



## ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page#. 4358-4370

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17213919) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17213919)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17213919)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17213919>**Ethnic Resurgence in Pakistan and Challenges for the Federation****Naimat Ullah Khan**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The Pakistani federation faces fundamental threat due to the continued resurgence of ethnic nationalism especially in Balochistan and Sindh. This Article argues that such emergence is not a historical anomaly, but the direct result of the structural failure of Pakistan's centralized federal system to live up to its constitutional promises of provincial autonomy and mechanism of equitable resource sharing. Using a qualitative comparative case study method, the research examines the different but interlinked movements in the two provinces in the post-2000 period - a period marked by the meaningful but flawed 18th Constitutional Amendment. Anchored in a theoretical framework that blends asymmetric federalism, federal bargain and grievance-based theory, the study shows the grievances of Balochistan with resource exploitation and political marginalization have manifested itself in a violent secessionist insurgency, while the grievances of Sindh over water rights and cultural preservation have developed into a constitutional autonomist movement. The papers collectively show that the gap between the promise of the 18th Amendment and its realization, in the face of a state response, characterized by securitization in most cases, has violated the federal compact and exacerbated ethnic tensions. Moreover, the state's inflexible, one-size-fits-all approach has contributed to instability rather than to finding solutions to it. The paper concludes that long-term federal cohesion will depend upon a genuine recreation of the federal bargain which goes beyond nominal concessions to a genuinely pluralistic and asymmetric model of long-term accommodation for different ethnic aspirations through effective political and fiscal devolution.*

**Keywords:** Ethnic Resurgence, Pakistani Federalism, Balochistan Conflict, Sindhi Nationalism, 18th Amendment, Resource Distribution, Provincial Autonomy.

**Introduction**

The state of Pakistan was constituted in 1947 out of a political project which premised religious nationalism as the prime unifying force between the Muslim majority territories in British India. However, this ideological basis was immediately confronted with the complex and long-standing realities of an overwhelmingly multi ethnic society. Generic nation was an amalgam of various nationalities, which included the Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch and others such as the Saraiki and Urdu-speaking Muhajirs, who each had their own rich historical narrative, linguistic repertoire and territorial attachments (Jaffrelot, 2015). It was thus immensely challenging to

build up a unified nation-state out of this mosaic. The initial phase of the state, dominated by a centralizing spirit that aimed at homogenizing the nation, inexorably and usually conflating it with Punjabi and Muhajir cultural hegemony, had marginalized less ethnocultural groups. As scholars such as Waseem (2018) have theorised this dynamic had produced a "dominant province" syndrome whereby the demographic and bureaucratic weight of Punjab was seen to be pushing national policy for its own ends. The basic crisis of this model came to a head with the secession of East Pakistan in 1971 and that became a great testament to the dangers of ignoring ethno-linguistic aspirations. Whilst the Constitution of 1973 marked a partial shift towards a more accommodative federalism, the charter's principles of provincial autonomy were regularly violated by extended periods of military rule and an enduring culture of centralization which thus set up a historical pattern of grievance, which still influences the country's political landscape (Adeney, 2012).

In the 21st century, this historical pattern has evolved into a potent ethnic resurgence, a persistent and renewed assertion of identity that directly questions the legitimacy and structure of the Pakistani federation. This resurgence is not a monolithic force but manifests in distinct movements with specific grievances, yet united by a common demand for a renegotiated federal contract. This article focuses on two of the most critical and enduring manifestations: the ongoing Baloch insurgency and the enduring Sindhi nationalist movement. In Balochistan, the conflict has escalated into a violent insurgency, fueled by a profound sense of political and economic alienation. Grievances center on the perceived predatory exploitation of the province's vast natural resources, particularly natural gas, which activists argue benefits the national exchequer while leaving the local population in poverty and underdevelopment (Siddiqi, 2022). This economic discontent is compounded by a history of political marginalization and a heavy-handed security response, characterized by allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, which have further entrenched anti-state sentiments (Grare, 2023). Concurrently, in Sindh, a more institutionalized but equally potent nationalist movement persists, articulating grievances over the control and distribution of water resources from the Indus River, concerns regarding demographic changes, and a consistent demand for the full implementation of constitutional autonomy (Channa, 2023). These movements, though differing in strategy and intensity, represent a fundamental challenge to the state's authority and its narrative of national integration.

This article contends that the ethnic resurgence in Balochistan and Sindh is a direct consequence of the failure of Pakistan's centralized federal model to honor constitutional commitments to provincial autonomy and equitable resource sharing, a failure that poses a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy and long-term cohesion of the federation. The analysis will focus specifically on the post-2000 period, a timeframe selected for its critical importance. This era encompasses the restoration of democratic governance, the enactment of the landmark 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 which was intended to address historical grievances by devolving power to the provinces and the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a mega-project that has intensified debates over resource distribution and provincial rights. The scope of this study is deliberately delimited to the cases of Balochistan and Sindh. These two provinces are examined as critical exemplars of the federal challenge, representing a spectrum of responses from violent secessionism to political autonomism. By conducting a comparative analysis of these two cases, this article aims to provide a nuanced understanding of

how the central state's failure to uphold its federal bargain fuels instability, threatening the very foundations of the Pakistani state.

### **Literature Review**

The scholarly discourse on managing plural societies provides essential theoretical frameworks for understanding Pakistan's ethnic dynamics. A central debate revolves around the motives for ethnic mobilization, pivoting between *grievance-based* and *opportunity-based* theories. Grievance theorists, such as Cederman, Weidmann, & Gleditsch (2011), argue that collective action is primarily driven by perceived injustices, including political exclusion, economic discrimination, and cultural marginalization. This perspective is highly relevant to the Pakistani context, where narratives of resource alienation and political disenfranchisement are potent mobilizing forces. Integrative federalism, often associated with the Indian model, aims to dilute ethnic identities by creating states that are not exclusively based on ethnicity. Accommodative federalism, as seen in countries like Canada or Belgium, explicitly recognizes distinct groups and grants them territorial autonomy. Scholars like Adeney (2012) have persuasively argued that Pakistan has historically vacillated between a centralizing unitary impulse and a reluctant, asymmetrical accommodative model, creating a system that acknowledges diversity in theory but often suppresses it in practice. This theoretical tension between grievance and opportunity, and between integration and accommodation, provides the essential analytical lens through which Pakistan's specific federal challenges must be examined.

The historical trajectory of ethnic politics in Pakistan is well-documented, revealing a persistent pattern of centralization provoking regional resistance. The foundational crisis was the language movement in East Bengal, where the imposition of Urdu as the sole national language immediately after independence ignited a struggle for linguistic and cultural rights that ultimately culminated in Bengali secessionism (Oldenburg, 2010). This early precedent established a template for center-province conflict. In the post-1971 era, ethnic discontent shifted to other regions. The scholarly work on Balochistan, notably by Siddiqi (2022), details a history of repeated insurgencies (1973-77, 2004-to present) triggered by the state's abrogation of provincial autonomy and its exploitative approach to the region's natural resources. The conflict is analyzed not merely as a law-and-order issue but as a nationalist struggle against internal colonialism. Similarly, the scholarship on Sindh, exemplified by Channa (2023), traces the roots of Sindhi nationalism to disputes over water distribution, demographic changes due to migration, and an enduring sense of cultural and political subordination. The violent Sindhi-Muhajir conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s in urban centers like Karachi, analyzed by Khan (2021), further illustrate how state policies of ethnic arbitrage and the manipulation of local identities exacerbated tensions, creating enduring fissures within the province. This body of historical literature firmly establishes that ethnic mobilization in Pakistan is not a recent anomaly but a recurrent feature stemming from a flawed state-building process that has consistently failed to construct an inclusive national narrative or a genuinely power-sharing federal structure.

A significant turning point in this historical narrative was the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010, which has since become a focal point of academic debate. Hailed by many as a landmark achievement of consensus politics, the amendment aimed to rectify historical grievances by abolishing the concurrent legislative list, thereby devolving significant powers to the provinces, and renaming the NWFP to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in recognition of ethnic identity. Proponents, such as Waseem (2018), argue that it represents the most serious effort to

restructure the federation along authentically federal lines, enhancing provincial ownership over sectors like health, education, and agriculture. However, a more critical strand of scholarship highlights the amendment's significant discontents and limitations. A major critique centers on implementation gaps; as Zaidi (2021) notes, the transfer of powers has been hampered by bureaucratic inertia, a lack of provincial capacity, and the persistent influence of federal agencies. The most profound criticism, however, concerns fiscal federalism. The work of Pasha (2022) demonstrates that while the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award was a progressive step, it failed to incorporate critical indicators like poverty and revenue generation, leaving unresolved the fundamental issue of vertical and horizontal resource distribution. Furthermore, the central government's retention of control over key areas such as macro-economic policy and, crucially, the management of water resources through federal agencies, continues to be a source of contention, particularly for Sindh (Channa, 2023). Thus, the academic consensus is shifting to view the 18th Amendment as an incomplete revolution a necessary but insufficient condition for federal stability.

Despite this rich body of scholarship, a discernible gap exists in the literature. Numerous studies provide excellent in-depth analyses of individual ethnic movements, such as the Baloch insurgency or Sindhi nationalism, and a separate set of works evaluates the constitutional and fiscal architecture of the 18th Amendment. However, there is a scarcity of comparative research that systematically links the *contemporary resurgence* of these distinct movements to the "specific political and fiscal context created in the post-18th Amendment era". While historical grievances are well-charted, the ways in which the promises and shortcomings of this major constitutional reform have shaped the strategies, discourses, and intensity of Baloch and Sindhi nationalism in the last decade remain underexplored. This article seeks to fill this gap. It asks: How have the implementation failures of the amendment, particularly regarding fiscal autonomy and resource control, reinvigorated or transformed ethnic demands? By conducting a focused comparative analysis of Baloch and Sindhi nationalism post-2010, this study will provide a novel and timely examination of why constitutional engineering alone has failed to pacify ethnic discontent, offering a more nuanced understanding of the ongoing challenges to the Pakistani federation.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the landmark passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010, which was designed to address long-standing grievances through devolution, Pakistan continues to face a critical crisis of federal trust manifested in the persistent resurgence of ethnic nationalism in Balochistan and Sindh. The central problem is that the constitutional promise of provincial autonomy and equitable resource sharing remains largely unfulfilled due to significant implementation gaps, bureaucratic resistance, and unresolved disputes over fiscal federalism. Consequently, the fundamental political and economic alienation felt by these ethnic groups has not been alleviated but has instead been reconfigured within the post-Amendment context. This failure has exacerbated sentiments of marginalization, fueling both a violent secessionist movement in Balochistan and a potent autonomist struggle in Sindh. These parallel movements pose an existential challenge to the legitimacy, stability, and long-term cohesion of the Pakistani federation by directly contesting the state's authority and the viability of its federal structure.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify and analyze the specific political, economic, and cultural drivers of ethnic resurgence in Balochistan and Sindh in the 21st century.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's federal institutions, particularly the National Finance Commission (NFC) and the Council of Common Interests (CCI), in addressing the core grievances of these regions.
3. To assess the impact of the 18th Amendment on the dynamics of Baloch and Sindhi nationalism.
4. To propose policy-oriented recommendations for a more stable and inclusive federal bargain.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the primary grievances related to resource distribution, political autonomy, and cultural rights that fuel ethnic nationalism in Balochistan and Sindh?
2. How do the strategies and demands of the Baloch insurgent movement differ from those of the mainstream Sindhi nationalist parties, and what does this reveal about the nature of the federal challenge?
3. To what extent has the 18th Amendment succeeded in mitigating ethnic discontent in these two provinces, and what are the key obstacles to its full implementation?
4. What are the implications of the continued resurgence of these movements for the future of Pakistani federalism?

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a comparative case study approach to conduct an in-depth investigation of ethnic resurgence in Balochistan and Sindh. This methodological choice is justified by its suitability for examining complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the distinct yet interconnected challenges each case presents to the Pakistani federation. The comparative framework enables the identification of common patterns, such as grievances stemming from centralization, while also highlighting critical differences in the manifestations and strategies of the respective movements.

The research relies exclusively on qualitative data collection from documentary and secondary sources. Primary data is gathered through rigorous documentary analysis of key legal and policy texts. This includes a critical examination of the Constitution of Pakistan, comparing its provisions before and after the 18th Amendment to assess the scope of devolved powers. Furthermore, official documents such as National Finance Commission (NFC) Award agreements, policy briefs and memoranda related to mega-projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the development of Gwadar Port, and reports from official human rights bodies are analyzed to understand the on-ground implementation of federal commitments and their socio-political impact.

Secondary data is incorporated through a systematic review of existing scholarly literature. This involves synthesizing arguments from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and credible reports from national and international research institutes. This body of literature provides essential historical context, theoretical grounding, and analytical perspectives on ethnic politics and federalism in Pakistan.

The collected data is subjected to a thematic analysis. This process involves a systematic coding of the textual data to identify recurring and significant patterns of meaning, or themes. Key

themes that guide the analysis include, but are not limited to: (1) grievances over natural resource distribution; (2) narratives of political marginalization and disenfranchisement; (3) demands for cultural recognition and linguistic rights; and (4) identified gaps between constitutional autonomy and its practical implementation. By organizing the findings around these emergent themes, the study ensures a structured and analytically robust examination of how the failure of federal accommodation fuels ethnic resurgence.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in a tripartite theoretical framework that integrates the principles of Asymmetric Federalism, the concept of the Federal Bargain, and Grievance-Based Theory. This integrated approach provides a robust analytical lens to dissect the complex dynamics of ethnic resurgence in Pakistan. The theory of Asymmetric Federalism offers a critical departure from the notion of a one-size-fits-all federal model. It posits that stability in multi-national states often requires a flexible approach, where constituent units are granted differing degrees of autonomy and rights based on their distinct historical, cultural, and political circumstances (Burgess, 2022). This framework is particularly apt for Pakistan, where the demands of Balochistan—a vast, sparsely populated region with a history of independent statehood and a brutal insurgency—differ significantly from those of Sindh, with its dense population, ancient civilization, and focus on constitutional autonomy. A symmetric application of federal principles fails to address these nuanced realities. By applying this lens, the study can evaluate whether the Pakistani state's rigid, uniform approach has exacerbated tensions by ignoring the legitimate need for asymmetrical arrangements that could accommodate the unique aspirations and grievances of each province, moving beyond a simplistic binary of unity versus separation.

To understand the consequences of failing to accommodate such diversity, the study employs the concept of the Federal Bargain. This concept, elaborated by scholars like Bednar (2023), frames federalism as an implicit political contract where constituent units cede certain powers to a central government in exchange for guarantees of autonomy, security, and equitable benefit-sharing. The stability of the federation hinges on the perceived fairness and reliability of this bargain. A breach of this agreement—where the center reneges on its promises of autonomy or equitable resource distribution—fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of the union and provides a powerful impetus for disaffection and mobilization. In the Pakistani context, the Federal Bargain was ostensibly renegotiated through the 18th Amendment, which promised a restoration of provincial autonomy. This framework allows for an analysis of how the subsequent implementation deficits, particularly in fiscal transfers and resource control, constitute a breach of this renewed bargain. This breach, in turn, explains the intensification of ethnic nationalism not as mere historical animosity, but as a rational response to a broken political contract, wherein loyalty to the federation is withdrawn as the state fails to uphold its end of the deal.

Finally, to systematically deconstruct the specific catalysts for mobilization, this study utilizes the Grievance-Based Theory of conflict. While opportunity-based theories focus on the means for mobilization, grievance-based theories, as advanced by contemporary conflict analysts like Cunningham (2023), prioritize the motives. This perspective argues that collective action is primarily driven by shared perceptions of injustice relative to other groups. These grievances are typically categorized into three dimensions: economic (e.g., inequitable distribution of resources, poverty, lack of development), political (e.g., exclusion from power, lack of self-determination, human rights abuses), and cultural (e.g., linguistic suppression, threats to identity). This

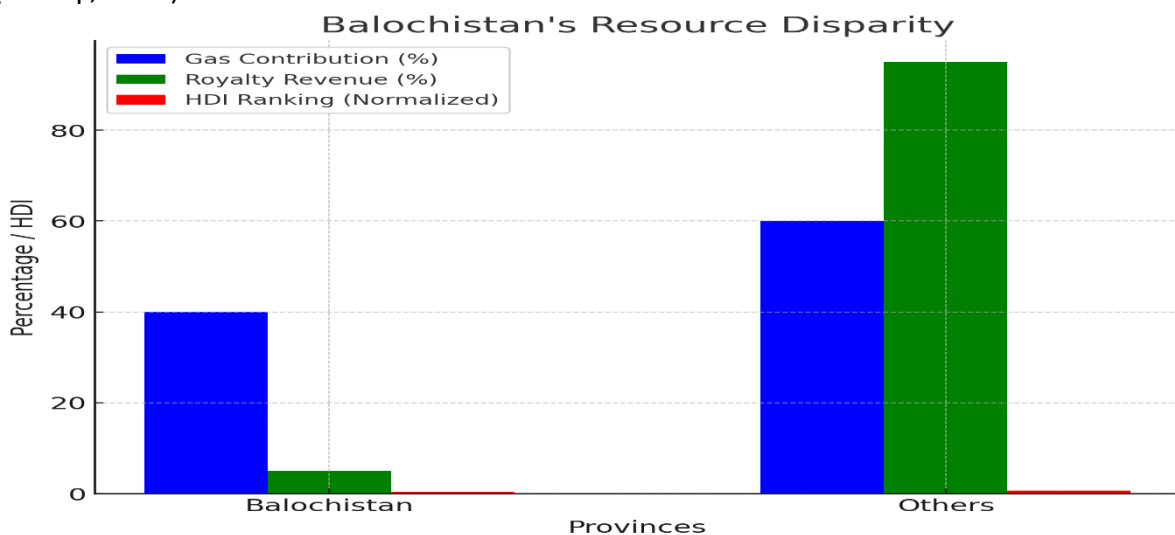
theoretical component provides a structured methodology for analyzing the distinct yet overlapping grievances in Balochistan and Sindh. It moves the analysis beyond vague notions of discontent to a precise examination of how material deprivation in Balochistan (economic grievance), combined with political marginalization and cultural fears in Sindh, fuels resistance. By integrating these three theories, the framework moves from the macro-institutional design (Asymmetric Federalism), to the political-contractual level (Federal Bargain), down to the micro-foundational drivers (Grievance-Based Theory), offering a comprehensive explanation for the persistent challenge ethnic resurgence poses to the Pakistani federation.

**Findings**

The empirical investigation into ethnic resurgence in Balochistan and Sindh reveals two distinct yet fundamentally linked challenges to the Pakistani federation. The findings are structured as a comparative case study, first detailing the specific grievances and manifestations within each province, followed by a cross-case analysis that synthesizes the core commonalities and critical differences.

**Balochistan: The Secessionist Impulse**

The findings in Balochistan paint a picture of profound alienation, where grievances have escalated from political discontent to a potent secessionist impulse. The primary driver is the pervasive perception of colonial-style resource exploitation. Despite producing a significant portion of Pakistan's natural gas since the 1950s, Balochistan remains the country's most impoverished province. As indicated in Figure 1, there is a stark disparity between the province's contribution to the national energy grid and its own energy poverty and socio-economic indicators. Local communities report receiving minimal royalties and witnessing little local development from projects like the Sui gas fields, fostering a narrative of internal colonialism (Siddiqi, 2022).



This economic grievance is compounded by acute political marginalization. The state's strategy has often relied on co-opting a select few tribal elites into a central patronage network, effectively bypassing broader political representation and suppressing mainstream Baloch nationalist parties. This marginalization is exacerbated by the state's dominant security-centric response. The findings highlight that military operations, particularly since 2004, and the widespread phenomenon of enforced disappearances have created a climate of fear and trauma.

As documented by international observers, these actions are not perceived as counter-insurgency but as collective punishment, severing any remaining bonds of trust between the citizenry and the state (Amnesty International, 2023).

Consequently, the political manifestation has undergone a critical shift. Mainstream political activism has been largely supplanted by a fragmented but resilient armed insurgency. The core demand of several prominent insurgent groups, such as the Baloch Liberation Army, is no longer greater autonomy but outright independence. This represents the ultimate challenge to the federation: a complete rejection of the federal bargain and a bid for territorial secession.

**Table 1: Key Grievances and Manifestations in Balochistan**

Grievance Category	Specific Findings	Primary Manifestation
<b>Economic</b>	Disparity in gas revenue share vs. provincial development; lack of local benefits from CPEC/Gwadar.	Grassroots support for insurgency; protests against federal projects.
<b>Political</b>	Elite-centric patronage politics; suppression of nationalist parties.	Erosion of mainstream political space; legitimacy of armed groups.
<b>Security/Human Rights</b>	Military operations; enforced disappearances; extrajudicial killings.	Deep-seated animosity towards state institutions; secessionist sentiment.

**Sindh: The Autonomist Struggle**

In contrast to Balochistan, the ethnic resurgence in Sindh is characterized by an autonomist struggle that operates primarily within the constitutional and political framework of the federation, albeit with increasing intensity. The most potent grievance is the ongoing dispute over water distribution from the Indus River System. Sindhi nationalists and provincial authorities consistently argue that upstream water usage, particularly by Punjab through large-scale dams and link canals, has severely compromised water availability downstream. This is framed not just as an economic issue but as an existential threat to Sindh's agrarian economy and cultural heritage, which is intrinsically linked to the River Indus (Channa, 2023). Figure 2, illustrating the flow of the Indus and the location of major dams, would visually underscore this geopolitical disparity.

**Indus River System and Sindh's Water Concerns**

Tarbela Dam

Indus River Flow

Sindh (Downstream)

Mangla Dam



A second major grievance revolves around demographic concerns and settlement patterns. There is a persistent narrative among Sindhi nationalists of state-sponsored demographic engineering, referring to the continued settlement of non-Sindhi speakers (often Pashtuns and Punjabis) in urban and rural areas, which is perceived as a threat to Sindhi linguistic and cultural dominance. This fuels demands for the implementation of quota systems and controls on migration.

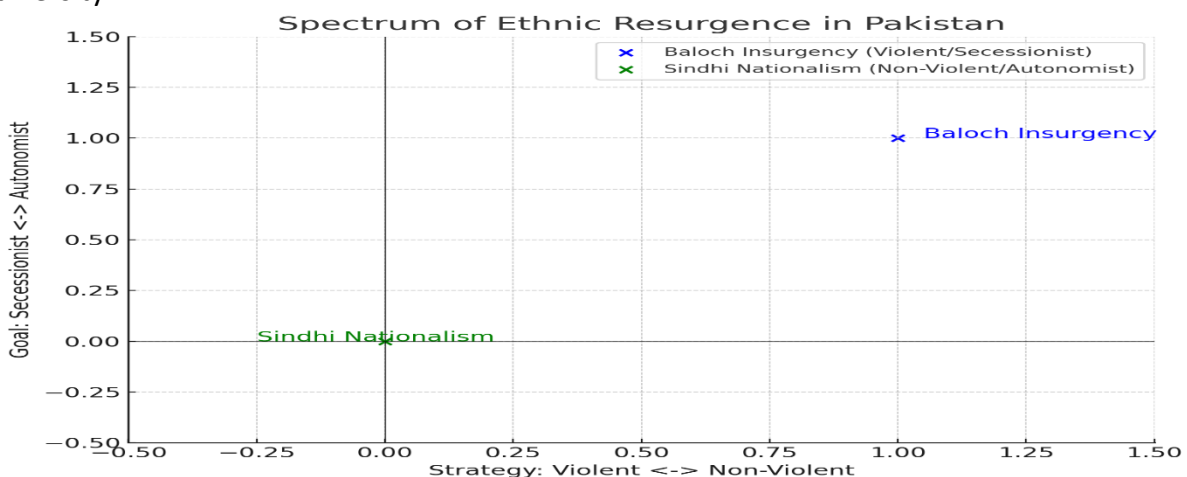
Unlike Balochistan, the manifestation of these grievances is overwhelmingly political and constitutional. Sindhi nationalist parties, such as the Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz, and mainstream parties like the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) when in opposition at the federal level, channel these grievances into demands for the full implementation of the 18th Amendment. The struggle is for a truly autonomous province within Pakistan, not for secession. This includes calls for greater control over resources, the promotion of the Sindhi language, and a more equitable NFC Award.

**Table 2: Key Grievances and Manifestations in Sindh**

Grievance Category	Specific Findings	Primary Manifestation
<b>Economic/Environmental</b>	Perceived inequitable water distribution; control over provincial resources.	Political rallies; legislative battles; media campaigns.
<b>Political/Cultural</b>	Fears of demographic change; protection of Sindhi language and culture.	Advocacy for constitutional autonomy; cultural promotion activities.
<b>Strategic Approach</b>	Grievances channeled through parliamentary politics.	Demands for full implementation of the 18th Amendment; working within the system.

**Cross-Case Analysis: Commonalities and Critical Divergences**

A synthesis of the two cases reveals a foundational commonality: both movements are, at their core, a response to the failure of centralized federalism. Both Balochistan and Sindh share deep-seated grievances regarding the inequitable distribution of natural resources (gas and water, respectively) and a sense of political disenfranchisement at the hands of the federal center. This shared experience points to a systemic flaw in the Pakistani state's approach to managing diversity.



However, the critical divergences in their strategies and ultimate goals are analytically significant. These differences are mapped in Figure 3, which provides a comparative visualization of the two movements along spectra of strategy (violent vs. non-violent) and political goals (secessionist vs. autonomist).

- Strategy: Baloch resistance has been securitized; the state's violent response has been met with a violent, insurgent counter-response. In Sindh, the struggle remains largely politicized, with grievances articulated through assemblies, protests, and legal channels.
- Goals: The most profound difference lies in the end goal. The dominant voice in Balochistan's resurgence is secessionist, seeking a fundamental re-drawing of international borders. In contrast, Sindhi nationalism is overwhelmingly autonomist, seeking a renegotiation of the internal federal contract to create a more confederal arrangement.

This divergence suggests that while the root cause (centralization) is common, the state's differentiated responses all-out military suppression in Balochistan versus political engagement (however contentious) in Sindh have critically shaped the character and intensity of the challenge each movement poses to the federation.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study give a huge hit to the integrated theoretical framework and exposes the failure of the system itself because of the state's denial to adopt Asymmetric Federalism as a concept. Persistent grievances in both Balochistan and Sindh are not just historical relics, but are very much the consequences of a hard and fast one size-fits-all federal model that is out of step with dealing with the depth of diversity in Pakistan. The failure of federal institutions such as National Finance Commission (NFC) and Council of common interests (CCI) lies in this basic design flaw; they both work within a paradigm devoted to uniformity, working against the differentiated accommodation the multi-negative state needs. This analysis reveals a void between the constitutional promise and the difficulties in its implementation, and one of the 18th Amendment is the prime example of such a void. While the amendment was of monumental importance on paper, and formally restored the autonomy of the provinces and territorial entities, implementation has been systematically undermined by bureaucratic inaction, lack of political will on the part of federal bureaucracy, and most crucially, by the uninterrupted emanations of the military establishment into major policy areas, especially security and macro-economics. Consequently, the amendment ends up representing the broken Federal Bargain: the State gave a new contract of autonomy but then ignored it almost unbroken; thus showing the validity of theories about conflict based on grievances by showing to the ethnic groups that joining in the system constitute a fruitless exercise. The distance, then, between constitutional text and reality of the reality of continued centralization is the same distance in which ethnic resentment festers and becomes active resistance.

The role of the Pakistani state, most notably the strong security machinery, has played the major role in determining the nature of this ethnic resurgence. Faced with calls for autonomy, the state's default response has been one of securitization and recentralization, and this has proved to be a catastrophically counterproductive strategy. In Balochistan, the choice to have a complex political grievance presented as a law-and-order issue, best solved by military operations and enforced disappearances, has helped undermine any hope of political dialogue and drawn much

energy to the very secessionist tendency it hoped to suppress. This approach is indicative of a deeply rooted insecurity and a preference for the use of coercion rather than politician control of the situation. Even in Sindh, where the struggle is still in its constitutional form, the state's response has been to frequently wilt the voice of legitimate claim of perception regarding water distribution as well as demographic changes as anti-national viewpoints instead of addressing near the radicalized voices as valid political claims. This securitized way of thinking makes the state an incapable honest broker in the settlement of inter provincial disputes rather a partisan associated with the status quo. Consequently, state action has not been a moderator of discontent, but has been its chief vector and has kept potential political partners from turning into political opponents while ensuring that grievances have hardened into irreconcilable stands. The insistence of the state on a paradigm of centralised security has actually closed the door on the prospects of a peaceful and negotiated federalism, so as to push fights towards more violent and intractable spirals.

The cumulative effects of such dynamics pose a multitude and existential challenge to the Pakistani federation. The most immediate threat is the irreparable eroding of federal trust. When a number of provinces like Balochistan and Sindh view the centre, federal government, as an extractive coercive force and not a protective and enabling force, the very legitimacy of the union is called into question. This crisis of legitimacy is a direct hindrance to national economic development, as instability in resource-rich regions is off-putting investment levels and sticks in mega projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) instead of engines of shared development. Furthermore, this internal fragility brings vulnerability against external manipulation: here, Baloch insurgent groups for example find safe havens and support in neighboring countries, which strongly tend to exploit the internal weaknesses of Pakistan for their own strategic purposes. Perhaps the ominous challenge looming is that of further fragmentation. The ecologic model preferably serves as the blueprint for subsequent discontent. The continuing Siraiki movement and the Hazara movement suggest that lack of ability to accommodate Baloch and Sindhi desires sends a signal to other smaller communities urging them to raise their own demands for separate provinces of the country and thus it may trigger the risk of a spawning cascade of territorial and political SEG.

Skeptics might counter that these ethnic movements represent fringe elements or are primarily puppets of external actors, lacking broad-based support. While it is true that external actors may exploit these conflicts, to attribute their cause to foreign machinations is a profound misdiagnosis. The grievances documented resource alienation, political marginalization, cultural suppression are deeply rooted in decades of domestic policy and are widely held within the respective populations. The massive electoral victories of parties like the PPP in Sindh, which campaigns on autonomist platforms, and the widespread popular sympathy, even if not active support, for the Baloch cause within the province, attest to the mainstream nature of these sentiments. Dismissing them as externally funded fringe activities is a dangerous form of denial that prevents a meaningful address of the underlying issues. The external support is a symptom of the conflict, not its cause; it is the internal failure of the federal bargain that creates the opening for foreign intervention. Therefore, the solution lies not in heightened securitization aimed at external threats, but in a fundamental internal renegotiation of the federal contract to address the legitimate political and economic aspirations of all constituent nationalities, thereby removing the very grievances upon which both internal militancy and external interference feed.

## Conclusion

This article has established that the modern ethnic revival in Balochistan and Sindh is an existential crisis of the federal pact (of Pakistan), which is itself a direct consequence of the state's continued failure to move beyond its centralized majoritarian framework. Using the concepts of asymmetric federalism, the federal bargain, and grievance-based theory, the analysis demonstrates that the grievances that drive these movements are not primordial grudges but sensible reactions to structural political and economic marginalization. Though a constitutional victory in theory, the August 1897 amendment as enforced has turned out to be a paper triumph whose delivery on the ground was frustrated by limited political will, bureaucratic lethargy- and unsolved fiscal structure, leaving all principal needs for autonomy and equity unmet. This has led to a fundamental violation of the federal bargain, where the agreement of the provinces to the federation has deteriorated to a breaking point owing to the failure of the center to live up to its promise to them. While the expressions of this discontent are diametrically different - violent secessionism in Balochistan and constitutional autonomies' in Sindh, the underlying cause of both is perhaps the same state that is unable to negotiate pluralism based on any other set of terms than coercive ones. The state's default approach of securitization of governance, most especially in Balochistan, has only served to heighten the tensions the state wishes to bury under the radar, politicizing the issues from the bottoms of the societies which they barely know into existential confrontations, leaving no room for normalizing peaceful solutions.

Thus, the crisis induced by ethnic nationalism is in the long-term an inevitable point of no return for the Pakistani federation. There is no feasible way to stabilize these conflicts through the existing mix of minimal constitutional concessions and high security which predict continuing domestic instability and will not allow substantive economic development, in lieu of instability and a vacuum, which foreign actors can easily exploit. The solution is not additional cosmetic changes in the form of government, or more coercion, but fundamental changes in the relationship of the state and the nations from which it is formed. This requires a substantive redevelopment from the centered state to a substantive plural federation considering and institutionalizing its internal diversity. In particular, a sincere and brave political discourse is needed to rectify historical grievances, and a proper devolution of power to Sindh that is sensitive to its constitutional autonomy, in Balochistan. The ability of Pakistan to create a national identity, rooted not in enforced uniformity but in a freely chosen and just partnership between its diverse peoples, will determine its future identity as a state. So the choice is merely between a brittle construct held together by unnecessary force to be reckoned with and a resilient federation that is held together by the voluntary agreement of all of its members.

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