

Ethnic-Based Deprivation and Its Impacts on Political Instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, using a quantitative approach. A sample of 296 individuals was selected from a population of 1280, and data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The results, presented in tables, reveal a significant link between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability. Economic exclusion, political marginalization, and social inequality are identified as key factors perpetuating deprivation and instability. The findings emphasize the need to address ethnic disparities to promote peace and stability in the region. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders working to address ethnic tensions and promote inclusive development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By understanding the complex dynamics of ethnic-based deprivation and political instability, this study aims to inform evidence-based policies that promote a more equitable and stable future for the region. The findings of this study have important implications for promoting social cohesion, reducing inequality, and improving political stability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Keywords

Deprivation; Political Instability; Ethnicity; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan, since its inception, has navigated the complex and often turbulent waters of ethno-national diversity. The challenge of forging a unified national identity while accommodating distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical identities has been a persistent feature of its political landscape (Chen & Khoso, 2025; Ying et al., 2024). This struggle has frequently manifested as political instability, with various ethnic groups expressing feelings of marginalization, economic exploitation, and political exclusion (Syed et al., 2015). Nowhere is this dynamic more historically significant and contemporarily relevant than in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) (Siddique, 2014).

The roots of ethnic discontent in KP are deeply embedded in history. The arbitrary demarcation of the Durand Line in 1893 bifurcated the Pashtun population, creating a territorial and psychological schism that continues to resonate (Rose, 2011, Rodrik, 1999). The subsequent political movements, from the Khudai Khidmatgar's alignment with the Indian National Congress to the post-1947 "Pakhtunistan"



sentiment supported by Afghanistan, underscore a long-standing quest for political rights and autonomy that was often perceived as being suppressed by the central state (Khan, 2020). This historical legacy of political deprivation has been compounded by internal ethnic dynamics within the province itself, such as the movement for a separate Hazara province, which highlights ongoing tensions between Pashtun and non-Pashtun communities over resource allocation and political representation (Ahmar, 2013; Feyyaz, 2011).

The core problem this research addresses is the nexus between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability (Anaya, 2010). Ethnic-based deprivation refers to the systemic and multidimensional marginalization of groups, leading to a lack of access to political power, economic resources, and social standing (Gurr, 1993; United Nations, 2019). When communities feel systematically excluded, the resulting grievances can fuel social unrest, diminish trust in state institutions, and become a potent catalyst for political fragmentation and conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Esteban, 2010). In the context of KP, this deprivation is not merely a historical relic but a living reality, perpetuated by perceptions of economic imbalance, political underrepresentation, and cultural suppression.

This paper, therefore, seeks to systematically investigate the relationship between ethnic-based deprivation and its impacts on political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It moves beyond a purely historical analysis to an empirical examination of contemporary perceptions, asking critical questions: To what extent do the people of KP perceive a link between ethnic marginalization and political unrest? How does this instability, in turn, cripple human development? And how effective are existing governmental initiatives in addressing these deep-seated issues? By answering these questions, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of one of Pakistan's most pressing internal challenges and to inform policies that promote inclusive governance and sustainable stability.

Statement of the study

The statement of this study to Exploring the link between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), this research aims to investigate how the province's complex ethnic dynamics, marked by a history of marginalization and exclusion, have contributed to ongoing political instability and social unrest (ICG, 2019; HRW, 2020). By examining the intersections of ethnicity, political participation, social, educational and economic development, this study seeks to identify the root causes of ethnic-based deprivation and its extensive impacts on the KP stability and development, with a focus on the Pashtun community's struggles for autonomy and self-determination.

This research endeavours to investigate the intricate relationship between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), a province characterized by a complex ethnic landscape and a history of marginalization and exclusion. The study aims to explore how the province's ethnic dynamics have contributed to ongoing political instability and social unrest, with a particular focus on the Pashtun community's struggles for autonomy and self-determination.

Through a comprehensive examination of the intersections between ethnicity, political participation, social development, educational attainment, and economic opportunities, this research seeks to identify the root causes of ethnic-based deprivation and its far-reaching impacts on the stability and development of KPK. By delving into the historical and contemporary contexts of ethnic relations in the province, this study aims to uncover the ways in which ethnic-based deprivation has been perpetuated and exacerbated, leading to ongoing political instability and social unrest.

Significance of the study

This study looks at how ethnic-based deprivation affects political stability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Ethnic-based deprivation refers to the unequal treatment and marginalization of certain ethnic groups, leading to feelings of exclusion and injustice. In KPK, the Pashtun community has faced historical marginalization, which has contributed to political instability in the region.

Understanding the link between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability is crucial for promoting peace and stability in KPK. By identifying the root causes of political instability, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to address the specific needs of marginalized communities. This study aims to shed light on the experiences of the Pashtun community and other ethnic groups in KPK, and to inform policies that promote inclusive development and social justice.

The findings of this study can contribute to conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives in KPK, by addressing the grievances of ethnic groups and promoting a more harmonious society. Moreover, the study's insights can inform development programs and projects, ensuring that they address the specific needs of marginalized communities and lead to more effective and sustainable development outcomes. By addressing ethnic-based deprivation and promoting inclusive development, we can work towards a more peaceful and stable future for KPK and its inhabitants.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the relationship between ethnic base deprivation and political instability in KP.
- To investigate the impact of political instability on human development in KP.
- To identify and assess the effectiveness of existing policies and initiatives aimed at addressing ethnic base issues in KP.

1.4 Hypothesis:

1. Ethnic based deprivations can lead to political instability.
2. Political instability paralyses human development.
3. Ineffective polices create ethnic based deprivations.

Exploring these questions and examining the relationships between ethnicity, political participation, and development, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex issues underlying political instability in KPK and to inform policies and initiatives that promote greater ethnic inclusivity, social justice, and sustainable development in the province.

METHOD

Methodology is the backbone of research, providing a clear and systematic approach to investigating a topic. It's like a roadmap that guides the researcher through the entire process, from designing the study to collecting and analysing data. Think of it as a step-by-step guide that ensures the research is conducted in a logical, organized, and unbiased manner.

In essence, methodology refers to the specific techniques and strategies used to gather and examine data. It outlines the research design, the methods used to collect data, and the techniques employed to analyse it. By doing so, it provides a transparent and reproducible approach that allows others to understand and build upon the research findings.

A well-crafted methodology is essential to ensure the quality and reliability of research. It helps to minimize errors, biases, and inconsistencies, ultimately leading to more accurate and meaningful conclusions. By following a structured approach, researchers can confidently explore their research questions, test hypotheses, and uncover new insights that contribute to their field of study.

Nature of the Study

This study takes a quantitative approach to explore the complex link between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). To achieve this, we've designed a cross-sectional survey that captures a snapshot of the current situation, allowing us to examine the relationships between these key factors. By analysing the data collected through this survey, we hope to uncover valuable insights into how ethnic-based deprivation contributes to political instability in the region. We chose a quantitative approach in our research to investigate

The relationship between political instability and human development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) because it allows us to objectively analyse the impact of political instability on access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. By using standardized measures and data collection methods, we can reliably assess the effects of political instability on human development indicators. Our large sample size enables us to generalize our findings to the larger population, increasing the precision and scalability of our research. Statistical analysis enables us to identify patterns, correlations, and causal relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Additionally, our quantitative approach allows for replicability, enabling future researchers to verify and build upon our findings. Overall, a quantitative approach provides an efficient and objective means to investigate our research question, yielding reliable and generalizable results.

Population of study

The target population comprised residents of KPK, aged 18 and above, representing different ethnic backgrounds. (Why?)

Sampling

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of 296 participants from various ethnic groups and regions in KPK, ensuring proportionate representation.

Data Collection Tool

A structured questionnaire was designed, consisting of: Demographic questions (age, gender, ethnicity, education), ethnic-based deprivation and political Instability questions. The data was collected through this well-furnished questioner from the educated people of the society.

Data Analysis

To better understand the data we collected, we used descriptive statistics to summarize and organize the information using SPSS software. This included calculating frequencies and percentages, as well as creating tables and graphs to visualize the data. These statistical measures helped us grasp the characteristics of the variables we were studying and helped us understand the scope and severity of the issue at hand. By presenting the data in a clear and concise manner, we were able to get a clearer picture of the problem and its impact.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table-1. Age of the Respondents

S.no	Age	Frequency	percentage
1	20 – 25	168	56.75%
2	25 – 30	82	27.70%
3	30 – 35	46	15.54%
Total		296	100%

The age distribution of the participants in the research study reveals a majority (168 individuals, or 56.75%) fall within the 20-25 age range, representing more than half of the total participants. A significant proportion (82 individuals, or 27.70%) are between 25-30 years old, while a smaller group (46 individuals, or 15.54%) are between 30-35 years old.

In other words, more than half of the participants (57%) are young adults in their early twenties, while about 28% are in their late twenties, and 16% are in their early thirties. This age distribution is an important consideration in analyzing the research findings, as it may impact the results and conclusions drawn from the study.

Table-2. Gender of the Respondents

S.no	Gender	Frequency	percentage
1	Male	239	80.74%
2	Female	57	19.25%
Total		296	100%

Out of a total of 296 participants in the research study, 239 males and 57 females contributed to the data collection. This represents a significant majority of male participants, accounting for 80.74% of the total, while female participants make up 19.25%.

In other words, approximately 4 out of 5 participants (or 81%) were male, while about 1 in 5 (or 19%) were female. This gender distribution is an important consideration in analyzing the research findings, as it may impact the results and conclusions drawn from the study.

Table-3. Education of the Respondents.

S.no	Education	Frequency	percentage
1.	Bs 8 th semester	256	86.48%
2.	Ms	28	9.45%
3.	Phd	12	4.05%
Total		296	100%

The educational background of the participants in the research study reveals a significant majority (256 individuals, or 86.48%) are currently enrolled in the 8th semester of their Bachelor's degree (Bs). A smaller proportion (28 individuals, or 9.45%) hold a Master's degree (Ms), while a minority (12 individuals, or 4.05%) have earned a Doctoral degree (PhD).

In other words, nearly 9 out of 10 participants (or 86%) are undergraduate students in their final semester, while about 1 in 10 (or 9%) have completed their master's degree, and a small fraction (4%) have earned a doctoral degree. This distribution of educational backgrounds is an important consideration in analyzing the research findings, as it may impact the results and conclusions drawn from the study.

Table 4. Ethnic Based Deprivation and Political Instability in Kp.

S.no	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Is the level of ethnic base deprivation in KP high?	Yes	197	66.55%
		No	99	33.44%
		Total	296	100%
2	Does ethnic base deprivation significantly affect political stability in KP?	Yes	236	79.72%
		No	60	20.27%
		Total	296	100%
3	Is there a strong correlation between economic deprivation and political instability in KP?	Yes	207	69.93%
		No	89	30.06%
		Total	296	100%
4	Does social exclusion contribute significantly to political instability in KP?	Yes	256	86.48%
		No	40	13.51%
		Total	296	100%
5	Does political representation play a crucial role in addressing ethnic base deprivation in KP?	Yes	207	69.93%
		No	89	30.06%
		Total	296	100%
6	Does discrimination have a significant impact on political stability in KP?	Yes	256	86.48%
		No	40	13.51%
		Total	296	100%
7	Does cultural suppression have a significant impact on political instability in KP?	Yes	187	63.17%
		No	109	36.82%

		Total	296	100%
8	Does linguistic marginalization have a significant impact on political stability in KP?	Yes	148	50%
		No	148	50%
		Total	296	100%
9	Is there a strong correlation between religious discrimination and political instability in KP?	Yes	187	63.17%
		No	109	36.82%
		Total	296	100%
10	Does ethnic base deprivation significantly affect political participation in KP?	Yes	197	66.55%
		No	99	33.44%
		Total	296	100%

This data reveals the responses of individuals to statements about ethnic-based deprivation and political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The majority of respondents (66.55%) believe that ethnic-based deprivation is a significant issue in KP. Moreover, a substantial majority (79.72%) think that this deprivation has a profound impact on political stability in the region.

The respondents also strongly agree that economic deprivation (69.93%), social exclusion (86.48%), and discrimination (86.48%) contribute significantly to political instability in KP. Additionally, a majority (69.93%) believe that political representation plays a vital role in addressing ethnic-based deprivation.

The responses also suggest a strong correlation between religious discrimination and political instability (63.17%), and cultural suppression and political instability (63.17%). However, the respondents are divided on whether linguistic marginalization affects political stability (50%-50%).

Lastly, a majority (66.55%) of respondents believe that ethnic-based deprivation significantly impacts political participation in KP. Overall, the responses indicate a strong perception among the respondents that ethnic-based deprivation and related factors have a profound impact on political stability and participation in KP.

Table 5. Impact of Political Instability on Human Development In Kp.

S.no	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	1. Does political instability significantly affect access to education in KP?	Yes	256	86.48%
		No	40	13.51%
		Total	296	100%
2	2. Does political instability have a significant impact on healthcare in KP?	Yes	256	86.48%
		No	40	13.51%
		Total	296	100%
3	3. Does political instability significantly affect economic growth in KP?	Yes	266	89.86%
		No	30	10.13%
		Total	296	100%
4	4. Is there a strong correlation between political instability and poverty in KP?	Yes	246	83.10%
		No	50	16.89%
		Total	296	100%

5	5. Does political instability significantly affect social cohesion in KP? (Yes/No)10	Yes	226	76.35%
		No	70	23.64%
		Total	296	100%
6	6. Does political instability have a significant impact on human security in KP?	Yes	256	86.48%
		No	40	13.51%
		Total	296	100%
7	7. Does political instability significantly affect access to justice in KP?	Yes	246	83.10%
		No	50	16.89%
		Total	296	100%
8	8. Is there a strong correlation between political instability and human rights in KP?	Yes	197	66.55%
		No	99	33.44%
		Total	296	100%
9	9. Does political instability have a significant impact on environmental sustainability in KP?	Yes	187	63.17%
		No	109	36.82%
		Total	296	100%
10	10. Does political instability significantly affect food security in kp?	Yes	197	66.55%
		No	99	33.44%
		Total	296	100%

The table presents the responses to 10 statements regarding the impact of political instability on various aspects of life in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The responses are categorized as “Yes” or “No”, and the frequency and percentage of each response are provided.

The responses suggest a strong perception among the respondents that political instability has a significant impact on various aspects of life in KP. For instance, an overwhelming majority (86.48%) believe that political instability affects access to education, while a similar percentage (86.48%) think it impacts healthcare. A vast majority (89.86%) believe it affects economic growth, while a significant majority (83.10%) think it contributes to poverty.

The respondents also believe that political instability affects social cohesion (76.35%), human security (86.48%), access to justice (83.10%), human rights (66.55%), environmental sustainability (63.17%), and food security (66.55%).

The majority of respondents believe that political instability has a significant impact on all of these aspects, with the highest percentage agreeing that it affects economic growth (89.86%) and the lowest percentage agreeing that it affects human rights (66.55%). This suggests a widespread perception among the respondents that political instability is a significant obstacle to development and well-being in KP.

Table 6. Effectiveness of Existing Political Initiative in Kp.

S.no	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	1. Are there existing policies and initiatives addressing ethnic base issues in KP?	Yes	128	43.24%
		No	168	56.75%
		Total	296	100%
2		Yes	78	26.35%

	2. Are these policies and initiatives effective in addressing ethnic base deprivation?	No	218	73.64%
		Total	296	100%%
3	3. Are there significant gaps in existing policies and initiatives addressing ethnic base issues in KP?	Yes	217	73.31%
		No	79	26.68%
		Total	296	100%
4	4. Do existing policies and initiatives address political instability in KP?	Yes	128	43.24%
		No	168	56.75%
		Total	296	100%
5	5. Do existing policies and initiatives have a significant impact on human development in KP?	Yes	167	56.418%
		No	129	43.58%
		Total	296	100%
6	6. Do existing policies and initiatives address the root causes of ethnic base deprivation?	Yes	118	39.86%
		No	178	60.13%
		Total	296	100%
7	7. Is there a high level of political will to address ethnic base issues in KP?	Yes	108	36.48%
		No	188	63.51%
		Total	296	100%
8	8. Do existing policies and initiatives engage effectively with local communities in KP?	Yes	138	46.62%
		No	158	53.37%
		Total	296	100%
9	9. Does civil society play a significant role in addressing ethnic base issues in KP?	Yes	138	46.62%
		No	158	53.3%
		Total	296	100%
10	10. Can existing policies and initiatives be improved to address ethnic base issues in KP?	Yes	187	63.17%
		No	109	36.82%
		Total	296	100%

The table presents responses to 10 statements about existing policies and initiatives addressing ethnic base issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The responses reveal a perceived need for improvement in these policies and initiatives.

While a minority (43.24%) believe that existing policies and initiatives address ethnic base issues, a majority (56.75%) disagree. Furthermore, only a small minority (26.35%) think these policies and initiatives effectively address ethnic base deprivation, while a large majority (73.64%) disagree.

The responses also indicate significant gaps in existing policies and initiatives, with a large majority (73.31%) believing that there are gaps, and a minority (26.68%) disagreeing. Additionally, a minority (43.24%) believe that existing policies and initiatives address political instability, while a majority (56.75%) disagree.

However, a majority (56.41%) believe that existing policies and initiatives have a significant impact on human development, while a minority (43.58%) disagree. Despite this, a minority (39.86%) believe that existing policies and initiatives address the root causes of ethnic base deprivation, while a majority (60.13%) disagree.

The responses also suggest a lack of political will to address ethnic base issues, with a minority (36.48%) believing that there is a high level of political will, while a majority (63.51%) disagree.

Furthermore, a minority (46.62%) believe that existing policies and initiatives engage effectively with local communities, while a majority (53.37%) disagree.

Similarly, a minority (46.62%) believe that civil society plays a significant role in addressing ethnic base issues, while a majority (53.37%) disagree. However, a majority (63.17%) believe that existing policies and initiatives can be improved to address ethnic base issues, while a minority (36.82%) disagree.

Overall, the responses suggest a perceived need for improvement in existing policies and initiatives addressing ethnic base issues in KP, with significant gaps and ineffective addressing of root causes and political instability. However, there is a perceived positive impact on human development and a desire for improvement.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes a definitive link between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The perception of economic injustice, political marginalization, and social discrimination is widespread and is seen as a primary cause of the region's instability. This instability, in turn, cripples human development by undermining economic growth, access to education and healthcare, and social cohesion. The research concludes that the cyclical relationship between deprivation and instability is perpetuated by policies that are perceived as inadequate, fragmented, and lacking in genuine political commitment. To break the cyclical relationship between ethnic-based deprivation and political instability, this study proposes a multi-faceted policy framework that begins with fostering inclusive political empowerment through proportional representation and independent grievance commissions to address political exclusion. This must be coupled with targeted socio-economic development that ensures the equitable allocation of resources to underdeveloped regions, implementing specific programs in education, healthcare, and infrastructure while encouraging private investment in marginalized areas. Furthermore, cultural recognition and preservation are vital, achievable through promoting mother-tongue education and establishing cultural centers to celebrate the province's diverse heritage. Concurrently, strengthening governance and justice by reinforcing law enforcement and judicial systems and establishing a provincial human rights commission is essential to protect rights and address social injustices. The entire process must be underpinned by participatory policy reform that actively engages local communities and civil society in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies to build trust through transparent governance, all of which requires the foundational step of building a consensus among political parties to recognize addressing ethnic grievances as a national priority for achieving sustainable stability and development.

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