

## FRAMING FEDERALISM: A MEDIA-BASED ANALYSIS OF DAWN NEWSPAPER'S COVERAGE OF CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY IN PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

This study analyses how Pakistan's leading English-language newspaper, Dawn, framed the themes of federalism, provincial autonomy, and intergovernmental relations from 2009 to 2024. Based on the qualitative content analysis of 312 purposively selected articles, the study employs framing theory to study media narratives around the key constitutional and institutional developments in relation to the 18th Amendment, the National Finance Commission (NFC), Council of Common Interest (CCI), judicial activism under Article 184(3), and demands for autonomy such as the FATA-KP merger and South Punjab debate. Findings indicate that Dawn systematically framed both the possibilities and limitations of decentralization. While many articles supported reforms aimed at enhancing provincial autonomy, they critiqued the underperformance of federal institutions and the centre's tendency toward judicial overreach. Thus, the contributions of the media not only incited criticism but were also driven by the interests of reform, creating a unique space for itself as a face for both the agenda-setter and the watchdog in the newly emerging federal order of Pakistan. This study contributes to media and political communication scholarship by showing how mainstream print media shape elite discourse on federal governance in transitional democracies.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Federalism and Provincial Autonomy in Pakistan: Historical and Political Context

Federalism in Pakistan has evolved through a complex nexus of colonial legacies, ethnic pluralism, civil-military power asymmetries, and episodic constitutional reform. The

Constitution of 1973, with all its imperfections, brought about a federal parliamentary regime. The course of governance along these lines was thwarted by several authoritarian interruptions and institutional fragility (Waseem, et al., 2010). Attempts to correct this setback were

made through the 18th Amendment in 2010 that offered a vast devolution of legislative and fiscal powers to the provinces (Shah, 2012). Implementation, however, proved to be patchy; hence, problems of intergovernmental relations over issues ranging from fiscal transfer to water-sharing and institutional coordination continued unabated (Cheema et al., 2006). The clamours for new provinces and the ever-present grievances of Baluchistan and post-merger FATA indicate deeper structural fault lines (Jaffrelot, C., et. al, 2024).

### 1.2. Media's Role in Framing Federalism and Governance Discourses

Media in contemporary democracies play a role in shaping public understanding of complex political processes. The major English language newspaper in Pakistan, Dawn, thus becomes the key agenda-setter, especially in constitutional reform, federalism, and judicial activism (Salahuddin, S. 2024). It not only mirrors elite policy perspectives through editorials and reports but frames stories that actively shape perceptions of institutional legitimacy and power sharing. In the context of federalism, Dawn operates as an interpretative variable that translates legal developments and intergovernmental dynamics into public discourse; critical consideration is warranted in assessing its framing of provincial autonomy and governance structures.

### 1.3. Research Problem

Despite the major constitutional reforms brought about by the 18th Amendment, Pakistan has yet to see, in real sense, the implementation of procedures for decentralization that would have meant; centre-and-province strains, conflicting claims over resources, and institutional inefficacy continue to make serious challenges. While existing scholarship has examined the legal and political dimensions of federalism, each of these issues remains largely understudied, particularly regarding its media framing. The media portrayals of federalism, autonomy, and intergovernmental dynamics by Dawn have never been systematically analysed. This study will fill this gap by looking at the construction

of narratives on constitutional design, institutional performance, governance capacity, and autonomy debates by the largest circulating English daily from Pakistan.

### 1.4. Research Objectives

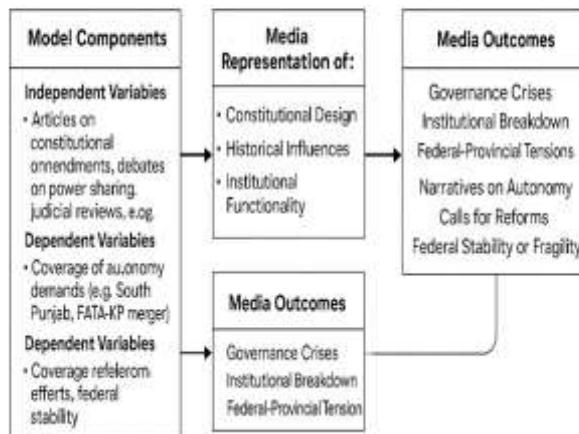
1. To understand how Dawn newspaper framed issues related to federalism, constitutional design, and provincial autonomy in Pakistan.
2. To analyse the periodicity and thematic concerns in Dawn's discussions of intergovernmental relations and institutional mechanisms.
3. To identify the dominant narratives and framing patterns in the discourse around federal-provincial tensions, governance challenges, and autonomy movements.
4. To evaluate the influence of Dawn in moulding elite opinion and public discourse on federalism and state re-structuration in Pakistan.

### 1.5. Significance of the Study

The study contributes to media and political communication scholarship by examining federalism from the media framing angle. It analyses Dawn's coverage from 2009 to 2024, with much constitutional and political tussles, thus lending empirical and theoretical insight into how media interprets and shapes federal reform debates. The findings, fulfilling a gap in South Asian federalism research, stand important for scholars and researchers, journalists, and policymakers interested in the media's role in navigating through state structures and pointing out governance quandaries.

## FRAMING FEDERALISM: A MEDIA-BASED MODEL

(Dawn Newspaper)



### 1.6. Conceptual Model: Media Framing of Federalism in Pakistan

This study puts forward a conceptual model (Figure 1) that draws upon federalism theory and framing analysis to examine how Dawn newspapers mediatize discourse on intergovernmental relations in Pakistan. Such independent variables include constitutional and political developments such as the 18th Amendment, NFC Awards, CCI decisions, and judicial interpretations (Article 184(3)), as well as historical legacies, East Pakistan secession as an example. All independent variables will be filtered through editorials by Dawn as the mediating variable, with framing and mainly emphasizing issues of constitutional design, institutional performance, governance challenges, and regional autonomy. The dependent variables are the media narratives emerging from this process of filtering, which include calls for devolution, criticisms of institutional dysfunction, and discourses on reform, conflict, or national unity. This allows very structured content analysis that reveals how journalistic framing shapes public understanding of the federal structure in Pakistan and the intergovernmental dynamics.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Federalism: Cooperative and Competitive Models

Federalism, as a political and constitutional framework, defines models like cooperative and competitive federalism. In this sense, cooperative federalism stresses intergovernmental coordination and shared governance while competitive federalism allows for sub-national units to innovate autonomously (Elazar, 1987; Hueglin & Fenna, 2015; Saxena, R. 2024). The two models often have their unique effects, and also, strains and cross-fertilization emerge from historical and political backgrounds. Simeon, R. et al., (2022), call for effective cooperation among strong institutions and incentives for consensus to exist. In case of Pakistan, coordination bodies CCI, NEC, and NFC are provided to support cooperation but rather overtaken by political interference and allies in enforcement (Cheema, 2006 & Ahmad et al., 2025). Competitive federalism has also encouraged remedial autonomy for the provinces, enabling innovation, which also has widened disparities (Singh, M. P., & Kukreja, V. 2014; Watts, 2010). The realization of these contradictory federal models will be essential to analyzing the framing of federal politics within the public sphere by Dawn.

## 2.2 Constitutionalism and Federal Reform in Pakistan

A significant turning point in Pakistan's federal structure was marked by the 18th Amendment to the Constitution (2010) abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List and empowering the provinces under the cover of devolution while also establishing local self-governance through Article 140A (Shah, 2012; Malik, A. et.al, 2023). While the reform moved toward the ordainment of Pakistan as an entity of formal constitutional federalism, few grievances due to drawbacks under it are still present to this day. The war over fiscal autonomy, administrative control, and resources distribution becomes a living issue every few years (Oranje, M., & Van Huyssteen, E, 2011; Raza, M. A, 2024). The NFC Award remains a bone of contention in political discourse for Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, more especially (Shahab, N. B. 2018). The bodies like CCI and NEC do flounder, often at their discretion, and almost never end up providing any concrete payout or results.

Furthermore, judicial activism under Article 184(3) has been accused of bringing centralization with scholars labelling it a usurper against executive and legislative branches (Munir et al., 2024). Devolved sectors, of health or education, also provide glaring examples of provincial inefficiency (Cheema, 2006, Mukhtar, G, 2023). The challenges of the FATA integration, the governance deficits surviving in Baluchistan, and the rise of a singular demand for South Punjab reiterated the precarious nature of Pakistan's federalism. These issues feed back into political contestation and media representation and can be moot points for the analysis of governance discourse in Pakistan.

## 2.3 Framing Theory and Political Communication

Framing theory provides a thoroughgoing look at how media tries to shape public comprehension of complex political episodes, whereby Entman (2010) offered four core functions for framing: defining and setting the agenda on problems, diagnosing causes of factors, making moral judgments, and even suggesting remedies. Frames from media also act on audience perceptions, issue

prioritization, and policy engagement; from or within that stretch of scholarship, the theory of frame now includes narratives, salience, and actor portrayal, too. Otmakhova and Frermann (2025) find the argument of narrative framing an essential instrument in political discourse in the digital ecosystem, replete with conflict and identity politics. Shehata et al. (2024) prove frame theory even for strange topics like amendments. Conceptualizing precedents of framing, geography, history, and audience segmentation lead to distinct editorial directions. Shabbir, Qamar, and Irtaza (2024) reveal that Dawn analyses issues under responsibility and analytical frames, which is strongly against the conflict-driven narrative mechanisms of the print mag. Spirig (2024) is the first to probe a dual story: on one end, the media indulge the elite agenda through gatekeeping; on the other end, these hybrid regimes afford space for critique. Analysing how Dawn frames federalism unravels her main conduit to facilitating conversations on how federalism is built, preserved, or even contended at the same time.

## 2.4 Media and Governance from the Perspective of Pakistan

The role of Pakistani media, including print, electronic and digital, is two-sided in governance: it supports transparency and, at the same time, reinforces elitist tendencies. Unwavering emphasis has been laid on the financial dependencies and political affiliations limiting editorial autonomy but not superimposing sheer notwithstanding power especially in times of constitutional and institutional crisis (Imran, M, M., 2024). Because this particular digital intervention at the subcitizen level inevitably influences public re-thinking and vibrancy, promoting informed policy advocacy and community interest analysis (Qaiser, M. N., & Jamil, M. S. 2025), old traditional newspapers similar to Dawn are still upsetting their powerful influence in their specified interest of elites on all matters of legislature and institutions.

Ghauri, M. J. et al. (2025) say the Political Communication in Pakistan, particularly along the lines of federalism, is mainly an expression coined into frame proposing perception for disputed issues and demands of resources,

judicial roles, and more region-specific grievances. Policy salience, as determined by Dawn and Jang, has contrastingly been elucidated in some instances (Niazi, H. A. 2022), but the literature review lacks a systematic exploration of the mediation and framing effects related to constitutional federalism.

## 2.5 Research Gap

The existing body of literature has sought to explore how Pakistani media wield power with regard to governance and electoral politics, albeit only a few studies have seriously addressed the frameworks provided by the individual news-making agencies addressing the country's constitutional structures and changing federal dynamics meshed with different interests. With the bulk of scholarly works concerned with press freedom, polarization, or elections, media, thus treated as one monolithic uniform without being divided (Maniou, T. A. 2023). Also worth mentioning is the relative absence of deep investigation of the framing of federalism by Dawn-entity in strategic governance discourse, despite its well-informed and opinionated following.

This research addresses the absence by focusing on Dawn's coverage of federalism during the years 2009-2024. Thus, this would inform, to a slight extent, additional discussions on the self-perception of constitutionalism and the state's legitimacy brought up by the media.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

In this research, qualitative content analysis is applied to examine how federalism, provincial autonomy, and intergovernmental relations are framed in Dawn, the leading English-language newspaper of Pakistan, from 2009-2024. This method allows an interpretive depth and systematic categorization of themes (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis included those two stages of identifying the main discourses and their frequency over time. A longitudinal scope of 15 years captures shifting media narratives in major federal reforms i.e. 18th Amendment, NFC award cycles, and autonomy debates.

### 3.2 Research Goals and Analytical Framework

The aim of the study is how Dawn narrates the framework of constitutional design, intergovernmental coordination, and demand for autonomy around Pakistani federalism. The analysis used deductive and inductive coding, based on federalism and framing theories, coded within NVivo: systematic identification of themes, frequency tracking, and visual representation of media discourse.

### 3.3 Sample Selection and Criteria

A purposive sample of 312 articles from Dawn (2009-2024) was purposefully chosen because the period coincided with major developments at the federal level, such as for instance, the 18th Amendment and ongoing debates at intergovernmental levels. The importation criteria were as follows: it had to include the keywords "provincial autonomy," "Council of Common Interests," "NFC," and "article 184(3)." It had to engage equally substantive content with constitutional reform, institutional coordination, or autonomy movement.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Coding Instrument

Each article was manually reviewed and coded using a structured spreadsheet and the NVivo interface, involving a coding protocol registering six important dimensions: (1) metadata such as headline, date, author, and article type; (2) thematic categories on a defined federalism codebook; (3) framing tone, whether supportive, critical, or neutral with regard to federalism and autonomy; (4) narrative frames like reformist, conflict-driven, legal-technical, or capacity-based approaches; (5) key actors such as the judiciary, CCI, political executives, and parties; and (6) proposed solutions such as institutional strengthening or judicial restraint. This framework had the promise to yield a comprehensive analysis of both content and media framing strategies.

### 3.5 Analytical Procedures

#### 3.5.1 Thematic Coding Framework

The coding scheme was designed around eight major thematic categories with corresponding sub-codes, grounded in federalism literature (Elazar, 1987; Watts, 2010; Shah, 2012). These included: (A) Constitutional Design covering

power distribution, the 18th Amendment, and autonomy clauses; (B) Historical References such as past constitutions, the East Pakistan experience, and political crises; (C) Institutional Functionality concerning aspects of CCI, NEC, NFC, and judicial oversight; (D) Governance Capacity on provincial performance, allocation of resources, and local governance; (E) Federal-Provincial Tensions including disputes on water and other resources and inter-party conflict; (F) Conflict Resolution through institutions and political processes; (G) Demands for Autonomy and Reform, such as those for the South Punjab movement, FATA-KP merger, and grievances from Baluchistan; and (H) Framing Tone, classified as supportive, critical, or neutral. Articles could be given several codes to capture overlapping themes and allow a multi-layered interpretation of media narratives.

### 3.5.2 Frequency and Trend Analysis

Code frequencies were systematically reported and then visualized to trace temporal patterns

and thematic focus across the coverage of 312 articles. Leading themes included 18th Amendment (68 articles), NFC Award (52), CCI and NEC mechanisms (47), judicial review under article 184(3) (34), the FATA-KP merge (29), and autonomy of South Punjab (22). These trends are presented through bar and line charts, reflecting the peaks in coverage, evident during constitutional milestones in 2010, followed by recurring resource disputes and an escalation in autonomy demands to elucidate moments of amplified media attention in federal discourse.

### 3.6 Intercoder Reliability and Coding Validity

To ensure the analytic validity and consistency of coding, an intercoder reliability test was done. A 10% subsample ( $n = 31$ ) of the corpus was coded independently with a second trained researcher using the standardized codebook. Cohen's Kappa measures the agreement levels, as a count of chance overlap.

**Table 3.1: Intercoder Reliability Scores by Theme Category**

Theme Category	Cohen's Kappa Score
Constitutional Design	0.78
Institutional Functionality	0.84
Autonomy Demands	0.75
Governance Capacity	0.72
Federal-Provincial Tensions	0.76
Framing Tone	0.80

The agreement was highly substantial to almost perfect (Landis & Koch, 1977), thus confirming the reliability of the coding framework. Minor differences were discussed, and definitions were clarified. Coding Comparison and Node Frequency in NVivo were engaged to ensure consistency and discover any thematic deviations.

### 3.7 Source Verification and Citation Protocol

All articles were obtained from the various online editions and e-papers of Dawn, with supplementary sources via Google Advanced Search applied for archives/otherwise inaccessible materials.

### 3.8 Sample Source Citation Statement (for transparency)

This study has analysed 312 Dawn articles (2009-2024) chosen by keyword relevance and coded using a researcher-developed coding scheme in NVivo. The major tools for data analysis were NVivo 12 Pro and Excel, which ensured transparency, replicability, and conformity with media research standards.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Coding Scheme and Thematic Framework

To analysis regarding Dawn's framing of federalism, provincial autonomy, and intergovernmental relations (2009-2024), a structured coding scheme was developed

underpinned by federalism theory (Elazar, 1987; Watts, 2010) as well as the post-18th Amendment context in Pakistan. In total eight

thematic categories steered the NVivo-based analysis of 312 articles, balancing frequency monitoring with qualitative interpretation of political narratives.

**Table 4.1. Thematic Coding Categories and Sub-Codes**

Code Category	Sub-Codes
A. Constitutional Design	A1: Power Distribution, A2: Constitutional Amendments, A3: Autonomy Clauses
B. Historical References	B1: 1956/1962 Constitutions, B2: East Pakistan, B3: Political Crises
C. Institutional Functionality	C1: CCI, C2: NEC, C3: NFC, C4: Judiciary (Article 184(3))
D. Governance Capacity	D1: Provincial Performance, D2: Resource Allocation, D3: Local Reforms
E. Federal-Provincial Tensions	E1: Water Disputes, E2: Resource-Sharing Conflicts, E3: Party Disagreements
F. Conflict Resolution	F1: Mechanisms, F2: Outcomes
G. Autonomy/Reform Demands	G1: South Punjab, G2: FATA-KP Merger, G3: Baluchistan Grievances
H. Framing Tone	H1: Positive, H2: Negative, H3: Neutral

#### 4.2 Frequency of Federalism-Related Themes

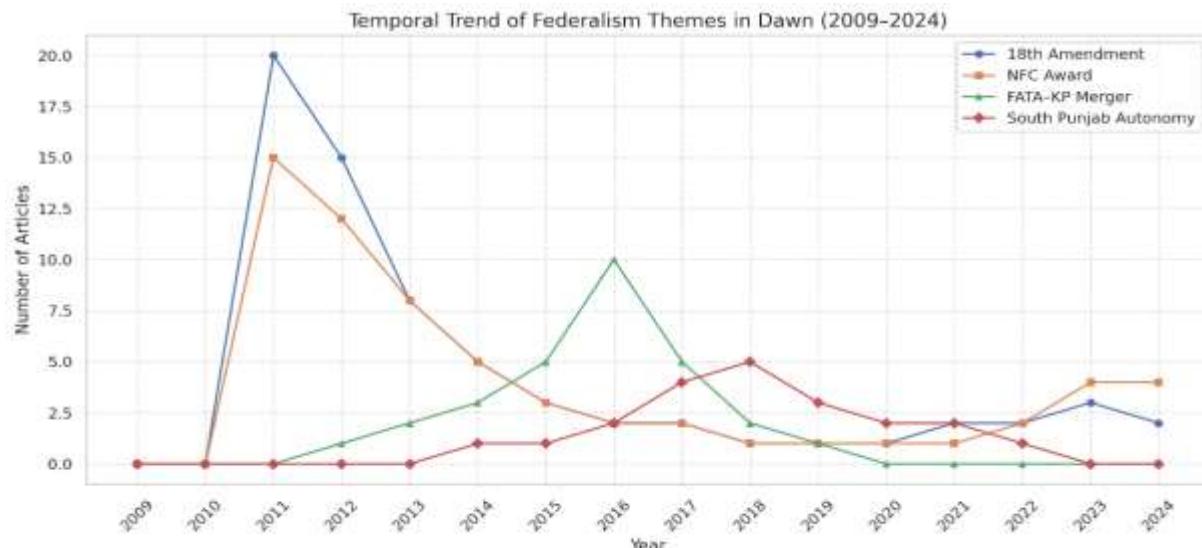
Frequency analysis of the findings revealed that Dawn had an ongoing engagement in the key debates on constitutional and institutional

issues. Most of the topics associated with federalism in the sampled articles can be seen in Table 4.2 with the greatest number of mentions among the 312 articles.

**Table 4.2. Frequency of Key Themes in Dawn's Coverage (2009–2024)**

Theme	Indicator Keyword	Frequency	% of Articles
A2: Constitutional Amendments	18th Amendment	68	21.8%
C3: National Finance Commission	NFC Award	52	16.7%
C1/C2: Institutional Coordination	CCI / NEC	47	15.1%
C4: Judiciary	Article 184(3), Review	34	10.9%
G2: FATA-KP Merger	FATA Reforms	29	9.3%
G1: South Punjab Autonomy	New Province Debate	22	7.0%
Other Related Themes	Governance, Conflict	60	19.2%

Data reveals a peak in coverage corresponding with major events at the federal level, such as the passage of the 18th Amendment (2010), the merger of FATA and KP (2018), and South Punjab autonomy discussions (2020-2022). The peaks represent media responsiveness to overt political developments and institutional changes.



**Figure 2 Temporal Trends in Dawn's Federalism Coverage (2009–2024)**  
Peaks in 18th Amendment (2010–2012),

FATA-KP Merger (2018) and rising South Punjab Autonomy discourse (post-2020).

### 4.3 Framing Analysis and Interpretive Patterns

#### 4.3.1 Institutional as well as Constitutional Framing

The general articulation regarding the 18th Amendment is one pertaining to it being transformative in moving toward decentralization. A handful of editorials, however, raised concern about the implementation gap and the limited capacity of provincial institutions to manage devolved responsibilities. All this criticism very much reflects the wider academic concern relating to the operationalization of devolution (Shah, 2012; Ahmed et al., 2024). Institutional mechanisms such as the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and National Finance Commission (NFC) framed ambivalent responses. One of them appreciates the constitutional significance of these institutions while the other points toward institutional deadlocks in areas like gas pricing, budget allocation, and delayed meetings indicating structural dysfunction in intergovernmental relations.

#### 4.3.2 Judicial and Legal Framing

The apotheosis of Article 184(3) has become an enduring theme in the lexicon of the Supreme Court. A great deal of coverage viewed judicial activity as a corrective mechanism; however, a substantial number of articles excoriated what they saw as judicial overreach, undercutting democratic federalism. This debate goes much beyond the articles and has been explored in the broader scholarly wrangle over centralizing tendencies of the judiciary in Pakistan (Munir, 2024).

#### 4.3.3 Autonomy and Reform Narratives

The politics of autonomy narratives tended to co-opt the said reforms as territorial, particularly about the FATA-KP merger and South Punjab autonomy. In this respect, some articles viewed equity and inclusion while others portrayed elite capture, administrative delays, unclear implementation mechanisms, thus revealing the contested nature of autonomy discourses in Pakistani media.

#### 4.4 Tone of Coverage

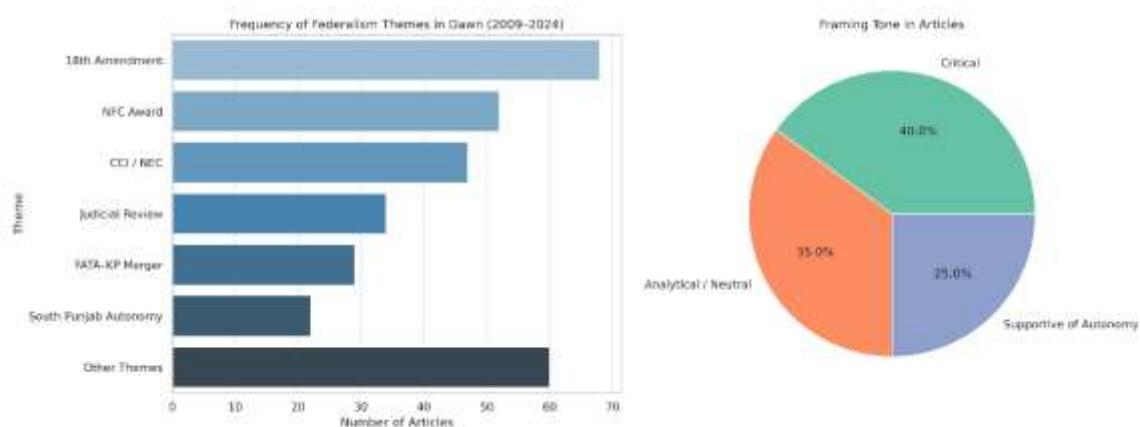
The tone in media reporting captures quite a range of views from critical comment to reformist optimism. The distribution of editorial tone in the sample is summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Distribution of Framing Tone

Tone	Approximate Share	Framing Examples
Critical	40%	CCI dysfunction, NFC deadlock, judicial overreach
Analytical	/ 35%	Constitutional debates, institutional design
Neutral		
Supportive of Autonomy	25%	Pro-devolution narratives, regional empowerment

Most articles were critical of major institutions such as inertia and central overreach. There were, however, a good number of neutral or

reform-oriented frames, indicating the vast number of editorial perspectives capturing Dawn's coverage.



Figures 3-4. Federalism Coverage and Framing

Tone in Dawn (2009-2024)

Left: Bar chart showing thematic frequencies, with the 18th Amendment, NFC Award, and CCI/NEC as leading topics.

Right: Pie chart illustrating framing tone 40% of articles were critical, 35% analytical/neutral, and 25% supportive of autonomy.

#### 4.5 Narrative Framing and Key Actors

All narratives in the examined articles follow different interpretative frameworks. Table 4.4 explains the dominant narratives and the relevant institutional actors.

Table 4.4. Narrative Types and Key Frames

Narrative Type	Dominant Framing Patterns
Reform Narrative	Focused on institutional strengthening and devolution
Conflict Narrative	Highlighted inter-provincial and federal disputes
Legal-Technical	Debated constitutional authority and judicial role
Capacity Discourse	Questioned provincial preparedness and governance gaps

The most commonly mentioned actors in the articles reviewed include the Supreme Court of Pakistan, more often than not, for the legal and conflict narratives; the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and the National Economic

Council (NEC), which are institutional paralysis casts; federal and provincial governments, which form part of the fiscal disputes and reform impasse fulcrums; and major political parties such as PPP, PML-N, and

PTI in autonomy and electoral federalism debates.

#### 4.6 Recommendations Raised in Coverage

The study pointed out several policy prescriptions and reform proposals in the

articles, which were not specific as to solutions for all of them. The table 4.5 contains a

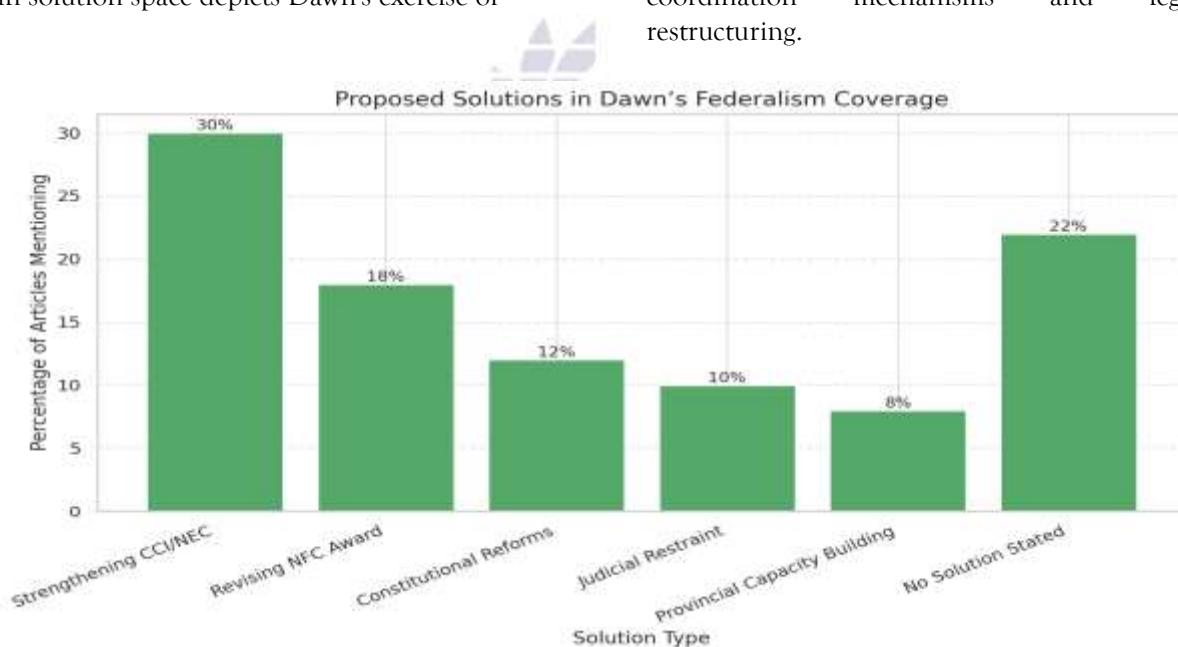
description of these proposed solutions and their distribution.

**Table 4.5. Suggested Policy Solutions in Articles**

Proposed Reform	Examples Mentioned	Estimated Occurrence (%)
Strengthening CCI/NEC	Binding decisions, regular meetings	30%
Revising NFC Award	Horizontal equity, depoliticization	18%
Constitutional Clarifications	Concurrent list, Article 184(3) reform	12%
Judicial Restraint	Limiting interventions	10%
Provincial Capacity Building	Administrative reforms	8%
No Solution Proposed	Descriptive or narrative coverage	22%

The pervasive presence of institutional reforms in solution space depicts Dawn's exercise of

editorialist directing systemic changes through coordination mechanisms and legal restructuring.



**Figur-5 showing proposed solutions in Dawn's federalism coverage: Strengthening CCI/INEC (30%) leads, followed by Revising NFC Award (18%), while 22% of articles state no solution.**

#### 4.7 Summary Interpretation

Dawn's content analysis shows a complex and multilayered media discourse on federalism in Pakistan. Coverage was especially intense during constitutional transformations (e.g., the 18th Amendment), institutional contestations

(e.g., NFC delays, judicial reviews), and regional restructuring (e.g., FATA-KP merger). Positive narratives of devolution would frequently appear but often accompanied by critiques of implementation hurdles, governance deficits, and legal ambiguities. The dual role of the media as both chronicler and critical

interpreter of events could be seen in the different tones and frames used in the reporting. These findings cohere with literature on media framing of governance and institutional legitimacy (Entman, 2010; Otmakhova & Frermann, 2025) and underscore the fact that the press can shape the public understanding of the evolving narrative of federalism in Pakistan rather than simply reflecting this reality.

## 5. Conclusion

This research studied the ways in which the leading English-language daily in Pakistan, Dawn, has been framing federalism, autonomy of provinces, and intergovernmental relations from 2009 to 2024 by making a qualitative analysis of 312 articles. It could be seen on the two major counts that the 18th Constitutional Amendment was repeatedly presented as the landmark reform towards enhancement in decentralization, but the talks with respect to its delayed implementation and weak capacity of provinces were manifested prominently. Federal important bodies like the CCI, NFC, and NEC were on the forefront; however, they were usually politicized or structurally ineffective. Diverged opinion on the contribution of the judiciary under Article 184(3) to the colorization of matters, i.e., some praising the activism and some warning against risks of centralization emerging from it. The reporting on which is made about territorial reforms has highlighted the FATA-KP merger and the movements on South Punjab, exposing the void between legislative adjustment and practical autonomy. Overall, it maintained a dual stance on editorial policies: support of decentralization in principle but critique of institutional reforms' performance in practice.

### 5.1 Contribution to Media and Governance Scholarship

This study contributes greatly to federalism and media research that is based on governance. It also helps one to gain empirical insight as to how the media constructs federalism in a transitioning, ethnically diverse country like Pakistan - with regard to the fact that it exposes the media's role as a political actor within fragmented federations. It shows too how the elite at their end control the frame of public

understanding with regard to constitutional matters across media and political communications. Here, additional framing theory is extended in terms of use toward intergovernmental relations. In addition, gaps created by constitutional ideals and the realities of practice in governance in Pakistan's federal structure are brought to light by looking at: institutional malaise; delays in reform use; an increased centralization of the judiciary.

### 5.2 Limitations

While this study develops a new perspective about federalism through its media-based angle, there are limitations to this work. For example, a focus only on Dawn leaves out many different editorial stances from regional or vernacular media which may frame federalism in a different language or ethnicity. While the English story influences elite opinion, it does not speak on maize and durum wheat of public discourse across most of Pakistan's multilingual citizenry. All qualitative content analyses must incorporate a certain element of researcher interpretation. However, aspects such as intercoder reliability checks and NVivo storehouse validation were applied to reduce the level of subjectivity of the researcher.

### 5.3 Final Reflection

The findings of this study attest that media institutions actively shape the discourse of politics rather than reporting on good governance. In the evolving federal system of Pakistan, Dawn has become an influential voice concerning perceptions of the public as well as the elite regarding decentralization, institutional reforms, and constitutional tensions. By its very coverage of the 18th Amendment, intergovernmental challenges, and policy debates, Dawn became both a debating platform of citizens and a watchdog over democratic processes. Federalism will continue to be framed, critiqued and, possibly, molded by the media as Pakistan deals with its pervading problems on provincial autonomy and institutional balance.

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