



Research Article

Strategic management of diplomatic engagements, security policies, economic initiatives, and cultural influence: Analyzing Pakistan's leadership role in South Asia's geopolitical stability

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the numerous crucial factors affecting Pakistan's strategic importance in South Asia, including economic pursuits, cultural influence, security measures, and diplomatic relations. The research uses a mixed methods approach to identify significant relationships between these traits and the perceived effectiveness of Pakistan's regional initiatives. The findings indicate that security protocols negatively impact Pakistan's strategic importance; however, they are positively influenced by economic initiatives and cultural presence in South Asia. Demographic parameters such as age and educational level strongly affect perceptions of Pakistan's regional influence. The study highlights cultural, political, and economic factors that bolster or undermine Pakistan's global stature. Policymakers seeking to enhance Pakistan's regional influence should regard these implications with gravity. The study offers valuable policy recommendations for addressing current challenges and enhances our understanding of South Asian geopolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The security dynamics in South Asia are complex and shaped by many factors, including historical conflicts, territorial disputes, and the pervasive threat of cross-border terrorism (Khan et al., 2024). As a pivotal player in the region, Pakistan's strategic role is crucial for fostering stability and mitigating conflicts. This study delves into Pakistan's bilateral relationships with Afghanistan and India, assessing their implications for regional stability

and exploring potential avenues for cooperation. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential for identifying South Asia's challenges and opportunities.

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has historically been multifaceted, influenced by shared cultural, ethnic, and geographic ties. These connections present opportunities for collaboration and challenges, particularly in cross-border terrorism, refugee crises, and economic cooperation (Baqai & Wasi, 2021). This study evaluates the factors shaping Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and analyzes the repercussions of instability in Afghanistan on Pakistan's security landscape. Furthermore, it explores how enhanced cooperation could address mutual challenges. In contrast, Pakistan's relationship with India is marked by enduring tensions rooted in territorial disputes, particularly over Jammu and Kashmir (Parveen, 2023). This study examines the underlying factors influencing bilateral relations and their implications for regional stability. It considers the potential for dialogue, confidence-building measures, and conflict-resolution mechanisms to foster peaceful coexistence.

The study critically assesses Pakistan's role in promoting stability within South Asia, scrutinizing the challenges and opportunities it encounters as it navigates its strategic interests and security concerns. It highlights the significance of diplomatic initiatives, Track-II dialogues, regional organizations, and international cooperation in the pursuit of lasting peace and stability (Farhan & Hashmi, 2023). In South Asia, interstate and territorial disputes necessitate distinct conflict resolution and peacebuilding approaches. Nonetheless, a common thread in both contexts is the imperative to address the core issues or root causes of conflict. This fundamental lesson underscores the challenge of building and sustaining peace without resolving underlying problems, as evidenced by protracted conflicts such as those in Palestine, Jammu, and Kashmir (Bhatta, 2023).

Regional stability in South Asia is paramount for several reasons: a stable South Asia is essential for fostering economic growth and development, facilitating trade and investment that benefits all countries in the region (Suresh et al., 2023). Stability is crucial for maintaining peace and security, reducing the risk of conflicts that can lead to violence and displacement (Wani, 2022). Political stability is vital for effective counter-terrorism efforts, as terrorist groups often exploit political instability to execute attacks. Greater regional stability enhances collaborative counter-terrorism initiatives (Bala & Tar, 2021). Environmental challenges, such as climate change and pollution, transcend political borders, necessitating regional cooperation for effective mitigation. These aspects illustrate the critical importance of regional stability in South Asia for promoting socio-economic development, enhancing security, countering terrorism, and addressing environmental issues.

This study aims to examine and understand Pakistan's strategic role in promoting or hindering regional stability in South Asia, specifically focusing on its relations with Afghanistan and India. The objectives of this research are:

1. Analyze the historical context and evolution of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and India.

2. Evaluate the impact of Pakistan's actions and policies on regional stability, considering political, economic, and security dimensions.
3. Assess the challenges and opportunities in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and India and their implications for regional stability.
4. Explore avenues for cooperation and conflict resolution between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India and their effects on regional stability.

These aims and objectives form a comprehensive framework for analyzing Pakistan's strategic role and relationships with Afghanistan and India, focusing on their collective impact on South Asian stability. The theoretical framework is a crucial aspect of this research, providing a conceptual foundation for interpreting findings. This study adopts neorealism, a theory emphasizing power distribution among states and its influence on their international behavior. By applying neorealism, this research explores the power dynamics and strategic calculations that shape South Asian stability.

In the context of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and India, a neorealist analysis considers the following dimensions:

- **Power Politics:** Neorealism posits that power dynamics are central to international relations. The study investigates how Pakistan, as a key South Asian player, seeks to enhance its security and influence through military strength, alliances, and strategic maneuvering (Khizar & Hassan, 2024).
- **Balance of Power:** This framework examines Pakistan's interactions with Afghanistan and India in light of efforts to maintain a balance of power in the region, including security arrangements and diplomatic efforts (Abbasi, 2023).
- **Security Dilemma:** The security dilemma illuminates how measures taken by one country to enhance its security may inadvertently threaten others, potentially escalating tensions (Kumar, 2021).
- **Systemic Constraints:** Finally, this analysis addresses how the international system's anarchic nature and existing power structures influence Pakistan's strategic decisions regarding Afghanistan and India (Anam et al., 2022).

Through this neorealist lens, this study aims to elucidate the power dynamics, security considerations, and strategic interactions among Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, contributing to a deeper understanding of their implications for regional stability. This study is significant since it thoroughly examines Pakistan's strategic role in South Asia and its interactions with Afghanistan and India. Given South Asia's geopolitical instability and global significance, Pakistan's foreign policy is crucial in shaping the region's stability.

The study contributes to the academic discourse by examining the many dimensions of Pakistan's foreign policy, economic interactions, cultural influence, and security strategies. This provides a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of these methods in promoting cooperation and peace in South Asia using a combination of quantitative and qualitative work. It is essential for scholars, international stakeholders, and policymakers to understand Pakistan's approach to fostering peace and resolving conflicts in South Asia within the current landscape of interwoven global and regional security. The findings of this research may assist in formulating Pakistan's foreign policy by elucidating the

advantages and disadvantages of the current strategies and offering recommendations for improvement based on empirical evidence.

This issue is particularly relevant to contemporary diplomatic studies since it analyzes the complex historical relationship between Afghanistan and India, two nations in South Asia. The information enhances the current body of knowledge by exploring these vital relationships and offers practical recommendations for promoting regional cooperation, mitigating conflicts, and achieving enduring peace in South Asia. Ultimately, the study findings may assist Pakistan's and international leaders in formulating more effective strategies to maintain peace in a region crucial to global stability and security.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan's strategic importance in South Asia is multifaceted, particularly its intricate relationships with Afghanistan and India. This literature review synthesizes existing scholarly research on Pakistan's role in shaping regional stability, aiming to clarify the dynamics and complexities of its relations with these neighbouring countries. Noor (2023), highlights the fragile and contentious relationship between nuclear adversaries India and Pakistan, significantly impacting discussions on South Asia's strategic stability. Influences from China and the ongoing border disputes between China and India further complicate the security dynamics in the region. However, the primary threat to regional security stems from the escalating antagonism between New Delhi and Islamabad, rooted in longstanding grievances such as the Kashmir conflict and mutual accusations of terrorism. Factors such as shifting nuclear postures, regional power competition and advancements in military technology contribute to this precarious balance of fear. The study emphasizes that both parties must engage in dialogue, resolve outstanding issues, and adopt a more cautious approach to diplomacy to enhance regional stability. Inayat and Singh (2023), examines the evolution of conflict and cooperation in South Asia in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, mainly focusing on the implications of the 2014 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. This study argues that the nature of conflict and collaboration in the region will be increasingly defined by the triangular relationship between Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan, alongside the strategic policies of major global powers such as the United States, China, and Russia. Following the U.S. withdrawal, Afghanistan's role as a gateway to Central Asia intensifies the significance of the Pakistan-China strategic partnership and the ongoing Indo-U.S. collaboration. The study posits that these dynamics could jeopardize Pakistan's security, particularly given the strengthening of Indo-Afghan strategic ties. Mustafa et al. (2018), further elaborates on the strengthening alliance between Afghanistan and India following the end of the Karzai regime. India's contributions to Afghanistan's infrastructure development, capacity building, and education have cemented a strategic partnership formalized through the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed in 2011. The study asserts that Pakistan and its neighbouring countries share significant interests in Afghanistan, driven by the need to protect regional stability and mitigate the effects of external hegemonic influences. The ongoing security crisis exacerbates the mistrust between India and Pakistan, particularly as India's growing presence in Afghanistan challenges Pakistan's strategic depth and regional advantages. Consequently, a stable and

peaceful Afghanistan is imperative for Pakistan, serving as a crucial conduit to Central Asia and the Middle East. Threlkeld and Easterly (2021), outline three potential outcomes for Afghanistan following the U.S. military exit: a negotiated settlement, civil war, or a Taliban takeover, with the Taliban likely to emerge dominant in any scenario. Afghanistan's future hinges on its ability to assert its position quickly and effectively and on the extent of support provided by the U.S. and its allies to the Afghan government. Central to this analysis are five recurring factors that have historically characterized Afghanistan-Pakistan relations: geopolitical dynamics, cross-border connections, security interests, sovereignty concerns, and issues related to connectivity and trade. The interplay of these factors is crucial in determining the prospects for stability in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.

Gilani et al. (2023), delve into the South Asian regional security complex, where the historical rivalry between India and Pakistan interacts with global power dynamics, particularly in Afghanistan. The study traces this conflict's roots to territorial disputes, notably over Kashmir, and profound differences in national identity. The study examines how global power rivalries manifest in Afghanistan, where both India and Pakistan strive to counter each other's influence, perpetuating a proxy conflict through indirect means. Pakistan seeks to maintain strategic depth against India and secure its borders, while India aims to diminish Pakistan's influence and bolster its own standing as a significant donor and regional actor. Bukhari et al. (2024), analyzes the strategic stability of South Asia, particularly focusing on the U.S. role in the region. The Kashmir dispute is identified as a persistent source of conflict, exacerbated by significant geopolitical shifts in the post-9/11 era, including the U.S.-led war against Al-Qaeda. The evolving nature of U.S.-Pakistan relations—marked by a decline—contrasts sharply with the strengthening of U.S.-India ties, posing implications for Pakistan's strategic interests. The study underscores the potential effectiveness of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in mitigating regional conflicts and advocates for a balanced U.S. approach to foster peace and stability in South Asia. Adnan and Fatima (2020), analyze the intense rivalry between Pakistan and India, two nuclear powers, as they compete for influence in Central Asia—a region rich in energy resources and critical trade routes. Both nations are strategically motivated: Pakistan aims to fortify its ties with the Central Asian Republics, while India seeks to expand its market access and secure natural resources. This competition is exacerbated by their broader ambitions for regional dominance, energy security, and global influence. The security environment in Central Asia remains precarious, with the spectre of nuclear conflict casting a long shadow over diplomatic relations. In response, Pakistan has proposed a "strategic restraint regime" to India, advocating for reducing nuclear reliance and enhancing bilateral relations. The involvement of major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia further complicates the security dynamics in the region. Notably, South Asia is characterized by low levels of intra-regional integration, with limited trade and cooperation due to challenges like natural disasters, food insecurity, economic difficulties, and transnational terrorism. Wani (2022), explores the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, emphasizing the intricate triangular dynamics between Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. This relationship significantly influences regional peace, governance, and stability. The study delves into the historical origins and evolution of the

Afghanistan-India-Pakistan triangle, highlighting how overlapping policies and strategic postures have shaped interactions among these nations. The fall of the Taliban in 2001 marked a critical turning point, altering the contours of their relationships. The interconnectedness of the triangle is evident; developments in one country invariably affect the others, underscoring the complex interplay of foreign policy objectives. Current realignments in Afghanistan have profound implications for the entire region, influencing long-term peace, development, and stability.

Based on the cited literature, the study has the following research hypotheses, i.e.,

H1: Pakistan's diplomatic arrangements with Afghanistan and India positively impact South Asian regional stability.

H2: Pakistan's security policies are perceived as practical in mitigating confrontations and sustaining stability in South Asia, especially in its ties with Afghanistan and India.

H3: Pakistan's economic initiatives and cultural impact positively contribute to its perceived effectiveness in fostering South Asian stability.

This study contributes significant new insights to the existing literature on international relations, regional security, and the geopolitics of South Asia. Focusing on Pakistan's role in South Asia contributes to the discourse on peace in one of the most politically volatile regions globally. This study adopts a more comprehensive approach by analyzing Pakistan's interactions with Afghanistan and India, filling a critical gap in existing research and offering an extensive analysis of how these interconnections influence the overall stability of the South Asian region. Secondly, the research contributes to the existing knowledge base on methodology by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies into a mixed-methods study. The study explores the intricacies of Pakistan's foreign policy on several levels by integrating open-ended inquiries with regression analysis. This method elucidates the effectiveness of Pakistan's strategic initiatives by integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights from key stakeholders. This technique enriches the study's conclusions by situating quantitative data within a comprehensive qualitative framework, offering a more nuanced perspective. Thirdly, political and policy stakeholders in Pakistan and the broader South Asian region may use the study's findings to guide their efforts. The research provides actionable recommendations for improving Pakistan's foreign policy strategies by identifying the key factors hindering the nation's efforts to foster regional stability. Enhancing Pakistan's bilateral relations and ensuring long-term regional stability need these insights for refining diplomatic interactions, security strategies, and economic endeavours. The research is pertinent to national and international parties concerned with South Asian security dynamics. It examines the issues Pakistan encounters in its relations with Afghanistan and India, offering a framework for surmounting security and diplomatic impediments. This research enhances its influence in international diplomacy by offering a case study that other nations facing similar geopolitical challenges may reference. The study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive international relations approach by illustrating the interplay of cultural influences, economics, security, and diplomacy in fostering stability. This book is relevant not just for South Asians but also for scholars and practitioners seeking to

comprehend and use analogous strategies in other areas experiencing substantial international conflicts.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine Pakistan's strategic role in promoting South Asian stability, with a focus on its relationships with Afghanistan and India. This methodology integrated quantitative and qualitative techniques through a case study of Pakistan, drawing insights from multiple stakeholders knowledgeable about the region's foreign policy.

The primary respondents included university professors, postgraduate students, university administrators, and political figures in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). These participants, well-versed in Pakistan's foreign policy, provided a comprehensive understanding of the political, military, and economic variables affecting Pakistan's interactions with its neighbors.

During the qualitative phase, participants were asked open-ended questions to elicit their perspectives on Pakistan's strategic relationships with Afghanistan and India. The key topics covered included:

- The significance of Afghanistan and India in Pakistan's strategic calculus.
- Pakistan's role in maintaining regional peace.
- The complexities of Pakistan's diplomatic relations with these two neighbors.
- The effectiveness of Pakistan's policies in stabilizing the region.
- Suggested modifications to Pakistan's strategic partnerships in South Asia.

This phase provided a deeper exploration of Pakistan's diplomatic, security, and economic policies, alongside its cultural influences and the challenges it faces in fostering peace.

In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire measured public perceptions of Pakistan's role in fostering stability in South Asia using a 5-point Likert scale. The dependent variable was the Perceived Effectiveness of Pakistan's Strategic Role in South Asian Stability, while the independent variables were:

1. Diplomatic Engagements
2. Security Policies
3. Economic Initiatives
4. Cultural and Social Influence

Regression analysis was used to assess how these factors contributed to the perceived effectiveness of Pakistan's strategic role, revealing significant trends in Pakistan's foreign policy approach.

By combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the strategic role Pakistan plays in the region. The findings provide key insights into the challenges and opportunities in Pakistan's foreign policy, highlighting areas for improvement in diplomatic, security, and economic

engagements. This research is significant for scholars, policymakers, and international stakeholders, offering practical recommendations for fostering stability in South Asia.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A diverse group of respondents from universities and postgraduate colleges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Punjab, representing various academic disciplines, participated in answering the open-ended questions. These participants were selected based on their knowledge and interest in geopolitics and international relations, providing a wide range of perspectives on Pakistan's strategic role in South Asian stability. Their academic diversity and deep geopolitical insights contributed to a multidimensional understanding of the complex bilateral relations between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. The responses, which combined academic rigor with practical geopolitical observations, offered valuable insights into the impact of Pakistan's diplomatic, security, and economic policies on the region's stability. This blend of perspectives helped illuminate the nuanced ways in which Pakistan influences regional dynamics.

4.1. Q1. KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN AND INDIA

A consensus emerged among the respondents on the key factors influencing Pakistan's strategic relations with Afghanistan and India. In the case of Afghanistan, security concerns, border disputes, and ethnic ties were identified as critical elements shaping bilateral relations. Many respondents emphasized the ongoing border issues, particularly the Durand Line, as a persistent source of tension. Additionally, Afghanistan's internal instability and the perception of security spillover into Pakistan were seen as crucial concerns. Some respondents further noted that ethnic and tribal affiliations across borders added complexity to the relationship. In contrast, respondents pointed to the Kashmir issue, security threats, and political rivalry as the dominant factors in Pakistan's relationship with India. The Kashmir conflict was universally acknowledged as the central point of contention, driving much of the antagonism between the two nations. Several respondents also highlighted the nuclear threat and the arms race, which have historically escalated tensions between India and Pakistan. Conventional confidence-building measures (CBMs) and terrorism were frequently mentioned as central security concerns in both relationships, further complicating Pakistan's efforts to maintain strategic relations in South Asia.

4.2. Q2. PERCEPTIONS OF PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN PROMOTING STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Respondents recognized Pakistan's critical role in promoting South Asian stability, though they offered a nuanced analysis of the country's influence. Many participants acknowledged Pakistan's strategic position at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, emphasizing its pivotal role in regional security dynamics. Pakistan's military strength, nuclear capabilities, and active participation in counterterrorism efforts were frequently cited as key elements of its contribution to regional stability. The respondents appreciated

Pakistan's involvement in regional peace initiatives and its efforts to address terrorism, which were seen as crucial to maintaining stability in South Asia. However, some respondents pointed out that Pakistan's domestic political challenges, economic constraints, and reliance on external powers like China and the United States could undermine its long-term effectiveness in fostering regional stability. These internal pressures, combined with geopolitical rivalries and historical conflicts, were seen as complicating Pakistan's ability to consistently project stability within the region. Overall, the responses reflected a balanced view, acknowledging both Pakistan's significant influence and the substantial challenges it faces in promoting a peaceful and stable South Asia.

4.3. Q3. CHALLENGES IN DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS WITH AFGHANISTAN AND INDIA

Respondents outlined various challenges Pakistan faces in its diplomatic engagements with Afghanistan and India. With Afghanistan, many highlighted the ongoing tensions surrounding the Durand Line, which remains a contentious border issue, alongside accusations of Pakistan's alleged support for militant groups. These factors have strained relations and complicated efforts to foster trust between the two nations. Furthermore, Pakistan's involvement in Afghan domestic affairs—often perceived as interference—exacerbates diplomatic challenges, particularly during peace settlement processes. In the case of India, the unresolved Kashmir dispute was overwhelmingly seen as the primary obstacle in diplomatic relations, perpetuating a climate of mistrust and military tensions. Many respondents pointed to frequent military clashes and claims of cross-border terrorism as additional factors hindering diplomatic progress. The responses also reflected concerns over conflicting national security policies between the two nations, which prevent meaningful cooperation. Moreover, internal political dynamics in Pakistan and regional power plays involving external actors like China and the United States were seen as compounding the difficulties in maintaining consistent and constructive diplomatic engagements with both Afghanistan and India. This complex landscape underscores the multifaceted challenges Pakistan faces in navigating its diplomatic relations in South Asia.

4.1. Q4. EFFECTIVENESS OF PAKISTAN'S POLICIES IN MAINTAINING REGIONAL STABILITY

Respondents offered various views regarding the effectiveness of Pakistan's policies in maintaining regional stability. Some were critical, suggesting that Pakistan's historical support for militant groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir has contributed to regional instability and fostered mistrust with neighboring countries, particularly India. These respondents argued that such policies have often resulted in conflicts and hindered regional cooperation. Furthermore, they noted that Pakistan's internal political instability and economic difficulties diminish its capacity to pursue a coherent foreign policy that could lead to lasting peace and stability in South Asia. On the other hand, many respondents acknowledged Pakistan's recent efforts to promote regional collaboration, mainly through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). They praised Pakistan's proactive counterterrorism policies, enhanced security measures, and

intelligence-sharing efforts as significant contributions to regional peace and stability. These respondents also pointed to Pakistan's engagement in diplomatic dialogue with Afghanistan and India as indicative of its commitment to resolving conflicts and maintaining peace. Overall, the responses reflected a mixed assessment, with some recognizing progress in Pakistan's policies and others highlighting the ongoing challenges that continue to undermine regional stability. This nuanced perspective illustrates the complexity of Pakistan's role in fostering a stable South Asia amidst various geopolitical dynamics.

4.5. Q5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC RELATIONS IIN SOUTH ASIA

Respondents recommended that Pakistan adopt a multifaceted approach to enhance its strategic relations in South Asia, focusing on diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and confidence-building measures. Many suggested that resolving long-standing disputes, particularly with India, through sustained dialogue and negotiations should be a priority. Continuous efforts to peacefully resolve disputes, especially over Kashmir, were seen as essential steps toward reducing tensions and fostering mutual cooperation. Strengthening economic ties through regional trade agreements and infrastructure projects, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), was also viewed as a practical way to build goodwill and promote regional integration. Respondents further advised that Pakistan actively participate in regional forums like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to address shared challenges such as poverty, security, and climate change. By promoting a transparent and consistent foreign policy and reducing support for non-state actors, Pakistan could foster greater trust among its neighbors. These efforts, along with a long-term focus on socio-economic development and regional cooperation, were deemed critical for enhancing Pakistan's strategic relationships and contributing to a more stable and cooperative South Asian region.

Table 1. Thematic Survey Results

Questions	Theme	Summary
Key Factors Influencing Relations	Historical Context	Historical ties and conflicts shape relations.
	Security Concerns	Security issues, especially terrorism, are pivotal.
	Economic Interests	Trade routes and energy projects are key economic factors.
Perception of Pakistan's Role in Stability	Mediator Role	Potential to act as a mediator in regional conflicts.
	Stability Contributor	Diplomatic efforts are crucial for stability.
Challenges in Diplomatic Engagements	Trust Deficit	Significant trust deficit with India.
	Political Instability	Afghanistan's internal instability poses challenges.
Effectiveness of Pakistan's Policies	Mixed Effectiveness	Varied opinions on policy effectiveness.
	Need for Strategic Review	Suggestion for a strategic review of policies.
Recommendations for Improving Relations	Enhanced Diplomacy	Increased diplomatic efforts and dialogues are recommended.
	Economic Collaboration	Economic ties could improve strategic relations

Source: Author's survey.

The demographic profile of the respondents, shown in Table 2, provides crucial insights into the survey participants and contextualizes the study's results. The gender distribution is

notably imbalanced, with 71% identifying as male and 29% as female. This disparity reflects a broader trend in academia and international politics, where males often dominate. In terms of age, the respondents represent a diverse range of experiences. Individuals over 35 years old constitute the largest demographic group, accounting for 45% of the sample. This indicates that many participants possess substantial academic and professional credentials, particularly in fields relevant to the study. Conversely, 13% of participants are within the 20–25 age range, 17% fall into the 26–30 age range, and 25% are aged 31–35. Researchers were prudent in including individuals of various ages in the study, ranging from novice students and scholars to experienced professors and industry specialists. This diversity ensures a comprehensive array of perspectives, which is essential for capturing viewpoints shaped by contemporary academic debates and extensive geopolitical experience.

Table 2. Demographic Survey

Demographic Characteristics	Response Options	Percentage
Gender	Male	71.0%
	Female	29.0%
Age	20–25	13.0%
	26–30	17.0%
	31–35	25.0%
	More than 35 Years	45.0%
Educational Background	Under graduate student	10.0%
	Graduate student	45.0%
	Faculty/Teacher	30.0%
	Administrative Staff	15.0%
Knowledge	Not familiar at all	10.0%
	Somewhat familiar	33.0%
	Very familiar	57.0%

Source: Author's survey.

The sample is mainly composed of individuals with graduate degrees. The presence of 45% of graduate students among the participants indicates a significant commitment to their studies and a substantial knowledge of the subjects addressed. Thirty percent of respondents, academic members or professors, provide an additional layer of intellectual understanding to the data. Although underrepresented, the 10% of the sample, including students, offers significant insight into the academic experiences of novices. Additionally, administrative personnel constitute around 15% of the participants, providing a novel and sometimes overlooked viewpoint on the university environment. The respondents' diverse academic and professional backgrounds enable us to understand perceptions of Pakistan's involvement in regional peacekeeping. A crucial survey component requests individuals to evaluate their knowledge of Pakistan's foreign policy and its South Asian standing. The data indicate that most of the sample firmly understands the present geopolitical concerns, as 57% of respondents report being "very familiar" with the subject. One-third of the poll respondents are "somewhat familiar," indicating a limited level of expertise, while 10% are entirely ignorant. The study's results are more trustworthy and comprehensive due to the involvement of individuals with substantial expertise in the field, facilitated by many participants possessing deep acquaintance. The poll participants are an intellectually

inquisitive and varied group capable of providing nuanced insights about Pakistan's strategic relationships in South Asia. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the study's principal variables affecting Pakistan's strategic stability in South Asia. These descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into the overarching trends and variability within the data, allowing one to assess the influence of cultural, diplomatic, security, and economic indicators on regional stability and identify patterns.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Diplomatic Engagements	3.986	0.768
Security policies	3.012	1.025
Economic initiatives	4.121	0.698
Cultural influence	3.854	0.857
Perceived Effectiveness of Pakistan's Strategic Role	4.741	0.547

Source: Author's survey.

Diplomatic engagements, with an average score of 3.986 and a standard deviation of 0.768, indicate that individuals usually see Pakistan's diplomatic endeavors as reasonably practical. The participants' varied perspectives on the efficacy of Pakistan's diplomacy with its neighbors, particularly Afghanistan and India, are shown by the standard deviation, which demonstrates significant diversity in these views. The comparatively elevated mean indicates that participants see diplomatic relations as significant. Conversely, security policies have a markedly higher standard deviation of 1.025 and a much lower mean score of 3.012. This suggests that respondents' views on the effectiveness of Pakistan's security measures are more varied. The larger standard deviation and lower mean indicate significant discrepancies in participants' evaluations of the effectiveness of security measures relative to other aspects. This variance may stem from differing perspectives on the internal and external security factors impacting Pakistan, including border issues, counterterrorism efforts, and the ongoing Kashmir conflict. The respondents' favorable assessment of economic initiatives, shown by a mean score of 4.121 and a standard deviation of 0.698, indicates their belief that Pakistan's economic policies substantially influence regional stability. The elevated mean suggests that individuals are significantly concerned about Pakistan's economic participation, particularly regarding initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is widely acknowledged to enhance Pakistan's economy and regional prominence. Respondents seem to exhibit more consensus about the effectiveness of Pakistan's economic efforts, as shown by the reduced standard deviation. This substantiates the notion that economic collaboration is a crucial element in fostering stability. Cultural influence receives a favorable assessment, with an average score of 3.854 and a standard deviation of 0.857. While most individuals have a favorable perception of Pakistan's social and cultural impact on South Asia, the somewhat higher standard deviation indicates a divergence of opinions on the significance of this influence. Although economic and diplomatic engagements are paramount, cultural diplomacy—which includes soft power strategies like educational exchanges, media outreach, and cultural connections—is regarded as a fundamental component of Pakistan's foreign policy. Ultimately, the dependent variable is the perceived effectiveness of Pakistan's strategic role, with a mean score of 4.74 and a standard deviation of 0.547.

Respondents firmly and consistently feel that Pakistan's predominant strategic role in promoting South Asian stability is influential. The low standard deviation and high mean score indicate that the majority favor Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic objectives. Notwithstanding challenges, this accord reinforces the perception that Pakistan's cultural, diplomatic, security, and economic endeavors positively influence regional stability. Table 4 presents the findings of the multivariate regression analysis, explaining the relationships between the independent variables and perceptions of Pakistan's strategic success in South Asia.

Table 4. Multivariate Regression

Variables	Coefficient	t-value	Prob. Value
<i>Demographic Variables</i>			
Gender	-0.991	-1.707	0.091
Age	0.452	3.822	<0.001
Educational Background	0.427	2.973	0.014
Familiarity with Topic	-0.088	-1.147	0.254
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Diplomatic engagements	-0.611	0.321	0.749
Security policies	-0.562	-5.818	<0.001
Economic initiatives	0.307	2.678	0.038
Cultural and social influence	0.433	4.886	<0.001
<i>Statistical Tests</i>			
R ²	0.863		
Adjusted R ²	0.801		
F-statistics	14.258		
F-prob. Value	<0.001		

Source: Author's survey estimates.

An age-dependent correlation was identified, beginning with demographic variables, which is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.452$, $t\text{-value} = 3.822$, $p < 0.001$). This research indicates that older individuals favor Pakistan's strategic posture more favorably. Older individuals may possess a finer understanding of geopolitics, influenced by their extensive exposure to historical events and policies, perhaps explaining the positive association between age and perceptions of efficacy. This validates the long-held assertions of life cycle theory that individuals' viewpoints inherently develop throughout time, becoming more pragmatic and conservative due to their experiences (de Sousa et al., 2023). This positive link may stem from older individuals' greater inclination toward diplomatic stability and long-term strategic relationships, as shown by previous studies on perceptions of foreign policy (Byun & Carson, 2023; Sciubba, 2023).

The educational background is a significant demographic variable, indicated by a coefficient value of 0.427 ($p = 0.014$). Individuals with more years of education are more likely to positively view Pakistan's strategic importance. Research indicates that higher-educated professionals have a superior understanding of intricate geopolitical issues and the implications of international relations and policy, corroborating our results. Cognitive mobilization theory posits that educated individuals possess a superior understanding of international relations and can analyze the intricacies of foreign policy tactics (Akman,

2024; Folarin, 2024). Consequently, persons with more formal education may view Pakistan's security and diplomatic initiatives—particularly economic endeavors such as the CPEC, which require an understanding of international commerce and economic diplomacy—as more intricate and compelling.

Security policies were identified as a significant independent variable, exhibiting a coefficient value of -0.562 ($p < 0.001$). Considering the negative association, it is reasonable to conclude that individuals are concerned about Pakistan's security policies and their potential impact on the nation's regional status. This finding aligns with critiques of the security dynamics in Pakistan, emphasizing the nation's strained ties with Afghanistan and India (Zarawar et al., 2024). The persistent issues of cross-border terrorism, nuclear threats, and the Kashmir conflict continue to overshadow Pakistan's regional standing. This result may be more comprehensively understood through security-related ideas, such as balance of power theory. It might be said that Pakistan is exacerbating regional tensions rather than fostering stability via its security policies, which focus on nuclear deterrence and conventional military strategies (Ali, 2024). A climate of distrust exists in South Asia, particularly regarding India, with prior studies indicating that Pakistan's security strategy is a significant cause (Imran et al., 2024). This reinforces the perspective that security measures are essential; however, they currently fail to enhance the region's long-term stability and peace.

The perceived effectiveness of Pakistan's strategic posture had a positive correlation with economic activities, shown by a coefficient value of 0.307 ($p = 0.038$). Respondents saw Pakistan's economic initiatives, particularly concerning regional projects such as CPEC, as essential to its strategic success, as shown by this positive correlation. The project's success in establishing robust business connections has enhanced Pakistan's economy and increased the nation's influence in South Asia. This conclusion aligns with liberal economic theory, which posits that cooperation and interdependence within the economy may foster enhanced stability and peace (Mousseau, 2003). The prevailing opinion is that Pakistan might attain enhanced regional success via economic diplomacy rather than through security or military approaches (Hussain et al., 2023). Aligned with the positive perception of Pakistan's economic initiatives, more studies on regional economic collaboration, particularly in South Asia, have underscored the importance of trade and infrastructure development as critical elements in sustaining regional stability.

There is a positive correlation with the cultural and social effect variable. This underscores the significance of cultural and social diplomacy in Pakistan's strategic stance within South Asia. Perceptions of Pakistan in the region are significantly influenced by cultural factors, including media engagement, educational exchanges, and soft power diplomacy. This result supports the concept of soft power, which posits that governments may achieve their geopolitical aims via cultural influence rather than coercion or force (Hussain, 2024). Pakistan aims to enhance its image and foster regional cooperation through cultural diplomacy by actively engaging in cultural forums and emphasizing its historical, religious, and social connections with neighboring states such as Afghanistan. The significant positive link in this study may be elucidated by previous research on the impacts of cultural

diplomacy, which has shown its potential to alleviate tensions and foster enduring relationships (Rehman et al., 2023; Akram, 2023).

The model effectively captures the significant factors influencing Pakistan's strategic posture, shown by a modified R^2 score of 0.801. The independent factors account for 80.1% of the variance in the dependent variable. The significant F-statistic further validates the model's fit at $p < 0.001$.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study underscore the dual role of economic initiatives and cultural diplomacy in enhancing Pakistan's regional influence while highlighting significant obstacles posed by security measures. The complexity of Pakistan's geopolitical position in South Asia is evident, especially in how age and educational attainment shape public perceptions of geopolitical processes. The positive influence of economic initiatives and cultural diplomacy indicates that economic initiatives, particularly infrastructure projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), are perceived favorably, indicating their potential to bolster Pakistan's strategic standing in the region. Cultural and social diplomacy significantly impacts perceptions of Pakistan's strategic effectiveness, suggesting that soft power strategies can foster better regional relationships.

However, the regression analysis reveals a negative correlation between security policies and Pakistan's strategic standing, suggesting that a militarized approach may undermine efforts to foster regional peace and cooperation. Persistent tensions related to cross-border terrorism and territorial disputes with India and Afghanistan detract from Pakistan's diplomatic efforts and regional stability. To enhance its strategic position, Pakistan should focus on economic initiatives that promote regional cooperation. This includes increasing participation in regional economic forums, pursuing trade liberalization, and building closer economic ties with neighboring countries. Engagement in regional infrastructure projects could improve economic ties and reduce tensions in the long term.

A shift from military-centric security measures to comprehensive, cooperative approaches is essential. Pakistan should engage in multilateral security dialogues to foster trust with neighboring nations, particularly India and Afghanistan. Collaborating on non-traditional security challenges such as counterterrorism and climate change can help mitigate regional tensions. Expanding cultural exchange initiatives and collaboration with regional media can strengthen Pakistan's appeal as a collaborative partner in South Asia. Highlighting shared historical and cultural connections can help mend regional rifts and foster goodwill. Increasing public awareness and education about Pakistan's diplomatic objectives and regional cooperation is crucial. Initiatives that educate citizens on the benefits of regional engagement can cultivate support for strategic objectives. The government should prioritize educational projects that promote understanding of cultural and economic opportunities stemming from regional cooperation.

Improving governance and transparency is vital for the effective implementation of foreign policy and economic development initiatives. Efficient governance mechanisms will help sustain long-term strategic goals. Strengthening institutions capable of handling complex

negotiations and ensuring alignment of foreign policy with national interests is essential for maintaining a favorable strategic presence in the region. The study concludes that while Pakistan's economic and cultural initiatives can enhance its influence in South Asia, the nation must address its security policy shortcomings. By integrating security considerations with economic collaboration and cultural engagement, Pakistan can navigate its geopolitical challenges and strengthen its regional prominence. Effective governance and public engagement will further support these efforts, creating a more favorable environment for diplomacy and cooperation.

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Informed Consent Statement:

Written informed consent has been obtained from the patient(s) to publish this paper.

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I declare that the authors have no competing interests, or other interests that might be perceived to influence the results and/or discussion reported in this paper.

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