

DEMOGRAPHY, IDENTITY, AND POWER IN BALOCHISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF PASHTUN MIGRATION

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Abstract

Balochistan's political, social, and demographic landscape has been significantly shaped by migration. The long-term migration and settlement of Pashtun populations in the province is one of the most important of these movements. The historical causes, demographic effects, and sociopolitical ramifications of Pashtun migration in Balochistan are all critically examined in this essay, with a focus on how it affects Baloch identity, political representation, and resource distribution. The study contends that Pashtun migration is a historically structured phenomenon influenced by colonial policies, post-independence state strategies, and regional geopolitical dynamics rather than just a spontaneous demographic process based on historical analysis, census data, and existing scholarly literature. The results indicate that the indigenous Baloch population's sentiments of marginalization have worsened, ethnic competitiveness has increased, and political politics have changed as a result of demographic change. The essay highlights the complexities of interethnic relations in the province while simultaneously acknowledging the economic contributions and social integration of Pashtun populations. The study's conclusion highlights the necessity of fair development plans and inclusive governance frameworks that protect social cohesion and indigenous rights while acknowledging demographic realities.

INTRODUCTION

Within Pakistan, Balochistan holds a contradictory stance. Despite being the largest province in terms of size, it is also the least populated and least developed economically. The province has remained politically neglected and socially divided despite having abundant natural resources and significant geostrategic importance. Balochistan's shifting demographic makeup is one of the most important but controversial aspects of the province's current political economy, especially in light of the persistent Pashtun population movement.

In addition to minor groups like Hazaras, Sindhis, and Punjabis, Balochistan is home to several ethnic populations, chiefly Baloch, Pashtuns, and Brahuais.

In the past, the Baloch were the most powerful indigenous tribe in terms of both territory and politics. But Pashtun migration has drastically changed this equilibrium over time, particularly during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Pashtuns now make up a sizable fraction of the province's population, according to census data and demographic studies, especially in northern districts like Quetta, Pishin, Zhob, and Qila Saifullah (Gazdar, 2007; Singh, 2019).

There hasn't been a political vacuum during this demographic shift. Complex results have resulted from the intersection of governmental policies, colonial legacies, regional conflicts, and economic

inequities with migration. Pashtun migration is seen by many Baloch nationalists as a demographic challenge that jeopardizes Baloch identity, language, and political autonomy (Bhattacharya, 2015). For Pashtun populations, migration has frequently been motivated by economic opportunity, survival, and relocation brought on by conflict in the northwest regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan (Mogiani, Qaisrani & Reis, 2024).

By placing Pashtun migration within a larger historical and political context, this article aims to go beyond oversimplified accounts of ethnic rivalry. It looks at how Balochistan's resource distribution, identity politics, and governance systems have changed as a result of demographic shifts. It also highlights how the Pakistani government has managed—or mismanaged—these dynamics.

Research methodology

The study primarily adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing on historical analysis to trace the evolution of Pashtun migration into Balochistan from the pre-colonial period to the contemporary era. In order to comprehend long-term demographic trends and their political ramifications, the essay methodically examines existing scholarly literature, historical documents, government reports, and census data rather than depending on primary field surveys or interviews. The study may place migration within larger structural settings, including as colonial rule, post-independence state policies, regional conflicts, and federal structures, thanks to this historical-analytical approach. The study finds patterns and changes in migratory dynamics and their impacts on identity, political representation, and resource allocation by tracking these processes throughout time.

The study also evaluates the socio-political effects of population transition using interpretative and political economy analysis. In order to investigate how migration interacts with political politics, urbanization, cultural transformation, and resource competition in Balochistan, secondary sources including scholarly journals, policy reports, and demographic studies are critically examined. In order to promote qualitative interpretations of political conduct and societal change, census data and demographic trends are employed descriptively rather

than quantitatively. In a politically delicate and data-constrained setting like Balochistan, where qualitative synthesis offers a better understanding of power dynamics, marginalization perceptions, and governance issues than strictly quantitative approaches, this methodology is especially suitable.

Literature Review

In social science literature, the issue of migration and demographic change has taken center stage, especially in societies with diverse ethnic groups and uneven growth. Most academics concur that migration is a highly political process influenced by historical structures, governmental policies, economic disparities, and identity-based power relations rather than just a movement of individuals from one place to another (Gazdar, 2007). Demographic change takes on greater political relevance in areas like Balochistan, where issues of autonomy, marginalization, and resource management are already hotly debated.

Push-pull factors including poverty, unemployment, and opportunity access were used to explain population movements in early theoretical approaches to migration, which mostly focused on economic incentives. Although these theories are helpful in explaining labor migration, they provide little understanding of situations in which migration is entwined with post-colonial state policies and colonial legacies. More recent research takes a political economy stance, contending that institutional decisions and power dynamics, rather than only personal choices, shape migration trends (Ahmed, 2020). This change in viewpoint is especially pertinent to Balochistan, where settlement patterns have been significantly shaped by state intervention, security concerns, and uneven growth.

Pashtun migration to Balochistan is situated within the historical framework of colonial rule in a large corpus of literature. Rahman (1996) shows how ethnic geographies along the northwestern frontier were significantly changed by British administrative procedures and boundary-making. The Durand Line's demarcation created the conditions for long-term migration into modern-day Balochistan by dividing Pashtun tribal territories and normalizing cross-border mobility. By favoring cooperative tribal leaders, many of whom were Pashtun, while marginalizing indigenous Baloch authority structures,

colonial governance mechanisms like the Sandeman System further solidified ethnic hierarchies (Rahman, 1996).

Building on this historical study, Bhattacharya (2015) contends that colonial population engineering continued to influence post-independence politics in Pakistan due to an inherited "ethnic entanglement." This perspective holds that Pashtun colonization in key Balochistani regions was not coincidental but rather directly related to imperial security goals. This work highlights the long-term and structurally integrated nature of Pashtun migration, challenging popular narratives that portray it as a recent demographic intrusion.

The importance of the Pakistani state in controlling population change is further shown by studies conducted after independence. According to Ahmed (2020), national integration and territorial control have always taken precedence over ethnic accommodation in Balochistani governmental policies. Pashtun consolidation in urban areas, especially Quetta, has been indirectly aided by administrative reorganization, urban growth, and security-driven government. Baloch views of exclusion and political marginalization have been strengthened by these policies, despite the fact that they are frequently justified in the name of stability and development (Ahmed, 2020).

Shafqat and Shahid (2017) concentrate on the relationship between migration and urbanization, contending that Balochistan's governance capabilities have been overburdened by the country's explosive population increase. According to their analysis, Pashtun migrants, who were first concentrated in the unorganized labor sector, progressively acquired access to political representation through local governance systems and election participation. Particularly in urban areas where population majorities immediately translate into political influence, this shift changed local power dynamics and heightened ethnic rivalry (Shafqat & Shahid, 2017).

In the literature on Pashtun migration, the conflicts in Afghanistan mark a turning point. Large-scale refugee migrations into Pakistan were caused by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the ensuing hostilities, with Balochistan emerging as a key host province. The social and economic fabric of urban

Balochistan was altered by these refugee influxes, as documented by Mogiani, Qaisrani, and Reis (2024). Long-term displacement resulted in informal integration, making it harder to distinguish between citizens and refugees, even if humanitarian concerns initially dominated state responses. This approach heightened concerns about political dilution and population displacement for several Baloch communities.

A thorough explanation of how labor markets, land tenure systems, and service delivery interacted with refugee settlement may be found in Gazdar's groundbreaking work from 2007. According to his interpretation, migration increased competition for limited resources, which led to societal disintegration and ethnicized grievances. Crucially, Gazdar emphasizes how migration interacts with structural underdevelopment and governance shortcomings rather than seeing migration as the exclusive source of conflict.

Scholarly interest in the cultural and linguistic aspects of demographic change has also persisted. Baloch identity is firmly anchored in language, tribal connection, and communal historical memory, according to Pavla and Petr (2012). Therefore, rather than being a neutral result of demographic transition, many Baloch see Pashto's increasing dominance in urban and governmental places as a sign of cultural loss (Pavla & Petr, 2012). Singh (2019) makes a similar connection between cultural concern and demographic changes, contending that language serves as a tool for political exclusion as well as an identity identifier.

A significant body of literature links nationalism and political mobilization to population shifts. According to Kumar and Hussain (2023), Baloch nationalist groups have mobilized to express allegations of exploitation and dispossession as a result of increased sense of injustice brought on by population shifts. According to this viewpoint, migration exacerbates preexisting complaints about resource exploitation, political representation, and federal injustices rather than immediately causing insurgency (Kumar & Hussain, 2023). Ahmed (2020) places these processes in the context of federalism discussions, arguing that separatist sentiment is strengthened and trust in state institutions is weakened by demographic imbalance.

The Balochistan case is further clarified by comparative studies. Experiences from places like Myanmar, where citizenship and belonging are still hotly debated, and Assam, India, where migration has changed ethnic politics, show that when nations fail to manage diversity through inclusive institutions, demographic change becomes disruptive. These international similarities support the claim that ongoing governance shortcomings and uneven growth are more to blame for Balochistan's problems than migration. Even with the wealth of current research, there are still significant gaps. A large portion of the literature limits comprehensive comprehension by treating migration, identity, and political economy as distinct analytical realms. While nationalist narratives occasionally downplay institutional and economic elements, quantitative demographic studies frequently ignore cultural and historical context. By combining historical analysis, demographic trends, identity politics, and state policy into a single analytical framework, this essay fills up these gaps and provides a more thorough understanding of Pashtun migration and its effects on Balochistan.

It is clear from the previous scholarly assessment that Pashtun migration to Balochistan cannot be viewed as a singular, recent phenomenon. Instead, it is the result of long-term historical processes influenced by disputed ideas of identity and belonging, colonial governance, post-colonial state policies, and regional warfare. The literature that is now available repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of placing current population change within its more profound historical background. Building on these academic discoveries, the next section explores the historical causes of Pashtun migration to Balochistan, emphasizing how early state formation, colonial interventions, and pre-colonial movements established the institutional underpinnings for current political and demographic dynamics.

Historical Roots of Pashtun Migration to Balochistan
The pre-colonial political economy of the area, tribal mobility patterns, and its advantageous location at the intersection of South and Central Asia are the historical foundations of Pashtun migration to Balochistan. Tribal migration was a widespread and frequently essential survival tactic in Balochistan, which operated as a fluid socio-political region even before contemporary state borders were established.

Motivated by access to grazing lands, trade routes, and shifting power ties among tribal confederations, Pashtun tribes like the Kakar, Tareen, Achakzai, and Shirani progressively spread into northern and northeastern Balochistan over centuries (Rahman, 1996).

Migration was neither strictly restricted nor seen through the prism of territorial sovereignty that characterizes contemporary politics in the pre-colonial era. Access to resources and territory was regulated by tribal authority as opposed to centralized governmental control. A pragmatic cohabitation characterized by economic interdependence and traditional norms, Pashtun settlements in Balochistan were frequently founded through negotiated agreements with Baloch tribal elders. Due to the decentralization of political power and the flexibility of demographic boundaries, this early stage of migration did not result in widespread ethnic warfare. The scope and nature of Pashtun migration underwent a dramatic change throughout the eighteenth century with the growth of the Durrani Empire. Pashtun tribes were urged to relocate to strategically significant locations under Ahmad Shah Durrani and his successors in order to strengthen imperial authority and provide safe communication lines connecting Kandahar with the Indian subcontinent (Gazdar, 2007). As frontier areas, northern Balochistan—especially the areas around Quetta and Zhob—acquired significant significance. Consequently, Pashtun presence in these regions grew more enduring and established politically.

Balochistan's political and demographic landscape was drastically altered by British colonial rule. The British attempted to pacify the frontier by indirect authority and selective interaction with tribal elites, motivated by geopolitical concerns related to the "Great Game." By elevating obedient sardars and maliks and undercutting established Baloch political structures, the Sandeman System reformed tribal authority. These agreements frequently favored Pashtun tribal leaders disproportionately because colonial administrations saw them as politically and militarily manageable (Rahman, 1996).

Pashtun migration was also driven by colonial infrastructure development. Pashtun laborers, traders, and service providers were drawn to Quetta because it was established as a military cantonment and

administrative center. Long-term population influx from nearby Pashtun districts were made possible by the building of railroads, the construction of road networks, and military recruitment. These dynamics embedded demographic change into the colonial political economy, transforming Quetta from a peripheral town into a largely Pashtun urban center over time (Bhattacharya, 2015).

Another significant turning point was the Durand Line's establishment in 1893. Cross-border migration was formalized by the colonial state through the division of Pashtun tribal territory between Afghanistan and British India. Pashtun tribes were able to maintain social, economic, and political relationships across the frontier because the boundary normalized migration rather than restricted it. The boundary between internal migration and transnational mobility was blurred as a result of this fluidity, which strengthened seasonal and permanent migratory patterns into Balochistan (Rahman, 1996). The historical underpinnings established during the colonial era continued to influence migration dynamics after Pakistan was established in 1947. Instead of negotiated federalism, centralization and force were the hallmarks of Balochistan's integration into the new state. Pashtun-dominated areas were strategically significant since early state policies placed a high priority on administrative control and security, especially in border regions. Because Pashtun populations were already well-established in northern Balochistan, they were in a good position to profit from government support and urban development programs.

Formal administrative organizations gradually replaced traditional tribal government arrangements during the post-independence era. Land ownership, political representation, and resource distribution patterns were all affected by this shift. Due to their earlier absorption into colonial administrative institutions, Pashtun settlers frequently adjusted to these changes more easily than Baloch tribal formations. Perceptions of political and demographic imbalance began to emerge as a result of these imbalances.

Pashtun migration to Balochistan changed from an intermittent tribal movement to a structurally rooted demographic phenomenon by the middle of the 20th century. The groundwork for later population shifts,

especially those related to Afghan conflicts and refugee migrations, were created by historical migration patterns, colonial interventions, and early state formation. Interpreting current discussions about identity, representation, and belonging in Balochistan thus requires an understanding of these historical foundations.

Historical Background

4.1 Post-Independence State Policies and Migration Dynamics

Balochistan's migration patterns and demographic shift were significantly shaped in the years after Pakistan gained its independence in 1947. Although the groundwork for Pashtun settlement had previously been established by historical and colonial processes, post-independence state policies turned these patterns into a more organized and politically significant phenomenon. Balochistan was included into the Pakistani state under conditions of administrative centralization, political pressure, and security-driven governance, all of which had a substantial impact on ethnic relations and population movements within the province.

Balochistan was viewed more as a strategically important frontier area and less as an equal federating unit in the immediate wake of independence. A securitized approach to government was solidified by the Khanate of Kalat's accession and the resistance movements that followed. Administrative choices, development priorities, and population control tactics were all influenced by this security-centric way of thinking. Instead of focusing on inclusion and representation, state institutions are increasingly seeing demographic composition through the prism of control and stability. Because of this, initiatives implemented during this time frequently had the unintended consequence of strengthening Pashtun demographic concentration, especially in urban and northern regions.

The implementation of the One Unit Scheme in 1955 was one of the most significant policy changes. The plan essentially eliminated provincial autonomy and weakened the political influence of minor ethnic groups, like as the Baloch, by combining all of West Pakistan's provinces into a single administrative body. One Unit, according to scholars, disproportionately benefited more demographically concentrated and

politically organized groups, including Pashtuns, who were prevalent in northern Balochistan (Shafqat & Shahid, 2017). In regions where Pashtun populations already existed, administrative centralization under One Unit promoted bureaucratic expansion and urban growth, exacerbating demographic and political disparities.

Another important factor influencing migratory dynamics in the post-independence era was urbanization. Migrants from all over the Pashtun belt were drawn to Quetta as it developed into the provincial capital and a significant administrative hub. Economic incentives for migration are created by state investments in infrastructure, education, and military facilities that are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas. Pashtun migrants were better positioned to assimilate into developing urban economies because many of them had prior experience with colonial administrative institutions or military service. Baloch inhabitants, on the other hand, had restricted access to these possibilities due to their tribal organization and predominance in rural areas, which widened socioeconomic gaps.

Migration patterns were also influenced by the military and security apparatus. Due to its strategic location near Iran and Afghanistan, Balochistan saw a significant military presence, especially after the 1970s. Pashtun laborers and traders were drawn to the new labor markets and service economies formed by military cantonments, checkpoints, and security facilities. The demographic makeup of important urban and semi-urban areas changed over time as a result of these localized migrations' contribution to permanent settlement. Baloch believes that migrant populations were given preference by governmental institutions over indigenous people were strengthened by this process.

The 1979 war in Afghanistan marked a significant shift in the patterns of migration after independence. Balochistan was significantly impacted by the flood of millions of Afghan refugees, mostly Pashtun, into Pakistan. Due to their close proximity to the Afghan border, Quetta and the adjacent regions became important refugee hubs. Although refugee settlement was once presented as a short-term humanitarian solution, extended hostilities turned makeshift camps into long-term communities. Local demographic concerns were exacerbated by state policies that gave

refugees access to employment opportunities, education, and, in certain situations, identity paperwork, making it difficult to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens (Mogiani et al., 2024).

Academic evaluations show that regional geopolitics and refugee policies were closely related. Due to Pakistan's geopolitical alliance during the Afghan jihad, refugee accommodations were given priority over local concerns in both internal policy decisions and foreign aid flows. This strengthened Baloch populations' perception of political marginalization and demographic dispossession. According to Gazdar (2007), refugee communities were able to integrate into local economies and electoral politics due to the lack of comprehensive repatriation measures, which had long-term effects on provincial government.

Migration patterns were further hampered by the Afghan conflict's post-2001 phase. Additional displacement was caused by renewed unrest in Afghanistan, while internal movement toward urban areas in Balochistan was facilitated by counterterrorism operations in Pakistan's northwest. Mega-development projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) increased awareness of demographic engineering at the same time. Despite being presented as national development initiatives, many Baloch communities believed that these programs benefited migrant populations and outside actors rather than native inhabitants (Ahmed, 2020). An important perspective for evaluating the overall effects of post-independence migration policies is electoral politics. Voter registration trends, representation results, and constituency borders all changed as a result of demographic shifts. Pashtun candidates became powerful political players in a number of metropolitan constituencies, changing the balance of power in the province. These changes show how migration interacts with institutional architecture to produce unequal political results, even as they also represent democratic involvement.

Although Balochistan's post-independence state policies did not specifically seek to engineer demographic change, their combined consequences profoundly altered the country's migration dynamics. Baloch views of exclusion were exacerbated while Pashtun demographic consolidation was supported by security-driven governance, centralized administration, refugee housing, and uneven

development. Analyzing current discussions about federalism, representation, and stability in Balochistan requires an understanding of these dynamics.

4.2 Demographic Change and Its Socio-Political Implications

One of the most important factors influencing Balochistan's current sociopolitical environment is demographic change. Although migration has always been a part of the region's social fabric, new forms of contestation have emerged due to the size, concentration, and political significance of recent population transitions. Debates about identity, belonging, and power have intensified as a result of the expanding Pashtun population, especially in urban and northern regions, which has changed patterns of political representation, social interaction, and access to state resources.

Despite ongoing disputes about accuracy and enumeration procedures, census statistics offer a crucial foundation for examining population trends. Particularly in districts like Quetta, Pishin, Qila Saifullah, and Zhob, the Pashtun population proportion of Balochistan's population has been steadily rising, according to subsequent population censuses (Singh, 2019). This trend has been exacerbated by urbanization, since cities serve as draws for migrants looking for work, security, and education. In addition to changing demographic ratios, the concentration of Pashtun people in metropolitan areas has changed the province's political topography.

Election politics is one of the most obvious socio-political effects of demographic change. Voter strength, parliamentary representation, and constituency borders are all directly impacted by population size under representative systems. Election results increasingly reflected new demographic realities as Pashtun populations grew in important districts. In provincial and local assemblies, Pashtun political actors became more visible and powerful, changing coalition dynamics and policy priorities. These changes strengthened views of political marginalization and demographic displacement for numerous Baloch political parties.

Beyond official politics, population shifts have altered social interactions on a daily basis. In today's

ethnically diverse urban districts, marketplaces, and educational institutions, coexistence frequently takes place without significant social integration. According to academics, when there is fierce competition for resources, such parallel coexistence may actually strengthen ethnic boundaries rather than weaken them (Gazdar, 2007). Balochistan's population growth has become a cause of fear and distrust due to economic shortages and uneven development, which have increased the stakes of demographic transition. Another crucial aspect of socio-political influence is language and cultural expression. Baloch populations' sentiments of cultural marginalization have been exacerbated by Pashto's growing dominance in urban public areas, the media, and unofficial markets. Singh (2019) contends that language serves as a symbol of social standing and political power in addition to being a tool for communication. Therefore, many see the relative decrease of Brahui and Balochi in public life as a sign of larger processes of dispossession.

Urban growth and land ownership patterns have also been impacted by demographic shifts. In cities like Quetta, rapid population growth has increased housing demand, resulting in unplanned settlements and disputed property claims. Pashtun migrants were able to establish themselves in developing metropolitan areas because they frequently arrived sooner and in greater numbers. These towns eventually gained access to municipal services and legal status. Socioeconomic disparities were exacerbated by the fact that Baloch communities, especially those uprooted from rural areas by conflict or underdevelopment, sometimes arrived in metropolitan centers later and in less ideal circumstances.

Debates around citizenship and paperwork further highlight the socio-political ramifications of population shift. The distinction between citizens and non-citizens has become more hazy due to the presence of Afghan refugees and their descendants, making voter registration and service delivery more difficult. Feelings of injustice and marginalization are made worse for Baloch communities by the belief that non-indigenous people have political rights. Whether or not these worries are completely supported, they have a significant influence on political narratives and mobilization tactics (Mogiani et al., 2024).

Baloch nationalism has become more intense at the level of collective identity due to demographic change. Population changes are sometimes framed in nationalist rhetoric as a threat to the Baloch people's continued existence as a distinct people, and demographic patterns are linked to historical complaints over resource extraction, federal injustices, and military involvement. According to Kumar and Hussain (2023), nationalist organizations can express more expansive demands for autonomy and control over local resources by using demographic fear as a mobilizing frame.

But it's crucial to understand that demographic shifts don't always result in the same or predictable effects. The political interests of Pashtun populations in Balochistan are not always in line with those of the state, nor are they a homogeneous group. Many Pashtun migrants experience their own types of exclusion and have marginalized economic positions. Overemphasizing demographic competitiveness has the risk of exacerbating ethnic division and hiding common socioeconomic problems. Therefore, a number of academics warn against deterministic interpretations that only blame population change for conflict.

All things considered, demographic change in Balochistan has profound socio-political ramifications that go beyond changes in population numbers. It alters social interactions, nationalist mobilization, cultural expression, and electoral politics. Historical grievances, governance shortcomings, and structural inequality all act as mediators for these impacts. Meaningful analysis and successful policy responses require an understanding of demographic change as a politically embedded process rather than a just statistical occurrence.

Political Economy and Resource Competition

A crucial lens for comprehending how migration and demographic shifts result in material conflict and social tension is Balochistan's political economy. Natural gas, coal, copper, gold, and a long coastline with significant maritime worth are among Balochistan's abundant natural resources. Nevertheless, the province continues to be Pakistan's least developed area in spite of this resource abundance. Many academics contend that Balochistan's political instability stems from this

contradiction of abundance amid deprivation. By altering who has access to and control over governmental resources and economic possibilities, demographic change has exacerbated these fundamental conflicts.

Historically, resource ownership in Balochistan was regulated by tribal structures and traditional customs. Informal institutions that balanced authority and access among indigenous people governed land, grazing regions, and water resources. Formal property systems and centralized decision-making replaced these arrangements as state authority gradually grew. Baloch groups were disproportionately affected by this change since their rights to resources and land were frequently based on customary law rather than formal ownership (Gazdar, 2007).

These institutional changes have been significantly impacted by migration. Access to state-regulated markets, jobs, and public services increased among Pashtun migrants, especially those who settled in urban areas. Through trade, transportation, building, and jobs in the public sector, urban economies in Quetta and other cities provided avenues for social mobility. Baloch locals' perceptions that migrants benefited from a development paradigm that excluded indigenous groups were strengthened over time as a result of these economic footholds turning into political influence.

One of the most obvious expressions of political economy tensions is competition for land. Intense demand for residential and commercial space brought about by rapid urban expansion has resulted in disputed property acquisitions and informal settlements. Pashtun migrants were able to establish claims in newly developed metropolitan areas because they frequently arrived earlier and in greater numbers. Over time, these settlements received infrastructure investment and legal recognition. On the other hand, Baloch migrants who were uprooted from rural areas often moved into urban areas later and in more unstable circumstances, which exacerbated social unrest and economic disparity.

These dynamics are further complicated by resource extraction projects. Natural gas deposits in Balochistan, especially in Sui, have long served as a symbol of unfair resource allocation. Local populations have historically benefited little in terms of employment, revenue sharing, or development,

despite being the source of a large portion of Pakistan's energy supply. According to academics, the notion that resources taken from Baloch territory are used for the advantage of non-indigenous groups abroad, including migrant communities inside the province is strengthened by demographic change, which exacerbates these complaints (Ahmed, 2020). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other large-scale development projects have escalated discussions over resource competition. Baloch people generally perceive these initiatives as top-down interventions that emphasize national and external interests, despite their official framing as engines of growth and regional connectedness. Demographic concerns have been exacerbated by the CPEC-related migration of labor, security personnel, and commercial actors, especially in areas where local communities believe they have little say in decision-making or benefit-sharing. Thus, rather than being a neutral economic activity, migration associated with development projects becomes a spark for wider political contestation.

The relationship between political economy and demographics is further demonstrated by employment trends. In industries that flourish in urban settings, including as transportation, logistics, retail commerce, and small-scale manufacturing, Pashtun migrants have gained prominence. Although these results are influenced by structural disparities in education, skills, and capital availability, their dominance in these domains is sometimes seen as proof of economic marginalization among Baloch people. However, political narratives and interethnic relations are significantly shaped by these perceptions. Another crucial aspect of resource competition is water shortage. Water availability is a highly contentious topic in Balochistan due to its arid climate and inadequate water infrastructure. Urban areas' rapid population increase has put tremendous strain on groundwater supplies, resulting in falling water tables and environmental stress. Demographic shifts are linked to environmental insecurity as competition heats up, escalating complaints and fueling social unrest.

From the standpoint of political economy, it is crucial to acknowledge that migration is not the only cause of resource rivalry in Balochistan. Instead, it shows how long-standing patterns of centralized governance,

uneven growth, and exploitative economic policies interact with changing demographics. Overemphasizing migration runs the risk of distracting attention from institutional reform and hiding the fundamental causes of inequality.

In a nutshell, Balochistan's political economy has changed as a result of demographic shifts that have affected access to natural resources, jobs, and land. In addition to integrating migrant populations into metropolitan economic systems, these changes have heightened views of injustice and exclusion, especially among Baloch communities. In order to achieve equitable distribution, local engagement, and sustainable development, addressing resource competition necessitates not just managing population realities but also modifying governance systems.

Comparative and Global Perspectives

Balochistan is not alone in its demographic concerns. Similar conflicts have arisen in places like Myanmar's Rohingya issue, where citizenship and belonging are still disputed, and Assam, India, where migration has altered identity politics. These incidents demonstrate the necessity for inclusive institutional structures and the perils of exclusive nationalism.

Comparative analysis emphasizes that demographic shifts become disruptive when they are coupled with identity-based politics, poor governance, and unequal resource allocation.

Conclusion

Rather than being a sudden or coincidental event, Pashtun migration to Balochistan is a historically ingrained and politically regulated process. It has had a significant impact on political representation, cultural identity, and demographic makeup, changing the sociopolitical landscape of the province. Migration has boosted urbanization and economic activity, but it has also increased ethnic rivalry and strengthened Baloch people's sense of marginalization.

This study contends that the lack of inclusive governance and equitable development, rather than migration itself, is the fundamental problem. Policies that acknowledge demographic realities, protect indigenous rights, encourage cultural diversity, and provide equitable access to resources are necessary for

a lasting peace in Balochistan. In the absence of such actions, conflict and instability will persist as demographic change is perceived as a zero-sum game.

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