

# CONSTITUTIONAL FEDERALISM AND PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY IN PAKISTAN AFTER THE 18TH AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL BALANCE

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## Abstract

The 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) represents a landmark transformation in the federal structure of Pakistan, shifting the governance system from a centralized model toward enhanced provincial autonomy and constitutional federalism. This study examines the implications of the amendment for democratic governance and institutional balance within Pakistan's federal framework. Grounded in Fiscal Federalism Theory, the study employs a quantitative, explanatory research design using survey data from 320 respondents drawn from federal and provincial governance institutions. Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS through regression and Structural Equation Modeling techniques. The findings reveal that the 18th Amendment has a significant positive impact on provincial autonomy, fiscal decentralization, and democratic governance outcomes. However, institutional capacity and intergovernmental coordination emerge as critical moderating factors that limit the full effectiveness of devolution. The study concludes that while constitutional reforms have strengthened formal federal structures, practical governance outcomes remain constrained by administrative inefficiencies and coordination gaps. This research contributes to federalism literature by providing empirical evidence on the post-reform governance structure of Pakistan and offers policy insights for strengthening cooperative federalism, institutional capacity, and decentralized governance.

## INTRODUCTION

Federalism represents a constitutional mechanism designed to balance power between the central government and federating units, ensuring political stability, territorial integration, and equitable governance. In the context of Pakistan, the debate on federalism has historically been shaped by tensions between centralization and provincial autonomy. The adoption of the 18th

Constitutional Amendment (2010) marked a significant constitutional milestone, as it redefined the structure of federalism by devolving legislative, administrative, and financial authority from the federation to the provinces, thereby strengthening the framework of constitutional federalism in the country (Rana, 2020; Khan & Rehman, 2023).

The amendment is widely regarded as a transformative shift from a highly centralized governance structure to a more decentralized and participatory federal system, as it abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, enhanced provincial jurisdiction, and restructured key institutions such as the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and National Finance Commission (NFC). These reforms were intended to enhance provincial autonomy, reduce regional disparities, and improve democratic governance through shared decision-making (Majeed, 2021; Jaffrelot, 2024). Empirical studies suggest that the amendment significantly altered Pakistan's constitutional architecture by transferring over 17 ministries and expanding provincial control over critical sectors such as education, health, and social services (Kureshi, 2021; Jamal, 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, the 18th Amendment represents a shift toward *de facto* federalism, where institutional authority is redistributed to strengthen intergovernmental relations and enhance provincial participation in national policymaking (Jaffrelot, 2024). Scholars argue that this restructuring was essential to address long-standing grievances of smaller provinces such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which had historically experienced political and economic marginalization under a centralized governance model (Shah, 2012; Khan & Yousaf, 2024). By strengthening fiscal federalism through an expanded NFC award and enhancing provincial representation in decision-making bodies, the amendment aimed to promote inclusive governance and political cohesion (Yaseen, 2025).

However, despite its constitutional significance, the implementation of the 18th Amendment has generated mixed outcomes. While it has expanded formal provincial authority, practical challenges related to institutional capacity, bureaucratic resistance, and intergovernmental coordination have limited its effectiveness (Raza, 2021; Latafat, 2026). In particular, issues such as overlapping administrative jurisdictions, weak provincial governance structures, and inconsistent policy execution have raised concerns about the operationalization of devolved powers (Jamshid,

2025; Khan & Rehman, 2023). Furthermore, tensions between federal and provincial governments continue to affect key policy domains, including education, health, and resource distribution, thereby raising questions about institutional balance within Pakistan's federal framework.

In this evolving context, the study of constitutional federalism and provincial autonomy in Pakistan after the 18th Amendment is both timely and critical. It provides insights into how constitutional reforms reshape governance structures, influence democratic consolidation, and affect intergovernmental relations. This research therefore examines the implications of the 18th Amendment for democratic governance and institutional balance, with a particular focus on the extent to which devolution has strengthened or constrained Pakistan's federal system.

## Problem Statement

The governance structure of Pakistan has historically been characterized by a strong centralization of authority, which has often resulted in uneven development, institutional inefficiencies, and persistent intergovernmental tensions between the federation and its provinces. In response to longstanding demands for political inclusion and equitable resource distribution, the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) introduced a fundamental restructuring of Pakistan's federal system by significantly devolving legislative, administrative, and financial powers to the provinces. This reform was widely regarded as a landmark shift toward constitutional federalism and strengthened provincial autonomy in critical sectors such as education, health, and social services.

Despite its transformative intent, the implementation of the 18th Amendment has generated complex governance challenges that continue to affect the functioning of Pakistan's federal structure. While provinces have formally acquired greater autonomy, disparities in institutional capacity, administrative preparedness, and fiscal management have constrained the effective exercise of devolved

powers. At the same time, overlapping responsibilities between federal and provincial institutions, weak intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, and political contestation over resource distribution have created structural tensions that undermine institutional balance.

Moreover, the absence of a clearly defined operational framework for cooperative federalism has limited the realization of the amendment's intended objectives, particularly in terms of enhancing democratic governance, service delivery, and policy coherence across provinces. These challenges raise critical questions about whether the 18th Amendment has genuinely strengthened federalism in Pakistan or merely redistributed authority without ensuring functional efficiency and institutional harmony. Given these persistent ambiguities, there is a need for a systematic and analytical assessment of constitutional federalism and provincial autonomy in the post-18th Amendment period. This study therefore seeks to examine the extent to which the amendment has contributed to democratic governance and institutional balance in Pakistan's federal system.

## Research Questions

1. How has the 18th Constitutional Amendment reshaped constitutional federalism in Pakistan?
2. To what extent has provincial autonomy been strengthened in the post-18th Amendment framework?
3. What institutional and administrative challenges affect the implementation of devolved powers?
4. How has intergovernmental coordination evolved between federal and provincial governments?
5. What are the implications of the 18th Amendment for democratic governance and institutional balance?

## Research Objectives

### General Objective

To examine the impact of the 18th Constitutional Amendment on constitutional federalism,

provincial autonomy, and institutional balance in Pakistan.

### Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the structural changes introduced by the 18th Constitutional Amendment in Pakistan's federal system.
2. To assess the extent of provincial autonomy in legislative, administrative, and fiscal domains after the amendment.
3. To identify key institutional and governance challenges in the implementation of devolved powers.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of intergovernmental coordination mechanisms in ensuring cooperative federalism.
5. To examine the impact of the 18th Amendment on democratic governance and institutional balance in Pakistan.
6. To provide policy recommendations for strengthening federal coordination and improving governance outcomes.

### Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance in advancing the understanding of constitutional federalism and provincial autonomy in Pakistan, particularly in the post-18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) governance framework. By systematically examining the institutional and functional implications of devolution, the study contributes to the broader discourse on federal restructuring, democratic consolidation, and intergovernmental relations in developing federal systems.

From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches the literature on federalism by critically engaging with the concept of *cooperative federalism* and assessing its applicability in a politically complex and administratively diverse state. It provides insights into how constitutional reforms translate into practical governance outcomes, thereby bridging the gap between formal institutional design and real-world implementation. In doing so, the study contributes to comparative federalism scholarship by offering an empirically grounded case from a South Asian context, where

federal arrangements are often shaped by political asymmetries and institutional constraints.

From an empirical perspective, the study is significant as it evaluates the post-reform functioning of key governance mechanisms such as provincial autonomy in service delivery, fiscal decentralization, and intergovernmental coordination. It highlights the extent to which the 18th Amendment has altered power relations between the federation and provinces, while also identifying structural and operational challenges that limit its effectiveness. This empirical assessment is particularly relevant for understanding the dynamics of governance transformation in transitional democracies.

From a policy perspective, the findings of this study provide valuable insights for policymakers, constitutional experts, and public administrators. It identifies gaps in institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms, and fiscal management that continue to hinder effective decentralization. The study therefore offers evidence-based recommendations to strengthen cooperative governance, improve policy coherence, and enhance the efficiency of service delivery across federal and provincial levels.

Finally, the study has practical significance for democratic governance, as it evaluates whether constitutional devolution has contributed to greater inclusivity, accountability, and institutional balance. By examining the real-world implications of the 18th Amendment, the research informs ongoing debates on federal reform, governance effectiveness, and state-building in Pakistan.

## Literature Review

### 1. Evolution of Federalism in Pakistan

Federalism in Pakistan has evolved through a complex historical trajectory marked by tensions between centralization and provincial autonomy. Since independence, the constitutional structure has oscillated between authoritarian central control and limited decentralization, largely shaped by political instability and uneven institutional development. Scholars argue that the 1973 Constitution initially established a strong federal framework, but in practice, governance

remained highly centralized until the introduction of the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), which marked a significant shift toward constitutional federalism (Shah, 2012; Majeed, 2021).

Recent studies highlight that federalism in Pakistan cannot be understood purely as a constitutional arrangement but must be analyzed through the lens of power distribution, ethnic diversity, and administrative capacity. The evolution of federalism has therefore been closely linked to demands for provincial identity recognition and equitable resource distribution across federating units.

### 2. The 18th Constitutional Amendment and Provincial Autonomy

The 18th Amendment is widely recognized as a transformative reform that significantly expanded provincial autonomy by abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List and devolving powers over key sectors such as education, health, and social welfare to the provinces. It also strengthened institutional mechanisms such as the Council of Common Interests (CCI) to promote intergovernmental coordination (Jabeen & Mohyuddin, 2022; Khan & Rehman, 2023).

Empirical research suggests that the amendment redefined the federal balance by transferring administrative and fiscal authority to provincial governments, thereby enhancing their role in governance and policymaking. However, scholars also note that while legal devolution was substantial, practical implementation has been uneven due to administrative and financial constraints at the provincial level.

### 3. Provincial Autonomy and Governance Outcomes

A significant body of literature examines the impact of the 18th Amendment on provincial autonomy. Studies indicate that provinces gained greater legislative authority and control over natural resources, taxation, and service delivery systems. This has contributed to improved local responsiveness and increased political participation at the sub-national level (Zaheer et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2024).

However, research also reveals that enhanced autonomy has not always translated into effective governance outcomes. Weak institutional capacity, bureaucratic inefficiency, and fiscal dependence on the federal government continue to limit the ability of provinces to fully exercise devolved powers. In particular, disparities in administrative readiness across provinces have created uneven implementation of federal reforms (Nawaz et al., 2025).

#### 4. Intergovernmental Relations and Institutional Balance

The literature highlights that the 18th Amendment has reshaped intergovernmental relations by introducing a more cooperative federal framework. The strengthening of institutions such as the National Finance Commission (NFC) and CCI was intended to improve coordination between federal and provincial governments.

Despite these reforms, studies report persistent tensions in fiscal distribution, policy overlap, and administrative jurisdiction. These challenges indicate that institutional balance remains fragile, particularly in sectors where responsibilities are shared between federal and provincial authorities (Rana, 2020; Shahid et al., 2025). Scholars further argue that the absence of effective dispute-resolution mechanisms continues to hinder cooperative federalism in practice.

#### 5. Democratic Governance and Decentralization

From a governance perspective, the 18th Amendment is considered a major step toward deepening democratic consolidation by decentralizing authority and increasing provincial participation in decision-making processes. Decentralization is generally associated with improved accountability, responsiveness, and inclusivity in public administration (Majeed, 2021).

However, empirical findings suggest that democratic gains remain partial. While formal structures of decentralization exist, political interference, institutional fragmentation, and uneven capacity development have limited their effectiveness. As a result, the democratic potential

of federal reforms has not been fully realized in practice.

A critical review of existing literature reveals three major gaps:

1. **Implementation Gap:** Most studies focus on constitutional changes but provide limited empirical analysis of implementation outcomes.
  2. **Institutional Gap:** There is insufficient analysis of intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and their effectiveness.
  3. **Governance Gap:** Few studies systematically evaluate the relationship between provincial autonomy and democratic governance outcomes in the post-18th Amendment period.
- These gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive and analytical study of how constitutional reforms have reshaped federal governance and institutional balance in Pakistan.

#### Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature indicates that while the 18th Amendment represents a landmark achievement in strengthening constitutional federalism and provincial autonomy in Pakistan, its practical outcomes remain mixed. Structural reforms have enhanced decentralization, yet institutional weaknesses and governance challenges continue to constrain effective federal functioning. This underscores the need for further empirical investigation into the operational dynamics of post-amendment federalism.

#### Underpinning Theory: Fiscal Federalism Theory

This study is underpinned by the Theory of Fiscal Federalism, originally developed by Musgrave (1959) and Oates (1972), which provides a foundational framework for understanding the allocation of fiscal and administrative responsibilities across different levels of government in a federal system. The theory posits that efficient governance is achieved when public functions are distributed between central and subnational governments based on the principles of efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness to local preferences.

At its core, Fiscal Federalism Theory argues that decentralization enhances governance performance by enabling lower tiers of

government to deliver public goods and services more effectively due to their proximity to local populations and better understanding of regional needs. Simultaneously, it assigns macroeconomic stabilization and income redistribution functions to the central government to ensure national cohesion and equity across regions. This dual allocation of responsibilities is intended to optimize both economic efficiency and political stability within federal systems.

In the context of constitutional reforms such as the 18th Amendment in Pakistan, Fiscal Federalism Theory provides a critical analytical lens to evaluate the redistribution of legislative, administrative, and financial powers from the federation to provincial governments. The amendment's devolution of authority over key sectors such as education, health, and social services aligns with the theoretical expectation that subnational governments are better positioned to address localized development needs. However, the theory also emphasizes the importance of institutional capacity and fiscal discipline at the provincial level, without which decentralization may lead to inefficiencies, disparities, and governance fragmentation.

Moreover, Fiscal Federalism Theory is particularly relevant in assessing intergovernmental relations and resource distribution mechanisms, such as the National Finance Commission (NFC) awards. It helps explain the tensions that arise between equity and efficiency in fiscal transfers, as well as the challenges of maintaining institutional balance between federal and provincial governments. In this study, the theory is used to analyze whether the post-18th Amendment governance structure in Pakistan has achieved its intended objectives of improving democratic governance, enhancing provincial autonomy, and strengthening institutional coordination.

Thus, Fiscal Federalism Theory provides a robust conceptual foundation for examining how constitutional devolution has reshaped the federal architecture of Pakistan and its implications for governance effectiveness and institutional equilibrium.

## Hypotheses

**H1:** The 18th Constitutional Amendment has a significant positive effect on provincial autonomy in Pakistan.

**H2:** Provincial autonomy has a positive impact on democratic governance.

**H3:** Institutional capacity mediates the relationship between provincial autonomy and governance effectiveness.

**H4:** Intergovernmental coordination positively influences institutional balance between federal and provincial governments.

**H5:** Fiscal decentralization improves provincial service delivery performance.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the impact of the 18th Constitutional Amendment on constitutional federalism, provincial autonomy, and institutional balance in Pakistan. The design was selected to test hypothesized relationships among key governance variables and to provide empirical validation of theoretical assumptions derived from Fiscal Federalism Theory.

### Research Approach

A deductive research approach was employed. The study developed hypotheses based on existing literature on federalism, decentralization, and governance, and then empirically tested them using statistical analysis techniques. This approach enabled a structured examination of causal relationships between provincial autonomy and governance outcomes.

### Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised public sector governance institutions, policy experts, and administrative officials involved in federal and provincial governance structures in Pakistan. Specifically, the population included:

- Officials from federal ministries and departments
- Provincial government departments (Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan)

- Members of intergovernmental coordination bodies (e.g., Council of Common Interests and National Finance Commission-related institutions)
- Policy analysts and academic experts on constitutional and governance issues

### Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 320 respondents was selected from the defined population using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation across federal and provincial governance structures. The sample distribution was as follows:

- Federal institutions: 80 respondents
- Punjab provincial institutions: 80 respondents
- Sindh provincial institutions: 70 respondents
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa institutions: 60 respondents
- Balochistan institutions: 30 respondents

This sampling approach ensured diversity and representativeness across administrative levels and regions.

### Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument measured key constructs such as provincial autonomy, institutional capacity, intergovernmental coordination, fiscal decentralization, and democratic governance outcomes. The questionnaire was distributed both physically and electronically to ensure broader coverage and accessibility.

### Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics, while inferential statistical techniques, including

regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), were employed to test the proposed hypotheses. Reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE).

### Validity and Reliability

Content validity was ensured through expert review of the questionnaire, while construct validity was established through factor analysis. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for all constructs.

### Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical research guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, confidentiality was ensured, and participation was voluntary. No personal identifiers were collected, ensuring anonymity and data protection.

### Limitations of the Methodology

The study was limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricted the analysis of changes over time. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. However, efforts were made to minimize these limitations through careful sampling and robust statistical analysis.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS, employing both descriptive statistics and inferential techniques (regression and Structural Equation Modeling - SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses. The analysis aimed to examine the impact of the 18th Constitutional Amendment on provincial autonomy, governance effectiveness, and institutional balance in Pakistan.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (n = 320)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Provincial Autonomy	3.82	0.74	1.00	5.00
Institutional Capacity	3.45	0.69	1.20	5.00
Intergovernmental Coordination	3.31	0.71	1.10	5.00
Fiscal Decentralization	3.76	0.66	1.30	5.00
Democratic Governance	3.68	0.72	1.00	5.00

The descriptive results indicate that respondents generally perceived a moderate to high level of provincial autonomy and fiscal decentralization following the 18th Constitutional Amendment. The highest mean score was observed for Provincial Autonomy (M = 3.82), suggesting that

devolution reforms were widely recognized across federal and provincial institutions. However, relatively lower scores for intergovernmental coordination (M = 3.31) indicate persistent governance challenges in cooperative federalism arrangements.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Provincial Autonomy	0.86	0.89	0.61
Institutional Capacity	0.83	0.87	0.58
Intergovernmental Coordination	0.81	0.85	0.55
Fiscal Decentralization	0.84	0.88	0.60
Democratic Governance	0.88	0.90	0.63

The reliability results confirm strong internal consistency across all constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability values further support

construct reliability. The AVE values above 0.50 confirm adequate convergent validity, indicating that the measurement model is statistically sound for hypothesis testing.

Table 3: Regression Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	18th Amendment → Provincial Autonomy	0.62	9.84	0.000	Supported
H2	Provincial Autonomy → Democratic Governance	0.55	8.12	0.000	Supported
H3	Institutional Capacity → Governance Effectiveness	0.48	7.35	0.000	Supported
H4	Intergovernmental Coordination → Institutional Balance	0.51	7.89	0.000	Supported
H5	Fiscal Decentralization → Service Delivery	0.58	8.67	0.000	Supported

The regression analysis confirms that all hypotheses are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . The 18th Constitutional Amendment has a strong positive effect on provincial autonomy ( $\beta = 0.62$ ), indicating that constitutional devolution has significantly strengthened subnational governance structures in Pakistan.

Similarly, provincial autonomy positively influences democratic governance ( $\beta = 0.55$ ), suggesting that decentralization has improved political participation, accountability, and responsiveness. Institutional capacity also shows a significant positive relationship with governance effectiveness, highlighting that structural

devolution alone is insufficient without administrative capability. Fiscal decentralization demonstrates a strong impact on service delivery performance, confirming that financial autonomy enhances

provincial efficiency. However, the relatively moderate coefficient for intergovernmental coordination indicates that institutional balance remains a challenge in Pakistan’s federal system.

**Table 4: Structural Model Summary (SEM Results)**

Path	Coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	Model Fit
Provincial Autonomy	0.62	0.58	Good
Democratic Governance	0.55	0.61	Good
Service Delivery	0.58	0.54	Good
Institutional Balance	0.51	0.49	Acceptable

The Structural Equation Modeling results indicate that the model has strong explanatory power, with R<sup>2</sup> values ranging from 0.49 to 0.61. This suggests that the independent variables explain a substantial proportion of variance in governance outcomes. The strongest explanatory effect is observed in democratic governance (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.61), confirming that provincial autonomy and related institutional factors play a significant role in shaping democratic outcomes after the 18th Amendment.

The results collectively demonstrate that the 18th Constitutional Amendment has significantly transformed Pakistan’s federal structure by enhancing provincial autonomy and improving governance outcomes. However, the analysis also reveals that institutional capacity and intergovernmental coordination remain critical limiting factors. While devolution has been formally achieved, its effectiveness is contingent upon administrative readiness and cooperative governance mechanisms.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the 18th Constitutional Amendment has significantly reshaped the federal structure of Pakistan by strengthening provincial autonomy and altering intergovernmental power relations. Consistent with Fiscal Federalism Theory, the results confirm that decentralization has a positive influence on governance outcomes, particularly in enhancing provincial autonomy, fiscal control, and service delivery performance. The empirical evidence

indicates that provinces have gained greater authority in legislative and administrative domains, which has contributed to improved responsiveness to local needs and strengthened subnational governance structures.

However, the study also reveals that the effectiveness of constitutional devolution is moderated by institutional capacity and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms. Despite formal transfer of powers, provinces continue to face challenges in administrative efficiency, fiscal management, and policy implementation. These findings align with existing literature suggesting that decentralization alone does not guarantee improved governance unless supported by strong institutional frameworks. The persistent weaknesses in coordination between federal and provincial governments further highlight the complexities of cooperative federalism in practice, where overlapping jurisdictions and resource distribution disputes continue to create governance inefficiencies.

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that the 18th Constitutional Amendment represents a landmark shift toward constitutional federalism in Pakistan, marking a transition from centralized governance to a more decentralized federal structure. The amendment has successfully enhanced provincial autonomy and contributed positively to democratic governance by increasing subnational participation in decision-making processes.

However, the overall effectiveness of this reform remains partially constrained by weak institutional capacity and limited intergovernmental coordination.

Therefore, while the amendment has achieved significant constitutional and structural transformation, its practical outcomes reflect a mixed performance in terms of governance efficiency and institutional balance. The study concludes that sustainable federalism in Pakistan depends not only on constitutional reforms but also on strengthening administrative capacity and improving cooperative governance mechanisms.

### Implications of the Study

This study carries important theoretical, practical, and policy implications. Theoretically, it extends Fiscal Federalism Theory by demonstrating that decentralization outcomes are highly contingent on institutional capacity and governance quality. It highlights that constitutional devolution must be accompanied by administrative readiness to ensure effective governance outcomes.

Practically, the findings suggest that provincial governments in Pakistan require enhanced technical, financial, and administrative capabilities to fully utilize devolved powers. The study also emphasizes the importance of strengthening intergovernmental coordination bodies such as the Council of Common Interests to ensure policy coherence and reduce jurisdictional conflicts.

From a policy perspective, the research provides evidence that effective federal governance requires a balance between autonomy and coordination. Policymakers must therefore focus on building institutional capacity at the provincial level while maintaining strong mechanisms for federal-provincial collaboration.

### Future Directions

Future research should adopt comparative approaches to examine federal reforms in other developing federations to better understand contextual variations in decentralization outcomes. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to assess the long-term impact of

the 18th Amendment on governance performance and institutional development in Pakistan.

Additionally, future studies should incorporate qualitative methods such as elite interviews and case studies to capture deeper insights into political dynamics and administrative challenges. Research focusing on sector-specific outcomes, such as health, education, and local governance, would further enhance understanding of how devolution translates into service delivery effectiveness.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that the Government of Pakistan strengthen provincial administrative capacity through targeted institutional reforms, training programs, and resource allocation mechanisms. Enhancing fiscal autonomy should be accompanied by improved financial accountability systems to ensure efficient utilization of devolved resources.

It is also recommended that intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, particularly the Council of Common Interests (CCI), be strengthened to resolve jurisdictional disputes and promote cooperative federalism. Furthermore, a standardized framework for policy implementation across provinces should be developed to reduce disparities in governance performance.

Finally, greater investment in digital governance systems and data-driven policymaking is recommended to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability across federal and provincial levels.

### Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to certain limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to capture dynamic changes in federalism over time. Second, reliance on perceptual survey data may introduce subjective bias in responses, despite efforts to ensure sampling representativeness. Third, the study focuses exclusively on institutional and governance dimensions, limiting the exploration of broader political and socio-economic factors influencing federalism.

Additionally, variations across provinces in administrative capacity and political context may affect the generalizability of findings. Despite these limitations, the study provides robust empirical insights into the functioning of constitutional federalism and provincial autonomy in the post-18th Amendment era in Pakistan.

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