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Revitalizing State–Society Relations in South Baluchistan: Governance, Inclusive Development and Institutional Legitimacy in Pakistan's Strategic Periphery

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ABSTRACT

South Baluchistan occupies a pivotal position in Pakistan's strategic landscape owing to its proximity to Gwadar Port, the Arabian Sea, and regional connectivity initiatives associated with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Ali, 2021; Government of Pakistan, 2023). Despite substantial public investment and increasing geopolitical significance, the region continues to face governance deficits, uneven socioeconomic development, and limited institutional trust (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022; World Bank, 2023). Existing scholarship has predominantly examined Baluchistan through the lenses of insurgency, security, and resource politics (Fair, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2022), while comparatively limited attention has been paid to the relationship between governance, development, and state–society relations (Nawaz & Ahmad, 2021). This review article addresses that gap through a qualitative systematic literature review, drawing upon peer-reviewed research, government publications, and international development reports. Guided by Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 1993), Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984), and Peripheral Governance Theory (Migdal, 1988), the article argues that sustainable stability depends not only on infrastructure investment but also on inclusive governance, institutional responsiveness, and meaningful public participation (OECD, 2020). The analysis indicates that development initiatives, including those linked to CPEC, have expanded economic opportunities but have not fully translated into social inclusion because of persistent challenges in service delivery, local participation, and institutional capacity (ADB, 2022; World Bank, 2023). The article proposes an integrated governance framework that combines effective public institutions, community engagement, human development, and locally responsive policymaking. It concludes that strengthening institutional legitimacy through education, inclusive economic participation, and accountable governance offers the most sustainable pathway towards long-term stability and development in South Baluchistan (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022; World Bank, 2023).

Keywords: South Baluchistan; Governance; Development; CPEC; Institutional Trust; Public Participation.

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Introduction

South Baluchistan occupies a strategically significant position within Pakistan because of its proximity to Gwadar Port, the Arabian Sea, and the regional connectivity envisioned under the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Government of Pakistan, 2023; Wolf, 2020). These developments have elevated the region's importance in national planning and international geopolitical discourse (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022). Yet, despite growing public investment and strategic attention, many districts continue to experience uneven socioeconomic development, governance constraints, and limited public confidence in state institutions (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022; World Bank, 2023). This contrast between strategic importance and persistent developmental challenges raises an important question: why have major investments not consistently translated into stronger state–society relations?

Existing scholarship has largely examined Baluchistan through the lenses of insurgency, security, federalism, and resource politics (Fair, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2022; Shah, 2022). While these perspectives remain valuable, they often give limited attention to the institutional and social processes through which citizens experience governance in their everyday lives (Grindle, 2017; Leftwich, 1995). The quality of public services, opportunities for participation, educational access, and perceptions of fairness shape institutional legitimacy as much as constitutional arrangements or infrastructure spending (Fukuyama, 2013; OECD, 2020). Accordingly, understanding South Baluchistan requires moving beyond a predominantly security-centered narrative towards a broader analysis of governance, development, and social inclusion.

This article argues that sustainable stability depends on the interaction between effective institutions and meaningful citizen participation. Development initiatives generate lasting benefits only when local communities perceive themselves as active stakeholders rather than passive recipients of policy (Putnam, 1993; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Drawing on Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 1993), Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984), and Peripheral Governance Theory (Migdal, 1988), the study examines how institutional capacity, community agency, and social inclusion collectively influence state legitimacy. These perspectives provide a coherent framework for explaining why similar development interventions can produce different outcomes depending on governance quality and public trust (Fukuyama, 2013).

Methodologically, the article employs a qualitative systematic literature review that synthesizes peer-reviewed scholarship, official government publications, and reports from recognized international development organizations (Snyder, 2019; Rahman, 2025). Rather than presenting a descriptive overview of previous studies, the review critically evaluates competing interpretations of governance, development, and inclusion while identifying areas of consensus and continuing debate. This interdisciplinary approach integrates insights from Pakistan Studies, Strategic Studies, Development Studies, and Governance Studies.

The article makes three principal contributions. First, it shifts analytical attention from infrastructure and security alone towards state–society relations as the foundation of sustainable development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Second, it develops an

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integrated theoretical framework linking institutional legitimacy, social capital, and community agency (Giddens, 1984; Migdal, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Third, it advances policy recommendations that emphasize inclusive governance, human development, and locally responsive institutions (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2023). The discussion therefore contributes to a more balanced understanding of South Baluchistan as a region undergoing social, political, and economic transformation, where long-term stability depends upon the quality of relationships between citizens and the state.

Literature Review

Research on Baluchistan has expanded considerably during the past two decades, largely because of the province's strategic location, resource endowment, and geopolitical importance (Fair, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2022; Wolf, 2020). Most studies examine federal–provincial relations, insurgency, nationalism, resource governance, and the strategic implications of Gwadar and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Ahmed & Baloch, 2017; Shah, 2022; Wolf, 2020). While this literature has enriched understanding of the province, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the everyday relationship between citizens and state institutions in South Baluchistan (UNDP, 2022).

Governance scholarship increasingly argues that peripheral regions should be understood through the quality of institutional engagement rather than through security variables alone (Fukuyama, 2013; Grindle, 2017). Studies informed by Migdal (1988) and Scott (1998) demonstrate that state authority in peripheral settings depends on negotiation, administrative responsiveness, and service delivery rather than coercive capacity alone. Pakistani scholarship similarly suggests that constitutional reforms and fiscal decentralization have created opportunities for improved governance, although implementation capacity and institutional performance remain uneven (Cheema & Mohmand, 2020; World Bank, 2023; Alam, 2024).

Another major debate concerns the role of tribal institutions. Earlier studies often portrayed tribal structures as obstacles to modern governance (Harrison, 1981), whereas more recent work adopts a hybrid governance perspective (Boege et al., 2009). Contemporary research recognizes that tribal leaders, community networks, and formal state institutions frequently coexist and interact. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these institutions may complement one another where public institutions have limited reach (Boege et al., 2009; Migdal, 1988).

Social Capital Theory provides an important analytical bridge between governance and development. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes social capital as resources embedded in social networks, while Putnam (1993) highlights trust and civic engagement as foundations of effective institutions. In South Baluchistan, bonding social capital strengthens community cohesion, whereas bridging social capital enables citizens to access education, markets, and public institutions (Putnam, 2000). The literature consistently associates higher institutional trust with better governance outcomes and more inclusive development (Fukuyama, 1995; OECD, 2020; Alam, 2024).

The emergence of CPEC has reshaped development debates. Although infrastructure investment has improved connectivity and enhanced South Baluchistan's strategic

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profile, scholars caution that physical infrastructure alone cannot ensure equitable development (ADB, 2022; Wolf, 2020). Sustainable outcomes depend upon education, local employment, institutional capacity, and meaningful community participation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; UNDP, 2022). Human development literature similarly argues that improvements in education, healthcare, and economic opportunity are essential for translating investment into long-term social inclusion (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2023).

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain. Existing research generally treats governance, development, security, and social inclusion as separate themes (Snyder, 2019). District-level analyses of Gwadar, Kech, and Panjgur remain limited, and relatively few studies examine development through the combined lenses of institutional legitimacy and state–society relations (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2023). This article addresses these gaps by integrating governance, development, and social inclusion within a single analytical framework.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates **Social Capital Theory, Structuration Theory,** and **Peripheral Governance Theory** to explain how governance outcomes are produced in South Baluchistan. Rather than applying these perspectives independently, the article treats them as complementary dimensions of state–society relations (Fukuyama, 2013; Migdal, 1988).

Social Capital Theory explains how trust, networks, and civic engagement shape access to institutions and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Structuration Theory highlights the reciprocal relationship between institutions and citizens, demonstrating that governance structures both influence and are transformed by human agency (Giddens, 1984). Peripheral Governance Theory places these interactions within the context of geographically and politically peripheral regions where legitimacy depends less on formal authority than on effective service delivery, participation, and institutional responsiveness (Migdal, 1988; Scott, 1998).

The combined framework proposes that institutional capacity, social inclusion, and community agency reinforce one another. Effective institutions improve inclusion; inclusive development strengthens public trust and participation; and greater citizen engagement enhances institutional legitimacy (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000). Sustainable development therefore depends not only on economic investment but also on the quality of relationships between the state and society (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Sen, 1999).

The analytical model guides the remainder of the article by evaluating governance initiatives against three interrelated questions: Do institutions deliver services effectively? Do development policies expand inclusive opportunities? Do citizens perceive themselves as meaningful participants in governance? These dimensions reflect widely accepted principles of good governance, including accountability, participation, institutional effectiveness, and responsiveness (OECD, 2020; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1997). Together, these questions provide a coherent basis for assessing long-term stability and development in South Baluchistan.

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Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative systematic literature review (SLR)** to examine the relationship between governance, development, and state–society relations in South Baluchistan. A systematic literature review was selected because it enables a transparent, rigorous, and replicable synthesis of evidence drawn from multiple disciplinary traditions, including Pakistan Studies, Strategic Studies, Development Studies, and Governance Studies (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The objective is not to generate primary empirical data but to critically evaluate existing knowledge and identify patterns, areas of convergence, and unresolved debates relevant to the study.

An **interpretivist research paradigm** underpins the analysis. This perspective recognizes that governance, legitimacy, participation, and development are socially constructed concepts whose meanings emerge through institutional practices and human interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). The interpretivist approach therefore provides an appropriate basis for analyzing how governments, communities, and researchers understand governance challenges in South Baluchistan.

Evidence was collected exclusively from **secondary sources**. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, official publications of the Government of Pakistan and the Government of Baluchistan, reports produced by international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), together with policy studies published by recognized research institutes (ADB, 2022; Government of Pakistan, 2023; UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Priority was given to publications issued between **2000 and 2025**, while retaining seminal theoretical works that provide the conceptual foundations of the study.

To enhance methodological rigor, explicit **inclusion and exclusion criteria** were applied. Included sources directly addressed governance, development, institutional legitimacy, social inclusion, CPEC, or state–society relations in Baluchistan and were published by academically credible journals or internationally recognized institutions. Opinion pieces lacking empirical evidence, duplicate publications, and sources with unverifiable claims were excluded. This process improved the reliability, transparency, and reproducibility of the literature review (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The collected material was analyzed using **thematic content analysis**. Following repeated reading of the selected literature, relevant concepts were coded and organized into recurring themes, including governance and institutional legitimacy, development and infrastructure, social capital, education and human development, economic participation, and community engagement. These themes were subsequently synthesized into an integrated analytical framework linking governance quality with social inclusion and institutional trust (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Although the study relies exclusively on secondary evidence and is constrained by the availability of district-level data, methodological credibility was strengthened through **source triangulation**, critical comparison of competing interpretations, and consistent application of the analytical framework (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln et al.,

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2018). As no human participants were involved, ethical considerations were addressed through accurate representation of published sources, appropriate citation practices, and adherence to accepted standards of academic integrity (American Psychological Association, 2020).

The methodology provides a robust foundation for evaluating governance and development beyond descriptive accounts. By integrating evidence from multiple disciplines within a systematic literature review framework, the study offers a balanced assessment of state–society relations in South Baluchistan and establishes the analytical basis for the discussion that follows.

Analysis, Discussion and Policy Recommendations

Governance and Institutional Legitimacy

Governance in South Baluchistan is best understood through citizens' everyday interactions with public institutions rather than through constitutional design alone (Fukuyama, 2013; Migdal, 1988). The literature indicates that perceptions of legitimacy are closely associated with the quality of education, healthcare, local administration, justice, and public infrastructure (OECD, 2020; UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2017). Although constitutional reforms and fiscal decentralization have expanded provincial authority, uneven administrative capacity continues to limit implementation (Cheema & Mohmand, 2020; Government of Pakistan, 2023). The evidence therefore suggests that institutional legitimacy is produced through effective, transparent, and responsive public service delivery rather than formal authority alone (Grindle, 2017; Rothstein, 2011).

Development, CPEC and Inclusive Transformation

Investment associated with Gwadar Port and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has reshaped South Baluchistan's strategic and economic profile (Wolf, 2020; Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022). Improved transport infrastructure and regional connectivity have created opportunities for trade, logistics, and investment (Government of Pakistan, 2023). However, the literature consistently cautions that infrastructure should not be equated with inclusive development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Sen, 1999). Long-term benefits depend upon local employment, skills development, transparent governance, and meaningful community participation (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Development strategies that fail to incorporate these dimensions risk widening perceptions of exclusion despite increased investment (OECD, 2020; Wolf, 2020).

Education, Human Development and Economic Participation

Human development emerges as the principal mechanism through which infrastructure investment can be converted into sustainable social outcomes (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2022). Expansion of educational opportunities, vocational training, and healthcare strengthens individual capabilities while enhancing engagement with state institutions (World Bank, 2018; OECD, 2020). At the same time, employment generation remains essential for translating development into improved quality of life (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The youthful demographic profile of South Baluchistan presents an opportunity to build a skilled workforce capable of

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participating in emerging sectors linked to maritime trade, logistics, tourism, and the digital economy (Government of Pakistan, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

State–Society Relations

The review demonstrates that state–society relations are dynamic rather than static (Migdal, 1988; Scott, 1998). Citizens increasingly evaluate government performance through transparency, responsiveness, and participation rather than symbolic expressions of state authority (Fukuyama, 2013; Rothstein, 2011). Educational expansion, urbanization, and digital communication have created new forms of civic engagement, particularly among younger generations (Putnam, 2000; UNDP, 2022). Consequently, governance is becoming progressively more participatory, requiring institutions to respond to changing expectations while maintaining accountability and public trust (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2017).

Discussion and Theoretical Implications

The findings reinforce the complementary value of **Social Capital Theory**, **Structuration Theory**, and **Peripheral Governance Theory**. Social Capital Theory explains the importance of trust, social networks, and civic engagement in strengthening institutional effectiveness and facilitating collective action (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Structuration Theory highlights the reciprocal relationship between institutions and citizens, demonstrating that governance structures simultaneously shape and are reshaped by human agency (Giddens, 1984). Peripheral Governance Theory further demonstrates that legitimacy in geographically distant and politically marginalized regions depends less on formal authority than on institutional responsiveness, negotiated governance, and effective public service delivery (Migdal, 1988; Scott, 1998).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives indicate that governance quality, social inclusion, and community agency are mutually reinforcing. Effective institutions enhance public trust and civic participation, while active citizen engagement strengthens institutional legitimacy and accountability (Fukuyama, 1995, 2013; Rothstein, 2011). These findings are also consistent with broader governance scholarship, which emphasizes that sustainable development depends not only on economic investment but equally on institutional quality, inclusive policymaking, and participatory governance (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; OECD, 2020; Sen, 1999).

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is its demonstration that state legitimacy in South Baluchistan is best understood as a **relational process** emerging from continuous interaction between public institutions and local communities rather than from infrastructure investment or security measures alone. This perspective extends existing governance literature by integrating institutional legitimacy, social capital, and community agency within a unified analytical framework for understanding governance and development in peripheral regions (Fukuyama, 2013; Migdal, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The framework therefore contributes to Pakistan Studies and Governance Studies by illustrating how locally responsive institutions, inclusive development, and sustained citizen participation collectively strengthen long-term stability, institutional resilience, and state–society relations in South Baluchistan.

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Policy Recommendations

Strengthen district-level governance by improving administrative capacity, transparency, and citizen feedback mechanisms. Decentralized institutions should be adequately resourced to deliver education, healthcare, and municipal services more effectively (Cheema & Mohmand, 2020; OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2017).

Align development initiatives with local human capital by expanding technical and vocational education linked to emerging sectors such as logistics, fisheries, tourism, renewable energy, and the digital economy. Human capital investment should be integrated into regional development planning to improve employment opportunities and long-term socioeconomic resilience (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022; Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2018).

Promote inclusive participation through structured engagement with local communities, civil society, academia, women, and youth during the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development projects. Participatory governance enhances institutional legitimacy, strengthens social cohesion, and improves policy effectiveness (Putnam, 1993; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1997, 2022).

Improve institutional trust by adopting evidence-based policymaking, digital governance tools, and performance monitoring systems that enhance accountability, transparency, and responsiveness (Fukuyama, 2013; OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2017).

Integrate security and development within a **human security framework** that recognizes education, employment, public services, and institutional legitimacy as long-term foundations of stability. Sustainable peace in peripheral regions depends upon inclusive governance and human development rather than security interventions alone (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022; United Nations, 1994).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that sustainable transformation in South Baluchistan depends upon the quality of state–society relations rather than infrastructure investment or security measures alone (Fukuyama, 2013; Migdal, 1988). Through a systematic review of the literature and an integrated theoretical framework, the article shows that governance effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, social inclusion, and community agency are mutually reinforcing (Putnam, 1993; Giddens, 1984). Major initiatives such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have created important opportunities for economic development, yet their long-term success depends on inclusive institutions, equitable access to opportunities, and meaningful local participation (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022; World Bank, 2023). The findings therefore support a shift from infrastructure-centered approaches towards governance strategies that prioritize human development, institutional responsiveness, and public trust (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2017).

By integrating perspectives from Pakistan Studies, Governance Studies, Strategic Studies, and Development Studies, the article contributes a relational understanding of state legitimacy in Pakistan's strategic periphery and offers an evidence-based

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framework for future research and policymaking. The proposed framework emphasizes that long-term stability in South Baluchistan is most likely to be achieved through accountable institutions, participatory governance, equitable socioeconomic development, and sustained collaboration between the state and local communities (OECD, 2020; Rothstein, 2011; UNDP, 2022).

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