Ethnic Identity and the Demand for New Provinces in Pakistan: Results from a Survey Data in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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ABSTRACT

The demand for new provinces in Pakistan gained traction after the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Pakistani constitution in 2010. All major political parties since then have included in their elections manifestos the need to create new provinces in Pakistan. While the debate on new provinces is manifest on the part of political parties and ethnopolitical actors, there is no large scale research that studies the phenomenon at the mass level. The present article fills the gap by undertaking a survey of respondents from the Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. The survey data highlights that ethnic majorities in these three provinces are opposed to the creation of a new province, whereas, ethnic minorities here are more desirous of new provinces. Secondly, identity and linguistic factors are

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less salient in the demand for new provinces as opposed to material variables.

Introduction

The present article seeks to ascertain the viewsand sentiments of people in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as whether they entertain the idea of creating new provinces in Pakistan. The demand for new provinces gained salience after the 18th Amendment to the Pakistan Constitution in 2010.[1] At the time, the renaming of the erstwhile North West Frontier Province (NWFP) as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)[2]–a longstanding demand of Pashtuns[3]–fuelled ethnic resentment on the part of Hazarawal minority in the province as they feared marginalisation. Immediately, the Hazarawals took to the streets agitating in favour of a separate province for the Hindko-speaking population of the KP.[4] As the political opportunity structure in Pakistan provided vent to the airing of the new provinces demand, Siraikis[5] in South Punjab and Mohajirs[6] in Sindh also expressed similar objectives.

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1   Muhammad Ahsan Rana, 'Decentralization Experience in Pakistan: The 18th Constitutional Amendment in Pakistan,"*Asian Journal of Management Cases* 17, no. 1 (2020): 61-84.

2   Bilal Baloch, "What's in a Name?"*Foreign Policy*(April 26, 2010), *https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/04/26/whats-in-a-name-2/*

3   "ANP Celebrates Renaming of NWFP,"*The Express Tribune*, April 15, 2010, *https://tribune.com.pk/story/7060/anp-celebrates-renaming-of-nwfp*;   DW, "North West Frontier Province's Renaming: Not the End of a Struggle," *Deutsche Welle*, April 21, 2010, *https://www.dw.com/en/north-west-frontier-provinces-renaming-not-the-end-of-a-struggle/a-5490716*.

4   Moonis Ahmar, "Conflict Prevention and the New Provincial Map of Pakistan: A Case Study of Hazara Province,"*Journal of Political Studies* 20, no. 2 (2013): 1-19; Muhammad Anwar, Azhar Mehmood Abbasi, and Kanwal Noreen, "Identity Crises and Politics of Ethnicity: A Case Study of Hazara Nationalist Movement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," *Global Political Review* 6, no. 4 (December 30, 2021): 54–62, *https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2021(VI-IV).06*.

5   Muhammad Mushtaq and Misbah Shaheen, "The Siraiki Province Movement in Punjab, Pakistan: Prospects and Challenges,"*Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 30, no. 2 (2017): 139-150.

6   Adeel Khan, "Mohajir Ethnic Nationalism in Pakistan: El Dorado Gone Sour,"*Asian Studies Review* 28, no. 1 (2004): 41-56.

Although different studies undertake analysis of the new provinces issue from a variety of perspectives,[7] a largescale study informed by people's opinions on the ground remains non-existent. The present article bridges this wide gap by presenting analysis from a survey data conducted in the following districts: Sargodha, Lahore, Multan, and Bahawalpur in Punjab; Sukkur, Karachi, Khairpur, and Hyderabad in Sindh; Peshawar, Mardan, Haripur, and Abbottabad in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The survey was part of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) funded National Research Program for Universities (NRPU) project titled, *Administrative Decentralisation and Effective Governance: Dissecting the Discourse on New Provinces in Pakistan*, which ran from 2017 till 2021. The survey was conducted in order to find answers to the following questions: What is the opinion of majority and minority ethnic groups with respect to the demand for new provinces in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? Are ethnic and linguistic markers important in the demand for new provinces? What is the relevance of administrative and resource deficiency variables in making claims for new provinces?

Review and Gap in the Literature

Studies on new provinces in Pakistan based on a nationally representative sample survey expressive of on-ground sentiments are negligible. Of the available literature, Ahmar relates the demand for new provinces with Pakistan's intra-

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7   Muhammad Mehran Latif, "Demand for new provinces in Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2017): 104-114; Azhar Mahmood Abbasi, Muhammad Shoaib Malik and Syed Hamid Mahmood Bukhari, "Ethnic Fault Lines and the Case for the Creation of New Provinces in Pakistan: An Appraisal," *Global Regional Review* 6, no. 1 (2021): 174-181; Muhammad Usman Asghar, "Demand for New Provinces in Pakistan," *ISSRA Papers* 4, no. 1 (2012): 59-78; Malik M. Hafeez, "Constitutional Framework for Formation of New Provinces in Pakistan," *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law* 4, no. 3 (2014): 4-10; Jamal Hussain, "Is the Creation of New Provinces in Pakistan the Need of the Hour," *Defence Journal* 18, no. 3 (2014); Umbreen Javaid, "Federation of Pakistan and Creation of New Provinces: A Case of Bahawalpur Province," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 39, no. 1 (2018): 15-36.

national security offering two juxtaposed schools of thought: the first believes that creating new provinces will negatively impact Pakistan's security and unleash centrifugal forces harmful to the country's status as an ideological state while the second school of thought reiterates the necessity of decentralised administrative structures as pivotal to attending Pakistan's governability crisis.[8] A key element in the second debate is mired in notions of whether the new provinces should be created on either administrative or ethnic criteria. Proponents of the administrative criterion portend an alarmist view fearing that ethnic titles for the new provinces will unleash centrifugal tendencies leading to the weakening of Pakistan's state and society. The creation of new provinces has also been analysed by relating it to conflict prevention mechanisms, specifically the multi-stakeholder (MSH) approach as a means of satisfying sub-provincial minorities'/identities' desire for provincial autonomy as well as vulnerable groups such as women, youth and religious minorities.[9] According to this argument, power devolved is power retained and that the unitary-centralised policies of the Pakistani state since independence have denied much-needed political participation and representation to ethnic minorities. Soherwordi and Khattak appropriate the creation of new provinces on ethnic lines as akin to playing with fire for this would weaken the ideological foundations of the Pakistani state, the sense of nationhood and an outpouring of ethnic and regional identities undermining the state's socio-political cohesion. They contest the renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for it projects a robust ethnic identity while other names such as Khyber, Abbasin or Gandhara would have been far more appropriate.[10] They reiterate that more

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8   Moonis Ahmar, "The Dynamics of Pakistan's Intra-national Security: The Role of the New Provinces,"*India Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2016): 16-29.

9   Ahmar, "Conflict Prevention and the New Provincial Map of Pakistan".

10   Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi and Shahid Ali Khattak, "The Creation of New Provinces in Pakistan and its Implications for An Integrated Country,"*JRSP* 51, no. 1 (2014): 146.

than new provinces, what the country needs are reactivation of local governments and good governance. While the delegation of power down to the local government is an important indicator of service delivery and good governance, Soherwordi and Khattak's argument ignores the fact that Pakistan's provinces are already ethnically constituted. Pakistan's Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan provinces have ethnic titles and the question that needs to be asked is why the renaming of NWFP to an ethnic category or the creation of new provinces with ethnic titles is likely to unleash centrifugal tendencies. In fact, the demand for new provinces gives vent to the fact that Pakistan's current provincial administrative divisions have not catered to the resource-based needs of ethnic minorities.

Mushtaq offers a suggestive argument on how dividing the core region, Punjab, and the creation of a new province in South Punjab on administrative, not ethnic, criteria provides grounds for resolving issues of neglect and deprivation for the minority Siraiki ethnicity.[11] Sticking to the administrative criterion is important because peripheralisation and the non-satisfaction of basic needs is the primary driver for the Siraiki ethnic group. As data from the survey suggests, it is not ethnic, cultural and linguistic variables that are imperative objectives for ethnic minorities in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh. Zulfiqar estimates the creation of new provinces as a thorny issue mediated only through the enabling of constitutional provisions and a wide national consensus and contends that establishing provinces on ethnic or linguistic formalities endangers the security of the Pakistani nation state as it tends to exacerbate sub-nationalist forces.[12] The solution for Zulfiqar as for Soherwordi and Khattak is not the creation of new provinces but energizing the local government which devolves political

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11 Muhammad Mushtaq, "Regional Identities in Quest of Separate Provinces: A New Challenge for the Pakistani Federation,"*Journal of Political Studies* 23, no. 1 (2016): 289-307.

12 Saman Zulfiqar, "Politics of New Provinces in Pakistan: Prospects and Challenges,"*IPRI Journal* 12, no. 2 (2012): 146-152.

authority down to the grassroots. Moreover, Rana *et. al*., write about decentralization and how it is impacted by different political processes in Pakistan, and it is also impacting other ancillary phenomena.[13] The decentralization drive was one of the key projects of President Musharraf's military-dominated and controlled political process in which local governments were energised as key actors in Pakistan's administrative setup. In the post-Musharraf phase, provincial governments were empowered via the 18th Amendment as several ministries were devolved to the provinces. The empowerment of provincial governments and the relative disempowerment of local governments went side by side with the demand for new provinces, which have now been patronised by mainstream political parties—the PPP, the PML-N and the PTI—as witnessed in their 2013 and 2018 election manifestoes.[14]

The available literature, while instructive, is increasingly bereft of the opinions and general sentiments of the mass public. It is the micro-level empirical data collected from the general public which the present article attends to. It is important to understand how the demand for new provinces and its salience is understood by ethnic majorities and minorities in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh. Moreover, the demand for new provinces on the part of ethnic minorities also requires careful broaching. Too often, while analysing ethnicity, it is the cultural or linguistic variables based on the differentiation principle that acquires

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13   Muhammad Ahsan Rana *at el*., "Decentralization Experience in Pakistan: The 18th Constitutional Amendment,"*Asian Journal of Management Cases* 17, no. 1 (2020): 61-84; Sameen A., Mohsin Ali and Mariam Mufti, "Political Parties and Decentralization in Pakistan,"*Publius: The Journal of Federalism* (2021); Fayyaz Hussain Tunio and Agha Amad Nabi, "Political Decentralization, Fiscal Centralization and its Consequences in Case of Pakistan,"*Cogent Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1-21; Adam Saud and Kashif Ali Khan, "Decentralization and Local Government Structures: Key to Strengthening Democracy in Pakistan,"*Journal of Political Studies* 23, no. 2 (2016): 397-412.

14   The question pertaining to why mainstream political parties instrumentalise the new provinces demand, their seriousness on this issue or otherwise is beyond the remit of the present article.

ascendancy in socio-political analysis. As the literature review indicates, ethnic, cultural and linguistic variables are seen as threatening to the territorial integrity of the state without assessing political and economic factors that feed into the differentiation principle. Our results from surveys in the 12 districts of Sindh, Punjab, and KP highlight important and interesting trends amongst the general public in this regard.

Hypotheses

The article propounds the following hypotheses:

- H1: Majority ethnic groups in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa oppose the creation of new provinces.
- H2: Ethnic and lingual identities are not the main cause for the demand for new provinces.
- H3: Administrative difficulties, deprivation, and unequitable resource distribution are major causes behind the demand for new provinces.

Research Methodology

At the general level, the research methodology is informed by an inductive approach whereby three provinces are earmarked for a study into the dynamics of the desire and movement towards creating new provinces in Pakistan. Quantitative methodology was pursued while gauging the public opinion about the creation of new provinces. For the purpose, surveys based upon questionnaires were conducted using the Stratified Random Sampling technique. Two main strata were utilized for the purpose–urban/rural and male/female. Pakistan has a population of about 207.68 million, according to the 2017 census, of which 52.96percent reside in Punjab, 23.04 percent in Sindh, 14.69 percent in KP–the three provinces in which the study was conducted. To address the problem of overestimation in the case of Punjab and underestimation in the case of Sindh and KP, the sample size of Punjab was reduced to 45 percent, and sample size of Sindh and KP was increased to 30 percent

and 25 percent, respectively. By doing so, the Sample Error remained within the acceptable limit of 2-3 percent at 95 percent Confidence Interval. It was measured using the formula, where *p* is the probability ratio, and *n* is the number of observations.

$$SE = \frac{\sqrt{p(1-p)}}{n}$$

The total sample size was 5159 based upon the above percentages, out of which approximately 2319 observations (questionnaires) were from Punjab, 1550 from Sindh and 1290 from KP. For the purpose of data collection, Punjab was divided into south Punjab and central Punjab; Sindh into urban and rural Sindh; KP into northern and central KP– while the selection of the districts was based upon Systematic Random Sampling. While dividing the sample size on the basis of the district's population, as per 2017 Census, 517 responses were collected from Karachi, 389 from Hyderabad,260 from Sukkur, 410 from Khairpur, 1102 from Lahore, 384 from Sargodha, 484 from Multan, 375 from Bahawalpur,209 from Abbottabad, 497 from Peshawar, 474 from Mardan, and 164 from Haripur. Minimum 18 years of age was set as a lower limit for population selected for the survey. The collected Cross-Sectional Data wasanalysed using Descriptive Statistics, SPSS V.20.

Statistical Analysis

Findings of the survey conducted in the 12 districts are presented below for statistical analysis, which comprises three questions asked during the survey:

1. Which ethnic group do you belong to?
2. Do you want a separate province?
3. Why do you want a separate province?

For the purposes of the article, the second and third questions are the most imperative. The second question

seeks to elicit the opinions of both ethnic majority and minority groups in each of the three provinces on creating a new province in their present provincial setup on a simple yes/no binary. The third question is addressed to ethnic minorities in each of the three provinces in order to understand the reasons for why they support the creation of a new province. These have been broadly categorised as falling into two areas (cultural-linguistic and material) with three explanatory variables: a. administrative difficulties, b. identity/language and c. deprivation/inequitable resource distribution. The next section presents the data results in a bar chart format followed by discussion and analysis.
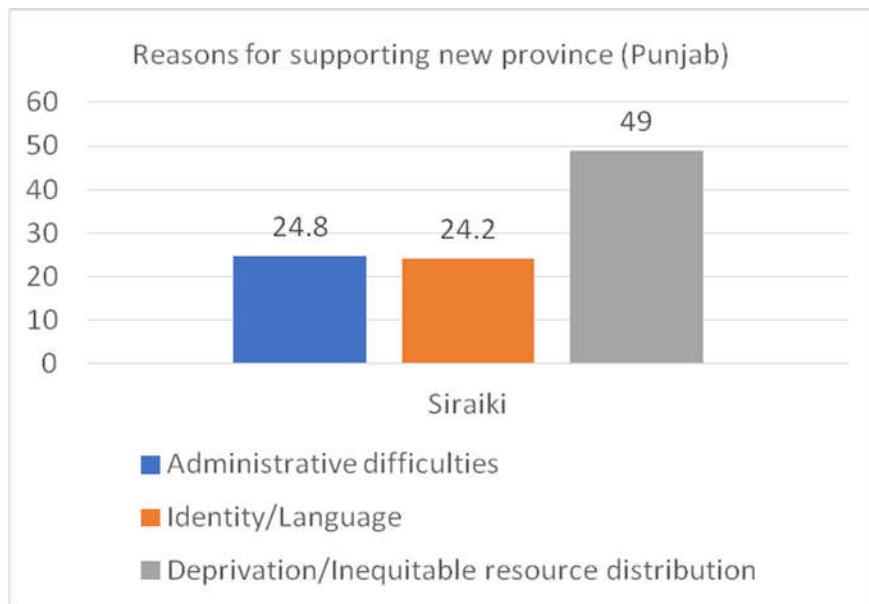
Data from Punjab

Figure 1: Which ethnic group do you belong to? (Punjab)
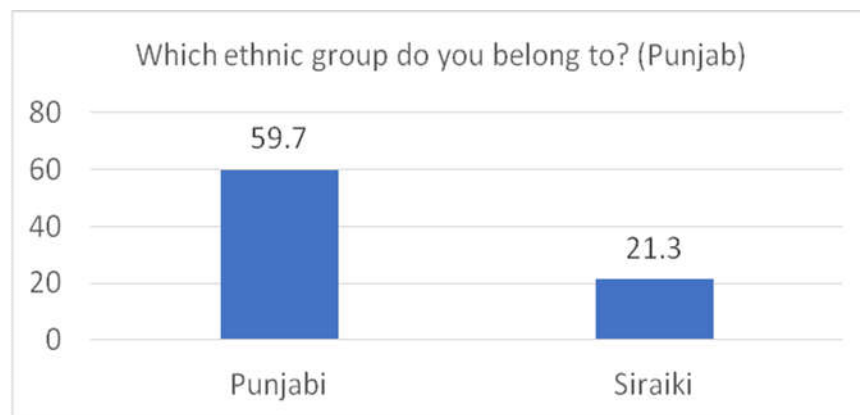
Figure 2: Ethnic group and the demand for new province (Punjab)
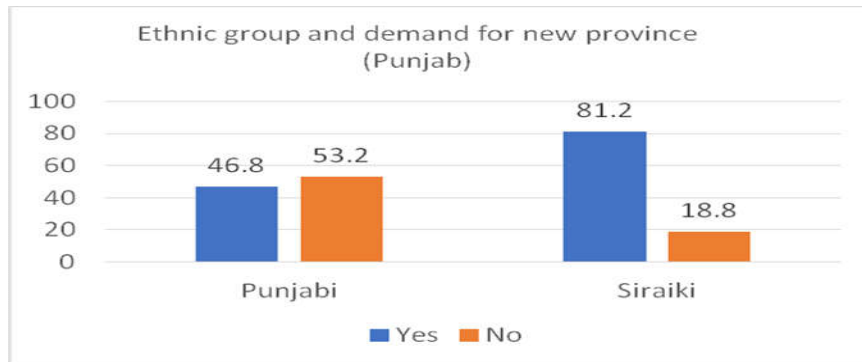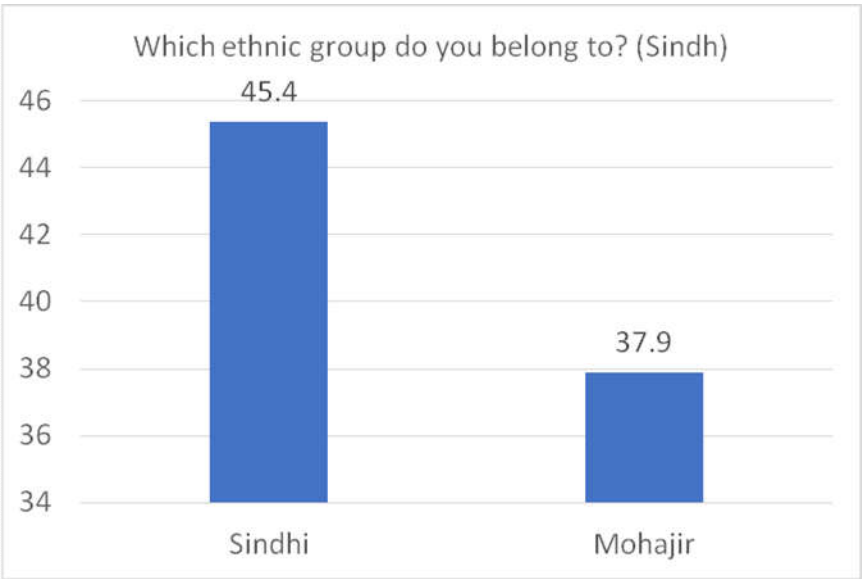
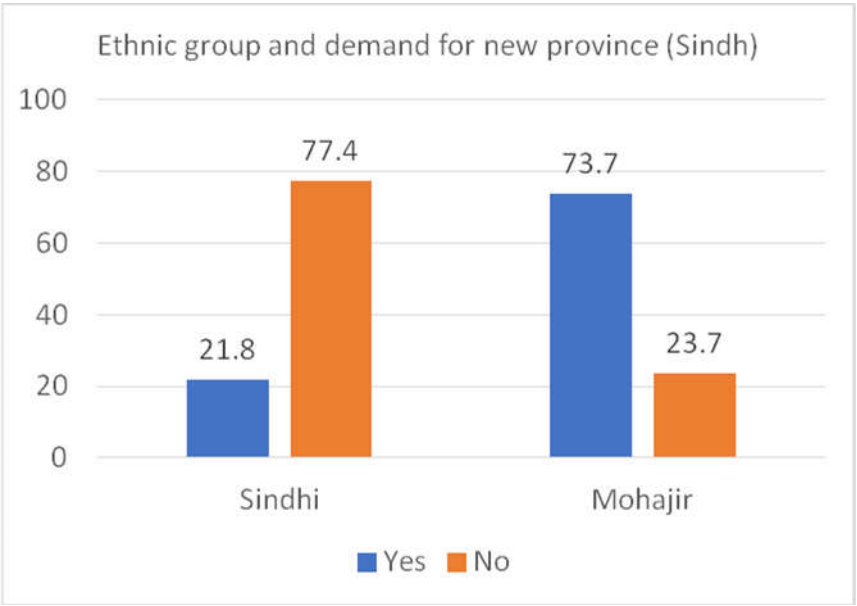**Figure 3: Reasons for supporting new province (Siraikis in Punjab)**
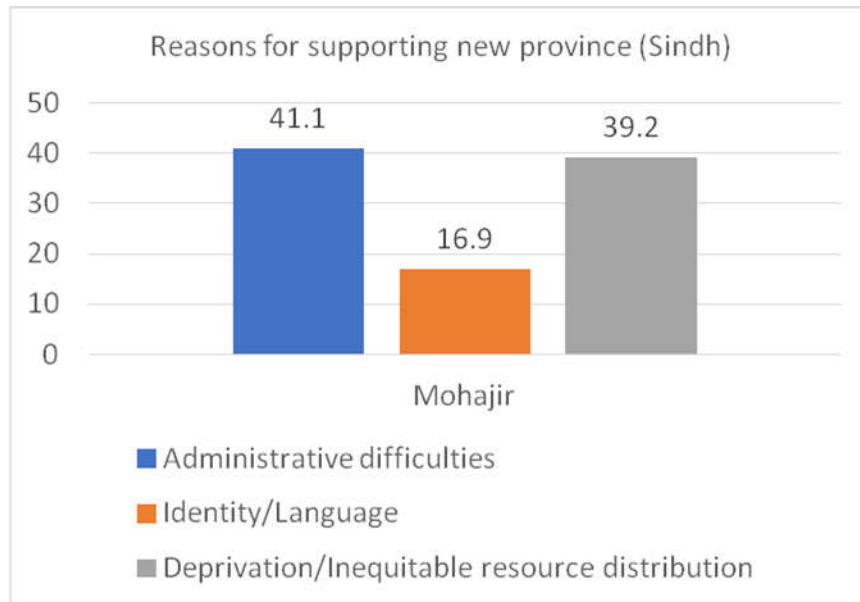

Data from Sindh

Figure 4: Which ethnic group do you belong to? (Sindh)

Figure 5: Ethnic group and demand for new provinces (Sindh)

Figure 6: Reasons for supporting new province (Mohajirs in Sindh)

Data from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

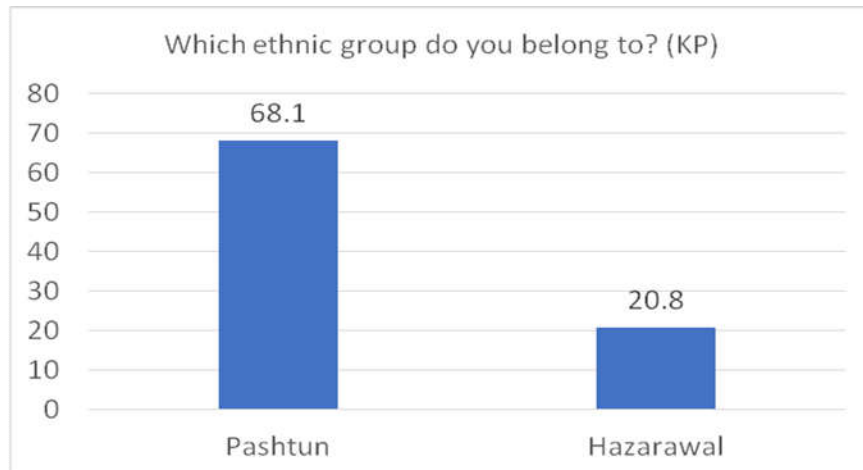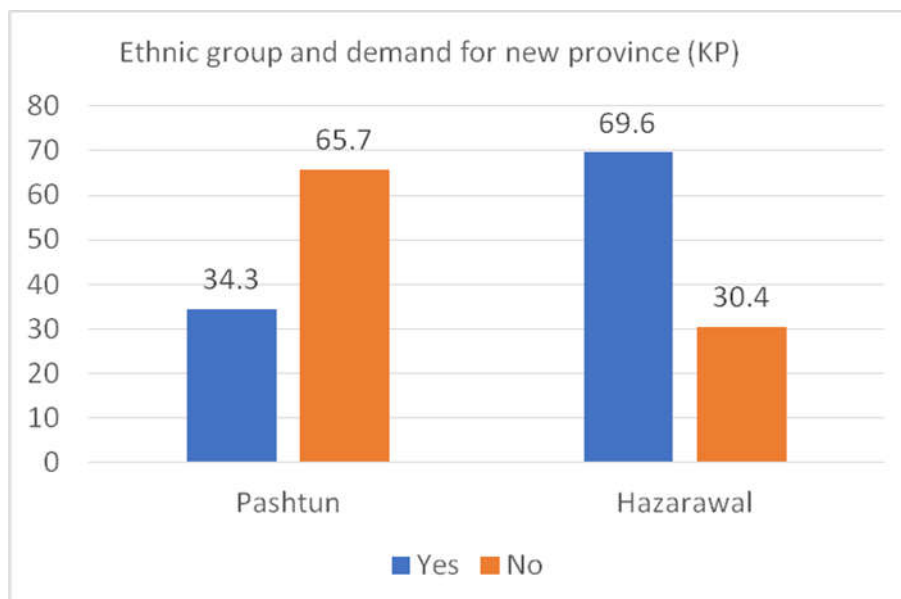**Figure 7: Which ethnic group do you belong to (KP)?**
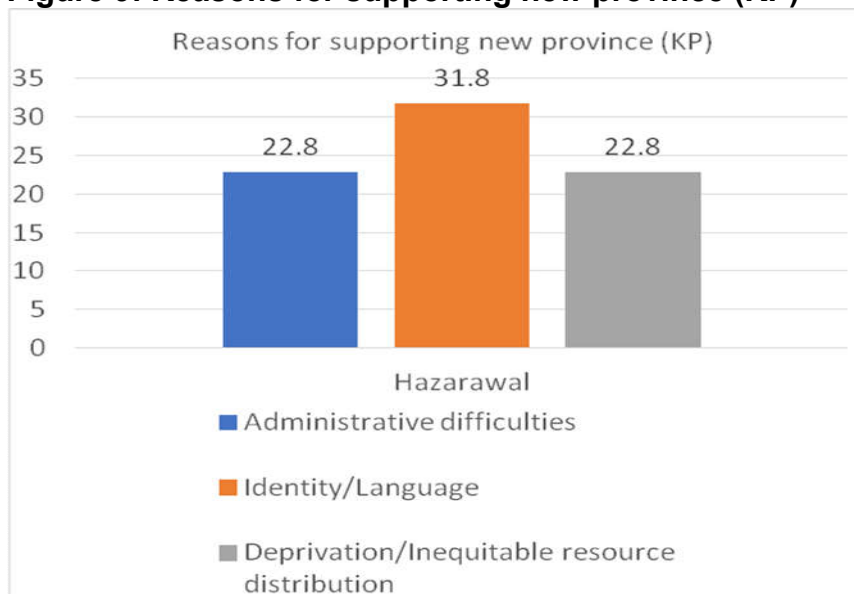

Figure 8: Ethnic group and demand for new province (KP)

Figure 9: Reasons for supporting new province (KP)

Discussion and Analysis

The survey data from Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was analysed with respect to assessing the opinion of the ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups on

the creation of a new province in the existing administrative setup. The survey data presented in the article compared the opinions of ethnic majority and minority groups and also sought responses from ethnic minorities as to why they support the creation of new provinces. The reasons were broadly divided into three categories that pervade the debate on new provinces. The first was administrative difficulties in the sense that peripheral ethnic groups do not have access to the provincial centre where the ethnic majority predominates.[15] The centre-periphery dialectic has been the bane of the Pakistani state's nation-and state-building drive in the post-colonial period.[16] The second reason had to do with linguistic and identity variables. That is, whether the support for a new province emanates from an essentialist belief in ethnic differentiation.[17] The third reason borders on arguments relative to deprivation and inequitable resource distribution, a long-standing grievance of ethnic minorities in Pakistan.[18]

Results and Discussion from Punjab

Figure 1 presents data on the ethnic majority (Punjabi) and ethnic minority (Siraikis) which comes up to 59.7percent for the former and 21.3 percent for the latter. When asked whether they support the creation of a new province in Punjab (Figure 2), a majority of the Punjabi respondents (53.2 percent) said no while a meaningful percentage (46.8 percent) responded with yes. As will be seen with ethnic majority groups in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Punjabi ethnicity is least biased against the creation of a new

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15 Theodore P. Wright Jr., "Centre-Periphery Relations and Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Sindhis, Muhajirs and Punjabis,"*Comparative Politics* 23, no. 3 (1991): 299-312.

16 Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1972).

17 Veena Kukreja, "Ethnic Diversity, Political Aspirations and State Response: A Case Study of Pakistan," *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 66, no. 1 (2020): 28-42.

18 Feroz Ahmed, "Ethnicity, Class and State in Pakistan,"*Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 47 (1996): 3050-3053.

province in Punjab compared to the Pashtuns and Sindhis. This is because of a sizeable minority (46.8 percent) being favourably disposed towards a new province in Punjab.

Figure 3 presents data on why the ethnic minority in Punjab, in this case the Siraikis, support the creation of a new province. The available numbers suggest that ethnic and cultural-linguistic differentiation is a minority concern (24.2 percent) with a plurality of respondents (49 percent) in support of the deprivation/inequitable resource distribution variable. If this latter percentage is added to the administrative difficulties variable (24.8 percent), the non-ethnic differentiation variables come up to 73.8 percent. This proves H2 and H3 that cultural-linguistic variables are less relevant and that material factors evidenced in administrative difficulties and deprivation/inequitable resource distribution are salient in the demand for a new province on the part of the Siraiki minority in Punjab.

Results and Discussion from Sindh

Figure 4 provides provincial distribution of the ethnic majority (Sindhis) and ethnic minority (Mohajirs) in the four districts–Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, and Khairpur–surveyed for mining data on the creation of a new province in Sindh. The Sindhis make up 45.4 percent of the survey data while Mohajirs are 37.9 percent.

Out of the Sindhi ethnic category, a significant majority (77.4 percent) opposed the creation of a new province in Sindh with a minority (21.8 percent) responding with yes (Figure 5). On the other hand, a significant majority of the Mohajirs (73.7 percent) say yes to the creation of a new province with a minority (23.7 percent) responding with no. When asked why they support the creation of a new province (Figure 6), the Mohajir ethnic minority, in almost similar numbers as the Siraiki ethnic minority in Punjab, gives short shrift to the cultural-linguistic differentiation variable (16.9 percent). A plurality of Mohajirs cite administrative difficulties (41.1 percent) as the primary reason for their support for a new province with deprivation/inequitable resource distribution

(39.2 percent) coming in a close second. Adding the material reasons–administrative difficulties and deprivation / inequitable resource distribution–together, the result remains 80.3 percent. H2 and H3 are, thus, proven when it comes to the Mohajir ethnic minority in Sindh.

Results and Discussion from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The percentages of the ethnic majority (Pashtuns) and ethnic minority (Hazarawals) in the four surveyed districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Figure 7)–Peshawar, Mardan, Abbottabad, Haripur–come up to 68.1 percent and 20.8 percent, respectively.

When asked whether they support the creation of a new province in KP (Figure 8), the Pashtun ethnic majority opposes (65.7 percent) while a minority of Pashtuns (34.3 percent) supports the new province. On the other hand, a majority of the Hazarawals, the ethnic minority in KP, supports the creation of a new province (69.6 percent) while a minority says no (30.4 percent). Figure 9 asked Hazarawal respondents about the reasons for why they support the creation of a new province. A plurality of Hazara respondents (31.8 percent) cited cultural-linguistic differentiation as the primary reason for their support for a new province with 22.8 percent citing administrative difficulties and deprivation/inequitable resource distribution. Compared to the Siraiki and Mohajir ethnic minorities, the Hazarawals are marginally motivated by ethnic differentiation, however, the material variables (administrative difficulties and deprivation/inequitable resource distribution) when combined together make up 54.6 percent of the surveyed population, hence, proving H2 and H3.

Conclusion

The article presented data from a survey in select districts in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to seek opinions of both ethnic majorities and minorities on creating new

provinces. On the basis of the above discussion and results following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Majority ethnic groups in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa oppose the creation of a new provinces in their present administrative setup. This being the case, the push for new provinces can only succeed once a middle-position between the opponents and proponents is generated through a viable discourse led by both national and ethnic parties in each of the three provinces.

2. The Punjabi ethnic majority as compared to the Sindhis and Pashtuns is less biased towards the creation of a new province. A meaningful minority of Punjabis (46.8 percent) supports the creation of a new province which is not the case with Pashtuns in KP (34.3 percent) and Sindhis in Sindh (21.8 percent). The fact that a sizeable minority supports new provinces attests to the fact that the new provinces discourse as represented in Punjab is perhaps, less incendiary, as opposed to KP and Sindh.

3. Minority ethnic groups in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are less motivated by cultural-linguistic differentiation as opposed to material variables (administrative difficulties and deprivation/inequitable resource distribution) in their support for a new province. However, compared to the Siraikis and Mohajirs, a plurality of Hazarawals (31.8 percent) cite identity/language as the primary reason for creation of a new province. Ethnocultural expressions are often seen at the core of ethnic groups from which stem their political demands and objectives. The evidence from the survey data gives vent to ethnopolitical variables (economic dislocation, resource distribution and satisfaction of material needs) as key in the demand for new provinces. A robust analysis requires a careful decentring of ethnocultural factors and a deep dive into

ethnopolitical drivers of the demand for new provinces.