

The Fragile and Inappropriate Political, Social, and Economic Situation in Pakistan

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Abstract

Due to the increasing political, security, social, and economic challenges in Pakistan, it is necessary for everyone to have a better and more accurate understanding of it to have a clear picture of the current situation in Pakistan. The aim of highlighting the above-mentioned topics is to provide a comprehensive roadmap for identifying, analyzing, and solving issues and problems that have hindered the development and progress of the country, especially when officials are not saying much about it. This research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to extract findings. Based on the analysis and evaluation of the political, security, social, and economic situation of Pakistan, it can be said that country is in a precarious situation and its management is beyond the capacity of its rulers and politicians. If this situation continues, it is possible that the country's situation will become more volatile in the near future, and in that case, the possibility of Pakistan's disintegration in the coming years is conceivable.

Keywords: Fragile; Inappropriate; Political; Social; Economic.

Abstrak

Peningkatan tantangan politik, keamanan, sosial, dan ekonomi di Pakistan membuat setiap orang perlu memiliki pemahaman yang lebih baik dan lebih akurat untuk memiliki gambaran yang jelas tentang situasi saat ini di Pakistan. Tujuan penulisan ini adalah menyoroti topik-topik yang disebutkan di atas adalah untuk memberikan peta jalan yang komprehensif untuk mengidentifikasi, menganalisis, dan memecahkan masalah yang telah menghambat pembangunan dan kemajuan negara, terutama ketika para pejabat tidak banyak bicara tentang hal itu. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk mengekstrak temuan. Berdasarkan analisis dan evaluasi situasi politik, keamanan, sosial, dan ekonomi Pakistan, dapat dikatakan bahwa negara berada dalam situasi genting dan pengelolaannya berada di luar kapasitas penguasa dan politisinya. Jika situasi ini terus berlanjut, ada kemungkinan situasi negara akan menjadi lebih fluktuatif dalam waktu dekat, dan dalam hal ini, kemungkinan disintegrasi Pakistan di tahun-tahun mendatang dapat dibayangkan.

Kata kunci: Rapuh; Tidak Pantas; Politik; Sosial; Ekonomi.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Especially Political, social, and economic problems in Pakistan have been ongoing since 2006, for instance: In July 2006, concerns within Pakistan about the country's direction prompted an intervention by a coalition of retired generals, former politicians, and academics, who typically would have been sympathetic to President Pervez Musharraf. They urged him to step down either as President or as Army Chief of Staff and to supervise the formation of a neutral interim government to ensure free and fair parliamentary elections in 2007. One of the individuals who signed a letter addressed to the President stated, "We were driven by a fear that the current situation is unsustainable and potentially hazardous." This fear has been validated. With the elections drawing near, Musharraf finds himself fighting for his political survival (Lunn, Taylor, Youngs, & Beale, 2007).

In 2007, Pakistan experienced a series of significant political crises, culminating in the assassination of former Prime Minister and prominent opposition leader Benazir Bhutto on December 27th. Bhutto, who had returned to Pakistan from self-imposed exile in October, was killed in what appeared to be a gun and bomb attack (the circumstances of which remain controversial). Her death has been labeled a national tragedy for Pakistan and severely undermines the already struggling efforts to democratize the country. Bhutto served as the "chairperson for life" of arguably Pakistan's most popular party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which secured the highest number of votes in the 2002 national election. The assassination occurred just 12 days after Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf lifted a six-week-old state of emergency (Kronstadt, 2008).

The prevailing consensus is that the declining trajectory of poverty in Pakistan during the 1970s and 1980s was reversed in the 1990s. Beginning in fiscal year 1993, the poverty rate surged from 26.6 percent to 32.2 percent by fiscal year 1999, resulting in a rise of over 12 million impoverished individuals during this period. Since fiscal year 1999, economic growth has further decelerated, coupled with sustained decreases in development expenditures and aggravated by a severe drought. Consequently, it is highly probable that the current poverty rate in Pakistan exceeds that of fiscal year 1999 by a significant margin (BANK, 2002).

Pakistan's economic challenges extend beyond the formulation and execution of fiscal and monetary policies. Numerous structural issues, largely stemming from inadequate governance, exacerbate the situation. Shortages of key production inputs, notably electricity and natural gas, further compound the problem. The State Bank of Pakistan's estimates suggest transmission and distribution losses ranging from 11 percent to 37 percent of total supply. It is projected that electricity shortages alone diminish the national product's growth rate by three percentage points. A February 2012 report by *The Economist* highlighted that unpaid electricity bills had soared to 326 billion rupees by the end of November the previous year, equivalent to US\$3.5 billion or 1.85 percent of GDP. Notable defaulters included the railways, the prime minister's secretariat, the army, and the ISI (Burki, 2012).

The real hurdle in overseeing Pakistan's economy isn't pinpointing the challenging policy options but rather putting them into action. Both the general public and experts are fully cognizant of Pakistan's significant macroeconomic challenges, encompassing sluggish and

erratic economic growth, persistent high inflation, extensive poverty juxtaposed with the wealth of a minority, escalating levels of debt, and a considerable budget deficit (Yaqub, 2011).

Since its inception, the PTM has focused on advocating for four key constitutional rights: the right to life, the right to human dignity, the right to be treated according to the law, and the right to enjoy legal protection. The PTM has sought an end to the impunity with which human rights violations have been committed against the Pashtun population during Pakistan's prosecution of the war on armed people (BRIEFING, 2019).

One of the ethnic identity movements is the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), which primarily mobilizes urban, middle-class men and women to advocate for protection against human rights abuses that have taken place during military operations in Pashtun areas. The PTM also aims to end forced disappearances, ensure fair and impartial trials for those affected within the judicial system, lift the curfew in South Waziristan, and stop the humiliation of Pashtun families at security checkpoints (ALAM & BANO, 2023).

The aim of highlighting political, social, and economic challenges in Pakistan is to provide a comprehensive roadmap for identifying, analyzing, and resolving issues and problems that may hinder the country's development and progress. This illumination involves recognizing factors such as corruption, economic inequality, deficiencies in infrastructure, security crises, and other challenges faced by Pakistan. This endeavor helps us offer appropriate solutions for advancing reforms and implementing operational plans to address these issues. This clarity not only assists in improving the social, economic, and political conditions of the people but also contributes to strengthening the resilience and stability of the country.

Multidimensional socio-political and economic challenges faced by Pakistan constitute the problem being investigated, which eventually lead to the extremely low level of stability and development in the country. Political instability, characterized by rapid changes in leadership and corruption, has weakened governance and people's confidence in institutions. Economic issues such as high inflation, the burden of debt, and stagnating industries are increasing unemployment and poverty, thus social inequality. Besides, internal conflicts and extremist activities worsened the security situation that disturbed daily life and hindered progress on many sectors. Yet, despite the gravity of these key issues, no multi-dimensional analysis that threads them together within a Pakistani context exists. It will be important to examine and analyze the interactions between these socio-political, economic, and security factors to understand the root causes of their cumulative effects on general stability in the country. This shall lead to the findings that will be used for policy interventions or strategies toward long-term national development.

B. METHOD

This research is a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods that have been derived to attain findings. The researchers have used established literature, academic articles, and reports comprehensively to analyze the political, social, and economic challenges of Pakistan. The data collection for this research has been collected from various resources like electronic media, print material, and online databases. Where the quantitative part deals with an analysis of statistical data on economic indicators, political stability, and social development, the

qualitative study of the same is engrossed with expert opinions, case studies, and theoretical frameworks interpreting these. The interplay between the two can better conceptualize the complexity surrounding the current situation in Pakistan. The study attempts to provide valid updated information on useful background insights relevant to policy makers, academics, and other stakeholders in the nation's development. This research seeks to present a clear picture of the challenges facing Pakistan and contribute to informed discussions on strategies for the solution of these problems.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Political Challenges

Dawn reports that the new government is facing significant challenges from the start, making it clear that fulfilling the promises will be no easy task (O. Wolf, 2022).

The arrest occurred the day after the military had refuted Khan's claims, made during a PTI rally, alleging that a senior general currently serving in the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate had plotted to assassinate him twice, including an incident in Punjab in November 2022. Khan's enraged supporters-initiated protests nationwide, assaulting law enforcement officers and causing property damage. Their anger quickly turned towards the military, with targets including the residences of high-ranking officers like the Lahore corps commander, and attempts to besiege the army headquarters in Rawalpindi. Such events heighten the risk of fatal clashes between soldiers and PTI activists (Group, 2023).

The detention of ex-Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan by the Rangers at the Islamabad High Court on May 9, 2023, over allegations of corruption linked to the Al-Qadir Trust case, ignited widespread protests and unrest, resulting in fatalities, extensive damage to public assets, and assaults on military vehicles and facilities (Chawla, 2023).

The divisions along ethnic and sectarian lines are glaringly apparent. Local armed groups, categorized by political and security elites as belonging to the 'Terrorist' category, particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have regained momentum through a series of attacks targeting the Pakistani armed forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other areas. Presently, Pakistan exhibits a highly fragmented society and an even more fragmented political class, both of which are in the process of dismantling the remnants of the democratic system and structures established after Gen. Pervez Musharraf's exit from the political arena. Between 2008 and 2018, there was a smooth transition of power at the federal level, with governments, if not Prime Ministers, completing their full five-year terms in office (Shukla, 2023).

The elite represent a pervasive and evolving entity, having historically played progressive and developmental roles in numerous countries, including Pakistan. However, in Pakistan's case, the actions and influence of the elite have also led to significant disruptions and calamities. For instance, the military elite has frequently intervened in popular movements and democratic processes since 1958, often spanning decades. Benefiting from substantial power, force, and weaponry, it has consistently held an unequal and unjust advantage over civilian elites. Conversely, civilian elites, when afforded the opportunity, have repeatedly demonstrated that their developmental interventions are more conciliatory, inclusive, and mindful of the people under their governance (Hyder, 2023).

Pakistan is grappling with a complex crisis that could potentially lead to the collapse of its economy and its semi-democratic system. Throughout its history, the nation has experienced three periods of military rule, totaling 33 years. Since 2008, Pakistan has been governed by a hybrid regime characterized by an elected civilian government that unofficially (and to some extent, reluctantly) shares power with the military. The military's involvement in politics has become more evident since 2018, as both coalition governments that have held power since then have come into office through collaboration with the military against common political adversaries. Considering Pakistan's large population, strategic location, and nuclear arsenal, instability within the country could have far-reaching negative and disruptive consequences not only in South and Central Asia but also beyond, including in Europe (Rafiq, 2023).

The Pashtuns Tahafuz Movement, often referred to as the "Pashtun Assurance Development," is a social initiative founded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan that champions the human rights of Pashtuns. It serves as one of the ethnic representation groups for Pashtuns in Pakistan. In May 2014, eight students from Gomal College in Dera Ismail Khan launched this movement (Nasir, Saeed, & Akram, 2023).

The leaders of the PTM started to emphasize indigenous perspectives in their public speeches and interviews with international media as recently as 2018, despite a media blackout in Pakistan (Foundation, 2023).

The tribal Jirga of the Pashtuns, which commenced on October 11 in the Khyber region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, announced its decisions on the night of Sunday, October 13. Manzoor Pashteen, the leader of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), presented these decisions, which were well-received by the attendees of the Jirga.

As per the decisions made by the Jirga, the Pakistani army and all armed groups, including Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), are required to vacate Khyber Pakhtunkhwa within the next 60 days.

Pashteen stressed that there has been no war in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and that no nation has attacked them, indicating that there is no need for assistance from armed groups or the military. He further stated that if this decision is not enacted within the next two months, the Jirga will explore alternative solution (Yousofi, 2024).

2. Alarming and Precarious Social Situation in Pakistan

The latest available survey data for estimating Pakistan's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) pertains to 2017/2018. According to these estimates, 38.3 percent of Pakistan's population (88,701 thousand people in 2021) are considered multidimensionally poor, with an additional 12.9 percent classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (29,896 thousand people in 2021). The deprivation intensity in Pakistan, measured by the average deprivation score among those living in multidimensional poverty, stands at 51.7 percent. The MPI value, representing the proportion of the population experiencing multidimensional poverty adjusted for deprivation intensity, is 0.198 (UNDP, 2023).

Increasing food prices exacerbate the disparity between impoverished and affluent households. Additionally, households residing marginally above the poverty threshold risk descending into poverty due to escalations in food costs. The surge in meat prices amplifies the

likelihood of urban households facing poverty across all survey years (Shabnam, Aurangzeb, & Riaz, 2023).

According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan holds the fifth position among the most vulnerable countries to climate change. This suggests that the nation will witness increasingly severe extreme weather events, such as the catastrophic floods experienced in 2022. The overall damage caused by these floods is estimated at PKR 3.2 trillion (US\$14.9 billion), resulting in a total loss of PKR 3.3 trillion (US\$15.2 billion). Floods and droughts have become recurring phenomena, expected annually in Pakistan. Hence, it is crucial to recognize the significance of climate-resilient urban planning and to integrate the aspect of climate change into development initiatives (UN-HABITAT, 2023).

Teachers serve as the foundation of the education system. The standard of teaching in Pakistani schools is dismal. As per a UNESCO report, both the caliber of teachers and the educational instruction they provide are subpar. This issue is particularly severe in remote regions of Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan, where schools may lack sufficient teaching staff altogether. Research indicates that teachers often stick to traditional teaching methods and fail to incorporate innovative strategies. A significant portion of educators lacks familiarity with lesson planning, hindering their ability to address diverse challenges in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, teachers tend to promote rote memorization among students, who often remain unaware of the resources available in educational libraries. Consequently, there's a noticeable decline in students' reading habits. Teachers bear significant responsibility for this state of affairs, as guiding students toward a culture of reading is an integral aspect of their professional duty (Ahmad, ur Rehman, Ali, Itbar Khan, & Akber Khan, 2014).

Corruption stands as one of the foremost governance challenges in Pakistan. Its pervasive influence extends across all facets of Pakistani society, evolving into an accepted practice. Its repercussions extend beyond governmental bodies, permeating into the private sector as well, thereby fostering a climate of distrust towards public institutions and discouraging foreign investment. Corruption in Pakistan is systematic and ingrained, marked by the solicitation and payment of bribes for services that are rightfully the government's responsibility. The absence of accountability and effective oversight has fostered an atmosphere where those in positions of authority operate with impunity, ultimately perpetuating a culture of corruption (Ur-Rehman, 2023).

Another significant reason behind youth unemployment in Pakistan is the limited access to financial resources. The nation's financial sector is still in its infancy, posing challenges for young individuals to secure loans and other essential forms of capital. Consequently, this hurdle obstructs their ability to initiate entrepreneurial ventures or capitalize on career prospects. Additionally, a majority of young people lack the fundamental financial knowledge required to manage their finances effectively. This deficiency stems from the low priority given to financial education within the country (Dr. Muhammad Asif, Pasha, Mumtaz, & Sabir, 2023).

Economic Challenges

There are signs suggesting that Pakistan is once more on the path to a severe economic crisis. Despite the nation's economic history being marked by numerous upheavals, the

expected challenges will arise at a moment when implementing remedial measures will prove difficult (Burki S. , 2012).

The depletion of reserves sparked panic in the foreign exchange market, resulting in a roughly 25 percent depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar in 2009, exacerbating inflationary pressures. Ultimately, and most significantly, during such turbulent economic times, strong leadership was needed. Unfortunately, this was not the case, as Pakistan experienced turnover with five finance ministers and five central bank governors between 2008 and 2014. Economic management took a backseat to political maneuvering and coalition politics. The incoming government's neglect of the economy and departure from the reform agenda were key factors contributing to low investment and consequently, stagnant growth rates (Husain, 2018).

Pakistan's economy is encountering notable hurdles caused by diverse factors such as substantial currency devaluation, strict International Monetary Fund (IMF) regulations, political instability, and inter-party conflicts. Consequently, the nation finds itself on the verge of default, unable to secure loans from neighboring or international sources (Zaman, 2023). The soaring inflation rate, especially in food costs, along with the astronomical surge in petrol prices, has elevated poverty rates, rendering it challenging for numerous Pakistanis to meet their basic needs (Zaman, 2023).

Over time, Pakistan has amassed a considerable debt burden, prompting worries regarding the nation's long-term capacity to meet these obligations. The elevated levels of debt, both internal and external, are not sustainable and may precipitate a debt crisis if not effectively addressed. A notable share of the government's budget is earmarked for servicing this debt, consequently diverting resources away from vital sectors like healthcare, education, infrastructure, and social welfare (Ajmal Khan, Mommen Khan, & Azam Khan, 2023).

Pakistan finds itself in a stagnant state of low technology, primarily exporting textiles, garments, leather goods, and other labor-intensive, low-value items. Despite attempts, it has failed to ascend the value chain towards more sophisticated products. The manufacturing sector's contribution to the GDP has drastically decreased, dropping from 15.7 percent in 1994 to 11.4 percent in 2020, representing only half of agriculture's contribution. Over time, Pakistan's economy has shifted towards introspection, the business climate has remained unfavorable, export competitiveness has declined, trade policies have shown bias against exports, and productivity has stagnated (Yusuf, 2022).

Corruption in Pakistan is a widespread issue, seen as detrimental to economic progress. It acts as a barrier to growth, diminishes the state's ability to collect taxes, fosters political instability, decreases public investment, curtails spending programs, and elevates the costs associated with conducting business. Additionally, it exacerbates poverty and income disparities, while also introducing imbalances into the tax structure (Rasheed, Muhammad Ali, & Ishtiaq Ahmad, 2024).

The successes that the Corridor aims to bring to the states of Pakistan and China represent one side of the coin, portraying the idealistic version of CPEC. On the other side, however, are the harsh realities and challenges that these states may encounter in executing the project. Experts have identified various challenges, both internal and external, that could hinder the

effective accomplishment of CPEC. These challenges can be broadly categorized into three main areas: political challenges, economic challenges, and security challenges.

For some observers, the political discontent and turmoil resulting from the dismissal of the former Pakistani Prime Minister do not bode well for the smooth implementation of CPEC's Early Harvest Projects. Additionally, CPEC has been a source of controversy between the provinces and the federal government of Pakistan since its inception (Afzal & Naseem, 2018).

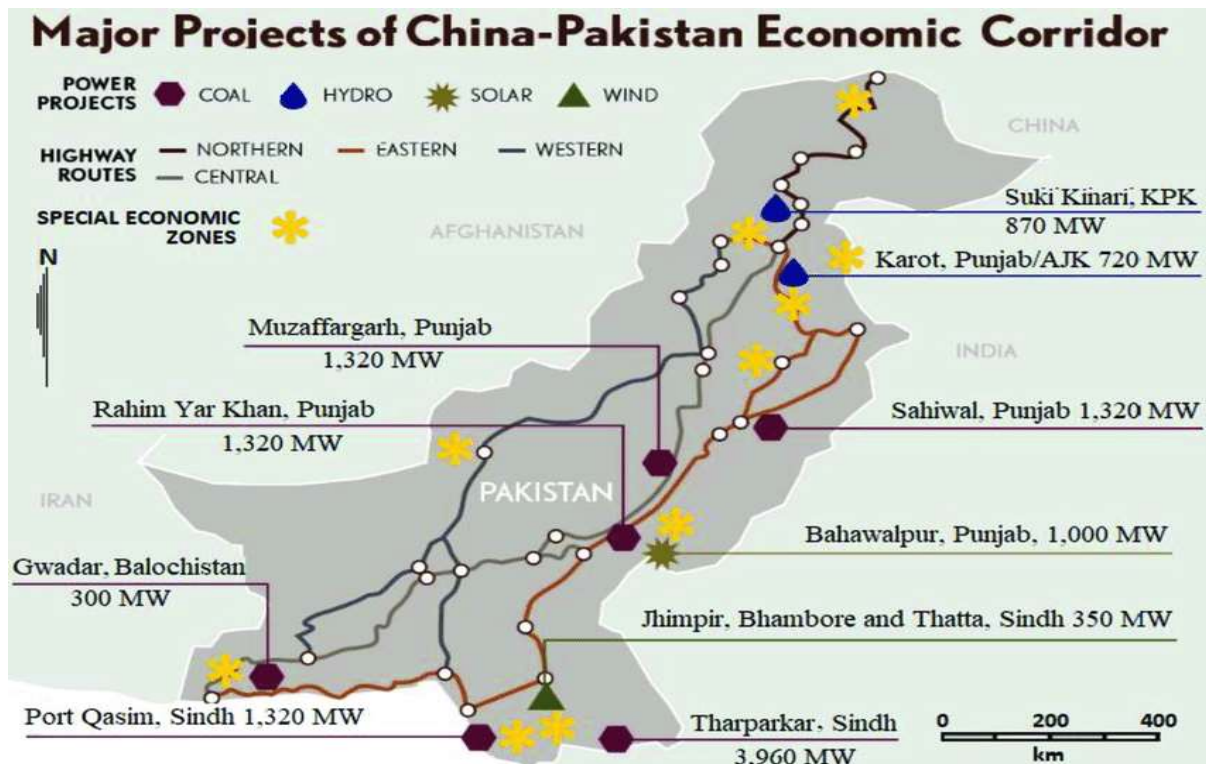


Figure 1: Major Projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The map attached is for the big projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This long-term infrastructural project aims at connecting western China with Pakistan's Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea. On this map, various long-term power projects of coal, hydropower, solar, and wind energies have been marked, along with major transportation routes and special economic zones. The CPEC is aimed at promoting economic development in both countries and regional connectivity (Waheed et al., 2021).

D. CONCLUSION

Since 1947, the Pakistan Army has played a prominent role in the country's political affairs, often removing elected prime ministers through coups and orchestrating their exit from power. A notable example is the ousting of Imran Khan and the subsequent violence against his supporters, leading to increased distrust between politicians and the people of Pakistan. Furthermore, in recent years, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has escalated attacks in the tribal areas, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and other regions of Pakistan, exacerbating the country's political and security challenges and overshadowing its social and economic issues. As well as The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement and their cohesion has raised concerns for the government of

Pakistan, and their recent gathering in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Poverty, unemployment, and food prices have risen compared to previous years, causing serious concerns among the people of Pakistan and the global community. Drought, climate change, and shortcomings in the education system are other social challenges in the country. Administrative inefficiency has led to Pakistan's inability to repay its debts, resulting in a grim and unsustainable economic situation. Additionally, Pakistan's manufacturing industry has failed to capture regional markets or gain sufficient credibility in the global market.

As well as, administrative corruption in the country has significantly increased compared to the past. While the Pakistani government expects more from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, the current political, security, and economic conditions make its implementation impossible. These aforementioned issues have a significant impact on Pakistan's currency prices. Analyzing the country's situation, it can be said that interventions and injustices by the Pakistan Army, administrative weaknesses in political, social, economic, and security issues have eroded its confidence domestically and internationally, deterring both domestic and foreign investors from investing in the country. With these issues in mind, it is likely that political differences will escalate further, leading to insecurity in Baluchistan, the tribal areas, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir, and other regions. Ultimately, there is a possibility this country may disintegrate and cease to exist in the coming years.

Based on the findings of this study, a few recommendations are made with a view to address identified key issues. First, the Government of Pakistan should strive for political stability and enhance coordination between the Federal and Provincial Governments in order to smoothly execute projects like CPEC. Second, corruption at all levels within government departments needs to be brought down through continuous diachronic strengthening of institutional frameworks for accountability and transparency. In this way, it would increase the inclusiveness of the financial sector towards youth and entrepreneurs and enhance innovative job opportunities for prevention or, at least, mitigation of unemployment among them. Regarding future economic growth, education is called for, especially in the fields concerning science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Beyond the aforementioned, there is a dire need to underpin those environmental challenges through more integrated and holistic disaster management and climate adaptation mechanisms for long-term sustainability and resilience of the economy and infrastructure development in Pakistan.

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