

**Evolution of Federalism in Pakistan A Historical Analysis of Political Challenges,
Constitutional Reforms, and Provincial Autonomy (1947–2025)**

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the history of federalism in Pakistan since 1947 to 2025 on how best a relationship between political issues and constitutional developments and the struggle to have provincial autonomy worked. Theoretical insights were taken through a historical-institutional approach, and the research tracked how the federal system in Pakistan has been experiencing alternating waves of decentralization and centralisation since the Objectives Resolution (1949) and the One Unit scheme (1955) until the constitutional frameworks of 1956, 1962 and 1973 and subsequent laws that changed the exceptional relations. The examination indicates that is that military interference and centralization policies took away the provincial autonomy several times, and finally led to secession of East Pakistan in 1971. A new constitution of 1973 restored the parliamentary system of federalism and established several new institutions that could facilitate case federalism, including the Council of Common Interests and the National Finance Commission, but due to their intermittent and uneven deployment they did not catalyze collaborative federalism. The decisive process took place with the 18th Amendment (2010), the 7th NFC Award (2009/10), which devolved profiles of legislation, fiscal, and general administration to the provinces and the 25th Amendment (2018) which merged the FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The major problems have been replication of the 7th NFC Award, water distribution, and tensions over issues of natural resources and implementation of Article 140 A of the weak local governments. By locating the Pakistani experience within the body of comparative federalism work, the paper has suggested that despite Pakistan formally making a sound step toward cooperative federalism, it still faces consolidations of institutions with a weak institutional, destabilizing political, and insufficiently decentralized environment. The results indicate that the concept of sustainable federalism in Pakistan relies on regular collaboration of the inter-governments, disclosure of fiscal federalism and strengthening of local governments.

Keywords: Federalism; Pakistan; Provincial Autonomy; Constitutional Reforms; National Finance Commission (NFC); 18th Amendment; One Unit; Council of Common Interests (CCI); Fiscal Federalism; Local Government; Water Apportionment Accord; Cooperative Federalism; Political Challenges; Decentralization; Comparative Federalism

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, the concept of federalism has been subject to intense debate during the course of the political history of the country as well as throughout the transition. Formed in 1947 as federal union consisting of two geographically and ethnically diverse wings of the country, East and West Pakistan, the country had adopted a colonial administrative system that was immensely centralized (Rais, 2010). Since its inception, Pakistan has been unable to find the balance between a centripetal force of a nation being united and centrifugal requirements of regions being autonomous (Burki, 2015). As opposed to federations like India or the United States, Pakistan did not have any strong federal traditions, and the early leadership was focused on unity through centralization instead of decentralization; this decision would affect the further political processes long into the future (Waseem, 2010).

The first decade following independence was characterized by political instability, constitutional wrangles, and argument over where power should be vested between the provinces and the federation. This Objectives Resolution (1949) gave importance to Islamic ideology without much detail as to the inner working of federation (Newberg, 1995). The formula of parity between the East and West Pakistan and the establishment of the scheme of One Unit (1955) actually tried to create a balance in respect of representation but as a matter of fact sidelined identities of ethnic groups and weakened the provincial autonomy (Adeney, 2012). According to the scholars, such central excessiveness added to the East Pakistani grievances, which led to its secession in 1971 and the formation of Bangladesh (Jahan, 2014; Jalal, 1995).

In 1973, the Constitution saw a change of course and re-introduced parliamentary democracy and explicitly stated that Pakistan was a federation. It presented a new layer of powers like the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and National Finance Commission (NFC) to govern the relationship between the centre and provinces and distribution of money matters (Shah, 2012). However, the ideology of federalism was sabotaged by authoritarian interventions. The balance shifted to centralization after the 8th Amendment (1985) under General Zia-ul-Haq that gave the president powers to dissolve legislatures (Afzal, 2001). This was followed by oscillations in civilian and military regimes that continued to put the federal structure in jeopardy (Rizvi, 2000).

The democratic transition of the post-2008 era brought with it the most radical changes in terms of the federalism in Pakistan. The 18th Amendment (2010), which repealed the Concurrent Legislative List, began devolving so-called first order ministries constitutional power, including health and education, and strengthened the CCI; it also, in article 172(3), included joint federal-provincial ownership of natural resources (Kennedy, 2012; Ahmed & Baloch, 2017). At the same time the 7th NFC Award (2009/10) raised the provincial share of the divisible pool to 57.5 per cent representing a fiscal rebalancing towards the provinces (Hasan, 2010). Reforms were a structural break in the direction of cooperative federalism (Adeney, 2017).

There are still a number of challenges though. The devolution of power to local governments has lagged due to resistance by the provinces that left a gap in the federal system of Pakistan, which is known as the missing middle (Cheema et al., 2016). Furthermore, the 7th NFC Award has been recurrently extended without a successor, which is a sign of political stagnation in fiscal federalism (Haque, 2020). The sharing of resources, the imbalance of administrative abilities and the old existing tension between the centre and the provinces are some of the things which tax the strength of federalism (Yusuf, 2021).

In the lead up to nearly eighty years of independence, the development of federalism has seen the move towards centralization and authoritarianism with moves towards decentralization and provincial autonomy,

although again very patchily done. This paper explores that path between 1947 and 2025 based on political issues since independence, constitutional changes and the level of provincial autonomy in a bid to develop further knowledge to the ever changing federal structure of Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Federalism and State-Building in Pakistan

It is not unusual to start scholarly discussions on the question of federalism in Pakistan with the state-building dilemma of 1947. Until 1956, when the constitution was finally adopted, there was an institutional vacuum, which caused successive governments to depend upon administrative centralization of the colonial type instead of negotiated federalism (Sayeed, 1967). The initial literature points out that the political elite of West Pakistan who remained predominantly dominated by the bureaucracy and army found themselves threatened by provincialism and therefore opposed the de-centralization of powers (Choudhury, 1974). Subsequent writers claim that such centralizing tendency undermined democracy and East Pakistan, which resulted in the loss of this province in 1971 (Callard, 1957; Ali, 1983). These testimonies establish the basis of why the federalism in Pakistan had been developing in the dynamics of centralization and crisis instead of institutional consolidation.

Constitutional Engineering and Federal Design

The analysis of the Pakistani constitutions shows that there are dynamic ideas of federalism. It has been noted that the 1956 Constitution had a parliamentary aspect but had not much autonomy at the provincial level because the federal lists were very strong and because of the existence of emergency powers (Binder, 1963). The 1962 Constitution also enhanced control of power on a presidential basis, and was seen as a top choice of the then-President General Ayub Khan that introduced controlled democracy (Burki, 1980). Political scientists analysing the 1973 Constitution make much of its dual inheritance, on one side institutionalizing parliamentary federalism through the Council of Common Interests and the National Finance Commission and on the other side leaving provinces reliant on central transfers because of the extensive federal lists (Ziring, 1980). This conflict between the planning and the practice has been revisited in the literature (Wilcox, 1972; Raza, 1997).

Military Intervention and Centralized Federalism

The literature points out repeatedly that the military regimes are disruptive elements in destroying federalism. Analyses with regard to Ayub Khan (1958-1969) are evidences on how the Basic Democracies system consolidated central power and marginalized regional political players (Gauhar, 1996). Islamization policies and Constitutional amendments under Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88) further undermined federalism with the promulgation of Article 58(2)(b), and emasculated the sovereignty of parliament (Khan, 2001). The era of Musharraf (1999-2008) was an attempt at devolution via the Devolution Plan of 2001 that enhanced the capacity of local governments but disregarded the provincial autonomy that is characteristic of the trend of centralizing federalism within authoritarianism (Shah, 2004). All these writings indicate that the new military regimes in Pakistan reorganised the federal order intentionally, to sustain rather than enhance equal governance.

Provincial Autonomy and Ethno-Nationalism

The clamor concerning provincial autonomy is not new in the Pakistani federalism. The initial research on East Pakistan examined the issues of structural inequality in the economy and political discrimination as

contributing to separatism (Sisson & Rose, 1990). The Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtun nationalists movements in West Pakistan have received a lot of attention due to their opposition to the centralized governance as well as the right to control over natural resources and cultural liberties (Harrison, 1981; Akhtar, 2015). These readings point out the poor federal accommodations that encouraged the scarring of ethno-nationalism. Balochistan in the past decades has been at the vanguard of the literature on autonomy, including chronicling the struggle over the division of natural resources, especially natural gas, and underdevelopment (Ahmad, 1992; Wirsing, 2008). Such works reveal that federal changes are not only constitutional but also are closely related to the questions of equity, identification, and inclusion.

Fiscal Federalism and Resource Distribution

The body of literature on fiscal federalism in Pakistan relates to the National Finance Commission (NFC) Awards, which entail distribution of revenue of the federation and provinces. Initial analysis observed the trend towards unchallenged supremacy of population as the only measure of distribution and that was tilted in favor of Punjab (Zaidi, 2005). The later papers examine how the NFC Awards particularly the 7th Award of 2009/10 integrated poverty, backwardness, and revenue effort to deal with areas of provincial imbalance (Khemani & Ahmed, 2010). Another factor noted by scholars is the reoccurring conflict between federal fiscal requirements (defence, debt servicing) and the provincial demands to increase their shares (Qureshi, 2010). Recent papers evaluate the sustainability of fiscal federalism in the post-18th Amendment context, which have concluded that despite empowering of the provinces, fiscal constraints due to poor tax collection and financial reliance is restricting the authenticity of autonomy (Pasha, 2014; Haque, 2017).

The 18th Amendment and Contemporary Federalism

The 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) has been considered as the most transformational phase in the history of federalism in Pakistan. Researchers point out that it removed the Concurrent Legislative List, transferred sensitive subjects to provinces, and enhanced the position of the Council of Common Interests (Bengali, 2011). Literature points out how this amendment rebalanced relations between the centre and the provinces by empowering provinces to control health, education and culture and allowing joint ownership of natural resources in accordance with Article 172 (3) (Khan, 2013). Nevertheless, in later assessments, lack of uniform application has been recorded with inadequacies at the provincial level and unwillingness of federal institutions to relinquish all control (Kugelman, 2013). Comparative analyses hint that the amendment made Pakistan more inclined towards cooperative federalism but did not solve problems in the fiscal federalism and coordination between governments (Yusuf, 2015; Waseem, 2017).

Local Government and the Missing Tier

The third governance tier of the provinces has some scholarship that focuses on the topic although there is still much emphasis on the federation. Scholars state that Pakistani federalism is not complete without effective local governments (Cheema and Mohmand, 2008). At first heralded by the prospects of grass-roots democracy, the Devolution Plan 2001 frequently receives criticism as a means of central control on the part of Musharraf (Niaz, 2010). Despite the 18th Amendment, the 140A enforced legislation by provincial legislatures to establish local governments and the research indicates a lot of delay, questionable fiscal transfer, and politicisation (Shah, 2012). This reading suggests the irony of provincial self-rule bereft of genuine decentralization of power to people.

Federalism in the Post-2010 Era

The recent literature deals with the process of federalism brought together after 2010. The 25th Amendment (2018), which merged the FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has been critiqued as an attempt at territorial integration that is both steeped in administrative and political problems (Yousaf, 2019). Though the reforms of the federalism of Pakistan have been enacted constitutionally, the problems experienced by the country such as delay of the release of the NFC, poor performance of the CCI as well as continuous clamor of autonomy in Balochistan have been noted to strain it (Rumi, 2020). Newer research has focused on how federalism connects with more general issues in governance including democratic insecurity, shortages of resources, and regional geopolitics (Kugelman & Hathaway, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used in this study is qualitative historical-institutional research design to analyze the development of federalism in Pakistan. A qualitative framework has been adopted because federalism was not itself a legal scheme but rather a political, economical, and social process. A historical-institutional approach enables the researcher to explore how institutional arrangements including constitutions, amendments, commissions and intergovernmental structures have changed over time and how institutional change has influenced the centre-province relationship. The design takes a diachronic view, that is, tracing developments over several political phases, be it since independence in 1947, during authoritarian periods, and the transitions toward democracy and, most recently, the adoption of the 18th and 25th constitutional amendments.

Data Sources

The study is mainly based on the secondary information with some additions of primary legal and constitutional source documents. Primary sources comprise the text of the constitutions (1956, 1962, and 1973), constitutional amendments (8th, 13th, 17th, 18th, and 25th) as well as state agreements as The 1991 Water Apportionment Accord and the successive National Finance Commission (NFC) Awards. The legal texts offer the official basis of the federal system and they give us an idea of how autonomy was legally articulated. Secondary sources were scholarly books, journal articles, policy briefs and reports by think tanks, as well as by international organizations like the World Bank, UNDP and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The other sources that have been availed include the use of reputable newspapers and editorials (e.g. Dawn, The News, Herald) to provide a context to present-day discussions of provincial autonomy, NFC disputes, and local government reforms.

Data Collection Strategy

The set of the data is organized in terms of theme-chronological approach. Thematic coding This creates categorisation of literature and document under themes like constitutional design, provincial autonomy, fiscal federalism, and local government. This chronological sequencing is then used to organize these themes across different political eras: (1) foundational years and One Unit (1947-1971), (2) refederalization under the 1973 Constitution (1973-1985), (3) centralization under authoritarian regimes of the 1980s (1985-2008), (4) devolution through the 18th Amendment and 7th NFC Award (2009-2018), and (5) consolidation and This combined method will provide the work with some historical groundedness without losing the analytical connection based on various themes.

Analytical Framework

The presented analysis utilizes historical-institutional lens with the references to the ideas of comparative federalism theory. Federalism is addressed as a multidimensional process which includes (i) political systems, (ii) fiscal systems and (iii) administrative systems. The historical-institutional one involves path dependency, that is, how previous institutional decisions, in this case the One Unit scheme or presidential predominance, left legacies that have shaped subsequent attempts at reform. The theory of comparative federalism can assist in situating the Pakistan experience relative to other federations, especially in gauging whether reforms such as the 18th Amendment have ushered in an era of cooperative or quasi-federalism.

Validity and Reliability

The study undertakes triangulation to increase credibility of the findings by cross referencing data that is used in more than one source. An example of this would be that the constitutional provisions are studied in relation to other scholarly interpretations as well as the contemporary press coverage because there is a need to consider both the legal and political views. Trustworthiness is enhanced through the use of widely acknowledged and peer-based scholarly works, and also government published documents. Given that the research involves qualitative style, its validity is premised on richness and depth other than statistics.

Limitations

The methodology will allow having a good historical and analytical account, but there are still limitations. First, access to inner governmental deliberations that influenced constitutional reforms may be limited due to use of a secondary data. Second, the modern political processes, at least, since 2018, are yet to be rather assessed, so the overall view of their effect on federalism could be restricted. Lastly, this study does not pay much attention to grassroots politics and electoral politics although they are inevitably touched by federal reforms.

RESULTS

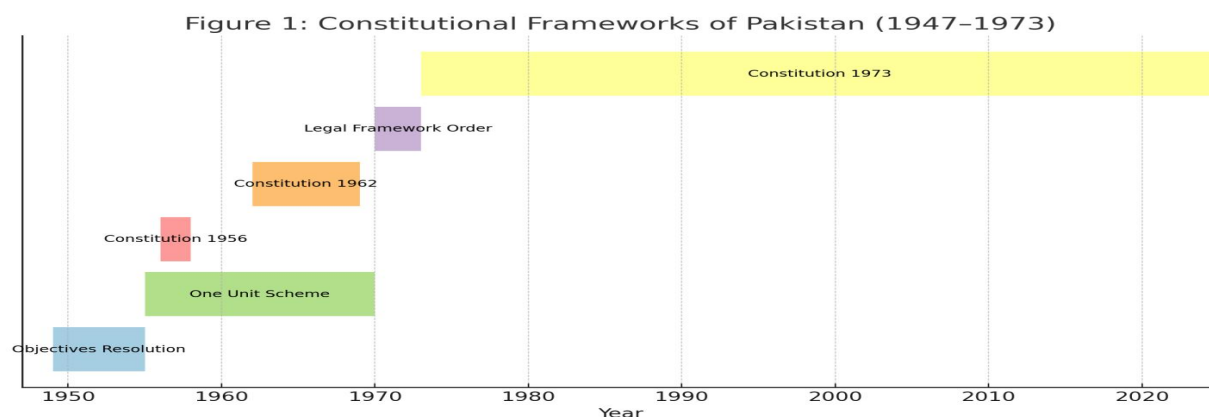
Constitutional Frameworks and Federal Design (1947–1973)

The centralizing trends are evident in early Pakistan as indicated in Table 1. Although ideologically decisive, the Objectives Resolution of 1949 did not provide many hints on organizational interactions. The One Unit Scheme of 1955 dismantled the western provinces and made them one unit thus weakening the provincial identities and autonomy. Both the constitutions of 1956 and 1962 were very centralizing in their nature, whether the framework was parliamentary or presidential. One Unit was disbanded under the Legal Framework Order of 1970 and provincial boundaries were restored, leading in 1973 to a new Constitution which introduced parliamentary federalism, the National Finance Commission (NFC) and the Council of Common Interests (CCI).

Table 1: Constitutional Frameworks of Pakistan and Their Federal Implications (1947–1973)

Constitution/Le gal Framework	Year	Key Features	Federal-Provincial Power Division	Provincial Autonomy Impact
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Objectives Resolution	1949	Declared sovereignty belongs to Allah; Islamic orientation	No clear distribution of powers	Weak foundation for federalism
Constitution of 1956	1956	Parliamentary democracy; unicameral legislature	Federal list (30 subjects), concurrent list (94 subjects)	Provinces had theoretical autonomy but federal dominance in practice
One Unit Scheme	1955–1970	Merged West Pakistan into a single unit	Erased provincial boundaries in the west	Suppressed provincial identity; autonomy curtailed
Constitution of 1962	1962	Presidential system under Ayub Khan	Federal control of major sectors; provinces subordinated	Centralization increased
Legal Framework Order	1970	Dissolved One Unit, restored four provinces	Provinces reinstated before elections	Provinces regained legal identity
Constitution of 1973	1973	Parliamentary federalism; bicameral legislature; guaranteed provincial participation	Federal Legislative List (67 subjects), Concurrent List (47 subjects), CCI established	Strengthened federalism in law, though practice varied



These constitutional periods are demonstrated in the Gantt-style chart in Figure 1 that visually illustrates the length and the area of overlap of various constitutional structures. The illustrative representation indicates that some of these frameworks were only brief as illustrated by the 1956 Constitution whose lifespan was just a period of two years, whereas others like the 1973 Constitution have been able to provide the federal foundation despite having had several amendments. This image supports the reading

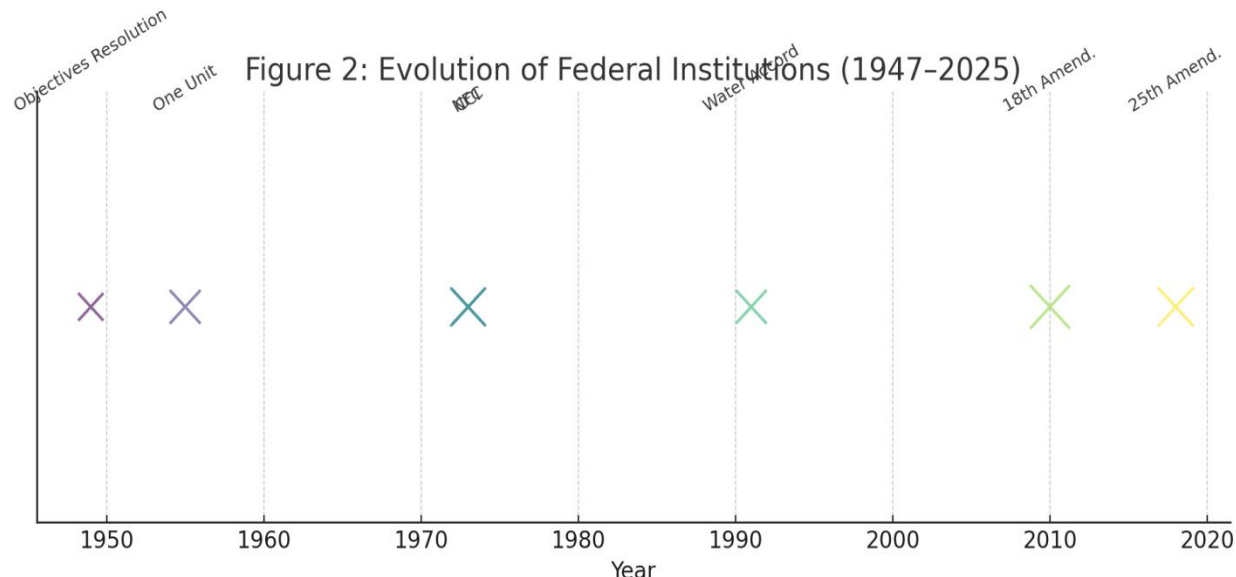
that stability in federalism had not occurred until such time when the institutions such as CCI and NFC were entrenched in the constitution.

Evolution of Federal Institutions (1947–2025)

The tabulated progress of developing the federalism can further be seen in Table 2 through the formation of such key institutions as the CCI (1973), NFC (1973), and the Water Apportionment Accord (1991). Other milestones like the 18 th Amendment (2010) and the 25 th Amendment (2018) would illustrate the scope of federal governance, especially in the context of devolution of powers, and integration of territories within Pakistan like FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 2: Chronological Evolution of Federal Institutions (1947–2025)

Period	Institution Created/Reformed	Purpose	Effect on Federalism
1949	Objectives Resolution	Ideological foundation	Weak clarity on federalism
1955	One Unit	Centralization of West Pakistan	Suppression of provinces
1973	Council of Common Interests (CCI)	Inter-provincial coordination on FLL-II subjects	Shared decision-making framework
1973	National Finance Commission (NFC)	Revenue distribution between federation and provinces	Fiscal balancing mechanism
1991	Water Apportionment Accord	Division of Indus waters	Cooperative inter-provincial resource sharing
2010	18th Amendment	Abolished Concurrent List, expanded CCI	Strengthened provincial autonomy
2018	25th Amendment	Merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Expanded territorial federalism



Such a path can be found in Figure 2 which is a bubble timeline whose bubble size is proportional to institutional importance. The 18 th Amendment and the NFC are larger ones and indicate change of a transformative character. The point that this interpretation makes is obvious: the development of the federal institutions in Pakistan was not an even process with significant periods of time between the periods of reform, but the reforms had extensive effects on changing the federal order.

Constitutional Amendments and Federal Balance (1985–2018)

The major changes that influenced centre-province relation are described in Table 3. Another turning point of that power towards the presidency was the addition of the 8 th Amendment (1985) which included Article 58(2)(b) that allows the president to dissolve the national assembly. The 13 th Amendment (1997) eliminated the clause and the supremacy of parliament was restored. The 17 th Amendment (2003) restored some of the presidential powers by only to snatch them right back in the 18 th Amendment (2010). The 25 th Amendment (2018) went further and merged FATA with KP further consolidating territorial jurisdiction.

Table 3: Key Constitutional Amendments and Federal Balance

Amendment	Year	Major Change	Implication for Federalism	Impact on Autonomy
8th Amendment	1985	Added Article 58(2)(b) (President can dissolve NA)	Increased central control	Reduced autonomy, weakened provinces

13th Amendment	1997	Removed 58(2)(b)	Strengthened parliamentary supremacy	Indirectly benefited provinces
17th Amendment	2003	Restored 58(2)(b) with judicial oversight	Semi-presidential dominance	Provinces still weak
18th Amendment	2010	Removed 58(2)(b); abolished Concurrent List; expanded CCI; Article 172(3)	Deep decentralization	Significant empowerment of provinces
25th Amendment	2018	Merged FATA into KP	Expanded provincial territory	Strengthened KP's autonomy

Figure 3: Impact of Constitutional Amendments on Autonomy (1985–2018)

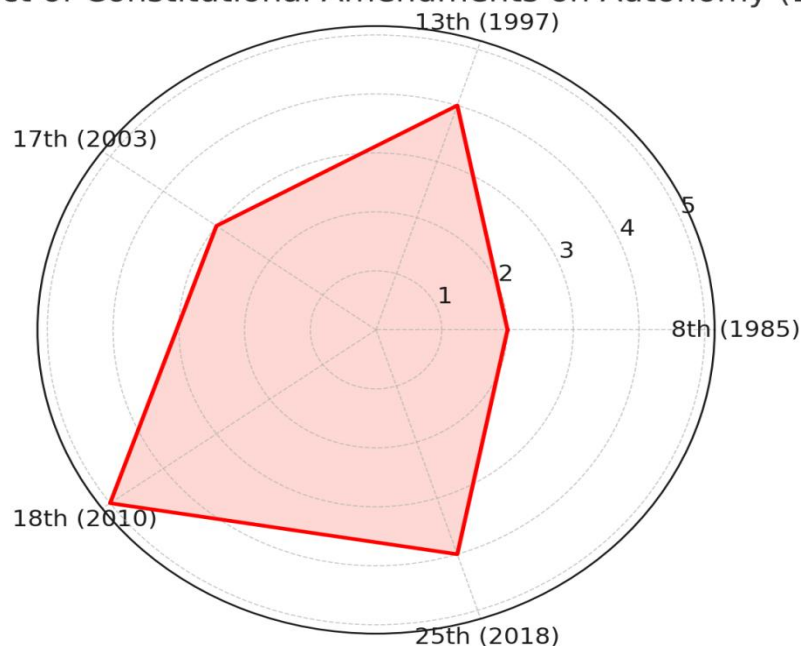


Figure 3 illustrates the compounded effects of these amendments in that it presents the extent to which each amendment scores on a five-point echelon of autonomy strength. The diagram visually helps to illuminate the swing between the centralization and decentralization with the climaxes at the 18th Amendment and the valleys at the 8th. This volatility highlights the absence of continuity in the constitutional evolution of Pakistan on the matter of federalism, with political institutions tending to undo earlier reforms.

Fiscal Federalism and NFC Awards (1974–2010)

Table 4 shows a line-by-line breakdown of the allocation of revenue by successional NFC Awards. Between 1974 and 1997, there was gradually only a slight rise in the share of the provinces which was however still dominated by population-based formulas. An unprecedented 7 th NFC Award of 2009/10 witnessed an increased provincial share to 57.5 %, and the introduction of new distribution criteria that included poverty, revenue effort, and inverse population density.

Table 4: National Finance Commission (NFC) Awards – Revenue Distribution Trends

Award	Year	Provincial Share of Divisible Pool (%)	Distribution Criteria	Observations
1st NFC	1974	20%	Population only	Strong federal dominance
2nd NFC	1979	20%	Population only	Centralization continued
3rd NFC	1985	20%	Population only	Status quo
4th NFC	1991	28%	Population only	Slight increase for provinces
5th NFC	1997	37.5%	Population only	Significant jump
6th NFC	2006	Failed	No consensus	Highlighted tensions
7th NFC	2009/10	57.5%	Population (82%), poverty/backwardness (10.3%), revenue effort (5%), inverse density (2.7%)	Landmark award, progressive criteria
Post-2010	2015–2025	57.5% (extended)	Same as 7th NFC	Gridlock, delays in new award

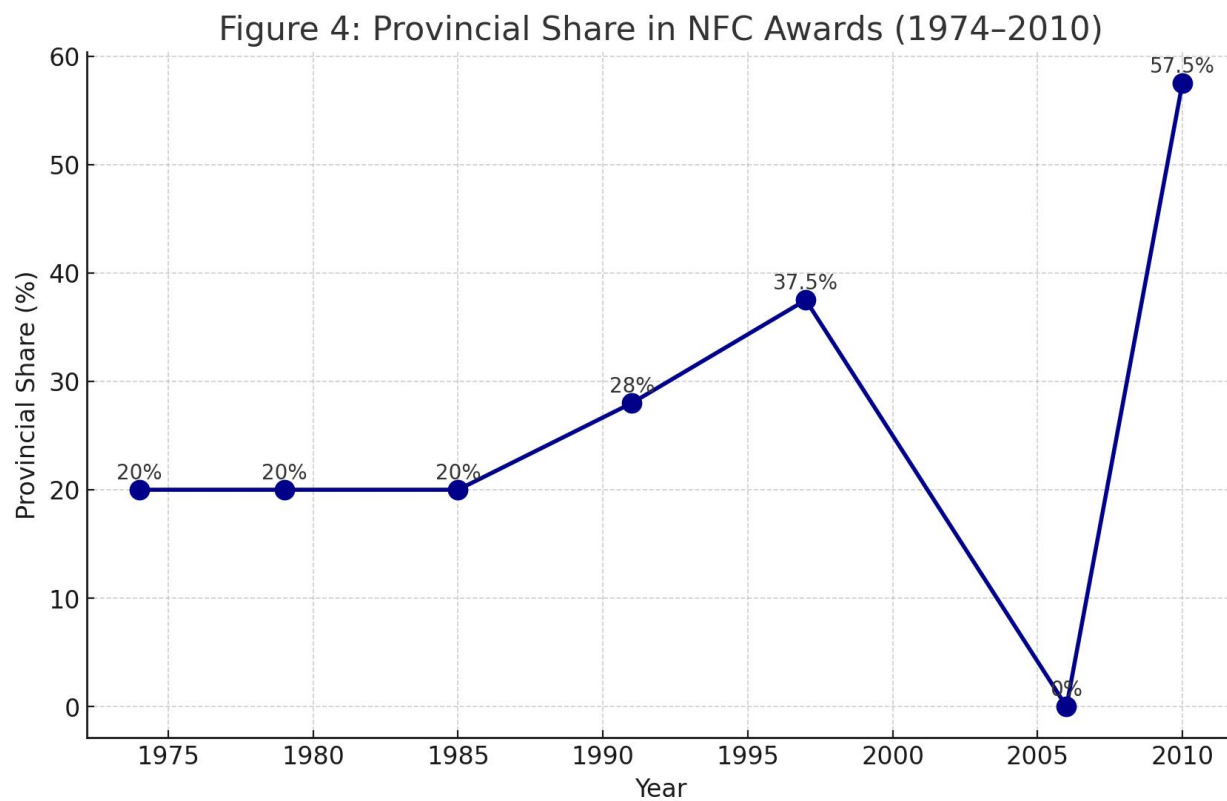


Figure 4 vividly shows the trends using provincial share over time. The line graph demonstrates that the growth was flat between 1974 and 1985, then it slightly improved in 1991, and then in 2010 there was an enormous growth. The reading would be that fiscal federalism has been very centralized till the 21st century when the political consensus allowed structural redistribution of resources in favor of provinces. This strengthened the larger trajectory of a shift toward a cooperative federalism in Pakistan in the wake of the year 2010.

Sectoral Devolution and the 18th Amendment

One impact of the 18th Amendment that had profound results was the sectoral devolution shown in Table 5. In education, health and culture, before 2010, very important topics were either on the federal control or under the shared subject of the Concurrent List. After 2010 they were completely devolved to provinces. Under Article 172(3) natural resources became a case of joint ownership and the provinces were empowered to deal with environmental and social welfare policies.

Table 5: Provincial Control Over Subjects Pre- and Post-18th Amendment

Sector/Subject	Status Before 2010	Status After 18th Amendment	Impact
Education	Concurrent List (shared)	Fully devolved to provinces	Provinces legislate independently

Health	Concurrent List (shared)	Fully devolved to provinces	Provincial autonomy increased
Culture	Federal oversight	Devolved	Strengthened local identity
Natural Resources	Federal dominance	Joint ownership (Article 172(3))	Greater provincial stake
Environment	Federal	Provincial control	Improved policy diversity
Social Welfare	Shared	Provincial control	Context-specific initiatives

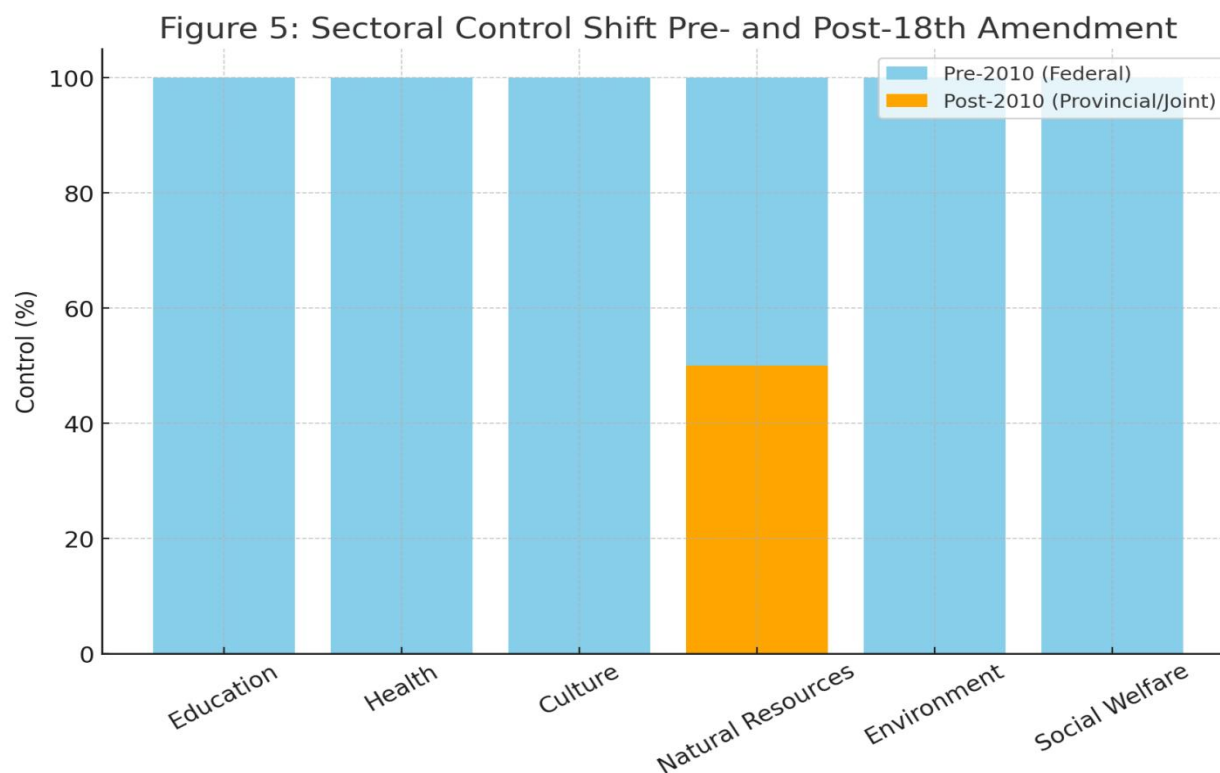


Figure 5, a stacked bar chart, indicates such transition in terms of dominance of one province as opposed to the centralized dominance of the federal government. The interception is that devolution extended not only the spheres of legislative and administrative authority of the provinces but also signified a structural break with the history of centralization of Pakistan. Yet, the shared nature of natural resources also

predicts ongoing confrontation as provinces demand more say with regards to their extraction of resource rents.

Water Apportionment and Resource Sharing

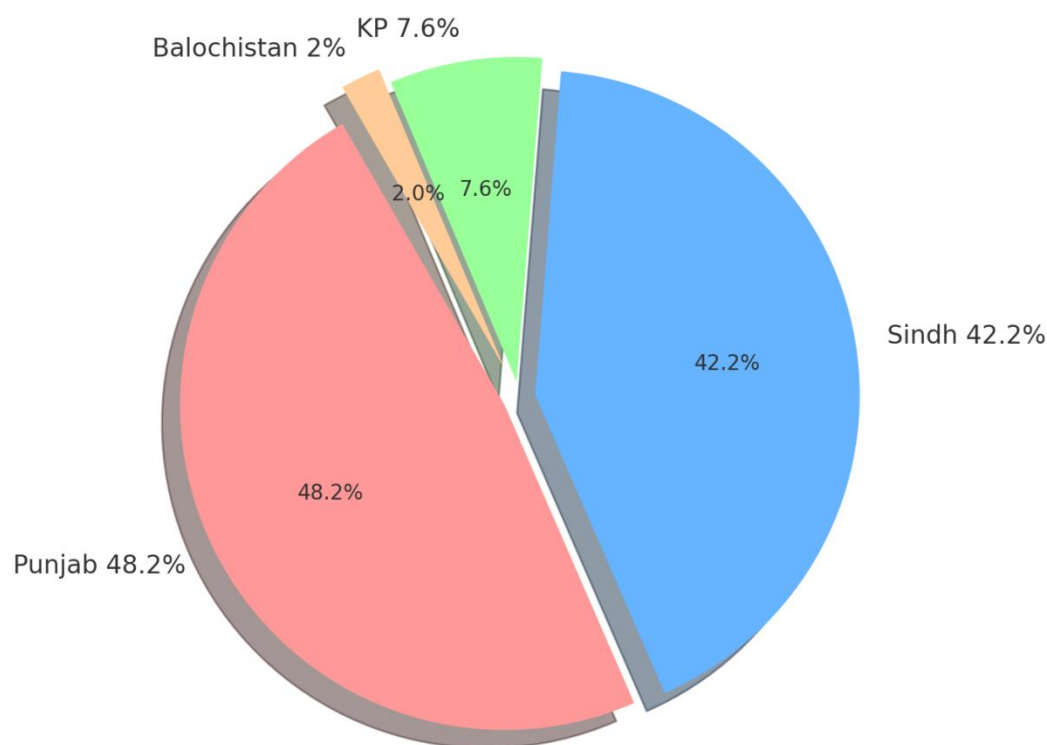
Even after the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord, which is outlined in Table 6, it has probably become one of the most influential federal compacts covering the natural resources. After being distributed among provinces, Punjab took almost half of the Indus waters (48.2 percent), Sindh took followed 42.2 percent, KP 7.6 percent and Balochistan 2 percent. The settlement resolved, old conflicts however, leaving protestations uncommunicated in Sindh.

Table 6: Water Apportionment and Resource Sharing (1991 Accord)

Province	Water Allocation (MAF*)	Share (%)	Key Issues
Punjab	55.94	48.2%	Often accused of dominating allocations
Sindh	48.76	42.2%	Downstream concerns, seawater intrusion
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	8.78	7.6%	Needs for irrigation, hydropower
Balochistan	3.87	2.0%	Under-utilization, infrastructure gaps
Total	117.35	100%	Disputes continue over compliance and shortages

(*MAF = Million Acre Feet)

Figure 6: Water Allocation under 1991 Accord



This allocation corresponds to the pie chart shown in Figure 6, which is exploded to materially show the primacy of Punjab and Sindh. The visual analysis indicates the sense of conflict in natural resource distribution and this has been indicated as a source of conflict, which has been evident in federal politics in Pakistan. The marginal share of Balochistan, which is also depicted by pie chart, forms part of structural inequities in natural resource governance.

Local Government and the “Missing Tier”

Presented in Table 7, compared to universal provisions in the Constitution (Art. 140A) the implementation of local governments has been irregular. First, Punjab and Sindh have carried out elections several times since 2010, but the councils have regularly been dissolved before their full terms. KP formed village and tehsil committees, providing more depth to grass-root level access and Balochistan contended with a resource crunch. Local governments in the federal capital have been hit strenuous and contentious.

Table 7: Local Government Implementation (Article 140A, Post-2010)

Province	Status of Local Elections	Key Features	Issues

Punjab	Held (2015, 2022)	Large districts, centralized	Delays, dissolution before terms
Sindh	Held (2016, 2023)	Party-based elections	Weak fiscal powers
KP	Held (2015, 2021)	Village/tehsil councils	Better grassroots reach, but funding issues
Balochistan	Held (2014, 2022)	Extensive councils	Severe fiscal/resource constraints
Federal Capital (ICT)	Held (2015, 2022 attempt)	Limited jurisdiction	Disputes over ECP and federal control

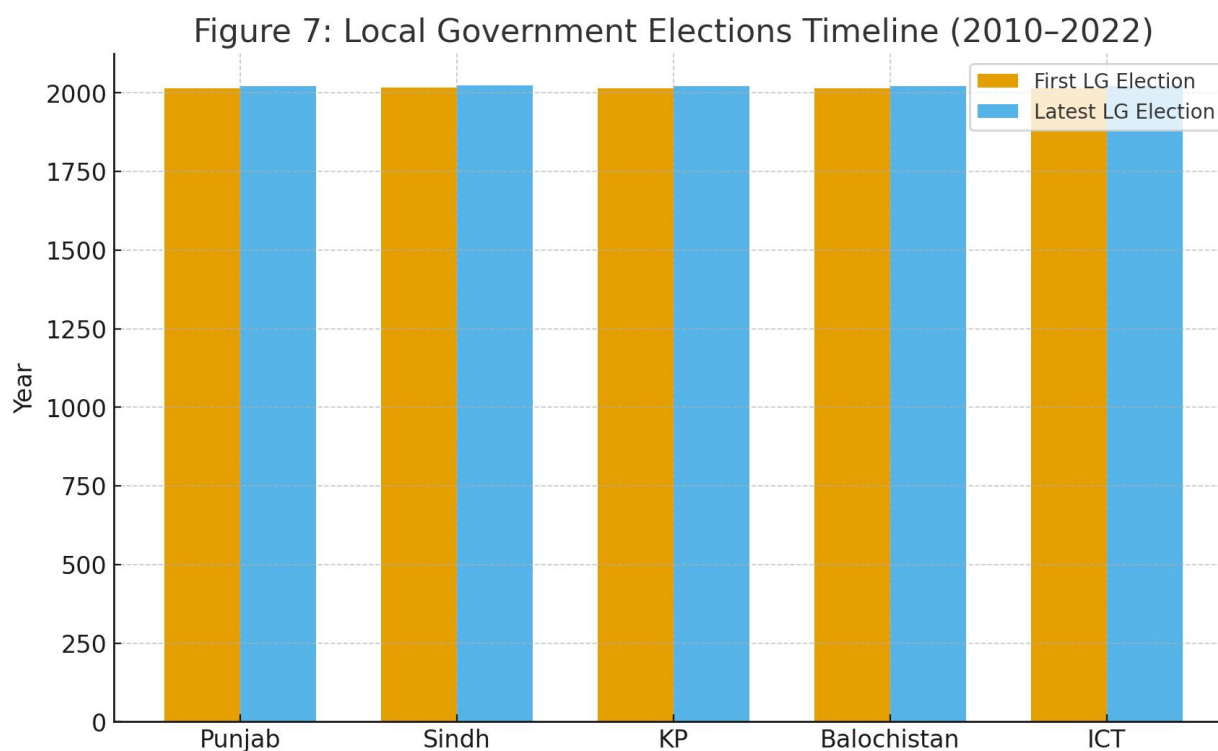


Figure 7, a group bar chart, determines the year of the first and latest local government elections per province as compared. The interpretation is sharp another approach: although the powers isolated to the provinces under the 18 th Amendment, they have not been keen on passing the powers further down the

line to the local level. This generates a paradox of autonomy-provinces diehard cling on to the very decentralization which they require of the federation as well.

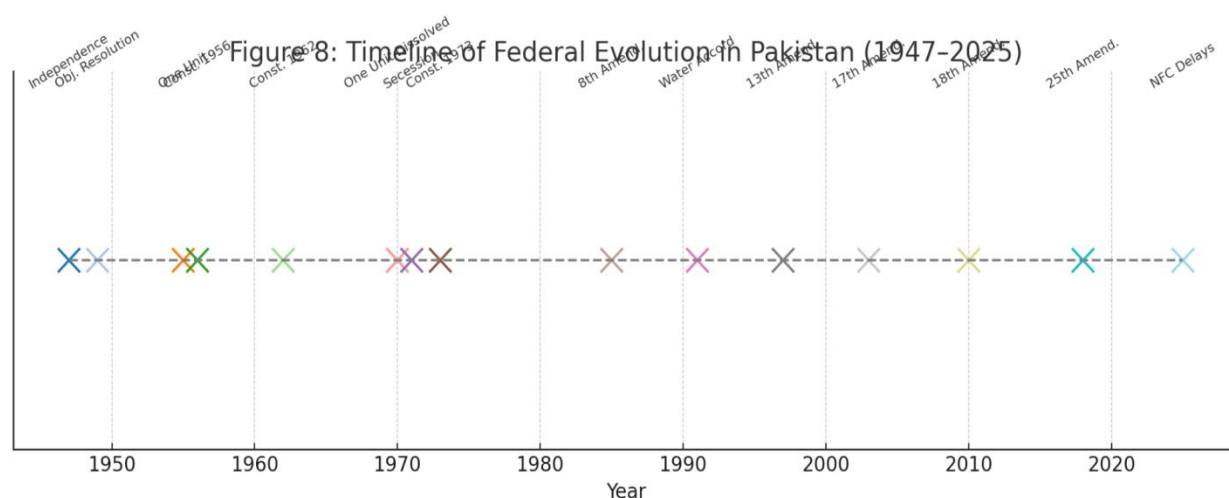
Timeline of Federal Evolution (1947–2025)

Lastly, Table 8 and Figure 8 summarize the whole process of federalism in Pakistan. The timeline shows that since the independence in 1947, there were cycles of centralization and decentralization with the Objectives Resolution, One Unit, various constitutions, amendments, NFC Awards and FATA merger.

Table 8: Timeline of Key Events in Federal Evolution (1947–2025)

Year	Event	Federal Impact
1947	Independence	Inherited colonial centralism
1949	Objectives Resolution	Vague on autonomy
1955	One Unit Scheme	Suppressed provincialism
1956	First Constitution	Parliamentary federalism (weak)
1962	Second Constitution	Presidential centralism
1970	One Unit Dissolved	Provinces restored
1971	East Pakistan Secession	Failure of federal bargain
1973	Third Constitution	Parliamentary federation, CCI, NFC
1985	8th Amendment	Central dominance
1991	Water Apportionment Accord	Shared water framework
1997	13th Amendment	Restored parliament
2003	17th Amendment	Presidential influence revived
2009/10	7th NFC Award	Provinces' fiscal empowerment

2010	18th Amendment	Historic devolution
2018	25th Amendment	FATA merger with KP
2019–2025	No new NFC Award, weak local govts	Consolidation challenges



The color-coded timeline of milestones in Figure 8 offers a big-picture understanding of what basic reforms were not a linear or continuous process, and instead happened largely in response to crisis or political settlements. The implication here is that federalism has had punctuated equilibrium in Pakistan as opposed to gradual development. Era of authoritarianism would be interspersed with the periods of democratic resurgence with the amendment of the 18 th and the 7 th NFC award being among the most influential.

In these eight tables/figures, the report presents us with the results that the federalism of Pakistan has never been fixed. Its first decades focused more on unity achieved by centralization which came at the expense of provincial identity to the extent of severe crises such as secession of East Pakistan. The Constitution of 1973 tried to establish a harmonious federal republic but repeatedly proved to be toppled by totalitarian adventures. It was only following 2008 that Pakistan made serious steps towards decentralization with the 18 th Amendment and 7 th NFC Award as the most profound reforms to its federal system.

However, the results also emphasize some things that are pending. The prolonged extensions of the 7th NFC Award, ongoing water sharing conflicts and poor organization of local governments in Pakistan paints an incomplete picture of federalism in Pakistan. To conclude, the cooperation federalism architecture is found on paper, but strengthened through stable implementation, financial restraint, and political determination at each of the levels of government.

DISCUSSION

Cyclical Centralization and Decentralization

The findings indicate the reality that the federalism in Pakistan has been passed through a series of centralization and decentralization processes. One of the earliest experiments like the One Unit scheme placed a prime focus on administrative efficiency and national integration however in reality; such efforts further increased regional alienation and led to the actual collapse of the federation in 1971. This trend echoes the findings of Elazar (1987) that a majoritarian federalism is where the mainstream, or dominant, elites employ centralization to quench rather than accommodate diversity. Comparative analysis shows that federations based on coercive centralization tend to be unstable and evolve into cases of repeated military takeovers as it has occurred in Nigeria in the 1960s and 1970s (Suberu, 2001). The developments in this regard in Pakistan are similar to other postcolonial federations that found it difficult to balance unity and diversity in the absence of well institutionalized democracies.

Constitutional Engineering and Institutional Weakness

Trying to redress grievances of the past, the Constitution of 1973 provided mechanisms of balancing the scales through institutional remedies like the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and the National Finance Commission (NFC). Nevertheless, the stability of federalism requires political practice alongside constitutions since they are not always sufficient (Wheare 1963). In Pakistan, the CCI was often unnecessary, met infrequently or dominated by the executive, undermining its hoped-upon purpose of a collaborative body. This institutionalized lack of performance is comparable to what Ethiopia has been going through in its federal government as constitutional safeguards of autonomy are reconciled with central government control through domineering parties (Tronvoll, 2009). Also in these two contexts institutional design was not sufficient to block centralizing forces.

Fiscal Federalism and Resource Disputes

The NFC Awards especially the 7th Award of 2009/10 provided a structural change to fiscal decentralization. The constant inability to settle a new award can be due to what Bird and Vaillancourt (2006) dub as the political economy trap-fiscal federalism where center and provinces will find it hard to negotiate efficiently. The over-dependence on population as the most important criteria further perpetuates the provincial imbalances in Pakistan as it also happens in India, where the country has been organized in terms of de-centralized territorial units, where resource-sharing formulas create inter-state jealousy (Singh & Srinivasan, 2006). Furthermore, conflicts over the ownership of certain natural resource or resources such as natural gas in Balochistan and hydropower in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prove that fiscal federalism is not a settled matter. The same can be seen in Canada where the ownership of natural resources by the provinces often conflicts with federal equalization plans (Courchene, 2007). Pakistan therefore has the same dilemma as other federations to strike a balance between equity and efficiency and political legitimacy of revenue-sharing arrangements.

Water Federalism and Environmental Governance

The system of allocation of water continues to be one of the most controversial issues on the federal level, which is evident in the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord. The relations between Punjab and Sindh are similar to tensions found elsewhere in the world, with water shortage contributing to intergovernmental antagonisms on the spectrum of what has been called hydro-federalism (Biswas, 2008). High-level enmity over the use of Cauvery River between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in India has frequently disrupted federal politics (Iyer, 2003). The failure by Pakistan to ensure that the 1991 Accord is adhered and strong basin-level institutions have been established also demonstrates the structural weakness of

cooperative water governance. It is even believed that without a credible system of joint resource governance, federations tend to embrace competitive as opposed to cooperative federalism (Oates, 1999).

Local Governments and the “Missing Tier”

Provinces have been hesitant to give up power even though Article 140A requires the devolution of power to the local governments. To the extent that this reflects what Shah (2007) terms provincial capture, the key issue is how the provincial elites have managed to concentrate power in their hands at the expense of local democracy. A comparative reflection on Brazil demonstrates that municipal empowerment with constitutionalized guarantees and fiscally funded transfers can enhance the provision of services and accountability (Arretche, 2010). In comparison, the provinces of Pakistan follow exactly the same centralizing tendencies that they oppose at the national level and thus, citizens have no effective say in bottom-level governance. The failure of strong local governments decreases the possibility of the 18 th Amendment and maintains what Ostrom (1990) referred to as governance gap where the decisions are not made close to the people and where there is no full accountability.

Political Settlements and Federalism

The outcomes also reflect the fact that great federal reforms based on political consensus moments- like the 18 th Amendment and 7 th NFC Award- came into existence. This echoes the position of Stepan (2004) who states that often coming together federations need extensive elite arrangements to stay alive. The democratic transitions in Pakistan in 2008 resulted in the centres balancing relationships with provinces as a result of compromise by civilian political parties. So settling of this kind is precarious. Military competencies, shifting regimes and the party rivalry tend to derail cooperative bargains leading to failure to institutionalize satisfactorily. In this regard, Pakistani federalism is different than that of India, in which although there has been centralization urges, the Finance Commission and the Supreme Court have been there to provide continuity (Arora, 2010).

Comparative Lessons from Other Federations

Contextualising Pakistan into the comparative federalism literature across the world highlights both commonalities and fractions in part. Similar to Nigeria, ethnic grievances and military interventions in Pakistan have destabilized the federalism of the country (Suberu, 2009). Similar to Ethiopia, constitutional provisions of autonomy have not been able to bear fruit on a practical level (Tronvoll, 2009). Disputing parties in Pakistan do not have in place settled judicial and inter-governmental procedures or gateways to mediate disputes as in Canada (Courchene, 2007). It does not institutionalize cooperative federalism in the form of binding intergovernmental councils as is the case of Germany (Jeffery, 2003). Such comparisons show that federalism in Pakistan is weaker than in many of its peers, being subjected to political volition rather than resiliency to institutions.

Incomplete Consolidation and the Path Ahead

That argument leads to expansion of the wider conclusion; that Pakistan has officially moved toward discrete centralization to cooperation-federalism, mainly after 2010, yet, consolidation of the same system is not complete. Federal stability continues to suffer due to weak local governments, lack of resolution to NFC issues as well as water/resource conflicts. According to Watts (2008) success of federations is achieved when there is not only constitutional design of institutions but also their consistent practice. Instead, reforms will remain incomplete without political will to follow through; otherwise Pakistan may fall into similar patterns of the history of centralization and crises.

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