OXFORD JOURNAL
OF STUDENT
SCHOLARSHIP

Beyond the Pitch: Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship and Structural Barriers in Pakistan and the UK

Fatima Salman
fatimasalman2628@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Ethnic minority entrepreneurship continues to face structural barriers in both Pakistan and the United Kingdom, although the nature of these inequalities differs across their respective economic, linguistic and cultural contexts. In the UK, ethnic minority businesses face systemic discouragement and barriers to accessing external finance, whereas in Pakistan, geographical concentration and infrastructural inequalities restrict entrepreneurial opportunities in several rural regions. Offering a comparative analysis of ethnic minority entrepreneurship across structurally equivalent platforms operating in distinct socio-cultural contexts, this paper examines 112 businesses featured in Dragons' Den UK Series 21–22 and 65 businesses identified from Shark Tank Pakistan Season 1, both aired between 2024 and 2025. It also examines whether the structural barriers identified in existing literature in both countries are reflected in patterns of entrepreneurial participation and investment outcomes on these platforms.

This study examines identifiable ethnic minority participation on Dragons' Den UK through self-identification in the available sources. For Shark Tank Pakistan, a geographical analysis was conducted using the locations of businesses, with locations confirmed for 46 out of 65 businesses through press and government articles and official company websites. The findings reveal a concentration of participating businesses in major urban centres in Pakistan, whereas only a limited number of founders could be identified as ethnic minorities through self-identification in the UK sample. These patterns are consistent with some of the structural inequalities documented in the broader literature, although the available data do not establish the causes of differences in participation or whether discrimination occurred during programme selection and investment. The paper concludes by outlining strategies that institutions and entrepreneurship platforms could adopt to reduce these divides and by identifying avenues for future research in ethnic minority entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic minority entrepreneurship remains shaped by inequalities in access to finance, infrastructure and business opportunities. Although these barriers exist across national contexts, they do not necessarily operate in the same way. In the United Kingdom, ethnic minority businesses face discouragement and perceived rejection when seeking external funding, while in Pakistan, entrepreneurial activity remains

concentrated in urban areas, limiting participation from many rural minority regions (Adey et al., 2024; Gul et al., 2024).

Ethnic minorities are referred to as “any group of persons which constitutes less than half of the population in the entire territory of a State whose members share common characteristics of culture, religion or language" (United Nations; OHCHR).

Entrepreneurship programmes such as *Shark Tank Pakistan* and *Dragons' Den UK* offer a useful point of comparison. Beyond presenting businesses to audiences, these programmes provide visibility to selected entrepreneurs and their business ventures. Examining the businesses featured on each platform alongside existing research on entrepreneurial inequality may offer insights into how wider structural barriers are reflected in patterns of participation. However, televised participation alone cannot establish whether discrimination occurred during application, selection or investment.

This paper therefore examines the structural barriers to ethnic minority entrepreneurship in Pakistan and the United Kingdom through a comparative analysis of *Shark Tank Pakistan* and *Dragons' Den UK*. It asks: How do structural barriers to ethnic minority entrepreneurship differ between the two countries, and what can the participation patterns observed on these platforms reveal about these inequalities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Structural Barriers to Entrepreneurship in Pakistan:

Demographic data indicates a strong rural concentration of ethnic minorities in Pakistan, where a vast majority of the ethnic minority Sindhis reside in rural areas (Bhattacharya 2015). This divide is also evident at the provincial level, with 40.74% of Sindh's population living in rural areas. Similarly, Balochistan, home to a Baloch minority, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, home to a Pashtun minority, have far higher rural population percentages (88.43% and 54.94%, respectively) than Punjab (27.14%), the province associated with Pakistan’s ethnic majority (Ullah 2022). Muhammad’s (1996) analysis of the 1990-1991 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey further explains this, finding that 66% of Sindhi-speaking female respondents lived in rural areas, compared with 51.7% of Punjabi-speaking women (Muhammad 1996).

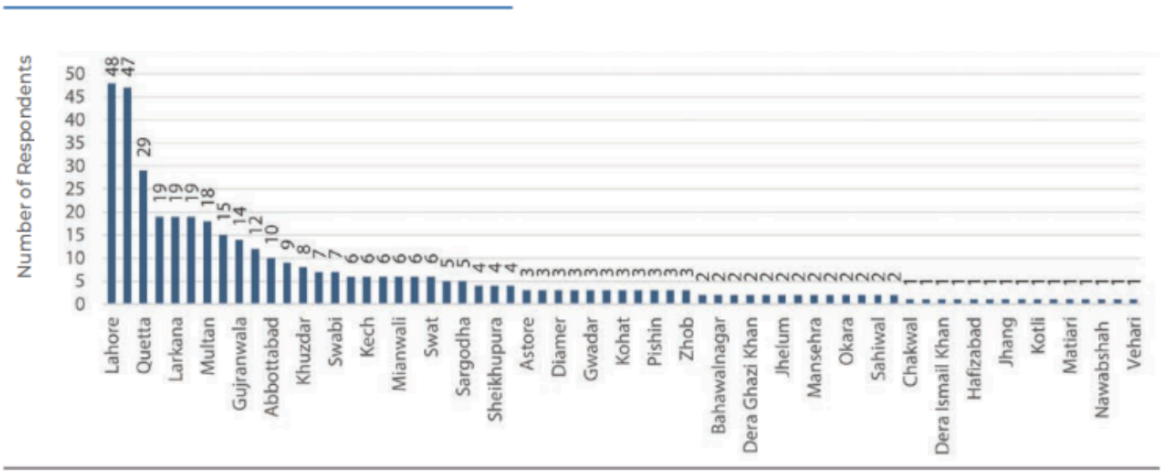
Ethnic minorities in Pakistan face underrepresentation that extends beyond social or media contexts, which is particularly dominant in entrepreneurship. This disparity is significantly shaped by geographic concentration, as ethnic minorities are predominantly concentrated in rural areas of Pakistan. These regions are characterised by profound limitations in access to education, employment opportunities, and infrastructure, including road and telecommunications networks, thereby restricting participation in entrepreneurial activities. The limited awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities among these communities stems from structural and infrastructural exclusion embedded in Pakistan's regional inequalities. This pattern is reflected in a large-scale survey conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of 419 young entrepreneurs across 65 districts of Pakistan, which found that more than 84 per cent of respondents resided in urban areas, with the highest concentrations of responses emerging from Lahore, Karachi, and Quetta, all of which are ethnic majority areas. Lahore

received 48 responses, Karachi received 47, and Quetta received 29, indicating that these cities are centres of economic activity.

Figure 2: Geographical Distribution of Entrepreneurs Surveyed by the UNDP Across 65 Districts of Pakistan

This trend is particularly relevant to platforms like *Shark Tank* Pakistan*,* which aims to present diverse and inspirational narratives, challenge stereotypes, and nurture a supportive environment for start-ups. Shark Tank showcases Pakistani start-ups not only to local audiences but also to international viewers, signifying wider outreach and potential influence beyond the domestic audience. However, the structural and infrastructural barriers faced by entrepreneurs in rural minority regions may limit their opportunities to participate in entrepreneurial activities and gain visibility on such platforms.

Around 70% of Balochistan's population is identified as multidimensionally poor, according to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in its multidimensional poverty report. In addition, not all ethnic minorities in Pakistan face equal structural exclusion within Pakistan. According to a 2025 study by Muhammad et al., Balochistan is Pakistan's largest region by area, yet remains highly underdeveloped because it receives insufficient investment in road infrastructure compared with other



provinces. This lack of physical infrastructure and economic activity restricts entrepreneurial activity in Balochistan. However, some ethnic minorities in Pakistan face greater infrastructural barriers than others. Based on patterns observed in research by Muhammad et al. (2022), Balochis appear to face greater infrastructural deficits, leading to higher levels of structural exclusion than Sindhis.

Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship and Financial Exclusion in the United Kingdom:

In contrast, ethnic minority entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom operates within a different economic and institutional context, where barriers to finance and business development remain prevalent despite the significant contribution of ethnic minority businesses to the economy. According to a report commissioned by the Minority Supplier Development of the United Kingdom (Legrain & Fitzgerald, 2021), an organisation advocating for ethnic minority business inclusion in corporate supply chains,

around 3 million individuals were employed in ethnic minority businesses, which together account for a sixth of the 6 million businesses registered in the UK. Furthermore, ethnic minorities are more likely to start a business, with 19% of early-stage entrepreneurs being non-white compared to 9% of white individuals in the UK economy in 2023 (Murray, 2025). The business landscape remains unequal, with ethnic minority businesses disproportionately concentrated in low-income sectors with limited growth potential, despite these contributions (London Chamber of Commerce and Industry [LCCI], 2022, p.10).

The British Business Bank reports that ethnic minorities in the UK are more entrepreneurial than the White population; however, they are less likely to run long-established businesses that generate a steady income. Although Ethnic minorities made up 18.3% of the population, the 2021 census in England and Wales reports that they received only 8% of the total funding being invested (British Business Bank 2023). This shows a continuous gap in the proportion of finance spent on ethnic minority businesses, where Ethnic minority businesses face systemic barriers such as a lack of information, discouragement, and perceived rejection beyond capital constraints. This aligns with academic evidence showing that Non-Whites, ethnic minorities, disabled people, and immigrants are also more likely to be excluded from the formal credit markets, as Pakistani firms are 1.5 times more likely to be denied a loan outright than firms owned by white British individuals in the UK (LCCI p.17)

Media Representation and Minority Identity:

In addition to local and national portrayals, there is also a disparity in how Western media represents certain marginalised groups. De Coster et al. (2024) conducted a computational text analysis of 12,319 articles from six British and American news sources published between 2003 and 2018. Two notable differences between coverage of Muslim and non-Muslim attacks were found: first, language used in articles about attacks by Muslim perpetrators was consistently more negative than language used to describe similar attacks by non-Muslim perpetrators; second, reporting on Muslim attacks received more sustained media attention. These findings reflect core principles of framing and agenda-setting theory, where certain narratives are repeatedly emphasised over others, shaping how audiences understand and give importance to particular issues (Almakaty, 2026; Song, 2024).

These findings suggest that media representations may contribute to broader stigmatisation of minority communities, although the nature of such marginalisation differs across national contexts. In Pakistan, negative representation in the media can also be directed towards ethnic and regional minorities, particularly Pashtun communities from regions such as Swat and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Research has found that Pashtun regions have often been represented through narratives of violence and danger in Pakistani media (Yousaf et al.). In contrast, Muslims in the UK may experience negative representation as a religious minority. Although these patterns demonstrate the wider social context in which minority communities are represented, they do not directly establish how ethnic minority entrepreneurs are selected for investment or entrepreneurship media platforms.

Comparative Socio-Cultural Context:

Although Pakistan and the UK are both ethnically diverse countries, their minority hierarchies are structured through different social and historical reasoning. Pakistan's ethnic diversity is organised primarily along regional and linguistic lines, as illustrated in Figure 1.2, whose data are taken from the Minority Rights Pakistan organisation. In contrast, the distribution of ethnic diversity in the UK corresponds to racial and national origins, with religion adding another layer of identity and potential discrimination. Pakistani communities in the UK may therefore experience marginalisation in relation to both ethnic and religious identity.

Moreover, Pakistan's ethnic divisions are rooted in pre-partition regional identities and post-partition political structures, whereas ethnic minority identities in the UK have also been shaped by post-colonial migration, including migration from India and Bangladesh. Despite operating within distinct socio-political contexts, ethnic minority communities in both Pakistan and the United Kingdom share some common features, such as being concentrated in specific geographic areas, like Balochis in Balochistan, Pakistan, and Asian communities in London, UK. Furthermore, both countries demonstrate inequalities in access to political and economic institutions, although the nature of these inequalities differs across their respective socio-cultural contexts.

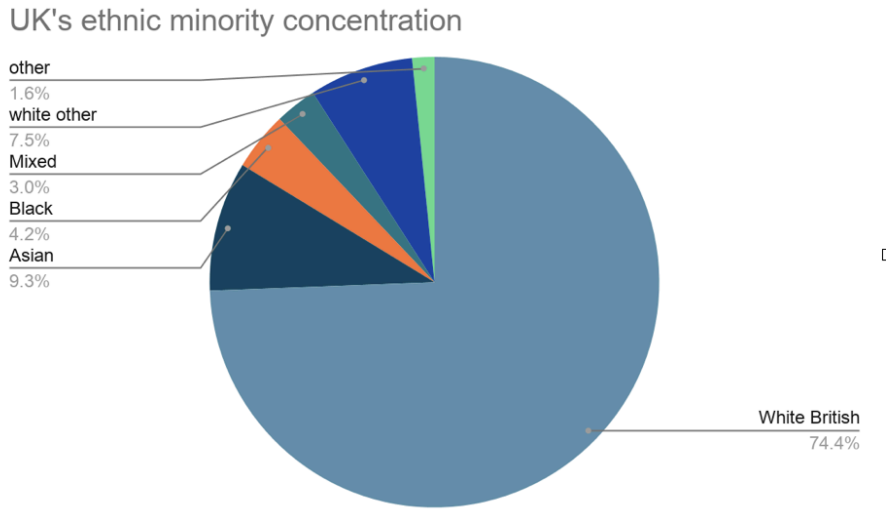


Figure 1.1: Ethnic Composition of the United Kingdom

Data in Figure 1.1 were taken from the Minority Rights Group of Pakistan's 2025 ethnic minority population census.

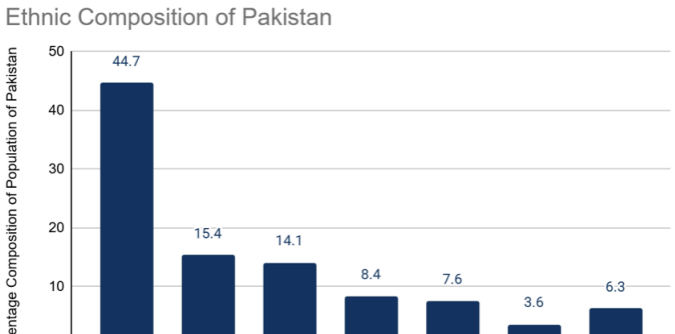


Figure 1.2: Ethnic Composition of Pakistan

Statistics in Figure 1.2 come from the Office for National Statistics' population census of ethnic minorities in the UK.

Research Gap:

Existing literature identifies several structural barriers faced by ethnic minority entrepreneurs in both Pakistan and the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to access to finance, infrastructure, employment opportunities and wider institutional support. Furthermore, much of the existing literature focuses on immigrant populations as minority communities to understand the conditions under which ethnic minority entrepreneurs establish their businesses and the barriers they face in establishing and sustaining them, such as securing equitable funding. However, this literature does not necessarily account for the different regional and linguistic forms of minority identity examined in Pakistan, where ethnic minority entrepreneurship is also shaped by geographical and infrastructural inequalities. Consequently, there remains limited comparative evidence on how these wider inequalities are reflected in the businesses featured on platforms such as Shark Tank Pakistan and Dragons' Den UK.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining the geographical concentration of businesses, identifiable ethnic minority participation, deal outcomes and gender representation across both programmes. Although these patterns can be compared with the structural barriers identified in existing literature, the available data do not establish whether ethnic discrimination occurs during the application, selection or investment stages. Therefore, this comparative analysis aims to identify observable differences in entrepreneurial participation while considering the wider socio-cultural and structural conditions within which these differences may emerge.

Methodology

Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
Sources that passed the CRAAP test (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose)	Articles, papers, reports, surveys published prior to January 1st, 2015
Representation of ethnic minorities in Media in the UK and Pakistan	Magazine articles, news articles from any platform other than *Dragons' Den* UK or *Shark Tank* Pakistan
Analyses the barriers to entrepreneurship for ethnic minorities	Bank reports, articles from countries other than the UK and Pakistan
Potential interventions for both countries	Not written in English
Government ethnicity population census	Not in entrepreneurial ecosystem (employees, athletes, students)
Both genders, Adults 18+ for *Dragons' Den*	Single source claims from unauthorised organisations mentioning location of businesses in *Shark Tank Pakistan*

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Secondary Research and Business-Level Geographical Analysis

This research uses a comparative analysis design, combining quantitative and qualitative data from secondary sources to examine how ethnic minorities are represented across two distinct national contexts. The study conducted a full-text evaluation of all secondary sources, including academic papers, bank reports, and magazine articles, after reviewing each source's title and abstract to determine whether it met the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 1. All included sources were limited to January 1, 2015, to July 31, 2026, except for an earlier demographic study. The 1996 health survey by Ali Muhammad et al. was included, which provided statistics on the rural concentration of ethnic minorities, because no more recent comparable survey was available.

The two entrepreneurship investment reality shows chosen were *Shark Tank* Pakistan and *Dragons' Den* UK, as they are recognised media platforms with large audiences. Systematic observation of existing media resources was conducted to examine the patterns of ethnic minority representation across these platforms. The data for *Dragons' Den* were collected from a government publication covering episodes across 23 series from 2019 to 2026, via the UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) *Dragons' Den* Blog. Business statuses were further cross-referenced with Den Tracker, which has tracked 1,507 companies to date. Moreover, Den Tracker was used to gather raw information about businesses in each series, as well as deal outcomes. Similarly, Exitbase, a commercial website, was used to source data for *Shark Tank* Pakistan due to the absence of an official database of entrepreneurs published by its broadcaster, Green Entertainment, or any other authorised media source. However, businesses and their data available on authorised media websites were cross-verified, for example, through websites such as Fuchsia magazine.

The Shark Tank Pakistan sample included 43 businesses and 72 individual founders (35 male and 16 female) across 13 episodes for the analysis of founder demographics and deal outcomes. For the geographical analysis, we used a broader dataset of 65 businesses featured in Season 1, of which we could confirm the locations of 46 through credible secondary sources. However, a much larger sample of 112 businesses and 163 individual founders (95 male and 68 female) across 28 episodes was drawn for Dragons' Den UK because more series were conducted.

Similarly, businesses with incomplete founder details, such as missing deal outcomes or funding amounts, from both platforms. Series 1 - 20 were excluded from the sample of *Dragons' Den* due to time constraints and to observe recent media patterns.

Several limitations of this study include the inability to record the ages of the sample for either show, as public records listing entrepreneurs' ages were unavailable. No official report specified participants' ethnic backgrounds, and entrepreneurs did not self-identify their ethnic backgrounds on Shark Tank Pakistan. Thus, businesses' geographical locations were used to examine participation from regions associated with ethnic minority populations, rather than to determine the ethnic backgrounds of individual founders. For example, 'Pakhtun Wardrobe' was included in the geographical analysis based on its location in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as confirmed by Fuchsia Magazine and the business's official website.

Multiple sources were used to collect data on the locations of 65 businesses featured on Shark Tank Pakistan to conduct a geographical analysis. Press and government sources confirmed the locations of 17 businesses, including Fuchsia Magazine, the Punjab Information Technology Board's official website, and the National Incubation Centre's website. Official websites for a further 29 businesses were used to collect location data because government coverage was unavailable. Therefore, the geographical locations of 43 of 65 businesses were confirmed, while excluding the remaining 19 from the geographical analysis because their addresses were not available in authorised and credible sources or on the businesses' official websites.

Correspondingly, because authorised websites and journals provide no data on entrepreneurs' ethnicities, only four businesses across *Dragons' Den UK* Series 21 and 22 included a founder who self-identified as an ethnic minority, constituting 3.6% of the 112 businesses examined, compared to ethnic minorities making up 18.3% of the UK population. Therefore, the trends observed in the media representation of ethnic minorities in entrepreneurship on both platforms were cross-referenced with secondary literature, such as reports from the UNDP and the British Business Bank, along with academic articles, including De Coster and Muhammad et al., to assess whether these patterns are reflected in broader demographics in Pakistan and the UK.

Lastly, three dimensions were used to identify similarities and differences between *Shark Tank* Pakistan and *Dragons' Den* UK: the ethnic concentration of participants, the deal success rate, and gender representation.

RESULTS

Geographical Distribution of Shark Tank Pakistan Businesses:

The geographical analysis of businesses featured on Shark Tank Pakistan shows a concentration of entrepreneurial activity in urban areas such as Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. Of the 65 businesses examined, geographical locations could be confirmed for 43 businesses through press, government and official company sources, as shown in Table A1. Of these businesses, 8 were located in regions associated with ethnic minority populations, including Peshawar and Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Hyderabad in interior Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan. This indicates a limited representation of businesses from minority-associated regions within the geographical sample, consistent with the broader regional inequalities identified in existing literature.

However, the geographical analysis was not applied to Dragons' Den UK, as the identification of ethnic minority participants in the UK was based on self-identification in the available sources rather than the geographical locations of businesses.

Identifiable Ethnic Minority Participation in Dragons' Den UK:

Only four of the 163 individual founders across four businesses in Series 21 and 22 of Dragons' Den UK clearly self-identified as an ethnic minority in the available sources, representing approximately 2.5% of individual founders and 3.6% of the 112 businesses examined.

Ethnic Minority Self-identification among *Dragons' Den*				
Business	Ethnic Background	Founder	Deal Outcome	Series
Pavan Beauty	South Asian	Pavan Dhanjal	Deal Received	Series 21 (2024)
ORI Lifestyle	Black British	Titilolami Bello	Deal Received	Series 21 (2024)
Nenya	Ukrainian (immigrant)	Yana Smaglo	Deal Received	Series 22 (2025)
Unpause (coolzen)	South Asian	Nitya Dintakurti	Deal Rejected	Series 22 (2025)

As shown in the table above, taken from episodes 4 and 6 of series 21 and 3 and 7 of series 22 of *the UK government's Dragons' Den* IPO blog, four of 163 individual founders were identified through explicit self-identification in the available sources. Their ethnic backgrounds were also reflected in certain aspects of their business pitches; for example, Pavan Dhanjal's pitch was centred on henna culture and South Asian beauty, whereas the specific hair care needs of Black women with afro hair were addressed through Titilolami Bello's pitch. This suggests that cultural identity may be more visible when directly connected

to a business proposition. However, the available evidence does not establish why other entrepreneurs did not self-identify their ethnic backgrounds.

However, none of the participants in Shark Tank Pakistan self-identified as an ethnic minority in the available sources. Pakhtun Wardrobe was therefore included only in the geographical analysis as a Swat-based business in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Deal Outcomes and Gender Representation:

Shark Tank Pakistan and *Dragons' Den* UK had slightly different deal success rates: 46.5% of businesses received an investment on *Shark Tank* and 62.5% on *Dragons' Den*. In addition, 68 out of 163 individual founders across *Dragons' Den* series 21 and 22 were female, accounting for 41.7% of entrepreneurs. Whereas 95/163 were male, comprising 58.3%. An upward trend was observed in female participation, increasing from 38.8% of founders in Series 21 to 44.9% in Series 22. Correspondingly, males comprised 68.6% of all founders (35/51) in *Shark Tank* Pakistan, while females comprised 31.4% (16/51). Both platforms showed lower female than male participation within the samples examined, consistent with the gender disparities observed in the broader entrepreneurial literature.

Metric	**Shark Tank Pakistan**	**Dragons' Den UK**
Season/Series analysed	Season 1 (2024–2025)	Series 21–22 (2024–2025)
Episodes	13	28
Sample Size	43 businesses,72 founders	112 businesses, 163 founders
Ethnic minority identification method	Geographic proxy (no self-ID data available)	Direct self-identification
Ethnic minority representation	17.4% of businesses located in minority-associated provinces vs. 82.6% in majority-urban areas	3.6% of businesses (4 of 112) self-identified as an ethnic minority
Direct self-identification	None	4/163 founders
Deal success rate	46.5%	62.5%
Gender split (male & female)	79.2% & 20.8% (57/72 male, 15/72 female)	58.3% & 41.7% (95/163 male, 68/163 female)

Gender trend across seasons	Not applicable (single season)	Female participation rose from 38.8% in Series 21 to 44.9% in Series 22

Table 2: Comparative summary of findings in Shark Tank Pakistan and Dragon's Den UK

The representation figures for ethnic minorities in both shows are not directly comparable because they used different methods of identifying ethnic minorities. Shark Tank Pakistan's statistics reflect the geographical distribution of businesses in regions associated with minority populations, whereas Dragon's Den UK reflects identifiable self-disclosure of ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, these figures cannot establish the complete ethnic composition of entrepreneurs participating in either programme.

However, limited prior research on these media sources and time constraints made it increasingly difficult to obtain accurate empirical evidence on entrepreneurs' ethnic backgrounds, and examining funding discrimination is beyond the scope of this research.

DISCUSSION

The patterns observed on Shark Tank Pakistan and Dragons' Den UK reflect different dimensions of ethnic minority representation in entrepreneurship. In Pakistan, the geographical analysis demonstrates a concentration of participating businesses in urban centres, whereas in the UK, only a limited number of founders could be identified as ethnic minorities through self-identification in the available sources. These patterns are consistent with the wider structural barriers identified in existing literature, particularly the geographical and infrastructural inequalities in Pakistan and the financial and institutional barriers faced by ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the UK. However, the available data do not establish whether these differences originate during business formation, application, selection or investment. Thus, recognising the structural differences between these countries is essential to understanding the different forms of exclusion faced by ethnic minority entrepreneurs. Consequently, policies designed for one country may fail to reach those they are intended to help in another country due to differences in how exclusion operates.

Geographical and Infrastructural Barriers in Pakistan:

In developing countries, one of the most significant challenges for underrepresented ethnic minorities in entrepreneurship is the lack of infrastructure investment in road and telecommunications networks in regions with high concentrations of minorities. The World Bank's 2019 study of ethnic minorities in Vietnam showed that groups physically connected to markets through developed roads and telecommunications networks, and with access to wage employment, performed consistently better than those with poor connectivity. These findings suggest that inadequate road and telecommunications networks may similarly restrict entrepreneurial opportunities in rural regions of Pakistan, such as Swat and Uthal, although the conditions examined in Vietnam cannot be directly applied to Pakistan without further research.

One of the most persistent barriers identified across Pakistan and the UK is exclusion from formal financial systems. In Pakistan, this is further complicated by the geographical concentration of businesses in urban centres and the limited availability of financial infrastructure in certain rural regions. Another possible strategy is a postal banking system that provides accessible, low-cost financial services to ethnic minority entrepreneurs in rural areas such as Astore, Swat and Uthal, where access to formal banking infrastructure may be limited. One example is Pakistan Post, one of Pakistan's largest postal networks, with around 13,000 branches spread across the country, including rural and remote areas. This existing institutional infrastructure could potentially be developed to provide ethnic minority communities with greater access to small-business loans and savings facilities, reducing certain financial-access barriers through the introduction of appropriate lending and accessibility measures.

Financial Exclusion and Institutional Barriers in the United Kingdom:

One strategy that can be successful in the UK is to institutionalise racial equity audits, in which structured investigations monitor how government policies and other institutions' practices affect different racial groups, as proposed by Hamilton et al. 2020 Applying this framework to business funding programmes would help make the disparity of funding between ethnic minorities and majorities in the UK structurally visible, allowing financial institutions and policymakers to be held accountable. Although available sources identify only four of 163 founders across Series 21 and 22 of Dragons' Den UK as ethnic minorities through self-identification, these findings do not establish whether underrepresentation originated during the application, selection, or investment stages. Therefore, racial equity audits could be used to examine these different stages, provided that information on applicants, shortlisted entrepreneurs and investment outcomes were available.

However, these barriers operate differently in the UK, where ethnic minorities face discouragement and perceived rejection, as shown by the British Business Bank, rather than the same geographical limitations in access to physical banking infrastructure. As a result, ethnic minority entrepreneurs may refrain from applying for available funding, expecting to be turned down.

Improving Data Collection and Institutional Accountability:

This comparative study was forced to rely on indirect measures of identifying the ethnic backgrounds of contestants due to the unavailability of published records in both Shark Tank Pakistan and Dragons' Den UK. Therefore, better data collection on entrepreneurial diversity is significant for improving policymaking in the UK, as suggested by Kašperová et al. 2022, particularly in relation to the financial disparities faced by ethnic minorities. Similarly, an institutionalised data collection framework, even at a provincial level, would allow policymakers in Pakistan to identify which ethnic minority groups face greater structural exclusion and which regions lack infrastructural facilities. Furthermore, voluntary collection of ethnic background information, with appropriate privacy safeguards, during the application and selection stages of entrepreneurship programmes could help identify whether differences in participation emerge before or after entrepreneurs are selected to appear. This would enable institutions to design solutions according to the different structural barriers faced by ethnic minorities across both countries.

Comparing Structural Barriers Across Pakistan and the United Kingdom:

Correspondingly, ethnic minority entrepreneurship in the UK faces systemic barriers similar to those in Pakistan, such as limited awareness of available financing options and a higher likelihood of rejection, which discourages entrepreneurs from applying and seeking external funding (Adey et al., 2024). However, ethnic minorities in Pakistan also face structural constraints, among which are incomplete road and telecommunication networks in certain regions. Whereas the literature on Pakistan highlights regional and infrastructural inequalities, research on ethnic minority entrepreneurship in the UK places greater emphasis on disparities in access to finance and institutional support.

These strategies show that reducing the economic divide between ethnic minorities and majorities is not only a matter of social justice, but also a concern of the wider economy, as ethnic minority businesses made a significant contribution to the UK's economy, estimated at £25 billion in 2018 (LCCI p.10). Thus, addressing the issues faced by ethnic minorities is important for supporting their wider economic contribution. This is an economic problem not confined to the UK alone but applies to national contexts in which ethnic minorities face systemic barriers, including disparities in access to finance and infrastructural barriers, such as a lack of telecommunications and road networks. As the UK may benefit economically by addressing financial and institutional inequalities, reducing the infrastructural barriers faced by ethnic minorities in Balochistan, Pakistan, could also help improve people's standard of living, whilst contributing to the economy's overall output.

CONCLUSION

This paper primarily compares the structural barriers faced by ethnic minority entrepreneurs in Pakistan and the United Kingdom, and examines how these inequalities are reflected in entrepreneurial platforms such as Dragons' Den UK and Shark Tank Pakistan. It reveals that businesses featured on Shark Tank Pakistan were predominantly concentrated in urban areas such as Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi, whereas participation from regions associated with ethnic minority populations remained limited within the geographical sample examined. These patterns are consistent with the infrastructural and regional inequalities identified in existing literature, although they do not establish that these barriers directly caused the observed underrepresentation. In contrast, ethnic minority businesses in the UK play a critical role in the wider economy, employing approximately 3 million individuals and contributing £25 billion, yet continue to face systemic barriers in accessing external finance, as reported by the British Business Bank and the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Although only a limited number of entrepreneurs on Dragons' Den UK could be identified as ethnic minorities through self-identification, these findings cannot determine whether financial discrimination or selection practices contributed to their participation. Therefore, the study highlights how ethnic minority entrepreneurship is shaped by different structural conditions across both countries, rather than establishing a single explanation for the inequalities observed.

Furthermore, future research would benefit from greater access to demographic information on entrepreneurs participating in both programmes, particularly during the application and selection stages. This would strengthen the comparative findings by allowing researchers to examine whether differences in participation emerge before or after entrepreneurs are selected. Primary data collection in both countries would also enable a more in-depth analysis of how ethnic minority entrepreneurs experience infrastructural, financial and institutional barriers, particularly in rural regions of Pakistan where access to research participants remains limited.

Future studies should more widely employ a comparative research framework, as it can be applied across different developing and developed country contexts, particularly where limited secondary data restricts the analysis of ethnic minority entrepreneurship. In addition, greater institutional accountability and voluntary collection of demographic information could help identify inequalities in access to entrepreneurial opportunities and investment. Racial equity audits could also be applied to business funding programmes to examine potential disparities in financing, while greater investment in road and telecommunications infrastructure may improve entrepreneurial opportunities in underserved regions of Pakistan. Therefore, addressing the structural barriers faced by ethnic minorities requires policies that recognise how the nature of exclusion differs across national contexts, rather than applying the same mechanisms to both countries.

REFERENCES

About minorities and human rights | ohchr. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (n.d.). https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues/about-minorities-and-human-rights

Adey, M., Horwood, J., Kirton, J., Krempl, M., Mistry, N., Morrill, F., Morrison, B., Al Obaidi, L., Sethi, D., Somes, J., Tortis, M., & Witton, Z. (2024, March). *Small business finance markets 2023/24* . British Business Bank. https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/sites/g/files/sovrnj166/files/2024-03/small-business-finance-market-report-2024.pdf

Afridi, S., & Nabeel, M. (n.d.). *List of shark tank pakistan startups | season 01 - exitbase*. Exitbase. https://exitbase.pk/list-of-shark-tank-pakistan-startups/

Ahmad, W. (n.d.). *Wahab Pink salt – global wholesale supplier of authentic Himalayan pink salt from Pakistan*. Wahab Pink Salt. https://wahabpinksalt.com/

Ahmed, A., & Mustafa, G. (n.d.). *Pakistan's trusted online pharmacy*. PILLBOX+. https://pillbox.pk/?srsltid=AfmBOoqQxV9rscyb5WiYWCj5QQUD3qAbCfZpsxl5BD3dPJsCVvhKgTyr

Ahmed Siddiqui, K. (n.d.). *Kaacib: Reliable Handyman Service at Your Doorstep*. Kaacib. https://kaacib.com/make-appointment/

Ali, M. (n.d.). *AI robotics for autism, education, Retail & UV-C Safety*. Haprow. https://haprow.com/

Almakaty, S. S. (2026). Revisiting Agenda-Setting Across Media Systems and Regime Types: Levels of Influence, the Need for Orientation, and the Algorithmic Turn in a Networked, Polarized Age. *Journalism and Media*, *7*(4), 203.

Aziz, H. (n.d.). *Buy Wireless Earbuds & Earcuffs in Pakistan | arch beat — 50,000+ sold*. Arch Beat. https://arch-beat.com/

Bhattacharya, S. (2015). Pakistan's ethnic entanglement. *J Soc Political Econ Stud*, *40*, 231-262.

Chiragh Education Technologies - products, competitors, Financials, Employees, headquarters locations. CB Insights. (n.d.). https://www.cbinsights.com/company/chiragh-education-technologies

Davy, P. (2025, February 20). *Dragons' den ip blog - series 22 episode 7*. GOV.UK. https://dragonsden.blog.gov.uk/2025/02/20/dragons-den-ip-blog-series-22-episode-7/

De Coster, S., Veilleux-Lepage, Y., Amarasingam, A., & Abbas, T. (2024). Uncovering the Bias and Prejudice in Reporting on Islamist and Non-Islamist Terrorist Attacks in British and US Newspapers. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *18*(3), 24–50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27336022

Emaan. (n.d.). *Emaanz peekaboo – earth warrior*. Emaanz Peekaboo. https://emaanzpeekaboo.org/

Ethnic Group, England and Wales - Office for national statistics. Office for National Statistics. (2022, November 29). https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021

Ever wondered what happened after the pitch? | dragons' den tracker. DenTracker. (n.d.). https://dentracker.co.uk/

Fahad & Hasnain. (n.d.). *Trusted by 100K+ premed students across Pakistan!*. PreMed.PK. https://www.premed.pk/

Gul, M., Aziz, R., Gul, E., Mahmood, F., Safdar, F., & Khan, H. (2024). *State of Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Pakistan*. UNDP. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-04/ycl-syee_pakistan-report_0.pdf

Hamilton, D., Asante-Muhammad, D., Collins, C., & Ocampo, O. (2020). 8 Solutions to Ensure the Economic Recovery Reduces the Racial Wealth Divide. In *White Supremacy is the Pre-existing*

Condition: Eight Solutions to Ensure Economic Recovery Reduces the Racial Wealth Divide (pp. 14–29). Institute for Policy Studies. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27073.8

Haroon, D. D., & Ali. (n.d.). *Contact*. Daigen & Co. https://daigenco.com/pages/contact

Hasan, O., Omer, H., & Hussain, F. (n.d.). *Binte Ahan*. Women Defense. https://binteahan.com/

Iftikhar, N. (2018, June 4). *With rise in Entrepreneurship, Lahore becomes talent magnet for Pakistan | The Express Tribune*. The Express Tribune. https://tribune.com.pk/story/1726990/2-rise-entrepreneurship-lahore-becomes-talent-magnet-pakistan/

Investing in ethnic minority entrepreneurs. British Business Bank. (2023, November). https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/sites/g/files/sovrnj166/files/2024-02/report-investing-in-ethnic-minority-entrepreneurs.pdf

Iqbal, N., & Ahsan, H. (2024). *Multidimensional poverty in Pakistan*. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. https://file.pide.org.pk/pdfpideresearch/rr-multidimensional-poverty-in-pakistan.pdf

Javed, A. (n.d.). *Transforming agriculture productivity through Precision Robotics*. AgriBotX. https://agribotx.com/

Jibran & Shayan. (n.d.). Cobblers Cartel & Company. https://www.cobblerscartel.com/

Juffs, M. (2024, February 9). *Dragons' Den ip blog – series 21 episode 6*. GOV.UK. https://dragonsden.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/09/dragons-den-ip-blog-series-21-episode-6/

Kareem, M., & Qureshi, F. (n.d.). *Bio Energy: Fulfilling your heat energy demand reliably and efficiently*. Bio Energy. https://bioenergy.com.pk/

Kašperová, E., Roberts, R., & Ram, M. (2022). *Time to change: A blueprint for advancing the UK's ethnic minority businesses*. Aston University (CREME). https://www.aston.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/creme_nwg_time_to_change_report_.pdf

Khan, H., & Mohsin, A. R. (n.d.). *AIBL - revolutionizing prosthetics*. AiBL Innovations. https://www.aibl-innovations.com/

Khan, U. R., Gabol, A., & Baig, M. H. (n.d.). *Transforming Logistics through tech-driven solutions*. MoveIt. https://moveittech.com/

Legrain, P., & Fitzgerald, M. (2021, February). *Minority Businesses Matter: The Contribution and Challenges of Ethnic Minority Businesses in the UK*. OPEN, commissioned by MSDUK. https://www.opennetwork.net/minority-businesses-matter/

Llewellyn, N. (2024, January 25). *Dragons' Den IP Blog - Series 21 Episode 4*. GOV.UK. https://dragonsden.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/25/dragons-den-ip-blog-series-21-episode-4/

London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (2022, May 12). *Ethnic diversity in business: Removing barriers impeding business success*. https://www.londonchamber.co.uk/LCCI_Media/LCCI/Media/Policy/Ethnic-Diversity-in-Business-Paper_1.pdf

Lums alumnus Syed Ismail named to Forbes 30 under 30 Asia 2026. LUMS. (2026, June 2). https://lums.edu.pk/news/lums-alumnus-syed-ismail-named-forbes-30-under-30-asia-2026

Manders, J. (2025, January 23). *Dragons' Den ip blog – series 22 episode 3*. GOV.UK. https://dragonsden.blog.gov.uk/2025/01/23/dragons-den-ip-blog-series-22-episode-3/

Mohammad, N. (2022, August). *USCIRF country update: Pakistan*. UNITED STATES COMMISSION on INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20Pakistan%20Country%20Update.pdf

Mubeen, H., & Rahman, A. (n.d.). *Yumkins | as seen on Shark Tank Pakistan | 100% natural baby food*. Yumkins. https://yumkins.co/

Muhammad, A. (1996). Ethnic Fertility Differentials in Pakistan. *The Pakistan Development Review*, *35*(4), 733–744. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41259995

Muhammad, I. T. E., Samiullah, K., Muhib, U., Masood, A., Muhammad, S., & Waqas, A. (2025). Strengthening road infrastructure and safety standards in Balochistan: pathways to promote education, economic development and prosperity. *Global Education Insights*, *1*(1), 6-17.

Murray, A. (2025, December 3). *Commonslibrary.parliament.uk research briefing by annalise Murray*. House of Commons Library. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06152/SN06152.pdf

Nausheen Barkat: Spreading the sweetness of Hunza Honey. Aga Khan Development Network. (2020, March 18). https://the.akdn/en/resources-media/whats-new/our-stories/nausheen-barkat-spreading-sweetness-hunza-honey

Pakistan - minority rights group. Minority Rights Group. (2025, December). https://minorityrights.org/country/pakistan/

PITB alumnus Yumkins Foods secures impressive deal on Shark Tank Pakistan. PITB. (2024, November 18). https://pitb.gov.pk/node/10432

PITB alumnus 'motto vest' secures impressive deal on Shark Tank Pakistan | PITB. Punjab Information Technology Board. (2024a, December 3). https://pitb.gov.pk/node/10461

Pitb's alumnus secures impressive deal on Shark Tank Pakistan | PITB. Punjab Information Technology Board. (2024b, November 13). https://pitb.gov.pk/node/10426

Raza, S. (n.d.). *Sehrish Raza Closet*. Biz B. https://bizb.store/en/store/sehrish-raza-closet?srsltid=AfmBOoqcLUXs4hSNMzWZLdsVK3bhwNpYNC1iM2dGsgY5ZkXgaqG3okxR

Rehan, M., & Haris, M. (n.d.). *Soundproof office pods: Meeting pods for office*. PodVare. https://podvare.com/

Rehman, E. (2024, November 7). *Shark tank pakistan: Five pitches, one standout shark of the day*. Fuchsia Magazine. https://fuchsiamagazine.com/shark-tank-pakistan-five-pitches-one-standout-shark-of-the-day/

Rehman, A. (n.d.). *Stuffeez home – Stuffeez.pk*. Stuffeez.pk. https://stuffeez.pk/

Rehman, E. (2024, November 12). *Innovators take the spotlight in episode 2 of shark tank Pakistan*. FUCHSIA. https://fuchsiamagazine.com/innovators-take-the-spotlight-in-episode-2-of-shark-tank-pakistan/

Rizvi, A. (2024, December 3). *Episode 5 of shark tank : A perfect blend of creative flavors*. FUCHSIA. https://fuchsiamagazine.com/episode-5-of-shark-tank-pakistan-a-perfect-blend-of-creative-flavors-and-entrepreneurial-spirit/

Shahzad, F., & Inayat, M. (n.d.). *Groceries delivered in 10–30 minutes*. FreshBox. https://freshbox.pk/

Shehzad, H. (2024a, November 18). *Shark tank pakistan breaks world record in episode 3 with the biggest deal made in Shark Tank History!*. FUCHSIA. https://fuchsiamagazine.com/shark-tank-pakistan-breaks-world-record-in-episode-3-with-the-biggest-deal-in-shark-tank-history/

Shehzad, H. (2024b, November 25). *Shark Tank Pakistan Episode 4: Creativity, Collaboration, & Game-Changing Ideas*. Fuchsia Magazine. fuchsiamagazine.com/episode-4-of-shark-tank-pakistan-proves-the-future-belongs-to-creative-minds-innovations-strategy-and-collaborative-efforts/

Shehzad, H. (2025b, January 20). *Shark tank pak: Check out the pitch that left the sharks teary-eyed!*. FUCHSIA. https://fuchsiamagazine.com/episode-12-of-shark-tank-check-out-the-pitch-that-left-the-sharks-teary-eyed/

Shehzad, H. (2025c, January 27). *Last episode of Shark Tank pakistan season 1*. Fuchsia Magazine. https://fuchsiamagazine.com/last-episode-of-shark-tank-pakistan-the-youngest-entrepreneur-first-no-investment-deal-much-more/

Song, Q. (2024). Framing in media and communication studies: A bibliometric analysis. *Insight-News Media*, *7*(1), 674-674.

Talha, & Umar. (n.d.). *STEM equipment manufacturer*. Markhor3D. https://markhor3d.com/?srsltid=AfmBOoohiFje1hBQUMdj3do59QcFcAnlTbV1yucCWgku0UBlFTtWWA8O

Ul-Hassan, R., & Asghar, A. (n.d.). *Home*. Zuucart. https://zuucart.com/

Ullah, I. (2022). Re-identifying the rural/urban: a case study of Pakistan. *Espaço e Economia. Revista brasileira de geografia econômica*, (23).

UNESCO. general conference. UNESCO. (1979). https://treaties.un.org/doc/source/docs/unesco_res_5_9.2_1-E.pdf

APPENDIX

Table A1

Geographic Distribution of Shark Tank Pakistan Season 1 Businesses (2024–2025)

No	Ep	Business	Deal outcome	City	Province	Minority region	Source tier
1	1	Knock Sports	Deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T1
2	1	Pink Salt	Deal	Gujranwala	Punjab	No	T2
3	1	Trash It	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
4	1	Zee.Sy	No deal	Karachi (origin)	Sindh	No	T2
5	2	Pillbox PK	No deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T2
6	2	Kangaroo Care AI	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T1
7	3	Yumkins Foods	Deal	Faisalabad	Punjab	No	T1
8	3	Saraaf	Deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T1
9	4	Turkish Mud Coffee	Deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T1
10	4	Agri Green Seeds	Deal	Uthal	Balochistan	Yes	T1
11	4	Agri Revolution Company	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T1
12	4	ReLife	No deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T2
13	5	Baked Spot	Deal	Islamabad	ICT	No	T2
14	5	Truly Komal	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
15	6	PreMed	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
16	6	Cobblers Cartel	Deal	Islamabad (HQ)	ICT	No	T2
17	6	Motto Vest	Deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T1
18	7	Stuffeez	Deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T2
19	7	KAACIB	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
20	8	Aquamarine	Deal	Gilgit-Baltistan	Gilgit-Baltistan	Yes	T1
21	8	Markhor 3D	No deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T2
22	9	Pak Bio Energy	Deal	Hyderabad	Sindh (interior)	Yes	T2
23	9	Haprow	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
24	9	ZUU Cart	No deal	Islamabad	ICT	No	T2
25	9	Move It	No deal	Islamabad	ICT	No	T2
26	9	National Impex	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
27	9	Daigen & Co	No deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T2
28	10	AgriBotX	No deal	Faisalabad	Punjab	No	T2
29	10	Bint e Ahan	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
30	10	Chiragh Education Technologies	Deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T1
31	10	Saaz	Deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T2
32	10	Enent	Deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
33	11	Arch Beat	Deal	Multan	Punjab	No	T2

Geographic Distribution of Shark Tank Pakistan Season 1 Businesses (2024–2025)

No	Ep	Business	Deal outcome	City	Province	Minority region	Source tier
34	11	Shahtaj Qaiser	Deal	Lahore	Punjab	No	T1
35	11	Fresh Box	No deal	Islamabad	ICT	No	T2
36	11	Biz B	No deal	Islamabad	ICT	No	T2
37	12	Asqurr	Deal	Hunza (production);	Gilgit-Baltistan	Yes	T1
38	12	Podvare	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
39	13	Pakhtun Wardrobe	Deal	Swat	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Yes	T1
40	13	Queen Extension	No deal (declined offer)	Quetta	Balochistan	Yes	T1
41	13	Earth Warriors	No deal	Karachi	Sindh	No	T2
42	13	Arshad Khan Chaiwala	Deal	Islamabad (origin)	ICT	No	T2
43	13	AIBL	No deal (advisory only)	Chaklala, Rawalpindi	Punjab	No	T2