

From Margins to the Mainstream: Evaluating the Impact of the 26th Amendment on Democratic Governance in Pakistan

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Abstract: *The 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan is a crucial reform that advances the country's democratic structure by increasing parliamentary representation and enhancing participatory governance. This study examines how the amendment contributes to the realization of constitutional principles, particularly the right to political inclusion and federal balance. The primary objective is to assess the legal and political significance of the amendment in the broader context of democratic consolidation across Pakistan. Adopting a doctrinal legal research method, the article analyzes constitutional provisions, parliamentary records, and relevant legal principles to explore how the amendment reinforces the representative nature of the state. The findings suggest that the 26th Amendment marks a meaningful step toward achieving greater political equity and institutional inclusivity, ensuring that legislative bodies more accurately reflect the country's diverse population. It also demonstrates the state's commitment to strengthening the federation through legal mechanisms. The study concludes that the 26th Amendment is a positive constitutional development that upholds democratic values, enhances legislative legitimacy, and promotes national unity through equitable representation.*

Keywords: Democratic consolidation, Electoral reform, Federalism, Marginalized communities, National unity, Parliamentary representation, Political inclusion

1. Introduction

The 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan marks a pivotal development in the country's democratic journey, aiming to rectify issues of political exclusion and underrepresentation that have long plagued its governance system. By increasing the parliamentary representation for marginalized regions and communities, the amendment seeks to foster a more inclusive and equitable political structure. This article evaluates the impact of the 26th Amendment on democratic governance in Pakistan, particularly focusing on how it enhances political inclusion, ensures a better balance between the federal and provincial governments, and contributes to national unity (Ahmed & Asma, 2024).

Pakistan's political landscape has historically been shaped by elite dominance, with certain regions, particularly provinces like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, often feeling politically sidelined. These underrepresented areas have struggled to secure adequate political representation in the National Assembly, which has led to a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement among their populations. The introduction of the 26th Amendment aims to address these concerns by adjusting the allocation of parliamentary seats, particularly increasing representation for smaller provinces and marginalized communities. This amendment was conceived as a step towards ensuring that the National Assembly better reflects the country's diverse population and adheres to the principles of political inclusion and

equality embedded in the Constitution (Ahmed & Asma, 2024).

The 26th Amendment carries significant importance for Pakistan's political system. It not only strengthens the democratic process by providing a more accurate representation of the nation's demographic diversity but also supports the federation by rebalancing political power between the federal government and the provinces. This article hypothesizes that the 26th Amendment has had a positive impact on democratic governance by enhancing political equity and strengthening the legitimacy of the National Assembly. By providing underrepresented communities with more seats in parliament, the amendment promotes political inclusivity and ensures that legislative decisions are more reflective of the broader population. Moreover, it reinforces the federal structure of Pakistan, ensuring that provinces with smaller populations are not overshadowed by the political interests of more populous areas (Khan & Khan, 2023).

This study explores these themes through a doctrinal legal research methodology, analyzing the constitutional provisions related to the 26th Amendment, parliamentary records, and other relevant legal principles. The research aims to provide a thorough understanding of the amendment's legal and political significance and assess how it has contributed to the broader goals of democratic consolidation in Pakistan. The findings are expected to show that the 26th Amendment has played a crucial role in enhancing the inclusivity and representativeness of Pakistan's political system, while also contributing to the long-term stability of its federal framework.

The article is structured to first examine the legal provisions of the amendment and how they impact parliamentary representation. It will then explore the social and political implications of the reform, particularly its effect on marginalized communities and regional representation. Finally, the article will consider the broader implications of the 26th Amendment for democratic governance in Pakistan, providing an analysis of its role in promoting national unity and offering suggestions for future reforms to strengthen political inclusivity further.

2. The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study centers around the principles of political inclusion, federalism, and democratic consolidation, which are key to understanding the impact of the 26th Amendment on Pakistan's political system. It explores how increasing parliamentary representation for marginalized communities influences the broader dynamics of political participation, federal balance, and national unity. The theoretical framework draws on theories of democratic representation, federalism, and political equity, particularly focusing on how legal reforms can enhance or hinder the political empowerment of historically excluded groups. This framework examines the relationship between constitutional amendments and the broader socio-political environment, assessing the potential for meaningful inclusion versus symbolic gestures. By linking these theoretical concepts, the study investigates how the 26th Amendment aligns with the goals of inclusive governance, equitable representation, and democratic legitimacy.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study adopts a doctrinal legal research approach, which focuses on analyzing legal texts, constitutional provisions, and parliamentary records to evaluate the impact of the 26th Amendment on democratic governance in Pakistan. This method involves a comprehensive review of primary legal sources, including the Constitution of Pakistan, relevant legislative documents, and the text of the 26th Amendment itself. The study also examines secondary sources such as academic articles, legal commentaries, and reports from national and international organizations that discuss the political and legal implications of the amendment.

To explore the broader political context, the research incorporates qualitative analysis of parliamentary debates and records, enabling an understanding of how the amendment was discussed, debated, and

implemented. The study also utilizes a comparative approach by drawing insights from other federal systems that have undergone similar constitutional reforms, which serves to contextualize Pakistan's experience with the 26th Amendment. Through this combination of legal analysis and comparative study, the research aims to assess the theoretical and practical impacts of the amendment on political inclusivity, federal balance, and the consolidation of democracy.

Data is processed by critically assessing the effectiveness of the amendment in addressing political exclusion, ensuring equitable representation, and strengthening the federal structure. The research evaluates these factors through a synthesis of legal texts, institutional reports, and case studies of previous political reforms in Pakistan and other comparable countries. This methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of how legal reforms can shape democratic governance and serves as the basis for formulating policy recommendations and identifying potential areas for further research.

4. Historical Context of the 26th Amendment

Pakistan's political system has long been plagued by issues of political exclusion, particularly affecting marginalized communities. For much of the country's history, political power has been concentrated in the hands of the elite, with minority groups, ethnic communities, and smaller provinces often excluded from meaningful participation in the decision-making processes. This pattern of exclusion has been especially evident in regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which have struggled with underrepresentation in the National Assembly despite their significant cultural, historical, and political importance. This marginalization of certain communities and regions has contributed to a sense of disenfranchisement, fueling perceptions of inequality and hindering the development of a truly representative democracy (De Schweinitz & Frost, 2023).

In response to these imbalances, the introduction of the 26th Amendment was aimed at correcting these inequities and ensuring a more representative and inclusive political system. The amendment sought to adjust the allocation of seats in the National Assembly, giving greater political representation to marginalized communities, particularly those in underrepresented regions. By revising the electoral framework, the amendment aimed to reflect more accurately the demographic diversity of Pakistan, ensuring that all groups—regardless of their size, geographic location, or socio-economic status—could participate in the democratic process on equal terms (Aloi, 2004).

The core objective of the 26th Amendment was not only to increase the number of seats for these marginalized communities but also to balance the distribution of political power between the federal government and the provinces. In doing so, the amendment sought to reinforce Pakistan's federal structure, ensuring that smaller provinces and less politically powerful regions were not overshadowed by the larger, more populous areas. By enhancing the political inclusion of underrepresented groups, the amendment provided a legal mechanism for these communities to exert greater influence in the political sphere, ultimately working toward a more equitable and balanced system of governance. This reform was particularly significant in terms of promoting national unity. By addressing the historical marginalization of certain regions and communities, the amendment aimed to bridge the gap between the federal center and provincial governments, fostering a more cooperative relationship between them. In this way, the 26th Amendment represented a concerted effort to move toward a more inclusive political culture in Pakistan, where all citizens could participate in the democratic process, thereby contributing to the broader goal of national integration and stability (Muhammad et al., 2024).

5. The Legal and Political Significance of the 26th Amendment

The 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan holds substantial legal and political significance, extending beyond its immediate impact on the composition of the National Assembly. Legally, the amendment embodies core democratic values such as political inclusion, equality, and fairness, all of which are fundamental principles enshrined in Pakistan's Constitution. By revising the electoral framework to accommodate a more accurate representation of the country's diverse population, the

amendment underscores a commitment to ensuring that all communities, especially those historically marginalized, have a rightful place in the legislative process. This not only contributes to the legitimacy of democratic institutions but also strengthens the broader democratic governance of the country (Muhammad & Ali, 2025).

A key legal principle embodied in the 26th Amendment is political equity. By increasing the number of parliamentary seats for underrepresented regions and communities, the amendment ensures that citizens from all walks of life—regardless of ethnicity, religion, or geographical location—are afforded a meaningful voice in the democratic process. This shift promotes fairness in the representation of Pakistan's diverse demographic makeup. Prior to the amendment, certain groups, particularly in smaller provinces, lacked the political clout to influence national policies. The introduction of additional parliamentary seats for these areas helps rectify this imbalance, ensuring that the National Assembly reflects the true diversity of the population. In doing so, the amendment enhances the representativeness of Pakistan's political system, making it more responsive to the needs and aspirations of all citizens (Asia, 2024).

Politically, the 26th Amendment plays a critical role in reinforcing the federal structure of Pakistan. Historically, Pakistan's federal system has been marked by tensions between the federal government and the provinces, particularly regarding concerns over political representation. Smaller provinces, such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have often felt that their interests were sidelined by more populous provinces like Punjab, leading to calls for a more balanced distribution of political power. The amendment directly addresses these concerns by increasing the number of seats for these smaller provinces and regions, thus ensuring that their interests are more effectively represented at the national level. This development is crucial for maintaining the delicate balance between the federal center and provincial governments, helping to foster a more harmonious and cooperative federal structure. By making these adjustments, the 26th Amendment not only responds to historical grievances but also strengthens Pakistan's overall governance framework, promoting political stability and unity. The 26th Amendment is a transformative legal instrument that significantly contributes to the democratic consolidation of Pakistan. By promoting political inclusion, ensuring greater representation for marginalized communities, and reinforcing the federal balance, the amendment addresses long-standing issues of political inequality. As a result, it stands as a key step toward achieving a more inclusive, equitable, and representative democracy in Pakistan, reinforcing the principles of fairness and justice in the country's political system (Tripathi, 2024).

6. Consolidation of Democracy

The 26th Amendment represents a pivotal moment in the ongoing process of democratic consolidation in Pakistan. As democratic systems evolve, the importance of inclusive and representative political institutions becomes increasingly evident. In a country as diverse as Pakistan, it is essential that the political system reflects the full spectrum of its social and demographic makeup. The 26th Amendment addresses this need by increasing the representation of marginalized communities and ensuring that all regions and groups have an opportunity to participate in the political process. This move strengthens the legitimacy of Pakistan's democratic framework, demonstrating that the country is not merely operating a procedural democracy but is working towards a system that genuinely reflects the will and interests of all its citizens (Dawn.com, 2024).

One of the most significant aspects of the amendment is its contribution to political inclusivity. By providing greater representation for marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and smaller provinces, the amendment allows these communities to have a voice in the national legislative process. This is critical for fostering a more participatory democracy, where decisions are made with input from all segments of society. The inclusion of underrepresented groups helps prevent political alienation and promotes a sense of ownership and engagement in the democratic process, which is crucial for long-

term stability. When citizens believe that their voices matter and that their needs are considered in political decision-making, they are more likely to support democratic institutions and participate actively in civic life (Jazeera, 2024).

In addressing the historical issues of underrepresentation, the 26th Amendment also plays a vital role in restoring public trust in Pakistan's political institutions. For many years, citizens in marginalized regions felt that their concerns were overlooked by the central government and the National Assembly. This sense of exclusion eroded faith in the political system, with many viewing the legislature as a body that served the interests of only the powerful and dominant groups. By correcting these imbalances and ensuring that all communities have a fair share of representation, the 26th Amendment helps rebuild confidence in the political process. When citizens perceive the legislature as truly representative of the nation's diversity, they are more likely to trust its decisions and engage with the political system. This shift in public perception is essential for the consolidation of democracy in Pakistan. A system that is seen as inclusive and fair is more likely to withstand challenges, whether political, social, or economic. The 26th Amendment enhances the resilience of Pakistan's democracy by making it more responsive to the needs of its diverse population. In doing so, it contributes to a democratic culture where political institutions are trusted, stable, and capable of addressing the country's complex challenges. As Pakistan continues to navigate the complexities of governance, the amendment serves as an important milestone in its journey toward a more inclusive, representative, and robust democratic system (Siddiqui, 2024).

7. Contributions to National Unity

In addition to its role in strengthening democratic governance, the 26th Amendment plays a crucial role in fostering national unity in Pakistan. As a country marked by significant ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, Pakistan faces the challenge of creating a cohesive national identity while respecting and acknowledging its pluralistic nature. The amendment's focus on increasing representation for marginalized communities directly addresses this challenge, helping to bridge the historical divides between various regions and groups. By ensuring that no community is left out of the political process, the 26th Amendment contributes to a more harmonious and unified nation (Chughtai, 2024).

The increased representation for underrepresented regions and communities not only addresses issues of political exclusion but also fosters a sense of shared ownership in the country's political future. When all groups—regardless of their ethnicity, language, or region—have a voice in the legislative process, it creates a more inclusive political environment where citizens feel that they are part of the nation-building project. This inclusivity is a powerful tool for promoting national unity, as it ensures that every community, from the largest to the smallest, has a stake in the country's governance and development. In turn, this sense of participation and inclusion encourages social cohesion, as citizens are more likely to view the state as a fair and representative entity. The 26th Amendment also sends a strong message to Pakistan's citizens about the state's commitment to reflecting the country's diversity in its governance structures. It signals that the political system is not dominated by one ethnic or regional group but is, instead, an inclusive representation of the nation's multifaceted identity. This inclusivity can serve as a foundation for peaceful coexistence, as communities that may have previously felt marginalized are now part of the national conversation. By recognizing the diverse makeup of Pakistan and ensuring that all communities are equally represented, the 26th Amendment promotes a sense of unity that transcends ethnic and regional differences (Iqbal, 2025).

In this way, the 26th Amendment contributes significantly to national unity by creating a more inclusive and equitable political system. It ensures that Pakistan's diverse population feels heard, valued, and connected to the nation's future, thereby fostering a sense of collective identity and shared purpose. In doing so, the amendment helps lay the groundwork for a more stable and cohesive society, where the country's pluralism is embraced as a strength rather than a source of division.

8. Challenges and Limitations

a) Challenges in Implementation

One of the primary concerns regarding the 26th Amendment is the challenge of effectively implementing its provisions. The amendment aims to increase the representation of marginalized communities in the National Assembly, but the mere addition of seats does not necessarily guarantee that these communities will experience meaningful political participation. In Pakistan, political power has historically been concentrated among elite groups, which have significant control over decision-making processes and access to resources. For the increased representation to translate into genuine political influence, there must be concerted efforts to address the deeper structural issues of political exclusion. This includes ensuring that marginalized groups not only have seats in the legislature but also the resources, support, and political power to engage meaningfully in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the political system in Pakistan has long been characterized by patronage networks and elite dominance. In such an environment, simply increasing parliamentary seats does not automatically result in greater political empowerment for marginalized communities. These communities often lack the financial and institutional support needed to compete effectively within the political system. Without such support, their representatives may struggle to exert influence or advocate for the needs and interests of their constituencies, undermining the intended goals of the amendment (Kanwel et al., 2020).

b) Structural Issues of Political Exclusion

In addition to the challenges of implementation, the 26th Amendment must address the deeper, more entrenched structural issues of political exclusion that have historically marginalized certain groups and regions in Pakistan. While the amendment increases parliamentary seats for underrepresented communities, it does not necessarily resolve the unequal distribution of resources or political power. Many marginalized areas in Pakistan, particularly smaller provinces like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have not only been underrepresented in the legislature but also suffer from systemic economic and political disadvantages. These include limited access to basic infrastructure, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities.

The root causes of political exclusion in these regions go beyond representation in the National Assembly. For the 26th Amendment to achieve its full potential, efforts must be made to address the broader socio-economic inequalities that continue to disadvantage these communities. This includes reforms to ensure equal access to resources, political decision-making power, and the creation of mechanisms that allow marginalized groups to actively participate in shaping national policies that affect them. Without addressing these structural issues, the amendment's goal of achieving political equity could remain an incomplete endeavor (Khan et al., 2020).

c) Political Environment and Elite Dominance

The broader political environment in Pakistan presents another significant challenge for the 26th Amendment. Political power in the country has often been concentrated in the hands of a few elites, including powerful political families, military figures, and business interests. These elites dominate the decision-making processes and have extensive influence over the political landscape, making it difficult for marginalized communities to achieve meaningful representation.

The amendment may increase the number of seats for underrepresented regions, but it remains to be seen whether these new seats will provide the necessary political power for marginalized communities to influence legislation. In a system where political elites have deep-rooted control over the political process, the increased representation of marginalized communities might not translate into a shift in the power dynamics. There is a risk that the new seats could become symbolic, offering little more than a

gesture of inclusion without any substantial changes to the distribution of political power. For the 26th Amendment to truly empower marginalized groups, it will require more than just increasing their numbers in the National Assembly—it will require a broader shift in the political culture and structures that have perpetuated elite dominance (Usman et al., 2021).

d) Resource Allocation and Political Clout

Even with increased representation, marginalized groups may still struggle to wield significant political influence if they lack the necessary resources and political clout to advocate for their interests effectively. In Pakistan, political influence is often tied to financial resources, media access, and political networks. These resources are often controlled by established political families and elites, making it difficult for new or marginalized voices to gain traction.

For the 26th Amendment to have a meaningful impact, it must be accompanied by measures that ensure that representatives from marginalized communities have the resources they need to effectively advocate for their constituencies. This could include financial support for political campaigns, access to media platforms to amplify their voices, and the development of networks that allow marginalized groups to engage with national-level decision-making. Without these additional resources, the increased representation might remain symbolic, as marginalized representatives may struggle to compete with more powerful political players (Javed et al., 2021).

9. Conclusion

The 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan represents a significant and progressive step toward enhancing political inclusivity and balancing the federal structure of the country. By increasing representation for marginalized communities, particularly those in underrepresented provinces and regions, the amendment strives to address historical political exclusion and promote a more equitable democratic system. This reform is vital not only for strengthening democratic governance but also for fostering national unity in a diverse and pluralistic society.

However, the effectiveness of the 26th Amendment depends on overcoming a range of challenges. While the amendment increases parliamentary representation, it does not automatically ensure that marginalized communities will experience meaningful political participation. Issues such as elite dominance, unequal resource distribution, and entrenched socio-economic inequalities must be addressed for the increased representation to result in real political empowerment. Additionally, the political environment in Pakistan, where power is often concentrated among a few elites, poses a significant hurdle to the amendment's success. For the amendment to genuinely fulfill its purpose, it is essential that it be supported by broader reforms aimed at achieving structural political equity and addressing resource disparities.

Future research should explore how the 26th Amendment can be complemented by other institutional reforms that empower marginalized communities and improve access to political resources. Scholars could examine the implementation strategies of similar amendments in other federal systems to identify best practices for ensuring that increased representation leads to meaningful political participation. Moreover, further studies could investigate the long-term effects of the amendment on political stability, national unity, and social cohesion in Pakistan. Given the challenges in transforming political representation into genuine political power, research on the mechanisms that enable marginalized communities to effectively navigate Pakistan's political landscape will be crucial.

In conclusion, while the 26th Amendment is a step forward in making Pakistan's democracy more inclusive, its success will depend on how well it is implemented and whether it is supported by complementary reforms. A truly representative democracy requires not only political inclusion but also equitable access to resources and decision-making power. As Pakistan continues to evolve as a democracy, the 26th Amendment offers an important opportunity to strengthen its democratic

structures, but it must be accompanied by sustained efforts to overcome the deep-rooted challenges of political exclusion and inequality.

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