



This work is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



AL DALILI

Bi-Annual, Multilingual (Arabic, Balochi, Brahui, English, Pashto, Persian, Urdu) ISSN:
2788-4627 (Print), ISSN: 2788-4635 (online)

Project of **RAHATULQULOOB RESEARCH ACADEMY**,
Jamiat road, Khiljiabad, near Pak-Turk School, link Spini road, Quetta, Pakistan.

Website: www.aldalili.com

Approved by Higher Education Commission Pakistan

Indexing: » IRI (AIOU), Tahqeeqat, Euro pub, MIAR.

TOPIC

Why Do Pashtun Nationalist Parties Fail in Balochistan? Analyzing Structural, Ethnic, and Political Barriers

AUTHORS

1. Abdul Baqi, Ph.D Scholar (Political Science), International Islamic University Islamabad. / Lecturer Political Science at University of Loralai, Balochistan, Pakistan. Email: abdulbaqi.khilji@uoli.edu.pk
2. Dr. Tariq Ahmed Khan, Assistant Professor Sociology, University of Loralai, Balochistan, Pakistan.
3. Kafayat Ullah, Lecturer at Balochistan University of Information Technology and Management Sciences Quetta, Pakistan.

How to Cite: Abdul Baqi, Dr. Tariq Ahmed Khan, & Kafayat Ullah. (2024). ENGLISH: Why Do Pashtun Nationalist Parties Fail in Balochistan? Analyzing Structural, Ethnic, and Political Barriers. *Al-Dalili*, 6(1), 07–21. Retrieved from <https://aldalili.com/index.php/dalili/article/view/137>

URL: <https://aldalili.com/index.php/dalili/article/view/137>

Vol.6, No.1 || July–December 2024 || English: Page. 07-20

Published online: 27-08-2024

Why Do Pashtun Nationalist Parties Fail in Balochistan? Analyzing Structural, Ethnic, and Political Barriers

¹ Abdul Baqi² Tariq Ahmed Khan³ Kafayat Ullah

ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the recurring failures of Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan despite the region's sizeable Pashtun population. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical context, electoral trends, and structural challenges, the paper explores why parties like the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) and Awami National Party (ANP) struggle to maintain political influence. It identifies a combination of institutional barriers, such as centralization of power and flawed electoral systems, alongside ethnic fragmentation, shifting demographics, and political co-optation. Case studies of PKMAP's rise and fall (2013–2018) highlight how alliances with federal parties and leadership disconnection from grassroots voters eroded public trust. A comparative lens contrasts this decline with the resilience of Baloch nationalist groups and the relative success of Pashtun parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The paper concludes with reform-oriented recommendations, emphasizing internal party democratization, youth engagement, and strategic alliances, aiming to revitalize Pashtun nationalist politics in Balochistan's evolving political landscape.

Keywords:

Pashtun Nationalism, Balochistan Politics, PKMAP, ethnic Politics, institutional barriers, electoral decline, Party fragmentation, Political co-optation, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Democratic reforms.

Introduction

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest yet most sparsely populated province, is marked by a complex ethno-political landscape dominated by two major ethnic groups: The Baloch and the Pashtuns. While the Baloch have historically asserted their political dominance through nationalist movements, the Pashtuns, constituting roughly 40% of the population, have struggled to establish a sustained political foothold despite their demographic significance.¹ Pashtun nationalist parties such as the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) and the Awami National Party (ANP) have played a notable role in provincial politics, advocating for greater autonomy, resource rights, and cultural recognition. However, their influence has been inconsistent, often overshadowed by Baloch nationalist parties like the Balochistan National Party (BNP-Mengal) and mainstream federal parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).²

Nationalism, is a political principle that binds a people's cultural identity to their demand for self-determination, a sentiment deeply echoed in Pashtun nationalism, where the preservation of Pashto language and Pashtunwali (the traditional code of honor) becomes an act of resistance against assimilation.³ Meanwhile, Eric Hobsbawm

views nationalism as an invented tradition, a lens through which Pashtun identity can be understood: oral histories, poetry, and heroic figures like Khushal Khan Khattak are woven into a collective narrative, reinforcing unity across artificial borders.⁴ For Pashtuns, nationalism is not just an abstract ideology but a lived reality, evident in the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement's (PTM) peaceful protests against enforced disappearances and discrimination, embodying Frantz Fanon's idea of nationalism as a struggle for dignity.⁵ These definitions remind us that Pashtun nationalism is not merely about political boundaries; it is about people asserting their right to exist, remember, and belong in a world that has often rendered them invisible.

Going back to the roots of Pashtun nationalism in this part of the region is linked with Khudai Khidmatgar movement launched by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, famously known as Bacha Khan, which advocated for Pashtun self-determination and non-violent determination.⁶ On the one hand, Pashtun nationalist party Awami National Party got some success in elections while, on the other, only marginalization is faced in Balochistan with the exception of 2013 general elections. Scholar Adeel Khan⁷ points out three key aspects regarding Pashtun political leadership such as state interference, structural imbalance and internal divisions. Additionally, the centralized governance model by Pakistani state and political engineering backed by military-establishment have further jeopardized regional parties, favoring instead flexible political actors who align with Islamabad's interests.^{8,9}

Despite their significant population share, Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan have failed to consolidate power or sustain long-term political influence. While they occasionally secure seats in provincial assemblies, their impact remains limited compared to Baloch nationalist groups or federal parties. The study seeks to answer two pressing questions: First, what specific structural barriers, ethnic divisions, and political obstacles prevent Pashtun nationalist parties like PKMAP and ANP from achieving lasting success in Balochistan despite their significant demographic presence? Second, how do Pakistan's powerful state institutions, particularly the military establishment and centralized bureaucracy, along with shifting political alliances, actively shape (and often limit) these parties' electoral chances? Our investigation pursues two key objectives: to carefully trace both the historical roots and current manifestations of Pashtun nationalist parties' decline in the province, and to critically analyze how a combination of institutional biases, ethnic rivalries, and manipulated electoral systems systematically work to marginalize these groups politically. Through this exploration, we aim to uncover not just why these parties struggle, but how the very rules of Balochistan's political game are stacked against them.

Meanwhile, this study contributes to broader academic discussions on ethnic politics, party systems, and minority representation in Pakistan. While much of the existing literature focuses on Baloch nationalism, the struggles of Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan remain understudied.¹⁰ By identifying key barriers, such as state interference, electoral manipulation, and intra-Pashtun divisions, this research offers insights for policymakers and activists advocating for more inclusive democratic

reforms in Pakistan's most restive province. Additionally, it provides comparative lessons for other multi-ethnic regions where minority political movements face systemic suppression.

- **Historical Overview of Pashtun Nationalism in Balochistan**
- **Origin and Development of Pashtun Nationalist Ideology**

Pashtun nationalism in Balochistan was deeply influenced by the broader Pashtun political awakening across British India. The seeds of Pashtun nationalism were sown in the early 20th century, as visionary leaders began carving out a political identity distinct from colonial rule, and later, from the narratives imposed by the Pakistani state. At its heart, this movement was about more than just politics; it was a fight to preserve a way of life. Pashtuns, despite their vast numbers, often found themselves marginalized, their cultural autonomy under threat. Their struggle wasn't just for rights; it was for respect.¹¹

The Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) movement was one of the most impressive political force that emerged solely due to Bacha Khan's visionary leadership. He was a towering figure of 20th century who brought not only discipline among Pashtun nationalists but also provided a progressive platform for demanding their due rights within the sub-continent. Similarly, it was a time when other such movements turned to arms struggle against their contemporary governments, Khan Ghaffar Khan's followers displayed greater discipline, resilience and a powerful vision for social reform.¹²

However, comparing to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pashtun nationalist movement in Balochistan presented a different picture all together. Comparing to Balochistan's Pashtun, KP's had a solid political cohesion and concentrated population. This is not the case in southern part of Pashtunkhwa where population is dispersed geographically mainly on tribal connections.¹³ Owing to this disintegration, exploited to their advantage by Islamabad, unified front could not be established among the Pashtuns.

- **Role of Wali Khan, Bacha Khan, and the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement**

Bacha Khan and his son, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, were more than just leaders, they became symbols of Pashtun political awakening, inspiring generations not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also across Balochistan. Bacha Khan's vision, rooted in non-violence, social justice, and fierce resistance to colonialism, struck a chord with Pashtuns everywhere, transcending the artificial divide of the Durand Line. Though the British and later Pakistani authorities dismantled his Khudai Khidmatgar movement after Partition, its spirit never faded. Instead, it lived on, shaping later political forces like the National Awami Party (NAP), later called Awami National Party (ANP), and eventually giving rise to the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP).¹⁴

Wali Khan, inheriting his father's mantle, became a key advocate for provincial autonomy and democratic rights in Pakistan. His leadership of the NAP in the 1970s briefly brought Pashtun and Baloch nationalists together under a shared platform, culminating in Balochistan's first elected government in 1972. However, this experiment was short-lived, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government, wary of NAP's growing influence, dismissed the Balochistan government within a year, triggering a

brutal military crackdown.¹⁵ This betrayal deepened Pashtun disillusionment with the Pakistani state and sowed lasting distrust between Pashtun and Baloch political leaders, making future alliances fragile.¹⁶

- **Formation and Evolution of PKMAP and Its Influence Post-1980s**

The 1980s marked a turning point for Pashtun nationalism in Balochistan. With the NAP banned and Wali Khan politically sidelined, Pashtun leaders sought new avenues for representation.¹⁷ This led to the emergence of the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) under Mahmood Khan Achakzai, a firebrand politician who positioned himself as the heir to Wali Khan's legacy.¹⁸ Unlike the ANP, which remained KP-centric, PKMAP focused exclusively on Balochistan's Pashtun belt, advocating for renaming the province "Pashtunkhwa" (a controversial demand that alienated Baloch allies) and greater resource rights for Pashtun-majority areas.

PKMAP's rise in the 1990s was partly fueled by resentment against Punjabi-dominated federal policies and Balochistan's unequal development. However, its influence fluctuated depending on the political climate. During General Musharraf's rule (1999-2008), PKMAP faced severe repression,¹⁹ as the military viewed all nationalist parties, whether Pashtun or Baloch, as threats to stability.²⁰ Yet, in the post-Musharraf era, PKMAP experienced a brief resurgence, capitalizing on anti-establishment sentiment and forming strategic alliances with mainstream parties like the PML-N.

- **Electoral Performance in Key Elections (1988, 1997, 2013)**

PKMAP's electoral fortunes have been inconsistent, reflecting both its grassroots appeal and structural limitations:

- After Zia-ul-Haq's death, PKMAP (then part of broader leftist alliances) won a handful of seats but remained overshadowed by Baloch nationalist parties and the PPP. The fragmented Pashtun vote and lack of strong party machinery hindered a major breakthrough.²¹

- The party gained modest traction in Pashtun-dominated districts like Pishin and Quetta but failed to expand beyond its tribal strongholds. Military interference and the rise of religious parties further diluted its influence.²²

- PKMAP's peak performance came in 2013, when it secured 10 provincial seats and joined a coalition government with the PML-N. This was largely due to Achakzai's tactical alliance with anti-establishment forces and public frustration with Baloch nationalist governance.²³ However, this success proved fleeting, by 2018, the party was reduced to just 3 seats, as voters shifted toward Imran Khan's PTI, which skillfully co-opted Pashtun grievances without the "nationalist" label.

Pashtun nationalism in Balochistan has always been a story of unfulfilled potential. Despite their significant numbers, Pashtuns have never been able to turn their demographic weight into lasting political power. Both Bacha Khan and his son Wali Khan have remained highly instrumental by injecting the fire of resistance among their followers but this was the case in later successors who could not bridge the deep tribal divides. Sidelining Pashtun nationalist movements under stronger centralized

system of Pakistan was not limited to ANP, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) which remained briefly influential in 2013, met the same fate as their momentum fade almost as quickly as it rose.

Today, the future of Pashtun nationalism in Balochistan remains an interesting topic to be explored as it hangs in the balance. In fact, younger generation are more radical as they are rallying behind movements like the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), which frames ethnic struggle within the broader fight for human dignity.²⁴

- **Structural Barriers to Success**

The failure of Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan cannot be understood without examining the structural obstacles embedded in Pakistan's political system. These barriers, rooted in institutional centralization, electoral manipulation, and systemic resource deprivation, have systematically marginalized Pashtun political aspirations, rendering their nationalist movements perpetually disadvantaged.

- **Institutional Constraints**

Power structure remains massively centralized in Pakistan despite of the fact that 18th constitutional amendment provided provincial authority. One of the reasons of frustration among Pashtun nationalists is the top-down power structure in Pakistan where 18th Amendment pays just lip service to provincial autonomy as key decisions about resources, security and development are not finalized in Quetta's assembly halls but, instead in Islamabad's.²⁵ This literally confirms Pashtun population politically marginalized within their homeland.

Both military and bureaucratic elites remain busy in playing ugly tactics and backroom deals. They routinely target outspoken leaders within Pashtun nationalists on the one hand, while on the other, politicians who are more compliant get massive rewards in shape of development projects and political cover.²⁶

- **Electoral System Challenges**

Even when Pashtun parties participate in elections, the rules of the game are skewed against them. Delimitation, the process of drawing electoral boundaries, has been repeatedly weaponized to dilute Pashtun votes. In Quetta, for example, Pashtun-majority neighborhoods are often merged with Baloch-dominated areas, reducing their electoral weight. Compounding this injustice is the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, which favors larger, well-resourced parties like PML-N or PTI over regional groups. In 2018, PKMAP lost several seats despite securing significant vote shares, as the FPTP system awarded victories to candidates with pluralities rather than majorities.²⁷ These systemic flaws force Pashtun nationalists into unwinnable contests, where even robust grassroots support rarely translates into proportional representation.

- **Resource Constraints**

Perhaps the most insidious barrier is the economic suffocation of Pashtun-majority regions. While Balochistan's natural gas and minerals generate billions in revenue, Pashtun areas like Pishin and Zhob remain among the least developed, with crumbling infrastructure, scarce jobs, and abysmal education indicators.²⁸ Federal development funds are disproportionately funneled into Baloch-dominated districts or military-run

projects, reinforcing a patronage system that rewards loyalty over need. Additionally, Pashtun parties lack access to state media, a critical platform in a province with low literacy rates. Television and radio networks routinely amplify federal parties or sanitized narratives, while nationalist voices are blacklisted or labeled "anti-state"²⁹. Without financial capital or media reach, Pashtun politicians struggle to counter propaganda or mobilize voters beyond their tribal bases.

• **Ethnic and Demographic Challenges: The Fractured Landscape of Pashtun Politics**

The Pashtun nationalist movement in Balochistan operates within a complex web of ethnic tensions, internal divisions, and shifting demographics that have consistently undermined its political coherence. Unlike in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where Pashtun identity forms a unifying political force, Balochistan's Pashtuns navigate a fractured landscape where competing loyalties, tribal, ethnic, and ideological, dilute their collective power.

• **Inter-ethnic Rivalries: The Baloch-Pashtun Divide**

The Pashtun nationalist movement in Balochistan has always walked a tightrope in its relationship with Baloch political forces. Though both communities share deep grievances against Pakistan's central government, their competing visions for the province have more often bred distrust than solidarity. For Baloch nationalists, particularly groups like the BNP-Mengal, Pashtun-majority areas, especially Quetta, represent contested spaces where shifting demographics threaten their historical claim to power³⁰. This tension plays out in elections, where Pashtun parties like PKMAP find themselves in an impossible position: branded as "pro-establishment" by Baloch hardliners, even as they challenge Islamabad's policies themselves.

Nowhere is this divide more visible than in Quetta. Once a vibrant, multi-ethnic hub, the city has become a flashpoint of competing identities. Pashtuns, who dominate commerce and local politics, are seen by Baloch activists as agents of their marginalization. Meanwhile, the physical and political distance between rural Pashtun strongholds like Pishin and Baloch-dominated districts such as Khuzdar only deepens the rift, making cross-ethnic alliances nearly impossible.³¹ It's a tragic irony: two communities that face similar oppression remain divided by history, geography, and mutual suspicion.

• **Internal Ethnic Fragmentation: The Pashtuns' Own Divided House**

Even within Pashtun communities, unity remains elusive. Tribal affiliations, particularly between the Achakzai, Kakar, and Tareen clans, often supersede nationalist solidarity, with political loyalties splintering along kinship lines. PKMAP, despite its rhetoric of Pashtun unity, has struggled to transcend these divisions, as rival factions within the party prioritize tribal patronage over collective goals.

Moreover, the very definition of "Pashtun identity" in Balochistan is contested. Some embrace a broader, secular nationalist vision tied to Bacha Khan's legacy, while others align with religious parties or federalist groups like PTI, which have successfully repackaged Pashtun grievances into a non-ethnic, populist discourse. This lack of a cohesive political identity leaves Pashtun nationalism vulnerable to fragmentation, as voters oscillate between tribal, ideological, and pragmatic considerations.

- **Changing Demographics: Migration and the Specter of Engineering**

Demographic shifts have further complicated Pashtun political fortunes. The decades-long influx of Afghan refugees, particularly after the Soviet invasion and the Taliban's rise, has altered population dynamics in Pashtun-majority areas, straining resources and fueling nativist backlash.³² While some refugees integrated into local Pashtun politics, others remained disenfranchised, creating a parallel society with limited electoral influence.

Simultaneously, Pashtun nationalists accuse the state of "demographic engineering" by resettling non-Pashtun groups, such as Hazaras and Punjabis, in Quetta and resource-rich zones.³³ These allegations, whether fully substantiated or not, reflect a deeper anxiety about political erasure, fear that state-backed demographic tinkering could permanently reduce Pashtuns to a minority in their own strongholds.

- **Political Barriers: The Quicksand of Pashtun Nationalism**

Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan face a political landscape where survival often requires compromising their core ideals. The allure of power, combined with systemic pressures, has created a cycle of co-optation, repression, and disillusionment that stifles meaningful political change.

- **Co-optation and Opportunism**

Many Pashtun leaders, despite their nationalist rhetoric, have frequently aligned with federal parties like PTI and PML-N for short-term gains. This "electable" culture, where influential tribal figures switch loyalties based on patronage, undermines ideological consistency. For instance, PKMAP's coalition with PML-N in 2013 diluted its nationalist stance, alienating grassroots supporters without securing lasting influence.

- **State Interference: The Invisible Hand**

Pakistan's military-intelligence apparatus plays a decisive role in marginalizing nationalist movements. Agencies allegedly prop up rival candidates, manipulate elections, and brand Pashtun activism as "anti-state"³⁴. Security laws, like the Anti-Terrorism Act, are weaponized to silence dissent, with activists facing enforced disappearances or legal harassment. This engineered suppression leaves nationalist parties perpetually on the back foot, struggling to campaign freely.

- **Leadership Crisis and Youth Disconnect**

Dynastic politics within PKMAP and ANP has bred stagnation, with aging leaders failing to address youth aspirations. Young Pashtuns, disillusioned by corruption and inefficacy, increasingly reject traditional nationalism for new movements like PTM or apathy³⁵. Without internal democracy or fresh faces, these parties risk becoming relics, unable to inspire a generation that demands accountability over tribal allegiances.

- **A Puzzle of Political Momentum: Why Pashtun Nationalism Stumbles in Balochistan**

Pakistan presents a striking political irony when you compare its two Pashtun-populated regions. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pashtun nationalism is not only alive but thriving. Parties like the Awami National Party (ANP) can still draw large crowds, and movements such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) have

successfully transformed ethnic pride and social grievances into political momentum. The reasons aren't hard to see: a tightly-knit Pashtun majority, strong cultural cohesion, and a political narrative that taps into everyday frustrations. If you wander through Peshawar's Qissa Khwani Bazaar, it's all around you, walls covered with nationalist slogans, chai dhabas buzzing with conversations on identity, rights, and political dignity³⁶. In this setting, leaders freely promote Pashtun heritage and even criticize state policies without immediate consequences.

Yet, once you cross into Balochistan, the dynamics shift completely. Though Pashtuns here form a significant part of the population, parties like PKMAP struggle to build the same momentum. The reasons are layered and complex. Deep-rooted tribal rivalries dilute any unified voice, and the scattered geography of Pashtun communities makes mobilization much harder. Unlike KP's relatively cohesive identity, Balochistan's Pashtuns are pulled between competing loyalties, some rooted in tribal affiliations, others in broader political visions. What works so seamlessly in the north seems to unravel in the south. On top of that, there's a lingering tension between Pashtun and Baloch nationalists, with the latter often viewing the former through a lens of distrust. The contrast becomes even more evident when looking at Baloch nationalist groups such as BNP-Mengal. Despite facing their own share of political repression, they've managed to stay grounded through consistent grassroots work, running schools, helping local businesses, and stepping in where the state has failed.³⁷ In comparison, Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan are often seen as disconnected from the people they claim to represent, operating more like distant political elites than community-driven movements.

- **Case Studies: PKMAP's Rise and Decline**
- **PKMAP's Rise in the 2013 Elections**

In the 2013 general elections, the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) secured significant wins in Pashtun-majority constituencies such as Quetta, Pishin, and Zhob, becoming a coalition partner in the provincial government. PKMAP's emphasis on Pashtun nationalism, civilian supremacy, and provincial rights found traction among voters frustrated by the centralization of power and Baloch-centric narratives in Balochistan³⁸. The party won 10 provincial assembly seats and 3 national seats, reflecting a temporary resurgence of Pashtun ethno-political identity.

- **Coalition with PML-N: A Double-Edged Sword**

PKMAP's political alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) during 2013–2018 allowed the party access to power and developmental portfolios. However, this alliance diluted PKMAP's nationalist rhetoric and alienated its support base, especially among youth and working-class Pashtuns. Critics viewed the party's leadership as being more interested in privileges than grassroots mobilization.

- **Electoral Collapse in 2018**

The 2018 proved to be a disastrous election year for PKMAP. The party failed to make a mark and manage to win a single Provincial Assembly seat. Their presence in National Assembly was wiped out. A number of reasons were attributed to this dismal

performance by political observers including state-backed electoral engineering, voter-disillusionment and the rise of alternative political platforms such as the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP).

- **Continued Decline in 2024 Elections**

In the 2024 general elections, PKMAP maintained their poor display. They failed again to re-capture their lost ground. This time around the party secured only a single seat of their chairman Mahmood Khan Achekzai. In Balochistan Assembly, previously held seat was also lost due to internal division within party ranks. Moreover, party lost its influence owing to a number of factors including that of competition from religious parties and lack of organizational reform.

- **Recommendations and Way Forward: Rebuilding Pashtun Nationalism from the Ground Up**

The waning influence of Pashtun nationalist parties in the southern province of Pakistan can be revived. What's needed the most is thorough introspection of these parties. Structural reforms and restructuring of their politics in line with modern times by working on their weaknesses and doubling on strengths. Some recommendations are explained in and given lines.

- **Reform Suggestions: Fixing the Broken Engine**

- **Intra-Party Democracy and Youth Inclusion**

A critical weakness plaguing Pashtun nationalist parties like PkMAP and ANP is their entrenched dynastic leadership structures, which severely limit intra-party democracy and exclude youth participation. Pakistani political parties across the spectrum suffer from hereditary succession patterns that concentrate power within elite families rather than meritocratic systems. This is particularly evident in Pashtun nationalist parties, where leadership remains confined to tribal dynasties like the Achakzai family in PkMAP, creating what Wilder (1999) terms "electoral feudalism" in "The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behaviour".

- **Concrete Steps Needed:**

Some of the concrete steps in this regard may include:

- Mandatory term limits for party positions
- Transparent primaries to select candidates
- Reserved seats for women and youth in decision-making bodies

- **Digital platforms for member consultations**

The digital revolution presents a crucial opportunity for Pashtun nationalist parties to democratize decision-making and engage younger members, yet most remain stubbornly wedded to outdated, top-down communication methods. Political organizations that leverage social media for internal consultations, such as the PTM's use of Twitter Spaces and Telegram polls, experience significantly higher youth participation and ideological coherence. By contrast, traditional parties like PkMAP and ANP continue relying on jirga-style physical gatherings that systematically exclude women, urban professionals, and the diaspora, precisely the constituencies

needed for revival. This digital deficit has real consequences. reveals how parties resisting digital member consultations suffer from policy disconnects, with leadership often unaware of grassroots concerns until they erupt into protests.

- **Cross-Ethnic Alliances: Beyond Tribal Politics**

The future viability of Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan may well depend on their ability to transcend ethnic silos and forge meaningful alliances with other marginalized groups, particularly the Baloch, on shared socioeconomic grievances. Pakistan's establishment has historically used ethnic divisions to prevent unified opposition, making cross-ethnic solidarity both a political necessity and an existential threat to the status quo.³⁹ While PkMAP and ANP rhetorically support federalism, their practical politics remain confined to Pashtun-majority areas, replicating the very tribal fragmentation that weakens their collective bargaining power. Similarly, successful ethnic parties in other regions, like the MQM in its early years, gained unprecedented influence by building multi-ethnic coalitions around urban governance issues.

- **Strategic Adaptation: Playing the Long Game**

- **Media Engagement: Rewriting the Narrative**

Pashtun nationalist parties in Balochistan have long suffered from a media representation crisis, their political messaging either ignored by mainstream outlets or distorted through security-centric frames. In fact, Pashtun political rights or demands are portrayed through “Separatist” or “Foreign Agent” lenses by the national media outlets in the country. This is done through deliberate means by underreporting the constitutional and legal grievances. National news channels disproportionately portray Pashtun political demands through the lens of "separatism" or "foreign agendas," while underreporting their constitutional grievances. Meanwhile the use of social media as an alternative to the state media has become a powerful tool for the nationalist movements such as PTM. Today, younger generation is more connected and engaged on social media applications and their constructive use by nationalist political parties can bring about meaningful change.

- **Electoral Reforms: Changing the Rules of the Game**

The current system is rigged against regional parties. But instead of just complaining, nationalists must lead reform efforts by putting their key demands in a more democratic and modernize language such as:

- Proportional representation for provincial assemblies
- Neutral interim governments during elections
- International observation of Balochistan polls

- **The Road Ahead**

Reviving Pashtun nationalism in the region is not impossible rather it requires timely and meaningful changes such as empowering modern youth including women, building politically viable alliances with shared interests through win-win situation, and delivering real and meaningful services to the community. Most importantly in this regard is truly listening to a new and educated generation that cares more about jobs and justice than tribal pedigrees.

• **Conclusion: The Crossroads of Pashtun Nationalism**

Navigating the region's political landscape, one thing becomes unmistakably clear that many of the setbacks faced by Pashtun nationalist movements have come not from outside but from within. Yes, the odds were never fair, state interference, manipulated elections, and years of neglect have made the road difficult. But equally damaging have been internal divisions, tribal leaders clinging to ego over unity, veteran old-fashioned politicians unwilling to step aside, and a leadership style that seems frozen in time, out of touch with a rapidly changing world.

Still, all is not lost. There's a quiet resilience simmering beneath the surface. You'll find it in the voices of young people quoting Ghani Khan as if his words still hold the answers. You'll see it in the solidarity between Pashtun and Baloch students protesting side by side in Quetta, united not by party lines but shared frustration. Even PKMAP's recent failures weren't without lessons, chief among them, that people won't follow leaders who abandon their values for political deals.

What's needed now is smarter nationalism that is a version that actually delivers in practice than political slogans only. One that prioritizes social expenditure over hero worship, meaningful jobs for youth over rhetoric, and party unity & discipline over outdated loyalties. The road ahead might be rough and difficult to travel, yet it guarantees long-term political base for Pashtun nationalist parties. In fact, harnessing the reach of digital platforms, empowering women and youth, and building meaningful alliances grounded in common challenges, not just kinship are pivotal steps to be taken without delay. The tools are there. The question is, who's brave enough to use them.

The tragedy that mars our history lies in the fact that we have long revered wealth, possessions, and splendor as the true measures of honor, while the enforcement of law has been selectively applied to the poor, the destitute, and the oppressed—despite the absence of any such provision in the scales of justice and equity. The gravest peril for one who holds authority is to bestow undue favor upon his kinsmen and intimates, to endorse them, and to apportion offices among them irrespective of their merit. When appointments are made on the basis of competence, nothing could be more commendable; yet, to elevate the unworthy solely because they are relatives or confidants of the ruler, and to squander the public treasury upon them while erecting barriers between them and the rest, is an egregious wrong. History itself stands as a witness that all who succumbed to such partiality met with disgrace even in this world. Nepotism and favoritism are the malignant tumors of lawlessness that corrode the very foundations of institutions from within⁴⁰.

References

- ¹ Ahmed, Feroz. 1999. *"Ethnicity and politics in Pakistan"*. Oxford University Press.
- ² Grare, Frederic. 2013. *BALUCHISTAN: The State Versus the Nation* . Carnegie Endowment for International Peace .
- ³ Gellner, E. 2015. *Nations and nationalism. In Conflict after the Cold War (pp. 378-389)* . Routledge.
- ⁴ Hobsbawm, E. J. 1992. *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* . Cambridge university press.
- ⁵ Fanon, F. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*, 36-37. New York: : Grove Press.
- ⁶ Banerjee, Mukulika. 2000. *"The Pathan unarmed : opposition & memory in the North West Frontier"*. Oxford University Press.
- ⁷ Khan, Adeel. 2005. *Politics of identity: ethnic nationalism and the state in Pakistan*. Sage.
- ⁸ Ayesha, Siddiq. 2017. *Military Inc.: inside Pakistan's military economy*. Penguin Random House India.
- ⁹ Shah, Aqil. 2014. *The army and democracy: Military politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.
- ¹⁰ Marvin G, Weinbaum. 2021. "Afghanistan and the great powers in regional geopolitics, economics and security. In *The Great Power Competition Volume 1: "Regional Perspectives on Peace and Security* . Cham: Springer International Publishing. (Springer International Publishing.) (pp. 413-430).
- ¹¹ Ahmed, T. 2020. *Literature and politics in the age of nationalism: The progressive episode in South Asia, 1932-56* . Routledge India.
- ¹² Banerjee, Mukulika. 2000. *"The Pathan unarmed : opposition & memory in the North West Frontier"*. Oxford University Press.
- ¹³ Karrar, H. H., & Mostowlansky, T. 2018. "Assembling marginality in northern Pakistan. ." *Political Geography*, 63, 65-74.
- ¹⁴ Nichols, Robert. 2017. "Pashtuns." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*. Retrieved 29 Jun. 2025, from <https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-181>.
- ¹⁵ Ayesha, Siddiq. 2017. *Military Inc.: inside Pakistan's military economy*. Penguin Random House India.
- ¹⁶ Zeb, Rizwan. 2018. "Pakistan's Political Chess Board: Bhutto, Bugti and The National Awami Party Government In Balochistan (1972–1977). ." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(1), 67-87.
- ¹⁷ Subhan, F., & Kasi, A. 2018. "Regional political Parties& democracy: a case study of Balochistan." *Journal of education and research*, 5(1), 219-231.
- ¹⁸ Akhtar, A. S. 2021. "The war of terror in praetorian Pakistan: The emergence and struggle of the Pashtun Tahaffuz movement. ." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51(3), 516-529.
- ¹⁹ Jahangir, J. 2020. "Political Culture of Balochistan during Military Regime of General Pervez Musharraf and Indian Interest in Balochistan. ." *Journal of Indian Studies*, 6(01), 83-118.
- ²⁰ Grare, Frederic. 2013. *BALUCHISTAN: The State Versus the Nation* . Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- ²¹ Marvin G, Weinbaum. 2021. "Afghanistan and the great powers in regional geopolitics, economics and security. In *The Great Power Competition Volume 1: "Regional Perspectives on Peace and Security* . Cham: Springer International Publishing. (Springer International Publishing.) (pp. 413-430).

- ²² Shah, Aqil. 2014. *The army and democracy: Military politics in Pakistan*. . Harvard University Press.
- ²³ Shafqat, S., Jones, P., Khan, T. M., Naqvi, T., Malik, A., Chacko, J., ... & Waseem, M. 2020. *Pakistan's political parties: Surviving between dictatorship and democracy*. Georgetown University Press.
- ²⁴ Jafri, Q. 2021. *The Pashtun protection movement (PTM) in Pakistan*. . International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.
- ²⁵ Ahmed, T. 2020. *Literature and politics in the age of nationalism: The progressive episode in South Asia, 1932-56*. . Routledge India.
- ²⁶ Ayesha, Siddiq. 2017. *Military Inc.: inside Pakistan's military economy*. Penguin Random House India.
- ²⁷ Ghani, Khial, and Noor Ul Amin. 2024. "THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND ROLE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES IN PAKISTAN (2018-2022)." *Journal of Islamic Civilization and Culture*,.
- ²⁸ Akhtar, A. S. 2021. "The war of terror in praetorian Pakistan: The emergence and struggle of the Pashtun Tahaffuz movement. ." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51(3), 516-529.
- ²⁹ Shah, Aqil. 2014. *The army and democracy: Military politics in Pakistan*. . Harvard University Press.
- ³⁰ Ahmed, Feroz. 1999. *"Ethnicity and politics in Pakistan"*. Oxford University Press.
- ³¹ Ejaz, M., & Rehman, A. 2022. "Exploration of the foundations of ethnic conflicts in Balochistan: a theoretical perspective." *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 6(1),.
- ³² Grare, Frederic. 2013. *BALUCHISTAN: The State Versus the Nation*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- ³³ Ayesha, Siddiq. 2017. *Military Inc.: inside Pakistan's military economy*. Penguin Random House India.
- ³⁴ Abid
- ³⁵ Akhtar, A. S. 2021. "The war of terror in praetorian Pakistan: The emergence and struggle of the Pashtun Tahaffuz movement. ." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51(3), 516-529.
- ³⁶ Marvin G, Weinbaum. 2021. "Afghanistan and the great powers in regional geopolitics, economics and security. In The Great Power Competition Volume 1: ." *Regional Perspectives on Peace and Security*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. (Springer International Publishing.) (pp. 413-430).
- ³⁷ Subhan, F., & Kasi, A. 2018. "Regional political Parties& democracy: a case study of Balochistan." *Journal of education and research*, 5(1), 219-231.
- ³⁸ Shah, Sikandar Ahmed. 2022. *Implementing Local Centripetalism in Pakistan: A Federalist Solution for Upholding Communal Democratic Values and Tackling Civil-Military Imbalance and Chinese Expansionism*. Indiana University.
- ³⁹ Akhtar, A. S. 2021. "The war of terror in praetorian Pakistan: The emergence and struggle of the Pashtun Tahaffuz movement. ." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51(3), 516-529.
- ⁴⁰ Dr. Syed Bacha Agha. (2018). Contemporary Social anxiety and its solution in the light of seerah. Rahat-Ul-Quloob, 2(1), 139-152. <https://doi.org/10.51411/rahat.2.1.2018.27>