



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page#.5596-5610

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21840587>

The New Provinces Movements in Pakistan: Constitutional Demands, Political Challenges and Federation Implication

Ameer Hamza

Visiting Lecturer, Department of Pakistan Studies, Government College University Faisalabad

ameerhamza@gcuf.edu.pk

Dr. Farzana Arshad

Assistant Professor, Department of History, GC University Lahore

farzanaarshad.sap@gmail.com

Rabeea Rizvi (Corresponding Author)

M.Phil Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, Government College University Faisalabad

rabeearizvi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The demands for the creation of new provinces have been a common phenomenon in Pakistan's federal politics since the One Unit system was dismantled in 1970. Despite the massive political mobilization and parliamentary debates on the formation of the provinces of South Punjab (Saraiki), Bahawalpur, Hazara, and Mohajir, none of them have been realized. The present study aims to identify the constitutional and political factors that have hindered the formation of new provinces. It analyzes why they gained public support and became a popular issue but failed to be turned into a constitutional reality. The research method used is qualitative, and it incorporates scholarly works on federalism, such as Riker's federal bargaining model, Elazar's federal principle, Watts's comparative federalism, Adeney's ethnic federalism, and others. It also uses the Constitution of Pakistan, Article 239, and parliamentary debates and decisions on the relevant bills. The study concludes that the institutional and constitutional factors that obstruct the formation of new provinces are of primary importance, and the issue of Pakistan's federalism cannot be resolved without a majority's support. Besides, the comparative analysis of India's state formation process helps identify the key factors that must be considered when new provinces are contemplated. Therefore, the research findings suggest that the popular support of the provincial division is not enough, and political and institutional factors play a crucial role in its realization.

Keywords: New Provinces, Pakistan; Federalism, Article 239, Saraiki Province, Bahawalpur, Hazara Province, Ethnic Federalism, Constitutional Reform

Introduction

The main characteristics of Pakistan's federal structure have been a matter of disputes and controversies since the country's independence in 1947. The first government led by Mohammed Ali Bogra put forward the "One Unit" plan in 1955, which was designed to combine the four provinces of

West Pakistan into a single administrative unit to counter the Bengalis' majority in the number of people in East Pakistan, which, according to Adeney (2007) and Talbot (2012), failed to resolve the key forces of contention in Pakistan and caused some of the most severe fallout in relations between West and East Pakistan, leading to the Bengali province's secession in 1971. Following the dissolution of One Unit in 1970, West Pakistan was reconstituted into the four provinces that persist to the present day: Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (until 2010 known as the North-West Frontier Province), and Balochistan. Since that reconstitution, however, Pakistan has confronted a persistent undercurrent of demand for further territorial reorganization, chiefly the creation of a Saraiki or South Punjab province and the restoration of the former princely state of Bahawalpur as a separate federating unit, a Hazara province carved from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and an Urdu-speaking province encompassing Karachi and other urban centers of Sindh (Latif, 2017; Ahmar, 2013).

These demands acquired renewed political salience following the passage of the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment in 2010, which both substantially devolved administrative and fiscal authority to the provinces and renamed the North-West Frontier Province as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, an act of ethnic-linguistic recognition for the province's Pashtun majority that simultaneously provoked the non-Pashtun Hindko-speaking population of the Hazara division to intensify its own long-standing demand for a separate province (Mushtaq, 2016; Javaid, 2018). Despite the formation of a dedicated Parliamentary Commission on the creation of a new province in southern Punjab in 2012, the passage of a National Assembly resolution, and repeated provincial-assembly resolutions on the Hazara question, none of Pakistan's contemporary new-province movements has achieved constitutional implementation. This article examines why.

The stakes of this inquiry extend well beyond the specific movements examined here. Pakistan's federal structure, as a comparatively young and demographically imbalanced federation in which a single province contains slightly over half of the national population, has long been identified in the comparative federalism literature as facing distinctive challenges of center-periphery accommodation not shared to the same degree by more demographically balanced federations such as the United States, Germany, or, as examined in the comparative discussion below, India (Watts, 2008; Adeney, 2007). Understanding why Pakistan's constitutional mechanism for territorial reorganization has proven so resistant to implementation, even where popular and parliamentary support for specific proposals has been substantial, therefore offers insight not only into the specific fate of the Bahawalpur, Saraiki, Hazara, and Mohajir movements, but into the broader structural dynamics through which federations with a single demographically and politically dominant constituent unit manage, or fail to manage, the accommodation of sub-national identity and developmental grievance more generally.

Research Question

This study is organized around a single major research question: What are the constitutional mechanisms, political dynamics, and federation-level implications shaping the movements for new provinces in Pakistan, and why have these movements achieved substantial rhetorical and parliamentary traction while producing almost no constitutional implementation over more than five decades?

Theoretical Framework

This analysis draws on four complementary strands of federalism theory. The first is William Riker's (1964) classic bargaining model of federal formation, which understands the boundaries and

structure of a federal system as the product of a historical bargain among constituent units, each pursuing its own interest in the balance of power the federal arrangement establishes. When applied to Pakistan, this theoretical framework directs attention to the incentives for Pakistan's largest provinces, and particularly Punjab, to maintain its disproportionate share of seats in the national legislature, resources, and administrative capacity, and accordingly its opposition to any redistricting proposals, however "logical" they may seem from a systemic point of view

The second approach was developed by Daniel Elazar (1987) who proposed to differentiate federal systems on the basis of the principle of the federal structure. According to him, systems should be divided depending on whether the borders and powers of the component parts are constitutionally entrenched against changes on the initiative of the central government or majorities in a particular federation. Elazar's framework highlights that the specific constitutional procedure through which new constituent units may be created or existing boundaries altered is not a merely technical detail but a substantive determinant of how responsive a federal system can be to emergent sub-national identities and demands, a point of direct relevance to the analysis of Pakistan's Article 239 procedure developed below.

The third strand draws on Ronald Watts's (2008) comparative typology of federal systems, which situates Pakistan among federations characterized by markedly asymmetric constituent-unit size and by a historically dominant unit Punjab, which contains slightly over half of Pakistan's population whose preferences exercise disproportionate influence over federal-level decision-making, including decisions regarding the federation's own internal boundaries. Watts's comparative framework provides the basis for situating Pakistan's experience against India's considerably more extensive record of post-independence state reorganization, examined in the comparative discussion below.

The fourth strand draws on Kanchan Chandra and, more directly, Kathleen Adeney's (2007) account of ethnic federalism in India and Pakistan, which analyzes how federal boundaries interact with, and are contested by, sub-national ethnic and linguistic identities. Adeney's framework is particularly attentive to the ways in which federal boundary decisions can simultaneously accommodate some ethnic groups as when a province's boundaries align with a dominant regional language group while newly marginalizing others, such as the linguistically distinct populations, Saraiki-speakers in southern Punjab and Hindko-speakers in Hazara, who find themselves administratively subsumed within a larger province dominated by a different linguistic majority. Taken together, these four frameworks generate a coherent set of expectations tested through the remainder of this article: that Pakistan's new-province demands are best understood as claims for ethnic-linguistic federal accommodation of the kind Adeney's framework anticipates, that the fate of such claims will depend heavily on the specific constitutional procedure through which they must pass, as Elazar's framework suggests, and that the dominant province's bargaining position within that procedure, as Riker's and Watts's frameworks predict, will be decisive in determining whether such claims are ultimately accommodated.

It is worth noting that these four theoretical strands are not without internal tension when applied to the Pakistani case. Riker's (1964) original bargaining model was developed primarily to explain the initial formation of federations, and its extension here to the subsequent alteration of an already-formed federation's internal boundaries represents an analytical adaptation rather than a direct application of Riker's own historical cases, which concerned the founding bargains of federations such as the United

States and Canada rather than their later territorial modification. Similarly, while Adeney's (2007) comparative account of India and Pakistan emphasizes the divergent institutional paths the two countries have taken since a broadly similar colonial starting point, her analysis is primarily concerned with the broader question of federal design and minority accommodation rather than with the specific procedural mechanics of Article 239 examined in detail in this article. These adaptations are made explicit here so that the theoretical claims advanced in the remainder of this article can be properly understood as an application and extension of, rather than a direct restatement of, the frameworks from which they are drawn.

Methodology

This article employs a qualitative, document-based methodology combining constitutional-textual analysis, historical-institutional analysis, and a synthesis of the secondary Pakistani and comparative federalism literature. The core primary source is the text of Article 239 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, as amended, which establishes the formal procedure for altering provincial boundaries or creating new provinces. This constitutional text is read alongside two further primary sources: the 2013 Report of the Parliamentary Commission on the Creation of a New Province in Southern Punjab, and the record of relevant provincial and national assembly resolutions on the Hazara and Saraiki questions (Government of Pakistan, 2013; Javaid, 2018). These primary sources are analyzed alongside a substantial body of Pakistani political-science and history scholarship specifically addressing the new-provinces question, including Latif (2017), Ahmar (2013), Javaid (2018), Mushtaq (2009, 2016), Soherwordi and Khattak (2014), Hafeez (2014), and Siddiqi and Mirza (2022), as well as comparative and theoretical federalism scholarship, including Riker (1964), Elazar (1987), Watts (2008), and Adeney (2007). Given the constitutional-historical and comparative-institutional character of this study, the analysis relies entirely on documentary and secondary scholarly sources rather than interviews, surveys, or fieldwork, though where available it draws on the findings of prior Pakistani survey research on public attitudes toward new provinces (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2022), a limitation discussed further below.

Historical Background: From One Unit to the Four-Province Federation

Pakistan's federal boundaries have been the subject of major reorganization on two occasions since independence. The first, the One Unit scheme of 1955, merged the provinces of West Pakistan Punjab, Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province, and Balochistan, along with numerous princely states including Bahawalpur, Khairpur, and the various Balochistan states into a single administrative unit, explicitly justified by the central government as necessary to establish political parity between West and East Pakistan, whose Bengali-majority population otherwise substantially outnumbered West Pakistan's combined population (Adeney, 2007; Hafeez, 2014). The former princely state of Bahawalpur, which had acceded to Pakistan in October 1947, initially enjoying a certain autonomy, and was granted provincial status in 1952, was incorporated into the One Unit in October 1955, which the restorationists in Bahawalpur consider as an unconstitutional revocation of accession by the Nawab of Bahawalpur to Pakistan (Javaid, 2018).

The One Unit scheme proved to be politically short lived and was repealed by President Yahya Khan in 1970 through restoration of Punjab, Sindh, North- West Frontier and Balochistan as separate provinces. The 4 provinces were the new Pakistan which continued till date with slight additions, after the secession

of East Pakistan which became Bangladesh. The only other change took place in 2018 when the federally administered tribal areas were merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Adeney, 2007; Hafeez, 2014). However, the One Unit scheme had lasting effect on future demands of new provinces since its abrogation. Firstly, the scheme became a lesson in Pakistan that the integration of different provinces can be undone and hence must not be attempted again. Secondly, Pakistan's security establishment and ruling elite remained wary of further territorial changes due to ethnic and regional unrest that led to the civil war and the subsequent breakup of the state (Soherwordi & Khattak, 2014).

The 1973 constitution was framed at a time of great political tension across the country following the 1971 secession. It is evident that the architects of the constitution were more conservative on issues of territorial reorganization and adjustments compared to those who were in power before the civil war (Hafeez, 2014; Waseem, 2010). Consequently, the reorganization process that was to be followed for such changes was shunned in favor of a much more difficult process that would need a super majority approval. It is this argument that provides the closest indication as to why article 239 was framed the way it was. Unlike its intent of preventing subnational demands for territorial reorganization, it seems as though the framers wanted to restrict any adjustments and boundaries within the country to prevent further divisions. This intent might have been justified in 1973 right after the civil war but as the author elaborates later in the text, it did not seem to work for the years that followed as much subnational demand was witnessed (Waseem, 2010).

The Constitutional Framework: Article 239

The current process for delimiting provincial boundaries or creating new provinces in Pakistan is provided by the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, particularly its Article 239. According to this article, a bill initiating the creation of a new province requires a two-thirds majority approval in both the National Assembly and the Senate in order to be passed (Hafeez, 2014; Latif, 2017). In addition, if the new province is to be formed from the territory of an existing one, its formation bill needs to be approved by a two-thirds majority in the assembly of the affected province as well (Hafeez, 2014; Latif, 2017). Thus, the procedure creates an exceptionally high threshold for the creation of new provinces, due to which such projects are highly unlikely to be submitted to a vote in the National Assembly, let alone pass it. This threshold is explained by the fact that in case of forming a new province from the territory of an existing one, the latter's provincial assembly obtains a de facto veto over the matter, which is notably not the case in India, as demonstrated in the comparative analysis provided below (Latif, 2017).

This constitutional design is consonant with the general principles advanced above, according to which the theoretical expectations are formulated. Elaborating upon Elazar's (1987) proposal, the specification that provincial limits cannot be imposed or changed "unilaterally by the central (federal) government," as he puts it in his article, is certainly a logical constraint to prevent provinces from being reorganized "arbitrarily" by the center. Yet, if the same supermajority is required to delimit the new provinces at the expense of the old, as the practice in Pakistan appears to confirm formally and de facto if not necessarily formally, then, as the authors demonstrate, Pakistan's existing provincial legislatures and, more specifically, the Assembly of Punjab, the largest province in terms of population, can veto any "new-province initiatives" with a lasting effect, despite the popularity of such proposals among the constituents of the emerging provinces as well as the National Assembly (Hafeez, 2014; Latif, 2017).

The Bahawalpur Province Movement

The basis of the demand for the restoration of Bahawalpur as a separate province is primarily based on the region being an acceding princely state and not an annex by Pakistan at the time of the country's partition in 1947. Nawab Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan Abbasi V signed the accession covenant for Bahawalpur with Pakistan in October 1947, and the state was formally recognized as a province of Pakistan in 1952 and later merged with the One Unit scheme in 1955 (Javaid, 2018; Hafeez, 2014). Restorationists' current demands are based on the position of Bahawalpur as a princely state that acceded to Pakistan, not on the basis of a new province being created. It is asserted that the conditions of accession, explicitly or implicitly, recognized the right of the rulers and people of Bahawalpur to enjoy a separate provincial status within Pakistan, thus, technically, the Bahawalpur movement's demands are different from those of the Saraiki nationalists who are demanding a new province on the basis of language and development needs, although both the Saraiki restorationists and Bahawalpur restorationists operate from roughly the same area (Javaid, 2018).

This overlap has caused internal rifts in an otherwise united southern Punjab reform movement, with the activists who want Bahawalpur restored as a separate province and those who want a bigger South Punjab or Saraiki province comprising Bahawalpur and other divisions such as Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, and others are each vying for the leadership of the movement and diluting it in the process; this division has affected the movement's strength, according to critics (Javaid, 2018; Mushtaq, 2016).

The Saraiki Province Movement

The demand for a Saraiki/South Punjab province is based on both linguistic/identity and socioeconomic grounds. Saraiki is a language spoken in the southern districts of the Punjab province and was granted official language status by the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, although the latter was simultaneously involved in attempting to quell the regionalist sentiment (Langah, 2011). The proponents of South Punjab are based on the premise that the southern districts are relatively underdeveloped compared to the central and northern districts of the province, which are further disadvantaged in terms of education, federal government jobs, and federal resources due to their regional location and political representation (Latif, 2017; Hafeez, 2014).

The movement's most significant institutional expression so far occurred in 2012 when the National Assembly approved a resolution endorsing the need to create a new southern Punjab province and a parliamentary commission, with Senator Farhatullah Babar as its chairman, was formed to explore the details of the proposal (it submitted its report to Parliament on 28 January 2013). Nevertheless, the new province was never formally created in the subsequent years (despite the approval of its resolution in the National Assembly) since it failed to gain the support of the Punjab Assembly, which, according to the Article 239, is required to approve such decisions, and ultimately, the idea died out in the Parliament (Latif, 2017; Government of Pakistan, 2013). Since then, the governments of Pakistan, including the current Tehreek-e-Insaf administration, which formed a South Punjab Secretariat in 2020 to provide certain autonomy to the region on a much smaller scale than proposed by the Saraiki regional groups, routinely raise the issue of southern Punjab in the Pakistani parliament (but none of them followed up with a new constitutional proposal under Article 239), which many researchers note as the sign of inter-party competition for popularity with the Saraiki-speaking electorate (Mushtaq, 2016; Chaudhry, 2012).

The Hazara Province Movement

The demand for a separate Hazara province, encompassing the Hindko-speaking Hazara division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, predates but was substantially intensified by the Eighteenth Amendment's 2010 renaming of the North-West Frontier Province to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a change intended to recognize the province's Pashtun ethnic and linguistic majority but experienced by much of the Hazara division's non-Pashtun Hindko-speaking population as a form of exclusionary ethnic labeling imposed upon a region whose own linguistic identity differed from the newly adopted provincial name (Mushtaq, 2016; Ahmar, 2013). The renaming controversy provoked sufficient unrest that the Hazara movement achieved a notable, if still non-binding, institutional milestone in March 2014, when the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly, under a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-led government, passed a resolution supporting the creation of a Hazara province and urging the federal government to introduce corresponding legislation in the National Assembly (Latif, 2017).

As with the Saraiki case, the Hazara movement has combined identity-based grievance with resource-based argument, with movement leaders emphasizing the region's mineral and hydropower resource endowment and arguing that a separate province would allow more direct local benefit from resource royalties currently administered at the provincial rather than the divisional level (Latif, 2017; Ahmar, 2013). Ahmar's (2013) case study of the Hazara movement situates this demand within a broader concern regarding the risks of unmanaged ethnic-territorial conflict in Pakistan's federal periphery, arguing that continued central and provincial government inattention to the Hazara grievance carries a meaningful risk of escalating regional political alienation.

The Karachi/Mohajir Urdu-Speaking Province Movement

A further, and politically distinct, new-province demand concerns the Urdu-speaking, predominantly Mohajir population concentrated in Karachi and other urban centers of Sindh, historically represented by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). Unlike the Bahawalpur, Saraiki, and Hazara movements, which rest on claims of regional and linguistic distinctiveness from a province's rural or provincial-capital-centered majority, the Mohajir province demand is further complicated by its urban-rural character within Sindh and by the acute political sensitivity of any proposal to formally divide the province along a Sindhi–Mohajir communal line, a division most Sindhi nationalist political forces and the Sindh Provincial Assembly have consistently and firmly opposed (Latif, 2017; Siddiqi & Mirza, 2022). Survey research conducted by Siddiqi and Mirza in 2022 revealed that the support for new-province proposals including that of Karachi was different across respondents' ethnic categories and provinces of residence, being generally lower in Sindhi than in the urban Mohajir category mostly associated with the demand's emergence, thus illustrating the degree to which the new-provinces question in Sindh is linked to broader and more persistent intercommunal conflicts than those of Saraiki or Hazara regions transpiring around more conciliatory mother tongues.

Gilgit-Baltistan and the FATA Merger: Contrasting Cases

Two further cases illuminate the constitutional and political dynamics examined in this article by way of contrast. Although the region has been administered by Pakistan since 1947 and granted a degree of autonomy under the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009, Gilgit-Baltistan remains technically distinct from Pakistan's four provinces. Its status is linked both to the region's connection to the disputed Kashmir territory and to Pakistan's concern that granting it provincial

status would prejudice Pakistan's claim to Jammu and Kashmir, which has repeatedly thwarted official attempts to upgrade its status (Zaheer, 2018). In this respect, Gilgit-Baltistan represents a class of impediment to new province formation that does not appear to apply to Bahawalpur, Saraiki, Hazara, or Mohajir, namely Pakistan's dispute with India over the Kashmir region, which has complicated Pakistan's domestic political position regarding the area's administrative division.

By contrast, the 2018 merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which was executed through the Twenty-Fifth Constitutional Amendment, represents the only successful attempt at restructuring Pakistan's territorial administrative divisions for the past five decades. Unlike all subsequent cases, however, the merger involved the absorption of a region previously administered separately by the federal government into an existing province, rather than the formation of a new one, which required support from a competing provincial assembly under the more rigorous requirements of the full Article 239 procedure. This article suggests that this particular nuance was at the heart of the difference between FATA's merger and the failed Bahawalpur, Saraiki and Hazara proposals; whereas the latter three cases involved carving out territory from existing provinces and consequently involved zero-sum political gains and losses for the legislative assemblies concerned, the FATA merger represented a mutual expansion of both the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's territorial jurisdiction and administrative capacity, and therefore involved no direct opposition from the affected provincial assembly (Malik, 2017).

Political Challenges: Party Strategy, Provincial Veto, and Internal Fragmentation

Aside from the constitutional constraints outlined in Article 239, the new-provinces movements discussed at length in this article face several additional political challenges. Firstly, it is not uncommon for political parties in Pakistan to use new-province agitation as an electoral tool to boost their ratings with little intention of actually pushing through the necessary legislation and constitutional reforms. The Peoples Party's (PP) campaign on the Saraiki province issue prior to the 2013 elections is one such example, which was largely abandoned shortly after the party's victory in the general elections (Chaudhry, 2012; Mushtaq, 2016). Secondly, and most importantly, the very same Punjab Assembly which would have to vote on any new province created from Punjab is likely to oppose any such decision due to its decreased representation and resources, thus presenting a severe institutional challenge to the adoption of any new provinces from Punjab, whether it is Bahawalpur or Saraiki (Latif, 2017; Hafeez, 2014).

Thirdly, each of the movements dealt with above in their own way, encountered significant internal fragmentation, which undermined their bargaining capacity. Thus, the Bahawalpur and Saraiki movements are split between those who seek the restoration of the old province of Bahawalpur and those who advocate a larger South Punjab province, and have at times presented substantially conflicting political agendas (Javaid, 2018). On the other hand, the political and security elites, concerned with the ethnic and territorial tensions triggered by the One Unit policy, have been reluctant to endorse any new restructuring along similar ethno-linguistic lines, fearing that it might set a precedent for further provincialization of Pakistan beyond the four units currently identified in this paper (Soherwordi & Khattak, 2014).

This security-establishment caution is also informed by Pakistan's ongoing security crisis in Balochistan, where an indigenous separatist insurgency has been waging a bloody war for self-determination and

greater regional autonomy. While clearly distinguishable from the Bahawalpur, Saraiki, Hazara, and Mohajir “movements” explored in this article, the Baloch struggle is nevertheless, according to several of the sources discussed here, a cautionary tale for Pakistan’s policy-makers due to its close links with regional discontent among ethnic Pakistanis and the significant toll it has exacted on the country’s security apparatus (Soherwordi & Khattak, 2014; Zaheer, 2025). While demonstrably different from the movements discussed in this module in terms of its lack of both electoral and constitutional legitimacy, the Baloch example nevertheless has enough interconnectivity with the central government to serve as a major influence on Pakistan’s secessionist policies, as discussed in this section (Zaheer, 2025).

Federation Implications: A Comparative Perspective

Unlike Pakistan, India’s States Reorganisation Act of 1956, enacted upon the recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) headed by Fazal Ali, resulted in a much more liberal constitutional framework for state formation and reorganisation, since the power to enact laws allocating or re-allocating seats in the Rajya Sabha on the basis of population, or creating or abolishing states, was devolved to the Parliament, where such bills only required a simple majority for passage, though the state legislature concerned had to be consulted (not necessarily approve) such bills in the meanwhile, unlike in Pakistan, where a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly is needed for such changes (Latif, 2017; Watts, 2008). This comparatively low threshold has permitted India to undertake extensive state reorganization across multiple waves since 1956, including the creation of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh from Punjab in the 1960s and 1970s and, most recently, the creation of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh in 2014, a degree of federal-map flexibility with no parallel in Pakistan’s post-1970 constitutional history (Latif, 2017).

This comparative contrast bears directly on the theoretical framework advanced in this article. Consistent with Elazar’s (1987) emphasis on constitutional procedure as a substantive determinant of federal responsiveness, and with Watts’s (2008) comparative observation regarding the disproportionate influence dominant constituent units can exercise over federal-level decision-making, the Pakistan–India comparison suggests that India’s considerably greater capacity to accommodate emergent sub-national and linguistic identities through territorial reorganization reflects not a difference in the intensity or legitimacy of underlying regional demands which arguably exist to a comparable degree in both countries but a difference in the constitutional threshold each country’s federal design imposes on such accommodation (Watts, 2008; Adeney, 2007). For Pakistan, the practical federation-level implication of this constitutional design is that a persistent category of sub-provincial ethnic and linguistic grievance Saraiki, Hindko, Mohajir, and, in the distinct case of Bahawalpur, historical-constitutional grievance remains structurally unable to secure formal accommodation through the federation’s own designated constitutional mechanism, leaving such grievances to be expressed instead through the comparatively blunter instruments of electoral mobilization, periodic administrative concession such as the 2020 South Punjab Secretariat, and continued, unresolved political contestation (Mushtaq, 2016; Khan et al., 2019).

Khan, Shaheen, and Ahmad’s (2019) analysis of the sources of horizontal inequalities in Pakistan fits into this line of reasoning by highlighting how the current stand-off between the federal government and the provinces fits into a larger pattern of uneven development that new-province advocates seek to address by advocating a far more decentralized administrative structure than the one currently in place, a

position that finds support in the wider federalism literature linking smaller constituency size to more responsive provincial authorities for the time being, while larger provinces suffer from institutional delinquency in Pakistan (Chandio, 2015; Rasool, 2011).

Public Opinion and Survey Evidence

Beyond elite and institutional political mobilization, a limited body of empirical survey research offers additional insight into the popular basis of Pakistan's new-provinces movements. Siddiqi and Mirza's (2022) survey-based study, conducted across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as part of a multi-year research project on ethnic identity and provincial demands, finds that support for new-province creation correlates strongly with respondents' ethnic and linguistic self-identification rather than with province of residence alone: Saraiki-identifying respondents in southern Punjab expressed substantially higher support for provincial separation than Punjabi-identifying respondents in the same province's northern and central districts, and a comparable pattern held for Hindko-identifying respondents in Hazara relative to Pashtun-identifying respondents elsewhere in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2022). This finding lends direct empirical support to the ethnic-federalism framework advanced by Adeney (2007): the new-provinces demand in Pakistan is not evenly distributed political sentiment but is concentrated precisely among those sub-national linguistic communities whose identity claims existing provincial boundaries fail to accommodate.

At the same time, Siddiqi and Mirza (2022) find that even among ethnic groups most supportive of new-province creation, survey respondents expressed considerable skepticism regarding the practical likelihood of constitutional implementation, a finding consistent with this article's central argument regarding the structural durability of the Article 239 veto. This discrepancy between genuine popular backing for new-province formation and a skeptical assessment of prospects for its realization is another illustration, relevant to the thesis advanced in this article, of the separation between the political popularity of new-province demands and the constitutional viability of these demands.

Economic and Fiscal Implications: The National Finance Commission Complication

The other federation-level implication of Pakistan's new-provinces debate is the country's fiscal-transfer system that takes a share of tax revenues in the form of annual National Finance Commission (NFC) awards to the provinces in accordance with a formula that mainly but not exclusively takes population size into account. New provinces would need the value of their share of NFC awards calculated and added to the formula, which poses another institutional impediment to the process since it adds another layer of contention to the already highly politicized delimitation of fiscal responsibilities under the NFC formula (Khan et al., 2019; Chandio, 2015). The same applies to the share of tax revenue that would have to be transferred to the new provinces from the federal government budget as well as any changes to the existing fiscal arrangements between the federation and the provinces and between the provinces themselves. New-province advocates argue that smaller, more fiscally autonomous units would in fact improve the efficiency and accountability of public expenditure at the local level, pointing to comparative evidence from federal systems with smaller average constituent-unit size; critics counter that province splitting risks fragmenting the administrative and fiscal capacity necessary for effective service delivery in Pakistan's less-developed regions, particularly if a newly created province, such as a prospective Saraiki or Hazara province, does not possess the same tax base and administrative infrastructure that a well-established, larger province has accumulated over decades (Chandio, 2015;

Rasool, 2011). This fiscal dimension of the new-provinces debate is rarely resolved in the movement-specific literature examined above, and represents a further practical obstacle layered atop the constitutional threshold established by Article 239.

The South Punjab Secretariat: A Sub-Constitutional Compromise

Faced with the practical impossibility of securing Article 239's dual supermajority, successive Punjab provincial governments have periodically offered administrative concessions falling well short of full provincial status as a means of partially addressing southern Punjab grievances without triggering the constitutional procedure examined above. The most significant among these was the South Punjab Secretariat established by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf provincial government in January 2020, which created a subordinate administrative secretariat in Multan with responsibility over selected departments for the south Punjab divisions, with no associated legislature or judiciary (Mushtaq, 2016, as extended by subsequent analysis; Sehri, 2024). Southern Punjab and Saraiki movement proponents have largely viewed the creation of the South Punjab Secretariat as insufficient, as the fiscal allocation, legislative, and NFC (National Finance Commission) quotas did not change, while opponents of the new-province movement have noted the creation of the South Punjab Secretariat as an example of administrative autonomy that does not require upheaval of the provincial government structure (Sehri, 2024).

The South Punjab Secretariat is illustrative of the issue for this article's argument because it represents a pattern, evident in several of the cases discussed above, in which the response of the Pakistani authorities to new-province demands has been to enact measures which, while having the effect of decentralizing administration to a degree, do not go as far as amending the constitution – a response which leaves the original constitutional design, together with its built-in resistance to new-province mobilization, basically intact. Whether such sub-constitutional concessions represent a durable long-term alternative to full provincial status, or merely a temporary palliative that will prove insufficient to satisfy the underlying identity and developmental grievances documented throughout this article, remains, as of this writing, an open and empirically unresolved question.

Discussion

The evidence assembled in this article directly addresses the research question guiding this study. Pakistan's new-provinces movements have achieved substantial rhetorical, electoral, and even formal parliamentary and provincial-assembly traction a National Assembly resolution and dedicated Parliamentary Commission in the Saraiki case, a Provincial Assembly resolution in the Hazara case, and sustained political mobilization in the Bahawalpur and Mohajir cases precisely because Pakistani political parties have found such demands electorally useful to articulate. Yet none of these movements has achieved constitutional implementation because Article 239's dual supermajority requirement, and in particular its grant of an effective veto to the very provincial assembly whose territory and representation a new province would reduce, creates a structural asymmetry between the relative ease of political mobilization and the near-insurmountable difficulty of constitutional ratification. Read through Riker's (1964) bargaining framework, this asymmetry is not an incidental design flaw but a broadly predictable consequence of a federal bargain in which Punjab's dominant demographic and political position at the time of the 1973 Constitution's drafting was encoded into a constitutional procedure that continues to protect that same dominant position against subsequent territorial claims.

This reading is further reinforced by the comparative and contrastive cases examined above. The success of 2018 FATA merger that did not involve any cession of territory or representation by existing provinces, as well as the stalemate around the issue of Gilgit-Baltistan, which is firmly blocked by another sovereignty-related concern, indicates a pattern where outcomes are determined not by the strength of popular or even parliamentary support for a certain position but by the distribution of institutional veto points which any bill has to pass before actual consideration. In this regard, it is fair to conclude that Adeney's (2007) framework fully applies to the ethnic-federalism discussion around Saraiki, Hindko and Mohajir movements, as the issues they raise have been substantiated in the secondary literature reviewed for this research, and decades of political debate have failed to produce any viable solution due to Pakistan's structural inability to reconcile diverse regional interests within the framework of the unitary state.

A further consideration is suggested by the very existence of the practices concerning new-province proposals, as discussed in this chapter. The sheer implausibility of getting the supermajority of votes in either house, regardless of the party's internal attitude towards the new provinces, would make a strong stand for new provinces in the campaign acceptable but not decisive for the party's parliamentary strategy. Thus, any party that wanted to avoid the huge parliamentary expenditures that would be needed when introducing a new-province bill to the lower house without having first obtained the assent of the federation would have a strong incentive to use a new-province slogan in electoral campaigns and then abandon the issue when the time comes for actual parliamentary action, which may well explain the pattern observed by several parties in Saraiki's case. Any reform that would allow Pakistan to overcome this impasse must address this issue, which explains why reforming the procedure itself, as discussed above, may not be enough.

Finally, the sub-constitutional loopholes explored above, namely, the South Punjab Secretariat, indicate a possible, if limited, alternative to the amendment of the Constitution in accordance with Article 239 for Pakistan's policymakers: the decentralization of administrative and fiscal powers to the level of the division or region within a province via ordinary legislative acts. Such an approach, while falling well short of the full legislative, judicial, and representative autonomy that new-province advocates ultimately seek, may nonetheless offer a more institutionally feasible near-term response to the developmental and identity-recognition grievances documented throughout this article than continued pursuit of a constitutional threshold that, on the historical record examined here, has proven effectively insurmountable for more than five decades. Whether such incremental devolution can, over time, substitute for full provincial status, or whether it will instead function merely as a temporary pressure valve that ultimately intensifies rather than resolves the underlying demand, remains an important open question for the continued political and scholarly treatment of Pakistan's new-provinces movements.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, as a qualitative, document-based analysis, it relies substantially on secondary Pakistani political-science and history scholarship for its account of specific movements' internal composition and political strategy, and would benefit from more direct engagement with movement leaders and affected communities through interview-based fieldwork of the kind this study's methodology does not permit. Second, the analysis addresses four principal new-province movements Bahawalpur, Saraiki, Hazara, and Mohajir together with the contrasting Gilgit-

Baltistan and FATA cases, but does not extend to a systematic examination of smaller or more localized reorganization proposals, including periodic Pashtun-belt demands within Balochistan noted briefly in the secondary literature. Third, the comparative analysis with India's state-reorganization experience, while illuminating, is necessarily limited in scope and would benefit from more extensive comparative institutional analysis addressing why India's considerably more permissive reorganization procedure has not, despite its greater flexibility, resulted in comparably severe center-periphery tension. Fourth, given the ongoing and unresolved character of Pakistan's new-provinces debate, this analysis reflects the state of the movements and the relevant scholarship as of the time of writing, and future political developments, including any renewed constitutional reform initiative, could materially alter the picture presented here. Fifth, this study's reliance on a single available survey-based source (Siddiqi & Mirza, 2022) for its discussion of public opinion means that the empirical account of popular attitudes toward new-province creation offered here, while suggestive, cannot be treated as a comprehensive or fully representative account of Pakistani public opinion on this question, particularly given the acknowledged difficulty of conducting representative survey research across Pakistan's more insecure regions. Future research would benefit from systematic survey-based analysis of public attitudes toward specific new-province proposals across all four provinces, building on the initial work of Siddiqi and Mirza (2022); comparative institutional analysis of alternative constitutional thresholds for federal boundary change; and closer analysis of the 2020 South Punjab Secretariat and comparable sub-constitutional administrative concessions as a potential alternative pathway to addressing new-province grievances short of full constitutional reorganization.

Conclusion

Pakistan's new-provinces movements for a restored Bahawalpur, a Saraiki or South Punjab province, a Hazara province, and an Urdu-speaking Mohajir province articulate genuine and, on the evidence examined in this article, substantively grounded grievances regarding linguistic-identity recognition, historical-constitutional status, and regional developmental disparity within Pakistan's existing four-province federal structure. Yet despite decades of political mobilization and, in the Saraiki and Hazara cases, formal parliamentary and provincial-assembly engagement, none of these movements has achieved constitutional implementation. This article has argued that this outcome reflects not the absence of legitimate underlying demand but the structural design of Article 239 of the Constitution of Pakistan, whose dual supermajority requirement grants an effective veto to the very provincial assemblies whose territory and representation new-province proposals would reduce, a constitutional design that, read through Riker's bargaining framework and Elazar's account of the federal principle, functions to preserve the relative position of Pakistan's dominant province, Punjab, against subsequent territorial claims regardless of those claims' popular or even parliamentary support. Comparison with India's considerably more permissive state-reorganization procedure reinforces this conclusion, suggesting that the frozen character of Pakistan's provincial map reflects constitutional design choices rather than any inherent absence of legitimate sub-national demand for federal reorganization. As Pakistan's new-provinces movements continue to articulate their claims into the foreseeable future, this article suggests that any durable resolution will require confronting the constitutional procedure itself, rather than relying on the recurring, but ultimately unproductive, cycle of electoral rhetoric and legislative inaction that has characterized the politics of new provinces in Pakistan since 1970.

More than five decades after the dissolution of the One Unit scheme restored Pakistan's four-province federal structure, the country's constitutional architecture for accommodating further territorial change remains, on the evidence assembled in this article, essentially untested in practice: not a single new province has been created under Article 239 since its enactment, notwithstanding the sustained political energy that the Bahawalpur, Saraiki, Hazara, and Mohajir movements have each, at various points, generated. This near-total absence of successful implementation across more than fifty years and four distinct movements is itself among the strongest available pieces of evidence for this article's central claim: that the obstacle facing Pakistan's new-provinces movements lies not in the particular merits or popular support of any one proposal, but in a constitutional procedure whose structural logic makes successful territorial reorganization exceptionally difficult regardless of which specific demand is under consideration.

References

- Adeney, K. (2007). *Federalism and ethnic conflict regulation in India and Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ahmar, M. (2013). Conflict prevention and the new provincial map of Pakistan: A case study of Hazara province. *Journal of Political Studies*, 20, 1–19.
- Asghar, U. M. (2012). Demand of new provinces. ISSRA Papers.
- Chandio, K. (2015). Justification for more provinces. Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI).
- Chaudhry, P. D. (2012). Creating new provinces in Pakistan: A print media analysis. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.
- Elazar, D. J. (1987). *Exploring federalism*. University of Alabama Press.
- Government of Pakistan. (2013). Report of the Parliamentary Commission on the Creation of a New Province in Southern Punjab. National Assembly Secretariat.
- Hafeez, M. M. (2014). Constitutional framework for formation of new provinces in Pakistan. *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, 4(3), 1–10.
- Javaid, U. (2018). Federation of Pakistan and creation of new provinces: A case of Bahawalpur province. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 39(1), 15–36.
- Khan, S. M., Shaheen, M., & Ahmad, M. (2019). Horizontal inequalities and identity conflicts: A study of Pakistan. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 56(2), 307–320.
- Langah, N. T. (2011). Call for Siraiki province. Forum of Federations and Centre for Civic Education Pakistan.
- Latif, M. M. (2017). Demand for new provinces in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 104–114.
- Malik, A. R. (2017, March 4). The FATA merger. *The Nation*.
- Mushtaq, M. (2009). Managing ethnic diversity and federalism in Pakistan. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 33(2), 279–294.
- Mushtaq, M. (2016). Regional identities in quest of separate provinces: A new challenge for the Pakistani federation. *Journal of Political Studies*, 23(1), 289–306.
- Rasool, A. K. (2011, August 12). Do we need more provinces? *The Express Tribune*.
- Riker, W. H. (1964). *Federalism: Origin, operation, significance*. Little, Brown.
- Sehri, S. N. (2024, August 29). More provinces is the way forward. *Dawn*.
- Siddiqi, F. H., & Mirza, M. N. (2022). Ethnic identity and the demand for new provinces in Pakistan: Results from a survey data in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 43(1), 1–19.

- Soherwordi, H., & Khattak, S. (2014). The creation of new provinces in Pakistan and its implications for an integrated country. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 51.
- Talbot, I. (2012). *Pakistan: A new history*. Oxford University Press.
- Waseem, M. (2010). *Federalism in Pakistan*. Forum of Federations.
- Watts, R. L. (2008). *Comparing federal systems* (3rd ed.). McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Zaheer, M. A. (2018). Constitutional developments and challenges to autonomous and self-governing system of Gilgit-Baltistan. *Journal of Indian Studies*, 4(2), 253–261.
- Zaheer, M. A. (2025). *Federalism and the quest for national integration in Pakistan*. Rehmat and Maryam Researches.
- Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. (1973). Article 239 (as amended by the Eighteenth Amendment Act, 2010).