

## Ethnic Fault Lines and the Case for The Creation of New Provinces in Pakistan: An Appraisal



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**Abstract:** This article seeks to analyze the discourse around the creation of new provinces in Pakistan. The demand for carving out new federating units is a popular and long-standing proposal in some areas of the country with a long history of ethnic sub-nationalism fuelled by the real and imagined sense of political alienation and economic deprivation. This demand has been raised from time to time based on the distribution of national resources, and on ethnic grounds, and sometimes on the basis of socio-economic backwardness of the relevant areas. The demand for a 'Saraiki Province', 'Bahawalpur Province', 'Hazara Province' are some major cases. This case study will focus on the different factors, including, most importantly, the constitutional setup and role of different political parties of Pakistan in the making of new provinces. The Following three basic questions are the major concerns of the rigorous academic endeavour taken up in the paper. First, what has been the basis of demands for the creation of new provinces in Pakistan? Second, what are the main hurdles in making new provinces in Pakistan and what urged the re-demarcation of state in Pakistan? Third, what has been the stance of various political Parties about the creation of new provinces in Pakistan?

**Key Words:** Ethnic Faultline, Re-Demarcation, Sub-Nationalism, Re-Organization, Pakistani Constitution, Political Parties, Ethnic Group, New Provinces, Politics of Identity, Multiculturalism

### Introduction

The world is known as a global village today. The political system based on ethnicity is still persisted in different forms and manifestation around the globe. The different aspects of identity in the contemporary South Asian context are caste, religion, language, ethnicity, gender, tribes, and politics of the region. These overlapping might create some pluralistic and complex social groups with different markers and dimensions. These identity markers such as gender, caste, tribe, religion, and language etc., give birth to visible boundaries. These boundaries differentiate the groups of people from one another. Therefore, some strategies were initiated which were directed towards achieving their political goals in the defined boundaries. For instance, if one powerful group is dominant over another group, the identity crisis starts in the shape of economic disparity and political recognition. If the weaker group has a fear that their identity is not secure, they will design strategies to secure it. Thus, to overcome the identity crisis,

various marginalized groups get support sometimes on ethnic grounds, distribution of resources and sometimes on socio-economic backwardness of the areas.

After the separation of East Pakistan from its western part, Pakistan experienced its breakup on ethnic grounds. The demand for the creation of new provinces on different lines appeared after its disintegration and a homogenous and compact contiguous and geographically new map of Pakistan. In fact, the Pakistani state failed to accommodate ethnic and political identities who wanted a separate provincial status in the new state. (Ahmar, 2013)

Soon after the creation of Pakistan, Urdu was declared as the national language of the country, but people from East Pakistan reacted against this and demanded Bengali as the national language of the country. After a civil war, on 16 December 1971, East Pakistan became the independent country of Bangladesh. The issues of language, economic

disparity in the field of allocation of resources and political recognition were among the important driving forces behind the rise of Bengali Muslim nationalism as against the centralized West Pakistan state. In line with the Bengali separatist movement, the Sindhu-Desh movement, greater Baluchistan and the Pakhtunistan movement are some harsh realities of our history which cannot be ignored.

Therefore, it is argued by a Pakistani scholar, "One major unresolved area of conflict in Pakistan is the problem of ethnic and regional sub-nationalism in the smaller provinces. He also argued that Pakistan is now a more cohesive state than it was before the separation of East Pakistan; critical problems still remain unresolved and tend to complicate the process of nation-building." (Amin, 1991). ([Ahmar, 2013](#))

Initially, in general, there were five major regional identities in Pakistan, namely Baloch, Bengali, Punjabi, Pashtun, and Sindhi. Later, Seraikis claimed a separate identity from Punjab and demanded a new province. After a decade in 1987, the Hazarawall, who are Hindko speakers living in the north-eastern part of KPK, claimed their separate identity. At that time, it was not popular demand. The main arguments behind their demand were economic disparity, fewer shares in jobs and that their language and cultural identity was being suppressed by Pashtuns in NWFP (now KPK). These kinds of ethnic issues are more or less similar in all four provinces of Pakistan. However, there is a difference in their demands. Some demands new provinces on ethnic grounds while others on administrative grounds. ([Moonis Ahmar, 2013](#))

In a milestone decision in 2010, the formerly known North-West Frontier Province was retitled as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by the Federal Government of Pakistan on the grounds of empowering and identifying provinces and particular ethnic communities. This decision was greeted as a step towards addressing the grievances of smaller provinces. But soon, the decision moved a wave of strong and fresh demands from various ethnic factions. The Hindku speaking and Hazara community raised up their voice against the new name of this province on the grounds that the newly specified name is absolute injustice to the Hindku speaking community. The name entails an ethnic notion representing the Pushtun community while ignoring the larger Hazara, Hindku and Chitrali communities.

Subsequently, the movement for Hazara province was started adding a new demand to the already long

list of demands made by smaller provinces and communities has been one of the most demanding and discouraging issues since the foundation of Pakistan. M.A Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, rightly apprehended the dangers of this issue and warned the people and policy-makers of the country to remain impartial and fuse into one nation as Jinnah was against provincialism and ethnic conflict. The region of Gilgit-Baltistan is yet another case of outstanding demands. The people of the region have long been demanding gratitude for their region as the fifth province of Pakistan, but so far, this demand has not been met. Likewise, demand for a separate Saraiki province from the southern parts of Punjab and the demand for dividing Sindh into two separate provinces. The demand for a separate province comprising Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has become very much popular. However, due to various issues and grievances pertaining to representation and allocation of resources and funds, a number of regions and communities have registered complaints and demanded separate provinces or recognition of their rights and contribution to the national wealth and resource pool.

The reason for conflicts in the provincial setup of Pakistan is primarily lingual and ethnic. There is not any province of the state which is regarded free from cultural, lingual and ethnic conflicts and cleavages. Admittedly, there are many provinces of Pakistan that are named ethnically, and there are many sub-ethnic identities in that provincial setup. For example, in Balochistan, which reflects the land of Balochs, a sizeable population is non-Baloch composed of Pashtuns and Brauhis. For example, in KPK, there is a significant non-Pashtun community called Hindko, and likewise in Punjab, the Seraiki speaking population in the southern parts of the Punjabi province since long is demanding a separate provincial status. And in Sindh, the Mohajirs (Urdu Speaking), Balochs, Pashtuns and Punjabis are the non-Sindhi population is substantial ([Ahmar, 2013](#))

Paradoxically, Pakistani provinces reflect major lingual and ethnic identities and fault lines of the country, but constitutionally, Islam is the binding force and official religion. Moreover, the ideological dynamics of Pakistan militate against lingual and ethnic assertions, a fact, which was used by religious parties to reject the projection of lingual and ethnic identities. ([Ahmar, 2013](#))

Since the passing of the 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment in the 1973 constitution, the renaming of NWFP as KPK gave an impetus to the dying ethnic or nationalist movement in Pakistan. Many ethnic movements started demanding new provinces on lingual and ethnic line in different parts of Pakistan. To tackle this emerging issue, the ruling Political party, Pakistan People's Party (PPP), formed a Commission named as Parliamentary Commission on the creation of new Provinces. However, this commission was limited to Punjab. In fact, similar demands were made in Baluchistan, Sindh and KPK, now KP, to establish the commission to redraw the Provincial map in the other three provinces.

The regional identity rises because one group has complete control over resources and revenue. The other group fears that their identity is being threatened. Because of the feeling of insecurity and suppression, the sense of grouping and fighting against the dominant group rises. The feeling of deprivation provides the impetus for the oppressed group to organize and save its identity. India and Pakistan had witnessed many examples of these kinds of ethnic and regional identity issues. Pakistan is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Since its very inception, the state of Pakistan began with dual and a complex vision of identity. Self-assertion or identities of various ethnic, lingual and cultural groups are the major challenges faced by the state of Pakistan since its creation in 1947. The political recognition of culture and language, inter-provincial migrations, allocation of resources, provincial and regional autonomy in the forms of new provinces are the main issues for which the nationalist movements are launched in Pakistan. ( [Feroz Ahmed1998](#))

There are two types of nationalist movements. First, the separatist movement wants complete autonomy from the present state and wants to form their own independent state (e.g. greater Balochistan movement and the Pukhtoonistan movement in the first stage). Second, those who want autonomy and recognition within the present state (e.g. Hazara and Seraiki province movements etc.). The state of Pakistan has faced both problems. In the present scenario, the voices of separation are coming from the Baloch-majority in Baluchistan and Sindh-Desh in Sindh province. There is a separatist movement in Baluchistan which demand Iranian and Pakistani Baluchistan to be unified and form a new state of

Baluchistan. Similarly, the voice of nationalist has been recorded for a separate state in Sindh. In the rest of Pakistan, all other nationalist movements demand either greater autonomy or share or want to create a new province on ethnic or administrative grounds like the movement for a separate Seraiki province in Punjab and Hazara province in KPK. (Saman Zulifqar, 2014)

## **Dynamics and Driver of the Politics behind Creation of New Provinces**

There can be certain rationales for the creation of new states or provinces in the world. There are many states of the world that have successfully re-demarcated the province or state on the ethnic or linguistic line, on geographical grounds or administrative, and on cultural and economic rationales. The most dynamic example is India, which had re-demarcated 16 new states or provinces both on a lingual or ethnic and administrative basis. There is another example of Germany, which had successfully demarcated the state and created the namely Lander province on a purely geographical line. The Philippines is another vibrant example that created 30 new provinces, all on cultural, lingual, geographical, administrative and geographical lines. Likewise, Nigeria, South Africa, Iran, Ethiopia, India, Afghanistan, Switzerland and the United States of America reorganized their states on similar grounds.

Creating a federal region is one of the major challenges faced by a young federation in the world. With the creation of new region or states, there are generally two types of competing objectives at play: (a) to protect the rights of an ethnic group (b) and to fulfil the desire to limit a maximum number of states for the economic, financial resources, administrative affordability. Suppose we look upon the Historiography of re-demarcation of states soon after their inception of states. South Africa, India, Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Philippines are some vibrant examples. ( [Burtus de Viller, 2012](#))

## **Theoretical Contextualization of The theme**

John Breuilly described nationalism that arises in opposition as a form of politics in the modern state. In fact, he challenges the conventional views that nationalism emerges from a sense of cultural identity. Rather he shows how social groups, elite, and foreign

governments use nationalist appeals to mobilize popular support against the state. He argued that Instrumentalism is a fine and more applicable theory about ethnicity and nationalism. He also described nationalism as a sense of identity. (Johan Bruielly, 2014)

Christophe Jaffrelot narrated the story about the causes behind different ethnic movements in Pakistan and concluded that these ethnic movements do not stem from primordial collective bonds. The author also criticized the views of Francis Robinson about Muslim Separatism in British India in the name of these primordial concepts and also tuned into two-nation theory. He also said the primordial viewpoint has been strongly criticized by Ernest Gellner, for whom man does not become nationalist from sentiment and sentimentally, atavistic or not, myth-founded, or well based: they became nationalist through practical necessity and genuine objective. The central argument of the article is that behind nationalism and especially Muslim nationalism in British India, the unequal distribution of economic resources and hence this Instrumentalism of identity symbols helped Muslim separatism to crystalized with the demand for Pakistan. Finally, he said the Gellner-Brass thesis is probably the most relevant one for interpreting the two-nation theory. (Feroz Ahmed, 1996)

A.D. Smith, while elaborating the role of the nation and nationalism in history, discussed three fundamental debates that have structured and continue to define the historiography of nationalism. First, the contemporary debate between primordial and instrumentalist. Second, the perennials versus the modern approach of nation and nationalism. The third one is on the social constructionist versus ethno symbolic approach to nations and nationalism and the contemporary debate about the relationship of the past and present.

According to A.D. Smith, nations are perennial and have been formed in every period of history, in every part of the world and ethnicity and nationalism in modern times is just a revival of pre-modern political ideology. Moreover, some nations raised ideological movements in order to gain and maintain their unity, autonomy, and identity and those movements are called nationalism. Smith points out that some nations are modern, and some are formed on the basis of pre-modern ethnic affinities. He finally said, “nationalism, I understand an ideological movement for the maintenance and attainment of

autonomy unity and identity on behalf of a population”. (Suharwardy 2014)

Eric Jahn Hobsbawm, while writing the historiography on nationalism, presented one of the best accounts by Marxist regarding the development of Nations. Hobsbawm defines nationalism as “primarily as a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent. He argues that Nations are the modern construction and that they are not unchanging social entities. Eric Hobsbawm views the development of the nation as “situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation, and he argues that they must be seen as such. ( [Eric John Hobsman, 2012](#))

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an imagined political community that is inherently limited and sovereign. He explains how nationalism emerges and draws an imaginary picture of nationalism. It is imagined because all the members of the nation never know each other they just identify with each other through an imagined sense of belonging. ([Benedict Anderson, 1983](#))

In fact, the present study follows the modern approaches of nationalism, focusing on the Instrumentalist approach. Thus it depicts that ethnonationalism is an ideology, a political movement, and a form of politics. So ethnic movement can be considered as Instrumentalism as they focused on ethnic identity and values. However, they have political interest but used ethnicity for mass mobilization. Here ethnicity is not fixed and not given by birth and is used by political elites as a tool to secure certain political objectives.

## **Mainstream Political Parties, Policy and Posture towards the Question of New Provinces in Pakistan**

The present study is focused on identifying the factors behind the emergence and development of issues of provinces in Pakistan. There is a range of political and constitutional links to the creation of new provinces in Pakistan as a federal state. This study also reveals the stance of different national and regional political parties of Pakistan regarding the creation of new provinces. The rationalization of new provinces and the changes in the constitution in case of the creation of new provinces are also discussed, which is the main theme of this paper.

According to the 1973 constitution, Pakistan is a federal state. In a federal government, power is shared

between the federal government and federating units. However, Pakistan could not fully evolve the spirit of federalism. Problems emerged between the Centre and provinces, and among the provinces themselves over the sharing of power and on the distribution of resources. According to Feroz Ahmed, provincial rights, self-determinations, regional autonomy, allocation of resources, inter-province migration, language and culture are some major factors responsible for the demands of new provinces in Pakistan. ([Feroz Ahmed, 1996](#))

According to James Q. Wilson, the federation is shared sovereignty between the federation and federating units. To keep a balance and create harmonious relationship between both, the political institutions play a vital role. (Suharwardy 2014) The current issue of demand for new provinces is creating challenges for the federation. This is an old and complex issue. More recently, the demands for new provinces was sparked by the government decision of renaming NWFP as KPK in 2011. (Saman Zulifqar, 2014)

Hence the renaming of NWFP was an ethnic demand which further motivated the non-Pashtun population, Hazarawall, to demand a separate province. Similarly, Seraiki and Bahawalpur's nationalists also raised their voice for separate provinces after the passing of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution. Thus the renaming of NWFP opened another chapter of ethnicity. This scenario was a milestone for the mainstream political parties of Pakistan. The political parties used the situation to gain public support and officially gave their stances regarding the creation of new provinces in Pakistan. (Saman Zulifqar, 2014)

The stances of mainstream and regional political parties of Pakistan are more or less supportive of the creation of new states or province in Pakistan. Many political parties were favouring the creation of new provinces and suggested an administrative model for it. For instance, PPP and ANP also showed support of new provinces but on an ethnic-lingual basis. While PML (N), PML (Q), PTI, MQM, JI favoured the creation of new provinces/states on an administrative basis. Only JUI F has shown a complex stance and said we would favour the opinion of the majority and democracy.

## **Delineating the Mythological Framework**

For the purposes of analysis, I use qualitative research

methods. My analysis primarily is based on the open-ended interview, as devolution of power to provinces occurred after the passing of the Eighteenth amendment in the constitution of Pakistan in 2010.

It is noteworthy to mention that this analysis does not take into account all political parties in Pakistan; rather, a selection of only five to six major political parties is made based on the fact that these parties are active in national politics and in forming a government of Pakistan over the last few decades. As the previous literature on federalism and ethnonationalism in Pakistan does not provide specificities with regards to the role of political parties, therefore, it is significant to analyze the political parties and their stances regarding the formation of new provinces in Pakistan. I collect data regarding the description and composition of provincial governments and provincial assemblies of Pakistan from their official

## **Constitutional Perspective on the Formation of New Federating Units**

Pakistan's constitution clearly sets a very tough process for the formation of new provinces. Article 239 of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 shapes a complete constitutional device for the making of new provinces. The article states that "a bill to alter the constitution which would have the result of changing the bounds of a province shall not be presented to the president for assent unless it has been approved by provincial assembly of that province by the votes not less than two-thirds of its total membership. For the separation of provincial boundaries, it is mandatory to get the approval of the Provincial Assembly.

In 2012, the National Assembly of Pakistan approved a common resolution in support of a new province in Punjab and consequently constituted a commission to submit a report on the feasibility and execution of the plan. The resolution asked the Provincial Assembly of Punjab to take essential measures. The Punjab Assembly approved two resolutions on May 9, 2012, proposing the creation of two new provinces, the South Punjab province and the renewal of Bahawalpur province. The constitutional and legal formalities were seemingly introduced, but soon, it was exposed that these were political delay tactics and the purposes of the ruling elite were not in favour of the creation of new provinces. The whole procedure ended up in a deadlock, wherein the Provincial Assembly of Punjab declined to accept the commission that was established to look into the

matter of creating new provinces. The commission, however, submitted its report to the Parliament on January 28, 2013. ([Umbreen Javed, 2012](#))

According to the constitution of 1973, Pakistan is a federal-state comprised of four provinces and Federal Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA). Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan are constitutionally part of Pakistan but come under the control of the central administration of Pakistan. <sup>i</sup> Constitutional amendments needed in the constitution for the current prospects and challenges of conflicts on the distribution of resources. According to 1973 constitution of Pakistan provide a formula for the creation of new provinces. For instance, clause 4 of Article 239 specifies criteria to have more provinces in Pakistan. Clause 4 says that “a bill to amend the constitution would have the effect of altering the limits of a province shall not be presented to the president for the assent unless it has been passed by the provincial assembly concerned by the votes not less than two-thirds of the total membership.” This means that after its passes in the two houses of the parliament, such a bill would have to be approved by the provincial assembly covered with 2/3 majority before it is presented to the president (Batt: 2012).

In May 2013, after general elections in Pakistan, two houses of parliament passed a bill to divide Punjab and create a “Janobi” or Southern Punjab- Bahawalpur, but this particular bill was not presented before the respective provincial assembly of Punjab, and hence it could not be presented before the president for his assent. Similarly, on January 3, 2012, MQM presented a bill in National Assembly for the creation of new provinces in KPK and Punjab. In August 2012, PPP, which was leading the coalition government, established a parliamentary commission to create new provinces in Punjab and other areas. On February 8, 2013, the 24<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment bill was tabled in the senate to create another province in Punjab by dividing it. Unfortunately, the issue of new provinces in Pakistan became victimized by leading political parties, i.e. PML N and PPP etc. This issue was politically used as a slogan in the 2013 election to get maximum votes but did not attract a majority. ([Moonis Ahmar, 2013](#))

When the NWFP was renamed as KPK under the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment, the 20<sup>th</sup> amendment bill was submitted by MQM to create Hazara and Seraiki as separate provinces from KPK and Punjab, respectively. On May 20, 2013, PML N, largely from

Hazara, submitted a resolution to the KPK government assembly to create Hazara Division as a separate province. ([Moonis Ahmar, 2013](#))

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan got independence on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Though Pakistan had remained a democratic country besides its heterogeneous cultural diversity, it has not been able to resolve the cultural, language and regional identity issues with the creation of new provinces. Pakistan is also a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multilingual country that could not resolve the ethnic issues. The main hurdle in the way of the creation of new provinces in Pakistan was their constitutional setup. In addition, Pakistan has a very complex constitutional setup and needed a two-thirds majority in the two houses of parliament and also respective Provincial Assembly. In the case of Pakistan, the constitutional set-up for the re-demarcation of provinces is very complex; that is why it could not create any new state or provinces on any line beside its harsh reality of the fall of Dhaka on ethnic lines.

The division of Sindh into two parts on the basis of ethnic composition are some of the most intractable challenges facing the federation

In addition, the Pakistani political parties, both national and regional level, are not stable. They never pay any heed to deal with this dynamic issue. They simply resort to statements to gain maximum political interests and resort to the political point-scoring game. While the continuous intervention of the Pakistan Army in constitutional and political spheres fragmented the Pakistani constitution. Four times of military coup destabilized the democratic structure of the Pakistan state and remained under military rule for about 35 years.

Most importantly for Pakistan is the two major cases that need to be dealt with urgently. The case of Balochistan is increasingly getting more and more complex because their demands revolve around not a single factor but many important factors. Basically, they consider themselves economically and politically deprived and marginalized. But their excessive reliance on their linguistic and cultural lines indicates their social deprivation. So when all the instigating factors come up unanimously with a unified movement and force, then that will become difficult for the state to reach any successful settlement with them. Another case is that of Gilgit-Baltistan, which has been



accorded less attention as a disputed territory from the start. In order to win over the Kashmir dispute, the state of Pakistan fails to settle GB in constitutional terms. Thus, in short, besides all the movements discussed in Pakistan, serious movements from Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan are more likely to be in the political scene in the near future. Pakistan can take a leaf out of the Indian solution to the similar calls for the new federating units. Unlike India, Pakistan has

been unable to find any solution to the challenge in question since its independence. If we have a comparative look at both cases, India has accommodated their ethnic issues by giving them their ethnic identities; for instance, India had created more than 15 new administrative states on different bases. In the case of Pakistan, it lacked as the ethical issue still there, and the Pakistani state failed to accommodate ethnic division on a cultural/lingual basis.

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