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# Ethnic disloyalty or federal loyalty? A case of contesting Baloch representation in postcolonial Pakistan

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This article captures the representation of the Baloch ethnic minority in Pakistan's multinational federation. The research establishes a taxonomy of Baloch representatives and their contesting ideological positions by analysing a sample of news articles published in Pakistan's national and international newspapers between 2006 and 2024. This approach provides fresh insights into the complex dynamics of minority representation for the Baloch. The study classifies the contesting groups of Baloch representatives into three clusters: (a) The federalists, (b) The nationalists, and (c) The secessionists. Not restricting its scope to periodisation, the research further investigates if there are linkages between the British colonial view of the Baloch, their treatment as a belligerent ethnic group and the submission of their ethnic loyalty in the postcolonial federation of Pakistan. Using the qualitative content analysis technique, the research attaches themes emerging from the analysed discourse of Baloch representatives from the news articles. Moreover, the article scrutinises each representative group's understanding of how they perceive themselves and other representatives of the Baloch minority within the federation – in the context of the broader Baloch question. The research also aims to provoke thought within federalism theory: if representatives of an ethnic minority group show more allegiance to the federal centre than the minority they represent, is it a case of federal loyalty or ethnic disloyalty?

## KEYWORDS

federalism, Baloch nationalism, ethnic representation, Pakistan, minority representation, federal loyalty

## 1 Introduction

The study of representation in multinational federations has remained one of the most important aspects of understanding how the multilevel system of governance functions. Numerous avenues of research have focused on the share and size of regional representation, whether symmetrically equal or asymmetrically distinct. Questions of population and territorial size have contributed to this idea. There is also an overarching sense of belief that the nature of representation will also affect the distribution of resources across regions in the federation (Dragu and Rodden, 2010). Most federations worldwide operate under the asymmetrical model, with constituent units possessing different autonomous powers and competencies and boding different representation formulas. Governance under the federal model may also be conceived as a political device for establishing flexible relationships capable of facilitating inter-state relations and inter-community cooperation (Gagnon, 1993, p.16). The same applies to federal institutions, which play a crucial role in allocating resources and providing representatives in decision-making processes, thereby influencing minority representation (Thorlakson, 2003). Regarding minority-majority relations within federations,

representatives at both levels also play a crucial part in situating interregional and federal harmony between units and their populace. This crucial avenue of inter-state and inter-institutional relations within federations has been paid attention to in research, and its potential impact on policymaking cannot be overstated.

What remains an understudied route is the pivot to the former conversation(s), one guided by the understanding of internecine conflict within ethnic representation in multinational federations. In minority nations, the onus of representation tends to be pivotal to the ethnicity's placement in the federal state. In cases of minority nationalism, if there is more than one cluster of representatives – how does the aspect of shared representation function? Scholars have identified ethnonational or ethnolinguistic cleavages along which self-determination pressures emerge to protect minority identities in plural societies (Keating, 2001; Kymlicka, 2001; Watts, 1999). Theories of civic and ethnic nationalism have guided much modern scholarship in shaping political and social understandings of power relations (Kohn, 1944; Plamenatz, 1973; Spencer and Wollman, 1998; Tamir, 2019). Less attention, however, has been paid to the ordeal of civic and ethnic representation within a singular group – as contesting ideological clusters. This gap in research is not just a void but a call for attention and further exploration, underscoring the need for this federal debate and the importance of this crucial area of study, especially for federations in the Global South.

This article takes a slightly distinct take on “Representation of Minority Nations in Multinational Federal States.” Instead of investigating how the main spokespersons of the national majority groups construct and disseminate national minorities, the research focuses on the divergence between representatives of the same minority group cohabiting on the same federal territory. This article takes up the case of the Baloch minority in the Balochistan region of Pakistan and establishes three distinct tributaries of ethnic representation – the federalists, the nationalists, and the secessionists. It creates a taxonomy of factions within the Baloch who stand for contrasting approaches to their understanding of ethnic representation. Not only does this article focus on minority self-representation, but it also analyses the internecine conflict between these different ethnic factions – and the broader Baloch question. The negation of a holistic and consolidated representative identity has left the Baloch of Balochistan to be underrepresented – or unrepresented at all. Whilst the federalists are political and feudal elites guarding the federation, most of whom dynastically inherited power from the British colonial era, the nationalists are the ones contesting representation and Baloch rights within the federal framework—the third set of representatives, the secessionists, are divided as secessionists in exile, and secessionist guerilla groups – who struggle for an independent state of Balochistan.

Balochistan is a multiethnic region primarily comprising the Baloch and Pashtun ethnicities. It is the largest and most ethnolinguistically diverse province of Pakistan but the smallest in terms of population. Baloch (including Brahuis) and Pashtuns, respectively, are the biggest ethnic groups, accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the province's total population (Kakar, 2020). According to the Census 2017 results, the Baloch population shrunk from 61 to 55.6% in the province over a period of 19 years in 21 districts where the Baloch form a majority. Apart from its broader connotations for understanding Balochistan's political reality, this research mainly

investigates how the three clusters of Baloch represent themselves and their counterparts in Pakistan's national, and international media – in the context of the broader Baloch question.

Scholars of media and politics have argued that perspectives, politics and political communication are inextricably linked (Blumler, 2016; Donges and Jarren, 2017; Schulz, 2011). The article focuses on the self-representation in political discourse, specifically the self-representation of political actors. In political communication, self-representation can be differentiated from the production of politics and its media representation (Esser, 2013; Meyer and Hinchman, 2002). On one hand politically civic, financially stable and socioeconomically elite federalists outbid the nationalists and secessionists as the main representatives of the Baloch through state patronage. On the other, the secessionist quarters contest themselves as the de facto representatives of the minority nation – committing to their cause of an independent Balochistan through unequivocal means of self-determination – driven by their historical ethnocentric identity and the federation's mistreatment. The question and hypothesis driving this article then is, if there are contesting representatives within a minority nation with diverging ideological paths, is anyone representing the minority at all? Not restricting its scope to periodisation, the research further investigates if there are linkages between the British colonial view of the Baloch, their treatment as a belligerent ethnic group and the current division between ethnic representatives in the postcolonial. The research utilises representative statements in newspapers to deduce the power struggle between representatives and how they perceive the Baloch dilemma. It analyses the statements of the elected federalists (Chief Ministers), nationalist leaders and secessionist quarters between August 2006 and June 2024. The periodisation from August 2006 is particularly important to understanding the competing representation of the Baloch. On August 26, prominent Baloch federalist-turned-secessionist Nawab Akbar Bugti, “the troublemaker,” was assassinated by the state military during the authoritarian rule and dictatorship of General Parvez Musharraf, marking the start of the fourth wave of Baloch insurgency (Khan et al., 2009).

The main objective of this research is not to depict and argue in favour of either group of representatives of the Baloch but to establish a political taxonomy of the minority ethnicity. Historically, ample political literature has been produced on Pakistan's teetering ties with Balochistan and the Baloch (Khan et al., 2009; Akhtar, 2007; Baloch, 2007; Ahmed and Baloch, 2017). However, not enough attention has been paid to the umbrella of representation and Baloch representatives in this dysfunctional federal relationship since 1948. The question of representatives and their loyalty is also fundamental to this research. Gamper (2010) states that federal loyalty is a principle that operates reciprocally, distinguishing it from constitutional loyalty, which demands that subjects obey the constitution without reciprocity. Federal loyalty for this research should be understood as the ethnic representatives' national loyalty towards the centre and the federation. In contrast, ethnic disloyalty pertains less to subnational loyalty and more towards the historical understanding of ethnic belonging. In multinational states such as Pakistan, political representatives contest between their loyalty towards the federation and their ethnicities. This understanding goes beyond Sidanius et al.'s (1997, p.103) question about whether it is possible to foster loyalty and identification to one's ethnicity whilst maintaining shared national values and a sense of common national identification. For the Baloch and their

representatives, it becomes a question of whether the vested interests of the representative groups (attached to the federation) supersede the miseries of their ethnic compatriots whom they are representing.

Thus, I ask: How do Baloch representatives depict themselves and other Baloch factions in national and international media? Do they contest representation or share it? Does this representation warfare benefit the Baloch in the Pakistani federation as a minority ethnic group? More importantly, through the normative lens of federalism – is the elected and constitutionally recognised representation of the Baloch federally loyal or ethnically disloyal? The questions showcase different levels of analysis, that of ethnic minority representation and institutional accommodation, to achieve one primary objective – to establish a taxonomy of Baloch representatives in the federation of Pakistan.

The opening section of this article connects the colonial history of the Baloch to their status quo in the Pakistani federation, focusing on the British intervention to the Sardari system. The second section outlines the research design through its methodology and framework. The third section presents how the competing quarters of Baloch federalists, Baloch nationalists, and Baloch secessionists display ethnic discourse in national and international newspapers. Fourth, I discuss the findings and analyse competing ideological stances and discourses of the ethnic factions. The sixth section offers a deeper discussion on Baloch ethnic representation and its implications on the Baloch question before concluding remarks.

## 1.1 Baloch representation in the colonial and postcolonial

There is a theoretical tradition in literature that links the political exclusion of ethnic groups to the outbreak of violence (Brass, 1991; Horowitz, 1985; Williams, 2003). Wucherpfennig et al. (2016, p.884) argue that states may strategically exclude potential belligerent groups from the sphere of governance and statehood due to their belligerent nature or histories. Governments may assume that excluding a belligerent group reduces the risk of conflict, denying resources for mobilisation – or potentially – secession. One such historically belligerent ethnic group, the Baloch, find themselves as an ethnic minority in the multinational federation of Pakistan.

This study specifically focuses on the Baloch ethnicity present within the territorial boundaries of Balochistan, Pakistan. The Baloch constitute approximately 56% of Balochistan's population and 3.5% of Pakistan's total population. As an ethnic group, the Baloch are also present in the federation's neighbouring states, Afghanistan and Iran, constituting about 2% of their total populations, respectively. Unlike the Baloch in Afghanistan, there is an evident cross-border kinship between the Pakistani Baloch and Irani Baloch (from Balochistan, Pakistan, to Sistan and Baluchestan, Iran). The reason for the lack of cross-border kinship between the Baloch in Afghanistan and Pakistan is that the bordering localities are dominated by the Pashtuns and not the ethnic Baloch. Moreover, it is pertinent to add here that neither the Baloch in Afghanistan nor Iran possess the same attributes of political self-determination as the Baloch in Pakistan. This is primarily due to Balochistan's accession to the Pakistani federation, having a larger territory, population, and abundance of natural resources and being marred by political and ethnic turbulence.

One of the earliest accounts of the Baloch comes from British colonial quarters administering the Indian Subcontinent. The British

discovery of Balochistan and its recognition as a garrison buffer state between colonial India and Afghanistan shaped the region's future and the Baloch ethnicity. Governed as a Princely State through indirect colonial rule, the native population of Balochistan traditionally consisted of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes that lived as pastoralists (Syed and Khan, 2020). Before the British intervention, the Baloch lived as a tribal confederacy, with sovereign power resting with the Khan, a title bestowed upon the leader of the semi-nomadic tribes. The best account of the Baloch and the British comes from the work of Sir Penderel Moon, OBE, a colonial administrator of India, who penned the British's earliest encounter with the Baloch and recorded their colonisation. The British influence in Balochistan was such that the Khan of Kalat took an annual subsidy from the colonial quarters in exchange for no contact with other states – as Balochistan sat in the path of any alien advance to colonial India as a buffer state. In effect, becoming a bastion of the British Indian empire (Moon, 1989, p.34).

However, this does not mean that the colonial government held the Khan of Kalat and the Baloch in high regard or considered them civil compared to other Princely States. Instead, the Khan was viewed as “barbarous and savage” (Moon, 1989, p.898) and other Baloch tribes as “brigands and plunderers” (Moon, 1989, p.511). This belligerent representation of the Baloch by their colonial overlords seems to have found no escape in the postcolonial – stuck to the minority as a label, just as most de facto colonial legacies tend to (Khosro, 2024). The centralised power of the Khan slowly eroded after the death of Mir Noori Nasir Khan, creating the pivot for British interference in the confederacy's affairs before occupying Kalat on November 13, 1839 (Ahmadzai, 1933). The centralised power of the Khan, during the more autonomous princely rule under the British compared to other states, was a question that needed addressing. The Khan's personalistic army of troops and consolidated power created schisms within the Baloch hierarchy. The colonial forces struck gold with the introduction of the Sandeman System under British colonial official Sir Robert Sandeman. This form of indirect colonial rule created new tribal councils, depleting the power of the Khan of Kalat outside of his tribe (Ahmadzai, 1933, p.57). Through the Sandeman System, the Sardars (the tribal chiefs) directly reported to the British administration. The Sandeman System also gave birth to an administrative and security system through the ‘tribal levies’ force, which created an identification of the Baloch to defend their state and be responsible for their welfare (Axmann, 2012, p.31). These colonial mechanics left legacies that would continue in the postcolonial structure of Balochistan.

Understanding the role of the Sardars is important to this research. It serves even better when the explanation is provided by British historians, who first encountered the Baloch and their territory. “The usual style of a chief was Sardar. British officials tended to regard the tribal Sardars as if they were Scottish clan chieftains... or English barons from the Wars of the Roses... There were, in fact, important differences between these respective societies. However, the Sardars of Balochistan resembled mediaeval European noblemen in their refusal to tolerate any slight on their personal honour or threat to their political power” (Heathcote, 1911, p.5). The Sandeman System empowered the Sardars sevenfold and created a Baloch national identity that revolved around the Khan – but with lesser power. The same Sardars inherited power and the state of Balochistan when the region became a part of the Pakistani federation in 1948. Even though there are contesting historical narratives of whether Balochistan

joined the federation willingly, the answer remains out of this research's scope. What is important, however, is to understand that this quagmire created two ideologically distinct sets of Baloch representatives – the federalists and the nationalists, even before the start of nation-building in Pakistan.

As articulated in *Postcolonial Federalism*, the remnants and legacies of colonial rule continue in the postcolonial (Khosro, 2024). The lens remains essential to grasp Baloch's representation in the Pakistani federation. The entrenchment of Sardars and their sociopolitical operations as an inherited dynastical feudal class in the present framework was structured during the colonial period. Before British rule, the Sardar's position was not hereditary but was conferred by a consensus of tribal leaders based on merits and abilities. Furthermore, Sardar's respect was maintained by ensuring the well-being of his followers (Heathcote, 1911). All this changed after the colonial administration intervened in the Baloch representative structure and hierarchy. That is not to say that the pre-colonial tribal structure was ideal for ethnic representation. However, such an intervention did morph the understanding of representation and ethnic camaraderie for the Baloch, especially the Sardars. The imperial project supported the Sardars' primary interest in consolidating their lands, buying their loyalties and making them extensions of the British authority in the region. As the leader of his tribe, a Sardar would often overlook the interest of his people in exchange for British financial assistance and submission to their authority. This model gave the British, and later the state of Pakistan, indirect access to the natural resources in their territory (Shah, 2017, p. 27). The bargain of Baloch political elites submitting their loyalties to a centralising authority followed in the postcolonial and impacted Baloch ethnic representation in the federation.

However, in the postcolonial journey, the Sardars and Nawabs of Balochistan have seen their powers somewhat diluted and devolved to another cadre of the Baloch hierarchy over time. This cadre includes the Mirs, Waderas and Takkaris, who act as sub-tribal leaders and exercise social power over the general population. Contrary to the popular discourse in media and belief in the federation, the role of the Sardars is not the only factor in Balochistan and the Baloch's disempowerment – the Mirs, Waderas and Takkaris play their due part as well. One of the key powers of this cadre includes naming the new Sardars or Nawabs of their tribes. Through their consensus, a new tribal chief is appointed – which is usually only a ceremonial act, as the Sardari system remains hereditary. Not including the Pashtun belts of Balochistan, the Makuran region (Gwadar, Turbat, and Panjgur) of Balochistan, historically, has disowned the concept of Baloch tribalism and the titles and accolades that come with it, even though socioeconomic disparities in Makuran have created new political and social elites over time. The same could be applied to the Rakhshan belt of Balochistan (Nushki, Chaghi and Kharan), where the tribal chiefs do not show immense influence anymore. The postcolonial Sandeman tribal system primarily exists and thrives today in the Sarawan, Jhalawan and Kacchi belts of Balochistan.

Balochistan's federal journey from 1948 to 1971 was not devoid of crisis or conflict. Since 1948, when Balochistan became a *de facto* and *de jure* part of Pakistan, the region has witnessed overarching supervision and surveillance. Questions of autonomy, political or social, have remained limited compared with other regions of the federation. "The oddity of state formation in South Asia makes the

problem far more vexed. Since the boundaries of partition were haphazardly drawn, a Europe-like situation, where cultural boundaries of 'nation' were somewhat in consonance with the political boundaries of the 'state,' could not be replicated" (Marshall and Gurr, 2003). However, during this period, the perceivable federal antagonists were the Bengalis of East Pakistan (modern-day Bangladesh). Whilst East Pakistan remained an unsound geopolitical part of the federation, Balochistan was a territorial unit within West Pakistan, along with Punjab, Sindh and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) (Ahmad, 2005). To counter the numerical ethnic dominance of East Pakistan's Bengalis, a quasi-federal structure was introduced in 1955, known as the One Unit scheme.<sup>1</sup> It is pertinent to add that this homogenous unit, consisted of multiple ethnicities, who spoke different languages, had different cultures, and had significantly different historical identities. It was just before East Pakistan's secession that the One Unit scheme dissolved, and Balochistan gained provincial status, with its first assembly coming into existence via a Presidential Order on 30th March 1970. Balochistan and the Baloch embarked on their bona fide federal journey through the first election in December 1970 with 21 members, comprising 20 general seats and one seat reserved for women (Abdullah and Ahmed, 2018). Today, the provincial Balochistan Assembly has 65 total seats, where 51 are contested through general elections and 14 are reserved for women and minorities.

## 2 Methodology and Framework

To apprehend the contesting case of ethnic minority representation of the Baloch in Pakistan and to purview their ideological representation, the research takes a qualitative approach to understand the political narratives of different actors and representatives. News media articles were selected as the primary data source for studying the political narratives of the Baloch federalists, Baloch nationalists, and Baloch secessionists. These news articles are presented in Appendix C of the research, along with coding decisions in Appendix A. The use of news media articles was done for three reasons. First, news media plays a pivotal role in endorsing public perceptions through images, hyperbolic reportage, and reporting comments from public officials (Morehouse and Sonnett, 2010). These perceptions and reportage provide a route to identify competing narratives that consciously perform and project the future (Dalpiaz and di, 2018). Second, data derived and analysed from news media articles is – naturally occurring data (Ninan and Sergeeva, 2023). This data arises without a researcher directly intervening and approaching a group of respondents (Silverman, 2006). Thus, no biases are showcased on the researcher's agenda or influencing relationships. Finally, narratives in news media can be seen as a platform where different stakeholders negotiate, oppose or resist dominant ideologies (Hall, 1980).

1 After Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra's "formula" in 1953 failed to establish equal representation of all five of Pakistan's provinces, including Bengal, the One Unit scheme was initiated. It integrated the four provinces of Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh, and NWFP into One Unit (West Pakistan) and left Bengal as the outsider eastern wing (East Pakistan).

For the analysis, the research utilises Qualitative Content Analysis as its framework to depict the contesting representation of the three clusters of the Baloch minority. Basic software such as Microsoft Word and Excel was used for the compilation of data and manual coding. Political communication is a wide-ranging, complex and fluid subfield (Blumler, 2016), and content analysis is the most widely used method in political communication (Graber and Smith, 2005; Neuendorf and Kumar, 2017). Political speeches and communication have played an essential role in analysing political actors' self-presentation, especially from a qualitative or discourse analysis approach (Hawkins, 2009; Van Dijk, 1993, 2005; Wodak, 2013). Moreover, Qualitative Content Analysis is "a research method for subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

The framework also uses aspects of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). PDA rests within the critical discourse analysis framework, which deals with "the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance. Such an analysis deals with the discursive conditions and consequences of social and political inequality that results from such domination" (Van Dijk, 1993). Moreover, the framework pertains to understanding discourse beyond just communication as an ontologically distinct structure to elaborate certain political and social realities of the units of analysis. For objective reasons, statements published by newspapers under quotation marks as direct quotes of the representatives were selected for the analysis. The framework perfectly fits the research design and the structure of this paper. Van Dijk (1997) asserts that political discourse, when published, does not need to be attributed to specific politicians. Furthermore, even though Van Dijk (1997) considers an editorial commenting on political affairs as media discourse, large parts of news (when about politics) are also categorised as political discourse. This study provides an even more precise implementation of the framework, as extracts from the news are direct quotations of Baloch politicians and contesting public actors. Van Dijk (1997) further elaborates on the implementation of PDA, stating, "In other words, once we have analysed the particular properties of political contexts, political discourse analysis in many respects will be like any other kind of discourse analysis."

To understand this instance of political statements and Baloch society, PDA helps explore opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practises, events and texts, and (b) their broader social and cultural structures, relations and processes (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Moreover, it provides the relationship between discourse structures and political context structures – metaphors in politics functioning in a political context, for instance, in the attack on political opponents, the presentation of policies or the legitimisation of political power (Van Dijk, 1997).

The research situates the context in the content selected from the news articles and discusses the ideological projection of different Baloch representatives—the federalists, nationalists, and secessionists. It is imperative to reiterate that the purpose of this study is not to build theory, nor is it an exercise in methodological training. Instead, the research design is used to help bolster the taxonomy of Baloch representation – as a minority nation within the multinational federation of Pakistan.

## 2.1 Coding the taxonomy of Baloch representation in Pakistan

Amidst perplexed contestation of who is representing the Baloch minority in the federation of Pakistan – a taxonomy is necessary to understand why the Baloch ethnicity remains marginalised. Thus, it is key to establish the different ideological narratives and approaches of the represented groups to understand the broader idea of minority representation. After scrutinising the sample, before the analysis, this article codes three different sets of representatives as (1) The federalists, (2) The nationalists, and (3) The secessionists.

The most relevant concept to Baloch representation comes from intra-ethnic competition and "ethnic outbidding." It is understood as a process where ethnically based political parties take increasingly extreme ideological positions to distance themselves from rival parties (Stewart and McGauvran, 2020). In the case of Baloch ethnic representation, ethnic outbidding includes ideologies of political parties but also gives importance to ideologies from outside the legal arenas of contestation. Contrary to the literature on political parties, ethnic outbidding in the Baloch minority does showcase rival groups taking extreme positions to counter an established hegemonic narrative of one group. In Balochistan, there are no separatist political parties that contend elections. Instead, the agenda of separatism arises from secessionist non-state organisations that have mostly been flagged as proscribed outfits by the Pakistani federation. This can be analysed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 presents a table of the taxonomy of Baloch representatives, their ideological positions, the main actors responsible and the last two provincial election results. It is important to discuss the strength of these main actors and their organisations here. However, before that, it is essential to understand that Balochistan operates within a feudal structure. Instead of political parties being necessary, political personalities find importance – comprising of the same regional, feudal elites. As in other regions of the federation, floor crossing and party switching of these political representatives is very common due to guaranteed votes from their localities and tribesmen.

The federalist political parties, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) have been the two most prominent dynastical parties in the federation's history, representing the regions of Sindh and Punjab, respectively. Both these parties have ruled the federation's centre and regions since the 1970s, only conceding power to dictators in between. Both political parties are present across the federation and regularly contest elections on all three levels of government (central, regional and local). However, the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) has served as a new player on the forum, created a week before the elections in 2018. Even though it is a regional political party, its alignment is with the centre. The party has since served as the face of the pro-establishment federalists in Balochistan, providing the Pakistani federation with a Chairman of the Senate and a Caretaker Prime Minister since its creation.

As Figure 1 states, the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) won 24 out of the 65 seats in the provincial assembly in 2018. Whilst the two main federalist parties, the PPP and PML-N had a combined total of 1 seat in 2018. Unsurprisingly, and as the trend of 'electable' politicians suggests, in the 2024 elections, most of the electable swayed away from BAP and joined either the PPP or the PML-N. The results of which are evident. The PML-N, a federal party based in Punjab, secured 18 out of the 65 seats and the PPP, a federal party based in Sindh, secured 16 seats.

Baloch Representative	Ideological Stance	Main Actors	Balochistan Assembly (2018)	Balochistan Assembly (2024)
<b>The Federalists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-Federation and status quo</li> <li>• Reconciliation with other representative groups</li> <li>• Primary agenda: No Secession Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pakistan People’s Party (PPP)</li> <li>• Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)</li> <li>• Balochistan Awami Party (BAP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPP: 0/65 (0.00%)</li> <li>• PML-N: 1/65 (1.53%)</li> <li>• BAP: 24/65 (36.9%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPP: 16/65 (24.61%)</li> <li>• PML-N: 18/65 (27.69%)</li> <li>• BAP: 4/65 (6.15%)</li> </ul>
<b>The Nationalists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-Federation but anti-status quo</li> <li>• Against “Puppet” Federalists</li> <li>• Primary agenda: Baloch rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M)</li> <li>• National Party (NP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BNP-M: 10/65 (15.38%)</li> <li>• NP: 0/65 (0.00%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BNP-M: 1/65 (1.53%)</li> <li>• NP: 4/65 (6.15%)</li> </ul>
<b>The Secessionists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-Federation and anti-status quo</li> <li>• Against both Federalists and Nationalists</li> <li>• Primary agenda: Independent Balochistan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)</li> <li>• Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF)</li> <li>• Balochistan Republican Army (BRA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secessionist groups do not contest elections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secessionist groups do not contest elections</li> </ul>

FIGURE 1  
Taxonomy of Baloch representatives in Pakistan.

The electoral strength of the two main actors for the nationalists, the Balochistan National Party–Mengal (BNP-M) and The Nationalist Party (NP), is restricted to regional elections and a few seats in the National Assembly. The parties only contest elections from Balochistan, unlike the federalist parties. Although both parties regularly contest elections, their electoral strength is only marginally reflected in election results, as both actors have historically claimed irregularities in the electoral processes. Due to their ideological stance and grievances over Baloch autonomy, the parties have often claimed they are forcefully kept out of the electoral sphere and power-sharing negotiations. This trend can be seen in the 2018 and 2024 elections. The BNP-M went from 10 seats in the Balochistan provincial assembly to only having 1. The National Party (NP) went from having 10 seats in 2013 to having 0 in 2018. These electoral trends for the Balochistan assembly suggest discrepancies that this research’s analysis wishes to provide context for. These trends show that in the last two elections, the prospects of centralisation in the federation have only increased – where regional nationalist parties lose their mandate to federal parties such as the PML-N and PPP.

On the contrary, Baloch secessionist organisations possess no political or electoral strengths. They are not registered as political parties and do not ideologically align with electoral politics. Instead, they openly call on the Baloch every election season to boycott the voting process altogether—to disown the current model and to be responsible for their safety on election day through threats of sabotage.

## 2.2 The federalists

Unlike federalists of many other multinational federations, the Baloch minority finds its federalists in an ambiguous situation. Just like the nationalists, most of the federalists also belong to the same category of the postcolonial elite that inherited fiscal and social standing within the minority – mainly the Sardars, Nawabs, Mirs, Waderas and Takkaris. Instead of getting involved in a federal contestation against the state and its apparatus (institutions – such as security forces), the federalists

wholeheartedly side with the federal spirit of Pakistan. They showcase unequivocal federal loyalty. This set of representatives takes a hardline no-secession policy and occupies the regional and national political podiums – and other important state portfolios. Apart from the Sardari postcolonial elite faction, another faction forms the federalists of Balochistan. The non-Sardar/Nawab cadre. This cadre finds its federalist political narratives as a ladder of upward socio-economic mobility through state patronage. Today, most federalists remain under the umbrella of the term ‘electable’. The term ‘electable’ may be a more contemporary invention. However, the concept is rooted in colonial times when the British depended on the rural elite’s mediation to form an efficient government (Sajjad et al., 2022).

## 2.3 The nationalists

The nationalists share characteristics with both the federalists and secessionists. Much like the secessionists, the Baloch nationalists also find themselves, at times, in a heated contestation with the state narrative. This cadre of representatives consolidates power from both the bottom-up and top-down. The nationalists comprise the noble cadres of Sardars/Nawabs, the middle-class and grassroots Baloch activists. Close to their feudal roots; the Baloch nationalists function within the postcolonial dynamics – having inherited social and fiscal power. However, they are also comprised of the postcolonial regional elite, who have remained part of the Baloch ethnonationalism movement and Baloch representation, with some having secessionist histories. This set of representatives keep their inherited feudal, political and social power close to heart, and occupy the political forums and podiums both at the regional and national levels when given the chance. However, unlike the secessionists, the nationalists possess more capital – political, fiscal and social – to lose when contesting the state and the federation. Thus, their political narratives often do not align with their ambitions. Even though this set of representatives would be one of the key inheritors of an independent Balochistan, a lot is at stake for them to be a part of the secessionist movement.

## 2.4 The secessionists

Like other self-determination movements across the paradigm of federalism and federations, Baloch secessionists contest rigorously for an independent Balochistan. The secessionists function as hardliners in their ideological agenda – of no conflict resolution through political dialogue. Since the 1960s, the cluster of representing groups within the secessionists has been involved in tactical guerilla warfare against the sovereign state of Pakistan. This set of representatives usually belongs to the middle or lower class within the social hierarchy of Balochistan, working with the narrative of being “forced to take up arms.” However, there is another faction of the Secessionists, those in exile.

The exiled secessionists belong to the postcolonial cadre of Baloch elites, including the Khan of Kalat and other Nawabs and Sardars. Thus, the secessionists could be understood as having two separate branches: (1) secessionists (exile) and (2) secessionists (guerilla).<sup>2</sup> The Baloch secessionists (guerilla) possess an insurgent outlook and have been constantly involved in sabotage and attacks on Pakistani security forces within Balochistan and other regions of the federation. Moreover, they have also been involved in targeting other ethnicities settled in Balochistan, namely the Punjabis, the de facto ethnic majority of the federation. This approach has rekindled the historical belligerency label attached to the Baloch. On the other hand, the secessionists (exile) maintain the same narrative, living out of Balochistan and Pakistan and trying to gather international support for self-determination.

A holistic aspect of unpopularity for both the secessionists (guerilla) and secessionists (exile) is the practise of extortion against their ethnic compatriots. Secessionist groups in Balochistan are famous for threatening, coercing and extorting money from pro-federation Baloch landowners, businessmen, politicians and bureaucrats alike, as the representative group sees itself in a “war against Pakistan” – which requires financial support. The secessionist approach for the Baloch in Pakistan realises qualitative differences to, perhaps, pro-secessionist Catalans in Spain. Whilst the latter minority group realises and enjoys political agency for their ideologies and forums for ethnic dialogue, the pro-secession Baloch are deemed as non-state actors.

## 3 Findings and analysis

### 3.1 The Federalists (FED) – elected premiers of Balochistan

#### 3.1.1 Theme: reconciliation, democracy and state’s writ

The key pattern in the federalists’ statement since the death of Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2006, as found, was mainly around

reconciliation and bringing other disfranchised figures of Baloch representatives, mainly the secessionists, to the political table and supposed democratic sphere.

After militancy resurged in Balochistan, FED 1 (2008–2013) asserted, “They [insurgents and security agents] have been targeting each other’s activists,” (BBC, 2010). FED 1 positioned himself in the middle, between the secessionists and the state apparatus, presenting a more nationalist perspective on the rising militancy in Balochistan.

FED 2 (2013–2015), the leader of a nationalist party who was elected as Chief Minister, also attempted to maintain this neutrality: “If you treat the people of Balochistan with love and respect, they will give you everything they have, but if you subject them to contempt and disrespect, they can destroy everything they have to take revenge” (Express Tribune, 2015).

The discourse also emphasised how the rising militancy in Balochistan had disrupted the region’s development and service of state goods provisions. FED 2 (2013–2015) stated: “Historically, the insurgency has given the Baloch people nothing but death and destruction and triggered forced migrations. This 12-year-long insurgency has destroyed the economy and disrupted social services in Balochistan,” (Express Tribune, 2015).

FED 4 (2018–2018) also emphasised the same: “In this fight (by separatists), many young Baloch men have been lost, our economy has been shattered, our education destroyed. Balochistan cannot bear terrorism anymore,” (Arab News, 2018).

Within the federalist discourse, constitutional proximity of actions was also considered—the federal structure was given importance, and rights under the parliamentary system were challenged via democratic solutions.

FED 2 (2013–2015) stated: “I’ve been mandated by the federal government to bring all Baloch leaders into the political mainstream. I want to persuade them to attain their rights through a democratic struggle. And I’m sure my efforts will yield results” (Express Tribune, 2014).

In a later statement, he added: “The people of Balochistan are determined to get their rights through political and democratic means, and we need to address root causes for unrest moving forward” (Dawn, 2015).

On the same notion, FED 3 (2015–2018) said: “Balochistan is part of Pakistan and is run by a democratically elected government. The Pakistan Army is ours and we will not tolerate any Indian interference in our internal matters,” (Dawn, 2016).

FED 4 (2018) was quoted as saying: “The people of Balochistan want to remain with Pakistan. They want to fight for their rights within the constitutional limits of Pakistan. We are not for taking up arms and causing damage to the entire Baloch nation,” (Arab News, 2018).

FED 4—re-elected— (2021–2023) mentioned: “This is not an armed struggle for Balochistan’s rights. If they want to get rights for people, they should come to the [Balochistan] Assembly and start the struggle for Balochistan’s rights under the parliamentary system” (Dawn, 2023).

The discourse also involved counter-secession narratives, particularly differentiating between manoeuvres of political protest and activities that may be considered acts of terrorism. A lot of energy was also expended on Baloch secessionists and their proximal relationship with Pakistan’s historically hostile neighbour, India.

<sup>2</sup> The secessionists (exile) are mostly individuals from the postcolonial elite including the incumbent Khan of Kalat himself. The secessionists (guerilla) serve as an umbrella of multiple non-state groups but are mainly represented through two major groups: the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF). Both organisations have been labelled as terrorist groups by the State.

FED 3 (2015–2018) was quoted as stating: “The Indian government fully supports the ongoing insurgency in Balochistan. It is deeply involved in sponsoring elements like W, X, Y and Z” (Dawn, 2016). This comment was directed at the secessionists in exile and those involved in guerilla warfare against the state.

However, even before 2006, the federalists shared tribal titles with many secessionists (exile). FED 3 (2015–2018) stated: “If the people of Balochistan elect them [Baloch in exile] as their leaders, I will respect their mandate” (Express Tribune, 2016).

FED 5 (2018–2021) further enhanced the state’s writ narrative: “Pakistan’s enemies were trying to turn its youth against it by spreading fake propaganda against the state. Their (enemies) nefarious designs will be foiled as the new provincial government is committed to ending the longstanding sense of deprivation amongst the people of Balochistan” (Daily Times, 2019).

More recently, FED 6 (2024\*) also asserted a similar view against militancy: “This war against terrorism is not only for security forces. This war against the enemies of peace is the State’s war. Those involved in the horrific killing (of Punjabis) are not Baloch but terrorists, and they should be called terrorists” (Dawn, 2024).

Almost all statements of the federalists considered that – the divide (in representation) – was detrimental to the Baloch nation, whilst solutions rested in joining mainstream democratic representation, rather than in contestation against the federal state. Even though there was negative discourse against many secessionists in exile, the same was not extended to one person, the incumbent Khan of Kalat – an important historical figure for the Baloch nation. The main variables from 2006 to 2024 remained reconciliation, bringing disgruntled Baloch leaders to dialogue and finding democratic solutions to the Baloch question, however, not at the cost of any alteration to the regional status of Balochistan.

In summary, the discourse potentially configures the idea of what federal loyalty means for the Baloch federalists. It is about countering the narrative of secessionists through reconciliation with the centre, giving preference to the federation over their ethnic identities. The notion of ethnic representatives in a socioeconomically malnourished region with human rights grievances siding with state institutions and preferring their national identity over their ethnic identity serves as proof of the same.

## 3.2 The Nationalists (NAT) – between the federation and revolution

### 3.2.1 Theme: Baloch rights and “puppet” political elites

Even though there is sufficient literature on Baloch ethnonationalism and nationalist politics, Balochistan only has two mainstream nationalist political parties. These parties rest between the interlocation of democratic politics and aspirations of self-determination. The sample displayed statements of perplexion and diffusion by leaders of the nationalist parties, who wished to be part of the government but also expressed their displeasure with the state’s approach.

NAT 1, after being attacked by a secessionist group upon his return from exile, stated: “The Baloch militants consider me a traitor whilst the security establishment also treats me as an enemy. I’m being targeted by both” (Express Tribune, 2013).

The nationalists also reserved their adherence to Balochistan’s historical relationship with Pakistan. On Balochistan’s tribal system of representation, the continuation of the postcolonial Sandeman-style Sardari system, NAT 1 stated: “The leaders wholeheartedly accepted the Sardars and still seek their support to form governments. A majority of tribal chiefs side with the government and always offer their support when asked” (Express Tribune, 2015).

And “Tribal chieftains have been part of provincial and federal governments since the birth of Pakistan. In 1947, the leaders even sought the help of tribal chieftains to lay the foundation of the new country. So, the system was flawed from its foundation” (Express Tribune, 2015).

NAT 2, who also served on the panel of the federalists as the Chief Minister of Balochistan, asserted: “I would not call myself a revolutionary. I cannot claim to be in a position to bring about a revolution in the province, but this situation has to change. Political parties must be allowed to consolidate their powers, not these individuals” (Express Tribune, 2015).

The nationalists also perceived the federalists as cosmetic representatives who lent more courtesy to the centre than their region and ethnicity. NAT 1 contested that this state-led approach of Baloch representation does not seek solutions for the ethnic population.

NAT 1: “The problems of Balochistan should be solved, but some people, most of whom belong to the government, do not want that. Some people are being ‘raised in pots’ to become leaders of Balochistan and they will never want the problems of Balochistan to be solved, I do not know which Baloch the government calls angry: those who are abroad or those who are sitting on the mountains” (Dawn, 2021).

NAT 1 reiterated the same 3 years later, asserting: “On the contrary, the political leaders here, who do not get tired of calling themselves heirs of the regions and the province, have been enjoying power and privileges by becoming allies of the dictators in all eras and the forces involved in the exploitation of the province” (Dawn, 2024).

NAT 2 presented the same narrative: “Popular public leaders were ousted from parliament, and those brought in were not politically affiliated and had no connection with people” (Dawn, 2024).

Regarding the notion of loyalty, the nationalists gave more leeway to their ethnic identity than to their loyalty to the federation. Their recurring engagement with Baloch rights and their unappreciation of Baloch federalists show that even though the nationalists prefer sitting on the fence, they prefer consolidating their ethnic ties over their federal identity.

## 3.3 The secessionists (SEC) – separatism from exile and the mountains

### 3.3.1 Theme: independence and boycott

The secessionists, arguably the cluster that finds the slightest support as representatives of the Baloch, present a more non-reconciliatory ideological narrative. Before analysing discourse from the sample statements, it is imperative to state that all statements extracted for the secessionists from the news aggregator were from Indian newspapers. No statement of Baloch secessionists could be found in any Pakistani newspaper from the sample of the reviewed 102 news articles—as was found for both the federalists and the nationalists (for example, [Dawn.com](https://www.dawn.com) and [Tribune.com](https://www.tribune.com) et cetera).

The primary theme that emerged from the sample was that of hardline secession and independence of Balochistan. Unlike the federalists and nationalists, this cluster did not denote much space for dialogue between the contesting sets of representatives. Regarding reconciliation with the state, the secessionists (exile) showcased a lack of trust in the arbitration process. At the same time, the sample did not find evidence of reconciliation from the secessionists (guerilla).

SEC 2 (in exile) stated: "I am not only in touch with political leaders but also with tribal chiefs, political activists and the common people of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. It is true that in politics, we are not as united as we are in culture and tradition. However, we are all united for the independence of Balochistan" (Hindustan Times, 2016).

SEC 3 (in exile), another hardline secessionist, stated: "X or any other Baloch leader who may be willing to talk with Pakistan for anything less than the independence of Balochistan should remember that the Pakistani and Punjabi elite have a history of betraying the Baloch in the name of peaceful negotiations" (Scroll India, 2015).

SEC 4 (guerilla) displayed a proximate narrative to the nationalists on the question of top-brass of Baloch electorates, stating: "Some federalist parties who are puppets of Islamabad, show them as representatives of Baloch but this is not reality," (OP India, 2019). Surprisingly, SEC 4 (guerilla) shared ideological strands with the nationalists on the question of tribal representation as well: "We want to make it clear that the stereotypical tribalism and tribal system in Balochistan have died their natural death," (News Intervention, 2020).

SEC 1 (exile) presented a stronger direct connection to Pakistan's historically hostile neighbour: "We have the highest expectations from the people of India. Balochistan is burning, genocide is happening there. We are looking towards India to extinguish that fire. We are also talking to other countries. We have just returned from visiting seven countries in Europe. We met people there, including many European parliamentarians, and strategists and also went to the United Nations and gave our presentation there. When you get tired whilst doing all these things, you remember India," (ETV Bharat, 2023).

For Baloch secessionists, the question of loyalty is a quagmire. Even though the discourse suggests that the secessionists are loyal to their ethnic tribesmen and do not accept the federation, the reality seems distant from this notion. The representative cluster displays more entrenchment towards their ideological stance, that of secession, rather than the repercussions it brings forth for their ethnic tribesmen who are neither living in the mountains or in exile.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Comparing varying ideological stances

As mentioned, this article aims to create an ideological and political taxonomy of Baloch representatives in the multinational federation of Pakistan and how they contest representation amongst themselves, as seen in Figure 1. From the sample utilised between 2006 and 2024, the three clusters of representatives can be identified as displaying varying ideological stances. Given that in a constitutional democratic setting, only elected representatives fall under the domain of regional or federal representatives, which, in this case, are the federalists and the nationalists. The Baloch secessionists do not hold any legal or electoral significance as representatives.

The most interesting finding from the sample of newspaper articles that serves to highlight is that not a single statement of the Baloch secessionists could be found in any Pakistani newspaper. All extracted statements in the sample were taken from Indian news outlets that promote the secessionists' narrative – including quotations and complete interviews. This collusion between Indian media and Baloch secessionists is seen as a counterbalancing act for Pakistan's approach to what the federation understands as Indian-Occupied Kashmir. This also aligns with the statements of the federalists on the Indian intervention into Balochistan's internal affairs, supporting armed groups to create fissures within the minority – and against the state. Similarly, proximity to Indian quarters for Balochistan's secession from the federation was also found in the secessionists' discourse. For example, SEC 1 (in exile) illustrated that the secessionists had higher hopes of support from India than from the United Nations or the Western world for an independent Balochistan.

The sample also showcased Baloch ethnic representatives following the model of ethnic outbidding. The secessionists, with the least political power and appeal, take a hardline ideological position on Balochistan's independence through extreme insurgent manoeuvres. The federalists run their narrative and outbid the nationalists and secessionists through the argument of legitimacy and reconciliation – showcasing themselves as the only cluster seeking a democratic power-sharing solution. The nationalists, outside elections, also display their moral compass as correct by mostly outbidding the federalists and the legitimacy of their rule. It is important to reiterate that Balochistan is not South Tyrol, Catalunya, Northern Ireland or Quebec. The social reality of this ethnic competition is qualitatively different from the mentioned cases or the convention of ethnic outbidding between political parties.

The sample also displayed the nationalists in a constant dilemma of whether they are federalists at the core or lean more towards their ethnonationalist secessionist tendencies. NAT 2 in the sample also served as the premier minister of Balochistan as FED 2 from 2013 to 2015. Whilst his tenure did not see amplified catering to the rights of the Baloch and Balochistan, his nationalist party was subject to unanimous corruption charges.<sup>3</sup> NAT 1's comments on state-backed elites being "raised in pots" can be understood through Pareto's (1916) circulation of elites, where he observed that a few individuals may join the ranks of elites from the non-elite groups, as elites not only change within their classes but also across them. NAT 2's position on a faction of federalists enjoying political privileges and considering themselves "heirs of the region (Balochistan)" by becoming "allies of dictators" adds to their anticlimactic positioning. Whilst NAT 2 served as FED 2, his tenure was amongst the most politically privileged for those elected under the nationalist banner.

Contrary to the statements of the nationalists and the secessionists on the federalists' role of consolidating political power, most of the federalists' reconciliatory statements served as invitations for the former two clusters to join the democratic and parliamentary process of representation. This could be noted in the statements from FED 2, FED 3, FED 4, FED 5 and FED 6. However, the federalists have remained clear in their interpretation of Balochistan's secession from

<sup>3</sup> See, "Corruption Scandal: Balochistan's former finance adviser fails to appear before NAB" (Dawn, 2016 - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1257941>).

the Pakistani federation as not being up for debate. The sample displayed multiple statements from the federalists, showcasing that secessionist tendencies within the Baloch minority would be met with a heavy hand and the state's writ. The sample also displayed their kinship with state institutions, especially the military. Focusing on the notion that the Baloch and the military are not at loggerheads, but on the same page. This is noted in the statement of FED 3, which mentioned the federal military institution, stating that the "Pakistan Army is ours" – emphasising that it belonged to the Baloch as much as other ethnic groups of the federation.

Another very interesting extraction from the sample was the representatives' view of the postcolonial Sandeman-style tribal system within the Baloch. NAT 1's statement on the problem of tribal chieftains being a part of the federal system contradicts his position. NAT 1 is one of the most prominent tribal chieftains of Balochistan, who has benefited from the tribal system – as hereditary as the British designed it. This praxis of rhetoric disassociates itself from the hierarchy of representation NAT 1 stands for in the sample. On the other hand, SEC 4 (guerilla) already considered Balochistan's tribal system as "dead" in his 2020 statement, which, of course, is very far from reality. As Pareto (1906) principled, the 20% often "own" the other 80 percent of the population; similarly, the feudal elites (Sardars, Nawabs, Mirs, Waderas and Takkaris) of Balochistan encompass socioeconomic ownership over the masses through the tribal system. Since there is a restricted rural–urban divide, most of the population lives in the bottom rung of society. Reminiscing the manorial feudal system of the Roman Empire, a type of feudal system where peasants worked the land under lords.

## 4.2 Future of Baloch representation: ethnic disloyalty or federal loyalty?

In the case of the Baloch, these cleavages display intra-ethnic, apart from their federal inter-ethnic dimensions. It displays internecine conflict. Since the beginning, Balochistan's history has been marred by constant intra-ethnic warfare between various tribes (Siddiqi, 2012). Baloch representatives are neither aligned in matters of political ethnonationalism nor social ethnolinguistics. This intrinsically contesting nature of tribal and feudal identities depletes the democratic necessity of minority representation in a federal system. The postcolonial Sandeman-style Sardari system has limited a homogenous approach to Baloch representation. This, in contention with Pakistan's federal dynamics and the historical label of Baloch belligerency, the masses remain unrepresented on matters of human development and elevation. Even though there are three distinguished taxonomical clusters of representatives, none have succeeded in representing the Baloch as a minority group within the federation. As a social adage, the Pareto Principle of 80/20 fits the contesting case of Baloch representation. Combined, these three clusters envisage political and social control over majority of the Baloch population. "A minority often controls the majority of resources and decision-making power within a society," (Pareto, 1906, 1916). When applied to the Baloch minority's misery, consequences generated for the Baloch – regarding their socioeconomic and sociopolitical status quo, have resulted from decisions taken by minority representatives. The linkage between Pareto's argued decision-making power for the Baloch falls beyond decisions related to governance and representation. To the extent that most of the population lives in the

peripheries of small towns, hinterlands of the region or on land owned by the tribal leaders – where their lives and livelihoods, including the right to vote, depend on the feudal elites.

Whilst the secessionists remain aloof in their ways of self-determination, they are further divided in their approach. Whilst one-half remains in exile, trying to sabotage a federal solution for the Baloch politically (Bugti et al., 2018), the often apolitical yet hardline insurgent groups further detriment Baloch integration within the federal structure. The secessionist groups have attached a label of terrorism to the Baloch minority through their non-state activities, such as targeting other ethnicities in Balochistan, along with international players who enter the region with foreign direct investment (FDI), namely the Chinese. The evolution of secessionist groups from conventional guerilla warfare to questionable manoeuvres, such as suicide bombings,<sup>4</sup> has further aggravated the state's anger – making the actions easier to be labelled as terrorism rather than acts of self-determination. Pakistan adopted a federal structure, and secession within federalism remains a lost cause. More controversial is the introduction, or not, of a right of secession for the minority nations of plurinational federations/regional states. This is a "right" which represents a clear break with the dominant logic of federations, although not with the tradition of federalism. This logic only accepts the right to self-determination for the federation (Requejo, 2010). Other theorists have also argued that a realist viewpoint would challenge the idea of moralising the theories of secession (Sanjaume-Calvet, 2020).

Not only do the secessionists (exile and guerilla) antagonise the Baloch minority in interethnic relations, but they also practise a disregard for the Baloch youth. The continuous recruitment of Baloch youth in the name of nationalism and a 'struggle' against the federation leaves them incapacitated. According to a non-governmental organisation that represents the minority, thousands of Baloch have been forcibly disappeared.<sup>5</sup> The same banner is carried by another grassroots organisation that has come to the surface recently. These nationalist organisations have also, in their capacity, become factions of Baloch representation – even though the ordeal of grassroots mobilisation is a new phenomenon. These organisations struggle to recover the missing Baloch who have either fallen to questioning state policies or have directly been involved in acts of insurgency. Despite this, the secessionists (exile) enjoy an affluent life in the arenas of Europe. Conversely, the Baloch youth struggle at home – between the devil of their socioeconomic miseries and the deep sea of the state's retaliation upon resistance. The secessionists (guerilla) also disregard the plight of the Baloch youth. Even though their narrative of fighting state institutions is for the Baloch upheaval, the historical trajectory of the movement depicts that it has only inferred negative consequences on the minority ethnicity within the federation, especially students and activists struggling for their rights within the federal framework.

The nationalists remain rooted in the tribal ways of affairs, aiming for small victories through myopic measures. They infer the federal

4 See, "Pakistan: Woman suicide bomber change in Baloch rebels' strategy?" (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/28/pakistan-woman-suicide-bomber-change-in-baloch-rebels-strategy>).

5 See, "Pakistan: Marching for the thousands who disappeared in Balochistan" (BBC, 2024 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68125590>).

spirit in many ways and contest elections on manifestos of Baloch rights and progress. However, upon receiving the democratic right to rule, they too fell prey to the same policies adopted by other representatives – one that fulfilled personal excellence and treasuries rather than the Baloch's socioeconomic and political upheaval. The same applies to the Baloch federalists. Cosmetic representation in the regional and federal assemblies and myopic personal agendas achieved through patronaged mandates serve as an oxymoron to minority representation. Even though these representatives carry *de jure* legitimacy, the *de facto* legitimacy remains missing.

The reality, however, must be acknowledged. The Baloch remain one of the most marginalised minorities in the world of federalism. Going through another wave of insurgency, the state has been forced to adopt strict and disciplining policies to contain the narrative of an independent Balochistan. Since 1971, when Balochistan became an official province and East Pakistan fell, the national interest for Pakistan has remained the same – for the federation to not disintegrate further – reinforcing the holding-together model. To achieve these ends, numerous means in terms of state policies have been adopted. From the stick to the carrot and the carrot to the stick – the state has applied multiple political and social tactics during different periods. This divide in Baloch representation has allowed national majority quarters and institutions to take advantage of the minority group. The missing cohesion within the ethnic composition of Baloch representatives has created a divide reminiscing British colonial settings in Balochistan and the colonised Subcontinent of India.

The relationship between federalism and representation is not a one-way street. Representation can also affect federalism (Tuschhoff, 1999). Once under the federal umbrella, representatives do not just symbolise one entity. As in the case of Baloch representatives, they adopt a trifecta membership to represent (a) their ethnicity, (b) their region, and (c) the federation. The biggest question, then, is whether the federalists portray more federal loyalty or if it becomes a case of ethnic disloyalty. Even though the academic understanding of federal loyalty differs from that of individuals within the federal context, what happens when applied to ethnic representative groups? Are Baloch federalists, who give more importance to Balochistan's membership in the Pakistani federation, displaying federal loyalty? Or, given the context of Balochistan's prickling relationship with the federation and its socioeconomic and sociopolitical conditions, their actions showcase ethnic disloyalty? Or both? Even in their constitutional aspirations for the United States, Publius<sup>6</sup> argued against the citizenry's natural loyalty and attachment to their states as against the federal centre. Even during the United States federal formation, neither Publius nor the anti-federalists imagined that loyalty could or should vest exclusively in the states (Levy, 2007).

If such is the case and natural loyalty and attachment should vest in both the centre and the states, then the Baloch federalists showcase neither ethnic disloyalty nor federal loyalty. It is important to focus on the federalists particularly for this question, as they are the only set of representatives with political mandate and agency at both federal and

regional levels. However, comparing the federal dynamics of Pakistan and the political operations of Baloch representatives with Publius' understanding of loyalty would be an ingenuine comparison. One of federalism's potential virtues in a democratic system is the capacity of provinces to be oppositional (Levy, 2007, p.469). Thus, normatively, the idea of separation of loyalties for representatives becomes pivotal for the federal structure to produce progressive results, not just for the federal centre, but the regions as well. Without the separation of loyalties, especially for minority representatives in multinational federal states, federalism instead may serve as a vice within the political system. For Baloch federalists, this crediting of loyalty towards the centre rather than their ethnic compatriots works more as a power-sharing mechanism. Contrarily, Baloch nationalists often argue that their belief in the federation and the centre is a pragmatic stance, one cradled by 'goodwill' towards the federation. Instead for them, it is the federation that should showcase more reciprocity for the Baloch minority. Even though their discourse pertains to finding the right balance, giving weightage to the Baloch miseries, it functions as a barter where ethnic loyalty is exchanged for federal loyalty, through political patronage. Then, this dilemmatic conundrum of loyalty does not restrict itself to that of the representatives. It also impacts citizen perception of the federation. When one faction of ethnic representatives struggle towards a holistic federal identity, and the others persuade the citizens to keep region and ethnicity first, a trust deficit between representatives and the citizenry is the only outcome.

Regardless of the feat, the implications of this tactical representation have left the Baloch divided and underrepresented in all avenues of Pakistan's federal dynamics. The region and the ethnicity continue to gain miserable dividends compared to other regions of the federation. "National minorities that are scattered across territories lack a comparable advantage of privileged representation. For them, it is harder to receive recognition of their minority status and defend it politically" (Jenson, 1998). The Baloch population scattered across 44% of the federation's total land has further diluted homogenous avenues of representation for the ethnic minority.

For the future of Baloch representation, it is an implication that is difficult to derive. As the federation goes through sociopolitical and economic turmoil, not restricted to Balochistan, the status quo seems to find no alternative. The contending cadres continue in their self-serving, often aristocratic ways, and the remaining population subserves under the feudalistic design of society – lacking political and social agency. The postcolonial stratification and operation of institutions intermingled with the tribal Sardari system have left the masses unrepresented. The only solution for the Baloch minority seems to be a new federal bargain, one not bound by contesting clusters of representatives. One backed by Islamabad through the reciprocal necessity of human development, primarily focusing on elevating education, health, and industry – that of the federal spirit. Since the days of the British colonial administration, the tag of belligerency attached to the Baloch can only be removed through measures of social upheaval for further integration within the federation. Which, of course, is the responsibility of the federal state and, at this point, a distant dream.

## 5 Conclusion

As this research was being conducted, the Baloch were mobilised in what was labelled as the Baloch National Gathering (Baloch Rajee

<sup>6</sup> Publius was a collective pseudonym adopted by the fathers of the American constitution (John Jay, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison). Together, they authored 85 papers on the future of American federalism, known as The Federalist Papers.

Muchi).<sup>7</sup> A grassroots mobilising movement of the Baloch, based on indigenous ideas, protesting institutional discrimination and state atrocities – mainly the disappearance of Baloch men, faltering autonomy over resources, and against Baloch representatives installed by the state. The mobilisation has, as always, been met with a strict response, barring the Baloch from reaching the port city of Gwadar, where China has invested almost \$1.6 billion under the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). The movement has not been led by the federalists, nationalists or secessionists but is being funnelled by the masses themselves.

When factions of ethnic minority representatives remain divided ideologically and fail to represent the people, grassroots mobilisation for social justice becomes an avenue of ethnic exercise and agency. Krause (2017) argues that divisions within national movements remain the main problem of minority nationalism. Until there is unity within the national minority, solutions of sociopolitical upheaval remain stagnant. On the back of uneven development in the federation since 1947, this has sparked constant resentment from the Baloch ethnicity – a feeling of marginalisation and misery. Broadly, a pivotal reason why the Baloch mobilise today is what Nairn (1977) labelled the response of the periphery to the core in matters of uneven development. “Real, uneven development has invariably generated an imperialism of the centre over the periphery; one after another, these peripheral areas have been forced into profoundly ambivalent reactions against this dominance” (Nairn, 1977).

The overarching postcolonial heritage of the Baloch ethnic minority in Pakistan may well answer for this thematic divide within ideologies and sociopolitical practises. Just as the British colonists viewed the Baloch as militiamen and Balochistan as a garrison state, the state of Pakistan has envisaged a similar understanding of the minority group and the region. Sandeman’s colonial impetus lanced at the Baloch hierarchy by restructuring the Sardari System showcases a linear continuity of inadequate representation by the Baloch elite. The tranquilising dose of loyalty administered to Baloch leaders by British colonists seems to have become innate to the elite Baloch’s DNA.

By analysing the statements of Baloch representatives in national and international newspapers from 2006 to 2024, first, I established a taxonomy of their representation, mainly: (1) The federalists, (2) The nationalists, and (3) The secessionists – as varying ideological camps of minority representation. Second, three themes emerged from their respective discourses. The federalist discourse revolved around reconciliation, democracy and the anti-state considerations (those of self-determination) being met with the writ of the state. The nationalist discourse focused on Baloch rights and other “puppet” political elites, almost always pinning blame on the nexus between the federalists and state institutions. The secessionist discourse broadly covered the theme of independence and boycott – giving no leverage to credentials of governance. Third, their statements showcase how the contesting cadres viewed themselves and other clusters of representatives. Whilst the federalists invited the secessionists to political podiums of contestation, they maintained that any narrative of Balochistan’s independence would be met with the state’s iron fist. The nationalists tried to balance their position

between a centre-centric narrative and Balochistan’s rights over autonomy, mainly targeting state-patronaged federalists, who do not all belong to the historical and hierarchal structure of tribal representation. There was also ample discourse on the social and political rights of the Baloch. The secessionists, even within, remain divided – the ones in exile and the guerillas in the mountains of Balochistan. The sample, however, did not display proof of the camps targeting each other. The common discourse between both camps of secessionists was restricted to Balochistan’s independence, international support, and the Baloch populace to boycott the federal structure – for example, democratic elections.

As for which faction represents the Baloch masses, it can be summarised very briefly. None, homogeneously. Those that rally behind all three clusters are benefactors of their ideological positions – mainly constituting their social, financial and political mobility. Baloch representatives, tied to their ideological camps, compete to display their loyalty to the ethnicity and the region. In the existing structure and taxonomy of representatives, all three camps benefit from their self-serving designs. The federalists benefit through state patronage and institutional accommodation, amplifying their social, financial and political status. The nationalists benefit by increasing their political personas and co-opting with other elites whilst garnering political appropriation as government members. The secessionists (guerilla) benefit from proxy-international financial support to carry out insurgency and boost their self-deterministic ideological positioning. The secessionists (exile) benefit through a life of comfort in the Western hemisphere whilst maintaining their financial hegemony and capital in Balochistan.

A potential avenue for future research to understand the notions of loyalty in this context would be to focus on the circulation of elites in Balochistan and a possible switch in ideologies over time. To what extent are Baloch representatives entrenched in their ideological positions? Do representatives switch loyalties and ideologies due to certain factors? Can federalists become nationalists or secessionists if they fall out of favour with the state stakeholders? Or if nationalists become federalists after exchanging political loyalty with the same stakeholders? These important questions may be answered by extending the same methodology across an extended period and over different platforms, not restricted to news articles, and with actors as the units of analysis. As things stand, finding a solution to the Baloch question and conundrum remains out of this research article’s scope. For new actors in the Baloch dilemma to emerge and deconstruct the current representation model would require an unprecedented, almost utopian dismantling of the existing postcolonial structure – not just for the Baloch and Balochistan, but the federation. However, the article leaves a lingering query for theorists of federalism, minority representation, and ethnic studies. When political representatives of ethnic minorities display more support for the centre than their minority regions (whilst their regions and ethnicities remain marginalised), do such avenues of representation display more federal loyalty or ethnic disloyalty?

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/[Supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

<sup>7</sup> See, “Govt, protestors trade blames as Gwadar’s Baloch National Gathering descends into violence” - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1848773>

## Ethics statement

Written informed consent was not obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article because it is a broader study on representative groups.

## Author contributions

SK: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2024.1476454/full#supplementary-material>

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