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**Abstract**

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**Keywords:** FATA, KP, Merger, reforms, Local Government, Administration, Police, Judiciary, Security, TTP

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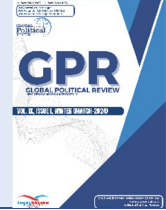
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### Title

## Post-Merger Political and Social Dynamics: Fata's Shifting Paradigm In Pakistan

### Abstract

*This research analyzes the perceptions and experiences of individuals from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) following its merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The study employs a mixed approach, collecting primary data through random sampling from various districts of FATA, including students, teachers, social activists, politicians, and government servants. The analysis reveals a divided sentiment regarding the merger, with nearly half of the respondents expressing dissatisfaction. Major concerns include the lack of improvement in governance, ineffective law enforcement, and worsening security conditions. The traditional Jirga system is still preferred over the new judicial framework by a majority, highlighting cultural and practical considerations. Findings indicate that the merger has not achieved its desired outcomes, with the Deputy Commissioners operating similarly to the previous Political Agents, and the former Levies and Khasadars remaining ineffective as a police force. Policy recommendations emphasize the need for honoring merger-related promises and improving peace and security.*

### Keywords:

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### Introduction

Situated in Pakistan's northwest frontier, the Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Ex-FATA) have long been representative of a complicated geopolitical fabric shaped by particular geography and a rich historical heritage. Once known for strategic significance and tribal autonomy, the area experienced a major shift when the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was repealed and merged into Pakistan's mainstream.

High hills, desert regions, and rocky patterns characterize the topography of FATA. The area, which borders Afghanistan, is strategically significant and has historically served as a hub for migration, trade, and violence. The region's rugged terrain, which varies from the massive peaks of the Khyber Pass to the wide valleys of Waziristan, shapes the opportunities and problems that its people face and gives FATA its distinct character.

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The region's geography is essential in determining the socio-political scenario of the area.

Tribal customs, outside interventions, and colonial legacies all play a significant role in the history of Ex-FATA. FCR was introduced by the British in the late 19th century, which established a separate legal framework that administered FATA apart from the primary system. Throughout the colonial era and into the post-independence period, the region was defined by tribal autonomy, customary law, and a strong sense of identity. FATA's geopolitical significance was further enhanced by the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s, which resulted in the emergence of militancy and a complex interaction between local, regional, and global factors.

The integration of the Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Ex-FATA) was a historical moment in Pakistan's history, which sparked a complex web of political, social, and cultural changes. This significant transition from a colonial-era legal system to a more inclusive constitutional governance structure was brought about by the abolition of the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in 2018 through the 25<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment (Wasim, 2018). Nearly six years after the merger of Ex-FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa KP, the region is still awaiting mainstreaming progress as desired by the country's policymakers. The Merged Districts MDs are facing many issues in the aftermath of the merger. One basic reason is that the merger was rushed; no proper work was done to analyze its short and long-term impacts. The jurisdiction of the courts of Pakistan as well as the police of KP and other state frameworks were extended to the Ex-FATA. But unfortunately, the judicial and policing system in the MDs is practically absent. The Jirga system still prevails, people prefer to solve their matters through Jirga instead of courts. The old Levis and Khasadar forces were converted to Police after some training, which is incapable of maintaining law and order under the new legal and political framework. There is total confusion between KP and the center regarding the implementation of the merger. The social isolation of Ex-FATA continues despite its merger with KP people are unable to interact with the wider world and participate in the cultural and intellectual landscape. Due to the lack of political will the government response has been slow.

There is a severe lack of awareness and confidence in the official processes and services provided by the newly formed departments. The new system does not perform up to the pre-merger system's level. The absence of funding, inadequate staff training, poor departmental coordination, regional disputes, procedural ambiguity, judicial ruling delays, infrastructure damage, the presence of extremist forces, and resistance from various social groups are some of the causes. People's expectations are not being met by the administration, and popular dissatisfaction with the new regime is increasing as long as the security situation is unstable.

Therefore, people's distrust of the newly established administration increases day by day. Both KP and central governments have failed to implement the merger plan. The development of Ex-FATA remains a pipedream even to this day. The promises made after the merger of Ex-FATA had yet to be fulfilled. Moreover, the security of tribal regions has deteriorated again because of the resurgence of the banned militant group Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan TTP (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). To ensure efficient government and sustainable development, understanding the complexities of the changing political dynamics of FATA is necessary in the post-merger scenario.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The merger of the Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Ex-FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) aimed to address decades of neglect, underdevelopment, past grievances, and representation issues by mainstreaming the region into Pakistan's political and administrative framework. However, this integration has brought significant challenges, including administrative and judicial inefficiencies, and security concerns. To better understand the political and social dynamics that have arisen since the merger, this paper aims to deeply analyze the important aspects such as post-merger political, social, administrative, judicial, and security issues. By outlining the issues this research work aims to aid in the formulation of focused remedies and policy suggestions that promote efficient governance, long-term stability, and development in the area.

### **Hypothesis**

It is hypothesized that the merger of Ex-FATA into KP has failed to achieve the benefits expected, with

substantial repercussions for regional governance, security, and public trust. This research attempts to uncover the underlying patterns, challenges, and opportunities that shape the post-merger sociopolitical scenario of Ex-FATA.

### Objectives of Research

- This research aims to assess the changes in governance structures and their efficiency in Ex-FATA following the merger.
- This paper attempts to analyze the post-merger security situation of Ex-FATA.
- This study seeks to evaluate the public's perception and trust in the post-merger system.

### Methodology and Sampling

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, analyzing the post-merger political and social dynamics of Ex-FATA, in interpreting primary data obtained through. The data was collected through a random sampling method. Questions were asked randomly to 34 respondents from various districts of FATA. The respondents knew the issues and provided answers regarding the merger, administrative changes, and socio-political impacts. The respondents include a mix of students, teachers, social activists, politicians, and government servants, from different districts of Ex-FATA. Secondary data is also utilized, collected from the existing publications to provide a background context for the primary data.

### Strategy for Study

This study utilizes a descriptive analysis approach to understand the post-merger socio-political dynamics of Ex-FATA. The data analysis strategy includes double hermeneutics, a two-layered interpretation approach in which participants tried to make judgments of their perceptions regarding the post-merger dynamics, followed by the researcher's interpretive examination of the participant's responses.

### Literature Review

In her article *"Has the West been won? Understanding the Legal and Political Implications of the FATA-KPK Merger"* written by Amber Darr (2018) the author holds that FATA is a narrower strip between the Pakistan and Afghanistan border. Since

1893, it came under the direct reign of the British, and in the then post-independence era, it had been wielded by Pakistan's federal government. Under Article 247 of the Pakistan Constitution, FATA was directly Administered by the president through the governor of KPK. FATA merged on 31st May 2018 through the 31st Constitutional Amendment of Pakistan's law. The Bill was signed by the then-president, Mamnoon Husain. Pakistan and its administration, involved in merging FATA, might have thought that to create harmony, peace, and order in the territory. While they had forgotten the views of the natives living there. (Dar, 2018) The study *"Constitutional Status Of FATA: Pre And Post Merger Comparison of Legal And Administrative System"* written by Sadia Fayaz, Sumaira Gull, and Asia Khatoon Khatak (2021) is planned to highlight the various strategies implemented by the governments of Pakistan for FATA and make a comparative analysis of the constitutional status, legal and administrative system of FATA pre- and post-merger. Strategically since the times of "the great game" i.e. Imperial domination took place in the 19th century, FATA served as a highlighted zone between British, India, and Russia. FATA is the central target of rival states of Pakistan for creating chaos in Pakistan. Before the merger, FATA was assigned a special status in the 1973 constitution, but the citizenship rights were not given to the people of FATA. (Fayaz, Gul, & Khattak, 2021)

The research paper *"Consequences of Merging of FATA in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Critical Analysis"* written by Najeeb Ullah and Ammal Atta Muhammad (2022) focused on securitization in the tribal areas that are traced back to the British arrival in the region. The colonial and post-colonial governance of the former FATA, reveals a persistent security division rooted in center-periphery dynamics and economic exploitation, leading to neglect and marginalization. Pakistan's maintaining of the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and imperial governance structure perpetuated tribal marginalization and security challenges, while economic exploitation further aggravated disparities, maintaining FATA's peripheral status and vulnerability to external influences and conflicts. FATA was run through FCR to uphold colonial interests and suppress tribal autonomy. The Pakhtun belt was established by the British using the "Threefold Frontier Policy" as a guide controlled by the British, India, and Afghanistan directly or

indirectly. (Ullah & Muhammad, 2022). The study "FATA Merges into Pakistan's National System" written by Sahibzada Muhammad Usman (2022) examines FATA in the Pakistani national system. In the global war on terrorism, FATA was the deep corner and it became a fortress from Jihadist to terrorist in 2001. Ex. FATA had a semi-independent status. After Pakistan's independence in 1947, it was kept under British legacy, facing various economic and security challenges. Pakistan's tribal regions faced historical events and geopolitical dynamics (the 9/11 incident, Soviet-Afghan War, ISI, and CIA activities, etc.). The study advocates for constitutional reforms within the framework of modernization theory to improve FATA's socio-economic situation along with scientific and political modernization of the territory. FATA's economy relies heavily on agriculture but there is insufficient infrastructure and mismanagement, unemployment, and poverty. (Usman, 2022)

### Theoretical Framework

The concept of institutional theory formulates the basis of this study Institutional Theory is a broad theoretical framework used to understand the structures, functions, and dynamics of institutions in society. Institutions, in this context, refer to the formal and informal rules, norms, and practices that shape social, economic, and political interactions. The merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa represents a significant institutional transformation, involving the replacement of long-standing informal institutions with new formal institutions. This study examines how this institutional change has impacted the political and social dynamics in FATA.

### Analyzing the Primary Data

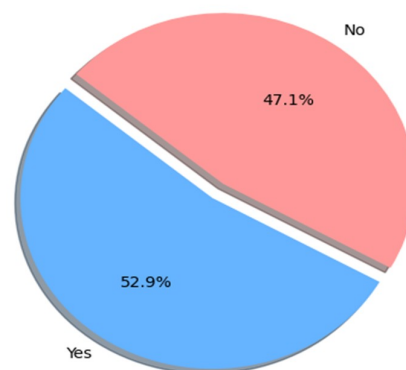
#### Satisfaction with the Merger

The integration of the Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Ex-FATA) was a historical moment in Pakistan's history, which sparked a complex web of political, social, and cultural changes. This significant transition from a colonial-era legal system to a more inclusive constitutional governance structure was brought about by the abolition of the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in 2018 through the 25<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment (Wasim, 2018). Nearly six years after the merger of Ex-FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa KP, the region is still awaiting mainstreaming progress as desired by the country's policymakers.

The question was asked What is your perception of the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)? Are you satisfied with the merger? The results abstracted from the interviews conducted denote that 47.5 percent of the subjects under study were rather not satisfied with the merger. In contrast, the rest of the 52.9 percent seems fairly satisfied. The near-equal split in satisfaction levels indicates a deeply divided sentiment among the residents. While a slight majority is satisfied, the substantial dissatisfaction highlights significant concerns. This division emphasizes the importance of thoroughly evaluating the merger's impact on governance, infrastructure, and public services. Future strategies should try to address the specific issues of the unsatisfied segment to achieve broader acceptance of the merger.

Figure 1

Are You Satisfied With The Merger of FATA?

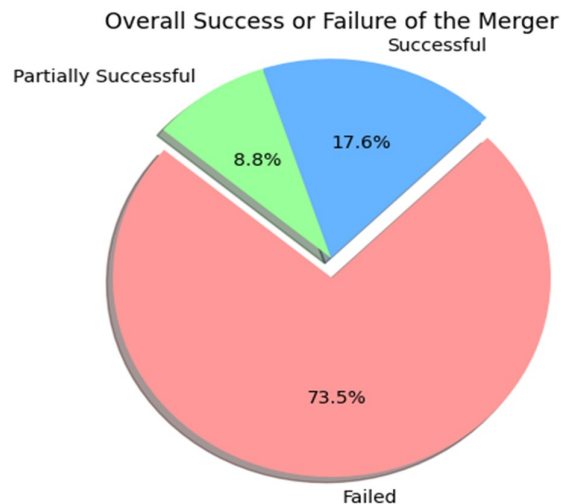


## Overall Success and Failure of the Merger

The researcher has asked the question, Describe the overall success or failure of the merger of FATA, the merger is seen as a failure by 73.5 percent as people in the FATA region have observed that there is no positive outcome associated with the merger in any field whether it be educational, social, or political. The reason for its failure is that the decision was made without the consent of the majority of the tribesmen. 17.6 percent deemed it to be successful and 8.8 percent viewed the merger as partially

successful. People also stated that the merger is merely the state's tool to legalize the exploitation of land and natural resources of FATA. The overwhelming feeling of failure indicates that the merger did not fulfill the desires of the majority of FATA citizens. The absence of perceived positive aspects in education, social services, and politics suggests fundamental flaws with the implementation process. The critique of a lack of consent highlights the significance of inclusive decision-making in governance improvements.

Figure 2



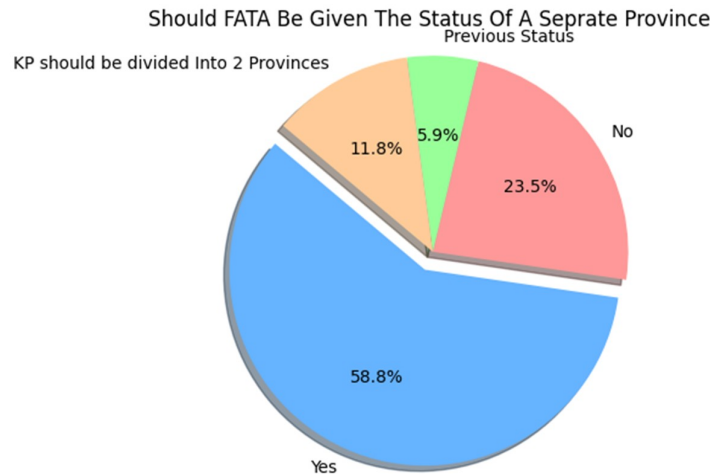
## Status of FATA

Furthermore, a question regarding the Status of Ex-FATA was asked, Do you believe FATA should be given the status of a separate province or maintain its previous status before the merger? A striking 58.8 percent gave an affirmative answer with one answer standing out and stating *“At the start of the movement against FCR, we advocated for FATA to become a separate province. This would have allowed FATA to have its parliament, Chief Minister, governor, and Inspector General, establishing a complete government. Consequently, FATA would have its financial status, similar to other provinces, which would improve education, health,*

*infrastructure, and other departments.”* 23.5 percent were not of the view whereas 11.8 percent expressed that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) should be divided into two provinces and 5.9 percent wished for the previous status. Some also explained that the merger is fine but it should've been a gradual and more planned process. The overwhelming support for FATA becoming a distinct province demonstrates a strong desire for autonomy and self-governance. This view implies that many individuals believe that a separate provincial status would better address their particular issues than the current system. The preference for gradual implementation emphasizes the significance of proper planning and inclusive decision-making in major administrative changes.



Figure 3



### Role of Deputy Commissioners

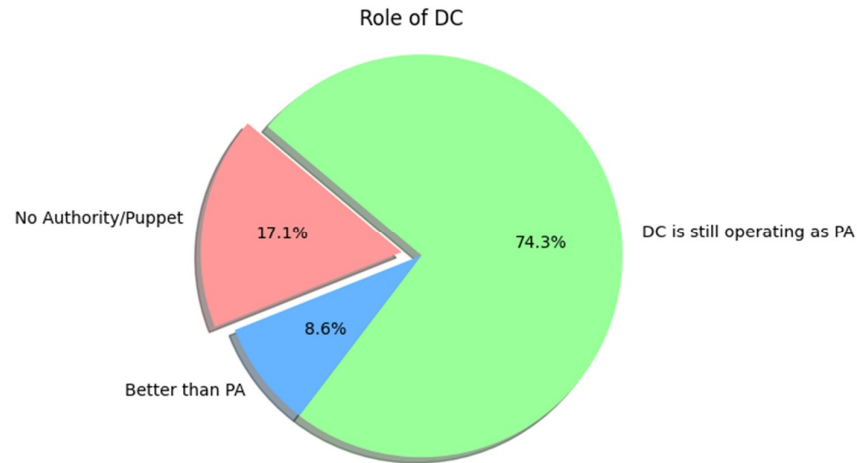
Before the merger, there was a Political Agent in each tribal agency to run the administrative affairs. Under the FCR, the PA had a substantial judicial role. In civil and criminal proceedings, they served as both judge and jury, depending on tribal jirgas or councils of elders, to render decisions based on tribal norms (Khan S., [2011](#)). The PA's rulings were final and frequently unchallengeable before the establishment of the FATA's Tribunal in 1997.

The Political Agents in the tribal agencies were redesignated as Deputy Commissioners. Additional Political Agents and Assistant Political Agents assumed the charge of Additional Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners respectively. Moreover, the KP government ordered the concerned Deputy Commissioners to immediately cease the collection of all types of "Rahdaares", as well as import and export taxes and levies previously collected by the political administration. (Ali Z. [2018](#))

The researcher has asked the question, Explain the role of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) in Post-Merger FATA, compared to the pre-merger Political Agent system, about 74.3 percent think that the Deputy Commissioners are operating just as the Political Agents were, citing that DSs are still managing the affairs through the then Sarkari or Government Jirga, involved in development funds embezzlement, using its powers under the same old draconian law, the FCR. Ghazan Jamal, a Former member of the KP assembly from District Orakzai

said that "DC is still trying to maintain their PA role through other means" (Jamal, [2024](#)). According to Gul Badin Khan, a prominent leader from Ex-FATA of the National Democratic Movement "check posts have been set up in various areas where Deputy Commissioner, in collaboration with FC officials and Police personnel collect illegal taxes. Similarly, officials sell government jobs and are also involved in illicit trade at the border, directly or indirectly (Khan G. B., [2024](#)). 8.6 percent classified Deputy Commissioners as better than the political agents whereas 17.1 percent perceived DCs as the government's puppets. They expressed The Political Agent was far more effective and powerful compared to the current Deputy Commissioner, who is now just a symbolic head with no real authority. The Political Agent had comprehensive control over legal and administrative matters, including the conduct of jirgas and the utilization of development funds, ensuring more direct and decisive governance for the tribal areas. Alam Zaib Mehsud a renowned social activist from Ex-FATA said "The security operatives in these districts have practically stripped the DC and civil administration of their authority. The DC and other civil administrations only have authority on paper. Furthermore, the new administration is unwilling to open offices in these areas, preferring to operate in other districts outside of tribal territories, despite our efforts to ensure that government offices should be built in their respective districts". (Mehsud A. Z., [2024](#))

Figure 4

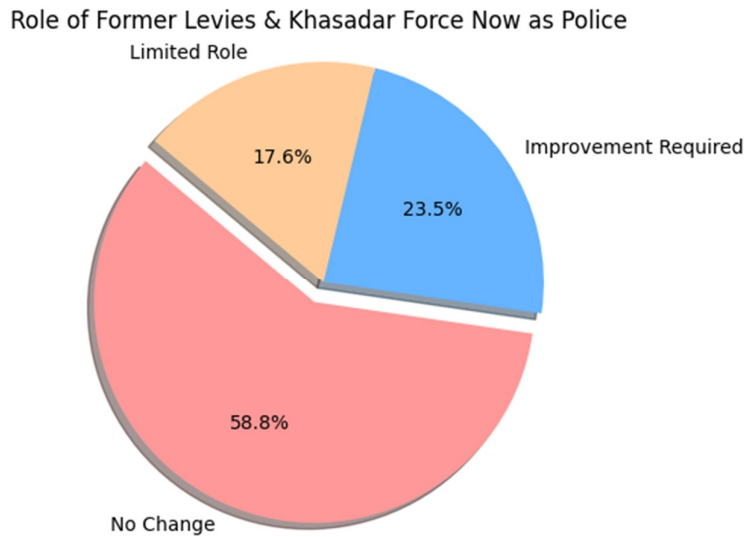


### Role of Former Levies and Khasadars as Police

Before the merger, there were traditional paramilitary forces in Ex-FATA known as Levies and Khasadar. These forces were established during the British era and operated under the control of PA in each tribal agency. The Levies and Khasadar personnel were recruited from the local tribes primarily responsible for law and order, security, and local administrative support (Howell, 1979). Following the merger in 2018, the government abolished the old British time paramilitary units and converted them into Police (KP cabinet decisions: Levies, Khasadar forces integrated into police, 2020). The question was posed, What changes have occurred in the role of former Levies and Khasadars, now operating as a police force, in the post-merger context of FATA? 58.8% of respondents believe that the roles of the aforementioned forces have not changed. As Asif Khan Mehsud, newly elected MPA from South Waziristan Upper said “The same system persists with no change in sight. “It is the same donkey with a different saddle” (Mehsud A. K., 2024). The reasons given for this include a lack of knowledge of the law, a lack of education, and an inability to fulfill modern policing tasks, rendering

them unsuited for the position. They still do not have a significant role in maintaining regional peace and security, and in many places, they collect illegal taxes for the administration, just like they used to before. Ihsan Tipu a renowned journalist who is covering Ex-FATA and Afghanistan affairs stated that “The regular police force performs their duties without any distinguishing, but in our tribal areas, this is not possible. The police here consider the local dynamics and often show each other leniency. If they confront someone, it can lead to personal and family feuds. Although the Levies and Khasadars have been merged, but they still function more like a tribal force than regular police” (Tipu, 2024). While 23.5% of respondents said that additional modernization and training are necessary to make them aware of the most recent policing standards, which could result in improvement, 17% of respondents said their role is limited. The perception of no significant shift in the roles of former Levies and Khasadars points to a critical gap in the reform process. The lack of education and training for modern policing responsibilities is a major impediment to successful law enforcement. Investing in thorough training and modernization programs is critical for increasing their capabilities and effectiveness.

Figure 5

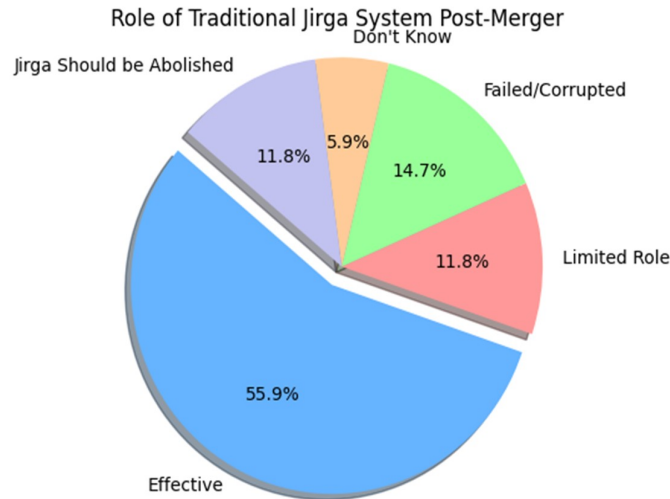


### Role of Jirga and the New Judicial System

Before the enactment of the criminal justice system in 2018, jirga dominated the judicial, administrative, and social systems when it came to resolving disputes in the tribal areas. Jirga was comprised of Tribal Elders known as Maliks who resolved disputes according to old traditions and practices. The word "jirga" in Pashto is frequently used to refer to a gathering of a few or more people (Hussain, 2011). One of the important forms of Jirga was FCR Jirga which was under the control of the Political agent and its objective was to deal with illegal and political matters in the administrative area of these tribal regions (Mahsud, 2023). A question was asked regarding the role of Jirga, What is your opinion on the evolving role of the traditional Jirga system following the merger, alongside the implementation of the new judicial framework? According to 55.9% of respondents, the jirga system is very good at delivering justice in a timely, simple, and affordable manner that aligns with the cultural and tribal dynamics of the region. They favored the jirga system over the new judicial system, citing its efficiency and effectiveness, unlike the failed and time-consuming system in place across the rest of Pakistan. Naseer Ullah Khan Wazir, a former member of the KP assembly stated regarding this matter "Although the judicial system was introduced in FATA after the merger, it requires infrastructure and proper procedures, which were not established. I have observed that no significant

response or seriousness has been shown by the judiciary in this regard. Our Jirga system is much better at delivering justice compared to the other judicial systems. If the judicial system gives 15-20% weightage to the Jirga decisions, because the Jirga considers all aspects and the dynamics of the region in its decisions, it would improve the justice system in the tribal areas to some extent. The court will need these local Jirgas to resolve land disputes at the regional level, as these issues cannot be resolved without them" (Wazir N. K., 2024). 14.7% of respondents thought that the merger's introduction of DRCs and ADRs had corrupted and failed the jirga system. 11.8% of respondents felt that the jirga system has a very limited role in the post-merger context, as the new judicial framework has taken precedence. 11.8% of respondents advocated for the complete abolition of the jirga system to ensure the proper implementation of the new judicial system, as they believed that parallel systems cannot coexist effectively. While 5.9% of respondents were unsure or lacked knowledge about the topic. The strong support for the traditional jirga system indicates its cultural and practical importance in the region. However, the presence of corruption and the preference for the new judicial system among some respondents highlight the need for a balanced approach. Integrating the strengths of the jirga system with the formal judicial framework could provide a more effective and culturally relevant justice system.

Figure 6



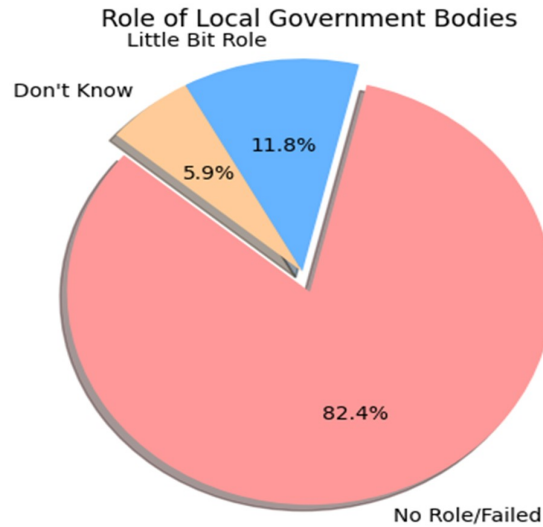
### Local Government Bodies

Following the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were given special constitutional protection. Several legislations, such as the Passports Act of 1913, the Trademarks Act of 1940, and the National Debt Acts of 1940 and 1944, were extended to these tribal areas, but no serious attempts were made to promote their organic growth. (Khan, Ali, & Khan, 2023) As a result, FATA remained isolated from Pakistan's mainstream governance and development processes. The Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was constitutionally protected under all three Pakistani constitutions. Real political reforms began with the Adult Franchise Act of 1996, which provided tribal elders with the right to vote for the first time. In 2011, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) administration expanded the Political Parties Act to FATA, allowing political parties to operate for the first time in the region. Before this reform, only independent candidates could be elected to the National Assembly from FATA (Wazir A. K., 2013). In 2004, former president Gen. Pervez Musharraf attempted to establish a local government system in the then-Fata. Sub-tribes were asked to nominate their representatives in place of general elections, and political agents were given the authority to propose women and tribal elders for these council positions. After FATA merged with KP, local government elections were held in ex-FATA for the

first time in 2021 (Tribesmen take interest in first-ever LG polls in former Fata, 2021). Although this was a big step toward the integration and good administration of the area, the local government bodies still have a lot of work to run efficiently and provide services to the public.

The researcher has asked the question, Describe the role of local government bodies in the post-merger tribal districts, 82.4% of respondents believed that the local government body system has failed and has no significant role, citing the lack of their authority following the amendment of the local government act by the previous Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government. They also mentioned the lack of funds, which prevents them from contributing to the development of the area. 11.8% of respondents felt that local government bodies have a limited role, such as enhancing political participation, cultivating new leadership, and promoting overall political awareness. 5.9% of respondents were unsure or lacked knowledge about the topic. The overwhelming perception of the failure of local government bodies is concerning. This suggests that the local governance system is not functioning effectively, likely due to insufficient authority and funding. Strengthening local government bodies with adequate resources and autonomy is crucial for their success and the overall development of the region.

Figure 7



### Security and Stability

Ex-FATA was significantly impacted by the geopolitical changes brought about by the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. As a result of the battle, the area saw an increase in terrorist organizations and an influx of Afghan refugees. In reaction to militancy in the former FATA following 9/11, the government chose to investigate the militant groups operating there. Operation "Rah-Haq, Zalzal, and Zarb-e-Azb, etc." was among the several collaborative military actions that were started. Large numbers of civilians were displaced as a result of these military operations, but the terrorist and insurgent groups were driven out of the tribal areas (Chughtai, 2013). Pakistan adopted a more progressive stance in the aftermath of 9/11, which presented the former FATA with the direst security circumstances. Even though the operations drove out the Taliban from the majority of the former FATA and brought about some degree of tranquility, there was fear that the terrorists might regroup once the Pakistan Army left the area (Ali, 2018).

A question was asked regarding the security situation of tribal areas, Do you believe that the security situation in the tribal areas improved after their merger? 79.4% of respondents believed that there has been no improvement in the security situation, citing the ongoing target killings of social workers, political activists, and tribal elders, which have become a routine occurrence. They also pointed to the resurgence of the Pakistani Taliban

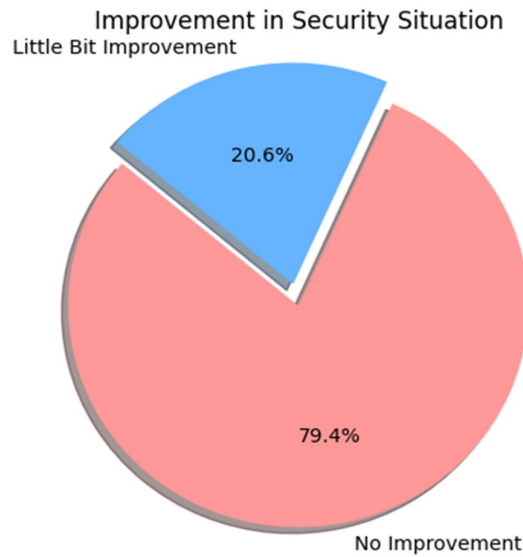
(TTP) after the merger, posing significant security threats, and the increase in crime rates compared to the pre-merger period. 20.6% of respondents believed that there has been a slight improvement in the security situation. The prevalent belief that the security situation has not improved post-merger is alarming. This indicates a failure to address the security concerns of the residents. A comprehensive security strategy that addresses the root causes of violence and involves local communities in peacebuilding efforts is essential to improve the situation.

The researcher has asked the question, "What are your perceptions about the role of the military in security and stability in the tribal regions? 47.1% of respondents believed that the military has no role in security and stability, citing the failure to eradicate terrorism despite numerous operations, the resurgence of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), and their ability to operate openly in many areas and carry out attacks. 44.1% of respondents believed that the military should not interfere in civil and political affairs and should focus solely on securing the borders to prevent militants from crossing over, which is essential for a peaceful and efficient post-merger setup. 5.9% of respondents refrained from commenting 2.9% of respondents believed that the military has brought peace to the region. The mixed perceptions about the military's role reflect a complex and nuanced view of its impact. While some see it as ineffective, others believe in its

potential if focused solely on border security. A clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the

military and civil authorities could enhance security and stability in the region.

**Figure 8**



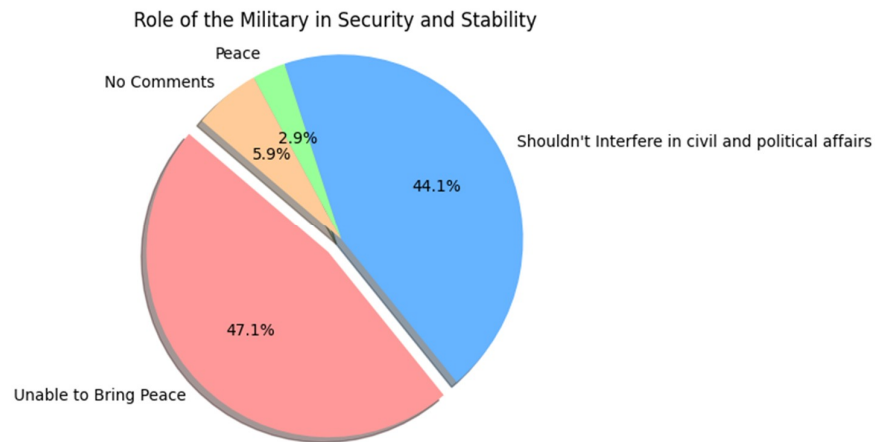
**To Improve Education and Create Opportunities for FATA Students**

The quality of schooling in the Ex-FATA is appalling. With a staggering 73% of students leaving elementary school before finishing their education, FATA has the nation's highest primary school dropout rate. Furthermore, a lot of schools are devoid of basic facilities like water supply, electricity, and toilets (Shinwari, 2016). The female literacy rate is only 7.8% in the region, well below the national average (Afridi, 2020). The region's pervasive illiteracy is partly caused by the absence of functioning schools, higher secondary schools, and colleges, as well as a monitoring mechanism.

A question was asked regarding education, In your opinion, what steps should be taken to improve educational outcomes and create opportunities for students in post-merger FATA? 44.1% of respondents suggested that a quota for FATA

students should be preserved and extended for a few more years in mainstream educational institutions across the country, and the government should provide scholarships to FATA students. 38.2% of respondents emphasized the need for proper and strict checks and balances in FATA educational institutions, including schools and colleges, to ensure the presence of teachers and other staff, which is a major issue. 17.6% of respondents recommended the construction of new colleges and at least one university in FATA, as the region currently lacks a university. The recommendations highlight key areas for educational improvement: maintaining student quotas, ensuring accountability in educational institutions, and building new educational facilities. Implementing these suggestions could significantly enhance educational outcomes and provide better opportunities for students in post-merger FATA.

Figure 9



### Findings

- The merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has failed to produce the desired outcomes.
- With no change in administration, the Deputy Commissioners still operate similarly to the previous Political Agents, with no significant improvement in governance.
- The Law Enforcement system is ineffective, the role of former Levies and Khasadars, now operating as the police force, remains largely unchanged and ineffective and they are unable to work as the regular Police force.
- The traditional Jirga system is preferred over the new judicial framework.
- The local government system is seen as a failure due to a lack of authority and funds.
- The security situation is perceived to have worsened post-merger, with ongoing violence and the resurgence of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP).
- The military is unable to ensure peace and security in the region despite numerous operations.

### Policy Recommendations

- The success of the merger depends on stability, so the government must give priority to enhancing peace and security in the area.
- Engage local communities in significant administrative decisions in a proactive manner to gain their support and backing, ensuring

that their opinions are acknowledged and valued.

- Fulfill all promises made during the merger, including the allocation of Annual Development Funds. FATA should be given its NFC award share. Both central and provincial governments should prioritize FATA to make the merger viable and progressive.
- Empower local governments and give more funds to effectively implement development programs.
- Provide comprehensive training and modernization programs for former Levies and Khasadars to enhance their policing capabilities.
- Combine the strengths of the traditional Jirga system with the formal judicial framework to deliver more effective and culturally relevant justice.
- Ensure that all newly established departmental offices are located within FATA, rather than in adjacent settled districts of KP, to enhance local governance and accessibility.
- Maintain and expand educational quotas for FATA students, offer scholarships, and establish new educational institutions, including at least one university and a medical college within FATA.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive rehabilitation plan for FATA's infrastructure, actively involving local populations in the planning and execution process to ensure the reconstruction meets community needs and expectations.

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