

One Unit System 1

The One Unit system was introduced in 1955 by the government. Its purpose was to merge the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and Balochistan into a single province called *West Pakistan*. The main idea was to balance power between East and West Pakistan because East Pakistan had a larger population and could dominate in elections. However, this system created serious problems. The smaller provinces lost their political identity, culture, and autonomy. Many people believed that Punjab became too dominant, while Sindh, Balochistan, and NWFP were neglected. This caused resentment and fueled opposition movements.

Opposition to One Unit

From the start, the One Unit system faced resistance. The people of Sindh, Balochistan, and NWFP strongly opposed it because they felt it destroyed their cultural and historical status. They believed Punjab was the biggest beneficiary and controlled the resources. In addition, East Pakistan also disliked the arrangement because it seemed unfair to them too. By the 1960s, protests, strikes, and nationalist movements grew stronger. Political parties also criticized the system and demanded the return of the original provinces. By the time Yahya Khan took power in 1969, the One Unit system had already become very unpopular.

Suspension of One Unit

In 1970, Yahya Khan officially suspended the One Unit system. The four provinces of West Pakistan—Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, and Balochistan—were restored to their original status. This was a historic achievement for the smaller provinces, who saw it as a victory for their struggle. It restored their cultural and political identities, which had been denied for 15 years. However, this decision came very late. East Pakistan was already demanding greater autonomy and had lost trust in the central government. So, while West Pakistan celebrated the change, it could not save the unity of the country.

The 1962 Constitution

When Ayub Khan came to power in 1958 through a coup, he abrogated the 1956 Constitution and later introduced the 1962 Constitution. This constitution created a Presidential system where the President had vast powers, including the ability to dissolve assemblies and control the executive. It was based on Ayub's Basic Democracies system, where local council members formed the electoral college to elect the President and national representatives. This system restricted the role of political parties and weakened democracy. It also reduced the independence of the judiciary and the freedom of the press. Although some civil liberties were included, many people saw it as authoritarian.

Suspension of the 1962 Constitution

When Yahya Khan took over from Ayub Khan in 1969, he suspended the 1962 Constitution. He declared martial law, which meant that all laws and assemblies were dissolved. The Presidential system and Basic Democracies structure were completely abolished. Yahya promised that a new constitution would be made through elected representatives, which later became possible under his Legal Framework Order (1970). Political parties and people welcomed this suspension because they wanted an end to Ayub Khan's authoritarian rule. However, suspending the constitution did not immediately solve Pakistan's political crisis. East Pakistan still demanded real democracy and autonomy, and the division between East and West Pakistan remained strong.