the ruling nexus led to sub-conflicts within the population, further dividing the nation. The reluctance of the ruling elite to accept societal

diversity fueled ethno-national conflicts in Baluchistan by separatist armed groups.

Kukreja (2020, p. 29) pointed out that Pakistan's ethno-national conflicts stem from a mismatch between its diversity and political institutions, with the ruling elite unwilling to accept the plural composition of society.

While Pakistan initially accepted the Constitution of 1935 as an interim arrangement, Quaid-i-Azam rejected it as over-centralized and unsuitable for resolving the diverse population's issues (Alexander, 1947). Quaid-i-Azam advocated for complete provincial autonomy, democratic government, and public participation, envisioning a constitutional arrangement that differed significantly from Gandhi's vision and eventually led to the partition of India. In light of this history, a shift towards federalism could help resolve conflicting issues in Pakistan by decentralizing the system and adopting an inclusive approach to federal governance.

Balancing the Parliament

Balancing the parliament in Pakistan is crucial, given the historical strain in federal-provincial relations. Unlike India, the 1956 and 1962 Constitutions of Pakistan failed to establish effective institutional arrangements for power-sharing and accommodating diversity at different levels of the polity (Kukreja, 2020). Before the 1971 secession incident, Punjab dominated the parliamentary democracy, and post-1971, the National Assembly was numerically dominated by Punjab in terms of majority seats.

Punjab often holds a dominant position in the legislative processes of the country because of the factors related to the fact that a significant portion of the country's total population belongs to this province. This demographic advantage translates into a larger share of seats in the National Assembly, giving it substantial influence in national legislative matters. The National Assembly, the lower house of the Parliament of Pakistan, is composed of members elected through a first-

past-the-post system based on proportionality. Due to its larger population, Punjab has more constituencies and, consequently, a greater number of representatives in the National Assembly, which results in a numerical advantage, allowing this province to play a crucial role in shaping legislation.

Political power dynamics

Punjab has traditionally held a strong presence in the country's administrative and bureaucratic institutions, and this influence extends to the decision-making processes associated with legislative matters. The historical events, including the implementation of the "One Unit Scheme" in the past, which shaped the political landscape and contributed to Punjab's prominence in the national legislative arena at the expense of other small provinces, are the attesting facts to the above argument.

Throughout Pakistan's history, the military, bureaucracy, and landed elite have often been dominated by individuals from the majority province. This concentration of power has resulted in policies and decisions that may align with the interests of Punjab. The bureaucracy, particularly in key administrative and decision-making positions, has traditionally included a significant number of individuals from Punjab. The appointment of bureaucrats from dominant provinces to influential positions can shape policy formulation and implementation in a way that reflects the province's interests.

The bureaucracy and military establishment play crucial roles in the allocation of resources, including budgetary allocations for development projects. Historically, there have been allegations that resources are disproportionately directed towards Punjab, leading to imbalances in infrastructure development and economic opportunities. The nexus between bureaucracy and the military has sometimes influenced the political landscape, leading to

decisions that favour political forces aligned with Punjab. This can impact electoral outcomes and contribute to the dominance of political parties from Punjab on the national scene.

The military establishment, as a key player in national security policies, can influence decisions that have implications for the entire country. These policies may be shaped, consciously or unconsciously, in a manner that addresses perceived security concerns in the majority province. Bureaucrats and military officials from Punjab may contribute significantly to the formulation of national policies. Their perspectives and priorities may reflect the socio-economic and political dynamics of Punjab, potentially influencing policies that favour the province.

Decisions related to economic policies, trade, and investment can be influenced by individuals from Punjab within the bureaucracy and military establishment. This may impact the economic interests of Punjab in terms of industrial growth, trade routes, and development projects. It's important to note that while these dynamics have been observed, they do not imply uniformity of perspectives within the bureaucracy or military establishment. There are individuals from various provinces serving in these institutions, and the situation is complex and multifaceted. Efforts have been made over time to address concerns related to regional imbalances and ensure equitable representation and decision-making in the interest of the entire nation.

The voting patterns in Punjab, influenced by a combination of demographic, socio-economic, and political factors, often contribute to the electoral success of candidates from this province. As a result, Punjab's preferences significantly impact the composition of the National Assembly. It's important to note that efforts have been made to address concerns related to regional imbalances and promote a more equitable

representation of provinces in Pakistan's legislative bodies. Nevertheless, the influence of Punjab in the legislative process remains a notable aspect of the country's political landscape.

To address the diverse and confronting population, it is imperative to secure the ethnic interests of sub-national groups by establishing balanced houses of Parliament and ensuring equal numerical representation for all provinces. While proponents argue for equal strength in all provinces in the Senate, the focus remains on the powers of the Senate and the dominance of Punjab in the National Assembly. The Senate, despite supporting equal votes, faces demographic challenges, as illustrated by the Pashtun and Punjabi populations in Sindh, affecting the strength of Sindh members. Furthermore, the Senate lacks significant powers over money bills, development, appointments of bureaucracy on a national level, ratification of foreign policy formulations, and amendments to money bills.

The composition of the National Assembly, the lower house of Pakistan's parliament, has been problematic. The Senate was established to provide equal representation to provinces regardless of size and population, modelled after the U.S. Senate and other upper houses in various countries. In contrast, the Pakistani Senate lacks such powers, allowing the National Assembly, dominated by Punjab, to exercise authority in key areas.

Province-wise seats of the national assembly, showing the difference of seats of each province.

PROVINCES	SEATS	DIFFERENCE BY LOWEST	MAJORITY OF PUNJAB WITH PROVINCE	OF EACH
PUNJAB	141	16 (B)	125	
SINDH	61		80	
KPK	45		96	
Baluchistan	16		125	
ISLAMABAD	03		-----	
TOTAL	266		122	

SOURCE:<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40276582/national-assembly-seats-reduced-by-six,ZulfiqarAhmadDecember4,2023>

The imbalanced representation and inequality in resource allocation have led to a loss of trust and a sense of nationhood among smaller provinces. The dominance of Punjab in the National Assembly has resulted in the uneven passing of budgets, favouring projects benefiting Punjab. The provided table illustrates Punjab's numerical majority, which makes it difficult for other provinces to collectively reject bills supported by Punjab, thereby affecting the balance of power within the National Assembly.

In the context of a diverse society, the composition of the parliament plays a pivotal role in a diverse society. While the lower house is known as the true representative of the people, the National Assembly in Pakistan fails to provide equal representation to smaller provinces. This imbalance has led to problems of trust and nationhood, affecting the confidence of smaller provinces in federal authorities and parliamentary institutions.

To address these issues, a rational parliament can play a crucial role by either strengthening the Senate or ensuring equal membership in the National Assembly. The bicameral system, as seen in the U.S. Senate, can serve as a model to balance the representation of diverse provinces. The lower house, as a symbol of popular sovereignty, should be reflective of the community's diverse views, seeking support for laws and amendments while respecting the rights of minorities.

In conclusion, the ongoing challenges in Pakistan's parliamentary system require a comprehensive approach to address issues of representation, power-sharing, and diversity. Balancing the parliament through a reevaluation of the powers and roles of the Senate and National Assembly is essential to foster a more inclusive and equitable political landscape.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article focused on the challenges to the Parliament of Pakistan for its composition and providing the necessary equal regional representation to the federation units. This study found that the unequal representation in the National Assembly gives a single province dominance over the other three provinces of Pakistan. However, this composition restrains the smooth sailing of the small provinces in the domain of legislation. In contrast to the Senate, the functions and powers of the National Assembly have the upper hand over finance, development, and other fields.

To rationalize the National Assembly and address the legitimate demands of smaller provinces, a revision of its formation is essential. We should introduce a "parity" system among provinces to counter Punjab's dominance, distributing seats equally among the federation's provinces. The current imbalance in the National Assembly not only gives separatists a platform to assert that Punjab dominates even democracy but also represents a denial of equality for non-Punjabi provinces. Implementing these changes will transform Pakistan into a genuine federal state, representing the diverse populations and regions across the country.

First, empower the Senate by granting it the authority to ratify the budget, taxes, and development projects for the year. This would ensure that small provinces have a significant say in economic and financial matters.

Second, introduced parity for the lower house (National Assembly) to ensure equal representation for each province, thereby preventing the dominance of any single province. The National Assembly should be responsible for sharing all bills, including money bills, with equal participation from the Senate. This will establish the National Assembly as a truly representative chamber for the people and the provinces.

Third, mandate that candidates for both houses of parliament must belong to the province for which they are contesting elections. This ensures a more localized and regionally representative composition in both the Senate and the National Assembly.

Fourth, introduce a parity system in the National Assembly, ensuring equal representation for each province. We can achieve this by revising the current seat allocation based on population size.

Five: advocate for greater decentralization and autonomy for provinces. This involves devolving more administrative and financial powers to the provincial governments, allowing them to make decisions that align with their specific needs. A more decentralized structure can reduce the centralization of power in one province.

Six, strengthen parliamentary committees to play a more active role in legislation and oversight. Particularly in the areas of finance, planning, and resource allocation, parliamentary committees can effectively represent and take into account the interests of small provinces during the decision-making process. Implement a fair and transparent system for resource allocation to ensure equitable distribution of funds among provinces. This should take into account the specific needs and development requirements of each province, preventing disparities in infrastructure development and economic opportunities.

These academic suggestions aim to address the concerns of small provinces by promoting a more inclusive and balanced parliamentary system. Implementing such reforms would contribute to a stronger, more representative, and more fair democratic structure in Pakistan.

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