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# THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY IN SINDH

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Charles H. Kennedy

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On May 26, 1990, security forces of the Sindh provincial government fired upon a crowd that had failed to disperse in Hyderabad, Pakistan's fourth largest city. The crowd had assembled to protest the continuation of a stringently enforced 16-hour-a-day curfew that had been imposed by the local authorities on the city since early May. Many women and children were among the 45 who were killed and 250 wounded. The security forces comprised mostly Sindhis and Pathans, and virtually all who were shot were Muhajirs. Over the next several days, gangs of Muhajir youth, many claiming affiliation with the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (Muhajir National Movement—MQM), attacked Sindhi neighborhoods, spraying machine gun fire. Dozens were killed or injured.

Such grim events have become commonplace in Sindh Province since the ethnic riots of mid-1985. Four-sided ethnic clashes between Muhajirs, Sindhis, Pathans, and Punjabis have claimed around 2,000 lives since the beginning of the fighting, have displaced thousands who have fled the scene, and have brought to a standstill the commerce of Pakistan's largest business center, Karachi. Moreover, the ethnic disturbances were a contributory factor in the ouster of the governments of both Muhammad Khan Junejo and Benazir Bhutto, and they currently threaten the stability of Nawaz Sharif's regime.

This article addresses some of the factors that have led to this tragic state of affairs. It contends that a primary cause of recent Sindh communal violence has been the perception by Muhajirs of an eroding representation of their community among Pakistan's most significant national elites: the civil bureaucracy, the military, and the business elite. This perception

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has served to politicize the Muhajir community. I also contend that governmental policy since 1971 has hurt the interests of the Muhajirs, and that current governmental policy is unlikely to meet their fundamental political demands nor perforce to dampen permanently Muhajir-related ethnic conflict in the province. The essay is divided into three sections. The first provides a brief ethnic mapping of Sindh Province, the second examines ethnic politics and policy in Sindh since partition, and the final section offers some conclusions based on the case study.

### The Ethnic Landscape of Sindh

Sindh is the most ethnically diverse of Pakistan's four provinces, due both to the international transfer of peoples into the province during, and subsequent to partition in 1947, and to domestic internal migration since 1947. The 1981 census disclosed that Sindh Province had a population of 19.3 million (see Table 1), of whom 10.6 million (55.7%) are indigenous Sindhis, as defined by mother language and "permanent" residence (pre-partition) in the province, and the remainder either domestic or international immigrants or their descendants. The largest of these immigrant communities is the "Muhajirs" (refugees), who emigrated to Pakistan from India, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and India's western coast. Most Muhajirs settled in Pakistan between 1946 and 1950. The mother language of most such individuals was Urdu or Gujarati; Indian immigrants from the Punjab, whose mother language was Punjabi, are considered Punjabis. The majority of Muhajirs settled in the urban areas of Sindh, particularly in Karachi and Hyderabad; as of 1981, 4.6 million Muhajirs resided in Sindh, over 3.3 million in Karachi.

Punjabis, Pathans, and Baloch have also settled in large numbers in Sindh's urban areas. They have been attracted by economic opportunities, both the commercial lure of Karachi and the availability of relatively cheap land in newly irrigated areas bordering on Punjab and Balochistan. Most domestic economic migrants have settled in Sindh since 1965, and by 1981, over 2 million Punjabis, 1.1 million Baloch, and 0.7 million Pathans lived in Sindh.

Because most of the migrants have settled in the urban areas of the province, the native Sindhis have become a minority in Sindh's two largest cities. In Karachi, Sindhis constitute only the fifth largest ethnic group in the city, outnumbered by Muhajirs, Punjabis, Pathans, and Baloch. In Hyderabad, Sindhis are the second largest group, outnumbered by Muhajirs. Only in Sukkur, a comparative backwater, are Sindhis a majority of the city's population. By contrast, however, they constitute an overwhelming majority in Sindh's rural areas; 81.5% of the rural inhabitants of the province in 1981 were Sindhis.

TABLE 1 *Ethnic Composition of Sindh, 1981 (percentage)**Sindh Province: Population 19.029 million; 8.24 million urban*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Muhajir	24.1	54.4	2.2
Sindhi	55.7	20.0	81.5
Punjabi	10.6	14.0	8.2
Pathan	3.6	7.9	0.5
Baloch	6.0	3.7	7.6

*Hyderabad Division: Population 7.093 million; 1.67 million urban*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Muhajir	12.9	49.3	2.7
Sindhi	74.9	36.3	85.6
Punjabi	7.9	10.2	7.2
Pathan	1.0	2.3	0.6
Baloch	3.3	1.9	3.8

*Karachi Division: Population 5.438 million; 5.20 million urban*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Muhajir	61.0	64.1	5.1
Sindhi	7.1	3.8	67.8
Punjabi	15.8	16.3	5.1
Pathan	11.0	11.3	2.6
Baloch	5.3	4.4	24.4

*Sukkur Division: Population 6.479 million; 1.3 million urban*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Muhajir	5.7	22.1	1.6
Sindhi	74.8	63.4	77.7
Punjabi	9.5	10.5	9.2
Pathan	0.5	1.2	0.3
Baloch	9.6	2.9	11.3

SOURCE: Adapted from GOP, Population and Census Organization, Statistics Division, *1981 Census Report of Sind Province* (Islamabad: Population Census Organization, 1984).

Ethnicity was determined by using "language most often used in household" as follows: Urdu—Muhajir; Sindhi—Sindhi; Punjabi and Siraiki—Punjabi; Pushto and Hindko—Pathan; and Balochi and Brauhi—Baloch.

Accordingly, the distinction in ethnic composition between rural and urban Sindh is very important and has long found expression in Pakistan's policies of ethnic preference. The rural/urban distinction has also served to politicize the issue of ethnic representation in the province, as Sindhi nationalists often claim that Sindhi "sons of the soil" are foreigners in their own cities. It is undoubtedly the case that the relative numerical position of Sindhis has deteriorated further since 1981. Karachi has grown very rapidly during the 1980s, with most of the increase due to the internal migration of Punjabis and Pathans. Also, President Zia-ul-Haq (1977–88), continued the policy of making land grants to retiring civil and military bureaucrats (who are mostly Punjabis) in the rural areas of Sukkur Division. Finally, several hundred thousand Afghan refugees, mainly Pushto-speaking ethnic cousins of the Pathans, have settled illegally in Karachi during the last decade. It is likely, therefore, that Pakistan's next census in 1991 will disclose that Sindhis no longer constitute a majority in Sindh Province.<sup>1</sup>

### Ethnic Politics in Sindh, 1947–1991

Ethnoregional actors and their motives have played very significant roles in the politics of Pakistan. Such concerns have taken on added significance owing to the fact that Pakistan has been unable since partition to develop effective national political institutions. Pakistan has had five constitutions; chronically weak, dissolved, or nonexistent legislatures; several bouts with martial law; and ineffectual political parties. In this context, some variation of an elite group model of political development seems particularly appropriate to Pakistan's experience. Since partition, three elite groups—the civil bureaucrats, the military, and the business elite—have predominated, and given the perception that such elites dominate politics, it follows that ethnoregional actors, seeking to maximize the political authority of, and/or bestow benefits upon, their respective "constituencies," have sought to place their respective "sons of the soil" in these elites. It also follows that access to such elite positions is the focus of much political activity in the state. After all, representation in such groups is tantamount to political power, and it is often the only game in town.

The policies of ethnic preference, which the government of Pakistan has followed since 1971, must be viewed within this context. Such policies have altered the implicit ethnoregional accommodation that persisted after partition at the expense of the Muhajir community and, accordingly, have released demands that have resulted in the current civil unrest in Sindh.

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1. See *Newsline* (January 1991), pp. 95–98.

*From Partition to Partition, 1947–1971*

Prepartition Sindh, although linguistically homogenous, was bifurcated along communal lines between a rapidly modernizing urban Hindu population and a rural Sindhi peasantry. At partition in 1947, most of the Hindus fled the new state of Pakistan and were replaced<sup>2</sup> by an equally modern and urbanized, largely Urdu-speaking Muslim population primarily hailing from northern and western India. These Muhajirs possessed several advantages over their Sindhi co-nationalists. For instance, 70% of them were literate, compared to only 10% of the indigenous inhabitants of the province.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Muhajirs brought with them considerable entrepreneurial and administrative experience largely lacking among the Sindhi population.

Early policies of the new state also favored the interests of the Muhajirs. Perhaps most significant was the decision by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, himself a Gujarati-speaking Muhajir, to make Urdu the national language of Pakistan. This decision elevated the status of Urdu, the mother language of the majority of the relatively small Muhajir community, above that of the much more widely spoken Punjabi, Bengali, or Sindhi languages. Also beneficial to Muhajir interests was the so-called One Unit scheme of 1955–69, which centralized the administrative system of West Pakistan by merging its four provinces. The rationale for this policy was to counterbalance the size differential of East Pakistan and thus enable the drafting of Pakistan's first constitution in 1956. However, One Unit emasculated the powers of the Sindh provincial government, which was dominated prior to 1955 by the majority Sindhis. Furthermore, Ayub Khan (1958–69) adopted economic policies that focused economic development activities in Karachi, the site of the largest concentration of Muhajirs.

As a consequence of these initial advantages and early policies, the Muhajir community became disproportionately overrepresented in Pakistan's elite groups. By 1973, Muhajirs held 33.5% of the gazetted positions in the civilian bureaucracy, although their share of the overall population was less than 8%. Similarly, Muhajirs held a disproportionate share of positions in the Pakistan Secretariat, and to an even greater extent, they dominated Pakistan's business elite. In 1974, nearly half of the senior positions in Pakistan's public enterprises were held by Muhajirs,

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2. The Evacuee Property Act (1947) provided that immigrants to Pakistan would be compensated for lands and property left behind in India through the redistribution of land and property abandoned by Hindus fleeing Pakistan.

3. Theodore P. Wright, Jr., "Indian Muslim Refugees in the Politics of Pakistan," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, July 1974, pp. 199–205; see also Wright's recent article, "Center-Periphery Relations and Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Sindhis, Muhajirs, Punjabis," *Comparative Politics*, April 1991, pp. 299–312.

and the dominance of Muhajirs in private sector business enterprises was even greater.<sup>4</sup> Although not generally acknowledged in the literature, until at least the early 1970s Muhajirs were disproportionately overrepresented in the military as well. In 1968, Muhajirs held 11 of the top 48 (23%) senior positions (ranks above brigadier) in Pakistan's military.<sup>5</sup> By contrast Sindhis were woefully underrepresented in the elite groups. Although there are nearly twice as many Sindhis as Muhajirs, in the early 1970s they constituted only 2.7% of gazetted employees, 4.3% of the Secretariat, and 3.6% of the executives in public enterprises. In 1968 there were no Sindhi generals in the military.

The reality of such discrepancies has long been acknowledged in Sindh, but at least until the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971, ethnic demands by Sindhis for greater representation paled to insignificance, at least at the national level, in light of the highly politicized East vs. West Pakistan issue. The founder of Sindhi nationalism is generally acknowledged to be Ghulam Mustapha Syed, who has argued since partition that Sindhis are the victims of "Punjabi-Muhajir imperialism" and that the interests of the Sindhis are ill-served by a strong central government.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the main emphasis of Sindhi nationalism prior to the 1971 civil war was on the dissolution of One Unit (a unified West Pakistan province), and the restoration of Sindhi as the official language at the provincial level. In 1967, such demands first took a violent turn when student members of the Sindh United Front were fired upon by police for demonstrating against the findings of the federal Education Commission, which had called for the elimination of Sindhi as a medium of instruction at all levels in Sindh. Several students were killed. Despite this incident, Syed's political following remained relatively weak as evidenced by his party's failure to win any seats in the 1970 election.

If Sindhi demands were inadequately politicized prior to 1971, Muhajir demands were conspicuous by their absence. Muhajirs constituted part of

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4. Muhajirs held 20.2% of gazetted posts in 1983 and 18.3% in 1986; Sindhis held 2.7% of gazetted posts in 1973, 5.1% in 1983, and 6.7% in 1986. At the officer level, Muhajirs held 30.2% of posts (grades 16–22) in 1974 and 14.8% in 1989; Sindhis 4.3% in 1974, and 6.1 in 1989. Of the senior posts, 46.8% were held by Muhajirs in 1974 and 31.5% in 1983; Sindhis held 3.6% of comparable posts in 1974 and 6.8% in 1983. These figures are adapted from the GOP's *Civil Servant Census Reports* of 1976, 1983, 1986; the *Gradation Lists* of 1976, 1989; and from Statistics Cell and Cabinet Secretariat, various documents. For private sector enterprises, see Stanley Kochanek, *Interest Groups and Development: Business and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1983), esp. tables, pp. 93–95, 97.

5. Tahir Amin, *Ethno-national Movements of Pakistan: Domestic and International Factors* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Sciences, 1988), p. 82.

6. G. M. Syed, *Struggle for New Sind* (Karachi: Sind Observer Press, 1949); G. M. Syed, *A Nation in Chains* (Karachi, 1974).

the core of the nation-state, and Muhajir "communal interests" were indistinguishable from the interests of the national elite. Indeed, prominent Muhajirs even now often take offense at the use of the term "Muhajir" to describe their community, and most Muhajirs identify themselves as Pakistanis.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Muhajirs have identified overwhelmingly with national political parties such as the Muslim League (Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan were both Muhajirs), the Jamaat-i-Islami, and during the 1965 election the centrist Combined Opposition Party of Fatima Jinnah.

*The Proliferation of Ethnic Demands, 1971–1985*

The political landscape of Sindh underwent profound transformation subsequent to the secession of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in 1971. Freed from the more salient issue of Bengali underrepresentation, the demands of the Sindhis came to the fore. Their champion was the newly elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a native Sindhi. Bhutto's government (1971–77) adopted several policies conducive to serving the interests of his Sindhi constituents.

The first was fulfillment of a campaign pledge made by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to restore Sindhi as the official language of the province. In the fall of 1972, the PPP-dominated Sindh Provincial Assembly voted to make Sindhi the sole official language. Bhutto's action was at least partially designed to weaken the appeal of G. M. Syed's Jiye Sindh Mahaz (Long Live Sindh Movement), the lineal descendant of the Sindh United Front, by coopting the main demand of the movement. To this extent the policy succeeded, but subsequent trouble was inevitable. Demonstrations against the measure claimed that Muhajir interests would be threatened in the provincial government, and Syed's heated rhetoric calling for a "return of Muhajirs to India" further incited the crowds. During the violence in December 1972, more than 55 persons were killed and thousands more were injured. Also, many non-Sindhis fled the rural areas of Sindh for the safer environments of Karachi and Hyderabad. In early 1973, the PPP amended the bill to make both Sindhi and Urdu official languages of the province.

Not as immediately contentious but far more important to ethnic relations in Sindh was Bhutto's reintroduction of a regional quota system for recruitment to the federal bureaucracy. Introduced in 1971, the quota mandated that 10% of the vacancies in government would be filled on the basis of all-Pakistan merit, 50% allocated to the Punjab, 11.5% to the

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7. Numerous personal interviews in Pakistan 1974–1990. I contend that few Muhajirs, or members of the MQM, or its leadership perceive themselves as part of a "periphery" in the sense used by Wright, *op. cit.*



North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), 7.6% to "urban Sindh," 11.4% to "rural Sindh," and 3.5% to Balochistan.<sup>8</sup> In part, this quota was designed to increase the representation of Sindhis in the federal bureaucracy by introducing a distinction between rural Sindhis (Sindhis) and urban Sindhis (Muhajirs), a distinction that had not existed under the terms of the 1949 federal quota. Shortly after introduction of the revised quota, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed an ordinance establishing stringent residency requirements for consideration as a "rural Sindhi."<sup>9</sup> The federal quota, which originally had application only to posts in the federal secretariat, was soon applied to federal posts in "attached departments," provincial governments, educational institutions, and public sector corporations. The significance of the rapid expansion in application of the quota was heightened when Bhutto, as part of his economic policy, nationalized much of Pakistan's private sector between 1972–76, making recruitment to the new public enterprises subject to terms of the federal quota. The nationalizations were also directed against some of Pakistan's largest industrial houses, disproportionately owned and managed by Karachi-based Muhajirs.<sup>10</sup>

In July 1977 a military coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq, a Punjabi, toppled the government of Z. A. Bhutto. But Zia maintained Bhutto's federal quota system intact and added a new wrinkle of his own—military preference.<sup>11</sup> Under Zia's policy, officially introduced in 1982, 10% of the vacancies in the Secretariat were reserved for retired military personnel, and many former officers were appointed to senior positions in Pakistan's public enterprises. Additionally, military preferences proliferated, pertaining to admission of sons and daughters of military personnel to Pakistan's highly competitive universities, particularly in admissions to medical, engineering, and law schools. Most of the military officers who benefited from these preferences were Punjabis or Pathans as these two groups dominated the military.

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8. Charles H. Kennedy, *Bureaucracy in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 181–208.

9. *Sind Permanent Residence Certificate Rules*, 1972, Sind Statutes 14 are discussed in *ibid.*, p. 207. The 1949 federal quota mandated 20% merit; East Pakistan 40%; Punjab and Bahawalpur 23%; Karachi 2%; Sind, Khairpur, NWFP, Frontier States and Tribal Areas, Baluchistan, Azad Kashmir, and Kashmir refugees 15%. In practice, Muhajirs were allowed to compete against both the Sind and Karachi quota, i.e., 17%.

10. See Shahid Javed Burki, "Pakistan's Economy Under Zia," in Shahid Javed Burki and Craig Baxter, *Pakistan Under the Military: Eleven Years of Zia-ul-Haq* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 92–96; and Kochanek, *Interest Groups and Development*, pp. 80–83.

11. Kennedy, *Bureaucracy in Pakistan*, pp. 122–25.

Combined, Bhutto's and Zia's policies served to erode Muhajir domination of Pakistan's civil bureaucracy and public sector business elite, while increasing the representation of Punjabis and Sindhis. Punjabis currently constitute an absolute majority in the federal bureaucracy, the Secretariat group, and public corporations. Muhajir representation has fallen correspondingly in each group, although Muhajirs are still disproportionately overrepresented relevant to their population or the terms of the federal quota. Conversely, the representation of Sindhis has increased in all three groups, but Sindhis remain disproportionately underrepresented in regard to both their population and the federal quota.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the civil bureaucratic and business elites, the military elite of Pakistan has never been subject to a comprehensively implemented quota. Since 1968 there has been an "informal" policy favoring the induction of Sindhi and Baloch into military service but it has not been implemented enthusiastically. In the absence of an effective quota, the military has been dominated by Pakistan's two traditional "martial races," the Punjabis and the Pathans. In the late 1980s, it was estimated that over 95% of the officers in the Pakistan military were either Punjabi (60–65%) or Pathan (30–35%). Muhajir representation in the senior military, which was significant at partition, has evaporated. In 1988, only one Muhajir army officer held a rank senior to brigadier and that was the armed force commander-in-chief, General Mirza Aslam Beg; all other high army officers were either Punjabis or Pathans.

Clearly, Sindhis have benefited from the consequences of governmental policy since 1971, with Sindhi representation roughly doubling in the civil and business elites of the state. Nevertheless, Sindhi nationalists were impatient with the pace of reform. G. M. Syed reconstituted the Sindh National Front into the Jiye Sindh Mahaz in 1972; he advocated maximum provincial autonomy, allowing the center only defense and foreign affairs. Other demands made by Syed included the readoption of Sindhi as the only official language of Sindh, an increase in the Sindhi share of the federal quota to 25%, and the expulsion of all non-Sindhis from lands granted them in Sindh during the Ayub Khan regime. After he was imprisoned by Bhutto in 1973, he called for Sindh's secession from Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

Despite such stridency, ethnic relations in Sindh were comparatively peaceful (particularly in comparison with Balochistan) during the Z. A.

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12. Muhajir nationalists often contend that statistics (note 4 above) overestimate the number of Muhajirs in government service, as Punjabi permanent residents of urban Sindh are also allowed to claim urban Sindh domicile. I suspect that such cases are few in number and are more than offset by Muhajir permanent residents in rural Sindh and the Punjab.

13. Anwar Syed, "Political Parties and the Nationality Question in Pakistan," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Fall 1988, p. 52.

Bhutto regime. Bhutto skillfully manipulated the imagery of his Sindhi origins) and deftly employed his position to dispense patronage to his followers. Such comparative calm was shattered by the military coup in 1977 and the eventual conviction and execution of Bhutto two years later. In its simplest terms, Sindhis interpreted the removal of Bhutto as usurpation of power by the Punjabi military and his execution as "judicial murder." Sindhi nationalism proliferated in three main directions after Bhutto's death. First, the "separatists," still led by the indefatigable G. M. Syed, advocated secession from the union and the formation of an independent Sindudesh. The "autonomists," including the Sindh Awami Tehrik of Rasul Baksh Palejo and the Sindhi-Baloch-Pakhtun Front of Mumtaz Bhutto, advocated significant devolution of authority to Sindh Province. The "gradualists," led by the mainstream PPP under the nominal control of Benazir Bhutto, argued that the rights of Sindhis could only be secured through an end to martial law and the restoration of the 1973 constitution. Despite such differences, on one point all could find common ground: the rule of Zia must end.

Such sentiments culminated in the disturbances led by the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in the summer of 1983. Leaders of the movement, including PPP stalwarts, had hoped that the disturbances would spread from their point of origin in rural Sindh to other parts of Pakistan, but due to well-coordinated repression by Zia's government, the movement never amounted to much outside of the province. Most of the thousands arrested as a consequence of the MRD disturbances were members of the PPP (72%), the Sindh Awami Tehrik (13%), and the Jiye Sindh Mahaz (10%).<sup>14</sup> After this, Zia appointed many Sindhis to his Majlis-i-Shura (advisory council), and he selected Muhammad Khan Junejo, a Sindhi, as prime minister following the lifting of martial law in 1985. Such attempts at cooptation proved only partially successful.

By contrast the politicization of the Muhajirs between 1971 and 1986 was slow and gradual. It was led by those most adversely affected by the decline in Muhajir fortunes, youths seeking employment. In 1979 Altaf Hussain, a student at Karachi University, founded the All-Pakistan Muhajir Students Organisation (APMSO) to counter other ethnic parties at the University and to compete with the Jamaat-i-Islami youth wing, the Jamiat Tulaba. The main demand of the APMSO was for revision of the federal quota in ways more favorable to the Muhajirs. It is important to note in this regard that Altaf Hussain's decision to form the APMSO was motivated in part by his failure to gain admission to the graduate pharmacy program at Karachi University owing to operation of the federal

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14. Tahir Amin, *Ethno-national Movements*, p. 198.

quota.<sup>15</sup> Following Zia's ban on student organizations in 1984, Hussain founded the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM), but the party remained small and its activities limited until the ethnic riots of 1985–86.

*The Disturbances of 1985–86 and the  
Sindhi-Muhajir Accord*

As mentioned above, the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a rapid increase in the immigrant population of Karachi. Most of these new immigrants, however, were not Muhajirs but rather war victims from Afghanistan or economic migrants from the NWFP or, to a lesser extent, Balochistan and Punjab. Many flooded the squatter settlements (*katchi abadis*) or the “worker’s colonies” such as Aligarh Colony in Orangi Township, or Lyari in Karachi’s unfashionable suburbs. In such neighborhoods, the new immigrants came into competition for scarce jobs and housing with the Muhajir underclass, most of whom were recent (post-1971) arrivals from Bangladesh, the so-called Biharis. Such an ethnic mix was highly flammable, and the spark that led to the conflagration was soon provided in the form of a traffic accident. In May 1985, a minivan recklessly driven by a Pathan—the Pathans control most of Karachi’s public transportation—struck and killed a Muhajir girl student. The first Pathan vs. Muhajir riot began; after the army was called in to restore order dozens were found to have been killed on both sides.

More bloody still were the November–December 1986 riots in Karachi and Hyderabad. Apparently, they started when the army decided to stage a raid on the headquarters of a heroin processing and distribution center in Sohrab Goth run by Pathans and Afghans. Shortly after the raid, which was largely unsuccessful, Pathan and Afghan thugs—allegedly with the blessing of Punjabi security forces—turned their ire on Muhajir residents of the nearby Aligarh Colony whom they blamed for informing army authorities of the illegal activities. In the course of the “Aligarh Colony massacre,” hundreds of Muhajirs were murdered and many Muhajir businesses and homes were destroyed. Pathan residents of Aligarh Colony were not harassed. Muhajirs struck back by attacking Pathan neighborhoods, the fighting spread to Hyderabad, and the army was again called in to restore order.

The communal disturbances of 1985–86 served as a catalyst for the growth in popularity of the MQM, and also greatly influenced the development of the party’s ideology. In early 1987, Altaf Hussain issued the MQM’s Charter of Resolutions (*Qarardad-i-Maqasid*), the foundation document of the party. The resolutions included the following points: (1)

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15. Personal interviews, Islamabad, January 1990.

Only "real" Sindhis (Muhajirs and Sindhis) should have the right to vote in Sindh; (2) business licenses and permits should not be given to those who do not have the franchise to vote; (3) "stranded Pakistanis" (Pakistanis living in Bangladesh—Biharis) should be allowed to settle and become citizens of Pakistan; (4) Afghans should be restricted to their official refugee camps in the NWFP and Balochistan and not be allowed to buy property or reside in Sindh; (5) local bus services should be taken over by the Karachi Municipal Corporation, and bus drivers must be literate before being given driver's licenses (directed against the Pathan domination of mass transportation); (6) non-Sindhis and non-Muhajirs should not be allowed to buy property in Sindh; (7) a fresh census should be held in Sindh Province and the Muhajir share of the federal quota should be revised upward to reflect the true population of the Muhajirs; (8) the basis for Sindhi domicile, for purposes of the federal quota, should be 20 years continuous residence in the province; and (9) police officers implicated in atrocities against Muhajirs should be tried before special tribunals (most such officers were Punjabis).<sup>16</sup>

Although not part of the original resolution, Hussain also introduced the idea that Muhajirs should be treated as a "fifth subnationality" along with the Punjabis, Pathans, Baloch, and Sindhis. The policy implications of this demand were not spelled out. On the basis of this platform, the MQM won pluralities in the local body elections for Karachi and Hyderabad, and an MQM mayor was elected in Karachi in November 1987. It is apparent that the MQM's charter expressed many of the long-standing grievances of Sindhi nationalists. This fact was recognized by both sets of actors,<sup>17</sup> and a cooperative arrangement of sorts was worked out between the MQM and various Sindhi nationalist parties during early 1988. To both the Sindhis and Muhajirs, "outsiders" were the common enemy and the primary villains were Punjabis and the Punjabi military.

The next shock to ethnic relations in Sindh was the probable assassination, by unknown party(s), of President Zia and several senior generals on August 17, 1988. A few months before his death, Zia had dissolved the National Assembly and had promised to hold general elections by November 1988. In accordance with the Pakistan Constitution, the chairman of the Senate, Ghulam Ishaq Khan (a Pathan), became president, and the most senior surviving general, Aslam Beg (a Muhajir), became com-

16. T. P. Wright, "Center-Periphery Relations," pp. 305-6; Anwar Syed, "Political Parties," p. 61; *Herald* (November 1989).

17. The Pakistan National Party's (PNP) charter of November 1987 is very similar to the MQM's Charter of Resolutions, particularly in regard to the threat of "outsiders." (Anwar Syed, "Political Parties and the Nationality Question," p. 60.)

mander-in-chief of the armed forces. Both Ishaq Khan and General Beg promised to hold elections as scheduled, a promise that was fulfilled.

In Sindh the election campaign developed into a four-way contest between the MQM, the PPP, Sindhi nationalists (loosely aligned under the banner of the Pakistan National Party—PNP), and the Jamaat-i-Islami, which had chosen to contest the election allied with the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (Islamic Democratic Alliance—IJI). As had been the case in 1970, Benazir Bhutto and the PPP were able to co-opt most of the support of Sindhi nationalists. Her successful strategy involved a combination of convincing many young Sindhis to compete under the banner of the PPP, the presentation of a party platform that was reminiscent of that advanced by the PNP, and the skillful use of the theme of her father's martyrdom. Similarly, the MQM was able to discredit the Jamaat-i-Islami candidates on the grounds of their close affiliation with General Zia's regime and by implication with the distrusted Punjabis.

The November 1988 general elections provided a clear victory in Sindh for the PPP and the MQM. The PPP won every National Assembly seat in rural Sindh (28), three of five seats in Hyderabad, and one of twelve seats in Karachi; the MQM won the rest (13). In the election for the 100-seat Provincial Assembly, a similar pattern emerged whereby the PPP dominated the rural areas of Sindh, winning 70 seats, while the MQM won 24. Two points are clear regarding the 1988 election in the province. First, voting was along ethnic lines—the PPP derived its support from Sindhis, the MQM from Muhajirs; second, the MQM had proven its wide appeal. In less than four years, the MQM had become Pakistan's third largest party.

The PPP fared much poorer in Pakistan's other provinces, and although it won by a plurality overall it was forced to seek partners to form a coalition government. The MQM was willing to join the PPP government but, in return, Altaf Hussain insisted on a formal agreement. The result was a 59-point MQM-PPP accord, also known as the Karachi Declaration, signed on December 2, 1988. The accord covered most of the points raised by the MQM's Charter of Resolutions. It is important to note that in the document specific promises were made pertaining to: (a) repatriation of "stranded Pakistanis" (Biharis) to Pakistan; (b) dissolution of all Placement Bureaus designed to recruit candidates to civil bureaucratic positions; (c) strict enforcement of the federal and provincial quotas for recruitment to posts in the civil bureaucracy and in educational institutions; (d) revision of the federal quota, replacing the Rural Sindh/Urban Sindh designation with Muhajir and Sindhi; and (e) revision of the federal

quota, following the prospective 1991 census, to reflect the proportional populations of Pakistan's five ethnic communities.<sup>18</sup>

*Breakdown of the Accord and Re-establishment of the  
Punjabi-Muhajir Entente*

The MQM-PPP accord proved short-lived, victim of the unwillingness or inability of Benazir and the PPP to fulfill their part of the bargain. Indeed upon assuming office, the PPP instituted policies that were interpreted by the Muhajir leadership as pro-Sindhi and/or anti-Muhajir. In January 1989, for instance, Prime Minister Bhutto established a federal Placement Bureau staffed by those personally loyal to her and the PPP. Its duties included recruitment for the bureaucracy and public corporations, bypassing the normal procedures of the Federal Public Service Commission. At least three-fourths of the hundreds of candidates selected by the Bureau were Sindhis, virtually all members of the PPP.<sup>19</sup> Benazir's government also victimized several prominent senior Muhajir civil servants by making them Officers on Special Duty (OSD), thus consigning them to inactivity with no official duties while keeping them on the payroll.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, she appointed Sindhis to many prominent positions within the government, some of whom were known for their pro-Sindhi and anti-Muhajir views. For instance, Minister of Education G. M. Shah (1988–89) is the editor of *Sind Quarterly*, long-known for its extreme Sindhi nationalist and anti-Muhajir editorial policy. But the most publicized evidence of the PPP's renunciation of its promises was Benazir's withdrawal of support in the spring of 1989 for a plan to repatriate the Biharis, following demonstrations by the Sindh National Alliance and the Jiye Sindh Mahaz.

Given such "provocations," the MQM decided in October 1989 to abrogate the MQM-PPP accord by withdrawing from the coalition and supporting the IJI-led attempt to unseat Benazir through a no-confidence motion. In exchange for its support, the MQM elicited a set of promises from the IJI—the so-called MQM-IJI accord. Like its predecessor, the new accord reiterated the MQM's basic positions as stated in the Charter of Resolutions, except for those clauses that would have prohibited "outsiders" from owning property or voting in the province since such clauses were clearly antithetical to Punjabi interests. In regard to the Biharis, the accord states: "all stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh shall be issued

18. Personal interviews, Karachi, January 1990, December 1988; also, *Herald*, November 1989, pp. 50–51.

19. Establishment Division, files and personal interviews, Islamabad, January 1990.

20. Comparing the list of OSDs found in the *Globe*, January 1990, against the *Gradation List of the Secretariat Group, 1989*, demonstrates that over 80% of the OSDs are Punjabis, the rest Muhajirs. No Sindhi official, as of January 1990, had been made an OSD.

Pakistani passports, and in the meantime arrangements shall be made to repatriate them to Pakistan immediately."<sup>21</sup> The no-confidence motion failed but the vote was close. Understandably, PPP loyalists interpreted the MQM's action as a betrayal of trust, and relations between Sindhis and Muhajirs deteriorated rapidly. Unfortunately, the protagonists in the ensuing struggle were both well organized and well armed.

Particularly prominent in the 1990 disturbances were the People's Student Federation (PSF), which was the student wing of the PPP, and the APMISO. In February 1990 hundreds were killed as heavily armed student groups rampaged in Karachi and Hyderabad. Atrocities were committed by both sides and reports of kidnapping and torture of student leaders were widespread. Apparently for failing to keep order, Bhutto dismissed Sindh's chief minister and its inspector-general of police in March, but the violence continued unabated culminating in the May 26 incident in Hyderabad mentioned at the beginning of this article. Subsequently, the perception grew that the PPP-led provincial administration in Sindh had become a partisan participant in the struggle. This perception was strengthened when Begum Nusrat Bhutto, senior federal minister and the mother of Benazir, made several inflammatory statements following the May 26 incident.<sup>22</sup> In June more than 15,000 troops were deployed to Karachi.

Prime Minister Bhutto's inability or unwillingness to stem communal violence in Sindh was undoubtedly a major contributory factor in President Ghulam Ishaq Khan's decision to dismiss her government in August 1990 and call for elections in October. The dismissal may also have been linked to the military's exasperation with the PPP-led Sindh provincial administration's decision not to allow summary military courts to be established in the province. In any case, Ishaq Khan replaced Benazir with a caretaker prime minister, Ghulam Mustapha Jatoi, and appointed Jam Sadiq Ali as chief minister of Sindh. Both Jatoi and Jam Sadiq are Sindhis and both had been high-ranking members of the PPP prior to the much-publicized falling out with the party leadership.

Despite considerable campaign violence in Sindh Province, national elections were held on October 24. The results in Sindh largely mirrored ethnic sentiment—the MQM dominated urban areas and the PPP, contesting as the Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA) prevailed in rural areas.<sup>23</sup> But overall, the election proved a disaster for the PPP. It was swept

21. *Herald*, November 1989, pp. 50–51.

22. *Arab News*, 30 May, 1 June 1990.

23. In the National Assembly polls in Sindh in 1988, the MQM won 13 seats (all urban constituencies) and 15 seats (14 urban) in 1990. The PPP won 31 seats (5 urban) in 1988 and 24 seats (4 urban) in 1990. In the Provincial Assembly election, the MQM won 24 seats (all



out of power at the center and was routed in the Punjab, NWFP, and Balochistan provincial polls. Although the party won a plurality of seats in the Sindh Provincial Assembly, it was denied government control when a coalition of MQM, independent, and IJI MPAs was cobbled together under the leadership of Jam Sadiq Ali. The overwhelming victory of the IJI can be attributed in part to the maintenance of the IJI-MQM electoral alliance. The parties had mutually agreed not to stand more than one candidate (IJI or MQM) per seat, thus avoiding a split in the anti-PPP vote. This factor and similar arrangements entered into with other parties helped turn a modest IJI plurality in the popular vote into a landslide victory.<sup>24</sup>

Since the election, Jam Sadiq's coalition has attempted to keep a tight lid on communal violence in the province through combined elements of tight security and alleged harassment of PPP activists. Bhutto and other PPP leaders have charged repeatedly that the provincial administration has tilted in favor of Muhajir interests by disproportionately targeting members of the PSF for arrest. There is considerable evidence to support this assertion, for example, the roundup of 650 PSF and pro-PPP activists after the assassination of Justice Nabi Sher Junejo on June 19, 1991.<sup>25</sup> Although such policies at the provincial level may prove successful in the short term, the long-term consequence of repression of the PPP and perforce Sindhi sentiments in the province can only prove disastrous.

At the federal level, the accord between the IJI and MQM may prove short-lived. The MQM's two main demands, to repatriate the Biharis and revise the quota policy for recruitment to the bureaucracy, have not been met by the government and do not seem to be on the policy agenda. Nawaz Sharif may gain support from the Muhajir community through his much-publicized intentions to privatize the economy. However, it is noteworthy that the only corporation actually denationalized as of July 1991, the Muslim Commercial Bank, was sold to the Mansha National Group

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urban) in 1988 and 28 seats (26 urban) in 1990. The PPP won 70 seats (15 urban) in 1988 and 46 seats (13 urban) in 1990. Adapted from *Elections '90 Special, Herald*, November–December, 1990.

24. At the national level in 1988, the PPP attracted 38.7% of the vote and received 47.5% of the seats; in 1990, it got 36.65% of the vote but only 22.7% of the seats. Conversely, in 1988, the IJI attracted 30.6% of the popular vote and gained 27.8% of the seats; in 1990, it got 37.3% of the vote but 52.8% of the seats. In other words, the IJI gained one seat for every 75 thousand votes cast for it in 1990, while the PPP gained one seat for every 172 thousand votes cast for it. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–13. Such discrepancies encourage the perception that the 1990 elections were rigged. For a discussion, see Lawrence Lifschultz and Rabia Ali, "Election '90: Fair or Foul?" *Newsline*, November 1990, pp. 34–44.

25. *Arab News*, June 19, 20, 1991. Junejo was the presiding judge in the "terrorism" trial of Asif Ali Zardari, husband of Benazir Bhutto.

owned by Punjabi (Chinioti) businessmen, despite a higher bid by its original Muhajir ownership, the Adamjees.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusions

Although a discussion of long-term prospects for Sindh's troubled communal situation is speculative, it seems likely that without a significant restructuring of Pakistan's federal system communal violence will remain endemic in the province. At the heart of Pakistan's ethnic dilemma are perceptions of Punjabi domination. Punjabis constitute around 60% of the population of the nation, and Punjabis are becoming increasingly predominant in each of Pakistan's major national elite communities. Pakistan's policies of ethnic preference exacerbate such developments. Without undertaking significant structural reforms, Pakistan can pursue three interrelated policies toward ethnoregional representation. First, it can continue its present policy of applying the principle of proportional ethnic representation to increasingly wider spheres of activity. The main problem with such a policy, as we have seen, is that proportionality ensures Punjabi domination. A second policy, more difficult to implement, would restrict the scope of the quota by expanding the importance of the principle of merit in recruitment decisions. Unfortunately, such a policy would result in the disproportionate representation of Muhajirs and the continued majority domination of Punjabis as both communities are likely to outperform the other ethnoregional groupings within the state. This outcome, of course, would be anathema to Sindhi interests. A third policy, really a temporary measure, is the cooptation of ethnoregional leadership. This may work some of the time but certainly not all of the time, as the breakdown of the MQM-PPP accord demonstrated.

A more radical approach to the problems of ethnoregionalism would be the structural reform of Pakistan's federal system. Zia's government proposed two extensive reforms but neither was implemented. The first, suggested by the Ansari Commission, recommended that the federal system be abolished and replaced with one in which the current 21 administrative divisions would serve as newly constituted provinces. The rationale was that such a restructuring would dilute the perceived domination of the Punjab and consequently tame interprovincial and ethnoregional politics.<sup>27</sup> Along the same lines, in early 1988 the government was working on the formulation of a policy that would have decentralized Pakistan into eight administrative units. Punjab would have been carved into three units

26. *Newsline*, March 1991, pp. 124-25.

27. Government of Pakistan, *Ansari Commission Report on Form of Government* (Islamabad: Printing Corporation of Pakistan Press, 1983), pp. 57-64.

(two Punjabi and one Siraiki dominant) and Sindh into two (one Muhajir and one Sindhi dominant). There is some evidence that Zia contemplated introducing this measure or a similar one after he dissolved the National Assembly in May 1988. Finally, there is considerable speculation that the MQM's demand for consideration of Muhajirs as a fifth subnationality masks its real interest in separating urban Sindh from rural Sindh by forming a fifth province consisting of Karachi and Hyderabad.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, any radical restructuring of the federal system would meet with considerable resistance within Pakistan, and perhaps would be impossible to implement in any case. Nevertheless, I reluctantly conclude that in the absence of bold policies designed to reorganize the political and administrative system, a long period of ethnic turbulence is in store for Pakistan.

28. Personal interviews, Islamabad, December 1987 and January 1990.