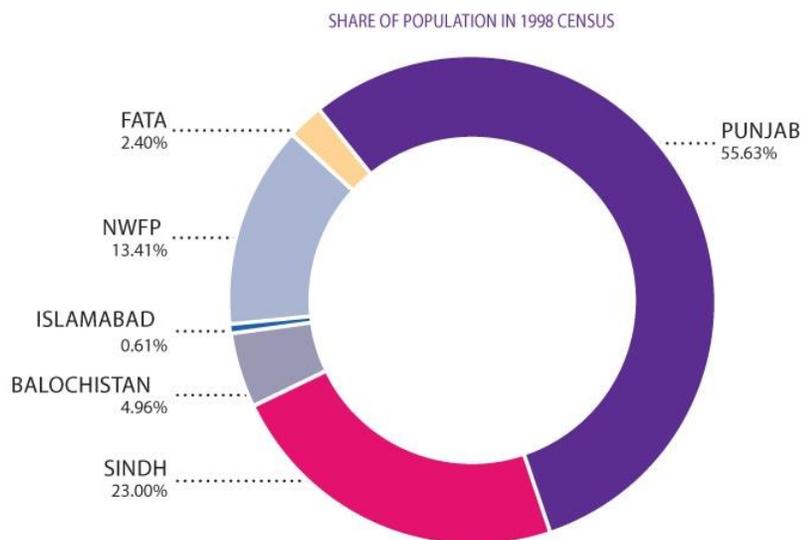


Who's afraid of the census?

Mansoor Raza
30 January 2017

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The signs are ominous: Sindh, which till very recently has been euphoric over the census, now fears that it may not be able to count all its citizens in time.



Source: 1998 Census Report of Pakistan Population Census Organisation, 2001

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[Mansoor Raza](#) d Jan 30, 2017 01:05pm

The signs are ominous: Sindh, which till very recently has been euphoric over the census, now fears that it may not be able to count all its citizens in time.

The chief minister was recently informed that more than 30 per cent of the province's population is without computerised national identity cards (CNICs).

With less than two months left to the scheduled date of the census, this spells doom for Sindh: its expected gains from an anticipated rise in population numbers is now at stake.

The other end of the spectrum is absolute denunciation and ire: in Balochistan, Mir Hasil Bizenjo, the chief of the National Party and the incumbent federal minister for ports and shipping, argued last December that the census should be put off in Balochistan and KP till "4 million Afghan refugees" return to Afghanistan and all the Baloch who have gone into exile return, else the Baloch population will be under-reported.

Clearly, emotions are running high and there are still qualms about how the entire exercise of counting heads and homes will pan out.

The resistance to holding a census is indicated by the fact that it took the Supreme Court to push the government into ensuring that it is finally carried out.

Population counts ought to happen every 10 years. The scheduled date of the census as announced by the PM's office and ratified by the Council of Common Interests is March 15, 2007.

As such, while the necessity of holding a population and housing census seems uncontested, holding it to all stakeholders' convenience has proven to be almost always impossible.

Were any provinces to pull out now on any pretext, the entire exercise would be rendered meaningless as the numbers would be incomplete and fraught with inaccuracies.

For scholars, planners and decision-makers of the country, the population census holds the key to explaining what has changed in the country since 1998 — when the census was held last — and how much has changed.

Instead of relying on estimates and guesstimates, the results of the census will show urbanisation trends, inter-provincial and intra-provincial migration, the gender configuration, the (un)employed population and educational attainment.

Voices of dissent are once again being raised about a constitutional requirement. Once again, an exercise that ought to have been conducted nine years ago hangs in the balance. The question remains...

There will be some direct indicators about health and poverty but also some indirect ones that will help paint a larger, more revealing picture. There will be statistics about homes built and the homeless, of lighting and potable water, the number of transgender, the physically challenged and above all, how many mouths to feed in the country.

From a citizens' perspective, a census is always a win-win. Which begs the question: who really is afraid of the census?

Punjab

The fears are quite palpable in the corridors of power in Punjab: its populationpcage share might well drop if the contested figures posted after the 2011 housing census are taken into account (see data on Page 2).

The pitfall, however, is that the 2011 housing census has already drawn criticism from various quarters for massive inaccuracies.

The new population count may well result in the reduction of Punjab's seats in the National Assembly, transferring them to another federating unit. The census may also have an impact on jobs.

Population has of course been Punjab's claim to the lion's share of power and resources in the country. With the province witnessing enormous social and economic changes over the past 18 years, its population growth rate has consequently slowed down.

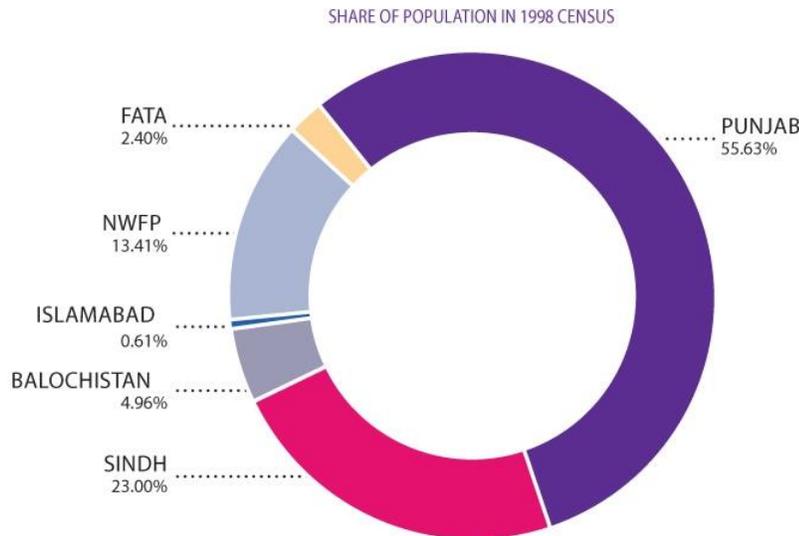
In the previous census, a slower per annum growth rate was recorded in Punjab (2.64pc) than in Sindh (2.80pc).

Were the trend to continue 19 years later, it will have a very direct impact on Punjab: the new population count may well result in the reduction of Punjab's seats in the National Assembly, transferring them to another federating unit.

Out of the 272 general seats, Punjab currently has 148 seats or 54.4pc. Sindh is next with 61 seats (22.4pc), followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 35 (12.9pc) and then by Balochistan with 14(5.1pc).

There are 12 seats (4.4pc) currently representing the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) while the federal capital has two general seats or 0.7pc representation.

Any decrease in Punjab's seats will result in one or more of the others benefitting.



Source: 1998 Census Report of Pakistan Population Census Organisation, 2001

The census may also have an impact on quotas in jobs and the distribution of the federal divisible pool (FDP) funds through the National Finance Commission (NFC).

Already, the federal government is seeking a sixpc cut in the size of the FDP.

If this proposal goes through, an additional 250 billion rupees will be transferred to the centre at the cost of the provincial share.

With stiff resistance from Sindh and Balochistan, any hopes of a new NFC award being agreed upon before the national budget for 2017-18 remain slim.

Punjab is reported to have reservations but would happily accept the proposal of following the existing 9th NFC Award formula — this would ensure that newer population realities are not accurately reflected in the new NFC award.

Are the power-brokers of Punjab apprehensive of the change coming with the census? Yes.

But an equally pertinent question is: are the Sharif brothers afraid of the census?

The answer to that question might also be yes.

Nobody wants to disturb their power base a few months before the elections.

Punjab's elite

Power is derived from land in Punjab but land is no longer available as large landholdings.

According to the Agricultural Census, 2010 which was carried out by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), only 20pc of private landholdings in the country were above 100 acres.

In Punjab, only 9pc of private landholdings were above 100 acres.

But it isn't just land that is weakening the hold of the Punjabi landlord.

The road network being built in the province by the Sharifs has dented traditional social hierarchies and connected many in the rural sector to nearby cities and commercial centres.

This, in turn, has resulted in those people carrying urban values back to the village and impacting others there.

The rise in education numbers over the past 18 years as well as the slower population growth are both results of proliferating urban attitudes.

With Lahore's share of the urban population of Punjab going down even further, questions may validly be raised about the disproportionate resources allocated to the provincial capital.

Simultaneously, the number of urban centres, their size and their sprawl has also increased in Punjab.

Smaller centres such as Gujranwala have now seen unprecedented growth and investment.

As reported in the 1981 census, Pakistan's urban sprawl was 28.3pc (total reported population 84.25 million) whereas in 1998, the figure rose to 32.5pc (total reported population 132.35 million). This is expected to climb even further in 2017.

It is also important to note that the urban growth rate was much higher than the rural growth rate in both 1981 and 1998.

The urban growth rate in 1981 was 4.38pc and the rural was 2.58pc; the corresponding numbers for 1998 are 3.5pc and 2.2pc respectively. In the 1998 census, Sindh appeared to be the most urbanised province (48.9pc) but Punjab whose urban population is pegged at 31.3pc in the same census has the largest number of urban dwellers.

ESTIMATED POPULATION FROM 2011 HOUSING CENSUS

Province/Area	HH Size	No. of HH	Est. Population	Percent share of Population
Balochistan	8.2	1,609,995	13,201,959	6.86%
Sindh	6	9,191,907	55,151,442	28.65%
KP-K	8.3	3,223,371	26,753,979	13.90%
Islamabad	6.5	176,280	1,145,820	0.60%
Punjab	6.6	13,911,812	91,817,959	47.69%
Fata	12.2	365,277	4,456,379	2.31%
Total Population		192,527,539		

Excluding three districts of Balochistan (Khuzdar, Kech and Panjgur) Agency of Fata (South Waziristan) as well as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) and Gilgit-Baltistan. Source: The News, March 29, 2012

Lahore's population as registered in the 1998 census is 6,318,745 — only 8.6pc of the overall urban population of Punjab.

With Lahore's share of the urban population of Punjab going down even further, questions may validly be raised about the disproportionate resources allocated to the provincial capital at the expense of the rest of Punjab.

With the profound socio-economic changes that are taking place in the rural areas and small towns of Pakistan, and particularly in Punjab, it can safely be concluded the trend of urbanisation may appear to consolidate itself in the upcoming census.

Who shall lose out in this new configuration? Those who derive power from land as well as the Lahore elite.

Punjab's bureaucracy

For many years, Punjab's bureaucracy has enjoyed great privilege and perks in return for facilitating those who derived power from land.

If the 2017 census goes ahead as planned, the bureaucracy's workings will have to change dramatically since they will no longer be set up to serve only the landed elite of the province.

In practice, this means that Punjab's bureaucrats will have to reconfigure the rural-urban divide in the province and make policies afresh.

For example, the Punjab government has revamped its health infrastructure and claims to be offering great

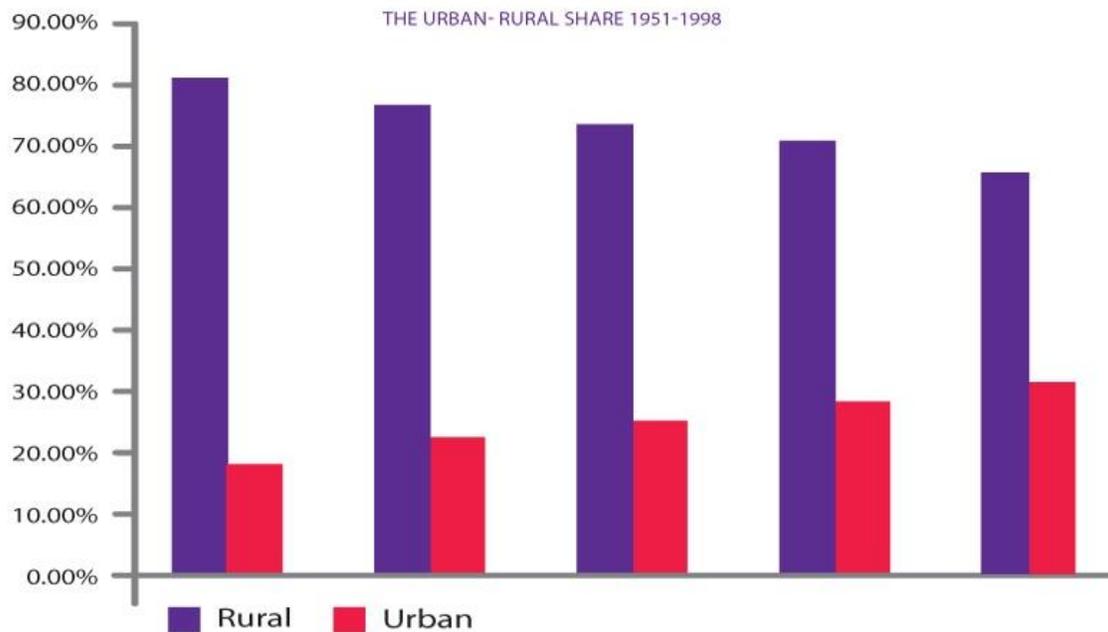
The 2017 census, in all probability, will redefine the demographic composition of Karachi with far-reaching impact on the politics of Karachi and in turn Sindh.

remuneration packages for young doctors in the province.

Many argue, however, that the doctors are largely after the jobs on offer in urban centres and the government has been unable to push highly-trained professionals into semi-urban and rural areas.

Crucially for Punjab, though, the inter-provincial water accord will have to be reworked since the province's current share in agriculture will need to be reassessed.

Due to population variance in central and southern Punjab, we may also see relations between the two get strained.



Source: The Scale and Causes of Urban Change in Pakistan, Arif Hasan, 2002 and 1998 Census Report of Pakistan Population Census Organisation, 2001

In Pakistan, policy has largely had an anti-poor bias and Punjab has been no exception.

The road transportation network has been developed to suit the city's commuting needs rather than improve the lot of its under-privileged dwellers.

In theory, policy objectives are to prioritise socio-economic development in various administrative units but in practice, housing and food remain at the bottom rung of government priorities.

But for these to become pressing concerns, someone will have to give up their existing privileges and perks.

In Punjab, this burden is likely to be shouldered by its bureaucracy and hence the reluctance to have a housing and population census conducted afresh.

KP's bureaucracy

The census assumes greater significance in KP because it allows the government to take stock of what has survived in the embers of war, how many people have lived, and how many perished to militancy.

The move to make Fata as part of KP is also welcome as it brings tribal areas into the national mainstream.

This has great political advantages: the swell in population numbers will allow the province to have more seats in the National Assembly, enjoy a larger share in the NFC Award, and have integrated governance.

WOMEN POPULATION GROWTH RATE 1951-1998

	1951	1961	1972	1981	1998
1. Per Annum Growth Rate		2.48 %	3.94%	3.07%	2.68%
2. Percentage wrt Total Population	46.22%	46.46%	46.66%	47.50%	48.05%

Source: Prepared by the author from various census reports.

But for KP's bureaucrats, any such move will need to come with separate funds for Fata's development, which are not drawn from the province's existing budget.

The federal government's proposal to cut the size of the FDP is meant to allay these concerns: if the other provinces give up their share, some of the money will then be redirected to the development of Fata.

Till now, Sindh and Balochistan have strongly resisted the move.

Meanwhile, Aftab Sherpao, chief of the Qaumi Watan Party and an ally of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, claimed last week that a conspiracy to undermine the "Pakhtun majority" in the country's population was being hatched by the federal government.

He termed any attempt to do so to be worse than rigging in national polls.

Balochistan's Baloch

Two chief ministers — Sanaullah Zehri and his predecessor Dr Malik Baloch — have resisted a census in Balochistan.

Their argument: the Baloch cannot be allowed to become an ethnic minority in Balochistan.

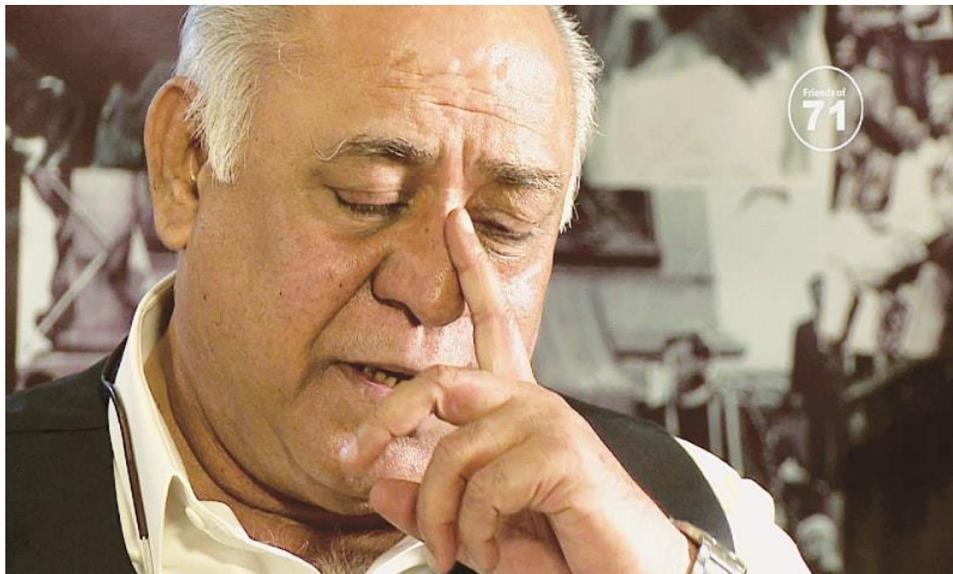
In such an eventuality, it would be difficult to allay the concerns and reservations of Baloch nationalists who have been alleging that the centre has historically been unfair to them.

Balochistan's population is largely divided between the Baloch and Pakhtun, with a significant minority of Hazara and Punjabi populations.

But it's the Baloch and Pakhtun that are face to face when it comes to benefitting from resource allocation in the province.

The Pakhtun belt in northern Balochistan now witnesses the gradual encroaching of Pakhtun people in all spheres of life, much to the chagrin of Baloch nationalists.

The Baloch concern is that the inclusion of over a million Afghan refugees, many of whom carry Pakistani CNICs, will further marginalise the native Baloch.



Voices of open and muted dissent: Mir Hasil Bizenjo

As mentioned earlier, the issue is serious enough to draw Mir Hasil Bizenjo's ire.

Despite being the incumbent federal minister for ports and shipping, his argument to delay the census in Balochistan and KP is, in fact, a move to ensure that the Baloch are not counted as an ethnic minority in Balochistan.

Urdu-speaking populace of Karachi

When the Advisor to Sindh Chief Minister on Information Maula Bakhsh Chandio urged Urdu-speaking and other migrant communities to describe themselves as "Sindhi" in the census, it touched a raw nerve in many of Karachi's political circles.

Some Sindhi nationalists have been loathe to consider the Urdu-speaking people as "new Sindhis" and this dynamic has historically resulted in greater acrimony between Sindhi nationalist parties and parties of Mohajir nationalism.

The response in Karachi was the distribution of leaflets urging the “Mohajir” people to stick together to safeguard the future of their next generation, and to ensure that “no Sindhi wadera can usurp their rights in Karachi.”

These leaflets urged the Urdu-speaking, the Memoni-speaking and the Gujarati-speaking to register themselves as “Urdu-speaking.”



Voices of open and muted dissent: Maula Bukhsh Chandio

As per the census data of 1981 and 1998, the proportion of the Urdu-speaking population in Sindh declined from 24.1pc to 21pc.

During the same period, the Sindhi-speaking population of Sindh rose from 55.7pc to 59pc.

Given their higher level of education and consequently lower birth-rates, Sindh’s Urdu-speaking population’s proportion is expected to go down further to below 20pc.

At the same time, the influx of Pakhtuns into Karachi is also challenging the characterisation of Karachi as a ‘Mohajir’ city.

In 1998, 48.52pc of the entire population of Karachi Division mentioned Urdu as their mother tongue. Punjabi claimed 13.94pc, Pashto speakers were 11.42pc and Sindhi speakers were 7.62pc.

But between 1972 and 1998, some 3.8 million migrants were added to the city and constituted about 40pc of the total reported population of 1998.

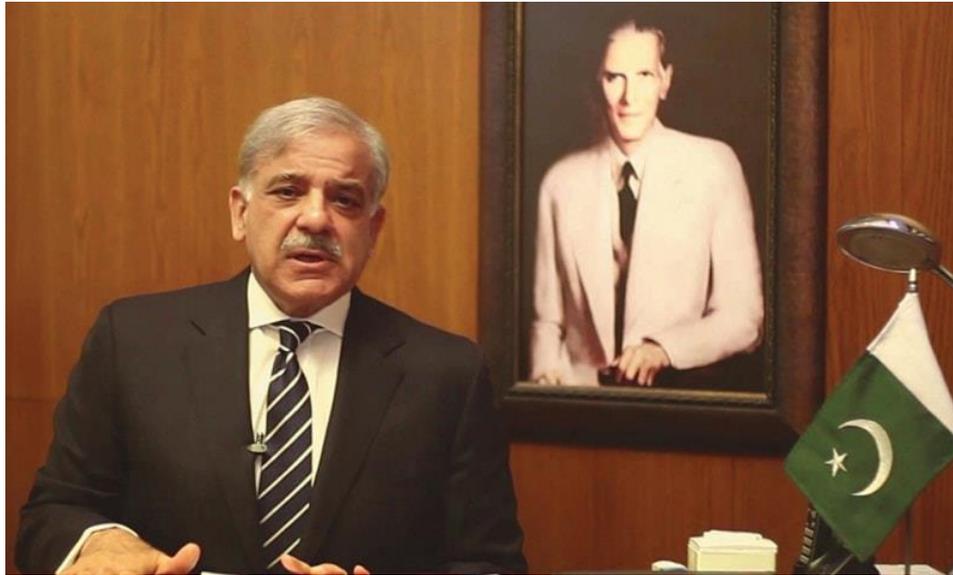
Of the 2.15 million migrants between 1981 and 1998, 40pc were from Punjab and the NWFP.

Of the total migrant population, 43pc were illiterate and 58pc were male.

About 91pc of those who migrated to Sindh between the two census periods of 1981 and 1998 settled in urban Karachi.

The Swat Operation, the floods of 2010, and the ongoing Operation Zarb-i-Azb further inflated the rate at which migrants arrived in Karachi from up-country and interior Sindh.

The results of the 2017 census, in all probability, will radically redefine the demographic composition of Karachi with far-reaching impact on the politics of Karachi and in turn Sindh.



Voices of open and muted dissent: Shahbaz Sharif

These factors will inevitably impact the politics of all factions of the “Mohajir” leadership and will be reflected in their dealings and negotiations with other political parties at the provincial and national levels.

It is envisaged that the results of the 2017 census will compel Karachi’s traditional ‘Mohajir’ leadership to devise ways to coexist and negotiate with other stakeholders.

The electoral rolls, if modified in the light of census results, will empower migrant communities to redefine the city’s politics through the potential of their swing votes.

The 2017 census will, in all probability, also disturb the rural-urban equation in different spheres, including job quotas.

In 1998, Sindh’s urban population totalled 30,439,893, which amounted to 48.8pc of the total provincial population.

Karachi’s total population (five districts) in 1998 was shown as 9,856,318 (32.4pc of the provincial population).

About 94pc of these citizens reside in the urban areas in Karachi. Needless to mention, even Sindhi nationalists remain sceptical, for the right and some not-so-right reasons, about the transparency and the eligibility of the census methodology.

Moreover, it is often mentioned that Karachi’s alien population was under-reported in the 1998 census.

Media reports suggest that 75pc of the 3.35 illegal immigrants (2.5 million) in Pakistan made Karachi their abode.

Those need to be accounted for in the census and their interaction with the city and its various actors needs to be studied — this will help explain the dynamics of poverty and the modus-operandi of a powerful informal sector that is responsible for the de facto management of the city.

Patriarchs and conservative Pakistan

President Donald Trump isn't the only one seeing the rise of women as agents of change. If the 2017 census goes ahead as planned, the women factor in Pakistan will become substantial in all matters of society, politics and planning.

It is interesting to note that 47 million women were added till 1998 to the women population of 1951 which was 15.6 million.

Some 22.7 million women were added between the two census periods of 1981 and 1998, and this addition alone is greater than the actual women population reported in the census period of 1961-1951.

The women population in the 1981 census was recorded as 40 million but with these additions, this number swelled to 62.7 million.



Voices of open and muted dissent: Aftab Sherpao

Though the per annum growth rate is moving down the curve but women's share in the total population has increased from 46.22pc in 1951 to 48.05pc in 1998.

It is worth noting that from 1972 onwards, while the base population of men for each census year is greater than women, the increase in the population of women is always greater than their male counterparts.

In all probability, the trend of a narrowing gender gap will continue in the 2017 census.

But there are other interesting associated trends that will also be verified in the census.

A perusal of other indicators reveals that there is a sharp decline in women's marriage rates, an upward shift in the age at which women marry, an increase in literacy rates, an increase in higher educational attainment and an increase in divorce rates between the census periods of 1981 and 1998 at the national level.

It means that there is a real transition taking place in the priorities of Pakistani women.

The desire for job security is slowly replacing the earlier concept of security associated with marriage.

It is envisaged that these trends will be more observable in the results of the 2017 census all across small towns and big cities of the country.

We are often told that change is incremental. But when counting heads and homes after 19 long years, change will seem to be monumental.

This will be an illusion of sorts — had we had the census back in 2008, changes to Pakistan's society and polity would not be registered as an upheaval.

The 2017 census is expected to turn the tables on the existing status quo and urge policy makers to rethink their paradigms and priorities. Whether they shall do so remains open to debate.

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