

# The Demand of New Provinces in Pakistan ~~Reverberates~~ as a Populist Shibboleth.

## I. Introduction:

In 2012, a committee was formed under senator Farahatullah Babar to conduct a survey...

## II. Thesis Statement:

Although the creation of new provinces in Pakistan is widely regarded as a panacea for governance issues, the current demand is a recurring shibboleth that marks institutional decay, lacks political will, serves as an electoral tool, and overlooks the financial burden.

## III. Conceptual Understanding of Key Terms: Populist and Shibboleth

## IV. A Counterperspective: The Creation of New Provinces as a Panacea for Governance Issues

## V. Demand of New Provinces in Pakistan is a Recurring Populist Shibboleth:

A. Serves as an electoral tool

B. two points

- B. Exploits the core-periphery sentiments
- C. Ignores fiscal and economic burden
- D. Neglects the risks of national disintegration and ethnic based violence
- E. Lacks genuine political will to devolve power
- F. Oversimplifies rigid process of making province given under Article 239(4)
- G. Unwillingness of bureaucracy to transfer power
- H. Masks structural faultlines of Pakistan's polity
- I. Neglects historical pattern of non implementation
- J. Lacks practical plan of assets division
- K. Reflects unrealistic public expectations
- L. Conflicts with the founding father vision
- M. Contradicts with Islamic concept of brotherhood

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- A. Empower the local government
- B. Ensure economic equality

## VII. Conclusion

In 2012, a committee was formulated under senator Farahatullah Babar to conduct a survey and draft a plan to carve a new province in Southern Punjab. The committee did extensive work, and submitted a report to the National Assembly. That report was converted to a resolution, and passed unanimously by the National Assembly, yet no steps <sup>have been</sup> taken after the 2013 General Elections. This debate again resurfaced on the political landscape during the 2018 elections. Politicians made promises to make a southern province within a hundred days after coming to power, yet no constitutional steps were taken. This chronic disparity between electoral pledges and legislative inaction reveals a calculated pattern of political maneuvering. Is it not, therefore, a

recurring populist shibboleth? Is this narrative not serving as an electoral tool that helps politicians securing power? Although the creation of new provinces in Pakistan is widely regarded as a panacea for governance issues, the current demand is recurring populist shibboleth that masks institutional decay, lacks genuine political will, serves as an electoral tool, and overlooks the financial burden. *Be...*

Nowadays, politicians are using <sup>the</sup> slogan <sup>popular</sup> of new provinces to portray that they really care about people. Demand of <sup>new</sup> provinces has been directly linked with emotions, making it a populist narrative. However, it is a shibboleth. Shibboleth means hollow slogan, catching phrase, and empty promises. Populist leaders have used this slogan so many times that it has become a populist shibboleth. People have started believing in this catching phrase without even analysing the practicability and implications.

of the idea. The politicians keep saying the word "New Provinces," but they have no real road map, no constitutional homework, and no intention to actually following through.

However, <sup>many experts regard the</sup> creation of new provinces in Pakistan is widely regarded as <sup>the</sup> need of an hour. Proponents such as Mian Amir, an educationist, claims that creating new provinces is the best solution to address the administrative issues. According to them, smaller units enhance governance and devolve power to the grass root level. More provinces mean better governance. They argue that, creation of new provinces will help in ensuring law and order, improving health services, and promoting education in backward areas which are neglected owing to large size of present provinces.

Though they are correct that many areas are under developed in the large provinces, they

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oversimplified the issue of governance. In the present time, demand of new provinces serves as an electoral tool instead of genuine concerns of people. Politicians exploit the emotions and grievances of masses by making empty promises during electoral campaigns regarding creation of new provinces to secure vote bank. Farahatullah Babar, for instance, raised the concern in the parliament by arguing that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won thirty out of fifty parliamentary seats from Saraiki belt on the promise of making separate province. However, in 2018, when PTI came in power no constitutional steps were taken in this regard. Same is the case with other political parties. Every party makes promises but never fulfill them. They just secure power by using new provinces narrative as an electoral tool. So, is it not a populist shibboleth?

Likewise, politicians exploit

the peripheries, ~~areas away from~~ provincial capital, sentiments by citing large size provinces as a hurdle in a way of delivering services. In reality, they are hiding their own maladministration and lack of will to devolve power. Moosatchel, for example, is the poorest district of Pakistan. It is neglected because provincial government merely focuses on the Quetta. Same is the case with areas like Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab. Lahore is developed; Dera Ghazi Khan is underdeveloped. However, whenever election campaign started, all parties go to the underdeveloped areas, and ensure peripheries better future through creation of new provinces. Therefore, such recurring pattern shows that demand of creating new provinces has become shibboleth, and everyone started believing the politicians words without having a plan analysing implications.

likewise, people and politicians

overlook the financial burden of carving new provinces. Both stakeholders just frequently chant the slogan without estimating the economic cost of establishing new units. It is not as simple as people perceive it. It is not like a construction of roads and parks. Rather, creating new provinces demands hefty amount. Federal government has to create new courts, bureaucratic infrastructure, and parliament that require large amount of money. It will place stress on the already fragile economy of Pakistan. Nigeria case serves as the best example. Nigeria started with only three regions but now it has thirty six units. Instead of making governance better, new units placed stress on federal government. Seventy to eighty percent of the budget is spent on official salaries and accommodation rather than people. So, in this way new provinces will make governance effective?

Moreover, politicians are neglecting the risks of national integration. People are not realising the cost of new provinces. They are just joining political movements without understanding the impacts. Currently, people are demanding new provinces on administrative needs. However, behind this demand, ethno-lingual forces are present. Back in 1987, Hazara community demanded separate province in North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Later on, voices were heard from the masses of Urban Sindh and Southern Punjab. All these demands of creating new provinces on ethno-lingual basis challenges the national integration. Pakistan has already lost its integral part in 1971 at the hands of ethno-lingual forces. This failure of nation to learn lesson from the history depicts that demand of creating new provinces is really a populist shibboleth which makes people emotional.

In addition to this, politicians are not willing to devolve power

to grass root level. Pakistan's constitution provides three tier system that includes government at three levels: Federal, Provincial, and local government. However, politicians remained reluctant to devolve power. Provincial governments consider local governments as rival; therefore, they do not conduct local government elections on time. Punjab, for example, conducted last local government elections in 2015, and when councils were elected their budget was placed under the thumb of commissioner, stripping mayor of financial autonomy. So, how can a government agree to limit its own power? Is creation of new demand not a populist shibboleth?

Narrative of new provinces creation is a shibboleth because government over simplifies the process of making provinces given under Article 239(4) of constitution of Pakistan.

It states that no bill should be presented before president for unless regarding limiting provincial powers or provincial demarcation unless it is approved by two-third majority by respective provincial assembly. Thus, the first issue is that politicians are not ready to strip off their own power. Secondly, it is very difficult to achieve two-third majority despite having a political will. MQM, for instance, moved a bill for creation of a South Punjab province, it was met with fierce condemnation from leaders like Chaudhry Nisar. He raised a question on the floor of assembly that the party MQM which did not have significant mandate in Punjab, how they had a right to demand for creation of new provinces in Punjab. Therefore, despite knowing constitutional complexities, repeated slogans chanted by politicians for new provinces make it a populist shibboleth.

In addition to this, bureaucracy

is another hurdle in the way of creation of new provinces. Peter Drucker, a socio ecologist, argues that bureaucratic elites in third-world countries have far greater staying power than people are willing to concede. They manage to keep power for decades. Pakistan is no exemption. Pakistan's bureaucracy follows the colonial legacy. They are against local government because in absence of local government they enjoy more power. Therefore, such hurdles make demand of new provinces a populist shibboleth that lacks concrete plan to follow through.

Furthermore, politicians use this populist narrative to mask the deep-rooted fault lines of Pakistan's polity.

For example, Imran Khan said Pakistan cannot be governed effectively because provinces are too large, MQM argued that Sindh urban suffers because provinces are unjustly structured and PML(N) stated that South

Punjab is poor because it lacks provincial status. In reality, they all are masking institutional decay, patronage politics, and maladministration. Maleeha Lodhi in her book, Pakistan Beyond the Crisis State, says that there are five major fault lines of Pakistan Polity: patronage politics, tussle between elected and non-elected institutions, theocracy versus democracy, dynastic politics, and centralisation of power. Thus, it is clear that governance issues is not merely because Pakistan lacks smaller provinces, and politicians use popular slogan of new provinces to mask their inability to address above mentioned issues.

In the same vein, people neglect the historical pattern of non-implementation. Since 1980s masses are demanding provinces on administrative and ethno-lingual basis. Despite this, no concrete step has been taken by politicians. In 2012, for instance, committee was formed to carve out plan for creation of

Southern Punjab province by PPP, Rana Sanaulah called for creation of three provinces in Punjab: Southern Punjab, Bahawalpur, and Punjab, and Imran Khan promised to create South Punjab province within <sup>100</sup> hundred days of acquiring power. Yet, no concrete steps were taken. This non-implementation pattern denotes that creation of new provinces <sup>is</sup> demand is no more than a populist shibboleth.

(Apart from this, <sup>rephrase</sup> politicians lack in having plan regarding asset division.) Imagine a person aspiring to win world weight lifting championship, but does not practice for strength building. However, at every gathering he shows great enthusiasm to ace the championship. Pakistani politicians are not different from such person. They are claiming to make new provinces but have no way out for asset division. Not to be astonished, even politicians are currently unable to agree on asset divisions.

among the four provinces and the federation. So, how they are going to create new provinces? Thus, there is no denying that new province demand is a populist hollow slogan.

Moreover, the popular demand of new provinces reflects unrealistic public expectation that new provinces are quick fix to governance issues. In reality, Pakistan's governance crisis does not stem from having too few provinces. It comes from refusal to respect the constitution. The constitution itself has been treated as a paliable document to be bent at will. Pakistan's political history is littered with amendments designed to serve rulers rather than citizens. Take General Zia's eighth amendment as an example. Thus, the problem is not design but denial and must realise it. Otherwise, new provinces will also bring no

good. This lack of understanding of real issue makes "new provinces" narrative emotional and shibboleth.

Additionally, the persistent demand for new administrative unit is a populist shibboleth because it undermines Iqbal-e-Azam's vision of a strong and unified federation. While people argue that smaller provinces are needed for "administrative ease," this logic often ignores the founding father's advice to prioritise national integration over regional division. Thus, presenting these demands as a technical necessity is often a cover for regionalism, which directly contradicts the Quaid's warning that the "poison of provincialism" would prevent the growth of true cohesive nation.

Likewise, the slogan for new provinces acts as a populist shibboleth because it risks dividing the people, which is

contrary to core Islamic ideology of unity. Islam emphasizes the concept of a single, cohesive community, and discourages the creation of artificial boundaries that lead to internal friction.

Therefore, by promoting a narrative that prioritizes regional divisions over national and ideological unity, the demand serves more as a tool for political gain than as a move aligned with the unifying spirit of Pakistan's Islamic foundation.

While the creation of new provinces is a deceptive shortcut, the real solution lies in respecting Pakistan's constitution. Pakistan's Constitution provides Article 140-A that is not an advisory clause but the supreme law of land. Politicians must stop treating this article as an option. They must establish strong autonomous local government as prescribed under Article 140-A of the Constitution.

of Pakistan, so that everyone at grass root level gets share in representation and power. This devolution of power will improve governance and result in development in neglected areas. Thus, it is essential to strengthen local government to address grievances of masses.

Likewise, equal distribution of resources must be ensured. Provinces should not only focus on the centre; rather, they must spend equally on social and physical infrastructure throughout the province. This will ensure equal opportunities, strengthen rule of law, improve health services, and promote education throughout the province. Therefore, by this mean politicians can address genuine concerns of masses without putting national integrity in danger.

In a nutshell, demand of ~~16~~ new provinces has

become an emotional slogan. People <sup>have</sup> stopped analyzing the practicability of new provinces, and started believing in empty promises of politicians. They actually have been manipulated by politicians. Moreover, the narrative of new provinces became a populist shibboleth because it is used to win votes and hide the failure of current institutions. Instead of fixing the system or giving power to local mayors through mayors through local devolution, politicians use this demand to distract the public. Creating new provinces would also put too much stress on Pakistan's weak economy and go against the founding father's wish for united nation. The real answer to Pakistan's problem is not redrawing of map, but making the existing government work better and sharing money fairly with

all districts. By moving away from empty promises and focuses on reforms, Pakistan can finally become the strong and united country it was meant to be.