



## Exploring and Explaining Regional Variability in Attitudes toward China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Muhammad Shahid<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Javed<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Sajid<sup>3</sup> & Azhar Ali Abbas<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bachelor of Education, Department of Education, Karakoram International University, Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan, Email: [shahidjohari14@gmail.com](mailto:shahidjohari14@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D. Department of Political and Administration Sciences, SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Poland, Email: [mj142113@doktorant.sgh.waw.pl](mailto:mj142113@doktorant.sgh.waw.pl)

<sup>3</sup>Bachelor of Economics, Department of Economics, Karakoram International University, Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan, Email: [sajidjohari512@gmail.com](mailto:sajidjohari512@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup>Bachelor of Economics, Kashmir institute of Economics, The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, Email: [azharaliabbas3@gmail.com](mailto:azharaliabbas3@gmail.com)

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#### Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Shahid

#### Email:

[shahidjohari14@gmail.com](mailto:shahidjohari14@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to examine stakeholders' attitudes toward the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a highly contested at a point project promoted by China as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative implementation. To evaluate the attitudes quantitative (online questionnaire survey and subsequent analysis) methods were employed. The findings show that over time the initially negative attitudes toward the CPEC subsided, while regional variability in attitudes exists. For instance, respondents from the Gilgit Baltistan province showed more interested in CPEC, while respondents from the Baluchistan province showed a lack of interest in CPEC. The really interesting question is which factors explain these regional differences in attitudes. To this end, the lack of education and political instability are explored as countervailing factors. The value added of this paper consists in its conceptual and empirical implications, e.g. on the one hand, the study provides a conceptual framework of analysis that can be applied to evaluate other groups of stakeholders and their attitudes toward CPEC. On the other hand, the insight into regional differentiation and the factors underlying it may serve as a background of policy planning and strategy building to be employed by decision-makers.

## Introduction

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is a comprehensive development paradigm for regional economic integration, infrastructure

development, and strategic collaboration (Mahmood et al., 2022). With an investment value of over \$60 billion, CPEC has the potential to transform Pakistan's economic map, and by interlinking Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa with an intricate network of roads, railways, pipelines, and economic parks, affect regional geopolitics too. The promise of greater trade, connectivity, and establishment of Gwadar Port as a deep-sea trade hub has the potential to transform Pakistan into a critical South Asian commerce gateway (Butt & Butt, 2015; Rehman et al., 2018).

Although it is expected to yield great benefits, the success of the CPEC is, to a large extent, contingent upon perceptions and support from domestic stakeholders. As lots of international development experiences would testify, sustainability and legitimacy of mega-projects are significantly affected by people's attitude, particularly by democratic or semi-democratic circles (Kanwal et al., 2022). Public support is usually a determining factor for the execution and sustainability of such ventures. Therefore, an understanding of people's sentiment, especially from varied regions of Gilgit-Baltistan, Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan, KPK and Azad Jamu & Kashmir is needed to navigate through socio-political intricacies which would either facilitate or stifle the progress of the CPEC.

According to SET, people's support for development projects is driven by a cost-benefit analysis if benefits are greater than costs, people will exhibit a positive attitude. In case of CPEC, benefits are potentially upgraded infrastructure, employment generation, and socioeconomic mobility, while costs are environmental degradation, displacement, and cultural disruption (Hassan et al., 2022). TRA, on the other hand, points out that people's intentions for behavior are driven by attitudes based on beliefs, norms, and perceived consequences. Collective, these theoretical perspectives provide useful tools for analyzing regional variability for CPEC perceptions (Ahmed, 2019).

Existing literature has mainly dealt with macro-level economic effects, strategic implications of Sino-Pak relations, and policy-level assessments of CPEC ventures (Ibrar). Micro-level analysis, however, is less explored, especially with regard to public opinion throughout regions. Few studies have analyzed systematically how people's responses are framed by demographic factors including income, education, source of information, and media exposure (Qianqian & Yijun, 2020). For example, although mass media is an important channel of information dissemination and opinion formulation, its impact on people's attitudes toward CPEC is yet to be explored for Pakistan (Kanwal et al., 2019).

Further, variations within a region in terms of infrastructure, education, and political stability add further depth of complication to the diversity of public opinion. Gilgit-Baltistan, commonly known as the gateway to CPEC (Shah et al., 2025), has had relatively optimistic responses because of its geopolitical location and anticipated economic dividends. Baluchistan, being a pivotal part of the corridor via Gwadar Port, however, reacted with suspicion and resentment (Kanwal et al., 2022). This could be because of historic underdevelopment, domestic insurrections, and previous marginalization. Resolution of such regional issues is essential for fair project outcomes and national integration.

The CPEC's infrastructure consists of four major alignments, including eastern, central, western, and northern routes. Eastern route has made rapid progress with existing infrastructure and stronger security, while western and northern routes pass through somewhat less developed and less stable areas (Bajwa et al., 2022) Development priorities and regional equity need to be weighed by policymakers so that existing socioeconomic disparities are not further aggravated.

Environmental and social issues are also a consideration. Though expansion of infrastructure and industry is an economic plus, it can have unfavorable environmental implications and affect local people (Butt & Butt, 2015; Durani & Khan, 2018; Sun et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024). Vehicular traffic, emission of noise, and land use change are all factors that affect health, diversity, and customary ways of life. In addition, there are concerns about non-compensatory land acquisitions, omission of locals from the process of town planning, and a lack of transparency, which are all potential causes of resentment and opposition.

This research adds to existing literature by analyzing stakeholders' attitudes toward CPEC from a regional perspective. Through a structured survey conducted among 400 respondents from all four provinces of Pakistan, it has attempted to map salient factors determining people's sentiment. The research applies empirical data and statistical analysis (through STATA and Excel) for analyzing correlations between regional origins, socioeconomic factors, and attitudinal responses toward economic, social, and environmental implications of CPEC.

The research findings are anticipated to be of significant policy value. In the first instance, they can be used to identify areas or groups needing greater participation and inclusion within the process of development. They can further inform policymakers and media organizations seeking to shape well-informed and constructive public opinion. Lastly, the research makes available a conceptual framework that is capable of being applied to analyzing support towards other megaprojects, whether within or outside Pakistan.

In conclusion, an emphasis is laid by the research on regional diversity in public attitude and a need for including consideration of public perception within policymaking frameworks. A participatory and inclusive mode of development is recommended, where people's opinion is not simply witnessed but actively pursued and heeded. Only by such participatory governance is long-term sustainability, legitimacy, and socio-economic returns for all feasible for megaprojects such as CPEC.

## **Literature Review**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was first initiated in July 2015 and formally established in April 2015 during President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan. The project calls for Chinese investments Between now and 2030, initially, the total cost was US\$46 but later on, it increased to US\$70. Khan (2017) investments in rail, oil, road, gas, and transportation infrastructures; renewable energy projects (primarily under a construct-own-operate mode) to address Pakistan's crippling power shortage; economic growth zones, including 27 special economic zones; investments in social facilities and vocational education; etc. are all included under the auspices of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Asif et al., 2019; Khan, 2017; Yang et al., 2025).

## **Role of CPEC on Infrastructural Development**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) investigates how perceived tourism and infrastructure development interact with one another (Nazneen et al., 2019). The studies, the strategy of CPEC was analyzed with an emphasis placed on the means of developing infrastructure, which is what distinguishes the significance of the corridor project. When examining the significance of infrastructure development, many aspects, such as economic and environmental protection, are taken into consideration. These elements are prevalent throughout

the relevant literature (Azeema et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2022). In the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), leadership has played an eminent role in the development of one belt and one road. This facilitates the development of collaboration between two countries. (OBOR).

### **Local Community Income and Support for CPEC Development**

Previous research has demonstrated that there is a correlation between one's income and the support one receives from the host community. The primary success criterion for any project is that it should be beneficial to the general public (Ali et al., 2018; Kanwal et al., 2019). When there is a greater benefit to the community nearby, residents tend to show more support for the endeavor. have written that It has been proposed in a variety of theoretical writings from a variety of perspectives that the mentality of a local community can shift depending on the benefits that community members receive, such as an increase in their income (García et al., 2015), the overall health of their economy, and the number of job opportunities available to them. This recommendation has been made in several different directions Conducted. research to determine whether or not There was a correlation between the mentality of the locals and the growth of the tourism industry in the area (García et al., 2015). They found that there was a positive correlation between an increase in income and support from local residents. In a similar vein, Butt et al. (2015) discovered that people with lower incomes are more likely to support tourism than those with higher incomes. CPEC projects will result in the creation of millions of opportunities for the surrounding community, including businesses and employment, both of which will lead to an increase in the residents' overall income (Khan et al., 2022). People living on a low income have easy access to opportunities to boost their income by starting and running businesses of any size. So, these opportunities will be particularly beneficial for them. For instance, the majority of the community in Gwadar Port, which is located in Baluchistan Province, is comprised of people who work in the fishing industry; on the international market, these people will have the chance to sell their wares (Butt et al., 2015). In addition, as a result of the development of Gwadar Port, local residents will have the opportunity to increase their household income by opening rest houses, restaurants, shops, and workshops.

### **Personal Benefits, Satisfaction, and Perceived Effect**

Infrastructure projects are more likely to be supported by the people who live there if they help them in some way. Previous research has shown that personal gain is a big reason why people help with development projects (Jurowski et al., 1997; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017) for example, found that locals didn't care about a development project if they didn't directly benefit from it. From what I've read, there are many benefits for the advantages to the neighborhood of having functional roads and transportation networks (Barrios, 2008; Ozbay et al., 2003) for example, found that communities with better roads and transportation infrastructure tend to have higher levels of creativity. Barrios (2008) said that transportation infrastructure and job opportunities for the local community were linked in a good way. Ozbay et al. (2003) said that infrastructure, which includes roads and transportation, generates employment possibilities in the surrounding area, which are of direct benefit to the community that is being hosted. Several studies on roads and transportation have found that building up transport infrastructure gets rid of poverty and raises the living standards of local communities (Rehman et al., 2018). The bad effects of roads and transportation systems have also been looked into. Davis and Jones (1996) said that a road and transportation network is bad for people's health because it causes air pollution and noise pollution and makes it more likely for accidents to happen in places where heavy machinery is used to build. Our study is

an attempt to find out how much support the Pakistani people have for CPEC based on the positive and negative effects they think it will have on them and how happy they are with it.

While there is substantial literature on the economic, geopolitical, and infrastructural aspects of CPEC, relatively few studies systematically analyze public attitudes at the regional level. Existing research often relies on macroeconomic indicators or policy reviews, overlooking grassroots-level sentiments that are crucial for understanding project success and legitimacy. Moreover, while Chinese public opinion regarding CPEC has been analyzed (Deling et al., 2016) there remains a dearth of comprehensive, data-driven studies focused on Pakistani citizens, particularly in underrepresented provinces. This study addresses this critical gap by empirically examining regional variability in public attitudes toward CPEC in Pakistan. This research offers insights into the demographic, socioeconomic, and regional factors shaping support or opposition to CPEC.

## **Research Methodology**

This study uses of quantitative methods, with the end goal of being able to promulgate complete structural and functional demonstrations along with research analysis. This study used survey questionnaires to collect data from a representative sample of the Pakistani population about their understanding of and reactions to the CPEC project using random sampling methods. This was done as part of the quantitative research. The data was gathered from 400 participants, the data were analyzed using STATA, and the data has been incorporated into the relevant chapters and topics of the thesis. A survey questionnaire was constructed using a five-point Likert scale to capture the study's main variables; perceived impact, overall people attitude and community support. The positive and negative cross questions were used to collect information regarding the behavior of respondents.

The respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements about the economy, society, and the environment from (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). We also took into account such socio-demographics as respondents' sexes, ages, home provinces, and educational backgrounds. The purpose of this research was to measure public opinion in Pakistan regarding the building of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Participants were recruited from across Pakistan to ensure a representative sample of the country's diverse provincial populations. In this chapter, we present the results of our data analysis, including a demographic analysis, a ranking analysis, and a frequency analysis.

Measurement items were developed from previous studies related to mega projects and events (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). All the variables of the study were considered at the aggregate level and measurement items tried to capture the summative behavior and opinion of the respondents. Existing kinds of literature show that self-reporting data collection tools are susceptible to common method variance problems (Wang & Noe, 2010). All necessary steps have been followed and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

## **Sampling Technique and Procedure**

### **Random Sampling Technique**

A simple random sample is a subset of a population that is selected randomly. With the help of this method of sampling, the odds of being chosen are the same for each and every member of the population (Olken, 1993). The use of a probabilistic method to control bias during the sampling process makes random sampling the method of choice because it allows the researcher to generate

his data for the use of the entire population. This makes random sampling the preferred method. Random sampling is more preferable (Emerson, 2015). This is because official statistical agencies have produced evidence showing that non-probability methods are purposeful, which leads to assumption, which raises the stakes. The reasoning behind this is as follows: It is preferable to use a random sampling method because this enables the researcher to generate data that can be utilized by the entire population. When one bases their decisions on assumptions, they risk making inappropriate generalizations about the population (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Nazir et al., 2025).

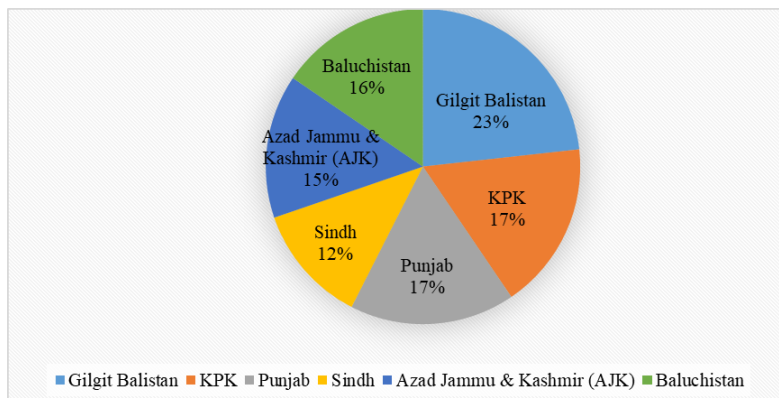
According to the findings of other studies, such as respondents were citizens or permanent residents of Pakistan, and they came from a variety of backgrounds and professions within the nation (Sultan et al., 2019). Because determining the influence of the people's attitude towards the CPEC is the primary purpose of this paper, the only people whose opinions were considered for the role of respondents were citizens of Pakistan. The objectives of the study were explained to the respondents in the "introduction" section of the questionnaire. The information was obtained through the use of an online survey. In addition, people with various socio-demographic characteristics, such as employees from both the public and private sectors, students at various levels, and people in the age range of 20 to 65 years old were approached in order to reduce the possibility of selection bias.

### **Three Step Procedures**

In the first STE of the process, we selected overall respondents from Pakistan. Pakistan is comprised of four provinces (Punjab, Sindh, Khayber Pakhtukhan (KPK), and Baluchistan), in addition to Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The second step: involved selecting 550 respondents at random from various provinces, with a particular focus on collecting data from students, employees, investors, and business owners. In the third step, missing data were cleaned up, and in the final step, 400 respondents were chosen.

### **Result and Discussion**

The Maga project of CPEC has been deemed a catalyst to transform all the provinces of Pakistan including Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jami & Kashmir. Its gives benefits all the provinces both socially and economically and also provides much-needed stimulus to their strategic ties. To get their responses, data were collected from all participants who belong to different provinces, the below data show that the majority of respondents were from Gilgit Baltistan, known as Gateway CPEC.



*Figure 1: Distribution of Sample*

The internal consistency of a set of survey items can be measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This is also known as reliability. Utilize this statistic as a tool to help determine whether or not a group of items consistently measures the same quality. Cronbach's alpha is a standardized scale that ranges from 0 to 1 that can be used to quantify the level of agreement. Higher values indicate higher agreement between items. The Table 1 demonstrates that Economic impact has 5 items, and it indicates 0.740, which is close to zero, which means that they are perfectly correlated with one another. The same can be said for how other variables and its components are correlated.

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis**

	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Test</b>
Economic Impact	5	0.740
social Impact	5	0.693
Environmental Impact	5	0.835
Positive attitude	5	0.736
Negative attitude	5	0.840
support for CPEC development	5	0.771

### **Region-Wise Comparison: Public Attitude toward CPEC in Pakistan**

CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) is a major infrastructure and development project that aims to connect the Pakistani port of Gwadar to China's northwestern region of Xinjiang via a network of highways, railways, and pipelines. CPEC connoted through the different regions of Pakistan Here is a comparison of public attitudes to CPEC development on different regions:

#### **Attitude toward the Economic Impact of CPEC**

The perception of people of Gilgit Baltistan about CPEC is mostly positive and agreed any other than provinces. Gilgit Baltistan is known as gateway of CPEC. It is expected to more developed will bring economic benefits and improve infrastructure in the region. Overall attitude about economic impact on CPEC is positive. People believe that CPEC will make economy strong, creating more job, rise investment opportunities and living standard of life.

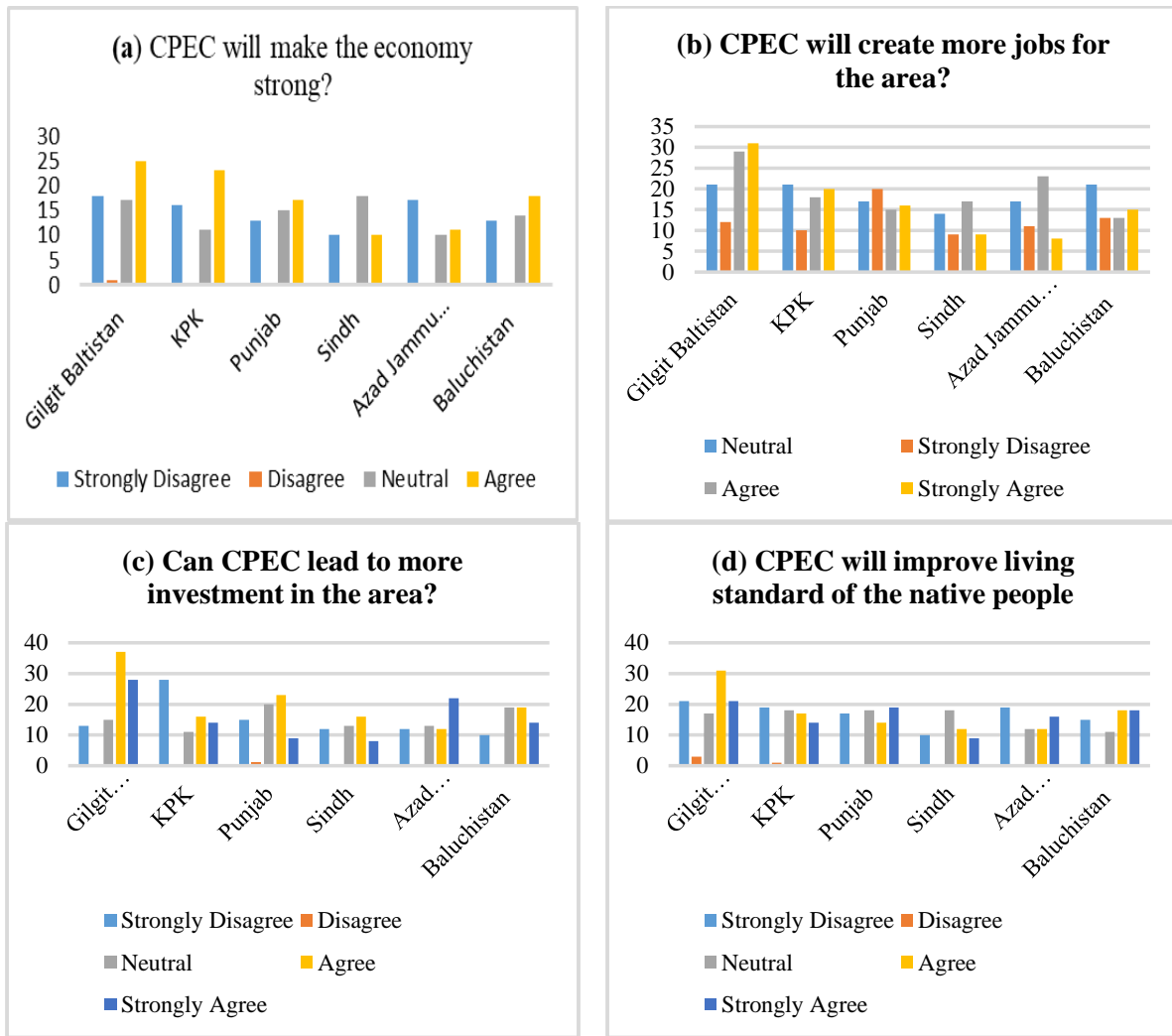


Figure 2: Economic Impact

**Attitude toward the Social Impact of CPEC**

Previous research found that the CPEC has so many benefits for society, such as enhanced market access, academic networks, and social activities, bridging social gaps and unequal treatment, and, most importantly, providing solutions to social exclusion (Deling et al., 2016). But this study found that there is some negative concern about the social impact of CPEC the different regions. GB is more concerned about the social impact as well as other provinces' attitudes also a negative attitude about the social impact. They expected that CPEC will change their culture and tradition, sabotage the area, and increase the crime rate.

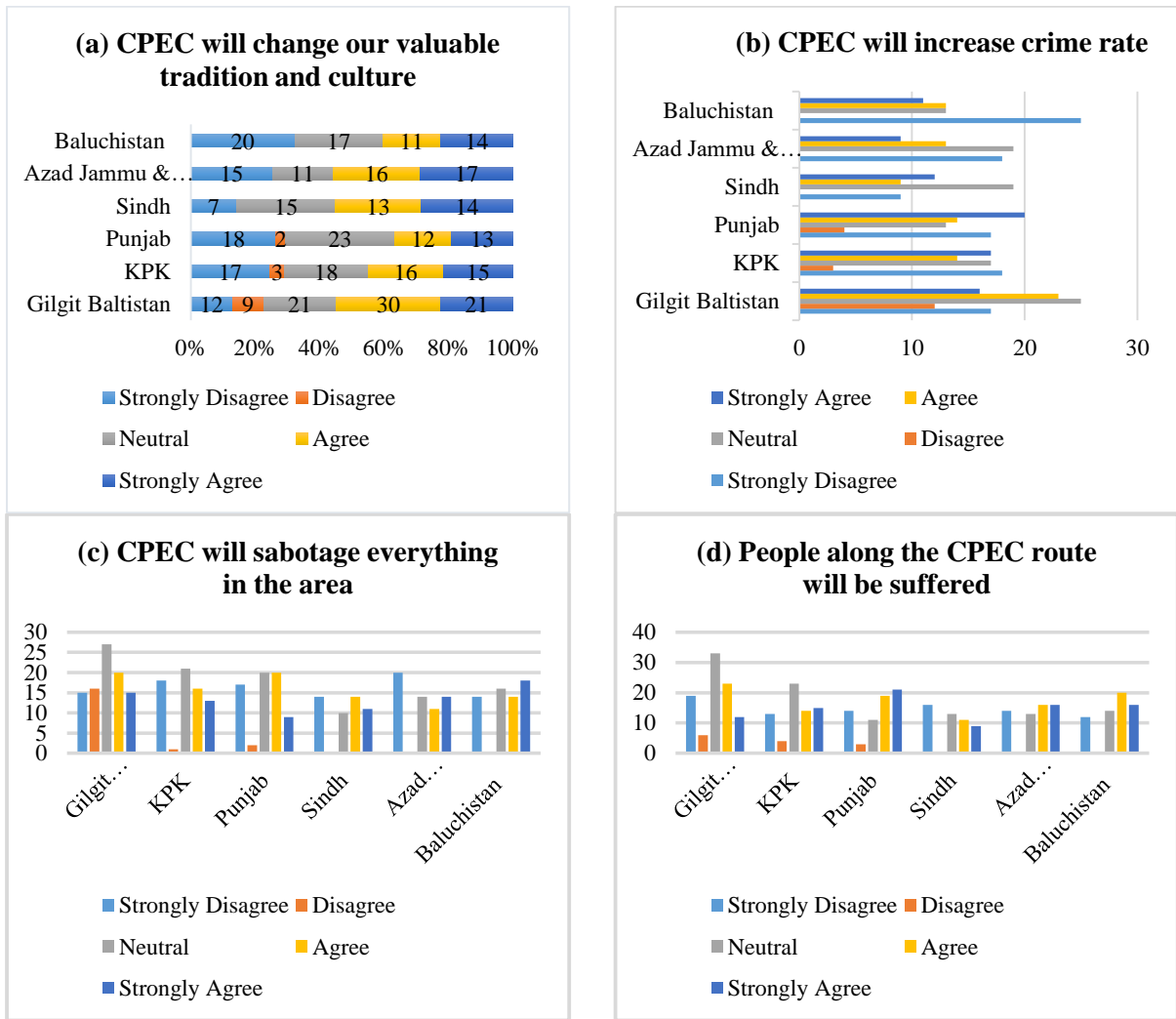


Figure 3: Social Impact

**Attitude toward Environmental Impact of CPEC**

Some view it as a positive development that will bring economic benefits and improve infrastructure in the region, while others are concerned about its impact on the environment, local culture, and way of life. One of the major concerns of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan is the environmental impact of CPEC projects, particularly the construction of dams and the expansion of mining activities. There are concerns that these projects could have a negative impact on the region's fragile ecosystem and lead to the displacement of local communities. Other provinces' perceptions same to GB's. Road construction and industries change their environment.

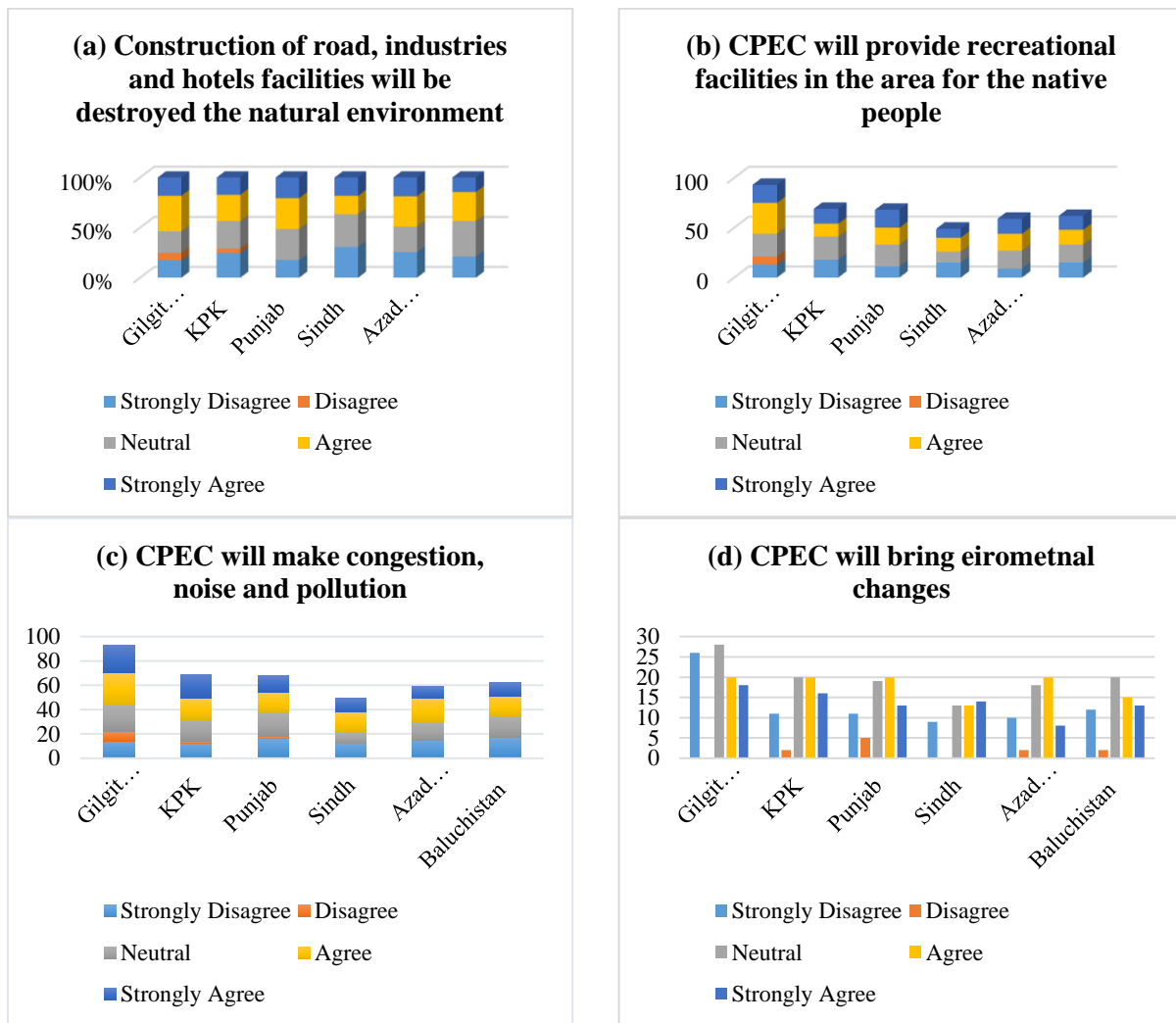


Figure 4: Environmental Impact

### Positive Attitude

Pakistan has shown a positive attitude towards the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) since its inception in 2013 (Javed & Ismail, 2021). The CPEC is a significant part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aims to connect China's western region with Pakistan's Gwadar port through a network of highways, railways, and pipelines. The following are some reasons for Pakistan's positive attitude towards the CPEC. The CPEC is expected to bring significant economic benefits to Pakistan. It is estimated that the project will create thousands of jobs, increase investment opportunities and boost the country's GDP. The CPEC also includes projects related to energy, infrastructure, and industrial development, which will help Pakistan overcome its energy crisis and upgrade its infrastructure.

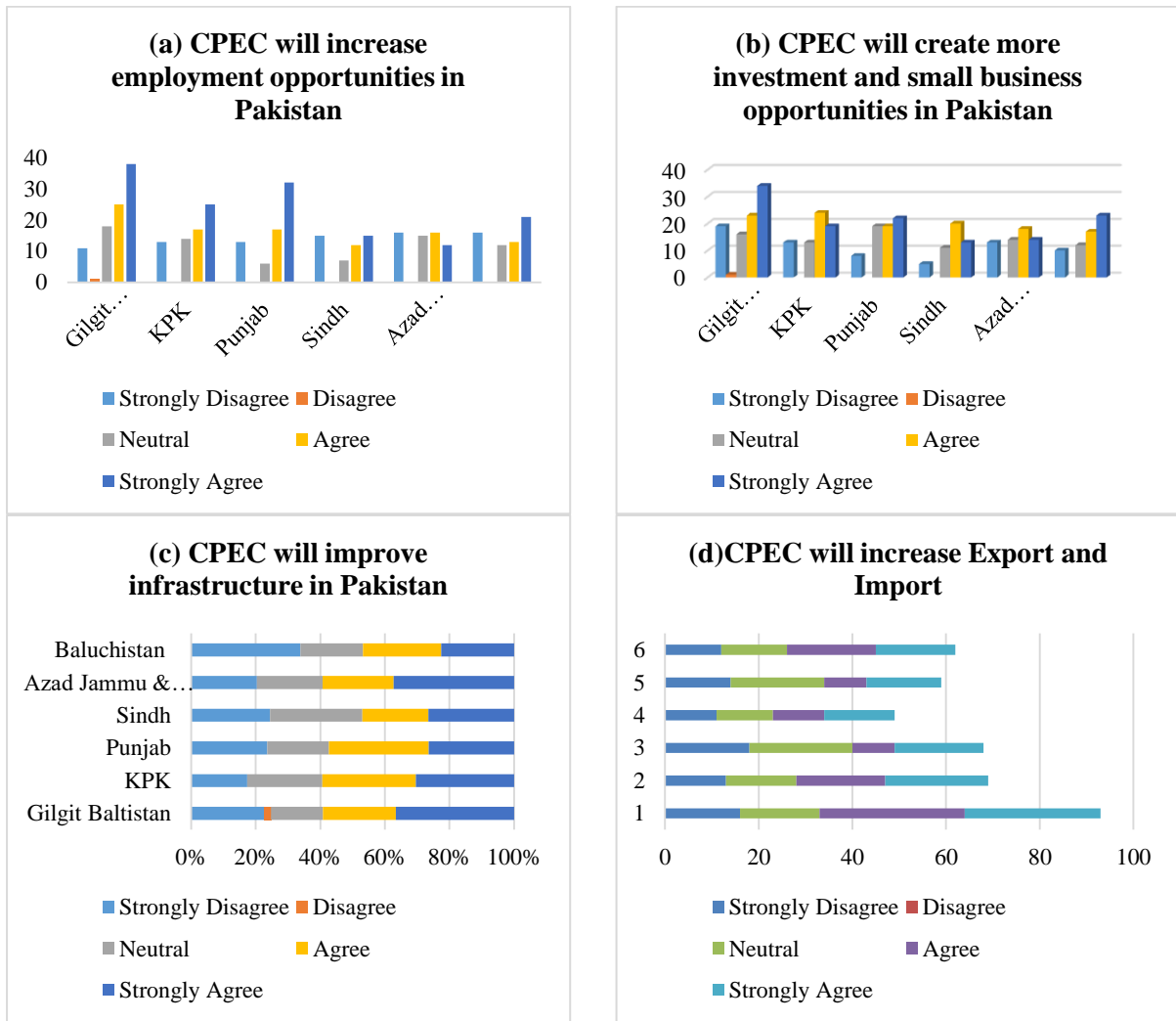


Figure 5: Positive Attitude

### Negative Attitude

While there is a positive attitude towards the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan, there are also some negative sentiments regarding the project. The following are some reasons for a negative attitude towards the CPEC. There are concerns about the environmental impact of the CPEC, particularly on the fragile ecosystem of the region. Critics argue that the construction of highways, railways, and pipelines will lead to deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution, which will have a long-term impact on the environment and the livelihoods of local communities (Wang et al., 2024). Figure 6 showed that all the province's people expected that CPEC will destroy the area as well as increase the in the pollution.

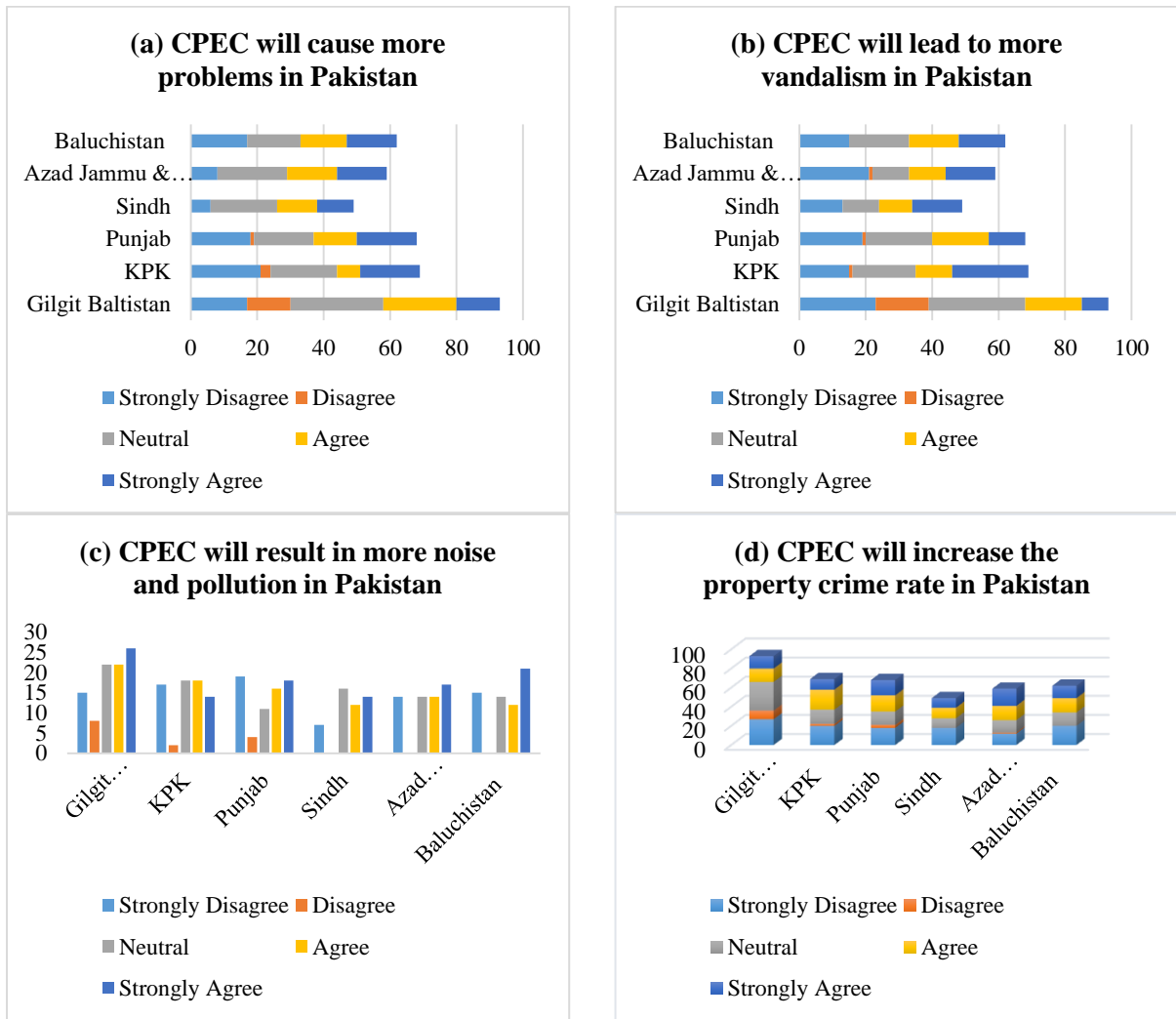


Figure 6: Negative attitude

**Overall Support**

CPEC is expected to have a significant impact on Pakistan's economy, as it will improve the country's infrastructure, create job opportunities, and development, and attract foreign investment (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). The project includes the construction of highways, railways, and energy projects, which will improve connectivity and energy security in the country. It connected all the provinces of Pakistan. It's a game-changer for Pakistan. There is a positive impact of CPEC as well as a negative impact also. Figure 7 shows that people's perception toward CPEC is positive and the public is supporting the development of CPEC.

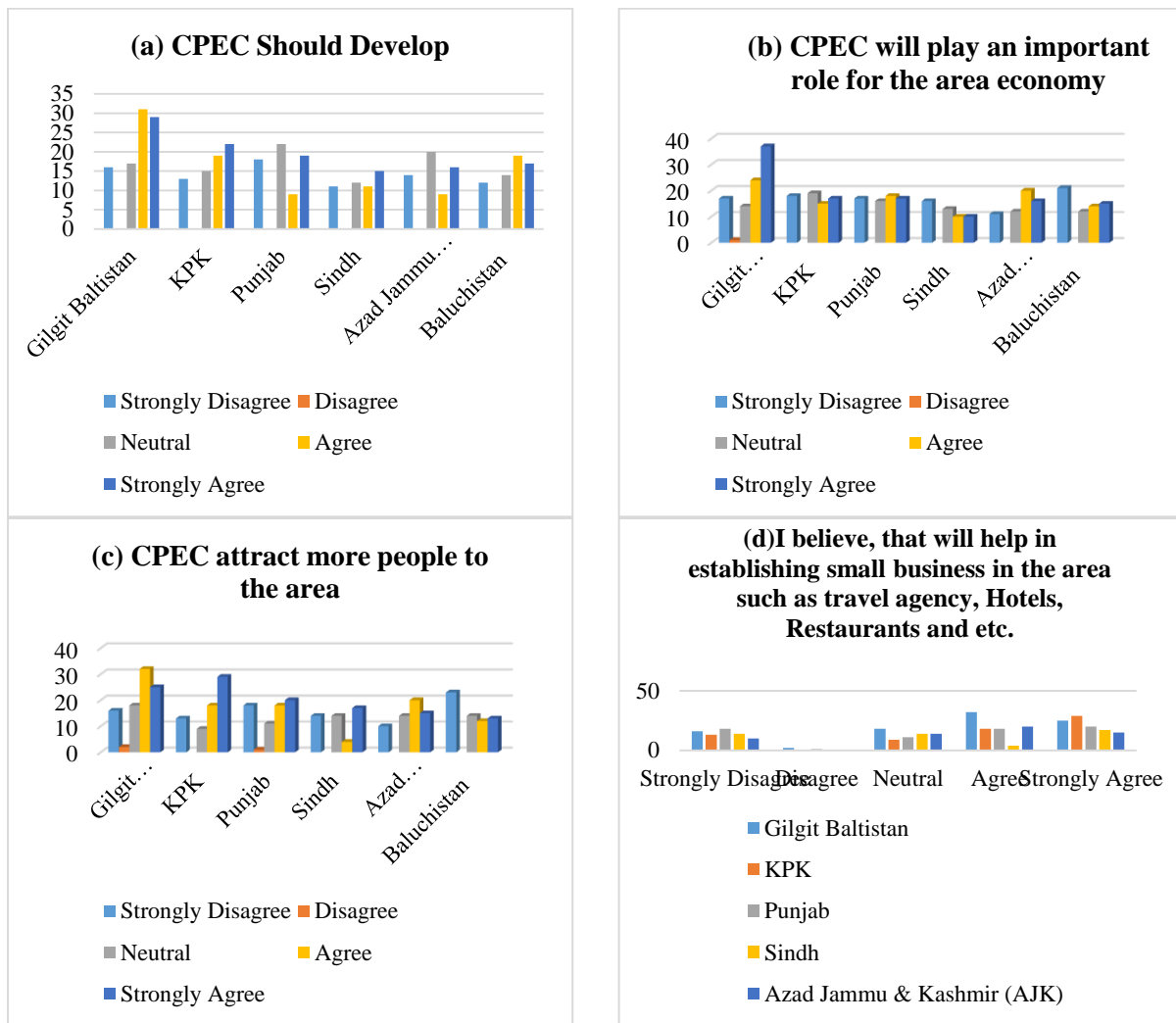


Figure 7: Overall Supports

## Conclusion, Policy Implication and Future Directions

### Conclusion

The results of our study indicate that people have a favorable attitude toward CPEC development. In Pakistan, attitudes toward CPEC were examined in this study and found to be both positive and negative. Providing an explanation for why people support or oppose CPEC based on factors like their personal values and the project's economic, social, and environmental impacts, the results of this study make a substantial addition to the theoretical literature on the topic. This piece of work is useful because it explains some of the public's CPEC attitudes. The findings area of particular interest to CPEC policymakers as they seek to win over Pakistani public opinion in favor of the project. According to the findings of the study, the government should try to persuade the general public to take part in the process of policy implementation in order to improve relations between the two nations, lessen the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts during the process of policy implementation, and create a scenario in which everyone comes out ahead. Enhance the government's sensitivity to public opinion, solicit more public opinion, and improve the ability to respond effectively to public opinion.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Our study found an overall positive attitude toward CPEC, but there is concern toward environmental issues which is affected by CPEC, and other negative attitude found that people belong the province of Baluchistan showed a lack of interest toward CPEC because of a lack of education and political instability. To ensure that environmental concerns are taken into account in the planning and execution of CPEC projects, it will be important for the government and other stakeholders to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account. This includes things like carrying out environmental impact assessments, promoting sustainable practices, and making sure that local communities are involved in the decision-making processes. working to instill confidence in the local community regarding CPEC projects. To promote the CPEC's advantages, policymakers should host public events like conferences and television talk shows. Social media platforms like Facebook can be used by the government of Pakistan to spread information about the benefits of the CPEC project among the local population.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Our sample size was relatively low in comparison to the overall study population, and this is the study's first major flaw. Although this sample size was chosen for practical reasons (i.e., to save time and money), future researchers interested in the CPEC route should consider using a larger sample size and including participants from both China and Pakistan. Second, this research was motivated by a desire to understand the extent to which Pakistani citizens support or oppose the CPEC initiative. Although we have looked into some of the potential drawbacks of this megaproject, such as its effect on the environment and wildlife, further research is needed. Third, we looked into people's overall enthusiasm for development initiatives. Scholars of the future may look into factors like social, political, and security backing for CPEC projects. We think local support for the CPEC may increase social security in regard to the CPEC route in Pakistan, which is important because security is a major threat along the CPEC route in Pakistan. Since this study only covered public sentiment, future scholars may want to inquire into the views of CPEC project officials, government officials, and employees.

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