

Local Communities Perspectives on CPEC: A Qualitative Analysis of Grievances and Implications of Militancy-Driven Security Measures

Mehwish Khan¹ & Dr. Asghar Dashti²

Abstract

This study explores resistance to the (CPEC) in Balochistan, in terms of local Grievances and security implications from militancy. The research shows that even though CPEC is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, it has sparked opposition in Balochistan. The study uses a qualitative methodology, involving semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to explore local perceptions and responses to CPEC projects. The study focused on residents of Balochistan who have information or awareness of CPEC projects. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who could share valuable insights. A sample of 12 interviews is deemed adequate for such a study because it is sufficient to reach data saturation. The findings indicate that the resistance is linked with perceptions of economic marginalization, employment and decision-making. Participants expressed concerns over the uneven distribution of benefits. Cultural assimilation, demographic shifts and media negligence also increase feelings of unease. The study also reveals that militant elements played a significant role in compounding these concerns as they see CPEC as plunderative, thus leading to resistance. In addition, the increased militarisation of CPEC projects has created a mistrust factor where security forces are perceived as an imposition, exacerbating grievances. Ultimately, the research suggests opposition to CPEC in Balochistan is a multi-faceted problem that stems from a combination of socio-economic, political, cultural and militant factors.

Keywords: CPEC, Balochistan, Security, Local Grievances, Militancy, Local Communities, CPEC Belt

Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a large economic and infrastructure-building project between Pakistan and China. It is considered as one of the flagship projects of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), which focuses on the improvement of connectivity, trade, energy cooperation, and economic growth in the

Balochistan region (Britannica, 2024). In April 2015, during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan, the CPEC was officially launched. The cost of the project was initially estimated at around US\$46 billion, before it grew to over US\$60 billion. It involves energy investments, transport infrastructure, industrial complexes and development of Gwadar Port (Britannica, 2024).

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an element of China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has been announced as a revolutionary project in terms of infrastructure development to enhance connectivity, economic interconnectivity and infrastructure in Pakistan. However, CPEC has not been well received in the Balochistan province which is significant to

¹Mehwish Khan, PhD Scholar, Department of International Relation, Federal Urdu University Karachi, meetmehwishkhan@gmail.com

²Dr. Asghar Dashti Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations Federal Urdu University Karachi, asghar.dashti@fuuast.edu.pk

CPEC through Gwadar Port despite its geopolitical and economic importance. Such resistance is a combination of the historical resentments, socio-economic inequality and resource and political representation (Ali, 2018; Baloch, 2020). Past under-development and political and resource mismanagement by the central government have plagued Balochistan. Local communities see CPEC projects as an extension of these historic damages - they fear displacement and lack of participation for local people (Ahmed & Baloch, 2019; Khan, 2021). This has contributed to a lack of trust in the government, and to dissident movements. Apart from socio-economic concerns, militant groups in Balochistan have also opposed CPEC, considering it a threat to Baloch identity and autonomy. The militant groups have targeted infrastructure, military and Chinese installations, thereby escalating security concerns of the Belt (Fair, 2019; Yaseen, 2020). This not only affects development but also allows security threats, which require more military response and counterinsurgency measures (Fair, 2019). Likewise, the militarisation of CPEC projects has also upset locals as the military presence is perceived as repressive. This, in turn, fuels grievances which translate into resistance, demanding more security, which alienates locals further (Wolf, 2017; Hussain, 2022). Given this intrigue environment, it is important to understand the local narratives and perceptions of resistance. Qualitative research provides a better understanding of the historical, political and social processes leading to the formation and expression of grievances, and their security implications. This new research aims to explore the role of local grievances and militancy in shaping resistance to CPEC in Balochistan; this will assist in understanding the socio-political landscape of the region.

Research Gap

While the economic, strategic and geopolitical implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have been explored in detail, few efforts have been made to examine local concerns of the communities in Balochistan, especially in the context of resistance to CPEC. Existing research mostly concerned with

economic opportunities and national-level gains from CPEC, with less research comparing the local grievances, exclusionary feeling, resource distribution issues and cultural anxiety which contribute to resistance at the grassroots level. Moreover, most of the previous studies have been quantitative or policy-oriented studies, while there are still few qualitative studies that take into account the lived experiences and perspectives of affected populations. The link between local grievances and militancy-driven security challenges is also poorly understood. Although some studies have mentioned insurgency and security issues in Balochistan, these studies usually focus on insurgency as an entity in itself, and do not pay attention to political disempowerment, identity issues and socio-economic deprivation that fuel resistance narratives. Furthermore, little research has focused on the unintended effects of the securitization of CPEC projects and the impact of heightened security on local perceptions, trust in the state and community-state relations. In this regard, this study aims to fill those gaps by conducting a qualitative analysis of the resistance against CPEC in Balochistan by analyzing the grievances among local residents and its linkage to militancy related security issues. The study's goal is to offer a more comprehensive and complex perspective on the socio-political dynamics of CPEC and its impact on sustainable development and regional stability, by capturing the voices and experiences of local stakeholders.

Research Objectives

RO1: To explore the local grievances of communities in Balochistan regarding CPEC projects.

RO2: To examine the role of militant groups in shaping resistance against CPEC.

RO3: To analyze the security implications arising from the interaction between local grievances and militancy.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the key local grievances associated with CPEC in Balochistan?

RQ2: How do militant groups influence and shape resistance narratives against CPEC?

RQ3: What security implications emerge from the resistance to CPEC in Balochistan?

Problem Statement

CPEC has been projected as an opportunity for growth and integration, but it has also generated a lot of resistance in Balochistan, and questions its feasibility and sustainability. Balochistan, a strategic province of Pakistan, is one of the country's poorest and most marginalised regions with widespread poverty, political disenfranchisement and a lack of basic facilities. This has created a feeling of deprivation among the population who see mega-development projects as a chance for others (Siddiqi, 2017; Baloch & Inayatullah, 2021). Part of the problem is the disconnect between the rhetoric of development and local concerns. The government's focus on economic development and infrastructure is not shared by locals who are concerned about the fair distribution of development and the loss of land, livelihoods and population due to migration (Nazir, 2018; Shah, 2020). This marginalisation has developed an attitude of resentment and distrust, which is exacerbated by a lack of local engagement in decision-making. On the other hand, militants are taking advantage of perceived injustices to oppose CPEC. They view the corridor as an emblem of exploitation and interference and therefore justify their militant activities. The attacks on CPEC infrastructure and workers highlight the security challenges of the project (Javaid, 2019; Akhtar, 2022). The mix of local grievances and militant ideologies showcase a complex mix of socially rooted and strategically organised resistance. And the state's responses to these challenges have been largely military-oriented, prioritising military protection of CPEC infrastructure over socio-economic concerns. This could further polarise the population and continue to stir up the violence (Haider, 2019; Sial, 2021). Therefore, it is important to examine the interplay between local concerns and militancy in crafting resistance and its security implications. This knowledge is vital for developing more inclusive and sustainable policies to tackle development and security challenges in Balochistan.

Justification of the study

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is recognised as a major development initiative in South Asia; but its implementation in Balochistan has resulted in intricate socio-political consequences that need to be further explored within the academia. While a lot has been written about the project's potential economic growth, infrastructure creation and regional connectivity, little has been written about the local perspectives and experiences of these developments. This is why there is a need for a qualitative study that focuses on local perceptions and experiences. Balochistan's size notwithstanding, it remains a politically, economically and infrastructurally marginalised province in Pakistan. These challenges lead to a sense of exclusion for communities, which has an impact on their perceptions of mega-scale development. CPEC, in all its forms, is not viewed as an opportunity for development, rather through the lens of historical exclusion and uneven development. Therefore, understanding these viewpoints is key to understanding the basis of resistance in some areas. The second major justification for this study is the security issues at hand. The intersection of militancy, state security and development activities is a volatile arena in which actors with different agendas engage. The existing literature is more likely to analyze the individual factors separately, but in reality they are interrelated. To study how local grievances are translated into issues of security, an integrated perspective, which qualitative research can only supply, is needed. Moreover, the study is essential because it points out the necessity to go beyond policy discourse. CPEC is a project that is being projected as a national and global priority project, but locals think otherwise. This may result in misunderstanding, mistrust and even animosity. By taking into account local views, this research will seek to do so, and to paint a more comprehensive picture of development. In addition, the study is validated regarding its methodology. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to explore subjective perceptions, feelings and experiences which are not quantifiable under quantitative methods. We must rationalize the notions of identity, trust, fear and injustice in order to realize how they affect

resistance. This approach is therefore more appropriate in studying a complicated political and social setting like Balochistan. Finally, the research can be generalized to practitioners. It offers lessons about more participatory development, by identifying the key issues of local people. The matter of exclusion, inequality and trust is crucial to the success of CPEC and other projects. The disregard of local perceptions may result in further opposition and failure of development projects. This study is warranted not only because it addresses an academic gap, but also it provides a more comprehensive perspective of the association between the development projects of large scale and local realities, especially in conflict prone areas such as Balochistan.

Literature Review

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has generated much scholarly interest due to its economic, political and military promise especially in Balochistan, where the Gwadar Port is located. Others see this as an economic chance to blend and further develop in the region, yet there is a growing literature on the socio-political issues and opposition to the project. This section examines the literature on local dissatisfaction, understanding of marginalisation and armed resistance in Balochistan. Scholars identify feelings of exclusion from and uneven development as the source of resistance to large infrastructure projects. In Balochistan, a history of political and economic marginalisation has resulted in increased feelings of exclusion. Sana Haroon (2018) asserts that the province has been sidelined in the provincial development projects in the top-down manner with little local involvement, which has supported the exclusion further. Similarly, Asma Faiz (2020) points out that a lack of participatory governance has resulted in mistrust towards government projects like CPEC. The second large stream of literature is concerned with allocation of resources and its contribution to the resistance. According to Sajjad Ashraf (2019), the citizens feel that CPEC is giving unfair treatment of outsiders, such as the federal government and foreign investors, compared to local economic opportunities. The fear of land acquisition, the destruction of the

environment, and unemployment strengthen this view (Naveed Ahmad, 2021). This brings the feel of economic injustice and opposition. Besides economic issues, there are cultural and demographic reasons, as well. Writers mention that the Baloch are worried about the changes in population due to the migration associated with the CPEC projects. According to Adeel Khan (2017), such issues are related to preserving cultural identity and the fear of becoming the minority in their own land. This is not merely a symbolic concern, but also a political and cultural one. Another significant element of the resistance is the role of militancy. These militant groups in Balochistan have framed CPEC as a neo-colonial project, which has led to its rejection. Rafiullah Kakar (2020) argues that militant groups exploit local sentiments to legitimise their activities, and project themselves as the defenders of local rights and resources. This is crucial to the insurgency and mobilisation. Furthermore, the securitization of CPEC is discussed. The role of security forces to protect infrastructure and foreign workers has been interpreted in various ways by scholars. Some view it as necessary to safeguard national interests, while others interpret it as a source of tension by giving an impression of blackmail. Over-militarisation can be a distraction to addressing the issues, reveals Zahid Shahab Ahmed (2018). This is also highlighted by Umer Karim (2019), who states that military responses are oblivious to the socio-political nature of resistance. Moreover, the literature also highlights the information gap between the government and locals. Huma Baqai (2021) argues that the lack of transparency and information dissemination about the CPEC projects cause information and trust deficit. This not only results in distrust but also anti-government rhetoric. With regard to the qualitative research, several studies emphasise the importance of local narratives. For Nosheen Ali (2019), ethnographic and thematic approaches are important to understand the dynamics of resistance movements as they allow researchers to explore the perspectives and responses of people to development projects. These methods help to examine the socio-economic-political nexus. In addition, regional and geopolitical commentary is also useful to understand some of the impacts of resistance to CPEC. To illustrate this, Andrew Small (2020) indicates that it is not only Pakistan

but also the Belt and Road Initiative of China that faces a challenge in Balochistan. This brings out the international implications of local opposition. To conclude, the existing sources prove that the opposition to CPEC in Balochistan is caused by several factors. In other words, it is an outcome of several historical and socioeconomic injustices, cultural sensitivities and militant strategies. While previous literature offers valuable insights, there is a need for more sophisticated qualitative research that links local voices and security. This study seeks to address this through thematic analysis to better understand the interplay between local grievances, militancy and resistance and its implications for security.

Contribution to the Literature

This study is an important addition to the existing literature on CPEC, conflict studies and development politics because it offers an in-depth qualitative analysis of resistance to CPEC in Balochistan from the local community perspective. This research will highlight the socio-political, cultural and security related factors influencing local perception and resistance, in contrast to the economic and geopolitical aspects that have been the main focus of previous studies concerning CPEC. The study contributes to the existing research by showing how socio-economic deprivation, political exclusion, identity issues, and perceived injustice are interconnected and affect opposition to large-scale development projects. Additionally, it adds to the scholarship on insurgency and security by depicting how local grievances can give rise to militancy-based resistance, and thus provide a more comprehensive understanding of conflict in development settings. This study highlights the voices and lived experiences of the people who are impacted, thus addressing an important empirical gap, and offers evidence that sustainable development efforts need to be more than economically focused; they must be integrated by inclusive governance, community involvement, and culturally responsive policy approaches. The results thus contribute to the theoretical and practical debates on development-induced conflict, state-society relations, and peacebuilding in resource-rich yet politically marginalized areas.

Methodology

This research takes a qualitative approach to examine the resistance to CPEC in Balochistan, through an in-depth analysis of local grievances and the security issues caused by militancy. The data were analysed through thematic analysis, which involves identifying themes and patterns in the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The study involved semi-structured interviews to provide participants with the opportunity to express detailed insights while focusing on relevant research questions. The study focused on residents of Balochistan who have information or awareness of CPEC projects. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who could share valuable insights, and snowball sampling was also considered to identify other respondents, where necessary. A sample of 12 respondents was interviewed, which is deemed adequate for such a study, and all the participants were 18 years of age and above because it is sufficient to reach data saturation (where no new information is emerging during analysis) in qualitative research, and permits in-depth analysis. Interviews were conducted in a safe space (face-to-face or online), recorded with permission and transcribed. This data was organised and five themes were identified through reflexive thematic analysis, 1.Socio-Economic Deprivation and Unequal Benefit Distribution, 2.Exclusion from Decision-Making and Governance Processes, 3.Cultural Insecurity and Fear of Demographic Change, 4.Militancy as a Reflection and Amplifier of Local Grievances, 5.Security Measures and the Reinforcement of Distrust which is effective for making sense of subjective accounts and social phenomena. Informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation were upheld throughout the research.

Ethical Consideration

In this study, the ethical principles were followed during the research process to protect the rights, dignity of each participant. Informed consent was obtained from each participant by ensuring that the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study and the voluntary nature of participation was explained to each participant. Subjects were told they could drop out of the

study at any time without any repercussions. Since the discussions between CPEC and the locals were sensitive, verbal grievances and security concerns were kept confidential and anonymous in Balochistan. All transcripts of interviews were anonymised and pseudonyms used to maintain participants' anonymity. The researcher has made sure that no information that might put participants at social, political or security risks was revealed in the study. Interviews conducted were used solely for academic research and the data collected was kept secure. In addition, the researcher was also neutral and did not intervene in the responses of the participants to ensure that their opinions and experiences were accurately and respectfully portrayed. Honesty, transparency, confidentiality and respect for participants was maintained throughout the study to ensure that the research was credible and of good quality.

Finding and Analysis

1. Socio-Economic Deprivation and Unequal Benefit Distribution

Our findings suggest that socio-economic inequality is one of the most prevalent grievances against CPEC in Balochistan. The respondents repeatedly complained about the lack of material benefits associated with large-scale development projects. While on paper CPEC is positioned as a development project that promises to uplift the local economy, local perceptions suggest otherwise, with economic opportunities perceived to be skewed in favor of external parties, investors and labor. Participants pointed out that CPEC jobs are highly skilled positions or not accessible for locals; jobs are more directed towards non-locals. This has created feelings of economic exclusion, in which people feel their region is being exploited as a transit and investment hub for development, rather than as a beneficiary. Furthermore, local entrepreneurs and workers said they are unable to compete with large contractors, leading to income inequality. This is both an economic and psychological inequality, as it contributes to the perception that development is not driven by local needs but for national and global interests. This has resulted over time in disenchantment with government development plans. The research indicates that economic

grievances are not isolated but reflect the underdeveloped status of the region.

P1: "Local people are not getting proper jobs from CPEC projects."

P2: "Most economic benefits are going to outsiders instead of local communities."

P3: "exposure to media outlets for promotion is also very limited for local communities"

P4: "Small local businesses cannot compete with large contractors."

P7: "CPEC has increased inequality because skilled jobs are not accessible for locals."

P10: "Our region is being used for development, but locals are not benefiting from it."

P11: "People feel economically excluded despite promises of prosperity."

Participant Statement: "CPEC projects have created opportunities for outsiders, but local people still struggle to find jobs and receive very limited economic benefits."

Participant Code Summary:

Participants mainly discussed unequal employment opportunities, lack of economic benefits for locals, and feelings of economic exploitation under CPEC projects.

2. Exclusion from Decision-Making and Governance Processes

The interviews also highlight a feeling of political exclusion. Respondents claim that they are not given adequate attention in the development of CPEC. Development planning is seen as highly centralised with decisions being made by the federal government without consultation. This has led to perceptions of political marginalisation, where respondents perceive a lack of representation in governance associated with their lands and resources, as well as livelihoods. Respondents also noted that while development is announced, there is little information on land expropriation, compensation

and benefits for locals in the long run. Such governance has contributed to an institutional distrust. Instead of being perceived as "friends of development", state institutions are perceived as outsiders and insensitive to local interests. This is a critical element of resistance as political exclusion breeds the perception of marginalisation and exclusion from national planning. As such, it is evident that resistance is not just a reaction to economic discrimination but also to political exclusion.

P2: "The government makes decisions without consulting local people."

P3: "We are not properly represented in CPEC-related planning."

P5: "There is very little transparency about land acquisition and compensation."

P8: "Local communities are ignored in major development decisions."

P12: "People have started distrusting institutions because their concerns are not heard."

Participant Statement: "We are rarely consulted in decisions about our land and resources, and most policies are imposed without considering local voices."

Participant Code Summary:

Participants highlighted lack of consultation, weak political representation, and distrust toward government institutions and decision-making processes.

3. Cultural Insecurity and Fear of Demographic Change

Demographic and cultural identity was a significant driving factor in resistance. Participants voiced concerns about a possible influx of outsiders under CPEC projects. These concerns are not only demographic but also point to cultural concerns, such as concerns of cultural homogenisation, language loss and erosion of social and institutional structures. Respondents said the influx of outsiders (workers, investors, security personnel) could change the

demographics of Balochistan. This may affect their medium-to-long-term self-representations and autonomy. Several participants linked these fears to their past experiences of marginalisation, suggesting a demographic shift may also reduce their participation in the province's political arena. These cultural concerns are highly symbolic and emotional, and demonstrate a power struggle over cultural identity. This study shows that resistance is not only mounted against material deprivation but also threats to cultural identity and autonomy.

P1: "The influx of outsiders may change the demographic structure of Balochistan."

P4: "We fear losing our cultural identity and traditions."

P5: "Lack of media coverage of our culture and tradition is damaging our identity."

P6: "Local languages and customs may weaken because of outside influence."

P9: "Demographic change can reduce local political representation in the future."

P11: "People are worried that cultural autonomy will gradually disappear."

Participant Statement: "The increasing arrival of outsiders makes us fear that our culture, language, and identity may gradually disappear in the future."

Participant Code Summary:

Participants expressed fears regarding outsider influx, cultural erosion, demographic change, and threats to local identity and autonomy.

4. Militancy as a Reflection and Amplifier of Local Grievances

The research shows that militancy has a two-fold impact on resistance to CPEC. First, militancy is seen as coming out of long-standing grievances over political exclusion and economic marginalisation. On the other hand, these groups are actively feeding the resistance discourse by portraying CPEC as oppressive and foreign. Respondents agreed that militant groups exploit

local grievances to legitimise their resistance to development. They can garner some support or at least tolerance from the community by leveraging local grievances. But respondents also held ambivalent feelings, as many didn't condone violence but could sympathize with the motives of the violent groups. This mixed sentiment indicates that militancy can't be separated from socio-political contexts. Rather, it exists within a milieu of inequality and injustice. This research shows that to combat militancy, the security response needs to be complemented by a response to underlying grievances.

P3: "Militancy is linked with years of political and economic neglect."

P5: "Some groups use local grievances to justify resistance against CPEC."

P7: "Although violence is wrong, many people understand the frustration behind it."

P9: "Militant narratives become stronger when communities feel ignored."

P12: "Economic deprivation and injustice increase sympathy for resistance movements."

Participant Statement: "Many young people become sympathetic toward resistance groups because they feel ignored, politically excluded, and economically deprived."

Participant Code Summary:

Participants linked militancy with long-standing grievances, political injustice, and resistance narratives surrounding CPEC.

5. Security Measures and the Reinforcement of Distrust

The final theme relates to the impact of increased security measures around CPEC. These measures are meant to protect infrastructure and allow project implementation, but respondents saw most of these as oppressive. The security forces have created a "securitised" environment, where day-to-day activities and interactions are perceived to be watched. This has created a sense of a "them" and "us". Security is seen as control,

not protection and trust. Importantly, the securitization has continued to alienate. Resistance is a response to grievances; security is a response to resistance and security measures perpetuate distrust. This leads to continued instability and hampers efforts to build state-community partnerships. The study demonstrates that responses in terms of security measures cannot overcome resistance. Unless local grievances are addressed, there is a risk that a more militarised state will lead to escalation.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the resistance to the CPEC in Balochistan is rooted in a mix of socio-economic, political and security concerns, which are in line with the academic literature on development-induced conflict. The issue of socio-economic inequality reflects historical concerns about resource disparities and lack of benefits. This is consistent with previous research that suggests mega-development projects often do not result in inclusive development when local communities are not included in the economy. The view that CPEC is more beneficial to outsiders' fuels discontent and fuels resistance.

RO1 To explore the local grievances of communities in Balochistan regarding CPEC projects.

The issue of being excluded in the decision-making also supports the idea that the top-down governance practices are also one of the problems of local grievances. Lack of involvement in the decision making process creates the perception of projects that are not participatory. This not only undermines confidence in the state but also brings about a feeling of political alienation. The findings suggest that resistance is not just a reaction to economic conditions but is also affected by a need to be recognized, involved and independent.

RO2 To examine the role of militant groups in shaping resistance against CPEC.

The participants raised the issues of cultural security and the population change, indicating that cultural issues are also a source of

resistance. This is the fear of the loss of their independence, territory, and representation. These sentiments have been captured in the literature on indigenous and marginalized groups whose development programs are usually considered as a threat to the cultural identities of the people instead of promoting development.

RO3 To analyze the security implications arising from the interaction between local grievances and militancy.

Another crucial aspect highlighted in this research is the influence of militancy in narratives of resistance. This research reveals that militia groups do not emerge in a vacuum, but are rooted in local concerns. Through their positioning of CPEC as exploitative, they can garner support and continue their resistance. This implies that militancy is the outcome as well as the enabler of local discontent. Consequently, to tackle militancy, it is not only important to focus on security but also on the socio-political environment in which militancy is embedded.

The message concerning the security measures highlights the adverse consequences of a security-oriented approach. The security increased with the aim of ensuring infrastructure security and upholding security yet the effect has been fear and mistrust by the people. This creates a vicious cycle of lack of contentment breeding resistance, resistance breeding heightened security measures, and this breeding further distrust. The research results suggest that to establish the lasting peace, it is important to consider the underlying grievances.

This study has established that the opposition to CPEC in Balochistan is complex and is a product of a complex mix of reasons, such as economic, political, cultural and militancy. Development or security cannot be addressed merely by looking at them, but by being more participatory in order to deal with the causes, as well as the consequences, of resistance.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to understand the issue of resistance to CPEC in Balochistan through the lens of the interaction between local claims, political marginalization, cultural fears, militancy,

and the changing security environment. The results have shown that the resistance is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but a complex result of the structural inequalities developed over a long period of time and the modern geopolitical processes. As a project that is being put in place as a groundbreaking economic project, CPEC is received differently at the local level where the face of local marginalization and exclusion remains evident in the minds of local citizens. One of the conclusions of the analysis is that socio-economic deprivation continues to play the crucial role in the explanation of resistance. The belief that the benefits of development are not fairly spread has widened the existing inequalities as well as strengthening mistrust towards state-directed efforts. The allocation of resources, opportunities to work are generally perceived to be highly skewed towards outside actors and this factor is one of the reasons why the local populations seem to be spectators of development in their regions and not its beneficiaries. Besides economic issues, political marginalization became a structural challenge. This has undermined institutional legitimacy and alienation due to the absence of meaningful involvement in the decision-making processes. When the communities are not included in the development of projects that directly affect their livelihoods and land, development will be seen more as forced rather than inclusive. This displacement plays a key role in the continuation of resistance narratives over the long run. Cultural and demographic apprehensions complicate the situation. The risk of losing culture and demographic shifts is the latent problems of maintaining identity and political representation. These problems are not merely symbolic, but they relate closely to the historical experiences of marginalization. Therefore, resistance is also an emotional and identity-based, hence more lasting and challenging to solve. The study also cites the dual role of militancy that mirrors and amplifies grievances in the locale. In spite of the fact that insurgencies derive legitimacy based on the prevailing socio-political frustrations, they also translate these frustrations into organized resistances discourses. This change creates a grey zone among actual socio-economic problems and the politico-based violence, and it is hard to respond to this policy-wise and plan the security.

Besides that, securitization of CPEC projects has not been without some unintended consequences. Though this is a good step since more security will mean that things will be stable and safe, it has resulted to a culture of spying and suspicion. This has reinforced a vicious circle of resistance and repression since a reaction supports the other and ultimately it leads to no long-term stability. Overall, the paper concludes that the answer to the challenge of resistance to CPEC in Balochistan lies in the fact that it is necessary to shift the security-oriented policies to more inclusive, participatory and place-based policies of development. The structural grievances might be unchecked and with unstable conditions unless any development undertaking is met with unrelenting resistance. It is important to note that one more aspect of the sustainable development of conflict prone regions in this study is that it is impossible to achieve it solely through infrastructure investment. Instead, it requires an equitable approach by incorporating economic inclusion, political participation, culture sensitivity and community participation. Only within the framework of such a comprehensive approach, trust will be rebuilt between the local communities and the state. Finally, the study will contribute to the wealth of literature on the connection between megaprojects in large-scale development and local socio-political contexts. It indicates that resistance is not always anti-developmental but rather, it is a response to exclusionary practices and what is perceived to be unjust. This is an important difference in policy formulation which is economically viable as well as socially acceptable and politically viable.

Recommendation

Future studies ought to undertake comparative studies across the various regions of Pakistan as a way of investigating the differences in resistance to CPEC across socio-political scenarios.

There is the necessity to conduct longitudinal research to examine the changes in the local perceptions of CPEC over time and especially during the project development. Combination of qualitative and quantitative data: Researchers need to use mixed methods in their research, so that they can gain better insights.

Future research can also be oriented towards the influence of media and digital platforms in the formation of the narratives about CPEC and resistance movements.

There is a need to conduct further studies on gendered experiences, especially the way women in Balochistan feel and are influenced by CPEC-related developments.

The researchers need to investigate how effective are the governmental policies and community-engagement strategies in curbing resistance and establishing trust.

Limitation of the study

The study is limited to the citizens of only Balochistan province.

References

- Ahmed, Z. S. (2019). CPEC and security challenges: Pakistan's strategic concerns. *Asian Survey*, 59(2), 282–303. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2019.59.2.282>
- Akhtar, N. (2022). Insurgency in Balochistan and its impact on development projects. *South Asian Studies*, 37(1), 89–104.
- Ali, S. (2018). China–Pakistan Economic Corridor: Socio-economic implications for Pakistan. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(111), 565–579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1433575>
- Baloch, M. A., & Inayatullah, S. (2021). Governance deficit and local resistance in Balochistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 41(3), 567–580.
- Britannica. (2024). *China–Pakistan Economic Corridor*. Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Fair, C. C. (2019). *In their own words: Understanding insurgency in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Haider, S. (2019). Securitization and development: The case of CPEC in Pakistan. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 42(5), 730–748. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1607801>
- Hussain, E. (2022). Security dynamics of CPEC and regional instability. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 30(1), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2022.2034567>
- Iqbal, M. (2021). Counterterrorism strategies and infrastructure protection in Pakistan. *Policy Perspectives*, 18(2), 45–60.
- Javaid, U. (2019). CPEC and the geopolitics of Balochistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 26(1), 95–110.

- Khan, A. (2021). Local perceptions of CPEC in Balochistan: A socio-political analysis. *Pakistan Horizon*, 74(2), 33–50.
- Lodhi, M. (2023). Governance reforms and development challenges in Pakistan. *The Washington Quarterly*, 46(1), 89–104.
- Malik, A. R. (2021). Economic corridors and regional inequality in Pakistan. *Development Policy Review*, 39(5), 789–805. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12567>
- Nazir, S. (2018). Socio-economic impacts of CPEC on local populations. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 9(12), 120–130.
- Rehman, I. (2018). Development-induced displacement and resistance in Pakistan. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 48(3), 441–458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1414700>
- Shah, S. A. (2020). Political exclusion and conflict in Balochistan. *Asian Affairs*, 51(2), 310–325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1750401>
- Sial, S. (2021). Security governance and insurgency management in Pakistan. *Conflict and Terrorism Studies*, 14(1), 55–72.
- Wolf, S. O. (2017). The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor and its impact on Pakistan’s regional integration. *South Asia Democratic Forum Working Paper*.
- Yaseen, Z. (2020). Militancy and mega development projects in Pakistan. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40(3), 215–230.