



**Quest for Decentralization and Challenges to Federalism in Pakistan:
A Case for Creation of New Provinces**

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Abstract:

This paper delves into the challenge to federalism in Pakistan following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, which significantly transferred powers from the centre to the provinces. The amendment strengthened the provinces at the cost of the centre, ending several controversies but creating new challenges for the federation. It highlights how the transfer of more powers and resources to the provinces further empowered already dominant ethnic groups and aggravated the sense of deprivation among smaller ethnic/linguistic groups. The study elucidates the genesis and history of the existing provincial boundaries and the prevalence of ethnic, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity across all four provinces, challenging the myth of only four or five subnational groups in the country. It builds a case for creating at least 14 provinces from the existing four units. The creation of new provinces can be based on different criteria, mainly the needs and aspirations of the local population in different regions. The study concludes that creating new provinces will ensure efficient administration, better governance and bring peace, progress and harmony in the country.

Key words: Pakistan, federalism, autonomy, ethnic diversity, creation of new provinces, efficient administration, good governance, conflict-avoidance

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a religiously, cultural, linguistically and ethnically diverse state, which led its founding fathers to declare it a federal state. However, the debate over a strong centralized federation with weak provinces versus strong provinces with a weak centre, among other factors, stalled the constitution-making process for about a decade after inception of the country. The political leadership from the smaller provinces largely demanded more provincial autonomy to avoid majoritarian Punjabi domination. This demand was addressed with the passage of the 18th

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Constitutional Amendment in 2010, preceded by the agreement on the 7th National Finance Award Commission (NFC) award in 2009. These two developments empowered the provinces politically and financially at the expense of the centre. While they resolved several controversies, they also introduced new challenges for the federation.

This paper aims to delve into the several challenges to federalism in Pakistan, with a special focus on the issue of creating of new provinces. The paper elucidates the genesis and history of the existing provincial boundaries, which were arbitrarily drawn by the British to meet its colonial needs or by military rulers without taking into consideration the people's needs and aspirations. Moreover, it highlights the ethnic, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of all four provinces, which are primarily dominated by majority ethnic groups, marginalizing smaller minority groups politically, economically and socio-culturally. Finally, the paper presents a case for the creation of new provinces based on multiple criteria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Federalism

The word "federal" has its origin in the mid-17th century and is derived from the Latin words, "foedus" and "foeder," which mean league or covenant (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, n.d.). According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d.), the adjective "federal" is developed from the Latin "foedus (genitive foederis)," meaning "covenant, league, treaty, alliance." In the 1640s, the word was used as a "theological term" about 'covenants' between God and man. By the 1650s, its secular context relating to "covenant or treaty" began to refer to a political organization "formed by agreement among independent states" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Lepine argues that federalism originates from the Latin word "foedus," which means a compact, contract or treaty. The word "foedus" itself comes from the older Latin word "fides," meaning trust (Lepine 2012, 31). In the ancient Roman Republic and Empire, the word "foedus" was used to refer treaties and agreements with peoples from other parts of the Italian peninsula (during the Republic) and with "barbarians' not Romanized, living in the Marches at the time of the Empire." In the Middle Ages, this word was used to refer peace agreements and treaties of alliances between political units or entities (Lepine 2012, 31-2).

Ronal Watts defined federalism as "A broad category of political systems in which [...] there are two (or more) levels of government, combining elements of shared-rule (collaborative partnership) through a common government and regional self-rule (constituent unit autonomy) for the government of constituent units" (Lepine 2012, 26). Federalism, in the words of Mitrany (1948, 351-4), was "one of the great inventions of political theory and life." It has been adopted in different places where it helped unite several adjacent political units seeking political union for general reasons while preserving their identities, e.g. the United States of America, Switzerland and Australia. Generally, federations pursue common defense and foreign policies as their main tasks, for which they are provided with common budgets (Ahmad 2013, 42-3).

A federation can be formed based on some common grounds among the constituent units, such as kinship or other relationship, as well as a desire for unification to manage most of their affairs separately. The conflicting desire to create unity while retaining identity among participating units is the essence of the federation, as it combines unity with diversity. Federalism relies on a written

and rigid constitution that provides for a detailed division of powers and functions between the authorities of constituent units, which enjoy equal authority and status. The constitution is equipped with “an armoury of safeguards against its being lightly tampered with” (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, n. d.). Federal arrangements are characterized by non-centralization, division and separation of powers guaranteed in written and rigid constitutions, and a will for unity while maintaining the separate identity and territorial integrity of constituent units (Ahmad 2013).

Federalism has a “dual character.” It can help create a union of two separate political units as well as prescribe for decentralization and distribution of powers in “overly centralized” states. This means that a federation can be created in two ways: first, when two or more independent states merge to form a larger state; second, when an overly centralized (unitary) state devolves powers to provinces under a rigid written constitution that delineates the powers of the central and provincial governments. Federalism provides for effective government in some areas through centralization, as well as local autonomy through devolution of powers (Ahmad 2013). Nonetheless, a truly democratic federal state, unlike other forms of states, signifies a social contract between different groups of people constituting a politically organized society.

Origin and History of Federalism in Indian Sub-Continent

Raza Rabbani, former Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan, believes that the history of federalism could be traced back to the creation of the state of Madinah, which emerged after a charter known as the Charter of Madinah (CoM) between three communities; Muhajireen, Ansar and the Jews of Madinah, all living together peacefully and enjoying equal rights. “This perhaps could be seen as the loosest form of what later came to be defined as federalism” (Rabbani 2010, ix). However, literature suggests that federal states existed even in the antiquity, particularly during the Greek era (600 BC to 300 BC) (Freeman, E. 1963; Ehrenberg, 1969; Larsen, 1944; 1955; 1968; Beck, H. & Funke, 2015). It has been noted that “in the ancient Greece of Pericles and Plato, the polis, or city-state, reigned supreme, but by the time of Alexander, nearly half of the poleis of the mainland Greek world had surrendered part of their autonomy to become members of larger political entities called koina” (Mackil 2013).

The state of Madinah was founded based on federalism. At the time of its establishment, the identity of different tribes was not only recognized but they were also given autonomy in their respective tribal jurisdictions in various ways. The Charter of Madinah refers to the respective tribes mentioning their rights and duties. It provides that the Muhajireen-e- Makkah, belonging to the Quraish, as well as five groups forming the Khazraj and three groups from the Aws, would preserve their respective tribal identity and rules, and continue to follow their customs regarding paying blood-wits and redeeming their own prisoners. The Charter also recognizes Jews as a part of the Ummah under certain conditions (al-Hibri, 2016). As Brohi noted, the Charter of Madinah did not make any significant change to the judicial and executive norms already prevailing among the respective tribes. Hence, a “confederated type” of government was established in Madinah (Brohi 1982, 81-2; Naazer 2018, 37).

The state of Madinah was a federation or quasi-federation of different communities and tribes living together. As the state expanded due to wars and conquests, it increasingly became centralized and unitary, though conquered people were granted varying degrees of autonomy in

several areas. The trend toward a centralized state strengthened as the caliphate was converted into monarchy after the period of the four righteously guided caliphs. Thus, Islamic history is replete with centralized state where powers were mostly concentrated in the capital, generally in the hands of a single person, i.e. caliph or sultan. Muslims established and maintained their rule through force until overthrown by another more powerful group or dynasty, again through force (Naazer 2018). As soon as central authority weakened, provincial governors and/or regional / local rulers sought autonomy or even complete independence. The history of Muslim rule in India is no exception to this trend.

India, throughout its history, remained divided into numerous small and large states that often confronted each other either in their quest for power and expansion or survival. Thus, the Indian sub-continent generally witnessed internal divisions, strife, disorder and wars. It was, however, united into a single political unit during three periods: 1) the Mauryan Empire; 2) the Mughal Empire; and 3) the British Empire. These empires were established and maintained by the use of force, though Mauryan and Mughals rulers showed considerable accommodation and tolerance towards their subjects, especially those of different religions and faiths. This tolerance was the main reason why these empires lasted for extended periods with relatively fewer difficulties (Naazer 2020, 191; Butt & Ahmed 2016, 4). These empires were, however, centralized states.

Federalism in India was introduced as part of the decentralization of powers scheme in an overly centralized state under the British rule. The British, who initially conquered India by force and established a centralized state, gradually introduced political reforms, such as those in 1858/61, 1891, 1909 and 1919 to build their constituency and broaden support for imperial rule. These reforms involved gradual decentralization, which ultimately led to the introduction of federalism in India. Especially, the 1919 Act introduced a limited responsible government and federal institutions by providing limited autonomy to the provinces and transferring less important subjects to Indian Ministers deemed accountable by the provincial assemblies under the “diarchy system” (Munawar & Mushtaq 2022, 469). The Government of India Act (GIA) 1935 truly introduced federalism to the Indian sub-continent.

The introduction of federalism in British India was also an outcome of the long struggle and concerns of Indian Muslims, who constituted one-fourth of the country’s entire population. The Muslim leadership was concerned that the introduction of Westminster style majority democracy and a unitary form of government would relegate them to a permanent minority dependent on the majority Hindu community. The Muslim leadership, under the banner of All India Muslim League (AIML), was deeply concerned about the rights of Indian Muslims particularly their religio-cultural identity, political independence and economic emancipation (Naazer 2020). To protect these legitimate rights, the AIML demanded a separate electorate and a federal arrangement with greater provincial autonomy, along with other legal and constitutional protections.

In the 1920s, Muslim leadership began voicing their demand for federalism, which materialized in the mid-1930s. In 1924, AIML at its annual session in Lahore adopted a resolution which read: “The existing Provinces of India Shall all be united under a common Government on a federal basis so that each Province shall have full and complete Provincial Autonomy” (Rid 2021, 119). Subsequently, this demand was echoed by various Muslim leaders including Aga Khan, Sir Mohammad Shafi, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Muhammad Ali Jouhar. It was also

reflected in Jinnah's famous 14 points as well as Iqbal's addresses at Allahabad in 1929 and 1930, respectively. During the three round table conferences held in London, the Muslim leadership emphasized that only a federal system with maximum provincial autonomy could ensure peace and communal harmony in India (Rid 2021, 119). The Congress leadership also endorsed the principle of federalism for self-rule in India. As Katherine Adeney noted, the idea of federalism and provincial autonomy was "an integral part of all constitutional proposals between 1916 and 1946," though the degree of provincial autonomy was a point of contention between AIML and Congress leadership. The former advocated a weak centre and greater provincial autonomy, while the latter wanted a strong centralized federation (2007, 34-41).

Nonetheless, the extensive deliberations and discussions, including the three round table conferences, culminated into the enactment of Government of India Act (GIA) 1935 by the British Parliament, which provided for the creation of an All-Indian Federation. The Act granted wide powers to the centre under a "Diarchy system" and limited powers to autonomous provinces (Munawar & Mushtaq, 2022, 469). Although a central government could not be formed under the GIA 1935, the provincial governments established after the winter 1936/37 elections enjoyed considerable autonomy between 1937 and 1939. Thus, the federation in British Indian Empire emerged because of decentralization of powers in an overly centralized state, in a phased manner.

Federalism in Pakistan

After Pakistan came into being in 1947, the Government of India Act (GIA) 1935, after necessary modifications, served as the provisional constitution of the state till 1956. The debate over "the degree of provincial autonomy," among other factors, caused delay in the formulation of a new constitution by the constituent assembly. However, it was agreed in the Objective Resolution of 1949 that Pakistan would be a federation. This principle was subsequently, endorsed and included in 1956, 1962 and 1973 constitutions. Muslim leadership, during the Pakistan movement, had advocated a weak centre and strong provinces. However, after creation of Pakistan, the outlook of its ruling elites shifted, as they believed that a strong central government was essential for the unity and territorial integrity of the country. The centralization of powers, coupled with dictatorial rule, sowed the seeds of discontent and separatism in East Pakistan that led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. To assuage the grievances and address the aspirations and demands of leaders of smaller provinces, the 1973 constitution provided for more provincial autonomy. The constitution contained three lists: federal, provincial and concurrent. It was verbally promised that the concurrent list would be abolished after 10 years (Rana 2020, 70). However, it took about four decades to fulfill this commitment. The 18th constitutional amendment (to the 1973 constitution) abolished the concurrent list and transferred these subjects to provinces and the central government.

The 18th constitutional amendment was a continuation of the process of decentralization and aimed at transferring more powers to the provinces. The amendment restored parliamentary democracy as provided in the 1973 constitution and empowered the Parliament, Election Commission of Pakistan and the National Finance Commission Award. Under the amendment, the concurrent list was abolished and 44 out of 47 subjects contained in it were transferred to the provinces, whereas three subjects were transferred to the federal list (Rana 2020, 7). The amendment also ensured the decentralization of resources and revenues to the provinces. It stipulated that provinces would

receive their share not less than that agreed upon in the previous (7th) NFC Award. The 7th NFC award provided that the provinces would receive 57.5 percent of the net revenue collection (Rana 2020, 71-72).

QUEST FOR DECENTRALIZATION AND CHALLENGES TO FEDERALISM IN PAKISTAN

The fiscal decentralization coupled with political autonomy strengthened the provinces at the expense of the centre. On one hand, the provinces got more resources and powers through transferred subjects but did not accept the employees working in the federal departments who were transferred to the provinces. This financial burden on the central government was exacerbated by its reduced share in the 7th NFC Award (Rana 2020). The provinces also lacked capacity to perform the required functions under some of the transferred subjects, creating governance issues as they relied on the central government to continue managing several affairs despite their transfer to provincial governments (Kugelman 2022).

The sheer size of the provinces, along with their increased political and fiscal powers, can undermine the writ and influence of the central government in several respects. For instance, the government of Islami Jamhoori Itihad (IJI), led by then Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif in Punjab, significantly reduced the influence of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government in the centre after 1988 elections (Shahzad, & Hussain, 2021). Similarly, the provincial government led by Mian Manzoor Wattoo severely undermined the writ of the central government led by Mian Nawaz Sharif in 1993 (Amin 1994; Mehdi, 2013). More recently, the Punjab government led by Chaudhry Parvaiz Elahi posed serious challenges to the federal government led by Shahbaz Sharif (Shah 2022; "By-polls have shaken federal govt." 2022). The large size and powers of the Punjab province mean that any party coming into power in the centre also seeks government in Punjab. Governments of different political parties in the province and in the centre can lead to political instability in the country. Sometimes, the survival of the central government can become precarious if a hostile party forms the government in Punjab. Occasionally, the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) during the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) era (2013-2018) also posed challenges to the federal government and threatened its existence (Buneri, 2014; Khan, 2016; "PTI marchers advancing," 2016). This situation was repeated after the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) led government took office in April 2022. During both tenures, the chief ministers of KP led long marches and used provincial administration and government machinery to destabilize the central governments ("Will use KP's force," 2022; "Cabinet committee deliberates," 2022). Such situation adversely affected centre-province relations and government-opposition engagement and undermined the spirit of democracy and federalism in Pakistan. They also prevented different political parties from coming together to cooperate for the welfare of the people and the progress and development of the country several times.

The ruling party in the centre is generally tempted to gain control of the provincial government, especially in Punjab. Without a stable government in Punjab, no party can effectively rule in the centre. Rival political parties are occasionally involved in political intrigues, palace conspiracies and even horse trading to topple, form or retain the provincial government in Punjab. This situation opens the doors to corruption, bad governance, mismanagement, and political instability in the country. It also deteriorates the political environment and undermines the democratic process in

Pakistan. Such practices have been used as an excuse to criticize democracy and to justify the establishment of dictatorial rule in the county.

Moreover, the existing provincial boundaries and administrative setup are major causes of politics of provincialism, inter-provincial discord and ethnic hatred, often centered on anti-Punjab sentiments prevailing in the remaining three provinces. Though these sentiments are inflamed by nationalist political parties and leaders in these provinces to find a scapegoat for their bad governance, poor performance, corruption and political failure at home, but they mainly stem from the sheer size and domination of Punjab, largely due to its large population (Raja, 2015; Akhtar, 2022; Ahmar 2016). Anti-Punjab sentiments are reflected in issues like the distribution of resources, such as water sharing among the provinces. The politics of provincialism and fanning the flames of anti-Punjab sentiments have also prevented execution of vital national development projects, such as the construction of large water reservoirs. The controversy over the construction of the Kalabagh Dam is its clear example (Waheed, Khan, & Umar, 2021).

Reportedly, one of de-merit of federalism is that it can promote or encourage federating units to move towards secessionism. This is more likely when the centre is weak and the provinces are strong. In case of Pakistan, the 18th Amendment weakened the centre and empowered the provinces. The merger of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into KP further increased the size and strength of the province. KP has a history of secessionist movement backed by foreign powers. In fact, there was a need to reduce the size of the provinces, including KP, but due to political and military pressures, its size was increased.

Moreover, if a large province has any issue of law and order or security problem in just a few areas, it can wrongly create the impression that these problems exist over a large part of the country. For instance, security problems in Balochistan— comprising about 43 percent of Pakistan's territory— can create a wrong perception that more than two-fifths of Pakistan territory is facing security problems.

The large size of federating units also inhibits effective control, especially in the far flung areas of the provinces. This creates governance issues leading to poor law and order situation, militancy and various crimes, since the criminal minds and anti-state elements exploit administrative vacuums and the lack of effective control by civilian law enforcement agencies. Inequitable distribution of resources, unequal development, lack of resources, unemployment and poverty exacerbate the sense of deprivation and exploitation, creating a breeding ground for anti-state activities. Thus, the areas on the periphery of the provinces mainly due to their distance from provincial capitals, become hub for anti-state and criminal elements. For instance, the border areas of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan have become sanctuaries for criminal groups, dacoits and other wrongdoers, creating serious law and order issues for the country. These elements are involved in kidnapping for ransom and other criminal activities that provincial governments need to address (“Tri-border police,” 2023; “Operation against dacoits,” 2023). Previously, legal, political and administrative vacuums provided militants an opportunity to establish strongholds in the erstwhile FATA and Malakand division (Ahmad 2013; Yousufi, & Islam, 2018; Orakzai, 2011).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment also aggravated the sense of deprivation among already aggrieved and deprived minority ethnic groups and far-flung areas of the provinces. Each province has a majority ethnic group that is dominant politically, economically, socially and culturally. This

group was further empowered due to the increased provincial autonomy granted under the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the 7th NFC Award, which provided fiscal autonomy and additional financial resources to the provinces. The decentralization of more political and fiscal powers to the provinces consolidated the supremacy of the dominant ethnic groups and aggravated the sense of deprivation among the disadvantaged minority ethnic communities. The arbitrary and inequitable distribution of the newly acquired additional financial resources and political powers by the ruling elites, mainly from the dominant ethnic groups, reinforced the sense of political exclusion, economic exploitation and socio-cultural marginalization among minority communities. These developments have also triggered demands for the creation of new provinces (Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019).

Demands for the creation of new provinces have been voiced in almost all parts of Pakistan. For instance, there have been calls for the creation of a Malakand province (Khaliq, 2011; “Malakand politician demands,” 2010; “And now comes call,” 2010), or even Chitral province, Hazara, FATA, D.I. Khan, South Pakhtunkhwa, Rawalpindi or Potohar Province, Saraiki or South Punjab Province, Bahawalpur Province, Karachi province etc. (Rasool 2018). Proponents make these demands on the basis of four factors: administrative, political, economic and cultural—such as language and ethnicity (Ahmd & Sabir 2021).

However, the ruling elites and political parties did not take these demands seriously and instead played with the gallery for narrow political ends. Various political parties have divergent political interests, concerns and priorities, which influence their decision to either support or oppose the demand for a new province from a particular area. For instance, Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and Awami National Party (ANP) support the demand for a Saraiki province but oppose the creation of a Hazara province. Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) backs these demands to strengthen its case for creating a Karachi province. PPP, however, is strongly opposed to any proposal for creating any province in Sindh. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) appears uncertain on this issue, though it apparently supports the creation of new provinces, including South Punjab, Bahawalpur and Hazara. But it is wary of losing influence in Punjab if new province(s) are created in South Punjab. Similarly, the stance of Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaf (PTI) on this issue remains vague and suspicious (Khan, Shaheen, & Ahmad, 2019; Asif, & Naazer 2022).

The large size of the provinces creates a diverse nature of problems for the masses. People in Pakistan especially from the far-off areas face numerous problems due to their remoteness from the provincial capitals. Citizens from these far flung areas often have to travel to the capital cities of their respective provinces to address their everyday problems. However, the long distances of some of the areas from the respective provincial capitals lead to several problems including the extended journeys and the significant financial expenditures for travel, overnight stays in hotels and food, etc. As it has been reported that in “Punjab, Lahore is about 300 kilometres away from Multan, while in Sindh, Kashmore is about 600km from Karachi. Similarly, the distance from Gwadar to Quetta is nearly 1,000km” (Rasool 2018). In some cases, the distances are even greater. For instance, the distance from Booni in Chitral to Peshawar is 450 km (10-11 hours travel time); Bhasha in upper Kohistan is around 500 km (about 9-10 hours travel time); and Jadewali in D. I. Khan is 400 km (8-9 hours) from the provincial capital Peshawar. The distance from Lahore to Sadiqabad in Rahim Yar Khan is about 600 km (7-8 hours travel time); Kashmore to Karachi, 600 km (9-10 hours),

Nagarparkar (Tharparkar) to Karachi is 450 km (about 7 hours); Quetta to Jiwani about 1000 km (13-14 hours), and Quetta to Mughalkot in Sherani is 400 km (7-8 hours).

In July 2023, the Senate Standing Committee on Law and Justice considered and discussed the proposals for the creation of Hazara and South Punjab provinces in KP and Punjab, respectively. Senator Syed Ali Zafar, the chairman of the committee, agreed that there was sufficient justification for establishing both provinces. He noted, "There is poor governance and lack of economic development in areas that were far from Lahore and Peshawar respectively and this distance is also creating daily communication problems for the people". He argued that the creation of new provinces would strengthen the federation by addressing political marginalization and economic deprivation faced by minority groups. However, he cautioned that new provinces should not be created based on linguistic or ethnic grounds but purely on administrative considerations, focusing on the problems faced by the population ("Senate panel to develop consensus," 2023).

Federalism and Number of Constituent Units: Global Practice

Before delving further into the issue of demand for creating new provinces in Pakistan, it is useful to examine the number of federating or administrative units in other federal states around the world.

According to Forum of Federations, currently there are 25 federal states globally which include: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Comoros, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Micronesia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America (Forum of Federations, n. d.). Spain is, however, no longer a federal state and is now listed as a devolved state. While Venezuela, Palau and Papua New Guinea also declare themselves as federal states, making the total to 27, though seven² of these are relatively small both in size and population and hence are not included in detailed discussion.

Out of the remaining 20 federal states, 12 states are larger than Pakistan in terms of their size and have far more number of constituent units. For instance, the United States of America (USA) has 50 states, Russia has 49 provinces and 21 republics, Nigeria has 36 states, Mexico has 31 states, India has 28 states, Brazil has 26 states, Argentina has 23 provinces, Venezuela has 23 states, Ethiopia has 12 states; Canada has 10 provinces, South Africa 9 provinces and Australia has 6 states.

Moreover, a number of smaller federal states much in terms of size and population have more provinces than Pakistan has. For instance, Austria with an area of 83,871 sq. km and a population of 8.9 million, has 9 states; Nepal, with 147,181 sq. km area and 31.1 million populace, has 7 provinces; Switzerland, with an area of 41277 sq. km and 8.8 million population, has 26 cantons (federating/administrative units); and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with 83,600 sq. km, and population of 9.5 million, has 7 emirates.

Meanwhile, medium-sized states such as Papua New Guinea, with an area of 462,840 sq. km and a population of 10.4 million, have 20 provinces and an autonomous region; Germany, with an area of 357,022 sq. km and a population of 83.2 million, has 16 states; and Malaysia, with an area of

² Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, Cyprus, Micronesia, Palau, and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

329,847 sq. km and a population of 34.5 million, has 13 states. The details of the federal, devolved, regionalized unitary states, and federacy states are given in the table No. 1.

Table .1. Federal States and Number of their Constituent Units

S. No.	Country Name	Area (km ²)	Population (million)	No. of States / Provinces
A. Federal States:				
States in which the federal government shares power with semi-independent regional governments. In many cases, the central government is (in theory) a creation of the regional governments; a prime example is the United States.				
1.	<u>Argentina</u>	2,780,400	46.0	23 provinces and 1 autonomous city
2.	<u>Australia</u>	7,741,220	26.6	6 states and 2 territories
3.	<u>Austria</u>	83,871	8.9	9 states
4.	<u>Belgium</u>	30,528	11.7	2/3 (<u>Flanders</u> and Wallonia)
5.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	51,197	3.2	2/3 (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska)
6.	<u>Brazil</u>	8,515,770	217.2	26 states and 1 federal district
7.	<u>Canada</u>	9,984,670	39	10 provinces and 3 territories
8.	<u>Comoros</u>	2,235	0.8	3 states
9.	Cyprus	9,251	1.2	6 districts
10.	<u>Ethiopia</u>	1,104,300	128.6	12 states, and 2 chartered cities
11.	<u>Federated States of Micronesia</u>	702	0.5	4 states
12.	<u>Germany</u>	357,022	83.2	16 states
13.	<u>India*</u>	3,180,697	1423.0	28 states and 6 union territories [Excluding the statistics for Indian occupied State of Jammu & Kashmir].
14.	<u>Malaysia</u>	329,847	34.5	13 states and 3 federal territories
15.	<u>Mexico</u>	1,964,375	129.0	31 states and 1 federal district
16.	Nepal	147,181	31.1	7 provinces
17.	<u>Nigeria</u>	923,768	227.3	36 states + 1 federal capital territory
18.	<u>Pakistan</u>	796,095	243.6	4 provinces, 1 capital territory + 2 administrative areas
19.	<u>Palau</u>	459	0.02	16 states
20.	<u>Papua New Guinea</u>	462,840	10.4	20 provinces+ 1 autonomous region + 1 district
21.	<u>Russia</u>	17,098,242	144.1	49 provinces, 21 republics, 4 autonomous okrugs, 6/9 krays, 2 federal cities, 1 autonomous oblast
22.	<u>Saint Kitts and Nevis</u>	261	0.05	14 parishes
23.	<u>South Africa</u>	1,219,090	60.8	9 provinces
24.	<u>Switzerland</u>	41,277	8.8	26 cantons
25.	<u>United Arab Emirates</u>	83,600	9.5	7 emirates
26.	<u>United States</u>	9,833,517	341.2	50 <u>states</u> + 1 District, two Commonwealths, and 12 Territories)

27.	<u>Venezuela</u>	912,050	29.2	23 states and 1 capital district + 1 federal dependency
B. Devolved States				
States in which the central government has delegated some of its powers to self-governing subsidiary governments, creating a <i>de facto</i> federation.				
1.	<u>Spain</u>	505,370	47.4	17 autonomous communities + 2 autonomous cities
2.	<u>United Kingdom</u>	243,610	67.8	4 (<u>Scotland</u> , <u>Northern Ireland</u> , and <u>Wales</u> ; <u>England</u> remains under full control of the central government)
C. Regionalized Unitary States				
States in which the central government has delegated some of its powers to regional governments.				
1.	<u>Chile</u>	756,102	19.6	16 regions, each one divided into smaller provinces (total 56), which are sub-divided into several municipalities).
2.	<u>Italy</u>	301,340	58.7	15 regions + five autonomous regions
3.	<u>New Zealand</u>	268,838	5.2	16 regions + 1 territory
4.	<u>People's Republic of China</u>	9,596,960	1425.3	22/23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities, and 2 Special Administrative Regions: <u>Hong Kong</u> and <u>Macau</u>)
5.	<u>Philippines</u>	300,000	118.5	79/81 provinces (grouped into 17 regions, one granted 'administrative' status and one granted 'autonomous' status)
D. Federacy States				
A federacy is a country in which some sub-states function like states in a federation and others like states in a unitary state.				
1.	<u>Denmark</u>	43,094	5.9	2/5 autonomous regions
2.	<u>Finland</u>	338,145	5.5	1 autonomous province and 19 regions
3.	The Netherlands	41,543	17.6	2 states and 12 provinces.
4.	<u>France</u>	551,500	64.8	13 régions, 4 <i>collectivités d'outre-mer</i> , 1 <i>territoire d'outre-mer</i>

Source: Compiled by the author using the data from websites of CIA- The World Factbook, wordometer, and Forum of Federations

Devolved states like Spain has 17 autonomous communities or regions; regionalized unitary states such as Chile has 16 regions, which are further divided into 56 provinces; Italy has 15 regions along with 5 autonomous regions; New Zealand has 16 regions and the Philippines has 81 provinces.

Federacy states include France, which has 13 regions and 4 overseas collectivities or regions; the Netherlands, which has 2 states and 12 provinces; Finland, which has 19 regions and an autonomous region and Denmark, which has 5 regions further divided into 11 provinces. Meanwhile, China has 22 provinces (excluding Taiwan), 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities and 2 Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macau).

The above discussion highlights that most of the federal, besides devolved states as well as federacies have significantly more provinces / administrative units than Pakistan. A few of them are smaller in terms of size or population, yet they maintain a higher number of provinces to

acknowledge and accommodate ethnic and cultural diversities of their people and ensure good governance and efficient administration. Consequently, Pakistan may also benefit from the creation of additional provinces to better address its ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as to enhance governance and promote equitable development across the country.

The Debate of Creation of New Provinces in Pakistan

The idea of creating more provinces, based on various grounds, have been advocated by several scholars and political leaders. For instance, Tahir-ul-Qadiri proposed the creation of 35 provinces, advocating for devolution and decentralization by converting every division into a province, which he deemed the “only durable solution of the problems faced [by] the country” (“Qadri for creating,” 2014). He argued that new provinces, established on administrative grounds, would facilitate “judicious allocation of funds, better resource mobilization and justice at local level” (“New provinces be made,” 2018). More recently, Mirza Mohammad Afridi, Deputy Chairman of the Senate, proposed the creation of 9 new provinces. He suggested dividing Punjab and Balochistan into three provinces each, as well as to establish provinces of FATA, Hazara and Karachi (“Senate deputy chief,” 2023). Earlier, in September 2022, the former Prime Minister and PTI chief Imran Khan suggested converting every division in the country into a province. At the time, there were 32 divisions; 10 in Punjab, 08 in Balochistan and seven each in Sindh and KP (“Imran moots idea,” 2023).

However, Raza Rabbani, a prominent leader of PPP vehemently opposed the idea of creation of new provinces in the country. Rabbani in a response to Imran Khan’s proposal stated: “Such a proposal shall sharpen the internal fault lines and destroy the federation. Provinces are created when there is a linguistic, ethnic and cultural affinity; not on the basis of administrative divisions.” He further argued, it “will alter the federal structure of the Constitution of 1973. It is a [sic] attempt to revive one unit, not Ayubian style but Musharraf’s local government.” Both of them attempted to introduce one-unit type of government but failed miserably, he added. Rabbani expressed concerns that new provinces “will create vertical and horizontal polarization in the body polity and society,” and warned that it could result in centralization of natural resources, such as oil and gas (whose 50 percent shares are constitutionally the ownership of the provinces), under federal control, requiring amendments to Article-160 of the constitution that deals with the National Finance Commission (NFC). For him, it would mean “a rollback” of the 18th amendment. Rabbani further stated that it would “undermine the parliamentary form of government and instead a presidential or quasi-presidential form of government will be introduced” (“New provinces proposal,” 2022). Later on, in reaction to the proposal of Mirza Mohammad Afridi, Deputy Chairman Senate regarding creation of nine provinces, Raza Rabbani again opposed the idea and termed it as an attempt to reverse the 18th Amendment and introduce the presidential form of government. He stated that such proposals aimed at countering the demand of provincial autonomy and nationalist movements in the country. . “The talk of creation of new provinces is strongly opposed on historical, linguistic and ethnic considerations,” he further added (“Rabbani opposed more provinces,” 2023). Earlier, in 2016, Rabbani had argued that under the present circumstance, there was “no room for creation of new provinces,” citing the complex cultural historical and political processes involved in the “evolution and constitution of present provincial boundaries of Pakistan.” He warned that “the

subdivision of present provincial boundaries merely on the basis of administrative reforms will lead to chaos in the country” (“Rabbani against creation of,” 2016).

The idea of creation of new provinces has been raised multiple times in the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan and was also discussed in the Senate Standing Committee on Law and Justice. However, keeping in view the differences among political parties and leaders on the issue, the committee agreed on a need to build a consensus on the issue. However, new federating units not only in KP and Punjab but also in other provinces, including Sindh, although no final decision was reached (Mukhtar 2023).

The Genesis and History of the Current Provincial Boundaries

Before further discussing the idea of creating new provinces, it is necessary to review the history and genesis of the existing provincial structure and boundaries. The position taken by Raza Rabbani appears to be incorrect in several respects. It seems imperative to explore the origins and history of the current provincial boundaries, as well as the ethnic and linguistic composition of the existing administrative units (provinces) of Pakistan.

As mentioned elsewhere, the Mughal Empire was centralized, however, it was divided into several provinces whose number increased with the expansion of the Empire resulting from conquests. During administrative reforms (1572-180) under Emperor Akbar, the empire was administratively divided into 12 provinces.³ This number was increased to 15 provinces⁴ by the end of Akbar’s era; to 17 provinces under Jehangir and to 19 provinces under Emperor Shahjahan; and 21 by the end of Aurangzeb Alamgir’s rule in 1707 (Ahmad, G. 2020, 14-6). As their power gradually started declining after death of Alamgir, the Mughal empire began to disintegrate. The governors previously appointed by the Mughal rulers began to assert their power, rebelling against central authority and establishing their own independent states, such as those in Awadh, Bengal, Hyderabad, Mysore, Sindh and Punjab, etc. Meanwhile, British power also ascended during this period, who gradually captured most parts of the Indian sub-continent. However, hundreds of princely states managed to reach agreements with the British, retaining some degree of autonomy in their internal matters, although compromising their security and foreign policy (Ramusack, 2008). The British took full control of India after the War of Independence in 1957, and subsequently introduced a series of administrative, legal and political reforms.

During most of British rule, the Indian Empire was divided into 8 provinces (including Burma) and five small provinces - administered by Chief Commissioners. By 1935, the number of provinces had increased to 12: Madras, Central Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, Bombay, Assam, Bengal, NWFP, Punjab and Sindh and Balochistan. At the time of partition of India, the number of provinces rose to 17 with the creation of following new provinces: Ajmer-Merwara, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Coorg, Delhi and Panth-Piploda) (Ahmad, G. 2020, 25-6).

At the time of partition, the Muslim-majority provinces were given the choice to decide democratically whether to join India or Pakistan. For instance, a referendum was held in KP, while the provincial assembly of Sindh voted to join Pakistan. The Provincial assembly of Punjab decided

³ Agra, Ajmer, Audh, Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, Gujrat, Kabul, Lahore, Malwa, Multan, and Allahabad.

⁴ Berar, Khandesh (Dandesh), and Ahmednagar.

to divide the province along communal lines. These provinces, however, had no option to remain independent. It is worth noting that these provinces were never independent states before partition. Their boundaries had been demarcated earlier by the Mughal rulers and then the British, based on their imperial interests rather than the consent of the masses. NWFP was separated from Punjab in 1901, and Sindh was separated from Bombay in 1936. British Balochistan, created in 1876, remained a chief commissioner province until independence.

Princely states were treated as separate federating units until the one-unit scheme was imposed in 1955. When the one-unit scheme was abolished, four provinces were established without considering the aspiration of the people and or obtaining their consent (Butt & Ahmed, 2016). For instance, the people of former Bahawalpur state wanted to restore their pre one-unit status, while the leaders in the Hazara division had been demanding a separate province since the independence of Pakistan. These demands were not taken into consideration by the military regime that arbitrarily carved out four provinces from one-unit (Javaid 2009; Asif & Naazer, 2021, 57). The 1973 constitution merely validated this administrative setup without further discussion or consideration of demands for creating new provinces.

The current four provinces of Pakistan never existed in their present form before July 1, 1969 when these units were established after the abolition of one-unit scheme by dictator Yahya Khan. Moreover, the cultural, lingual or other common affinities of the residents were not taken into consideration by the rulers at the time of the creation of provinces, either before or after the creation of Pakistan. The boundaries of the present provinces were set up by the rulers primarily based on strategic, political and administrative factors. A brief discussion of the history of the different provinces over the years can help us understand how they were formed.

Sindh became part of the Mughal Empire during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Lower Sindh, under the name of Tatha subah (province), was ruled by the Mughals until the early 18th century. Upper Sindh was administrated under Multan subah (province). After the decline of the Mughal Empire, Upper Sindh became independent when Mughal governor Mian Yar Muhammad Kalhora established Kalhora dynasty (1701-1783), which was later overpowered by the Talpur dynasty (1783-1843). During the Talpur dynasty, Sindh was divided and ruled by four branches: Upper Sindh, Lower Sindh, Mirpur Khas and Tando Muhammad Khan (Bond, & Wright, 2006).

During British rule (1843-1947), part of upper Sindh, namely the princely state of Khairpur, managed to maintain a degree of autonomy in internal affairs, while the rest of Sindh was merged into the Bombay Presidency. Sindh was separated from the Bombay Presidency in 1936 to become a province. After independence, Karachi was separated from Sindh to create the Karachi-Bela division and became a federal territory. It was merged into the one-unit scheme in 1955 and following the abolition of the one-unit scheme, the province was restored with Karachi and the former state of Khairpur being part of it.

In the late 16th century, army of Emperor Akbar conquered Balochistan, initially making it part of the Multan Subah, and later ruling it through a local vassal. As the Mughal Empire's influence declined, four tribal confederacies emerged, which were precursors to the Baloch Khanates (Dashti 2012, 149-63). After 1843, during the British era, Balochistan was divided between the British-controlled chief commissioner province and the princely states of Kalat, Kharan, Makran and Lasbela while the Gwadar district was under the sovereignty of Oman. Pakistan purchased Gwadar

from Oman in 1958. The princely states retained their autonomous status until the one-unit scheme was introduced in 1955, after which they were merged into Balochistan province following the abolition of the one-unit scheme in 1970.

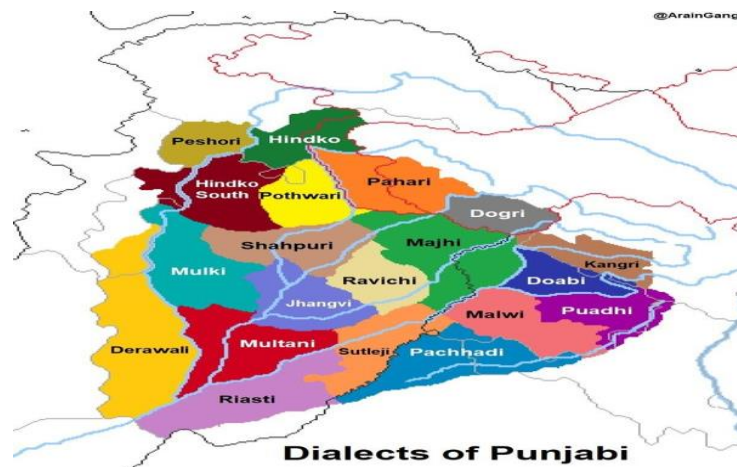
The administrative history of South Punjab differs from that of other parts of Punjab. Multan was a separate province even under Mughal rule, while the princely state of Bahawalpur survived the British Raj and the post-independence era till it chose to merge into the West Pakistan under the one-unit scheme in 1955.

KP (former NWFP) was separated from Punjab in 1901. The Tribal Areas, along with the princely states of Chitral, Dir, Swat and Amb, were not part of it. This situation remained the same until the one-unit scheme was introduced in 1955. When the one-unit scheme was abolished in 1969, the former princely states and other areas of the former NWFP were incorporated into the province. Later, FATA, which had enjoyed autonomous status throughout British rule and the post-independence era, was merged into the province in 2018.

In sum, the argument that the existing provincial boundaries are based on historical, linguistic or ethnic factors is not accurate. Their boundaries were previously demarcated by the British rulers based on their imperial interests, or changes to their size were made by a dictator during the abolition of the one-unit scheme in 1970. Moreover, the assertion that there are only four or five sub-national or ethnic groups in Pakistan is also incorrect.

Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity of Existing Four Provinces

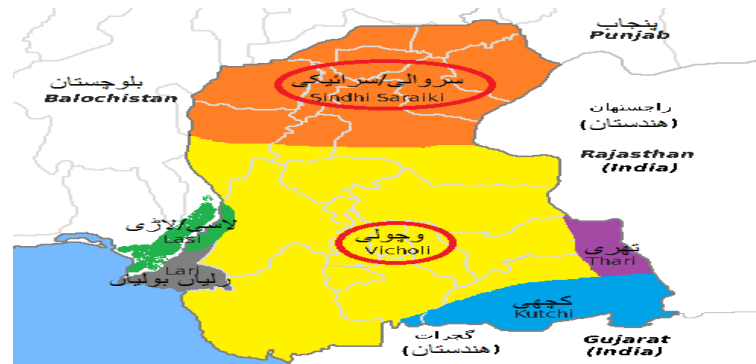
There is a misconception that the existing four provinces are homogenous or there exist only four/five or six sub-national/ ethnic groups in the country. In fact, all four provinces are heterogeneous by any definitions. Thus, there is a dire need to consider this issue based on facts, including the ethnic and linguistic diversity of all four provinces, as well as administrative and development needs of their people.



None of the four existing four provinces is ethnically or linguistically homogenous. For instance, in Punjab, a significant number of people speak Saraiki and Potohari, both different from Punjabi, the language spoken by the majority. While some scholars believe that both Potohari and Saraiki are the different dialects of Punjabi, they also argue that Saraiki and Potohari have their own different

dialects. For instance, Saraiki includes dialects such as Multani, Riasti, Thali and Derawali, spoken in different parts of Punjab. Whereas Potohari dialects include Hindku, Kohati, Pahari, Mirpuri and Poonchi. However, this perspective has not been accepted by the scholars, particularly those who support the demand of a separate Saraiki province. It is worth noting that like, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pashto have also various dialects.

In Sindh, a significant number of people speak Urdu, especially in urban areas like Sukkur, Hyderabad and Karachi. Additionally, a large number of Punjabi and Pashtu speaking people also live in Karachi. The linguistic and ethnic diversity in Sindh extends beyond these languages, with different dialects spoken throughout the region (Parakh, 2008; Bughio, 2001). Saraiki is spoken in Siro, i.e. Upper Sindh; Vicholi in Vicholo or Central part of Sindh; Lari is spoken in Laru, i.e. Lower part of Sindh; Lasi in Lasa, a “part of Kohistan,” areas adjacent to Sindh in Balochistan province; Thari or Thareli is spoken in Tharu, -the desert region on the southeast border of Sindh; and Kutchi is spoken in the Kutch region and parts of Kathiawar in Indian Gujrat (Mukherjee, 2020).



(Source: Hassan 2016, 2)

As Parakh has noted, “The Sindhi language has many regional dialects, of which the main six are Siroli, Vicholi, Lari, Thari, Lasi and Kucchi. These dialects are diverse and among them Vicholi, the one spoken in the central region of Sindh, was adopted as the standard language and was used for official and educational purposes during the British rule” (Parakh, 2008). According to Ahdi Hassan (2016), the six dialects of Sindhi Language are different from one another. Siroli is spoken in the Shikarpur, Larkana and Naseerabad areas of Upper Sindh. Vicholi is spoken in Nawabshah and Hyderabad areas of Central Sindh. Lasi is spoken in the western side of Sindh, including the Naseerabad and Lasbela regions of Balochistan. Lari is spoken in Umarmkot, Tharparkar and Mithi areas of Lower Sindh. Thari is spoken in the Rajasthan region and Kacchi in the Indian parts of Sindh.

In Balochistan, Brahvi is spoken mainly in the Qalat, Khuzdar, Sorab and Mastung districts of the Qalat division. Like Saraiki and Sindhi languages, Balochi language also has at least three dialects: eastern (influenced by Sindhi), western (influenced by Persian) and southern or Makrani languages spoken in the coastal areas. Similarly, at least three dialect patterns of Pashtu have been identified in Pakistan including the Northern Pashtu (Pakhto), mostly spoken around Peshawar as well as other areas along the Afghan border; Central Pashtu or Bannochi and Waziri, spoken in Kara, Bannu and Waziristan; and Southern Pashtu, spoken in Quetta and other parts of Balochistan (Ziring & Burki, n.d.).

The proponents and supporters of creating a Saraiki province based on recognizing it as a separate language from Punjabi must acknowledge similar differences in Sindhi, Balochi and Pashtu languages. They should also support the creation of separate provinces for speakers of these dialects using the same rationale they apply to the Saraiki province.

The preceding discussion demonstrates the ethnic and cultural diversity within existing provinces of Pakistan. It reveals the myth of four sub-national groups being represented by these provinces, which were established and their boundaries demarcated by colonial masters or a military dictator without considering the needs, aspirations and socio-cultural affinities of the local people.

The cultural, ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity of all four provinces is a reality that should be recognized by every democratic political party and its leaders. Denying the existence of smaller ethnic and linguistic groups in these provinces amounts to imposing homogeneity, specifically the culture, language and influence of the dominant ethnic and linguistic groups, on the others. This approach is more like an imposition of a one-unit-fits-all scheme across the provinces.

The Case of Creation of New Provinces: A Proposed Roadmap

Given the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversities, as well as administrative and development needs of the people from different parts of the country, there is a need to create more provinces from the existing administrative units of Pakistan. The primary criteria for the creation of new provinces should be administrative and geographic, but ethnic, linguistic and cultural aspects must also be considered to avoid ethnic and linguistic conflicts.

Keeping in view predominantly the geographical proximity, administrative needs and to some extent the ethno-cultural aspects of different regions, it is proposed to redraw the existing provincial boundaries and create new provinces as per the following details:

- a. The present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) may be divided into four provinces: 1. Malakand Province (comprising Upper Chitral, Lower Chitral, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Swat, Shangla, Buner, Malakand and Bajur districts), 2. Hazara Province (comprising Upper Kohistan, Lower Kohistan, Kolai-Plas, Batgram, Torghar, Mansehra, Abbottabad and Haripur districts), 3. Peshawar Province (comprising Swabi, Mardan, Newshehra, Charsadda, Peshawar, Mohamand, Khyber, Kohat, Orakzai, Kurram, Hangu and Karak districts), and; 4. D. I. Khan Province (comprising Lakki Marwat, Bannu, Upper Waziristan, Upper South Waziristan, Lower South Waziristan, Tank and D. I. Khan districts, as well as Mianwali and Bhakkar districts of present-day Punjab province, and Zhob, Sherani and Musakhel districts from Balochistan).
- b. Punjab province may be divided to create the following provinces: 5. Potohar/North Punjab Province (comprising Attock, Rawalpindi, Chakwal, Jehlum, Gujrat, Mandi Bahauddin, Sargodha and Khushab districts); 6. Lahore or Central Punjab Province (comprising Sialkot, Narowal, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sheikhpura, Lahore, Nankana Sahib, Qasur, Okara, Pakpattan, Sahiwal, Faisalabad and Chiniot districts); 7. Multan or South Punjab Province (comprising Jhang, Toba Tek Singh, Khaniwal, Vehari, Multan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, D.G. Khan and Rajanpur districts), and; 8. Bahawalpur Province (comprising Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan districts).

- c. Balochistan Province may be divided to create the following provinces: 9. North Balochistan or Quetta or Bolan province (comprising Quetta, Killa Abdullah, Pishin, Karezat, Killah Saifullah, Loralahi, Duki, Barkhan, Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Sibi, Harnai, Ziarat, Nushki, and Chaghi, districts; 10. South Balochistan or Qalat Province must include Qalat, Khuzdar, Sorab, Mastung, Awaran, Kharan, Kachhni, Jhal Magsi, Nasirabad, Sohbatpur, Jafarabad, and Usta Muhammad district; 11. Makran or Makran-Rakhshan Province may include Washuk, Punjgur, Kech, and Gwadar districts.
- d. Sindh may be divided to create the following provinces: 12. South/Lower Sindh Province comprising Tharparkar, Umerkot, Mirpurkhas, Badin, Sajawal, Tatha, Tando Muhammad Khan, Tando Allahyar Khan, Hyderabad, Sangarh, Nawabshah (Shaheed Benazirabad), Matiari, Jamshoro districts, 13. North Sindh or Upper Sindh, comprising Khairpur, Sukkur, Ghotki, Kashmore, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Larkana, Qambar Shahdadkot, Dadu and Noushahro Feroze districts; and, 14. Karachi Province, comprising of Lasbela and Hub districts of Balochistan, and Karachi division, and Tatha district of present Sindh province.

The proposed demarcation of boundaries for the creation of new provinces is tentative and can only be finalized after thorough evaluation by a competent commission established under the concerned legal and constitutional framework of the country. Alteration or changes can be made in the proposed boundaries or areas for the new provinces based on the needs and aspirations of the local people, as well as administrative and financial considerations. Instead of focusing on a single aspect, multiple factors such as administrative, socio-cultural and ethno-linguistic as well as economic aspects, must be considered when demarcating the boundaries of new provinces. Moreover, strategies should be devised to provide equitable financial resources and to facilitate the socio-economic development of all new provinces without any prejudice and bias etc.

Conclusion

Federalism is considered as a time tested recipe for ensuring peace, harmony and stability among diverse nations and groups. It provides a balance between unity and diversity by allowing people to achieve certain common goals while retaining their separate identities through a degree of autonomy and self-rule. Federalism provides a remedy against the real or perceived dominance of one group over another by empowering all groups, large or small, within their respective areas or regions and guaranteeing their political, economic and cultural rights. Thus, it acknowledges heterogeneity of regions and societies and offers a framework for conflict-avoidance among nations, groups and people with diverse religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural background.

Like many other countries, Pakistan is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse. However, the heterogeneity of Pakistan has yet not been fully acknowledged. A myth has been created and fortified over the years that only four, five or maximum six subnational groups exist in the country. In reality, all four existing provinces are socio-culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse, with a dominant ethnic group often controlling political and economic power, sidelining smaller or minority groups. These smaller or minority groups perceive themselves politically marginalized, economically deprived and socio-culturally excluded, leading to a consistent demand for their separate provinces. Proponents of federalism must acknowledge the distinct identity of these groups and support their demand for separate provinces.

Proponents of federalism in Pakistan should realize that the federalism introduced by the British was not the result of merging pre-existing sovereign states in the Indian sub-continent. Instead, it was a part of the British strategy to address the heterogeneity of the population and the need of decentralization within an overly centralized state. The 1973 Constitution and the 18th Amendment were also steps towards the decentralization of power keeping in view the diversity of the country. This process must continue by recognizing the heterogeneity of all four provinces as well as decentralizing power to provide autonomy and self-rule to all regions and ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups in the country. The creation of new and smaller provinces would not only be an acknowledgement of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity within the existing provinces but also address the administrative and developmental needs, ensure better and efficient governance, improve law and order situation and strengthen peace, harmony, tranquility and security in the country.

Notably, most federal states in the World have acknowledged their cultural and ethno-linguistic diversities and granted self-rule and autonomy to important groups by creating a larger number of federating units. Pakistan should follow this approach and the true spirit of federalism by recognizing the diversity within its existing provinces and creating more provinces.

Considering all the factors discussed, it is strongly recommended to create more provinces from the existing four to fourteen. From the present-day KP province, four provinces should be created: Malakand Province, Hazara Province, Peshawar or Khyber Province and D. I. Khan or Gomal (or South KP) Province. Similarly, the present Punjab province may be divided into four provinces: Potohar or Northern Punjab Province, Lahore or Central Punjab Province, Multan or South Punjab Province and Bahawalpur Province. Three provinces should be carved out of the present Balochistan: North Balochistan or Quetta or Bolan Province, South Balochistan or Qalat Province and Makran or Makran-Rakhshan Province. Likewise, Sindh province should be divided to create North Sindh, South Sindh and Karachi Province, which should include Lasbela and Hub districts of Balochistan and Tatha district of the present Sindh. province.

This proposed scheme is, however, tentative and adjustments can be made based on diverse factors affecting the lives of the local people in different regions of the country. Necessary strategies should be devised to provide equitable financial resources and to support the socio-economic development of all new provinces without any prejudice and bias. Regardless of the specific criteria and strategies used, creating around a dozen more provinces is essential for ensuring balanced development across the country and for promoting stability, peace, security, harmony and tranquility in the country.

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