

CONFLICT AND POLICIES OF ETHNIC FEDERALISM IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract of proposed paper

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Pakistan has addressed issues of ethnic representation and ethnic conflict through a combination of policies of ethnic preference and federalism. At best such policies have achieved mixed success and at worst have been signal failures (e.g. the creation of Bangladesh; chronic and proliferating ethnic conflict). Domicile quotas (defined in terms of provincial residence) for recruitment to federal bureaucratic postings were established as early as 1951 later admission to educational institutions were subjected to similar quotas. Each of Pakistan’s constitutions has also provided for devolution to federal units and since 1973 Pakistan has had four provinces and several evolving semi-autonomous regions (Northern Areas, Azad Kashmir, FATA, PATA). Pakistan has also “experimented” with numerous local government systems throughout the decades the most notable of which and arguably most effective being the 2001 Devolution (aka Local Government) Plan.

In April 2010 after extensive debate, Pakistan’s National Assembly passed the omnibus 18th Amendment bill which among other things provided for a very significant devolution of power from the center to the provinces. This action and attendant events also led to the proliferation of demands for the creation of new provinces either through the division of old provinces or through the redefinition of semi-autonomous regions as provinces. The fallout from the 18th amendment has also had the effect of gutting the 2001 local governmental system.

This paper will re-examine Pakistan’s complex case in terms of managing ethnic conflict in the state. It will focus primarily on a comparison of the effects of the 2001 Local Government Plan (2001-2010) and the post 18th Amendment constitutional system (since 2010) on ethnic conflict in Pakistan. This is a very ambitious project one that is complicated by the fact that the intention of the framers (military and civilian bureaucrats, partisan politicians, and jurists) of Pakistan’s numerous policies of devolution have rarely focused specifically on the task of reducing conflict between the “nations” of Pakistan but rather have been more vitally concerned with seeking or maintaining power for their respective groups at the center. The incidence of ethnic violence is far less important than which group(s) are its victims. Moreover ethnic boundaries are porous and changeable and often determined to a significant degree by the policies that the Pakistan state adopts and increasingly by the interests and actions of international players.