FROM LOCAL STRUGGLE TO GLOBAL CAUSE: FRAMING STRATEGIES IN THE BALOCH LONG MARCH MOVEMENT

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Abstract
The Baloch Long March (December 2023–January 2024) turned a local protest over enforced disappearances in Balochistan into a global advocacy campaign. This study examines how activists framed their fight to mobilise domestic and international supporters. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on Baloch Yakjehti Committee and allied group social media posts, campaign materials, public statements, and news coverage using Snow and Benford's tripartite typology of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames. The diagnostic frame portrayed enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings as a systematic "genocide" rooted in historical marginalisation and linked them to resource extraction projects like the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Prognoses urged global civil society and diaspora networks to petition human rights bodies and use hashtags like #UNforBalochistan and #IStandWithBalochMarch to pressure authorities. Motivational framing used personal stories, women's leadership, and emotional imagery to create a collective identity and moral obligation. These strategies made a regional grievance a global human rights issue and drew criticism from Amnesty International, but state repression and geopolitical priorities that prioritised security and investment over accountability limited their influence on policy. Digital transnational activism has potential and limits, and effective framing requires sustained organising, broad coalitions, and solutions to state delegitimisation.

Keywords*: Baloch Long March, Social Movement Framing, Transnational Activism, Hastag Acvtivism, Narrative Construction.*

Abstrak

Pawai Panjang Baloch (Desember 2023–Januari 2024) mengubah protes lokal terkait penghilangan paksa di Balochistan menjadi kampanye advokasi global. Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana aktivis merumuskan perjuangan mereka untuk menggalang dukungan domestik dan internasional. Analisis konten kualitatif dilakukan pada posting media sosial, materi kampanye, pernyataan publik, dan liputan berita dari Baloch Yakjehti Committee dan kelompok sekutunya, menggunakan tipologi tripartit Snow dan Benford tentang kerangka diagnostik, prognostik, dan motivasional. Kerangka diagnostik menggambarkan penghilangan paksa dan pembunuhan di luar proses hukum sebagai "genosida" sistematis yang berakar pada marginalisasi historis dan mengaitkannya dengan proyek ekstraksi sumber daya seperti Koridor Ekonomi China-Pakistan. Kerangka prognosis mendesak masyarakat sipil global dan jaringan diaspora untuk mengajukan petisi kepada badan hak asasi manusia dan menggunakan tagar seperti #UNforBalochistan dan #IStandWithBalochMarch untuk menekan otoritas. Kerangka motivasi menggunakan cerita pribadi, kepemimpinan perempuan, dan gambar emosional untuk menciptakan identitas kolektif dan kewajiban moral. Strategi ini mengubah keluhan regional menjadi isu hak asasi manusia global dan mendapat kritik dari Amnesty International, tetapi represi negara dan prioritas geopolitik yang mengutamakan keamanan dan investasi daripada pertanggungjawaban membatasi pengaruhnya terhadap kebijakan. Aktivisme transnasional digital memiliki potensi dan batasan, dan kerangka

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yang efektif memerlukan organisasi yang berkelanjutan, koalisi yang luas, dan solusi untuk mendelegitimasi negara.

Kata kunci: *Baloch Long March, Kerangka Gerakan Sosial, Aktivitas Transnasional, Gerakan Tagar*

A. Introduction

In the process of analysing how social movements develop and how they communicate meaning, framing theory is an extremely important factor. According to Benford (1994). "signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning" for both the people who are a part of their constituents and the general public. According to this point of view, activists are not merely the carriers of preexisting ideologies; instead, they are actively involved in the selection, emphasis, and contestation of ideas. It is emphasised by that framing involves both selection and salience, which means that it involves selecting particular aspects of reality and enhancing their visibility in communication in order to emphasise a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, or moral evaluation.

Along the same lines, Gamson and colleagues show that movement frames frequently take the form of injustice frames, which are interpretive packages that emphasize grievances and attribute blame to authorities. Through assertions of unfairness, injustice frames serve as a precursor to collective noncompliance, protest, and/or rebellion, effectively mobilising bystanders to take action. According to the findings, successful movements form collective action frames that are based on values (diagnostic framing), acknowledge groups that are affected (prognostic framing), and cultivate a sense of agency or solidarity (motivational framing).

The 2023-2024 Baloch Long March is a stark reminder of how local struggles for justice can evolve into movements with global resonance. Sparked in late 2023, the protest involved hundreds of women and families walking from Turbat in Balochistan, an arid and economically marginalised province of Pakistan to the capital city of Islamabad, a journey of nearly a thousand miles. They were not marching for economic gain or political power, but to demand accountability for enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings that have scarred their community. These disappearances disproportionately affect young men, leaving mothers, wives and sisters searching for answers in the face of state silence. As the march proceeded through cities and towns, participants confronted blocked roads, fake criminal charges and arbitrary arrests. Upon reaching Islamabad, they staged a month-long sit-in outside the National Press Club, sleeping in near-freezing temperatures, yet remained peaceful despite repeated harassment. Their courage drew national and international attention, challenging the

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narrative that such protests are "anti-state" and instead framing them as urgent calls for basic human rights.

Balochistan's political context makes this mobilisation especially urgent. Since the early 2000s, the province has experienced an insurgency rooted in long-standing grievances over political disenfranchisement, economic marginalisation and resource exploitation. Although home to significant mineral wealth, it remains one of Pakistan's poorest regions, fuelling resentment toward a central government perceived as indifferent to its development. Armed groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army and Balochistan Liberation Front emerged amid allegations of state neglect. In this volatile environment, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings have multiplied, with some advocacy groups estimating around 7,000 cases in the past two decades. Women in Balochistan, historically confined to domestic roles by patriarchal traditions, have become frontline activists because so many men have either disappeared or been killed. The long march thus reflects not only a human-rights crisis but a fundamental transformation in the province's gender dynamics, as women step into public political spaces to demand justice for their missing loved ones.

The scale and character of the 2023-2024 long march set it apart from previous protests. Earlier demonstrations were typically confined to Balochistan and led by men, attracting little national attention. In contrast, the long march involved participants from diverse social backgrounds, including women from poor and lower-middle-class families who had never before engaged in public protest. The march covered over 900 miles and confronted numerous checkpoints and state attempts at obstruction. Footage of police dragging women and children into buses prompted outrage across Pakistan and highlighted the authorities' heavy-handed tactics. This repression continued during the month-long sit-in in Islamabad, where families of the disappeared camped out in harsh winter conditions. According to Amnesty International, the demonstrators—many of whom were elderly or very young—faced disinformation campaigns, arbitrary arrests and intimidation. Yet the movement persisted, drawing solidarity from civil-rights activists, journalists and even United Nations special rapporteurs. The combination of mass participation, women's leadership and state repression underscores why scholars and policymakers should pay attention: the march illustrates how grassroots movements can reshape gender roles and challenge authoritarian narratives.

Digital media played a pivotal role in amplifying the protesters' voices and connecting their local struggle to a global audience. Protesters utilised hashtags such as #StopBalochGenocide and #BalochLongMarch to share updates and personal stories; photographs of missing loved ones circulated widely, humanising statistics and fostering

empathy. Social media became both a tool for mobilisation and a battleground for competing narratives. Pakistani authorities, aware of the power of online discourse, reportedly launched digital disinformation campaigns targeting the women-led Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC). These counter-framing efforts sought to discredit the movement, portray protesters as foreign agents and suppress dissent. Despite these challenges, online platforms enabled diaspora communities and international human-rights organisations to follow events in real time, pressure the government and offer solidarity. The long march thus demonstrates how digital activism can circumvent mainstream media blackouts and bring marginalised voices to the fore, even as states attempt to control the narrative.

Understanding how social movements construct and communicate meaning is central to social-movement theory, particularly in the "framing" approach. Frames are interpretive schemas that activists use to organise experience, highlight injustice and motivate action. Snow and Benford distinguish diagnostic frames (identifying problems and assigning blame), prognostic frames (proposing solutions) and motivational frames (mobilising support). Framing is both selective and salient: activists choose certain aspects of reality to emphasise and connect them to broader values, thereby eliciting moral outrage or collective identity. Movements often construct "injustice frames" that portray violations as morally unacceptable, attributing responsibility to authorities and calling for change. In the Baloch case, activists frame enforced disappearances as a form of genocide and link them to broader issues such as colonial exploitation and geopolitical projects like the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. They also frame their struggle as part of a global human-rights movement, drawing parallels with campaigns such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, which have demonstrated the power of social media to mobilise transnational solidarity. Through these frames, Baloch activists seek to transform individual grief into a collective cause that resonates beyond national borders.

Framing does not occur in isolation; it is intertwined with transnational advocacy networks (TANs). Keck and Sikkink's "boomerang pattern" describes how activists bypass blocked domestic channels by linking with international allies, who then pressure their governments to influence the offending state. This mechanism has been observed in Latin American human-rights campaigns, feminist movements and environmental struggles. Digital technologies have amplified the boomerang's reach, enabling rapid communication and mobilisation across continents. In semi-authoritarian contexts, where domestic media and political institutions are constrained, social media platforms provide avenues for activists to engage diaspora communities, human-rights organisations and journalists. The Baloch long march exemplifies this: despite limited national media coverage, the campaign gained

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international attention through online storytelling and diaspora engagement. United Nations officials and prominent journalists voiced concern, illustrating how transnational networks can elevate local issues. Yet digital spaces are also sites of repression; states monitor, censor and harass activists online. Analysing how Baloch activists navigate this contested digital terrain can illuminate broader dynamics of digital repression and resistance in South Asia.

The academic urgency of this research lies in a notable gap in existing scholarship. Studies of digital protest and framing have largely concentrated on movements in Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. While well-documented campaigns such as the Egyptian revolution, Occupy Wall Street and the Hong Kong protests have deepened our understanding of online mobilisation, South-Asian peripheries remain under-represented. Furthermore, much of the literature focuses on male-led movements or those with ready access to urban media infrastructure. The Baloch movement challenges these assumptions: it is led by women from rural regions, it addresses ethnic and gendered violence, and it confronts an authoritarian environment where media censorship is pervasive. As Pakistan's military allegedly conducts digital disinformation campaigns against the BYC, understanding how activists frame their narratives and counter counter-narratives becomes crucial. Without examining cases like Balochistan, we risk a geographically and gender-biased understanding of digital activism.

Beyond filling a geographic gap, this study introduces methodological novelty. It combines traditional social-movement framing analysis with a qualitative content analysis of digital media, integrating data from Twitter posts, Facebook updates, campaign materials, mainstream media coverage and NGO reports. Snow and Benford's framework guides our coding of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames, while thematic analysis allows us to identify emergent patterns such as emotional appeals and identity construction. Our dataset spans the peak period of the long march, capturing both the march itself and the subsequent sit-in. By analysing posts from prominent Baloch activists, diaspora organisations and human-rights groups, we can trace how frames circulate and evolve across networks. We also examine state responses, including official statements and disinformation, to explore counter-framing dynamics. This triangulation not only enhances the reliability of our findings but also offers a comprehensive picture of how narratives travel and transform in a contested digital arena.

The urgency of the Baloch long march also lies in its gendered dimension. Women's leadership in the movement is both a strategic choice and a response to the vacuum created by the disappearance of male activists. By marching and speaking publicly, these women challenge patriarchal norms and draw attention to the gendered impacts of repression. Their narratives

often intertwine personal grief—stories of missing husbands, fathers and brothers—with broader claims about state violence, thereby creating an "affective digital counterpublic." Kirmani (2024) describes how Baloch activists use social media to convey anger, grief and hope; such emotionally resonant stories invite empathy and solidarity. Analysing the emotional content of frames can therefore reveal how movements mobilise support and build collective identity. It also highlights the vulnerability of women activists, who face threats both for their political actions and for transgressing gender norms. Understanding how gender shapes framing and activism enriches broader theories of social movements and digital engagement. Another novel aspect of this study is its consideration of counter-framing and digital repression. While framing theory traditionally focuses on how movements construct meaning, recent scholarship emphasises the role of opponents who contest frames. In Balochistan, state actors have sought to undermine activists by labelling them as separatists or foreign agents, spreading misinformation, and employing bots to flood hashtags. Amnesty International's reporting notes that authorities engaged in disinformation and intimidation during the long march. Examining how activists respond to these counter-frames—by correcting misinformation, amplifying personal stories or appealing to international allies—offers insights into resilience strategies. Such analysis has broader implications for understanding digital repression across contexts, including Myanmar, Palestine and Iran, where states similarly weaponise digital platforms.

By situating the Baloch long march within theoretical debates on framing, digital activism and transnational advocacy, the research bridges micro-level narratives with macro-level political dynamics. It contributes to feminist scholarship by highlighting women's leadership in a patriarchal society and to regional studies by bringing attention to South-Asian peripheries often overlooked in global discussions. Importantly, the study carries policy implications: understanding the framing strategies of activists can help international organisations, journalists and civil-society actors to better support human-rights defenders and counter disinformation. As state repression intensifies and digital spaces become increasingly contested, documenting and analysing cases like the Baloch long march is an urgent academic and moral task.

B. Research Methodology

This study makes use of a qualitative content analysis approach, which reflects the exploratory nature of framing strategies within a context that has been subjected to a limited amount of examination. Considering that our goal is to uncover the complex meanings, symbols, and narratives that are present in activist discourse, this decision is supported by that

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objective.   When compared to quantitative methods, qualitative methods are more effective in facilitating the interpretation of frame construction within unstructured text. Examples of such text include tweets, Facebook posts, and statements made by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).   An example of how qualitative framing analysis can be used to uncover how media representations shape the legitimacy and grievances of a movement is provided by Moscato (2016). As an illustration of the impact that local contexts have on global hashtag campaigns, Senyo Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018) conduct a qualitative frame analysis to investigate the coverage of the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag in several different countries to investigate its coverage.   We aim to identify emerging frame themes (diagnoses of injustice, attributions of blame, and emotional appeals) that may be missed by quantitative methods alone. This is in line with the precedents that have been established.

Our strategy is based on conducting thematic content analysis on textual data that has been derived from a variety of information sources.   The first thing we did was compile a dataset that included messages and reports associated with Baloch demonstrations.   Data sources include the following: (1) posts on Twitter and trending hashtags used by prominent figures in the Baloch long march movement; (2) posts from Facebook groups associated with Baloch diaspora organisations and human rights entities; (3) coverage from mainstream media (both regional and international) regarding significant Baloch demonstrations; and (4) reports and press releases issued by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) in conjunction with Baloch advocacy organisations. Social media platforms Twitter and Facebook were chosen because of their ability to facilitate the narratives of activists and the hashtags associated with those narratives, which attract audiences from all over the world.   For triangulation and context, articles from the media and reports from non-governmental organisations were included. This made it possible to investigate how activist frames are portrayed or challenged in alternative forums.   Data collection took place during the period that the Long March events took place (July–August 2024), making use of relevant keywords (such as "Balochistan," "Yakjehti," protest slogans), and hashtags (such as #BalochLongMarch, #StopBalochGenocide).

During the coding process, several particular steps were carried out.   To inductively derive preliminary codes, an initial open reading of a representative sample of documents was carried out.   The codes identified consistent frame elements. These elements included fundamental grievances (such as economic exploitation and enforced disappearance), assertions of identity (such as the genocide against the Baloch and the solidarity of the Pakhtun), and appeals for action.   At the same time, we incorporated deductive codes that were derived from

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recognised framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational), as described in the literature on social movements.   The compilation of these codes into a codebook was the result of their respective organisation. In order to independently code all of the texts, two researchers used the NVivo software. They highlighted passages that were relevant to each code with great attention to detail.   For example, we classified tweets that described a problem (such as "Pakistan is committing genocide"), identified victims or perpetrators (such as "the missing Baloch youth"), or made use of symbols (such as pictures of people who have gone missing). The instances of emotional language, such as anger, grief, and hope, were coded systematically, and evidence of frame alignment between local and transnational actors was also analysed. Double-coding a subset of texts and addressing discrepancies through discussion were the methods that were utilised to evaluate the reliability of the intercoders. The use of this methodical approach ensured that the codes were defined precisely and that they were implemented consistently.

When conducting the qualitative analysis, a structured content-analysis protocol was followed, which was similar to the methodologies that were utilised in earlier research.   van der Velden & Loecherbach (2023)conducted an investigation into a Guatemalan justice movement by utilising content from Facebook. He addressed questions about the movement's organisers and frames by conducting a comprehensive analysis of individual posts.   In a similar vein, the focus of our investigation is on how Baloch actors express the concerns that are associated with the Long March.   When we were selecting the data for our analysis, we focused on hashtags and keywords that encompassed the majority of the active participation. With the help of methodologies that were comparable to those used by Pramana et al (2020), we identified the ten most frequently used relevant hashtags, which accounted for more than eighty percent of mentions during the period that was specified. We carried out a comprehensive qualitative coding of the posts that were associated with those hashtags.   By doing so, we ensured that our sample accurately reflected the fundamental digital dialogue that was taking place during the movement.

Triangulation was utilised by us in order to improve the validity of our findings by analysing frames from a variety of sources.   When conducting qualitative research, triangulation refers to the implementation of several different data sources or methods in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.   Comparing the content of social media frames with that of news reports and statements made by non-governmental organisations was a methodical process.   For example, when a particular grievance frame, such as "Baloch resources exploited," became prominent on Twitter, we

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investigated whether human rights reports or press coverage supported or contested that particular grievance frame. The purpose of this comparative analysis across a variety of sources is to shed light on the frames that extend their resonance beyond activist circles and to investigate whether the narratives that activists present are being amplified or challenged. The purpose of this is to prevent an excessive amount of unique rhetoric from being interpreted within a single channel. Our investigation into the dynamics of TAN was directed by the alignment (or misalignment) of framing elements across different digital platforms.

This mixed-source framing approach is supported by evidence recently gathered from studies. Traditional media texts were utilised in Moscato's analysis of the framing surrounding the #IdleNoMore movement in Canada. The purpose of this analysis was to investigate the various ways in which the protest that was initiated by the hashtag was either legitimised or critiqued. The purpose of our research is to investigate how a local Twitter campaign influences broader narratives by combining data from Twitter with coverage from alternative sources. The work that Ofori-Parku and Moscato have done about the #BringBackOurGirls campaign exemplifies the tendency for campaigns that originate on social media to be reinterpreted by mainstream media in a variety of countries. Not only does our qualitative analysis investigate raw tweets, but it also investigates press and report texts. This allows us to track the evolution of frames from grassroots to global contexts, which is in line with their approach.

We recognise the constraints and ethical implications involved. Initially, our dependence on publicly accessible content indicates that we only include activists and supporters who communicate online (and in English or other accessible languages); this approach may overlook voices that refrain from using social media or prefer closed platforms. Secondly, framing analysis involves interpretation and may exhibit subjectivity. We addressed this by implementing double-coding and peer debriefing; however, our focus remains on interpreting tone and context instead of quantifying effects. Third, social media data often presents challenges due to its inherent noise and the potential for deletion or inaccessibility; however, archival snapshots and NGO records have proven instrumental in recovering essential statements. In our approach, we exclusively utilised publicly available posts. We ensured that any personal names were de-identified, unless they were widely reported, to reduce potential risks to individuals in a repressive environment.

C. Discussion and Findings

Our multi-method analysis such as content from social media, campaign materials and news reports—reveals how the Baloch Long March leveraged framing strategies to elevate a

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local human-rights crisis into an issue of global significance. This transformation did not occur by accident: it was the result of deliberate rhetorical choices, symbolic practices and networked digital activism that reconfigured the movement's audience and potential allies. In this section, we dissect those choices, evaluate their effectiveness and consider the obstacles they faced.

A significant illustration of how localised human rights movements can be transformed into global advocacy through the utilisation of strategic framing techniques is provided by the Baloch Long March. Traditional methods of protest, which rely heavily on physical demonstrations and the attention of the national media, were not followed by the Baloch Long March when it was carried out. Instead, it operated within a constrained political environment, which required the utilisation of framing strategies that were digitally connected, emotionally impactful, and aimed at an audience that was global in scope. The purpose of this discussion is to examine how diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing collectively shaped the Baloch Long March as a regional grievance and a transnational cause. This discussion is a synthesis of findings from field observations, digital content analysis, and comparative social movement literature.

Diagnostic framing: From local grievance to genocide narrative.

The core of the Baloch activists' diagnostic framing was the assertion that enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings constituted a deliberate, systematic campaign against the Baloch people, amounting to genocide. This claim was more than rhetorical hyperbole; it served to reframe state violence through the lens of international law and to invoke the moral weight of the Genocide Convention. In doing so, activists aligned their struggle with historical injustices recognised globally, such as the Armenian genocide or the Rwandan genocide, thereby signalling to external audiences that what might appear as a domestic security issue was in fact a violation of universal human rights. The link to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) added a structural dimension to the diagnostic frame. Protesters argued that the project's extraction of minerals and construction of strategic infrastructure enabled the dispossession of Baloch communities and justified an increased security presence that facilitated human-rights abuses. This framing connected economic exploitation with political repression, expanding the conflict from isolated incidents to a systemic pattern. By embedding resource exploitation within the narrative of genocide, activists sought to expose how state violence served broader geopolitical and economic interests. This analysis resonates with academic work on extractive industries and conflict, which shows how large-scale development projects often exacerbate tensions between central governments and peripheral regions.

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Other elements that were characterised as being part of this campaign included enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. This framing was articulated through slogans such as "Stop Baloch Genocide" and "End Enforced Disappearances," which were consistently used in protests (Masood & Mir, 2023). These slogans were used in both online and offline demonstrations. By strategically aligning their narrative with established global human rights standards and appealing to the responsibilities of the international community as outlined in the United Nations Genocide Convention, the movement is able to strategically align their narrative with the term "genocide," which serves to heighten the moral and legal significance of the issue. During the process of strengthening this diagnostic narrative, the role of visual framing was extremely important. Individuals who participated in the demonstrations wore black armbands, displayed photographs of family members who had gone missing, and participated in candlelight vigils in order to simultaneously represent mourning and resistance. Images that went viral on social media, including mothers holding portraits of their sons who had gone missing, were created with the intention of eliciting feelings of compassion and outrage. Through the utilisation of influential hashtags such as #BalochLivesMatter and #BalochGenocide, the movement was able to facilitate the translation of local experiences of suffering into broader global digital discussions. Similar movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter and #FreePalestine, are reinterpreting localised injustices as violations of universal human rights. This strategy is a reflection of those movements.

A notable feature of the Baloch narrative was its extensive use of historical references. Activists situated current abuses within a long history of military crackdowns, economic marginalisation and cultural erasure. This historical framing served two analytical functions. First, it countered state narratives that portrayed disappearances as isolated incidents linked to counterterrorism; by tracing a lineage of repression, activists demonstrated continuity and intentionality. Second, it affirmed a collective Baloch identity rooted in shared experiences of resistance and survival. Framing scholars emphasise that successful diagnostic frames often draw on cultural narratives and collective memory to resonate with audiences. In the Baloch case, references to previous uprisings and resistance heroes integrated present-day protesters into a lineage of struggle. This tactic underscores that framing is not only about naming current injustices but also about placing them within temporal arcs that confer legitimacy and urgency.

Prognostic framing: demanding accountability and international intervention

The movement's prognostic frames were equally ambitious. Beyond identifying state actors as perpetrators, activists proposed clear solutions: ratification of the International

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Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, independent investigations into human-rights abuses and sanctions against officials involved in violations. These prescriptions reflect a sophisticated understanding of international law and advocacy. By demanding ratification of the convention, activists highlighted Pakistan's failure to adopt global standards; by calling for sanctions, they sought to create material costs for perpetrators. The use of digital campaigns like #UNForBalochistan signalled the movement's aspiration to internationalise the conflict and appeal directly to bodies such as the United Nations. This strategy follows the boomerang pattern identified by Keck and Sikkink: when domestic institutions are unresponsive, activists solicit help from international allies, who then pressure their governments to influence the repressive state. Diaspora organisations played a pivotal role in this process, organising webinars, petition drives and solidarity protests in North America, Europe and the Gulf. Their lobbying of foreign policymakers and creation of English-language content extended the movement's reach beyond regional linguistic barriers. However, the prognostic framing also raises critical questions about efficacy. International conventions and sanctions can be slow and uncertain, and external pressure may provoke nationalist backlashes. This tension illustrates the dilemma for movements operating in semi-authoritarian contexts: while internationalisation can provide leverage, it can also generate dependence on actors with their own geopolitical agendas.

Not only did the Baloch Long March identify problems, but it also presented solutions that were specifically targeted through the use of a structured approach to forecasting in the process. The proposed solutions placed an emphasis on the importance of accountability, the relentless pursuit of justice, and the urgent need for intervention from the international community. In addition to urging the Pakistani government to sign the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the initiative advocated for comprehensive investigations into human rights violations, particularly those involving enforced disappearances (McDonell, 2024). Online campaigns such as #UNForBalochistan made direct appeals to international organisations, including the United Nations, requesting the dispatch of fact-finding missions to Balochistan. These campaigns were in response to the region's ongoing conflict. The demand for sanctions against Pakistani officials who are involved in human rights abuses was increased as a result of simultaneous protests that were coordinated by organisations representing the diaspora in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. In addition to merely condemning the behaviour in question, the prognostic frames outlined specific actions that the international community should take. These actions included the

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implementation of diplomatic pressure, the imposition of economic sanctions, and the establishment of legal frameworks to ensure accountability for those responsible for the crimes.

Digital platforms were not only spaces of broadcast but also sites of mobilisation for the movement's prognostic goals. Activists used Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to disseminate calls for solidarity, share links to petitions and coordinate simultaneous protests across continents. This use of "connective action"—a model of collective action in which networks are formed through digital media rather than formal organisations—allowed individuals with minimal prior activism experience to participate. Online forums and messaging apps enabled real-time coordination of hashtags and trending campaigns, while livestreams connected marchers in Balochistan with diaspora supporters. These practices exemplify how modern prognostic frames often rely on digital infrastructure to crowdsource support and resources. Yet digital mobilisation also faced constraints: accounts were suspended, posts were removed and algorithms prioritised other content. Thus, while digital media amplified prognostic frames, they also constituted contested terrain requiring constant adaptation.

The movement was able to successfully garner support from people all over the world by utilising crowdsourcing thanks to the deliberate implementation of digital platforms. Online petitions were organised in a methodical manner by activists, who also engaged United Nations officials and international human rights organisations through the use of social media tagging and held webinars in conjunction with non-governmental organisations from around the world. This type of transnational networking is an example of the boomerang pattern that was described by Keck and Sikkink (1998). This pattern describes a situation in which domestic actors circumvent their own state in order to gain leverage through worldwide advocacy networks .

Motivational framing: crafting a moral community.

Motivational frames in the Baloch Long March emphasised shared identity and moral obligation. The movement did not simply invite supporters to join a protest; it presented participation as an ethical imperative rooted in familial bonds and communal survival. This framing tapped into deeply held cultural values of honour, kinship and collective responsibility. The rhetorical use of phrases like "We are all mothers of the disappeared" blurred the line between affected families and the broader community, transforming individual grief into a shared cause. The invocation of silence as complicity evoked moral shock, a mechanism that social movement scholars identify as effective in mobilising bystanders by confronting them with the moral consequences of inaction. Motivational frames also highlighted women's leadership as both strategic and symbolic. Dr. Mahrang Baloch's personal story of her father's

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disappearance and death became a narrative anchor, demonstrating how personal narratives can galvanise participation and challenge patriarchal structures. Her prominence defied traditional gender roles in Baloch society and served as a model of moral courage, inspiring other women to join. This gendered dimension underscores that motivational frames are not value-neutral; they operate within cultural contexts and can simultaneously subvert and reproduce social norms. The movement's emphasis on maternal identity risked reinforcing stereotypes of women as mourners, yet it also redefined motherhood as a site of activism and agency.

Through the use of powerful motivational framing, the Long March was able to successfully encourage participation not only in Pakistan but also among the international Baloch diaspora. During this process, the formation of a collective identity and the establishment of emotional solidarity were both essential components. The leaders of the protest emphasised the significance of familial and communal connections, and they presented participation in the march as a moral obligation to protect the Baloch nation from the possibility of extinction. There was a widespread sense of collective responsibility, as evidenced by the prevalence of phrases such as "We are all mothers of the disappeared" and "Your silence is complicity" in speeches, social media posts, and protest chants (Amnesty International, 2024). It was absolutely necessary for women to be involved in the process of developing this framework for motivation. Dr. Mahrang Baloch, who rose to prominence within the movement, made it a point to emphasise her personal story of loss, specifically the disappearance and eventual death of her father, in order to motivate and encourage other people. Through her leadership, she was able to challenge the traditional patriarchal norms that existed within the Baloch community as well as the wider Pakistani society. This demonstrated a gendered representation of strength and ethical leadership throughout Pakistan.

Emotional resonance was integral to motivational framing. Protesters engaged in hunger strikes and overnight vigils, enduring harsh conditions to signal commitment. These acts, widely disseminated online, were designed to elicit empathy and highlight the cost of protest in a repressive environment. Emotionally charged images and testimonies functioned as what sociologist Jeffrey Alexander calls "cultural performances," wherein activists stage suffering to communicate moral messages. In the digital age, such performances are amplified and contested; images can go viral and prompt global solidarity, but they can also be misinterpreted, co-opted or ignored. The Baloch activists' careful curation of emotional content illustrates a sophisticated understanding of the politics of suffering. By choosing which stories to highlight and how to narrate them, organisers controlled the emotional tone of the movement and avoided narratives that might undermine sympathy. This strategic use of emotion challenges

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the view of emotions as irrational and instead positions them as central components of rational mobilisation.

There was an additional support for motivational frameworks that was provided by symbolic acts. Despite the fact that they were intimidated by the police, protesters continued to maintain their presence, participated in hunger strikes, and held overnight vigils in freezing temperatures. For the purpose of serving as evidence of dedication and invitations to participate in the initiative, the actions were widely disseminated across various social media platforms. The Long March went beyond the realm of traditional political activism, transforming into a moral movement that demanded global awareness. This was accomplished by portraying participation as an act of ethical bravery and a historical imperative.

Comparative Analysis: Global Framing Strategies

Patterns that can be found in other transnational movements are reflected in the framing strategies that were utilised during the Baloch Long March. The #FreePalestine campaign has consistently utilised a diagnostic framing that focusses on themes of occupation, dispossession, and apartheid. This has been the case throughout the campaign. On the other hand, its prognostic frames advocate for international sanctions, boycott movements, and interventions by the United Nations. In a similar fashion, the #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar campaign that emerged after the coup in 2021 utilised Twitter as a key platform to circumvent state censorship and raise global awareness (Phattharathanasut, 2024). This campaign follows in the footsteps of the Baloch Long March, which made strategic use of social media in order to overcome Pakistani media blackouts.

Indigenous movements in Latin America, such as those that are opposed to environmental degradation in the Amazon and those that are resisting pipeline expansions in Canada (for example, the Wet'suwet'en resistance), are utilising digital platforms to articulate narratives concerning cultural genocide and ecological exploitation. Local grievances are effectively connected to larger, more universal issues such as climate justice, indigenous rights, and anti-colonialism through movements such as the Baloch Long March and others like it. On a global scale, this strategy expands their reach and increases the moral significance of their actions.

The Baloch case is distinguished by its one-of-a-kind context, which consists of a semi-authoritarian state that is participating in a complex geopolitical alliance with China through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Together with the economic factors associated with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the stringent security measures that have been implemented by the Pakistani state contribute to a landscape that is significantly challenging for

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domestic activism. In order to successfully frame the Long March, it was necessary to not only articulate the problems that needed to be addressed, but also to be able to persevere through repression. Frame resonance and movement were found to be ineffective due to the following obstacles: With regard to the strategic framing of the movement, a number of obstacles impeded its capacity to bring about significant policy change, including the following:

1. **State Counter-Framing and Censorship**

   The Pakistani government actively undermined the Baloch Long March through counter-framing, labeling the activists as separatists or foreign agents. State-aligned media depicted the movement as destabilizing, framing it as a security threat rather than a human rights campaign. This tactic mirrors what Tufekci (2017) calls **"repressive response framing,"** where states delegitimize protests by conflating them with terrorism or foreign interference. Furthermore, periodic internet shutdowns in Balochistan severely limited the movement's ability to disseminate information in real time, constraining online organizing.

2. **Digital Disinformation and Algorithmic Suppression:**

   Social media platforms often operate under opaque algorithms that can inadvertently suppress activist content, especially when flagged by coordinated state-sponsored reports. In the Baloch case, activists reported content takedowns and account suspensions on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, limiting their outreach. This phenomenon is not unique; similar patterns have been observed in Myanmar, Palestine, and Iran, where digital activists contend with both state and platform-induced censorship.

3. **Global Attention Fatigue**

   Sustaining global attention is inherently difficult, particularly for causes that lack immediate geopolitical relevance to Western powers. While the Baloch movement achieved temporary visibility during the peak of the Long March, international media coverage waned over time. This decline in attention weakens the resonance of motivational frames, as global audiences shift focus to newer crises.

4. **Geopolitical Constraints**

The Baloch issue is entangled with the broader strategic interests of China and Pakistan, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative. Western governments are often reluctant to confront Pakistan directly due to regional security concerns, including Afghanistan's instability and counterterrorism partnerships. These geopolitical realities

limit the extent to which the Baloch Long March's prognostic frames translate into actionable foreign policy responses.

Comparative analysis: patterns and particularities.

The framing strategies of the Baloch movement both mirror and diverge from those of other transnational movements. For instance, the #FreePalestine campaign similarly combines a diagnostic frame emphasising occupation and dispossession with prognostic demands for sanctions and UN interventions. Both movements leverage global human-rights discourses and rely on diaspora networks for amplification. Likewise, #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar employed social media to circumvent censorship and call for international action, showing the transnational resonance of digital activism against authoritarian regimes. Indigenous movements in the Amazon and the Wet'suwet'en pipeline protests use framing strategies that connect local environmental grievances to global issues of climate justice and colonialism. These parallels suggest an emerging repertoire of digital transnational activism characterised by the localisation of universal rights claims, the mobilisation of diasporic publics and the creative use of hashtags. Yet the Baloch case is distinct in its geopolitical entanglement with China's Belt and Road Initiative and Pakistan's national security paradigm. The movement's diagnostic frame must contend with narratives of development and security that hold strong sway domestically. Its prognostic calls for international intervention run up against strategic interests that make global actors reluctant to confront Islamabad. Moreover, the gendered nature of the movement—led by women in a patriarchal, militarised context—adds a dimension largely absent in many other campaigns. Such particularities illustrate that while there are global patterns in digital activism, local contexts shape framing strategies and their effectiveness.

Theoretical Implications: Framing in Authoritarian Contexts.

When it comes to the larger theoretical discourse that surrounds the framing of social movements within authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts, the Baloch Long March plays a significant role. In contrast to movements that take place within fully democratic settings, where the presence of diverse media outlets makes it easier for competing narratives to emerge, activists who operate within restrictive contexts are required to employ strategic manoeuvring in order to circumvent state repression while simultaneously effectively communicating compelling messages. As a consequence of this, hybrid framing strategies are developed, which have the ability to incorporate local cultural symbols, such as Baloch poetry and family honour, into the conversation that surrounds global human rights (Ghazala & Jehanzeb, 2024).

The movement is an example of the calculated application of emotional framing, which is the process of strategically engaging feelings such as grief, anger, and pride in conjunction with factual assertions. The utilisation of mothers and daughters in leadership roles during protests, the emphasis on personal narratives of loss, and the strategic use of visual representations of martyrdom collectively work to transform the abstract figures associated with disappearances into relatable human experiences, thereby rendering the consequences of inaction ethically unacceptable for those observing.

To add insult to injury, the Baloch case brings to light the significance of networked framing in the context of the digital age. By facilitating the participation of a wide range of decentralised entities, such as diaspora groups, independent journalists, and global non-governmental organisations (NGOs), hashtag activism makes it easier for these entities to adopt and modify the fundamental frameworks of the Long March. By doing so, a multi-nodal advocacy network is established, which transcends the authority of any individual organisation. This exemplifies the concept of "connective action," which was described by Bennett & Segerberg (2012)

Digital Transnationalism and Diaspora Advocacy

The dynamics of transnational advocacy have been fundamentally altered as a result of the development of digital media. Within the framework of the Baloch Long March, diaspora communities in Europe, North America, and the Gulf served as significant amplifiers of the narratives that were being conveyed by the movement. Interacting with foreign policymakers, coordinating solidarity protests, and disseminating opinion pieces written in English were all activities that these groups participated in. Their role goes beyond merely providing support; the diaspora is an essential component of the ecosystem of Baloch advocacy, and it has the ability to reshape the narrative for audiences that may not be well-versed in the geopolitical situation in South Asia.

Balochwarna News and The Balochistan Post are two examples of media outlets that are part of the diaspora that are responsible for the systematic curation and dissemination of narratives that correspond with the framing strategy of the Long March. The narratives that are primarily controlled by the state in Pakistan are challenged by these media spaces, which serve as counter-publics and provide alternative discourses. They make possible a form of transnationalism that is characterised by shared emotions, such as grief, outrage, and solidarity, and that facilitates the formation of a cohesive moral community among individuals who are geographically separated from one another.

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D. Conclusion

This study set out to understand how the 2023-2024 Baloch Long March—an extraordinary mobilisation of Baloch women and families demanding an end to enforced disappearances—became a focal point for national and international human-rights advocacy. Through multi-method analysis combining social-media content and secondary literature, the research examined how activists used framing strategies to transform local grievances into a transnational cause, and it assessed the effectiveness and limitations of those strategies. The following sections synthesize the principal findings and their implications.

1. Strategic framing of injustice.

At the heart of the movement was a deliberate effort to recast enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings not as isolated or unfortunate incidents but as part of a systematic campaign of oppression. Activists described these abuses in the language of genocide, explicitly connecting them to broader structural conditions such as economic marginalisation and resource exploitation. By invoking the term "genocide" and referencing international human-rights instruments, they sought to frame the crisis as a violation of universal values rather than a domestic security issue. This strategy had several effects: it elevated the moral and legal stakes, invited comparisons to globally recognised atrocities and appealed to transnational audiences who might otherwise perceive the conflict as distant. Moreover, by linking the crisis to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor—a massive infrastructure project considered central to Pakistan's development—the movement exposed how geopolitical and economic interests intersect with human-rights abuses. Thus, the diagnostic frame combined an attribution of blame with a critique of structural and geopolitical factors.

Visual and symbolic practices amplified this message. Protesters carried photographs of missing relatives, wore black armbands and organised candlelight vigils. These powerful images humanised statistics and embodied suffering, making the abstract notion of enforced disappearance tangible. Hashtags such as #BalochGenocide and #BalochLivesMatter mirrored global campaigns against racial and ethnic violence, situating the Baloch cause within a familiar digital vocabulary. Such strategies illustrate how digital networks can create resonance and solidarity by embedding local narratives in global discourses. They also reveal a nuanced understanding of how to capture attention in a crowded media environment where images and slogans travel faster than detailed reports.

2. Articulating solutions and mobilising transnational advocacy.

Beyond identifying injustice, the movement articulated clear demands and strategies for remedy. Activists called for Pakistan to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, for independent investigations into extrajudicial killings and for sanctions against officials responsible for abuses. These demands anchored the movement's prognostic framing in international law and institutional accountability. Instead of simply denouncing the state, activists proposed legal and policy changes that could be monitored and enforced by international bodies. This approach reflects a broader trend in contemporary social movements, where local actors appeal to global institutions to pressure states through what Keck and Sikkink term the "boomerang pattern" of advocacy. The Baloch movement capitalised on diaspora networks to coordinate petitions, organise protests in Western capitals and engage with human-rights organisations, thereby leveraging the resources and political influence of expatriate communities. These efforts signify a strategic shift from domestic mobilisation to transnational lobbying, recognising that domestic institutions alone are unlikely to address the crisis.

Digital platforms were central to this prognostic frame. Hashtag campaigns such as #UNForBalochistan and #SaveBalochWomen directly targeted international organisations, diplomats and global audiences. Live-streamed speeches and simultaneous protests allowed supporters across continents to participate in real time. Online petitions gathered signatures that were sent to UN bodies, while webinars and panel discussions brought experts together to discuss accountability mechanisms. By enlisting celebrities, journalists and human-rights lawyers, activists amplified the legitimacy of their demands. Nevertheless, the research indicates that such digital efforts faced significant obstacles. Accounts were suspended, content was removed and algorithms buried posts under less contentious topics. These forms of digital repression highlight the limitations of relying solely on platform-mediated advocacy and underscore the importance of diversifying communication channels.

3. **Building collective identity and moral urgency.**

The movement's motivational frames emphasised shared identity and moral obligation. Activists used familial terms—especially maternal metaphors—to cultivate empathy and solidarity. Slogans like "We are all mothers of the disappeared" and messages that equated silence with complicity framed participation as a moral duty. Central to this framing was the leadership of women such as Dr. Mahrang Baloch, who publicly recounted personal tragedies to galvanise support and challenge patriarchal

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norms. By foregrounding female voices, the movement redefined the role of women in Baloch society and portrayed them as agents rather than passive victims. This gendered framing served multiple purposes: it highlighted the disproportionate impact of enforced disappearances on families, underscored the urgency of protecting vulnerable populations and leveraged the moral authority often associated with mothers in South Asian cultures. Such strategies align with scholarship on emotions in social movements, which emphasises how affective appeals can galvanise bystanders and sustain engagement.

The research also notes that motivational framing extended beyond emotional appeals to incorporate strategic acts of sacrifice and solidarity. Hunger strikes, overnight vigils and long-distance marches were designed to demonstrate commitment and evoke moral shock. Digital dissemination of these acts magnified their impact, transforming local demonstrations into global spectacles. Yet the sustainability of such emotional mobilisation remains a concern. Movements that rely heavily on moral shock may struggle to maintain momentum once initial outrage subsides. The Baloch activists sought to counter this by institutionalising solidarity—through alliances with NGOs, continued social-media engagement and periodic reminders of ongoing disappearances—thereby attempting to convert emotional responses into long-term activism.

4. **Structural constraints and counter-movements.**

Despite sophisticated framing and widespread digital engagement, the movement encountered formidable obstacles. The Pakistani state responded with counter-framing, labelling the activists as separatists and insinuating foreign sponsorship. These narratives tapped into nationalist sentiments and fears of external interference, thereby undermining the movement's legitimacy among segments of the Pakistani population. State-aligned media echoed these accusations, saturating domestic airwaves with messages that redefined protesters as threats to national security. Additionally, the government employed legal repression—arrests, intimidation and occasionally violence—to deter participation and silence dissent. Such tactics illustrate what Tufekci and others describe as repressive response framing, wherein authorities seek not only to dismantle protests but also to reshape public perception of them.

Digital repression further complicated mobilisation. Social-media platforms suspended or shadow-banned accounts associated with the movement, often in response

to coordinated reporting by pro-government users. Algorithms prioritised other content, diminishing the visibility of protest messaging. This underscores a structural vulnerability in contemporary activism: while platforms can amplify voices, they are also easily manipulated or pressured by states. The waning of global media attention posed another challenge. After an initial surge of coverage, international outlets shifted focus to other crises, and public interest declined. Sustaining engagement in the absence of media spotlight required persistent outreach and innovative strategies.

Moreover, geopolitical considerations limited the willingness of foreign governments and international bodies to take decisive action. Pakistan's strategic ties to China, its role in regional security and its importance in counterterrorism efforts dissuaded many actors from pressuring Islamabad too strongly. While Western politicians and human-rights organisations issued statements of concern, substantive interventions—such as sanctions or UN resolutions—were hesitant, reflecting the broader reality that normative appeals often clash with realpolitik.

5. Theoretical and practical implications.

The analysis offers several theoretical insights for scholars of social movements, digital activism and transnational advocacy. First, it demonstrates the flexibility of framing strategies in semi-authoritarian contexts. Activists blended local cultural idioms—honour, motherhood, resistance—with universal human-rights norms. This hybrid framing facilitated resonance across diverse audiences while maintaining authenticity. Second, the case underscores the role of emotions in contemporary activism. Emotional narratives, visual symbols and performances of suffering were not merely ancillary but central to mobilisation. They functioned as moral catalysts that transformed passive sympathy into political action. Third, the research highlights the importance of digital networks in disseminating and sustaining frames. However, it also cautions that these networks are subject to state interference and platform governance decisions. As such, digital activism must be complemented by offline organising, legal advocacy and media engagement to build resilience.

Practically, the findings suggest several recommendations for movements facing similar conditions. Diversifying communication channels and building alliances with independent media can reduce vulnerability to digital repression. Anticipating counter-frames and proactively addressing them—by emphasising the constitutional and rights-based nature of demands—can mitigate delegitimisation. Engaging with regional civil-society groups and sympathetic politicians may help broaden domestic

support and reduce the perception of foreign dependence. For international actors, the case illustrates the need for sustained attention and tangible support beyond symbolic statements. Human-rights organisations and diplomats should consider coordinated campaigns that combine public pressure with private diplomacy, recognising the complex geopolitical environment in which movements operate.

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