

Map
MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Afghanistan and Pakistan Ethnic Groups

Language and Culture Span Across Political Boundaries in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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PARTNER



This map shows ethnolinguistic groups across Afghanistan and Pakistan. This map is part of a high school human geography lesson, *The Geography of Afghanistan*, developed by Brown University for The Choices Program.

QUESTIONS

- Sometimes, political borders do not match up with cultural boundaries. Where do you see cultural boundaries intersecting a political border on this map? How do you think these differences between cultural and political borders developed?

Answers will vary! On this map, both the **Baloch** and **Pashtun** ethnolinguistic groups straddle the 2640-kilometer (1640-mile) border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, known as the **Durand Line**.

The border was established in 1893 via an agreement between Abdur Rahman Khan, the emir (or ruler) of Afghanistan, and Sir Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary of the British Raj. The Durand Line was drafted with the purpose of limiting each government's sphere of influence in the contested Pashtun tribal areas, referred to in antiquity as "Arachosia".

Interestingly, the agreement was only one page long and consisted of just seven short articles. Joint Afghan-British demarcation surveys were not even carried out until 1894 and only amounted to roughly half of the modern border. Consequently, eighty-five percent of the Durand Line follows rivers and other physical features, instead of critical ethnic boundaries.

- How can the intersection of cultural and political borders lead to conflict between groups?

Answers will vary! When borders separate a group of people, their interests and representation in government may be overshadowed by more populous or unified communities. This can result in disenfranchisement, resentment, and conflict.

In the case of the Pashtuns, the Durand Line—the border drawn by Afghan and British surveyors—**divided land, tribes, and families between two countries**. Complicating matters, Pashtuns had long been in conflict with the British-supported Punjabi of northern India—fighting to prevent Punjabi migration into the mountains of southeastern Afghanistan.

In 1893, Pashtuns living in the northwestern reaches of the tribal areas came under Afghan control, while those in the southeast fell under the influence of India. The Pashtun community was further divided when Pakistan gained its independence from India in 1947. Those Pashtuns living within Pakistan's borders (more than half of the total Pashtun population) became subject to a country governed by a Punjabi majority. This is still a source of great tension between the groups today.

- Where else have political boundaries led to conflict?

Answers will vary! Boundaries can be responsible for conflict in “**artificial states**”, countries where borders do not match the divisions desired by the people.

The **Kakwa** are an ethnolinguistic group living **divided among 3 countries** in central and eastern Africa: **Uganda, South Sudan** and parts of the **Democratic Republic of Congo**. During the 19th century, the Kakwa endured European colonization, Christian missionaries, slave raids, droughts, livestock epidemics, and displacement.

The British division of the territory into the nations of Uganda and Sudan was originally devised as a quarantine line to prevent the spread of African trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness, throughout the region. The boundary, however, remained after British and Egyptian claims to Sudan were relinquished and a democratic parliament was established in 1956. Uganda gained its independence from Britain in 1962.

Over the following decades, the minority Kakwa of southern Sudan grew resentful of their political marginalization by the Arab majority in the north. When civil war broke out in the 1960s between the north and south, the artificial division did little to prevent the Kakwa in Uganda's military from supporting their kin north of the border. Ugandan supporters offered safe harbor for refugees, supplies, and arms. In turn, southern Sudanese Kakwa guerillas supported Idi Amin, chief of the Ugandan army and a Kakwa himself, in a coup against the Ugandan president, Milton Obote.

Despite being a minority group in Uganda, Kakwa occupied more than 75% of the key positions in Amin's military by 1973. Not surprisingly, when the Tanzanian army ended Amin's failed rule in 1979, he was able to escape the country through Kakwa supporters north of the border.

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
artificial state	<i>noun</i>	government or nation (state) whose borders do not reflect ethnic divisions or the desires of its peoples.
border	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
boundary	<i>noun</i>	line separating geographical areas.
colony	<i>noun</i>	people and land separated by distance or culture from the government that controls them.
disenfranchise	<i>verb</i>	to take away certain rights, usually voting.
displacement	<i>noun</i>	forced removal of something, often people or organisms, from their communities or original space.
Durand Line	<i>noun</i>	border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
emir	<i>noun</i>	leader of a Muslim region or state. Also called amir.
ethnic group	<i>adjective</i>	people sharing genetic characteristics, culture, language, religion or history.
linguistics	<i>noun</i>	study of language.

marginalize	<i>verb</i>	to reduce the significance or importance of something.
Pashtunistan	<i>noun</i>	region along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
physical features	<i>noun</i>	naturally occurring geographic characteristics.
Raj	<i>noun</i>	British government rule in India, prior to Indian independence in 1947.
sphere of influence	<i>noun</i>	area or region where a nation or cultural group has cultural, economic, military, or political influence.
surveyor	<i>noun</i>	person who analyzes the specific boundaries and features of a piece of land using mathematical concepts such as geometry.
tribe	<i>noun</i>	community made of one or several family groups sharing a common culture.



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