

# **POLITICAL REFORMS IN THE FORMER FEDERALLY ADMINISTERED TRIBAL AREAS (FATA) OF PAKISTAN AND TRIBAL PEOPLE RESPONSE: FROM A MYTH & RHETORIC TO REALITY**

**Saeed Khan**<sup>\*</sup>  
**Muhammad Hanif Khalil**<sup>\*\*</sup>  
**Manzoor Ali Veesrio**<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

## **Abstract**

*Introducing genuine reforms and integrating the former FATA region in the national mainstream is indeed a challenging task. To suggest reforms and bring governance improvements in the tribal region, successive governments have constituted more than a dozen reform commissions and committees. Ironically, the tribal people, who are the key stakeholders, have always been side-lined in the reform debates. Their views and input have neither been genuinely consulted nor incorporated in the reform policies. It is generally asserted that tribal people are highly traditional and ultraconservative. They want to intact their tribal*

---

<sup>\*</sup> Research Assistant, National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Email: [saeedqau84@yahoo.com](mailto:saeedqau84@yahoo.com)

<sup>\*\*</sup> Associate Professor, National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Email: [hanifkhalil@gmail.com](mailto:hanifkhalil@gmail.com)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Assistant Professor, National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Email: [maveesrio@qau.edu.pk](mailto:maveesrio@qau.edu.pk)

*identity and have persistently opposed all those reforms and development initiatives that bring any changes to the tribal self-governing system. This research investigates the tribal people's views and response to political reforms and development initiatives in the tribal region. The study concludes that the tribal people have long yearned for reforms, developments, and peace in the tribal region. However, these voices were either misrepresented, or remained unheard. Secondly, any reform intervention in the tribal region can only become a success story when it has strong social support base and acceptability in the tribal society. The active involvement of tribal people is sine qua non for comprehensive reform policies and its successful implementation.*

**Keywords:** FATA, Frontier Tribesmen, Stereotypes, Political Reforms, Public Participation, Myths and Realities.

## **Introduction**

The idea of public participation in the public policy making process is advocated all over the world. Consultations with the relevant stakeholders and incorporating their views and wishes in the public policy making is one among the prerequisites of good governance. The notion of public participation entails that government services are expected to be easily reachable to the citizens and where they are encouraged to have a say in the policy making process, either directly or by their elected

representatives (Weiss, 2000). Such a participatory mechanism creates goodwill among the concerned community, which helps in devising rational policy choices, securing social support base in the society, and increasing the chances of acceptability and legitimacy of the devised policies. Consultations with the relevant stakeholders and incorporating their inputs further helps in seeking the best ways to resolve a conflict. As Kahlon (2017) states, “Solution to a problem is best suggested and put into operation by those closest to the problem”.

The interdependence between the formal political and informal societal actors is a necessary condition to devise rational policy choices. In this connection, Bjork and Johansson (2001) state, “No single actor can solve a social problem or make the best of an opportunity on its own”. The interdependence between the formal and informal actors makes a reform policy effective, appealing, and durable. It helps in cementing the bonds between the governors and governed, forestall recurrence of violence and leads to durable peace in the society (Rahman, 2016). On the other hand, denying the people to participate in the public policy making procedures would simply mean that a government is compromising on the universally accepted norms of good governance. In this case, there are greater chances of public outraged, lack of trust among the masses towards the government, and less acceptability of the devised policies in the society.

The lack of public participation in the governance and policy making process can largely be seen in the case of former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. If one critically analyses the region's governance and reform process, it will bring to the forefront that tribal public participation has always been extremely minimal, if not absolutely missing. Over the years, successive federal governments of Pakistan kept governing the FATA region through an indirect system of administration, which did not encourage tribal people's say and feedback in the governance affairs. Tribal *maliks* (tribal elders) and Political Agents (PAs) were the main pillars of this indirect system. The state of Pakistan did not establish contact with the local people directly at the grass-root level, and all the communication between the state and society in the tribal region was done indirectly through the *maliks* and PA. Wazir (2013) has rightly pointed out that, "This was an exclusive system where tribal people had no say in the decision making and administrative matters. They could not even forward their suggestions and feedback on crucial matters, concerning their respective areas".

It is worth mentioning here that since 1976 more than a dozen FATA reform commissions and committees have been constituted by successive governments, to suggest reforms and likely future status of the FATA region, but none of these committees included any representatives from the tribal local

population. Ironically, all the members of these committees neither belong to FATA nor had they ever physically visited these areas. Majority of them were even lacking the basic information and knowledge about the norms and social structure of the tribal society. This may be one of the reasons that all the previous reform strategies proved less effective and did not achieve its desired objectives. Wazir (2014) points to the similar problems and says, “The communication gap between the tribal population and the federal government has been the mother of all ills that led to policy decisions failing in the tribal areas”. Ironically, the 2015 FATA reforms committee, on whose recommendation the FATA region has been merged in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), did not include even a single member from FATA (Khan, 2018). Although the government claims to have ascertained the tribal people views before merging the former FATA region in the KP, however, critics have termed it as a cursory survey and not a credible mechanism to seek the genuine inputs of the tribal people. It is generally termed as consultations with few *maliks* and bureaucrats in indoor meetings (Bukhari, 2017).

The basic reason, recurrently, counted behind the denial to tribal people participation in the governance and reforms process is that the tribal people are highly traditional and ultraconservative. It is further asserted that the tribesmen have always been advocating for retaining the tribal governance

system and that they have strongly opposed any changes to it. However, in view of the widespread transformation and social change in these areas, due to external influences and internal changing dynamics of the tribal society, this supposition is no more a valid argumentation and an incorrect account of the subject matter under discussion.

With regard to the discourse on political reforms in former FATA, the available published literature suffers from some serious limitations. It heavily relies on the romantic and stereotypic discourse that got developed during the British rule in the subcontinent. It depicts the tribal people as savages and the tribal region as a no go area. However, no scientific surveys and field reports are available to measure and prove this supposition. The current literature recurrently gets theoretical explanations from the old ethnographic assessments and discourses despite the fact that the tribal region has gone through significant transformations and the tribesmen's worldview has largely been changed. The cyclic and deterministic approach has left little room for fresh and informed voices about the tribal region and its population. This study attempts to disprove some established myths about the tribal people. It attempts to explore that the tribal people worldview has tremendously been changed after the tribal region annexation in Pakistan in 1948. The tribesmen have long yearn for reforms, developments, and peace in the tribal region. However, these voices were either misrepresented and

misinterpreted, or remained unheard. In this connection, different case studies are presented that demonstrate the tribal people yearn for reforms, progression, and the replacement of tribal system with a modern system of governance.

### **Research Questions**

1. Are the tribal people averse to reforms and changes in the tribal governance system, or they aspire for reforms and developments in the tribal region?
2. How far the tribesmen's active participation is necessary for an effective policy making and its smooth execution?

### **Methodology**

Keeping in mind the nature and quest of this research, both qualitative and quantitative data were accessed and analysed. Qualitative-descriptive and explanatory research techniques were applied to properly analyse the subject under discussion and to draw the conclusions. For secondary data sources, the available published literature such as books, journal articles, magazines, newspaper articles, and policy papers were accessed. Primary data sources were collected through the field work. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions were the primary research tools. For this purpose, Simple Random and Purposive Sampling techniques were used. Simple Random technique was used to comprehend in general the tribal people views and response towards political reforms and development initiatives in the tribal region. Purposive

Sampling method was used to approach the most relevant informants and to get the relevant information on the subject under study. The respondents represent different backgrounds across the tribal region including; common tribal people, Temporarily Displaced Persons (TDPs), social workers, tribal elders, and experts on the FATA region.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study pivots on the fact that it examines the tribal people perspective on governance issues and political reforms in the tribal region. Previous researches have discussed different perspectives on political reforms, but it did not touch upon the viewpoints of the tribal local population. Contrary to the previous researches, this study discusses the importance of tribal people participation in the reform debates and the incorporation of the local people views and inputs in the reform policies.

### **Stereotypes and Radical Profiling of the Frontier Tribesmen: An Historical Overview**

The existing published literature and scholarships on the former FATA region consistently repeat some sweeping statements and stereotypes that have historically played a significant role in producing a bad image of the tribal regions and its population. It is now customary to define these areas as the most dangerous place in the world and its people as wild tribes,

savages, and barbarians etc. Based on these stereotypes, a discourse has been advanced that the tribal people are highly traditional and they are immune to change and progression. They love to live a free and independent life under the tribal system of governance and have long resisted its replacement with a regular and formal system of administration. This discourse provided a well-established excuse to the British colonial masters, during their ruling in the subcontinent, and later on to the successive federal governments of Pakistan to avoid meaningful reforms and other developmental activities in the frontier tribal regions. Resultantly, over the years, these areas remained isolated from the mainstream and have experienced extreme underdevelopment and governance issues.

The seeds of bad profiling of the frontier tribesmen were sowed by the British administrators, during their ruling in the subcontinent. After their arrival in 1848 and occupying most parts of the subcontinent, the British forces faced tough resistance and insurgencies from the tribesmen on the Pak-Afghan border areas, later on known as the FATA region of Pakistan. The colonial masters were aware of the fact that the tribesmen had historically resisted external aggressions and inflicted huge cost to those who ever tried subjugating them. That is why they decided not to fully penetrate in these areas. However, keeping in mind the geostrategic location of this region and the prospects of its utility for security considerations, the British could not afford

to leave these areas unnoticed and totally independent of their control. After waging several expeditions for deterring the tribesmen, the British policy makers realized that it would never be possible to completely subdue the frontier tribes.

Their early difficulties in dealing with the frontier tribesmen created frustrations and anxieties among the British administrators. Gradually, this frustration turned into extreme hatred among the British administrators towards the tribesmen. They started passing sweeping statements and negative remarks about the tribesmen and bluntly painted them as violent, warlike and brutal (Banerjee, 2001). Along with the negative remarks, the British officers often, exaggeratedly, described the tribesmen as brave, independent, and traditions loving people. The following paragraph presents a brief account of those statements and writings of the British officers that depicted the tribesmen as either savages or brave people of the borderlands.

A British officer, while sharing his experiences of dealing with the frontier tribesmen, stated that, “The Afridi tribes on the border regions were the most lawless and savage of the Pashtuns” (Oliver, 1890). Another British official commented on the frontier tribesmen as, “They are brought up as kids to distrust all mankind” (Warburton, 1900). Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of the Britain, described them as, “Animal-like”; for George Curzon, a British officer, they were “Child-like species of cat”; and Denzil Ibbetson described these people as, “Most

barbaric of all races, bloodthirsty, vindictive and bigoted” (Yousaf, 2019). There are also some writings that have reported the British officers’ statements in which some features of the tribal population are over-romanticised and unduly exaggerated. For example, Tanner (2002) quotes a British officer when he exaggeratedly praising the bravery and independent nature of the tribal people as, “We (frontier tribesmen) are comfortable with dissension, we are at ease with panics, we are content with blood . . . we will never be contented with a master”. Haroon (2007) quotes another official of the British army, Colonel Brazier, who add further weight to this exaggeration and says, “When we went to the frontier regions it was called *Yaghistan* (un-administered, or unruly land); it was a forbidden land, and no Englishman had ever been there before... It was impossible to go (inside); and if you did your bones would be left there”.

The depiction of the tribal region as a no go area and its population as different creatures was done on purpose on the part of British colonialists. It is worth mentioning here that the British administrators were not interested in full-fledged penetration in the tribal areas. There are two main reasons that led to this policy decision. First, the geographical features of the tribal areas—fairly typical rugged and barren mountains, tough terrains, harsh weather, scarcity of water—made it less attractive for the colonial masters. Out of the entire geographical area only 7 per cent is conducive for cultivation (Abbas, 2006). Only 44

per cent of the cultivable land is under irrigation while rest of the areas are mainly dependent on rainfall (Yusufzai, 2004). Due to remoteness, rugged terrains, and harsh weather the yielding ratio of these lands is very low and ultimately made it less attractive for any kind of investment. Secondly, the typical tribal structure in this region and the tribesmen resistances to external interference in the tribal affairs made the British colonial power to avoid direct contact with the tribesmen and physical presence in these areas. However, due to the sensitive nature of these areas and its importance from the security point of view, they could not completely leave it free from their influence and control. The British policy makers wanted to devise a viable policy towards the tribal areas that could not ignite tribal hostilities, and best serve their colonial interest. The British recognized the tribal areas as special zones and choose to indirectly administered it with a peculiar system of administration and anomalous legal frameworks like Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) (Shah, 2013). In this process the British did not challenge the tribal society social structure. The tribesmen were allowed to follow their traditions and customs in running the affairs of the tribal society but in return they had to ensure that writ of the government is not challenged and loyalty to the British Raj was not disobeyed (Kureshi, 2014).

Most of the things rapidly changed when the colonial power departed from the subcontinent. However, the situation in

the frontier tribal regions of Pakistan remained intact. The discourse about the tribesmen, cultivated by the British, kept blossoming long after their departure from the subcontinent. Majority of the people and even government officials in Pakistan view the tribal areas as ‘a separate land’ and its people as ‘aliens from another planet’ (Wazir, 2013). The Afghan war in 1979 and 9/11 incidents in 2001, and resulted poor law and order situation in the tribal region further contributed in the ill-repute and bad image of the frontier tribesmen. For the reason that Pakistan’s tribal areas have been the epicentre of terrorism and violent activities of the militants, various research works and scholarships have used different untested historical accounts to connect the tribal people with violence and have increasingly been profiled as terrorists and troublemakers. In this connection, the Irish Times published a story which describes the tribal people as “Steeped in a political culture of guns and violence” (Yousaf, 2019). Similarly, a report presented to the U.S congress in 2003 stated that, “Majority of the tribal Pashtuns sympathised with the Al Qaeda and the Taliban” (Shah, 2018). Thus, while the colonial literature portrayed the tribal people as “warlike and savages” the contemporary literature describes them as “extremists and militants” (Yousaf, 2019). Based on these untested facts and ill-depictions, the tribal region is now generally known as a most dangerous place on the earth and its

people as troublemakers and disturbers of peace in Pakistan in particular and in the South Asian region as a whole.

Because the tribal people have always been presented as typical traditional people, who loved to follow their tribal customs and opposed any reforms and progression, the successive Pakistani governments found it convenient to continue with the anomalous legal frameworks and segregated administrative system in these areas, inherited from the British. Based on the old mystiques and romantic theories, the mainstream majority view in many official and public circles debates in Pakistan is that it's actually the tribal people themselves who are responsible for the backwardness in the tribal region. Like their predecessors (British colonialists) the Pakistani state was also not interested in integrating the tribal areas in the national mainstream governance and development spectrum. In this regard, different logics and theories are forwarded to maintain the status quo in the tribal region. However, the most appealing excuse has been that "Since the tribesmen have fiercely resisted all invaders of the past and have never accepted any changes to their tribal set up, so they must be allowed to continue with their tribal system of governance without any major changes" (Shah, 2018). It has largely been presented as a pretext to deny the tribal population their basic civil rights and governance reforms in the tribal region. Thus, the deeply-rooted bad profiling of the tribal region and its inhabitants has been one

of the major factors that have largely hurdled reforms and governance improvements in these areas.

The existing dominant narrative, which suggest that the tribal people have always been oppose to change and progression, has always been paraded by those who had stakes in the status quo. They were afraid that in case of reforms and change they have to lose the privileges and power position in the tribal society. That is why they left no stone unturned to propagate that the tribal people have whole heartedly accepted the tribal system of governance and there was no need for any change or renovation. However, different historical facts and incidents disprove this myth and suggest that the tribal people are not averse to reforms and they have long desired for reforms and development in the tribal region.

### **Political Reforms and Tribal People Response: Myth Vs Reality**

The rhetoric, that the tribal people are imperious to reforms and progression, may somehow be factual in the British case, because the colonial power had less acceptability in the tribal society and they were generally perceived as invaders by the tribal people. However, in the case of Pakistan, this narrative is not a valid argumentation and can be easily contested. After the creation of Pakistan, the tribesmen wholeheartedly joined the Pakistani block and ensured their services and loyalties to the state of Pakistan. The tribal people might have hesitation to

reforms and changes to their traditional tribal structure in the early days, when these areas were assimilated into Pakistan in 1948, but it would defy all comprehensions if one goes with its longevity and present it as a pretext to deny reforms and progression to the tribal regions.

The moment these areas were assimilated in Pakistan, the tribesmen attitude towards governance changed and they started realising that their tribal system of administration is subject to change in the coming days. According to Khan (2008), “The level of resistance among the tribesmen, opposition to change and meddling in the tribal society’s internal affairs, had largely reduced. The basic reason was that they had realised to adjust to the changing circumstances and had to accept the new identities, sooner or later. Another reason was that the Pakistani state was not an alien for the tribal people, as they perceived the British colonialist”. The Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah visit to the Frontier Region Peshawar in April 1948 and the tribal people warm welcome to the father of the nation clearly depicts that the tribesmen were aspiring for change and expected major reforms in the tribal areas. However, successive federal governments ignored their responsibilities in the tribal region. The tribesmen call for reforms and development was either misinterpreted or silenced by advocates of the status quo. The proceeding paragraphs discuss different case studies that clearly reflect the

fact that the tribal people have long been desirous for change and governance improvements in the tribal region.

Over the years, after its annexation in Pakistan, the former FATA region did not attract much attention from the Pakistani policymakers. Although the tribal regions were recognised as an integral part of the Pakistani federation but till 1970s these areas did not see any genuine governance reforms and developmental projects. Some development initiatives were undertaken but the nature of these steps were such that could not be called genuine reforms. It did not improve governance in the tribal areas and had little impact on the lives of its population. Khan (2008) summarises these policies as, “These were negligible and did not bring any improvements and progressions in the tribal region. It only revived the already existing system and further strengthened the federal governments’ control in these areas”.

The first major reforms and development initiatives were undertaken during the 1970s. After coming into power, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) administration under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Prime Minister of Pakistan, resolved to give some relief to the tribal population. Z.A Bhutto extended the quota system to the tribal regions and its inhabitants were bestowed with the opportunity of allocations in educational institutions and other federal jobs. Furthermore, the tribal people were given a kind of recognition as normal citizens of the country, by providing the National Identity Cards and issuing of Passports.

(Sammon, 2008). As a result of these initiatives, the tribesmen were allowed to work in different parts of the country and traveling abroad for overseas employment opportunities. Those reforms had its positive impacts on the tribal society and were highly appreciated by the tribal people. The issuing of passports and allowing tribal people to travel abroad contributed in the socio-economic development of these areas and triggered the desire for change and progression among the frontier tribesmen. The educational policies and job quotas for tribal residents further facilitated the emergence of a new class, an educated middle class. It was this class that started challenging the ultraconservative tribal governance system and demanded to alter it with modern institutions and formal legal frameworks, which were in practice in the settled areas of Pakistan (Khan, 2008).

The desire among the tribal people for change and progress can be further endorsed by examining the statistics on out-migration of the tribal people, in search of employment opportunities and seeking settlement in urban areas of the country. According to Ahmed (1980), "In South Waziristan alone, by 1979, about 20,000-30,000 men moved to the urban centres of the country such as the port city of Karachi, and to the Gulf States in search of employment opportunities". It is also worth mentioning that during the period of 2007-2016 around 452,000 labourers from FATA contributed to the international labour market, mostly in construction sectors (Kamal, 2017).

Such figures on out-migration lend support to the argument that the tribal society is not averse to progress and change. Now there is a rising demand among the tribesmen, especially among the young segment of the population, that there should be jobs, formal legal system, and improvements in their living standard.

The existing discourse presents the tribesmen as troublemakers, extremists, or sympathizers of the militants. However, the realities on ground suggest otherwise. Many people from the tribal regions have moved to the settled areas in Pakistan to escape the militants' assaults, safeguard their lives and properties, and to avoid tribal feuds. This is another indicator which shows the desire among the tribal people for change, progress, and living a normal civilized life. While interviewing the people from the former FATA region majority of the respondents showed their willingness to live in the settled areas of the country if they were given the opportunity. "Living here in the tribal region is full of miseries. We have faced the difficulties of life in so many respects and do not want that our coming generations should face the similar fate" (Group Discussion with people belonging to North Waziristan on August 8, 2021).

Likewise, there was consensus among the respondents that there should be a uniform law for all the residents of the country and people of FATA should not be treated differently. In this regard, majority of the respondents expressed their desire that, "The out-dated FCR should be replaced with formal and

regular laws of the country” (Group Discussion with people belonging to former Bajuar Agency on August 19, 2021). The field work findings are further endorsed by a poll survey conducted the Fata Research Centre in 2016. The survey results indicated that 68 per cent of the respondents demanded the complete abolishment of FCR and its replacement with a new governance system (Bukhari, 2022). In addition, the tribal people have also voiced against the bad aspects of the tribal culture and demanded its complete abolishment. For example, majority of the respondents agreed that, “The old obsolete traditions like, ‘*Badal*’ (Revenge) and ‘*Swara*’ (giving a girl to the aggrieved party as repentance to resolve a conflict) should be shunned and must be declared as inhuman and punishable crimes by the higher courts of the country” (Group Discussion with people belonging to Bajuar on September 23, 2021).

Successive military operations against the militants in the tribal areas and resulted displacement have exposed the uprooted tribal population to the world outside the tribal belt. Such an exposure has further egged the desire for reforms and change among the tribal population. The displaced people were surprised to saw that there is another life, other than the one they lived in their respective areas. They got astonished to saw the facilities and respect that is due to a citizen by the state (Baloch, 2018). While interviewing the Temporarily Displace People (TDPs) from the FATA region, majority of the respondents shared the

similar view and stated, “The displacement is like ‘blessing in disguise’. It gave exposure to the tribal people and changed their worldview. Even those who were highly traditional and conservative one are now compelled to think out of the box” (Personal Interview from the TDPs in Bannu on August 20, 2021). It is also worth mentioning that some of the TDPs, mostly youngsters, in the Frontier Region (FR) Bannu refused to go back to their respective areas and stated that they have started planning for settlement in the settled areas. “We had never seen such a glamorous life before. Observing the proper roads system, hospital facilities, rush in the markets, and free movement from one place to another in the settled areas has made us feel that life in the black and barren mountains in our areas is nothing else but just a wastage of time” Having exposure to such world, majority of the people are unwilling to go back to their respective areas” (Focus Group Discussion with youngsters belonging to North Waziristan on August 23, 2021).

Over the years, it was a common saying that the tribal people are hesitant to either allow political activities in their respective areas or to participate in such events. This notion was also disproved by certain cases and events. Before the introduction of Adult Franchise in 1996 it was presumed that the tribal people did not want elections, as it goes against their customs and traditions, but to the surprise these people greeted this political move and enthusiastically participated in the

successive elections (Durrani and Wazir, 2017). This notion was further disproved when the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government introduced some pragmatic reforms in 2011, the extension of Political Party's Order (PPO 2002) to the tribal areas and amendments in FCR (Dawn, 2011).

Tribal people highly appreciated these reforms and positively responded to it. As a result of these reforms, the political parties were allowed to launch election campaigns and other political activities in the tribal areas. It is to be noted that despite the Taliban threats, who warned the tribal people not to go for casting their votes otherwise they would face the consequences, the tribal people enthusiastically participated in the 2013 general elections. It is worth mentioning here that voter turnout in 2013 elections in the former FATA region was 37.4 percent which is very encouraging (Iqbal and Khan, 2014). The positive response of the tribal people to political reforms in the tribal region can also be checked from the fact that even tribal women participated in the 2013 general elections both as candidates for the National Assembly (NA) seats and as voters. For example, against the tribal norms and other cultural taboos, Badam Zari from former Bajuar Agency contested the 2013 elections for NA seat against 25 male candidates (Malik, 2013). Tribal women participation in the political activities bore fruits when Aisha Gulalai from former South Waziristan Agency

became Member of National Assembly, as candidate of PTI on a reserved seat for women from former FATA (Mohmand, 2013).

The 2018 general elections in the tribal areas and the tribal people enthusiasm to participate in the elections as voters or candidates also reflect the fact that these people are desirous for political and other reforms in the region. The interesting development and a new trend in this election was that new faces came to the light and the former politicians, those advocating the status quo, got defeated. Their defeat is indication of the fact that the tribal public have rejected them for the role they played in the past, denying the tribal people genuine representation in the National Assembly and blocking the road to reforms in the tribal society. Furthermore, the new parliamentarians from former FATA are not limited to one party like the past. It is a mixed bag, belonging to PPP, PTI, JUI-F, PTM, and Independent candidates. Among them, the PTI stood the major party that had more parliamentarians (Wazir, 2018). The support for PTI, a progressive mainstream political party, and giving it reasonable parliamentary representation is another clear indication that the tribal people have expressed their aspiration for reforms and development in the tribal region. Similarly, the tribal population wholeheartedly and enthusiastically participated in the 2024 general elections. Despite security threats, door to door campaigns were observed in all tehsils and towns of the newly-merged tribal districts. The February 8, 2024 was a historic day

for the tribal people when for the first time they polled their votes for seats in the National and Provincial (KP) Legislature.

Last but not the least, the evolution of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)<sup>1</sup> and its increasing support base among the tribal people, especially the youth, is another indicator of desire for reforms and change among the tribal people. The participants demand for pragmatic governance reforms and developmental projects in the tribal regions. They seek redressing of the tribal people grievances and the provision of fundamental human rights defined in the Pakistani constitution. They demonstrate a rejection to all forms of extremism and terrorism in the tribal areas in particular and in Pakistan in general (Shah, 2018). The nonviolent nature of PTM and the calls for genuine reforms in the tribal region also verify the fact that the tribal people are progressive and open-minded. The demand for pragmatic changing in the tribal system of governance and the introduction of a uniform modern administrative system in the tribal region further proves that these people are neither conservative nor they support any kind of traditionalism. The former FATA region merger in the KP can be attributed in part to the pressure of the PTM. The followers of this movement, especially the tribal

---

<sup>1</sup> Formerly called the Mahsud Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, it was founded in May 2014 by eight students at Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan. It was an initiative for removing landmines from Waziristan and other parts of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In January 2018, it turned into the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, which is a social movement for Pashtuns basic human rights based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan.

youth, highly appreciated the merger scheme and kept demanding for further pragmatic reforms in the newly-merged tribal districts.

## **Conclusion**

The available literature and scholarships heavily rely on the romantic and stereotypic discourse that got developed during the British rule in the subcontinent. The established discourse depicts the tribal people as savages, highly conservative, and averse to changes and progressions. However, the above discussed cases and evidences suggest otherwise. It clearly indicates that the tribal people are open-minded and have long yearned for peace, reforms, and progression. No society of the world can remain static for long. It undergoes changes and adopts new rules and norms to adjust to the changing circumstance and conditions. The same is true of the tribal society, which is not an anomaly and is subject to the forces of change. The tribal people might have resisted reforms and changes in the tribal system in the very beginning, when these areas were annexed in the state of Pakistan. However, with the passage of time they realised that tribalism cannot survive for long and that it has to be replaced with a modern system of governance.

Sidelining the tribal population in the reform debates and denying them active participation in the policy making (concerning the tribal region) is dangerous and undesirable. There is a longstanding belief and complaint among the tribal population that policy decisions with regard to reforms in the

tribal region are always taken by outsiders. It has extremely annoyed the tribal public and they see all the reform initiatives with suspicious eyes. It is gradually increasing the gaps between the state and society in the tribal areas and ultimately weakening the bonds between the two.

Any reform intervention in the tribal region can only become a success story when it has strong social support base and acceptability in the tribal society. It is only possible when there is reconciliation with the tribesmen and their views and inputs are respected and incorporated in the reform policies. The active involvement of the tribal people is sine qua non for comprehensive reform policies and its successful implementation. Because they are the key stakeholders and they better understand the dynamics of the tribal society and the necessities of tribal population. The tribal local support can only be secured when the broken links between the state and society in the tribal region are repaired. For this purpose, the government must stimulate societal cohesion by encouraging the tribesmen to openly discuss major issues in the tribal region and suggesting the best ways to solve these issues. Giving the tribesmen an opportunity to participate in the reform debates and putting forward their inputs will create goodwill among the tribal community. Securing the tribal local support will largely help in making comprehensive reform strategies and its smooth implementation.

## References

Abbas, H. (2006). Profiles of Pakistan's Seven Tribal Agencies. *Terrorism Monitor*, 20 (4),5-17.

Ahmed, A. S. (1980). *Pukhtun Economy and Society: Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*. Routledge & Kegan Paul Publishers.

Aziz, S. (2017). History of FATA Reforms. *Pakistan Today*.  
<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/03/08/history-of-fata-reforms.html>

Baloch, S. M. (2018). Pakistan's Troubled Frontier Justice. *The Diplomat*.  
<https://thediplomat.com/2018/018/pakistan-troubled-frontier-justice/>

Banerjee, M. (2001). *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the Northwest Frontier*. Oxford University Press.

Björk, P. G. & Hans S. H. J. (2001). Towards Governance Theory: In search for a common ground. *Research Gate*.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228610779/Towards-governance-theory-in-search-for-a-common-ground>

Bukhari, R. (2022). Merger and Reforms in ex-fata. *Dawn*.  
<https://www.dawn.com/news/merger-and-reforms--in-ex-fata/>

Bukhari, S. A. S. (2017). Bottlenecks in FATA's Mainstreaming. *Development Advocate Pakistan*, 4 (2), 8-15

Durrani, A. Shah., & Abid K. W. (2017). FATA Reforms: A Break from Tradition. *Tanqeed*. <http://www.tanqeed.org/2017/03/fata-reforms-a-break-from-tradition/>

Haroon, S. (2007). *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland*. Columbia University Press.

Iqbal, H., & Saeed K. (2014). Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA): From no Man's Land to Political Mainstreaming. *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, 3 (1), 64-82.

Kahlon, T. M. (2017). Governance Reforms in FATA. ISSRA Papers- Journal of Governance and Public Policy, 9 (1), 63-76.

Khan, D. A. (2018). Why the most ambitious initiative to change Fata's status is put on hold. Herald.  
<https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153875/why-the-most-ambitious-initiative-to-change-fatas-status-is-put-on-hold>

Khan, G. Q. (2018). How the British kept the Pakhtuns divided? Herald.  
<https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398521/how-the-british-kept-the-pakhtuns-divided/>

Khan, I. (2008). Challenges Facing Development in Pakistan's FATA. The National Bureau of Asian Research, 19 (3), 13-20.

Kureshi, S. T. (2014). Tribal tales. The Friday Times.  
<https://www.thefridaytimes.com/tribal-tales/>

Major Changes made in FCR: FATA People get political rights. (2011). Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/major-changes-made-in-fcr-fata-people-get-political-rights>

Malik, M. (2013). Women's role can change Fata election results. The Nation. <https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2013/women's-role-can-change-fata-elections-results>

Mohmand, M. (2013). Making history: Vernal parliamentarian set to shine on political stage. The Express Tribune.  
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2013/029/05/making-history-vernal-parliamentarian-set-to-sine-on-political-stage.html>

Oliver, E. E. (1890). Across the border or Pathan and Baloch. London: Chapman & Hall Publishers.

Rahman, M. L. (2016). Governance and Good Governance: A Theoretical Framework. Public Policy and Administration Research, 6 (10), 40-50.

Sammon, R. L. (2008). Mullas and Maliks: Understanding the Roots of Conflict in Pakistan's FATA. PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

Shah, K. M. (2018). Too Little, Too Late: The Mainstreaming of Pakistan's Tribal Regions. Observer Research Foundation, 5 (157), 1-26.

Shah, S. W. A. (2013). Fencing of the Durand Line and Its Impact. *Internationales Asienforum*, 44 (1–2), 85-103.

Tanner, S. (2002). *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*. New York: Da Capo Publishers.

Warburton, R. (1900). *Eighteen Years in the Khyber*. London: John Murray Publishers.

Wazir, A. (2014). Fata and the myth of joint responsibility. *The News*.  
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/88519-fata-and-the-myth-of-joint-responsibility>

Wazir, A. (2013). Conflict in FATA and Governance. *Policy Perspectives*, 10 (2), 49-70. Wazir, A. (2018). Fata's future. *The News*.  
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print355334-fata's-future/>

Weiss, G. T. (2000). Governance, Good Governance and Global Governance: Conceptual and Actual Challenges. *Third World Quarterly*, 21(5), 795-814.

Yousaf, F. (2019). *Pakistan's Tribal Pashtuns: Their Violent Representation, and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement*. SAGE Open.  
<https://www.journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo-Pakistan-s-Tribal-Pashtuns-Their-Violent-Representation-and-the-Pashtun-Tahafuz-Movement.pdf/>

Yusufzai, R. (2004). Backyard to the Fore. *The News*.  
<https://www.thenews.com/news/1343660/backyard-to-the-foe/>