

Cultural Identity and National Cohesion: A Study to Explore the Complexity of National Identity amidst Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic identities are the beauty of State but when they used negatively for the political and economic benefits, it may be a threaten for national cohesion. This study explores the relationship between cultural identity and national cohesion in Pakistan, a state characterized by significant ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. The research examines the roots of ethnic tensions related to Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun nationalism, analyzes the urban–rural divide in terms of cultural traditionalism and globalized adaptability, and evaluates the role of soft power assets such as cricket diplomacy and diaspora engagement in shaping Pakistan’s global image. Drawing upon theories of nationalism by Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, and Ernest Gellner, along with anthropological perspectives on identity and ethnicity, the study argues that national cohesion in Pakistan requires an inclusive understanding of identity that recognizes cultural diversity while strengthening shared national narratives. The study relies on qualitative analysis of contemporary academic literature to assess the evolving socio-political dynamics influencing national identity. The findings suggest that addressing ethnic grievances, bridging the urban–rural cultural divide, and utilizing soft power resources can contribute significantly to strengthening Pakistan’s national unity.

Keywords: Pakistan, ethnic identities, ethnic nationalism, national cohesion, socio-economic inequalities, urban-rural divide, globalization, nationalism, traditionalism, soft power, cricket diplomacy, diaspora, global image

INTRODUCTION

National identity and cultural diversity remain central challenges for multi-ethnic states. Countries with diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural communities often struggle to balance local identities with national cohesion. Pakistan represents a significant case in this regard, as it contains multiple ethnic groups with distinct historical narratives, cultural traditions, and political aspirations.

Before the creation of Pakistan, diverse ethnic and religious identities were existed in sub-continent. From 1857 to 1947, number of social, political and religious events took place and became the reason of grievance among Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. This grievance led them towards partition. In Pakistan, this has been evident since the early years of independence; political leaders' preference for ethnic

groups exacerbated divides between the dominant and underprivileged ethnicities (Jaffrelot, 2002) which once again led towards partition of Bengal in 1971.

Jaffrelot argues that ethnic identification used in political power has broken down the cohesiveness among the people, resulting in increased ethnical cleavages based on ethnicity. As a multi-ethnic state, Pakistan has major groups including Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi and Pashtun and they have their own cultures, languages and historical identities. This variation is natural and the beauty of this country. Problem arose when political elites frequently employ ethnic identities as instruments and mobilize ethnic groups by highlighting grievances and presenting themselves as defenders of that ethnic group to consolidate power (Horowitz, 1985). Similarly, some provinces or groups believe that resources and development are distributed unfairly. And certain communities feel they do not have enough political, administrative, or military representation in the state system.

As a result, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and Baloch Nationalist Movements (BNM) emerged from particular communities by claiming their grievance on social, economic and political bases. We can also see, famous political parties in Pakistan get their support or votes from one province i.e., Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN) from Punjab, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has strong support in Sindh and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This explains that ethnic identities are as much stronger in Pakistan that people vote or support those parties which represent their own ethnic group. (Ahmed, 2025).

At the same time, globalization, urbanization, and technological changes are transforming cultural identities. The growing urban-rural divide reflects tensions between traditional cultural values and globalized lifestyles. Urban populations often demonstrate greater adaptability to global cultural influences, while rural communities tend to preserve traditional social structures and cultural practices.

In addition to internal dynamics, external perceptions of national identity are increasingly shaped by soft power resources. Cultural diplomacy, sports, media representation, and diaspora engagement can play significant roles in shaping a country's international image.

This research aims to explore how ethnic diversity, cultural change, and soft power influence national cohesion in Pakistan.

Research objectives:

1. Discuss the roots of international tensions related to Baloch, Sindh, and Pashtun nationalism.
2. Analyze the "urban-rural divide" in terms of cultural traditionalism versus globalized adaptability.
3. Evaluate the role of "soft power" assets, such as cricket and the Diaspora, in improving Pakistan's global image.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines cultural identity and national cohesion in Pakistan through key theories of nationalism and anthropological perspectives on identity formation. The theoretical framework draws on the works of Benedict Anderson (1983), Anthony D. Smith (1991), and Ernest Gellner (1983), along with anthropological theories proposed by Fredrik Barth (1969), Arjun Appadurai (1996), Pierre Bourdieu (1986), and the soft power concept developed by Joseph Nye (2004). These perspectives help explain how ethnic identity, modernization, globalization, and cultural diplomacy influence national cohesion.

The concept of Imagined Communities, introduced by Benedict Anderson (1983), explains that nations are socially constructed communities in which citizens imagine themselves as part of a shared collective identity, even though they may never meet most other members of the nation. National identity is created through shared symbols, institutions, and narratives such as media, education, and national culture. In the context of Pakistan, this theory helps explain how citizens from diverse ethnic backgrounds—such as Baloch, Sindhi, Pashtun, and Punjabi communities—develop a sense of belonging to a single national identity. However, when ethnic identities become politically dominant, they may challenge the broader imagined national community.

The Ethno-symbolism theory developed by Anthony D. Smith (1991) argues that modern nations are rooted in earlier ethnic communities that share myths, traditions, historical memories, and cultural symbols. According to Smith, these cultural elements strongly influence national identity formation. In Pakistan, ethnic communities maintain distinct cultural traditions and historical narratives that shape their political and social identities. This theory helps explain the persistence of ethnic nationalism and the demand for cultural recognition among different ethnic groups.

Another important perspective is the modernization theory of nationalism proposed by Ernest Gellner (1983). Gellner argues that nationalism emerges as societies modernize and industrialize, creating a need for standardized education systems, shared language, and unified cultural frameworks. In Pakistan, modernization processes such as urbanization, economic development, and exposure to global culture have created differences between urban and rural communities. Urban populations tend to adapt more easily to globalization, while rural communities often maintain traditional cultural practices. This theory therefore helps explain the cultural and social differences that contribute to the urban–rural divide.

Anthropological perspectives further deepen the understanding of identity dynamics. The ethnic boundary theory introduced by Fredrik Barth (1969) emphasizes that ethnic groups maintain their identities through social boundaries rather than fixed cultural characteristics. These boundaries are reinforced through language, social practices, and cultural traditions. In Pakistan, ethnic identities remain strong because communities continue to maintain such cultural boundaries.

The effects of globalization on cultural identity are explained through the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996), who argues that global cultural flows—such as media, technology, and migration—reshape identities in modern societies. In Pakistan, urban populations exposed to global media and technology often adopt global cultural practices, while rural communities remain more closely connected to traditional cultural values.

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) introduced the concept of cultural capital, which refers to cultural knowledge, education, and social resources that influence social status and opportunities. Urban populations in Pakistan generally possess greater access to educational and cultural resources, enabling them to engage more actively with global culture, while rural communities may rely more on traditional cultural knowledge.

Finally, the concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph Nye (2004), explains how countries influence global perceptions through cultural attraction rather than military force. Cultural diplomacy, sports, media representation, and diaspora engagement are important sources of soft power. In Pakistan's case, cricket diplomacy, media presence, and overseas diaspora communities contribute to shaping the country's international image and strengthening its cultural influence globally.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how ethnic diversity, socio-cultural transformation, and cultural diplomacy interact to shape national identity and cohesion in Pakistan

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship highlights that national cohesion in Pakistan is shaped by a complex interaction of ethnic identity, political structures, globalization, and international image-building. Both local and international researchers provide important insights into these dynamics.

A major area of research focuses on ethnic politics and nationalism in Pakistan. Mian Saeed Ahmed (2025) argues that the politicization of ethnic identities has significantly influenced governance and weakened national cohesion. Similarly, Syed Nouman Ali Shah (2025) examines how the rise of ethnic nationalism among Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun communities challenges the stability of Pakistan's multi-ethnic state. These findings are supported by international scholars such as Adeel Khan (2005), who explains that ethnic nationalism emerges due to unequal power distribution and state centralization. Likewise, Christophe Jaffrelot (2015) highlights that regional inequalities and political exclusion have contributed to ethnic tensions in Pakistan.

From a broader perspective, Ian Talbot (2012) traces the historical roots of ethnic conflict to colonial legacies and post-independence state-building challenges. Husnul Amin (2023) further explains that Pashtun nationalism reflects a hybrid identity shaped by both ethnic belonging and national integration. In addition, Nasreen Akhtar (2018) shows that the Baloch conflict is closely linked to issues of resource control and political marginalization. Theoretical insights from Rogers Brubaker (2004) also support these findings by suggesting that ethnic identities are not fixed but are politically constructed and activated during conflict situations.

Another important theme in the literature is the national identity dilemma and internal diversity in Pakistan. Rani Erum (2023) argues that identity conflicts stem from historical political decisions, institutional weaknesses, and regional inequalities. Similarly, Benish Khan, Muhammad Azeem, and Tahir Tabassum (2018) highlight that globalization and political changes have reshaped ethnic identities in the postmodern era. Research by Krzysztof Krakowski and Hidayat Ullah Khan (2025) further shows that ethno-religious diversity influences public perceptions of state legitimacy, especially in marginalized regions.

The concept of inclusive nation-building has also gained attention in recent studies. Farhan Hanif Siddiqi (2022) emphasizes the importance of "unity in diversity" as a framework for strengthening national cohesion. This perspective suggests that recognizing cultural pluralism can reduce ethnic tensions and promote social harmony.

In addition to ethnic politics, scholars have examined the urban-rural divide and the impact of globalization on identity formation. Jawad Hussain and Waheed Murad (2025) argue that social media and global influences are reshaping identity narratives in Pakistan. These findings align with global theories of globalization. Arjun Appadurai (1996) explains that global cultural flows, such as media and technology, influence societies differently, with urban populations being more exposed than rural communities.

Similarly, Saskia Sassen (2001) describes cities as centers of global interaction where identities become more cosmopolitan. Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that modernity leads individuals, especially in urban areas, to develop more reflexive and flexible identities. This idea is further supported by Zygmunt

Bauman (2000), who suggests that globalization creates fluid identities, particularly in modern urban societies.

Moreover, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2009) highlights that globalization leads to cultural hybridity, while Mike Savage (2005) explains that urban populations tend to develop cosmopolitan identities, whereas rural populations maintain traditional forms of belonging. Together, these studies show that the urban–rural divide is a key factor in shaping cultural identity and social cohesion in Pakistan.

Finally, recent literature emphasizes the role of soft power and international image-building. Dure Shahwar Bano (2023) examines how cricket diplomacy and media representation contribute to Pakistan’s global image. This aligns with the broader concept of soft power introduced by Joseph Nye (2004), who argues that countries can influence others through culture, values, and diplomacy rather than military force.

Further contributions by Nicholas Cull (2008) highlight the role of media and diaspora in shaping national image, while Yudhishtir Raj Isar (2013) emphasizes the importance of cultural diplomacy in global perception-building. Stuart Murray (2012) explains how sports function as diplomatic tools, and Paul Brannagan (2016) shows that international sports events enhance national prestige and global visibility.

Overall, the literature suggests that national cohesion in Pakistan is influenced by multiple interconnected factors. Ethnic nationalism arises from historical inequalities and political exclusion, while globalization creates differences between urban and rural identities. At the same time, soft power tools such as media and sports diplomacy play an important role in shaping Pakistan’s global image.

These studies collectively highlight the need for inclusive policies, cultural recognition, and effective engagement with global platforms to strengthen national unity and international standing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis to examine ethnic identities and national cohesion in Pakistan. Data is collected from academic articles, books, government reports, and international organizations such as the UNDP and World Bank. A thematic analysis method is applied to identify key themes, including ethnic identity, regional inequality, urban–rural divide, governance, and soft power. The study is guided by theoretical perspectives from Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith to understand identity formation. To ensure reliability, multiple sources are compared (data triangulation). However, the study is limited as it relies only on secondary data and does not include primary field research.

DISCUSSION

Historical Evolution and Structural Roots of Ethnic Identities

Since independence in 1947, Pakistan has faced continuous challenges in developing a cohesive national identity due to its multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse population. Early state policies emphasized religion (Islam) as the primary unifying force, often overlooking ethnic and linguistic diversity. This centralized approach to nation-building, as noted by Ian Talbot (2012), limited provincial autonomy and contributed to long-term tensions between the center and federating units. A major turning point was the separation of East Pakistan in 1971, which demonstrated that ignoring linguistic and ethnic identities can weaken national unity. This reflects Benedict Anderson (1983)’s concept of nations as “imagined communities,” where exclusion from shared narratives undermines state legitimacy.

From the 1980s onward, ethnic movements in Pakistan became more organized and politically visible. Adeel Khan (2005) argues that ethnic nationalism is largely driven by unequal distribution of political power and economic resources, particularly in smaller provinces. This imbalance is most evident in Balochistan, where structural inequalities persist. Empirical data supports this argument: Balochistan's contribution to GDP declined from about 4.9% to 3.7% (International Affairs Review, 2020), while the province ranks lowest in literacy, health, and access to services (UNDP, 2021). The Multidimensional Poverty Index shows poverty at 71.2% in Balochistan compared to 38.8% nationally (Ministry of Planning & UNDP, 2021), and the World Bank (2022) highlights higher infant mortality and malnutrition rates. These inequalities support Christophe Jaffrelot (2015), who identifies regional disparity and political exclusion as key drivers of ethnic conflict.

In contemporary Pakistan, ethnic tensions are deeply linked to socio-economic deprivation, governance challenges, and security issues, varying across provinces. Balochistan remains the most prominent case of structural marginalization. Despite rich natural resources, it faces underdevelopment and political exclusion. According to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED, 2023), around 7,000 cases have been reported over the past decade, while Amnesty International (2024) reported over 2,300 cases in a single year. Female literacy remains below 45% in several districts (PSLM, 2021), indicating severe social inequality. Security conditions also remain volatile, with reports from Associated Press (2026) and Reuters (2026a, 2026b) documenting large-scale military operations and militant clashes resulting in significant casualties. These developments support Nasreen Akhtar (2018), who links the Baloch conflict to resource exploitation and political exclusion, and Rogers Brubaker (2004), who explains that ethnic identities intensify during conflict.

In Sindh, ethnic tensions are shaped primarily by the urban–rural divide and linguistic diversity. Karachi represents a globalized, multi-ethnic urban center, while interior Sindh remains traditional and agrarian. This divide leads to political competition, linguistic conflicts between Sindhi and Urdu-speaking populations, and uneven development. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2022), Karachi contributes a significant share of national economic output, yet disparities in resource distribution persist, fueling grievances. These dynamics illustrate how economic inequality and cultural differences reinforce identity divisions within the province.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), ethnic identity is influenced by cross-border dynamics and security challenges. The Afghan conflict, refugee influx, and military operations have reshaped the region's social structure. Pakistan hosts over 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees (UNHCR, 2023), many residing in KP, creating demographic and economic pressures. Military operations during the War on Terror also caused displacement and increased state presence. As a result, Pashtun identity has evolved into a hybrid form combining ethnic, national, and transnational elements, as explained by Husnul Amin (2023).

National cohesion in Pakistan is further shaped by both internal and external factors. Internally, economic inequality remains a major challenge. The World Bank (2023) estimates that around 39–40% of the population lives below the poverty line, with rural poverty at 54.6% compared to 9.4% in urban areas (UNDP & Government of Pakistan, 2021). Educational inequality is also severe, with 77% of children unable to read basic text by age 10 (World Bank, 2023), and lower literacy rates in rural areas (PSLM, 2021). Weak governance, corruption, and lack of inclusive policies further deepen divisions, as highlighted by Rani Erum (2023), while surveys (Gallup Pakistan, 2022) show declining trust in institutions. Rapid urbanization (UN DESA, 2022), with over 37% of the population living in cities, has increased inequality and competition over resources.

Externally, regional and global dynamics also influence national cohesion. The long-standing Pakistan–India conflict continues to shape national identity and security priorities, with defense spending around 3–4% of GDP (SIPRI, 2023). Relations with Afghanistan, particularly refugee flows (UNHCR, 2023), create additional pressures and contribute to hybrid identities (Husnul Amin, 2023). Pakistan’s involvement in the War on Terror led to large-scale displacement (IDMC, 2022), increased militarization, and social disruption. Additionally, global geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East, influence Pakistan through sectarian dynamics, diaspora connections, and economic dependencies. Remittances exceeding \$27 billion annually (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023) highlight the importance of external linkages.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that national cohesion in Pakistan is shaped by a combination of historical legacies, structural inequalities, provincial dynamics, and external pressures. Internal disparities in development, governance, and education create the foundation for ethnic divisions, while external conflicts and global influences intensify them. These findings strongly align with Christophe Jaffrelot (2015) and Husnul Amin (2023), emphasizing that both structural conditions and geopolitical context are central to understanding ethnic identity and national cohesion in Pakistan.

Urban–Rural Divide: Cultural Traditionalism vs. Globalized Adaptability

The urban–rural divide in Pakistan represents a significant dimension of socio-economic and cultural inequality that shapes identity formation and national cohesion. This divide is not only geographical but reflects deeper differences between traditional rural lifestyles and globally influenced urban cultures. Pakistan has experienced rapid urbanization, with about 37–38% of its population living in urban areas and projections suggesting this will exceed 50% by 2050 (UN DESA, 2022). However, a large portion of the population still resides in rural areas, where access to healthcare, education, and infrastructure remains limited, and employment is largely dependent on agriculture and informal sectors (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2022). These disparities contribute to uneven development and reinforce regional inequalities.

The divide is particularly evident in education and technology. According to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM, 2021), urban literacy rates exceed 74%, compared to around 51% in rural areas, with female literacy significantly lower in rural regions. Similarly, digital access is uneven, as urban areas benefit from greater internet penetration while rural communities face connectivity challenges (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority [PTA], 2023). This digital gap limits rural participation in the global economy. From an anthropological perspective, Arjun Appadurai (1996) explains that globalization operates through uneven cultural flows, meaning urban populations are more integrated into global networks, while rural populations remain relatively excluded.

Cultural differences further deepen this divide. Rural areas are characterized by strong kinship ties, tribal affiliations, and adherence to traditional norms, whereas urban centers such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad reflect cultural diversity, social mobility, and exposure to global influences. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) highlights that access to cultural capital—such as education, language, and social networks—shapes social opportunities. In Pakistan, urban populations possess greater cultural capital, enabling them to adapt more effectively to globalization, while rural populations remain disadvantaged.

Economic inequality also reinforces the divide. According to the World Bank (2023), urban economies are more diversified, while rural employment is concentrated in low-productivity agriculture. Rural-to-urban migration has increased, but often leads to informal settlements, underemployment, and rising social tensions in cities. Politically, rural areas are influenced by traditional patron-client systems,

whereas urban populations are more engaged in issue-based politics and civil society activism. As noted by Ernest Gellner (1983), modernization creates more standardized societies; however, in Pakistan, this transition is uneven, resulting in the coexistence of traditional and modern identities.

Overall, the urban–rural divide in Pakistan reinforces economic inequality, creates distinct identity patterns, and limits social integration. At the same time, it offers opportunities for cultural exchange through increased connectivity and migration. As Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggests, globalization can lead to both integration and fragmentation depending on how it is managed. Therefore, bridging this divide through inclusive development and equal access to resources is essential for strengthening national cohesion.

Soft Power, Diaspora, and National Image

In addition to structural and geopolitical factors, soft power and transnational linkages play an increasingly important role in shaping Pakistan’s national cohesion and global image. Unlike hard power, which relies on military and economic strength, soft power operates through culture, identity, and global perception. Joseph Nye (2004) defines soft power as the ability of a state to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. In Pakistan, this is reflected through cultural exports, sports diplomacy, diaspora engagement, and humanitarian initiatives. From an anthropological perspective, soft power also involves symbolic representation, where nations construct their identity through shared cultural narratives.

Cricket serves as one of the most powerful tools of soft power in Pakistan, functioning both as a source of international visibility and internal unity. Major events such as Pakistan’s victory in the ICC Champions Trophy 2017 and the growth of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) have contributed to enhancing the country’s global image and fostering national pride. According to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB, 2023), PSL has attracted international players, generated significant revenue, and increased Pakistan’s visibility in global sports markets. Cricket also reinforces Benedict Anderson (1983)’s concept of the nation as an “imagined community,” where collective experiences strengthen shared identity across ethnic and regional divides.

The Pakistani diaspora represents another critical dimension of soft power. According to the State Bank of Pakistan (2023), overseas Pakistanis contribute over \$27 billion annually in remittances and are primarily located in the Gulf, the United Kingdom, and North America. Beyond economic contributions, diaspora communities act as cultural ambassadors by promoting Pakistani identity abroad, influencing global perceptions, and facilitating transnational networks. From an anthropological perspective, diaspora communities operate as “transnational social fields” (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), where identities are negotiated across borders. The emergence of second-generation diaspora professionals, including academics, media figures, and entrepreneurs, further contributes to reshaping Pakistan’s global narrative toward innovation and resilience.

Media and digital culture also play a significant role in shaping national image. Pakistani television dramas and digital content have gained international popularity, particularly through platforms such as YouTube and Netflix, reaching audiences across South Asia, the Middle East, and diaspora communities. According to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA, 2022), media exports have steadily increased, contributing to cultural diplomacy. This reflects Clifford Geertz (1973)’s interpretive approach, where culture functions as a system of meanings communicated through symbols, and media becomes a key tool in constructing national identity narratives.

Pakistan's humanitarian and religious institutions also contribute to its soft power. Organizations such as Edhi Foundation and Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital & Research Centre have gained international recognition, enhancing the country's moral image and promoting values of social welfare and charity. These efforts align with anthropological perspectives on moral economy, where legitimacy is built through ethical practices and community service.

Despite these strengths, Pakistan's soft power faces several challenges, including negative global perceptions related to security concerns, inconsistent cultural diplomacy, and limited investment in international branding. According to the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (2023), Pakistan ranks relatively low in global perception indicators, particularly in governance and influence. This highlights a gap between Pakistan's soft power potential and its actual global image.

Importantly, soft power contributes not only to international image-building but also to internal cohesion. Shared cultural symbols, such as cricket victories, media narratives, and diaspora achievements, foster collective pride and cross-ethnic solidarity. This supports Anthony D. Smith (1991)'s argument that nations are sustained through shared myths and symbols. Overall, Pakistan's soft power reflects a "hybrid model," where traditional elements such as religion and culture interact with modern forces like digital media and globalization. Strengthening this model through coherent cultural policies, diaspora engagement, and inclusive narratives can enhance both national cohesion and Pakistan's global standing.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure equitable distribution of resources among provinces, especially Balochistan and rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to reduce center-periphery tensions.

Implement targeted programs to reduce socio-economic inequalities, including rural infrastructure, education, and healthcare development.

Strengthen governance and institutional trust through transparency, accountability, anti-corruption measures, and inclusive local governance.

Bridge the urban-rural divide by expanding digital infrastructure, improving connectivity, and promoting rural employment opportunities.

Leverage soft power via cultural industries, media, sports diplomacy (cricket), and international cultural exchanges to enhance national unity and global image.

Actively engage the diaspora as strategic partners through investments, knowledge transfer, and cultural diplomacy initiatives.

Promote an inclusive national identity that celebrates ethnic and linguistic diversity, fosters intercultural understanding, and builds shared historical narratives.

Strengthen regional peace and diplomacy to reduce security tensions, enabling better allocation of resources toward development and cohesion.

Adopt a coordinated, multi-dimensional approach combining economic inclusion, political reform, cultural integration, and global engagement to reinforce national cohesion.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Pakistan's national cohesion is shaped by a complex interplay of ethnic identities, socio-economic disparities, urban-rural divides, and global interactions. Historical

marginalization, unequal resource distribution, and political exclusion have fueled ethnic nationalism in provinces such as Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while urban centers increasingly adapt to globalized cultural and economic flows. The analysis demonstrates that bridging the urban–rural divide, addressing structural inequalities, and promoting inclusive governance are critical for fostering national unity. Moreover, Pakistan’s soft power—through cricket, media, cultural industries, and diaspora engagement—plays a dual role in enhancing both its international image and internal cohesion, creating shared symbols and narratives that transcend ethnic and regional boundaries. Anthropological theories, including Barth’s ethnic boundary framework and Appadurai’s global cultural flows, alongside classical nationalism theories by Anderson, Smith, and Gellner, provide insight into how collective identity is negotiated and sustained. Effective policy interventions, emphasizing equitable development, inclusive national identity, diaspora participation, and cultural diplomacy, are essential to mitigate internal tensions and strengthen state legitimacy. In a region characterized by geopolitical volatility—including conflicts with neighboring countries and global security dynamics—Pakistan’s ability to leverage soft power, foster intercultural understanding, and address historical grievances will determine the resilience and cohesion of its multi-ethnic society in the twenty-first century.

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