



## **The Enigma of Balochistan's Socio-Economic Deprivation and The Way Forward**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The socio-economic deprivation of Balochistan negatively affects human development in the province, forming the nucleus of the structure of non-traditional security threats there. This article attempts to examine the impact of non-traditional security threats on provincial development of Balochistan as well as the implications of CPEC for regional geopolitics with a special focus on the causes of Balochistan's economic slowdown and its economic revival. It employs an inductive-explanatory methodology to highlight the deprivation with some key applicable measures for betterment. It argues that non-traditional security threats, such as terrorism, natural hazards, the tribal system, political instability, and economic exploitation significantly reduce Balochistan's development. Building on the available literature, it explores the province's state-led development initiatives, political processes, and political economy to highlight the gaps and suggest recommendations to concerned authorities for improvement. While emphasizing the need to address non-traditional security threats to promote provincial development as par with other provinces of Pakistan, this article recommends a multi-faceted approach, to be spearheaded by the federal government, to address the deprivation of Balochistan. Such an approach may include, among others, improving security measures, strengthening disaster management systems, and promoting economic development. The findings of this study can inform policymakers and practitioners in designing effective policies and strategies to address threats, promote growth, rectify internal weaknesses, and resolve mishandled antagonism which is exploited by external forces.



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## **1. Introduction**

Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan, covers 43.6% (347,190 sq.km) of the country's land mass. It is located in the southwest of Pakistan and shares borders with Iran, Afghanistan, and the Arabian Sea. Balochistan is known for its natural resources, including oil, gas, copper, and gold, as well as its strategic location as a trade and transit hub between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. According to a 2017 estimate, it is inhabited by 12.34 million people, with Baloch, Pashtun, and others accounting for 52%, 36%, and 12% respectively (Khan et al., 2020). Ironically, it makes up merely 6% of the country's total population. Balochistan is home to three aboriginal ethnic groups—the Pashtun, Baloch, and Brahvi—along with a small number of individuals from other ethnic and religious backgrounds such as Hazaras, Punjabis, Sindhis, Hindus, and Christians. The province has a tri-dimensional ethnic makeup, with Pashtun areas being more densely populated than the Baloch and Brahvi areas. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017), n.d, the largest ethnic group in Balochistan is the Balochis-cum-Brahvis; accounting for 55% of the provincial population. The Census combines Balochis and Brahvis into one group without distinguishing them as separate ethnic groups. The second largest ethnic group is the Pashtuns, who make up around 30% of the population. Other smaller ethnic groups are primarily settled in urban areas such as Quetta, Sibi, and Bela for business, commerce, services, and educational purposes. However, living and migrating to remote and rural areas of Balochistan is not advantageous for these smaller groups due to the underdevelopment of rural areas in terms of commerce, business, education, and standard of living.

Unfortunately, more than 48% of the province's population lives beneath the poverty line (Kagabo et al., 2023). The low populace thickness suggests that the territory appreciates a possibly high estimation of common assets per individual. The province's land mass endows Pakistan with an economically relevant strategic space that might reduce trade and travel costs both for Pakistan and the countries of emerging economic regions. The long coastline is a possible site for trade and travel transit routes and a great source of rich marine resources. The Balochis are considered to be one of the oldest Iranian plateau nations that have always lived in tribal communities without a proper chain of central command. Before the partition of British India, the colonial government controlled and administered the area by exploiting the tribal system and strengthening the Sardars/Nawabs (tribal leaders) while keeping the masses extremely deprived. Balochistan was a confederacy of tribal chiefs and had a status as a semi-autonomous state till the partition. The roots of the current socio-economic deprivation of the province can, therefore, be found in the legacy of the colonial era.

The enigma of Balochistan's social and economic slowdown is a complicated conundrum with several deep-seated causes. This article outlines internal weaknesses and unresolved mishandled antagonism in the province, exploited by external forces, as the primary cause of provincial socio-economic deprivation. Due attention has also been given to shortcomings and handicaps that restrict the economic growth in Balochistan. This article also highlights the prospects of economic growth and stability in Balochistan with reference to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Khushal Balochistan Project, launched by the federal government of Pakistan. It is worth noting here that Balochistan has great potential for the economic uplift not only of itself but also of the whole country. Given its crucial geostrategic location, its economic development and social progress, and cohesion as a province is vital for Pakistan's economy as well as security. Unfortunately, it has lagged behind the other provinces of Pakistan due to some internal and external factors. The failure of the central government to address Balochistan's economic slowdown and social fragmentation has over the decades created a sense of deprivation in the minds of the people. It should, therefore, form a top priority of both the provincial and federal governments to attend sincerely and urgently to the deprivation, felt by the people of Balochistan.

This article is arranged in five sections. Section 1 provides a brief review of the literature, identifying general themes and gap. Section 2 conceptualizes the notion of deprivation, and highlights some of its significant types for better understanding the phenomenon. Section 3 discusses major causes, ten in number, of economic slowdown in Balochistan. Section 4 gathers some crucial findings of the study under the heading "Fallouts and Deliberations." Last section, followed by a brief conclusion, provides a practicable set of recommendations to improve the socio-economic condition of Balochistan, and to lower the sense of deprivation felt by the people of the province.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature employed helps to develop an understanding of the province of Balochistan while keeping focus on its socioeconomic under-development in contrast to the other provinces of the country. Identifying the key themes, it is indispensable that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) be studied for its potential benefits along with the implications it might entail for the province and its inhabitants (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015; Baloch, Khowaja, & Lohana, 2018). As the authors have pointed out the CPEC project may bring prosperity to the region by creating opportunities for employment, development of new infrastructure and adding to a well pronounced regional cohesion. However, meticulous strategies must be applied to address the apprehensions related to the security and economic inconsistencies following the flagship project. The second theme under consideration relates to the geography and the socioeconomic facets of the province of Balochistan (Ahmed, Mohammad, & Wadood, 2020). Weighing in the geostrategic location and the abundance of natural resources the province has a huge potential. To unleash this potential effective governance and careful planning are required to address the plethora of challenges faced by the province. Furthermore, the study has also built upon the political and nationalist sentiments in the province (Ahmad, 1973). The Baloch people over the course of history have showed concerns over the intrusive policies of the federal government, undermining their constitutional right of provincial autonomy. To gauge poverty, education, health and the standard of living in Baluchistan Alkire and Foster (2011) work has been analysed to undertake curative measures.

The sources offer little to no information on various factors, such as *sardari* system, responsible for the socioeconomic deprivation of Balochistan and its implication for both the province and the country. There is also the need to assess the issue of deprivation as a complex phenomenon. This study has made an attempt to connect the issue of Balochistan's socioeconomic deprivation to a wide range of relevant causes alongside proposing workable recommendations.

### 2.1. Conceptualizing Deprivation

Sociologists broadly define deprivation (*mehroomi* in Urdu) as "inequality of access to social goods" (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994). It can be objective and subjective as well as absolute and relative. When deprivation is measured against that of others—objectively or subjectively—it is called relative deprivation (Turner, 2006). The feeling of being deprived creates in a group anxiety, resentment and a sense of being unjustly treated and marginalized. The lack of a timely and comprehensive policy response to the feelings of deprivation may lead to a situation where the "deprived" group may challenge the legitimacy and authority of the state to govern them. In some extreme cases, such a group may resort to violence as a means of catharsis as well as a way to push the state to take seriously its deprivation.

Sometimes, deprivation is caused by poverty and the inability of people to access necessary means of life. In such a case, the Alkire-Foster methodology can prove to be a good approach to understanding the causal relationship between poverty and deprivation which is a multidimensional approach to measuring poverty that was developed by Sabina Alkire and James

Foster in 2011 (Alkire & Foster, 2011). The methodology is based on the capability approach, which emphasizes the importance of assessing people's ability to achieve well-being in different dimensions of life, such as health, education, and living standards. This methodology draws on a set of indicators that capture different dimensions of poverty, such as nutrition, education, housing, and access to health care. The methodology then combines these indicators to create a multidimensional poverty index (MPI), which provides a comprehensive picture of poverty that takes into account multiple dimensions of well-being.

The MPI is calculated by identifying individuals or households that are deprived of more than one dimension of poverty, and the severity of poverty is measured by the number of deprivations. For example, an individual who is deprived of both nutrition and education would be considered poorer than someone who is deprived of only one dimension. This methodology has been widely used in academic research and policy analysis, particularly in the field of international development. It provides a useful tool for policymakers to identify the dimensions of poverty that require intervention and to monitor progress over time.

Having said that, we should not solely focus on the economic factor in understanding the phenomenon of deprivation as it may be driven by other considerations as well. An analytically convenient approach to understanding the multidimensional nature of deprivation may be to look into it by dividing it into some important types, as done in the following.

**Material Deprivation:** Material deprivation refers to the lack of access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022). People who do not have access to these basic necessities may feel deprived and may struggle to meet their basic needs. Given the complexities of the modern world, basic needs may also include, for example, access to the internet and communication technologies. If the "deprived" group feels that its lack of access to these needs is due to structural injustice or unequal distribution of national resources and wealth, it may alienate from the wider national society. This feeling of alienation, over time, may prepare grounds for self-interested actors to exploit the situation and create insecurity in the region, as we have seen in the case of Balochistan.

**Social Deprivation:** Social deprivation refers to the lack of social relationships, support, and connections. People who feel socially deprived may experience loneliness, isolation, and a sense of disconnection from others. As per the headcount index related to social deprivation, Balochistan province's rural areas have 69% deprivation as compared to that of other provinces having 45% (Rehmat & Idrees, 2022).

**Economic Deprivation:** According to a source Abid and Ashfaq (2015), Balochistan serves as the economic hub of Pakistan owing to its extensive mineral resources. Furthermore, it can open the gateway of foreign direct investments in different fields like mining, infrastructure development, and the like. However, the province faces certain precarious challenges that can affect the economic revival of the province. One such challenge is the construction of Gwadar Port, which is vital for the economic uplift of the province. The problem here is that some segments of the Baloch population consider the development of the port as the government's efforts to settle as many outsiders in the region as possible.

**Political deprivation:** An active participation of all stakeholders in the political processes of the state, a fair and just mechanism for the distribution of political power and adequate participation of all provincial representatives in decision-making bodies is a prerequisite for creating a sense of nationhood and state ownership in people of different political regions. If the case is otherwise, it makes lead to a state of affairs where people of one or two federating units may experience political deprivation, which in the long run may be a serious threat to the political and territorial integrity of the state. If the people of Balochistan feel politically "deprived," their grievance should be settled through dialogue and conciliation.

**Emotional Deprivation:** This type of deprivation may be comparatively more important as it has the potential to animate other dimensions of deprivation. Generally speaking, owing to economic backwardness and political disorganization, the Baloch people have failed to exert themselves within the federation as per, what they see, as their due rights. It is important to note that different people may experience deprivation differently depending on their personal circumstances and life experiences. Some people may feel deprived in one area of their life while feeling content and satisfied in others. If a sense of deprivation is collectively shared, it may create emotional distress. Such emotional distress usually comes with drawing hard lines between “us” (the “deprived”) and “them” (the “privileged”/ “oppressor”/ “usurper”).

Understanding the causes and experiences of deprivation can help individuals and communities address and alleviate these feelings. This saga of Balochistan’s social and economic slowdown is a complicated conundrum and has several deep-seated causes. Every passing day, Balochistan is struggling to overcome poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, while facing an impending economic and resource crisis. Balochistan’s poverty rate is more than 48%, which once was the highest among all provinces in Pakistan (Rehmat & Idrees, 2022). In terms of the GDP Balochistan in 2019-20 was the lowest among all provinces in Pakistan, with only 0.5% (Ahmed et al., 2020). Like its GDP growth rate, the province’s literacy rate is the lowest among all provinces in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement survey of 2019-20, Balochistan had the lowest literacy rate of 46% as compared to Punjab’s 64% and Sindh’s 58%. This highlights a significant disparity in educational attainment among the provinces in Pakistan. Education is a crucial element in the growth and development of society, economy, or nation. Unfortunately, in Balochistan, education is not as advanced as in other provinces of Pakistan, and the literacy rates for both men and women are relatively low.

In sum, a number of socio-political and regional-structural factors have made the resource-rich Balochistan the most underdeveloped and poverty-stricken province of Pakistan, signified by the fact that living standards in the province are the lowest in the country. Having 72% of the population under 30-year age Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017), the province is faced with an unsatisfied “youth bulge,” which is an alarming situation. And if the socioeconomic deprivation of the province is not addressed on an urgent basis through a comprehensive and honest plan of action, it may create serious geopolitical problems for Pakistan in the coming future.

### **3. Causes of Economic Slowdown in Balochistan**

As noted earlier, the underdevelopment of Balochistan is a serious problem as well as a challenge both for the people of the province and the security and economic well-being of Pakistan. A sense of deprivation, in any way justified, on the part of the people of such a geo-strategically important region is by no means good for Pakistan. One can find a plethora of causes behind the socioeconomic deprivation of Balochistan. Here, we list some key causes of it in the following:

**Poverty:** More than 70% of the province’s population lives beneath the poverty line due to its harsh mountainous terrain, lack of government infrastructure, and its long history of pro-independence grievances (Baloch et al., 2018).

**Proportional Representation in Federation:** According to a source Baloch et al. (2018) smaller provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan find it difficult to accommodate within the federation due to its centralist nature. This difficulty to accommodate has created resentment in the two provinces, especially in the latter. Furthermore, Balochistan is not proportionately represented, as the people of the province maintain, in the government because despite covering almost 44% of the country’s land, only 6% of the total national population resides here and the representation along with the distribution of resources in both state

institutions and elected bodies are based upon population. Therefore, the Baloch population insinuates that the government is only interested in enjoying the economic and geostrategic potentials of the province with the help of the so-called local elites and is not truly interested in the uplifting of the locals. Keeping this in view, the resource share of smaller provinces was increased to manifolds by the 7th National Finance Commission Award in 2009. It, therefore, seems unwise to put all the blame on the government for the lack of economic growth (Javaid, 2010).

**Tribal System:** Additionally, a more pertinent question is how well entrenched the modern developmental concepts would be in a society that is based on primitive tribal systems given the current social structure of the province. Democracy has never been smooth in Pakistan. The political economy, therefore, has been unsuccessful resulting in controlled or quasi-democracy. In such circumstances, it is very difficult to develop a regional/provincial political culture, responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people of that province. This state of affairs has added fuel to the resentment of the unsatisfied people of Balochistan, further complicating the process of socio-political development. In addition to the failure of the federation in coping effectively with the problems of the province and the unfavourable social culture of local tribes, the all-powerful yet unaccountable bureaucracy has been equally responsible for impeding Balochistan's progress.

**Demographic Resentment:** According to a rough estimate, approximately 91,000 Chinese entered Pakistan in the year 2017 alone. In 2017, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry published a report, pointing to the prospect that Baloch natives will be outnumbered by Chinese nationals if the influx (of that time) remains unaltered (Cooley & Heathershaw, 2017). This situation appears to make the provincial people, especially those who hold an Ethno-centric nationalist outlook, apprehensive about their demography and local culture. Furthermore, there have been growing complaints in the local Baloch community that despite the province having seen high investments over the years, there has been little done to benefit the local community (Iqbal, 2017).

**Economic Exploitation of Baloch Resources:** Balochistan is the most underprivileged region in Pakistan with the lowest growth rate among the four provinces. The province has struggled with economic development, poverty, and underdevelopment. The development and utilization of Balochistan's resources have been a contentious issue. The province has long felt neglected by the federal government, which has favored other provinces in terms of development and resource allocation. There have also been accusations of exploitation and marginalization of Balochistan's resources by outside entities, such as multinational corporations.

**Sardary System:** The *Sardari* system, also known as the tribal chieftaincy system, has been a part and parcel of the social structure in Balochistan for centuries. The system is based on the concept of *sardars*, who are tribal leaders appointed or recognized by the state, to manage the affairs of their respective tribes. The *sardars* exercise significant power and influence over their respective tribes, including the control of land resources, and the resolution of disputes. One of the primary reasons behind Balochistan's underdevelopment is its deep-rooted association with the *Sardary* system. The *sardars* receive significant privileges and powers from the government, including the right to collect taxes from their tribes and the ability to exercise police powers in their respective areas. This system has led to a concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few tribal leaders, while the majority of the population lives in poverty and deprivation, not to mention being marginalized. The *Sardari* system has had a significant impact on the socio-economic conditions of Balochistan. The system has also contributed to the spread of corruption, nepotism, and exploitation in the province. Furthermore, the *Sardari* system has led to a lack of development in the province. The tribal leaders have been known to block development projects and other initiatives that they perceive as a threat to their power and influence. This has resulted in a lack of basic infrastructure, education, and healthcare facilities in many parts of the province, leading to a lower standard of living for the bulk of the population. Historically speaking, this

affiliation was further strengthened by the British as they sought to gain control over India through their policies and colonial strategies (Mehrab, Ahmed, Qaiser, & Raja, 2017).

**Politicization of Ethnicity:** Politicization of ethnicity in Balochistan refers to the use of ethnic identity by political actors for the purpose of gaining power, influence, or resources in the province. Balochistan is a multi-ethnic province with a diverse population, including Baloch, Pashtuns, Brahvis, Hazaras, and others. The politicization of ethnicity has been a significant issue in the province's political landscape, particularly in the context of Baloch separatist movements and insurgency. One of the key factors contributing to the politicization of ethnicity in Balochistan is the historical marginalization of ethnic Baloch by the state. Balochistan has been subject to a long history of political, economic, and social exclusion by the central government, which has fuelled resentment among the Baloch people. This sense of marginalization has been exploited by Baloch nationalist groups, which use ethnic identity as a rallying point for their political agenda. The politicization of ethnicity in Balochistan has had significant socio-economic effects on the province. Ethnic conflict and violence have hampered economic development and foreign investment in the region. The province's infrastructure remains underdeveloped, and access to basic services such as health care and education is limited, particularly in Baloch-dominated areas. The politicization of ethnicity has also led to a breakdown in trust between different ethnic groups in the province, which has further exacerbated tensions and conflicts. It is worth noting here that ethnicity creates no issues inside a government system if it is addressed with a central framework and according to widely agreed mechanisms. If the genuine demands and issues of ethnic races are subdued using power, ethnicity moves toward becoming politicized—to be a convenient tool in the hands of political actors.

**System of Governance:** Administratively Balochistan is divided into 'A' and 'B' areas. It is worth noting that the categorization of districts into 'A' and 'B' areas is subject to changes driven by the evolving security and development situation in Balochistan. The urban area of Balochistan stretched over four thousand eight hundred square kilometers is called the 'A' area and the rural area spread over two hundred, ninety-nine thousand and one hundred ninety square kilometers is called the 'B' area. The 'A' areas are administered by the law of the land, where maintenance of law and order is the responsibility of the police, which operates under a district police officer. On the other hand, the maintenance of law and order in 'B' areas is the responsibility of 'Levies Force'. The Balochistan Levies Force is a law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining law and order in most districts of Balochistan. This community force has been in operation for over a century, with its roots tracing back to the British Raj era. The force is led by a director general and is mainly composed of local security personnel, including Baloch and Pashtun officers. Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, and Tehsildars command the Levies force at the district, sub-divisional, and tehsil levels, respectively. In order to ensure intimate coordination at the provincial level, both the Police and Levies Force operate under the Home Department of the Provincial Government (Tabssum, Mustafa, Liaqat, Aslam, & Shah, 2023).

**Security Situation:** Nationalist groups in Balochistan have been involved in a long-standing insurgency against the Pakistani government, demanding greater autonomy and control over the province's resources. These groups have been known to engage in violent attacks against government installations, security forces, and civilians. The main nationalist groups operating in Balochistan are the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), and Baloch Republican Army (BRA). These groups are believed to receive support from various sources, including foreign powers, and have been accused of committing human rights violations, including targeting non-Baloch civilians. The nationalist groups argue that the Pakistani government has exploited the resources of Balochistan while neglecting the province's socio-economic development. They demand the right to self-determination and accuse the government of suppressing their political aspirations through force. The ongoing insurgency and violence in Balochistan have had a negative impact on the province's socio-economic development. The security situation has deterred investment and development projects, leading to a lack of job opportunities and economic growth. The conflict has also caused the displacement of thousands

of people, creating a humanitarian crisis. The security situation in Balochistan is one of the biggest challenges to CPEC and its projects. Baloch people have always felt deprived of their social, political, and economic rights. Despite being rich in resources, they are being ignored consistently. This void, if exploited by sub-nationalist organizations or our adversaries, can create a security situation that will seriously hamper the timely completion of projects.

**Threat to Provincial Autonomy:** There has been a common consensus amongst Baloch leaders that provincial autonomy is in constant jeopardy as outlined in the constitution. The province has been struggling for greater provincial autonomy and more control over its resources as compared to all other provinces of Pakistan, especially Punjab. Some of the main causes of limited provincial autonomy as claimed by Baloch leaders are as under:

**Resource Exploitation:** The Baloch leaders claim that the federal government has been exploiting the natural resources of Balochistan, such as minerals and gas, without proper compensation to the province. This has resulted in limited control of the province over its resources and revenue.

**Political Marginalization:** Balochistan's political representation has been weak in the federal government, and Baloch leaders claim that they have been marginalized in the political process. They claim that they are not given equal representation in decision-making, which has resulted in limited autonomy.

**Military Intervention:** The Baloch leaders claim that the federal government has used military force to suppress dissent and political opposition in Balochistan. They claim that the military has violated human rights, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, which has resulted in further alienation of the Baloch people from the central government.

**Lack of Development:** Baloch leaders claim that the province has been neglected in terms of development projects, which has resulted in limited economic growth and social progress. They claim that the federal government has not invested enough in the province's infrastructure, education, and healthcare, which has resulted in limited opportunities for the Baloch people.

**Constitutional Issues:** Baloch leaders claim that the constitution of Pakistan does not provide enough provincial autonomy to Balochistan. They claim that the provincial government's powers are limited and that the federal government has too much control over the province. This has resulted in limited decision-making power for the provincial government.

**Political Instability:** The ideal condition for investment in Balochistan has never been as deficient as today. No local or foreign investor is willing to invest capital in Balochistan due to insecurity and instability in the province. Overall, the factors enumerated below have combined to create a volatile political environment in Balochistan, which has hindered the province's development and prosperity.

**Insurgency and Violence:** Balochistan has been facing insurgency and violence for several decades, which has destabilized the political environment of the province. The Baloch nationalist groups have been fighting for greater political and economic rights, while sectarian violence and terrorism also add to the instability.

**Marginalization of Balochistan:** Balochistan has a different cultural and historical background than the rest of Pakistan. The Balochis feel marginalized due to the imposition of the dominant culture, language, and traditions of the Punjab province.

**Ethnic and Sectarian Divisions:** The province has a diverse ethnic and sectarian makeup, with Baloch, Pashtuns, Hazaras, and Punjabis residing in the region. The tensions among these groups have resulted in political instability and violence.



**Foreign Interference:** Balochistan's strategic location and vast mineral resources have attracted foreign interests, leading to interference in the province's political affairs. Some foreign powers have supported the nationalist groups in their fight for greater autonomy, further contributing to the instability.

#### **4. FALLOUTS AND DELIBERATIONS**

After studying some of the major internal and external causes impacting the economic progress of Balochistan, we have identified some points that beg for attention. Firstly, there is a sense of insecurity and lack of ownership in Balochistan vis-à-vis Pakistan. The government's policies such as the lowest natural resource royalties (12.5% per well-head of gas) to Balochistan have resulted in creating a sense of insecurity and lack of ownership of the country in the minds of Balochis. Secondly, Contribution to Policy Making. The lack of Baloch representation in the higher governmental hierarchy and policy-making institutions has not only cast them their rightful share in the country's resources and wealth distribution but has also resulted in disharmony and divergence between federal and provincial policies. A proportional, just, and active representation of the Balochis is required in the federal government to mitigate the effects of feeling deprived.

CPEC project is not only vital for Pakistan's economy and geopolitical interests, it is also crucial for the socioeconomic development of Balochistan. It is for this reason that India has been critically concerned about the project on the ground that it passes. Apart from it, India is also facilitating certain quarters in Pakistan/abroad that hold an anti-CPEC view.

According to a report published by Pakistan's Ministry of Planning, Development, and Reform in 2016, more than 52% Baloch population is currently living in multidimensional poverty which is very high as compare to other provinces (43% in Sindh and 31% in Punjab) despite all the billion-dollar investments. There have been reported uneven development patterns in the province where the rich are getting richer and the poor seeing no improvement in their lives.

According to Balochistan Human Rights Organization, around 2,578 families have been displaced because of the acquisitions of lands required for these development projects as of 2017. This situation is intensified by the lack of proper infrastructure, poor law & order, and environmental concerns. It compounded Afghanistan's political instability, chaotic security, and support to Baloch insurgents (Hussain & Kumar, 2023).

Lastly, the National Financial Commission (NFC) award formula has not been advantageous for Balochistan, mainly because of factors such as its low population, lack of representation at the national level, underdevelopment, political fragility, and limited revenue generation. In contrast, Punjab has consistently received a larger share of public resources and project allocations, owing to its larger number of seats in the National Assembly and the fact that many military and civil bureaucrats are from Punjab.

#### **5. Recommendations**

There can be numerous recommendations that can be proposed to address the complex challenges associated with Balochistan's socioeconomic development and its impact on Pakistan. Over the years, several mega-projects and policy initiatives have been introduced by the government to put Balochistan on the path of economic development. Such initiatives include Aghaz-e-Haqooq Balochistan, the 18th Amendment, and National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, the Kacchi Canal, the Coastal Highway, the Gwadar port, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, and Khushal Balochistan Project. While being significant in themselves, these initiatives have largely been unsuccessful to achieve the desired objectives. What follows is a list of recommendations to address the sociopolitical and economic grievances of Balochistan.

**WHAM:** It is necessary to bring all separatist elements into the mainstream by initiating actionable measures within the community. The ongoing ameliorating efforts in the form of Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) should be taken at a broader scale, which allows the integration of an anti-state element into the national community.

**Implementation of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the constitution has called for power decentralization and greater provincial autonomy, that have not yet been fully realized. There is a need to reinvigorate Inter-Provincial Coordination Committee (IPCC) so that opportunities such as tourism could be revived in Balochistan. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment needs to be implemented in letter and spirit.

**Federal and Provincial Harmony:** The major cause of Balochistan's economic failure is the absence of trust and hope in the federal government resulting in a perceived sense of deprivation and lack of belonging towards the country. This sense of being "disconnected" needs to be addressed by devising a credible, creative, and implementable policy that represents the government's sincerity.

**CPEC and Karachi Canal Project:** Development projects like CPEC and Karachi Canal require to be pursued with national vigor. An all-inclusive approach should be adopted for the execution of these projects to ward off Baloch's fears of marginalization and exploitation. Decisions related to the development of the province should be owned by the locals through their representatives. The federation should reach out to all stakeholders to discuss the design and planned benefits of the projects for locals of the province.

**Regional Economic Connectivity:** CPEC can be used for regional economic connectivity. It can be extended to Iran's Chahbahar Port and UAE's ports. It will accrue two folds advantages: besides the increased spectrum of CPEC over the region, it will also raise its stakes for regional countries and a collective response will be generated against any anti-CPEC move/ act.

**Security Situation:** Law enforcement agencies have already minimized the threat by successful kinetic operations. Its long-term and consistent dividends, however, cannot be accrued until it is correspondingly supported by other quarters of government. Rules for this have already been formulated in terms of the National Action Plan which needs implementation by all concerned departments.

**Role of Media:** Media, both electronic and print, can play a vital role to project CPEC as a game changer for the development of Pakistan and a tool for economic integration at regional and international levels. This will not only counter anti-CPEC narratives effectively, but also create "awareness about the economic opportunities for local masses.

**CPEC Facilitation Center:** Facilitation Center involving all local stakeholders can be established where one window operation can be carried out for necessary correspondence and management. This will not only facilitate the investor but also reduce time delay resulting in early and smooth completion of CPEC-related projects.

**Economic Issues:** Timely provision of funds is ensured through concerned quarters for the uninterrupted continuation of the Khushal Balochistan Project. Any delay in the release of funds to projects under Khushal Balochistan will severely affect the progress of development, consequently, the project will have the same fate as Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan.

## **6. Conclusion**

Geo-strategic importance of Pakistan is linked in a crucial way with Balochistan. This article has explored the impact of non-traditional security threats, such as terrorism, natural

hazards, political instability, and economic exploitation, on Balochistan's Provincial Development Index (PDI) and human development in the province. It has adopted an inductive-explanatory approach to identify the root causes of socio-economic deprivation in Balochistan and has recommended measures for improvement. The study has highlighted the need to address non-traditional security threats and bridge the gaps in state-led development initiatives, political processes, and political economy in the province. The article recommends a multi-faceted approach, led by the federal government of Pakistan, to improve security measures, strengthen disaster management systems, and promote economic development. The findings of this study can guide policymakers and practitioners in designing effective policies and strategies to address threats, promote growth, and resolve internal weaknesses (that are exploited by external forces) and bring Balochistan to the mainstream of national politics and development.

The dream of a progressive Pakistan can hardly be realized without addressing the internal and external causes of the economic slowdown in Balochistan and enhancing the living standards of the people of the province. Furthermore, impediments to planned projects in the province should be pursued with national vigor and resolve. There is also the need to address the issue of deprivation as a complex social phenomenon. It calls for the study of the issue from different aspects, such as psychological, cultural and social. In other words, the issue should not be treated as something related to economic statistics and numerical political representation. We recommend the formation of a dedicated committee—composed of experts from different fields of social sciences, local social and political activists, and policy makers from both the province and the federal government—to investigate the factors causing feelings of deprivation in the province and to propose policy guidelines.

#### **Authors Contribution**

Asim Shabir Tur: Initiated the core idea of performed data analysis and drafting.

Raziq Hussai: Reviewed and revised overall quality and writeup of the manuscript

Zahid Ume: Provided guidelines for empirical analysis

Muhammad Sibte Ali: Provided guidance for data analysis, reviewed, supervised overall study

#### **Conflict of Interests/Disclosures**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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