



Journal for Social
Science Archives

Journal for Social Science Archives

Online ISSN: 3006-3310

Print ISSN: 3006-3302

Volume 3, Number 4, 2025, Pages 590 – 604

Journal Home Page

<https://jssarchives.com/index.php/Journal/about>



Political Parties and Climate Change Policy Implementation in Pakistan: Green Initiatives in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2013– 2018)

Sumaira Manzoor¹ & Dr. Mussawar Hussain Bukhari²

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia University of Bahawalpur,

Email: sumiabbasi7@gmail.com

²Former Chairman, Department of Political Science, Islamia University of Bahawalpur,

Email: mussawarbukhari@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: September 02, 2025
Revised: October 06, 2025
Accepted: October 25, 2025
Available Online: November 04, 2025

Keywords:

Political Parties, Green Initiatives,
Climate Change Policy, Policy
Implementation

Corresponding Author:

Sumaira Manzoor

Email:

sumiabbasi7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Pakistan has been faced with severe climatic challenges which include deforestation and land degradation combined with susceptibility to ecological insecurity thus necessitating early and effective policy measures. The study was done to examine whether major political parties in Pakistan, namely, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), in Punjab, and Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), in Sindh, translated climate-related promises in their manifestos to provincial-level green action between 2013 and 2018. The study uses a qualitative comparative design combining content analysis of the political party's manifesto with semi-structured interviews of political leaders, bureaucrats and the civil society actors to cast an eye into the relationship between political incentive, institutional capability and environmental performance. Results show that there is a stark inter-provincial difference. Ecological sustainability At Punjab, political visibility was interpreted by green programmers instigated by PML -N at the cost of environmental sustainability, and at Sindh, PPP-led mangrove conservation had fragile institutional ownership and relied on donor funding. The Billion Tree Tsunami of PTI in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa achieved the international visibility because of the strong political-bureaucratic rapport and the well-developed control systems but the sustainability of the project, as well as its continuity, remains a problem. In all the instances inadequate monitoring processes, piece meal institutional duties and dependency on election cycles undermined policy effectiveness. This study shows that the relationship between political will, institutional framework, and donor involvement rather than the policy ambition shape subnational climate governance in Pakistan. The paper adds to the current body of work by connecting commitments of the manifesto and delivery of outcomes and promotes the need to institutionalize, cross-party structures to ensure lasting and effective climate action. The results have practical implication to the heightening accountability, sustainability, and environmental effects of the green projects in the federal developing states.



Introduction

Pakistan is also one of the most climate-prone countries although it contributes below one percent of the global emission of greenhouse gases. Frequent floods, extended droughts, rapid deforestation and increased temperatures continuously reveal the vulnerability of the ecological and socio-economic system of the country (Anjum Bari Farooqi, 2005). Pakistan, as the Global Climate Risk Index showed, with its high number of vulnerable regions, mass displacement, loss of farm lands, and epidemics of human health issues in the region due to adverse climatic changes, has consistently been listed in the top ten highly climate-impacted nations all over the world (Siddiqui, 2019) (Farooq, 2023). These climate pressures co-exist with structural issues such as rapid urbanization, energy insecurity, poor environmental regulation, and institutional fragmentation making climate governance a priority policy issue and not an environmental issue (Ajaz, 2017).

Deforestation is a dimension of climate vulnerability of Pakistan. Having a forest cover of about 475 percent to the total land area, Pakistan ranks among the lowest forest cover to land ratios in South Asia. (Farooq, 2023) The exhibited factors of rapid urbanization and growth, development of infrastructures, agricultural encroachment, and household use of biomass as a primary means of energy have caused permanent loss of forests (Jadoon, 2019). This deterioration compromises ecosystem services that promote climate adaptation; these include watershed, flood control, carbon capture and biodiversity preservation. (Falkner, 2016) In addition to ecological effects, deforestation contributes to the insecurity of rural livelihood in Pakistan and undermines the ability of the country to fulfill the global commitment on climate change through agreements like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement (Somani, 2023).

As a reaction to this, green projects, and specifically the afforestation, reforestation, urban greening, and mangrove restoration are becoming notable elements in the climate adaptation and mitigation strategy of Pakistan. It is common belief that these nature-based solutions are cost-effective solutions and can be used to improve ecological resilience and create co-benefits like job opportunities, reducing disaster risks, and alleviating urban heat islands (Ali Arshad, 2014). Restoration of mangroves on the coast of Sindh enhances natural protections against tropical storms and rising sea level, and greening of cities helps alleviate thermal isolation in urban areas growing at an extremely rapid rate. On the same note, it is viewed that afforestation in mountains will serve as a flood control and watershed management measure (Dr. Ghulam Rasul, 2012). Green initiatives therefore assume two positions namely environmental policies and socio-economic resilience strategies (Almaaitah, 2021).

Nevertheless, there is also a great political attractiveness to green initiatives. Drastic changes that the tree plantation drives and urban beautification programs produced are visible and measurable and can be easily conveyed to voters in a short period of time during one electoral cycle (Hussain, 2019). Political leaders often link themselves to headline green initiatives, therefore, turning climate action into a political branding and legitimacy instrument (Kolokytha, 2017). Although visibility may create pressure and awareness with people, critics point out that such actions may be accompanied by unsustainability, and the ability to concentrate on species selection, maintenance of the plantation, monitoring, and community involvement is not addressed adequately (Owen, 2020). Therefore, the clash between political observability and ecological sustainability in the long term poses some important questions of whether climate governance can be effective in politically competitive environments.

This is further complicated by the institutional environment of Pakistan. Environmental governance was greatly decentralized based on the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) where the mandate of forestry, environment and similar sectors was left to provincial governments (Leikanger, 2016). Consequently, provincial political parties became the participants of green initiatives design and implementation, and the federal government remained significantly in a coordinating and global-negotiating role (H. Ali, 2019). This change provided a chance to take climate action contextually and problematic concerns in terms of unequal institutional capacity, political determination and institutional coordination processes across provinces. As a result, the provinces give more and more weight to provincial political interests and less priority to the development of a of a national policy on climate.

Even though recent research has paid rising importance to the governance of climate change in Pakistan, available literature is placed in a significant proportion on federal policy, donor-based models, and technical aspects of the climate-adjustment. Subnational performance including the agency of a political party in the circumstances of provincial sovereignty has had a relatively greater systematic coverage (Jawad Ullah, 2024). Although some separate case studies, best exemplified by a Billion Tree Tsunami that is based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been highlighted all over the world, very few comparative evaluations among provinces have been brought out. Furthermore, a limited number of studies explicitly associate party manifesto promises with outcomes of on-ground implementation, creating a huge gap in the knowledge of how politics can influence the action on climate at provincial level.

The gap identified by this article corresponds to the comparative analysis of the green initiatives in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in terms of the leadership of three major political parties: Pakistan Muslim League -Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Using qualitative content analysis of political commitments on climate matters in party manifestos and semi-structured interviews with policymakers, bureaucrats and civil society actors, the study explores the manner in which the translation of political commitments regarding the issue of climate into provincial level action and the impact of institutional capacity, donor influence and political stimuli on the achievement of implementation outcomes.

Research Question

1. How do major political parties in Pakistan translate climate-related manifesto commitments into provincial-level green initiatives?
2. What political and institutional factors explain variation in the implementation of green initiatives across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2013–2018)?
3. To what extent does political visibility influence the sustainability and effectiveness of provincial green initiatives?

Literature Review and Analytical Framework

Existing scholarship on climate change governance in Pakistan

It is due to the severity of the climate weaknesses the nation is undergoing, that over the last few years, there has been an intensification of academic interest on the area of climate-change governance in Pakistan. The vulnerability of the country to the key events of the climate, as well as the structural shortcomings in the ability of the state to respond adequately and quickly, have become a fairly prominent focus of the available literature (Khan, 2019; Rauf et al., 2021). Researchers point to the processes of deforestation, water stress, and frequent flooding as the key elements of the climate-risk picture in Pakistan (Ali and Afzal, 2018). Many studies are devoted to

the federal policy development, especially such documents as Framework for Implementation of Climate Change Policy (201432030) and National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2012; however, the authors observe that, even though these documents provide general schemes, the operationalization process is disorganized and insufficiently funded (Qureshi, 2017).

However, once the 18th Amendment was introduced, very limited attention was given to the territorial application of it. Federal government and international organizations are in the center of the existing literature, and climate change is often presented as a donor-related or technocratic problem (Haque, 2020). This outlook does not take into consideration that provinces now become the main executors of environmental, agricultural, and forestry programmers with the help of its governing parties that are elected (Yaseen, 2017). No significant systematic comparative study of case studies on subnational initiatives exists, even though the Billion Tree Tsunami in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the most studied (Abid et al., 2021). It is against this gap that this essay attempts to elucidate the relocation of green programmers into the context of provincial politics in order to connect the results of an ecological process with political goals, as well as the quality of governance itself.

Politics of visibility vs long-term sustainability

The tension between demands of long-term sustainability and politics of visibility has existed in the environmental governance scholarship. According to political scientists, states are more willing to choose short term and very visible initiatives that can be promoted within an electoral cycle (Schedler, 2015). The tendency is common in environmental regulation as massive planting movements or beautification interventions that find direct response in the present population but fail to provide means of ecological integration or surveillance of survival (Ribot, 2014).

This has been a volatile situation in Pakistan. An example includes the high-profile plantation movements in PML-N Punjab government like the Green Punjab Program; the opponents argued that the success rate of trees planted was low and planting monocultures reduced biodiversity (Saeed, 2017). In their turn, PTI Billion Tree Tsunami was recognized on the global level as the project that multiplies the practice of afforestation, but the questions arise with regard to sustainability and how long these ecological advantages of the project can be maintained compared to its huge brand presence (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2018). In the same way, the mangrove restoration by the PPP in Sindh had been effective in finding donor collaborations and improving coastal resilience, but remained focused on the political agenda as the parties' ecological effects were not as manifestly felt to urban citizens.

What this trend brings out clearly is a paradox inherent with sustainability which demands patient capital, consistency between the institutions, and continuity since its production; visibility on the other hand can create momentum and may lead to political capital. According to the study of the climate governance system in South Asia, the capacity of provincial forestry departments to maintain the long-term care of the trees after their planting is rather based on the labor supply, financial organization, and community participation than on the actual act of planting (Agarwal, 2019). Based on this, the politics of visibility, whereby short term political gains might be at odds with ecological necessities, should also be taken into account in any strict analysis of any type of green project in Pakistan.

Theoretical lens: policy implementation gap

The current research embraces policy implementation gap paradigm to question this phenomenon. Qualitative studies of policy-making processes habitually show that, especially in young democratic settings, there is usually noticeable inconsistency in the actual results of a policy and

the commitment of the policy (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Lipsky, 1980). The persistence of this gap can be due to the contribution of a plurality of determinants, such as inadequate fiscal provisioning, incoherent administrative structures, and weak supervisory mechanisms, and vested political opposition.

The nature of environmental projects is rather prolonged and requires a long-lasting cross-sectoral cooperation; thus, implementation gap appears in the context of climate regulation in a conspicuous manner (Schwöre, 2023). Despite the fact that the political actors actively include climate commitments in their electoral manifestos, according to scholarship of the environmental politics, the actualization of the said commitment is hindered by the conflicting goals of the developmental policies, fiscal limitations, as well as the lack of power of the environmental ministries relative to the departments responsible of infrastructure or energy (Huitema & Jordan, 2014).

The implementation gap is observable in Pakistani context in various channels. The formalized goals like mass planting can be reflected in policy documents, but the practical effects of such actions are ethnic in nature in case of no corrections on the institutional level, e.g., the creation of effective data management or the increase of the number of forest workers. Moreover, even so-called green programmers started off with high rhetorical frames but are unable to build community stewardship, autonomous audit procedures or concrete monitoring codes as its stakeholders confirm through interviews undertaken during this study. It is against this theoretical backdrop that the paper contextualizes the green initiatives of Pakistan and identifies such initiatives as being situated within larger ecological interventions by demonstrating the problem in skills of transforming political condition to longer lasting and systemized results when the capacity issues as well as the electoral factors are not adequately taken into consideration.

Methodology

The proposed research uses a qualitative comparative design to analyze the political parties in Pakistan in transforming the climate-related promises to green activities at provincial level. It analyses three provinces, specifically, Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) between the period of 2013 and 2018, which were under the leadership of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Parliamentarians Pakistan people party (PPPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), respectively. This is analytically important because it came after the adoption of the 18 th Constitutional Amendment to devolve environmental and forestry roles to provincial governments and introduce political parties as key players in climate governance.

The paper relies on two major qualitative data sources. To begin with, the systematic content analysis of party manifestos published on a party election of 2013 and 2018 concerning the general elections was carried out. Manifestos were chosen because they form official policy promises and give information on how political parties address the issues of the environment and climate in the election race. The review concentrated on the commitments in the area of afforestation and reforestation, urban greening, conservation of mangroves, environmental control and institutional capacity in climate governance. Thematic codes of the content of the manifold were constructed on both deductive and inductive categories, based on the deductive categories based on the research in the area of climate governance and policy implementation gaps, and inductive categories developed as a result of the close textual analysis. This was also the method that allowed cross-party comparison as well as sensitivity to party-specific framing and priorities.

The study is augmented by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders who are directly engaged in implementation and the process of policymaking in climate-related issues and project

implementation at the provincial level. Eighteen interviews were made (nine an interview with politicians each party having three members), 6 an interview with senior bureaucrats (two on each province), and 3 an interview with the representatives of major non-governmental organizations on the projects concerning climate collaboration with provincial governments. Purposive sampling strategy was used in such a way that respondents had firsthand experience on environmental policy formulation, implementation or even supervision. The interviews were completed in 2025 and most of them took a period of thirty and forty minutes. The interview guide prioritized the knowledge of the respondents on the manifesto promises, the experience over green initiatives implementation, their understanding of political leadership and ownership, monitoring and evaluation processes, the role played by the donor, the coordination of institutions as well as the sustainable nature of projects outside electoral periods.

All the interviews were carried out through informed consent, audio-taped, and transcribed. Thematic analysis was performed on the interview data, and the coding was done through repeated cycles to enable the development of patterns across the cases without losing control to the research questions and theoretical aspects of the study under question. The especially broad interest was given in finding gaps between political promises and the real practices in the field of implementation, how political visibility can affect the project design, and whether institutional capacity and donor involvement could impact the results of the project. The results of the interviews were used in triangulation with the manifesto analysis and secondary literature to provide higher analytical strength and diminish the need to use specific sources of interpretation.

The research was also sensitive to the politics which is why ethical concerns were keenly followed. Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants and no identifying information was learned in transcripts and analysis. Treatment of the respondents is done in the form of anonymized code to maintain the confidentiality and promote the open discussion. Although the qualitative design allows conducting an in-depth analysis of the political and institutional process, there are some limitations that have to be mentioned. Use of elite interviews also brings Strategic bias and the ecological outcomes like the survival rates of plantations are not quantitatively determined. They are however alleviated by means of triangulation and by making attention to governance processes and implementation dynamic as opposed to measuring alone the environmental impact. In this regard, the methodological approach will be well adopted to investigate the influence of political motives and institutional structure on the subnational climate governance in Pakistan.

Manifesto Analysis: Party-Wise Assessment and Comparative Insights

This part restructures the analysis of the manifestos by focusing on a disaggregated analysis of each of the political parties and then proceeding to analyze them comparatively. A food deconstructivism methodology enables better attribution of political intent, ideological framing and implementation orientation, which can then be used to make cross-party conclusions of analysis.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

PTI Manifesto Analysis (2013)

Although PTI had no specific framework addressing climate change in its 2013 manifesto, its most ambitious environmental vision among the three major parties included the proposed vision (P5-PTI, 2025). The concept of environmental protection involved afforestation in mass, statutory protection, and restoration of the ecosystem. The promises of developing a countrywide afforestation program, the reuse of the damaged forests and wastelands, and the observance of the Environmental Protection Act (1997) by the authority of special tribunals are indicative of high-

profile interventions, which is supported by the use of regulatory powers (Yaseen, 2017). These commitments once a sign of policy ambition and administration intention, there were no specific implementation tracks, timeframes, and surveillance.

Symbolically, the 2013 manifesto of PTI is a strategic blend of environmental leadership that is symbolic in nature and legalistic governance. The focus on national campaigns was a precursor to subsequent flagship projects like the Billion Tree Tsunami and the lack of emphasis on management of business in the post-plantation phase and institutional buy-in pointed to possible gaps in application.

PTI Manifesto Analysis (2018)

PTI has greatly expanded its environmental agenda by 2018, with the Billion Tree Tsunami being an initiative that was expanded to a nationwide basis (Siddiqui, 2019). The green projects were clearly imagined as a tool of climate change reduction, a healing of the ecosystem and a national pride. The manifesto linked afforestation to the creation of employment opportunities, biodiversity protection and the urban planning of the ecosystems, hence it denotes a broader conceptualization of green development (David Nawiene Chutab, 2022). However, despite the increased sophistication of rhetoric, the specifics of these mechanisms of monitoring, assessment, and long-term sustainability were not specified in detail.

Beyond the window dressing, analytically the 2018 PTI manifesto reflects on the growing confidence in politics and aggregation of the agenda. Environmental policies were strongly brought up as flagship policies thus boosting political attention and world presence. At the same time, there is still no sign of strong institutional anchoring, which indicates that it uses executive commitment instead of installed administrative systems.

Table 1: PTI Manifesto Commitments on Green Initiatives

Year	Policy Ambition	Implementation Clarity	Political Visibility	Sustainability Orientation
2013	High	Medium	High	Medium
2018	Very High	Medium	Very High	Medium

Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N)

PML-N Manifesto Analysis (2013)

As stated in the 2013 manifesto by Pakistan's PML -N, there has been an understanding of environmental degradation with the primary focus being on it in the form of a regulatory framework and a service-delivery framework. The policy pledges were focused on implementing the available environmental laws, urbanizing green areas, improving solid waste disposal infrastructures as well as reducing the trends of deforestation. PML-N, contrary to PTI, did not frame green initiatives as the regular national revolutions, but as the continuation of administrative conformity and the city administration.

A critical interpretation of such position displays a managerial conceptualization of the environment that is consistent with the infrastructural development paradigm of PML-N. Although the manifesto suggests some institutional continuity and regulatory awareness, it is still below the level of introducing innovation, ecological compatibility, and overall sustainability planning. In turn, the factors of the environment are seen as less imperative than the needs of the development of the economy and the infrastructure.

PML-N Manifesto Analysis (2018)

The 2018 manifesto exhibited an incremental learning, which is expressed in the increase of the references to urban greening, sanitation, clean drinking water and biodiversity protection. Environmental issues were more noticeable as compared to the 2013 variant, and this can be attributed to the heightening rates of public and foreign focus on climate change. However, green projects continued to be integrated into larger developmental and infrastructural discourses and clear climate adaptation or climate mitigation strategies were still missing.

Analytically, the PML Read More 2018 environmental agenda at PML-N can be described as one of adapting and not transforming. Although the scope of the policy was extended, the clarity of implementation, the scope of institutional reform and the level of cross-sectoral integration were limited, thus enhancing a development centered, as opposed to a climate centered, style of governance.

Table 2: PML-N Manifesto Commitments on Green Initiatives

Year	Policy Ambition	Implementation Clarity	Political Visibility	Sustainability Orientation
2013	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low–Medium
2018	Medium	Low–Medium	Medium	Low–Medium

Pakistan People’s Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)

PPPP Manifesto Analysis (2013)

The 2013 manifesto by PPPP placed the issue of environment under broader scope of the discussion of social development and forest ability in cities (Farooq Arshad, 2024). The proclaimed commitments put an emphasis on water security, city planning, and acknowledgment of disasters caused by climate, however, they lacked specifics regarding forestry management, institutional change, or particular implementation mechanisms. Instead of stating the operational directives, the policy was put in normative terms. Analytically speaking, the position of PPPP reflects a theoretical understanding of the need to make the environment a priority, yet lacks administrative nuance. Lack of baselines, timelines and monitoring structures indicate low implementation purpose and hence puts environmental protection at a subsidiary but not central governance agenda.

PPPP Manifesto Analysis (2018)

In 2018 the PPPP included a larger lexicon on the environment, including a mention of a Green New Deal, climate security and fortification of environmental protection agencies. This shift implies the growing conceptual agreement with global climate dialogue and discourses of environmental justice. Yet, there are still indistinct concrete paths of implementation, financing approaches, and structural ways of institutions to coordinate themselves.

Put differently analytically, the 2018 manifesto by the PPPP shows discursive development devoid of corresponding operational preparedness. In as much as the party has presented a broadened vision of the environment, lack of administrative coherence dilutes its prospects of being put down in writing.

Table 3: PPPP Manifesto Commitments on Green Initiatives

Year	Policy Ambition	Implementation Clarity	Political Visibility	Sustainability Orientation
2013	Low–Medium	Low	Low	Medium
2018	Medium	Low	Low–Medium	Medium

Comparative Analysis of Party Manifestos

A cross-party comparative assessment shows that the differences between manifesto promises could be explained by factors of strategic political framing and governance priorities rather than by political orientation ideology. The most ambitious and visible party always was Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which made green projects one of their national business ventures. The Pakistan Muslim league-N (PML-N) embraced a pragmatic, development-based approach, and integrated the aspect of environmental concerns into the successive structures of administration and infrastructure. On the contrary, PPP party had a premonition of normative and justice-oriented discourse but lacked operational specificity. In all the two electoral cycles, none of the parties explored comprehensive governance of the climate, with strong institutional mechanisms. The lineage of manifestos between 2013 and 2018 shows the development of increased rhetorical activity of climate change, but this trend is not indicative of an organizational learning systematic process.

Table 4: Comparative Assessment of Green Initiative Commitments (2013–2018)

Party	Political Framing	Implementation Orientation	Visibility Incentives	Institutional Anchoring
PTI	Flagship leadership	Campaign-driven	Very High	Medium
PML-N	Developmental governance	Compliance-based	Medium	Low–Medium
PPPP	Normative justice	Discursive	Low	Low

The party-by-party and comparative analysis demonstrates that the establishment of manifesto promises was substantially a device to political signaling as opposed to blueprints to be implemented. Such strategic framings shaped a series of implementation paths on the provincial scale, hence substantiating the main argument which stated that, politically driven incentive as well as an institutional capacity jointly defines the effect of climate governance in Pakistan.

Key Themes Emerging from Stakeholder Interviews

Political Ownership and Leadership Commitment

Nationwide, the stakeholders found political ownership to be a deterministic aspect in the initiation/sustainability/visibility of green initiatives. The political leadership was inclined to manifest climatic-related projects as the demonstration of the commitment of the leadership, frequently with the focus on the flagship projects, including the extensive afforestation campaigns or the noises about renewable energy sources (P3-PML-N, 2025; P2-PML-N, 2025). Nevertheless, the bureaucratic and civil society respondents frequently opposed the intensity of this ownership by citing that the political commitment was usually symbolic but not institutionalized.

In Punjab and Sindh, interviewees also admitted that climatic programs relied a lot on individual interests of the top politicians and could easily be abandoned once a new administration came to power. (P2-PPPP, 2025) This observation is consistent with the available literature, which emphasizes personalization of environmental policy in the formation of systems, where sustainability of programmers is increasingly linked to political cycles as opposed to institutional requirements (Aklin & Urpelainen, 2013; Franzmann, 2014). Conversely, the stakeholders in KP noted a particularly higher political-bureaucratic orientation, implying an ease of translating the political intent into long-term action in the form of programmatic action.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation (MRE) Mechanisms

A wide variety of stakeholders found a weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as an issue that was pervasive (N-YDF, 2025). The lack of standardized indicators, the decentralization of reporting lines and the lack of technical capacity to measure the environmental results once more became a concern with bureaucratic respondents, in particular (P1-PPP, 2025). In many instances success in the project was measured based on financial outlay or physical goal-achievement; the number of saplings handed out in many instances; instead of basis on ecological impact and subsequent sustainability.

The opponents of civil-society participants used to pretend that the lack of monitoring undermines transparency and accountability and hinders learning and corrective measures. These results reflect larger critiques on the climate governance in underdeveloped contexts and the inability of the systems of variable ratios or MRV to help reduce efficient adherence of a policy agreement amid formal procedural formats (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Mickwitz, 2003; UNFCCC, 2019). The poor monitoring practices were repeatedly linked to the creation of bloated success stories that mistook the most serious shortcomings of implementations by stakeholders.

Donor Influence and Project Dependency

The theme of donor influence also came out as another salient theme that formed the perception of stakeholders on provincial climate initiatives. Interviews were carried out to find out that many green projects, especially those that were carried out in Sindh and also KP were majorly donor-led with regards to design, financing, and evaluation frameworks (N-IUCN, 2025) (N-WWF, 2025). Although the stakeholders had realized the importance of the external finance towards the reduction of fiscal bottlenecks, they also noted the issues of the sustainability of projects in the long run after discontinuation of the donor funds.

Bureaucratic respondents emphasized the inflexibility of donor reporting demands and discrepancy between the donor priorities and the local needs, which limited the flexibility of the policy (B1, 2025). The interviews with civil society actors also argued that the projects that were funded by donors also favored short-term deliverables at the cost of long-term institutional capacity development (N-IUCN, 2025). These results are in line with the literature that warns against the excessive dependence on externally financed climate interventions in an environment expressed in weak domestic ownership (Averchenkova et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020).

Institutional Capacity and Coordination Deficits

The structural impediments to the effective climate governance were identified as institutional deficiencies, especially, limited availability of human resources, lack of clear mandates, and inadequate inter-departmental coordination. It was noted by the provincial stakeholders that the climate responsibilities were often divided between many departments without definite leadership or coordination systems, which led to the repetition of efforts and inefficiencies (Adnan, 2021).

This was due to the absence of special climate units with technical expertise, which curtailed the ability of provincial governments to incorporate climate issues when developing sectoral policies namely, energy, agriculture and urban development policies. This kind of institutional fragmentation is in line with the findings of the multi-level governance literature which highlights the significant importance of strong coordination structures to preclude policy incoherence in the context of successful decentralized climate action (Ostrom, 2010; Schreurs, 2010).

Comparative Overview of Stakeholder Views on Green Initiatives

Table 5: Summary of Stakeholder Views on Green Initiatives in Each Province

Province	Political Ownership	Monitoring & Evaluation	Donor Influence	Overall Perceived Performance
Punjab	High visibility, leader-driven	Weak, output-focused	Moderate	Mixed
Sindh	Fragmented, inconsistent	Weak, donor-led	High	Limited
KP	Relatively institutionalized	Improving, though uneven	Moderate	Comparatively stronger

Linking Stakeholder Perspectives to Performance

Analytically, the perception of stakeholders relates strongly with the defined changes in project performance within the provinces. In Punjab and Sindh, such dominance of politically motivated and initiative-based programs (in conjunction with poor monitoring structures) led to a discontinuous implementation and a low level of lasting impact. Although the policy rhetoric was ambitious, projects were often poorly embedded at the institution, which led to poor results and challenges in sustainability.

Conversely, KP had rather better performance that was linked with more convergence of the political leadership and bureaucratic execution and institutional coordination. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of clarity of administrative requirements and coherence between departments in terms of increasing implementation capacity despite resource limitations. This finding evidence confirms implementation-theory claims that policy results are more related to administrative internal consistency and institutional imaginative strength than formal policy formulation (Hill and Hupe, 2014; Howlett, 2019).

Comprehensively, the views of stakeholders indicate that the effectiveness in climate governance at provincial level is determined by the combination of political motivation, institutional and external factors as opposed to the effect of policy commitments. These lessons illustrate the need to shift to past headlines efforts to empower the governance systems underlining continuous climate action.

Provincial Case Narratives of Green Initiatives

This part will provide cases comparison between provincial examples of green initiatives that have been executed in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Instead of providing the descriptive description of separate projects, the analysis will place each project in the framework of political, institutional, and governance context to answer the question of why the acquiring and maintaining outcomes vary among the implementation processes.

Punjab (PML-N): Green Punjab Program—Political Symbolism and Weak Follow-up

The Green Punjab Program has become a high-profile project that is consistent with the overall developmental focus on visibility and infrastructure-based governance of Pakistan Muslim league Nawaz (PML-N) in Punjab. The stakeholders are generally agreeing that the programmed had good political support in its initial implementation stages, especially at the chief ministerial level thus making it easy to roll out and mobilize interparent (P1-PML-N, 2025).

However, interviewees always emphasized that in Punjab political ownership was quite superficial and centralized and that there was little institutional offloading other than that of incumbent political actors (P2-PML-N, 2025). According to bureaucratic respondents, there were low or no mechanisms of post-plantation monitoring, ecological evaluation, and upkeep yet plantation targets were openly stressed (N-WWF, 2025). Based on this, numerical outputs and not environmental outcomes were used to measure project success.

This trend includes a wider movement of performative environmentalism, whereby climate drivers have reputational and electoral roles but no administrative follow-through (Edelman, 1964; Carter, 2014). Weaknesses in monitoring structures and institutional sustainability have also added to the gaps in implementation, further backing the same argument saying that climate initiatives in Punjab are prone to the turnover of governments and shifting priorities of development (Ahmad et al., 2020; Hill and Hupe, 2014).

Sindh (PPP): Mangrove Restoration—Donor Dependence and Institutional Constraints

The restoration efforts of mangroves in the country which are mainly focused in the area around the Indus Delta are one of the most ecologically important climate interventions in the country of Pakistan. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been recognized by the stakeholders as having a rhetorical commitment to climate resilience, specifically, in the framework of coastal vulnerability and exposure to climate-driven livelihoods.

However, interviews have shown that these projects have a high dependence on donors with the international organizations playing a central role in the design, funding and evaluation of the projects (P1-PPPP, 2025) (P2-PPPP, 2025). Although participation by donors has been influential in helping to offer technical experience and mobilize resources, it has also limited provincial ownership and flexibility in policies (N-YDF, 2025). According to bureaucratic respondents, dispersion between provincial departments and donor agencies has emerged as the main factor in coordination and has resulted in parallel reporting systems and restricted institutional learning (B2, 2025).

The stakeholders in the civil society also argued that the mangrove projects are often handled as one-off events other than as part of a broader plan towards coastal management. A poor institutional capacity, regular administrative restructuring and lack of clarity in departmental mandates have compromised the sustainability of the restoration efforts. The presented observations are aligned with the literature that sheds light on the dangers of the externally motivated climate interventions in situations where the domestic institutionalization is still scarce (Averchenkova et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PTI): Billion Tree Tsunami—Visibility, Recognition, and Sustainability Challenges

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Billion Tree Tsunami (BTT) project stands out as the most globally visible project carried out in Pakistan in the green field. Launched under the highest leadership of

the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, the project received massive international focus and was even supported by the influential global environment-related organizations, due to its excessively wide scope of activities along with noble aims.

The relative success of the BTT was attributed by the stakeholders to a combination of political commitment, bureaucratic leadership, and the coordination of the institutions. Contrary to Punjab and Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gave the forestry department unquestionable administrative powers that were supported by committed staff and a relatively strong monitoring system. This kind of alignment helped to introduce more coherent implementation path and increase credibility at national and international level.

However, despite its popularity and recognition, stakeholders expressed their concerns with the sustainability of the initiative in the long term. Questions were developed in the areas of ecological diversity, community involvement and sustainability of the funding sources outside of the project lifecycle. Some of the interviewees warned that the glancing glass effect of international recognition could be used to hide a set of continuing governance problems especially those related to land tenure, benefit-sharing and adaptive management (P5-PTI, 2025).

These concerns are consistent with criticism throughout the world regarding large-scale afforestation programmers, which warn that size and visibility may not always instill ecological solidity and institutional sustainability (Ostrom, 2010; Aylett, 2015). Whereas the experience of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can shine the light of the ability to lead climate at subnational level, it also shows the need to continue its institutionalization after flagship successes.

Comparative Assessment of Green Initiative Projects

Table 6: Comparative Assessment of Green Initiative Projects across Provinces

Province	Scope of Initiative	Sustainability	Political Visibility	Monitoring Mechanisms	Stakeholder Satisfaction
Punjab (PML-N)	Broad but fragmented	Low to moderate	High	Weak, output-oriented	Mixed
Sindh (PPP)	Ecologically focused	Moderate (donor-dependent)	Low	Donor-led, fragmented	Limited
KP (PTI)	Large-scale, focused	Moderate to high	Very high (national & international)	Relatively strong	Comparatively high

Conclusion

This current research focuses on how political parties contributed to the planning, process, and sustainability of green projects at the provincial levels in Pakistan in 2013-2018. The study can explain the relationship between political incentives, the effectiveness of the institutions and environmental performance by comparing the case of Punjab, Sindh, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The results show that, despite the fact that political actors proved to be committed towards climate-related initiatives, the level of these interventions, their success and longevity exhibited a high degree of diversity and were directly attentive to provincial political and administrative settings.

The Green Punjab Program of the PMLN in Punjab had a high visibility of politics and fast implementation. However, its focus on its quantitative performance measures against ecological

performance was an example of performative environmentalism. The mangrove restoration led by PPP in Sindh presented ecologically valuable results but was extremely dependent on foreign donors and ownership meaning that it did not demonstrate the dangers of the externality of interventions. The Billion Tree Tsunami organized by the PTI had admired international attraction within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and, relatively, better institutional fit; however, issues regarding maintenance in the long-term, involvement and engagement of communities, and future funding are still raised.

The stakeholder views across all the provinces highlighted weaknesses in the system in terms of monitoring, reporting, and evaluation systems, the administrative responsibilities were not clearly coordinated and were prone to political influence cycles. These gaps imply that policy ambition is not enough; the transformation of manifesto undertakings into efficient climate action has to be crucially grounded upon the harmony of political volition, institutional aptitudes and governance systems. The paper also brings out the dichotomy of green efforts as both environmental action and a political branding tool, which often reward the visibility and immediate success over both sustainability and ecological education.

Policymakers need to put the findings into policy implications to highlight the need to institutionalize climate governance outside electoral processes. Among the recommendations will be the creation of the provincial climate units as a legal obligation, the enhancement of the monitoring and evaluation system through standard indicators, the promotion of the cross-party agreement on the significance of climate, and the implementation of supports of projects funded by the donor in the domestic government framework to promote sustainability. These would help in closing the divide between political rhetoric and long-term ecological effect, and hence make sure that the green programs play an important part in climate adaptation and mitigation goals of Pakistan.

In conclusion, this study has noted that political incentives and institutional architecture as well as environmental policy intent shape subnational climate governance in Pakistan equally. Without the prolonged institutionalization and careful coordination of incentives, even the most noticeable green projects can be left scattered, symbolic, and not optimal with regards to the environment. Connecting the promises of the manifestos, political practices, and the results of the implementation, this research contributes substantially to the larger discussions on the impact that political parties have on the federal developing states and can provide practical recommendations on how to make the climate action more sustainable and efficient on the provincial level.

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