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Theoretical Implication: Neorealism vs. Neoliberal Institutionalism in Educational Diplomacy

Uswa Rafiq¹ and Muhammad Akram Zaheer²

Article Information	Abstract
Received: Oct 08, 2025 Revised: June 20, 2026 Accepted: June, 28, 2026	The article explores educational diplomacy as an evolving instrument of international relations, analysed through Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism. It argues that scholarships, exchanges, and research collaborations serve as tools of soft power, shaping perceptions and fostering cooperation beyond military and economic means. Neorealism views these initiatives as strategic instruments for national interests and relative gains, while Neoliberal Institutionalism emphasizes their potential to create absolute gains, trust, and cooperation. Drawing on examples such as the U.S. Fulbright Program, China's Confucius Institutes, and Pakistan's scholarship initiatives, the study highlights how states employ education competitively and cooperatively. Special focus is given to South Asia, where India-Pakistan rivalry limits academic cooperation but also makes educational diplomacy valuable as a confidence-building measure. The article concludes that educational diplomacy is dual in nature, both a tool of power politics and a pathway for dialogue, interdependence, and regional stability.
Keywords <i>Neorealism,</i> <i>Neoliberal institutionalism,</i> <i>Regional security,</i> <i>Domestic politics,</i> <i>International diplomacy</i>	

1. Introduction

The 21st century has seen education emerge as a potent instrument of diplomacy, to the extent that it has long remained a knowledge transfer mechanism. States are no longer restricted to the use of military or economic tools to project their power; instead, they use their educational diplomacy by using scholarships, exchange of academics, collaboration on research projects, and cultural events to enhance their soft power and influence the way the world views them and establish long-term relationships. This tendency emphasizes the fact that knowledge and ideas, and institutions have become as important factors in international politics as arms or trade treaties. Educational diplomacy is a point of contact between the foreign policy and international relations of such giants as the United States, China, and Russia. Education is a tool of competition, collaboration, be it in the form of student exchange programs, Confucius institutions, or Fulbright scholarships to third-world nations, including Pakistan. Educational diplomacy gives the possibility of increasing the world's visibility, the attraction of talent, and mutual understanding with partner states. The increased relevance of this practice necessitates the need to examine the relevance using theoretical frameworks, which explain the way the state behaves in international relations. It is useful to review the implications of educational diplomacy in terms of the debate between Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism. Neorealism is a structural realism developed by Kenneth Waltz that perceives the international system as a state of anarchy and states as rational agents interested in power and security. In such a context, educational diplomacy is considered an instrument of national interest, relative gains, and geopolitical profit (Waltz, 1979). Conversely, when it comes to neoliberal institutionalism, developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, there are international institutions, interdependence, and cooperation.

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Educational diplomacy leads to trust building, long-term partnerships, and international governance via academic networks.

This article will endeavour to describe the theoretical implications of neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism in the practice of educational diplomacy by comparing the assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses of these two highly dominating theories. It also highlights the various ways states utilize educational initiatives as sources of power and as pathways for cooperation. It also focuses on the applicability of these theories to modern educational diplomacy, with specific emphasis on the global examples as well as the changing role of Pakistan in academic interaction in doing so. The article plays a role in closing the gap between the international relations theory and the factual practice of foreign policy due to education (Knight, 2015).

2. Conceptualizing Educational Diplomacy

Educational diplomacy is the application of education as a foreign policy tool and instrument of international relations. It includes how states and institutions, and international organizations use education to build perceptions, develop understanding with one another, project influence, and encourage cross-border cooperation. One concept that has spread widely due to Joseph Nye and that underlines the capacity of states to exert pressure or power on other states without force. (Nye, 2004).

Educational diplomacy involves persuasion, cooperation, and long-range relationship building, unlike the traditional approach of diplomacy that employs the political or military bargaining approach. Practically, educational diplomacy has a wide range of activities, state-sponsored scholarship programs for foreign students, bilateral and multilateral academic contracts, the organization of foreign cultural and language centres, and transnational joint research. An example is how the United States employs the Fulbright Program in enhancing its international image. China uses Confucius Institutes as one of its wider global outreach policies. These activities provide an example of how education can become a clandestine tool of influencing the mass mind, networks of influence, and selling national values overseas. Educational diplomacy is also important for generating people-to-people contact, cultural barriers, as well as the improvement of intercultural dialogue. Elite policymaking is not the only aspect of academic linkages, as it involves individuals, communities, and institutions that form cross-border ties as students come back home after studying in foreign countries. They are not only technologically informed but also contain cultural experiences and personal contacts that can affect bilateral relations. Thus, Educational diplomacy initiates long-term investments in goodwill, which could even survive through political or economic periods. It can be argued that educational diplomacy is a two-way instrument; it helps Pakistan to enhance the quality of education within the country but also provides a stronger international presence. The use of scholarships to accept Afghan students in Pakistan, the work done by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and even the engagement in agencies such as UNESCO are just some of how education is integrated into the foreign policy strategy of Pakistan. Such efforts not only lead towards the stability of the region but also make Pakistan a goodwill partner in the academic and diplomatic world. Educational diplomacy can only be understood under the international relations theory. One can understand it either as a strategic competition tool that is also consistent with the logic of neorealism or as an instrument of institutionalized collaboration, which is also consistent with neoliberal institutionalism. This twofold meaning is filled with depth of understanding the concept as education can be applied to both realist demands of force and security and liberal demands of interdependence and common development (Smith, 2008).

3. Literature Review

The study of educational diplomacy has gained significant attention within International Relations, where scholars interpret cross-border academic initiatives through competing theoretical lenses. Early work by Hans Morgenthau (1948) and Kenneth Waltz (1979) emphasized the primacy of power and structural constraints in shaping state behaviour. From this neorealist perspective, education-related exchanges are viewed as extensions of geopolitical strategies used to cultivate influence, secure future

elites, and maintain relative gains. Studies on the Fulbright Program and Confucius Institutes often highlight how major powers embed ideological and strategic narratives within academic outreach. These works collectively frame educational diplomacy as an indirect but deliberate exercise of soft power.

In contrast, neoliberal institutionalist literature underscores the capacity of education to promote cooperation, trust, and interdependence. Robert Keohane (1984), Joseph Nye (2004), and Ikenberry (2018) argue that institutions and norms help states overcome uncertainty, exchange information, and generate absolute gains. Educational programs such as Erasmus+, UNESCO-led learning networks, and Commonwealth scholarships illustrate how consistent interaction can reduce mistrust and support collective problem-solving. This scholarship highlights the transformative potential of academic mobility and collaborative research in building long-term partnerships.

Recent studies focusing on South Asia capture both theoretical viewpoints. Alam (2020) demonstrates that educational diplomacy can contribute to regional peacebuilding, particularly in nuclearized environments where formal diplomacy is constrained. Meanwhile, research on China–Pakistan cooperation under CPEC shows how academic collaboration simultaneously fosters interdependence and advances strategic calculations (Manhas & Singh, 2025). Literature on Pakistan–Afghanistan scholarship programs similarly reveal dual interpretations: cooperative capacity-building versus influence-generation (Allama Iqbal Scholarship Report, 2009).

3.1 Research Gap

While extensive scholarship exists on soft power, academic exchanges, and IR theory, there is limited work that directly applies Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism side-by-side to the specific case of educational diplomacy. Existing studies often analyse programs as either strategic tools or cooperative instruments but rarely integrate both frameworks to explain their dual nature.

This article addresses this gap by comparing both theories and examining how they interpret the same educational initiatives differently, particularly in the context of Pakistan, China, the United States, and South Asia's security environment.

4. Theoretical Framework

International Relations (IR) theory assists in the explanation of how states act and how states interact in the international system. Neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism are among the two schools of thought that are the most prevalent in explaining why states behave as they do, cooperate, and compete. Although both recognize the anarchical condition of the international system, they differ radically in their presumptions concerning the nature of power, the values that they hold, and the future of cooperation. These theories are important in analysing the way educational diplomacy is exercised and construed in international politics. It is also known as neorealism or structural realism, and it was Kenneth Waltz who spearheaded its propagation in *Theory of International Politics* 1979. It claims that the international system is anarchic, and there exists no common power above sovereign states in this anarchic system. States are the key participants, and they are mainly interested in their survival. The issue of power, specifically military and economic aspects of it, becomes the defining factor of a state in the world order hierarchy (Rosato, 2015).

Neorealism underlines that states pursue relative benefits, not absolute gains. This implies that a state will not only strive to elevate its own status, but it is also responsive to the danger of its competitors acquiring more. Competitiveness is the cause of a continuous scuffle over security, alliances, and power play. Even seemingly friendly projects like cultural or educational exchange are regarded as tools to benefit the strategic purposes and power of the nations. According to the neorealist view, educational diplomacy is not a selfless act but a thin disguise of power politics through scholarships given to foreign students; this can be a scheme to nurture future elites who will not turn against the

country offering them the scholarship. Equally, educational partnerships can be used as avenues to the promotion of strategic discourses, gaining of leverage, and even technology transfer (Morgenthau, 1948).

For example, U. S. and Chinese educational programs in Africa are often interpreted not as mere goodwill gestures but as efforts to compete for long-term political and economic influence on the continent.

Neoliberal Institutionalism provides an alternate view of how the state's actions in an anarchic system would be understood. Led by theorists like Robert Keohane (*After Hegemony*, 1984), it tolerates the anarchy of the international system but emphasizes that anarchy does not doom states to war but instead, they can establish enduring cooperation via international institutions, norms, and regimes. Neoliberals, in contrast to neorealists, believe that in many cases the states are interested in absolute gains, that is, in the overall benefits of cooperation, notwithstanding the gains of other states as well. The institutions decrease the uncertainty by supplying rules, information-sharing, and dispute resolution mechanisms; thus, cooperation becomes predictable and less risky. It is in this sense that educational diplomacy is not an instrument of power politics but a gateway towards mutual advantage, a means of trust and interdependence. The exchange programs, scholarships, and international networks of research are perceived to promote long-term cooperation by forming common bodies of knowledge and connecting states with interpersonal relationships (Ikenberry, 2018). Programs such as the Erasmus Program in Europe or other global education programs by UNESCO show how education can work as a common good towards enhancing collective solutions to problems, as opposed to benefiting the interests of a single, powerful state.

5. Research Methodology

This article employs a qualitative, theory-driven analytical approach grounded in conceptual, comparative, and interpretive methods. Since the objective is to examine how Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism explain educational diplomacy, the study relies on thematic analysis of secondary literature, theoretical texts, policy documents, and scholarly publications.

5.1 Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative and theoretical, based on a comparative analysis of IR theories and focuses on conceptual interpretation rather than empirical measurement.

5.2 Data Sources

The study draws on foundational texts of Neorealism (Waltz, Mearsheimer, Morgenthau), Neoliberal Institutionalism (Keohane, Nye, Ikenberry), academic research on soft power, educational exchanges, and global diplomacy, policy documents such as reports on Fulbright, Confucius Institutes, CPEC, and Allama Iqbal Scholarships, and case studies from Pakistan, China, and the U.S.

5.3 Method of Analysis

Methods of analysis employed for this research include comparative theoretical analysis for assessing how each theory interprets educational diplomacy, Case-based interpretation for Pakistan, U.S., and China used as illustrative examples, Content analysis for understanding how narratives reflect strategic or cooperative motivations, and Contextual analysis for linking educational diplomacy to regional geopolitics, especially in South Asia.

5.4 Justification of Method

Since the aim is to explain theoretical implications, conceptual analysis is the most appropriate method. Educational diplomacy is not directly measurable through numerical data alone; instead, its

interpretation requires unpacking motivations, narratives, and institutional behaviour. The qualitative framework allows for flexibility in comparing multiple examples and placing them within broader IR debates.

6. Neorealism and Educational Diplomacy

According to neorealists, this kind of educational diplomacy is not a neutral and altruistically driven activity but a continuation of state power and strategic rivalry. Similarly to the way military alliances and economic agreements are meant to maximize the relative gains. They are using educational programs to establish an impact on future elites, disseminate national stories, and attain a superiority in the international system. Academic exchanges and scholarship programs are seen by states as long-term strategic placement, especially in geopolitically strategic regions. When viewed in the light of neorealism, such means as scholarships and exchange programs can act as a tool to influence the mentality of foreign students and create a positive impression of the host state. Fulbright, a program in the United States, is not only a cross-cultural exchange but it is also a strategic tool to produce pro-American elites in recipient states (Smith, 2008).

In its turn, China, as a rival in efforts to establish Chinese values and stories, thus increasing its geopolitical presence and opposing the Western hegemony, frequently charges the Confucius Institutes in China. Neorealism also describes the theory of competitive educational diplomacy between the great powers; an example is that both China and the United States invest heavily in their educational programs in Africa. They are not only goodwill gestures but plans on how to exert influence on the people with new economies, resource accessibility, and political alignment in the long term. Educational partnership in this kind of view is an indirect expected power project battlefield where every state aims to restrict the other one. The educational diplomacy of Pakistan can be viewed through the prism of neorealism as well. Historically, the country has provided thousands of grants to Afghan scholars, especially following the Soviets invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 as well as the war on terror instigated by the U. S. Although these scholarships were provided as an act of goodwill, they were also meant to help foster the development of Afghan elites, who would be vulnerable to Pakistan strategic interests in the region. Under the Allama Iqbal scholarship program, Pakistan has been providing over 6000 scholarships to Afghan students since 2009. Pakistan has established long-term control in the political, economic, and security environment of Afghanistan by training Afghan students in Pakistani universities. The other example is the education partnership under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), although it is commonly framed as reciprocal development. According to neorealism, the Pakistani scholarships and universities funded by China have strategic interests. Through laying eggs in educational institutions in Pakistan, China not only enhances the power of soft platforms but also ensures its friendship with South Asia in the presence of regional competitors like India and the United States. To Pakistan, it is prudent to accept the Chinese assistance in the education sector to improve its relative profits by offsetting the regional superiority of India. The fact is that since 2013, China has awarded more than 20000 scholarships to Pakistani students, and many of them were CPEC-related (Lo, 2016).

Within this context, mistrust limits educational programs. States take care lest their investment in education abroad contribute to the development of potential competitors, such as in the case of Pakistan, its worry regarding Indian educational outreach in South Asia, or the U.S. worry about Chinese academic partnership in U.S. universities; education, seemingly friendly, is nevertheless involved in the logic of security and rivalry as expected.

7. Neoliberal Institutionalism and Learning Diplomacy

Neoliberal Institutionalism provides a significantly different conception of educational diplomacy, though admitting the anarchic form of the international system, it claims cooperation is possible and desirable when states perceive absolute gains to be valuable. The educational interactions, collaborative research, and institutionalized learning are not only an instrument of strategic

competition but also a chance of building trust, long-term cooperation, and mutual development. Institutions and norms lower the uncertainty, create a framework of interaction, and create interdependence between the states. International and regional institutions, which have already been recognized in neoliberal institutionalists as pivotal arenas, are where educational diplomacy can collaborate and cooperate in engaging with each other programs like the Erasmus+ program of the European Union can show how states may help to institutionalize academic mobility as a means of encouraging integration and the minimization of mistrust and the building up of a sense of identity. On the same note, a response can be given to the Global Education 2030 Agenda of UNESCO, which offers a framework wherein states will collaboratively achieve universal education and cross-border cooperation, which would strengthen the perception of liberal institutionalism based on cooperation. In contrast to the neorealist approach that regards scholarships as a manipulative weapon, neoliberal institutionalism tends to attribute its purpose to building on, which is a fascinating reciprocal understanding and a cultural experience. As an example, the Fulbright program, as a method of advancing U.S. soft power, has had the effect of producing a system of scholars who also help in global scientific collaboration and the solution of problems. Similarly, the Confucius Institutes of China, through this prism of understanding, can be explained as forums to learn the language and appreciate the culture, which provide chances to discuss the subject instead of fighting against it. The context of Pakistan is portrayed under neoliberal institutionalism and thus can be seen in the fact that the nation is actively involved in multilateral educational programs. Pakistan is a signatory to UNESCO and regularly plays a role in education programs, development programs, higher education reforms, and literacy campaigns. In addition, Pakistan enjoys commonwealth scholarship programs, which intensify the academic connectivity of the country with more than one country simultaneously, and such relations are not merely the strategic- but rather the cooperative models to enable Pakistan to absorb its human capital as well as work towards advancing the international learning objectives. Examples of what can be put in a framework of neoliberal institutionalism can also be found in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In addition to economic endeavours, CPEC has facilitated academic connections, including joint research centres, faculty exchange as well and scholarships to Pakistani students studying in China. These efforts result in interdependence and more opportunities to share development and a lessening of chances of conflict by creating greater cooperation, according to a liberal view. In contrast to the neorealist way of policy-focusing on strategic containment, according to neoliberal institutionalism, the integration of mutual benefits is testified by the academic cooperation of CPEC (Neha Manhas, 2025).

The Pakistani scholarship that offers the Afghan students could also be read along this line, with the neorealists viewing it as a tool of influence. The neoliberal institutionalists highlight their cooperative advantages through educating the Afghan youths in Pakistan. Such educational programs create interconnections across borders and among people, facilitate the rebuilding of Afghanistan, and increase regional stability by using networks of academicians in the example of states to overcome the fundamental contest of pure competition in favour of collaborative security. In this sense, educational diplomacy is used to deal with such global challenges as poverty, inequality, climate change, and extremism. The point is that cross-border health, environmental, and technology research partnerships demonstrate the effectiveness of academic cooperation as a source of collective goods that individual states cannot produce individually. This supports the neoliberal assertion that the role of educational diplomacy should not be understood merely in terms of relative power but of the generation of outcomes that become productive to the international community in general.

8. Comparative Theoretical Implications

Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism provide entirely different conceptualizations of educational diplomacy. Neorealism presupposes the international system of anarchy that compels states to unceasing competition, where educational programs are regarded as a means of strategic power. In response, Neoliberal Institutionalism states that even in the state of anarchy, states can collaborate significantly using institutions and normative rules, and educational diplomacy is one arena in which long-term partnerships and mutual gains can be achieved. Scholarships, academic

exchanges, and university partnerships are perceived as the instruments of subtle power projection by neorealists. A scholarship provided to international students is not so generous; it is an investment in the creation of future elites that can benefit the sending country. Neoliberal institutionalists, on the other hand, see the same initiative as a mutually beneficial cooperative arrangement where the donor and the recipient gain from each other through cross-cultural learning, exchange of knowledge, and mistrust between societies. Among the most acute variations in the two theories is the concept of gains. Neorealists focus on relative benefits whereby the interest of a state is that its competitors are gaining more than it is expected through the processes of education, an example is the U.S. worries regarding the number of Chinese students joining American universities. In comparison, neoliberal institutionalism points to absolute gains, making it clear that both nations gain something in the case of academic cooperation, even though one of them may gain more than the other. This reasoning underpins the fact that multilateral scholarship programs and academic networks remain successful even in the backdrop of geopolitical toughness. Neorealists are not very much optimistic about institutions; they consider them as mere shadows of interests of those powerful states; therefore, organizations like UNESCO or Erasmus+ designed by the EU are being viewed as the instruments of powerful actors, even inside such an institution, there are those neoliberal institutionalists who claim that such institutions lead to a reduction of transaction costs, the development of trust, and the creation of structures of continuing collaboration (Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/18).

When made institutional, educational diplomacy offers a predictable model that reduces mistrust and permits the states to interact, even in a tense political environment. The Pakistan case also brings out the conflicting theoretical implications. In neorealism, scholarships offered by Pakistan to Afghan students are perceived as a strategic initiative with a view to ensuring a voice in Afghanistan as well as offsetting the Indian outreach towards Afghanistan. The same initiative under neoliberal institutionalism is perceived as a cooperative gesture to foster regional peace and stability in education. Likewise, the academic tie-ups of CPEC can be viewed through the neorealist lens to be an effort to balance India and the U.S. by China and the neoliberal institutionalists to point to the growth in interdependence and mutual growth between Pakistan and China. This comparative study shows that the understanding of educational diplomacy is closely dependent upon the theoretical perspective used. Neorealism focuses on the continuation of competition. Untrust and tactical reason, and instability neoliberal institutionalism demonstrates the transformative opportunities of institutions, cooperation, and interdependence. Neorealism makes sense because states are still apprehensive about academic collaboration, whereas neoliberalism helps to understand why academic exchange and global interdependence continue to grow despite geopolitical tensions (Alam, 2020).

9. Case Studies: Pakistan, China, and the United States in Educational Diplomacy

To see the pragmatic aspect of educational diplomacy, it is more effective to consider the way in which educational initiatives are upheld by Pakistan, China, and the United States as an element of foreign policy and how they are perceived by others. These examples demonstrate not only the strategic logic that was stressed by neorealism, but also the potential of cooperation that has been accentuated by neoliberal institutionalism. Scholarships of Afghan students in Pakistan have long been a weapon of soft power; thousands of Afghans have been studying in Pakistani schools, especially after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in Afghanistan by the Soviets in the U.S.-led war on terror. In a neorealist sense, such scholarships are beneficial to the strategic interests of Pakistan since they can produce Afghan elites who can still be responsive to the political and security interests of Islamabad. However, the way scholarships are taken is significant. The opportunity is regarded by many Afghan students as a real help in the reconstruction of the human capital of Afghanistan, which can be regarded as the neoliberal institutionalist logic of cooperation. Critics of them among Afghan commentators accuse them of influence-building, encouraging dependence on Pakistan, instead of encouraging actual equality. This two-sided attitude demonstrates that the same initiative may be viewed as a tool of power employed strategically or a collaborative tool of maintaining the stability of the region (Allama Muhammad Iqbal Scholarships for Afghan Students, 2009).

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has not just limited its scope to infrastructure but also broadened its scope in education with joint research centres, faculty exchanges, and Pakistani students having a chance to study in China through scholarship. These agreements are to enhance durable collaboration and cultural literacy. From the perspective of a liberal institutionalist, they are an attempt to establish interdependence, lessening the mistrust, and facilitating common growth. These opportunities are viewed by many Pakistani students as getting technical systems, career opportunities, and improving the image of China as a stable collaborator. Meanwhile, Neorealist critics note that these alliances are in the strategic interests of China in the sense that they entrench its presence in the academic and technological infrastructures of Pakistan censure that the attempts are intensifying the lack of balance of dependency since they form the view of China not simply as a partner but as a dominant power who imposes its principles and creates a stable advantage. The Confucius institutes, which are situated in China, can perhaps be the most evident manifestation of education as diplomacy, as these language and cultural centres have spread all over the world, introducing Chinese traditions, values, and orientations to international audiences. They allow neoliberal analysis as forums of intercultural communication and international interaction; their reception has not been uniform at all. In many host countries. In the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the Confucius Institutes have been criticized as lacking scholarly freedom, propagating selective narratives, and acting as tools of propaganda. Some schools of higher learning have even been shut down because of political interference. This underscores the fact that neorealist distrust of educational diplomacy is often not overt competitive action on a pure cooperative basis. Therefore, the Confucius Institutes are a representation of the clash between liberal principles of mutuality and understanding and the interests of realists concerning power and domination. The Fulbright program of the United States is one of the oldest and most effective educational diplomacy tools. It has funded generations of foreign students, including most of the South Asian students, to attain higher education in American institutions. Over 8000 Fulbright grants had been awarded across the globe in 2023 alone, with 189 grants awarded in Pakistan alone (FY2023-Annual-Report_VEF, 2023).

The program, according to the neoliberal view of international institutions, is a true investment in international collaboration, academic interchange, and networks of problem solving, of which many Fulbright alumni report describing their experiences as personal growth and intercultural understanding, and long-term professional relationships. However, neorealist explanations cannot be disregarded. Critics claim that Fulbright scholarships breed pro-American elites who usually bring home with them the U.S values and tastes - further consolidating the impact of Washington throughout the world. Although the program is, undoubtedly, the means of mutual learning, it is also an instrument of soft power that enhances the American strategic standing in the long term.

10. Nuclearization and Educational Diplomacy in South Asia

Nuclearization of South Asia has had a significant impact on geopolitics in the region, both as a barrier as well as an opportunity for educational diplomacy since India and Pakistan held nuclear tests in 1998. Instead, nuclear deterrence has at least negated outright wars, however, at the cost of the deeply rooted mistrust and hostility. Such competitions have much further-reaching effects in the non-military context of the interaction of scholarly, cross-border scholarship, research, and cultural programs. In this respect, Nuclearization cannot be examined outside of the context of educational diplomacy, but it gives the structural environment where diplomacy finds it difficult to maintain its footing, or it is actively used as a confidence-building instrument. Nuclearization limits educational diplomacy according to the views of neorealists. Whenever nuclear crises break out, such as the Kargil conflict of 1999, the 2001-2002 military confrontation, or when the searchlight is switched off or severely reduced, when student exchanges and joint research projects between India and Pakistan have suffered or been forced to shut down, Neorealism stresses relative gains, security dilemmas, and mistrust, all easy to find in South Asia. Scholastic connections, even though apparently collaborative, are frequently understood strategically. Scholarships can be regarded as efforts to shape the future elites. Cross-border research is regarded as a way of transferring sensitive information such as

Pakistan has often objected to Indian educational penetration of Afghanistan, believing it was enhancing the strategic power of New Delhi. Equally, Indian policymakers have been worried by the fact that China has been increasing its academic presence in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

These cases demonstrate that the logic of nuclearized rivalry reduces the possibility of true academic collaboration since all actions are perceived through the prism of competition and relative advantage. The neoliberal institutionalist school of thought says it offers various readings even in the face of nuclear tensions; educational diplomacy has been an instrument of dialogue and trust-building when political or other avenues are closed off. Track-II diplomacy programs like academic conferences, peace discussions convened by think tanks, and cultural exchange programs have given scholars and students the means to continue communication even during official hostile regimes, e.g., in the form of common research projects under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation SAARC and attending UNESCO programs. Pakistani scholarships for Afghan students and as part of CPEC collaboration projects are other examples of how education can be used as a collaboration tool, and neorealists can view them as instruments of strategy. Neoliberals want to underline that they promote contacts between people, areas, and knowledge sharing inside networks. Food within the dilemma is that nuclearization restricts and combines the need for educational diplomacy at the same time. Nuclear competition breeds mistrust and restrains the desire of states to support cross-border academic programs. Contrastingly, nuclear weapons increase the stakes of the miscalculation and escalation. Educational exchanges have proved to be one of the few comparatively safe mechanisms of creating mutual understanding. Scholarly partnerships in areas like climate change, communal wellbeing, and poverty reduction provide a successful example of how states can team up with one another on issues that are not connected to security, even though there are profound strategic challenges.

These exchanges are leading to a gradual yet significant process of trust-building by encouraging interdependence and decreasing cultural barriers. The future of educational diplomacy in South Asia will thus hinge upon the ability of the states to weigh their nuclearized competition against the necessity to collaborate, which may be simply considered within the framework of the neorealist approach. Academic efforts will continue to suffer at the hands of crises, increasing nationalism, and the quest for relative advantage. However, as viewed through the lenses of neoliberal institutionalists, educational diplomacy is a way to stability as institutionalized cooperation and long-term academic networks can eventually melt mistrust. The nuclearization creates aggression. One of the rare tools that the region can use to seek to shift towards dialogue, interdependence, and subsequently peace is educational diplomacy (Kahl, 2020).

11. Analysis and Discussion

Educational diplomacy occupies a complex position in IR theory, and its interpretation varies drastically depending on the theoretical lens applied. The analysis below compares how Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism interpret the same initiatives differently.

11.1 Educational Diplomacy as Power Politics (Neorealist Lens)

Neorealism argues that states use academic programs to build influence and shape future elites. Examples from the article include the U.S. Fulbright Program, which is interpreted as producing pro-American elites; Chinese Confucius Institutes, viewed as spreading Chinese narratives; Pakistan's scholarships for Afghan students, interpreted as securing political leverage; and CPEC educational cooperation, seen as China increasing strategic depth in Pakistan. Neorealists emphasize relative gains, security concerns, strategic competition, and informal influence-building. Thus, education is a subtle extension of state power.

11.2 Educational Diplomacy as Cooperation (Neoliberal Institutional Lens)

Neoliberal Institutionalism interprets the same initiatives as tools for interdependence, trust-building, information-sharing, and long-term stability. Examples include UNESCO programs promoting collaborative learning, Erasmus+ reducing mistrust in Europe, CPEC academic centres fostering shared innovation, and Pakistan–Afghanistan scholarships serving as regional peacebuilding initiatives. Neoliberals highlight absolute gains, institutional rules and norms, mutual benefits, and long-term cooperation.

11.3 Dual Nature in Nuclearized South Asia

The nuclear environment heightens mistrust (Neorealism) while simultaneously increasing the need for cooperation (Neoliberalism). This duality appears in restricted India–Pakistan academic exchanges, the rise of Track-II dialogues, SAARC academic initiatives, and shared research on climate, health, and development. Thus, educational diplomacy is both constrained and necessary in South Asia.

11.4 Synthesis

The analysis reveals that Neorealism explains competition and strategic motives, while Neoliberal Institutionalism explains cooperation and trust-building. Educational diplomacy contains elements of both power and partnership. Understanding this duality enhances policy design, especially for Pakistan.

12. Conclusion

Educational diplomacy is now a more prominent tool of statecraft. Giving states chances to exert influence, to gain trust, to sign long-term relations without the use of the traditional instruments of military and economic influence, the fact is that its interpretation is highly dependent on the theoretical prism used. In terms of neorealism, educational programs are looked at with suspicion because most are constructed on a strategic interest of maximizing relative benefits and modelling future elites in a manner that is beneficial to the donor state. Such initiatives as the scholarships of Pakistani students in Afghanistan, such institutes as Confucius in China, and the Fulbright in the US are then perceived as the quiet manifestations of power politics, but this time bound by mistrust and geopolitical rivalry. According to the views of a neoliberal institutionalist, the same initiatives are channels of collaboration, understanding, and total benefits. International organizations, bilateral agreements, and multilateral networks, including those of UNESCO, Erasmus +, or the academic relationships of CPEC, show the way in which institutions and norms allow states to overcome competition and make joint contributions to systemic education, social development. In these two logics lies educational diplomacy. Neorealism states why states are alert, competitive, and strategic in their scholarly outreach, and neoliberal institutionalism suggests the long-lasting expansion of cooperation and interdependence despite combined geopolitical conflicts. Combining the two theories will grant a more improved insight into the dualistic role of educational diplomacy, both as an instrument of power and rivalry, and as a means of dialogue and partnership. Policymakers and scholars should understand this duality. It highlights the anticipated limitations and the transformational possibilities of education in international relations.

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Security Dilemma in Northeast Asia: A Case Study of North Korea

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Abstract

In Northeast Asia, the security threat, particularly in connection with North Korea, is a significant threat to the global and regional peace. The actions of North Korea and its activities, such as the creation of nuclear weapons and military aggression have increased the tensions between North and South Korea as well as between the United States, China, and Russia. This article aims at analysing factors that relate to security dilemmas within the region, especially the military posture of North Korea. Based on the collected material, this article investigates the main actors' reactions—the regional powers and the international community—and explores the processes that led to increasing tensions and the identified security issues; the paper also assesses the possible ways of addressing these threats. Stabilization and long-term peace require political dialogue, mutual trust with ambassadors' reciprocal visits, membership in collective security systems, non-proliferation and arms limitation, and cooperation in economic matters. However, a variety of actors in the regional and international system are required to manage the threats of conflict and achieve stability in Northeast Asia. This qualitative research contributes to the existing literature on security problems and helps to discover ways of addressing regional conflicts based on cooperation and diplomacy.

1. Introduction

The sub-region of Northeast Asia with the geographical coverage that includes the Korean peninsula; China; Japan; and Russia, is said to play centre stage in world politics due to a mix of; political and both economic and strategic characteristics of the area. The main country that lies at the heart of this area is North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), a monochrome state coloured by the unpredictability of its government, secretive isolation, and military-first orientation. After the Korea-Armistice Agreement signed in 1953, the DPRK has been following a very provocative, military dominated, nuclear capable, and missile technology driven policy. North Korea's persistent development and testing of nuclear-powered weapons have created enduring security concerns that impact not only South Korea and Japan but also extend to the United States and other regional actors (Oh, 2024). As such, North Korea's actions are often perceived as a significant destabilizing factor in Northeast Asia, which complicates attempts to establish long-term peace and stability.

North Korean nuclear and missile initiatives have been termed as one of the primary origins of instability in this region. Nuclear program in DPRK is a program that started in the mid-20th century and has grown tremendously over the last few decades against international non-proliferation standards. Nevertheless, North Korea has been able to use several nuclear explosives to this day and it

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is actively building a strong arsenal of ballistic missiles that can strike large portions of East Asia and even further due to multiple UN sanctions and widespread international condemnation (Dalton, Michishita, & Zhao, 2018). This development undermines international non-proliferation and increases the security threat in Northeast Asia causing deterioration to a faulty security situation characterized by military build-ups and diplomatic strains.

The reasons of North Korea to pursue nukes are complex. On the inside, the nuclear weapons are perceived to guarantee the continuity of the regime by preventing any perceived external aggression, especially that of the United States, which is massively deployed in the United States of Japan South Korea (Bechtol, 2017). North Korea has been utilizing its nuclear program as a bargaining chip, internationally, where it has sought to gain economic support and compromises as long as it is able to retain a bargaining power at the international level. The acquisition of nuclear arms has therefore assumed a fundamental part of the DPRK foreign policy that shapes its relations with its neighbours and the structure of security in the area.

This is further aggravated by the constant missile tests and military provocations by the DPRK thus creating instability in the region. Over the last few years, North Korea has been launching more missiles and most of them are done in such a way that they coincided with United States, South Korea, and Japan combined military drills (Lee & Botto, 2020). Such provocative moves cause panic in other neighbouring states, and the responses of these states are increased military vigilance and a fast reaction to the changes in the military defence strategy. An example is Japan and South Korea which have acted in response by enhancing their military capacities and strengthening their security ties with the United States especially. Consequently, the provocations of North Korea have led to an arms race in the region, creating a complicated security dilemma, as any state security steps are seen as a threat to the other, and the process of mutual distrust and additional militarization begins (Iqbal & Sajjad, 2023).

In addition, North Korea has dramatic posture and unpredictability, which affect the larger geopolitical orientations in the Northeast Asian region. The DPRK has caused bilateral relations between the major states such as China, Russia, the United States, and Japan to be strained and change of the focus of policies. Previously viewed as the closest ally to North Korea, China has problems with its approach to supporting the latter and preserving order in the region, avoiding the growth of its influence (Swanstrom, 2024). The US has expanded its security commitments in relation to its allies to strengthen the US-South Korea association and US-Japan affiliations but goes on to detail the possible interpretations of diplomacy association with China and Russia. These regional dynamics shed light on the retaliatory implications of North Korean actions outside of East Asia and to a greater extent, the Korean Peninsula and how the actions of the DPRK have a spillover effect on the security structure of the whole of Northeast Asia.

This article is aimed at providing a broad understanding of North Korea and its contribution to insecurity within the Northeast Asian region. It will investigate the origin of nuclear and missile programs in North Korea and other factors that led to military buildup and consequences of its policies on its neighbours and the world. In addition, the study has discussed the implications of North Korea's actions on other relations, policies, and diplomacy of the countries in Northeast Asia, with a focus on the security dilemma that is characteristic to the region because of provocative actions by North Korea. The goal of offered research is to bring new insights to the analysis of the multifaceted military, political, and diplomatic security system of Northeast Asia and contribute to the explanation of factors that might determine the prospects of peace in one of the most sensitive and crucial zones in the world.

2. Literature Review

In the article *Russia-DPRK relations: Strategic partnership or opportunistic alliance?* by DePetris in 38 North (2024), the author focuses on the Russian economic and political cooperation with North

Korea and the impact on the respective region's stability. As he asserts, Moscow considers its partnership with North Korea as the means of maintaining a balance of power with the United States in the Northeast Asian region and providing the North with food and diplomatic support that it needed to sustain itself in the international arena (DePetris, 2024). The article shows that Russia's participation allows the provision of necessary assistance to North Korea, thereby complicating the work with sanctions and challenging the goal of strengthening international security. However, the study leaves a gap in exploring the potential effects of a more cooperative or hardline Russian approach on regional stability and North Korea's strategic calculations.

The paper *Economic sanctions during humanitarian emergencies* by Haggard and Noland in *East-West Centre* (2023) aims to review and critically weigh the success of economic sanctions against North Korea with emphasis on North Korea and regional economies implications. They describe how the UN and US implementation of sanctions has limited Pyongyang's connections to international financial systems and essential resources yet failed to let the country surrender its nuclear weapons. Looking at some of these negative impacts, Haggard and Noland revealed that sanctions created an economic burden on other nations that have business relations with North Korea in addition to a boost to the black market. They also underscore how sanctions have made North Korea's dependence on China even deeper (Haggard, 2023). But they do not explore differential diplomatic strategies, therefore lacking information about how the positive economic incentives may change the behaviour of North Korea.

The paper *South Korea: Siding with the West and distancing from Russia* by Pardo and Kim in *International Politics* (2023) focuses on the fact how the South Korea has adapted its defence tactics due to the moves from the North Korea, including missile tests and nuclear development. They also talk about South Korea's heavy spending on defence systems like THAAD and further explain how such measures put South Korea in sync with the US security goals. The authors also tackle South Korea's intention to build up pre-emptive strikes, a new shift in outlook for self-defence (Pardo, 2023). This strategy, they state, has strengthened the second-party's deterrence capabilities, but at the same time has created a multiplier effect that leads to the growth of military reaction in the second-party system—the DPRK. From this viewpoint, moreover, the study fails to show how this posture might affect South Korea's relationship with other actors in the region, including China and Japan, or how it might alter the overall system of security in the region.

The article *How regional organization survives: ASEAN, hedging and international society* by Wicaksana and Karim in *Contemporary Politics* (2023) explains ASEAN's diplomatic third-party position in the Northeast Asian security architecture and how it use this position to foster dialogue between North Korea with other countries in the region. They also talk about the ASEAN course, which embraces multilateral communication and collective security and could help to reduce tensions with North Korea. ASEAN Track II diplomacy forums, including the ARF, provide sparse chances for North Korean diplomats to interact with counterparts from South Korea, Japan, China, and the US. According to authors, ASEAN get a free ride unlike other organizations but points out that it has no power to punish (Wicaksana, 2023). According to the work done, ASEAN activities could scale up if backed sufficiently by the regional actors, but the research does not delve into the specific structures that could endow ASEAN with more of a peace-building mission in Northeast Asia.

The article *North Korea's advanced nuclear weapons and US extended deterrence for South Korea: An assessment based on nuclear deterrence theory* by Choi in *Journal of the Asia-Japan Research Institute of Ritsumeikan University* (2021) gives a balanced review of the image of allies, South Korea and the United States, who discuss the threats the former faces, and at the same time, the destabilizers that can aggravate the situation. He posits that it acted in the past as a balancer, comforting South Korea when North Korean actions were worrisome. Yet Choi note that North Korea views this cooperation as a threat, which is why the DPRK develops nuclear programs and missile technology as ways to preserve the regime. The researcher discusses the American involvement in conducting military rehearsals with South Korea, which the latter interprets as actual preparations for an invasion—thus increasing the tension (Choi, 2021). This is striking, given that, as the study under

discussion demonstrates, the alliance helps to contain North Korea yet in the meantime fosters insecurity. However, there is no discussion in article how confidence building measures and tension releasing can be stimulated in the context of the alliance, non-military.

3. Research Question

How has North Korea's security strategy contributed to the security dilemma in Northeast Asia, and what are its implications for regional peace and stability?

4. Research Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative method of inquiry in the effort to determine how North Korea affected security policy issues related to Northeast Asia. Because of the nature of geopolitical relations and the sensibility of nuclear topics, qualitative methods are particularly well suited to uncover those less explicit dimensions around the state interaction, strategic intentions and actors' views. The methodology of this research rested on two main pillars, data collection and analysis.

4.1 Data Collection

The research used secondary sources as the major source of data such as peer-reviewed journals, government policies documents, official reports, and credible news outlets on North Korea, nuclear developments, ballistic missile launchings, and security in the region. This study therefore explored strategies of North Korea and their effects on stability in the Northeast Asian region. It has examined the way in which the regional states have been managing themselves and examines the general regional implications of these interactions. The study commissioned the official pronouncements and speeches of the government heads, officials and conducted detailed reports of global institutions to know the policy position and stance of the most affected. These were the sources that reported on different trends which influence security in Northeast Asia. Data has been collected from Books, articles, reports for analysis.

4.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to comprehend and classify patterns of data gathered in this research. These trends exposed the character and the level of nuclear armaments desired by North Korea, the security measures of states within its region, diplomatic developments, and diplomatic endeavours to connect with this country. The gathered information was synthesized by stimulating and placing it under specific categories as an explanation of how the military of North Korea assumed a stance that posed a risk to the security of the region. The case studies presented give factual experiences of actions by the North Korea, and they can be used to illustrate the acute effects, as well as the more chronic effects of the actions of the North Korea on the security in the northeast of Asia. Advantages of the move was to provide a broad perspective of the role the North Koreans played in causing the insecurity in the region, assist in acquiring information that can be valuable in the subsequent formulations of the approaches and policies to improve security and viable diplomacy in the region.

5. North Korea's Military Posturing and Its Impact on Regional Security

Nuclear accumulation and general military aggression of North Korea has been one of the major factors that have contributed to the ongoing security crisis in Northeast Asia. The numerous causes of domestic politics and foreign policy dictate the necessity of the country to assume a militant military stance manifested in the creation and training of nuclear and missile or in conventional armies. This is not only risky behaviour with the regional neighbours such as South and South Korea and Japan but also has invited the major powers states such as the United States, China, and Russia. North Korean leadership (especially Kim Jong-un) considers that the nuclear weapons serve as the ultimate provider of security of regimes to its leaders in an international system that they see as hostile to them. The

impact of the Korean War (1950-1953) where North Korea was destroyed by the U.S. and South Korean forces is still evident in the defence strategy of the country. With military preparedness and self-reliance, which were centralized in the state ideology of Juche, North Koreans have been focusing on military preparedness since the war. The nuclear weapons program that was gaining great momentum after the 1990s was fuelled by the perceived need to have deterrence against what Pyongyang considers the existential threat of the U.S and its allies (Kim, 2023).

The result of this arms race has been to further increase the South Korean, Japanese and U.S defence expenditure. Military modernization of South Korea has not been spared since many decades ago and during the past decades; the country has been advancing its missile defence systems such as the Korean Air and Missile Defence (KAMD) and deployment of the latest system the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system which is specifically designed to intercept missiles launched by North Koreans. South Korea has however installed THAAD, a development that has brought conflict with China, which believes that the system is a danger to its own strategic deterrence (Wang, 2024).

6. Regional Responses to North Korea's Military Actions

North Korean military activities, especially in the development of nuclear and missiles, have received different reactions across the region. Such responses are due to security considerations, history, and balance of power equations. The five important factors that are involved in the process of managing the North Korean provocations are South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States, targeting to serve their playing strategic interests in Northeast Asia. However, these responses are not only inconsistent but also varied by the different priorities and regional factors, even though they hinder the establishment of a permanent peace and security.

South Korea, being the immediate neighbour to North Korea, has the misfortune of suffering from any military aggression from North Korea. Accordingly, North Korea's buildup of military power has been meted out by South Korea's progressive spending in defence and efforts at updating its top-notch equipment. Steven Miller has written that the South Korean government considers North Korea's nuclear program as an existence threat, and its military strategy is based on the twin principles of deterrence and defensiveness. Currently, the missile defence of South Korea is improved, especially with the THAAD system, developed by the United States. THAAD is designed to intercept North Korean missiles in their terminal phase, thereby offering protection to South Korean territory and U.S. military assets in the region (BBC NEWS, 2017).

Although geographically Japan is detached to the Korean Peninsula, it has been heavily affected by military progressions of North Korea. The rise of North Korea missile and nuclear testing has made Japan rethink its posture of pacifism protection as guaranteed in Article 9 of its constitution after the World War II. The way Japan has reacted to the provocations of North Korea has been multifaceted because it had deployed military and diplomatic methods. Japan has also strengthened its missile defence systems such as Aegis Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system which is meant to intercept the missiles launched by North Koreans. Japan has also been having joint military drills with United States and South Korea in order to enhance its regional security (O'Shea, 2024).

The China policy towards North Korea is motivated by the interest to stabilize the region and avert North Korean regime collapse, which may result into a hoard of refugees into the China northeastern provinces. Also, China fears the possibility of united Korea that would lead to a U.S.-oriented, democratic neighbouring state. As such, although China sometimes backs international sanctions it also offers North Korea important economic assistance and diplomatic assistance, particularly when tensions are high. A balancing act between preserving its relationship with North Korea and countering the risk of military development by North Korea has complicated the role of China in the crisis especially to an extent that it is contradictory (Wang, 2024).

Russia is also a major regional power that borders on North Korea, and it is like China. Although Russia does not enjoy such an economic or military weight that China possesses in North Korea, it has remained influential in terms of affecting how the region reacts to the activities of North Korea. Russia has mostly followed the same stance as China and has been in favour of U.N. sanctions, yet at the same time they have tried to seek diplomatic resolutions to the crisis. The stability of the region is the main issue that Russia is concerned about because it believes that the destabilizing impact of the provocations of North Korea might result in a more dominant U.S military presence close to its borders (Lee, 2024). During the recent years, Russia has been reinforcing diplomatic and military ties with North Korea. Russia has also provided technical support to North Korea in fields like nuclear power generation, and both states have also had joint military exercises. Another area that Russia has been averse to is the U.S. security architecture in the region especially the proliferation of THAAD in South Korea, which the country considers destabilizing. The reaction of Russia to the activities of North Korea is thus influenced by the urge to have a balance of power in the region and take the U.S. influence expansion at the cost of the strategic interests of Russia.

The U.S. has diplomatically sought bilateral and multilateral initiatives to interact with North Korea. Where the Trump administration had focused on its maximum pressure policy, which prioritized sanctions and isolation, the Biden administration has focused on a more subtle policy, in which it has placed an emphasis on diplomacy, but without conditions. The failure of the 2018-2019 summit discussions between President Trump and Kim Jong-un, however, underscored the difficulties within negotiating with a regime that perceives nuclear weapons as the key to its existence (Smith, 2023). The U.S. reaction to the activities of North Korea has been a combination of military deterrence, economic sanctions, and sporadic diplomatic overtures with the aim of denuclearizing North Korea and at the same time containing the overall security risks associated with its antics.

7. Escalation of the Security Dilemma in Northeast Asia

One of the most prominent tendencies in security relations in Northeast Asia has been the so-called security dilemma where actions of a state aimed at improving its security will lead to insecurity of other states which respond by taking countermeasures, which will only increase the initial insecurity. The hostility of the North Korean towards USA particularly and the strategic insecurity in the region at the same time has turned this region to be the epicentre of the intensification of the security dilemmas. To react to the threat of North Korea, the U.N. Security Council has already passed several resolutions which are based on a series of sanctions on the economy, military and leaders of the North Korean country. Sanctions, although they inflict profound consequences on the North Korean economy, have not contributed to the change in behaviour in Pyongyang. Also, the UN and its partners, including the United States, constantly blame China and Russia for not implementing sanctions fully, thus making multidimensional attempts to resolve the crisis fail. However, such talks have remained virtually deadlocked, and very little has been done towards denuclearization. The demise of multilateral diplomacy in addressing the North Korean issue has further underscored the problems associated with intervention in the management of the security dilemma in Northeast Asia (Iqbal & Sajjad, 2023).

8. Mitigating the Security Dilemma in Northeast Asia

The security dilemma in Northeast Asia that stems from North Korea's military developments, actions of regional actors, and roles of powers from outside the region pose a great threat to regional security. The best way to reduce the seriousness of the security dilemma is through diplomacy that continues unabated. Prior attempts at diplomacy using the Six-Party Talks have shown that the crisis cannot be solved only through dialogue in the bilateral or multilateral format. Yet, there is understandable reluctance to attempt that kind of initiative again, but the upside is that the resumption of direct multilateral talks between North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia may offer a forum for addressing key security issues. Thus, talk for North Korea is a means of achieving its ultimate goal: the guarantees of its security. North Korea's leaders have always wanted the United

States to pull out its troops from South Korea as well as halt the joint drills with the United States (Swanstrom, 2024). However, those demands may be hard to accept. 100% dialogue could have the following effects of compromise: containment of military drills and assurance of no harm or intention of attack. But, because diplomatic dialogue provides the skeleton for a positive interaction between the states, it can stop the process of either side giving a provocation and the other providing a counter provocation, which results in the escalation of the security dilemma.

The first and one of the most important tasks in reducing exacerbation of the security dilemma is the problem of North Korean nuclear ambitions. Perhaps one cannot dream of the immediate total elimination of the nuclear threat, but a gradual approach seemed to be the solution to greater arms control. The rivals could view it that, with some promise of the other backing off, North Korea could be persuaded to desist from its nuclear and missile tests. This process was that gradual, progressive measures such as the freezing and eventual dismantling of North Korea's nuclear program or a dismantling of its arsenal could be negotiated. Also, the further development of multilateral arms control approaches, including the NPT framework applied to North Korea, can also assist in the integration of the country into the mainstream world's non-proliferation regime. Such steps should be reinforced by statements about the non-use of force against North Korea by the United States and its allies if the country adheres to the requirements of disarmament (O'Shea, 2024).

While economic engagement remains one of the critical approaches to the promotion of stability, there is the likelihood that the security dilemma will only be overcome through the adoption of a multifaceted approach. This paper argues that North Korea has been propelled to engage in militarily provocative gestures by its economic isolationism as a way of sustaining its internal political stability. Perhaps limited liberalization of the economy to encourage limited cross-border exchanges with a foreign entity of the North Korean economy's choosing could help relieve its current pressures while increasing cooperation and dependence in the region. From the 1990s, South Korea had its own "Chance Policy" example, which implies cooperation through humanitarian aid and trade as a leverage to decrease hostility levels (Kim, 2023). Although the policy is slightly divergent, we are still able to move in this direction and establish a system of economic cooperation with certain benefits and opportunities that would not appear under more ambiguous conditions, tied to problems of nuclear disarmament and security assurances. The exchange of goods, money, investment, or technology between North Korea and other countries will make any conflict least efficient and help diminish the interests of both sides on the use of force.

9. Conclusion

The security challenge in Northeast Asia, or focusing on North Korea's military actions, is one of the most profound and significant issues of the current theoretical and practical geopolitical agenda. The ongoing process of building up nuclear capability and aggressive military actions, combined with the North Korean government's aggressive actions as well as the impact of other great powers such as the United States, China, and Russia, has made the security environment of the peninsula quite unpredictable. Nevertheless, it is possible to eliminate the risk of conflict through intensified diplomacy, increased trust, collective security arrangements, and a gradual reduction of the level of arming. First of all, diplomatic relations are the only way to stop the process—a reciprocal response to an escalation. The Soviet actions of the Six Party Talks and bilateral summits prove that talking requires challenges but is necessary to consider the security interests of all sides. Due to the establishment of communication linkages between North Korea, its neighbours, and other international actors, chances of conflict resolution will be initiated. It involves strategic manoeuvrability and a basic understanding that the security of no single country should be achieved at the expense of the other. A broad and multilayered diplomatic approach could be created with the help of which its authors are able to consider North Korea's concerns about its security and, at the same time, respond to the legitimate interests of the countries in the region.

Some of the measures include periodically launching general ‘transparency’ activities, for example, when providing information of military actions ongoing in a certain state, and the development of ‘hot lines’ for direct communications. Although such measures may prevent conflicts from arising or cool down the hostile relations that have already developed between states, they do not address the security questions at their root; nevertheless, they can build confidence between the parties, which may help to establish the conditions for more fundamental talks. Trust was identified here as a way of achieving confidence-building that could also pave the way for further comprehensive security pacts and, thus overall, ‘dialling down’ on the elements of mistrust in the region. Unlike the security dilemma, which is still a fact in Northeast Asia, it is not an insurmountable problem. Through the spectrum of diplomacy, mutual reassurances and commitments, collective security arrangements, a program of disarmament and arms control, and economic cooperation, there is a potential course for the more effective assurance of a more stable regional environment. It is the responsibility of everyone to accept the concept that long peace and security in the region can only be achieved when the people of Northeast Asia come together to promote long-term security.

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A Modernist Perspective on the Role of Political Parties in Democratic Consolidation

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: Feb 08, 2025 Revised: Jan 01, 2026 Accepted: June 29, 2026	This paper discusses the activities and roles of political parties towards the democratic consolidation of the post-colonial states with specific focus on Pakistan. It examines the concept of political development in the light of the modernisation theory that anticipates changes in the form of the traditional structures into the present-day institutions and political cultures. The manuscript assumes that the political parties are an essential tool in this process and they are some of the most powerful sources of democratization and political change. This research paper aims at discussing the relationship between political development and modernization and the role played by political parties in this change. It also discusses the issues that affect political parties in Pakistan which are complicated in nature such as factionalism in every political party, the leadership that is dominated by the dynastic leadership of almost everything in politics, and external forces that are exerted on them by frequent military interventions. This research is qualitative and theory-oriented using secondary sources to assess these dynamics. The analysis shows that the systemic issues have not eliminated the fact that political parties still have the important functions of participation, representation, and continuity of institutions. This paper will be more enlightening on how the political parties may assist in and sustain democratic consolidation in the shifting institutional milieu by exploring the dynamics between political development and modernisation. The conclusion of the paper is that the future of democratic consolidation of Pakistan lies in the consolidation of party institutionalisation and internal democracy without the interference of the outside world.
Keywords <i>Modernisation,</i> <i>Political development,</i> <i>Military Interventions,</i> <i>Governance,</i> <i>Democratic consolidation.</i>	

1. Introduction

Political parties are the foundation of democratic systems and are regarded as influential mediators and directing the channel of connecting the citizens to the political process. This issue is even more relevant in situations of post-colonial state in which it is not only necessary to develop colonial authoritarianism into democratic governance but also to develop institutional stability at the same time (Leys, 1982). This is how it is entirely summed up in a post-colonial state, such as Pakistan. The process of democratization in Pakistan has not been easy, full of military interferences, political conflicts in the country, and social-economic issues. Political parties were forced to operate within such an unstable socio-political structure marked by factional politics, dynastic nepotism /external influence leadership. During the post-independent period, Pakistan still has not been able to reach

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democratic consolidation and institutional stability, although political parties and numerous elections have taken place. This leads to an important research question, why have political parties in Pakistan not worked as effective agents of democratisation even though they are central to democratic systems the world over?

The importance of this research is that it attempts to examine the issue of political development in Pakistan using the Modernisation Theory that provides a theoretical understanding as well as practical implications of the democratization of institutions in other post-colonial settings.

The paper will discuss the following main proposals: (1) to discuss the role of political parties in democratic consolidation; (2) to assess the lack of structural and historical issues to limit the capacity of this solution; and (3) to explore their role in the development of institutions in Pakistan.

The paper is laid out as follows, it gives the theoretical framework and literature available, second it gives the methodology and third is the analysis of politics of political parties and their role in the institutions of Pakistan. Offering an academic image of the essential component of the political parties in this process, Modernisation Theory offers an analytical framework behind the support of the democratic structures as well as processes. The political parties had been theorised to wake the popular conscience to shape it, though, within regulation, the socialisation of politics was perceived through the education of a bunch of savages who were compelled to cooperate with one another. In the long run, this theory assumes that societies are transitioning out of traditionalist as a phase where the institutional change in the real world may (Fukuyama, 2014). The performance and behaviour of political parties and its leaders are directly attributed to democratic consolidation and strengthening of institutions such as the judiciary, parliament, etc, in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

The Modernisation Theory has been a basic tool in understanding political development. According to classical theorists like Talcott Parsons (1968) and Daniel Lerner (1958), societies move through traditional systems to modern systems, and the political institutions adapt to the socio-economic change. Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) also brought in a connection between economic development and political legitimacy which brings out the importance of political parties in the maintenance of democratic rule.

The latter interventions, such as Cheibub and Vreeland (2018) have returned to these arguments with increased focus on institutional maturity, inclusiveness, and stability as the primary predictors of effective democratisation. Though these classical and contemporary views have a rich theoretical explanation, they rarely put in context their arguments in post-colonial context where democratic institutions are weak and are easily destroyed. Bates (2018) and Huntington (1968) acknowledge the disruptive history of colonialism and the active control of military dominance, but in a general comparative context.

The studies on Pakistan, including those by Waseem (1997) and Alavi (1973), illuminate how political instability and intervention by the authoritarian regime are repeated processes but lacks sufficient context of situating the process within a systematic modernisation process. Later scholarship has attempted to address this deficiency by examining the democratic course of Pakistan in terms of structure, institution and culture.

Wu (2020) discusses the changes in the party politics of Pakistan, especially the emergence of new centres such as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the disintegration of conventional party regimes. Taking the position of the very future of democracy in Pakistan, Jalal (2024) puts the debate into the context of the long-standing civil-military relationships, and Janjua (2021) highlights that the asymmetry of the civil-military relations still limits the process of democratic consolidation. The Journal of Democracy (2024) commentaries also identify the problems with elections and the

structural hindrances to competition of the parties. Raza (2023) theorises Pakistan as a hybrid regime of with a weakly institutionalised party structure, but larger region analyses of the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia (2024) appear to place these trends in the context of South Asian party system dynamics. Together, these writings provide a reassertion that the political parties have a paradoxical position in the Pakistani politics, both as an engine of democracy participation and weak institutionality.

2.1 Research Gap Identification

Even though a considerable amount of literature is present, there are still critical gaps. Much of the literature that is available on modernisation and democracy is too generalised and does not give much country-specific analysis that reflects the unique post-colonial and militarised setting of Pakistan. Furthermore, recent studies are inclined to use mostly formulations of the theories that were developed in the middle of the 20th century, and there is not enough interaction with the new empirical material and theoretical developments. There are not many studies that directly look at the role of institutional resilience in Pakistan political system through the mediation of political parties, which are central actors in the democratic system. The research fills these gaps by directly applying the Modernisation Theory to the Pakistani context and thoroughly addressing both the traditional and modern literature. Thus, it tries to make some contribution to the refining of theories and at the same time providing an empirical explanation of the process of democratic consolidation in a post-colonial South Asian context.

3. Objectives

The main objectives of this research are:

- To critically analyse the role of political parties as institutional players in the democratic consolidation process in post-colonial states with a particular reference to a state like Pakistan.
- To analytically use Modernisation Theory in the process of explaining the socio-economic change and development of political institutions in Pakistan.
- To determine and examine the structural, historic, and civil-military limitations that inhibit institutionalisation the political parties in Pakistan.
- To determine how much of a role are played by the political parties in enhancing the democratic standards, institutional stability, and the outcomes of governance in the modernisation path of Pakistan.

4. Research methodology

The research design as has been employed in this study is qualitative in nature, theory based and has sought to analyse the role played by the political party in the consolidation of democracy in a post-colonial nation. The study does not involve the empirical test of hypotheses but the analytical test of the interpretation to specify the connection between theoretical propositions and observed political patterns in Pakistan. The study only uses secondary sources, such as academic literature, history, institutional reports, and policy documents.

4.1 Research Design

Theoretical Framework: It uses the Modernisation Theory as the analytical instrument to determine the interplay between socio-economic change, political mobilisation and institutional development in

the case of democratic experience in Pakistan. The theory serves as an explanatory and a critical assessment instrument especially in connection to its shortage in militarised political systems.

Data Collection: The peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, election reports, party manifestos, Freedom House indices, and valid institutional evaluations are the sources of secondary data. The sources were filtered according to their applicability in relation to party politics, democratic institutions, and civil-military relations in Pakistan.

Analytical Process: The paper uses thematic content analysis to point-by-point analysis on recurrent trends based on institutionalisation of parties, leadership systems, electoral procedures, and military intervention. These themes are discussed within the framework of important assumptions of Modernisation Theory which enables determination of the extent to which the realities in Pakistan are aligned or lacking alignment with the theories.

The given methodological procedure allows interpreting political trends in Pakistan in a systematic way and preserving analytical integrity between theory and data..

4.2 Data Analysis

The empirical data on this research relies completely on the secondary sources; it includes election reports, party manifestos, Freedom House indices, and the analysis that remained available to academics. The party politics in Pakistan since the independence shows very similar trends of military interruption, loose institutionalisation of parties, and elite control over the democratic procedures. To illustrate, lack of intra-party democracy between Pakistan people party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim league (Nawaz): decades of alternation among the two parties had deeply rooted dynastic leadership to the extent that it limited the intra-party democracy. The advent of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has broken this duopoly, which reflects general modernisation processes in the political courtesy of urban and middle-class people (Wu, 2020); but the break has not yet led to any institutional changes. The civil-military relations continue to be the cornerstone to an explanation of the democratic path of Pakistan. As Janjua (2021) shows, the military remains a regulatory force in the government, thus directing the political fortunes. Freedom House statistics continuously categorise Pakistan as one that is Partly Free, which is an indication of poor democracy consolidation. In addition to this, the perennial dissolution of the elected assemblies is adversely affecting the vertical and horizontal accountability, thus undermining the institutions of democracy.

Comparative evidence in South Asia as provided by Oxford Research Encyclopaedia (2024) shows that Pakistan is below India, Sri Lanka and even Bangladesh in terms of party-system institutionalisation and successful democratic transitions. These short-term results indicate that the role of Pakistan political parties is two-fold as they enable political participation and representation, yet structural weaknesses drive the country to instability.

4.3 Discussion

The results point to the conflict between the modernisation processes and institutional failures that Pakistan still experiences in its democracy. Regarding the Modernisation Theory, the growing urbanisation, literacy, and middle relative mobilisation of Pakistan to the concept of democracy consolidation should contribute to the development; nonetheless, as Jalal (2024) claims, the influence of civil-military dominance thwarts this path. This analysis has shown that political parties have failed to become strong institutions of absorbing socio-economic change. Instead, they can be easily subject to capture and clientelism by the elites (Javid, 2019), which is symptomatic of a greater paradox of modernisation in the post-colonial states, where socio-economic change is not accompanied by a growing institutional back-up. Placing the identities of Pakistan into the wider context of South Asia, it is quite clear that structural legacies and geopolitical demands make the process of democratisation difficult but internal party weaknesses are a very decisive issue in postponing consolidation. This is

consistent with the thesis advanced by Huntington (1968) which argues that the failure of political institutions in advancing leads to political decay in cases where political mobilisation is occurring faster than that of institutions. The argument therefore strives to support the point that in a democratic future of Pakistan, the institutionalisation of parties must be empowered, the military influence must be restrained and the elements of accountability must be enhanced.

5. Theoretical Framework: Modernisation Theory

Modernisation theory has its foundations back to some significant scholars who have contributed towards its development. One such name is Talcott Parsons, a sociologist by profession who advocated for societal differentiation and transcendence from older to more recent forms. Parsons maintained that as societies progress through modernity, they undergo evolutionary processes in their structures, which make them more intricate and specialised; thus, contributing to the advancement of society (Parsons, 1968). This field is also represented by Robert H. Bates. Among other issues, the author elaborates on the Modernisation Theory, which is crucial for understanding development politics. The theory connects the politics of development, democracy, culture, ethnic politics and religion. Its growth happened between World War II and the Vietnam War (Lancaster, C., & Van de Walle, N., 2018).

Bates (2018) connects the modernisation school with the decline of colonial empires during the mid-twentieth century. Political development, as a branch of political science, appeared in the 1960s, as stated by him. When states progressed into modernity, they were characterised by rising levels of urbanisation, enhanced education, increasing levels of wealth and the modern media. Conditions became conducive for politicians to mobilise the common citizens for mass action. This was the case, for instance, in France's withdrawal from Africa, the Dutch exit from Indonesia and Great Britain's departure from India. Bates (2018) presents the dissolution of colonialism as one of the key evolutionary points towards political development.

6. Modernisation Theory and Institutional Stability

The intellectual roots of Modernisation Theory lie in people, who attempted to describe political development because of the socio-economic change. Talcott Parsons (1968) stated that societies develop in structural differentiation processes, in which old institutions undergo the stages of replacement by more specialised and functional autonomous structure. Under this paradigm, politics and political parties are supposed to be increasingly professionalised, programme and rule based as societies grow modern.

Theory of Modernisation was later extended by others to include political development in relation to decolonisation and the formation of states. Bates (2018) places modernisation in wider context of politics of development, and states that post-colonial states face increased mobilisation politically because of urbanisation, education, and development of media. Nevertheless, Bates is also able to state that in most cases, institutional development is not becoming in pace with social change which establishes the circumstances of political instability. The same warning was by Huntington (1968) who argued that in the speed of political mobilisation that exceeds institutional capacity, societies can only face political decay instead of democratic consolidation.

This observation applies especially to the Pakistani politics. Political institutions have also been weakly institutionalised even though there have been tremendous social-economic transformations since independence. Modernisation Theory would anticipate that this kind of transformation would be one of the implications of which strengthened political parties; Pakistan, however, is an uncharacteristic situation where modernisation has not brought about any consolidated democratic state.

6.1 Modernisation Theory and Political Parties in Pakistan

This theory is not applied as a forecast model, but the critical model to evaluate why the results of modernisation were expected to take place in Pakistan did not happen. The political parties are theoretically supposed to be the mediating institution where political participation is channelled into democratic governing bodies, which was supposed to stabilize the governance. In Pakistan, though, the political parties have tended to be personalistic, factionalised, and dynastic in terms of limiting their capacity to institutionalise the political parties. Although the socio-economic modernisation has increased the involvement, the inability of military dominance has broken the learning process of democracies and institutionalisation of parties. Such deviation depicts the conditionality of the Modernisation Theory in post-colonial states that are militarised.

6.1.1 Monetary Progress and Political Stability

Modernisation Theory also posits that economic development induces political change. Industrialisation and urbanisation lead to the rise of new social classes, changing power dynamics, leading to fresh political opportunities (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). The unevenness of economic development across Pakistan has resulted in notable disparities among regions, and these regional variations are frequently mirrored by corresponding contrasts within the political atmosphere. At the same time, political parties have to operate across the economic inequalities, trying to build the alliances amidst the social divide which is growing.

6.1.2 Institutionalisation of Democratic Patterns

The institutionalisation of democratic pattern in the form of a governmental framework should be depicted in form of structures and not just a culture with its irregularities and should therefore be a guarantee in the stability of the political structure. Freedom of politics, openness and responsibility will depend on platforms offered by political parties. However, in Pakistan, these norms have been compromised so much especially due to the fact that the ancillary institutions, the judiciary and parliament have the ability to apply these norms effectively (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi, 2000).

6.1.3 Political Participation

The level of political participation expands with the increase in complexity of the society and the replacement of traditional values by the modern ideology. The feudalism, and the traditional sources of power, pose a strong challenge to the political parties within Pakistan, thus establishing some levels of social inequality which existed previously. The parties are needed to break the legacy limits in order to encourage more individuals to participate in the elections to maintain a healthy democratic culture (Kitschelt, 2000).

6.1.4 Political Parties as Drivers of Democratic Consolidation

Political parties form the building blocks of democratic consolidation especially in a scenario such as the one in Pakistan. Democratic consolidation refers to the process through which democracy stabilises and becomes less prone to shun authoritarian regimes. Parties also serve as the main intermediaries between citizens and the state in that they organize elections, it consists of different interests and facilitate peaceful transfer of power. In addition, they play significant functions in cultivating political conversation, consensus-building, and responsibility and thus develop a culture of conflict resolution in the society. Their value is enhanced in the presence of the unrelenting conflicts in the form of political instability, military intervention, and ethno-religious fault lines. The needs of such a process as modernization of society and its institutions highlight the necessity of the parties to gain institutional stability. The modernisation theory argues that the evolution of societies leads to the increased complexity, and specialization of political structures to accommodate the social and political

tensions. Parties, therefore, can play the key role in establishing and sustaining stable institutions- a claim that is especially apt when dealing with Pakistan, whereby democratic institutions are weak because of the constant military dictatorships and political instabilities in the country (Huntington, 1968).

Political parties in Pakistan have also worked to consolidate democracy in the state by participating in elections and passing of constitutional amendments aimed at increasing citizen participation. However, they are faced by enormous challenges such as internal disintegration and dynastic politics that cripple their ability to work as consolidation drivers.

7. Role of Political Parties in Stabilising Institutions

Political parties are important not only for the consolidation of democracy, but also as part of ensuring institutional stability. The importance of stable institutions for democratic consolidation, good governance and durable socio-economic development is highlighted in the study titled "Political Parties as Agents of Institutional Stability in Pakistan".

Political parties have a great impact on functional stability in various ways:

7.1 Forming and Improving Institutions

Political parties are central in the activity of democratic governance can build and enhance institutions such as the judiciary, parliament and executive arms of government (Huntington, 1968). They help to form a rules-based system where institutions operate free of the whims of man. In Pakistan, political parties were instrumental in successfully adopting the 18th Amendment (2010) that institutionalised a parliamentary system and curtailed presidential authority to bolster democracy.

7.2 Encouraging Accountability

In these obligatory tasks, political parties are guardians of accountability in governance. Elections are an important accountability mechanism for political parties in Pakistan. Political parties offer citizens the opportunity to participate in elections as a means of evaluating previous accomplishments both by serving government and opposition forces. This is not the whole story, as political accountability may in turn be undermined by problems such as electoral fraud and vote-rigging or simply of democratic choice. These problems undermine the credibility of democracy and are obstacles in the way that political parties can use to control government with effective performance (Hine, 1996).

7.3 Dispute Negotiation and Harmony Developing

Political parties play a critical role in not only democratic consolidation but also establishment of institutions stability. Through their key responsibility of arbitrating between opposing interests, their main role is to find a consensus over important national issues especially in the year 2018. Through conflict mitigation and avoiding the continuation of the social cleavages into political crisis, parties maintain social cohesion in a fragmented polity. They cultivate mediation and political compromise by coalition-building, negotiating cross cutting alliances making institutions to be continued (Waseem, 1997).

With less political mediating force, divisions in society – be they ethnic or religious and even political — are more likely to lead eventually to a weak state that competing forces seek ultimately to control. As a result, political parties perform the important function of mediating between these conflicts and fostering social cohesion

8. Obstacles Faced by Political Parties in Pakistan

8.1 Domestic Factionalism

Political parties in Pakistan face a significant obstacle to their effective functioning: internal factionalism. Faction, in this sense refers to the power-related intra-party divisions, which cripple party organisational coherence and orientation towards an electorate (Carey, 2007). One of the reasons why political parties in Pakistan have always been inefficient and unable to govern is factionalism, which has fuelled for long time unstable political system.

Over the years, dozens of splits have occurred within several factions prompting an inevitable dilution in its overall power including the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party. While increasingly inward-looking, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been beset by inner-party rifts in any case — most pronounced during leadership transitions or immediately afterwards — and this public confidence that they can effectively rule is at an all-time low.

8.2 Dynastic Leadership

Dynastic leadership is another major challenge for political parties in Pakistan. Most of Pakistan's leading parties — including the PPP, led by the Bhuttos; and PML-N, controlled by Sharifs — are family-run enterprises. Power concentration in the hands of few families distorts internal democratic practices by parties, as well as, the rise of fresh talents.

Dynastic leadership also integrates patron-client networks, which entrap political loyalists in government positions and resources thus undermining the integrity of democratic institutions. Such a system encourages leaders to safeguard their interests to the impetus of national issues.

8.3 Army Intervention

Pakistan's political history can be best understood through its distinct phases of military interventions that endlessly interrupted the process of democratic consolidation. Pakistan, created in 1947 has been dominated by the military for most of its history with a continued pattern following through several successful and failed coups where almost every single democratic phase has promised a new era (Alavi, 1973). These interventions have served to weaken political parties as well as undermine civilian public faith the rule of law

Although civilian rule still prevails, political parties often have to strike a fragile balance of power vis-a-vis the armed forces who retain an upper hand in national security and foreign policy along with ruling having majoritarian character. As a result, political parties are unable to demand civilian supremacy over the military and govern effectively due to unpredictable politics.

8.4 Ethnic and Sacred Divisions

The politics of Pakistan is one where diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and language which the more often than not gets reflected in all walks specifically political as well. Hence, parties have to manage social divisions and establish large coalitions which will attract significant chocolate of voters. However, ethnic and religious identity make it difficult to establish unified and all-inclusive parties (Lancaster and Van de Walle, 2018). The agendas of the regional and ethnic parties, including ANP and MQM, tend to be narrow in nature and thus, moving the political spectrum, undermining the ability of parties to bring the people together and promote democratic consolidation.

8.5 Election Manipulation

Pakistan has been facing a regular problem of electoral malfeasance, and this has been manifested through rigging and voter fraud and even intimidation that have cast doubt on the integrity of the

electoral process. The parties that have large financial resources or business connections can vote through manipulations, open ballots and boxes, and exaggerate the number of votes in the chosen polling stations. These activities undermine the democratic standards and reduce the level of trust in political establishments. The manipulation of elections tends to favour established elites at the expense of smaller players and eliminate any real sense of democracy. Consequently, elected governments usually become less legitimate, and the level of voter alienation also increases (Azhar and Khan, 2020).

8.6 Media Bias/Misinformation

In Pakistan, the media play a very important role in influencing the minds of people; most media houses are characterized by strong partisanship whose interests are linked to the corporate worlds. This prejudice spreads false information, polarises politics and weakens the growth of an enlightened voter.

Moreover, another factor that has complicated political waters is the inundation of the politics with false information and fabricated news through social media. Political parties are generally interested in their image, and an ill-informed voter may always vote on fake or inaccurate accounts (Zelenkauskaitė, 2022). Besides creating a distortion on the results of the electoral process, this phenomenon complicates political discourse.

8.7 Financial Dependency

Most of the political parties in Pakistan are dependent on financial support based on business interests, rich individuals or business people. This economic dependency can create vested interests whereby parties may choose the desires of those who pay to keep them in power over serving the broader electorate. The rich or corporations will often want something in exchange for their donation, hence policies that cater to the affluent rather than the common man. Rather it also leads to questions concerning the transparency and accountability of political parties. In any electoral campaign, richer parties have a very clear edge since they can pay for media campaigns and rallies which reach the masses.

9. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Political development can be nurtured in various ways and the political system and political codes can be improved and updated. These include:

- Improving the electoral system. Such a system is designed to ensure that the government applies proportional representations to enhance the presence of minority groups in the legislature.
- Weakening of the judicial. A control over nominating judges to the Supreme Court and legal regulation of the constitutionality of statutory acts are reserved for the government.
- Bringing a level of professionalism into the bureaucracy. A policy that emphasizes merit over seniority should be implemented in promoting civil service employees.
- Fostering Development of Political Parties: Encouraging the development of political parties through creating the right atmosphere for their creation and working. Such regulations can include those that promote internal democracy in political parties, advocate for party programs that are in the interest of the general public and support the strengthening of the structures of political parties.
- Reduce the use of the military in state affairs: Restructure the organisation and functioning of the military and bring it under civilian control.
- For the system of political democracy to function effectively, it is crucial to ensure that the real power is exercised by the masses.

10. Evaluation

Political parties in Pakistan play an important role as far as democratic consolidation and institutional stability of the country are concerned. Political parties have made substantial contributions to the growth of democratic institutions, but they are still encumbered with formidable internal problems, among which party factionalism, dynastic leaderships and military relics linger. In addition, political development is failing due to the absence of a coherent party system and traditional control powers.

Nevertheless, the political parties are part and parcel of the democratic flow in the country. These are supposed to prompt political interest, arbitrage conflicts in the society, and institutionalise democratic norms. More successful parties in consolidating democracy do it through alleviating their weaknesses, filling the gap where more structured organisations are required, and eventually giving rise to a stronger and less elite political system.

11. Conclusion

This paper focused on the political parties and their role in the process of democratic consolidation of post-colonial states, and in particular Pakistan was considered. The results indicate that alongside increased political participation due to the process of socio-economic modernisation, it has not coincided with the similar institution-level consolidation. The Democratic form of governance is still based on political parties, though lacking institutional independence, personalised leadership systems as well as repeated military interventions. Consequently, the modernisation pathway which is envisaged by classical theory has not been achieved.

This work contributes something to a conditional conceptualisation of recipe of Modernisation Theory, which states that political parties may act as effective organization of democratic consolidation only when socio-economic change is justified by the autonomous state of institutions, in-party democracy and civilian dominance. Lack of the above means that modernisation can lead to political turmoil instead of democratic enrichment.

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Comparative Analysis of Democratization in Egypt and Tunisia: Key Factors behind Success and Failure (2011-2020)

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: Feb 03, 2026 Revised: June 28, 2026 Accepted: June 29, 2026	This paper critically evaluates the advent of Arab spring on democratization process in Arab world, concentrating mostly in Tunisia and Egypt. In general, this research aims to answer three main research questions: how the Arab spring affected democratization, what are the main reasons for the success of the formation of democracy and what factors led the failure of democratization movements in Egypt. In this paper, comparative results of Arab spring in various countries are provided, and the paper also shows that Tunisia experienced a relative success in formation of a democratic framework, while in Egypt, regression into authoritarianism was the outcome. As opposed to being dominated by the military, the economy is challenged, political cohesion is lacking, and the role of civil society, political pluralism, and international support are key factors in Tunisia, not in Egypt. The outcome of these democracies is important when considering the role of the Arab spring in influencing political transitions. Drawing on this gap, the study considers the political, economic, and social determinants that shaped process of democratization in both countries. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes case studies and document analysis to assess institutional reforms, civil society engagement, and external influences. The findings are to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for democratization in the region, offering valuable implications for policymakers, scholars, and international organizations. By contributing to the discourse on political transitions in MENA, this research aims to enhance the understanding of democratic consolidation and regression in post-revolutionary states.
Keywords <i>Democratization,</i> <i>Egypt,</i> <i>Middle East,</i> <i>Political pluralism,</i> <i>Tunisia</i>	

1. Introduction

The rise and fall of democratization in the Middle East and North African region present an intriguing narrative marked by aspiration and disillusionment. Recent historical movements, especially the Arab spring, have enlightened the many complexities involved in transiting from authoritarianism to democratic governance. As, (Huntington, 1993) defined a wave of democratization as "a group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period".

The failure or inadequacy of embedding an accountable and functioning political system is held to be caused by an embedded political framework, historical background, institutional legacy, and cultural baggage. With the annual data given by freedom house, none of the political systems in the region

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was considered "free" before 2010 (Inmaculada Szmolka, 2015 and Eryilmaz, 2017). The popular uprisings that began in Tunisia and spread throughout the middle east in December 2010 caused mass speculation over whether it was the inauguration of a "fourth wave," the beginning of the end of authoritarian rule in the region. What came so strongly and abruptly in Tunisia followed in Egypt, as the whole world watched the regimes come down. For so long had the people that participated in the Arab spring been denied political and religious freedoms, justice free of corruption, and economic opportunities that it was time for change. (Dunay, 2017).

The Arab uprisings of 2011-2012 popular protests challenging authoritarian rule across the middle east and north Africa took the world by surprise. The possibility that the Arab region might finally be loosening the chains of tyranny was electrifying. But within five years, this hope had largely been dashed. Popular mobilization had left in its wake a political scene littered with state collapse, civil war, and authoritarian regression. This dark turn in the Arab world was bound to happen to pessimists. To others, however, alternative routes were available (Belin, 2015). The growing anti-government demonstrations, revolutions, and armed rebellions in 2011 in the MENA culminated into the "Arab spring". As a result of the Arab spring, four leaders of the region's authoritarian governments have been overthrown: bien Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Gadhafi in Libya, and Saleh in Yemen. From Yemen to Syria to Morocco and Bahrain, contentious politics and protest movements have spread across the Arab world (Barakat, 2020). Although the two transitions started off similarly, they ended up being quite different, with reasons ranging from economic constraints to lack of camaraderie in constitution building. While these reasons are plausible, they are not mutually exclusive. (Dunay, 2017)

The uprisings in Tunisia were the first in a series of events that made a powerful impression on ordinary people in the region, and as a result it spread like wildfire to its neighbouring countries. The events that took place in Tunisia demonstrated that broad based movements such as the one that overthrew the Tunisia n government was both powerful and effective. Protesters in Egypt subsequently occupied Tahir square in Cairo on 25th January 2011 (Machrouh, 2017). It then locates the structural and agential factors that make a patrolled democracy, such as in Tunisia, successful rather than failed transitions, as seen in the case of Egypt. It argues that bargained pacts can bring about democratization and overcome this contentious cleavage; and that, ultimately, such mutual adaptations between the realms of religion and politics are not alien to the Islamic tradition (Alaoui, 2020). The juxtaposition of Tunisia and Egypt also makes for an elegant, paired comparison. While taking all these differences into consideration with utmost care, these cases offer diametrically contrasting outcomes of successful versus failed paced transitions between Islamist and non-Islamist actors. What makes Tunisia and Egypt different is that before their regime transitions, both qualified as closed autocracies rather than competitive authoritarian regimes (Alaoui, 2020).

2. Historical background

This refers to the series of prodemocracy protests and demonstrations that erupted in the Arab world and is otherwise known as the "Arab spring, " "Arab awakening, " or "Arab uprisings. ". It started in Tunisia in 2010 and then spread to other countries, most notably Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, in 2011. The protesters expressed their political and economic grievances and called for regime change: "The people want to bring down the regime. " Under the increasing pressure of the mass protests, Tunisia n president Zine el abidine ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011; Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak resigned on February 11, 2011 (Ahmed, 2024).

The Arab Spring highlighted the failure of pan-Arab ism and the rise of narrow nationalism, which hindered democratization efforts. Historical tribal and sectarian divisions contributed to the ongoing struggles for social and economic equality in the region post-Arab spring. (Muhammad, 2024). The Arab uprisings, that shook the MENA region between late 2010 and late 2012, refer to a series of social movements that have destabilized authoritarian governments in the region. The uprisings led to the overthrow of the reigning dictators in crucial MENA countries (E. G., Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and

Yemen) and eruption of civil wars (E. G., Libya, Syria, and Yemen). (Sahin, 2022). The Arab Spring was a turning point in democratization as citizens in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq tried to overthrow autocratic regimes. The results were mixed, with challenges in democratic consolidation, and the outcome led to civil wars and authoritarian retrenchment. (Stephen, 2020). Egypt's transition to democracy failed with the 2013 military coup while the Tunisia n transition had been successful. This is even though revolts in Egypt and Tunisia bore great resemblance with each other during the initial phases.

3. Research Questions

- How did the Arab spring influence the democratization process in Arab world in general and middle east in particular?
- What were the decisive factors in the success of democracy in Tunisia?
- What were the decisive factors for democracy failure in Egypt?

This paper compares the process of democratization in Egypt and Tunisia between 2011 and 2024 to present a critical view of how these two states developed differently due to the results of the Arab spring. This article discusses the critical function of the Arab spring in realizing democratization in the MENA region, dwelling on critical reasons for the difference between democratization in Tunisia, which was successful, and democratization in Egypt, which failed. Both cases are focal to understanding larger trends in democratization in the Arab world.

The first goal of such analysis is to know how the Arab spring sprouted the democratization process throughout the Arab world. This will discuss if the mass uprising of 2011 challenged the traditional authoritarian regimes with spaces for democratic transition in Egypt and Tunisia. Also, this paper measure to what extent this political change catalysed by the Arab spring had sustained after this occurrence. The second is to identify and evaluate the determinants of a successful democratic transition in Tunisia. This article examines to what extent inclusive political institutions, power in civil society, the efforts of national dialogue quartet who mediated, and the adoption of a progressive constitution of 2014 played a role. Additionally, the analysis examines how the political culture of Tunisia, its apparent consensus building of political factions, and international support played a role in bringing about its relatively stable processes of democratization. The third objective will be to investigate the reasons behind deeming the democratization in Egypt a failure. The article examines four reasons which have inhibited Egypt's democratic transition political polarization, the military's hold over politics and suppression of civil liberties, and the inability to establish inclusive institutions. Also, it will be about the return to authoritarianism under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to undo democratic gains. It shall help uncover the dynamics that gave rise to the different democratic outcomes achieved in Egypt and Tunisia, if accomplished. During study, an analysis of political, institutional, social and geopolitical factors will be made to reach at a deeper comprehension of why democracy was successful in Tunisia, but not in Egypt, pointing the way forward with respect to prospects and hurdles of democratization.

4. Literature Review

The very opposite of that is the collapse of an authoritarian regime which is indeed a much more radical and dramatic road to democratization. This happens when popular uprisings or revolutions would have general discontent and social movements that would overthrow the established government, replacing it with a new democratic order. The pathway is high in intensity and high in unpredictability, usually accompanied by great social disruption and the possibility of democracy or chaos depending on the way the transition process is managed (Whitehead, 2002). The second mode of democratization is imposed democracy, where democratic institutions and processes are imposed on a country by external powers such as foreign governments or international organizations. This often is a result of military intervention or occupation, intending to reshape the political order toward democracy. The results of this top-down kind of democracy vary from case to case, with mixed

success, but also suffering from legitimacy and ownership failures that might question the long-run survival of these forms of implantations (Steven levitsky,2005). Incremental democratization occurs after an extended, step-by-step extension of political rights and civil liberties. This trajectory does not attempt to jump at sudden or sensational changes but works on gradual change that builds a step-by-step foundation for democracy. It has been viewed as a stable form of democratization especially in scenarios where rapid change can destabilize established institutions (Stephan haggard, 2016). Democratization from below is often characterized by the grassroots mobilization of civil society organizations, social movements, and communities at the grassroots level demanding democratic reform and creating one. This bottom-up approach depends on active citizenry to bring about the change and illustrates the effectiveness of collective action in the politics of change. In contrast, democratization from above is a process led by ruling elites or political leaders as they chart a course towards democratization. Sometimes, it's a power-strategic ploy to continue ruling, a move to boost legitimacy, or just to survive new political reality. Together, these pathways show how societies can pursue democratization in many ways, often involving complex and sometimes difficult processes. (Merkel, 2014).

The Arab Spring serves as a compelling case study of democratization, showcasing how different pathways including peaceful transitions, grassroots mobilization, and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes played out across the Middle east and north Africa, particularly in countries like Egypt and Tunisia.

5. Influence of Arab spring on Democratization of Arab World

The Arab Spring greatly marked the democratization agenda of the Arab world especially the middle east as protested massively through demanding proper democratic rule. The movement began in Tunisia in 2010 and then spread to countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen before the fall of several long-standing authoritarian regimes (Abushouk, 2024). Despite these challenges the transition towards democracy has been difficult. For instance, the revolt of Egypt's Arab spring demonstrated how the historical, sociopolitical, and way of life factors had impacted in the progression of democracy, hence, it requires structural upgrade and inclusion political cooperation for long haul transcend of the worldwide democratization (Colette, & Mika, 2024).

5.1 Direct impact on democratization

The Arab Spring mobilized millions of citizens across the various countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. Social media played a crucial.

This mobilization role meant that individuals could freely use social platforms to plan protests, gather information, and bring consciousness about their demands for democracy and human rights (Azab, 2023).

5.2 Overthrowing regimes

The protests led to the ousting of long-term leaders such as Zine el abidine ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. In this way, the demonstrations became a force and inspired movements that spread throughout many other countries as well, signalling the region as a possibility of change (Bank & Busse, 2021).

5.3 Political reforms

In a few countries, the first wave of protests did result in a fair degree of political reforms. Tunisia, often hailed as the success story of the Arab spring, embarked on a path toward democratization that included the drafting of a new constitution and the establishment of free and fair elections (Mansouri, 2020). The Tunisia n national dialogue quartet, a coalition of civil society organizations, played a

pivotal role in mediating between various political factions, demonstrating the importance of inclusive dialogue in the democratization process. This collaborative approach also helped stabilize the political landscape, while fomenting a culture of compromise and negotiation, which forms an essential characteristic of any democratic society (Mansouri, 2020).

However, Egypt's transition was riddled with mishaps. Just after the initial euphoria of his ouster and the ouster of all other politicians, the power struggle grips Mubarak between all the different political entities and military forces, especially the Muslim brotherhood (Brooks & White, 2022). The problems with moving from a regime that used to be authoritarian towards one with a democratic plan were demonstrated in 2013 by the military's eventual coup, whereby President Mohamed Morsi was removed from his position. However, dissent was subsequently cracked down upon, and a more military led government was reestablished under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, which alarmed pro democratic aspirations in Egypt.

Huntington's conception of democratization waves also provides a frame of references to more broadly assess the impact of the Arab spring. It was during 2010, 2011 during which there were several countries with a similar kind of sentiment as if they are all collectively moving on at the same time when they all woke up and had a series of uprisings in the Middle East, in North Africa. In many countries, rage against the reigning rulers was fought by citizens who demanded political change. This is something that Huntington observed democratization waves went in waves, often this is so in groups within the scope of the experience and the transnational influence. Nevertheless, contrary to these inconsistencies, the results of the Arab spring-Tunisia (a story that seems somewhat successful) and the reversal of Egypt to authoritarianism require a clear understanding of these structural, institutional and contextual factors because of democratic transitions. Based on Huntington's structure which borrows domestic circumstances and regional forces to provide explanations to democratization waves, its usefulness is a result of it.

6. Decisive Factors in the Success of Democracy in Tunisia?

Then, a lot of the differences lay in the economics in both countries or rather states and how quite different paths the two countries took to democratization. Tunisia, though its unemployment rate was high and its economy faced much pressure, could manage to maintain an economy relatively stable compared to Egypt, whose economic mismanagement, coupled with runaway inflation, only worsened the social unrest (Rapanos, 2017). The economic resilience difference would have affected the public's perception of the new political regimes' ability to implement reforms. In Tunisia, the government's emphasis on dealing with economic complaints, like youth unemployment and regional imbalances, served to prolong public commitment towards the democratic institution (Mansouri, 2020). In Egypt, however, the inability to abate economic concerns ended in massive disillusionment and a hunger for stability at the expense of democratic sentiments (Hyde, 2020).

The influence of foreign players cannot also be ruled out when comparing democratization in these two countries. International organizations, foreign governments, and regional powers have at different times been influential in shaping the political developments of Egypt and Tunisia. The democratic transition in Tunisia was supported by western nations, whereas the strategic importance of Egypt to the United States and military ties complicated the international response to Egypt's political turmoil (Hyde, 2020). These dynamic underlines the importance of understanding how geopolitical interests can shape domestic political outcomes, often at the expense of genuine democratic development (Rapanos, 2017).

6.1 Relative Democratic Success of Tunisia: A Deep Dive

Tunisia's democratic transition, though riddled with problems, remains one of the few relative successes in the post-Arab spring landscape. Such success is the result of a combination of factors

that, though not necessarily predictive of long-term success, have laid the groundwork for democratic development.

Tunisia has a strong civil society with a long history of independent organizations. The Tunisia and general labour union, for example, is an old organization with a long history of activism and an important actor in mobilizing the protests that was believed to be crucial for the 2011 revolution. Other than labour unions, several organizations have played an important role in the democratization process, including human rights groups, professional associations, and women's rights organizations. These actors did not only organize and mobilize people's participation within the revolution process but continued pushing for democratic reform, checking governmental actions, and holding leaders responsible. Thus exemplified its essentialness by serving as a link to the dialogue process between the government and the opposition, part of the forming quartet that founded the national dialogue, and pleading for social justice and economic reform. Such vibrant civil society proved to be crucial in checking and balancing state power, thus generating a degree of pluralism as well as inclusive politics. According to (Zartman, 2014),

The most distinctive aspect of such a transition in Tunisia was the willingness of Tunisians to talk and compromise; the national dialogue quartet a civil society coalition engaged in negotiating the dialogue between government and opposition—is an example of people who would sacrifice all to reach a compromise. The description involved the notion of shared ownership of the democratic transition process through this very inclusive approach, often fraught with challenges in most instances. About the key feature that allowed the political process to be dissociated from a single subject or faction on the one side, and the integration of various other sides on the other side. The fact that the quartet has been inclusive, made things work out, and was willing to have difficult conversations that was the basis for this success. Such a culture of dialogue and compromise has been quite fragile, but the only way we have been able to walk the difficult path that is Tunisian politics. (National dialogue quartet, 2015).

6.2 Economic reform and socio-economic development:

Democratic gains must be consolidated in suppressing issues of socio-economic grievances that sustained 2011 revolution. However, the Tunisian government has done enough reforms for change in the economy, diversification of the economy, reduction of unemployment and enhancement of public services. But such things lack big barriers to their success including long-term unemployment, regional inequality or international economic crises. Economic reform and socio-economic development: tackling the socio-economic causes that fuelled the revolution of 2011 is necessary for Tunisia's democracy to gain sustainable ground as well as achieve stable growth. The Tunisian government recognized the value of economic reforms and undertook several initiatives on its path toward an economic system to diversify the economy, reduce the level of unemployment, and also to enhance the provision of public services. There is, for example, investment in tourism and renewable energy to support sectors identified as vital toward new employment generation and foreign investments. (Gherib, 2012)

Infrastructure: Tunisian economy main pillar, tourism, did not succumb casually to the pandemic but it also pinpointed that the need for decent reform in the health sector is to go beyond the surface. Grassroots movements and human rights advocacy movements contributed to the pillars of this transition. Grassroots movements amplified the voices of the people and availed a platform where citizens ensured that the government adhered to its reform commitments. Civil society organizations emphasized inclusivity and dialogue, fostering the culture of compromise necessary for a sustainable environment in a country's political sphere. They have provided a platform for the participation of diverse stakeholders and laid down a resilient democratic framework, thereby showing that civil engagement is no for sustainable governance. (Mansour et al., 2024)

The new constitution adopted in 2014 marked the most important milestone in the democratization process in Tunisia. The document guaranteed civil liberties, gender equality, and separation of powers, as embodied in the dreams of Tunisians for a modern and democratic state. The constitution was drafted through heavy negotiations between the political parties. It symbolized a commitment to democratic principles. Tunisia introduced electoral system and judicial reforms to consolidate democratic governance. The independent high authority for elections was put in place to oversee free and fair elections and increase public confidence in the democratic process.

7. Failure of Democracy in Egypt: Critical Analysis of Contributing Factors

The reasons of failure of democracy in Egypt after the 2011 revolution is a very complex issue deeply rooted in a combination of historical, political, socioeconomic, and institutional factors. Though the Egyptian revolution of 2011 first ignited hope for democratic change, several critical challenges thwarted the establishment of a stable democratic system. The factors that have contributed to this failure are as follows:

One of the key reasons why democracy in Egypt has failed is that the military remains entrenched as the powerful entity. Traditionally, the military has been central to the political and economic system in Egypt; they are protectors of the state, and the government also shares this role with them. The military, through the supreme council of the armed forces, took control after the ousting of Mubarak and promised a transition to civilian rule. The military remained in a position of considerable influence in Egyptian politics, at times sabotaging democratic efforts. Their reluctance to relinquish political power, even after promising democratic reform, was reflected in their handling of the transition process where they sidelined voices of civilians and prolonged political instability. It dominated not only politics but also the economy, with control over the resources across vast sectors, including construction and telecommunications, which it profited from to barter for its interests (Brooks & white ,2022). That was the case even after the election of Mohamed Morsi in 2012, since the military remained an institution to reckon with, demonstrated by its capability to dictate terms to the newly elected government. The final military coup of 2013, led by then-general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, was the death knell of Egypt's experiment with democracy since the military reasserted its authority over the state, thus eliminating the last chance for a democratic future.

Following Mubarak's ousting, political institutions in Egypt were not developed enough to aid in a successful democratic transition. The political environment was fragmented, characterized by a lack of unified opposition, weak political parties, and limited political experience among key leaders. The Muslim brotherhood, which won the 2012 elections, struggled to consolidate power effectively. While their electoral victory signalled political mobilization, it also proved to be a double-edged sword. Their failure to forge alliances with secular and liberal groups alienated significant segments of Egyptian society and exacerbated polarization. An arena without democratic tradition among both the Islamist parties and the secular camp meant a battle of frequent coups, and bad management did not make such reforms feasible as was the experience. Lack of institutional checks that complement the situation of an inferior judiciary, less than minimal democratic traditions, which had further gone to ruin from a failure or non-feasibility of sustaining a democratic transitional setup.

Political polarization in Egypt represented an insurmountable barrier to the democratization process. Immediately after the collapse of Mubarak, the political, religious, and ideological spheres of society divided the nation even further. The rise of the Muslim brotherhood was a direct dichotomy between the Islamist and secular sectors, each waging an all-out war to dominate the destiny of the state. The liberal and secular forces, including Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, fought a massive resistance against the Islamist agenda of the brotherhood for fear of marginalization in a political system where political Islam is core constitutive. The continual political and social conflict arose due to the failure to form a consensus of these issues. Most clearly during Mohamed Morsi's term, whose policies, including wanting to concentrate power in the presidency and therefore the controversial constitutional declaration that you were subjected to in November 2012 started up mass protests and

civil unrest. Mutual distrust and hostility replaced the efforts to build a stable, inclusive government, in which Islamists and secular groups became virtually at war.

In the failure of Egypt's democratic transition, economic challenges were decisive. However, change did not come to Egypt's economy after the revolution as promised. There was still an economy in Egypt with high unemployment, inflation, wide-ranging poverty, public and extremely corrupt impatience. While it was spearheaded by political demands, it also originated from the country's economic woes, especially from the youth of Egypt who simply wished for a better future for themselves. Under the transitional governments nothing changed economically, the Muslim brotherhood could not deal properly with pressing issues. It further distanced the public from the Muslim brotherhood as Morsi failed to stabilize the economy, provide social justice and economic reforms, despite the young people that had led the revolution having been promised of it. Economic crisis only added to the political instability and the ordinary Egyptians began to turn their nose away from democratic freedoms for stability and thus a dangerous cycle was established where the economic despair resulted in political apathy.

These had the impetus of the 2013 military coup that brought down Mohamed Morsi. Mass protests were on the side of the people behind the coup and to the shock of the world another government was overthrown by a military leader general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. It effectively ended Egypt's limited period of democracy. And for the period after that till el Sisi stood for the presidency, the president was transformed into authoritarian governance based on gross human rights abuses, political opposition suppression, and suppression of dissent.

8. Conclusion

Such an uneven process of democratization has been the Arab spring, which is to say it has shaken up or drastically changed democratization processes in the Arab world, and in the middle east. This paper discusses different contradictions of Tunisia and Egypt and the reasons for the ascent of democratic governance. Thus, Tunisian transition would be considered successful if it is based on a strong civil society and a good political pluralism in combination with a favourable international dynamic that shaped the scene towards and through the transition. But the economic and social basis of such serious instability and unrest had not done sufficient damage to the democratic system that a sort of unity in politics and foundations of the democratic institutions had been built and democratic institutions had been founded.

Instead, it is in the case of Egypt that a complicated situation of vested military power and political fragmentation make further democratization difficult. The failure of Egyptian democratic movements can be found in the existence of a decisive role of the military in politics, non-existence of a single opposition and lastly, socio economic grievances that turned out to be the source of popular discontent. These factors arrived at this combination which finally led to regression to authoritarianism and the momentum on the Arab spring was unlikely to continue towards democratic progress.

This indicates that a knowledge of the very specific history, society and politics with which a country cohabits in any process of democratization is necessary. Celebrated by the Arab spring as dreams of democracy were lit across the region, not all these things have followed on since. In many ways the confluence of domestic and foreign factors which drive democratic prospects in the region, in future research will have to go further. Therefore, the Arab springs finally serves to remind us to include inclusive political dialogue, provide incentives to develop civil institutions as well as attending to socio economic disparities to better ensure the long-term sustaining of democratic governance in the region.

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Parliamentary Diplomacy and Climate Legislation in Pakistan: Institutional Responses to Global Climate Governance (2015–2025)

Zoya¹ and Rehana Saeed Hashmi²

Article Information	Abstract
Received: May 12, 2026 Revised: June 28, 2026 Accepted: June 29, 2026	With increased climate vulnerabilities for the global south, Pakistan has felt the need to shift its climate governance strategies from executive centric response to more institutionalized legislative frameworks. This research aims to study evolution of climate legislation in Pakistan between 2015 and 2025 by surfacing the role of parliamentary diplomacy in redefining the country's legislative and policy approach towards climate change. The research also poses a big question as to how global climate commitments and norms are incorporated into national and provincial legislative framework in Pakistan via inter-parliamentary engagements. To explore the objectives research questions designed for the study, a qualitative research design is employed based on secondary sources such as reviewing the existing literature, policy documents, legislative developments, and international engagements. Moreover, a thematic approach is designed which is extracted from the global climate commitments and national legislative framework via parliamentary actors, committees, and other parliamentary efforts mediated by inter-parliamentary engagements. A visible, yet inconsistent but growing alignment of Pakistan's climate legislation with global commitments, supported significantly by engagement forums such as IPU, CoPs, and CPA is revealed through the study. It is concluded from this study that parliamentary diplomacy serves as a critical bridge between international norms and national legislative approaches, reinforcing both legislative legitimacy and policy coherence. By situating Pakistan within broader global climate governance processes, this study contributes to the emerging discourse on the role of parliamentary institutions in advancing climate-responsive legislation in developing countries.
Keywords <i>Parliamentary diplomacy,</i> <i>Climate legislation,</i> <i>Climate change,</i> <i>Pakistan,</i> <i>Policy diffusion</i>	

1. Introduction

As a country ranked among the world's ten most climate-vulnerable states (German watch, 2021), Pakistan confronts climate change not as an abstract global challenge but as an immediate and existential threat materializing through catastrophic flooding, accelerating glacial melt, prolonged drought cycles, deteriorating air quality, and intensifying heatwaves. The floods of 2022, submerging about one-third of the country's landmass, and displacing nearly thirty-three million people, and

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caused damages estimated at thirty billion US dollars, illustrated more legislative intrusion and institutional responses to a warming climate (UNDRR, 2022).

In today's democratic world, legislative institutions are seen beyond passive recipients of executive policies and have rather emerged as spaces providing legislative insights and oversight where scientific knowledge, international norms and commitments and national political will is embedded into legislative frameworks. Parliamentary studies like these have acquired the analytical urgency that the relationship between legislative institutions, parliamentary diplomacy, and climate change now commands. This advancement is neither prompt nor inevitable, but gradual and systematic, as to how legislatures engage with climate issues across institutional traditions, geopolitical positions, and levels of economic development that makes the comparative and single-country study of legislative activism a productive scholarly contribution.

The nexus between legislation and climate change has increasingly become central to parliamentary diplomacy in developing states. The approach of Pakistan's parliament to surfacing climate related challenges at both national and provincial levels remained evident from 2015 to 2025. The periods are defined as an era of entering into global climate commitments such as the Paris Agreement and UNFCCC by embedding these norms into national initiatives, such as; Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017, the National Climate Change Policy 2021, and the institutionalizing of the Standing Committee on Climate Change in both houses of the parliament emerged alongside intensified engagement with international climate forums and inter-parliamentary organizations.

These developments were not merely the outcomes of global commitments but were intensified with perpetual participation in para-diplomacy forums facilitated by inter-parliamentary organization such as Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Conference of Parties (CoPs). In doing so, the study also highlights the importance of looking beyond executive policy actions and recognizing the evolving role of parliaments in addressing complex transnational challenges such as climate change.

In the broader global context, Robert. D Kaplan discussed his viewpoint in the 'The Atlantic' that climate change as an issue has predominantly been seen in the premise of parliamentary diplomacy in post-cold war scenario. His research predicts that future security threats such as scarcity of resources, uncontrolled population, diseases would emerge from environmental degradation instead of nuclear advancements of the states. His research also hinted towards the environmental issues which started to seep in Africa, Asia and the United States of America because of massive World Wars. (Kaplan, 1994).

The triangulated relation between the three has been acknowledged by the governments and international parliamentary institutions for past two decades. The recent outbreak of smog in the province of Punjab is declared as 'calamity' by the provincial government of Punjab with the acceptance that the only solution to this climate emergency shall be mitigated through climate diplomacy between both Pakistan India. Legislative measures at both provincial and national level shall be required based on the diplomatic strengths to ease the situation for the people of both the countries.

1.1 Research Problem, Significance and Structure of the Study

There exists sufficient scholarship on Pakistan's climate vulnerabilities and on international climate diplomacy. However, the analytical attention given to parliamentary diplomacy as distinct from executive policymaking as a mechanism that mediates between international norms and domestic legislation is limited. Therefore, the study poses an essential question as to has parliamentary diplomacy shaped and facilitated Pakistan's climate legislation efforts by incorporating global norms from 2015 to 2025.

The study is essential to contribute to the existing literature which provides little understanding regarding the interplay of climate legislation, global climate commitments and the role of parliamentary diplomacy in advancing climate legislative framework in Pakistan. It also highlights the institutional channels through which legislators absorb, identify, contest and translate external norms into statutory arrangements such as committee inputs, legislative initiatives oversights arrangement.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study intends:

- To understand the journey of climate legislation in Pakistan from 2015 and 2025.
- To examine the interplay between parliamentary diplomacy and climate legislation?
- To describe the international climate norms incorporated into national and provincial institutional mechanisms.
- To identify structural factors hindering the implementation of climate-related legislation in Pakistan.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Construct

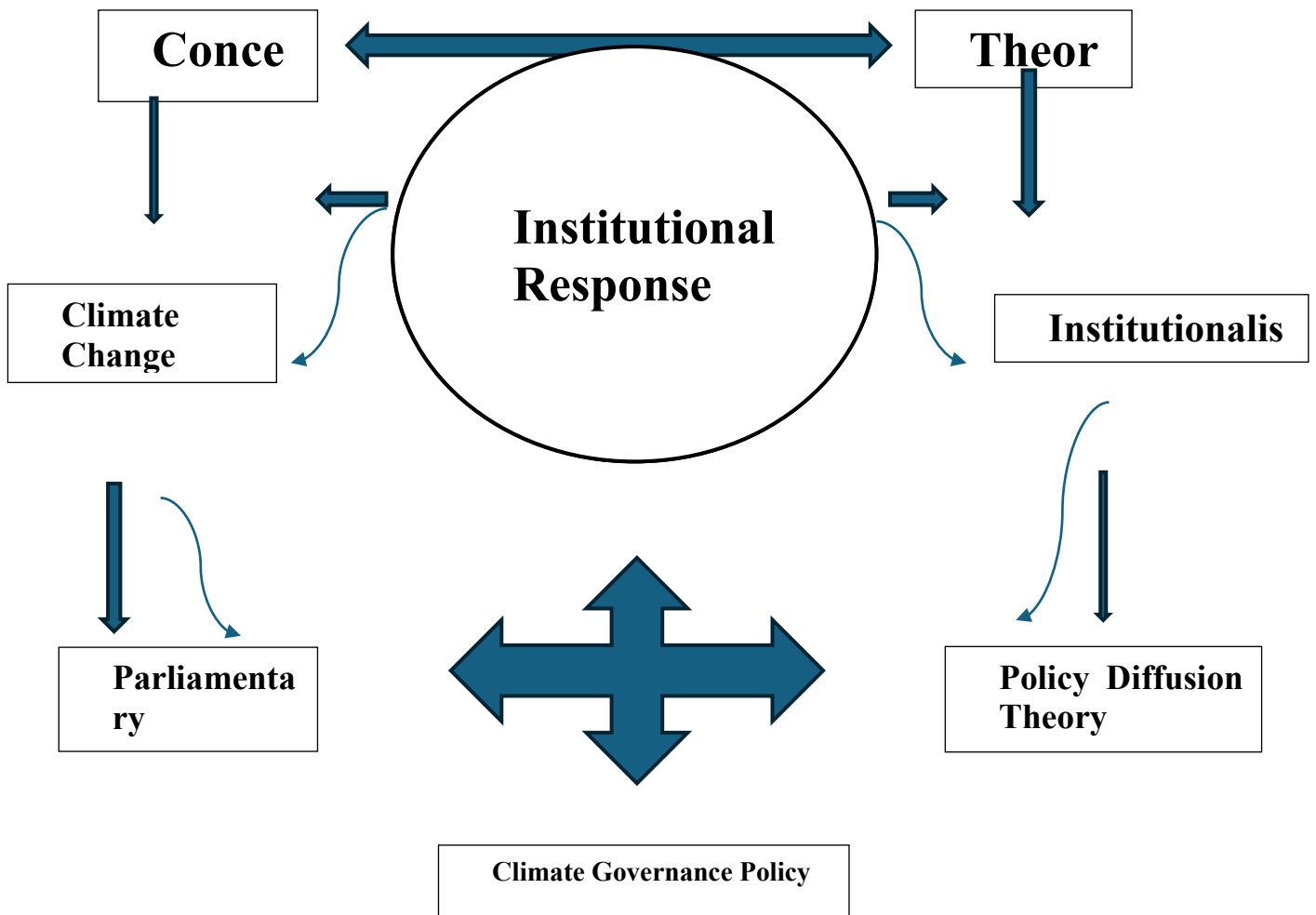


Figure 1: Theoretical and Conceptual Construct (created by the researcher)

Figure 1 is designed to illustrate three conceptual strands; i- Legislative progressivism and institutionalization theory provide the lens for assessing the quality and durability of Pakistan's legislative response, ii- policy diffusion theory accounts for the channels through which international norms enter national and provincial laws, iii- and the study's operational concept of parliamentary diplomacy distinguishes the legislature's international role from that of the executive.

2.1 Climate Change

Climate change refers to perpetual transitions in temperatures and weather patterns. Such transitions were primarily natural, due to changes of the activity of the sun or large volcanic outbursts. However, human activities have been the main factor of climate change, significantly due to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas. The combustion of these fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions, which act like a heat-trapping blanket around the Earth. This blanket-like effect causes the planet's temperatures to rise, leading to the climate changes we are experiencing today. (United Nations Environment Program, n.d.).

2.2 Parliamentary Diplomacy

Parliamentary diplomacy is essentially defined as interconnectedness of parliaments with other parliaments and engagements of parliamentarians with each other to cooperate across borders to address global issues and challenges. Post-2015m following the adoption of the Paris Agreement has marked significant shift in Pakistan's parliamentary diplomacy front when climate was seen as a priority agenda on all global platforms. Pakistan's parliamentary bodies have increasingly engaged in international forums, advocating for stronger global climate action while seeking international support to address domestic climate vulnerabilities (Khan, 2018).

The period from 2015 to 2025 witnesses Pakistan's parliament actively participates in climate-related dialogues, particularly in the IPU, CPA, COPs, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) platforms. These engagements have been crucial in positioning Pakistan as a key player in regional climate initiatives; while also highlighting the challenges the country faces due to its high vulnerability to climate change.

2.3 Institutionalization and Legislative Institutions

"The process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability" is how Samuel Huntington defines institutionalization in his classic definition (1968, p. 12). According to Huntington, institutionalized organizations are characterized by their flexibility, complexity, autonomy, and coherence, while institutions themselves are "stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour." This framework is applicable to the parliament of Pakistan to understand the efficacy of its legislative efforts have inhabited to the needs and requirements of climate governance by integrating and sustain climate consideration into their standard processes. Judge (2008) elaborates on these criteria in the context of legislatures specifically, emphasizing that the adaptability of legislative institutions and their capacity to take on new mandates without losing coherence is a crucial indicator of institutional quality.

2.4 Policy Diffusion Theory + Climate Change Governance

Policy diffusion theory is defined as a process in which policymaking and policy outcomes in one polity influence policymaking and policy outcomes in other polities. (Gilardi, 2015)

This purposive theoretical approach is used to analyse and compare how the parliament and parliamentarians of Pakistan have and will learn climate change policy initiatives from other parliaments and parliamentarians to advance Pakistan's climate change regime through this approach.

3. Literature Review

Scholarly work on climate governance in Pakistan and beyond has expanded considerably in recent years. However, much of this literature remains fragmented across different domains, including climate vulnerability, institutional development, and international cooperation. For the purpose of this study, the literature can be organized into three broad themes: (i) climate vulnerability and governance challenges, (ii) legislative and institutional responses, and (iii) the emerging role of parliamentary diplomacy in global climate governance.

3.1 A Global Scholarship of Parliamentary Diplomacy to Address Climate Change

Stavridis and Jančić (2016) are of the opinion that the shape and content of international relations underwent a significant transformation post cold war, and the bipolar world collapsed due to increased globalization of economics, finance, politics, and security. This unrelenting process is demonstrated by the 9/11 attacks, the emergence of the so-called BRICS group of nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), financial and other crises at the regional and international levels. Traditional intergovernmental diplomacy is altered by all of this. The job of a diplomat according to Jancic (2016) is more complicated and includes communication, reporting, policy research, negotiation, and representation. This is due to: (a) the introduction of new responsibilities, like learning about certain policy domains, like terrorism, climate change, and global economic governance; and (b) the existence and actions of new players, including think tanks, parliamentary bodies, lobbying, civil society, academia, the media, cities, sub-state areas, celebrities, foundations, and non-state organizations. The authors have also highlighted that new forms of diplomacy have emerged as a result, including parliamentary diplomacy, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, Para-diplomacy, celebrity diplomacy, sports diplomacy, climate diplomacy and para-diplomacy which are contributing significantly to changing the very preface of a country at the global front. (Jančić, 2016)

Inter-Parliamentary Union has been an instrumental institutional vehicle to bring parliament and parliamentarians of the World under one roof. Ahead of the Paris agreement, IPU launched 'Parliamentary Action Plan (2016)', to draw the attention of the parliaments towards the pressing issue of climate change around the World. According to IPU, parliaments and parliamentarians are not only destined to run the affair of the governments but are also responsible to respond to national and international climate change issues with a coordinated intent. They can also account for their actions, or lack thereof. Moreover, parliamentarians also serve as bridge a between constituents, governments, and policy makers at the global level. IPU, in lieu of parliamentary diplomacy, is suggesting and facilitating the parliaments around the globe in defining key action areas to combat issues: such as; 1- risk assessment and modelling, coordinating and mitigating strategies from the best practices, national disaster loss databases and early warning system. 2- Accelerating the ratification and implementation of Doha Amendment in Kyoto Protocol. 3- Strengthening oversight of national and international commitments, last but not least; Enhancing consistency and complementarity between national climate legislation and other international goals. (Inter Parliamentary Union , 2016)

Parliamentary diplomacy has seen itself turned into an important tool in today's complex world to deal with issues that impact countries across the border. Vannarith (2021) mentions how parliamentary diplomacy can be categorized into four levels "intra-state, inter-state, intra-regional and inter-regional" (Vannarith, 2021, Pg. 187). The author goes on to suggest that to deal with international issues that parliamentarians engage in negotiations between governments, provide oversight to the negotiation process, promote dialogue and inform the public regarding international issues and organizations. When dealing with climate change the article points towards the complexity of the matter and how parliamentarians have started engaging in international cooperation and partnership. The author also acknowledges how parliamentary institutions provide a bridge between the people they represent and the government allowing for effective execution of international goals.

3.2 Climate Vulnerability and Governance Challenges

Pakistan is considered as one of the most vulnerable countries when considering climate change as suggested by Nadeem et.al. (2024). The authors focus on the Punjab region, which is the most fertile of the country, and as they put it “highly sensitive to climate change due to the region’ dominance as a major agricultural producer” (Nadeem et.al., 2024, Pg. 2). Their study reveals how the southern and northern parts of Punjab are highly susceptible to changes in the climate. The authors also note how lack to initiatives from the government and managerial issues hinder the abilities of the farmers to adapt to the changing climate scenarios. Policy making according to Nadeem et.al. (2024) needs a comprehensive overhaul to deal with the emerging challenges of climate change.

Jamal (2021) examines and contrasts the Pakistan Climate Change Act of 2017 with global climate frameworks. It evaluates the legislative framework of the Act, including the creation of the Climate Change Authority and Council, with the goal of strengthening Pakistan's adaptation and resilience plans. The paper does, However, highlight certain drawbacks, including lack of interaction with international frameworks, budgetary restrictions, and implementation gaps. According to the study, Pakistan's approach to climate change might be strengthened and alignment with international norms improved by modifying the Act.

3.3 Legislative and Institutional Responses to Climate Change

Ayaz (2020) details in her writing that Pakistan’s efforts towards climate change began when the committee of climate change was first established in 2005 during the regime of former President General Pervaiz Musharraf. The committee launched its National Environment Policy the same year to meet the needs of climate emergencies affecting the country and its people. The author goes on to say that in 2008, the Planning commission established a “Taskforce on Climate Change” that emphasized working on regional strategies such as water policies, policy on forestation, national conservation policy and to name a few. Pakistan’s climate change policy remained ineffective for a couple years until the Sustainable Development Goals taskforce was established in the National Assembly of Pakistan in 2014. The Climate change Act was introduced in 2017. Khan at.al. (2024) mentions how the act was introduced to provide a proper framework to deal with issues arising from the emerging climatic changes.

The act led to the formation of the climate change council and climate change authority and development of policies at the federal and provincial level to negate the effects of climate change. As Jamal (2018) mentions that the climate change act proved that Pakistan placed importance on the issue and was the 104th country to ratify the agreement at the United Nations.

Another attempt to combat climate emergencies was the initiative of Billion Tree Drive in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa followed by national drive of ‘Billion Tree Tsunami’ under the premiership of Imran Khan in 2018 presenting the case of Pakistan’s model for climate diplomacy. The progress in terms of legislative initiative is quite evident as the Pakistan’s National Climate Change Policy 2021 has also been presented and, the parliament of Pakistan is pacing its legislative initiatives through a proactive role by the parliamentary committee on Climate Change, However, the author suggests there is still a long way to go to mitigate challenges in the way and learning through best practices. (Ayaz, 2020)

What the literature also makes clear, however, is that the legislative trajectory has been shaped by the 2010 Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment, which devolved environmental governance to the provinces and created a legislative fragmentation that the 2017 Act sought to address at the federal level without fully resolving. The National Climate Change Policy 2021 and the creation of provincial climate policies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan since 2022 represent further elaboration of this post-devolution legislative architecture, but coordination between these instruments remains a work in progress (Khan et al., 2024; Ayaz, 2020).

The synthesis that emerges from this cluster of scholarship is that Pakistan's legislative response to climate change has been incremental, institutionally fragmented, and unevenly implemented. It also remains descriptive: the existing literature traces what legislative developments occurred and identifies constraints on implementation but does not systematically examine the mechanisms through which international engagement and specifically parliamentary diplomacy shaped these developments.

3.4 Research Gap

The literature reviewed for this research facilitates with valuable insights into Pakistan's climate vulnerabilities, legislative appetite for climate emergencies, policy frameworks, and institutional development, as well as the evolving role of parliamentary actors in global governance. However, a noticeable gap exists in understanding how parliamentary diplomacy functions as a connecting mechanism between international climate commitments and domestic legislative processes with reference to Pakistan. The connection is evident if studied in co-relation, but a significant study on the nuanced connection still requires scholarly attention.

The intended research seeks to address this gap by examining how engagement with global climate regimes is reflected in Pakistan's legislative developments, and by highlighting the role of parliamentary institutions in mediating this relationship. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of policy evolution and offers a more integrated perspective on the interaction between diplomacy and legislation.

4. Research Methodology

A qualitative research method is designed to examine the impact of global climate norms and commitments on climate legislation in Pakistan during the period 2015–2025 through parliamentary diplomatic engagements. The study relies primarily on document analysis of secondary sources, including policy documents, legislative initiatives, institutional mechanisms, and documents associated with international climate frameworks such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and related agreements. A guided thematic analysis is conducted to achieve the objectives designed for the study and to fill the identified research gap. Thematic categories were extracted from the study's conceptual framework, which integrates Huntington's (1968) institutionalization theory, and Gilardi's (2015) policy diffusion framework. Documents were read in support of these categories to identify patterns of alignment between international obligations and national legislative developments, and to situate the institutional mechanisms through which such alignment was achieved or not. The study, through these, seeks trace process and pattern, identifying which parliamentary and legislative pathways were adopted to initiate climate legislative journey by incorporating global norms and via parliamentary diplomacy platforms. Data collection is based entirely on secondary sources.

5. Discussion and Analyses

The trajectory of this part of the study is based on three interconnected mechanisms through which Pakistan's parliament's engagement with global climate governance shaped its national legislative framework between 2015 and 2025: i- norm incorporation through exposure to international standards, ii- parliamentary oversight that translates diplomatic commitments into accountability structures, iii- and diplomatic legitimation that facilitates international cooperation and finance. Before examining these mechanisms, a brief contextual account of Pakistan's international climate commitments and the global framework within which they sit is presented to orient the analysis.

5.1 Pakistan's Global Climate Commitments

Pakistan's stance and advancement in adopting and ratifying global climate commitment took its roots from conventions of Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Minamata, Vienna, and Cartagena, the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UNCCD, the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Standing Committee on Climate Change, 2022). These global norms and commitments ignited the light of obligation that successive governments have sought, with challenging degrees of success, to translate into national and provincial legislation.

The UNFCCC, signed in 1992 and ratified by Pakistan in 1994, established the foundational principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and created the Conference of Parties as the central arena for ongoing international climate diplomacy (Bodansky, 2010). The Kyoto Protocol (1997) introduced the first legally binding emissions reduction targets for industrialized states and established flexible mechanisms, including the Clean Development Mechanism, that allowed developing countries such as Pakistan to participate in the global carbon economy (Grubb et al., 1999). The Paris Agreement (2015) restructured this architecture significantly, by introducing Nationally Determined Contributions as the primary instrument for climate commitment, it placed domestic legislative institutions; parliaments, provincial governments, and sectoral regulators at the centre of implementation in a way that the top-down Kyoto model had not (Bodansky, 2016). Pakistan ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016, and this commitment directly shaped the legislative agenda that produced the Climate Change Act 2017.

These international commitments created the normative environment within which Pakistan's parliamentary diplomacy operated. The forums through which that diplomacy was conducted CoPs, the IPU, the CPA, SAARC are described briefly below before the three mechanisms are examined in detail.

The Conference of Parties is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC and has become, since the formalization of parliamentary meetings at Copenhagen in 2009, a central venue for legislators as well as negotiators. Parliamentary meetings at COP27 and COP28 brought hundreds of legislators together to share best practices, coordinate positions, and engage with the negotiating process from within the Green Zone (United Nations, 2024). Pakistan's parliamentary delegations have attended CoPs consistently since Paris, and the exposure generated by these meetings has been one of the direct inputs into the domestic legislative agenda documented below.

Established in 1889, The Inter-Parliamentary Union, is the oldest international parliamentary organization and serves as a global platform for cooperation among parliaments. IPU seeks to strengthen parliaments and parliamentary forums to enable their participation in surfacing global issues, including climate emergencies, and environmental sustainability (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Parliamentary engagement in climate legislation and governance has been a core priority of IPU since last decade, national legislature is instrumental in translating international climate commitments into implementable policy framework. By providing guidance and facilitating dialogue among legislators from different regions, the IPU contributes to the diffusion of climate governance norms and best practices across national parliaments (Stavridis & Jancic, 2017).

One of the Commonwealth's oldest organizations is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Founded in 1911, it is a membership organization that unites people of all genders, races, religions, and cultures who share a common interest, respect for the rule of law, individual liberties, and the pursuit of the idealistic goals of parliamentary democracy. The Association is composed of more than 180 Legislatures (or Branches) spread over the Commonwealth's nine geographical divisions. It provides a great chance for lawmakers and legislative employees to work together on topics of shared interest and to exchange best practices.

The Paris Agreement, the Glasgow Climate Pact, and Agenda 2030 are few of the pledges made by the international community on climate change and sustainable development. These pledges are crucial resources for legislatures in their efforts to combat climate change and carry out the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

The CPA's mission is to empower its members to effectively advocate for sustainable development and climate action. Our programs and other endeavours reflect this dedication. Raising awareness of biodiversity and climate change inside the CPA has been spearheaded by the CPA Small Branches network.

As a member of the UNFCCC Parliamentary Group, the CPA helps parliamentarians and parliamentary networks participate in UNFCCC meetings and COPs. The Group, led by GLOBE International, provides administrative, information and coordination support to engage cross-party legislators at these major international meetings.

5.2 Parliamentary Diplomacy and Climate Legislative Journey of Pakistan

The following table highlights that international norms, parliamentary diplomacy and national and provincial legislative initiatives are not exclusive pathways, nor do they operate in silos. However, they are pragmatically distinguishable and are each supported by traceable evidence in the documentary record. Table 1 maps these mechanisms, the international norms they draw on, and their national and provincial legislative manifestations.

Table 1: Parliamentary Diplomacy Mechanisms for Climate Legislation in Pakistan, 2015–2025
(created by the researcher)

Mechanism	Rationale	International Commitments and Norms	National	Provincial
1- Legislative Initiatives Through International Norms	Legislators are exposed to international climate standards (such as adaptation, mitigation, climate financing, loss and damage, and ecosystem-based approaches) through international parliamentary networks, treaties, and diplomatic interactions. Following that, these standards are converted into domestic laws.	Paris Agreement, The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Sustainable Development Goals	International agreements are integrated into the institutional architecture by the Climate Change Act of 2017. NCCP Climate Change Council	Climate Change Council (federal-provincial entity)
2- Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability Via Diplomatic Dimension	By surfacing climate change issues to the legislative agendas, (parliament and provincial	COPs	Parliamentary Committees (Standing Committee on Climate	Committees Cross Border Cooperation via provincial parliamentary

	legislatures) can monitor climate commitments, hold the executive responsible for treaty-based obligations, and enact appropriate legislation.		Change) Calling Attentions, Questions, Adjournment Motions Prompt Climate centric Legislation Parliamentary Friendship Groups SDGs Secretariate	friendship groups) (Commonwealth Conference hosted by the Punjab Assembly) Provincial Adaptation Plans Provincial SDGs Secretariate
3. International Cooperation Via Legislative Framework	Open to international collaboration, financing, and technical support is facilitated by parliamentary diplomacy. International actors identified the legitimacy of the domestic institutional foundation (law, policies, councils) established by the legislative frameworks. The debate, approval, and oversight of these frameworks by Parliament links diplomatic pledges to national legislative framework.	COPs	MoU during COP28, 29 9 (remaining to be confirmed)	Provincial Adaptation Plans Provincial SDGs Secretariate

The designed table sets out three mechanisms tracing the relationship between global norms, role of parliamentary diplomacy in aiding the climate legislative framework for Pakistan;

5.2.1 Legislative Initiatives Through International Norms

The Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017 is the first and primary legislative effort came into being as a result of global commitment, The Paris Agreement, ratified in 2016 and translated into this act in 2017. The Climate Change act also provides its institutional architecture, the Climate Change Council, the Climate Change Authority, and the mandate to monitor international agreement implementation, directly reflects the NDC obligations and institutional requirements articulated in the Paris framework. Jamal (2018) notes explicitly that the Act was designed to address the legislative void that ratification of the Paris Agreement exposed, and that its drafting drew on parliamentary engagement with international climate institutions.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Billion Tree Tsunami program, launched in 2014 and mounted nationally from 2018 is a testament to the transmission of global commitments into provincial efforts as the program was brought to life in dialogue with international conservation frameworks, and its legislative underpinning drew on best practices shared through CPA and IPU channels. The National Climate Change Policy 2021 extended this pattern, embedding NDC commitments into a domestic sectoral framework across water, agriculture, forestry, and energy.

When it came to implement the changes detailed in the act, it became apparent that the motivation was somewhat lacking. The promised clauses of the act were not executed until seven years after sailing through the parliament and was only taken up again after the Supreme Court of Pakistan intervened. Through the public interest constitutional petition (No. 42 of 2022) was the search for members of the authority initiated (Express Tribune, 2024). With the pressure from the Supreme Court, the Parliament enacted the framework, but still the executive failed to operationalize it, leading to the judiciary forcing their hand even further. Such patterns of enforcement raise questions regarding the depth of institutionalization that has been achieved so far by parliamentary diplomacy.

5.2.2 Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability

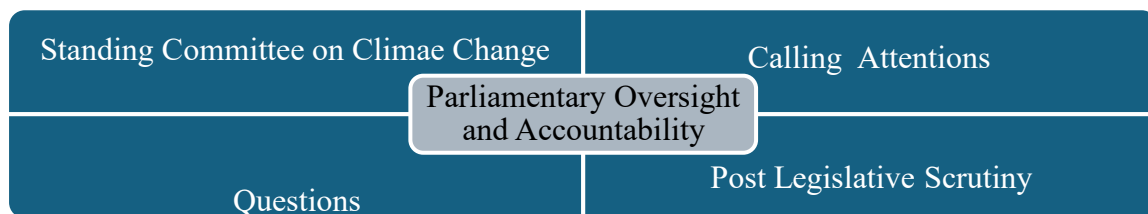


Figure 2: Mechanisms of Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability (Created by the Researcher)

This mechanism is rarely found in the literature but its significance cannot be overstated. Due to parliamentary diplomacy the political importance of international climate commitments is observed and creates national accountability for their implementation.

5.2.2.1 The Climate Change Committee

Established under the 14th National Assembly, The Standing Committee on Climate Change, is considered as a constructive vehicle through which parliament exercises oversight of climate policy. Its meetings constitute the direct documentary evidence of the oversight accountability mechanism in operation. The following analysis draws on press releases and meeting records from the National Assembly’s official archive. mandate of climate change committee constitutes; ensuring adequate laws are implemented, facilitating political and public support for climate centric initiatives, reviewing national policies and holds formal accountable framework within which parliamentarians may question whether diplomatic commitments have been embedded into legislative and budgetary initiatives. (Standing Committee on Climate Change, n.d.). Committee may also request reports from parliamentary delegations presenting Pakistan’s climate case at inter-parliamentary platforms to ensure smooth and effective incorporation of global ideas into national efforts.

On 16th September 2019, the Standing committee held its sixth meeting under the chairpersonship of Ms. Munaza Hassan, who exemplified the Committee’s oversight and policy-shaping role. During the meeting, the Ministry of Climate Change enlightened members on the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Program, while the Global Change Impact Studies Centre (GCISC) presented evidence on climate impacts across key socio-economic sectors. Moreover, the establishment of a digital monitoring mechanism for tree plantation activities, the committee also recommended greater involvement of parliamentarians in constituency-level, and demanded the submission of the Water Policy 2017 for the committee review, thereby linking climate adaptation with broader sectoral governance (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2019). The interventions by the climate change committee highlights their

commitment and dedication that has moved not only beyond information-sharing but towards progressively shaping executive implementation and mainstreaming climate considerations into related policy domains. The oversight function of the committee continued to grow in 2021 through parliamentary diplomacy and post-legislative scrutiny. Chairperson Ms. Munaza Hassan's participation at COP26, where she represented Pakistan in discussions on the role of parliaments in climate governance, the Committee engaged in post-legislative scrutiny of the Climate Change Act 2017 through a Westminster Foundation for Democracy workshop, serves as a testament towards committee's appetite towards advancing oversight. Committee meetings since then, perpetually reinforced this oversight role by reviewing implementation progress and formally transmitting recommendations to the Ministry of Climate Change, illustrating the integration of international parliamentary engagement with domestic legislative accountability (Standing Committee on Climate Change, 2021).

5.2.2.2 Parliamentary Questions and Calling Attention Notices

Beyond the committee proceedings, questions and calling attention notices are another set of crucial parliamentary record for climate related legislative engagement. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure and Business of the National Assembly, any member may pose a question to a minister that enquires into the activities of the said minister's department. Similarly, any member may raise a calling attention notice to direct the attention of the house to a certain matter of urgent public importance.

MNA Mirza Ikhtiar Baig, member of the National Assembly's Standing committee on economic affairs, brought the House's attention to the 2022 flood that ravaged the country and the lack of recovery. He noted that the pledged international reconstruction finance had not materialized and called for losses to be recuperated from the fund setup at the COP28 (Business Recorder, 2025). Such statements point towards the increased focus towards the agenda of climate change.

Amidst all the fervour it would be pertinent to point out how despite an increase of hundred and eighty percent in mitigation funding in the 2025 – 26 federal budget, the finance bill was not adequately scrutinized by parliamentary committees, neither did they challenge the eighteen percent tax on solar panels or the sixty six percent cut in pollution abatement, which went in contrary to Pakistan's NDC commitments (Dawn, 2025). The lack of oversight was exposed after the civil society and the media had begun scrutinizing the parliamentary performance against the NDC targets and international commitments that would have been unheard of a decade ago. Due to the diffusion of international practices and protocols in domestic institutions through parliamentary diplomacy, the standards through which action on climate agendas were judged has drastically changed.

5.2.2.3 Post-Legislative Scrutiny and the Climate Change Authority Petition

Two significant evidences of post legislative scrutiny with the help of external support can be traced; first, the post-legislative scrutiny workshop conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for the Standing Committee in 2021 2022 produced a formal assessment of the Climate Change Act 2017's implementation, the findings show significant gaps between the Act's institutional mandates and their execution. The workshop concluded on a critical juncture highlighting that the Climate Change Authority had not been constituted, the Climate Change Fund provided for in Section 12 of the Act is not adequately capitalized. Moreover, it was also highlighted and presented to the committee that NDC reporting obligations assigned to the Authority were being fulfilled by the Ministry rather than by the statutory body the Act had created. (Standing Committee on Climate Change, 2022). This is a documented instance of the feedback loop between international diplomatic engagement (COP26 participation), parliamentary oversight (the Committee's post-legislative scrutiny), and domestic institutional pressure (questions on the Authority's operationalization).

Second, when it came to implement the changes detailed in the act, it became quite apparent that the motivation was somewhat lacking. The promised clauses of the act were not executed until seven years after sailing through the parliament and was only taken up again after the Supreme Court of

Pakistan intervened. Through the public interest constitutional petition (No. 42 of 2022) was the search for members of the authority initiated (Express Tribune, 2024). With the pressure from the Supreme Court, the Parliament enacted the framework, but still the executive failed to operationalize it, leading to the judiciary forcing their hand even further. Such patterns of enforcement raise questions regarding the depth of institutionalization that has been achieved so far by parliamentary diplomacy. This is consistent with the literature on climate litigation's role in complementing legislative action, as documented in Nachmany et al.'s (2017) global study, and it places Pakistan's domestic experience within a recognizable comparative pattern.

5.2.3 Diplomatic Legitimation

The third mechanism operates at the interface of national and international institutions. Pakistan's participation in CoPs, its engagement with the IPU and CPA, and its positioning as a spokesperson for climate-vulnerable developing states have cumulatively constructed a diplomatic identity that is itself a resource. Diplomatically, Pakistan advances a consistent position articulated by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (2017) as a climate-vulnerable state advocating for equitable burden-sharing, loss-and-damage mechanisms, and access to climate finance. The domestic legislative framework that parliament has constructed the 2017 Act, the institutional bodies it created, the provincial policies that followed lend credibility to that diplomatic position by demonstrating that Pakistan has fulfilled its side of the Paris bargain to the extent its institutional capacity permits.

This legitimation has practical consequences: access to Green Climate Fund resources, bilateral climate cooperation agreements, and technical assistance from international bodies all depend in part on the demonstrated existence of a domestic legal and institutional framework. Parliamentary diplomacy, in this respect, is not merely a mechanism for importing norms but also for projecting them outward in ways that open resource channels unavailable to states without credible legislative foundations.

5.3 Alignment and Its Limits

The three mechanisms documented above have produced a measurable degree of alignment between Pakistan's international climate commitments and its domestic legislative architecture. The Climate Change Act 2017, the National Climate Change Policy 2021, and the provincial climate policies adopted since the Eighteenth Amendment devolution have collectively created a statutory framework that broadly reflects the NDC obligations Pakistan undertook while ratifying the Paris agreement. Parliamentary diplomacy through the three mechanisms of norm incorporation, oversight accountability, and diplomatic legitimation was a constitutive element of the process that produced this framework. Pakistan's parliamentary delegations' presence and Speaker's addresses at the Annual Conferences of IPU and CPA by presenting Pakistan's climate vulnerabilities and climate priorities is testament to growing appetite for legislative framework for climate change.

It would be misleading, however, to characterize this alignment as deep or consistent. Ahmed and Bukhari (2021) document persistent implementation deficits. Coordination between federal and provincial legislative bodies remains fragmented, budgetary allocations for climate action fall short of stated commitments. The Ministry of Climate Change itself has acknowledged that formal commitments and ground-level outcomes diverge, and independent assessments consistently find a gap between legislative provision and administrative delivery. Parliamentary diplomacy, in other words, has been more effective at producing legislation than at ensuring its implementation a finding consistent with Huntington's (1968) warning that institutionalization without coherence and adaptability produces brittle rather than durable institutions.

6. Implications

The intertwining of climate change legislation and parliamentary diplomacy create several favourable consequences:

- By engaging in parliamentary process and diplomacy, the legitimacy of climate laws is significantly bolstered
- International expectations and domestic implementations are aligned
- Provinces are looped into the diplomatic process, allowing for implementation of legislation at the provincial level
- Parliament assumes a major role of overseeing the implementation of laws to maintain accountability

7. Challenges

Despite efforts, progress on the Pakistan's legislative approach to climate change has been marred by lack of implementation, insufficient levels of coordination and inadequate funding. Political instability and the undermining of policies by subsequent governments have led to less than adequate attention and effort towards a sustained climate action (Ahmed & Bukhari, 2021).

Another significant challenge is the lack of evidence based legislative indicatives, lack of research capacity building for the parliamentarians continue to hinder the process of realization for effective and urgent legislative framework or amending the loopholes in the existing climate act and policy.

Absence of a strong and functional local government system also accounts for one of the many challenges for climate change legislative support at the local and provincial level.

This assessment is not a counsel of pessimism about Pakistan's legislative trajectory. The existence of a statutory framework, a functioning standing committee, a Climate Change Authority, parliamentary platforms; SDGs Secretariate and Climate Caucus, and a consistent diplomatic positioning on climate justice all represent institutional achievements of the period under review. However, the significance of these achievements must be assessed against the severity of the challenge Pakistan faces: as one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, the question of whether parliamentary diplomacy has produced not merely legislation but implementation-capable governance frameworks is one the next decade will answer.

8. Conclusion

An evolving transition from a fragmented climate response to more institutionalized framework in response to climate emergencies in Pakistan has been seen in Pakistan from 2015 to 2025. Literature and existing parliamentary activity are evident that the transition owe significantly to increased parliamentary diplomacy contributing to shaping country's climate governance architecture rather than just through executive policymaking. Resultantly, Pakistan's parliament has begun to internalize global climate norms within domestic legislative processes through engagement in international climate forums, inter-parliamentary cooperation, and legislative oversight mechanisms. This research points towards parliamentary diplomacy as a mechanism that ensures the implementation of international climate commitments at a national policy level. Such international agreements have influenced legislation, institutional initiatives and policy framework. The Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017, National Climate Change Policy, Parliamentary standing committees and the federal – provincial coordination mechanisms testify to the growing importance of the issue of climate change as a governance and legislative priority. At the same time significant gaps in coordination between the provincial and national legislative authorities. By highlighting this gap, the research exposes perpetual structural factors like lack of implementation mechanisms, political polarity that are restricting climate initiatives. Although legislative progress is clearly clamouring to make a headway, the

unwillingness to translate climate commitments into something actionable remains a major hindrance that needs to be dealt with.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight Mechanisms

The traces from parliamentary committee reports indicate that Parliamentary standing committees on climate change has the margin to institutionally strengthened through improved research support, inclusion of technical experts on climate governance and legislation, and regular monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of climate-related legislation and international commitments. Moreover, parliamentary engagement reports such as that of COPs should also be submitted to the committee to have farsighted approach during oversight business.

9.2 Federal-Provincial Legislative Coordination

To ensure uniform execution of global climate commitments and adaptation strategies while institutionalizing parliamentary diplomacy, a well-coordinated climate governance structure should be developed between federal and provincial legislatures. It would also help reducing policy fragmentation at all levels.

9.3 Legislative Continuity

Political discontinuity hinders the process of smooth climate legislation which should be protected through bipartisan parliamentary consensus to ensure climate policies to remain sustainable despite changes in governments and political leadership. By promising continuity efficacy in climate governance shall have lasting imprints.

9.4 Inclusive Public Engagement

Climate legislation should incorporate stronger consultation mechanisms involving civil society, academia, environmental experts, and local communities to improve democratic participation and policy effectiveness.

9.5 Align Domestic Laws with International Commitments

Pakistan should continue harmonizing domestic climate laws with international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals while adapting them according to local socio-economic realities and institutional capacities.

9.6 Learn from Best Practices

Parliamentary institutions should actively engage with international best practices and comparative legislative models to improve climate governance frameworks and strengthen adaptive legislative responses.

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Pakistan-US-China Trilateral Relations in the Context of Evolving Geo-Strategic Calculus of Asia-Pacific

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: March 11, 2026 Revised: June 28, 2026 Accepted: June 29, 2026	This paper finds out the evolving nature of Pakistan's relations with United States and China. The geographical position of Pakistan being at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean provide it with strategic advantage as well as challenges amid escalating competition between Washington and Beijing. Through the framework based on the hedging theory and the middle power model, the paper investigates the way Pakistan copes with the intricate balance between its deep security and economic reliance on China, and its unequal relationship with the United States. This paper analyses the nexus between trade policy, critical mineral security, and U.S. foreign relations. Pakistan's strategic calculus appears to be driven by a confluence of key variables including economic vulnerability, persistent security threats, technological reliance, and internal political strife. All these factors, explain the limitations of the manoeuvring power of Islamabad on the international front. The results indicate that hedging provides a certain leeway to Pakistan in the short run, but more structural weaknesses particularly economic and political in the long run. This makes Pakistan incapable of realizing real autonomy in both economic and political domains. The paper argues that Pakistan's ability to follow this strategy will largely rest on its economic strength, reforms in governance and its capacity to deal with the growing security challenges in the Asia-Pacific calculus.
Keywords <i>Pakistan foreign policy,</i> <i>China-US rivalry,</i> <i>Hedging theory,</i> <i>Indo-Pacific,</i> <i>CPEC</i>	

1. Introduction

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced a fair share of severe geopolitical hardships over the past years, redefining the manner in which the giant powers and regional states interact with each other. Pakistan being at the junction of South Asia, Central Asia and the Arabian Sea is in the midst of this turbulent image. It does not have any set or one-dimensional relationships with China and the United States. They are ever changing, depending on history, strategic objectives, financial demands, and internal politics. In order to observe where Islamabad goes next, it is essential not only to examine its option in balancing between these two powers but also to analyse the tendencies of competition and cooperation as well as stability throughout the Indo-Pacific (Nagy, 2022).

Pakistan's relations with Washington and Beijing have not simply appeared out of thin air; rather they have been a product of regional alliances, colonialism baggage and Cold War politics. Immediately after gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan drew closer to the United States, becoming part of such

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alliances as CENTO and SEATO. The reason behind that move was not merely about friendship but rather to counteract India without letting the Soviet influence go out of control (Talbot & Singh, 2009). Simultaneously, Pakistan found an opening with China, particularly, following Sino-Indian War of 1962 that left Beijing and New Delhi on different sides of the fence. This precondition laid the foundation for a close Sino-Pakistani partnership that has subsequently deepened across energy projects, infrastructure development, military cooperation, and diplomatic engagement (Small, 2015). The US-Pakistan relationship has on the contrary been more of a rollercoaster ride. The periods of close collaboration have been followed by collisions over aspects such as human rights, nuclear policy, and conflicting approaches in Afghanistan (McMahon, 2013; Sattar, 2016). Simply put, the balancing act between Beijing and Washington in Pakistan is not recent but the stakes seem to be greater at present due to the dynamism of the broader Indo-Pacific. A series of prominent occurrences in recent years have underlined Pakistan in its fluctuation between Washington and Beijing.

1.1 Research Questions

This paper aims to answer these interlinked research questions:

Q1. How is Pakistan navigating its relationships with the United States and China in the context of intensifying US-China strategic competition in the Asia-Pacific?

Q2. To what extent is Pakistan's foreign policy characterized by a hedging strategy: maintaining strong ties with China while engaging the US in selective domains like trade, critical minerals, and security cooperation?

1.2 Objectives of the Research

This paper aims at offering an empirically based study on the strategic decisions of Pakistan in the changing Asia-Pacific order. The paper aims at establishing the forces and limitations that affect decision-making in Islamabad, but it also integrates the obstacles hampering its selection. It does not just assess trade flows, economic interdependence, and patterns of security cooperation, but also ideational variables, national identity, discourse of diplomacy, and the goals of strategic autonomy and all of them are placed under the scrutiny. The combination of these material and ideational factors together is what the research will seek to elucidate the current Pakistani position, along with making predictions about the possible future trends of the Pakistan-US, China and the overall regional situation.

1.3 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The research methodology employed in this research is based on exploratory, descriptive and analytical footings to systematically investigate the geo-strategic configurations shaping US-China great power competition in the Asia-Pacific and their implications for Pakistan's foreign policy and security. The qualitative approach was applied involving in-depth textual analysis of primary and secondary sources, including policy documents, official statements, strategic white papers, and scholarly literature. Journals of international repute were consulted as principal academic sources, drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship in international relations, security studies, and political economy. Additionally, internet-based sources and real-time data repositories were utilized to capture contemporaneous developments and day-to-day updates, ensuring the research remained responsive to the rapidly evolving strategic environment under study.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The proposed study is important on three dimensions. First, it examines Pakistan with nuclear capacity involving in unremitting conflict processes. Second, it anticipates the fact of Pakistan having geo-strategic role, which has been under-researched in greater Asia-Pacific discourse. The intersection

of these dimensions creates a case that would hardly appear in the current regional political discourse. The research adds to the body of literature on the topic of middle-power strategy, hedging theory, and great-power competition. The study also participates in the growing theoretical discussions that require the hybrid approaches that would combine the realist schools of thought with the concepts of hedging or balancing. These models will recognize the fact that states like Pakistan are strategic actors and independent decision-makers, rather than respondents to exogenous demands (Tahir, Kasi, and Qadir, 2025; Adil, Uzzaman, and Hera, 2024). The research has more than just a theoretical contribution, and has a provider of practical implications, as a policy maker in Pakistan, the United States and China.

The paper is based on empirical data between the period of 2020 and 2025, but its future projections reach to 2030. The infrastructure projects especially the CPEC are critical sectors of interest, as well as the interaction in the realm of trade and investment flows, security, and diplomatic alignment. Nevertheless, the study notes that it has some shortcomings such as the uncertainty of external shocks such as pandemics, wars and global financial crises, and the inability to have reliable information in sensitive security related fields.

2. Literature Review

The literature review excavates an extensive variety of concepts: theories of great-power rivalry, in particular, about the current tug-of-war between the US and China, the changing foreign policy approaches of Pakistan including the balancing, hedging, and non-alignment leans as well as the greater role of trade and connectivity initiatives. It also examines economic corridors, access to critical minerals and economic initiatives such as BRI and their flagship project in Pakistan, CPEC. In addition to that, previous research on trilateral relations and the overall regional security is introduced in the discussion to provide a more comprehensive background.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Sino-US rivalry remains a key element of contemporary international politics (Ali and Ali, 2021; Saeed and Yaqub, 2023). Hedging theory is the key concept that recurs repeatedly in this discussion, it is sometimes termed as a combination of balancing and bandwagoning. The hedging theory has emerged as significant framework of handling the uncertainty in the environment created by the great-power rivalry in which weak states attempt to deal with the problem. Thus, rather than aligning with one of the powers, most Southeast Asian nations like Pakistan seem to be hedging the benefit of working with both power like US and China in the security, economic and diplomatic spheres. The article, *Navigating Great Power Competition: A Neoclassical Realist View of Hedging*, emphasized that internal factors, such as the perceptions of leadership and domestic institutions, along with external pressures, the changes in the balance of power and the emergence of apparent threats shape such decisions (Marston, 2024). A significant part of the literature continues to rely heavily on structural realism or neorealism, particularly in the context of the reaction of states to shifting coalitions, increased threats, and changed military balances. Moreover, number of scholars argue that realism alone doesn't provide a full picture. They suggest that more nuanced explanations come from combining realism with other views such as institutionalism, hedging, and domestic-level variables (Waqar & Uzzaman, 2025; Shah, Gaho & Bukhari, 2025).

2.2 Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Balancing, Non-alignment, or Hedging

There are many studies focusing on how Pakistan is shaping its foreign policy among the growing rivalry between the US and China, with particular attention to strategies of hedging and balancing (Ali, et al. 2024). In the article *Trilateral Dynamics in Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Balancing China and Hedging the US*, Ali, Arshad, and Rogers (2024) argue that Pakistan is not simply aligning with one power but, pursuing a careful hedging strategy, enacting economic and military ties with China while engaging the America especially in trade and diplomacy. Based on this, Adil, Uzzaman, and

Noor-e-Hera (2024), in *Pakistan's Quest for Strategic Autonomy: Hedging against US-China-Russia Rivalries Post-2013*, highlight Pakistan's efforts to diversify its partnerships with China and the US. They show how Islamabad seeks security and economic cooperation with multiple actors, maintaining links with both the U.S. and Russia while also deepening its commitment to China through CPEC. This reflects a broader drive for strategic autonomy, give leverage to Pakistan to avoid overdependence on China or United States.

The work on "Between the Balancing and Hedging? The Foreign Policy Behaviour of Pakistan in the Power Struggle between the US and China" reveals that the behaviour of the country is different with respect to the sphere (Waqar, & Uzzaman, 2025). It tends to be more inclined towards China in certain domains including defence and infrastructure whereas in other domains such as trade, aid, or diplomatic support, it is aggressively seeking an equal footing with the U.S. Meanwhile, researchers stress that hedging is associated with risks. The factors that make Pakistan unable to continue playing both sides include economic dependency, domestic political instability, external pressure, and the consistent threat of security such as terrorism and insurgency (Shah, Gaho, and Bukhari, 2025; Waqar and Uzzaman, 2025).

2.3 Trade, Critical Minerals and CPEC Significance

Even in most of the literature, the CPEC remains a key articulation of Beijing's geoeconomic and geostrategic aspirations in South Asia in the context of BRI (Jasmin, et al. 2025). Such works as *Shifting Power Dynamics in South Asia: The Geopolitical Impact of China CPEC on Regional Rivalries* use a neoclassical realist approach and show how the systemic factors, the strategic interests of China, encounter internal constraints, including the economic capacity and political stability of Pakistan. This point of view can be used to explain the opportunities associated with CPEC as well as the vulnerabilities related to it (Manhas et al. 2025). Reading more recently, trade and critical minerals are now the areas of interest. Pakistan has signed investment deals with American firms in the infrastructure, logistics, and development of critical minerals such as rare earth, copper, gold, tungsten, and antimony in 2025 (AP News, 2025; Tribune Pakistan, 2025). These actions are the signs of new aspects in the relations between the U.S. and Pakistan which extend beyond the standard concern of security relationships (Zaidi, et al. 2025). Multilateral financing has also come into the scene. The fact that the Asian Development Bank gave a significant loan on the Reko Diq copper and gold project underlines the fact that the international actors are increasing their presence in the mining sector in Pakistan (Ghaffar, 2024). This not only spreads investment sources, but also puts a challenge to China, by giving Islamabad an opportunity to become less reliant and open itself to more external rivalry (Financial Times, 2025, August 21). Researchers also stress the increased focus on trade and logistics in Pakistan. Deals with U.S. and European corporations, as well as external infrastructure collaboration, are viewed as a wider initiative by Islamabad to diversify its foreign economic contacts and minimize the risks to them (Shah, Gaho, and Bukhari, 2025).

2.4 Trilateral Relations and Regional Security Complex

The three-way relationship among China, United States, and Pakistan has now been a growing area of research. The articles like the *Foreign Policy: Trilateral Dynamics* (Ali, Arshad, and Rogers, 2024) about Pakistan discuss the influence of the U.S. and Chinese policies on each other that are either complementary or contradictory and contribute to the development of the foreign policy choices in Pakistan layering the bilateral interactions that Pakistan has had. The other significant line of previous study relies on the Regional Security Complex (RSC) model that is proposed by Buzan and Waever. This model can be used to understand the tendency of security dependencies and threat perceptions to be regional. As an example, the article *New Dynamics in the Indian Ocean: A Study of Pakistan, China, and India under the Regional Security Complex* (Khizar, 2025) can be viewed through the prism of the RSC approach to the strategic, economical, and naval interconnection between China, India, and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean. The studies bring to the fore the fact that Pakistan exists in more than one security complex.

In the Indian Ocean, the problem of security of sea lanes and presence of the naval forces prevails; in the broader Indo-Pacific, Pakistan is sucked into the U.S.-China game; and in South Asia, it is heavily involved in the India-Pakistan conflict and Afghanistan affairs. Much of the academic literature is concerned with the way in which Pakistan is manoeuvring within and among these complexes either through port access agreements, infrastructure development, diplomacy or changing alliances.

2.5 The Geo-Strategic Developments in Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia-Pacific now seems to be commonly denoted as the Indo-Pacific, forming a focal point of the significant geopolitical changes, being characterized by the increasing great power competition and changing regional alliances. The United States as an example has been advocating events such as the Quad (which is composed of the U.S, Japan, India and Australia) as a means of counteracting the influence of China. A big part of this rivalry is played in the South China Sea where military activities and territorial assertions by Beijing have led to conflicts with Philippines and Vietnam (Kaplan, 2023).

Meanwhile, China is still expanding its economic and strategic footprint through BRI. This growth has prompted a reactionary move, such as the Build Back Better World initiative supported by the U.S. or the Free and Open Indo-Pacific plan of Japan (Panda, 2024). To make it even more complicated, the fact that North Korea continues to pursue nuclear capabilities and the heightened level of activeness of ASEAN in its diplomatic activities only strengthens the Indo-Pacific as a place, where cooperation and competition are continually going hand in hand. All these dynamics are transforming the global security order and the overall economic environment (Smith and Hu, 2025).

2.6 Rise of China's Naval, Economic, and Diplomatic Power

The high rate of modernization of the Chinese Navy has drastically changed the sea power in the Asia-Pacific. On the basis of a new Congressional Research Service (CRS) study, the PLAN currently has more than 370 battle force platforms, comprising amphibious platforms, major surface combatants, submarines, and support vessels. This figure is projected to increase to approximately 395 ships in 2025, and 435 in 2030. Besides pure shipbuilding China is also enhancing its C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance), improving its logistics, doctrine and manpower, indicating a wide program of modernized capabilities (O'Rourke, 2024, January 30). As part of showing the interest in a more global outlook, China has extended naval activity not just to its traditional near-seas (the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea), but also to the Western Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and even European waters (O'Rourke, 2024, January 30).

Meanwhile, Beijing is still using the BRI as a foreign policy and economic instrument. The CPEC continues to be the centre of attention in South Asia, offering energy, port, and transport infrastructure. The new deals (2024-2025) indicate a new beginning of dedication, and more investments in mining, energy, and agriculture, with more robust security assurances to Chinese workers. The recent situation was also updated by new statements of both Pakistani and Chinese officials, which are recommended to remain updated with the latest information. China has also increased its diplomatic reach to the members of ASEAN, Pacific Island States and Coastal states of the Indian Ocean, and the more visible presence in bilateral and multilateral Indo-Pacific forums. Even though some nations are becoming increasingly cautious of their reliance on Beijing, Chinese soft power in the form of trade, culture exchange, development assistance, and regional deals remain one of the primary instruments of influence.

The most recent demonstration of naval strength was the dual aircraft carrier drills of the Liaoning and Shandong in the South China Sea which aimed to enhance combat readiness, coordination and power projection (Ryall, 2024, October 17). The United States has tried a complex approach as a

reaction to the growing influence of China. This is coupled with military modernization and the increased alliances like the Quad and AUKUS and at the same time heightening competition in trade and advanced technologies.

2.7 Security Partnerships and Alliances

AUKUS was established in 2021, to drive cooperation among the U.S., the U.K and Australia in the most advanced spheres such as quantum computing, hypersonic and defence technology, nuclear-powered submarines, and intelligence sharing. It has since become a primary means through which Washington has been trying to push back against the rising activity of China in the seas (Medcalf, 2023, November 20). The Quad, however, is commonly discussed in less emphatic, more diplomatic terms. It emphasizes the communicated dialogue, the construction of infrastructure and provision of public goods, yet it is difficult not to notice its strategic advantage. It is regarded by many as an extension of the overall US effort to establish smaller, more focused alliances known as minilaterals to ensure that China remains within check. In this arrangement, the Quad assists in strengthening certain very significant regional norms, directly pertaining to freedom of navigation, maritime safety and ensuring that important shipping routes are free and secure (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2025, January 27).

2.7.1 Capacity and Military Posture

The US has been constantly increasing its military presence in the Indo-Pacific by establishing more forward bases, rotating forces and ships in the region. More frequently, it is raising its naval presence, investing in submarines and anti-submarine warfare, and conducting more frequent exercises with allies individually and in groups (O'Rourke, 2024, January 30). An important component to this exercise is the Pacific Deterrence Initiative or PDI. It was introduced in the 2021 fiscal year, and it is basically a funding structure that is designed to enhance deterrence and the upgrading of infrastructure in the region. Fundamentally, the PDI is an indication of Washington regarding the difficulties of increasing aggressive behaviour of China (Nicastro, & Kaileh, 2023).

2.7.2 Economic Competition, Technology and Trade

Technology and supply chain security are increasingly becoming directly related to U.S. foreign policy. One of the main priorities is to ensure that the country does not rely too much on China when it comes to supplying such commodities as semiconductors and rare earth elements, among other important minerals. The trade policy that was once slightly independent is now strongly linked to these strategic issues. In export restrictions, tariffs, the push to bring supply chains back home, reshoring or the push to relocate them to proven allies and partners, sometimes referred to as friend-shoring.

2.8 Regional Responses

India, ASEAN, Japan, Australia and other players in the region do not sit by and watch the United States and China fight over influence; they constantly strike their deals by hedging, balancing and by stepping up and down the ladder. An example is that India has gradually been joining the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) by building more naval infrastructures, enhancing its domestic shipbuilding capacity, conducting joint exercises with the US, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN members, and extending its maritime presence. Its longstanding rivalry with China, ineffective border claims, and the desire to become a formidable regional power are some of the policy reactions that have caused India to seek an answer to these issues (Bala and Kumar, 2024).

The case among member states of the ASEAN is highly heterogeneous. Countries like Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are gradually focusing on the multilateral norms, freedom of navigation, and more emphasis on the discourse of the South China Sea issues. On the other hand, some of these

states such as Cambodia and Laos have more of a soft approach to Beijing. It is still debated by scholars whether or not ASEAN serves as a central political actor, but the majority of scholars agree that the organization keeps playing a major role as an arena of controlling diplomatic interaction, rivalry, and balance of power at the regional level (Jayaram, 2024).

In the meantime, Japan and Australia are beefing up the defence ties with each other and with Washington. The maritime power that Australia is about to increase includes the thinking of obtaining nuclear-powered submarines via AUKUS. On its part, Japan is deepening its partnership with other countries such as South Korea, India, and Pacific Islands, as well as increasing the access level of U.S. troops and investments in Self-Defence Forces (Medcalf, 2023, November 20). The smaller states particularly the southeast Asian and the Pacific islands are walking on thin ice. They want stronger security partnerships, sometimes with the U.S. or Europe, but at the same time they rely heavily on China for economic ties. Many of them are trying to diversify their options carefully, without triggering the kind of tensions that come from openly choosing sides.

2.9 Implications for Trilateral Relations (Pakistan-US-China)

The strategic environment that Pakistan is now operating in is quite more disputed thanks to the many regional developments. It concerns both Washington and Beijing since it is affected by a number of factors, including the increase in the naval strength of China, strengthening of the American allies, and balancing of other states, including Japan, Australia and India (Khan, et al. 2019). Pakistan's geography gives it significant leverage to Gwadar port, access to major sea lanes, its position near the Indian Ocean, and its border with Afghanistan all make it strategically valuable. But that leverage only really works if Islamabad can manage its internal challenges while carefully navigating pressure from both the U.S. and China.

3. Pakistan's Strategic Interests: Security, Economy, Trade, and Ideology

The asymmetry of traditional military strength, the tactical use of nuclear deterrence, and Kashmir conflict issue are still the core aspects of the foreign policy of Pakistan (Sattar, 2016). What is more, the situation is complicated by internal security threats, such as terrorism and separatism in Balochistan, which makes it more difficult to present the state as a stable one and attract foreign investment (Shah, Gaho, and Bukhari, 2025). These economic hardships have accumulated with time, which is depicted by worsening balance of payment, high rate of foreign debt growth and high level of inflation which has remained a burden to the people whether knowingly or unknowingly. To deal with such complex challenges, multilateral intervention and international cooperation are the required steps.

Pakistan has significant mineral resources that could prove to be strategic resources because they include copper, gold and rare earth. However, other than the possibility of mismanagement of resources, the main problems facing Pakistan involve the diversification of its trade model and making it appealing to foreign direct investment, as highlighted by modern literature. Infrastructure connectivity is an important element of the strategic framework of Pakistan. The cloud of the infrastructure, energy, and logistics projects known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the essential plan of transforming Pakistan into an economic centre between South and Central Asia and achieving the access to the Arabian Sea.

Pakistani diplomacy is also guided by ideological factors besides its economic aspects. Foreign-policy formulations are pragmatic and determine the orientation of the country informing it both on its Islamic identity and a strong strategic independence. By stable declarations of the leaders in Islamabad, the foreign policy practised by Pakistan does not suggest an expansion of the interests of any great power or a proxy system; it is instead aimed at ensuring the state makes its independent choice.

3.1 Economic, Military, Infrastructural Dependencies on China

China and Pakistan frequently refer to their relationship as an all-weather one, yet the relationship is not free and pure. This has seen approximately 81 percent of all the major weapons exported into Pakistan in the last five years, which is comprised of fighter jets, missile systems as well as submarines which were both imported by China (Indian Defense News, 2025). Such excessive dependence demonstrates the extent to which Pakistan is dependent on Beijing, in regard to high-tech defence gadgets. China has invested billions of dollars in such projects as the Gwadar port, railways, power plants, and road networks through CPEC. This reliance grew even more in 2025 when both nations signed an agreement to develop cooperation in infrastructure, mining, and offshore oil exploration (Reuters, 2025). The supply of capital by China is not without conditions; it is always accompanied with financial and political conditions. There is also a security cost that has been incurred. Islamabad has been forced to deploy large numbers of military and police forces in order to safeguard the interests of the Chinese personnel and engineers working in Pakistan. The security resources distribution mentioned above depicts how an infrastructural dependency can spill over into domestic security issues (Kuszevska, & Nitza-Makowska, 2021).

3.2 Relationships with the United States

Even though China is still the close partner of Pakistan, of late, Islamabad has been striving to restore its ties with the United States. A few developments stand out:

3.2.1 Critical Minerals Cooperation

Pakistan signed contracts estimated at USD 500 million with the companies of the USA, including Strategic Metals and Mota-Engil. The deals are aimed at exploration and processing of rare earths, copper, gold, tungsten, and antimony. It is proposed to establish a polymetallic refinery in Pakistan, which will be shifting the process of extracting resources to the processing stage of resource utilization (Kahyarara, & Simon, 2018).

3.2.2 Top-Tier Diplomatic Contacts

The participation of a U.S. delegation, led by State Department official Eric Meyer, in the Islamabad Minerals Investment Forum and its subsequent meetings with Pakistan's civilian and military leadership, affirmed that Pakistan's mineral sector is perceived by Washington as having strategic value (Edelman, 2024).

3.2.3 Diversification Strategy

These actions indicate the intention of Pakistan to draw the attention of Western investment and technology, decrease the excessive dependence on China and expand the range of external relationships. In this way, the Islamabad not only establishes new growth opportunities but also better bargains with not only Washington but also Beijing (Shah et al. 2025).

All this portrays the delicate balancing exercise of Pakistan. Chinese support on one hand comes with the crucial infrastructure and security assistance but on the other hand, there is the danger of Islamabad becoming excessively reliant. Conversely, by accessing U.S. trade, investment and mineral partnership, Pakistan has another way into the future. Nevertheless, the options of Pakistan are few. Its ailing economy and recurrent security problems are taking their toll in the amount of space it has to negotiate. That being said, how Pakistan interacts with the two powers indicates its willingness to have certain degree of strategic freedom. Furthermore, Pakistan's policy orientation vis-à-vis Washington and Beijing is not formulated in vacuum. These are the creation of internal and external forces. Four core determinants underpin Pakistan's recalibration of its trilateral alignment, namely

economic constraints, persistent security challenges, technological and infrastructural development, and the need to ensure domestic political stability.

3.3 Economic Pressures

Unstable economy is arguably the over-riding factor in the Pakistan's foreign policy. By mid-2025, the public debt in Pakistan had increased to a high of 80.5 trillion rupees which is estimated to be equal to 70.2 percent of the GDP, compared to the 6768 percent of the previous year (The Express Tribune, 2025). This debt is mostly domestic and interest payments take a significant portion of the federal budget by themselves (The Nation, 2025). The economic pressure has been further worsened by climate shocks and supply chain disruptions. Farming production has been destroyed by flooding, and the inflation that had dropped to 4.10 December 2024 has in turn bounced back (The Express Tribune, 2024).

3.4 Security Issues

The security threats continue to dominate the foreign alignments in Pakistan. Militant factions such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch separatists still attack military convoys, and infrastructural projects including the Chinese investment. Such attacks impose a lot of pressure on the state resources (Saeed, et al. 2025). Despite the military's ongoing counter-insurgency operations, the escalation of violence in Waziristan in 2025 underscored the fragility of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region (Saeed, et al. 2025). The tension involved in border conflict with Afghanistan has only made matters worse, making it difficult to manage the refugees and their trade across the border (Bangakh, et al. 2024). Meanwhile, the nuclear stance of Pakistan against India remains the focus of the country in its general security policy. As much as nuclear capability is a deterrent, it makes alliances no longer easy since there is increased risk of escalation. To the U.S., the nuclear capabilities of Pakistan pose an added degree of concern with regard to proliferation that impacts the extent to which Washington would be willing to go in its assistance (Adil, Uzzaman, and Hera, 2024; Waqar and Uzzaman, 2025). Under these pressures, Islamabad's options are constrained. It must maintain close security relations with China while also securing U.S. aid and counterterrorism support.

3.5 Technology and Infrastructure in Pakistan

For Pakistan, infrastructure represents a dual-edged asset. Gwadar Port is positioned as the flagship of CPEC and the vehicle for Islamabad's goal of connecting the Arabian Sea to Central Asia as a regional trading centre. Yet operationally, no Pakistani seaport functions at full capacity, constrained by inadequate inland linkages, elevated insurance costs, and ongoing security challenges in Balochistan (Business Recorder, 2025). The increased reliance on China has been further aggravated by the fact that it has been involved in the construction of the surveillance system in Pakistan. In September 2025, an Amnesty International report revealed that Pakistan has been operating systems made by Chinese company the "Lawful Intercept Management System" and the Web Monitoring System to intercept phone conversations and internet traffic (Reuters, 2025). Although the tools reinforce the security of a project and internal security, they also generate a debate over the issue of sovereignty, digital rights, and Pakistan becoming too reliant on the Chinese technology. This dependence is evident in the magnitude of resources that Islamabad has to allocate in ensuring that the investments of foreigners are safeguarded. As an example, there is a Perimetric Security System consisting of 675 cameras installed to protect Chinese workers and facilities in Gwadar (Pakistan Today, 2024).

3.6 Domestic Politics and Stability

Domestic instability continues to deteriorate the quest to attain consistency in the foreign policy of Pakistan. The civil-military tensions, frequent changes in leadership, and recurrent outbursts of street-level activism have continuously weakened the Islamabad's capacity to make strategic commitments

in the long term. Policymakers tend to take a cautious step even where there are concrete economic gains of closer engagement with the United States, because of ingrained discourses of sovereignty and a long-standing sense of anti-Westernism (Shah, Gaho, and Bukhari, 2025).

The environmental shocks have added to this vulnerability. The massive floods that hit Punjab and Sindh provinces in mid-2025 displaced millions of citizens, broke the food-supply chains, and new emergency fiscal reallocations were necessary (Hote & Koike, 2025). Such developments limited the budgetary funds, as well as the confidence of the people in the state to plan and respond to crisis (Jan et al., 2025). To add to this crisis, governmental attempts to limit internet accessibility and increase surveillance systems undermined civil upheaval and brought up serious issues concerning the endurance of democratic leadership in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2024). Such internal vulnerabilities cannot but affect the foreign orientations of the foreign-policy of Pakistan. Washington often bases its cooperation on the governance reforms, which leaves a conflict between normative expectations and strategic interests. On the other hand, Beijing significantly underpins the governance issues to the benefit of the infrastructure building and investment priorities (Sial, 2023). This difference highlights the intrinsically different concepts of the role of Pakistan as a strategic partner that are employed by the United States and China.

4. Implications for Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Sovereignty

Systemic lack of economic efficiency and endemic security concerns have restricted the autonomy of the Pakistan's foreign policy. Pakistan's reliance on China to fund infrastructure, develop capital and military hardware has strengthened asymmetric relationships that deny the country manoeuvrability (Ahmed et al., 2025). On the other hand, any attempt to secure concessions in American trade or investment in the vital mineral sectors are usually associated with a set of conditionalities concerning the strategic alignment and governance reforms. The excessive reliance on either of the partners reduces the hedging ability of Pakistan. Pakistan's over reliance on China can limit the opportunities of engagement in the United States, whereas increasing the closeness with Washington can arouse the suspicion of Beijing, which will have to be diplomatically reassured (Khan, 2024). Consequently, the imperative to balance relations between the United States and China constrains Pakistan's sovereign autonomy in external policy formulation.

These external limitations are aggravated with domestic frailties. Investments made by Beijing, especially through CPEC are still susceptible to continuing terrorism and separatists' attacks in Balochistan province (Siddiqui, 2025). The growing cost of project and increasing security threats have generated massive risks for investment. Militancy and refugee flows are ways through which domestic instability transcends boundaries, which increases the level of insecurity in the region (Khan and Ahmed, 2024). Both Beijing and Washington understand Pakistan's fragility and struggle to gain the influence by providing financial aid and security. This rivalry poses the danger of trapping Pakistan in terms of strategic engagements at the expense of its hedging approach. Political instability in Gwadar and other coastal hubs is not merely a domestic concern for Pakistan; it also threatens to disrupt key maritime economic corridors that underpin China's Belt and Road Initiative and broader Indo-Pacific connectivity (Siddiqui, 2025).

A central strategic dilemma facing Pakistan is its unstable economic situation. By the middle of 2025, the total public debt was about 80.5 trillion rupees, making 70 percent of GDP (World Bank, 2025). The cost of debt servicing takes a huge fiscal burden limiting the spending of funds on social welfare and development. It is exhibiting inflation that is expected to be 7.5 percent in FY2026 and is mainly fuelled by high food and energy prices. The balance of payment pressures is exacerbated due to chronic trade deficits, low tax base, and poor export performance (Ahmed, 2025). The high dependency of Islamabad on the usage of the International Monetary Fund, China, and the Gulf states has helped the country to avoid default but at the expense of policy freedom since their requirements as a conditionality limit the economic sovereignty. The disasters caused by climate, such as the

devastating floods which hit Punjab and Sindh in 2025, have further burdened the fiscal ability and necessitated costly emergency responses and foreign aid (Jan et al., 2025).

The security situation is also not more stable. Militant violence is still ongoing in the northwest and Balochistan. The recent high-profile attacks like the 2025 Mastung bus bombing and the suicide attack of Mir Ali highlight the long-term nature of the threat of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch separatists. Even today militant groups still have the potential to carry out advanced operations aimed at attacking the assets of states and China as seen in Operation Baam (Bukhari, 2025). The ongoing unrest, including smuggling, militia infiltration and the offer of safe havens to the extremist groups, along the Durand Line remain to create instability and mutual suspicion between Islamabad and Kabul (Omrani, 2009; Wagner, 2018). Intrinsic governance deficits further increase these external pressures. Endemic corruption, institutional weakness, and the presence of uncontrollable spaces systematically undermine state authority (International Monetary Fund, 2025; Jan et al., 2025). At the same time, civil liberties are increasingly facing opposition. The alleged use of surveillance technologies produced in China to provide mass surveillance and intercept telecommunications have led to some of the most basic issues in terms of theoretical privacy, state transparency, and the sustainability of the democratic establishment in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2024; Yilmaz et al., 2025). All these dynamics together shedding light on the structural constraints under which Pakistan has to choose its foreign-policy. The combination of economic precariousness, security weaknesses as well as the inadequacy in governance is what reduces the autonomy of Islamabad as well as the ability to act strategically between Washington and Beijing.

5. Conclusion

The paper concludes that how Pakistan fits into the escalating competition between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific, a phenomenon that is caused by a combination of geo-strategic realignments, economic vulnerability, security pressure, dependence on technology, and political restraint at home. The discussion demonstrates that Islamabad does not align fully with either great power. Instead, it pursues a selective strategy of balancing and hedging between their respective interests. Thus, by deepening cooperation with China through infrastructure, defence, and trade initiatives — most notably CPEC — while simultaneously pursuing engagement with the United States in critical minerals, trade facilitation, and diplomacy, Pakistan enhances its strategic autonomy. The United States ought to focus on the long-term and stable economic relationships with Pakistan, which should not be conditional upon abrupt governance changes. On the other hand, China would enjoy the advantages of becoming more proactive in the governance and social issues of Pakistan, which would lead to less opposition to CPEC projects in the region, and increased sustainability of the long-term project.

The strategic freedom of Pakistan is limited with the poor administrative organization. High debt obligations, inflationary, sustained trade deficits and dependence on external funding cripple its negotiating capacity using a strong position. That is the way Chinese investments are dealing with critical infrastructure gaps and are strengthening long term dependencies, undermining bargaining leverage. Security issues such as militancy in Balochistan, cross-border issues in Pakistan and other countries among others also complicate this balancing process because it increases the reliance of Pakistan on foreign security support and endangers foreign-based projects. The example of Gwadar port and assistance in digital surveillance infrastructure demonstrate the two-sided character of the external involvement like providing connectivity and development but also increasing the worry over the statehood, surveillance, and homegrown instability.

In the present geopolitical context, Pakistan is driven by multiple strategic imperatives intended to expand its policy space and preserve room for manoeuvre. To begin with, Pakistan must secure fiscal resilience by expanding its tax base, curbing revenue leakages, and maintaining transparent and sustainable debt practices, especially in relation to Chinese-financed projects. To mitigate strategic vulnerability, Islamabad needs to decrease its dependence on bilateral financing from the United

States and China by broadening its funding base to include multilateral development banks, private investors, and regional partners. The partial reinforcement of security systems in the area around foreign-financed infrastructure, particularly in volatile places, like Balochistan, requires the improvement of intelligence efforts, focused development projects, and genuine incorporation of locals. Extensive participation of local communities in the development of key infrastructure projects would not only help to counter complaints that militant groups use to recruit and financially sustain them. The ability to decrease reliance on external technological suppliers and the increasing strategic independence can be achieved through investments in indigenous technological capabilities and strengthened regulatory frameworks, especially in the fields of artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and renewable energy.

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Indian Nuclear Submarine Programme: Countering China or Disrupting South Asian Strategic Stability?

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: Dec 10, 2025 Revised: June 29, 2026 Accepted: June 29, 2026	This paper offers a critical examination of the expanding Indian Nuclear Submarine (SSBN) Programme in light of recent development and the Indian ambitions of expanding its maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific region. The prominent interpretation of the programme is that is a response to the growing Chinese maritime military capabilities, however these analyses do not aptly capture the full scope of the Indian strategic ambitions. This paper assesses that the Indian maritime ambitions, especially the development and recent expansion of its SSBN programme is a means of asserting its power, prestige and regional dominance. This paper utilises the relatively underutilised framework of the Power Transition Theory (PTT) to investigate and highlight the Indian ambitions in this particular domain. Multiple experts in this particular field, both Pakistani and International, were interviewed to substantiate the findings of the paper. The key findings of this paper highlight that India, as an aspiring power, seeks to challenge the Indo-Pacific regional status quo through its SSBN development and maritime projection. While this aspiration may be aimed at shifting the balance in the Indo-Pacific where China currently sits at the top, these developments by India have implications for Pakistan's security calculus in the maritime domain as well as for South Asian regional stability.
Keywords <i>Nuclear Submarines,</i> <i>SSBN,</i> <i>Indian Navy,</i> <i>Pakistan Navy,</i> <i>Second-Strike Capability,</i> <i>Power Projection</i>	

1. Introduction

Throughout recorded history, warfare has served a two-fold purpose: projection of power in regional and subsequently global arenas while subjugating the adversaries to one's own will. One of the ways states are fulfilling the above objectives in the present era is through the expansion in the maritime domain, especially undersea, with the expansion of their submarine fleets. Nuclear-powered submarines, more commonly known as SSBNs, play a significant role in this power maximisation and afford the states that possess this technology an edge over those that do not. Not only do these platforms provide a state with an assured second-strike capability, but they are also increasingly being credited with helping states maintain a strategic advantage in maintaining a stable balance of power. The possession of a SSBN programme is seen as an enhancement of a nation's influence not only within the regional context but also in international affairs.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Indo-Pacific region, where India and China, as the two major competing powers, remain embroiled in a strategic competition. The rise of China and the bolstering of India by the US as a net security provider against its rise have made this region a strategically important flashpoint. Against this backdrop, the primary objective of this research is a critical

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evaluation of the Indian SSBN programme, which moves beyond the traditional framework of reactive deterrence. More specifically, this study highlights that Indian naval nuclear expansion is driven by its dissatisfaction with its status in the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific region and its underlying desire to alter the regional hierarchy. The paper aims to map the cascading effects of the ensuing modernisation being undertaken by India to fulfil this desire. This study is significant because it offers both a theoretical and policy perspective. Conceptually the paper addresses a gap in the literature by applying a relatively underutilised theoretical framework, the Power Transition Theory (PTT) to decode the Indian psyche in this particular domain. From a policy perspective, the research offers critical insights by contextualising how prestige-driven naval modernisation can inadvertently or advertently intensify regional security dilemmas.

1.1 Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach

This research draws on the Power Transition Theory (PTT), which offers a vastly underutilised perspective on Indian SSBN development and is instrumental in understanding the Indian rationale. PTT, developed by A.F.K. Organski, a professor of world politics, posits that the international system is inherently hierarchical, with a dominant power at the top. States that consider themselves rising powers and are dissatisfied with their position within this hierarchy seek to revise the existing order by acquiring greater economic and military capabilities. This manifests as a strategic competition especially when the rising power sees an opportunity to alter the regional balance of power in its favour. Sometimes the rise of an emerging power is peaceful; however, more often than not, the rising power's desire to replace the dominant state leads to war and conflict as both parties vie for supremacy. Conflicts can occur when the challenger seeks to prematurely replace the prevailing dominant state (Tammen, Kugler & Lemke, 2017).

In this context, India's naval nuclear modernisation, particularly its SSBN programme, is a means of disrupting the regional hierarchy in the Indo-Pacific, currently led by China. In this scenario, India considers itself a rising power dissatisfied with the status quo and seeks to alter it to its advantage. Three analytical variables allow the operationalisation of this framework:

1. **Status Dissatisfaction**, which stems from India's perception of its subordinate position in the regional hierarchy, which China dominates.
2. **Capability acquisition**, which includes the expansion of India's SSBN fleet and its associated SLBM arsenal, which are instruments of systemic revision.
3. **Behavioural manifestation of revisionism**, which includes India's assertive maritime posture, doctrinal ambiguity and signalling behaviour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

These three variables help explain the Indian pursuit of advanced maritime capabilities including SSBNs as both a material and symbolic capability in its pursuit to revise the regional status quo. Conventional realism terms this behaviour as status seeking within the anarchic international system. However, under the PTT framework, this can be seen as the dissatisfaction of the rising power with the existing status quo. This paper proposes that India, unhappy with the prevailing hierarchy in the Indo-Pacific seeks to augment its relative power vis-à-vis China in a bid to rise as the dominant power in the region. The SSBN programme is the practical manifestation of this desire.

The trickle-down impact of this development on the South Asian security calculus is also profound. Within this region, Pakistan's strategic aim is to maintain the status quo, while its adversary is adamant on eroding the precarious balance of power through its revisionist behaviour. Integration of PTT in this study offers a new framework for analysing the Indian SSBN development. It explains how Indian ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, as well as its desire for regional dominance, ultimately impact the overall strategic stability of the South Asian region and its strategic relationship with Pakistan.

2. Review of Existing Literature and Identification of the Gap

An extensive scholarship exists on India's evolving nuclear posture and the development of its sea-based deterrent. However, the interpretations of this development differ significantly depending on the motivations and implications of this programme. Much of the early as well as contemporary literature on this issue offers analysis based on the framework of deterrence, stability, technological advancements and great power competition. While these aspects have been valuable in explaining the operational logic as well as doctrinal rationale behind India's naval nuclear modernisation, however, they tend to overlook the broader systemic and psychological dimensions of India's strategic behaviour.

From a doctrinal standpoint, several scholars, including Frank O'Donnell and Yokesh Joshi, have argued that the SSBN programme forms a critical component of India's quest for a survivable and assured second strike capability (O'Donnell and Joshi 2018). They have rationalised the operational necessity of a sea-based nuclear leg to reinforce credible minimum deterrence, as well as second-strike capability, while also enhancing the flexibility of India's retaliatory options. Vipin Narang and Chris Clary's research, although similar, focuses more on nuclear entanglement and doctrinal ambiguity, particularly regarding India's C-2 infrastructure in relation to its SSBNs (Clary and Narang 2019). They argue that India is increasingly moving towards counterforce capabilities, which can prove to be highly unstable and lead to regional instability.

Indian scholarship on the subject predictably places the Indian SSBN programme as a defensive reaction to the expansion of the Chinese maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific and its expanding SSBN programme which includes its Jin-Class submarines in particular the JL-2. These Chinese developments have been termed as the catalyst for the Indian programme (Kanwal & Rajagopalan, 2016). Non-Indian scholars on the other hand highlight the implications of this development beyond the China-India dynamic. Their arguments stems from the point that any Indian development cannot be seen in isolation and will necessarily have an impact on South Asia (Kazmi 2017). Pakistan's development of Baber 3 SLCM as well as increasing investment in other conventional undersea assets represents its asymmetric attempts to preserve the strategic balance in the region in light of the Indian assertive developments in the maritime domain (Sultan, 2025).

More recent analyses, which built on these foundational debates, highlight that India's counterforce temptations have transitioned from theoretical to tangible operational posture. Recent assessments, most notably in the SIPRI yearbook (2026), suggest a historic departure from India's alleged disassembled, 'recessed deterrence' framework. The yearbook suggests that India is now potentially deploying active nuclear warheads in peacetime on automated cannisterised sea-based systems. Additionally, scholars also note that such rapid technological diversification is also severely straining the declared Indian No-First-Use (NFU) stance, thereby introducing heightened risks of escalation in low-trust maritime environments.

Despite a plethora of studies on this issue, a number of gaps still remain in the existing scholarship. This research, in particular, will focus on two of these gaps. The first gap identified from a review of the existing literature is that the Indian SSBN programme is seen as a relative measure in response to external maritime pressures emanating from China's maritime strategy. Existing studies have not focused on Indian revisionist designs, which are aided by the development of such prestigious capability. Analysed from this perspective, the development highlights India's long-term quest for great-power recognition and the prestige associated with developing such capabilities. The second gap is theoretical because the PTT has not been applied in this particular domain to explain how naval nuclearisation through the development of SSBN by India aims to reshape the regional status quo in its favour.

This research aims to plug these gaps by analysing the Indian SSBN programme as a response to its dissatisfaction with the existing status quo in the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, the Indian

revisionist intent, which is disguised under its security-driven agenda, will also be analysed to ascertain its implications not only for the Indo-Pacific but also for the trickle-down effects in South Asia.

3. Methodology

This research follows a qualitative analytical approach to examine India's SSBN program and its implications for regional strategic stability. Document analysis, as well as expert interviews, have been conducted to ensure a balanced understanding of both the developments and the strategic perceptions surrounding them. Compounding this is a review of primary documents which includes doctrines, policy statements, press releases and statements by officials as well as secondary literature including academic writings and open-source analysis.

Complementing this documentary research are semi-structured expert interviews with scholars and analysts specialising in this domain. A set of guiding questions was developed to elicit qualitative insights on key themes, including the strategic motivation behind India's SSBN programme, its doctrinal implications, and the resultant effect on South Asian strategic stability. The interviews were conducted via Zoom or through written correspondence between March and April 2025. A semi-structured format allowed flexibility for the interviewees to elaborate beyond the basic guiding questions, which generated richer, more nuanced analysis. The interview notes were transcribed, thematically coded and cross-referenced with the secondary data sources to identify converging as well as diverging points of view. Formal informed consent was sought and obtained from all expert participants prior to conducting the interviews. The experts were fully briefed on the specific scope, objectives and academic nature of the research project. Explicit verbal as well as written authorisation was secured regarding the disclosure of their professional identities, organisational affiliation and verbatim quotes.

Data from these diverse sources were thematically analysed to establish causal linkages between India's SSBN development, its status-seeking behaviour, as postulated by PTT, and the resulting cascading impact on South Asia. While this study encompasses multiple perspectives, it acknowledges certain limitations, including a lack of access to classified and operational data on SSBN development, as well as C-2 arrangements.

4. Indian SSBN Programme: A Strategic Fulcrum

Within the strategic calculus of the Indo-Pacific, the Indian SSBN programme serves as an extension of the naval leg of the Indian nuclear triad. While India may perceive a legitimate threat from China's naval developments in the region, its development of nuclear submarines can also be seen as a deliberate instrument of power projection in the maritime sphere. Tracing the historical evolution of the SSBN programme is crucial to ascertain the Indian motivation and rationale for its development. A close examination reveals that the programme is driven by a set of interwoven factors: historical precedent, domestic compulsions, external influences, as well as psychological aspects related to the Indian strategic thought. The following analysis traces the trajectory of the Indian SSBN development as well as how these capability acquisitions reflect a manifestation of India's dissatisfaction with its regional status. This framing is also helpful in differentiating the SSBN's military utility from the political symbolism of this development, which stems from systemic revisionism rather than reactive balancing efforts.

4.1 Historical Evolution and Strategic Drivers of the Programme

The evolution of the Indian SSBN programme can be traced back to the 1980s when it launched the Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project (NTI, 2025). This project focused on reverse-engineering the Russian Akula-class submarine technology with the aim of developing indigenous vessels. Following several decades of under-the-radar developments, the country finally launched the

INS Arihant in a public ceremony in 2009, with formal commissioning occurring in 2016 (Peri, 2016). Alongside the country, missile systems were also being developed that would be compatible with these undersea platforms. The latest iteration of this technology demonstration came in August 2024, when India commissioned its second SSBN, the INS Arighat as well as the development and deployment of the K-15 and K-4 missiles. Table 1 presents a detailed historical account of the Indian SSBN programme, along with the timeline for the development of missiles for these platforms.

(Table 1: Evolution of India's SSBN Programme and Missile Pairing 1970s–2024)

Year/Period	SSBN Development	Ballistic Missile Development	Key Notes
1970s–1980s	Initiation Phase	Sagarika/K-15 Begins	- BARC begins naval reactor research (Project 932). - Missile design starts under DRDO's Sagarika project.
1985–1998	Project ATV Launched	K-15 Sagarika Testing Begins	- Secretive 'ATV' project initiated with Russian assistance. - Missile tests began in the early 1990s.
1998	Nuclear Tests (Pokhran-II)	—	- Catalyst for accelerating SSBN and SLBM development. - Formalisation of India's No-First-Use (NFU) doctrine.
2004–2009	INS Arihant Construction	K-15 (750 km) Tests Successful	- SSBN Hull constructed at Ship Building Centre, Visakhapatnam. - K-15 Sagarika tested from an underwater platform in 2008.
July 2009	INS Arihant Launched	—	- First indigenously built SSBN launched. - Sea trials begin.
2013–2016	INS Arihant Trials	K-15 Integrated into Arihant	- INS Arihant underwent sea and weapons integration trials. - K-15 Sagarika test-fired multiple times from INS Arihant
August 2016	INS Arihant Commissioned	—	- INS Arihant became operational, marking India's entry into the SSBN club - capable of carrying twelve K-15 Sagarika missiles
2017–2020	INS Arighat Constructed & Sea Trials Begin	K-4 SLBM (3500 km) Tested	- Second SSBN built secretly, initially named Arihant-II - K-4 SLBM tests conducted from submerged pontoon and sea platforms
2022–2023	INS Arighat Final Trials	K-4 Near Induction	- Advanced SSBN trials with more vertical launch tubes (estimated 8) - K-4 testing completed
August 2024	INS Arighat commissioned	K-4 Deployment Pending	- Quiet commissioning of INS Arighat - K-15 fitted initially; K-4 planned
2025	SSBN Fleet Expansion Plans	K-5 & K-6 SLBMs in Development	- Next-gen SSBNs (S-4, S-4*) under construction. - K-5 (5000 km) and K-6 (6000+ km MIRV-capable) missiles in advanced R&D.
2026	SSBN Fleet Expansion	S4 (INS Aridhaman)	- INS Aridhaman was commissioned into the Indian navy in April 2026

Augmenting the existing SSBN fleet is INS Aridhaman, also known as S4 which was commissioned in April 2026, a marginally larger SSBN. Another SSBN, currently known by its codename S4*, was launched secretly in October 2024 (Peri, 2024). While INS Arihant and INS Arighat share the same reactor, the newer S4 and S4* variants will have imported reactors. The S4* is also larger than all its predecessors and can carry more K-4 missiles, each with a stated range of 3500 km.

The gradual scaling up of their SSBN tonnage and missile range illustrates a deliberate pattern whereby incremental capability acquisition is synonymous with the behaviour of a rising power seeking parity with states it perceives as on a higher tier, as posited by PTT. While India frames its development of the SSBNs as purely defensive, the development of this and other sea-based platforms effectively blurs the lines between its strategic defensive compulsions and its desire for power projection (Afridi, 2024).

In an interview with the author, an expert on India's strategic and nuclear issues, asserted that "India's SSBN plan predates the post-Cold War environment in the Indo-Pacific region. It was not intended to counter Chinese presence in the region but was a continuation of India's strategic thought process since its independence in 1947 (Sultan, 2025)." This observation situates the Indian programme within a broader framework of Indian strategic behaviour, where technological milestones are pursued as status symbols to augment a country's regional and international stature. The introduction of nuclear weapons by India in the regional calculus in 1974 is another example of this behaviour. Collectively, this resonates with the PTT's notion of dissatisfaction with the prevailing regional hierarchy.

4.2 Indian SSBN Programme considering China's Strategic Developments

One of the most compelling justifications given by India for the development of its SSBN's is that of Chinese naval advancements. Recent years have seen an increase in Chinese maritime developments particularly in its own SSBN fleet. The induction of Chinese Jin-Class SSBNs equipped with JL-2 SLBM (TNTI, 2024), coupled with China's expansion of its surface fleet, forms a part of a broader Chinese strategy designed to ensure maritime security in critical regions such as the South China Sea. According to Dr Tong Zhao, senior fellow with the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Centre in China, Chinese SSBNs are primarily aimed at countering the US and its Western allies (Zhao, 2025). In view of this, China is also making a great effort to extend the reach of its SLBMs. While the Chinese focus remains on the US, however, should China ever plan to expand the reach of its SSBNs westward, it would be able to launch missiles from different angles against India. However, given the current Chinese plans, this does not seem to be the trajectory of Chinese plans (Zhao, 2025).

It is essential to compare and contrast China's development in the SSBN domains with that of India's pursuit. While there is a definite domino effect of strategic developments starting with the US, cascading all the way to India through China, recent Indian developments in this respect highlight a stark exaggeration by the Indian side. One example that can be cited in this case is the K4 missile, which has a range of 3,500 kilometres and thus far exceeds the distances needed to counter critical Chinese naval assets in the IOR or even in the South China Sea. These ranges are also far beyond what would necessarily be needed for effective deterrence vis-à-vis China in the immediate Indo-Pacific context. Therefore, the scale and range of India's SSBN developments suggest motivations to extend its force posture beyond immediate deterrence needs. The divergence between the Chinese strategic intent and Indian threat perception positions the latter's naval nuclear modernisation as only partially reactive to the former. It also suggests an assertive approach aimed at improving India's position in the regional hierarchical structure.

Overall, it indicates India's aspiration to enhance its regional influence and international standing, a behaviour consistent with a power seeking to revise, rather than operate within, the existing system. The prestige factor becomes clear when viewed through the above lens. SSBNs allow India to become

part of a select group of states which have this technology, a point which has been reiterated by several Indian leaders over the years, thus augmenting the argument that it is a status symbol.

This pattern of institutionalised prestige is further corroborated by India's rapid naval expansion in more recent years. As of April 2026, India has commissioned its third SSBN INS Aridhaman (S4), which theoretically provides the Indian Navy with the baseline structural redundancy required to establish a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent (CASD) cycle (Dempsey & Dewey, 2026). From the PTT perspective, the secrecy surrounding the 2026 commissioning, juxtaposed with more aggressive signalling, highlights that these platforms are meant to solidify systemic status revisionism, aiming for recognition at a more global level while bypassing any regional containment (Colom, 2025). Altogether, these developments reflect India's strategic duality: while claimed to be deterrence-driven, its SSBN developments suggest deeper prestige-related motivations. The following section dissects this in detail by situating the development of SSBNs within the broader Indian psyche and historic pursuit of recognition as a major power.

4.3 SSBNs and India's Strategic Psychology

Historically, the military developments undertaken by India have had prestige and status symbolism. The most pertinent example of this is the 1974 nuclear tests by India, which were undertaken as a result of the Indian desire for great power status rather than any strategic requirement. The main aim was to highlight its ability to develop sophisticated technology. This point is augmented when seen in conjunction with the statement of a former Indian Prime Minister, who said that the door leading to a permanent seat at the UN Security Council has a (metaphorical) sign stating that only those with economic prowess or nuclear weapons may enter (Ali, 2023). This highlights that despite numerous stated reasons for going towards nuclearisation, a major factor was the overarching desire for great power status. Through the lens of PTT, this falls within the ambit of status dissatisfaction, in which a revisionist state seeks to augment its current stature by developing such technologies.

Similar is the case vis-à-vis the development of its SSBN programme. While India has grounded the rationale for this development in deterrence and maritime strategic language, however the pursuit of this development seems to have been equally shaped by a deeper quest of recognition at both regional and global levels. Unlike the conventional submarines, SSBNs are not mere defence tools: they are powerful symbols which can help augment the great power identity of an aspiring power. Accordingly, the SSBN fleet, while it has a clear deterrent role, is also a political signal to communicate India's entry into a domain which has historically been monopolised by major powers.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh clearly indicated this desire in July 2009 at the launch of INS Arihant when he said, "Today we join a select group of the five nations who possess the capability to build a nuclear-powered submarine." Compounding this aspect is the fact that much of the developments in this domain go far beyond the Indian threat matrix vis-à-vis China, the prime Indian adversary in the naval domain.

As one of the only non-P5 states operating an indigenous SSBN programme, India sees its fleet as a marker of parity with de jure nuclear powers. This symbolism is central to India's psychological needs to assert its position in the world. The China factor allows India the space to justify its military modernisation, while the major motivation propelling India's SSBN programme is prestige and regional dominance (Sultan, 2025).

China views the Indian SSBN programme to be driven by two factors: security and prestige. One does not necessarily have to be at the expense of the other and both can be true at the same time (Zhao, 202). The security aspect stems from the Indian perception of threat from the Chinese advancements in the naval domain. The prestige factor, which appears to be the more compelling of the two, becomes apparent when viewed through a comparison of the developments by both sides. India seems to be following a similar incremental development path as China as it expands its programme. India began the development of the SSBNs with only four times, the next SSBN had eight whereas the future ones

are expected to have twelve (Zhao, 2025). The PTT framework of 'capability acquisition' as a means to augment one's power fits this staged Indian acquisition plan, which aims to accumulate power while also augmenting its prestige.

5. Cascading Implications of Indian SSBN Programme Development

The power-projection and status-seeking dimension of India's SSBN programme is a hallmark of a revisionist power seeking to augment its relative power vis-à-vis the status quo state, in this case China, within the ambit of the PTT. The status-seeking and power projecting behaviour in this particular case is further reinforced by India's increasingly assertive nuclear posture. While India officially continues to adhere to its declared No-First-Use (NFU) policy, the operational logistics of sea-based deterrence complicate this stance. SSBNs, which are deployed for longer-duration patrols, require either pre-delegation launch authority or a highly redundant communication system, both of which introduce significant strategic ambiguity into India's already complex nuclear doctrine. Such ambiguity, while serving a deterrent purpose, also signals an assertiveness towards projecting greater strategic autonomy. In addition, recent statements by Indian officials on the conditionality of Indian NFU suggest a departure from stated policy under extreme circumstances, which further reinforces the perception of a flexible doctrine in the near future (Rajagopalan, 2016).

Ambiguity, thus, serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it aims to maximise India's deterrent effect, leaving adversaries uncertain about the nuclear threshold and retaliatory capabilities. On the other hand, it provides space for political signalling, allowing India to calibrate its strategic messaging for different audiences, be it Pakistan or China. From a Pakistani perspective, this ambiguity is highly destabilising: SSBNs with their high survivability rate could potentially embolden India towards pre-emptive counterforce options, thus eroding stability in an already volatile region. According to Dr Clary and Dr Narang, India is already moving towards a nuclear posture focused on counterforce as well as pre-emptive first-strike options (Clary and Narang 2019). This concern is further magnified by India's increasingly ambiguous nuclear doctrine, especially the conditional interpretation of its NFU policy aimed at carving out a space for limited pre-emptive strikes in scenarios where the threat is perceived to be imminent. This doctrinal evolution can be interpreted as the behavioural manifestation of revisionism. From a PTT lens, it posits a shift from restraint to assertive deterrence, aimed at reinforcing India's emerging great-power self-image. In crisis-prone dyadic relationships, such as those between Pakistan and India, where early warning systems remain limited and strategic communication is underdeveloped and underutilised, the presence of SSBNs may unintentionally lower the threshold of nuclear use by creating an illusion of escalation dominance. Thus, the Pakistani apprehension stems not only from the platforms alone, but also from the doctrinal fluidity and crisis instability they could incentivise in the adversary's psyche.

According to Dr Zhao, the Chinese are not particularly impressed by the Indian display of its naval nuclear power or its SSBN fleet. There has only been one case, during the 2020 border crisis, where reports emerged of the INS Arihant being mobilised as a deterrence signal for China. However, the Indian SSBN capability does not register very high on the Chinese radar (Zhao, 2025). This clearly indicates that, while India continues to invoke the alleged Chinese threat for justify its naval developments, the actual developments align more closely with its power-projection plans and have a direct bearing on Pakistan's security calculus. This diversion between the intent and the perception encapsulates the core argument of this paper: that Indian SSBN development is less a response to immediate strategic imperatives and more a quest for recognition and greater influence in the regional hierarchy. This also highlights the Indian status seeking behaviour: an archetype of power transition behaviour under the PTT framework which has significant implications for Pakistan's security calculus specially in the maritime domain.

6. Strategic Implications for Pakistan

Given the domino effect of security developments in the Indo-Pacific and South Asian regions, India's development of an SSBN programme severely complicates Pakistan's security calculus. The shift in the region's strategic landscape, in light of this development by the Indian side, necessitates corresponding adjustments by Pakistan to its deterrence and security posture to preclude potential escalation risks.

6.1 Pakistan's Strategic Dilemma

The current Indian SSBN fleet has introduced a new survivability gap in the South Asian nuclear equation, providing India with an added advantage (Sultan, 2025). It can be construed as a deliberate shift in India's nuclear posture from strategic restraint to dominance in the event of escalation. This doctrinal shift mirrors India's evolving assertion-based security posture, a hallmark of power-transition behaviour in which a rising state's strategic ambitions unsettle regional equilibria.

This asymmetry increases acute doctrinal concerns within Pakistan. The continued ambiguity in India's NFU stance, combined with the opacity of SSBN's C-2 systems, fosters uncertainty about Indian intentions during a crisis. C-2 also become far more complex in the naval nuclear context. In the absence of foolproof, redundant, and fail-safe communication channels, the deployment of SSBNs risks unauthorised and inadvertent use, highlighting an inherent vulnerability of delegated authority at sea. These platforms, therefore, increase the chances of miscalculation or unintended crisis (Sultan, 2025). To this end, nuclear Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) are a pressing need of the hour, especially to build confidence in each other's C-2 systems as well as deterrence postures (Sultan, 2025).

6.2 Pakistan's Asymmetric Adaptation under the Power-Transition Framework

Pakistan has initiated several asymmetric response options to counter these Indian developments, starting with the successful test of Babur III SLCM in 2017 (MDP, 2017). This test can be considered Pakistan's first step towards developing its own credible second-strike capability at sea, which, according to an interviewee, is necessary to create uncertainty in the mind of its adversary (Sultan, 2025). Babur III, which was launched from a submerged mobile platform, is a viable but limited option relative to India's SLBM, which can be launched from its SSBNs. However, it remains operationally significant, reflecting a cost-effective strategy of maintaining minimum but assured retaliatory capabilities at sea, which is consistent with Pakistan's doctrine of maintaining a credible deterrence at all levels of conflict for a full spectrum of threats. Matching capability with India's capability would be difficult and is also not required; therefore, Babur III offers a viable and proportionate response consistent with Pakistan's principle of credible minimum deterrence.

Alongside the nuclear options, Pakistan has invested in conventional undersea forces, including the acquisition of Hangor-class submarines from China. Pakistan is also in the process of acquiring Air Independent Propulsion (AIP)- equipped submarines from China, which are likely to be delivered in the next few years. Submarines equipped with AIP technology will have longer underwater endurance compared to traditional diesel-electric submarines, which Pakistan currently possesses.

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) also plays a role in augmenting Pakistan's naval leg through multiple joint endeavours, chief among them being the Sea Spark Exercises which bring together personnel from both services for continuous maintenance of safety and security at sea (Official PAF Social Media Page, 2024). The PAF also offers its surveillance, reconnaissance and strike-capabilities to its sister service both for surface and aerial threats. Air-launched missiles are used complementarily with sea-based platforms for multi-vector strike capability. Ra'ad II is particularly significant in this regard because it offers strategic stand-off capability both at land and sea (ISPR, 2020). Long-range maritime patrol aircraft alongside advanced surveillance systems round out the use of the aerial domain as a

force multiplier for the maritime operations (Vavasseur, 2021). Ultimately, a combination of all these capabilities bridges any gaps in the country's maritime deterrence in the absence of SSBNs and SLBMs. This type of multi-vector integration and interoperability between sister services ensures that the Pakistani deterrence architecture is networked, flexible, and all-encompassing.

On the naval front, while Pakistan is in the process of augmenting its maritime military assets, the country still faces significant technical, financial and doctrinal constraints reflecting the structural limitations of peripheral powers in a power-transition framework. If Pakistan were to plan for an SSBN fleet, it would require substantial investment, crew training, C3I redundancies, and several years to reach parity with India's current position. Additionally, the rapid development of countermeasures, such as quantum and seabed sensors that enhance detection capabilities, can make it difficult for SSBNs to remain undetected by adversaries. This can result in the nullification of its stealth aspects which is the hallmark of this development as an assured second-strike option (Sultan, 2025).

Therefore, Pakistan's best short-term options lie in pursuing a limited, asymmetric sea-based deterrent that serves as a credible retaliatory platform for sea denial without entering an overt naval arms race. The Indian SSBN fleet and its planned expansion will, at least in the short term, continue to disrupt all its adversarial dyads.

6.3 South Asian Strategic Stability and Escalation Risks

Indian SSBNs create conditions which are ripe for arms race dynamics unless one side shows the necessary restraint. Continued Indian investment and augmentation of its SSBN fleet could compel Pakistan to develop countermeasures to ensure that its own deterrent remains credible amid evolving threat perceptions. While quantum sensors remain a far-off idea, the development of seabed sensors, which detect vessels passing above, can be a viable alternative for Pakistan (Salik, 2025).

In addition, the maritime domain also lacks established risk reduction platforms, unlike the more mature land-based channels that exist between Pakistan and India. While most of the existing CBMs between Pakistan and India continue to be tenuous, however, the complete lack of CBMs in the naval domain raises serious concerns for strategic stability in South Asia. While naval skirmishes in the past may have remained limited, the addition of these newer SSBNs can lead to a dangerous escalation. Compounding this risk are the vulnerabilities within the Indian C3I, whereby a breakdown in secure communications between land-based command centres and the SSBNs, either due to technical failure, interference, or the unavailability of clear lines of communication, can lead to unintended or unauthorised actions. Within the power-transition framework, the development of India's SSBNs and the ensuing Pakistani asymmetric adaptation exemplify a classic security dilemma, albeit intensified by India's dissatisfaction with its position in the Indo-Pacific regional hierarchy.

7. Potential Strategic Response Options for Pakistan

Looking at Pakistan from the lens of PPT, it can be identified as a status quo state, which is confronted with a revisionist India intent on reshaping the existing hierarchy of the Indo-Pacific. Consequently, Pakistan has to navigate through an intense and complex maritime deterrence environment. In order to maintain the regional order and stability, Pakistan has to undertake specific measures in the maritime domain. These do not necessarily have to be a replication of the Indian moves such as the development of SSBNs. Pakistan can pursue other technologically viable, cost-effective and strategically sustainable options which preserve the regional strategic stability. As elucidated above, Pakistan has already taken several measures to safeguard its maritime security in this regard. The following section highlights prospective strategic options that, when viewed through the PTT lens, constitute asymmetric adaptations suited to Pakistan's specific needs.

7.1 Tech Adaptation through Emerging Technologies

Diversification and augmentation of emerging and disruptive technologies represent one area through which Pakistan can maintain its competitive edge vis-à-vis India in the maritime domain. One way this can be achieved is through investments in newer sensor technologies to detect SSBNs. China has established a network of hydroacoustic sensors that utilise sonar to detect submarines (SDM, 2024). Given the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, this technology or relevant expertise can be gained. Additionally, Pakistan can also look into developing seabed sensors, which would enhance its ability to potentially detect even SSBNs near its territorial waters.

7.2 Institutionalisation of Naval CBMs

There is an urgent need to institutionalise naval CBMs between Pakistan and India, a historically neglected area. These CBMs can include the establishment of a dedicated naval hotline akin to the existing ones between the Foreign Secretaries and the DGMOs. A Prevention of Incident at Sea agreement similar to the one signed between the US and USSR during the Cold War (US DOS, nd) is another potential area for confidence-building. In competitive dyads marked by high mistrust, maintaining reliable channels of communication, even on an informal level, can help cultivate a nuanced understanding of mutual concerns and reduce the likelihood of inadvertent escalation. (Zhao, 2025)

7.3 Integration of Air Power to Augment Maritime Deterrence

Keeping in mind the important role of air power in reinforcing the maritime deterrent, Pakistan can continue to leverage the expertise of the PAF to strengthen its naval posture. This can be achieved through several initiatives, including leveraging PAF's ISR capabilities to provide real-time intelligence to the naval forces. Exploring the option of deploying air-launched cruise missiles, with maritime strike capabilities, along the shoreline could also work to enhance Pakistan's deterrence posture.

7.4 Consolidation of a Credible, Asymmetric Second Strike Capability

According to Dr Adil Sultan, Pakistan has already developed some version of a second-strike capability, which has also been alluded to by Lt Gen Khalid Kidwai (Retd) in recent years (Sultan, 2025). Therefore, if existing second-strike capacity is sufficient, then it would be counterproductive to compete with India in terms of numbers or similar technologies. A second-strike capability does not necessarily have to be achieved only through sea-based options. It can also be achieved through land and air-based technologies if these are deployed in creative ways to enhance their survivability even against massive attacks with precision weapons, whether nuclear or conventional (Zhao, 2025).

8. Conclusion

Indian development of SSBNs marks a significant transformation in the deterrence landscape of not only Indo-Pacific but also South Asia. Although publicly framed as a response to Chinese naval developments, a more apt rationale appears to be India's desire to augment its power projection and prestige at both regional and global levels. This development has far-reaching consequences for South Asia as a whole and Pakistan's security calculus in particular.

The analysis presented in this paper suggests that India's SSBN development is not a purely technical or operational endeavour. This development is embedded in the broader strategic psychology which is driving India's quest for recognition as a great power and a net security provider in the IOR. Analysing this development through the lens of PTT, it becomes abundantly clear that India's development of SSBNs is not merely a defensive response, but a deliberate assertion of strategic and systemic status revisionism and power-projection within and outside the regional contexts.

The three variables highlighted at the beginning of the paper and as posited by PTT, namely status dissatisfaction, capability acquisition and behavioural manifestation of revisionism, altogether form the core construct of a revisionist state's ambitions, which transcend beyond pure deterrence logic. The central logic of this study — that India's SSBN development is less about countering a specific threat and more about fulfilling its self-ascribed great power identity — is also affirmed through this framework.

The empirical findings derived from the expert interviews further reinforce the central argument of the paper, although Dr Sultan and Dr Zhao approached the Indian SSBN programme from varying vantage points, their assessments converged on several important themes. Both experts acknowledged that India's pursuit of an SSBN capability extends beyond the narrow operational requirements vis-à-vis the Chinese threat in the maritime domain. Frequently it carries a prestige dimension associated with power-seeking status. At the same time, their perspectives also revealed a nuanced distinction. Whereas Dr Sultan viewed prestige and regional power projection as the principal drivers of the programme, Dr Zhao argued that India's motivations are shaped by both security concerns and status aspirations. However, neither expert regarded the Chinese maritime threat alone as a sufficient explanation of the scale and trajectory of India's expanding capabilities in this domain.

The convergence of expert assessment alongside empirical data supports this paper's central contention that India's naval nuclear modernization can be best understood as an expansion of its status-seeking behaviour, which is consistent with the tenets of the Power Transition Theory, rather than being a pure reactive response to Chinese maritime development. From a Pakistani perspective, the induction of India's SSBNs introduces several destabilising factors into the South Asian nuclear dynamics. Not only does it create a survivability gap in the nuclear deterrence equation between the two sides, but it also complicates the regional dynamics through doctrinal asymmetry and decapitation strategies by the Indian side. The inherent opacity in India's maritime C3I, in conjunction with its ambiguous NFU doctrine, increases crisis instability, especially in an environment which is already lacking robust maritime CBMs or reliable communication mechanisms.

Pakistan's response to the Indian development of SSBNs and SLBMs through the induction of Babur III SLCM is a rudimentary but politically significant signal of the country's intent to continue to maintain credible deterrence at sea. Pakistan is also in the process of modernising its conventional submarine fleet, as well as integrating air power in the maritime domain to augment strategic flexibility.

The expert interviews and documentary analysis in this study highlight that India's SSBN program cannot be adequately explained through a deterrence strategy-centric model alone. The evidence points towards a broader pattern of status-seeking behaviour, power-expansion, capability acquisition and strategic signalling, which aligns closely with the expectations of the Power Transition Theory. Consequently, the evolution of India's SSBN programme, as well as Pakistan's asymmetric adaptation efforts, highlight how shifting regional hierarchies can reshape strategic behaviour in both the Indo-Pacific and South Asian regions. The way forward for Pakistan is not to pursue numerical parity, but to continue its efforts to preserve deterrence credibility through technologically sustainable asymmetric capabilities, while also advocating for stronger naval CBMs aimed at reducing the risks of inadvertent escalation.

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The Ethical Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Smart Cities: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of AI technologies has changed the meaning of the very notion of smart cities, thus, permitting unparalleled levels of transport efficiency, health care, education, and energy consumption. The other multifaceted ethical issues relating to the introduction of AI include the privacy, data safety, algorithm bias, surveillance, and creation of an augmented divide between social disparities. The study article is concerned with the ethical consideration of AI in smart cities in the context of Islamic ethical considerations i.e. justice (*Adl*), compassion (*Rahmah*), and common good (*Maslahah*). By relying on the systematic literature review technique, the study will identify the evidence in the current academic literature, case studies, and policy reviews to identify how Islamic values can influence governance, planning, and the introduction of AI-based urban infrastructure. The literature review supports the reality that despite the fact that the programs of a smart city would suggest the advantages or development in the management of traffic, reduction in the intensity of emissions, personalized health and adaptive education, it would be harmful when it comes to justice, inclusiveness and human dignity. This research follows qualitative method to get in-depth information of the core objective of the study. The Islamic moral principles as laid down in the Quran and Sunnah give a holistic method of addressing these issues by prioritizing the fairness, confidentiality and the promotion of the good of the populace. These findings are summarized such regulations are being practiced, including the application of fairness measures in AI systems, privacy-by-design, participatory governance, and inclusive city planning of services. It is determined that the comparative analysis of AI application in different areas-transportation, healthcare and education support the Islamic ethics and international best practice on ethical AI.

1. Introduction

A smart city is an invention in the technologies of urban planning and city management methods in which networked digital technologies are being applied to control the infrastructures and deliver services in the city. Some of the technologies used include city operating systems, centralized control rooms, intelligent transport systems, smart energy grids, sensor networks, and smartphone applications (Herath and Mittal, 2022). Although innovativeness and efficiency are possible, introducing such technologies raises serious ethical issues regarding the invasion of privacy due to the

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monitoring of individuals all the time, the loss of control due to the transparency of the systems, discrimination based on predictive profiling, and unequal access to services due to the digital divides (Phillips, 2022). The issue of ethics is more significant when AI receives a higher priority in the physical context of cities. By 2025, cities in every corner of the world were rapidly adapting AI systems in their systems in an effort to simplify all spheres of life, including traffic flow and energy consumption. However, other ethicists who examine the use of AI in urban communities state that most of the identified ethical issues raised about the current versions of urban AI are quite close to the overall dislike of the technology (Phillips, 2022). These are information security issues, privacy issues and issues of compounding the preexisting social imbalances.

The issues in the Islamic moral thinking are brought up with acuity. The Islamic values, due to the emphasis on justice, common good and judicious management, therefore, offer a more holistic path to thinking through and shaping AI application in urban areas. Primarily, AI applications need to be juxtaposed to the specified ethical values because urban communities will turn into smart communities so that the development of technologies will not harm humanity and the fundamental principles. That is, the necessity to involve technical experts, policy theorists, and Islamic scholars in an interdisciplinary process is not far off, in order to solve the problem of ensuring that the AI systems used in the smart cities become more innovative and ethical. Part of the key recommendations is that the governing paradigms need to operate under the Islamic ethics, stakeholder consultation, technical solutions which would deliver fairness and privacy, metrics development which would keep the ethics under check. The present paper concludes that integrating Islamic ethics into the design of a smart city will not only solve the technological dilemmas at the moment but also create a substantial basis on sustainable, equitable, and human urban living. Having these values as the main part of AI management and design, smart cities will have a chance to meet the needs of all its residents without abusing the basic human rights and social justice (Salman, 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Artificial Intelligence and Smart Cities

The idea to build smart cities is conceptualized based on the application of information and communication technologies in developing city service, therefore, contributing to the betterments of citizens. The force behind this revolution is artificial intelligence since it allowed cities to access significant amounts of data and make smart decisions in real-time. According to Herath and Mittal, 2022, a critical review of 133 articles concerning the uptake of AI in smart cities, 2014-2021, revealed that the areas of use were transportation, healthcare, energy management, and public safety. The application of AI in the transportation industry has several advantages. Indicatively, Pittsburgh used the Surtrac system at 50 intersections and cut down the travel time by 25 percent and traffic jam by 40 percent by maintaining the traffic flow in real time, Smart City Hub, 2022. 2024.

The eagerness of Amsterdam to turn into a zero-emission transport city by 2030 is an excellent illustration of the potential of the idea of artificial intelligence to support the process of the realization of the concept of environmental sustainability at the city level (World Economic Forum, 2024). Nevertheless, although these efforts show the efficiency of AI in its technical and policy-oriented approach to the reduction of emissions, much of their functioning is in a technocratic system, where efficiency and environmental performance are the most valued. The gap in analysis is that there is no clear ethical ground that deals with social justice, fair access, and moral responsibility. Islamic ethical standards, including *Adl* (justice) and the *Maslahah* (public good) are additive to these models because they provide the sustainability change that AI-driven sustainability brings with it is not only environmentally efficient but also socially fair and encompassing. (Ministry of Education of China, 2025).

Ethical Frameworks in AI the ethical framework progresses have also been on the increase of which the institutions, along with governments, have been noticing the emergence of the need to apply moral

principles in the regulation of technological progressions. The technology interests in smart cities in the study of Phillips, 2022, are concerned mainly with the problem of privacy, security, and fairness, yet some technology-oriented reviews or frameworks that can support the ethical discussion were also included in the research. In addition, the recent studies have marked the issues of algorithmic prejudices in smart cities. Biased data would result in unjust outcomes and perpetuate social inequalities and the application of the potential of inclusive environments that would be challenging (Herath and Mittal, 2022). This will in turn require the use of strong mechanisms regarding the identification and solutions of biases such as using a diversity of and representative data, and methods of algorithmic fairness.

2.2 Islamic Ethics and Technology

The Islamic ethics (being based on the Quran and Sunnah) offer a rational approach towards the problems of modernity, including the technological revolution. Other sources discussing the application of Islamic ethics to AI and smart cities building, including, but not limited to, Kamali (2008) and Mohadi and Tarshany (2023), have covered it.

The Arabic word *Adl* refers to justice and has been applied over twenty-seven times in Quran and its pre-eminence as one of the essences of Islam is proven (Kamali, 2008). Justice is a natural end of the Islamic law or Sharia; technically, it means putting things in the right place and right position and it is used to establish equilibrium of the forces of compulsion and right in every aspect of life (Kamali, 2008). It is compassion and mercy otherwise called *Rahmah*, and it is the primary reason why Muhammad was sent to be a Prophet, as the Quran recommends. This can be seen in the Quran and Sunnah provisions that eradicate favouritism, curb misery and set up justice (Kamali, 2008). This technology maxim ratifies the wellness value and the respectful design value, which is placed in the centre. *Maslahah* is a term that is used to describe activities and policies that are used to maximize the good of the people and it does not cause harm to the people. The recent study by Mohadi and Tarshany (2023) This literature confirms the relevance of the given concept by pointing out that the ethical aspects should be incorporated into the process of creating and implementing artificial intelligence solutions. Nevertheless, even with this increasing awareness, much of the literature remains quite normative and incomplete and provides scanty information on how ethical considerations can be systematized into AI-based systems of urban governance, especially in non-Western and Islamic societies. Intelligence.

3. Methodology

In this paper, the analysis of the academic sources about the ethics of AI in smart cities through the Islamic ethical prism is made with the help of systematic literature review. Systematic review follows the guidelines provided by Phillips (2022), and, therefore, it includes the process of gathering and summarizing the number of articles dedicated to the concept of smart city ethics. The set of facts belonged to the discovery of the relevant research in various databases of articles released between 2015 and 2025 to ensure an up-to-date solution. The keywords used in the search included the variants of artificial intelligence, smart cities, ethics, Islamic ethics, and the Maqasid Shariah. They were chosen based on relationship to research questions and quality of their academic status. In the literature review, the study was qualitative and aimed to find important themes and trends in the literature. Specific emphasis was put on the methods of how AI can be applied to smart cities to be able to utilize the moral principles of Islam, and the dissimilarities between Islamic and other moral systems. The review was also aimed at exploring the examples of smart city implementations with the purpose of defining the best practices and issues of ethical AI implementations.

4. Results

This study has demonstrated that the linkage between the principle of ethics and the development of smart cities is getting more significant and a number of researchers have examined how the Islamic

codes of ethics can be applied to the development process. This paper states that the most practically translatable values in the creation of smart cities are *Adl* (justice), *Rahmah* (compassion), and *Maslahah* (communal well-being) among the variety of Islamic moral principles presented in the literature. This choice is informed by their immediate correspondence to AI-driven governance, service delivery, and sustainability results, in which concerns of fairness, inclusivity, and benefits to the population are most acute. (Kamali, 2008; Mohadi and Tarshany, 2023).

4.1 Smart Cities Ethical Principle (Islamic)

Islamic ethics should be used to motivate the production, deployment, and operation of AI in intelligent cities using an integrated moral ideal. The *Adl* principle is considered to form the basis of value in the Islamic jurisprudence and consequently places a burden on the people in power and those involved in creating the AI system to make sure that the system is fair, there is no discrimination in the system and that it does not violate human dignity (Kamali, 2008). In practical solution-finding of smart-city infrastructures, the translation of *Adl* needs to have algorithmic fairness measures, strict information-auditing measures and incessant efforts aimed at ensuring that the training data is diverse in order to alleviate prejudices in the socio-technical system. The fourth and the most important, but also the least, is the need of justice that requires independent ethical considerations and the impact analysis of AI-based decision-making systems, such as those adopted in urban policing, welfare targeting, and resource allocation (Herath and Mittal, 2022). This reacts to structural discrimination and ensures that the population has confidence about how the technologically mediated forms of governance are occurring. Smart cities are further developed in moral perspective by *Rahmah* (meaning compassion) to human welfare, empathy, and inclusion. *Rahmah* suggests that the ICT-based urban settings should be planned keeping in mind various physical, social, and psychological requirements of the communities inhabiting the environments through integrating the application of AI in planning the territories, provision of digital services, and automated services. This can be well illustrated in the AI-enhanced healthcare surveillance systems that take this notion into account through the provision of proactive, easy, and low-latency medical assistance. Such systems provide health alerts tailored to the needs of the vulnerable population, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and the chronically ill, predictive diagnostics, and remote care solutions. In that way, compassion ceases to exist as an ethical ideal, but it is the working design criterion, which will inform the development of human and decent smart-city ecosystems. Similarly, the Islamic ethic of *Maslahah* upholds the view that long-term development, social peace and the common good is always better than selfish economic or purely technical benefit. *Maslahah* involves the intelligent systems in the AI governance mechanism to ensure that the long-term welfare of the society is supported through reduction in inequity and augmentation in the resilience of the community (Mohadi and Tarshany, 2023). The other situation that is most noticeable is the use of AI in education, where the content offered by educational platforms is modified based on the requirements of a particular learner, the origin of structural learning inequalities is eliminated, and a greater number of individuals receive quality education. This is mined in the Ministry of Education of China, 2025. In this way, *Maslahah* would render the technological innovation in agreement with communal good and smart-city shifts are morally knowledgeable and socially significant. Together, *Adl*, *Rahmah* and *Maslahah* present an influential normative framework of Islamic ethics, which guides AI application toward responsible innovation as smart cities. Three major pillars of innovation responsibility are put forward and are the following: the need of justice, compassion and public interest in the balance between technological progress and ethical integrity and humanism. Table 1 below illustrates the comparison of different applications of AI in smart cities and the way they compare against the Islamic ethical principles.

Table 1: Alignment of Smart City AI Applications with Islamic Ethical Principles

AI Domain	Smart City Use Cases	Key Islamic Principle	Implementation Example	Ethical Consideration
Transportation	Traffic management, emissions reduction	<i>Maslahah</i> (common good)	Pittsburgh's Surtrac system (Kamali)	Equitable access to mobility benefits
Healthcare	Patient monitoring, service delivery	<i>Rahmah</i> (compassion)	Edge AI-enabled IoT healthcare (Herath & Mittal, 2022)	Data privacy and protection of sensitive health info
Education	Personalized learning platforms	' <i>Adl</i> (justice)	AI reducing achievement gaps (Ministry of Education of China, 2025)	Addressing digital divides and ensuring accessibility
Energy	Smart grids, consumption optimization	Stewardship	Amsterdam's emissions-free initiative (World Economic Forum, 2024)	Environmental sustainability and resource conservation
Public Safety	Surveillance, emergency response	Privacy (' <i>iffah</i>)	Balancing security with privacy (Phillips, 2022)	Preventing undue surveillance and protecting liberties

4.2 The Ethical Attraction of the AI Implementation

Despite these advantages, several problems have been noted when it comes to the ethical aspects of AI application in smart cities. Among the key problems is data bias as biased data can lead to discriminative outcomes, especially when it comes to vulnerable populations. This goes against Islamic concept of *Adl*, which states that equal dispensation of justice or treatment to all should be practiced (Kamali 2008). Another significant question of protection is privacy. Data requirement is voracious of the technologies that are commonly being used in smart cities. This raises the issues of intrusive surveillance. This goes against the Islamic concept of *Iffah* or decency and privacy in which the privacy in personal affairs is sacred. As it has been demonstrated, smart cities technology implements privacy-by-design principles, some data governance, and data collection and use transparency. It would be more difficult to practice human control and moral leadership in the cases when the AI systems are less dependent. Based on the Islamic ethics, human beings are expected to be accountable as they are the vicegerent or *khalifah* of God on earth. Further, it has been stated that the AI must assist in the decision-making process yet the final one must be made by humans.

5. Discussion

In this paper, the results have revealed that the Islamic ethics represent one of the most suitable systems of implementation of AI in intelligent cities. Concerns about justice, mercy, and common good provide a comprehensive solution to the ethical issues of smart city technologies (Kamali, 2008; Mohadi and Tarshany, 2023).

5.1 The Islamic Ethics as an Intelligent City

Making sure that the technology development will not dehumanize human prosperity, instead of supporting it, the inclusion of Islamic principles in the design of smart cities is a potentially useful trend. *Adl*-justice suggests a very attractive standard of solving the problems of algorithmic fairness and digital disparities by referring to the reality that there must be fairness in the acquisition of the rewards of technology. Such light is the opinion expressed by Kamali, 2008; Mohadi and Tarshany,

2023. Similarly, AI systems are also guided by the Rahmah principle to develop human well-being and dignity. The AI-based monitoring systems in healthcare, including the ones that could offer quality healthcare to the underserved individuals, could, thus, preserve human life, *hifz al-nafs*, which is one of the fundamental aims of Shariah. Kamali 2008 has given the Maslahah-community-good-the-focus to the preference of common good in relation to the specialized technical or economic efficiencies. It can be applied in order to inform the decision-making on how AI can be implemented to ensure that technological development benefits the masses and not the small populations. In this case, the reasoning of Mohadi and Tarshany 2023 has been reflected.

5.2 Comparison of other Ethical Frameworks

As a matter of fact, the Islamic moral standards are comparable to the other normative ethical standards of the AI world such as values of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice that are commonly discussed in the Western ethical discourse (Phillips, 2022). Nonetheless, Islamic ethics is much more sensible where such values are placed in a generalized worldview that emphasizes a human responsibility as a vicegerent of God on earth (Kamali, 2008; Mohadi and Tarshany, 2023). To some extent, such a vision can be applied to supplement current ethical frameworks to have a solid background to address the problem of role of technology in the life of human beings. The Islamic perspective on the concept of stewardship (*khilafah*) and the ways of improving life (*ta'mir*) are instructional in terms of the way AI should be designed and implemented in the benefits of human well-being (Kamali, 2008).

5.3 Threats and Competencies

Though the Islamic values of ethics are significant in informing the way of conceptualizing and handling the smart cities, practical concerns are presented, which in essence requires systematic solutions. The first significant issue is that the long-term and institutionalized process of coordination between the technical experts the AI writers, data scientists, urban designers, and the Islamic thinkers capable of sensing the ethical norms under the circumstances of the modern technology is required. It is necessary because without such interdisciplinary collaboration, the ethical explanations stand a high probability of being abstract and unconnected with the technicalities of the AI-based urban systems. The second burning issue is that it is necessary to develop concrete evaluative variables and quantifiable indicators that could be implemented in the use of whether AI applications align with the Islamic ethical norms like justice, privacy, dignity, and the common good. Without such working specifications, the policymakers and developers will be compelled to grapple with the effort of transforming the broad principles to working standards. The other problem is the difficulty of creating a governance system in which the aspects of ethics and religious controls are implemented into the decision-making process that will, in turn, guarantee that the use of AI is consistently put under strict scrutiny among diverse stakeholders, such as ethicists, representatives of the society, and religious scholars (Mohadi and Tarshany, 2023).

The transformative opportunities of Islamic ethical principles applied to the planning of smart cities are enormous, despite the dynamical nature of the challenges. It may offer a criterion against which the human good can direct technological innovation hence accessing such values as *adl* (justice), *amanah* (trust), and *maslahah* (public interest). The cities will become more productive and connected, as well as fairer and more human by developing AI-driven urban development on the basis of the ethical promises. It offers an opportunity in the shape of alleviating the painful technological rising that is often associated with the galloping technological advancement: social disintegration, information protection, and discrimination of algorithms and, generally, a decrease in human dignity. The emerging form of ethics contributed by Islamic would be a development whereby the technological innovations would not undermine the living standards and the social life of every citizen but enhance it.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, as depicted above with the assistance of this study, the recommendations as outlined below are therefore made in respect to the ethical integration of AI in Smart Cities in the Islamic perspective:

6.1 Develop a Framework of AI Governance using the Islamic Ethics

There is need to establish governance systems that incorporate technical skill and ethics which are grounded on the Islam values of justice, compassion, and common good within the cities. This can include development of two-level control mechanism including a Shariah Supervisory Board and AI Governance Committee, which is also suggested to be implemented to Islamic finance institutions (Mohadi and Tarshany, 2023).

6.2 In Partnership and Engagement

The stakeholders must be diversified as well as the views to regulate AI in smart city projects so that it can help them in making rational and informed decisions on the system design and implementation. To this end, community forums are put in place that assist in the debate that is going on between the technologists, religious scholars and citizens. The processes of participatory designs must be noticed due to the fact that the voices and experience of disadvantaged societies come to the centre of the decision making (Kamali, 2008).

6.3 Ethical AI: Implement Technical Solutions

Cities should also provide technical resolutions to ethical issues: e.g. create end-to-end solutions to detect and eliminate data bias, incorporate privacy-by-design solutions, establish systems of human control over AI, etc.

6.4 Encourage Technical-Religious Interaction

The technical professionals and Islamic scholars need to introduce a higher level of coordination with the view of making sure that Islamic moral values are integrated in the smart city development. This can be attained through interdisciplinary workshops and conferences, establishing education programs that can accommodate the related courses besides establishing research centres specializing in the subject of technology- Islamic ethics convergence.

6.5 Design Measures and Assessment instruments

It will still require the cities to establish the right measures and evaluation instruments to evaluate the AI systems against the Islamic ethical standards and this will entail the coming up with such instruments as ethical impact assessment, performance indices and periodical ethical checks on the AI systems.

7. Conclusion

More important, yet simultaneously, AI application in the framework of smart cities has offered unparalleled opportunities of efficiency, inclusivity, and innovation and provided critical problems in ethical terms that should be pursued cautiously. One of the most effective normative guidelines to navigate this complex landscape is the ethics of Islam which is informed by the principles of justice (*adl*) compassion (*rahmah*), accountability, and the desire to achieve the common good (*maslahah*). The conclusions of the paper justify the claims that AI-empowered system of high-ranking sectors such as transportation, health, and education are capable of consistent adjustment to Islamic moral

principles since both applicative aim and spirit are pegged on moral wilfulness. The guarantee of equal mobility services, loving and dignified health care through online channels, AI to help with more personalized learning opportunities-the channels through which these smart city projects convey the Islamic values, as well as to broaden the technological possibilities, they are both to assure the presence of new technologies and to grow them. The practical application of this kind of a vision, in its turn, will also be accompanied by the significant structural ethical concerns of the existing AI systems: the elimination of biases in the information, the presence of the privacy, the establishment of meaningful accountability models cannot be the preserve of technologists themselves.

It is coordination with and collaboration with other domains. It thus requires concerted actions by technologists, Islamic ethicists, urban planners, policy makers and players in the civil society in plotting how Islamic values can be rationally addressed in designing and management of smart cities. The suggestions offered in the paper are nothing more than an approximate sketch of such cooperation between the communities, which gives the real steps of the inclusion of the ethical consideration at every level of technological advancements. As a matter of fact, the conceptual and operative injection of the Islamic values of moral virtues into the smart city programs will ensure that technological advancement is employed to empower human blossoms rather than to diminish it. This set of ethics will gain mostly greater significance in the nearest future when the infrastructures of smart cities will continue to increase and become even more interdependent with the daily life. Ethical paradigm is an assistant of planning technologically developed, just, human, and accommodating urban environments that have the potential to cater the interests of all citizens in these zones. In any case, the clash of the AI-generated city development and the Islamic morality forms a terrifying path to the high-tech cities containing the human soul.

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