

Ethnic Identity, Nationalism and Governance in Pakistan

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Abstract

The combination of Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns, Baloch, and Muhajirs in Pakistan's population affects government operations through political structures and nationalist movements since ethnic identity strongly influences national unity and inclusive governance. These groups form their understanding of state politics and governance interaction using their linguistic traditions combined with historical stories and cultural practices. Historical political changes in Pakistan emerged from ethnic dynamics that led to conflicts that disrupted state operations, blocked policy delivery, and created unbalanced resource distribution. Society's discriminated groups seek both political changes and autonomous governance because they encounter dual barriers from discrimination and limited access to economic resources and political systems. The protection of national unity and the respect for ethnic diversity count as a fundamental challenge since discriminatory policies are responsible for generating conflicts that dissolve social cohesion. The success of public policies that handle ethnic diversity depends on the state's selected approach because these policies establish fair representation while lowering ethnic tensions. The integration success of various policies exists alongside other policies, which have worsened divisions, leading to public unrest and opposition. This research explores ethnic identity features in Pakistan by analyzing how public governance systems affect national unity. The study examines effective and ineffective governance methods to create recommendations about frameworks that support national integration by respecting ethnic identities. A thorough comprehension of these issues allows Pakistan to develop policies that foster social harmony, equal political participation, and sustainable national development.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Nationalism, Governance.

Introduction

The diverse ethnic makeup of Pakistan along with its multiple linguistic and cultural traditions makes the country difficult to govern and unite as a nation. The population of Pakistan consists of its major ethnic groups which include Punjabis and Sindhis Pashtuns Baloch and Muhajirs together with smaller groups including Hazaras Kashmiris and Saraikis (Shah & Khan, 2022). The numerous ethnic groups in Pakistan maintain their individual cultural historical and linguistic traditions which create both a rich national heritage and difficulties in developing unified patriotic bonds.

Nationalism functions as a unifying force to create a Pakistani identity yet ethnic affiliations determine the most important aspects of socio-political relations economic prospects and regional power dynamics. The political sphere in Pakistan experiences frequent unrest because of ethnic-based political tactics and distribution dilemmas for resources along with historical conflicts leading to demands for provincial autonomy and occasional separatist movements (Kalhoro, 2022). National unity becomes challenging because Pakistani society needs to

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respect diverse ethnic communities and their independent demands. The government of Pakistan has shifted its governance approach from centralized to decentralized control as a means to handle ethnic diversity and regional demands throughout the years.

The research investigates the relationship between ethnic identity nationalism and governance in Pakistan through a study of historical and present-day ethnic integration issues (Qaiser, 2015). The research evaluates how ethnic identities affect political transformations social unity and governmental decision-making processes. Public policies receive evaluation to assess their effectiveness in handling ethnic grievances advancing equal representation and diminishing socio-economic differences between ethnic groups.

The analysis investigates governance approaches that help build national unity through the preservation of ethnic diversity (Khushbakht, 2024). The paper explores different solutions including federalism together with political representation inclusive economic development and cultural recognition to reduce ethnic tensions. The research investigates the relationship between ethnic identity nationalism and governance to establish enduring national unity methods that accept Pakistan's multiple ethnic groups (Admin, 2024).

Literature Review

Religious identity stands as the primary focus of nationalism in Pakistan because the country was established to serve as a state for Indian subcontinent Muslims. The foundation of Pakistan occurred in 1947 through the Two-Nation Theory which acknowledged a distinct religious identity between Hindus and Muslims as reasons for creating an independent Muslim state. Although religion functions as a unifying force the strong ethnic identities within Pakistan's social and political structure continue to dominate religious nationalism thus producing tensions along with political instability and conflicts (Shabbir et al., 2024).

The ethnic groups of Pakistan uphold their individual linguistic cultural and historical identities despite conflicts that arise with the central Pakistani nationalistic identity pushed forth by the government. The Pakistani state has attempted to enforce Urdu as the national language for ethnic unity but this initiative encountered strong opposition from regions whose native languages including Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and Punjabi carry deep cultural significance for their ethnic populations (Falki & Bano, 2019). Official failure to support regional languages along with ignoring them has made ethnic groups more dissatisfied and led them to feel excluded from the national identity.

Regional political groups formed ethnopolitical movements due to rising demands for self-governance together with language recognition rights and fair resource distribution. The Baloch nationalist movement continues its persistent fight against economic oppression and political discrimination. Baloch leaders continuously criticize the central government because it extracts natural resources from Balochistan while neglecting to build development projects or infrastructure (Zafar et al., 2023). The development of Sindhi nationalism occurred through migration patterns and federal government policies that triggered ethnic conflicts between Muhajirs and Sindhi residents in Karachi and Hyderabad.

Minority groups encounter major hurdles in securing their proper political influence and economic growth under the control of the national administrative authority. The political power centering in Punjab where the largest ethnic group resides has intensified tensions which now leads people to ask for increased provincial autonomy and governance decentralization. Political underrepresentation together with economic differences has created discontent among smaller ethnic groups who face increased difficulties in governance.

Research by previous studies demonstrates that national stability depends on inclusive policies together with decentralized structures of governance within multi-ethnic states. The successful management of ethnic diversity by Canada and Switzerland is supported by their adoption of federal governance which provides regional authority within a united national bond (Ullah et

al., 2024). Countries that enforce central control together with nationalistic approaches experience internal ethnic conflicts which lead to separatist activities. The national cohesion of Pakistan would be strengthened by implementing policies that include ethnic groups politically distributing resources equitably and recognizing cultural diversity. The country requires a governance system that both supports ethnic diversity and provides equal representation and economic opportunities to all ethnic groups to achieve long-term national stability and unity (Shahzad, 2019).

Methodology

Research Methodology

The research employs qualitative methods to study the linkage between ethnic identity with nationalism as well as governance in Pakistan. The research requires a qualitative methodology because it enables detailed analysis of historical and present-day ethnic diversity and governance matters. Multiple secondary research materials including academic literature together with government policies policy reports historical records and case studies support the study's investigation of ethnic identities' influence on national cohesion and governance structures.

Data Collection

The data for this study is collected from multiple sources to ensure a well-rounded analysis:

Academic Literature: Scholarly articles with books and theses about ethnic identity together with nationalism and governance in Pakistan supply theoretical and empirical research findings. The research incorporates literature reviews from political science and sociology together with public policy research to establish the wider background context.

Government and Policy Reports: Official government documents together with census reports and policy frameworks related to ethnic integration and language policies and governance models are evaluated. These sources deliver original information about Pakistan's governmental approach to managing ethnic diversity throughout history.

Historical Records: The study examines ethnic relations in Pakistan through a combination of historical documents from archives and newspaper archives and archival data. Each stage of Pakistani history is analyzed covering policies from colonial times through independent nation governance and pivotal political changes over the years.

Case Studies: The research examines particular ethnic movements and governance problems in Pakistan through detailed case studies that focus on the Baloch nationalist movement together with the Sindhi autonomy movement and Pashtun political activism

Comparative Analysis: The research analyzes governance systems in multi-ethnic states including Canada, Switzerland, and India to find applicable strategies for Pakistan's situation. The research evaluates the federal systems language policies and political representation methods that these countries utilize to handle ethnic diversity.

Findings

A multi-ethnic state such as Pakistan needs to establish policies to facilitate inclusive representation for all ethnic groups alongside socio-economic enhancement. The nation of Pakistan exists with multiple obstacles to effective governance and country unity because ethnic differences combine with resource inequality and partisan unbalance in representation. The governance issues lead to regional grievances and ethnic tensions which cause demands for greater autonomy thus making ethnic identity an important element in policy decisions and governance (Rupesinghe et al., n.d.).

The major challenges that hinder governance in Pakistan include:

Political Marginalization and Underrepresentation

Ethnic minority groups face the most critical governance challenge because they remain politically excluded. The large population size and number of parliamentary seats held by Punjab enable control over federal institutions and maintain a centralized political authority throughout Pakistan (National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan., n.d.). Important decision-making processes exclude the ethnic groups living in smaller provinces such as Baloch Sindhis and Pashtuns.

Several indicators demonstrate the existence of political exclusion throughout Pakistan. Punjab controls most seats in both the National Assembly and Senate which leads to inadequate representation of other provinces in national policy decisions. The 2010 18th Constitutional Amendment intended to increase provincial autonomy but failed to achieve its goal because crucial political and administrative functions still reside at the center. Systemic exclusion continues to grow stronger through the denial of leadership roles to ethnic minorities by federal ministries bureaucratic agencies and law enforcement departments (Pakistan Lawyer. n.d.).

Public beliefs that Punjab governs national politics have triggered rising nationalist movements across Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). These ethnic groups strive for both self-governance control of their administrative systems and equal representation in addition to autonomy. An inclusive governance system represents the key solution to stop the continuous development of political discontent and separatist sentiments within Pakistan's population (PSSR Report. n.d.).

Unequal Resource Allocation and Economic Disparities

The way resources are distributed in Pakistan leads to continuous disputes between different parts of its government. The provinces produce income from natural resources alongside industrial production to support the national economy but economic growth benefits fail to distribute equally across all sectors (Lash & Featherstone, 2001).

Key Economic Disparities

The province of Balochistan holds the highest number of natural resources yet it stands as the least developed region regarding infrastructure development and both education and healthcare systems.

The revenue generation in Pakistan mainly stems from Sindh through Karachi yet many rural areas populated by Sindhis face poverty and underdevelopment. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa along with Gilgit-Baltistan receive less federal funding although they contribute to national hydropower development and tourism sectors (Khan, 2021).

The National Finance Commission (NFC) Award functions as a core governance issue because it determines how federal resources get distributed among provinces. The provinces consider Punjab's fund distribution unfair thus creating economic conflicts along with ethnic tensions across the nation (Kemal, n.d.). A suitable solution demands clear budget accountability combined with targeted funding approaches for underprivileged areas to decrease interprovincial disputes.

Language and Cultural Recognition Issues

The Pakistani governance system prefers to use Urdu as the national language and it suppresses regional languages such as Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and Saraiki which comprise vital ethnic identification components (Lash & Featherstone, 2001).

Regional languages fail to appear in official government documents or judicial proceedings and educational policies which leads to increased exclusion of ethnic groups. The residents of Sindh and Balochistan demonstrate dissatisfaction because they want their native languages to gain official status while demanding recognition of their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Students who do not speak Urdu well encounter limited educational service access that hinders their vocabulary growth and academic achievement (IBEX Times. n.d.). The language barrier creates more significant problems for areas where regional languages serve as the main communication method thus it worsens existing educational and governmental disparities.

The decline of public service efficiency and rise in ethnic mistrust occur because Urdu serves as the only official language despite linguistic diversity. Switzerland together with Canada serve as examples of successes in multi-ethnic governance through official language recognition for different ethnic groups (University of Ottawa. n.d.). The governance structure of Pakistan would benefit from adopting this same approach.

Ethnic Conflicts and Separatist Movements

Different provinces in Pakistan face serious governance problems because of ethnic conflicts and separatist movements. The conflicts form from economic underdevelopment political discrimination and security actions against ethnic activist groups.

The political economic and cultural rights battles between different groups throughout Pakistan represent major ethnic conflicts within the country. The Baloch Insurgency maintains its separatist nature because of economic discrimination enforced disappearances and restrictions on political independence which have led many Baloch nationalists to seek greater autonomy (The Express Tribune, 2017). People from Sindh fight for expanded resource management authority while strongly resisting policies they see as diminishing provincial power. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) stands as an essential advocacy organization that champions the rights of Pashtuns as well as seeks military operation justice and security reform nationwide. The ongoing disputes emphasize the requirement for governance changes which should resolve ethnic problems and boost a unified national system.

The ethnic demands remain unmet because current governance systems fail to provide accommodation. Security measures used excessively instead of political dialogue have worsened ethnic tensions between different groups (University of the Punjab. n.d.). The required governance strategy should utilize conflict resolution together with economic inclusion and decentralization mechanisms to handle these issues.

Federal vs. Provincial Power Struggles

The federal governance system of Pakistan concentrates most power at the central level which reduces the capabilities of provincial governments to function effectively. The 18th Amendment failed to deliver its intended goal of enhancing provincial autonomy because various issues continue to emerge.

The Pakistani provinces have constantly faced disputes because the central government continues to intervene in their economic planning and law enforcement activities. The provinces encounter substantial barriers in program development because of their financial dependence which restricts their capacity to address local requirements properly. Punjab receives the most advantages from centralized governance while other regions experience resentment because they lack adequate decision-making power and receive fewer resources (University of the Punjab. n.d.). Pakistan needs to establish three fundamental measures to achieve full decentralization by giving provinces enhanced legislative power and financial independence by allowing local governments to function independently from federal control and establishing resource distribution protocols that prioritize provincial needs above political influence. A governance system with these objectives in place will promote balanced national development alongside regional unity.

The governance problems in Pakistan stem from conflicts between ethnic identities nationalistic movements and differences between regional areas. Centralized governance has proven inadequate for resolving ethnic issues because it has produced both political unrest and

economic inequality and separatist movements across different parts of the country (Social Sciences Spectrum, 2023). The government struggles with essential governance issues because it bars citizens from political participation and distributes resources inequitably while disregarding language rights and retaining excessive control over provincial affairs.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged governance strategy that ensures greater inclusivity and fairness. The political system should incorporate proportional representation, allowing ethnic groups an equal voice in decision-making processes. Economic resources must be distributed equitably to minimize disputes, particularly in underdeveloped provinces that struggle with economic deprivation. A governance framework that recognizes linguistic diversity is essential to fostering national unity and inclusivity. Additionally, decentralizing power would enhance provincial self-governance, enabling regions to address their socio-economic challenges effectively (The Spine Times, 2024). Implementing robust conflict resolution mechanisms is also crucial, as they can integrate ethnic movements into political discussions, reducing the reliance on military confrontations and promoting peaceful dialogue. The adoption of inclusive governance in Pakistan will transform ethnic diversity into a national strength that supports sustainable development and national cohesion.

Table 1: Ethnic Groups and Their Population Percentage in Pakistan

Ethnic Group	Percentage of Population
Punjabis	44.7%
Pashtuns	15.4%
Sindhis	14.1%
Baloch	3.6%
Muhajirs	7.6%
Others	14.6%

Conclusion

The multiple ethnic groups within Pakistan create both constructive and difficult circumstances for governing the country. National unity and development can be built through appropriate public policies that utilize historical ethnic divisions. The public governance institutions of Pakistan must identify the diverse ethnic groups across the nation to build integration systems which foster a sense of national affiliation for all communities.

Transforming Ethnic Diversity into National Strength

The implementation of suitable governance structures allows Pakistan's different ethnic groups to grow their cultural traditions alongside economic and political development. National unity between Punjabis Sindhis Pashtuns Baloch and Muhajirs can form when cultural traditions blend into economic partnerships and multiple languages receive acceptance. Inclusive governance systems create substantial national development instead of traditional centralized administration. Ethnic groups achieve national unity through representative governance by participating in government decisions. Provincial development becomes balanced through resource equality thus reducing inequalities caused by discriminatory political approaches. The advancement of economic integration in Pakistan will occur through regional asset development alongside trading system establishment and industrial projects and agricultural enhancement. The core function of a national identity system in Pakistan should be to maintain cultural diversity between ethnic groups as the foundation for national unity. The establishment of multiple governance reforms will build a sustainable national development framework that achieves desired outcomes for inclusivity.

Addressing Political Marginalization

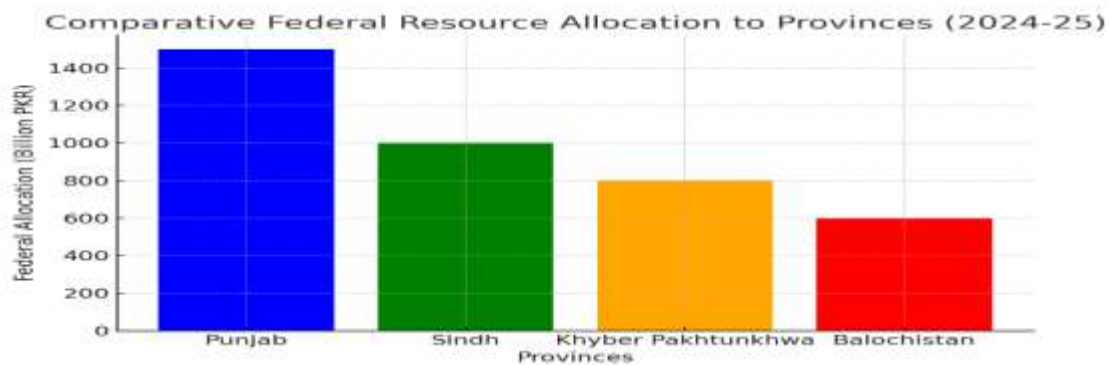
The principal governance problem in Pakistan exists because ethnic minorities receive unequal political representation across the entire national territory. The political dominance of Punjab province generates alienation within other provinces leading to damage of national unity. An appropriate federal governance system exists as a solution to resolve this problem. A governance system should establish proportional representation at national and provincial levels to ensure every ethnic group participates in decision-making processes. The growth of minority leader governance power leads to better national cohesion and equal territorial development throughout the country. The democratic legitimacy grows stronger when electoral and policy reforms provide representation rights to every ethnic group. Arend Lijphart establishes through consociation democracy theory that nations implementing proportional representation and federal principles will obtain stronger national cohesion among diverse populations.

Ensuring Equitable Resource Distribution

The uneven allocation of resources between Balochistan and Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the fundamental cause of ethnic grievances in Pakistan. The provinces generate substantial economic worth yet experience planned economic underdevelopment because officials show no attention. The federal fund distribution process should operate under transparency while development requirements should function as the primary decision-making basis to establish fair governance. Infrastructure development programs require adequate funding to establish economic prospects and employment generation throughout all areas. The economic justice theories support equal opportunity creation through fair resource distribution to achieve social equality based on John Rawls' justice theory. A revision of the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award must be conducted to assess provincial development needs and economic outcomes for strengthening national unity through equitable resource distribution.

Recognizing and Preserving Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

The unequal resource distribution between Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stands as the primary cause of ethnic grievances in Pakistan. The provinces generate substantial economic value yet face planned economic underdevelopment because government officials fail to acknowledge their importance. A transparent system for distributing federal funds should operate in parallel with development needs to establish fair governance. The success of an infrastructure development program depends on having enough financial support to establish economic prospects and create jobs throughout all regions. Equal priority appears in John Rawls' theory of justice and other economic justice doctrines when distributing resources fairly because it creates opportunities to avoid leaving anyone behind. The National Finance Commission (NFC) Award requires revision to assess provincial development needs and economic achievements because this will strengthen national unity through equitable resource distribution.

Figure 1: comparative federal resource allocation to provinces (2024-25)

Recommendations

Decentralization and Strengthening Provincial Autonomy

The federal power structure in Pakistan generates ethnic conflicts because it provides more benefits to selected provinces than others. The government needs to implement essential measures for decentralization together with fair governance. Provincial and district governments need both administrative and financial decentralization to obtain necessary power for making decisions that address their particular needs. According to theories of federalism states achieve better governance performance with improved ethnic relations through regional self-governance.

Fair Political Representation for Ethnic Groups

National instability in Pakistan develops because dominant ethnic groups retain political control while discriminating against ethnic minorities. Multiple methods should be implemented to create governance systems that unite every group. The electoral system needs to provide proportional representation to every ethnic group in both the National Assembly and Senate and provincial legislative bodies. Lijphart's consociationalism theory demonstrates that minority community integration into politics and reduction of ethnic conflicts happens by implementing two critical strategies including reserved political participation along with power sharing responsibilities.

Equitable Resource Distribution

National instability in Pakistan develops because dominant ethnic groups retain political control while discriminating against ethnic minorities. Multiple methods should be implemented to create governance systems that unite every group. The electoral system needs to provide proportional representation to every ethnic group in both the National Assembly and Senate and provincial legislative bodies. Both reserved political representation and sharing of power serve as essential elements of Lijphart's consociationalism theory which aims to connect minority people to political institutions and decrease ethnic violence.

Linguistic and Cultural Inclusion

The strength of ethnic tensions in Pakistan continues to escalate because of linguistic and cultural marginalization that affects educational institutions and government departments and media outlets. Official recognition of regional languages serves as the requirement for students to access public administration and educational curricula and media broadcasts. National unity under multiculturalism theory requires both linguistic and cultural unification to achieve social cohesion instead of social fragmentation.

Establishing Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The strength of ethnic tensions in Pakistan continues to escalate because of linguistic and cultural marginalization that affects educational institutions and government departments and media outlets. Official recognition of regional languages serves as the requirement for students to access public administration and educational curricula and media broadcasts. National unity under multiculturalism theory requires both linguistic and cultural unification to achieve social cohesion instead of social fragmentation.

Strengthening Legal Protections for Ethnic Minorities

Pakistan requires strengthened legal institutions which will protect ethnic minority rights. The government must enforce strict anti-discrimination laws which prevent every type of employment barrier and educational barrier and governance barrier. Establishing a just society demands full human rights protection through laws which follow human rights theories.

Economic Empowerment and Development Programs

Economic grievances among ethnic populations in Pakistan result from systemic neglect. The government requires specialized economic programs to provide power to ethnic minority groups. The deployment of targeted programs for underdeveloped regions stimulates national unity and stability according to economic development theories.

Fostering Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Reconciliation

Every educational institution together with public institutions must establish national integration programs to enhance mutual understanding between ethnic groups. The structured frameworks of inter-group interactions based on social integration theories work to minimize stereotypes through the development of national unity.

The conversion of ethnic diversity into national strength requires Pakistan to establish protective legal frameworks alongside economic policy decentralization and ethnic inclusion strategies. National stability in Pakistan depends on establishing both inclusive governance and social justice systems which defend every ethnic group residing within Pakistan's borders.

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