



RESEARCH PAPER

Gilgit Baltistan and the Debate on New Provinces: A Comparative Analysis through the Lens of Good Governance

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the demand of new provinces in Pakistan, in the light of good governance with special focus on Gilgit-Baltistan. However, this article does not discuss the methods and hurdles. The debate on the demand of new provinces in Pakistan has emerged as a recurring political rhetoric deeply rooted in the longstanding concerns about governance, administrative efficiency and equitable representation. Gilgit-Baltistan remains unique due to exclusion of constitutional rights. A qualitative systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA framework. From 220 identified documents – journal articles, historical records, policy reports, and legal documents – 35 met inclusion criteria for thematic analysis. The study finds five themes: governance deficits; political under-representation; administrative restructuring; identity politics; and governance as justification for the new provinces. It recommends that provincial restructuring should prioritize governance reform over political rhetoric and address Gilgit-Baltistan's constitutional status for inclusive governance and national cohesion.

KEYWORDS Good Governance, New Provinces, Constitutional Status, Federalism

Introduction

Pakistan has a federal structure comprising of seven administrative units including capital territory, four provinces, Gilgit Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Khan, 2025). The country has a vast diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, language and culture. This diversity has encouraged Pakistan to adopt a federal structure of the state. The structure guarantees to provide an ideal state of governance that ensures equal representation, administrative efficiency, just resource distribution, economic prosperity, better governance and national integration. However, demand for new provinces in Pakistan has become the part of political discourses owing to the failure of the existing federal structure to fulfill its promises. Since independence of Pakistan in 1947, Pakistan has reformed its federal structure multiples of times (Zaheer M. A., 2025). It brought into forth the One Unit Policy (1955-1970) under which the west wing of Pakistan was merged into a single unit making the federal structure with a center and its two wings, East Pakistan and West Pakistan. In 1967, Pakistan shifted its capital form Karachi to Islamabad exactly 20 years after the country's independence. Administrative reorganization was again made in 2018 when the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) was merged into Pakhtunkhwa province. Contrary to the reforms, different regions continue to demand for new provinces as the existing structure could not address their longstanding grievances. The demands for separate provincial status include South Punjab province, Bahawalpur province, Hazara province, Mohajir province, pashtoon province, and most notably, Gilgit-Baltistan.

These demands are based on the socioeconomic, political and cultural factors, along with a sense of marginalization in decision making and unequal access to quality public services. The most prominent reason in the demand of new provinces is the absence of factor of good governance, which ensures efficient public service delivery, rule of law, participatory governance and transparency (Malik, et. al., 2023). The prevailing structure certainly lacks the ideals of good governance which is a primary demand of the public (Qasmi, et al., 2023). In addition to this, the political discourse for separate provinces is not just a territorial rearrangement, but also a strategy to attain good governance; as there is parity in attainment of services in different regions. Thus, the creation of new provinces will solve the issue of identity as well as provide a more decentralized mechanism to lead the various regions toward the much needed better governance.

The systematic review is the aim of the study related to the demand for new provincial setups in Pakistan, with particular focus on the role of the good governance as the driving force behind these demands. This review article seeks to analyze the existing literature on the issue of the demand of new provinces in Pakistan, while the broad literature on restructuring of provinces is fragmented across various disciplines including political science, public administration, legal studies, regional development and public policy. A special focus has been made on the issue of Gilgit-Baltistan, which has unique legal complexities in relation to be a constitutional province of Pakistan. This comparative analysis highlights the governance challenges and aspiration of Gilgit-Baltistan compared with the other regions of Pakistan seeding separate provincial status. In doing so, it gets a broader context in terms of governance gaps that fuel the demand for new provinces. These governance gaps comprise of weak service provision, poor accountability, exclusion for national policy making, and absence of representation. This study also aims to explore whether the demand for new provinces in merely a political rhetoric or a genuine effort to improve the governance structure of the regions to end disparities. In short the comparative study of the existing literature offer a clear picture of how the establishment of the new provinces will lead to the effective governance in the new provincial setups; and also how it will strengthen Pakistan's federal structure addressing the long standing regional grievances.

Literature Review

The debate on the creation of new provinces in Pakistan has long been deeply rooted in concerns related governance performance, political representation, administrative efficiency, and regional identity (Latif, 2017). However, the context and motivations vary across the regions. Scholars trace the debate of new provinces to Pakistan's persistent struggle with service delivery, uneven development, and provincial resource disputes (Asghar, 2012).

Good Governance and Decentralization

Good governance is featured by transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, and adherence to the rule of law; and it has been promoted globally as a framework for improving state legitimacy and development outcomes (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2009). On the other hand, decentralization refers to the transfer of power, responsibility and resources from center to units (Mookherjee, 2015). In Pakistan decentralization has been viewed as a way to strengthening governance by bringing decision making closer to common people (Ali & Mufti, 2022). However, there are

concerns that without addressing structural inefficiencies, the creation of new administrative units may replicate existing governance failures (Ahmad, G. et al., 2023).

Comparative Regional Contexts in Literature

Literature on the demand of South Punjab province points to persistent socio-economic disparity within Punjab (Iqbal, 2021). The south region of the Punjab possesses lower literacy rates. Weaker health infrastructure, and poor HDI scores compared to north part, despite South Punjab's strong agricultural contribution (Mughal, 2020).

Literature on the demand of Bahawalpur province emphasizes its unique historical and legal identity as a former princely state, merged into Pakistan in 1955 under the "One Unit" scheme (Javaid, 2018). Proponents of this provincial set up call for restoration rather than mere creation of new province, underscoring a sentiment of lost sovereignty and resource control.

In case of Hazara, identity politics dominates scholarly accounts. Renaming of NWFP to Pakhtunkhwa under 18th amendment reactivated ethno-linguistic fault lines (Ahmad, G. et al., 2024). This fault line coupled with perception of marginalization has fueled separatist sentiments in the province.

Literature on the demand of Karachi province mainly focus on urban governance challenges and also political biases. There is overlapping jurisdictions between municipal bodies, provincial authorities, and federal agencies (Siddiqi, 2024; Muzaffar & Choudhary, 2017). Studies highlight that demand for a province or special administrative status stem from governance fragmentation, rapid urbanization, and disputes over fiscal control.

The case of Gilgit-Baltistan has uniqueness in legal and political sphere. Unlike other regions, Gilgit-Baltistan is deprived of constitutional recognition, representation in the National Assembly and Senate, and a provincial status under Pakistan's federal structure. The region is governed through ad hoc executive orders rather than a permanent constitutional framework, with its disputed status under the Kashmir conflict. The literature explores that for Gilgit-Baltistan, the primary grievance is not just poor governance but political disenfranchisement and constitutional exclusion.

Cross-Regional Comparison Commonalities and Contrasts

In the motives for the demand of new provinces varies across regions, literature shows existence of commonalities and contrasts in multiple aspects for provincial restructuring. The convergence ranges from governance deficit, center-province disparity to the achievement of good governance (Muzaffar, et. al., 2023; Rameez & Imran, 2021). Each of the factors motivates the demand of the administrative restructuring in Pakistan. Let's discuss each in details:

- **Perceived Governance Deficits:** in all regions, which are demanding separate provincial set ups, suffers from the problem of governance deficit__ weak service delivery, lack of responsive administration, and absence of citizen engagement in planning and decision-making. These governance deficits persist as structural shortcoming in the existing provincial structure and leading to demand of new provinces.
- **Center-Province Disparity:** the factor of disparity shares much in the political rhetoric in demanding new provinces in Pakistan. Whether it is South Punjab's distance from Lahore, Hazara's marginalization within KP, or Gilgit-Baltistan's exclusion from the

constitutional framework, each region shares a strong perception of neglect by the central or provincial capitals.

- Strategic Use of Governance Language: another common dimension in the demand of new provinces is the strategic use of governance language. Stakeholders frame their demands not only in terms of identity politics, but also as tool to achieve good governance. And that leads to a trend of aligning regional politics with modern administrative discourse.

However, Gilgit-Baltistan's case represents a unique scenario due to its non-provincial, disputed constitutional status, lack of national representation and important geopolitical position, particularly after the commencement of CPEC project. Unlike other regions seeking enhanced provincial autonomy within the constitutional system, Gilgit-Baltistan is demanding inclusion into the system itself (Sajid, 2022). This distinction is mainly because of the attachment of the region with the Kashmir issue; that legally hinders its constitutional inclusion owing to the UNSC's resolutions. In short, there exists a distinction between other regions and Gilgit-Baltistan in terms of their legal status which makes the case of Gilgit-Baltistan more complex.

Gilgit-Baltistan in Focus

Gilgit-Baltistan is located in the North of Pakistan and holds a great strategic importance. The region is not legally under Pakistan's constitutional domain and being governed as a federal territory (Ali, 2025). The region got independence from Dogra Raj by its own and offered unconditional accession to Pakistan in 1948. However, Pakistan failed to make the territory its constitutional part and thus its constitutional status remain in limbo.

The ambiguous constitutional status is rooted in the broader Kashmir conflict; because the region was made part of this conflict by the government of Pakistan without its consent. Pakistan also gained direct administrative control under Karachi agreement between government of Pakistan and then government of AJK in 1949. As a result, the dream of integration of Gilgit-Baltistan in the federal territory remained unfulfilled and its people could not enjoy the legal status, protection and representation in constitutional bodies like people of other provinces enjoy. This region has remained under different federal laws since its accession (Qasim, M. et al., 2024). The region was governed under the notorious Frontier Crime Regulation (FCR) from 1948 till 1974, when Bhutto government announced reforms for the region and abolished FCR and State Subject Rule (SSR). The State Subject rule gave the people of the region right to government and right to property (Haq-e- Haqimiyat and Haq-e-malkiyat). After the abrogation of the SSR, people from outside GB were allowed to buy land in the region. The region got a breakthrough in terms of the recognition of its identity in 2009 when the government of PPP gave it the name of Gilgit-Baltistan and establish a legislative assembly with the powers to legislate on a few subjects (Zaheer M. A., 2018). PML (N) government also passed the Gilgit-Baltistan ordinance 2018 limiting empowerment granted in 2009 government order. So, under various reforms introduced by the government of Pakistan, the fate of provincial identity of the people of the region could not be translated into reality and still lacks constitutional clarity in its status like other provinces.

The people of the region demands provincial status since its accession to Pakistan. Over the last two decades, the demand for either legal provincial status or acceptance of an autonomous region has gained momentum. The region's uncertain legal status has undermined the principles of good governance and led to the public dissatisfaction.

Access to secured internet connectivity is even a challenge in the region; as the social media plays a vital role in promoting education (Ali, V. et al., 2024). Proponents argue that the lack of political representation, inadequate resource allocation, limited judicial resources, fragile administrated system and legal production under constitution have further resulted in public distress in Gilgit-Baltistan. The inception of China Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in 2013 has given this region more importance (Hussain & Kifayat-Ullah, 2023). Now, the government of Pakistan seeks and effective governance system in the territory to attain its broader economic goals. The effectiveness of the good governance in the region is in the favor of both GB and Pakistan. Thus, the government seems more interested in making effective governance in the federally administered region.

This review study explores a wide range of literature on the new provinces demands. However, there are several critical gaps exist in the existing literature which includes:

- Empirical Data Absence: most studies are theoretical or political in nature and lacks empirical data on the actual governance impact of past reforms (e.g., FATA merger) or simulation of administrative performance under new provincial structure. Thus, the dearth of empirical data stands as a major gap in the existing literature on the demand of new provinces
- Public Perception and voices: the existing literature also lacks the public perception and their opinion on the matter of new provinces. Few studies capture grassroots-level insights -- particularly from Gilgit-Baltistan -- regarding citizen expectations, lived governance experiences, or youth perspectives. Thus, the absence of citizen's voice in available literature is considered as literature gap.
- Dearth of Governance Metrics: there is insufficient governance metrics mechanism to measure and compare cross regional scenarios in Pakistan regarding governance performance. Little effort has been made to apply standardized governance indicators (e.g., World Bank's WGI, UNDP's governance frameworks) in the existing data to assess regional disparities in a measurable way. So, the dearth of governance metrics is one of the literature gaps in the existing data.

Lack of Comparative Federalism Studies: Pakistani scholars seldom situate its debate within a comparative international framework, missing valuable lessons from other country's feral systems that have experimented with provincial restructuring. This comparative study lacks in the existing literature to guide policy formulation for administrative restructuring.

Material and Methods

This study uses a systematic review methodology to comprehensively analyze existing literature on the issue of the demand of new provinces in Pakistan, with particular focus on the Gilgit-Baltistan through the lens of good governance. Systematic reviews are essential in analyzing the existing vast literature across disciplines. These reviews hold a particular importance regarding policy oriented social science research, where multiple dimensions intersect with one another. In addition, the review study provides a better understanding about a topic keeping in view the already existing data to help policy making.

Review Design

This systematic review adopts the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) guidelines to make sure a transparent and applicable methodology. A qualitative thematic synthesis approach was used to identify, organize, and interpret recurring themes related to governance and provincial restructuring across selected literature.

Data Sources

In this study, data was reviewed from multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive coverage. The sources to data collection comprised of academic, policy, and legal sources. The detailed description of these sources and as follows;

- Academic Data base: Google Scholar, Jstor, Scopus, ResearchGate, SpringerLink, Taylor and Francis.
- Policy Reports and Governance Documents: Publication from the Planning Commission of Pakistan, National Assembly Debates, Gigit-Baltistan Reforms Committees, Center for Peace and Development Initiative (CPDI), PILDAT, and International Crises Group reports.
- Legal and Constitutional Texts: Pakistan's Constitution (especially Article 1, Article 239), GB Empowerment and Self Governance Order 2009, GB Order 2018, court rulings.
- History books written by local historians of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Data Inclusion Exclusion Criteria

In this article, the criteria for the inclusion of data are based on the sources from both English and Urdu which provide conceptual and empirical depth about the topic. These sources include journal articles, policy papers, credible reports published in the last two decades. In addition, data has also been included from studies which analyze governance, representation, autonomy, or administrative performance. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria relies on the principle that those articles and literature which do not give us conceptual understanding on the topic and were solely focused on constitutional law without discussing governance implications.

Data Analysis Approach

In this review analysis study, the available included data was analyzed based on for key domains;

- Domain of Good Governance; in which how the need of good governance let to the demand of new provinces has been discussed. As the governance deficit has resulted in the rise of grievances in different regions.
- Domain of Politics; in which the how the demand for new provinces has become the part of political discourse has been discussed. As the people across Pakistan wants equal political representation and inclusion in policy making.
- Domain of Administrative restructuring; in which the need of provincial restructuring has come to a comprehensive discussion that how it will provide an easy and effective administration to the local people.

- Gilgit Baltistan as a Case Study; in which the uniqueness of the region in the dimensions of legal, geopolitical, governance perspective has come into light, along comparing the situation of GB with the demand of administrative restructuring in rest of the Pakistan.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Overview of Reviewed Literature

This study reviewed 35 sources relevant to this comparative analysis which includes Journal articles, books, policy reports, legal documents and investigative news analysis. These data sources are of published in the time range from 2000 to 2025. Most of the literature was published after 2009, coinciding with growing debate on decentralization following the 18th amendment and the GB Empowerment Order. Most of the sources deal with the issue of Gilgit Baltistan, while the rests are related to the demand of new provinces in Pakistan.

Thematic Categorizes Identified

Governance Deficits and Regional Grievances

Governance failure plays a pivotal role in the demand of new provinces in Pakistan. Governance deficit has derived the people for demanding separate provincial set ups in different regions. The public of these regions do not seem to be satisfied by the working of the prevailing administrative system. In general, the failures of the governance by the existing administrative system can be categorized as follows;

- Poor service delivery (health, education, infrastructure)
- Lack of accountability and transparency
- Inaccessible or ineffective provincial bureaucracies
- Unbalanced resource distribution
- Administrative re-tapes
- Slow responsiveness in times of need and natural disasters

In case of Gilgit Baltistan, these issues of governance inertia are further deteriorated owing to the region's non-provincial status. The constitutional ambiguity amplifies the grievances of the people of the regions. Amid neutral status deprived of provincial rights, the region faces following challenges;

- Absence of constitutional rights
- No representation in the National Assembly or Senate
- Limited fiscal autonomy
- No inclusion in the NFC Award
- Executive power concentrated in the federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs
- Limited legislative powers
- People are deprived of citizenship rights
- No voting rights to elect president and prime minister

In contrast, the regions, which are part of the provinces, demand for new provincial set ups due to their own multiple challenges and grievances in the existing systems. The region of South Punjab, Hazara, Urban Sind, and Pashtoon belt of

Baluchistan express frustration over the ineffective governance and marginalization. In a broader view they faces following challenges;

- Uneven development of the regions compared the other regions of the provinces
- Ethnic marginalization of the regions
- Political neglect y the provincial capitals (e.g. Lahore for South Punjab, Peshawar for Hazara)
- Absence of basic human services (education, health, infrastructure)
- Ethnic based divisions and identity politics in the regions

In sum up, the regions across Pakistan demanding new provinces confronts with the challenge of poor governance. However, the Gilgit Baltistan has a different context when it comes to absence of its provincial status. The gist of the demand for separate provinces is the attainment of good governance in the regions.

Political Under-representation and Constitutional Ambiguity

Absence of political representation and political autonomy, along with the constitutional ambiguity are factors that drive for the demand of new provinces in Pakistan. The regions of the different provinces demanding new setups are basically seeking autonomy in the political sphere. They face political negligence in decision making and policy formulation in the prevailing set ups. These demands for separate provincial systems by different regions on their own political grounds are as follows:

- South Punjab demands a separate province for better governance and identity recognition within the federal structure
- Hazara movement for separate province gained momentum after the renaming of NWFP to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, reflecting ethnic identity based resistance
- Karachi's call, especially for the MQM, focuses on urban governance , ethnic balance, and devolution within Sindh
- Bahawalpur demands new province due its own historical identity of the region as separate state, along the ethnic and linguistic bases
- The pushtoon belt of Baluchistan demands a separate provincial set up on the basis of ethnicity and language. They also want political say in the federation of Pakistan.

On the other hand, the region of Gilgit Baltistan seeks political representation in Pakistan. The people of GB are deprived of citizenship rights and lack the right to elect the prime minister of Pakistan and its President. Although the Gilgit Baltistan Assembly was established in 2009 under the GB Ordinance, yet it remains subordinate to the federal executive. GB is being governed as disputed territory under the federal territory.

In short, the contrast in GB and other regions of Pakistan underscores that the people of Gilgit Baltistan are demanding basic rights and constitutional recognition, while the other regions demand political autonomy and identity in the federal set up, along with expectations for better governance.

Administrative Restructuring and Demand Rationales across Regions

In the several reviewed studies, it has been recognized that the administrative restructuring__ such as creating new provinces__ will fulfill the demands of different regions demanding new provinces. Each region has its own set of basis on which new

provincial set ups are being demanded. In general, the reasons behind the demand for new provinces include demonstrative factors, economic factors, cultural factors, political factors, constitutional 18th amendment, and historical factors. On administrative grounds, the establishment of the new provinces has become an administrative necessity; because, population of provinces is very high, along with their geographical vastness. Thus, for a better administration, demand of new provinces has been put forward. Secondly, economic factors for the demand of the new provinces include unequal distribution of resources and inadequate budget allocation. Third, political reasons behind demand of new provinces comprised of bad governance, and political stunt by political parties to gain political support. Fourthly, there are cultural factors on the back of the demand for separate provinces. In cultural factor, language and ethnicity plays crucial role. Fifthly, the constitutional 18th amendment has provoked these regions to demand for new provinces as it gives provincial autonomy to the provinces. Lastly, historical factors also contribute to the demand. Some regions have their own historical background giving them a separate and unique position; and people of these regions want to protect their historical lineage in the shape of forming a separate provincial set ups. Let's have overview of the reason that has led to the demand of the separate provincial system. In this context:

- Demand for South Punjab Province: demand for South Punjab province is based on the administrative, economic, cultural and political factors.
- Demand for the Creation of Mohajir Province: demand for this province for the equal distribution of resources and decision making representation. Thus the Political and economic factors are at the play in demanding this province.
- Demand for Pashtoon Province in Baluchistan: in the demand of this province, cultural and historical factors are the most contributing factors. The Pushtu speaking belt in Baluchistan wants a separate province on ethnic and cultural basis.
- Demand to Reinstate Bahawalpur Province: in this case, the most contributing factors for this demand are the historical and administrative factors. After independence the region remained a separate administrative identity till 1954 when the one unit formula was presented. In 1970 this region became a division when the one unit was abrogated. Thus, the people of the region want their historical identity back.
- Demand for the Province of Hazara Province: demand for this province gained momentum after 18th amendment and the language factor also plays an important role in this regard.
- Demand for the Province of Gilgit Baltistan: GB has to acquire not only a provincial status, but also a complete constitutional mainstreaming, enabling institutional reform and development planning in line with federal practices. Similarly, attainment of good governance contributes to this demand as well.

Policy documents argue that administrative proximity enhances service delivery, foster local accountability, and increases citizen satisfaction -- all pillars of good governance (Batool, et. al., 2023). Thus, the basic goals of the administrative restructuring of the provinces are to ring a sophisticated and better governance strategy.

Identity Politics and Regional Autonomy

Identity politics based on the ethnicity and culture is a reality in the political system of Pakistan. This political reality is shaped by local movements, party politics, and media framing. On the other hand, Political parties exploit and used identity politics

to secure their political interests. In reality, Ethnic and cultural identity gains importance across various regions in Pakistan such as:

- Hazara, which is Hindko-speaking community in KPK, feels marginalized in Pashtun-majority kpK. This identity difference shapes identity politics in KP.
- South Punjab, where most of the people speak Seraiki, also protest for their underdevelopment and marginalization. This region with its own cultural and historical trajectory tries to formulate a separate identity.
- Karachi, with mostly Mohajir and Urdu speaking people, also complain about their marginalization in politics, decision making and development. On the linguistic and cultural grounds, a separate identity is claimed by the people of Urban Sindh.
- Likewise, the other regions also claim their separate identity, for instance, the Bahawalpur region in Punjab, and Pashto speaking belt in Baluchistan province.

However, the identity politics plays its central role political discourse and particularly in the demand for new provinces. The regions with their own particular cultural and ethnic identities want their separate provincial set ups to avoid marginalization in decision making and development.

On the other side, Gilgit Baltistan portrays a different story. There is no issue of identity politics, but the issue which lies at the center is the problem of territorial status, religious composition, and historical exclusion. The region is deprived of its constitutional rights since the cession of the region to Pakistan. Apart from this constitutional exclusion, the region's complexities amplify with its strategic role CPEC, Kashmir diplomacy, and Sectarian diversity. In a net shell, the region possesses a great importance on the one hand and confronts various complexities on the other hand. As a result the people of the region are real victim who has to bear brunt of it.

Good Governance as a Justification and Expectation

Across all cases, the demand for new provinces is justified as a pathway to good governance. It is claimed that formation of new provinces will lead to;

- Enhance public sector responsiveness
- Inclusion in decision making
- Localized planning and budgeting
- Reduction in bureaucratic delays
- Equitable development
- National integration

However, many sources caution that formation of new provinces alone cannot guarantee the acquisition of good governance in the regions. The lack of good governance is because of the poor institutional culture, absence of intergovernmental coordination, and lack of public sector accountability. So, without fixing these issues, establishment of new provinces will risk the resources restraint, in addition to the failure to achieve its desired outcome of good governance.

In Gilgit Baltistan, expectations of good governance in case of becoming a new province are high. Review findings reveal that people of Gilgit Baltistan are hopeful of legal reform, public sector modernization, and inclusive development; once they would acquire the provincial status. The region has already gained importance due to CPEC.

Gilgit Baltistan is a gateway of CPEC, which is a flagship project of the Chinese belt and road initiative.

Conclusion

This systematic review conducted in this study aimed to critically examine the demands for new provinces in Pakistan through the conceptual lens of good governance. It particularly focuses on the case of Gilgit Baltistan and compares it with the other regions demanding separate provincial structures. This study analyses scholarly literature, policy documents, and legal texts, and compare multiple regional case including South Punjab, Hazara, Bahawalpur, Karachi, Pushtoon belt in Balochistan, and Gilgit Baltistan. It concludes that governance related grievances are the primary factor behind the sub-national movements for new provinces across different regions in Pakistan.

Across all reviewed regions, the calls for new provinces stem from perceptions of ineffective governance, administrative neglect, uneven development, and political under-representation. The region demanding new provinces want decentralization and regional autonomy to achieve good governance with greater transparency, efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability in public administration (Muzaffar, et. al., 2024). Malik & Rana, 2019).

However, the case of Gilgit Baltistan stands apart both in form and substance. Unlike other regions that demand administrative separation within the constitutional structure of Pakistan, Gilgit Baltistan operates outside the constitutional structure. The region is devoid of constitutional status, political representation, and the institutional safeguards enjoyed by other provinces (Iftikhar, 2020). However, some administrative reforms have been introduced in the form of Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment Orders of 2009 (Assembly, 2009) and 2018 (Baltistan, 2018); but these are the executive arrangements lacking permanence and legitimacy. These orders neither provide constitutional safeguards, nor give the legislative autonomy. In this context, the demand for full provincial status in Gilgit Baltistan is not merely about decentralization; it is about inclusion, recognition, and constitutional justice.

This study further illustrates that provincial restructuring will not improve governance, unless the inefficiencies in existing provincial structures are removed. There is pressing need of parallel reforms in institutional capacity, public sector performance, fiscal federalism, and citizen engagement while going for the process of establishing new provinces. Without structural reforms, the aim of new provinces to ensure good governance will not fulfill. Therefore, governance reform must be structural, not just spatial.

The study also identifies significant gaps in the existing literature -- particularly the absence of grassroots-level data, longitudinal impact evaluation, public perception, and comparative federalist analysis. Future research must prioritize the gaps to fully understand and guide any policy rendering provincial reorganization.

In conclusion, Gilgit Baltistan's struggle for provincial status is a test case for the country to keep itself to its own commitment to inclusive governance, legal equity, and democratic deepening; as it encompasses legal and political complexities owing to its attachment with the Kashmir dispute. The move toward inclusion of Gilgit Baltistan in

constitutional framework giving it provincial status, along with provincial reconstructing, will become a trans-formative step toward a balance federation.

Recommendations

This systematic review study recommends several key implications for policy and institutional reforms:

- **Gigit Baltistan's Provincial Integration:** Giving provincial status to Gilgit Baltistan must be approached not only as a political decision, but as a governance imperative. This will provide the region fiscal autonomy, administrative capacity-building, and representation in national institutions.
- **Provincial Restructuring:** Provincial restructuring debates In Pakistan need to move beyond political rhetoric toward a data-driven, governance-oriented framework. And this restructuring should focus on decentralization, development equity, and inclusive federalism.
- **Requirement of Evidence-based Governance Assessment:** The government and civil society need to invest in evidence based governance assessments of underrepresented regions, so that future policy decisions on administrative reorganization could be guided.
- **Good Governance must proceed or Accompany Provincial Creation:** the existing administrative inefficiencies and structural hurdles are required to be removed to ensure good governance; otherwise, these inefficiencies of current provinces may simply replicate to the new provinces (Nazir, 2010).

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