

Seminar Report

National Census 2023 and its impact on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Date: August 8, 2023

Location: Qazi Hussain Ahmed Auditorium, IRS Peshawar

Experts and politicians express concern over the results of census 2023

Addressing a seminar organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) Peshawar on "National Census 2023 and its impact on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa", experts and leaders of various political parties have expressed concern by saying that the population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been shown to be less than the actual population in the census 2023, which will not only affect the representation of the province in the form of a reduction in the seats of the province in the National Assembly, but the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's share in the distribution of resources based on population in the NFC award will also have to be borne in the form of a loss of Rs.2 trillion.

IRS Chairman Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Khalil, former senior provincial minister of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Inayatullah Khan, former member of provincial assembly of Pakistan People's Party Ahmed Khan Kundi, former member of provincial assembly of Awami National Party Salahuddin, Statistical expert Javed Khalil and Prof. Dr. Fazl ur Rehman Qureshi spoke at the seminar.

The speakers said that the new census will have a negative impact on KP as the population growth of the province has been shown to be lower than the average population growth of the country while some districts have recorded a decrease in population. They said that the Council of common Interests (CCI) is incomplete and the caretaker government does not have the power to approve the census results. The speakers felt that the caretaker governments of KP and Punjab had violated their mandate and constitution by approving the census results while the CCI in the present composition had no right to approve the results. They urged the political forces raise your voice for the rights of the province.

Inayatullah Khan said that there is anxiety among the people of the province over the results of the census. Millions of people belonging to KP are living abroad and the rules should be relaxed to enumerate them. The JI leader said that in several areas of the province, the number of families has decreased instead of increasing, which is incomprehensible and worrisome. He said that the delimitation of the constituencies of the National Assembly will be done on the basis of population, due to which there is a serious fear of reduction in the seats of KP, especially the merged tribal districts. He added that 82 percent of the National Finance Commission (NFC) shares are distributed on the basis of population and the alleged lapses in the recent census will hurt KP a lot.

Ahmad Khan Kundi said that the census is very important for policy making and planning as most of the resources are distributed on the basis of population. The PPP leader said that ignoring the results of the recent census would be tantamount to criminal negligence. He said questions were being raised on the digital census as more families than individuals were recorded in KP. He said that he will raise this long-standing problem of the province on every platform, regardless of party affiliation. Aham Kundi said that the tragedy of East Pakistan also happened as a result of imbalance in population and resources, but unfortunately, we have not learned from the past.

Salahuddin Khan Masud said that injustice has been happening to KP and this process continues till date. He said that the province is not being given its constitutional rights and ANP will not remain silent on this injustice. This important issue will be raised strongly in the meetings of the working committee and the provincial council.

Speaking at the seminar, an expert on provincial rights Javed Khalil said that it is surprising that even in the 70s, tribal districts had six seats in the National Assembly and now six seats have been allocated for them in 2023 as usual which is unbelievable. He said that on the one hand, developing countries like India, Malaysia and Korea also give special importance to census and distribution of resources on the basis of population, but unfortunately, here in Pakistan it is done behind closed doors in such meetings whose constitution is doubtful. He said that the interim provincial governments do not have the mandate to decide on this important issue related to the fate of the people of the provinces. He said that the seats of Balochistan have been increased

from seven to seventeen since the 70s until now, while the seats of tribal districts have been decreased from twelve to just six, which is open injustice to Pakhtuns.

Dr. Iqbal Khalil said that KP has shown the lowest population growth rate. He said that the difference between the National Assembly seats in KP and Sindh is only one. He said that in the same way, one less seat will be made for women from the province. Six National Assembly seats taken from KP will be given to Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. Each province will get two seats. This is not acceptable to KP and there is a need to raise a united voice against it. He said that IRS is Peshawar based think tank in the province which has been highlighting the problems of the province and the entire region for the past several years. These activities will be expanded in the near future.

Recommendation:

Based on the concerns and insights discussed during the seminar on the impact of the 2023 census on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), it is recommended that a series of actions be taken to address the issues raised by experts and political leaders:

Independent Review of Census Results: Considering the doubts raised about the accuracy of the census results and their potential negative impact on KP, it is imperative to initiate an independent review of the census data. This review should involve statisticians, demographers, and relevant experts to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the population figures.

Engagement with Council of Common Interests (CCI): Given the assertion that at the present CCI lacks the authority to approve census results, it is recommended that the CCI more consider to readdress the approval of Census results and reconsider the issue in the next meeting.

Inclusion of Overseas Population: There is a need to account for the population of KP residents living abroad. Relaxing the rules for enumerating overseas citizens could help capture a more accurate representation of the province's population.

Transparent Delimitation Process: To address concerns about potential seat allocation in the National Assembly, it is advised to establish a transparent delimitation process that considers accurate population figures. The involvement of independent electoral commissions and experts can ensure fair representation for all regions.

Provincial Representation in the National Assembly: The federal government has already announced that the present province wise allocation of seats in the national assembly shall be preserved in the election 2023. This announcement is welcomed and head to be implemented.

Resource Distribution Mechanism: Recognizing the impact of population figures on resource distribution through the National Finance Commission (NFC) award, it is recommended to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the allocation formula. The goal should be to ensure that KP receives a fair share of resources based on its actual population and needs.

Comprehensive Awareness Campaign: To build public awareness and support for the issues raised during the seminar, a comprehensive awareness campaign should be launched. This campaign could involve social media, public discussions, and community engagement initiatives to mobilize support for the province's rights.

Collaboration Across Political Parties: It is essential for the leadership of the political parties of KP province of their affiliations, to come together and collectively raise their voices for the rights of KP. Political leaders can play a pivotal role in advocating for fair representation, resource distribution, and the integrity of the census process.

Continued Engagement with Think Tanks: Recognizing the valuable role of think tanks like the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) in highlighting regional issues, it is recommended to continue engaging with such institutions. This collaboration can lead to well-informed policy recommendations and a better understanding of the challenges faced by KP.

Long-Term Planning for Census: To prevent future discrepancies and controversies, it is advisable to develop a long-term strategy for conducting future censuses. This strategy should include comprehensive planning, training of enumerators, technology upgrades, and a focus on transparency and to setup an independent Census Commission.

Constitutional Reforms: If it is found that the existing constitutional framework lacks clarity in terms of census approval and resource distribution, it might be necessary to consider constitutional reforms to address these issues and prevent similar challenges in the future.

In conclusion, the concerns raised during the seminar regarding the 2023 census and its impact on KP's representation and resource allocation are crucial and warrant immediate attention. By

taking these recommendations into consideration, stakeholders can work together to ensure a fair and accurate representation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's population and protect its rights within the national framework.