

## SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN PAKISTAN: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF POLICY, PERFORMANCE, AND PROSPECTS

Muhammad Asad<sup>\*1</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Fahim Khan<sup>2</sup><sup>\*1</sup>PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations MY University, Islamabad<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Bahria University, Islamabad<sup>2</sup>mfahimkhan.buic@bahria.edu.pkDOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17588996>**Keywords**

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Corresponding Author: \*

Muhammad Asad

**Abstract**

This study examines the evolution, governance, performance, and developmental impact of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Pakistan within the broader context of industrialization, regional connectivity, and foreign direct investment. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines policy review, comparative analysis, and secondary data evaluation, the manuscript argues that SEZs occupy a critical yet underperforming position in Pakistan's economic landscape. While CPEC has accelerated SEZ deployment by integrating them into regional industrial corridors, persistent governance challenges, infrastructure bottlenecks, policy inconsistencies, and coordination failures have hindered their full potential. Findings indicate that SEZ effectiveness depends heavily on predictable regulatory frameworks, competitive incentives, export orientation, and institutional capacity. The study proposes a refined policy model that aligns Pakistan's SEZ strategy with global best practices and sustainable development goals.

**INTRODUCTION**

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have long been recognized as catalysts for industrial development and economic transformation across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Pakistan, the SEZ framework evolved gradually from Export Processing Zones (EPZs) of the 1980s to the diversified and integrated zones envisioned under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). According to industrial policy analysts, SEZs thrive when they provide a competitive environment characterized by efficient infrastructure, transparent governance, streamlined regulatory processes, and reliable utilities support (Farole, 2011). Pakistan's SEZs, however, reveal mixed outcomes. While they reflect ambitious planning—especially under CPEC's Long-Term Plan—their implementation has been constrained by institutional fragmentation, delays in land acquisition, coordination gaps among federal and provincial

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### **Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach integrating qualitative content analysis of existing SEZ policies, comparative review of international industrial zone models, and secondary statistical analysis of SEZ performance indicators. Policy

documents from the Board of Investment (BOI), Planning Commission, and CPEC Authority were assessed alongside academic publications and World Bank datasets. The methodological rationale follows Creswell (2017), emphasizing triangulation and multi-source validation to ensure analytical rigor.

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#### Analysis and Discussion

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### Conclusion

SEZs represent an essential yet underutilized component of Pakistan's industrial strategy. Despite their potential to enhance exports, stimulate investment, and generate employment, the current SEZ model suffers from policy inconsistencies, governance challenges, and infrastructural deficits.

Future reforms must prioritize implementation capacity, regulatory predictability, technology transfer, and global integration. Lessons from East Asian and African SEZs illustrate that coherent governance, export orientation, and stable investment regimes are decisive for long-term success. Pakistan's SEZ strategy must therefore shift from land-centric planning to productivity-oriented, innovation-driven industrial development.

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