

Politicization of Ethnic Identities in Pakistan:

Implications for National Unity and Cohesion

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Suggested Citation:

Ahmed, M. S. (2025). Politicization of Ethnic Identities in Pakistan: Implications for National Unity and Cohesion. *Journal of Pakistan Administration*. 46(2). 158–187.

Received: July 15, 2025/ Accepted: October 22, 2025/ Published: December 1, 2025.

Abstract

This study explores the factors that led to the politicisation of ethnic identities in Pakistan and the effects on the country's social and national cohesion. Ethnic Diversity has been characteristic of the demographic fabric of Pakistan; Punjabi, Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtuns have contributed significantly to Pakistan's political, social, and cultural canvas. Given the path-dependent nature of the topic of politicisation of Pakistan's ethnic identities, the research paper identifies some critical movements like the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the Baloch nationalist movement and rights movements like 'The Baloch Yakjehti Council' and Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). The research paper elucidates how political elites exploit and hijack the grievances of the masses and give them an ethnic colour to strengthen their political positions. They exacerbate social-political cleavages. This study uses qualitative research approach based on quantitative data and recognises the limitations of relying on secondary data. It strengthens the conclusions presented in the research, informing mechanisms of ethnic identity mobilisation and policy recommendations for a more inclusive political climate. The study concludes that in tackling ethnic grievances, there needs to be an understanding of the structural causes, which include equitable resource mobilisation and distribution, solving the matrix of political, civil, and military representation, and fiscal and administrative decentralisation through local governments as fundamental

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in the quest of national integration in the long run.

Keywords: *Ethnic identity politicization, National unity, Pakistan, Ethnic grievances, Political manipulation.*

1. Introduction

Political ethnicity in Pakistan has been at the centre of the country's political development for a long time. Landscape with its direct consequences for the integrity of the nation and the cohesion of society, Pakistan's ethnicity, including Punjabis, Sindhis, Balochi, Pathans and others, plays a vital role in influencing other people's political, social and cultural lives. However, this diversity has been used for political objectives, where ethnic groups have been used to disguise 'Rights movements' or with political campaigns such as elections. Such actions have stirred ethnic animosities and hostilities and become potentially menacing to the territorial integrity of national unity. Ethnic identification used in political power has broken down the cohesiveness among the people, resulting in increased ethnical cleavages based on ethnicity (Jaffrelot, 2002).

Ethnic diversity is one of the most characteristic features of the Pakistani population. It is holding together Punjabi, Sindhi, Baloch, Pashtun and many other small ethnic groups in its fold. The country offers a more complex demographic structure, with people propounding their identities by compartmentalizing them into different groups. Each group expresses perceptions of each region rooted to cultural, linguistic, or historical features that define the collective national conscience. Paradoxically, it causes great schisms in the weave of national cohesion instead of unifying factor (Talbot, 1998).

The emergence of ethnic politics in Pakistan's political domain started almost right from the country's formation in 1947. Sub-Nationalist ideologies are used in politics to form a unique national brand of identity, usually Indigenous ethnic groups, especially in issues pertaining to language, resource distribution, and representation. Ethnicity in Pakistan tends to be path dependent with historical, cultural antecedents, linguistic schism forming a collective memory. While these identities contribute to the social fabric, their politicisation has transformed them into a tool of political influence, further entrenching societal divisions and fostering an environment where ethnic loyalty surpasses national unity (Martin, 2016).

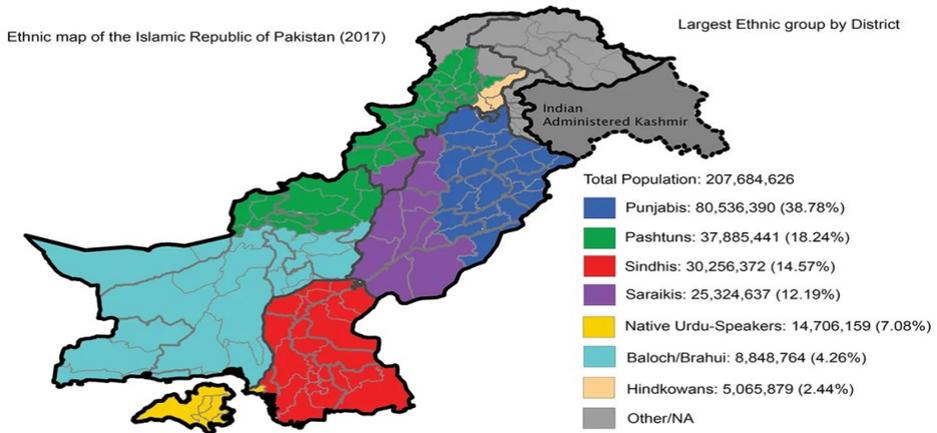
Pakistan's ethnic politicisation dates to the early years after independence, especially the division brought about by Urdu's imposition as the official language. The imposition of Urdu as the national language in the earliest years post-independence was also viewed as attempt at denying a cultural identity to other languages apart from Urdu, which in turn gave rise to ethnic antagonism, especially in East Pakistan, culminating in the form of Bangladesh crisis which led to its secession in the year 1971 (Jalal, 1995). The dangers of marginalising ethnic identities were brought to light by East Pakistan's secession in 1971,



mainly when political power was concentrated in the hands of one group while disregarding the interests of others (Jaffrelot, 2002). Violent movements like the Baloch insurgency and ethnically based political organisations like the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) highlight the continuous difficulty in resolving ethnic concerns in a politically charged setting. The threat to national unity grows more serious if ethnic identities are still used for political ends (Harrison, 1981).

Figure 1

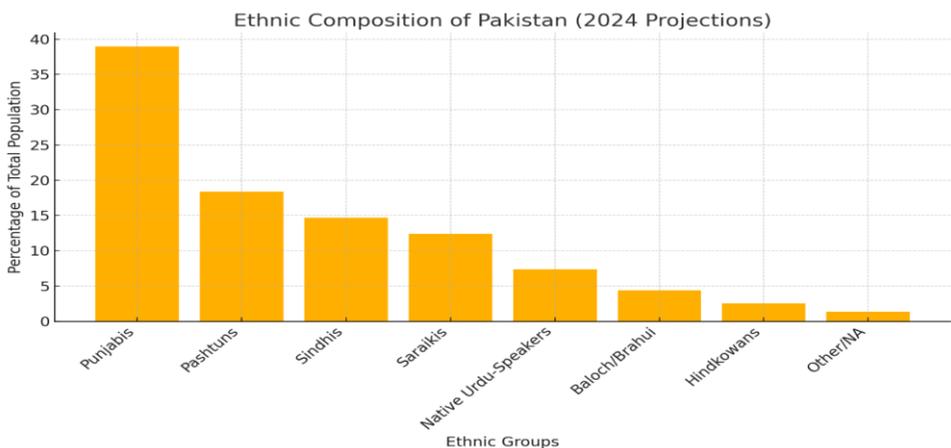
Ethnic map of Islamic republic of Pakistan



Source: Reddit.com

Figure 2

Ethnic map of Islamic republic of Pakistan



Source: (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2024)

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This study examines the implications of politicising ethnic identities in Pakistan, explicitly emphasising its effects on national unity and social cohesion. In this research, examining how political actors instrumentalised ethnic identity to serve their proprietary political ends was added to existing knowledge on the eventual consequences on the nation. Further, the study emphasised the policy interventions aimed at preventing the escalation of ethnic conflicts and promoting the feelings of national identity among the representatives of different ethnic groups. It analyses how political stakeholders have mobilised ethnopolitical sentiments to gain political advantage and looks at such actions' social and political consequences.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The politicization of ethnic identities in Pakistan has significantly fractured the nation's social fabric, with various ethnic groups experiencing marginalization or political exploitation (Hashmi, 2014). The core problem arises when political actors manipulate these identities for their own power gains, resulting in heightened tensions, protests, and, in some instances, insurgencies (Horowitz, 1985). This manipulation has exacerbated ethnic tensions, deepened the political marginalization of minority groups, and intensified socio-economic disparities (Cohen, 2004). Despite efforts to promote national cohesion, the continued prevalence of ethnic-based politics undermines the formation of a unified national identity, hindering the country's progress towards a stable and inclusive political framework. This research aims to investigate the root causes, consequences, and potential solutions to the politicization of ethnic identities in Pakistan.

1.3. Scope of the Study

The study examines how Pakistani ethnic identities have historically been politicised, emphasising the political tactics that stir up ethnic feelings. Essential case studies discussed in the subject matter include the emergence of the MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement) in Sindh. This political party represents the Muhajir community, the Baloch violence, a series of conflicts between the Baloch nationalists and the Pakistani government, and the role of the Pashtun nation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province with a significant Pashtun population. The study also investigates the relationship between ethnic identity politicisation and movements for provincial self-governance, which explores the roles played by political parties, governmental organisations, and extra-constitutional actors in these processes. By analysing these cases in this study, light was shed on efforts as to how attempts to forge a unified national identity are frustrated by the politics of ethnic identity. It amplifies calls for formulation and implementation of policies that address issues of ethnic diversity and thus help identify the ethnic conflicts in Pakistan and address the root causes of such problems.



2. Literature Review

The division of the Indian subcontinent and colonialism are tied to one another. In Pakistan. Political anthropologists have noted that whenever ethnic and religious identities have been politicized, it has been brought about by social engineering, primarily through the divide-and-rule policy spearheaded by the British colonial masters. With Pakistan's independence, the state inherited entrenched ethnic atmosphere where regional and national loyalties are often subsumed by ethnic emotions. These differences were only made worse by the central government's attempts to foster, by force, a single national identity, frequently at the expense of regional and ethnic ambitions (Talbot, 1998).

Although Pakistan is not alone in the politics of ethnic identities in the comity of nations, the nation's historical and geopolitical circumstances make it an interesting subject for a case study. Political elites frequently employ ethnic identities as instruments to consolidate power, especially in states with diverse populations (Horowitz, 1985). In Pakistan, this has been evident since the early years of independence; political leaders' preference for ethnic groups during Pakistan's early years of independence exacerbated divides between the dominant and underprivileged ethnicities (Jaffrelot, 2002).

Pakistan's ethnic polarization has a complex historical background that includes colonial legacies, geographical differences, and socioeconomic gaps that have fuelled ethnic grievances for many years. This issue dates to Pakistan's early years when governance institutions and policies did not fairly serve the needs and ambitions of all ethnic communities (Bose & Jalal, 2022). These sentiments of marginalization have been made worse over time by regional differences, economic inequality, and uneven growth, which have prompted calls for more autonomy and representation (Khan, 2021).

Some of the observable events that each contributed to the emergence of ethnic politics in Pakistan can be used to map the overall development of ethnic politics in Pakistan. Ethnic identities have been knit to seek political power ((Ziring, 1997). It is evident in ethnic-based political organizations such as Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Baluchistan, National Party (BNP), Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), and to some extent, major political parties have also limited their political capital and focus to a single federating unit. The examples include Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) to Punjab, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to Sindh and Pakistan Tehreek -e Insaf (PTI) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

While revisiting ethnic marginality, the MQM successfully rallied the Muhajir minority in Sindh, especially in urban areas like Karachi and Hyderabad. Similarly, Baloch resistance groups complaints have continued and have detached themselves from the mainstream politics. Ethnic-based activity can be credited for the emergence of the MQM in Sindh province, in which the Muhajir group wanted more political representation by using their shared identity

(Martin, 2016).

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), on the other hand, instead, concentrates on perceived injustices, particularly related to military operations in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) is a relatively new and defiant group (Verkaaik, 2018). PTM brings a different view to the analysis of Pakistani peripheral nationalism by stressing a phenomenon of ethnic-based political mobilization. It also puts interesting historical context as a backdrop for the development of PTM. PTM focus on structural prejudices pervading the Pashtun society and is in line with the theories on internal colonialism and ethnic oppression (Ahmed & Khan, 2022). However, despite their evocative and firebrand hate speech against the military establishment, it has so far operated within the confines of the constitution of Pakistan and its threshold has not crossed the separatist or militant tendencies.

A study of ethnic identity politics in Baluchistan revealed that ethnic identity politics are a consequence of the region's political and economic exclusion or peripheralization and are state-sponsored (Harrison, 1981). The perceived injustices coupled with historical roots have contributed to the radicalisation of the ethnic identity of Baloch nationalists.

Ethnicity and politics are not limited to Pakistan only. They are intertwined issues that have affected political spheres globally. When minority groups in multiethnic states want more autonomy, acknowledgement, or representation, ethnic identities are seen to be frequently politicized. Political marginalization, socioeconomic inequality, and historical grievances contribute to ethnic-based political mobilization. Political movements to correct these inequities are more likely to be formed by ethnic communities who feel underprivileged (Gurr, 1993).

Cases from around the world, like Sudan, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia, show how disastrous politicized ethnic identities can be if they are not stopped. In many cases, civil wars and violent conflicts resulted from the mobilization of ethnic groups along polarizing lines. Although it has occurred in a different historical and geopolitical setting, Pakistan's ethnic politicization can be understood within a comparative perspective provided by this global context (Kaufman, 2015).

There are numerous instances in South Asia when political systems have been significantly shaped by ethnic diversity. India's federal style of government, which gives its states a great deal of autonomy, has allowed it to accept its enormous ethnic diversity. Ethnic communities have been able to participate in the larger national framework while retaining some degree of political and cultural autonomy. Sri Lanka's inability to use political means to address Tamil issues resulted in a protracted civil war that did not conclude until 2009 (DeVotta, 2004).



Inadequate representation is one of the main complaints of Pakistan's ethnic communities. The most populous and economically significant province Punjab has historically dominated the political, economic and administrative structure of the state. Smaller provinces like KP, Baluchistan and Sindh, which believe their political and economic interests are frequently disregarded, have accused Punjab of dominating the country (Waseem, 2010).

Muhajir population in Sindh felt excluded from the province's political and economic processes, leading to the rise of the MQM in that region. The party gained considerable political strength by using ethnic identification as a mobilizing tactic, especially in cities like Karachi, where the Muhajir population is substantial. However, this also resulted in heightened ethnic tensions, especially between the Pashtun and Sindhi communities, which fuelled violence and instability in the area (Levesque, 2013).

Since external actors have frequently backed ethnic-based insurgencies as part of more extensive geopolitical strategies, ethnic politics in Pakistan are not just a domestic matter. Afghanistan has long encouraged Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan, primarily when both nations were allied with rival superpowers in the Cold War. Afghan government have refused to acknowledge the Durand Line as an international border, which divides the Pashtun communities of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pashtun complaints in Pakistan have been exacerbated by this, especially considering the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), which has demanded that Pashtun rights be given more attention (Rashid, 2017).

India has also been accused of aiding and abetting ethnic insurgencies in Pakistan, specifically in Baluchistan. Pakistani officials have frequently charged that RAW, India's intelligence agency, is supporting Baloch separatists financially and logistically as part of a larger plot to destabilize Pakistan. The arrest of Indian Agent Kulboshan Jadev by Pakistan, who has also confessed of fuelling insurgency in Baluchistan, is a case in point. These outside influences draw attention to the intricacies of Pakistani ethnic politics, where rivalries across regions frequently intensify internal frustrations (Khetran, 2017). Thus, ethnic issues in Pakistan are worsened by the interference of foreign players. For instance, India has been accused of sponsoring Baloch rebels to destabilize the country bloodily. Afghanistan has always helped Pashtun nationalists, especially with the Durand Line conflict. Pakistan's ethnic and foreign factors complicate politics even more, making it more challenging to deal with them through bureaucratic consensus and political amendments (Rashid, 2001).

One of the leading causes of ethnic grievances in Pakistan is economic marginalization. Significant differences exist between the provinces due to the unequal allocation of resources and development possibilities, with Punjab frequently thought to gain the most economically. Smaller provinces have become resentful of this, especially Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

where ethnic groups believe they are being routinely left out of the nation's economic development (Stewart, 2008).

The central government and the Baloch nationalism movement have been at odds over the development of natural resources, especially in Baluchistan. Although Baluchistan has abundant natural resources, such as coal, gas, and minerals, the local populace is still among the poorest in the nation. Baloch nationalists contend that the central government is abusing the province's riches with little benefit to the local populace. This economic exclusion has been a significant factor in the ongoing Baloch insurgency and has fuelled calls for more authority over the province's resources (Akhtar, 2007).

The media, especially social media, has played a more significant part in the politicization of ethnic identities in recent years. The use of Cyber space like social media platforms have given underrepresented ethnic groups a forum to air their complaints and rally support. Social media has been a valuable tool for movements like the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) to spread their narrative. Ethnic differences in Pakistan have been deepened by ethnic-based political parties' constant utilization of the media to publicize cases of exclusion and impersonation (Taj, 2020).

The formation and parliamentary mobilization of ethnic communities in Pakistan cannot be wholly understood without invoking the colonial legacy of British colonialism. To maintain authority, the British followed a policy of divide and rule; they started dividing one ethnic or religious group from another. In the areas that comprise today's Pakistan, ethnic identities were built through politics and the division of the territory, such as the formation of a separate vote for Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs (Bose & Jal, 2022).

Urdu, as adopted as an official language in Pakistan, is one of the most debated language policies in the region, and it has been a topic of debate in its early history. Bengali was the primary language in East Pakistan, and the animosity this policy caused was extreme there. East Pakistan's separation in 1971 because of the language dispute is a sobering reminder of the perils of ignoring ethnic identities. The MQM's ascent in Sindh is primarily attributed to language politics, which helped the Muhajir population become more politically engaged in language and cultural identity (Rahman, 1996).

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research method, which is more appropriate for studying aspects of the social and political reality of the politicisation of ethnic identities in Pakistan. The study uses secondary data sources such as academic literature, policy documents, government reports, media coverage, and books. Thematic analysis is utilised to discover important themes about political manipulation, ethnic grievances, and the effects on national unity.



3.1. Research Design and Approach

The paper employs a qualitative research approach to study the politics of ethnic identities in Pakistan. A qualitative approach refers to a research methodology that focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attribute to social or political phenomena. This approach proves highly useful when studying a broad range of social phenomena, including but not limited to ethnic identity, given the centrality of actors' meanings to the outcomes under observation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This paper used a case study technique to examine the formation of ethnic politicisation such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Sindh, nationalist movements among the Baloch people, and the emerging Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM).

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Since this research is qualitative, the data is arguably mostly secondary, including research articles, policies, government reports, media articles, and books. These sources offer comprehensive information about Pakistan's Ethnic Politics, both historical and modern.

3.3. Data Analysis

Secondary data collected is analysed using thematic analysis. This method entails discovering repeating themes, patterns, and concepts in the data, which is then classified and evaluated in accordance with the study's objectives. Focused themes, including ethnicity, political turmoil, and regional autonomy movements, are explored to understand how they lead to ethnic tensions and national confrontation.

3.4. Case Study Justification

In this study, the participants' ethnic politicisation was presented through their cases, which made it easier to analyse the phenomenon. The Baluchistan conflict, the political growth of MQM, and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) were chosen as case studies because they are relevant to Pakistan's context. All these movements impacted not only domestic politics but also the focus of foreign actors.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive and political nature of the subject, ethics play an essential role in this study. The report does not contain ethnopolitical constructive sentiments as a possible aggravation of the tension of ethnic conflicts. Data analysis and subsequent presentation ensure that the original research findings yield no negative impacts on political or ethnic analysed divisions.

3.6. Limitations of the Study

This study pointed out some limitations even though a comprehensive approach research method was used. Reliance on secondary data sources such as academic literature, policy documents, and historical records may limit the ability to capture the rapid ethnic and political evolution, especially the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). The topic's sensitive nature also poses a challenge since some materials available may possess inherent bias represented by regional or political agendas that could obscure ethnic grievances.

The research is restricted to some prominent ethnic political movements in Pakistan, such as the MQM, Baloch nationalist movements, and PTM. However, it neglected other areas of ethnic politics in the country, such as the Gilgit Baltistan and Hazara populations, which have distinct challenges. This paper covers the general topic with certain limitations to generalise the role of ethnic politics in contributing to national unity, utilising historical and current data.

3.7. Theoretical Analysis

As complex theoretical concept, politicization of ethnic identities is a confluence of political, cultural, and historical elements, frequently shapes ethnic identity. The sociopolitical dynamics of the region, colonial policies, and post-independence nation-building initiatives have all had a significant impact on ethnic identities in Pakistan. Ethnic groups are based on enduring cultural symbols and historical memories rather than just political formations of ethnic symbolism. which is why Pakistani ethnic identities enduring despite efforts at national unity, requires a grasp of this paradigm (Smith, 1987).

Horowitz's theory of ethnic conflict, which holds that political elites frequently exploit ethnic allegiances in multiethnic countries to consolidate power, is also consistent with ethnic identity politics. Political organisations like the MQM and BNP have exacerbated tensions and weakened national unity in Pakistan by using ethnic identities for their political ends (Horowitz, 1985).

3.7.1. Paradigm Shift: Political Ethnicization Ladder,

The author of this research paper has introduced "Paradigm Shift: Political Ethnicization Ladder," model. It enunciates the progressive stages or 'ladders' of political ethnicization. The model asserts that marginalization, where a particular ethnic group is excluded from meaningful political, social, or economic participation or representation. This leads to ethnic politicization, where marginalized groups regroup for political representation or rights by emphasizing their distinct ethnic identity and leverage pressure. As ethnic grievances intensify due to non-inclusion by the powerful quarters or ignoring the threat, the next stage is polarization and radicalization, where ethnic groups become more assertive and isolate themselves from other political actors in the federation, often leading to heightened tensions and ideological and ethnic extremism. The final stage is separatist militarization, where disenfranchised



ethnic groups resort to armed resistance, militarization and separatist movements to achieve independence instead of autonomy. This progression illustrates how political exclusion and ethnic-based divisions can escalate into violent conflicts if not addressed effectively at the initial stages, as evident from the history and backed by the empirical evidence.

Figure 3

Paradigm Shift: Political Ethnicization Ladder



Source: Author's own Model

The Pakistani state is an essential factor in the politics of ethnic identities. Smaller ethnic groups have been neglected from the early post-independence era due to official policies that try to consolidate power in the hands of a select few. These policies have exacerbated complaints, especially in underdeveloped but resource-rich areas like Baluchistan (Jalal, 1995). Furthermore, the state has frequently inflamed rather than ended disputes when using military action to quell ethnic insurgencies, especially in Baluchistan and NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) (Lake & Rothchild, 1998).

This makes Pakistan not an exception to the other countries living with the problem of ethnic politicisation. Similar tendencies of ethnic phases concentrating on the political and economic powers have been seen in those countries with a wide ethnic diversity across the globe, including Sudan, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria. As illustrated by the Pakistani Baluchistan rebellion, it is alleged that the international component also acted to receive assistance from Afghanistan and India; the international dimension also emphasises how external factors affect ethnic violence (Roberts, 2014).

4. Critical Analysis

The study findings presented in this paper are based on a thematic analysis of the collected data that focus on the established thesis about how political actors and other instrumentalized ethnic identities for personal or political reasons and left consequences for national cohesion.

4.1. Theme 1: Political Manipulation of Ethnic Identities

According to the data, Political Manipulation of Ethnic Identities identified that political parties in Pakistan especially have continued to exploit ethnic identities to create a political support base, which worsens the existing conflicts. Essentially, in Sindh, this struggle of the MQM was based on the exploitation of Muhajir's identity for political mobilization (Martin, 2016). Baluchistan's political elites exploited ethnopolitical claims to mobilize demands for decentralization and confrontation with the centre (Harrison, 1981).

Table 1 shows the political representation of Pakistan's major ethnic groupings in the National Assembly, emphasizing inequalities in seat allocation. Table 2 shows the vote shares of ethnic-based political parties in the general elections of 2013, 2018, and 2024, which represent changes in regional political influence (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Census (GoP, 2023); Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP, 2024).

Table 1

Political Representation of Major Ethnic Groups of Pakistan

Ethnic Group	Estimated Population (%)	Primary Region	Representation in National Assembly (%)
Punjabi	36.98	Punjab	52
Balochi	3.38	Baluchistan	4
Sindhi	14.31	Sindh	13
Pashtun	18.15	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	16
Muhajir	9.25	Urban Sindh (Mainly Karachi)	6

Source: (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023 and Election Commission of Pakistan 2024).

Table 2

Vote share of Ethnic Based Parties in Pakistan

Political Party	Ethnic Base	Vote 2013	Share	Vote 2014	Share	Vote 2024	Share
Muttahida Quami Moment	Muhajir	5.5%		6.2%		7.1%	



(MQM)						
Baluchistan (BNP)	National Party	Baloch	1.9%	2.4%	2.6%	
Pakistan People's Party (PPP)		Sindh	15.4%	13.6%	12.9%	
Pashtun (PTM)	Tahafuz Moment	Pashtun	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Source: (Election Commission of Pakistan reports 2013, 2018, 2024 & Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023)

The Bangladesh case study is shown in Table 3, which also highlights the 1970 elections where the Awami League won 160 of 162 seats in East Pakistan with a resounding 74.9% vote share. This overwhelming mandate emphasized long-standing regional issues, contributing to East Pakistan's quest for autonomy and eventual independence (Jahan, 1980).

Table 3

Political Representation of Major Ethnic Groups of Pakistan

Region	Awami League Vote Share (%)	Seats won (Out of 162)
East Pakistan	74.9%	160 (98.77%)

Source: Bangladesh Case study-Awami League in 1970 Elections - Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues. University Press.

4.2. Theme 2: Ethnic Grievances and the Rights Movements

According to the relevant sources, Ethnic Grievances and Regional Autonomy Movements advocate that ethnic grievances influence the demands for regional autonomy. Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, having ethnic population groups, have long protested political and economic exclusion. These complaints had given rise to regional separatism, or ethnic groups wanting to increase self-governance of adaptation for adequate resources, as well as political demands for fair representation. The Baloch insurgency, for instance, is wrought with the belief that the province has been sacrificed while the centre has neglected the people of the province (Cohen, 2004).

Figure 4

NFC Award Distribution Criteria (7th NFC Award)

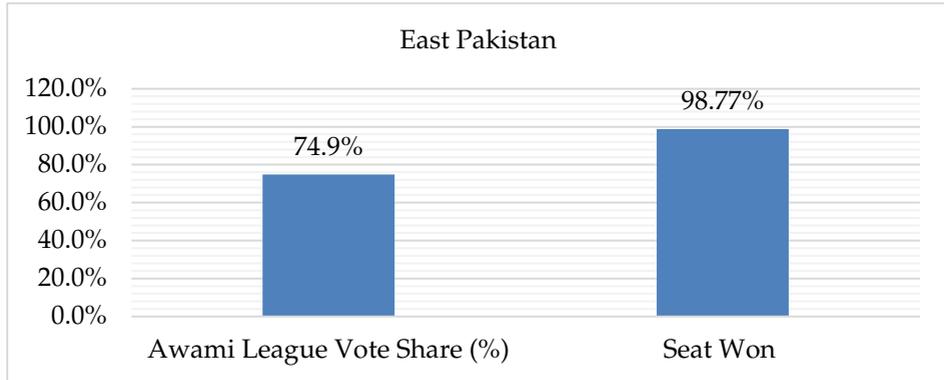


Table 4

Pakistan: Provincial Government Fiscal Operations, 2023-24, Finance Division GoP.

Criteria	Weightage (%)	Explanation
Population	82.0%	Largest share based on the population of each province.
Poverty and Backwardness	10.3%	Recognizes underdeveloped areas to address regional inequalities.
Revenue Generation and Collection	5.0%	Rewards provinces that contribute to national revenue through taxes and other collections.
Inverse Population Density	2.7%	Benefits sparsely populated provinces like Baluchistan due to the high cost of service delivery.

Source: Pakistan: Provincial Government Fiscal Operations, 2023-24, Finance Division GoP.

Based on the above criteria, the **7th NFC Award** allocates resources to the provinces as follows:

Table 5

7th NFC Award Share

Province	Share in NFC Award (%)
Punjab	51.74%



Province	Share in NFC Award (%)
Sindh	24.55%
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	14.62%
Baluchistan	9.09%

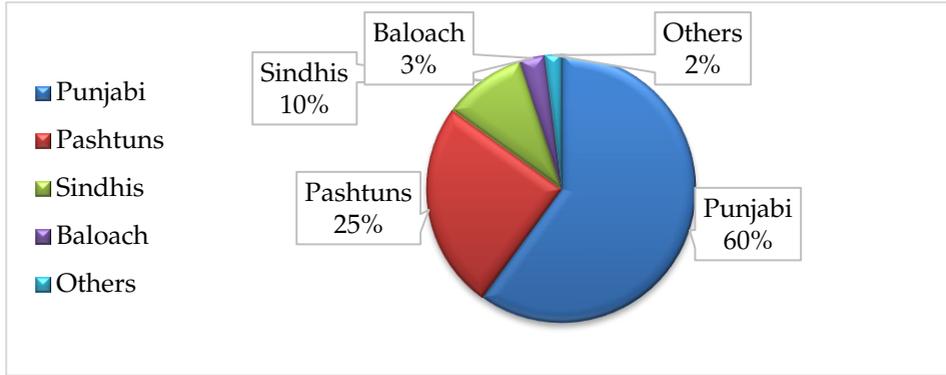
The Baloch insurgency is one of Pakistan's longest-standing and most multilayered ethnic conflicts, with its roots in long-standing political and economic grievances. Since the early 1950s, Baloch nationalist leaders have desired further autonomy and control over the province's rich natural resources (Siddiq, 2017). Despite many attempts by the central government to subdue the insurgency via both military action and political engagement, the conflict remains unsolved, exposing the deeply rooted nature of ethnic marginalisation in Baluchistan (Akhtar, 2018).

The 1973 insurgency, which erupted following the resignation of the provincial government led by the National Awami Party (NAP), marked a watershed moment. The central government's measures, particularly the deployment of armed forces, sparked significant discontent and reinforced the Baloch people's belief that their political aspirations were being ruthlessly suppressed. This insurgency phase witnessed growing external involvement, with reports of Soviet support for Baloch rebels during the Cold War, highlighting the conflict's geopolitical dimensions (Harrison, 1981).

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) demonstrates how ethnic concerns can fuel political activism. Consequently, the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) emerged from FATA, resulting from continuous political marginalisation and militarisation of the Pashtun during the war on terrorism. These included displacement, loss of a source of income, and stigmatization of the Pashtun community leading to the creation of the movement (Ahmed & Khan, 2022). The PTM gained a national spotlight after the extra judicial murder of Naqeebullah Mehsud in 2018. This rally helped acted as a gradual process, where thousands of Pashtuns come together to demand justice and to hold government accountable for violence. The movement's leaders, from the fundament of the PTM, including of its leader Manzoor Pashteen, to bring larger grievances forward, such as forced disappearance and the use of prohibited Instrument like The PTM were one unique element better than any other; the PTM uses social networks like Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information; because of digital activism on social media platforms, the problems which the Pashtun people face have gained attention from the public both domestically and in the global community (Shahid & Zaman, 2022).

Figure 5

Ethnic Representation in civil services

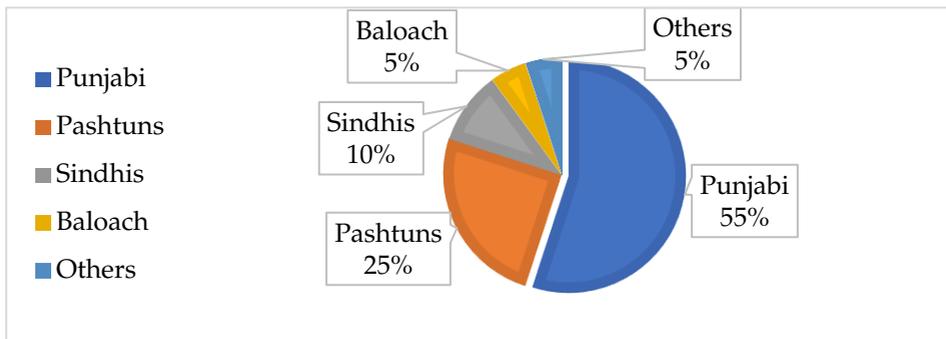


Source: Based on the analysis of PBS & FPSC data/2024

The above pie chart abundantly makes it clear that the ethnic representation in Pakistan's civil services, highlighting significant disparities among ethnic groups. While Punjabis dominate with 60% representation, followed by Pashtuns at 25%, Sindhis at 10%, Baloch at 3%, and others at 2% (PBS, 2024). This reflects an overrepresentation of Punjabis relative to their proportion in the population and an underrepresentation of smaller ethnic groups, raising concerns about inclusivity and equitable access to civil service opportunities. Similarly ethnic representation in the military, highlighting that Punjabis dominate with 70% representation, followed by Pashtuns at 20%, Sindhis at 5%, Baloch at 3%, and other groups at 2%. This distribution indicates a significant overrepresentation of Punjabis and underrepresentation of smaller ethnic groups, which might raise concerns regarding

Figure 6

Ethnic Representation in parliament

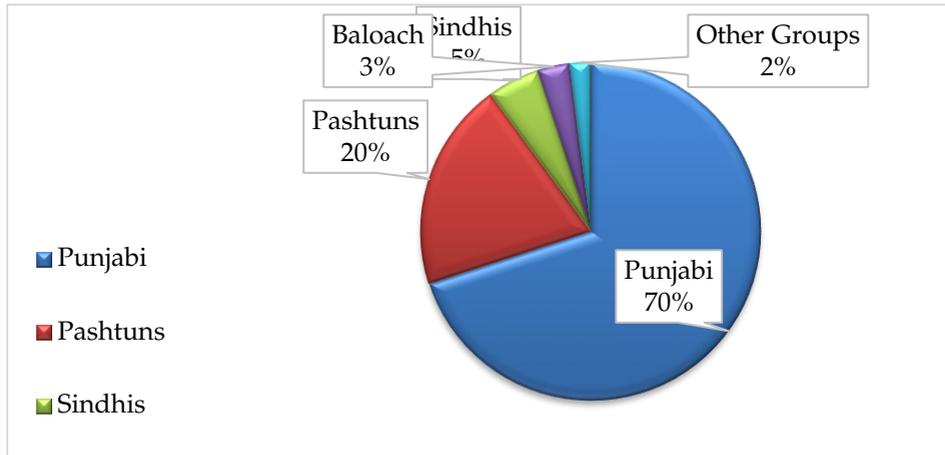


Source: Based on the analysis of ECP



Figure 7

Ethnic Representation in Military



Source: Based on the analysis of PBS data-2024

Pashtuns at 25%, Sindhis at 10%, Baloch at 5%, and other groups also at 5%. Overall, These figures reflect ethnic disparities in all the important realms of Pakistani society and thus add fuel to the fire and provides ample justification to these minority ethnic groups to propagate their narrative.

4.3. Theme 3: Impact on national unity

According to the data sources about the impact on national unity, the politics of ethnic identities significantly impacted Pakistan's national unity. Increased ethnic violent conflicts, especially when political leaders try to mobilize ethnicity for political vote-gain purposes, result in a shifted ethnic identity, indicated by ethnic loyalty that more often outweighs national goals (Horowitz, 1985).

The ethnic and regional cleavages as factors threatening the unity of a nation were illustrated by the example of Bangladesh, the former East Pakistan. The political divergence between East Pakistani's central power and regional discontent stemmed from cultural, linguistic, and economic disparities. Techno economically, East Pakistan generated export foreign exchange of over 50% per cent primarily through jute, but it received far less vertical federal development and appropriation to support it. Researchers described that East Pakistan provided 60% of Pakistan's gross domestic product. However, it received a little more than half of the development expenditure of Pakistan (Ministry of Planning, 1971). Disregarding Bengali in favour of Urdu as the official language of the new Pakistan, even though Bengali is the language of the majority in East Pakistan only aggravated this sentiment (Jahan, 1980).

Table 6

Percentage of language by population

Language	Percentage of Total Population (1951 Census)
Bengali	54.6%
Punjabi	28.4%
Pashto	6.9%
Sindhi	5.8%
Urdu	3.2%
Others	1.1%

Source: (Oldenburg, 1985)

Further, surveys done in the late 1960s' showed that over 70% of the population of East Pakistan was dissatisfied with its economic status compared to West Pakistan. The ultimate result of the dissatisfaction was the separation of East Pakistan in 1971 to form Bangladesh. This case brings out the fact that if ethnic and regional disparities are left to grow without matching efforts by governance structures, then national cohesiveness is in real danger (Cohen, 2004).

4.4. Theme 4: Ethnic Victimization Narratives in Digital Spaces.

The relevant sources about the Ethnic Victimization Narratives in Digital Spaces show that the invention of digital activism has given ethnic groups other avenues through which to showcase their problems and solicit support. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), which has benefited from social media in the past to spread awareness regarding state oppression, discriminatory practices, and socioeconomic disparities, has come out strongly against the ban. Victimization tales receive fast circulation in the digital domain, much to audiences' interest globally, although from within the Pakistani context.

Approximately 70% of PTM material focuses on ethnic discrimination, and more than 60% of young social media users in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan utilize the platform to address local concerns (Digital Rights Foundation Report, 2020). The persistence of similar stories is a typical path in supporting ethnic conflict information that polarized in social media can lead to recreating dominant mythologies of victimization and exclusion (Kumar, 2009).

The relevant paper asserts that technology esp, especially communication technology, has influenced ethnic identity politics in Pakistan due to globalization. Baloch and Sindhi diaspora groups have been using social media sites like Twitter to spread awareness of ethnic discrimination and rights problems since 2018, which has led to a rise in social media activism throughout



Pakistan. According to studies, these groups' content typically contains appeals to international human rights organizations in about 65% of cases, which increases internet participation on these issues by 40% worldwide (Digital Rights Foundation Report, 2020).

Globalization has reinforced the people's network and directed international concentration to local issues. In Pakistan, ethnic groups have been more active in global narratives of identity and autonomy. Movements like the Baloch nationalism movement have resorted to framing their battles in the frames of human rights global discourses where the fights are of self-determination against state domination. Those organizations that have associated their grievances with the principles of international standards gain outside support within and outside Pakistan, influencing people's perceptions regarding their grievances (Kavada, 2011).

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has also associated its fight for human rights with global trends and virtually places its demands on the general call for justice and accountability. The globalization of information has enabled such movements to develop alliances with international human rights organizations, magnify their voices, and pressure the Pakistani government to respond (Shahid & Zaman, 2022).

The relevant sources about Digital Activism and social media show that the emergence of digital technology, mainly social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, has altered how ethnic communities in Pakistan organize, communicate, and campaign for their rights. Movements such as the PTM have successfully used these platforms to bypass established media outlets, which are frequently state-controlled, and directly reach a larger audience. Extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and military operations harming Pashtun communities have all been highlighted through social media (Uttley & Schirmer, 2019).

Table 7

Social Media and Mobilization of Pashtun Community in Pakistan: A case study of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement

Platform	Metric	Figure
Twitter	#PashtunLivesMatter tweets	300,000+
Twitter	#StopEnforcedDisappearances tweets	100,000+
Facebook	PTM official page followers	1 million+

Platform	Metric	Figure		
Facebook	Posts highlighting state atrocities	10,000	shares,	5000+ comments
YouTube	PTM official channel views	100,000+		
YouTube	Human rights abuse videos	5,000+	views,	1,000+ comments

Source: (Shahid & Zaman, 2022)

4.5. Theme 5: The role of patronage networks

According to the data, Ethnic politics in Pakistan relate their ethnic groups to the maintenance of these patronage relations where political leaders offer ethnic groups services and other material needs to be considered in return for political support. These ethnic patronage networks are standard in Sindh; PPP and MQM have always used ethnic cards to maintain their political stranglehold on the province. While patronage provides short-run political stability, the process aggravates ethnic tension by perpetuating socioeconomic disparities (Wilder, 1999). Similarly, the Sardari System in Baluchistan is the pristine example of how the post-colonial government of Pakistan continued to provide patronage to the tribal elders. The democratic institutions and autonomy suffered in the process of this system.

4.6. Theme 6: The role of External Actors

In recent years, Baloch nationalist leaders have emphasised the economic exploitation of the province's resources, particularly natural gas, which supports the rest of the country while leaving Baluchistan underdeveloped. The Gwadar Port, a vital component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has also become a flashpoint, with local communities feeling excluded from the economic gains promised by these megaprojects (Siddiq, 2017).

International involvement, the insurgency's persistence is owing in part to suspected support from neighbouring countries, most notably India, which Pakistan claims of supporting separatist forces through its intelligence agency, RAW. This external backing hinders the central government's efforts to reach a peaceful solution, as the involvement of regional competitors adds to geopolitical tension (Akhtar, 2018). The arrest of Kulboshan Jadev is a stark reminder how external actors exploit internal weaknesses and national divisions.

5. Implications for Policy and Practice

This study's findings have significant policy and practice implications in Pakistan. The paper also argues that addressing ethnic concerns requires integrating political reforms and economic growth. This might mean



decentralising power to the provincial level or even fostering provincial autonomy, better resource sharing, and platforms for ethnic groups to communicate with the state (Cohen, 2004). To further elaborate, we can briefly see global case studies, ranging from the normative to the worst examples in the follows.

5.1. International Case Studies; a brief overview

Pakistan's experience with the politicisation of ethnic identities is not unique; other multiethnic states have experienced similar issues and learned valuable lessons. This section examines countries such as Nigeria, India, and Yugoslavia, focusing on their ways of managing ethnic diversity and the consequences for Pakistan (Gagnon, 2004).

5.1.1. Nigeria: Balancing Ethnic Diversity through Federalism

Nigeria is a multiethnic country that includes prominent communities such as the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani. Like Pakistan, Nigeria has faced ethnic political mobilisation and secessionist movements, such as the Biafra War in the 1960s. The Nigerian government has attempted to tackle these difficulties through a federal structure that offers autonomy to its regions, ensuring that major ethnic groups have representation in the political framework (Stewart, 2008).

5.1.2. India: Accommodative Federalism and Cultural Recognition.

According to the relevant sources, India can also be used to add another dimension to the strategy of managing ethnic diversity. India has created a liberal federal system that sufficiently corresponds to its ethnic, linguistic, and religious population and recognises and safeguards the various identities of its states. Unlike Pakistan, which imposed a single national language, India has legally recognised numerous languages, allowing regions such as Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to preserve their linguistic and cultural history inside the Indian Union (Chatterjee, P. 1993).

Table 8

Comparative politicisation of ethnic identities

Aspect	Pakistan	India	Nigeria
Ethnic Composition	Dominated by Punjabis; marginalized ethnic groups like Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun face systemic inequities.	Multiple linguistic and ethnic groups (e.g., Dravidians, Bengalis, Kashmiris);	Over 250 ethnic groups; major divisions between Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo communities.

Aspect	Pakistan	India	Nigeria
Political Representation	Ethnic minorities underrepresented in key political and administrative institutions, fostering grievances.	policies often prioritize Hindi-speaking states. Regional parties dominate in ethnic strongholds (e.g., Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Northeast), creating fragmented national politics.	Ethnic balancing often formalized through "zoning" of political offices, but tensions persist.
Resource Control	Centralized control over resources (e.g., Balochistan's gas reserves) fuels ethnic grievances and insurgencies.	Uneven resource allocation leads to disparities (e.g., Northeast vs. industrial hubs in the South).	Oil wealth concentrated in the Niger Delta; lack of equitable sharing sparks regional and ethnic conflicts.
Conflict Dynamics	Ethnic tensions manifest in insurgencies (e.g., Balochistan Liberation Army, MQM in Sindh).	Ethnic politicization seen in secessionist movements (e.g., Khalistan, Nagaland, Kashmir).	Ethnic rivalries have led to civil wars (e.g., Biafra) and recurring violence over resource control.
State Response	Federal structure often undermined by centralization and military interventions, exacerbating ethnic divisions.	Use of paramilitary forces and political bargaining to manage ethnic unrest; sometimes accused of partiality.	Federalism weakly implemented; political elites exploit ethnic identities to consolidate power.



5.1.3. Yugoslavia: The Risks of Ethnic Politicization

The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s is a warning story for multiethnic states. The politicisation of ethnic identities hastened the country's demise, with political elites exploiting ethnic grievances to acquire power. This eventually resulted in violent wars and state fragmentation, and political actors continued to exploit these divisions for electoral benefit (Bose, 2002).

6. Findings

The study identifies that the politicization of ethnic identities has consistently threatened Pakistan's national unity. The extended ethnic groups of Baloch, Sindhi, Muhajir, and Pashtun are likely to orient themselves with their respective ethnic groups rather than to a single nation. Socio-political manipulation of these political identities has deepened social-political cleavages, sapping the nation's unity.

The formation of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and Baluch resistance movements is an example showing that a process of isolation and militarization has compounded political concerns about ethnicity. The PTM's support for Pashtun rights, though justified as the discontent of the ethnic minority, still reveals a failure in all the rights of inclusive administration. Baloch separatism is driven by sentiments of being stereotyped as the other who is being economically exploited while politically marginalized.

The results reveal that political elites use ethnic identifiers as vote resources to obtain support. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) made the most of the Muhajir card to gain political power in metropolitan Sindh, especially Karachi. This manipulation has caused sporadic manifestations of violence on various occasions, more so in Sindh and Baluchistan, which has disrupted progress towards the goal of national unity.

7. Conclusion

This study establishes that the confrontational aspect of ethnic identity politics obstructs the formation of Pakistan's national unity. From the Baloch conflict to the PTM, Pakistani political elites have played ethnicity politics in a bid to win the electorates' vote. Moreover, the aggravation of ethnic conflict is attributed to the influence of foreign actors and economic inequities. Indian and Afghan support for ethnic insurgencies in Pakistan has not allowed the formation of national unity. Internally, federal-provincial disparities have raised ethnic implications, particularly for Baluchistan, the local population that has regularly complained about economic marginalization (Roberts, 2014). The study indicates that civil unrest could be resolved only through extensive political, economic, and social shifts, which Pakistan requires. Enhancing provincial management, ensuring fair distribution of resource endowment, and promoting inclusive political participation are all effective ways of stratifying ethnic conflict and

boosting national cohesion. The failure to implement such measures is likely to cause the breakdown of nationalism alongside ever-rising ethnic-based violence.

8. Recommendations

The future of the national unity of Pakistan is dependent heavily on how effectively the government deals with the issue of the politicization of ethnic identities. This section examines various scenarios, emphasizing both threats and potential development prospects, and defines methods of ensuring the integration and coordination of a unified nation. Otherwise, Pakistan can experience new disturbances in conditions of non-solution of existing problems of Ethnic Communities. Previous events, for instance, the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, best illustrate the perils of not observing ethnic and linguistic diversity. Ethnic groups may get more mobilized against the state, and they get involved in violent confrontations and insurgencies, like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Ethnic problems that are prolonged for a long time may push certain areas to demand a high level of decentralization or even secession, which is an issue for the stability of the state.

In addressing ethnic conflicts, there is probably no better way to reduce the effects of ethnic clashes than to slide back from majoritarian federalism and devolve power through administrative redistribution. Pakistan's current structure of federalism should be further developed to grant provinces autonomy in administrative and fiscal domains.

One significant recommendation is implementing policies aiming at the equal and equitable distribution of resources. The unequal distribution of resources has enhanced ethnic conflict despite the many resources in the region that have been economically underdeveloped, such as Baluchistan.

Greater urgency is to develop organizational forums for the exchange between ethnic groups and the relations between regional communities and the national government. These channels assist in raising issues and supporting policies that can be understood as the desire of all ethnic groups of the population.

To avoid further depersonalization of the population regarding citizenship, the government should create a framework for common unity that fosters ethnic groups' unity in the country. Education reforms that promote the unity of the nation are a good combination of cultural relations that can help to eliminate ethnic differences. The media contributes to the change and promotion of inclusive stories that advocate for mainstream national values rather than any ethnic diatribe.

If Pakistan devolves power to the provinces, ethnic groups may not retain the notion that they are being marginalized, which will make them loyal to the central government. If resources are invested in poor provinces like Baluchistan and rural Sindh, it may help create economic prospects and reduce the economic grievances that often lead to ethnic conflict.



Equitable development projects can promote the feeling of receiving part of the wealth, an essential requisite for national unity. Education and social activities could be influential in restoring and harmonizing the ethnic history of Pakistan's ethnic groups. Cultural exchange and other celebrative programs associated with national festivities will go a long way to strengthening the existing bond in society.

Pakistan can also employ other multilateral and bilateral avenues to obtain support for its efforts in establishing national unity. Foreign alliances may help Pakistan gain cumulative conflict-solving experience, obtain assistance in implementing development projects, and acquire diplomatic support for efforts aimed at reducing ethnic tensions.

Ethnic tensions can be explained through diplomatic initiatives with neighbouring countries like Afghanistan and India. Governments interested in helping ethnic minorities who need development aid can join international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or the Asian Development Bank (ADB). They may help finance the region's projects that will benefit the ethnic minority.

Pakistan also has the long-term objective of establishing a clear national cultural identity that respects and comprehends ethnic differences but, at the same time, feels like one nation. The ability of the state to adopt changes and to enter a dialogue with the ethnic formations remains vital for stability in Pakistan. Establishing forums for the state and ethnic groups to dialogue can be used to solve existing issues. Combining the concepts of national unity into the school system to complement the cultural diversity principles and build a youthful sense of belonging is a basis for a more unified society.

Several countries have effectively reduced ethnic tensions by implementing community-driven frameworks and inclusive policies.

Consociationalism in Governance: Power-sharing agreements in Belgium and Switzerland guarantee representation for linguistic and ethnic communities. Pakistan could adopt a similar arrangement to increase province autonomy and include ethnic voices in the federal framework.

Fair Resource Distribution: The equalization payments system in Canada transfers funds from more affluent to less affluent provinces. Through the National Finance Commission (NFC), Pakistan might implement a fair financial distribution plan to give underfunded areas sufficient funding to lessen inequalities.

Digital channels for Inclusivity: In Estonia, minority communities and the government may communicate openly thanks to digital channels. Pakistan might establish online forums for candid discussion, enabling underrepresented groups to address grievances constructively.

8.1. Policy Interventions and Strategic framework

To eliminate ethnic identity politicization and nurture national integration in Pakistan, the country requires certain severe political, economic, and social reforms. The following is policy interventions matrix table.

Table 9

Policy interventions matrix

Goal/ Objective	Quantitative KPI	Time Frame	Executing Agency	Brief Description
Enhance Provincial Autonomy	20% increase in provincial decision-making power in resource management	3 years	Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination, Provincial Governments	Implement amendments to increase provincial control over natural resources and regional policy-making.
Equitable Resource Distribution	10% increase in federal allocation to underfunded provinces (Baluchistan and KPK)	2 years	Ministry of Finance, National Finance Commission (NFC)	Revise the NFC Award to allocate federal resources based on both population and development needs.
Inclusive Political and administrative Representation	15% increase in representation of smaller ethnic groups in civil services and federal parliament	3 years	Election Commission of Pakistan Parliament FPSC	Introduce and enforce quota systems for civil services and legislative positions to ensure fair representation.
Promote Regional Cultural Identity	50% increase in regional language and cultural programs in public education	3 years	Ministry of Education, Provincial Education Departments	Integrate regional languages and cultural history in school curricula to strengthen a sense of shared national identity.
Strengthen Digital Governance	25% increase in digital platforms used by government to engage with regional groups	2 years	Ministry of Information Technology, Digital Rights Foundation	Launch online forums and social media channels to address grievances and maintain dialogue with marginalized groups.



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