



The Eighteenth Amendment and Its Impact on Policy, Politics, and Governance in Pakistan

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Abstract

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, passed in 2010, stands as a landmark development in the country's constitutional and political history. By devolving significant legislative, administrative, and financial powers from the federation to the provinces, it aimed to strengthen federalism, ensure democratic consolidation, and reduce the legacy of centralized authoritarianism. This study critically examines the multidimensional impact of the 18th Amendment on policy formulation, political stability, and governance structures in Pakistan. It explores how the amendment reshaped the federal-provincial relationship, enhanced provincial autonomy, and influenced service delivery mechanisms across key sectors, including health, education, and resource management. At the same time, the paper highlights the challenges of capacity, fiscal imbalances, and political contestations that continue to hinder the effective implementation of devolution. The analysis underscores that while the 18th Amendment has contributed to deepening democracy and decentralization, its long-term success depends on institutional strengthening, consensus building, and cooperative federalism.

Keywords: 18th Amendment, Pakistan, federalism, provincial autonomy, governance, decentralization, democratic

Introduction

The Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010 stands among the most consequential constitutional reforms in Pakistan's post-1973 political history. Enacted by a broad parliamentary consensus in April 2010, the Amendment altered more than a hundred constitutional provisions, abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, restored parliamentary primacy by curtailing several presidential powers, strengthened guarantees for provincial autonomy, and reinforced the constitutional status of local government (Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010). The amendment's sweeping reallocation of legislative and administrative responsibilities fundamentally recalibrated the relationship between the federation and the provinces and was widely hailed by



many policy-makers and scholars as a decisive step toward deepening democratic governance and making federalism more responsive to regional diversity.

Despite broad agreement about the 18th Amendment's political symbolism—reasserting parliamentary rule and reversing years of centralizing reforms imposed during repeated episodes of authoritarian rule—its practical implications for policy-making, fiscal arrangements, and governance have proven complex and contested. By transferring large swathes of subjects (including education, health, agriculture and many elements of criminal and civil administration) from the Centre to the provinces through the abolition of the Concurrent List, the amendment expanded provincial policy space while simultaneously imposing new administrative and fiscal responsibilities on provincial governments (PILDAT, 2021). Scholars and policy analysts have stressed that constitutional devolution alone cannot guarantee improved service delivery: the success of devolution depends crucially on predictable intergovernmental transfers, institutional capacity at subnational levels, and mechanisms for dispute resolution and harmonization where cross-provincial coordination or minimum national standards are required.

The literature on the 18th Amendment has therefore approached the reform from at least three complementary angles. First, constitutional-legal analyses examine how the Amendment reshaped the formal distribution of powers and what that implies for constitutionalism, the rule of law, and separation of powers in Pakistan. The text of the Amendment—together with subsequent statutory and regulatory changes—provides the baseline for questions about legal competence, the role of institutions (for example, the Council of Common Interests), and potential ambiguities that may require judicial interpretation. Second, political analyses investigate the Amendment's consequences for partisan competition, center–province bargaining, and the incentives facing political actors at federal and provincial levels. With provinces now holding clearer authority over matters that directly affect citizens' lives, provincial political actors gained leverage in national politics, changing coalition dynamics and electoral strategies. Third, governance and public-policy studies focus on service delivery, fiscal federalism, and the administrative capacity required at provincial and local levels to translate legal authority into results for citizens. World Bank and academic assessments emphasize that while devolution creates opportunities for locally responsive policy innovation, it can also produce “unfunded mandates” and coordination problems unless fiscal, technical and institutional supports are aligned with constitutional change.

An appreciation of the 18th Amendment's mixed outcomes requires attention to sequencing and complementarities between constitutional reform and fiscal arrangements. Several analysts have argued that the sequencing of the Amendment and subsequent National Finance Commission (NFC) decisions created tensions: provinces assumed policy responsibilities before agreed, predictable fiscal transfers and revenue arrangements were fully institutionalized. As a result, some provinces experienced financial stress in meeting new obligations, generating calls for reforms to the NFC process and more formulaic approaches to transfers (PILDAT, 2021; Shah, 2012). The fiscal dimension is central to the political economy of devolution: without reliable resources and strengthened revenue mobilization at the provincial level, constitutional powers



risk remaining nominal and failing to produce improvements in public goods and services.

The Amendment's political effects have been equally nuanced. On the one hand, the restoration of parliamentary supremacy and removal of certain presidential prerogatives were widely viewed as advances for democratic accountability. On the other hand, the greater autonomy of provinces has at times amplified partisan fragmentation especially where provincial and federal governments are controlled by rival parties complicating national policy coordination on issues that require uniform standards or collective action (e.g., pandemic response, higher education accreditation, and national regulatory frameworks). The evolving dynamic between enhanced provincial autonomy and the demands of national cohesion constitutes a central paradox of the post-2010 constitutional order: it creates democratic openings for localized governance while placing a premium on intergovernmental institutions capable of reconciling diversity and ensuring minimum national standards.

This introduction concludes by situating the study's analytical contribution. First, by integrating constitutional, political and governance perspectives, the paper aims to go beyond descriptive accounts and to explain why the 18th Amendment generated differentiated outcomes across provinces and policy sectors. Second, the study emphasizes institutional complementarities: constitutional change must be matched by fiscal reforms, capacity-building programs, and durable intergovernmental mechanisms if devolution is to improve service delivery and democratic accountability. Finally, the research underscores policy implications strengthening the NFC mechanism, investing in provincial and local administrative capacity, and institutionalizing dispute-resolution and harmonization platforms so that the normative gains of the 18th Amendment (provincial empowerment and parliamentary governance) are translated into measurable improvements in governance and citizen welfare. Subsequent sections of the paper trace these arguments in depth through legal analysis, political economy review, sectoral case studies, and policy recommendations grounded in comparative and domestic evidence.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, desk-based methodology. Primary legal texts (the Amendment itself and the consolidated constitution) and authoritative briefings (government and intergovernmental commission reports) were analyzed to identify legal changes. Secondary sources peer-reviewed articles, think-tank briefs, major national newspapers, World Bank and research institute reports were synthesized to trace empirical and evaluative literature on implementation and outcomes. Where available, sectoral studies (education, health, criminal law, and local government) were consulted to assess policy and service delivery effects. The analysis emphasizes triangulation across sources and highlights contested interpretations where scholars and practitioners disagree. Key primary and secondary sources used include the official text of the 18th Amendment, World Bank analyses, PILDAT briefings, and major national commentary

Political Impacts of the 18th Amendment in Pakistan

The passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in April 2010 marked one of



the most transformative moments in Pakistan's democratic and political history. Its political impacts are multifaceted, reshaping the balance of power between federal and provincial governments, redefining civil-military relations, and influencing the trajectory of democratic consolidation in the country (Waseem, 2012).

One of the most significant political outcomes of the 18th Amendment was the abolition of Article 58(2)(b), which had previously empowered the President to dissolve the National Assembly unilaterally. This change significantly reduced the powers of the presidency, shifting Pakistan's political system from a semi-presidential framework toward a more parliamentary model. The curtailment of presidential authority was widely celebrated as a step toward strengthening parliamentary sovereignty and preventing arbitrary dismissals of elected governments, which had been a recurring feature of Pakistan's political instability during the 1980s and 1990s (Shah, 2012).

The amendment also had a profound impact on federal-provincial relations, granting greater autonomy to provinces. By devolving power in key areas such as health, education, agriculture, and culture, the amendment attempted to address long-standing grievances of smaller provinces that had often accused the federal government of centralization and resource exploitation. Politically, this devolution fostered a more inclusive federal arrangement, enhancing the legitimacy of the state in regions like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Khan, 2016). However, the effectiveness of this devolution has remained contested, with challenges in administrative capacity, financial management, and coordination between federal and provincial governments (Rais, 2015).

Another political consequence was the reconfiguration of the Council of Common Interests (CCI), which was made a permanent constitutional body with mandatory quarterly meetings. This institutional reform elevated the CCI as a central mechanism for intergovernmental negotiations and dispute resolution, thereby deepening cooperative federalism (Ahmed, 2018). Although its performance has been uneven, the strengthened CCI underscores the amendment's role in building institutional avenues for political consensus-building. The 18th Amendment also influenced civil-military dynamics. By removing presidential discretion and empowering parliament, it indirectly curtailed avenues historically exploited by the military to legitimize interventions under civilian cover. Scholars argue that this shift made it more difficult for extra-constitutional takeovers to be justified legally, though the military's informal influence over politics continues to pose challenges (Siddiqi, 2017).

Finally, the amendment contributed to democratic consolidation by institutionalizing political consensus. Its passage was the product of unprecedented unity among major political parties, signaling a rare moment of elite consensus on democratic norms and rules of the game (Shah, 2014). This consensus-building strengthened Pakistan's political culture, demonstrating the potential for negotiated reform in a deeply divided polity.

In sum, the political impacts of the 18th Amendment can be seen in the strengthening of parliamentary democracy, the decentralization of power to provinces, the institutionalization of cooperative federalism, and the promotion of political consensus. While challenges remain in the implementation of devolved powers and the persistence of authoritarian tendencies, the



amendment remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's democratic trajectory.

Party Politics and Coalition Dynamics after the 18th Amendment

The 18th Constitutional Amendment was not only a structural reform of the state but also a landmark event in Pakistan's party politics. Its formulation and passage required unprecedented political cooperation among diverse parties, reflecting a moment of consensus-driven coalition politics in Pakistan's otherwise polarized political landscape (Shah, 2014).

One of the central political dynamics was the formation of a cross-party consensus on constitutional reform. Historically, Pakistan's constitutional amendments had been either imposed by military regimes or contested along partisan lines. The 18th Amendment, however, emerged from the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms (PCCR), which included representation from nearly all major political parties. This inclusive process ensured that no single party dominated the agenda, and the final draft reflected compromises across ideological and regional divides (Waseem, 2012). This consensus significantly enhanced the legitimacy of the amendment and strengthened democratic norms of negotiation and compromise.

The amendment also reshaped coalition politics at the federal level. By strengthening parliament and devolving powers to provinces, the amendment reduced the centralizing tendencies of federal governments. As a result, ruling coalitions were compelled to accommodate regional parties, especially from Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. For example, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)-led coalition (2008–2013) relied heavily on the support of the Awami National Party (ANP), the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) during the constitutional reform process (Afzal, 2019). This reliance on coalition partners fostered a more pluralistic parliamentary culture but also made governance more complex and fragile.

At the provincial level, the rise of provincial parties became more pronounced. By devolving powers in key sectors such as education, health, and local governance, the 18th Amendment enhanced the political relevance of provincial leadership. Parties such as the ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Baluchistan National Party (BNP) in Baluchistan gained greater political leverage in shaping provincial governance agendas. This shift reconfigured coalition bargaining, as regional parties could now exert influence not only in provincial assemblies but also in federal negotiations through institutions like the Council of Common Interests (Ahmed, 2018).

However, the amendment also introduced new challenges in party politics and coalition management. The empowerment of provinces increased competition between federal and provincial governments over resource distribution, particularly under the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. This tension has sometimes fueled political polarization, as parties ruling at the provincial level accuse the federal government of encroachment or insufficient transfers. For instance, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government (2018–2022) often clashed with opposition-led provincial governments in Sindh over fiscal autonomy and governance mandates (Cheema & Javid, 2020).

Furthermore, the consensus politics that facilitated the amendment has not been consistently replicated in subsequent years. While the 18th Amendment demonstrated that elite cooperation was possible, partisan divisions have since



deepened, and coalition politics has often been characterized by mistrust and instability. This underscores the paradox that while the amendment institutionalized decentralization, it did not fully transform Pakistan's adversarial party system into one of sustainable cooperative politics (Yusuf, 2019).

In conclusion, the 18th Amendment had a profound impact on party politics and coalition dynamics in Pakistan. It fostered cross-party cooperation during its passage, enhanced the role of provincial and regional parties, and reshaped coalition bargaining at both federal and provincial levels. Yet, its legacy is mixed, as the culture of consensus-building has been overshadowed by renewed polarization and governance struggles in subsequent years.

Rebalancing Centre–Province Politics

The 18th Constitutional Amendment fundamentally reshaped the political architecture of Pakistan by recalibrating relations between the federation and its provinces. Historically, Pakistan's political structure was dominated by a strong center that often marginalized provincial autonomy. This centralization generated long-standing grievances in smaller provinces, especially in Baluchistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which accused the federal government of resource exploitation and political exclusion (Rais, 2015). The 18th Amendment addressed these concerns by redistributing constitutional powers, thereby rebalancing the dynamics of center–province politics.

One of the most significant changes was the abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List, which transferred 17 ministries including health, education, culture, agriculture, and social welfare—from federal to provincial control. This devolution allowed provinces to design and implement policies tailored to their socio-economic needs rather than adhering to one-size-fits-all federal frameworks (Waseem, 2012). By expanding provincial jurisdiction, the amendment sought to institutionalize cooperative federalism and reduce political alienation among the provinces.

The rebalancing was further reinforced through reforms in the Council of Common Interests (CCI), which was transformed into a permanent constitutional body with mandatory quarterly meetings. The strengthened CCI became a central platform for provinces to voice their concerns and resolve disputes with the federation, thereby institutionalizing mechanisms of political negotiation (Ahmed, 2018). This reform symbolized a shift from unilateral decision-making by the center toward collective federal governance.

Financial relations between the center and provinces were also restructured through the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award of 2010, which coincided with the 18th Amendment. The award increased the provincial share of federal divisible pool resources from 47.5% to 57.5% (Khan, 2016). This fiscal empowerment provided provinces with greater autonomy in policy implementation, though tensions over revenue collection and federal transfers persist, particularly during economic crises.

The amendment also had important political implications for provincial empowerment and representation. For instance, the renaming of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa addressed a long-standing demand of the Pashtun population, symbolically recognizing ethnic and regional identities within the federal framework (Shah, 2012). This recognition helped



strengthen the legitimacy of the state in regions where nationalist movements had historically challenged the federation.

However, the process of rebalancing has not been without challenges. Critics argue that many provinces lack the administrative and institutional capacity to manage devolved responsibilities effectively (Cheema & Javid, 2020). Moreover, disputes over natural resource control—especially in Baluchistan’s gas and mineral sectors—continue to strain center–province relations. Additionally, the federal government often attempts to reassert influence through regulatory authorities and discretionary powers, leading to accusations of “recentralization” (Rais, 2015).

Despite these challenges, the 18th Amendment remains a milestone in Pakistan’s journey toward federalism. By redistributing legislative, administrative, and financial powers, it sought to correct historical imbalances in center–province relations and enhance the legitimacy of the federation. While implementation hurdles remain significant, the amendment has entrenched a framework where provinces are no longer mere administrative units but autonomous political actors within Pakistan’s federal structure.

The 8th Amendment and Its Impact on Policy in Pakistan

The 8th Constitutional Amendment, passed in 1985 under General Zia-ul-Haq’s military regime, stands as one of the most controversial constitutional reforms in Pakistan’s history. Unlike the 18th Amendment, which was hailed as a product of democratic consensus, the 8th Amendment was introduced in a controlled political environment under martial law and significantly altered the balance of power in Pakistan’s polity (Shah, 2014). Its implications for public policy were profound, particularly in shaping the trajectory of governance, executive authority, and the nature of political decision-making.

One of the most critical policy implications of the 8th Amendment was the concentration of power in the presidency. The amendment introduced Article 58(2)(b), granting the President discretionary authority to dissolve the National Assembly if, in his opinion, the government could not be carried on in accordance with the Constitution. This clause fundamentally reshaped Pakistan’s policymaking environment, as governments became vulnerable to dismissal at the President’s discretion (Rais, 2015). The frequent dissolution of elected assemblies in the late 1980s and 1990s led to policy discontinuity, with successive governments unable to sustain long-term reforms in economic management, education, health, or industrial development.

Another major policy consequence was the legitimization of martial law ordinances. The 8th Amendment retroactively validated all laws, orders, and actions taken under martial law between 1977 and 1985 (Khan, 2016). This provision not only undermined judicial independence but also entrenched authoritarian policies related to Islamization, censorship, and restrictions on civil liberties. Policies introduced under Zia’s Islamization drive—such as the Hudood Ordinances, the introduction of zakat and ushr, and educational reforms with a religious orientation—were given constitutional cover, shaping Pakistan’s social and legal framework for decades (Shaikh, 2009).

The amendment also had significant implications for civil–military relations and defense policy. By empowering the presidency, which was occupied by a serving military general, the amendment blurred the line between civilian



policymaking and military authority (Shah, 2014). This allowed the military to exert a decisive influence over security and foreign policy decisions, often sidelining parliamentary oversight. In practice, it reinforced the military's dominance over strategic policy areas, including Pakistan's Afghan policy during the 1980s and early 1990s (Rizvi, 2000).

In terms of governance and socio-economic policy, the 8th Amendment fostered a climate of political instability that obstructed institutional development. Successive governments, wary of presidential dismissal, often prioritized short-term populist measures over long-term structural reforms. For instance, while some progress was made in privatization and economic liberalization under Nawaz Sharif's first government, frequent dismissals of governments prevented continuity in economic reforms (Ahmed, 2013).

The 8th Amendment had deep and lasting impacts on policy in Pakistan. It undermined parliamentary supremacy, entrenched authoritarian legacies, and created a policymaking environment characterized by discontinuity and instability. While it facilitated the entrenchment of Islamization policies and legitimized military dominance in governance, it simultaneously weakened the prospects for sustained democratic policymaking. Its eventual repeal through the 13th and 18th Amendments was a corrective attempt to restore parliamentary sovereignty and ensure policy continuity.

The 18th Amendment and Its Impact on Governance in Pakistan

The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 is widely regarded as a transformative milestone in Pakistan's constitutional and political development. Beyond its political and policy dimensions, the amendment had profound implications for governance, particularly in terms of decentralization, institutional strengthening, and public service delivery. By redistributing powers and responsibilities between the federation and the provinces, the amendment sought to enhance democratic governance, improve administrative efficiency, and address long-standing issues of provincial autonomy (Waseem, 2012).

One of the most significant governance impacts was the abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List, which devolved 17 ministries including health, education, agriculture, environment, and social welfare to the provinces. This devolution was designed to bring governance closer to citizens by empowering provincial governments to craft policies aligned with local needs (Khan, 2016). In theory, decentralization improved responsiveness and accountability in governance, though its effectiveness has varied depending on the administrative capacity of provincial institutions.

The 18th Amendment restructured Pakistan's federal system by enhancing provincial autonomy in both legislative and executive functions. Provinces gained greater authority to design development strategies and manage service delivery. For example, provincial governments assumed control of higher education through the devolution of the University Grants Commission (later replaced by provincial Higher Education Commissions) (Cheema & Javid, 2020). While this enhanced ownership of governance, it also exposed disparities in provincial capacity, with stronger provinces like Punjab managing transitions more effectively than weaker ones such as Baluchistan.

Governance was also reshaped through the financial dimension of federalism. The 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award of 2010, which coincided



with the 18th Amendment, increased the provincial share of federal revenues from 47.5% to 57.5% (Ahmed, 2018). This shift provided provinces with greater fiscal space to implement devolved functions, but it also created tensions over federal fiscal sustainability. The center's shrinking fiscal space limited its ability to pursue national-level development projects, which has occasionally strained center–province relations and complicated governance in times of economic crisis (Haque, 2020).

The amendment also revitalized institutional mechanisms of governance by strengthening the Council of Common Interests (CCI), which became a permanent body required to meet quarterly. The CCI has emerged as a key institution for managing intergovernmental disputes and fostering cooperative federalism (Ahmed, 2018). However, delays in convening meetings and disputes over agenda-setting have sometimes weakened its effectiveness, highlighting the challenges of institutionalizing cooperative governance in a fragmented political system.

While the amendment promised enhanced governance, its implementation revealed significant weaknesses. Many provinces lacked the institutional and human resource capacity to take over devolved ministries, leading to governance gaps, particularly in sectors like health and education (Cheema & Javid, 2020). Overlapping jurisdictions between federal and provincial authority's further complicated governance, with disputes arising over regulation, standard-setting, and resource management. Moreover, the amendment did not sufficiently address the role of local governments, leaving a critical gap in the governance chain between provincial capitals and grassroots communities (Haque, 2020).

Despite its challenges, the amendment symbolized a shift toward democratic governance by empowering elected provincial governments and limiting arbitrary presidential powers. It institutionalized consensus politics and demonstrated the capacity of Pakistan's political elite to negotiate structural reforms (Shah, 2012). Over the long term, this decentralization has the potential to deepen democratic accountability by making provincial governments more directly responsible for service delivery and development outcomes.

The governance impacts of the 18th Amendment are both promising and complex. By decentralizing authority, strengthening intergovernmental institutions, and expanding provincial autonomy, the amendment laid the foundation for a more responsive and inclusive governance framework. However, weak provincial capacity, fiscal constraints, and the absence of robust local government systems continue to undermine its potential. Ultimately, the 18th Amendment has redefined governance in Pakistan, but its success depends on the ability of provinces and the federation to effectively manage their new roles in a cooperative federal system.

Conclusion

The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 remains a watershed in Pakistan's constitutional and political history. Emerging from a period of deep political instability, military dominance, and fractured governance, the amendment symbolized a collective effort by Pakistan's political elite to restore parliamentary sovereignty, empower provinces, and strengthen democratic institutions. Its impacts on policy, politics, and governance are both profound and contested,



reflecting the complexities of Pakistan's federal system and the broader struggle for democratization.

One of the most immediate and visible impacts of the 18th Amendment was the restoration of parliamentary supremacy. By repealing Article 58(2), (b), which had empowered the President to dissolve the National Assembly at will, the amendment effectively ended an era of repeated interruptions of democratic governments under constitutional cover. In doing so, it reduced the likelihood of arbitrary dismissals that had plagued the political system throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Shah, 2012). This shift signaled a transition from a semi-presidential system—dominated by an executive president often backed by the military—toward a more parliamentary framework, where the Prime Minister and the legislature became the central actors in decision-making. Politically, this change fostered greater stability and predictability in the system. Governments could now focus on completing their constitutional terms without the constant threat of presidential dismissal. This not only enhanced the credibility of elected institutions but also created an environment where longer-term policy planning became possible. At the same time, it symbolized the reduction of military leverage over civilian politics, as the presidency could no longer serve as a legal mechanism for military-backed interventions.

This decentralization was politically significant in addressing the long-standing grievances of smaller provinces. Historically, provinces like Baluchistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had accused the federal government of monopolizing resources and decision-making. By expanding provincial autonomy and strengthening fiscal decentralization through the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, the amendment provided these provinces with greater control over their development agendas and financial resources (Khan, 2016). In this way, it contributed to national integration and reduced the sense of alienation that had fueled ethno-regional tensions.

Yet, decentralization also exposed significant challenges. Provincial governments, often lacking the institutional capacity to manage devolved responsibilities, struggled to implement reforms effectively. In areas like higher education and healthcare, the absence of clear mechanisms for standard-setting led to fragmentation, duplication, and uneven quality of service delivery (Cheema & Javid, 2020). Moreover, disputes over natural resource management, particularly in Balochistan, continued to strain center–province relations, highlighting that constitutional reform alone could not resolve deeply entrenched structural inequalities.

The 18th Amendment also sought to institutionalize cooperative federalism by strengthening the Council of Common Interests (CCI). As a constitutional body with mandatory quarterly meetings, the CCI became a central forum for intergovernmental coordination, dispute resolution, and policy harmonization (Ahmed, 2018). This institutional strengthening was essential in a decentralized system, where overlapping jurisdictions and resource distribution require mechanisms for negotiation and compromise. Although the CCI has not always lived up to its potential—due to delays in meetings, political polarization, and disputes over agenda-setting—it nonetheless represents an important institutional innovation. Its prominence underscores the amendment's role in promoting consensus-based governance, where provinces are recognized as equal stakeholders in shaping national policy.



The 18th Amendment attempted to create a framework for more context-sensitive policymaking at the provincial level. By giving provinces control over education, health, and social welfare, the amendment opened opportunities for localized innovation. For example, Punjab introduced reforms in school education and health delivery that reflected its administrative strengths, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa pursued policies emphasizing social protection and cultural autonomy (Haque, 2020). However, decentralization also created policy fragmentation. Without a strong federal coordinating role, provinces pursued divergent strategies, leading to disparities in service delivery and governance quality. For instance, while Punjab and Sindh managed to expand higher education institutions through their provincial Higher Education Commissions, smaller provinces like Baluchistan struggled to match their pace due to limited fiscal and administrative capacity (Cheema & Javid, 2020). This uneven implementation raised concerns about inequality across provinces, undermining the amendment's promise of equitable development.

The 18th Amendment was a milestone in Pakistan's democratic evolution, rebalancing power between the executive and legislature, between the center and provinces, and between authoritarian legacies and democratic aspirations. Its impacts on policy, politics, and governance are undeniable: it restored parliamentary supremacy, empowered provinces, strengthened cooperative federalism, and created space for localized policymaking. Yet, the amendment remains an unfinished project. Challenges of capacity, fiscal sustainability, and political polarization continue to undermine its transformative potential. The persistence of centralized tendencies, disputes over resource distribution, and weak local governments highlight the gap between constitutional promises and governance realities.

Looking forward, the future of Pakistan's governance will depend on how effectively the federation and provinces manage their shared responsibilities. Strengthening the CCI, institutionalizing local governments, enhancing provincial administrative capacity, and fostering a culture of cooperative politics are essential steps to fully realize the spirit of the 18th Amendment.

Ultimately, the amendment demonstrated that constitutional reform, when grounded in consensus and inclusivity, can reshape the political and governance landscape of a divided polity. While its implementation has been uneven, the 18th Amendment remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's democratic journey a reminder that federalism and decentralization are not just constitutional arrangements but essential ingredients of national cohesion, political stability, and effective governance.

Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen Federal–Provincial Coordination Enhance the role of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) as a regular platform for policy harmonization, dispute resolution, and cooperative federalism.
- Fiscal Reforms for Provincial Autonomy, Revise the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award to balance equity and efficiency, while encouraging provinces to expand their own revenue bases through effective taxation and resource management.



- Capacity Building of Provincial Institutions Invest in strengthening administrative, financial, and policy capacities of provincial governments to ensure effective service delivery in health, education, and infrastructure.
- Empower Local Governments Institutionalize and protect local government systems under provincial laws so that devolution extends beyond provinces to the grassroots level.
- Monitoring and Accountability Frameworks Establish joint federal–provincial mechanisms for monitoring policy outcomes, backed by transparency measures, parliamentary oversight, and independent audits.

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