

Tabadlab Policy Roundtable 06 - Federalism in Pakistan & the 18th Amendment Policy Brief

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQRVMu9LgHk&t=1s>

A heavily politicised tussle between federal and provincial authorities over how to respond to COVID-19 has recently been threatening to take a constitutional turn. Arguably the most popular and controversial piece of legislation in Pakistani history, the 18th Amendment has the unique capacity to simultaneously draw on intense emotions, governance hurdles and questions that cut to the very essence of the federal structure. Tabadlab speaks to a diverse panel of experts to weigh in on the sticking points of the debate and how to build a consensus that will last.



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Recommendations

- Strengthening the capacity of provinces to manage their affairs
- Convening Council of Common Interest meetings to discuss issues
- Beginning deliberations over an 8th NFC Award to resolve financial tussles
- Understanding that revenue growth is the only long-term solution
- Recognising the need for consensus-building in delicate political matters

Discussion Summary

● Timing of debate

With COVID-19 currently running over all aspects of public and private life, our panellists question whether this is an appropriate time to launch into a complex debate over the devolution of powers. Will the wrangling further diminish the possibility of a united political response to the current crisis?

● Financial distribution

Is the leadership of the country genuinely divided over the principle of devolution or does the issue pertain specifically to the limits placed on federal finances? Our speakers delve into the NFC Award, state expenditures and whether the possibility of an amicable agreement exists.

● Capacity constraints

How legitimate is the critique levelled at provinces of lacking the requisite capacity to effectively administer the powers vested in them by the 18th Amendment? Is the best solution to bolster their capabilities to manage their affairs or revert authority to the Centre?

● Civil Services

What role does a centrally-recruited civil service play in provincial autonomy? How does the efficacy of the same bureaucracy vary when placed at the Centre as opposed to the federating units? What are the possibilities, prospects and hurdles of certain services being entirely localised?

● Local governments

Are the provinces doing an injustice to the spirit of the 18th Amendment by acquiring powers and funds from the Centre without passing it down to district administrations? What are the historical trends regarding full devolution and how has this impacted service delivery in key areas?

● Restructuring provinces

Our speakers shed light on some sensitive debates surrounding the creation of new provinces in Pakistan. Should newer units be carved up based on ethnolinguistic lines? And why have some of the most popular of such movements not reached their logical conclusion despite widespread consensus?

● Identity politics

Are debates over the federal structure inevitably tinged with a sense of identity politics? How important is it to avoid hitting nationalistic nerves when discussing issues of governance? What responsibilities does the federation have towards its units and has the historical centralisation of power left much to be desired?