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The Impact of the 18th Constitutional Amendment on Tourism Development in Pakistan during 2010–2022

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ABSTRACT

The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 fundamentally altered Pakistan's federal structure by abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List and transferring a substantial range of responsibilities to the provinces. Tourism was consequently transformed from a predominantly centralized policy field into a more decentralized system of provincial governance. This study examines how this constitutional change shaped tourism development in Pakistan during 2010–2022. It uses qualitative documentary analysis of constitutional provisions, government and provincial policy documents, official tourism statistics, institutional reports, academic studies, and development-sector material. The analysis compares Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Balochistan and evaluates domestic tourism, international tourism, infrastructure, public-private partnerships, cultural heritage, digital promotion, economic effects, environmental sustainability, and security. The evidence indicates that devolution created greater space for province-specific policy innovation and destination development, but outcomes remained uneven. Punjab developed a formal provincial tourism policy in 2019 and expanded tourism regulation and destination initiatives, while Gilgit-Baltistan recorded domestic tourist arrivals rising from 28,893 in 2012 to 1,391,628 in 2018 before falling during the COVID-19 period. Pakistan's international arrivals also fell sharply during the pandemic, from 3.58 million in 2019 to 0.16 million in 2020, demonstrating the importance of external factors alongside institutional reform. The study argues that the 18th Amendment was transformative but not sufficient by itself: institutional capacity, infrastructure, security, investment, environmental management, data systems, and intergovernmental coordination determined how effectively devolved authority translated into tourism development.



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Introduction

Tourism is an important component of economic development because it connects mobility, services, employment, cultural exchange, infrastructure, private investment, and local enterprise. In federal states, tourism governance is also a question of institutional design: decisions concerning destination development, heritage, environmental resources, infrastructure and visitor services may be distributed among national, provincial and local authorities. The literature on tourism governance therefore emphasizes that the effectiveness of tourism policy depends not only on the attractiveness of destinations but also on the institutional arrangements through which public resources and responsibilities are organized (Hall, 2008; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

Pakistan provides a particularly important case because its tourism resources are distributed across highly different geographical and cultural regions. Punjab contains major historical, religious and cultural destinations; Sindh includes archaeological and coastal resources; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa contains mountain, heritage and adventure destinations; Balochistan possesses extensive coastal, desert and archaeological potential; and Gilgit-Baltistan contains some of the country's most significant mountain and adventure-tourism assets. The diversity of these regions creates a strong rationale for examining whether decentralized governance can produce more locally responsive tourism policies than a uniform centralized model (Government of Pakistan, 2010; UNWTO, 2017).

Before 2010, tourism policy was primarily organized through federal institutions. The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, established in 1970, became an important federal instrument for tourism promotion, accommodation and infrastructure. The National Tourism Policy of 2007 also sought to modernize tourism through private investment, infrastructure improvement and international promotion. Nevertheless, the centralized structure limited the extent to which provinces could independently formulate and implement tourism strategies suited to their own destinations and cultural assets (Government of Pakistan, 2007; Chapter 4 source document, 2026).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment marked a major institutional turning point. The abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List changed the distribution of legislative responsibilities and strengthened provincial authority over subjects that had previously involved federal and provincial participation. In the tourism sector, the post-Amendment arrangement required provinces to assume greater responsibility for policy, planning, regulation, destination management and promotion. The constitutional change therefore created the institutional conditions for a province-based tourism governance model (Government of Pakistan, 2010; Cheema & Khwaja, 2014).

The practical importance of the reform can be seen in the development of provincial institutions and policies after 2010. Punjab, for example, adopted its first formal provincial tourism policy in 2019, while the Department of Tourist Services was devolved and subsequently operated as an attached department of Punjab's Tourism Department. Punjab's policy identified tourism as a provincial priority and emphasized infrastructure, safety and security, branding, destination development and private-sector participation (Government of Punjab, 2019; Department of Tourist Services Punjab, 2026).

The reform nevertheless produced a governance dilemma. Tourism has strong local dimensions, but international marketing, national branding, standards, cross-provincial routes, aviation, visa facilitation and national tourism data require coordination beyond individual provinces. A federal government statement in 2019 explicitly acknowledged that tourism had become a provincial subject after the 18th Amendment while arguing that federal and provincial governments still needed a stronger coordination mechanism to address sectoral constraints and improve Pakistan's international tourism image (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

The research problem addressed in this study is therefore not simply whether tourism improved after 2010, but whether the transfer of authority produced an effective and balanced tourism governance system. The research gap arises because constitutional devolution, provincial policy, tourism infrastructure, heritage, security, digital promotion and economic outcomes are often discussed separately. This study brings these dimensions together and compares regional outcomes over the same 2010–2022 period. The study consequently asks how the 18th Amendment reshaped tourism governance, how provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan responded institutionally, what measurable changes occurred in tourism development, and why outcomes differed across regions (World Bank, 2013; ADB, 2020).

The study is significant because it links constitutional reform to a concrete sector of economic and cultural development. Instead of treating decentralization as an administrative event, it examines how institutional change interacted with tourist flows, infrastructure, investment, heritage, digital promotion, security and environmental pressures. The study therefore provides a more evidence-based assessment of the opportunities and limitations created by decentralized tourism governance in Pakistan between 2010 and 2022 (UNDP, 2015; UNWTO, 2018).

Literature Review

Decentralization and Tourism Governance in Pakistan

Tourism governance involves policy formulation, regulation, destination management, infrastructure, heritage protection, marketing and service delivery. Hall (2008) argues that tourism planning is inseparable from institutional relationships because public agencies determine the regulatory and infrastructural environment in which tourism businesses operate. Dredge and Jenkins (2007) similarly emphasize coordination among multiple stakeholders. These perspectives are particularly relevant to Pakistan because the 18th Amendment changed the institutional location of tourism decision-making rather than merely changing a departmental name (Hall, 2008; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

Decentralization theory suggests that subnational governments may possess better information about local assets and local needs. Faguet (2014) associates effective decentralization with improved responsiveness where local institutions possess adequate authority and capacity. The World Bank's work on devolution likewise cautions that the transfer of responsibilities without corresponding institutional and financial capacity can produce weak service delivery. Tourism therefore represents a useful test of decentralized governance because destinations differ substantially in geography, culture, infrastructure and market potential (Faguet, 2014; World Bank, 2013).

Pakistan's post-2010 experience illustrates both sides of this theoretical debate. The uploaded Chapter 4 identifies greater provincial autonomy, region-specific initiatives and opportunities for local participation as benefits, but also identifies fragmentation in national branding, international marketing, service standards and coordination. Provincial performance varied according to administrative capacity and financial resources, meaning that the same constitutional authority did not produce identical outcomes in every region (Chapter 4 source document, 2026).

Tourism Development, Infrastructure and Economic Growth

Tourism contributes to economic development through direct visitor expenditure and through indirect demand for transport, accommodation, food, retail, handicrafts and other services. The Asian Development Bank's assessment of Pakistan's tourism sector emphasizes the importance of infrastructure, institutional capacity, investment and destination management for converting tourism potential into economic activity (Asian Development Bank, 2020). Thus, tourist numbers alone are insufficient for assessing the developmental impact of tourism; infrastructure and the capacity of local economies to retain tourism expenditure are equally important.

Public-private partnerships are particularly relevant where governments lack sufficient resources to develop resorts, accommodation, recreation facilities and destination services alone. Pakistan's tourism literature has recognized PPPs as a potential mechanism for tourism infrastructure, while Punjab's post-devolution policy explicitly identified private-sector leadership as an important part of its tourism-development model (Government of Punjab, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2021).

The regional evidence also demonstrates that tourism benefits can be highly uneven. Gilgit-Baltistan's domestic tourist arrivals increased from 45,300 in 2010 to 1,391,628 in 2018, while total tourist spending was estimated at PKR 93.96 billion in 2018, equivalent to 33.52% of the region's GDP in the cited economic study. The subsequent decline in 2020 illustrates how tourism-dependent regions are particularly exposed to external shocks (Karim et al., 2023).

Cultural Heritage, Environment, Security and Digital Tourism Promotion

Cultural heritage is a major tourism asset in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab and Sindh and in the archaeological and historical landscapes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. Heritage tourism, however, creates a policy requirement to balance visitor access with conservation. Available heritage-site statistics show that Punjab accounted for 5,293,672 national visitors and 15,307 foreign visitors at recorded heritage sites in 2019, indicating both the scale of heritage-based tourism and the concentration of visitation in major provincial sites (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Environmental sustainability is especially important in mountain destinations. Rapid increases in domestic tourism can place pressure on waste management, water resources, roads, accommodation and fragile landscapes. The Gilgit-Baltistan evidence demonstrates the scale of tourism growth: domestic arrivals increased from 28,893 in 2012 to more than 1.39 million in 2018, before falling to 634,340 in 2020. Such fluctuations demonstrate why destination planning must address both tourism growth and resilience to shocks (Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023; Karim et al., 2023).

Security is another major determinant of tourism demand. Pakistan's tourism recovery after improvements in security was accompanied by renewed domestic interest in northern destinations, but security cannot substitute for infrastructure and institutional capacity. Digital promotion has simultaneously become more important. Provincial tourism bodies increasingly use websites, social media and online information to promote destinations, but the federal-provincial division of responsibilities can make national branding and coordinated international marketing more difficult (Government of Pakistan, 2019; UNWTO, 2018).

Research Methodology

The study uses a qualitative documentary research design covering the period 2010–2022. The evidence base includes the Constitution and 18th Amendment material, federal and provincial tourism policies, official tourism statistics, government reports, development-sector reports, academic literature and the uploaded Chapter 4. The method is appropriate because the research examines institutional transformation and policy outcomes rather than attempting to estimate a single statistical causal coefficient.

A comparative regional approach is used for Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. The comparison focuses on institutional change, tourism policies, tourist flows, infrastructure, investment, heritage, digital promotion, environmental pressures and security. Gilgit-Baltistan is analyzed separately because its administrative and constitutional position during the study period differed from that of the provinces (Government of Pakistan, 2010; Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023).

The 18th Amendment and Devolution of Tourism

The 18th Amendment changed the constitutional distribution of authority by abolishing the Concurrent Legislative List. The uploaded Chapter 4 identifies this as the central institutional mechanism through which tourism shifted from federal control toward provincial responsibility. Provinces consequently became more directly responsible for tourism policy, planning, implementation, destination management and promotion (Government of Pakistan, 2010; Chapter 4 source document, 2026).

The institutional consequences were visible in the transfer and restructuring of tourism-related organizations and functions. A study of the federalism process notes that functions and institutions were devolved in phases and that Punjab received tourist information centres and other tourism-related functions. The Department of Tourist Services also records that it was devolved under the 18th Amendment and subsequently operated under Punjab's Tourism Department (Cheema & Khwaja, 2014; Department of Tourist Services Punjab, 2026).

The transfer of authority did not eliminate the need for national coordination. In 2019, the federal government explicitly acknowledged that tourism had become a provincial subject while calling for stronger federal-provincial coordination to address constraints, improve Pakistan's image abroad and exploit tourism potential. This demonstrates that devolution created a multi-level governance problem rather than a complete withdrawal of the federal government from tourism-related coordination (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

The transition also affected federal tourism assets. In March 2022, the federal government began handing over PTDC assets to provinces, including 19 motels and resorts to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while negotiations concerning Punjab's PTDC properties were underway. This development illustrates how the practical implementation of devolution continued well after the constitutional amendment itself (Dawn, 2022).

Provincial Transformation of Tourism Governance

Punjab

Punjab entered the post-devolution period with an established Tourism Development Corporation and a large and diversified tourism resource base. The province contains major historical, religious and cultural destinations and has long used TDCP for tourism promotion and destination services. Contemporary TDCP documentation identifies sightseeing services, chairlifts and cable cars, boating, resorts and destination events among its tourism functions, demonstrating the institutional breadth of the provincial tourism model (Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab, 2026).

The most important policy milestone during the study period was the approval of Punjab's first formal Tourism Policy in 2019. The policy treated tourism as a provincial priority and proposed development of landscapes, wetlands, ecology, history, heritage, festivals, cuisine, religious heritage and archaeological assets while emphasizing private-sector participation. It also identified strategic priorities including tourism infrastructure, tourist safety and security, branding and destination development (Government of Punjab, 2019; TDAP, 2022).

The provincial government also moved toward geographic diversification. In February 2019, the Punjab government approved development of new tourism sites in the Sulaiman Range of Dera Ghazi Khan and proposed renovation of TDCP resorts there, together with camping sites, safari, paragliding and local heritage markets. These measures are significant because they show an attempt to move tourism beyond Lahore and established urban destinations toward southern and less-developed parts of Punjab (Pakistan Today, 2019).

Tourism regulation also became more measurable after devolution. In 2020–21, Punjab's Department of Tourist Services reported a rise in hotel-registration revenue from Rs2.5 million in 2019–20 to Rs6.5 million in 2020–21, a reported increase of 200 percent. During the same period, 78 new hotels, 124 restaurants and 190 travel agencies were registered, while notices were issued to 498 hotels and 1,465 restaurants for registration. These figures indicate that provincial tourism governance was expanding from promotion toward regulation of the tourism-service market (Business Recorder, 2021).

Punjab also incorporated PPPs into its tourism development planning. The province's 2019–20 development programme included the rehabilitation and upgrading of the TDCP Resort at Sakhi Sarwar through a PPP arrangement, with a scheme cost of Rs50 million, while the broader PPP component of the tourism programme was recorded at Rs67.993 million. This provides concrete evidence that post-devolution tourism policy was connected with investment mechanisms rather than remaining purely promotional (Government of Punjab, 2019–20).

The Punjab case therefore shows a relatively developed provincial response to devolution: formal policy adoption in 2019, institutional regulation through DTS, destination diversification, PPP planning and expanded promotion. Nevertheless, the province continued to face heritage conservation, destination-management and coordination challenges, meaning that stronger provincial institutions did not remove the wider governance problems created by fragmented national tourism administration (Government of Punjab, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

Sindh

Sindh possesses a distinctive tourism portfolio based on archaeological, historical, religious, urban and coastal resources. The post-18th Amendment framework gave the province greater responsibility for developing these resources through provincial institutions and destination promotion. The available federal tourism research notes that Sindh established tourism institutions aimed at promoting Sindhi culture and historical sites, illustrating the broader provincialization of tourism governance after 2010 (TDAP, 2022).

Official heritage-site data demonstrate both the scale and concentration of Sindh's recorded heritage tourism. In 2019, recorded heritage sites in Sindh received 133,049 national visitors and 1,449 foreign visitors, while the corresponding figures in 2015 were 97,670 national and 864 foreign visitors. The increase indicates growing visitation to recorded heritage attractions during much of the pre-pandemic period, although the figures also reveal the much smaller foreign-tourist component compared with domestic visitation (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Sindh's tourism challenge therefore concerns conversion of cultural and archaeological potential into a wider tourism economy. The province requires integrated heritage conservation, visitor infrastructure, destination marketing and private investment. The uneven quality of infrastructure and the concentration of tourism around a limited number of destinations constrained the ability of devolution to produce broad-based tourism development (Asian Development Bank, 2020).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's post-devolution tourism model was strongly shaped by its mountain landscapes, valleys, cultural heritage and adventure-tourism potential. The province adopted a tourism policy in 2015 that emphasized infrastructure, accessibility, human-resource development and marketing. This represented an early example of a province using its devolved authority to construct a dedicated tourism-development strategy (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2015; TDAP, 2022).

The province also benefited from improved security conditions and rising domestic interest in northern destinations. The national tourism data show that tourism activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was severely affected during the COVID-19 period, while later provincial data show large domestic flows to destinations such as Malam Jabba, Galiyat, Naran/Kaghan and Chitral. These patterns demonstrate both the market potential of KP and the sensitivity of tourism to security, mobility and external shocks (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Pakistan Tourism Data Booklet, 2023–24).

The transfer of PTDC assets further strengthened the provincial role. In March 2022, 19 PTDC motels and resorts were handed over to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government. The transfer was

important because it moved not only policy responsibility but also physical tourism assets into the provincial management sphere (Dawn, 2022).

Gilgit-Baltistan

Gilgit-Baltistan provides one of the clearest quantitative illustrations of rapid tourism growth in the post-2010 period. Domestic tourist arrivals increased from 45,300 in 2010 to 200,651 in 2015, 439,685 in 2016, 781,224 in 2017 and 1,391,628 in 2018. International arrivals increased from 7,728 in 2010 to 9,027 in 2018. The scale of domestic growth shows the emergence of northern Pakistan as a major domestic tourism market (Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023; Karim et al., 2023).

The economic implications were substantial. A study based on Gilgit-Baltistan tourism data estimated total tourist spending at PKR 93.96 billion in 2018, equivalent to 33.52 percent of regional GDP. Tourist spending remained substantial in 2019 at PKR 65.34 billion before falling to PKR 40.46 billion in 2020. These figures demonstrate both the economic importance of tourism and its vulnerability to shocks (Karim et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 shock is particularly clear in Gilgit-Baltistan. Domestic arrivals fell from 1,023,023 in 2019 to approximately 634,344 in 2020, while foreign arrivals declined from 10,828 to 1,098. Domestic tourism subsequently recovered to 893,129 in 2021 and 912,587 in 2022, while foreign arrivals reached 3,237 in 2021 and 12,140 in 2022. The recovery confirms the strength of domestic demand but also highlights the region's dependence on mobility and external market conditions (Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023).

The GB case also demonstrates why decentralization must be accompanied by environmental and infrastructure planning. A destination receiving more than one million domestic tourists in a year requires adequate roads, accommodation, waste management, emergency services, water management and heritage protection. Without such capacity, rapid growth can generate environmental costs that undermine the long-term tourism resource base (UNWTO, 2018; Karim et al., 2023).

Balochistan

Balochistan possesses substantial but underdeveloped tourism resources, including coastal landscapes, archaeological sites, deserts, mountains and cultural heritage. The post-18th Amendment system gave the province greater formal responsibility for tourism, but the available evidence indicates that institutional and infrastructure capacity remained weaker than in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is consistent with the broader finding that decentralization produces different outcomes where provincial administrative and financial capacity differs (Asian Development Bank, 2016; Chapter 4 source document, 2026).

Recorded heritage-site data illustrate the limited scale of formal heritage visitation in Balochistan. During 2015–2019, the available national heritage statistics recorded fewer than 550 national visitors annually at the listed Balochistan sites and no recorded foreign visitors in those tables. These figures should not be interpreted as the total tourism market of the province, but they do indicate the limited reach of the recorded heritage-tourism system compared with Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Balochistan therefore demonstrates the importance of capacity-building within decentralization. Constitutional authority can enable a province to set priorities, but effective tourism development also requires roads, accommodation, security, destination data, trained personnel, investment facilitation and conservation capacity. Without these inputs, tourism resources remain underutilized despite formal provincial responsibility (World Bank, 2013; Asian Development Bank, 2020).

Impact on Tourism Development

Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism became one of the most important growth areas after 2010. Gilgit-Baltistan provides the strongest evidence: domestic arrivals rose from 28,893 in 2012 to 1,391,628 in 2018, before declining to 634,344 in 2020 during the pandemic. By 2022, domestic arrivals had recovered to 912,587. The pattern indicates both strong domestic demand and significant sensitivity to travel restrictions (Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023).

Provincial destination promotion contributed to this expansion. Punjab developed events and destination products such as the Cholistan Desert Rally and Thal Desert Rally, while KP promoted mountain and adventure destinations. These initiatives illustrate the way devolution allowed tourism products to be designed around region-specific landscapes and cultural resources (Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab, 2026; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2015).

International Tourism

International tourism was more constrained than domestic tourism because it depends on national-level security perceptions, visa policy, aviation connectivity, international marketing and global travel conditions. National data presented to Parliament show international arrivals in Pakistan at 3.37 million in 2018 and 3.58 million in 2019, followed by a collapse to 0.16 million in 2020 and partial recovery to 1.87 million in 2021. The magnitude of the pandemic shock demonstrates why provincial tourism governance cannot be evaluated independently of national and global conditions (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

Gilgit-Baltistan illustrates the same pattern at regional level. Foreign arrivals reached 10,828 in 2019, fell to 1,098 in 2020, and recovered to 12,140 in 2022. This recovery suggests renewed international demand, but the data also show that international tourism remained far smaller than domestic tourism in the region (Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023).

Infrastructure

Infrastructure was central to the post-devolution tourism agenda. Punjab's tourism policy and development planning emphasized state-of-the-art tourism infrastructure and destination development, while KP's tourism policy similarly emphasized accessibility and infrastructure. Punjab's 2019–20 development programme included a PPP scheme for rehabilitation and upgrading of the TDCP resort at Sakhi Sarwar with an estimated cost of Rs50 million (Government of Punjab, 2019; Government of Punjab, 2019–20).

The uneven infrastructure base also helps explain regional disparities. Remote mountain regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan require large investments in roads, accommodation, sanitation, telecommunications and emergency services simply to manage the visitor volumes generated by successful promotion. Thus, tourism promotion without infrastructure can increase pressure on destinations rather than produce sustainable development (Asian Development Bank, 2020; Karim et al., 2023).

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs became a practical mechanism for tourism investment under provincial governance. Punjab's 2019–20 development programme recorded a Rs50 million PPP scheme for the Sakhi Sarwar TDCP Resort, illustrating an attempt to use private-sector participation in tourism infrastructure rather than relying exclusively on public finance (Government of Punjab, 2019–20).

The wider rationale for PPPs is also reflected in Punjab's tourism policy, which identified private-sector leadership as a major component of tourism development. However, PPPs require transparent procurement, clear concession arrangements, environmental safeguards and effective regulation; otherwise, private investment may increase commercial development without delivering balanced local benefits (Government of Punjab, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2021).

Cultural Heritage

Heritage became an increasingly important part of provincial tourism strategies after devolution. Punjab's tourism policy explicitly included history, heritage, religious heritage and archaeological assets among resources to be developed, while Sindh's tourism potential similarly rests heavily on archaeological and cultural resources (Government of Punjab, 2019; TDAP, 2022).

The recorded visitor data demonstrate the scale of heritage tourism. In 2019, Punjab's listed heritage sites received 5,293,672 national visitors and 15,307 foreign visitors, compared with 3,914,514 national and 5,615 foreign visitors in 2017. The increase in recorded national visitation indicates the importance of domestic heritage tourism while also showing the much smaller international component (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Heritage tourism nevertheless creates conservation pressures. Increased visitation can damage historic structures if visitor management, conservation finance and site protection are inadequate. The policy challenge is therefore to treat heritage simultaneously as an economic asset and as a non-renewable cultural resource requiring long-term protection (ICOMOS, 1999; UNWTO, 2018).

Digital Promotion

Digital promotion expanded the capacity of provincial tourism bodies to communicate directly with visitors. Punjab's tourism institutions developed online services and promotional platforms, while national policy initiatives also included a tourism e-portal and social-media promotion. The National Assembly record of tourism initiatives specifically lists development of a tourism e-portal, Brand Pakistan, social-media promotion and tourist information centres among national measures (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

The major limitation is coordination. Provincial digital campaigns can successfully promote individual destinations but may not provide international visitors with a unified national tourism narrative. A coordinated national platform linked to provincial destination pages would allow local autonomy while improving consistency in information, standards, branding and international marketing (Government of Pakistan, 2019; UNWTO, 2018).

Economic Impact

Tourism's economic contribution was especially visible in regions with rapid growth. In Gilgit-Baltistan, estimated tourist spending reached PKR 93.96 billion in 2018 and represented 33.52 percent of regional GDP in the cited study. It fell to PKR 40.46 billion in 2020 and recovered to PKR 63.35 billion in 2021, illustrating both the sector's importance and its vulnerability (Karim et al., 2023).

In Punjab, the expansion of tourism regulation also generated measurable service-sector revenue. Department of Tourist Services registration revenue increased from Rs2.5 million in 2019–20 to Rs6.5 million in 2020–21, while 78 hotels, 124 restaurants and 190 travel agencies were newly registered. These figures do not measure total tourism GDP, but they demonstrate expansion in the regulated tourism-service base (Business Recorder, 2021).

Environmental and Security Challenges

Rapid domestic tourism growth created environmental pressures in destinations that had previously received relatively low visitor volumes. The increase in Gilgit-Baltistan's domestic arrivals from 28,893 in 2012 to more than 1.39 million in 2018 illustrates the scale of pressure that infrastructure and environmental systems had to absorb. Waste management, water demand, road congestion, construction and ecosystem disturbance therefore became important governance issues (Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023; Karim et al., 2023).

Security remained a critical determinant of tourism recovery, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other areas affected by insecurity. The post-2010 tourism recovery therefore cannot be attributed solely to devolution. Improvements in security conditions, infrastructure and destination promotion interacted with provincial governance to create a more favorable tourism environment (Asian Development Bank, 2020; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a clear demonstration of tourism vulnerability. Pakistan's international arrivals fell from 3.58 million in 2019 to 0.16 million in 2020, while Gilgit-Baltistan's foreign arrivals fell from 10,828 to 1,098. The pandemic therefore temporarily reversed tourism gains and demonstrated the importance of resilience, crisis planning and diversified domestic tourism markets (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023; Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department, 2023).

Critical Analysis

The evidence suggests that the 18th Amendment was transformative at the institutional level but uneven at the development level. Its strongest contribution was to create provincial ownership of tourism. Punjab's 2019 tourism policy, KP's tourism policy, the transfer of tourism functions to provincial departments, and the continuing development of region-specific tourism products all

demonstrate the practical consequences of devolution (Government of Punjab, 2019; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2015; Department of Tourist Services Punjab, 2026).

The evidence also shows that institutional capacity conditioned the benefits of devolution. Punjab possessed established tourism institutions and was able to expand regulation, PPP planning and destination development. Gilgit-Baltistan experienced spectacular growth in domestic tourism but remained constrained by infrastructure and environmental sensitivity. Balochistan had extensive tourism resources but weaker recorded heritage visitation and institutional capacity. The comparison therefore supports the argument that decentralization without equal capacity can reproduce regional disparities (World Bank, 2013; Asian Development Bank, 2016).

A second weakness was fragmentation. National data systems, branding, international marketing and cross-provincial tourism routes require coordination. The federal government itself recognized this problem in 2019, while the World Bank's assessment of Punjab tourism also identified the absence of a sufficiently strong federal coordination structure as a constraint. Devolution therefore needs to be understood as a multi-level governance arrangement rather than a complete separation of federal and provincial tourism responsibilities (Government of Pakistan, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

Discussion

The findings support the theoretical proposition that decentralization can increase policy responsiveness when local governments have authority over resources and institutions. Punjab's policy development and Gilgit-Baltistan's tourism expansion demonstrate how region-specific tourism strategies can emerge when decision-making is closer to destinations. However, the evidence also confirms that local autonomy produces stronger outcomes where administrative capacity, infrastructure and investment are available (Faguet, 2014; Government of Punjab, 2019).

The comparative evidence also suggests that tourism development should not be measured only by tourist arrivals. Gilgit-Baltistan recorded more than 1.39 million domestic arrivals in 2018 and estimated tourism spending of PKR 93.96 billion, but such rapid growth also increases environmental and infrastructure pressures. Punjab's expansion of tourism regulation generated measurable registration revenue and new tourism businesses, but regulatory expansion does not automatically prove broad economic welfare. The appropriate assessment therefore combines tourism volume, economic effects, institutional capacity, sustainability and distributional outcomes (Karim et al., 2023; Business Recorder, 2021).

The pandemic further demonstrates the importance of distinguishing constitutional effects from external shocks. Tourism in Pakistan and its provinces expanded in several years after devolution but suffered a dramatic decline in 2020. This means that the 18th Amendment should be interpreted as a governance framework that enabled provincial action, rather than as a single causal explanation for annual changes in tourist arrivals (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

The most appropriate model for Pakistan is therefore coordinated decentralization. Provincial governments should retain responsibility for destination development, local promotion and regulation, while national institutions should support international branding, national tourism

data, standards, cross-provincial circuits, aviation and visa facilitation, and international market access. Such a model would preserve the responsiveness created by devolution while reducing fragmentation (UNWTO, 2018; Government of Pakistan, 2019).

Conclusion

The 18th Constitutional Amendment fundamentally reshaped tourism governance in Pakistan by transferring major responsibilities from the federal level to provinces. The reform created opportunities for provincial policy innovation, destination-specific development, heritage promotion, private-sector participation and local responsiveness. The development of Punjab's tourism policy, KP's tourism initiatives and the rapid growth of tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan demonstrate the practical significance of this institutional change.

The evidence nevertheless demonstrates that tourism outcomes were uneven. Punjab developed comparatively strong regulatory and policy mechanisms; KP benefited from strong mountain-tourism potential and improved tourism conditions; Gilgit-Baltistan experienced exceptionally rapid domestic tourism growth but also high infrastructure and environmental pressures; Sindh continued to possess significant heritage potential but required stronger destination integration; and Balochistan remained constrained by infrastructure, security and institutional limitations.

The study therefore concludes that devolution was necessary for greater provincial ownership but insufficient for balanced tourism development. The long-term effectiveness of the post-2010 system depends on combining provincial autonomy with national coordination, stronger institutions, infrastructure investment, sustainable destination management, heritage conservation, digital integration, security and reliable tourism statistics. The central policy lesson is not to reverse devolution but to make decentralized tourism governance more coordinated, evidence-based and sustainable.

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