

A Strategic Interaction Game of Political Rights: A Case Study of Gilgit–Baltistan, Pakistan



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Abstract

Using a simple sequential game, this article aims at exploring the outcome of the political interactions of various strategic players related to the political status of Gilgit-Baltistan. A political system that comes into existence after the strategic interactions of different players is defined to be an outcome for the purpose of our analysis. To discuss the constitutional limbo in Gilgit-Baltistan, the article identifies four strategic players: the federal government, the provincial, the Shia Muslims in Gilgit-Baltistan, and the Sunni Muslims in Gilgit-Baltistan. Their strategies, preferences, and payoffs have been highlighted. The simple sequential game has an outcome of “status-quo”, which is in harmony with the existing political status of the region. The status-quo of the region will continue until the players decide to play different strategies. The outcome will tilt in the favor of the player with most political influence.

Key Words: Political status, Strategic players, Status-quo, Constitutional Limbo, Gilgit-Baltistan.

Introduction

Groups and individuals often have conflicting desires on policy issues, policymakers confront the need to choose from various available choices. The policymakers have to consider a certain criterion while choosing their actions and outcomes. And in doing so, the desirability of society regarding these actions and outcomes is often taken into consideration. The game theory of the strategic interactions details a simple but comprehensive way of reaching an equilibrium outcome that helps in minimizing conflict and maximizing agreement among the players. The Federal Government of Pakistan has been confronting different strategic players to achieve a desirable political system in Gilgit-Baltistan. This paper analyzes the strategic interactions among the potential players having a stake in the political system of Gilgit-Baltistan. The equilibrium outcome of this strategic interaction makes the policymakers’ job easier.

Gilgit-Baltistan is located in the extreme north of Pakistan. In 1947, the sub-continent was divided by Great Britain into two independent states; India and Pakistan. Gilgit-Baltistan was under the rule of Britain at that time. States within the sub-continent were given the option to join either Pakistan or India according to the aspirations of their people. But the people of Gilgit-Baltistan had to fight an armed struggle for their independence when Britain decided to handover Gilgit-Baltistan to the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir (for a detailed description see Husain 2009 and Zain, 2010). Being a Muslim majority region, the inclination towards Pakistan was natural on behalf of people of Gilgit-Baltistan and therefore after maintaining an independent identity for a couple of weeks, they opted for annexation with Pakistan. But India did not accept Gilgit-Baltistan’s annexation to Pakistan (for more details see Khan, 2017). And here lies part of the political conflict. Since then, people in

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Gilgit-Baltistan are campaigning for their political rights. The divergent political thoughts of the four major religious sects namely Sunnis, Shias, Ismailis, and Noorbukshies constituting a population of 1.5 million could not make a single agenda for the political rights of Gilgit-Baltistan

Gilgit-Baltistan remained a laboratory for experimenting with different political systems in the last 65 years, albeit none of them turned out to be the desired outcome as is evident from the continuation of the struggle for the political right (for details see Husain 2009, Khan 2017). The latest episode of the political evolution was in the form of Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order that was introduced by the federal government of Pakistan in 2009.[†]The continuation of the political struggle by different segments in Gilgit-Baltistan again predicts that even this outcome is not the end, at least for a few segments of the society.

A political system that comes into existence after the strategic interaction of different players is defined to be an outcome for the purpose of our analysis. What should be the desired outcome then? It depends on the strategic interactions of individuals having different schools of political thoughts that include both religious actors and governments. For simplicity, I have identified four major players; two governments at different levels and two different sects of Muslims having their influence in the politics of Gilgit-Baltistan. Based on the strategic interactions of these four major players, each with a major stake in a different political outcome, this paper analyzes a game theory strategy that leads to the equilibrium outcome through an equilibrium path. The federal government minimizes the political conflict by basing its decision on the rollback equilibrium of the strategic interaction among the four major players.

The following section details the four major players and their approach towards the political process in Gilgit-Baltistan. Section III outlines the actions and strategies of the four players. Preferences and assumptions of these four players are discussed in section IV. The next section details payoffs and costs to the players and the paper sum up with the concluding remarks.

Strategic Players

To keep the analysis simple and avoid complications, I have ignored minor players assuming that they are not strong enough to make their agenda to the policymaking-arena. This assumption is construed from the political behavior of minor players and from their ability to influence public policy in the years passed. Secondly, the behavior of like-minded players is assumed to be reflected in the strategies of a major player. The four players I have identified for the strategic interaction of political rights are 1) the federal government of Pakistan, 2) the semi-provincial government of Gilgit-Baltistan, 3) the Shia Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan 4) the Sunni Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan. Furthermore, the two religious sects represent a particular political school of thought that is each sect desires a political system (the outcome in our case) that ensures the dominance of his religious school of thought, at the best. The study intentionally ignores the Government of India and Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to be potential players in our strategic interaction game for two reasons: 1) The Political rights of Gilgit-Baltistan has never been an issue on the agenda of Pakistani delegates visiting India or Indian delegates visiting Pakistan, 2) The agreement between the Government of Pakistan and Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) in April 1949 authorizes Government of Pakistan to have temporary administrative control over Gilgit-Baltistan.

Being the Federal Government of Pakistan, player 1 in our case, has the agenda-setting power. Though the other three players through interest groups, lobbying, and protests can influence the agenda the norm is that the Federal Government sets the agenda and other players either endorse

[†]Hussain 2009

it or reject it. The rejection can be explicit through agitation and protests or implicit through spreading hatred against the outcome and other players. The authority of the Federal Government of Pakistan is not challengeable by any player giving it the advantage of the First Mover if any. Hence, in this strategic interaction of political rights, the Federal Government moves first and sets the agenda.

The Semi-Provincial Government of Gilgit-Baltistan which came into being through the Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009 of the Federal Government is the second player in this strategic interaction game. The ongoing political struggle and continuous demand for a more autonomous political setup are sufficient to make the judgment that this governance package is either not the equilibrium outcome or is Pareto Inefficient. Recent episodes of sectarian violence made the provincial assembly seek help from two top religious clerics of the Shias and Sunnis explains that it might not be able to resolve major religious and political issues on its own.

The Shias of Gilgit-Baltistan constitute player 3 in this strategic interaction of political rights. Gilgit-Baltistan is the only Shia dominated political unit in Sunni-dominated Pakistan and this unique feature enhances the strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan[‡]. Shias want to maintain their only dominance and Sunnis trying to abolish Shias only dominance. The outcome of the strategic interaction in the form of a political system thus affects their agenda and depends on their strategies. The Ismailis and Noorbukshies having 18 and 16 percent representation in the total population respectively are assumed to have political thoughts akin to Shias who make 39 percent of the total population in Gilgit-Baltistan[§]. Again, the assumption is construed from the ideological leanings, religious affiliation, and similarity of political thoughts in the years passed. To sum up, the strategies of the Shias, player 3, also reflect the political thoughts of the Ismailis and the Noorbukshies.

The fourth major player in our strategic interactions game is the Sunnis constituting 27 percent of the total population of Gilgit-Baltistan. The importance of this player is obvious from the fact that Pakistan is a Sunni-dominated unit.

Actions and Strategies

The Federal Government of Pakistan controls the agenda-setting being her authority legally accepted by all the players in the game. The agenda does not necessarily reflect her own opinion; social constructions of the target population are taken into consideration while setting the agenda and choosing the actions and strategies.** More often, the players explicitly influence the public policy process. Based on the assumption that the Federal Government and the other players are rational and have complete information, I have identified four possible actions based on the historic events, newspaper statements and interviews, resolutions and public opinion.

- Declare Gilgit-Baltistan the fifth constitutional province of Pakistan by amending the constitution (FP).
- Declare Gilgit-Baltistan part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ &K)
- Declare Gilgit-Baltistan an Autonomous state like AJ & K (AS)
- Maintain the Status-Quo that is the current status (SQ)

The abbreviations in the brackets are used for the game tree analysis. Some of the other options like declaring it as a completely independent country are out of the domain of our analysis because no sovereign country would happily like to do so. As discussed in the preceding sections, the other

[‡] For detailed description on sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan: Baig, (2020).

[§] PILDAT (2011)

players do not have the agenda-setting power therefore their strategies comprise of endorsing or rejecting the actions posited by the Federal Government.

Preferences and Assumptions

Preferences of the players are not based on my personal assumptions. They are extracted from the past political behavior, media statements, ideological leanings, political and religious affiliations, and voting patterns of the players. The possibility of overstating or understating their preferences should be considered as a human error and not an intentional bias. I have listed the preferences in order of the ranking by the players that are followed by a detailed description.

- Player 1: The Federal Government
 - Maintain Status-Quo
 - Declare it the Fifth Constitutional Province
 - Autonomous Independent political system like AJ&K
 - To cede it to Azad Jammu and Kashmir AJ&K

The best outcome for the federal government is to maintain the status quo. Because the federal government has maintained the status quo for the last 65 years and the current situation doesn't predict the federal government's intentions to consider any other situation without strategic interactions. Second, the current semi-provincial Gilgit-Baltistan has limited powers while the federal government having most of the political and administrative powers thus making it, its favorite choice. More importantly, the region is considered to be so-called disputed between India and Pakistan that gives the federal government of Pakistan the latitude to keep the status quo. If the federal government couldn't maintain the status quo, its second-best outcome would be to declare it the fifth constitutional province, as the Gilgit-Baltistan would still remain under the federation. In this case, the federal government could still manipulate the powers but through the political process and not through the federal bureaucracy as in the current case. The federal government would receive its share in the revenue from taxes. Declaring Gilgit-Baltistan an autonomous and independent political system like AJ&K makes the third option for the federal government. In this case, the federal government loses most of its administrative powers over the region retaining limited and ceremonial powers. But under this option, the federal government can reconsider the status of Gilgit-Baltistan as an independent state that is to say that the federal government retains the powers to declare Gilgit-Baltistan a constitutional province if the circumstances change at a later stage. Declaring Gilgit-Baltistan to be a part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir AJ&K is the least preferred option for the federal government.

- Player 2: The Semi-Provincial Government
 - Fifth Constitutional Province
 - Maintain Status-Quo
 - Autonomous Independent political system like AJ&K
 - To cede it to Azad Jammu and Kashmir AJ&K

The semi-provincial government recently passed a resolution in the provincial assembly in favor of the fifth constitutional province^{††}. From that resolution, it can be construed that the fifth constitutional province is the best outcome for the semi-provincial assembly. Because the provincial

^{††} The Express Tribune (2018)

government currently holds the office and has limited administrative powers but greater official protocol, it would like to maintain the status quo and thus making it the second-best outcome. There seems lack of consensus on the autonomous independent political system like AJ&K among the majority of the semi-provincial assembly members, as they never voiced in favor of this outcome and will be considered only if the first two outcomes were not achievable. The semi-provincial government will lose all of its administrative powers and might not be able to retain or regain power again if Gilgit-Baltistan is merged with Azad Jammu and Kashmir being a larger political entity. Therefore, the provincial assembly would not like to cede to Azad Jammu and Kashmir and hence is the least preferred outcome for the semi-provincial assembly.

- Player 3: The Shia Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan
- Fifth Constitutional Province
- Autonomous Independent political system like AJ&K
- Maintain Status-Quo
- To cede it to Azad Jammu and Kashmir AJ&K

The Shia Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan constitute forty percent of the total population and are thus the majority in Gilgit-Baltistan. Pakistan is Sunni Muslims dominated unit while Gilgit-Baltistan is Shia dominated unit. The Shia Muslims' top priority in any political policy would be to maintain their majority. Therefore, a constitutional province and even an independent state ensure that their majority will remain intact enabling to make a Shia majority government^{‡‡}. Maintaining a status quo would be better for the Shia Muslims instead of merging it Azad Jammu and Kashmir, a Sunni dominated unit, as the latter would make them a minority.

- Player 4: the Sunni Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan
- To cede it to Azad Jammu and Kashmir AJ&K
- Maintain the Status-Quo
- Autonomous Independent political system like AJ&K
- The fifth province

The reverse of the discussion in the preceding section is true for the Sunni Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan. They constitute thirty percent of the total population in Gilgit-Baltistan and merging Gilgit-Baltistan with Azad Jammu and Kashmir, a Sunni dominated unit, ensures their religious as well as political dominance and hence it is their best-preferred outcome^{§§}. The status quo reflects uncertainty about the future status of Gilgit-Baltistan and the Sunni Muslims would prefer it to the outcomes that are more permanent in nature. The status quo maintains the hope for a desired change in the political setup and thus would be the second preferred option for the Sunni Muslims of Gilgit-Baltistan. The least preferred outcome would be then, the fifth constitutional province as it would make the Sunni Muslims accept political and religious dominance of the Shia Muslims in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Payoffs and Costs

The payoffs are expressed in units that reflect the utility of the players. Higher a unit represents a higher utility level of a player for a particular outcome. I have assigned 5 units to the best-preferred

^{‡‡} RSP Report (2011)

^{§§} The Freedom House Report 2011

outcome for each player. Similarly, a player gets four units of utility, if the game ends up with his second preferred outcome. The payoffs are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Players' Payoffs

First Preferred Outcome for each Player	5
Second Preferred Outcome for each Player	4
Third Preferred Outcome for each Player	3
Least Preferred Outcome for each Player	2

In addition to payoffs, players have to bear costs as well. In this strategic game of interactions, I assume the Player 1; the federal government has the costs of proposing different options. Because the federal government has to constitute a special parliamentary committee that needs resources. The consultation process with all the stakeholders may take years. Therefore, the federal government faces some costs before and during the interaction process and thus it has to bear a cost of 0.5 for Table 2 details all the costs to the players.

Table 2. Players' Costs

Costs to the Federal Government for proposing AJ&K	0.5
Costs to the Federal Government for proposing is AS	0.5
Costs to the Federal Government for proposing is AS	0.5
Costs to the Federal Government for proposing AJ&K	0.5

Interactions and Implications: A Game Tree Analysis

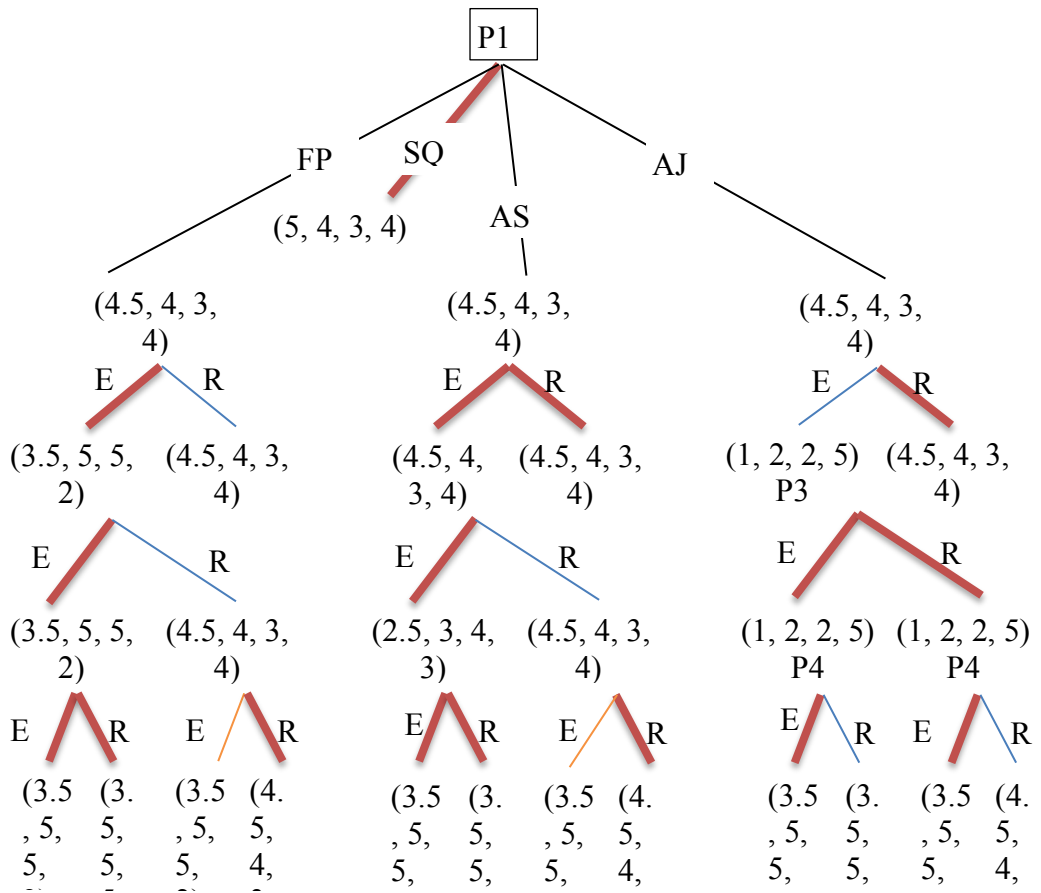
The game theory assumes that the players use a particular type of interactive thinking and each player must think about his opponent's move before his own move. In addition, players take into consideration the impact of their current actions on their own as well as their opponents' future actions. In the preceding sections, I have explained the sequence of the game that is Player 1 plays his actions; four actions in this strategic interaction. Other players in a sequential manner endorse or reject his actions. If two players excluding the player 1 endorse the player 1 agenda, the agenda gets approved. Whereas if two or more players excluding the player 1 reject the agenda, the Status Quo maintains. Furthermore, if the semi-provincial assembly rejects any proposal, the status quo maintains.

When the player 1 moves his actions, the player 2 either endorses or rejects it. Similarly, player 2 strategies are either endorsed or rejected by player 3 and the game continues till the last player endorses or rejects the strategies of the previous player in the sequence of the game. Hence, the rollback equilibrium gives the direction about the final outcome as shown in figure 1. The red arrows show the decision taken by the respective player according to his payoffs. Our strategic interaction game of political rights leads us to the equilibrium outcome of the status quo. This outcome is Pareto

Efficient. No other outcome makes all the players better-off without making any player worse-off. The equilibrium outcome is:

(P1, P2, P3, P4) = (Status-Quo)

Figure 1: The Game Tree for Political Interactions in Gilgit-Baltistan



It is obvious from the game tree that the status quo is the dominant strategy for the federal government. It will always have the status quo in the current interaction as all the other options have a cost for the federal government. By intuition, the equilibrium outcome has logic. The Federal Government of Pakistan, player 1 in this strategic game has maintained the Status Quo of Gilgit-Baltistan in the last 70 years. Given the situation, if the federal government's dominant strategy is to maintain the status quo, then the question now arises how the other players can influence the federal government, the player 1 to reconsider its strategy.

Let's now assume that the Player 3, the Shia Muslims who constitute forty percent of the population along with other minority sects that have religious and political leanings towards them play brinkmanship with the federal government by threatening to start a separation campaign. If the federal government perceives the threat as credible it would impose a cost on the status quo

(that is on the outcome) and let's assume this cost is equal to one. Furthermore, we assume that the credibility of the threat makes the federal government drop costs attached to the other three options. Similarly, player 3 can play brinkmanship with the semi-provincial government or it can play a bargaining game with player 4, the Sunnis. There could a couple of strategies that however can influence the outcome. When the Shia Muslims, player 3 in the interaction threatens to start separation campaign, the outcome changes and the federal government seems indifferent among all the four outcomes though the fifth province is not socially optimal. Furthermore, we can also see at what level of brinkmanship, any player can influence the outcome.

Outcome (Indifferent among all the outcomes)

In this situation with a cost attached to the status quo and no costs with other outcomes, player 3 is still not able to achieve its desired outcome. This may explain that the threat was not perceived as credible enough by the federal government. The player 3 if it plays brinkmanship skillfully and forces the federal government to attach higher costs to other outcomes might lead to a more desirable outcome for player 3. Similarly, player 2 can negotiate with both players 2 and player 3 for a government sharing formula and if agreed it may lead to a different outcome. To sum, there are a couple of strategies for all the players for changing the current status. A detailed and more technical could explore those options.

Conclusion

By using a simple sequential game of strategic interaction, this paper analyzes a case of strategic interactions for the political rights of Gilgit-Baltistan, a semi-autonomous province in the north of Pakistan. To decide the political fate of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan is confronting different strategic players having a potential stake in the political system of Gilgit-Baltistan. There is a paramount pressure on behalf of these strategic players for an earlier decision. Four possible options are under consideration by Pakistan. Pakistan has to follow a procedure while deciding an outcome to minimize the conflict and maximize agreement among the different players. This paper through a simple sequential game of strategic interactions provided a guideline suggesting that maintaining the status quo is the dominant strategy in the current scenario. But if one player, the Shia Muslims plays brinkmanship with the federal government, or ceding Gilgit-Baltistan to Azad Jammu and Kashmir is the best outcome in the given scenario. Choosing any option between these would minimize the conflict whereas choosing among the rest might be feasible within the given scenario. In this paper, a simple sequential game has been analyzed through a more realistic and practical approach would be to use sequential and simultaneous games together. Finally, attaching probabilities to a different outcome might predict a different scenario.

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