



An Architecture of Control

Local Governance in
Balochistan

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Local Governance Profile – Balochistan

This chapter examines the state of local governance in Balochistan, a province where the constitutional promise of devolution has been rendered inert through prolonged and systemic neglect. The analysis reveals an architecture of control, historically defined by fiscal starvation due to a dormant Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) and an opaque development process dominated by the provincial bureaucracy. The recently evolved architecture, replacing outright starvation with large-scale discretionary grants that maintain provincial control under a guise of generosity. The result is a local government (LG) system that, despite a significant injection of funds, remains deprived of the institutional autonomy and authority required to function as a democratic tier of government.

1. Provincial Context and Political Landscape

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province by land area and its least populous, occupies a unique position within the country's federal structure. Despite considerable natural resource endowments, the province remains underdeveloped and institutionally fragile, a reality mirrored in the state of its local governance systems. Although local governments (LGs) are constitutionally devolved [1], Balochistan has consistently struggled to institutionalize and sustain effective LG structures, primarily due to political apathy and entrenched administrative centralization.

A majority of Balochistan's fiscal resources originate from federal transfers [2], but the province has not regularly devolved these funds further down to the third tier of government. The Provincial Finance Commission (PFC), the critical mechanism for intra-provincial fiscal transfers, has been dormant since 2008 [2]. This dormancy has rendered LGs financially incapacitated and structurally dependent on provincial allocations. Their functional autonomy is further curtailed by the overriding authority of Deputy Commissioners (DCs) and provincial line departments, which routinely bypass LGs in development planning and execution [3]. Following the 2024 general elections, the provincial government has made

public commitments to improving governance but has yet to materialize significant legislative or institutional reforms to reinforce local democracy [11]. While LG elections were held in 32 districts in 2022, Quetta—the provincial capital—remains without an elected LG setup due to legal disputes, leaving municipal functions under appointed administrators. This administrative gap in the province's largest urban center underscores the persistent challenges to establishing comprehensive local democracy [13].

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1.1 Timeline of LG Systems and Elections

The history of local government in Balochistan reveals a system hampered by long periods of inactivity and a persistent failure to translate legislation into functional, empowered institutions.

- **2001:** LGO 2001 was enacted, introducing elected LGs under the national devolution plan.
- **2005:** LG elections were held, and councils became functional under LGO 2001.
- **2009:** LGO 2001 was repealed, and local governments were dissolved.
- **2010:** The Balochistan Local Government Act (BLGA) 2010 was passed, re-centralizing oversight [5].
- **2013:** After their term expired, no new elections were held, leaving a multi-year gap.
- **2022:** LG elections were finally held in 32 districts (excluding Quetta) [11].
- **2025:** By-elections were held to fill vacant general seats in 25 districts, though the system's overall functionality remains constrained [12].

2. LG Law and Institutional Structure

2.1 Legislative Framework and Unfulfilled Mandate

The legal framework for local governance in Balochistan is the Balochistan Local Government Act (BLGA) 2010 [5]. While the Act formally establishes a three-tiered LG system and outlines responsibilities for service delivery and planning, its enforcement has been weak and marked by centralizing tendencies. Amendments introduced in 2019 and 2023 [9] purported to strengthen local autonomy but, in practice, did little to challenge provincial control over finances and personnel. Recent government statements on large-scale reforms remain aspirational and have not yet been translated into binding legal changes to dismantle this centralized structure. The persistent disconnect between legislation and implementation continues to render local governance ineffective [14].

2.2 Administrative and Fiscal Constraints

Administratively, Deputy Commissioners continue to act as de facto district managers, often eclipsing elected representatives [5]. The provincial Local Government and Rural Development Department (LGRDD) remains institutionally weak, with overlapping mandates from other departments hindering coordination [12]. The absence of a dedicated Local Government Service impedes the development of professional capacity within LGs. Fiscally, LGs in Balochistan are among the weakest in the country. The failure to issue a Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) Award since 2008 has denied local bodies

predictable, formula-based funding [2], while key local revenue sources remain under provincial control [13].

2.3 Evolution of Local Government Laws

The trajectory of local government legislation in Balochistan reflects a recurring tension between constitutional mandates for devolution and persistent centralizing tendencies. While the LGO 2001 ushered in a system with substantial authority, its repeal marked a return to greater provincial control. The subsequent BLGA 2010 has largely fallen short of fostering true local autonomy, with administrative and fiscal powers remaining predominantly centralized [5][14].

Law/ Amendment	Key Features	Gaps and Criticisms
LGO 2001	Introduced elected district governments with substantial authority.	Politically bypassed provinces; removed in 2009.
BLGA 2010	Re-established local councils, aligning with constitutional provisions.	Centralized administrative control remained; weak fiscal devolution.
BLGA Amendments 2019/2023	Promised enhanced LG empowerment and fiscal authority.	No implementation roadmap; Quetta elections delayed; no service decentralization.

3. Fiscal Transfers and Development Allocations

3.1 Annual Development Programme (ADP) Allocations

Balochistan’s approach to fiscal transfers reveals a deeply entrenched centralized model that has recently adopted a new tactic. The provincial Annual Development Programme (ADP) was set at PKR 321.2 billion for FY 2024–25 and PKR 249.5 billion for FY 2025–26. A significant policy shift has been the announcement of substantially increased funding directed towards local governments—PKR 35 billion in FY 2024-25 and approximately PKR 80 billion for FY 2025-26. [3][6]. However, this funding is not being channeled through institutionalized devolution. It is delivered as discretionary grants from the provincial executive, bypassing the legally mandated Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) which remains dormant. This method provides a temporary fiscal injection but reinforces the dependency of LGs on the provincial government. The overwhelming majority of development planning and financial control remains with provincial line departments, perpetuating a centralized model that systemically excludes LGs from autonomous participation.

3.2 Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) Awards

The BLGA 2010 mandates a Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) as the cornerstone for equitable resource distribution [5]. However, this fundamental legal obligation remains unfulfilled, with the last reported PFC Award issued in 2008 [2]. This prolonged absence of an active PFC framework severely undermines the financial predictability, equity, and autonomy of LGs. Without a formula-based mechanism, fiscal transfers are ad hoc, politicized, and opaque, leaving LGs fiscally dependent on provincial grants primarily for salaries and routine expenses [6].

3.3 Own-Source Revenues

Despite being legally empowered to generate revenue, LGs in Balochistan exhibit severely limited financial autonomy [5]. Major potential local revenue sources, such as property tax, are collected by provincial departments without any established revenue-sharing mechanism for local councils [3]. Furthermore, the administrative capacity within most LGs to effectively mobilize their own revenues is critically weak, as they lack essential digital infrastructure, trained finance staff, and robust audit systems [6].

3.4 Indirect Execution Channels

Balochistan's development financing is prominently characterized by indirect execution mechanisms that largely bypass elected LGs [3]. Most development schemes, even those intended for the district level, are proposed, approved, and implemented by provincial actors, including Members of Provincial Assemblies (MPAs) and especially Deputy Commissioners. This entrenched system reinforces bureaucratic control, perpetuates political patronage, and systematically marginalizes local councils from the entire project cycle [2].

4. Institutional and Political Realities

4.1 Bureaucratic Dominance and Administrative Control

Balochistan's LG institutions function under a governance architecture heavily influenced by the provincial bureaucracy. The LGRDD exerts firm administrative oversight, and Deputy Commissioners often assume a dual role as principal administrative authorities and project managers at the district level [5]. This consolidates control over planning, budgeting, and implementation in the hands of unelected provincial officials, rather than devolving it to local democratic bodies.

4.2 Political Influence and Impaired Local Governance

A parallel system of political control further compounds bureaucratic dominance. Provincial legislators (MPAs) wield disproportionate influence in the nomination and funding of development schemes, often through dedicated MPA funds. This political patronage frequently dictates resource allocation, leading to development decisions driven by short-term electoral considerations rather than comprehensive, needs-based local planning [2]. This practice has been widely criticized for fostering inefficiency and corruption, thereby undermining the institutional legitimacy and developmental mandate of LGs

4.3 Capacity Deficits and Service Delivery Constraints

LGs in Balochistan face acute and persistent capacity limitations. Most local bodies lack adequately qualified personnel, reliable data systems, and essential infrastructure for effective operations. Budget formulation and tracking largely remain manual processes, with little evidence of structured training programs or provincial support for institutional strengthening [5]. Consequently, mandated service delivery areas like water supply and sanitation are inconsistently executed [3].

4.4 Weak Oversight and Limited Civic Engagement

Accountability mechanisms within Balochistan's LG framework remain fragile and largely ineffective. There are no active local government commissions or provincial watchdog bodies tasked with overseeing LG performance, and internal audit functions are nominal and lack independence [6]. Citizen engagement mechanisms, such as public hearings or participatory budgeting, are either non-existent or poorly institutionalized. This lack of oversight and engagement inhibits demand-driven accountability from the citizenry [6].

5. Provincial Scorecard

The following scorecard presents a civil society evaluation based on the evidence and framework outlined in this paper. It reflects a system where local governments are legally recognized but systematically deprived of the fiscal and administrative authority needed to function effectively. The recalibrated scores below present a more critical assessment of the functional reality on the ground.

Dimension	Indicator	Status/Rating *	Remarks
Legal Framework	Status of LG Law (2010, amended 2023)	Medium	Provides for a multi-tier structure, but key powers remain centralized [5][9].
	Tier Structure (Union/Tehsil Councils)	Low	Legal structure exists, but the system is dysfunctional with the tehsil tier largely inactive [5].
	Election Timeline	Low	Elections held after long delays but remain incomplete, with no polls held in the provincial capital [10, 13].
Fiscal Autonomy	Share of ADP allocated to LGs	Low	Nominally higher share via large ad-hoc grants (PKR 35B in FY25, PKR 80B announced for FY26), but lacks institutional basis as PFC remains dormant, reinforcing provincial control and dependency. [2, 3].
	Operational PFC	Low	No PFC award since 2008; no public plans to activate it [2, 6].

	Local Tax Authority	Low	LGs lack effective revenue powers; major taxes under provincial jurisdiction [3, 7].
Administrative Control	Staffing Autonomy	Low	No local cadre system exists; staffing is under provincial control [5, 6].
	Planning and Oversight	Low	MPAs, DCs, and provincial departments dominate planning [3, 6].
	Scheme Execution Autonomy	Low	Most development schemes are implemented by line departments or DCs [3, 6].
Political Will	Ruling Party's Manifesto Implementation	Low	Manifesto commitments to empower LGs remain unfulfilled in policy and practice [8, 10].
	Discretionary Funds & Parallel Programs	High	MPAs retain significant influence through discretionary funds, undermining LGs [3, 6].

Legend: High = enabling/good practice; Medium = mixed or transitional; Low = constrained/deficient

6. Recommendations

To address the profound institutional and fiscal challenges facing local governance in Balochistan, the following province-specific recommendations are proposed:

Fiscal Decentralization and Transparency

- **Immediately Constitute and Mandate a Transparent Provincial Finance Commission (PFC):** This is the most urgent and critical reform. The provincial government must end the dependency created by ad-hoc grants by immediately activating the PFC. The new award must be transparent, equitable, and legally binding. To ensure political acceptance, it should include a "hold harmless" clause, guaranteeing that no LG receives less under the new formula than it did through recent discretionary grants, thereby institutionalizing the increased funding levels [2, 6].
- **Legislate Geographic Budgetary Transparency:** To counter the extreme opacity in provincial finances, amend provincial financial rules to require the Planning & Development Department to publish an annual supplementary report. This report must consolidate all development expenditures (provincial, federal, and foreign-funded) and present them broken down by district and tehsil, enabling genuine public oversight and accountability [2, 3, 4].
- **Devolve Revenue Authority:** To build fiscal self-sufficiency, grant LGs genuine authority over key local revenue sources. At a minimum, establish a formal, predictable revenue-sharing mechanism for taxes collected by provincial departments within local jurisdictions [3, 7].

Legal and Electoral Reforms

- **Ensure Complete Democratic Representation:** The provincial government and the Election Commission must resolve the administrative and legal hurdles that have prevented LG elections in Quetta, ensuring the provincial capital has an elected, functional local government [10, 13].
- **Empower LGs in Law and Practice:** Amend the Balochistan Local Government Act (BLGA) 2010 to statutorily curtail the overriding administrative authority of Deputy Commissioners in local development. The authority to plan, approve, and execute local schemes must be vested in elected councils [5, 6].

Administrative and Institutional Strengthening

- **Invest in Long-Term Capacity Building:** Launch a comprehensive and sustained capacity-building program for Balochistan's LGs, focused on building skills in financial management, participatory planning, and revenue mobilization [6, 7].
- **Establish a Professional LG Service:** Create an independent, professional Local Government Service to attract, train, and retain skilled staff, thereby reducing reliance on deputed officials and building institutional continuity [5, 6].

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Annex B.1: Division-Wise ADP Allocations – FY 2024-25 & 2025-26

Division/Category	Allocation FY 2024–25 (PKR Billion)	Allocation FY 2025–26 (PKR Billion)	Executing Authority
Total Provincial ADP	321.2	249.5	P&D/Line Departments
Allocation to/via Local Govt.	35.0	80.0	LG&RDD / DCs
Quetta	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments
Kalat	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments
Zhob	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments
Nasirabad	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments
Rakhshan	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments
Makran	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments
Sibi	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	<i>Not officially disaggregated</i>	P&D/Line Departments

Disclaimer: The Government of Balochistan does not publish a consolidated, geographically disaggregated Annual Development Programme (ADP). The total ADP figures are from official budget announcements. The "Allocation to/via Local Govt." represents funds announced for transfer as discretionary grants, not through a formula-based PFC award. The precise distribution and executing authority for most schemes remain centralized within provincial line departments.