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**Federalism under Stress: Ethnic Identity vs. National Integrity in Pakistan**
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**ABSTRACT**

*This article discusses the systemic stress-disease faced by federal structure of Pakistan by analyzing the basic conflict between ethnic sub nationalism and the national integrity of the state of Pakistan, which is being pursued by the state of Pakistan. A theoretical analysis, inspired by theories of holding-together federalism, consociationalism, securitization, and internal colonialism, shows that the paradox of Pakistan's constitutional design is that it has fostered the centrifugal ethnic opposition that it is trying to deter. The analysis examines the historical centralization in the 1973 constitution, the incomplete devolutionary promise of the 18th Amendment and the fiscal federalism fault-lines that continue to create structural inequality in the distribution of resources by population. Using the paradigmatic case studies of the problem of resource extraction and insurgency in Balochistan and the urban-rural ethnic conflict in Sindh, the article shows how FD works at various levels, interprovincial with federation and province, as well as intra-provincially in the majority-minority conflicts. The study also highlights new stressors such as trans-provincial ethnic mobilization for constitutional inclusion, unresolved Seraiki province movement, water scarcity due to climate change which has potential to generate inter-provincial resource conflict. The main thesis is that the federal stress in Pakistan is enmeshed in a vicious circle because the federal policies of securing national unity give more power to the fringes of Pakistan that demand separation and make the federal structure illegitimate. The article ends by suggesting a re-conceptualization of national integrity as ethnic covenant, i.e. the health and strength of the Pakistani nation does not come from cultural uniformity, but from a constitutionally enshrined system of distribution of resources in a fair manner and a genuine political autonomy, in which strong and secure ethnic identities are guaranteed.*

**Keywords:** Federalism, Ethnic Identity, National Integrity, Balochistan, 18th Amendment, Internal Colonialism

**Introduction**

The paradox of Pakistan is rooted in the conflict that was latent in its very conception of being a safe haven for a single entity with a single religion, Muslim identity, yet facing the stark reality of deep ethno-linguistic differences. The political mobilization that succeeded in creating a

sovereign state from the subcontinent was based on the premise that Muslims were a single nation, but this premise started to crack as soon as the state came into being and the homogenising logic came up against deeply entrenched historical national identities of Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns, Baloch and Seraikis. As Ayres (2009) shows, the cultural logic of this nation building project aimed to impose linguistic and cultural uniformity, imposing Urdu as the sole symbol of Pakistani unity, and thereby revealing the state's deep unease with the fact of multilingualism. This was not simply an inconsequential ideological contradiction, but was a basic structural defect (Ayres, 2009). The demand for a single identity denied legitimacy to the ethnic groups that needed to be involved in maintaining the territorial integrity of the state. A demand for a single identity illegitimized the ethnic groups that were needed to ensure territorial integrity for the state. The most striking and paradoxical indicator of this was the existence of a thousand miles of hostile territory separating the east and west wings of the nation, where Bengali linguistic nationalism faced head-on the vision of a homogenized Islamic nation of the West Pakistani elite, which ultimately led to the demise of the initial design of the nation.

To reconcile these self-contained and culturally distinct minorities with a unified national State, politicians found their solution in a constitutional compromise: federalism. Federalism was the constitutional compromise in which the territorial concentration of ethnic groups and their distinct cultures were recognized without denying the existence of a common national state. The federal formula, potentially, provided an opportunity to balance the particular and the universal, to let different peoples govern themselves in their own cultural and administrative affairs, but to unite them under a common sovereignty in national defense and foreign policy. The 1973 constitution was the most elaborate of this agreement, establishing a bicameral parliament, with equal provincial representation, and allowing for regional languages in addition to the national language, thereby reflecting the devising of a structure for the country's multinational aspect (Ayres, 2009). But this federalism was tainted from the beginning by a centrifugal political logic that meant power and money were increasingly being gathered in the central government, effectively stripping the provinces of autonomy as if it were theirs to begin with. The state formation was pathological, with the ruling elite being a much smaller minority, predominantly from the dominant majority of the Punjabis who were reluctant to cede to the peripheries, whose inhabitants were culturally different and much smaller. Federalism did not function as a partnership, but as a hierarchy of authority that limited the powers of the provinces and granted the central government authority over them. Federalism became a reality of domination, rather than a true partnership; what had been promised as shared sovereignty became actual domination of the provinces by the central government. Such a violation of the federal principle meant ethnic groups were not seen as having a neutral state but the state as a tool for the dominance of one ethnic bloc, this undermining the legitimacy of the national institutions (Bangwar, 2025).

This systemically undermined federal contract has placed the Pakistani state under constant stress and the legitimacy of the national project is continually challenged along ethnic lines, resulting in violent conflict, secessionist insurgencies, and the zero-sum game between subnational identity and the state-chosen conception of national integrity. The stress is not something that can be stopped from happening now, it is a structural aspect of a polity which has not institutionalized an inclusive national identity that can accommodate the component ethnic parts. The deliberate ethnic, sectarian and regional divide and rule strategy has been used

by the ruling elites to keep society in check and secure their entrenched privileges (Bangwar, 2025). The conceptual framework of Baloch representation helps to shed lights on the dysfunctional outcomes of this phenomenon where the representatives of the minority ethnic group are divided among three categories – federalists, nationalists and secessionists – and the question may be raised whether federal loyalty for a Baloch representative is ethnic disloyalty to the marginalized group. (Frontiers in Political Science, 2025). From this logic, the central argument is driven home. Paradoxically, the Pakistani state's historical and current attempt to build a homogenizing sense of national integrity, which has frequently been a means to an end of institutional dominance by the Punjab, has paradoxically provoked strong ethnic counter-reactions. This quest keeps federalism in a state of constant imbalance, as the imposition of an imposed identity in Balochistan and its political "neutering" in urban areas of Sindh is a radicalisation of ethnic identities, which becomes a means of secessionist aspiration or violent grievance (Frontiers in Political Science, 2025). The centralization designed to secure the nation has become the engine of its dismemberment (Bangwar, 2025).

### **Literature Review**

The theoretical framework for analysing the nature of federal stress in Pakistan needs to start with the distinction between 'coming together' and 'holding together' federations developed by Alfred Stepan that explains the different political logic of federations. Pakistan can clearly be categorized under holding together because it is a result of the need to prevent the breaking apart of territorially concentrated ethnic groups rather than voluntary association. Recent scholarship has compellingly shown the need to elaborate this categorisation in the postcolonial context. The notion of postcolonial federalism has come into existence as a corrective measure because federations in the Global South were the product of colonial socio political engineering which imposed provincial boundaries with a complete disregard for existing linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious cleavages, and as a result of such socio political engineering, federalization has remained as the only option to gain sovereignty rather than a contractual democratic choice (Mushtaq & Rehman, 2022). This is a hugely destabilizing factor in the Pakistani case since it proves that the federal system was not agreed upon by the ethnic groups that the federal state seeks to rule.

The theoretical debate between consociationalism and centripetalism has been rich and each approach provides a different diagnosis of the Pakistani situation in the management of ethnic conflict in deeply divided societies. According to Arend Lijphart (2012) stable democracy in plural societies can be realized by grand coalition governments, segmental autonomy, proportional representation, and a minority veto on important issues. The constitution of Pakistan demonstrates its ambivalent attitude towards these mechanisms, both incorporating and undermining them. The 18th Amendment of 2010 furthered the path toward consociational democratic federalism, by removing the Concurrent Legislative List and delegating powers over seventeen federal ministries to the provinces, with the aim of soothing ethno nationalist pressure that had threatened to break up the state (Mustafa & Sadiq, 2023). But the same constitutional structure has forcefully repudiated the most important consociational feature-the minority veto-and the Senate has been rendered impotent by its failure to vote on money bills, making provincial equality largely a political fiction when it comes to the finances.

The depolarization of ethnicity through the creation of institutions that reward cross-ethnic political appeals, known as the centripetal alternative, has done even worse in the Pakistani

context. Pakistan had not allowed the division of its provinces based on the ethno-linguistic concept, a concept that was politically unfeasible because to do so would have been to defy the claim of the mobilising ideology of the Two-Nation Theory, which was that Pakistan was one indivisible nation of Muslims (Ali, 2021). This difference is brought out in stark contrast by the comparative analysis of federal formation in India and Pakistan. The institutional creation of linguistically homogeneous states in India gave a containment for subnational identities which at the same time buffered the potential secessionist pressures and safely enabled the party system to fragment at the subnational level (Mushtaq & Rehman, 2022). As long-term observation has shown, the result of Pakistan's rejection is the link between the lack of linguistically homogeneous federal units and the rise of secessionist movements which has deterred the formation of a fractionalized party system in Pakistan, and which instead has acted as a marker of ethnic security in India (Ali, 2021).

Perhaps the most important conceptual tool to look at the Pakistani federal crisis is the conversion of ethnic political demands into existential security threats. The Copenhagen School developed the securitization concept by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, which describes a rhetorical elevation of a political issue beyond the scope of regular political contestation, transforming it into an existential danger that calls for action outside the political process, a process that Buzan and Wæver call an "emergency politics" (Buzan et al., 1998). In Pakistan, ethnic mobilization in the Balochistan and Pashtun areas has been removed from the normal political arena where it might be negotiated under the framework of federal bargaining, and redefined as insurgencies or foreign conspiracies. The Pakistani government has consistently described the Baloch insurgency as law and order issue brought on by other countries, rather than as a political movement with clear grievances over resource allocation and autonomy, thereby allowing for military actions and rejecting any domestic political resolution (Akhtar, 2020). This securitized logic has been strengthened by the military establishment, whose operations are largely independent from civilian federal institutions, by viewing ethnic dissension as a threat to national security instead of a challenge to the federal system of governance.

The internal colonialism thesis is the most developed theoretical elaboration of material stresses that redirects focus from cultural recognition to economic exploitation as the main source of centrifugal ethnic movements. This takes a different view of the relationship between the Pakistani center and its partly peripheral ethnic provinces, arguing that this is a re-enactment of colonial dynamics of extraction, where a dominant metropolitan core systematically and effectively drains resources from an inferior periphery, excluding the people by denying them benefits (Sadiq, 2022). There is a wealth of empirical evidence. The province of Balochistan is the most underdeveloped province because it has 44% of the land area of Pakistan, which is estimated to have 80% of the mineral and gas resources, but more than 70% of its population is living in poverty, and the GDP per capita has declined significantly in the period when mega projects have been generating unprecedented wealth from its territory (Rafique & Baloch, 2023). This extractive relationship has become the paradigm of the Sui gas fields, which were in operation since 1955, and which are providing natural gas to the whole country, while the population of the province remains deprived of the economic benefits and also the very gas, in the constitution's architecture in a distribution formula that structurally disadvantages the province of Sui, the largest in the territory, and the smallest in the population (Sadiq, 2022).

Gaps in the existing literature on Pakistan suggest that a lot of literature about ethnic conflict has been security-centric or history-sociology centric, and in the absence of properly considering the working mechanisms of a distressed institution that is the federal constitution. This article goes beyond this, however, in examining how the constitutional architecture, its financial formulae, its powers within the Senate, and its devolutionary clauses are the main arena for contestation, rather than merely providing a background against which ethnic conflict plays out (Mustafa & Sadiq, 2023). The fact that the Baloch insurgency has been ongoing for nearly eight decades and has continued despite any rational idea of foreign sponsorship, and even during a time when it was clearly absent, gives us sufficient evidence that the conflict is fueled by the institutional framework of the state itself and not any foreign machination, which remains systematically ignored in official narratives and much of academic debate (Akhtar, 2020). The theoretical implications are deep. In Pakistan's federated system, ethnic conflict is not a result of primordial hatreds or failure to adequately recognise and accommodate ethnic cultures, but a structural economic and institutional relationship that cannot be solved by the federal constitution which explicitly states that it will remedy the situation and yet simultaneously fails to actually remedy it, creating a perpetual centrifugal dynamic that requires a more focused study of the federal mechanics, rather than historical or security narratives.

### **Problem Statement**

The issue, however, is that Pakistan's federal system is caught in a vicious cycle that as it moves towards unity, it also produces resistance from the ethnic minorities that it wants to eradicate in the country. The literature provides evidence of the state being given the boundaries without paying heed to the ethnic character and then subsequently opposing the ethno-linguistic restructuring of the provinces, thereby rendering the federalism a forced hierarchy. It is an architecture that embraces consociational rhetoric without granting material minority vetoes and that renders the Senate economically impotent and creates extreme material deprivation in the peripheries where it counts in terms of resources. Most importantly, the ongoing "securitization" of ethnic political demands moves ethnic grievances out of constitutional negotiation into a "military" discourse that produces the very radicalization and violence that is offered as justification for continued centralization. What still needs to be done is to consider the operational process of the federal constitution itself, and not just security or historical considerations, as the major institutional driver for this ongoing stress.

### **The Constitutional Architecture**

The constitutional design of Pakistan from its inception till the first 60 years of the statehood systemically gave a centralizing thrust to the system in favor of the federal state by systematically marginalizing the provinces. This centralization was formalised in the 1973 constitution by the enhanced role of the president under the 8th Amendment, the removal of the parity between wings of the parliament, and an upper house of the Senate with reduced financial authority compared to the lower house of the National Assembly, which is elected from the population. One proposal made by the delegates from Balochistan during the constitution making process was for each bill to be passed with the support of at least one third of the members from every federating unit, but this was rejected as a veto would tie up the country to a minority of votes from a few provinces (Frontiers in Political Science 2025). All the opposition, representing the minority ethnic groups, left the assembly in protest, returning only on the last day after the constitution was adopted by just one majority.

The 18th amendment of 2010 was a revolutionary change of an extra ordinary ambition in which a de jure revolution was trying to break the centralist edifice and was trying to reconstitute the federalism of Pakistan on the true principles of devolution. The amendment completely removed the Concurrent Legislative List and transferred seventeen federal ministries to the provinces, radically changing the allocation of sovereign powers between the federation and its provinces. The provincial ownership of natural resources was constitutionally guaranteed in Article 172 Clause 3 and in the Constitution of Namibia Act, 1990 and the Council of Common Interests was reconstituted as a real instrument of intergovernmental coordination (Adeney, 2017). But this vision has been systematically undermined and a deep centralist core within the military establishment has worked hard to turn the devolutionary logic of the amendment against itself. The constitutional promise has not been fulfilled simply due to the lack of political will to put its words into action.

The fiscal federalism fault-line is the one most likely to impact the 18th amendment's promise of devolution, through institutional design. Political and administrative matters were devolved to the provinces, fiscal federalism is still very weak, with provinces having only a part of the tax base, and fiscal vertical equity is low, meaning that administrative autonomy without fiscal sovereignty is simply irrelevant. The National Finance Commission Award's population only criterion of horizontal distribution is a constant source of discontent for Balochistan and KPK, both of which have high developmental needs and important contribution of natural resources of strategic importance. Balochistan contributes to 80% of the country's mineral resources and natural gas while structurally is disadvantaged by the NFC formula in terms of territory and population size (Jaffrelot, 2015). In the decades of articulated grievance, this formula has been essentially unchanged, and shows that devolution is empty words unless there is some form of fiscal power.

Institutionalized, the Senate's subordination becomes the means of constitutionally eroding provincial equality, and thereby undermining the very foundation of federalism's promise. The Senate is a body of provincial equality, in which every federating unit is represented in exactly the same way, irrespective of its population; it was given the unrealisable power of initiating or voting on money bills, which includes the Federal Budget. The one clause that makes the resource-rich, but population-poor provinces structurally voiceless on all consequential economic decisions, ranging from how the national revenues are split to how their natural resources are extracted and monetized. The Baloch and Pashtun Senators may debate cultural policy and administrative issues forever without having a say in the fiscal issues that ultimately shape their provinces' material fate (Shah, 2012). On paper, there is provincial equality, but the central government with its demographic power base in the Punjabi majority has secured unchallenged fiscal hegemony.

#### **The Paradigmatic Case of Federal Failure**

Balochistan is not an exception, but also a reflection of systemic stress that is plaguing the Pakistani federal architecture as a whole. The province's history of conflict with the central government has seen events of forced incorporation in 1948, when the princely state of Kalat was annexed, and five more violent ruptures; in 1948, 1958-59, 1963-69, 1973-77 and the current fourth wave from 2004 to the present day. Every rebellion has faced inordinately violent response from the military instead of political negotiation, and a cycle of grievance and repression has stalled the process of any lasting constitutional resolution (Harrison, 1981). The

federal government has always approached Balochistan's political issues as a law and order issue, which is to be addressed with a military solution, instead of it being a crisis of federal legitimacy, which requires institutional reforms. This pattern suggests that the situation in Balochistan is not an exception but the natural outcome of the centralist constitutional structure, put in place in 1973.

The material basis on which Baloch ethno-nationalism has been built over a generation is the resource curse and internal colonialism. It is the Sui gas fields—these have been operating since 1955, and generate enormous profits for the federal center, while the local population is systematically deprived of economic returns and access to the natural gas itself. While the province of Balochistan is responsible for the 40% natural gas production, the consumption of the gas in the province is negligible, and its Human Development Index rank is always the lowest among all federating units (Kuipers, 2021). Despite the huge wealth generated from the land of Balochistan, poverty rate is higher than seventy percent in several districts, unemployment is high and infrastructure development is far behind the national average. This extreme imbalance in the contribution of resources and the outcomes of development is not due to chance but it is a structural characteristic of a federal fiscal system that favors population over need. The population-only distribution formula used in the National Finance Commission Award, works in a systematic manner, which is to the detriment of the province of Balochistan, which has the largest landmass but the smallest population. This economic structure will provide the rational material prerequisites for ethnic mobilizations, which can be solved only with the help of cultural recognition.

The security approach of the Pakistani state to Baloch issues has been a process that has systematically reduced the likelihood of a political settlement by converting issues which could be up for negotiation, into existential threats. The state regularly refers to the Baloch conflict as a law and order problem, driven by foreign agents, thereby denying any legitimacy to indigenous political and economic motives and political arenas, while authorising military action outside the constitutional framework. The most virulent tool of this security strategy has been the practice of enforced disappearances, in which thousands of Baloch activists, students and political workers have been kidnapped by security forces and detained without any legal process, in incommunicado conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The military-backed development through Southern Command or other security structures, instead of civilian administration, also compounds the sense of trust deficit, as if Balochistan were an occupied territory and not an equal partner in the federation. This has been further heightened by the establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its end-point at Gwadar, which adds an extra level of strategic value while also neglecting to involve the province in consultation and consent, thus cementing the idea that local resources and geography will be used for the benefit of the nation without the province being meaningfully consulted or involved in decision-making or in the benefits the project brings.

The course being followed is a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the state's own activities enable just what it is trying to prevent, namely the collapse. Nationalism as a doctrine of denial of political autonomy and dignified sharing of resources has been the major recruitment agency for the secessionist fringe, which otherwise would have been politically marginal (Siddiqi, 2012). Delegitimization is more effective by the federal state blocking the constitutional avenue that gives citizens to voice their complaints and pressing for solutions to their problems, when

politicians are arrested and disappear, and when resources are squandered on the outside while poverty is exacerbated within. The threat to integrity does not come from an identity of Baloch but from the failure to accommodate the legitimate claims for autonomy and equity, as part of the federal system, by the Baloch. The remedy is to reject the notion of a "secure" state and accept the need to negotiate politically, knowing that national integrity must be achieved through consent and proven by a fair distribution of resources and political power..

### **The Urban-Rural Ethnic Faultline**

The federal stress in Pakistan is not just reflected in the tensions between the federal government and the provinces; it is also seen in the similarly perilous interprovincial ethnic cleavages which have been all too evident in Sindh between the Muhajirs and the Sindhis and have led to decades of violence and political turmoil. The partition division of the population, which saw the displacement of some 1.2 million Urdu speakers to urban centers of Sindh, had laid the foundation of a socio-geographic divide that would become a key political fault-line in the state in the coming decades. Tensions erupted between the Sindhis and Urdu-speakers during Ashura proceeding and turned violent in the country, followed by a provincial language bill that was viewed by Urdu-speakers as a bill to marginalise their mother tongue and led to riots that killed many and created a longstanding pattern of mutual suspicion that has never been resolved, with the fighting spreading across Karachi and Hyderabad (Hussain, 2016). The province thus became a laboratory of a new kind of failure of the federal government, the failure to ensure the management of majority-minority relations within a federating unit when the majority has taken over the institutions designed to protect everyone.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement, which has consolidated from a linguistic recognition group to a disciplined political party, now run by the Muhajir community in Karachi and Hyderabad, is a result of institutionalization of the Muhajir grievance within this fractured space. The movement began with material changes rather than with primordial ethnic consciousness, and the changes which most affected the economic security of urban Muhajirs were the nationalisation policies which disturbed the industries and educational institutions in which many Urdu speakers had invested their lives. With economic control becoming loosened, political grievance was becoming more hardened, and identity was increasingly becoming a platform for seeking access to state jobs, contracts, housing and municipal resources in an increasingly competitive space (Bangwar, 2025). The party's persistent demand of a separate province of Muhajir, put forward at the times of mobilizations when the MQM declared its push for new administrative units, was an attempt to shift away from the perceived 'Sindhi majori'arian rule of the provincial assembly and to get autonomy over the urban centers that produce most of the economic activity in Sindh but which are allegedly ignored by the provincial government dominated by rural people in the party's narrative (Akhtar, 2016). This is a structural demand that the current federal system of government cannot be addressed with regular political give-and-take.

The government's quota system based on province of origin has been the main institutional structure which has created a zero-sum competitive conflict between the two communities, Muhajir and Sindhi, around material resources in government jobs and higher education. The quota system was originally a means of redressing the imbalance in public sector jobs in rural areas of Pakistan's Sindh province, but it soon turned into an inflexible identity marker of belonging that drove both communities to compete for an ever smaller number of jobs, jeopardizing their shared economic interests. This system denied chances to meritorious urban

Muhajir candidates but scholarly research revealed that an appreciable number of seats assigned to urban Sindh did not get filled, indicating that many meritorious Muhajir candidates were also opting out of the job in the government sector in favour of the private sector (Siddiqi, 2020). However, the symbolic dimension of the quota system, which is used as a symbol of exclusion, has played a much more political role than its real impact on demography, as it has given birth to a continuous narrative of grievances, which the MQM has successfully exploited for cementing the Muhajir identity consciousness. The system helps to show how federal systems that are meant to help reduce differences can paradoxically increase them.

As the economic hub of the country that contributes to a significant share of the country's revenue, Karachi mirrors the federal tensions on a micro level as the state's inability to control multi-ethnic urbanism is directly reflected in threats to national economic security. The city has also seen catastrophic outbreaks of violence, such as the riots between the Mohajirs and the Pashtuns in the 1980s and the Mohajir-Sindhi riots of the same time, each of which has solidified the identities and territorial staking which all contribute to this conflict (Siddiqi, 2020). The 18th Amendment, though granting powers to provinces, did not ensure further devolution of powers to empowered local governments, and the situation where the provincial ministers are exercising control over powers that are only supposed to be local is described as poor devolution of funds and functionaries to the city (Rizvi, 2025). The federal stress is not simply a side issue; it is a disease attacking the core of the state's material capabilities, as the constitutional issues has been raised by recurring calls to put Karachi under federal control or make it a separate province which are constitutionally problematic and yet is indicative of the real institutional vacuum where neither any existing tier of government has been able to control the metropolis.

### **Reconceptualization of National Integrity**

As a result, the trans-provincial ethnic mobilization in KP and Balochistan is a challenge to the traditional territorial federal model of Pakistan articulating demands that are not based on secessionist ideologies but on constitutional rights and the end of impunity of the security state. This mobilization is a call for inclusion in the state, unlike earlier ethnic mobilizations that were promoting separation. The sustained focus on constitutional redresses and peaceful civil society action places this activism clearly in the democratic tradition, but the state's reaction has still been in the familiar vein of securitized action (Shah, 2021). The continuing state policy to view ethnic political assertion as a problem of law and order and not of federal governance and governmental processes, is indicative of the structural inability of the centralist state apparatus to accommodate demands that are expressed not by force, but through the constitution.

The Seraiki demand for a separate province in South Punjab throws a new light on another equally serious economic tension that has been simmering in the province for more than four decades, despite being officially supported in the political arena. The idea of establishing new provinces from the southern districts of Punjab has been supported by various political parties at different times, but the province has yet to be established (Javaid & Rashid, 2023). The unwillingness of the Lahore provincial elites to give away land and administration is stark, despite the presence of the constitutional provisions for provincial reorganisation. They have been dismayed that parties use periods of political opportunity to introduce provincial bills instead of a clear intention to do so, and have observed a growing crisis of federal credibility with peaceful constitutional processes continually blocked.

Climate change and increasing water scarcity pose a future stressor that could grow to be the most significant federal conflict to date, especially in relation to ethnic territoriality. The declining flow of the Indus has rendered water distribution, as per the terms of the 1991 Water Accord, a matter of life and death for Sindh, against the backdrop of the upstream Punjab (Mustafa, 2022). The expected decrease in water availability over the coming decades due to reduced glacial melt and irregular monsoons, and the current allocation mechanism are insufficiently institutionally flexible to handle a scarcity of water without sparking conflicts between provinces. The ethnic aspect of this hydrological crisis magnifies its potential for destruction and will intensify all other existing divisions and result in new conflicts that cannot be resolved by existing federal institutions.

The only sustainable solution to the federal tensions in Pakistan is the abandonment of the state's traditional focus on a notion of national unity as an undivided entity and the rethinking of Pakistan as an ethnic contract between equal partners. In this context, Pakistan is a nation, not one in terms of nationhood, but one as a nation that is committed to a just and equitable federalist state where ethnic identities are strong and secure (Adeney, 2017). This reconceptualization of national integrity is not one of repression by centralization, but of peoples' voluntary, self-given adherence to a constitutional order which enables their collective flourishing.

### **Conclusion**

The evidence gathered throughout this analysis shows that the federal stress is not a shortcoming of Pakistan's constitutional system, but a definite part of the system that has been built to quell the very ethnic diversity it was supposed to serve. The constitutional vision of coordinated federalism has been progressively turned into a tool of ethnic domination through the majoritarian imposition of the 1973 constitution over the objections of minority provincial representatives, to the continued financial oppression of resource-rich but population-poor provinces through the National Finance Commission Award. In essence, this was a moment of real constitutional creativity, an insight that the old centralism was not working, and that devolution was the only way towards federal stability. But its failure to materialize, blocked by an entrenched centralist thinking in both civilian and military circles, has turned the amendment into a statement on "political feasibility" and not "political achievement. The tragedies of Balochistan and Sindh are a lesson in this apparent failure, showing that armed insurrections by a minority over access to resources and urban-rural ethnic warfare over quotas and political power are symptoms of the same disease. The federal state is not a neutral forum between equals but the instrument of particular ethnic interests, and this destroys the legitimacy of national institutions much better than can any separatist propaganda.

The future lies in a rethinking of the concept of national integrity in an exceedingly diverse polity. The state needs to break from its past traditions of imposing a uniform identity and national community upon Pakistan's people and must instead take steps to envision a Pakistan that is an ethnic covenant, a voluntary association of different ethnic communities united by a shared purpose, not a common culture, but a commitment to a constitutional order that will ensure their collective prosperity. This reconfiguration requires concrete institutional changes: the real empowerment of the Senate in fiscal law-making, the reorganization of the National Finance Commission Award, taking into account more factors than population, the establishment of new provinces that meet with the legitimate ethno-territorial demands and the de-militarization of

ethnic politics by discarding the security paradigm for political negotiation. This change is not just desirable, but necessary, given the new pressures of trans-provincial ethnic mobilization and the threat water scarcity poses to livelihoods. It is neither a fantasy nor a pipe dream that a federal Pakistan with robust and secure ethnic identity, with equitable access to resources and with an ability to turn diversity from enemy to ally can be achieved. It's the only way to avoid the gradual deterioration that the status quo assures. Pakistan is not choosing between federalism and national integrity it is choosing between a federalism of true partnership which regenerate integrity through consent, and a federalism of hierarchical domination which destroy integrity through coercion. The history of the world is no longer open to interpretation when it comes to the road to national salvation.

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