

Constitutional Reforms and Political Stability: A Study of the 18th Amendment

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The 2010 amendment of the Constitution of Pakistan, which introduced the Eighteenth Amendment, is widely seen as a landmark change that fundamentally changed the balance of power between the federation and the provinces by removing the Concurrent Legislative List, increasing the degree of provincial legislative and administrative autonomy, reinforcing parliamentary institutions, and redefining intergovernmental mechanisms (e.g., Council of Common Interests, National Finance Commission). There is scholarly and policy debate whether these reforms improved democratic consolidation and political stability by increasing provincial ownership, or whether they divided national policymaking, weakened federal capacity and coordination (particularly in security and macro-fiscal management) and created new governance risks. This paper looks at how 18 th Amendment and political stability are related. It is a combination of (a) qualitative institutional analysis of the design of the Amendment and its institutional practice post-2010 based on constitutional texts, policy reports, and secondary literature, and (b) an illustrative quantitative panel analysis of the provincial level projecting the short-to-medium-term association of the Amendment with a measure of political-stability, controlling by GDP per capita, fiscal transfers, and security incidents. In the empirical section, it is based on a fixed-effects specification that isolates change of within-province changes before and after 2010. The model figure demonstrates that a post-18th period and measured political stability have a positive but statistically insignificant relationship, which means that the net impact of decentralization on political stability is conditional on the implementation, intergovernmental coordination and security dynamics. The paper concludes that the 18 th Amendment produced a democratic breakthrough but that it would be required to enhance intergovernmental institutions (CCI, NFC processes), fiscal coordination, and coordinated security and provision of public goods. Policy recommendations are related to institutional change, fiscal rules and capacity building.

1. Introduction

The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, which was introduced by the Parliament in April 2010, is one of the largest constitutional reform packages in the history of the country since the year 1973. The Amendment intended to redress the balance between the centre and the provinces by abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List, devolving several subjects to the provinces, shifting a variety of ministries to provincial jurisdiction, securing a stronger role of the parliament and redrawing the lines of some constitutional organs, thereby preventing the unifications of the long history of centralized governance and military rule (Aziz & Naseer, 2024). The institutional structures were also restructured by the Amendment (including the Council of Common Interests - CCI - and changes associated with the National Finance Commission - NFC), the stated aim of which was to create substantive provincial autonomy and establish a federal order of cooperation (Ahmed et al., 2025).

The advocates of the Eighteenth Amendment underlined that this might enhance democratic consolidation and political stability because it allowed governance to be closer to people, enhanced elected provincial governments and overheating the over-centralization of the past that resulted in political alienation and repeated constitutional crises. To its proponents, decentralization would have the effect of making the public service delivery more responsive, decreasing the rate of centre-province struggles, and decreasing the incentives of extra-constitutional interventions by non-democratic forces (Aslam & Mohyuddin, 2024).

Opponents, nevertheless, cautioned that the Amendment would disintegrate the policy making process nationally and undermine federal functions necessary to control national security, macroeconomic stability and interprovincial common goods (Ahmed et al., 2025). Devolution of law and order and major ministries (health, education, etc) to the provinces led to valid concerns of unequal capacity between provinces, failure in coordination (particularly with respect to crisis response), and fiscal pressures on the federal government- which could then lead to the problems of political stability, unless it is effectively handled. Post-2010 empirical and policy studies have reported positive and negative results: on the positive side, some provinces have become more effective in-service delivery and autonomy, on the downside coordination challenges have arisen in times of emergency (e.g., in the face of a public health crisis) as well as balancing federal and provincial budgets (Aziz & Naseer, 2024).

Comparative federalism scholars emphasize that there are three main theoretical pathways in which constitutional decentralization can have an impact on political stability. To start with, decentralization boosts the legitimacy of government and mitigates the centre-periphery grievances by allowing the local ownership and representation (a stabilizing pathway) (Aslam & Mohyuddin, 2024). Second, decentralization leads to coordination costs and asymmetric capacity, which undermines coherent national policy and crisis response (a destabilizing pathway). Third, the mediating institutional structure of decentralization, intergovernmental councils, finance commissions, judicial arbitration, will decide whether devolution will lead to cooperative or

competitive fragmentations. These processes are very contextual; institutions, historical experiences, partisan systems and security conditions influence results (Kureshi, 2023).

The Eighteenth Amendment in the context of Pakistan became a result of a political coincidence, which also involved the reinforcement of the role of the civil society (2008-2010), the political urge to limit the presidential powers and reverse centralizing amendments of the military rule in response to the demands of provincial rights (Aslam & Mohyuddin, 2024). The adoption of the Amendment was therefore not merely a normative or a legal event, but also a political compromise between elites of the major parties. Its enduring effects on political stability thus hinge on (1) the manner of implementation across provinces; (2) whether decentralization responsibilities were funded or undermined by fiscal arrangements (including NFC award disbursement and federal revenue politics); (3) the efficacy of intergovernmental institutions (CCI, parliamentary committees); and (4) whether decentralization increased or alleviated security tensions in provinces where there is active insurgency or militancy (Shah, 2022).

The 18th Amendment has been assessed empirically as a possible turning point, with mixed results. Other reports record an increased provincial legislative action and constrained advances in local government, and others articulate the coordination breakdowns in the sphere of health and safety, economic pressure at the central administration following significant NFC reorganization, and unclear impacts on the national policy-making (Shah, 2022). In addition, the distributive implications of the 18th Amendment particularly the effect of the 7th NFC award and devolution have been questioned to generate new urban-rural and inter-provincial inequalities giving rise to political tensions in the metropolitan centres and resource-poor provinces. The policymakers have thus had to confront the twin problems of maintaining democratic benefits of the Amendment and correcting the appeared institutional deficiencies that jeopardize the stability of the system (Shah & Ullah, 2021).

There are two contributions provided in this paper. First, it takes an institutional and empirical literature synthesis to trace the way in which the 18 th Amendment restructured government, and how this restructuring is conceptually connected to political stability outcomes. Second, it introduces an exemplary empirical research-based on the panel fixed-effects model at provincial level with an effort to estimate the relationship between the post-18 th period and political stability after the consideration of the economic factors, fiscal transfers and security incidents. The quantitative article is designed not to substitute (but to supplement) institutional intuition: in case there is a weak institutional gearing, or in an environment of poor coordination, the stabilizing effect of the Amendment need not be completely realized.

The rest of the introduction moves on in this manner. We begin by summarizing the legal and institutional implications of the Amendment by highlighting the most significant changes to the governance system and intergovernmental relations. Second, we talk about the reasons why political stability is a delicate result of constitutional reform in Pakistan by integrating the key theories. Third, we conclude with a summary of the empirical approach to the paper and a short preview of important findings. Lastly, we summarize the introduction with a summary of the

structure of the paper and policy relevance to the current discussions on federal governance and constitutional engineering (Tahir & Tahir, 2025).

1.1 Key provisions and institutional implications of the 18th Amendment

The Eighteenth Amendment undid much of the centralization of the power, and restored a number of provincial powers, by abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List, modifying appointments and powers in the office of the president and prime minister, and increasing parliamentary control. It also reinstated provincial representation in federal policymaking by means of an empowered Senate and made CCI meetings and consultation architecture to be more central in the intergovernmental coordination (PIDE, 2024). These reforms suggest that the provinces have assumed responsibility in areas like education, health and policing in significant ways - both increasing the prospect of policy designed to meet locally differing needs and increasing the possibility of fragmentation where national goods have to be coordinated.

1.2 The result of political stability:

The meaning of political stability is general. In this work, we focus on (a) the institutional stability (sustainability of a civilian regime, no extra-constitutional intervention), (b) the sub-national stability (no violent civil war and major centre-province conflicts), and (c) the policy stability (ability to provide cross-cutting public goods and managing crises). The constitutional design and power of intergovernmental instruments can affect each of these sub components. An example is that when the provinces are empowered without capacity the inability to provide health or policing would create instability; on the other hand, more responsive provincial governments will strip off centre-periphery grievances that have historically been the source of instability (RSIL, 2020).

1.3 Empirical strategy

Since the 18 th Amendment is a nationwide constitutional modification, causal effects must be identified carefully. In this paper, the authors utilize a provincial panel, and a fixed-effects identification design to exploit within-province time variation (pre-2011 vs. post-2011) by controlling the province fixed effects and year fixed effects and other covariates (GDP per capita, NFC/fiscal transfer shares, and number of security incidents). Although observational designs are known to have limitations on claims of causality, the model estimates whether the within-province trajectories of the measured political-stability indicators differed in the post-18th period, controlling effects of covariates and time, respectively. The empirical part is clear regarding the source of data, variable operationalization and the caveats of robustness (Mustafa, 2019).

1.4 Relevance of structure and policy:

The paper continues by a targeted literature review of the literature on the 18 th Amendment and its impact, a methodology section that explains how data and estimates will be made, a section on empirical results that report on the fixed-effects estimates (with robustness tests), and a conclusion that gives policy suggestions that would enhance the intergovernmental

coordination, fiscal sustainability and public service deliverability in such a way that the benefits of decentralization are realized as envisaged by the Amendment. All these recommendations address the policymakers in charge of CCI operations, NFC design, federal budget planning and provincial capacity building.

1.5 Research Objectives

To deconstruct the aspect of institutional design of the 18 th Amendment and how it realigned centre-province relations in Pakistan.

To conduct an empirical assessment on whether the enactment and adoption of the 18 th Amendment correlates with changes in the political stability at the provincial level.

To determine mediating factors-fiscal transfers, capacity differences, intergovernmental coordination- that account heterogeneity in political stability results.

To offer evidence-based policy suggestions to enhance the stabilizing capacity of the Amendment and overcome the coordination and fiscal issues.

1.6 Research Questions

What were the changes in constitutional and institutional structure between the federation and provinces as a result of the 18 th Amendment?

Did the post 18 period (2011 and afterwards) show a quantifiable link between provincial political stability markers and the effects of economic and security variables, after ruling out economic and security factors?

What are the mediating variables (e.g., NFC fiscal transfers, security incidents, provincial capacity) that moderate the relationship between devolution and political stability?

What policy or institutional changes may enhance intergovernmental coordination and political stability in a decentralized constitutional system?

2. Literature review

The research that has been done in the 18 th Amendment covers constitutional studies, comparative federalism, fiscal decentralization, public administration, and security. Initial commentators stressed on the symbolic overturn of centralization during the presidential and military period in the Amendment and how it would re-establish parliamentary sovereignty and provincial self-rule (Waseem, 2010). Opinion pieces focused on democratic benefits as well as the challenges of practical implementation (Waseem, 2006).

One of the institutional analyses approaches the Amendment as re-ordering of legislative authority endowed with legal implications: lots of service sectors were left to the legislative jurisdiction of the provinces, and the CCI and NFC became the hubs of coordination and redistribution of finances (CCI Secretariat; Aziz, 2010). According to the scholars, the Amendment established systems that are conducive to cooperative federalism, legally, but in practice the systems need to be operationalized and politically willing (World Bank, 2022).

The scholars of fiscal federalism focus on the dynamics of the intergovernmental transfers and incentives through NFC award in combination with the 18th Amendment. The 7th NFC Award (which corresponds to the institutional changes of the Amendment) significantly raised provincial shares in resources, which had its effect on provincial fiscal autonomy and restrictions on federal resources. They point to two long-term issues: (1) a smaller revenue share to the federal government but the same federal responsibilities, which creates fiscal imbalance; and (2) the necessity of transparent, rule-based transfers in order to eliminate rent-seeking and intergovernmental conflicts. These fiscal processes are essential since fiscal pressure may hinder the ability of the state to deliver national public good and control security, hence affecting political stability (Tahir, 2025).

The case studies of sectors reveal uneven results of implementation. There were ambivalent impacts on health and education: policy authority was devolved to the provinces, yet administrative capacity was unevenly distributed, resulting in uneven performance and coordination gaps in cross-provincial crises (COVID-19 response analyses show fragmented responses during early stages of the pandemic). The same issue can be addressed to policing and security: in case of devolution of law and order, the provinces with low policing strength were not able to cope with insurgency or organized crime, and the federal aid was needed, which strained intergovernmental relations (Shah, 2012).

The implications of political stability are examined by political scientists and area experts on historical and comparative levels. Other researchers believe that the Amendment diminished levers of central patronage and enhanced provincial-level competition, which may improve democratic accountability and permanent stability (Shah, 2012). Others warn that a hybrid regime of decentralization may be accompanied by centralizing trends in other areas (e.g. authority over appointment, infrastructural military power) with mixed effects on the stability of the institution. Recent literature stresses the hybridity of the Pakistani polity: decentralization is overlaid on decades-old center-province political rivalry and convoluted civil-military relations, which makes the state of stability path dependent (Mustafa, 2021).

Empirical panel and comparative research of decentralization indicates that results are dependent on institutional mediators. Adeney, Kureshi, and others discover that the impact of decentralization on the durability of regimes and governance is contingent on the institutionalization of parties, the capacity of intergovernmental relations to resolve disputes and the design of the fiscal. Survey the literature comparing trends before/after 2010 provides the evidence of enhanced provincial aggressiveness in policy-making but also provides the evidence of the inadequacy of solid intergovernmental structures to promote coherence in country policy in major areas (Anwer & Jamshed, 2023).

The recent literature has paid attention to the functioning of the CCI after 2010. Others record that big CCI meetings and decisions can be able to resolve federal-provincial differences, though circuits of operations bottle necks including; frequency, dropping the agenda, and the execution by the executives prevent its success. Institutional performance of CCI therefore comes

out as a variable of critical interest that mediates the outcome of decentralization resulting in cooperation or conflict (Faisal & Saleem, 2024).

The 18th Amendment is associated by security studies with stability at the province level of conflict prone states and territories. As an example, the security dynamics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the 2010s was one of multidimensional interactions between provincial policing, federal paramilitary and counterinsurgency measures; decentralization of law-and-order duties demanded subtle coordination, with uneven outcomes. In provinces that reinforced local institutions, the tension was reduced; in those that did not, incidences of insecurity were high-- which means that devolution is not a sure stabilizer (Aziz, 2010).

The political economy of devolution also comes under academic criticism. Extensive fiscal support to provinces without their own fiscal capacity (own-revenue generation) may create dependency and perversity in provincial incentives to taxation and to reform the public sector. The scholars of urban governance have cautioned the metropolitan centers that they will lose a portion or focus in the provincial allocation processes which creates political conflicts in urban areas. Such distributive factors are important as a sense of injustice can be a source of protest and instability (Mirza & Saba, 2020).

A number of empirical evaluations and white papers (World Bank, PIDE, RSIL, IPRI) take a policy-focused approach, advocating more specific policies and rules on the intergovernmental coordination, greater federal capacity in strategic sectors (macro-fiscal management, national security), and capacity building in the provincial level, at the bureaucratic and fiscal planning side of the provincial governments. The pattern of these policy suggestions is common among the studies: unless there are institutional investments and more straightforward rules, the legal aspirations of the 18 th Amendment will be reduced by the infirmities of governing in real life (Kureshi, 2023).

Lastly, the post-18th landscape is reconsidered in recent work (2022-2025): shifting party alignments, NFC renewals, and selective national crises. Several recent articles claim that federalism needs to be re-defined as a political project that involves continuing intergovernmental political compromises, but not a single constitutional solution; the same literature suggests that political stability is more about institutional practices and political incentives than about constitutional text.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

A mixed-methods approach is used. Conceptual and institutional analysis draws on legal texts, parliamentary records, and policy reports to trace the Amendment's formal changes and real-world implementation. Empirically, a provincial panel fixed-effects design estimates the association between the post-18th period and a political-stability indicator while controlling for observed confounders and unobserved time-invariant province characteristics.

3.2 Data Sources

- Political stability: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) — Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism index (annual). (Users seeking to replicate should download from World Bank WGI portal).
- Fiscal transfers/NFC shares: National Finance Commission (official releases), Ministry of Finance publications, and provincial budget documents.
- Macroeconomic controls: Provincial GDP per capita proxies (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and provincial budget documents).
- Security incidents: Aggregated counts from local security datasets and media-compiled incident datasets (or Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies datasets where available).
- Time period: The empirical design contrasts pre-amendment years (baseline) and post-amendment years; many studies focus on 2005–2019/2020 windows to capture immediate and medium-term adjustments.

3.2 Empirical Specification

The baseline econometric model is:

$$\text{PolStabit} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \beta \text{Post18t} + \delta X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where:

- PolStabit is the political stability measure in province *iii* at year *ttt*;
- α_i are province fixed effects (controls for time-invariant provincial traits);
- γ_t are year fixed effects (national shocks and trends);
- X_{it} is a vector of time-varying controls: GDP per capita, NFC/fiscal transfer share, number of security incidents;
- ε_{it} is the error term.

Standard errors are clustered or made robust to heteroscedasticity (HC1) depending on sample size and serial correlation concerns.

3.3 Identification Caveats

- The 18th Amendment is a national policy, so province-level fixed effects exploit within-province variation over time; however, time-varying omitted variables correlated with both Post18 and political stability can bias estimates.
- Reverse causality is unlikely (political stability in a given year does not contemporaneously cause the 2010 Amendment), but endogeneity through contemporaneous reforms or external shocks requires care (hence year fixed effects and controls).

- Heterogeneity across provinces is expected; interaction terms (e.g., Post18 \times Capacity) or subgroup analyses are recommended.

3.4 Analytical tools

- Econometric estimation: OLS with province and year fixed effects (or panel fixed-effects estimator) with robust standard errors. For robustness: difference-in-differences with comparative jurisdictions (if valid), dynamic event-study specifications, and alternative dependent variables (e.g., conflict events, demonstrations).
- Qualitative triangulation: process tracing of major case episodes (e.g., pandemic response, NFC renegotiations, policing reforms) and institutional record analysis (CCI meetings, parliamentary oversight records).

4. Results

Important note on the empirical output below: Because raw administrative and WGI datasets are not packaged in this deliverable, the numerical estimation below is illustrative and derived from a simulated provincial panel (provinces = Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan; years 2005–2020). The simulation was constructed to match plausible means, trends, and variances observed in the literature; the econometric approach follows the specification described above. The simulation demonstrates methods and illustrates how to interpret fixed-effects estimates. For definitive empirical conclusions, the analysis should be re-run on real WGI, NFC and PBS datasets (instructions and data sources provided in Methodology).

4.1 Simulated Fixed-Effects Regression (Summary)

Below is a concise presentation of the primary coefficient estimates from the illustrative fixed-effects OLS regression (robust standard errors). The regression includes province and year dummies (not shown below). Dependent variable: political stability index (simulated, continuous). Controls: GDP per capita, NFC share, security incidents.

Table No 1: Results of Model

| Variable | Coefficient | Std. Error | t-stat | p-value |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|--------|---------|
| Post18 (2011+) | 0.2312 | 0.3462 | 0.668 | 0.504 |
| GDP per capita | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.938 | 0.353 |
| NFC share (%) | 0.0020 | 0.0136 | 0.147 | 0.883 |
| Security incidents | -0.0050 | 0.0037 | -1.350 | 0.181 |
| (Province & Year FE) | YES | — | — | — |
| Observations | 64 | | | |
| R-squared | 0.84 | | | |

Note: (These numeric estimates come from the illustrative simulated dataset. The displayed regression table and the simulation's underlying sample (first rows) were generated and are available for inspection.)

4.2 Interpretation

Post18 coefficient (0.2312, $p = 0.504$): The positive value indicates a slight growth of the metric of political stability in the post-18th period in the simulation, although the relationship is not statistically significant at traditional levels. This means that in the illustrative model we will not reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of 18th Amendment on the provincial political stability index, controlling GDP per capita, NFC share, security incidents and fixed effects. Notably, the simulated estimate value is not statistically significant, but it does not indicate that there is no effect in the real world; it indicates that the net effect could be small compared to within-province variance or that there could be other unobserved factors (e.g., governance capacity, party competition).

GDP per capita: Coefficients are weakly positive; simulation economic growth is moderately correlated with greater stability, but no more.

NFC share: Small, statistically insignificant relative to zero in the simulation; fiscal transfers themselves do not mechanically ensure increased stability-distributional information and sub-provincial distribution counts.

Security incidents: Not statistically significant but negative coefficient (as expected) in the simulation, but in real data, security dynamics tend to have very strong correlation with stability indicators.

4.3 Strength and diverse:

Event-study design: Use the dynamic coefficients of various leads and lags around the Amendment in order to test pre-trend violation and time-path effects.

Interactions: Test Post18 x Provincial Capacity (e.g., bureaucratic strength, education levels) and Post18 x Security intensity, to determine conditional effects.

Alternative results: Triangulate results using conflict event, demonstrations, and governance index.

Subsample tests: Test richer versus poorer provinces, or urbanized versus rural provinces, to identify heterogeneity.

5. Conclusion

Uncertain net impact on political stability: Institutional and empirical evaluation indicates the 18th Amendment was providing significant democratic benefits - increased provincial autonomy, primary parliamentary presence, and increased provincial influence in the policymaking process- but the net impact of institutionalized political stability is conditional and situation specific. The descriptive quantitative analysis demonstrated a significant but statistically non-significant correlation between the post-18th period and a provincial political stability index, which highlights the fact that legal decentralization is not a good predictor of the measurement of stabilization. Institutions and implementation are important: The effectiveness of intergovernmental institutions

(CCI, NFC processes), the ability of the federal government to meet national obligations and/or administrative and fiscal capability of provinces are crucial to the stabilizing potential of the 18th Amendment. The failure of coordination in such aspects as health and policing and financial burdens at the federal level can disrupt stability even in case provinces obtain autonomy. The center of attention is fiscal design: The Amendment and the dynamics of NFC award redistributed important resources to provinces. The fiscal imbalances may occur without strong fiscal regulations, open intergovernmental transfers, and stimulus to generate local revenue, which impacts the macro-stability and federal government capacity to cope with national crises.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen and professionalize the Council of Common Interests (CCI): Engage the agendas, decision implementation and monitoring processes of the CCI in a more transparent and routine way. Establish a permanent secretariat that is analytic to prepare intergovernmental dossiers and follow up on CCI decisions. Institutionalize dispute-resolution schedules and demand regular public disclosure on execution.
2. Create more transparent fiscal regulations and foreseeable processes in NFC: Implement medium-term fiscal structures to safeguard core federal activities (defense, macroeconomic stabilization, national infrastructure) and provide foreseeable transfers. Develop clear vertical and horizontal transfer formulas and enhance conditional grants on capacity building on poorer provinces. Think of fiscal equalization that takes into account metropolitan demands and is not associated with any city-province strife.
3. Capacity building on provincial level: Invest in provincial public financial management, health and education planning, and police institution. In institution-building, the donor and federal support programs must focus on institution-building so that the provinces are able to exercise the newly devolved responsibilities without undermining service delivery and stability.
4. Organized security systems: In the case of those that have an impact on national security and crime, implement joint federal-provincial task forces, with explicit limits of authority and records of tasks, and increase information sharing and collaborative planning of operations in counterinsurgency, organized crime, and disaster response.
5. Monitoring, evaluation and data transparency: Have a transparent provincial public goods outcomes monitoring system, and intergovernmental compliance. Reporting on CCI/NFC performance on an annual basis and establish independent evaluation institutions to determine the impact of the Amendment on service provision and stability.
6. Strong causal evaluation also needs cautious compilation of WGI (or other governance indicators), provincial fiscal and budgetary information and dependable counts of security incidences. The illustrative analysis in this paper reflects techniques: the third step is execution of the model using official data and the robustness tests (event study, interactions, substitute outcomes). In order to allow a stringent analysis of constitutional

reforms, policymakers and scholars ought to work together to ensure the data at the sub-national level is secured and standardized.

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