



BALUCHISTAN: SECURITY CRACKDOWN AND CIVILIAN IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the enduring human rights crisis in Pakistan's Balochistan province, where enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and stark economic marginalization have fostered a persistent insurgency. It traces the region's multidimensional suffering to structural inequalities rooted in history, particularly the disputed 1948 annexation of Kalat, and analyzes the legacy of centralized policies. The study highlights recent developments, such as the October 2025 attack on the Jaffar Express, situating them within a pattern of militarized repression and the proliferation of "kill and dump" tactics targeting both civilians and activists. Original field reports, statistical data, and firsthand accounts reveal how institutional impunity and the failure of legal mechanisms further deepen mistrust and trauma.

Special focus is given to gender-based exclusion, alongside sectarian violence targeting the Hazara community, illustrating how state policy perpetuates both marginalization and the criminalization of identity. The paradox of Balochistan's immense mineral wealth and persistent poverty is examined, alongside the failures of decentralization and equitable resource distribution. The paper examines new forms of suppression, including digital censorship under PECA 2025, which exacerbates the risks faced by human rights defenders and journalists.

The research contends that genuine reconciliation demands more than security operations: only justice, robust accountability, cultural recognition, and inclusive structural reforms can foster sustainable peace. Deep engagement with local communities, equitable political representation, and reforms grounded in democratic inclusion are critical for transforming Balochistan from a conflict zone into a site of coexistence and shared nationhood.

KEYWORDS: Military Repression, Kill and Dump Strategy, Resource Exploitation, Marginalization

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1. INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2025, the Jaffar Express, a vital railway link between Quetta and Peshawar, was again targeted in a powerful attack, marking a significant escalation in the protracted human rights crisis of Pakistan's Balochistan province (Khan, 2025). Early reports confirm that militants from the Baloch Republic Guards (BRG), an affiliate of the Baloch Raaji Aajohi Sangar (BRAS), claimed responsibility for a remote-controlled improvised explosive device (IED) detonation near Sultan Kot on the Sindh-Balochistan border, derailing at least six coaches, killing and injuring several passengers, including Pakistani Army personnel (Arab News, 2025). This incident is the latest in a string of attacks on the Jaffar Express over the past year, including the March 2025 mass hostage crisis perpetrated by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and multiple bombings in Mastung and Jacobabad, which have drawn worldwide attention to the deteriorating security environment and ongoing conflict in Balochistan (Goldbaum & ur-Rehman, 2025).

The BRG has explicitly stated that its operations will continue against trains carrying security forces, a strategy that highlights militant targeting of both CPEC infrastructure and key state assets. Today's attack starkly illustrates the entrenched indignation towards perceived military occupation and economic exploitation, underscoring why the Jaffar Express has become an emblematic target for Baloch rebels (Khan, 2025). The continuous disruption of civilian infrastructure, frequent hostage situations, and fatalities have deepened fears in local communities and intensified scrutiny of the government's security-driven approach to Baloch grievances (Arab News, 2025).

This newest escalation must be viewed within a broader historical and structural context: decades of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, gender-based exclusion, and sectarian violence, including attacks targeting the Hazara community, have fueled an intractable insurgency and cemented a multidimensional crisis in the region. As this article demonstrates through statistical data and firsthand accounts, true reconciliation in Balochistan cannot be achieved solely through security operations. It demands justice, accountability, cultural recognition, and meaningful reform rooted in respect for human rights and democratic inclusion (Shah, 2025).

2. BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT

The conflict between Balochistan and Pakistan is rooted in a complex interplay of historical, political, economic, and cultural grievances (Shah, 2025; Saiyid, 2006). Below is an analysis of the key factors driving this prolonged struggle.

I. Kalat's Accession to Pakistan in 1948:

In 1947, during the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, the princely state of Kalat, located in what is now Balochistan, was left uncertain about its future. Kalat had been recognized by the British as a sovereign state under a 1876 treaty. On August 15, 1947, Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, the Khan of Kalat, declared independence, stating that Kalat was not bound to join either India or Pakistan (Crawford, 2010).

Initially, the British leader, Lord Mountbatten, quietly supported Kalat's claim to independence and did not pressure it to join either nation. However, political circumstances soon changed. Pakistan's leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who had once advised Kalat to join Pakistan legally, now pushed for Kalat to do so. Jinnah believed Kalat's location was strategically important and worried that letting it remain independent could fragment Pakistan (Saiyid, 2006).

In March 1948, the nearby states of Las Bela, Kharan, and Makran, which had once been part of Kalat's territory, joined Pakistan, leaving Kalat surrounded and isolated both politically and geographically. Under this mounting pressure, the Khan of Kalat signed an agreement to join Pakistan on March 27, 1948. Pakistan's Governor-General, Jinnah, formally accepted this on March 31.

The conditions of Kalat's accession remain disputed. While Pakistan says the Khan agreed willingly, many historians believe the decision was made under pressure. Some also question whether the British exit strategy helped Pakistan take control of Kalat to build a stronger Muslim-majority state (Shah, 2025; Hajjar, 2006).

II. Geostrategic Importance of Gwadar and Ethnic Composition of Balochistan:

Balochistan is a historic region that spans parts of modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, with the largest portion situated within Pakistan (Patel & Sharma, 2022). It is Pakistan's largest province in terms of land area, covering approximately 44% of the country, but it has the smallest population, accounting for only 5-6% of Pakistan's total population.

The population of Balochistan is ethnically diverse, consisting mainly of three groups. The Pashtuns, an Indo-Iranic ethnic group and the largest population in neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, make up roughly 36-40% of Balochistan's population (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2025). They primarily reside in the province's northern regions. The Brahui people, who speak a Dravidian language related to those found in southern India, comprise

approximately 12-20% of the population and are primarily located in the central region of Balochistan (Saiyid, 2006).

Geographically, Balochistan is mostly mountainous and desert terrain. It serves as a land connection between the vast Iranian Plateau and South and Central Asia, while also opening up access to the Arabian Sea. One of its most significant landmarks is Gwadar Port, which was once leased to Oman by the Kalat state and was subsequently acquired by Pakistan in 1958 (Bibi, 2015). Gwadar is strategically important because it lies near the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial global shipping route through which approximately 17 million barrels of oil pass daily. Today, Gwadar is a key part of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, making it a vital investment and trade hub for the region (Bibi, 2015; Ahmed & Baloch, 2017).

III. Challenges of Resource Management and Poverty in Balochistan:

Balochistan occupies a vital strategic position at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the Indian Ocean. This location has historically been a key site of global power competition, serving not only as an important military corridor but also as a hub for controlling international trade routes, energy pipelines, and regional security dynamics (Singh, 2020).

One of the most remarkable aspects of Balochistan's significance comes from its vast wealth of natural resources. The province is incredibly rich in a variety of minerals, including gas, coal, copper, gold, marble, iron, chromite, and many other valuable deposits. Experts estimate that this mineral wealth could be worth up to \$1 trillion if adequately explored and managed (Singh, 2020; Pakistan Climate Change Portal, 2025). The province hosts more than 1,600 mines, including over 500 coal mines and approximately 600 marble and onyx sites. Other minerals such as antimony, fluorite, granite, and gabbro are also found in substantial quantities. Two of the world's most renowned mineral sites are located in Balochistan's Chaghi District: The Reko Diq and Saindak mines, which contain massive reserves of gold and copper. These sites have attracted global mining companies and international attention due to their sheer scale and potential economic value (Ahmad, 2016; Malik, 2012).

Balochistan is also famous for its gemstones, including some of the finest emeralds in the world, garnet, and tourmaline, prized in both local and international markets. The province boasts extensive marble reserves, ideal for construction and decorative purposes, which support a nascent mining industry.

Natural gas, first discovered in the Sui region of Balochistan in 1953, remains a critical energy resource fueling much of Pakistan's economy. However, despite

sitting on some of the country's largest gas reserves, the people of Balochistan were largely excluded from benefiting from these resources for decades after their discovery (Ahmed & Baloch, 2017).

Paradoxically, despite this immense wealth, Balochistan is Pakistan's least developed province economically. It consistently ranks low on key indicators, including poverty, literacy, healthcare availability, and infrastructure development. According to reports, about 70% of the population lives below the poverty line. The literacy rate stands at a mere 54.5%, and the availability of medical facilities is woefully inadequate, with only 0.3 hospital beds per 1,000 people (Dawn, 2010).

This development deficit stems largely from the exploitation and diversion of Balochistan's resources, which often benefit major cities and other regions far more than the local communities. The province's 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010, which aimed to decentralize authority and empower provinces, has been criticized for fostering corruption and mismanagement rather than true political and economic devolution (Ali et al., 2025).

3. THE IMPACT OF "KILL AND DUMP" ON BALOCH SOCIETY AND ACTIVISM

Pakistan's so-called "Kill and Dump" policy has led to a grave human rights crisis in Balochistan, marked by enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. According to the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP), over 7,000 people remain missing in Balochistan, while official records from Pakistan's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances show only 454 active cases as of October 2023. This discrepancy is contested by Pakistan's interim prime minister, who has dismissed the numbers as exaggerated, claiming only 50 are missing (Dawn, 2010; PIDE, 2021).

The crisis remains acute with continuous reports of new disappearances. 134 new cases were reported across Balochistan, Punjab, and Sindh in February 2025 alone. Many of these victims endure severe mental and physical torture, with some later released. The prolonged crisis has provoked persistent protests and sit-ins across Balochistan, with families demanding justice even after more than 5,750 days of ongoing demonstrations (Banuri, n.d, 2025).

A worrying trend has emerged: enforced disappearances now often involve brief abductions followed by fresh detentions, creating a perpetual cycle of fear in the population. A local journalist from Gwadar summed it up starkly: "If the state releases one missing person today, it will disappear four more tomorrow." This pattern suggests a deliberate attempt to suppress dissent and silence voices, especially targeting students who fear attending universities due to threats and

abductions, with similar dangers extending to Baloch students in cities like Lahore and Karachi (Paank, n.d., 2024).

I. State-Sanctioned Killings and Human Rights Violations in Balochistan

Extrajudicial killings have been a serious and ongoing problem in Balochistan for over two decades, with thousands of cases documented. Between 2000 and 2013, the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP) recorded 126 extrajudicial killings and over 400 enforced disappearances (Fahad & Ayaz, 2025). The victims' bodies are often found in districts such as Quetta, Khuzdar, Kalat, and Mekran. From July 2010 to the end of 2012 alone, more than 400 bodies of disappeared individuals were discovered. These killings persisted during the civilian government led by Dr. Abdul Malik (2013–2015), with 56 extrajudicial killings and 64 disappearances reported (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2024).

In recent years, the frequency of such killings has increased. For example, in February 2025, the Human Rights Council of Balochistan (HRCB) reported 46 killings, many of which appear to be executions following enforced disappearances. Similarly, in January 2025, Paank documented eight extrajudicial killings alongside widespread enforced disappearances (Fahad & Ayaz, 2025).

On April 9, 2025, twelve bodies were found in the districts of Barkhan, Khuzdar, Mashkay, and Buleda. These victims were allegedly killed in staged encounters after being forcibly disappeared. Over the past two decades, thousands of civilians have been killed or disappeared under counterinsurgency operations targeting Baloch activists and insurgents. Security forces and affiliated militias, often described as "death squads," frequently carry out these killings under the pretense of counterterrorism but disproportionately target civilians (Kakar, 2024). Families of victims accuse authorities of staging fake encounters and dumping bodies to silence dissent. Despite repeated international calls for accountability, impunity prevails, deepening the mistrust between the Baloch population and the state, and perpetuating cycles of violence (UNDP Pakistan, 2024).

4. THE STATE'S CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINED VIOLENCE

The Pakistani government's handling of the conflict in Balochistan has faced harsh criticism for worsening the violence cycle. Through intense militarization, systematic human rights violations, and economic neglect, the state has failed to address the root causes of the unrest, fueling ongoing hostility and alienation (Shah, 2025).

I. Militarization and Repression

More than 25,000 troops have been deployed in Balochistan as part of counterinsurgency operations. Despite this heavy military presence, human rights abuses continue without restraint. Between October 2024 and January 2025, human rights group PAANK documented 217 enforced disappearances and 14 extrajudicial killings, many victims showing signs of torture (PAANK Report, 2024).

Rather than holding perpetrators accountable, the state often either supports or turns a blind eye to actions by militias like the Aman Force, which operate with full impunity. These groups have carried out targeted assassinations of political activists, such as Pir Jan in Panjgur and Altaf in Kech, who were killed because of their activism (Fahad & Ayaz, 2025).

II. Judicial Ineffectiveness and Institutional Impunity

Despite Supreme Court investigations starting in 2010, Pakistan has failed to prosecute military officers responsible for abuses in Balochistan. Security agencies, including the Frontier Corps and intelligence services, continue to operate with near-total immunity from legal consequences, even when courts order inquiries (Paank, 2024.; VBMP, 2024).

A 2011 Human Rights Watch report revealed that intelligence agencies often ignore judicial instructions on enforced disappearances, and no prosecutions have resulted. A 2023 UN document confirms this enduring pattern of institutional impunity for over 7,000 unresolved disappearances since 2003 (UN Human Rights Council, 2024).

III. Structural Violence as State Policy

The Pakistani state uses spatial containment as a tool of structural violence. The Hazara community in Quetta faces harsh restrictions, with neighborhoods like Hazara Town and Alamdar Road surrounded by four-meter-high blast walls and guarded by more than thirty checkpoints. These barriers restrict residents' movement and isolate them socially and economically, limiting access to jobs, education, and healthcare (Nawaz & Hassan, 2017).

Similarly, in Balochistan, entire districts are declared “no-go zones” under counterinsurgency laws, curtailing civilian movement and bypassing civil administration. These policies focus on surveillance and containment rather than addressing political grievances or promoting justice (ANI News, 2025).

Sectarian violence has left the Hazara community's mortality rate 12.7 times higher than other groups in Quetta, yet their attackers rarely face justice (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Meanwhile, Balochistan accounts for around 63% of Pakistan's enforced disappearances, despite representing only about 5% of the country's population (PAANK Report, 2024). Such disparities highlight the state's strategy of managing dissent through militarization and demographic control, rather than tackling systemic inequality or protecting human rights. This structural violence deepens marginalization, driving displacement and migration.

IV. Legal Repression in Digital Form

The 2025 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Amendment Act (PECA) has become one of the government's most aggressive tools for suppressing Baloch dissent and silencing digital activism. Section 26(A) punishes the dissemination of "fake news" or material considered "against national interest" with imprisonment and hefty fines, but these terms are vaguely defined, giving authorities broad discretion to target journalists and activists (Prevention of Electronic Crimes [Amendment] Act, 2025).

Quetta-based journalist Khalil Ahmed was arrested in February 2025 for reporting on extrajudicial killings, with authorities citing PECA's defamation provisions. The Act also expands state surveillance powers and enables the creation of a Social Media Protection Tribunal, which can remove content, block accounts, and criminalize digital advocacy without fair due process (Arab News, 2025).

In March 2025, activist Dr. Mahrang Baloch was detained under PECA and anti-terrorism laws after protests against enforced disappearances. Authorities imposed internet blackouts in Quetta to prevent coverage and documentation of these events (OHCHR, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION

The situation in Balochistan stands as one of the most urgent and overlooked human rights crises in South Asia today. The evidence reveals a tragic cycle where state violence manifested through enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and severe militarization provokes insurgency, which in turn leads to further repression. This vicious pattern has normalized brutality, deepened institutional indifference, and inflicted intergenerational trauma on the Baloch people. Particularly disturbing is the state's use of enforced disappearances through the "kill and dump" policy, a deliberate tactic aimed at silencing dissent and maintaining control over the region's abundant natural resources. Despite growing international scrutiny and pressures, meaningful accountability remains elusive.

Vulnerable groups, such as students, women, and notably the Hazara minority, bear a disproportionate share of violence, exclusion, and repression.

Women in Balochistan exemplify both the crisis and resilience, as they combat patriarchal neglect while spearheading demands for justice and advocating for families of disappeared persons. However, their activism faces harsh reprisals, including institutional violence and digital suppression, especially under the repressive PECA 2025 law, which criminalizes online voices that challenge the state's narrative. The Hazara community lives under siege behind walls and checkpoints in Quetta, their forced isolation reflecting a broader issue of sectarian discrimination and governmental neglect. This spatial and social marginalization illustrates how state policies extend beyond immediate security concerns to systemic exclusion and control.

Economically, Balochistan's vast reserves of gas, minerals, and the strategic Gwadar port should have empowered the province and its people. Instead, resource exploitation benefits the core regions of Pakistan, widening economic inequalities and fueling grievances. The 18th Constitutional Amendment, intended to promote provincial autonomy, has fallen short of delivering real governance improvements or socio-economic development.

For Balochistan to move toward genuine peace and stability, a fundamental shift is vital. This requires moving away from militarized securitization toward inclusive reconciliation. Transparent investigations into enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings must be prioritized. The culture of impunity surrounding security forces must end with genuine legal accountability. Repressive laws like PECA 2025 should be repealed to safeguard freedom of expression and protect human rights defenders.

Investments must be made in socio-economic infrastructure with meaningful involvement of local communities. Acknowledging and respecting Balochistan's cultural and linguistic diversity is essential for repairing fractured trust. Political representation must be equitable, and dialogue platforms must be created for all stakeholders, including nationalist groups, civil society, and marginalized communities.

Peace will remain out of reach until the roots of conflict, inequality, repression, and denial of rights are addressed. A just and lasting solution will only emerge through respect for dignity, equality, and democratic inclusion. Only then can Balochistan transition from a zone of conflict to a region of opportunity, coexistence, and shared nationhood.

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