

## **Voices of Tribal Residents on the Merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas- FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

In a federation, decentralized power is crucial in alleviating ethnic conflicts and addressing sentiments of deprivation among marginalized communities. The historic merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in May 2018, under the 25th Amendment of Pakistan's 1973 constitution, aimed to address the grievances of this area's residents and promote peace and development. Despite its strategic significance, the tribal agencies (bordering Afghanistan) have long suffered from socio-economic and political neglect and enduring insurgency since 2002. Consequently, the merger was widely welcomed by residents and political stakeholders in the area. This study presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sentiments of young residents in ex-FATA regarding socio-economic and political changes following the merger with KPK. A survey, interviews, and focus-group discussion were conducted with residents of these tribal agencies. Research findings indicate that while most former FATA inhabitants appreciate the merger, substantial progress in improving their quality of life has yet to be witnessed in practice.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, FATA Merger, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Federalism, Decentralization.

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## **1. Interduction**

The tribal society of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) comprises seven administrative tribal agencies (Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North, and South Waziristan) and six smaller settled districts known as Frontier Regions-FRs (Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Peshawar, and Tank). This region holds significant geographical importance as it shares a 1600km border with Afghanistan to the west, adjacent to the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in the north and east, and with Baluchistan to the south. The former FATA comprises 3.34 million people, approximately 2 percent of the country's population. The prominent Pashtun tribes residing in this territory are Wazir, Afridi, Mohmand, Tarkani, Mahsud, Dawar, Bettani, Sherani, Turi, Orakzai, Bangash, Shinwari, Safi and Uthmankhel.<sup>1</sup> Over a period, this tribal area, which has faced militancy and subsequent security operations, endured many challenges, from terrorist activities to displacement due to evacuation operations by armed forces. These issues will be explored in detail within a historical context in the forthcoming segment. To ensure residents' comfort, this tribal area, previously under federal control, was integrated into the province of KPK in 2018. While existing literature primarily focuses on the theoretical impact of the FATA merger, it often overlooks the expectations and aspirations of the area's inhabitants about various impacts on their lives, particularly regarding ensuring human security and improving governance conditions. Although public perception of human security threats is subjective and depends on individuals' views of their safety and well-being, it is essential to understand these sentiments to develop effective human security interventions through legislation and practical implementation (Thomas, 2001).

In the backdrop of the multifaceted historical narrative encompassing various stages of tribal society, the legacy of colonial governance under British rule, the persistent specter of militancy, consequential military interventions against the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and the subsequent wave of extensive reforms instituted by the Pakistani government, this research

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1. Over 99.6% of the population is Muslim and belongs to the Sunni Hanafi Fiqh. The socio-cultural order of this society has a strong impact of the religion Islam. Apart, the area has a significant number of other religious communities like Sikh (20,000), Christians (20,000) and Hindus (10,000). The 99.1% of the population speaks Pashto language.

endeavors to concentrate on a pivotal juncture—the aftermath of the FATA merger with KPK. This is a transformative milestone, ostensibly designed to address governance and human security challenges prevalent in this tribal region. Central to this inquiry is an examination of the extent to which the residents of this region perceive and acknowledge the consequential shifts in governance dynamics after the merger. Focusing on the perspectives of the young and educated demographic, this study aims to explore their views on governance and human security in the post-merger landscape. Additionally, it seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the merger's implications and contribute valuable insights into the ongoing discourse on administrative reforms in the former tribal areas. It further recognizes that the merger must not only aim for immediate political engagement and violence reduction but also consider the broader implications of governance practices on human security. This study draws on the theoretical framework of David Chandler and Richmond Oliver's theory on human security. Chandler emphasizes the need for empirical research to understand the impact of reforms on socio-political dynamics (Chandler,2008). Based on these assumptions, the paper will elucidate the methodological framework to capture the sentiments of the young local population through surveys, focused group discussions, and interviews. This approach ensures that policies are not merely symbolic but are designed to address the underlying socio-political dynamics that contribute to insecurity. Furthermore, the emphasis on inclusive governance, as highlighted by Richmond (2012), reinforces the idea that genuine public engagement must be accompanied by structural changes that empower marginalized groups like tribal area residents, thereby fostering a more equitable socio-economic landscape. To fully grasp the discussions on the impact of the FATA merger, it is essential to understand the unique socio-cultural, economic, and political profile of this tribal society.

## **2. Background**

The socio-political dynamics of merged tribal areas revolve around two

essential elements: Pashtunwali<sup>1</sup> and the jirga system<sup>2</sup>. In the absence of definite codified rules, these two components were considered the guarantee of law and order and the maintenance of traditional culture. Based on these two features, the Pashtun tribes inhabiting the region had a long history of self-governance, administered by the tribal Maliks and elders.<sup>3</sup> With the onset of the British colonial system, the governing authorities adopted a strategic approach that combined persuasion, control, and military interventions. This region received special treatment compared to the rest of the colony due to its unique tribal structure and a strong desire for liberation. Between 1849 and 1939, the British conducted a total of 58 military campaigns against the Pashtun tribes to assert control over the area. However, they quickly realized that the Pashtuns were unlikely to yield easily to their authority. In response, the British granted the region semi-autonomous status, allowing tribal leaders some autonomy while introducing their own system known as Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). In exchange for this arrangement, the British provided allowances and subsidies to tribal Maliks and elders and received free road access along the Durand Line, the border between Afghanistan and British India (now Pakistan). The new government maintained a status quo after Pakistan's independence in 1947, preserving the

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1. Pashtunwali is a centuries-old customary Pashtun code of life, based on four basic principles: Melmastiya (hospitality), Badal (revenge), Nanawatay (providing asylum), and Tarboorwali (agnatic rivalry) (Khan et al., 2019:266). This is a pre-Islamic unwritten set of laws based on traditions and norms, which though does not have a legal binding but is an integral part of Pashtun society. While explaining the features of this tradition base code of life, Cassidy added that the Pashtunwali, is a set of unwritten principles that are deeply embedded in Pashtun culture and comprised of tolerance, independence, self-respect, hospitality, respect, forgiveness, justice honor, and revenge. This code reflects the shared vision of the tribes and the mechanism they have developed from within to enforce it, preserving their socio-cultural foundation (Cassidy, 2012:10). The Pashtun tribal society has been characterized by collectiveness, harmony, and mutual respect. These values have helped the Pashtuns maintain their independence and a sense of pride.

2. The jirga system is a council of tribal elders that upholds the traditional code of Pashtunwali and makes decisions by consensus. The jirga system is considered a strong pillar of tribal Pashtun society.

3. Maliks were tribal elders elected by the local community based on their status and influence in the tribes. Their main responsibility was to maintain peace and resolve tribal disputes among different clans. Later, they played a role as mediators between the locals and the federal government.

same autonomous status. However, the roles of the Maliks and Political Agents (PAs) were modified to represent the President of Pakistan and the Governor of KPK province.<sup>1</sup>

From the late 1990s to the 2010s, the tribal region remained a victim of militancy due to its proximity to Afghanistan, which various terrorist groups had destabilized. After the Talibanization of the region, not only the administrative but also the social structure was transformed as militants took over. The advent of militancy and the imposition of rigid religious ideology by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1996 disrupted Pashtun values and traditions on the Pakistani side of the border as well. Under the influence of the Afghan Taliban, the newly formed militant group TTP seized control of the entire tribal area, rendering the Pakistani government virtually powerless. They disregarded established conventions by imposing a strict interpretation of religion. The tribal elders were replaced by militants, and traditional institutions were dismantled. For example, the centuries-old traditional dance called “Baragai Attan” and the singing of songs or “tapas” to the beat of drums during festivities was disallowed. Women, who were already marginalized in Pashtun society, faced further setbacks under the Taliban. They were forbidden from fetching water from public wells, which was a depriving opportunity to socialize and discuss family matters. The freedom of tribal women before the Taliban rule is also pointed out by Farzana Bari in her study. Bari notes that women's mobility was restricted after the introduction of militancy. Taliban curtailed cultural practices that previously provided them with opportunities to socialize. In the past, women would come together to perform crucial tasks, including washing clothes, collecting water, and gathering firewood. Additionally, they would visit graveyards and shrines. “These were traditional spaces for women outside the homes where they used to meet with other women, make friends, and discuss their issues” (Bari,2010:37). It is important to highlight that while the tribal society was already conservative, the arrival of the Taliban led to a significant decline in its social dynamics. The militants imposed their interpretation of Islam, disrupting the existing social order and diminishing the roles of khans, maliks, mullahs, and tribal chiefs. In discussing the transformative impact of the

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1. During British rule, the position of Political Agent was established as the highest government official vested with executive and judiciary powers. The administrative heads of each tribal agency were political Agents.

militants, Hilali explains that unlike in the past, the influence of Mullahs increased in FATA after militancy, giving them more power to interpret and enforce their own version of religion, which made the socio-cultural environment more conservative. Maliks and jirga, who were previously seen as the power centers, lost their control. “Initially, the mosque was prohibited to be used for political purpose but after the event of 9/11, the status of maliks has declined and mullah emerged as a supreme commander who has the leading position in the political and social activities” (Hilali,2010:26). The presence of Mullahs altogether altered the socio-cultural and political landscape of the ex-FATA. An International Crisis Group report explained that militants consolidated their power by killing several hundred Maliks. In contrast, others were forced to adjust their loyalties and accept the authority of local militant leaders. The report stated, “Militants have also dismantled or hijacked tribal forums such as jirgas and hujras (tribal councils), exposing the state’s weaknesses in depending on individuals, proxies, and informal processes to govern rather than strong institutions” (International Crisis Group,2009:4). The destruction of traditional forums and the presence of militancy together disturbed not only the political order but also the social fabric of this tribal society, creating problems for human security. Thus, while disturbing the centuries-old social order in a previously peaceful tribal society, militants established their own exclusive control. They presented their interpretation of Islam, enforcing a new lifestyle where gender and minorities had almost no rights. While explaining the structures and composition of this tribal society, Rahman stressed that the tribal areas of Pakistan were “...peaceful before 9/11. The ongoing insurgency is not a local phenomenon; rather things have spilled over into Pakistan from across its Western borders where American and Allied Forces have drastically failed in achieving any of their stated targets” (Orakzi,2009:27). It is important to mention that the fragile economic condition, growing poverty, and negligence of the federal government toward the development of tribal areas further provided a conducive environment for the militants to regroup and establish their control over the area. Since 2001, this deprived and politically marginalized society has become a breeding ground for militant groups closely linked to the TTP, Al-Qaeda, and, to some extent, Daesh. To address the problems of FATA residents during the militancy in the 1990s and even before that, the federal government introduced several reforms in

different phases. In the first phase, from 1947-1970, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was removed from NWFP<sup>1</sup> but remained in FATA, where administrative control was given to the KPK Governor and President, and power was monopolized by Maliks and Political Agents.<sup>2</sup> They were also the heads of Khasadar<sup>3</sup> and Levies<sup>4</sup>, responsible for maintaining law and order. The hegemony of the Maliks and the PAs in the tribal area undermined the established governance structure, including the regular judicial system, resulting in accusations of arbitrary detentions and unfair trials. As a consequence of the region's semi-autonomous status, ordinary tribal people had minimal representation in decision-making bodies, which led to insufficient investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare (Malik, 2013:105). In the second phase, between 1970-1990, the 1973 constitution introduced federal reforms, including infrastructure development, educational institutions, and increased quotas for FATA residents. During this phase, the area saw infrastructure development by constructing roads, schools, and colleges. However, these advancements brought little improvement to the social lives of its inhabitants due to the rigid tribal system that adhered to old customs and practices. In the third phase, from 1990 to 2015, the Adult Franchise Act was introduced in 1996, which granted the right to vote to the locals aged 18 and above, followed by the reforms in the FCR, strengthening the tribunal and establishing a secretariat in 2002. In addition, in 2011, for the first time, people elected independent candidates under the Political Parties Order-PPO, which oversaw the activities of political parties. Despite the federal government efforts, the militants kept on challenging Pakistan's law enforcement agencies from time to time and disrupted the long-standing peace in this tribal region. In response, the Pakistan armed forces initiated multiple operations against the militants in the

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1. NWFP stands for North-West Frontier Province, which was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in April 2010, following the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan.

2. In 2018, their offices were redesignated as Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner. These positions were held by the senior-most bureaucrats, who wielded judicial, executive, and fiscal powers.

3. Khasadars were "tribal police" from the same tribes who patrol the Fata territory and perform multifarious duties under the political administration.

4. Tribal authorities appointed Levies, who were lightly armed, wore uniforms and received some basic training.

area, aiming to curb terrorist activities.<sup>1</sup> As a result, although terrorism decreased, the complete eradication of militancy from the tribal belt remains an ongoing challenge. Evaluating the last military operation, Zarb-e-Azb (2014- to present), an expert on terrorism studies, Zahid writes that this was the most required operation, especially in North Waziristan, because it had been a militants' hideout, providing them with a conducive environment to regroup. This is why the armed forces operations against militants between 2002 and 2014 remained unsuccessful. Although Zarb-e-Azb has been helpful in bringing relative peace to the area still, TTP and affiliated groups are able to launch significant attacks, and terrorism is not completely rooted out of the area (Zahid,2015:1-6). While militant groups may not exert the same level of influence in all tribal agencies today, their meager presence even today remains a persistent challenge for law enforcement agencies and their residents, especially in North Waziristan.

The military operations in the tribal region brought relative peace; however, it was crucial to eliminate militancy entirely and establish a law-and-order system to deter external elements from disrupting society's socio-cultural and political equilibrium. It is important to mention that the armed conflict between militants and the Pakistan army pushed residents to migrate, leaving their homes and businesses (Muhammad and Khan,2020:81-93), which had a devastating impact on their livelihoods, a vital source of income and food for many families. "Several urgent evacuations of villages due to military operations in FATA (Waziristan and Bajaur) and the Swat Valley compelled many farmers to abandon their livestock. Many fleeing farmers either left their livestock unprotected, or they managed to sell them at throw-away prices" (Center for Research and Security Studies,2014:17). Contributing to the fragile economic profile of the tribal area, the support of the Pakistani government for the Afghan jihad with money and materials led to the illegal

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1.Operation Al Mizan in North Waziristan (2002), Operation Zalzala in South Waziristan (2008), Operation Rah-i-Haq-I in Swat valley and Shangla district (2007), Operation Rah-i-Haq-II in Swat valley and Shangla (2008),Operation Sirat-i-Mustaqeem in Khyber Agency (2008), Operation Sherdil jointly launched with Frontier Corps in Bajaur Agency (2008), Operation Rah-i-Haq-III in Swat valley and Shangla (2009), Operation Black Thunderstorm in Buner, Lower Dir and Shangla district (2009), Operation Brekhna in Mohmand Agency (2009), Operation Rah-i-Rast, commonly known as Swat Operation, (2009), Operation Rah-i-Nijat in South Waziristan (2009). Rah-e-Shahadat in Tirah Valley of the Khyber Agency. (2013); and Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan (2014-Present).

influx of weapons, drugs, and currency. This resulted in weak law and order, increased unemployment, and a rise in human trafficking. These factors left the area underdeveloped and disturbed its security and social fabric (Khan et al.,2017:63). With this fiscal landscape, the “shadow economy”<sup>1</sup> of this tribal area made the large trade untaxed and unregulated, resulting in weak state control and a stronghold of a few tribal leaders (Ayaz,2012:80).

A significant phase for the former FATA population occurred from 2015 to 2021, during which extensive reforms were implemented following major Pakistan military operations against militants. These reforms were necessary to stabilize and transform tribal society. The FATA Local Government Regulation was introduced to establish local bodies in the area in 2012. On May 31, 2018, the former FATA was officially merged with the province of KPK through the 25th constitutional amendment, which eliminated reserved seats, provided judicial protection, and replaced the FCR Act 1901 with the FATA Interim Governance Regulation 2018 with significant budget allocation for development.<sup>2</sup> This merger aimed to incorporate the tribes into the mainstream administrative structure for improved governance and law and order. It was a historic step towards addressing the political marginalization of the strategically significant tribal territory. The decision was influenced by the socio-cultural ties and administrative linkages between FATA and KPK, aiming to foster development in an area plagued by militancy, low literacy rates, a weak healthcare system, and severe poverty. The merger eliminated FATA's special status by territorially integrating it with the province of KPK, thus doing away with the reserved seats for FATA in the National Assembly and the Senate. These reforms aimed to increase political participation, improve governance, and promote area development. The autonomous status of the area, militant activities, and the Pakistan Army's operations together contributed to making this tribal society financially fragile, socio-cultural remote, and politically marginalized. This led to the

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1.Shadow Economy is “also called the underground, informal, or parallel economy, the shadow economy includes not only illegal activities but also unreported income from the production of legal goods and services, either from monetary or barter transactions. Hence, the shadow economy comprises all economic activities that would generally be taxable were they reported to the tax authorities” (Boyes and Melvin,2012:101).

2.The merger process commenced in 2015, establishing a cabinet-level committee on FATA reforms. The committee organized a Jirga (a council of tribal elders) in 7 tribal agencies and consulted Maliks for this unprecedented step.

region's low literacy rates and high poverty levels facilitating the unlawful activities. According to a UNDP survey for the year 2020, only 3.5 percent of the population has completed schooling, and approximately 2 percent of educated individuals possess a bachelor's degree, illustrating the limited higher education opportunities available in these areas. When examining the illiteracy rates across the seven tribal agencies, South Waziristan stands out with the highest illiteracy rate at 61 percent, while Kurram district is at the lowest with a 38 percent illiterate population (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). The literacy rate of tribal society significantly exacerbates poverty, as evident in the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) estimates for 2021, which mention that a staggering 73 percent of the FATA population faces poverty, surpassing the poverty rates of any other province in Pakistan (Khan and Siddiqui, n.d.). This fragile socio-economic situation, compounded by severe security challenges of a grave nature and political marginalization, prompted the central government to take action to improve this region, ultimately leading to its merger with KPK.

### **3. Methodology**

The mixed-method approach was adopted to study complex issues with social, political, and economic implications. It allowed us to capture the different dimensions of the problems and how they interacted with each other. This method enabled the triangulation of the findings, which means checking the validity of the results from one method by relating them to those from different approaches. The survey provided data through closed and open-ended questions regarding the lived experiences of young people after FATA's merger with KPK. In contrast, group discussions and interviews provided information on how the residents evaluate the impact of this area merger on their lives (Creswell and Clark, 2017). The available literature does not incorporate these missing voices of the young population, especially their sentiments attached to the aftereffects of the merger. Therefore, in this research, by incorporating a mixed method approach, which interweaves various data collection techniques, the anticipated outcomes are expected to heighten accuracy and increase reliability. The quantitative data from the cross-sectional survey (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016) is analyzed using Excel to identify initial themes related to human security, law and order, access to education, healthcare, and employment after the merger (Sirkin, 2006; Presser, 1985:93). To gain a deeper understanding of the participants'

perspectives, we employed a qualitative approach to analyze the open-ended survey responses, focus group discussions, and interviews (Morgan and Spanish,1984; Rubin and Rubin,2011). This approach allowed the participants to express their experiences, grievances, and merger impact on the area's people in greater depth, which might have been overlooked otherwise. Without incorporating multiple data collection techniques, the natural expression of FATA residents regarding merger impact through their personal stories was impossible. It is felt that such qualitative data proved invaluable for developing a nuanced understanding of FATA inhabitants' perspectives regarding the law-and-order situation, healthcare facilities, and expectations of the merger's impact.

**Sample:**

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants for the study (Tongco 2007). We focused on three key groups: in-person survey from college students (n= 50), Zoom interviews from the teachers of the area (n= 5), and the in-person group discussion with university students from FATA enrolled in baccalaureate studies (n= 6) at Lahore. Incorporating these three data collection methods allowed us to gather insights from individuals who were likely to be impacted by the merger in different ways. College students provided a perspective on potential educational opportunities and changes in social dynamics. The presumption was that the younger population does not have self-centered interests or biases and, therefore, tends to express whatever they feel to be the truth. While the teachers offered insights into the educational system and governance. On the other hand, university students, being more mature, shared their views on the broader socio-economic and political implications. We acknowledge that individuals, families, or tribes may harbor diverse interests when considering the broader societal perspective. During our discussions and interactions with the local population, we observed a consensus regarding the overarching impact of the FATA merger on the political and administrative landscape. This influence extended across various social classes and tribes, affecting nearly all population segments. The sample consisted exclusively of male participants due to cultural constraints in tribal areas that limit women's interactions with strangers and restrict their mobility in public spaces. During the pilot survey, the researchers observed that, while there are female colleges in the region, women's exposure to critical discussions regarding the merger remains

limited. Their mobility is typically accompanied by male or female relatives, making it challenging to access the female demographic for this study. These social and cultural barriers posed significant challenges to include women’s perspectives. The **in-person survey** of intermediate male students aged 16-22 years resided in Landi Kotal, Khyber, Loi Shalman, and Torkham areas belonged to Shirwari, Afridi, and Shalmani tribes. The selection of this age group for the survey sample serves a clear purpose. Respondents younger than this group largely lack the vision and depth to understand the ongoing transformational processes discussed in the research, while older respondents carry mindsets shaped by growing up within a particular socio-political setup, limiting their perspective on recent changes. The selection of the sampled population was not based on random choice but on making sure that the sample encompassed a diversity of society. They were all well-versed in Urdu (Pakistan’s national language) as well as the English language. The survey was in English language. For the detailed demographic profile of the survey respondents, see Table (1) below.

**Table (1): Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents**

Age	16-18		19-22			
		94 %		6%		
Area of Origin	Landi Kotal		Khyber	Loi Shalman	Torkham	
	76%		16%	4%	4%	
Tribes	Shirwari		Afridi		Shalmani	
	80%		16%		4%	
Family Income	5000-10,000	10,000-20,000	20,000-40,000		40,000-80,000	80,000 to Above
	22%	36%	28%		10%	4%
Father Occupation	Professional (Doctor, Lawyer, CA, Teacher, etc)	Employment (Govt Servant, Bank Official, etc)		Business	Skilled Labour (Electrician, Plumber, Mechanic, Computer, etc)	Un-skilled Labour
		14%	14%			

Apart from the survey, a **focus group discussion** was conducted in Urdu with university students who belonged to erstwhile tribal areas but were studying in Lahore. The discussion was facilitated by the researcher and lasted for 60

minutes. The discussion was semi-structured, and the participants were asked various questions regarding their assessment and experience of the impact of the FATA merger on the lives of its residents. The discussion was recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis. Another qualitative data technique was to conduct **interviews**. For this, schoolteachers from former FATA were interviewed via Zoom. The interviewees were selected based on their willingness to provide detailed written answers to the semi-structured questions regarding the impact of the FATA merger on its residents. However, at the request of some interviewees, the questions were also emailed to them, as they were more comfortable providing written answers.

### **3-1. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**

The **survey questionnaire** was in English. However, those who could not understand the questions were provided help translating the questionnaire into Urdu and Pashto for clarity. The identities of these respondents are not revealed as per their request. The **focus group discussion** was conducted in Urdu language. Only voluntary respondents who belonged to ex-FATA and were currently studying at universities in Lahore were allowed to participate. Similarly, the **interviews** were conducted on Zoom in English. At the request of some interviewees, the tentative questions were emailed to them before the interview. Incomplete submissions were excluded from the sample. Due to significant cultural and social restrictions, female respondents were excluded from this study. Their limited access to public interaction made it difficult to include their perspectives, presenting a methodological limitation in fully understanding the impact of the FATA merger across both genders.

### **3-2. Instrument**

The **survey questionnaire** comprised 26 questions, including 18 closed and 8 open-ended questions of an explanatory nature. It included both nominal and ordinal scale questions. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first two sections were designed using a nominal scale and analyzed using quantitative analytical techniques, while the eight open-ended questions at the end were analyzed qualitatively. The first section of the survey questionnaire comprised the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, including their age, area of origin, tribe, family income, and father's occupation. The second section of the quantitative survey questionnaire intended to collect data regarding their understanding of the FATA merger with KPK and its impact

on them as residents. There were 8 questions in this section. The first three questions were asked to know the knowledge of erstwhile FATA about the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which merged this tribal area into KPK. The answers provided were yes or no. The fourth question sought to understand the perception of the young population on whether the merger benefitted the region's development. The answers provided were yes or no. The fifth question assessed whether the respondents believed that the merger of FATA had changed the influence of Maliks, PA, and the FCR. The answers provided were yes or no. The sixth question assessed the areas in which respondents had observed development in the post-merger scenario. The provided options included health, education, employment, law and order, and infrastructure (water, sanitation, roads, etc.). The seventh question sought to understand the role of law enforcement agencies in maintaining peace in the post-merger environment. The answers provided were yes or no. The third section of the same survey questionnaire was based on open-ended questions that were analyzed using the narrative analysis technique (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The open-ended questions allowed respondents to share their thoughts and feelings about the challenges facing tribal agencies after its merger with KPK. The questions were designed to elicit respondents' perspectives on the hindrances that have prevented the full benefits of the 25th amendment, as well as their views on the role of the provincial and federal government, local population, and political parties in ensuring development and progress in this area. Group discussions and interviews were conducted to further understand the benefits of the merger and the economic and political challenges that the residents of former FATA faced. The data from these discussions and interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that allows researchers to identify, analyze, and report patterns in the data (Terry et al., 2017:17-37). This method has been used to analyze various data types, including the transcripts of interviews, focus group discussions, and field notes. The findings of this analysis were then used to write the findings and discussion of this paper.

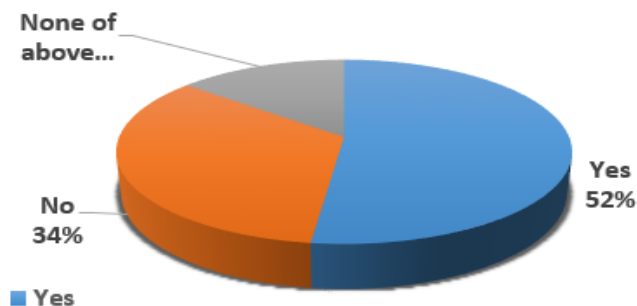
### **3-3.Procedure**

The respondents were informed about the nature of the research before conducting the survey questionnaire, focus group discussion, and interviews. Their consent was obtained before the data collection process began. The participants' anonymity was maintained throughout the study, which was

administered between March and May 2021.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Despite its strategic significance, the socio-culturally conservative society of erstwhile FATA feels disconnected from the mainland. Their grievances range from low economic facilities to political marginalization. The security arrangements revolve around Rangers, Levies, and Khasadar, but the local population has reservations about these forces. The primary reason for this sentiment is that Pashtuns believe in their own community-oriented security system; thus, while living under multiple security arrangements, their sense of independence and pride is challenged (Johnson and Mason, 2008:44). These people, who previously were residing under the British introduced FCR, where Maliks and PA had firm control, experienced the presence of the Army for the first time in 2002. “The movement of military into FATA severely compromised the writ of the political agents, who are responsible for handling the tribes in the seven agencies and six FRs. The diplomatic manipulation that a political agent uses was replaced by a supra-authority that damaged the political command and control system. Pakistan lost control, which was replaced by management through coercion” (Nawaz and Borchgrave, 2009:9). Since 1901, first, the draconian FCR and later the involvement of the Army created a sense of resentment among the residents of this area against the federal government’s policies towards this region. This was further confirmed by the responses of survey participants, as shown in Figure (1).



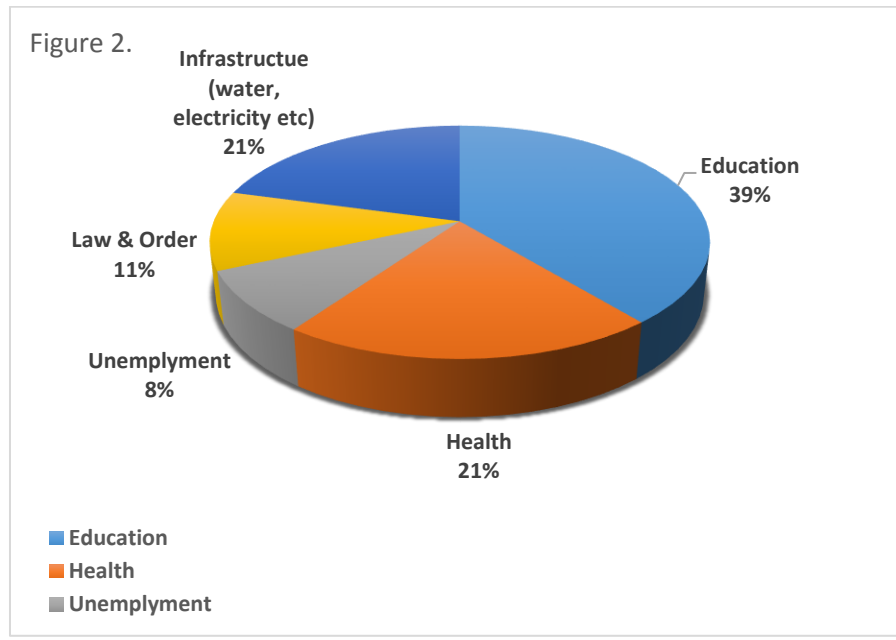
**Figure (1): Have you Noticed any Irregularities on the Part of Law Enforcement Agencies and Federal Govt Institutions in your Area since the Merger?**

More than half of the respondents (52 percent) shared that since the merger, they have noticed irregularities from law enforcement agencies and federal government institutions in their area. These irregularities have resulted in depriving them of basic necessities. While responding to the open-ended question over the same matter, participants of the survey shared:

“FCR is still active.” “There are many check posts in this area, which restrain our mobility. We have to reveal our identity in many places. It is strange that even in our own area, we have to prove our identity repeatedly.” “Considering tribes enemy, Federal government neglected our area for a long time.” “When Khasadar and police are on check posts, we do not face any problem.” “We have to go through many check posts on a daily basis. Nadra Staff’s attitude is not helpful. Police are indulged in corruption. We cannot move out at night. Based on suspicion, People are arrested.” “The FATA merger has made no change for us. At checkpoints, we have to bribe people for no reason. Although our area is merged, but nothing has changed for common people.” “The federal government has not done justice to the FATA areas. The people of our area have witnessed torture and cruelty. Compared to other provinces and cities, only our area is deprived of necessities.”

The responses above highlight people's dissatisfaction with a number of accounts after the FATA merger with KPK. Residents acknowledge a history of neglect, the presence of numerous security checkpoints, and limitations on movement, which suggest a heavy security presence that disrupts daily life. They consider the excessive number of check posts inconvenient, humiliating, and a waste of time. Overall, these views express disappointment with the merger's impact, highlighting a need to address security concerns, bureaucratic hurdles, and feelings of unequal treatment for successful unification. Apart from that, the lack of basic facilities is another primary concern the residents raise. They still complain of limited access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. This is due to several factors, including the region's remoteness and the government's lack of investment. The absence of basic facilities makes it difficult for people to live a decent life, and it also contributes to poverty and social problems. The views above suggest that the FATA merger has not brought the changes the locals hoped for. They still face many of the same challenges, and they are frustrated with the lack of progress. While further building on it, when participants of the survey were asked, “In your opinion, what are the major issues of your area?”, most respondents selected low literacy as a fundamental problem, followed

by the inadequate healthcare system, unemployment, and absence of infrastructure as depicted in Figure (2).



**Figure (2): In your Opinion, what are the Major Issues of your Area?**

Figure (2) illustrates that education is the primary concern for 39 percent of students, followed by the weak healthcare system/absence of proper infrastructure (21 percent), as an equal proportion of respondents chose these two options. This was followed by law and order (11 percent) and unemployment (8 percent). The most selected options remained inadequate education facilities, weak healthcare systems, and infrastructural weaknesses. The results of Figure (2) regarding a weak education system are further confirmed by group discussions with university students from the same area. They explained that very few schools and colleges exist in each agency, which is insufficient to meet the population's needs. While further elaborating on this, one of the students from South Waziristan, currently studying at the university in Lahore, shared during a group discussion:

Colleges in FATA are not accessible to locals. For instance, the Cadet College in FATA is mainly attended by people from outside the region. There are hardly any local students. Only a

particular class of people (Sons of Maliks) from FATA are able to attend these colleges (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

This self-explanatory response suggests that basic facilities are primarily available to the elite class in this area. The limited availability of educational opportunities before a merger can be understood by the statistics of the Directorate of Education in FATA Secretariat for the year 2017-18, which state that there are only 5,890 education institutions in the ex-FATA region, comprising mosques, primary, middle, and high secondary schools, colleges. After analyzing the above statement of respondents and these statistics, we can derive that although there are few schools and colleges in this area, contrary to the opinion of some respondents' views, there is no class-based discrimination when it comes to enrollment. However, with limited facilities, it is difficult for males to continue their education, let alone female literacy. This analysis was confirmed by another participant in the discussion, who explained:

Many of my family members are enrolled in these colleges, so I don't believe only the elite class can attend them. I think blaming the federal government for all the problems is inappropriate (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

It is important to note that the trend of getting an education among the residents of this area has increased over time, and the merger has created relatively better education facilities. Supporting this, a quantitative study on the positive effects of the merger on FATA residents' education concludes that residents of this area are more enthusiastic about education today, and comparatively, there is more focus on girls' education. Teachers are chosen based on merit, and administrative problems are being addressed (Umer et al., 2021). There is a likelihood that this development is due to the education of tribal areas falling under the provincial jurisdiction of KPK.

Despite this progress, there are still various factors contributing to the weak trend in education, particularly in higher education. These reasons include unaffordability and absence of water and sanitation services. While explaining the trend of education as well as the other challenges associated with it, another student from South Waziristan, in a group discussion, shared:

Another example is that only two students in Lahore from our area are in the freshman class this year. During this year, there are only

one or two students from our area, and the vast majority are from Waziristan. Waziristan has a superior infrastructure, especially the town of Wana, which has the most developed facilities in FATA. On the other hand, our own area has been prone to violence as it is on the border. On our side, there are only APS schools. Only those with money can afford to send their children to APS schools because the monthly fees range from 1500 to 2000 rupees. This is not something that locals can afford, especially the majority who have lost their businesses and homes in the ongoing conflict. There are no colleges in our area either (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

These views reflect the absence of enough schools and colleges in every tribal agency, especially in South Waziristan, which is less developed than the other agencies. However, it is noteworthy that the education trend has increased in this area across the classes. Although not all students can afford schools like APS, which are private schools with high fees, many students are enrolled in less expensive public schools, which are government-run and free of cost. Perhaps some respondents pointed towards private sector education institutions, which may offer quality education but are often more expensive. A college teacher in an online interview corroborated the reported increasing trend of education in the area and added:

The level of education in the area has improved in the last two decades, but this is primarily due to the initiative of individual families. The government has not provided enough incentives to promote education, and higher female education is still considered taboo. However, families are more flexible about primary education for girls (Online Interview 1, personal communication, April 7,2021).

Although all college and university respondents in tribal areas complained about inadequate education facilities, their opinions on female education differed sharply. Young university students believed the only hurdle was the absence of enough separate schools and colleges. In contrast, university teachers considered conservative tribal traditions and religious interpretations the major hurdle. The grievances of students in both colleges and universities indicate that the relative deprivation of the residents of tribal agencies has made them more critical and skeptical of the federal government's efforts.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The theory of Relative deprivation refers to the feeling of real or cosmetic lack of resources

The feeling of deprivation is not just because of the absence of necessities but also because of the misconception developed after the rise of militancy regarding the tribal areas of Pakistan. Many people in Pakistan and worldwide have started blaming Pashtuns as contributors to terrorism, which is a gross generalization. This misunderstanding has made it even more difficult for the residents of the tribal areas to get the support they need to improve their lives. In an online interview, one teacher shared:

After the 2001 tragedy, the tribal areas faced the biggest challenge of being associated with terrorism, which badly affected the daily lives of its residents and further limited their already few economic opportunities (Online Interview (2), personal communication, April 10,2021).

Apart from education, the second major issue identified by most respondents in Figure (2) is inadequate healthcare, which is not yet seriously addressed after the merger. A university student from South Waziristan explained the healthcare situation by stating:

The healthcare system is underdeveloped and unable to meet the needs of the people. The medicines provided by international organizations as aid do not reach the people; instead, they are sold in private medical stores with large profit margins, leaving locals with little access to medicine (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

This indicates that the primary cause of the region's inadequate education and healthcare facilities is that although funds are available for development, but they are being used by middlemen due to the weak oversight system. Another university student who has worked closely with the healthcare sector in the tribal area shared:

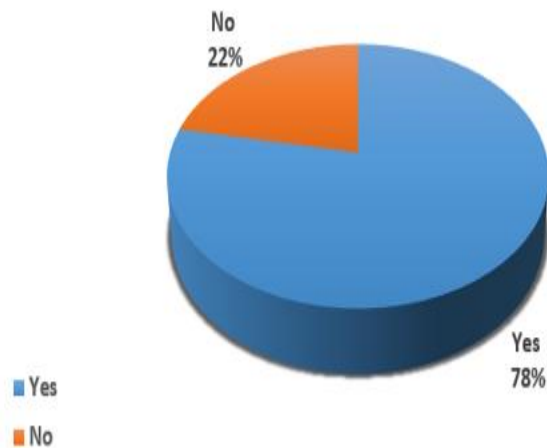
I have personal experience in the health sector. I volunteered at a hospital in Wana where the Medical Superintendent (MS) is a colonel's wife who has been in charge for 10-15 years. She rarely comes to the hospital herself and instead sends someone else in her place. This has led to a lack of

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pertinent to social, economic, or political survival. Sociologist Samuel Stouffer proposed this theory in the 1940s, to which Robert Merton and Walter Runciman contributed later (Merton, 1968; Schulze and Krättschmer-Hahn, 2014).

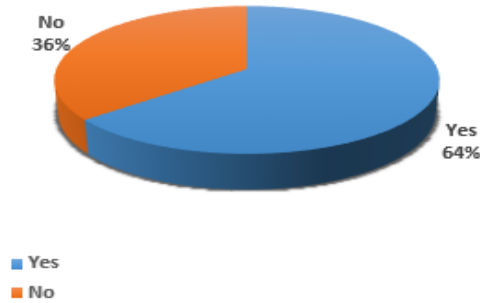
oversight and accountability, and the hospital has suffered as a result. There are too many issues, and even the US aid of 4 crore worth was not properly utilized. There is no way for us to benefit from the healthcare system. This has been the situation for the past 15 years (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

In terms of basic facilities, this already neglected area faced further challenges after militancy. This encouraged the federal government to streamline the area and introduce reforms that could provide relief and ensure economic development and political integration. When students were asked in a survey, “Do you think the FATA merger is beneficial for the development of the area?”, their responses are reflected in Figure (3).

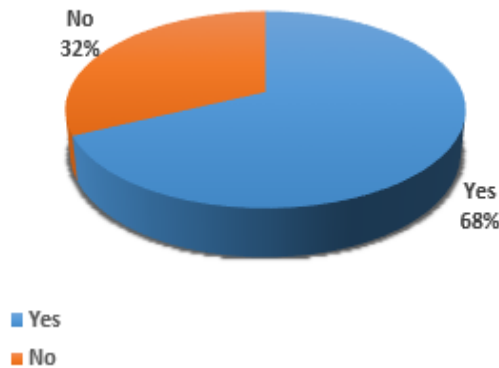


**Figure (3): Do you Think FATA Merger is Beneficial for the Development of Area?**

Figure (3) shows that 78 percent of respondents consider the merger beneficial for their area. Their responses to the question of whether the FCR, Maliks, and PA, who previously controlled their area, are no longer active in the erstwhile FATA are shown in Figures (4) and (5) below.



**Figure (4): Do you Think the Role of Political Agents and Maliks has Changed after FATA Merger?**



**Figure (5): Do you Think, after Fata Merger, the FCR is no more Active and Powerful in the Area?**

Figures (4) and (5) show that 64 percent of respondents believe that the role of PA and Maliks has changed since the FATA merger, and 68 percent agree that the FCR is no longer active in their area. However, we must recognize that 36 percent and 32 percent of respondents, respectively, believe that the merger has not affected the role of Malik, PA, and that the FCR is still effective in this area. The main reason could be the slow implementation of the clauses mentioned in the merger package and the respondents' personal experiences and perceptions. While discussing the change of structure after the merger, one interviewee in an online interview stated:

The FATA reform replaced the office of the Political Agent, who previously had executive and judicial powers and functions, with police and proper police stations. Courts are also present to interpret the law. However, people are still unable to get speedy justice. The percentage of civil and criminal cases has increased instead of decreasing. In mutual disputes, the testimony of Maliks, Khans, and Nawab is still preferred (Online Interview 3, personal communication, April 15,2021).

In other words, despite legal changes, the deeply entrenched colonial and tribal structures resist abrupt transformation in this tribal area, especially when people are also not adaptable to the new system. While these views acknowledge the progress made since the FATA merger, significant efforts are still required to integrate the previously neglected region and transform mindsets. A participant in a group discussion further explained the challenges faced by the police system mentioned:

In almost every tehsil, the police setup has been installed and is operational. However, this system is not practical in Bajur Agency. Although the Khasadars wear police uniforms, they are not working under the DPO's command. They have reservations about the system and like to work as Khasadars (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

While discussing the required efforts to make the merger successful with positive results, one of the online interviewees expressed:

The reform packages seem good, but the commitments made must be fulfilled. The federal government must provide 110 billion rupees per month. Failure to meet this criterion will seriously undermine the merger and reform process (Online Interview 4, personal communication, April 20,2021)

When college students were asked in a survey about the implementation of the FATA reform in response to the question, "How the 25th amendment/FATA reform could be better implemented?", the responses indicated that the students were not interested in how the reforms are implemented, but instead in what results they could bring for the development of the region. Most of the responses revolved around good education/healthcare facilities, peace in the area, and better employment opportunities. However, in a group discussion, the respondents explained that even after the merger, they do not experience the same freedom in their own

area as in other parts of the country. There is no regular internet facility. While explaining this matter in more detail, one respondent mentioned:

I feel that my society is a closed society. There is no openness like I feel in Lahore. There is censorship in the media and even in political parties. In elections, the favorite candidates of political parties' win, regardless of whether they are credible or not. Our society was not like this before. We had a liberal environment. It is after 1979, when the Mullahs came and enforced rigidity (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

The opinion above highlights how respondents in group discussions often take the opportunity to highlight other socio-cultural issues, even when they are not directly asked about them. This additional information is helpful in understanding their inner thoughts. To understand their views on politics, another question was asked in a survey, "Do you think the political parties' active role in FATA contributed to conveying the demands of common residents to the federal and provincial governments?". The overall response of college and university students and teachers showed their disappointment with political parties. 90 percent of respondents said that political parties had done nothing for the people of tribal areas. They believe that political parties only enjoy the benefits of being elected from this area and that they rarely represent the people's demands. Respondents expressed their preference for independent candidates, but they believe that there are too few of them and that their opinions are, therefore, not given much weight. They are unable to gain the necessary support for their demands. While explaining this, one of the college students complained:

Political parties have done nothing for us. The MPA (member of provincial assembly) from our area was an independent candidate, and in the provincial assembly, one person's views hardly matter (Group Discussion, personal communication, May 20,2021).

In an online interview, a participant highlighted the weak role of political parties in raising the voice of people, stating:

Political parties could not do anything for this area's people because they knew they were not powerful enough to bring any development here. The geo-strategic sensitivity of this area has always empowered few institutions to chalk out all policies of this region, including the political ones. For those who are in politics, it is difficult to work independently. Residents do not have active political lives here (Online Interview 5, personal communication, April 7,2021).

The respondents' dissatisfaction with political parties after the FATA merger is evident from the above views. There are many reasons for political parties' poor performance in tribal areas. These include the parties' lack of commitment to the area and weak infrastructure. In addition, decades of conflict between militants and security forces have turned this region into a battleground, hindering political party activity. This is despite recent progress in tribal areas since 2011, where political parties have seen increased support compared to the more established political landscape in settled areas of the province. The youth responses in our survey closely align with David Chandler's and Oliver Richmond's theoretical framing of human security, which emphasizes that the mere absence of violence is insufficient for true human security in conflict-prone areas; it must be accompanied by economic, social, and political empowerment. The young population of the tribal areas expressed that feel more secure and optimistic when integrated into a broader socio-political landscape that provides greater access to higher education, employment opportunities, and social recognition. Being part of a larger institutional framework enables them to envision clear pathways for personal and professional development, reflecting the human security perspective that stresses individual agency and opportunities for self-betterment as essential components of sustainable peace and security.

### **5.Limitations**

This study acknowledges several limitations that impact the generalizability of its findings. The exclusive focus on a population from the former FATA region, comprised of college students, teachers, and university student groups, may not fully capture the diverse perspectives throughout the community. However, it does provide a broader range of opinions, stemming from the extensive discussions or interactions within this group and their daily interactions with their families. Nonetheless, the broader perspective on the merger lacks significant diversity. This is because, unlike urban societies, tribal setups seldom prioritize individual views on important matters; instead, collective thought processes prevail over individualistic opinions. A notable limitation is the reluctance of certain community members to participate, especially when researchers hail from different geographic and ethnic backgrounds. Despite trust-building efforts such as inviting participants for tea and employing a gradual questioning approach, participant hesitancy may still have exerted an influence. Additionally, time constraints may have

hindered a more in-depth exploration of the topic and engagement with a broader demographic, such as women, older adults, and individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The inclusion of additional age groups could have provided a more nuanced understanding of the merger's impacts. Despite these limitations, we maintain confidence in the accuracy of our findings, asserting that they genuinely reflect the general sentiments and perceptions of the community as a whole. Acknowledging these limitations and identifying areas for future research underscores the significance of considering factors like community trust, participant comfort, and potential biases in sensitive research environments. Subsequent studies could further investigate the effects of the merger across a broader range of demographics, including women, older adults, and individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds.

## **6. Conclusion**

The merger of the former FATA into KPK represents a transformative yet complex process, reflecting diverse opinions among residents about its outcomes. While some progress has been made, the study highlights critical areas requiring further attention and action. The alignment of judicial and police systems with KPK and the allocation of development funds are commendable steps. However, the gradual nature of societal adjustments and the realization of tangible benefits underscore the need for sustained and inclusive efforts. A major finding is the ongoing challenge of security concerns, particularly persistent militancy, and its implications for residents' lives. The narratives collected during the study highlight a tension between the essential role of security forces and the civilian cost of military operations. This underscores the importance of adopting strategies that prioritize community trust and minimize collateral damage. The absence of women's voices in this study points to a critical gap in understanding the merger's impact comprehensively. While logistical and cultural constraints limit their inclusion, future research must prioritize female perspectives to gain a holistic view of the region's transformation. Reflecting on the findings, it is evident that the merger has initiated broader systemic changes that align the region more closely with national development frameworks. However, patience and persistence are crucial, as the full potential of this integration can only be realized through sustained efforts to address governance, human security, and inclusivity. In conclusion, the merger is not merely a policy shift but a long-

term journey toward social and administrative integration. The findings of this study suggest that a focus on community-driven approaches, inclusive policymaking, and addressing socio-cultural barriers will be essential to ensuring the merger's success.

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