



The New Provinces Debate in Pakistan

An analysis of print and online opinion coverage,
April 2025 – August 2026. Based on 112 opinion
articles across 14 Pakistani newspapers.

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01

Overview and method

The dataset

- 112 opinion pieces, editorials and columns on creating new provinces or equivalent administrative units in Pakistan.
- 14 Pakistani newspapers and news portals, in Urdu and English.
- Published between April 2025 and August 2026.
- Each article pre-classified as either “Support” or “Oppose”.

What we measured

The balance of opinion

Classified stance data, publication dates and newspaper of origin, used to quantify how much support versus opposition exists in the sampled commentary.

The substance of the argument

The framing, language and recurring keywords of each article title and its editorial context, used to build out the themes both camps rely on.

A note on the use of AI

Where AI was used

AI-assisted text analysis was used to read 112 article titles and their editorial context across two languages, to group recurring framings into themes, and to draft the descriptive summaries in sections 03 and 04.

Where it was not

Every stance label, count and percentage comes from the classified source dataset, not from a model. Gallup Pakistan researchers reviewed the themes and the wording. No quotation, headline or figure in this report is AI-generated.

“Stance counts reflect the balance of published opinion coverage in this dataset, not a representative opinion poll of the Pakistani public.”

— A caveat on interpretation

02

How much support is there?

61.6%

of the 112 sampled opinion articles oppose creating new provinces. Opposition outweighs support by a clear margin — for roughly every three articles against, fewer than two are in favour.

Overall stance split

STANCE	ARTICLE COUNT	SHARE
 Oppose	69	61.6%
 Support	43	38.4%
Total	112	100%

Overall stance distribution across all 112 articles.

Two waves of debate

34

Wave 1 · Aug–Dec 2025

21 oppose, 13 support. The debate opens with opposition already in the majority, at about 62%.

5

Quiet interval · Jan–Feb 2026

3 oppose, 2 support. An even split, and a topic that briefly faded from the opinion pages.

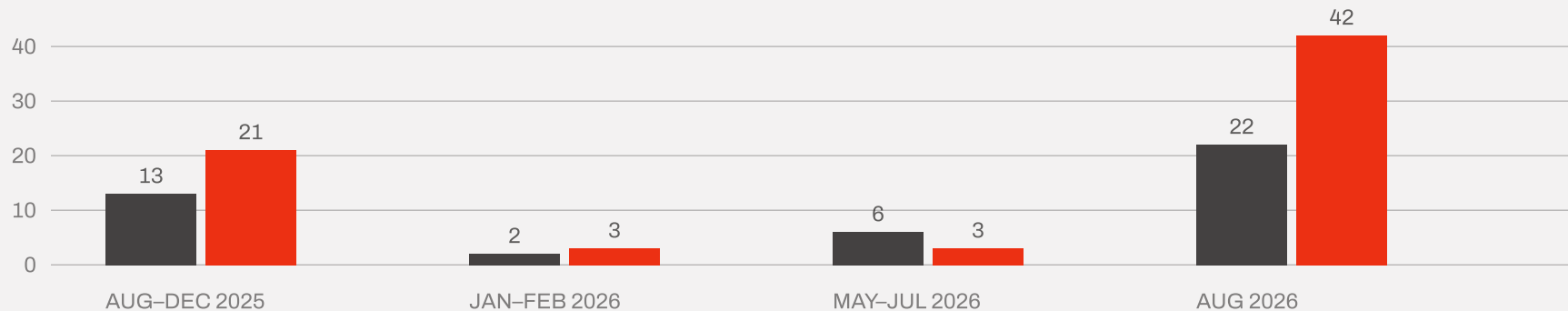
73

Wave 2 · May–Aug 2026

Nearly two-thirds of the entire dataset, dominated by a single month.

Monthly volume of opinion articles by stance, in chronological order.

Support and opposition over time



■ Support ■ Oppose March–April 2026 and April–July 2025 carry no articles in the dataset

57%

of the full dataset falls in August 2026 alone — 64 articles, 42 opposing and 22 supporting. A spike this concentrated indicates a concrete triggering event that pushed the debate to the top of the opinion agenda and hardened opposition.

The pattern across both waves

- Opposition is the plurality or majority position in nearly every month sampled.
- June 2026 — 4 support against 1 oppose — is the only month where support clearly leads.
- The second wave did not soften the balance: it hardened it.

Stance by newspaper · highest volume

NEWSPAPER	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	TOTAL	LEAN
Jang	13	22	35	Oppose
Daily Times	8	5	13	Support
Express	5	6	11	Oppose (slight)
Daily Pakistan	6	4	10	Support
NawaiWaqf	3	7	10	Oppose
Dawn	1	6	7	Oppose
The News	2	2	4	Even

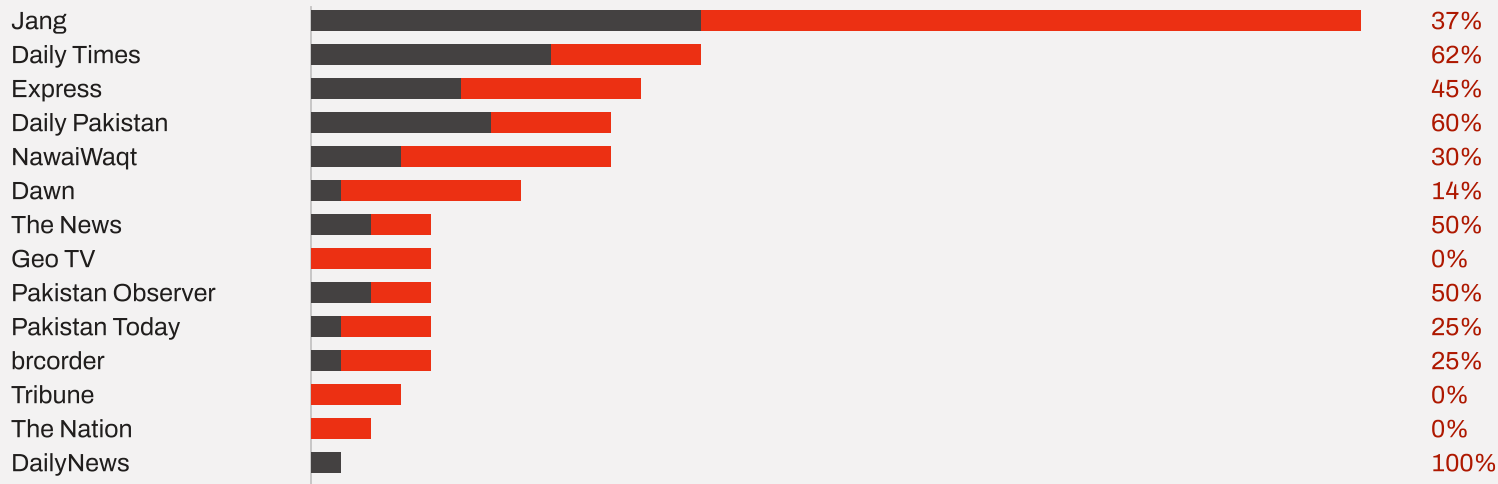
Stance by newspaper · remainder

NEWSPAPER	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	TOTAL	LEAN
Geo TV	0	4	4	Oppose
Pakistan Observer	2	2	4	Even
Pakistan Today	1	3	4	Oppose
brcorder	1	3	4	Oppose
Tribune	0	3	3	Oppose
The Nation	0	2	2	Oppose
DailyNews	1	0	1	Support

What the outlet split shows

- Jang is by far the most prolific publisher on this topic — 35 articles, 31% of the dataset — and leans opposed roughly 2:1.
- Daily Times and Daily Pakistan are the only major outlets where supportive commentary outweighs opposition.
- English-language outlets historically associated with a governance-reform editorial line — Dawn, Tribune, The Nation, Geo TV — are overwhelmingly opposed, publishing very little supportive commentary.

Volume and stance by newspaper



■ Support ■ Oppose Right-hand figure: share of that outlet's articles in support

Is the Urdu press more supportive?

LANGUAGE OF OUTLET	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	TOTAL	SUPPORT SHARE
Urdu-language outlets (5)	27	43	70	38.6%
English-language outlets (9)	16	26	42	38.1%
— of which the governance-reform press (4)	2	14	16	12.5%

Urdu: Jang, Express, Daily Pakistan, NawaiWaqf, Geo TV. English: Daily Times, Dawn, The News, Pakistan Observer, Pakistan Today, brcorder, Tribune, The Nation, DailyNews. “Governance-reform press” groups Dawn, Tribune, The Nation and brcorder, per section 2.3 of the report.

Language is not the fault line

- In aggregate, the Urdu and English press are almost indistinguishable — 38.6% and 38.1% of articles in support.
- The variation is at outlet level, not language level: Daily Times runs 62% supportive, NawaiWaqf 30%, both writing for large domestic readerships.
- The one sharp split is within the English press: Dawn, Tribune, The Nation and brcorder together publish 2 supportive articles against 14 opposed.
- Urdu mass-circulation dailies are therefore not the pro-province camp they are sometimes assumed to be; the strongest opposition and the strongest support both sit in Urdu.

03

Arguments in support

The case for · themes 1–3

1 · Administrative efficiency

The most common pro-creation argument: four provinces are too large and too centralised to govern well. Columns propose smaller units to “decentralise to stabilise” — including a formula for 32 units and defined “Economic Administrative Regions”.

2 · Inevitability

A cluster of pieces call new provinces “inevitable” (ناگزیر) after decades of population growth, urbanisation and administrative strain — the country has structurally outgrown its four-province map.

3 · Linguistic representation

Units organised along linguistic lines would strengthen national unity rather than weaken it, by giving under-represented linguistic communities a formal administrative voice.

The case for · themes 4–6

4 · Political legitimacy

Supportive pieces invoke the demand's pedigree, citing historical leaders and current parties — notably the MQM and PPP — to frame it as a mainstream position rather than a fringe proposal.

5 · “The old system has collapsed”

An urgent strand, concentrated in the August 2026 spike: the existing system has already broken down — “Why did the system collapse?”, “This system had to fall” — making new units a corrective, not a discretionary reform.

6 · International comparison

A smaller set make the case by comparison, asking whether Pakistan should create more provinces and drawing lessons from how other countries structure sub-national units.

“Pakistan has outgrown four provinces.”

— the representative framing of the support camp, recurring across Urdu and English titles in the dataset

04

Arguments in opposition

“Fix governance, not the map”

The dominant opposition argument by a wide margin: Pakistan's problem is governance quality and the absence of functioning local government, not the number or size of provinces.

- Recurring titles frame it as a binary — “new provinces or local governments?”, “not new provinces, but a new system”, “not the map, change the system”.
- The implication: redrawing boundaries without reforming how power is exercised reproduces the same problems at smaller scale.

The case against · themes 2–5

2 · The “One Unit” precedent

Columns invoke the One Unit scheme of the 1950s–70s — widely blamed for regional resentment and the loss of East Pakistan — to warn that redrawing maps has been associated with fragmentation, not unity.

4 · Elite capture and motive

Proposals are read as a vehicle for a few political families to entrench “constitutional dictatorship” over new units, or as rhetoric benefiting lawyers and elites rather than citizens.

3 · Constitutional process

The debate is being conducted outside proper process: legislation passed without consulting the law minister, a proposed 28th Amendment, and the argument that Pakistan “needs its Constitution” respected as written.

5 · Sindh and Karachi's status

A geographically specific theme: why should Karachi be “handed to the federation”? A separate Karachi province is treated as a threat to Sindh's territorial and political integrity.

The case against · themes 6–8

6 · Cost and bureaucracy

New provinces mean new bureaucracies, new civil services and new costs — “new provinces, new rates” — which Pakistan cannot afford while existing provincial governments are under fiscal strain.

7 · A governance crisis, not a provinces crisis

Especially visible in Dawn, Tribune, The Nation and brcorder: titles ask whether the country needs “more provinces or a democratic reset”, arguing for structural reform of the political economy over boundary changes.

8 · Historical and symbolic caution

A smaller number invoke historical memory — Quaid-e-Azam's questions to Pakistan's rulers, and the colonial-era logic of “divide and rule” — to caution that division echoes older patterns of fragmentation.

“New provinces, old governance?”

— the representative framing of the opposition camp, recurring across titles in the dataset

05

Summary and conclusion

The two camps compared

DIMENSION	SUPPORT CAMP	OPPOSITION CAMP
Core diagnosis	Provinces are too large and centralised; the system has collapsed	The problem is governance quality and missing local government, not province size
Preferred fix	New provinces or administrative units, possibly along linguistic lines	Empower local government; implement the Constitution as written
Historical reference	A long-standing cross-party demand (MQM, PPP, past leaders)	The One Unit era (1955–70) and its role in fragmentation
Key risk cited	Continued stagnation if the status quo persists	Elite capture, added cost, threat to Sindh, Karachi and federal unity
Representative framing	“Pakistan has outgrown four provinces”	“New provinces, old governance?”

Conclusion

- Opposition clearly outweighs support — 61.6% against 38.4% — and the imbalance holds in almost every month and across most newspapers.
- Coverage is event-driven rather than constant: two bursts, the second of which alone makes up over half the dataset.
- Supporters argue from administrative efficiency, representation, and an unworkable four-province structure.
- Opponents converge overwhelmingly on one counter-argument — governance and devolution, not the number of provinces.

06

Appendix · sources

Sources · all 14 outlets

OUTLET	LANGUAGE	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	TOTAL	SUPPORT SHARE
Jang	Urdu	13	22	35	37%
Daily Times	English	8	5	13	62%
Express	Urdu	5	6	11	45%
Daily Pakistan	Urdu	6	4	10	60%
NawaiWaqf	Urdu	3	7	10	30%
Dawn	English	1	6	7	14%
The News, Geo TV, Observer, Today, brcorder	Mixed	6	14	20	30%
Tribune, The Nation, DailyNews	English	1	5	6	17%

112 articles. One dominant counter-argument.

Findings reflect the balance of published opinion coverage between April 2025 and August 2026 — not a representative opinion poll of the Pakistani public.



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This report analyses published opinion coverage and is not a survey. AI-assisted text analysis was used for classification and thematic grouping, as set out in section 01; all figures derive from the classified source dataset.