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Cooperative Federalism in Pakistan: The Role of the Council of Common Interests (CCI)

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Abstract

This study critically analyses the role played by the Council of Common Interests (CCI) in creating an environment of cooperative federalism in Pakistan during the period September 2012 to September 2021, with emphasis on how consistent with the constitutional mandate, the CCI has operated in these areas. Constitution organized in Articles 153 and 154, the CCI is a congress of great significance that acts as a federal coordination body but with responsibility for governing intergovernmental relations, most especially in respect to enumerated subjects in the Federal Legislative List (Part II). Using a qualitative, discourse-based analysis, the research examines the legal make-up, frequency of meetings, and central thematic agendas, as well as institution-related challenges for the CCI during the indicated period. The outcomes indicate that the CCI contributed substantially to helping resolve complex federal issues such as management of water resources, distribution of energy, health policy, management of education, and population census disputes. Although the 18th Constitutional Amendment, among other measures, considerably improved the mandate and institutional design of CCI, its effectiveness has been blunted by irregular meeting calendars, gaps in implementation, and politics. Though faced with many challenges as a result of the eclectic organization of the CCI it was dissolved and then reformed after a year; it also operates outside the realm of the law with Mandate vested in all members at the same level as they participate in town and country-wide meetings the CCI has grown to occupy a vital space as an agency for fostering consensus and conflict reconciliation in Pakistan's federal ordering. Based on the discussion above, the paper finds that the long-term effectiveness of CCI depends on continued political engagement, procedural changes, and "institutionalization" of transparent mechanisms.

Keywords: Federalism, Pakistan Constitution, Council of Common Interests, 18th Amendment, Intergovernmental Relations, Policy Coordination

1. Introduction

Federalism in Pakistan is characterized by a constitutional split (given the limited nature of the powers of the federation) between legislative,



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administrative, and financial powers between the federal and provincial governments, which is meant to accomplish a balance between national unity and provincial autonomy (Muhib et al., 2025). As a multi-ethnic and linguistically divided nation, the introduction of a federal system by the country of Pakistan was meant to bridge regional gaps and accommodate the political necessity of...the people to self-determination (Amir & Ahmad, 2020). The Constitution of 1973, even today, constitutes the foundation of this federating arrangement based on the inclusion of several provisions encouraging decentralization and collaborative governance amongst federating units (FARUKH, n.d.). One of the greatest mechanisms for intergovernmental coordination created by the Constitution is the Council of Common Interests (CCI), which was created under Article 153. The CCI is constituted as a constitutional body to mediate consultation and dispute about the affairs of both federal and provincial governments, especially the Federal Legislative List (Part II), Government of Pakistan, 1973. Its makeup incorporates the Prime Minister as chairperson and all four provincial Chief Ministers and three federal nominees, which gives representation of both levels of government in the national policy discourse (Faiz, 2024). Under article 154 of the constitution, the CCI's responsibilities are listed, requiring that the CCI hold regular meetings punctually (at least once every 90 days) and submittal of annual reports to both the House of Parliament for transparency and transparency Government of Pakistan 1973. The writing of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 was the watershed moment in Pakistan's federal development. This amendment leads to the transfer of 17 ministries and several important policy arenas, including health, education, and environment, from the federal level to the provincial (A. Shah, 2012). With this change, the CCI role was substantially strengthened because the CCI transformed to be the key place of intergovernmental differences resolution, particularly on interwoven jurisdictions or resource-sharing conflicts (Jaffrelet et al., 2024). The increased power of CCI in the post-18th Amendment era is an institutional effort to bring cooperative federalism collaboration instead of rivalry to the center-province relations.

During the years 2012-2021, CCI took a more visible and participative role in Pakistan's federal governance framework. It was assembled to discuss urgent national questions, including energy governance, distribution of water, and confirmation of census data, hence, it rose to play a role in reaching policy consensus among federating units (Waheed et al., 2025). The CCI played an awakening coordinating and decision-making role in such disagreements as disagreements over NHP, implementation of the 1991 Water Accord, and culmination of the 6th Population Census 2017, for instance. These engagements highlight its relevance in tackling long-standing geographically interprovincial concerns and advancing policy harmonization in a hitherto divided political system. Nevertheless, though significant, the CCI has not resisted criticism. Its unpredictable schedule of meetings, especially between 2012 and 2016, when meetings were few and were held at delayed times, has been listed by observers (Khalid, 2020). Additionally, there has been a consistent gap between implementation and many of its decisions have not been implemented because of bureaucratic inertia or because of political opposition at either a federal or provincial level. Inter-agency disharmony has also limited the workings of CCI, mainly over issues of federal financial control and revenue deductions by the



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Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), which some provinces consider as federal overreach (Janjua et al., 2020). In this situation, the CCI is a symbol and a mechanism of cooperative federalism in Pakistan. It provides a framework of structured debate, conflict management, and consensus making, the basics of stability and the effectiveness of any federal arrangement. This paper seeks to determine the effectiveness of the CCI during 2012-2021 regarding its legal mandate, policy influence, institutional issues, and contribution to reinforcing federal governance in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The Council of Common Interests (CCI) is constitutionally the hub of Pakistan's federal structure in the capacity of an intergovernmental forum that is given the mandate of regulating center-province relations. Increasing volumes of scholarly discussion have addressed its institutional evolution, its legal underpinnings, and its workings, as well as limitations in the post-18th Amendment Pakistani federalism. (Bhattacharyya, 2020) allows providing an overview of the federalism's historical development in Pakistan, and claims that such cooperative entities as CCI are crucial for addressing the ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity of the country. The council, he argues, is a must for the constitution because it is needed to mediate between the contradictory imperatives of national integration and provincial autonomy. Using a legal-institutional lens, (Larik & Chandio, 2025) investigate Articles 153 and 154 of the Constitution. They note that while the CCI is institutionally empowered, even though politically, there exist political tensions and executive dominance, and its implementation has been inconsistent, and its institutional independence is rather weak. (FARUKH, n.d.) is critical of the post-18th Amendment federal transition since the devolution of powers made the CCI's role more significant. But he argues that institutional inertia and politicization shortchange it from having the ability to serve as an effective federal coordination mechanism. Likewise, (A. Shah, 2012) attests to the amendment's revolutionary effect in reshaping the federal balance of power, with Shah arguing that the CCI should be a regular policy harmonization forum and not a crisis sorting tool. Literature such as (Khawar et al., 2021), empirical research examines meeting records and policy outcomes between 2012 and 2021. These works record the council's intervention on major issues such as energy allotment, census verification, and water controversies, but stir up the apprehensions of tardy implementation and partisan scheduling of meetings. According to (Jaffrelot et al., 2024), intergovernmental mechanisms suffer from a weak institutionalization as informal negotiations tend to undermine formal, rules-based decision-making procedures. Some scholars have analyzed the thematic ambit of the CCI. (Alam, 2019) investigate the mediation function of the 1991 Water Accord in addressing interprovincial water disputes while highlighting the technical and political strength of provincial players. They evaluate the scope of its role in natural resource governance, claiming that federal hegemony still limits the provincial player, especially in areas nominally shared. In comparison, Adil sees things more positively by proposing that the CCI has an institutional means of promoting policy convergence in devolved matters like higher education and environmental regulation. Starting with this optimism, (Adil, 2023) then describes how CCI's normative value lies in reinforcing interprovincial trust and



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curbing policy fragmentation. The CCI has also been analyzed on both a judicial and oversight level. (Khan & Zubair, 2023) debate that judicial intervention in center-province delays has once been more counterproductive than coercive. (Adil, 2023) At this time, emphasizes the absence of material parliamentary discussion of CCI annual reports that inhibits accountability and transparency. Finally, (Khan & Zubair, 2023) suggest structural reforms that will help make the CCI work better, ensuring more parliamentary oversight and public participation. They endorse a move from a technocratic and closed model of intergovernmental coordination to a more inclusive and responsive scheme. Aggregately, the literature verifies that the CCI is constitutionally indispensable for Pakistan's federalism but suffers from political, administrative, and procedural restraints that affect its effectiveness. However, it has powerful potential as a means of cooperative federalism, given that transparency, regularity, and institutional autonomy can be encouraged.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative research design to examine the documents to explore the functioning and role of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) in Pakistan's federal framework from 2012 to 2021. The main sources of data are official minutes of meetings of the CCI, published reports of the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination, the records of parliament, and public communiques. Other relevant information was obtained from reliable sources, including journal essays, legal commentaries, and media repositories. The analysis is based on a thematic content approach, drawing out recurring themes in major agenda items of the CCI, such as energy governance, water disputes, education and health coordination, census-related debate, and institutional transparency. These themes were obtained by inductive coding of CCI meeting results and triangulated with external evaluations and scholarly reviews to confirm validity. The empirical findings are inserted by filling in the data from across comparative federal systems with the mechanisms concerning intergovernmental coordination: The Inter-State Council in the case of India and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Australia. During this triangulation, the methodological triangulation is improved in terms of analytical depth and comparative relevance.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Federalism is constitutionally defined as a system in which powers are distributed to a central government and constituent units, things as provinces or states, working on their own within their jurisdiction (Elazar, 1987). This structure is based on the guidelines of communal governance and self-governance, meaning that joint actions in matters of the state are attained while maintaining provincial autonomy (Aroney, 2016). Practically, for effective federalism, there must exist an apparatus for intergovernmental coordination, open fiscal arrangements, and constitutionally irreversible devolution. Within the framework of Pakistan, the 1973 Constitution set up a formal federal structure. However, giving real teeth to the provinces as far as meaningful provincial autonomy is concerned came in the 18th Constitutional amendment, which transferred a lot of power to the provinces and strengthened the role of



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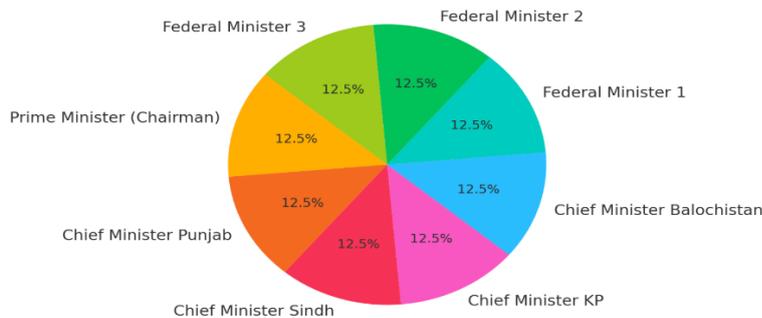
institutions such as the CCI in ensuring the equilibrium of government at the national level (A. Shah, 2012). To study the CCI's performance, this research uses two main theoretical lenses. Cooperative federalism and institutionalism. Cooperative federalism, which is sometimes compared to dual federalism, supports working together and mutual policy creation between different levels of government in various fields such as energy, water, health, and education (Bose, 2023). An example of this model is the CCI as a formal platform for consistency building, sharing, and resolving disputes between the federal and provincial governments (Singh & Siddiqui, 2024). Meanwhile, the institutionalist approach, in essence, new institutionalism, calls attention to the influence of formal institutions, legal fields, and organizational norms on intergovernmental behavior. Within this lens, CCI is examined as a constitutionally ordained institution, and its functioning is less dependent on its structural design than on political will, administrative niceties, and the state of federal dynamics (Fiseha, 2024). Combined, these frameworks provide a fine-grained overview of how legal mandates, institutional arrangements, and political interactions combine in the working of the CCI and, by extension, what is shaping Pakistan's developing federalism.

Constitutional Foundation of the Council of Common Interests

The Council of Common Interests (CCI) is a vital constitutional organ in the federal setup in Pakistan, charged with coordinating and reconciling differences between the federal government and provinces of the federation. Such a cooperative partnership formed by the forum historically existed before the 1973 Constitution, and had limited mechanisms under prior constitutional frameworks 1956 and 1962 constitutions, which had some centralization of powers (A. Shah, 2012). However, the 1973 constitution had a drastic departure by institutionalizing a cooperative model of federalism and creating the CCI as a constitutionally mandated body to protect provincial rights and support a consensus on major national issues (Chandio, 2014). Located in Articles 153 and 154 of the 1973 Constitution, the constitutional base of CCI is structured. Article 153 sets up the CCI and states that its chief role is to frame and regulate policies on issues listed under Part II of the Federal Legislative List and resolve disputes of the Government of Pakistan, 1973. This is inclusive of vital areas, including energy, water, and mineral resources, that need joint oversight because of their interprovincial context. Article 154 of the Act further enhances institution design by establishing operation requirements such that the CCI will be required to meet at least once every ninety days and submit an annual report to parliament on performance and decisions (Naseem et al., 2022). These constitutional provisions together seek to ensure that CCI was operating and accountable during Pakistan's federal set-up.



Composition of the Council of Common Interests (CCI)



Source: *Based on the constitutional framework outlined in Article 153 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) and interpreted by (Haris & Rauf, n.d.).*

This research deals critically with the functioning of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) concerning the promotion of cooperative federalism in Pakistan, based on its constitutional mandate and operation from 2012 to 2021. Constitution organized in Articles 153 and 154, the CCI is a congress of great significance that acts as a federal coordination body but with responsibility for governing intergovernmental relations, most especially in respect to enumerated subjects in the Federal Legislative List (Part II). Conducting a qualitative, document-based study, the current study examines the legal framework, rates of meetings, core thematic agendas, and institutional challenges to the CCI during the identified period. The results show that the CCI was a useful vehicle for managing complex issues facing the federal government, such as allocation of water resources, energy distribution, health policy, education management, and population census disputes. Although the 18th Constitutional Amendment, among other measures, considerably improved the mandate and institutional design of CCI, its effectiveness has been blunted by irregular meeting calendars, gaps in implementation, and politics. All these have not prevented the CCI from becoming an important arena for the negotiation of consensus and dispute settlement in the federal structure of Pakistan. The paper ends by concluding that any success in the long run of CCI depends on political commitment in the long run, procedural reforms, and institutionalization of transparent mechanisms.

Role of the CCI in Post-18th Amendment Federalism

The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 marked a historic reform that Pakistan's constitutional evolution: it sought power decentralization and provincial autonomy. Before the amendment, most policy areas were under high control by the federal government, reducing the dominion of the provinces. But



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the 18th Amendment introduced dramatic alterations, most importantly by relocating several subjects to the provinces from the list of the Federal Legislative and by empowering the provinces to participate in the decision-making processes (Ali et al., 2023). Such a change was supposed to guarantee that the provinces would gain more power in managing their resources and period-making, hence promoting a more inclusive and representative federal structure. Perhaps the most searing effect of the 18th Amendment was the export of power to the provinces. Previously centralized issues like health, education, and local governance were devolved to provincial jurisdiction, where the provinces became authoritative in policy implementation (S. A. A. Shah et al., 2021). This devolution was designed to solve the gaps in regional disparities and encourage local governance so that provincial governments were left with the autonomy of making decisions that were most appropriate to the demographic and economic setup in one province or the other. This change not only changed the political flavor of Pakistan but also enhanced the provinces' roles in the affairs of the country in the form of institutions such as the Council of Common Interests (CCI).

Strengthening of CCI's Mandate Post-Amendment

The 18th Constitutional amendment in 2010 was a consolidation of reform that consolidated provincial power and autonomy in Pakistan's constitutional past. At that time, the federal government had enormous control over various policy areas, thus reducing the power of provinces significantly. The 18th Amendment, however, made substantial changes, which are most notable of all as it moved several subjects from the Federal Legislative List to the provinces and provided more powers to the provinces to play their respective roles in the decision-making processes (Zardari & Zardari, 2023). This shift was supposed to bring more decision-making power at the provincial level by controlling their resources and policymaking, hence the creation of a more inclusive and representative federal structure (Ali et al., 2023). The devolution of powers to the provinces was perhaps the most important result of results from the 18th Amendment. Previously concentrated subjects, including health, education, and local government, were delegated to the provincial level, and provinces were thus held responsible for their policy implementation (Khatoon, 2023). This devolution was meant to correct the regional disparities and encourage local governance to empower the provincial governments to make the decisions that best served their demographic and economic needs. This shift had the effect of also changing the political dynamics in Pakistan as well as instituting a greater role of the provinces in instituting national policy through such institutions as the Council of Common Interests (CCI).

Functional Analysis of the CCI (2010-2024)

The effectiveness of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) is in large part reflected in the number of its meetings and the topics that are discussed at them. Based on the constitutional requirement, the CCI has to convene at least once in 90 days (Article 153, 1973). However, the number of meetings has been tremendously different from 2010 through 2024, with some years having for a single or two meetings and others six or more. For example, in the subsequent years on the 18th Amendment 2010-2014, the CCI had seldom meetings, only



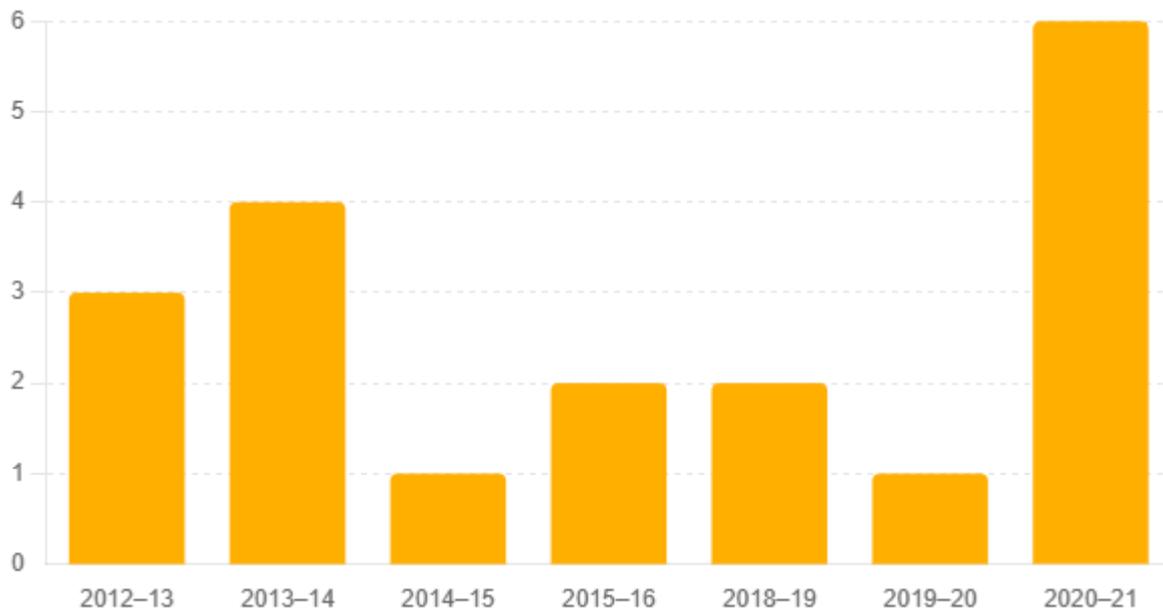
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one to two meetings per year (Jaffrelot et al., 2024). However, given the more acute questions concerning resource allocation and inter-governmental coordination, the intensity grew in subsequent years, especially from 2018 to 2021. For instance, in 2020-2021, the CCI convened 6 times with manifold agendas, including national census data, energy policy, and health funding, which reflected the increasing importance of the CCI in the framework of the federal government of Pakistan (“The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973).

Source: *Data compiled from* (Naseem et al., 2022).

Year	Number of Meetings	Key Focus Areas
2012-13	3	Water rights, energy, EOBI, LNG
2013-14	4	Energy policy, population census, and education standards
2014-15	1	Economic planning, water disputes
2015-16	2	National flood protection, net hydel profit
2018-19	2	Cleanliness drive, devolution issues
2019-20	1	ARE Policy, education, energy royalties
2020-21	6	National census, health funding, and electricity policy

Number of Council of Common Interests (CCI) Meetings Held Annually (2012-2021)





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Source: *Data compiled from (Naseem et al., 2022). An analysis of the performance of the council of common interest in post-18th amendment scenario in Pakistan (2010 to 2020)*

Out of the core issues raised by the CCI, energy and water governance have been recurring issues. In the energy fields, the CCI became important in formulating the policies on the distribution of national resources, including oil and gas, in harmonizing both their federal and provincial interests. Among the most important decisions in the energy sector was the natural gas distribution policy decision that was associated with fair distribution of resources between provinces, especially in the face of rising industrial and domestic consumers' demands. Similarly, in the case of the water sector, implementation of the 1991 Water Accord and resolution of inter-provincial differences between provinces about water rights have taken up a major portion of CCI discussions, between Punjab and Sindh on the use of water from the Indus River (Aziz & Naseer, 2024). Yet another key matter discussed on the CCI's agenda has been the national census. In 2017, whereas the CCI played a key role in leading to the 6th population census in Pakistan, there is also a question mark over the timing and methodology of the census. After inter-provincial consultation, census data was finally approved in 2021, where consensus was reached between federal and provincial governments (A. Shah, 2012). This choice was vital in the provision of equity in Pakistan's legislative organizations and a balanced allocation of financial resources between federal and provincial governments. Although the CCI has improved its constitutionality by increasing the frequency and area of its activities, the implementation of decisions remains a challenge. For example, atopic CCI, for instance, in the energy and water management, has made many crucial things that have been slowed down by the fulfillment. Ineffective coordination of the federal ministries and provincial governments is one of the reasons for such a state of affairs, which usually leads to slow implementation of the agreed arrangements made at the CCI (Aziz & Naseer, 2024). In addition, although CCI has been successful in conflict resolution, the failure to implement all decisions, particularly financial-oriented or resource-distributed decisions, has been a constraint. Sometimes shortage of binding legal powers to ensure that the province or the federal government implements the CCI decisions has undermined CCI authority (Jaffrelet et al., 2024).

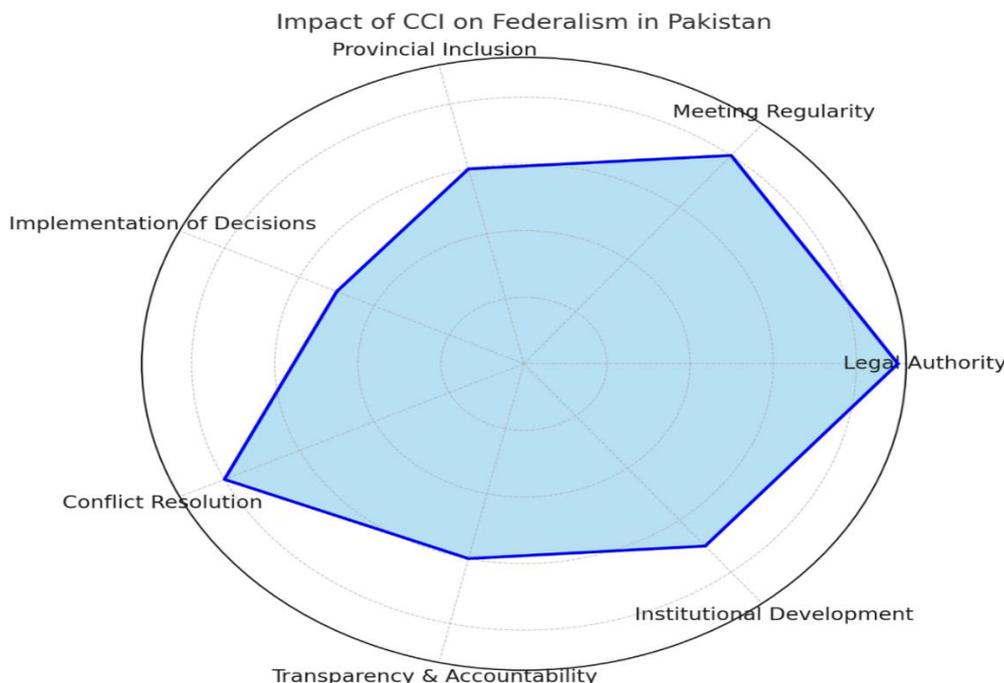
Institutional Challenges and Political Dynamics

The most apparent difficulty the Council of Common Interests (CCI) in Pakistan had been the lack of regular meetings prescribed in the constitution that should be held once every 90 days ("The Constitution Of Islamic Republic Of Pakistan, 1973," 1973). There was a great deal of variation in the number of meetings during the years 2010-2021, and in many years, the body would meet only once or twice. These delays eroded the effectiveness of the CCI concerning the timely resolution of critical intergovernmental problem areas such as water resources management, energy distribution, and national census information (Jaffrelet et al., 2024). The irregularity of meetings not only paralyzed the decision-making process but also resulted in the growing frustration of provincial governments



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because it was seen as in an abject failure to deliver on the constitutional mandate.



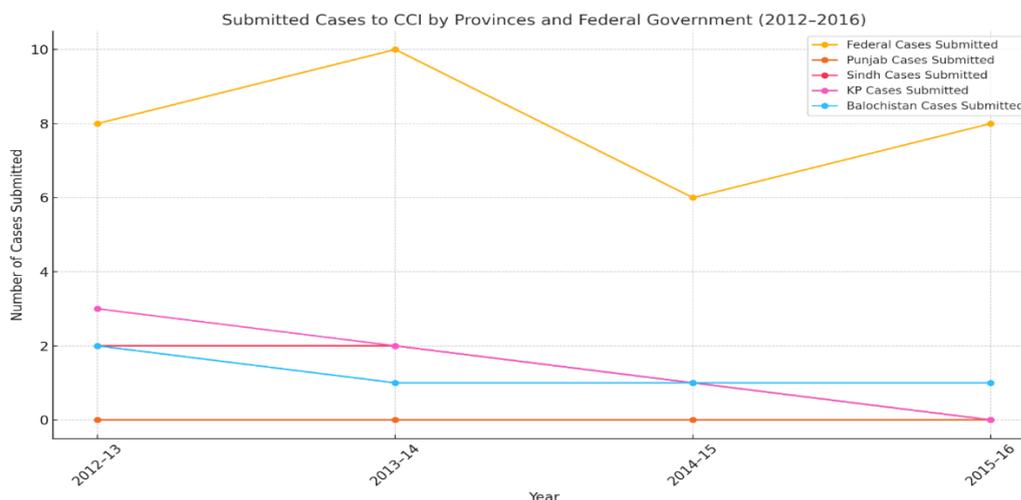
Source: *Based on qualitative insights into CCI's role in federal governance and intergovernmental coordination.*

More awkwardly, the untoward situation remained in that a lack of transparency in the functioning of CCI has been a recurring problem. Notwithstanding constitutional requirements for regular reporting of this information to parliament, sometimes these reports were not available to the public, raising questions of accountability (Khatoon, 2023). Lack of a permanent CCI Secretariat only in recent years contributed to this lack of institutional continuity since it has lacked the consistency and follow-up on decisions by body (A. Shah, 2012). Another problem for the CCI has been the simmering conflict between federal and provincial powers. The 18th Amendment, where; some powers to the provinces, was supposed to strengthen federalism and provide provinces with more autonomy. This, of course, also resulted in disputes surrounding provincial rights and the federal government's oversight of national policies. As the main dispute forum through which such disputes were resolved, CCI mostly found itself in the middle of these power wars. For instance, Punjab and Sindh have frequent disagreements surrounding the allocation of water from the Indus River, whereas disputes over the remit of energy royalties exist between the federation and different provinces. Although the CCI played the role of facilitating discussions, these issues invariably led to long-term deadlocks, with divergent political interests in federal and provincial governments. These power struggles were exacerbated by the political complexion in Pakistan's federal setup. The settlement between the provincial and federal governments would often affect the operation of the CCI. Political pressures in certain provincial governments in turn caused provincial governments to take conflicting positions on some important issues, thereby stalling the CCI's powers to reach consensus concerning such critical issues as energy distribution and resource allocation



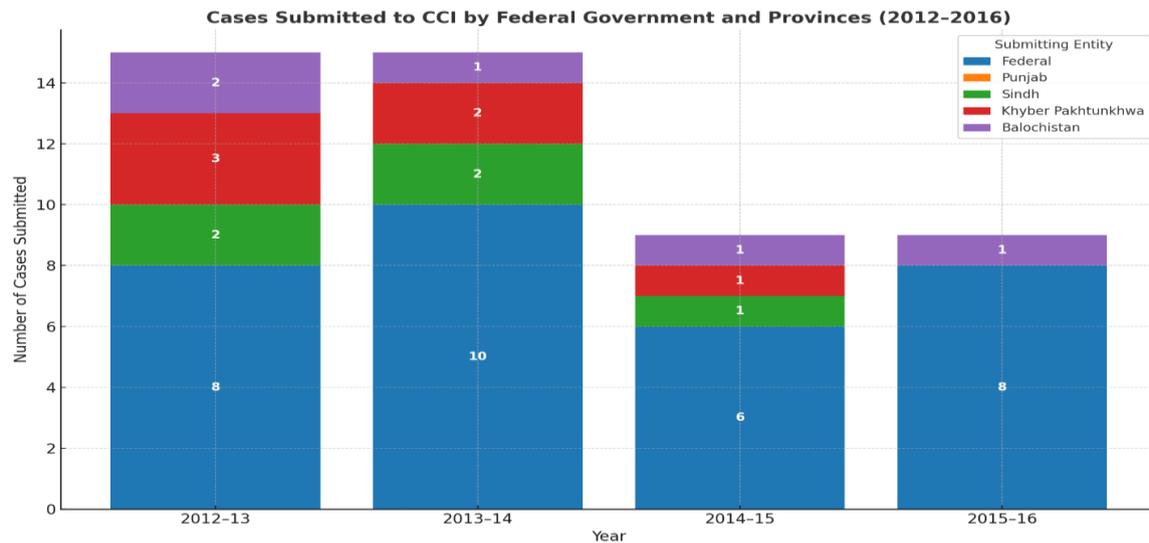
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(Jaffrelot et al., 2024). The changing will of the federal leadership also contributed to the effectiveness of the CCI operations, because its ability to come up with decisive and timely recommendations usually relied on the political agenda of the dominant party. It has also been an important concern about the provincial representation in CCI. Notwithstanding the constitutional provisions that each province should be represented by the chief minister or his nominee, their sufficiency has frequently been a subject of question. The smaller provinces like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have often complained about their relative powerlessness in CCI, with CCI having been increasingly seen as unrepresentative to more powerful provinces, especially Punjab (A. Shah, 2012). These power imbalances have been a significant hindrance to the CCI's ability to address the varied needs of all provinces since such power imbalances hamper the equitable sharing of national resources and policy formulations whose carrying capacities are sensitive to regional needs.



Source: Data adapted from (Naseem et al., 2022) An analysis of the performance of the council of common interest in post-18th amendment scenario in Pakistan (2010 to 2020)

In addition, the effectiveness of the CCI in managing complex intergovernmental problems is hampered by the limited ability of provincial governments to raise high-level discussions. Several provincial governments, especially in less developed localities, are constrained in terms of institutional capacity and resources, hence poor participation in the deliberations of CCI. The addition of this problem is exacerbated by the non-existence of a permanent Secretariat that can help in the framing of the agenda and follow up on the decision that would otherwise enhance the body's capacity to manage the federal-provincial issues effectively.



Source: Adapted from (Naseem et al., 2022) An analysis of the performance of the council of common interest in post-18th amendment scenario in Pakistan (2010 to 2020)

Judicial Interventions and Legislative Oversight

Lastly, its judicial interventions and the role played by legislative oversight are critical in determining the CCI's decision-making process. There have been many controversies involving the mode of operation of the CCI, which have been taken up by the judiciary, which has brought in need of judicial intervention in ensuring that the agency conforms to the constitutional requirements (Aziz & Naseer, 2024). Consequently, the judiciary has intervened in situations in which to offer clarifications on the powers, and responsibilities of the CCI, which has resulted in an operational framework that has been more defined (A. Shah, 2012). Nevertheless, judicial intervention has always been viewed as a reactive rather than proactive, and thus have been a source of concerns as regards the autonomy of the CCI and a requirement for better institutional mechanism to settle disputes independently. Likewise, the role of legislative oversight has also been a key determinant in the CCI's ability to execute constitutional mandate. It is of great importance for the federal parliament to subject the CCI to a regular reporting system in order to guarantee the accountability of the CCI and its proper implementation of its decisions. However, a weak legislative oversight has in most cases hampered the CCI from acting effectively because there has been lack of clear investigations by the national legislature on its activities (Naseem et al., 2022).

Comparative Perspective

It is helpful to make comparisons with the other inter-governmental bodies in other federal systems of things like such as ones that we have in India, Canada, and Australia, to get a better insight into the role and challenges of the Council of Common Interests in Pakistan. These nations have created institutional mechanisms to balance the interests of the central and provincial governments under the umbrella of a series of intergovernmental councils and forums and have provided lessons to replicate in the nation of Pakistan. In our case, in India, the Inter-State Council (ISC) that was created under Article 263 of the Indian



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Constitution acts similarly to CCI in mediating interaction that is between the central government and states on issues about the nation of India (Saxena, 2021). The ISC is authorized to treat any matter of national importance and submit recommendations to the central government. One of the strengths of the ISC is that it holds regular meetings and can discuss issues that cut across boundaries, such as water disputes, resource management, and economic planning, which has helped uphold better intergovernmental relations. Compared to Pakistan's CCI, which has suffered from the challenges of irregularities as well as interference from politics, the ISC has operated more consistently because it has enjoyed stronger institutional support as well as a clearer mandate (Guénette & Mathieu, 2023). In Canada, the FPTRC is an important mechanism for dealing with conflicts and a coordination mechanism for the federal and provincial territorial governments. The FPTRC is especially effective at addressing problems such as the health policy, environmental rules, and taxation because of its large representativeness and the strong will of all involved governments to support the intergovernmental cooperation. The focus on a collective approach and openness is another lesson learned from Canada that has minimized the sort of feudalistic rivalry typical of Pakistan's federal-provincial relations. Additionally, the robust role of legislative oversight in Canada ensures that these bodies will have some checks on their actions, and the public can trust them and will obey. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) replaced by the National Cabinet in 2020, in Australia, has been a critical forum for conducting national business in the aspects of health, education, and infrastructure. Australia's experience reflects the need for a flexible approach that allows for structure in intergovernmental cooperation, such as the change from COAG to the National Cabinet, which aligns with rapid decision making and response times for key problems like the COVID-19 pandemic (Aroney & Boyce, 2021). The success of the National Cabinet is based on high-level political involvement and timely and effective response to emerging challenges. In contrast, Pakistan's CCI has been challenged in adapting to new issues because of its poor capacity and irregular work (Larik & Chandio, 2025). By looking at some of these international examples, several lessons would appear that could contribute towards a better functioning CCI in Pakistan. First, the coherence and regularity of the meetings are key to ensuring that the role of intergovernmental coordination still succeeds. Pakistan may look to implement the ISC, followed by the FPTRC of India or Canada, where having clear timetables and institutional encouragement has enabled keeping a regular discussion framework, as well as follow-up of decision-making promptly (BIDHURI & TECKCHANDANI, n.d.). On the contrary, Pakistan's CCI has experienced a slowdown, and a well-organized process could help accomplish better credibility and effectiveness in resolving disputes. Second, the intervention of legislative oversight and public transparency will be key material for guaranteeing accountability. In the case of Canada and Australia, it has been shown that if intergovernmental entities are under rigorous scrutiny, they serve much better (Aroney & Boyce, 2021). The adoption of open-laying mechanisms, such as frequent updates in the public of CCI meetings and decisions, would enhance public trust and willingness to abide by the body's deliverances. Third, the inclusion of all provinces in the decision-making process and the issue of equal representation are of the essence in reducing the political tensions while



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promoting a cooperative environment. Pakistani CCI would gain from making sure that all provinces have equal weight in the decision-making process, just like ISC of India and FPTRC of Canada do to ensure broad representation.

Finally, flexibility and adaptability are key in managing new challenges. Going from COAG to the National Cabinet in Australia shows how important it is for the intergovernmental bodies to adapt to issues that emerge. In Pakistan, a more adaptive framework of CCI can rapidly react to the national challenges in such areas as climate change, energy security, and economic development (Naseem et al., 2022). The comparative study of intergovernmental bodies in India, Canada, and Australia holds important lessons for the better working of Pakistan's CCI. Asking Pakistan to learn from these institutions, Pakistan can effectively improve its federal governance, improve the CCI's operational effectiveness, and also play a significant role in being an institution that helps foster intergovernmental coordination. An approach to federal-provincial relations that is more consistent, transparent, and inclusive will make it easier to resolve conflicts more effectively and will ensure that citizens of Pakistan benefit from federalism as a way of life.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Council of Common Interests (CCI) has an important constitutional place in Pakistan's federal architecture because it is a mechanism of cooperative federalism. Through 2012-2021, the CCI handled a variety of intergovernmental issues spanning energy governance, water apportionment, health and education devolution, and census finalization. These engagements emphasize the Council's role in arbitration between the center and province and policy harmonization within the shambolic federal structure. Although after the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the CCI has gained a new mandate, it has recorded irregularities regarding its meeting schedules, a slow pace of implementation of its decisions, and has had little autonomy in terms of its institutional structure. Political dynamics and bureaucratic inefficiencies have further limited its utility, particularly vis-à-vis more contentious issues such as resource distribution and fiscal transfers. Comparative analysis with intergovernmental forums in India, Canada, and Australia, however, has shown that regular convening, open decision-making, and a supportive institutional framework are key to success, aspects lacking today within the Pakistani CCI. To ensure that the CCI plays the role of a core pillar of Pakistan's federalism, the following policy recommendations are made: Institutionalize a Permanent Secretariat: By setting up a fully resourced, professional CCI Secretariat to guarantee continuity, follow-up, and expert support for complex technical issues. Encourage Regular Meetings and Transparent Reporting. Strict adherence to law requires the quarterly meeting, which must be coupled with public dissemination of the meeting agenda, decisions, and annual performance reports under Article 154. • Strengthen Implementation Mechanisms: Develop legal and administrative checklists that would monitor implementation of CCI decisions and a timetable, and accountability parameters for federal actors and provincial actors. • Strengthen Provincial Representation and Equity: Make sure all provinces, but especially smaller, lesser-represented provinces like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, enjoy equal roles in agenda setting and decision making after the merger. • Establish Sectoral Committees: Constitute permanent technical working groups under CCI around recurring themes such as energy, water,



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census, and education, towards more focused deliberation and policy making. • Strengthen Consensus and DE politicization; Promote consensus between the parties on procedural regularity and institutional independence to insulate the CCI from becoming politicized while it earns the federating units' trust. • Integrate Civil Society and Academic feedback: Strengthen consultative mechanisms within the CCI's policymaking and review processes through institutionalization of the same by the involvement of legal scholars, policy experts, and civil society stakeholders in the latter. • Benchmark Best Practices from Comparative Federates: Emulate procedural innovations of other federal systems, such as the Australian digital transparency tools, each year, performance audits Canada, and the interstate planning commissions in India, to make CCI operations up-to-date.

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