



Journal of Climate and Community Development

A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, HEC recognized [Y-category](#) Research Journal

E-ISSN: [3006-7855](#) P-ISSN: [3006-7847](#)

FATA-KP Merger: An Analysis of Post-Merger Realities

Abdul Qayyum¹ Dr. Anwar Ali² Dr. Bilal Bin Liaqat³ Dr. Ghulam Mustafa⁴

¹ BS Scholar, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

³ Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

⁴ Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: bilalbinliaqat@gcuf.edu.pk

Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2025

Article Information

Received:

2025-02-19

Revised:

2025-04-30

Accepted:

2025-05-23

ABSTRACT

The joining of FATA with KP in 2018 was a big step for Pakistan, meant to boost governance, security and economic and social growth. Here, we look at what the local public thinks about the merger, studying the possible impact on governance, infrastructure, economic chances and traditional culture. The research uses surveys (with 104 participants), interviews and focus group discussions with students, elders, officials and professionals who lived in former FATA. Studies find that although some recognize improvements, many are still unhappy about slow changes, ongoing corruption and broken economic pledges. Matters of concern are difficulties in finding work, the problems of political leadership and worries about the continuing influence of the tribes. According to the report, the region should speed up its decentralization process, boost openness, aid financial and social progress and keep its unique identity as it links to the rest of the nation. Sustainable integration can be achieved by giving priority to community outreach, fair sharing of resources and security with development. The findings recognize that immediate, practical changes must be made to unite what is promised by leaders with actual everyday life for people in the merged districts.

Keywords: *FATA Merger, Public Opinion, Governance, Socio-economic Development, Political Representation, Security Concerns.*

Citation: APA

Qayyum, A., Ali, A., Liaqat, B, B & Mustafa, G. (2025). *Fata-Kp Merger: An Analysis of Post-Merger Realities*, *Journal of Climate and Community Development*, 4(1), 168-180.



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Introduction

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) situated along the 500-kilometer Durand Line next to Afghanistan constitute an important strategic area due to their mountainous geography and challenging terrain. The 27,220 square kilometer territory of FATA contains more than 5 million residents as recorded by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in 2017 (Noor, Hashmi, & Bukhari, 2018). Pashtun inhabitants along with rugged landscape have blocked continuous foreign control in this region through multiple invasions starting from Alexander the Great to the British Empire. The Great Game between Russian and British Empires concentrated their efforts on FATA during the nineteenth century. British officials perceived control of this area as critical to blocking Russian advances toward their territories in India. Despite continual British attempts to dominate the fiercely independent FATA tribes they could not extinguish their semi-autonomous status because the tribes used both fighting back and diplomacy as their survival strategy (Sadiq, Mahmood, & Sohail, 2021).

The political transformation of Pakistan took a defining step when the 31st Amendment to the Constitution completed the merger between Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on May 31 2018 (Gohar, Khan, & Sajid, 2024). FATA faced economic challenges and political disengagement because it operated under its independent legal system which separated it from Pakistan for multiple decades. Through the merger process FATA connected to provincial governance so its population who had been excluded from centralized government would obtain fundamental constitutional privileges and public programs. FATA functioned as a legal entity under Frontier Crimes Regulation while denying people their fundamental rights so it comprised six border regions together with seven tribal agencies. The semi-autonomous nature of the region allowed local tribal leaders to govern themselves yet this status created conditions where lawlessness together with militancy could gain strength. Successive governments of Pakistan have failed to develop FATA which remains impoverished because of insufficient healthcare, educational resources and infrastructure. The

ongoing warfare against extremist organizations together with military operations generated worsening conditions that led to massive population displacements and acute humanitarian crises (Ahmed, 2020).

The union of FATA into KP emerged from Political Reforms and Security Requirements. The negative political and security conditions in FATA over many years led the Pakistani government to merge FATA into KP to stabilize the region. The immediate resolution of Pashtun population grievances against previous governing systems turned into a pressing matter. The political landscape featured another motivator behind the merger as observers suggested increasing support base among ethnic Pashtuns ahead of upcoming general elections was a major factor in the political calculations. People responded differently when the merger became public knowledge. The local population demonstrated both positive responses to potential improved governance and questions regarding governmental ability to deliver on their promises. The majority of respondents initially backed the merger because they expected the government to maintain greater control over political representation and provide better healthcare facilities, education and infrastructure. Local perspectives about decision-making remained under scrutiny despite the administrative decision to combine these districts (Ali, 2021).

Building Trust between the people and government officials demands prompt resolution of these problems during Pakistan's historical merge process. Legislative officials need to establish authentic dialogues with local populations as their first priority in order to fulfill community needs effectively. The government must improve infrastructure as well as security services with investments and increase transparency in public governance procedures and spend on health care and educational development. The merger has the opportunity to fulfill its mission of empowering and developing FATA residents through direct implementation of promised changes. The establishment of lasting prosperity in this abandoned territory needs sustained commitment from local residents together with government institutions to achieve successful integration (Hussain, 2022).

Literature Review

“Post-Merger Political and social Dynamics: Fata’s shifting paradigm in Pakistan” by Adnan Khan research assesses public opinion among FATA residents after the province joined Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to study various stakeholder groups. The study shows contradictory results because respondents from FATA demonstrate negative views about poor governance performance as well as weak security forces and law enforcement efforts. The population of FATA continues to select the traditional Jirga system higher than the modern judicial system because of both cultural factors and convenience. The merger goals remain unmet because security forces together with administrative practices have not shown any improvements. The study supports fulfillment of mergers' agreed commitments and peace enhancement efforts to resolve this main challenge (khan & mustafa, 2024).

“Exploring the Reforms Journey of FATA in Pakistan Through Various Regimes (1947 2018)” by Shaista Gohar provides an evaluation of secondary education in the former FATA districts which merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Better monitoring and reduced teacher absenteeism combined with staff recruitment and infrastructure reconstruction make up the major improvements outlined in the research. Merged district schools face ongoing difficulties because budget shortages combine with destroyed buildings and elevated student disengagement and sexual inequality and tribal cultural constraints. The advancement of FATA integration into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces additional hurdles from terrorism together with poor administration and political intervention. According to the study schools in the region need additional budget funds along with basic facilities and new educational institutions and scholarships together with reduced political involvement to achieve national quality standards (Gohar, Khan, & Sajid, 2024).

“A historical overview of reforms in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Pakistan” The abstract delivers a streamlined summary about FATA's developmental path that details its important role in British colonial times and independent Pakistan integration and its

administration based on the Jirga tradition. The text describes the conversion of FATA to a strategic frontline region after 9/11 during the War on Terror together with its resulting adversities for local inhabitants. The abstract needs additional details regarding the exact economic and social consequences resulting from the War on Terror alongside the formal inclusion of FATA into KP. Although the article acknowledges the 2018 merger's importance it fails to provide adequate analysis on its effect on governance and rights together with development initiatives in FATA. The information provides an acceptable overview although an analytical approach with extended analysis would increase its value (Khan, Ali, & Khan, 2023).

“Perception about FATA Reforms and Identification of Constraints: A case study of Bajaur Khar” This research conducted a specific analysis of local views and limitations affecting FATA reforms while focusing on the District Bajaur's Tehsil Khar region. The research uses semi-structured interviews together with focus group discussions as qualitative methods to obtain information from politicians and government officials together with local residents. The research data points to bureaucratic management problems as well as conflicts between different authorities alongside enduring legacies from the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The research would gain greater overall applicability by offering more information about its methodology and by increasing the number of participants. This analysis fails to address in detail what role the strategic region and natural resources play in reform implementation processes. This work presents significant findings yet its findings would gain additional credence with quantifiable research evidence and additional assessment of governmental initiatives (Zeb & Nawab, 2023).

“Fata Merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: An Analysis of Challenges and Problems to Secondary Education” by Muhammad Ullah Orakzai undergo assesment of the merged districts of erstwhile FATA now in KPK regarding their secondary school Education structure. The improvement efforts have brought forward many useful changes including better oversight mechanisms and both vacancies and teacher absenteeism reductions and staff recruitment and infrastructure reconstruction.

Various difficulties continue to emerge including insufficient funding and facility damages along with high rates of student abandonment and gender identities and tribal ethnic obstacles. The integration process faces obstacles from three main issues: terrorism, inadequate management and political authority involvement. The researchers advocate for an increased budget alongside essential school facilities and fresh educational institutions alongside scholarship programs and lower political involvement because these steps will boost education standards and national standard alignment (Orakzai & Ali, 2023).

Research Questions

1. How do the perceptions of security and stability in the Ex-FATA compare before and after the merger, and what factors influence these perceptions among local people?
2. To what extent has the FATA merger influenced the trust in government institutions among local people, and how does this affect their desire to participate in formal governance processes?

Methodology and Sampling

A combination of surveys and interviews is used in this study to examine public views on FATA and KP being merged. Using a standardized questionnaire including a Likert scale, data on governance, socioeconomic growth, politics and security is gathered from a random sample of FATA residents. Ten close-ended questions in the survey seek opinions on public perception, government growth, development of the economy and society, saving traditions and engaging in politics. To better support this information, qualitative data is received through semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with tribal leaders and members of the community. The numbers obtained are analyzed statistically and the text answers are looked at to find repeating themes. In addition, the research considers findings by looking at them in light of existing publications and academic writings about FATA's integration. I ensured more people would see the survey by sending it through the internet and WhatsApp. Using components of both statistics and observations, this research thoroughly explores people's opinions on merging FATA and KP, giving well-defined explanations

for each outcome.

Theoretical Framework

It can be studied using Liberal Inter-governmentalism (LI) which says that political decisions in this context rely on domestic views, negotiation among governments and global trends. First, the Pakistani administration chose to merge FATA with KP because the people there wanted better government, security and development. In addition, negotiations among tribal leaders, provincial government officials and federal representatives were held concerning political participation, how resources were divided and the unification of government organizations. In the end, pressure from the global community such as the U.S., played a part in urging Pakistan to keep the region under control, chiefly because FATA was so important just outside Afghanistan's borders. As a result, LI demonstrates that the merger happened when complaints from the people and negotiations among leaders were affected by pressure from abroad, showing that different influences - both domestic and external - can impact reforms to governance.

Research Objectives

- Assessing how much people are satisfied or not with the changes following the merge of former FATA into KP.
- We want to understand how infrastructure, healthcare and education in the community are being developed by the merger and see if these improvements meet expectations.
- To investigate how former FATA residents are represented in post-merger structures and how that affects their participation in making local decisions.

Analysis of the Primary Data

Implementation of the FATA Merger

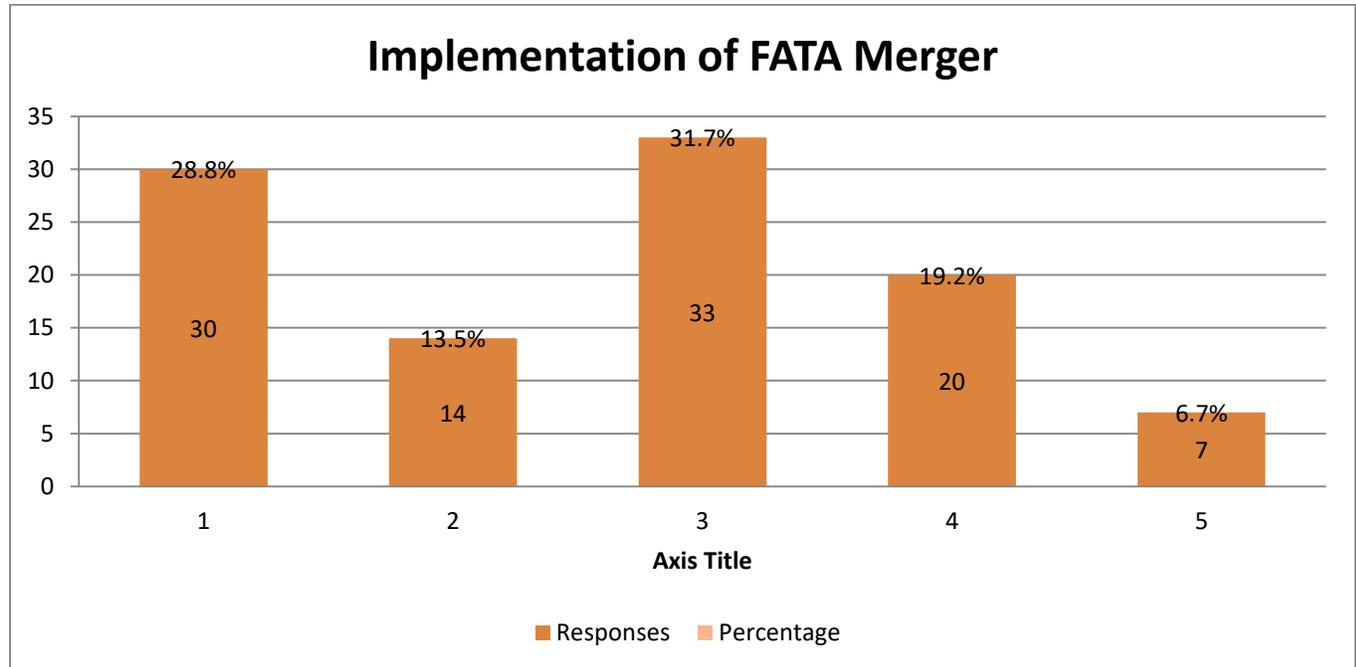
When FATA and KP were merged in 2018, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was also abolished, and offered equal rights, development and connection to Pakistan's legal and administrative systems to the FATA's residents (Khan, Ali, & Khan, 2023). But progress has been slow because locals feel that many promises such as fixing infrastructure, solving security problems and supporting the economic needs of tribal

people, have not been kept. While many are glad that the FCR ended, others feel disappointed with the quick merger and the lack of consultation with tribes, so they are not satisfied with the new system.

The question was asked that How would you rate the implementation of the FATA Merger? The results abstracted from the survey questionnaires conducted, denote that most students in the survey gave mixed reviews about the FATA merger,

finding it “Average” at 33% and either “Very Poor” (28.8%) or “Poor” (13.5%). Many people remain unsure about the merger, as only 25.9% think it is good or excellent. The bar chart also shows that the highest points are the “Average” ratings and these are only weak positives, meaning the community is urgently in need of improvements, more effective services and higher engagement to boost public faith and accomplish merger goals.

Fig No.1:

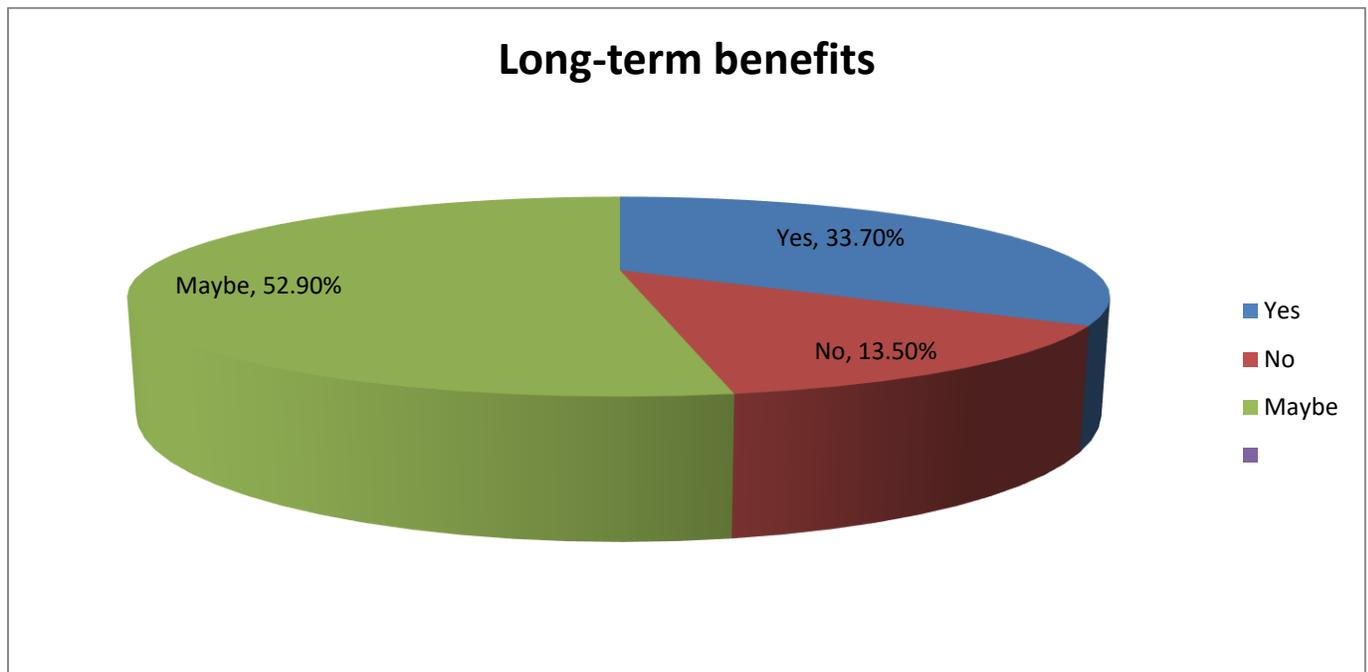


Long-term Benefits of the Merger

The researcher has asked the question; do you believe that the merger will bring long-term benefits to the region? When asked, many people say they are unsure about the future benefits of the FATA merger and only 33.7% believe it will be positive and 13.5% expect it to be negative. Such uncertainty is caused by slow growth, delayed

results and obstacles in government operations. Tentative optimism is present, but the way people support the government will depend on noticeable upgrades in these fields. The results emphasize that decisions must be made quickly to ensure promised changes and boost confidence in the achievement of the merger. In the pie chart, you can see that respondents say “Maybe” more often (52.9%) than “Yes” (33.7%) and “No” (13.5%).

Fig No.2:

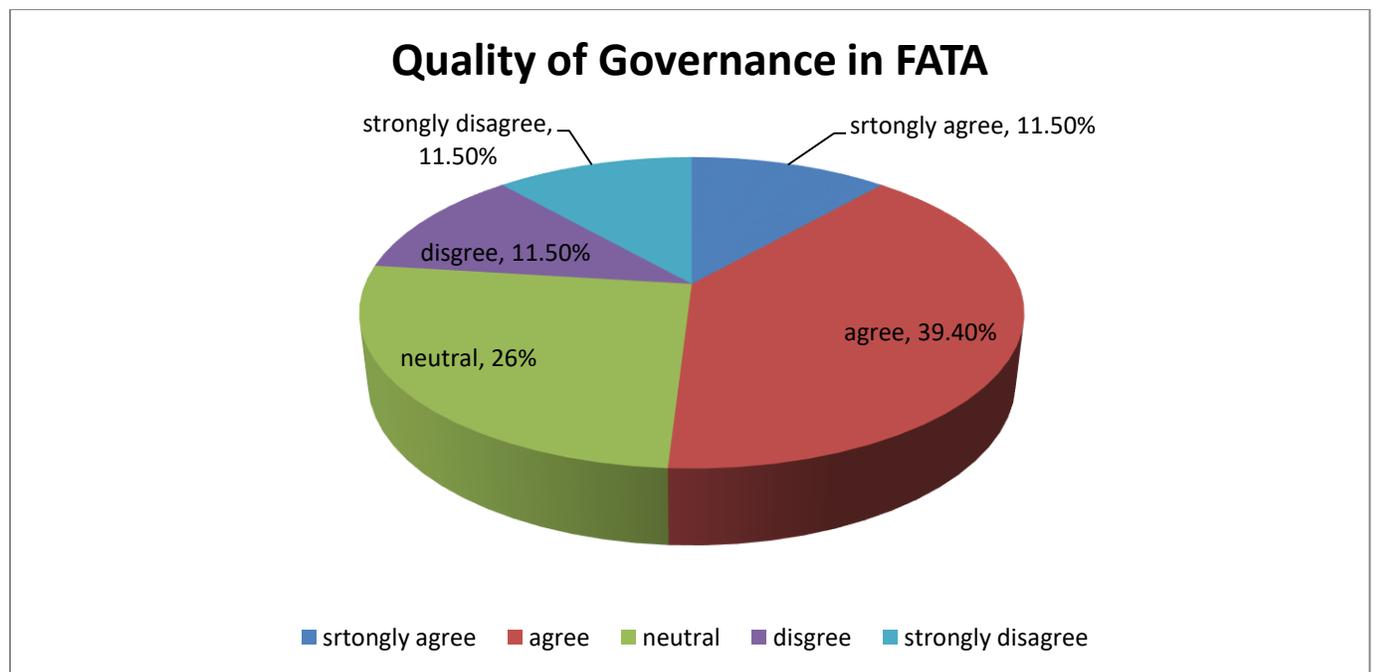


Quality of Governance in FATA

Furthermore, a question regarding the quality of governance in FATA was asked, the merger has improved the quality of governance in your area? After the FATA merger, according to the survey of 104 participants, some are not sure and some said governance had improved, while a similar number dissented and a smaller group had not

formed an opinion. Most acknowledge progress, but there is still doubt, showing that further steps need to be taken by policy and administration to make governance better and answer people’s worries. Looking at a pie chart, the majority (39.4%) taking part feels positive about reforms, with a smaller number feeling uncertain (26%) or against the changes (23%).

Fig No.3:



Corruption in Local Administration

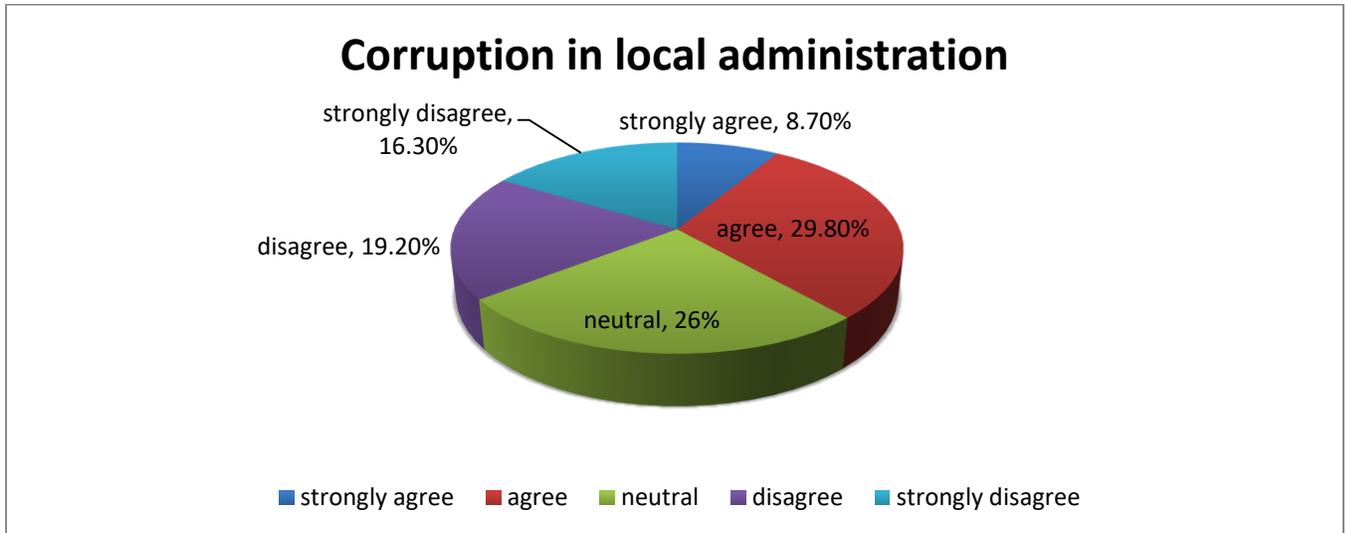
The researcher has asked the question, about the corruption in local administration, that the

Corruption in local administration has decreased after the merger? The survey of 104 participants indicates that half think corruption stayed about

the same after the merger, with people either agreeing on a drop or disagreeing on seeing improvement. Roughly a quarter of the work showed little or no effect, pointing either to invisible shifts or bad communication about the reforms. Since opinions for and against are so

similar (3%) and a good number are neutral, people need to see clear anti-corruption efforts to increase their trust. A pie chart makes it clear that only 36.9% disagreed, while almost half of the respondents had no opinion.

Fig No.4:

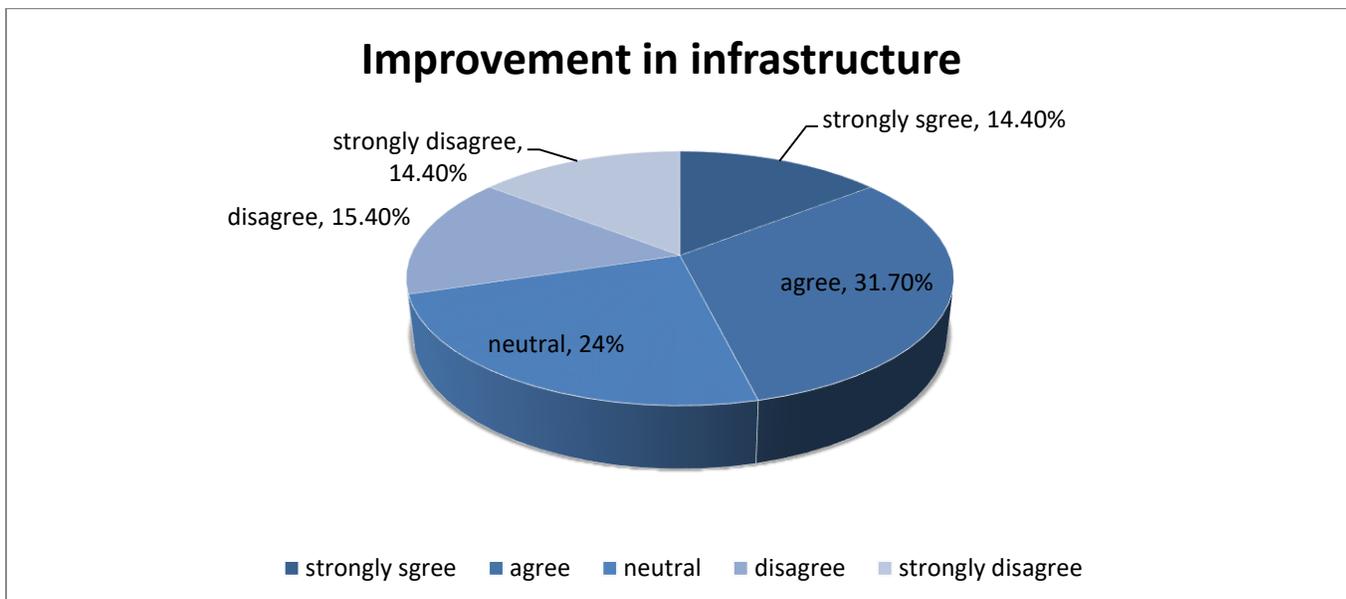


Improvement in Infrastructure after FATA-KP Merger

The question was posed, the merger has improved the infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals) in your area. A total of 104 respondents gave mixed views on whether infrastructure in FATA became better after the merger, with almost half of them (46.1%) seeing improvements in roads, schools and medical services, versus almost 30% who thought it didn't and didn't consider the merge to

be the essential cause. A quarter of countries were neutral which may suggest that either few obvious improvements were shown or they were not well informed. Nearly half of the participants noticed improvement, but a major disagreement and a large number of neutral attitudes suggest that progress is not consistent. "Agree" (31.7%) is at the top of the pie chart, yet the remaining portions for those opposed and neutral amount to a large group, suggesting that it is needed to install greater certainty in the public about the merger.

Fig No.5:

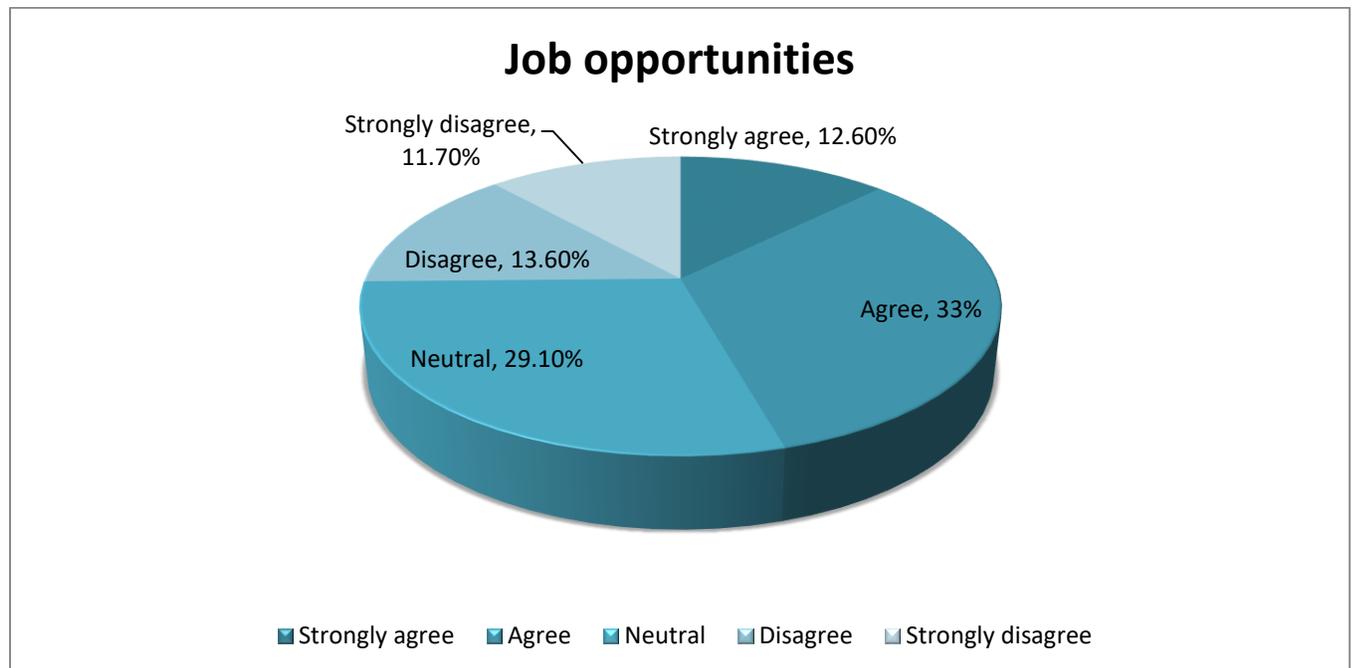


Enhancement in Job Opportunities since Merger

A question was asked regarding the job opportunities since the merger, Job opportunities have increased since the merger? According to the results of 103 respondents, there is a disagreement about employment changes due to the FATA merger, with just about 1 in every 2 respondents indicating either satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their jobs. 11.7 percent of females said in neutral

terms that they were unaware of many changes or did not receive much information. The chart clearly shows that different sectors felt the merger's effects differently, indicating it is important for both employers and intermediaries to provide individual job support and explain merge decisions better. Many people shared strongly negative opinions in the data, showing that employment prospects after the merger are still a concern.

Fig No.6:

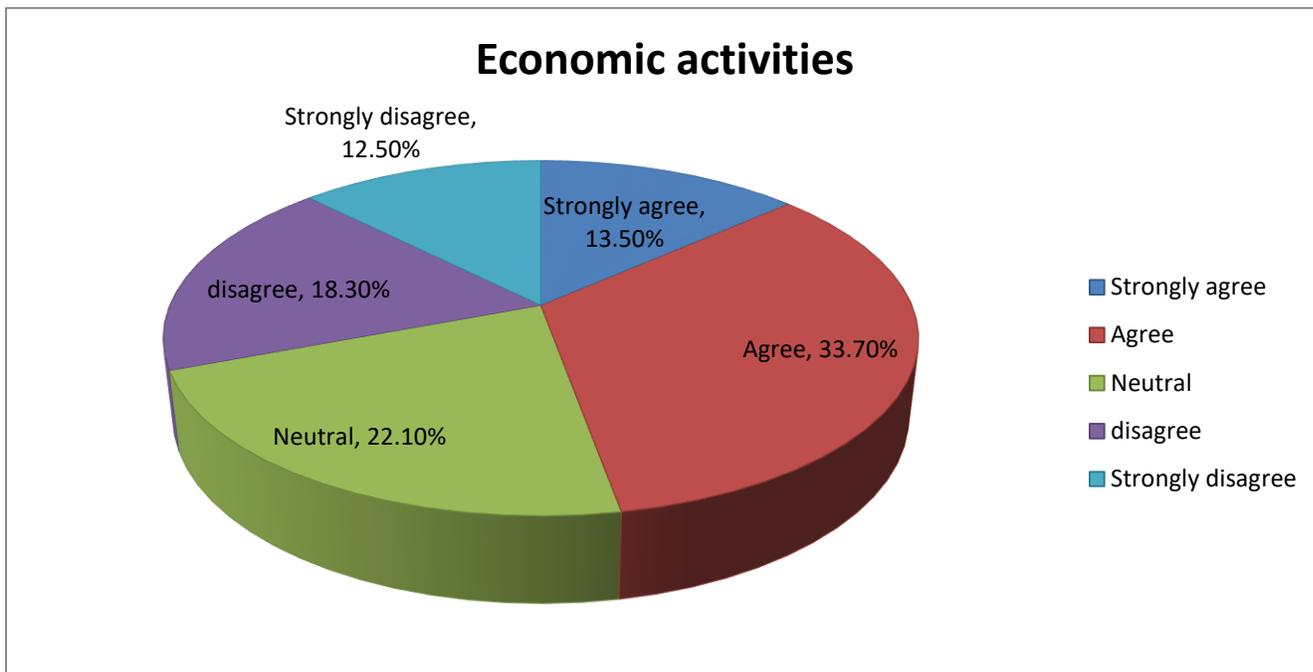


Improvement in Economic Activities

The researcher has asked the question, Economic activities (trade, markets, investment) have improved due to the merger? The survey of 104 people found that 40.4% believed the merger would improve trade or investment, yet 47.2% worries that it has not fulfilled its promises or caused disruptions. Only about 12.5% stayed neutral which means most based their opinions on what they had experienced. Public skepticism about petroleum is clear from this bar chart, where the largest section represents those strongly

disagreeing, despite some positive changes. Data show the merger didn't evenly impact the economy, with citizens seeing fewer positives than negatives—revealing a need for changes in policies to deal with imbalances and meet pledged development goals.

Fig No.7:

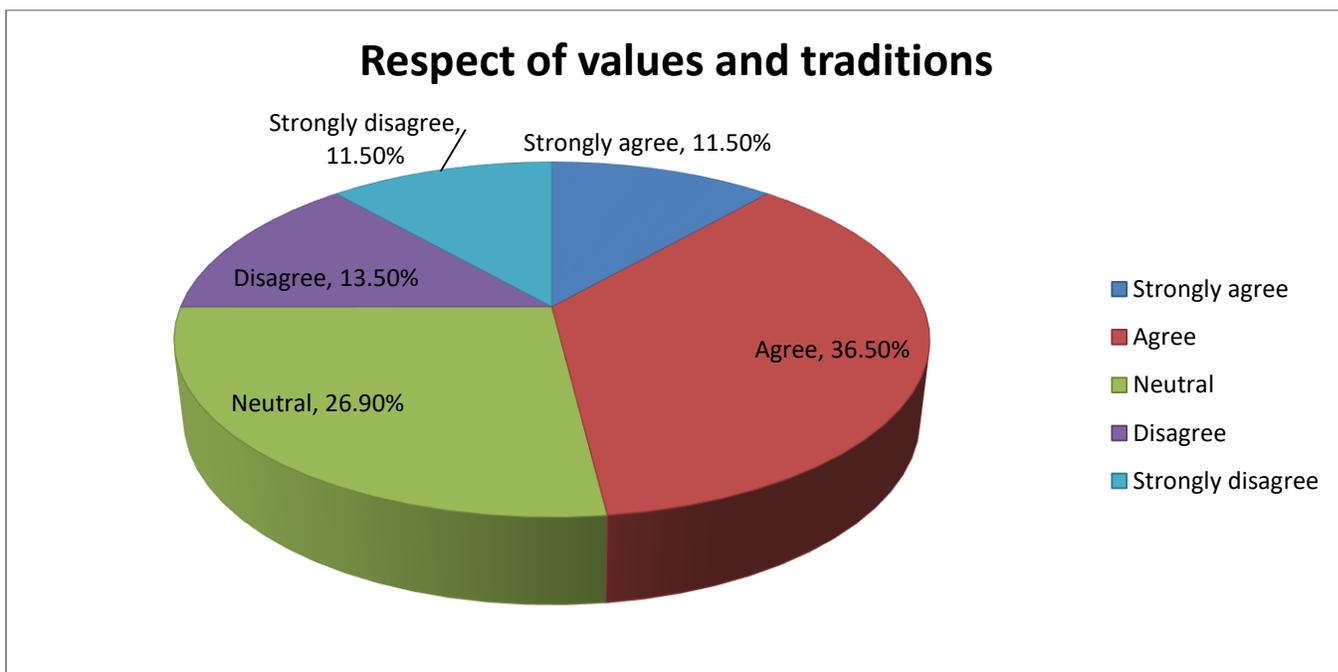


New Political System and Respect of local Practices

The researcher has asked the question regarding the new political system of FATA, the new political system respects the traditions and values of the local population? Only half of the surveyed population appreciated the way the new political system respects local practices, as shown by 48% (11.5% + 36.5%) approval, with one quarter of respondents expressing concern that cultural values were neglected (25% — 11.5% + 13.5%).

Nearly one-quarter (26.9%) of employees weren't sure or didn't participate much with the changes. A significant group of participants are still dissatisfied with the reforms, so the system will benefit from more inclusivity and stronger choices for providing local representation. The section of the pie chart that says "Agree" is the biggest, but together, opposition and neutrality make up a lot of the data.

Fig No.8:



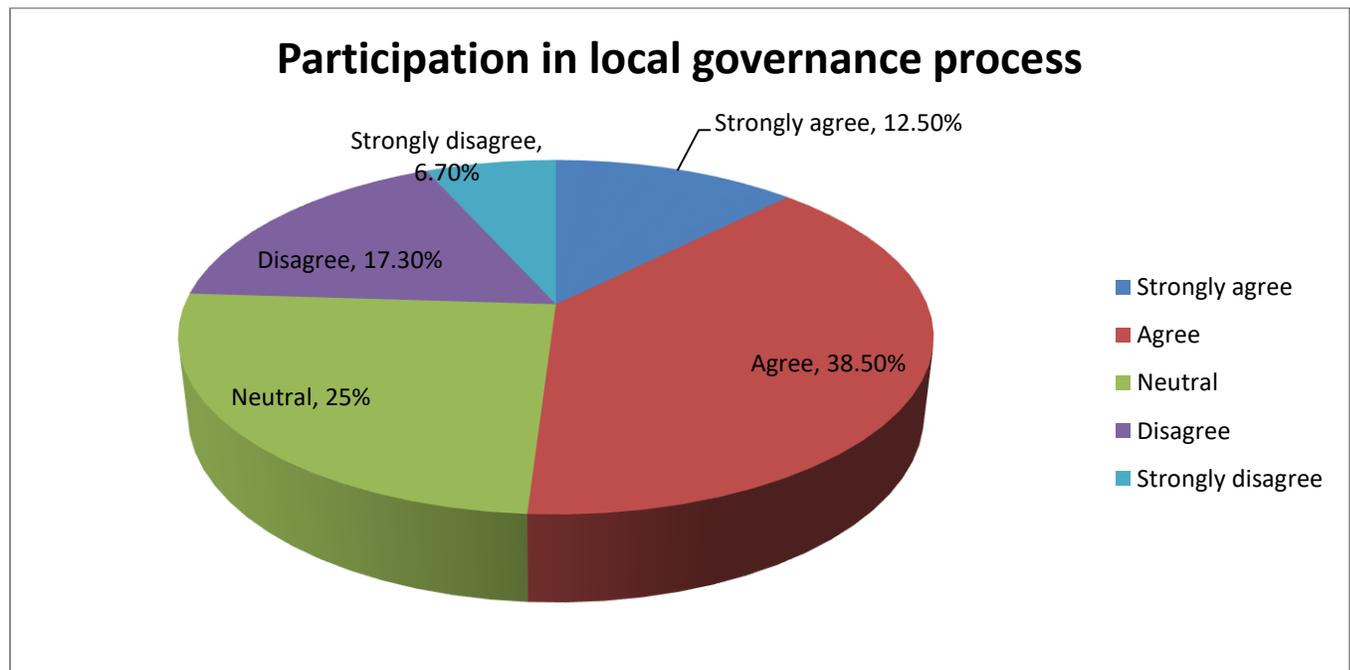
Participation in Local Governance Process

When FATA joined KP, local elections were conducted in Ex-FATA by the government, for the first time in 2021. Although this was a big step toward the integration and good administration of the area, the government body still has a lot of functions to run efficiently and help the community by giving out services (Jamil, 2022).

A question was asked regarding the participation in local governance process, the merger has enhanced your participation in local governance processes? A majority of the respondents, 48%,

gave approval to the new system’s handling of local traditions, but 25% said they were unhappy and 26.9% felt neutral. Even though almost half of those interviewed liked the reforms because they encourage cultural preservation, a large portion replied neutrally or negatively which indicates community worries have not been completely resolved, suggesting cultural sensitivity should be increased and better ways to include local voices in decision making are needed in the system. There is optimism, but also real concerns about if the system is culturally inclusive enough.

Fig No.9:



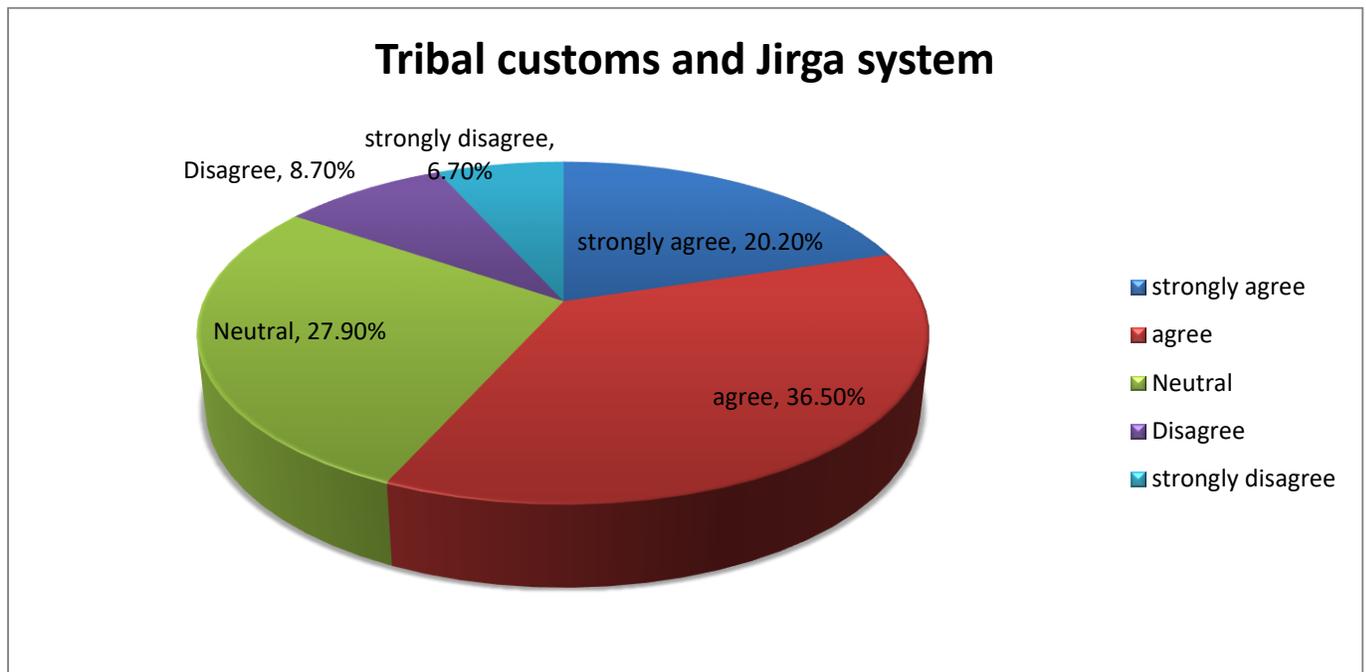
Tribal Customs and Jirga System

Before the criminal justice system which was put into place in 2018. Law, government and police departments were under jirga control. The members of Jirga were Resolving disputes was the role of the tribal Malik Elders, using old ways and customs. The word "jirga" is commonly used in Pashto to talk about getting together with a small or larger group (Fakhr-ul-Islam, Faqir, & Atta, 2013). FCR Jirga was a leading example of Jirga within the courts. The region was governed by the local Political agent and its role was to address illegal and political subjects, matters and challenges within the administrative fields of these tribal regions (Sadiq, Mahmood, & Sohail, 2021).

A question was asked regarding the tribal customs and Jirga system, Tribal customs and jirga systems

are being respected alongside formal governance structures? According to the results, most respondents (56.7%) believe tribal customs and Jirga systems continue to hold importance under the new system (20.2% strongly agree with this and 36.5% agree), yet 27.9% are not sure and nearly 15.4% are dissatisfied, saying they are concerned about current policies leading to change in traditional tribal affairs. The results point to tentative hope about both formal and tribal governments, but many remain concerned, so reforms should strive to safeguard traditions and modernize the systems equally. This gap is made clear in the pie chart, as agreement takes the largest part and negative and neutral responses make up a good portion, highlighting continuing challenges during the change.

Fig No.10:



Findings

- A Mixed Reaction from the Public– Even though people are relieved that FCR is abolished, some of it has not truly been eradicated and this is why locals are still unsatisfied.
- There is doubt about Enduring Profits– Just 33.7% think the merger will eventually help, as 52.9% are unsure, likely because of delays and governance issues in development.
- Only a few (39.4%) believe governance was improved after the merger, with many uncertain (26%) and some disagreeing (23%) which should be seen as weak improvements in management.
- Persistent Corruption– Almost half of those polled feel no change in corruption which suggests that initiatives to fight corruption have not worked well.
- Uneven Infrastructure– Although 46.1% believe roads, schools and hospitals are better, 30% think they are not which means progress is not the same everywhere.
- Jobs Hard to Find– About half of respondent's state that jobs were unchanged which shows the problems caused by merger-related economic changes in tribal industries losing their tax breaks.

- Respect for Tribal Culture in the New Political System – Almost half, 48%, think their traditions are respected, but 25% say otherwise, showing concern about losing their ways under official systems.
- Even so, 56.7% think Jirga systems should still be considered important, even though 15.4% are concerned about them losing influence which shows some reluctance toward integrating with the courts.

Policy Recommendations

- Developing infrastructure at a fast pace along with clear monitoring should lead to the delivery of the promised roads, schools and hospitals. Promising results that are easy to notice will make the public more willing to support the changes.
- Government accountability should be increased by adding independent oversight bodies and digital tools. Exposing the way services are provided will reduce the wide belief that there is continuous corruption.
- It is important to invest more in job creation programs and investment incentives to help the local economy after the merger. Teaching workers in new skills and providing incentives for employers will make the region's change from tax exemption easier.
- Getting involved with communities through

jirgas and other means will raise awareness on the reforms. Having the public take part in creating law will encourage more people to back the merger.

- Combining Jirga and formal courts in the justice system allows for respect of traditions as changes are introduced. Teaching tribal managers about national laws can develop a system that works well for all cultures.
- Enhancement of political representation should happen by creating reserved seats and holding regular local elections to benefit the communities. The new democracy measures

seek to help people who feel left out in the merged areas.

- To solve the issues behind instability, communities and projects for development should go together with security efforts. When rights are respected, harmony between locals and security services can be maintained.

Every year, an independent commission should use information and feedback from the community to check how the merger is progressing. Using evidence will help policies remain effective and adapted to what is happening on the ground.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

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