

The Pakistan Peoples Party and the 18th Constitutional Amendment: Strengthening Cooperative Federalism in Pakistan (2008–2013)

***Mehreen yaseen, Dr.Asiya Saif Alvi**

PhD Scholar, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Sargodha

Associate Professor

Chair Person, Department of Political Sciences, University of Sargodha.

asia.saif@uos.edu.pk

HOW TO CITE: | ABSTRACT:

Mehreen yaseen, Asiya Saif Alvi (2026). The Pakistan Peoples Party and the 18th Constitutional Amendment: Strengthening Cooperative Federalism in Pakistan (2008–2013). International Journal of Special Education, 41(24s), 1850 - 1864

This article examines the role of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in promoting cooperative federalism in Pakistan during its 2008–2013 government. Although Pakistan has been a federation in constitutional terms since 1947, centralisation under civil-military rule and successive governments weakened provincial autonomy. Using a qualitative, document-based approach, the study analyses the Charter of Democracy, the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms, the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment (2010), the Seventh National Finance Commission Award, the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan package and the Gilgit-Baltistan reforms. It finds that these measures, achieved through broad inter-party consensus, abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, strengthened the Council of Common Interests and increased the provincial share of resources, moving Pakistan towards a hybrid of cooperative and asymmetrical federalism. Implementation, however, was constrained by bureaucratic resistance, weak provincial capacity, fiscal dependence and security conditions in Balochistan. The article concludes that the PPP laid the constitutional foundation of cooperative federalism, but its full realisation requires sustained political will, institutional reform and intergovernmental coordination.

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Keywords: cooperative federalism; 18th Amendment; Pakistan Peoples Party; provincial autonomy; National Finance Commission; Council of Common Interests

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Federalism has remained a cornerstone of Pakistan's constitutional and political framework, yet its implementation has often been spoiled by centralization, inter-provincial tensions, and

institutional conflicts. Federalism's history demonstrates that successful federations only form freely or when the necessary level of public consciousness and awareness is present among the states that are joining or federating. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), a major political force advocating for provincial autonomy, has

played a pivotal role in shaping federal dynamics through legislative, administrative, and political measures. One of the most significant milestones in this regard was the reconciliation policy, which redefined center-province relations by federalizing key legislative and administrative powers to the provinces.

The PPP's tenure from 2008 to 2013 was a critical period for Pakistan's federal structure. During this time, the party sought to address the long-standing imbalances between the central government and the provinces, a key aspect of federalism that had often been sidelined in Pakistan's political history. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 2010, stands as an achievement of the PPP government. This amendment significantly redefined the relationship between the federation and the provinces by transferring substantial powers and resources to the latter. By restoring the original federal spirit of the 1973 Constitution, the PPP attempted to rectify the centralization trends that had dominated Pakistan's governance, thus promoting a more balanced and equitable federal structure.

However, the PPP's efforts to strengthen federalism were not without challenges. The party faced significant obstacles, both internal and external, in its bid to promote a more robust federal structure. Internally, the PPP had to navigate the complexities of coalition politics, where differing regional interests often clashed with the broader goal of national unity. Externally, the PPP confronted resistance from wide ranging vested interests within the federal bureaucracy and political opposition that closely viewed the devolution of powers as an emerging threat to their influence.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The relationship between the federal government and the provinces in Pakistan has historically been shaped by a strong centralization of power, which has often resulted in tensions between the center and the federating units. While the Constitution of Pakistan envisions a federal structure, successive governments have struggled to implement genuine federalism, leading to

disparities in governance, resource allocation, and political representation. The centralization of authority has been particularly pronounced during military regimes, which sought to maintain a stronghold over provincial affairs, often bypassing democratic processes. In contrast, civilian governments have made varying attempts to decentralize power, though their efforts have been constrained by political, institutional, and external challenges.

It was not until the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led government (2008–2013) that serious efforts were made to reverse the trend of centralization and move toward effective and strengthened federalism. Effective federalism entails a clear division of powers, functional intergovernmental coordination, fiscal decentralization, and institutional mechanisms that allow provinces to exercise autonomy within the constitutional framework. Strengthened federalism goes further, involving not only legal reforms but also political will, administrative capacity, and consistent implementation of entrusted authority.

The passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), championed by the PPP, stands as a solution in Pakistan's federal evolution. This amendment delegated significant legislative, administrative, and financial powers to the provinces, abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, empowered the CCI, and attempted to rebalance center-province relations. It signified a historic shift from a highly centralized model to a more decentralized and participatory federal structure. However, despite these reforms, the persistence of centralization continues to manifest through bureaucratic resistance, overlapping jurisdictions, weak implementation of entrusted subjects, and the re-emergence of centralized tendencies under subsequent governments.

1.3 Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

- RQ1. Why has centralization remained an enduring hurdle against cooperative federalism in Pakistan, despite constitutional reforms like the 18th Amendment, and how did the PPP's efforts

during 2008–2013 redefine the pathway toward strengthened federalism?

- RQ2. To what extent these efforts were successful in reversing the trend of centralization and promoting effective and strengthened federalism in Pakistan?
- RQ3. What institutional, political and fiscal barriers limited the effectiveness of the PPP government's federal reforms between 2008 and 2013?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the evaluation of federalism in Pakistan and investigate the influence of political parties in Pakistan on the advancement of cooperative federalism from 1947 to 2013. The principal objective of this research is to interpret the federal guidelines adopted through constitutional arrangements.

- It will analyze the extent to which these parties have shaped the development of federalism in the country, with a particular focus on their efforts to advocate for regional autonomy, negotiate power-sharing agreements between the central and provincial authorities, and promote collaboration among different levels of government.
- The research will examine into the tactics employed by various political entities to address regional concerns and ensure an equitable distribution of power within the federal framework.
- By examining the historical and political situation in which these parties functioned, the study seeks to offer valuable insights into the achievements and obstacles of cooperative federalism in Pakistan, emphasizing the pivotal role that political parties have played in shaping the nation's federal governance.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Federalism is a very broader term in Political Science. Scholars of Political Science discuss different theories of federalism from different angles. These help us to understand how federations arise and how do they function. A.V. Dicey, John W. Burgess, James Bryce, K.C.

Wheare, M. J.C. Vile, Garran, Jether Brown and Harrison Moore, etc. are main exponents of classical theory. The Classical Theory means a particular type of government, functioning with slight variations in America, Canada, Australia, and Switzerland. This type of federalism is very adaptable and is suited to meet special local conditions for states like India, Pakistan, Nigeria, West Indies, Malaya, and Central Africa. According to classical theory, a federal system is characterized by a codified and rigid constitution, the allocation of powers between the federation and its constituent units, and an independent judiciary. Classical federalism provides the foundational principles that guided the constitutional restructuring under the PPP government. The 18th Amendment reinforced these principles by abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List, transferring numerous legislative and administrative powers to the provinces, and strengthening the role of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) as an intergovernmental coordination body. The amendment ensured a clearer constitutional division of responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments, aligning with the classical notion of legal federalism.

However, the success of federalism in Pakistan post-18th Amendment also depends on elements of cooperative federalism. While the amendment granted greater autonomy to the provinces, the need for intergovernmental collaboration remains essential for policy implementation, particularly in sectors such as education, health, and economic development. Federal grants and shared financial mechanisms continue to play a role in ensuring that provinces have the resources to exercise their newfound powers effectively. For instance, the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, revised in 2010, increased the share of provinces in federal revenues, demonstrating the cooperative federalism model where the center provides financial support while allowing provinces autonomy in policy implementation.

Cooperative federalism can be analyzed through competing theories such as dual federalism and asymmetrical federalism, which offer different

perspectives on power distribution and intergovernmental relations. Dual federalism envisions a clear division of authority between central and regional governments, with minimal overlap in functions. Pakistan's shift toward cooperative federalism increased decentralization, but challenges such as fiscal disparities and resource allocation conflicts highlight the complexities of its federal structure. Understanding these competing models helps assess whether Pakistan's system leans toward cooperation, asymmetry, or a hybrid influenced by political realities.

Anwar Shah confessed vertical/horizontal fiscal imbalance, grants, incentives and macro management in multi-tier systems; stresses that fiscal rules must match political decentralization. Provinces remain fiscally dependent on the centre; NFC outcomes matter hugely, and without reliable, transparent fiscal transfers plus capacity to spend, legal devolution is hollow

2. Literature Review

2.1 Review of Existing Literature

Asma Faiz's edited volume "Making Federation Work: Federalism in Pakistan after the 18th Amendment" (2015) addresses the transformative impact of this Amendment on Pakistan's federal structure. The contributors analyze various dimensions of federalism, including legislative changes, fiscal decentralization, and intergovernmental relations. The book is a valuable addition to the literature, offering insights into the successes and challenges of implementing the amendment. However, it primarily focuses on the immediate aftermath of the amendment, with limited discussion on its long-term effects and the evolving role of political parties in this context.

While the book highlights how the 18th Amendment reshaped center–province relations and enhanced provincial autonomy, it pays limited attention to how these federal reforms were negotiated, operationalized, and contested during the PPP tenure (2008–2013). The mechanisms through which PPP balanced cooperative federalism and managed structural asymmetries among provinces are not sufficiently

analyzed. Moreover, the implementation phase how the devolution of powers functioned on the ground and how provincial capacities and intergovernmental relations evolved under PPP remains largely absent in empirical terms.

Sayyid Jafar Ahmad "Federalism in Pakistan: A Constitutional Study" offers a constitutional analysis of federalism in Pakistan, examining the distribution of powers between the federation and the provinces. The book provides insights into the legal frameworks that have shaped federal-provincial relations. However, it primarily focuses on constitutional provisions without extensively exploring the practical political dynamics and the role of political parties in influencing federalism.

Muhammad Waseem's work "The Politics of Federalism in Pakistan" is a critical study of the challenges and evolution of federalism in Pakistan, with a particular focus on ethnic diversity, center-province relations, and party politics. He explores how political parties have shaped federal dynamics, discussing key events such as the Bengali demand for autonomy, the creation of the 1973 Constitution, and the rise of provincial political movements. The book presents a rich political analysis, backed by empirical data and case studies, particularly on the role of nationalist parties in shaping federal discourse. While highly informative, some readers may find the book heavily focused on historical developments, with limited discussion on contemporary governance challenges post-2010.

2.2 Research Gap

While a considerable amount of literature exists on Pakistan's federal structure and constitutional developments, most studies tend to focus on legal and constitutional outcomes rather than the political process, party strategies, and implementation mechanisms behind these reforms. The Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) specific role in conceptualizing, negotiating, and sustaining cooperative federalism remains underexplored.

This research seeks to critically examine whether these reforms effectively strengthened federalism

and to what extent they addressed longstanding provincial grievances. Additionally, the study will explore the external and historical factors that influenced the government's ability to implement decentralization. By evaluating the successes and limitations of the PPP's efforts, this research will contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges of federalism in Pakistan and the role of political parties in shaping its trajectory.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design focused on a single case: the PPP-led federal government of 2008–2013. It relies on documentary evidence. Primary sources include the Constitution of Pakistan as amended by the Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010, the Charter of Democracy (2006), the Seventh National Finance Commission Award and the Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order, 2009. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, institutional reports and newspaper reports. The material was analysed thematically against the principles of cooperative federalism: the division of powers, intergovernmental coordination and fiscal distribution. The study is limited by its reliance on documentary sources and by its focus on the period ending in 2013.

4. Historical Background and the Road to Reform

4.1 Centralisation and the Struggle for Provincial Autonomy

When Pakistan gained independence in 1947, it inherited a centralized administrative system from the British colonial rule. Initially embraced by the ruling Muslim League as a means to ensure national unity in a newly established state with significant ethnic and regional differences, this centralized model soon sparked tensions, especially in provinces like East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Sindh, and Balochistan, where regional identities were prominent. The Muslim League's failure to effectively address the diverse needs of these areas resulted in increasing discontent, setting the stage for future calls for enhanced provincial autonomy. This early imbalance between central authority and

provincial aspirations laid the foundation for enduring tensions and persistent demands for greater provincial autonomy in Pakistan's federal structure.

The struggle to promote federalism in Pakistan between 1988 and 1999 was shaped by the intense political rivalry between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). During this period, both parties alternated in power, but instead of strengthening federalism, their political conflicts often led to centralization, institutional instability, and power struggles between the federal and provincial governments. When the PML-N came to power in 1990, it pursued a more centralized approach, strengthening federal control at the expense of provincial autonomy. This trend continued when the PPP returned to power in 1993, but intergovernmental conflicts remained, especially between the PPP-led federal government and the PML-N-controlled Punjab government. These political tensions not only disrupted governance but also discouraged meaningful cooperative federalist reforms.

4.2 Restoration of Democracy after 2008

The ousting of General Pervez Musharraf from his position was the outcome of a pivotal agreement reached by the coalition partners, namely the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), in August 2008. This event represented a crucial turning point in Pakistan's political setup. The decision stemmed from ongoing disputes and the necessity to address the political turmoil that had arisen during Musharraf's tenure. The coalition partners considered two main avenues for his removal: impeachment and resignation. Ultimately, to avoid the potential disgrace of impeachment, Musharraf chose to resign on August 18, 2008. Following his resignation, Asif Ali Zardari, co-chairperson of the PPP, garnered backing from coalition allies such as the Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), positioning himself as a leading candidate for the presidency. In the subsequent election, Zardari triumphed over Saeeduz-Zaman

Siddiqui of the PML-N and Mushahid Hussain Syed of the PML-Q, securing his role as the eleventh president of Pakistan (Khalid, 2013, p. 202).

In line with the 2006 Charter of Democracy (COD), the government led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) made concerted efforts to restore parliamentary democracy in Pakistan during the tenure of the 13th National Assembly (2008–2013). This period was characterized by notable legislative initiatives and cooperation between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the PPP, who had previously been rivals. A key objective of this legislative agenda was to implement constitutional reforms aimed at fostering cooperative federalism and strengthening democratic governance, with the 18th, 19th, and 20th Amendments to the 1973 Constitution being particularly significant.

4.3 The Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms

In his address to Parliament in September 2008, President Asif Ali Zardari proposed the formation of a multiparty committee tasked with recommending amendments to the Pakistani Constitution. In response to Zardari's proposal, the National Assembly approved the establishment of a parliamentary committee comprising representatives from all significant political parties and stakeholders. This committee was charged with conducting a thorough review of the Constitution and formulating appropriate recommendations for amendments. The committee was designed to encompass a broad spectrum of political parties in Pakistan, including both the ruling party and the opposition. This inclusivity was essential for fostering a sense of ownership among all political actors and achieving a broad consensus on the proposed reforms.

In light of the necessity for constitutional reforms, the Speaker of the National Assembly established the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms (PCCR) in 2009. This committee, comprising 27 members, was intended to encompass a wide array of political parties and stakeholders, thereby mirroring the

diverse political environment of Pakistan. Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, representing the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), served as the chairperson and was instrumental in steering the reform initiative. The PCCR featured representatives from 14 distinct political parties, promoting a thorough and inclusive methodology for the constitutional review process.

Notable members of the committee included: Raja Pervez Ashraf (PPP); Professor Khursheed Ahmad from Jamaat-e-Islami; Syed Naveed Qamar (PPP); Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, Chairman of the PPP (Sherpao group); Babar Awan (PPP); Ishaq Dar (PML-N); Lashkar Raisani; Ahmad Khan Abbasi; Abdur Razzaq Taheem from Pakistan Muslim League (Functional); Ahsan Iqbal (PML-N); Waseem Sajjad and Hamayoun Saif Ullah from PML-Q; Dr. Farooq Sattar from MQM; Rehmat Ullah Kakar from JUI-F; Haji Adeel from ANP; Munir Khan Orakzai from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); Mir Israr Ullah Zehri, a Baloch nationalist leader.

The PCCR was designed with a diverse membership to bring together a variety of viewpoints and interests in the constitutional reform process. The committee's role was to assess the current constitutional structure, pinpoint areas that needed enhancement, and suggest amendments to improve governance and federalism in Pakistan. By including a wide range of voices, the committee aimed to build consensus and ensure that the proposed changes reflected the diverse political and regional face of the country. The committee met 77 times and recommended changes to 102 articles of the Constitution. The National Assembly passed the amendment on 8 April 2010 and the Senate on 15 April 2010 without a single vote against, and the President gave his assent on 19 April 2010 (Ahmed, 2020).

4.4 The Emerging Culture of Consensus Politics

However, a significant shift occurred in Pakistani politics following the February 2008 elections, marking the beginning of a new era characterized

by increased agreement among major political factions. After these elections, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)-led government promoted cooperation among key national parties, including the PML-N, ANP, JUI, and MQM, establishing a precedent for consensus-driven politics. A notable outcome of this collaborative effort was the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which resulted from extensive negotiations and consensus among the principal political parties, reflecting their shared dedication to democratic principles and the need for constitutional reform.

The adoption of a hybrid model of cooperative and asymmetrical federalism was made possible through broad-based political consensus and the active support of other political parties. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), despite being the principal opposition party, endorsed the abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List, which devolved key policy areas—such as health, education, environment, and culture—to the provinces. This support aligned with the party's interest in strengthening provincial autonomy, especially in Punjab, its political stronghold (Waseem, 2010).

Similarly, regional and nationalist parties such as the Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and Baloch nationalist groups strongly supported reforms to address historical grievances. The ANP was particularly vocal in demanding greater autonomy for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and successfully lobbied for the renaming of the province, along with enhanced control over local governance structures. The MQM backed the reforms to secure greater urban representation in Sindh, while Baloch nationalist parties advocated for more control over natural resources and administrative affairs (Rais, 2008, p. 23).

The Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms (PCCR) served as the key institutional forum where these inter-party negotiations took place. Representatives from almost all major parties participated, allowing for deliberation, compromise, and consensus-building on sensitive issues such as resource distribution,

administrative control, and center–province relations. The result was a constitutional amendment supported across party lines, giving it broad political legitimacy (Adeney, 2012).

5. The 18th Constitutional Amendment and Cooperative Federalism

5.1 Abolition of the Concurrent List and Provincial Autonomy

Over the years, there have been numerous proposals in Pakistan to bring about greater regional autonomy and political decentralization. By their very nature, all such proposals – whether concerned with the reallocation of central and provincial powers, reconstitution of provinces or provincial boundaries, reorganization of political institutions, or protection of minority rights – at least implicitly involve placing limits on the Punjabi mandate to govern (Wirsing, 1988, p. 78). It is in this backdrop that the Eighteenth Amendment was passed unanimously by all political parties, including the religious ones, marking a paradigm shift in favour of the provinces in Pakistan's federal politics.

In 2010, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan was enacted with the full involvement of all political parties. This amendment has had a profound impact on the governance structure at both federal and provincial levels. (Waseem, 2010, p. 21) It has led to substantial modifications, including the revision of 102 articles within the Constitution, the transfer of 47 subjects and 17 federal ministries to provincial authorities, the precise delineation of federal and provincial powers through two Federal Legislative Lists, and the constitutional requirement for the creation of local government systems along with the establishment of the Election Commission of Pakistan to oversee local government elections.

One of the key features of the 18th Amendment was the transfer of powers from the federal government to the provincial authorities. Prior to this amendment, Pakistan's Constitution included a Concurrent Legislative List, which permitted both federal and provincial legislatures to legislate on specific subjects. This arrangement often led to administrative challenges and

jurisdictional disputes due to overlapping authorities, resulting in conflicts and inefficiencies. The 18th Amendment abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, thereby granting provinces the authority to legislate on various matters that were previously under federal jurisdiction. The primary objective of this devolution was to minimize federal interference in provincial matters by clearly delineating responsibilities and enhancing governmental efficiency. Consequently, provinces gained greater legislative power, enabling them to enact laws and implement policies on issues that were once managed at the federal level.

Education: Provinces are now empowered to develop and implement curricula and programs that reflect their specific requirements. This autonomy has allowed them to improve educational outcomes, address disparities in educational quality and access, and incorporate local languages and cultures into the educational framework.

5.2 Strengthening the Council of Common Interests

The Chief Ministers of the four provinces, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and up to three federal ministers whom the Prime Minister designates make up the CCI. By guaranteeing that the interests of the federal and provincial levels are fairly represented, this composition encourages a balanced approach to decision-making. The CCI offers a regular forum for discussion and cooperation since it convenes at least once every ninety-day period (Tabssum et al., 2023, p. 1738).

Another key aspect of cooperative federalism under the PPP's tenure was the strengthening of institutional mechanisms to resolve federal-provincial disputes. The amendment gave a more prominent role to the Council of Common Interests (CCI), an intergovernmental body

responsible for addressing conflicts and ensuring coordination between the center and provinces. The CCI was mandated to meet more frequently, making it an active platform for dialogue and negotiation on matters of national importance. This institutional development facilitated better cooperation between different tiers of government and promoted a culture of consensus-building (Waseem, 2010, p. 21).

5.3 Fiscal Federalism and the Seventh NFC Award

A key feature of the 18th Amendment was its provision to enhance the provinces' share of federal funding. The reallocation of resources was primarily executed through the National Finance Commission (NFC) Awards, which are periodic agreements that delineate the distribution of federal tax revenues between the federal and provincial governments. The 18th Amendment reinforced the NFC framework, ensuring that provinces received a larger share of the revenue. This transformation was significant as it provided provincial governments with a more consistent and substantial influx of funding (Ali & Mufti, 2021). As a result of receiving an increased share of federal resources, provinces gained greater financial independence.

Before the Seventh Award, the provincial share and the basis of distribution changed several times, as shown in Table 1. The 1974 and 1991 awards gave the provinces 80 percent of a narrow divisible pool distributed on the basis of population alone; the commissions of 1979 and 1985 failed to produce an award; the 1997 award brought all federal taxes into the pool but reduced the provincial share to 37.5 percent; and after the commission constituted in 2000 failed to agree, a presidential order of 2006 raised the provincial share gradually from 41.5 to 46.25 percent (Ahmed, Mustafa & Khalid, 2007).

Table 1: National Finance Commission awards and the provincial share of the divisible pool, 1974–2010

NFC Award / Order	Year	Government	Distribution criteria	Provincial share
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1st NFC Award	1974	Z. A. Bhutto (PPP)	Population (100%)	80% of a narrow pool
2nd and 3rd NFC	1979, 1985	Gen. Zia-ul-Haq	No award concluded	1974 arrangement continued
4th NFC Award	1991	Nawaz Sharif	Population (100%)	80% of a wider pool
5th NFC Award	1997	Caretaker government	Population (100%)	37.5% of all federal taxes
Distribution Order (6th NFC deadlocked)	2006	Gen. Pervez Musharraf	Population (100%)	41.5%, rising to 46.25%
7th NFC Award	2010	Yousaf Raza Gilani (PPP)	Population 82%, poverty 10.3%, revenue 5%, inverse population density 2.7%	56%, then 57.5%

Source: Ahmed, Mustafa and Khalid (2007); Government of Pakistan, National Finance Commission notifications.

The most significant change occurred with the 7th NFC Award in 2010 under the PPP government. This award introduced a multi-factor formula that included population (82%), poverty and backwardness (10.3%), revenue generation and collection (5%), and inverse population density (2.7%). This decision addressed long-standing concerns of smaller provinces. Balochistan, for example, received a guaranteed minimum share, and the overall provincial share of the divisible pool increased to 56 percent, with the federal share reduced to 44 percent.

This Award also complemented the 18th Constitutional Amendment, which devolved several subjects from the federal to the provincial governments, making fiscal decentralization both practical and constitutionally supported. By recognizing poverty levels and revenue contribution, the award ensured a more equitable distribution of national resources rather than a purely demographic one. The 18th Amendment then protected this gain through the new clause (3A) of Article 160, which provides that the share of the provinces in each award shall not be less than their share in the previous award.

5.4 Restoration of Parliamentary Supremacy

The parliamentary democracy of Pakistan faced significant challenges due to numerous military

coups and constitutional changes prior to the enactment of the 18th Amendment. The power dynamics were notably altered by constitutional reforms during the tenures of General Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008) and General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988). Under Zia-ul-Haq's leadership, the 8th Amendment of 1985 was introduced, which conferred substantial new powers upon the President while diminishing the roles of the Prime Minister and Parliament. Similarly, Musharraf's 17th Amendment (2003) further enhanced presidential authority by granting the President exclusive oversight of the executive branch, effectively sidelining both the Prime Minister and the Parliament (Arshad, Ali & Muneer, 2019, p. 228). The primary objective of the 18th Amendment was to reverse these alterations and restore the parliamentary framework envisioned by the 1973 Constitution. A key feature of this amendment was the reinstatement of legislative supremacy, which had been compromised by previous changes, achieved through several significant modifications to various sections of the constitution.

The 18th Amendment enhanced the federal structure of Pakistan by granting greater powers to the provinces. This decentralization aimed to diminish regional disparities and improve local governance by reinforcing the role of Parliament

as the primary legislative authority and empowering provincial assemblies. Additionally, under clause 90 of the revised article, the Prime Minister of Pakistan is now empowered to appoint the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, as well as the Chiefs of the Army, Air, and Naval Staff, a responsibility that was formerly assigned to the President (Tahir, Askari & Jatoi, 2023, p. 63). The amended provisions also stipulated that the President must endorse legislation within a period of 10 days instead of the previous 30 days, while granting the Parliament, including the National Assembly and the Senate, the power to approve or reject any proposed law. Furthermore, the President is required to follow the Prime Minister's advice when appointing a provincial governor and a provincial governor can only initiate the dissolution of the assembly based on the recommendation of the respective province's Chief Minister.

5.5 Judicial Reforms

The 18th Amendment, passed in 2010, was another major step toward judicial reform. The amendment introduced changes to the appointment process of judges by establishing the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) and the Parliamentary Committee on Judicial Appointments. Previously, the appointment of judges was largely influenced by the executive, leading to concerns over political interference. Under the new system, the JCP, primarily composed of senior judges, was given a leading role in recommending judicial appointments, reducing direct executive influence. However, political debates over the role of the parliamentary committee in approving or rejecting judicial nominees led to controversies, with the judiciary asserting its authority in appointments through later judicial interpretations.

6. Accommodating Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan

6.1 Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan

As far as unequal distribution of resources is concerned, the major concern for Balochis regarding economic deprivation is the issue of gas

royalty share. Large reservoirs of natural gas were discovered in Sui in 1950's but the gas produced was given to other parts of Pakistan but not Balochistan. (Javaid, 2010, p. 120). The increased share of 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) to Balochistan from 5.1 percent to 9.09 percent, revision in royalty for gas and Supreme Court's intervention has created an atmosphere of truce, but the half-hearted implementation of the Eighteenth Amendment and disorderly funds transfers have created deadlocks between the centre and the province.

The Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan package included a wide range of measures, including increased provincial autonomy, economic incentives, and the resolution of missing persons' cases. One of the key aspects was the devolution of power to the province, which was further reinforced by the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 2010. This amendment significantly enhanced provincial autonomy by transferring numerous subjects from the federal to the provincial governments. The package also included financial support, such as waiving Balochistan's debt and increasing its share in the National Finance Commission (NFC) award. Additionally, it proposed employment opportunities for Baloch youth in federal departments and announced a special economic development plan aimed at improving infrastructure and social services in the province (Khalid, 2013, p. 203).

On the supporting side, the PPP-led federal coalition, which included the Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), endorsed the package in Parliament. The package was passed unanimously in a joint sitting of Parliament, signaling a rare moment of inter-party consensus on the need to address Balochistan's concerns (Gishkori, 2011). Supporters argued that the package represented a "paradigm shift" from coercion to dialogue, combining economic development, administrative autonomy, and political accommodation. The ANP, in particular, welcomed the initiative, viewing it as consistent

with its broader federalist agenda of devolving powers and strengthening provincial autonomy.

One of the key reasons for its failure was the lack of effective implementation mechanisms. While the package outlined 61 policy measures, including the withdrawal of the army from certain areas, release of political prisoners, increased resource allocation, and greater provincial control over development planning, only a limited number of these measures were actually executed (Gishkori, 2011). Bureaucratic inefficiency, entrenched corruption, and weak coordination between federal and provincial governments created serious obstacles to the delivery of promised reforms. A progress report prepared by the Establishment Division and reported in March 2011 found that only 15 of the 61 proposals had been implemented sixteen months after the package was announced (Gishkori, 2011).

The security situation in Balochistan also undermined the package. At the time, the province was witnessing an escalation in nationalist insurgencies, targeted killings, and enforced disappearances, leading to an environment of deep mistrust between the state and the Baloch population. The simultaneous continuation of military operations and promises of political reconciliation created a credibility gap. As a result, the package was viewed by many Baloch nationalists as symbolic rather than substantive

Ultimately, the Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan Package failed because it lacked credible implementation, monitoring, and trust-building measures. Although it reflected a symbolic political gesture of reconciliation by the PPP government, it fell short of transforming the center–province relationship in a meaningful way. The gap between promises and delivery further deepened Baloch alienation, undermining the broader goals of cooperative and asymmetrical federalism in Pakistan.

6.2 Constitutional Empowerment of Gilgit-Baltistan

A significant illustration of cooperative federalism can be observed in the constitutional

empowerment of Gilgit-Baltistan by the PPP-led government. The Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 conferred semi-provincial status upon the region and rebranded the Northern Areas as Gilgit-Baltistan, initiating a transformative process. This reform substantially modified the previous administrative framework, which had been characterized by insufficient local legislative authority and representation. As a result of the 2009 amendments, Gilgit-Baltistan now possesses an elected legislative assembly, an elected chief minister, and a governor appointed by the president upon the prime minister's recommendation. This system, in collaboration with the federal government, aimed to enhance local autonomy and governance.

An additional critical aspect of these reforms was the provision of annual appropriations and a Consolidating Fund for the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly. This financial empowerment granted the regional government greater fiscal independence, enabling it to manage its expenditures and resource distribution effectively. Such financial autonomy was essential for the region to competently oversee its own affairs and foster a sense of accountability and self-sufficiency.

7. Challenges in Implementing Cooperative Federalism

7.1 Devolution and Political Resistance

To manage the transition, Article 270AA required devolution to be completed by 30 June 2011 and provided for an Implementation Commission, chaired by Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, which devolved seventeen federal ministries in three phases between December 2010 and June 2011 (Rumi, n.d.).

While widely hailed as a progressive reform, the implementation of the 18th Amendment has faced several political challenges, reflecting the deep-rooted structural, institutional, and political complexities of Pakistan's governance system.

One of the primary political challenges has been the resistance from the federal bureaucracy and certain central institutions that were reluctant to

cede power to the provinces. The devolution of subjects like education, health, culture, and labor raised concerns among federal authorities about the capacity of provinces to effectively manage these areas. This skepticism was often echoed by technocrats and federal ministries, leading to delays and disputes over the transfer of administrative and financial control. Despite the constitutional obligation to implement the amendment, the lack of a coordinated and sincere effort from the federal apparatus slowed the devolution process and created ambiguities in jurisdiction and accountability.

Another major challenge has been the uneven political will among provincial governments themselves. While some provinces, particularly smaller ones like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, welcomed greater autonomy, others struggled with internal political instability, lack of preparedness, and administrative inefficiencies. The lack of capacity at the provincial level to absorb devolved functions and deliver public services effectively further complicated the implementation process. Political parties ruling at the provincial level often lacked clarity or consistency in their approach to decentralization, leading to fragmented policy responses and weak institutional development.

Inter-provincial coordination also emerged as a serious issue. The abolition of the concurrent list necessitated enhanced cooperation among provinces, particularly in areas requiring harmonized legislation and policy. However, in the absence of strong mechanisms for inter-provincial collaboration, such as an empowered Council of Common Interests (CCI), disputes over resource allocation, curriculum development, and environmental regulations became more pronounced. The CCI, though constitutionally strengthened under the 18th Amendment, has not always functioned effectively due to irregular meetings and politicization of its agenda.

7.2 Disparities in Service Delivery

A key empirical example of disparity affecting service delivery is the education sector. Provinces like Punjab, which have better administrative

capacity and financial resources, have managed to improve their education indicators significantly, while provinces like Balochistan and Sindh continue to lag behind. Punjab's school infrastructure, teacher training programs, and examination systems have shown considerable progress, while Balochistan struggles with issues such as a lack of schools, teacher absenteeism, and poor literacy rates. According to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey, Punjab consistently reports higher literacy rates compared to Balochistan, where educational access remains limited. This gap is partly due to historical disparities in resource allocation and the federal government's failure to ensure equitable development. The resulting frustration among smaller provinces fuels demands for greater financial autonomy and raises questions about the effectiveness of federalism in Pakistan.

7.3 Fiscal and Administrative Constraints

Another major issue was the financial burden on the provinces. While the 7th NFC Award increased provincial revenue shares, the cost of running devolved ministries and public service programs was higher than anticipated.

Provinces faced difficulties in generating their own revenues, relying heavily on federal transfers. The failure of provincial governments to enhance their tax collection mechanisms and manage resources effectively led to financial mismanagement. For instance, Sindh and Balochistan struggled to fully utilize development funds, and many projects remained incomplete due to inefficient planning and lack of expertise.

The amendment also weakened the federal government's ability to enforce national standards and policies. Previously, the center had the authority to set uniform education and health policies, ensuring nationwide consistency. However, after devolution, disparities between provinces widened. The education sector saw different curriculum standards emerge, affecting students' mobility and national integration. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), which previously regulated university education across Pakistan, faced legal and operational challenges

after the devolution of education. Conflicts arose over whether provinces or the federal government should control higher education policies, leading to confusion and inefficiency.

8. Analytical Review

During the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government from 2008 to 2013, the country experienced a significant shift in its federal design, moving toward a hybrid model that combined elements of both cooperative and asymmetrical federalism. This transformation was most clearly embodied in the 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010, which was a step toward restructuring center–province relations. The PPP, building on its political legacy of championing provincial rights since the 1970s, sought to strengthen provincial autonomy while maintaining functional intergovernmental coordination. The abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List and the devolution of multiple ministries to the provinces represented a decisive move away from the previously centralized federal model. At the same time, the retention of certain key powers—especially in security, defense, foreign affairs, and fiscal policy—reflected the persistence of central authority, thus producing an asymmetrical federal structure in practice.

This hybrid model was operationalized through cooperative mechanisms, such as strengthening the Council of Common Interests (CCI), enhancing the role of the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, and encouraging regular intergovernmental negotiations to manage shared responsibilities. By institutionalizing these forums, the PPP government aimed to balance provincial autonomy with national cohesion, ensuring that the provinces were not only politically empowered but also integrated into the federal decision-making framework. Scholars note that this approach was driven by political pragmatism: the PPP sought to address the historical grievances of smaller provinces while maintaining the unity of the federation through cooperative arrangements. However, this hybrid model also revealed tensions, as provinces often

lacked the administrative capacity to fully utilize their devolved powers, and the federation retained a dominant role in strategic sectors.

Unlike India's Finance Commission which operates through constitutional mandate, Pakistan's NFC Awards require contentious political negotiations before each distribution period. Germany's cooperative federalism model includes robust mechanisms for inter-state coordination that Pakistan's system lacks institutionally. These comparative shortcomings suggest that while the 18th Amendment made important structural changes, it failed to create the supporting institutions needed for effective cooperative federalism.

In addition, for the cooperative federalism model to function effectively, a strong level of collaboration and mutual trust between federal and provincial administrations is essential. Nevertheless, such productive collaboration is often obstructed by political competition and hostility. In Pakistan, political rivalries and conflicts among political parties, as well as between federal and provincial governments, can impede cooperation. While the cooperative federalism model introduced by the 18th Constitutional Amendment represents a significant advancement towards decentralization and provincial empowerment, it is not without its critical shortcomings. The effectiveness of this model is undermined by issues related to capacity, political dynamics, and resource distribution, clarity of responsibilities, financial independence, and national unity. To ensure that the cooperative federalism framework achieves its intended objectives and fosters a more equitable and efficient governance system in Pakistan, it is crucial to address these deficiencies.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has played a pivotal role in advancing federalism, especially during its time in power from 2008 to 2013. This era was characterized by a strong commitment to improving federal relations, highlighted by the enactment of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010. The initiatives taken by the PPP during this period were essential in rectifying

the historical disparities between the central government and the provinces, which had often led to friction and discord in the nation. The 18th Amendment is regarded as a significant milestone in the PPP's mission to foster cooperative federalism. By transferring considerable authority and resources to the provinces, the amendment sought to revive the original federal principles of the 1973 Constitution, which had been compromised by years of centralization. This transfer of power encompassed vital sectors such as health, education, and local governance, all of which were handed over to provincial authorities. Additionally, the amendment bolstered the financial capabilities of provincial governments through the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award of 2009, which adjusted fiscal allocations to better support the provinces. However, the uneven implementation of these reforms—constrained by bureaucratic inertia, fiscal dependency, and political contestation—revealed the enduring challenges of translating constitutional devolution into genuine provincial empowerment.

The PPP government from 2008 to 2013 made significant contributions to promoting federalism in Pakistan by passing the 18th Amendment, implementing the 7th NFC Award, and addressing provincial grievances. Its efforts fell short of achieving complete decentralization due to weak institutional implementation, uneven provincial capacities, and persistent central dominance—revealing that true federal strengthening in Pakistan demands not only constitutional reform but sustained political will, administrative efficiency, and cooperative intergovernmental relations. While challenges remained in execution, these reforms laid the foundation for a more decentralized and inclusive political system, reinforcing the federal structure envisioned in the Constitution.

Pakistan's federal system, though constitutionally symmetrical, operates in practice as an asymmetrical hybrid form of federalism where power remains unevenly distributed between the center and the provinces. Political parties made significant strides toward decentralization through the policy of reconciliation, Charter of

Democracy, Constitutional Amendment and the 7th NFC Award, aiming to restore the balance disrupted by decades of centralization. These reforms strengthened provincial autonomy and institutionalized fiscal federalism, yet their implementation exposed enduring structural and political asymmetries. Weak administrative capacities, bureaucratic inertia, and central dominance continue to limit the provinces' ability to exercise full autonomy. Thus, while Pakistan has constitutionally transitioned toward cooperative and participatory federalism, its hybrid and asymmetrical nature persists demanding continued political commitment, institutional reforms, and intergovernmental coordination to achieve the genuine spirit of federalism envisioned in the 1973 Constitution.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are put forth:

- **Ongoing Dedication:** The PPP, in collaboration with other political entities, should maintain a steadfast commitment to the comprehensive execution of the 18th Amendment. This necessitates that the devolution of powers to the provinces transcends mere theoretical frameworks, ensuring that provinces are adequately equipped with the requisite resources, capabilities, and autonomy to effectively manage the devolved sectors.
- **Development of Capabilities:** Allocate resources towards enhancing the administrative and technical competencies of provincial governments to effectively manage the responsibilities assigned under the 18th Amendment. This includes providing training for provincial officials, improving institutional structures, and ensuring the availability of essential infrastructure.
- **Financial Resource Distribution:** Guarantee that provinces have sufficient financial resources to competently handle their devolved responsibilities. This may require a reassessment and modification of the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award to better align with the provinces' needs.
- **Federal-Provincial Relations:** Reinforce the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and other

federal-provincial entities to ensure amicable resolution of disputes and to facilitate effective communication.

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