The changing political trends in erstwhile FATA: a study of the last three elections

Raja Qaiser Ahmed [iD]

Mohammad Ishaq
Quaid I Azam University, Pakistan

Muhammad Shoaib [iD]
National Defence University, Pakistan

Abstract

This study investigates the changing political trends in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. Analysis of the last three elections (2008, 2013, 2018) shows a substantial change in the region. The tribal structure, local traditions, power arrangement and electoral practices have changed significantly over a decade. The extension of the Political Parties Order to the region and its merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stimulated political activities in the area that increased the political awareness of tribal people. The results of the 2013 and 2018 elections highlight the changes. Electoral activities, women participation and voter turnout increased with every election. Tribal youth joined existing political forums to demand their democratic rights. A significant percentage of the young, educated Pashtuns joined the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement in its demand for improved governance.

Introduction

Erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (henceforth FATA) comprised seven agencies and six frontier regions (FRs). The agencies included Bajur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. The frontier regions included Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan. According to the provincial figures from the 2017 Census, the estimated population of the area was above five million. It was spread over an area of 27,220 km,

Corresponding author:
Raja Qaiser Ahmed, Assistant Professor School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid I Azam University, 3rd Avenue Islamabad, Pakistan 44000.
Email: rajaqaiserahmed@gmail.com

with an overwhelming majority of Pashtuns (Khan, 2008). It was bordered by Afghanistan to the north and west, Baluchistan to the south and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to the east.

The year 2018 was a monumental period in the history of the erstwhile FATA. On 24 May, Pakistan's National Assembly voted in favour of the 25th amendment to the constitution of Pakistan that called for the merger of FATA with KP (Ali, 2018; Begum, 2018; Noor et al., 2018). The Senate approved the legislation the following day. On 27 May, the KP Assembly passed the merger bill with a clear majority (87:7). Finally, on 31 May, the President of Pakistan, Mamnoon Hussain gave his assent to the amendment, after which FATA became part of the KP province (Wasim, 2018). The merger with KP was the fulfilment of a longstanding demand of the tribal populace.

Nonetheless, the merger was not their only demand: demands had evolved (and increased) along with overall political awareness in the area. Since the extension of the Political Parties Order (PPO) to the region, political activities had increased, and tribal youth had started actively participating in electoral activities. Their attitude towards electoral politics and political activities had changed. And their questioning and critiquing of decades-long practices had increased. After the merger, Pashtun leaders discussed a variety of matters and demanded their constitutionally assured democratic rights. In this regard, the 2018 election results and ensuing changes show that the politics of FATA had changed significantly over the years.

This study investigates the changing political trends in FATA. A very robust and dominant trend that recently occurred in FATA is the rise of the PTM (Pashtun Tahafuz Movement). This is a social movement that has triggered upheaval in Pakistan's political landscape. The rise of this movement is due to the contextual background of existing political trends in FATA. The marginalization of the Pashtun population in the backdrop of the war on terrorism and absentia of political representation guided the trajectory of this movement (Ahmed and Khan, 2020). PTM's origin primarily lies in the post-9/11 military operations in erstwhile FATA. It emerged in response to displacement, reverse urbanization, disappearances and extra-judicial arrests. Its demands concern the population of tribal areas and seek removal of landmines and a reduction in the number of checkpoints (Aslam and Neads, 2020). It is a non-violent, constitutional movement that relies on popularity among the Pashtun youth mainly in KP and Baluchistan (Siddique, 2019). Since 2018, the military and PTM have consistently attempted 'to cast each other in hostile terms' (Shah, 2020).

This research study explains how the political trends in FATA evolved with every successive election (2008, 2013, 2018). It uses data collected from different sources, mainly books, articles, reports (official and unofficial) and the gazettes of the Election Commission of Pakistan. It also uses data collected in the field involving non-structured interviews, focus-group discussion and participant observation among the youth and elderly males in the area. The interviews mentioned in the following section were conducted by the first author (during August–December 2019 mainly in South Waziristan, the Kurram agency and the Khyber agency). During his stay in the erstwhile FATA, the author interviewed the youth and political workers and arranged focus group discussions (with male participants) to understand the nature of change in the region. Also, public responses and non-structured interviews with the tribal populace have significantly shaped our understanding of the changing perceptions about the politics, elections and political process in the region. The locals' commentaries on political participation, political activities, the structure of political parties and women's participation in elections have been important in explaining changes in the region's political trends.

This study follows a three-section approach. The first section includes the historical context that describes the attitude of the British Raj and its successor state (Pakistan) towards FATA and covers the attempts to mainstream the region. The following section covers political trends in the region and discusses three elections (2008, 2013, 2018). The last section maps the change (that began from the adult franchise and matured in 2018).

FATA in historical context

The FATA region has remained at the centre of great power politics. It was significant during 'the great game' between Russia and the British Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the British were successful in keeping the Russians away, FATA residents were resistant to the influence of the British Empire (Qaiser, 2015). They tried to maintain their autonomy and independence from British control. Thus, after a long struggle, the British Raj signed an agreement with Amir Abdul Rahman of Afghanistan and in 1893 divided the tribal region under the Durand Line accord (Rahi, 2014).

After the accord, FATA became part of the British-controlled subcontinent of India. In 1901, the Raj enacted a set of laws, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) to administer the region. The FCR was a colonial project; it endowed political agents with unrestrained powers while ensuring their nexus with the residential tribal elders (*Maliks*) (Ullah, 2015). In the absence of a legislature, the political agents and *Maliks* exercised unrestrained administrative powers. Thus, soon after its enactment, the weaknesses of FCR became evident. But the British did not make any significant attempt to replace it or address its weaknesses. They wanted only to maintain control of the region, so they administrated, controlled it remotely by ensuring non-interference in the tribes' internal affairs (Hopkins, 2015).

The colonial system ensured minimum state penetration in the region. The state was concerned mostly with security of infrastructure (Ahmed and Tamoor, 2021). *Jirga* was adopted to work as an intermediary between the state and tribal population (Khan, 2008). Locals' traditional set-up remained intact and regional issues were resolved through the FCR. The status quo did not change even after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Although the formerly British-controlled FATA became part of Pakistan, the nascent state continued the practices of its predecessor. It did not make any attempt to either abolish or change the FCR.

Under the first and second articles of Pakistan's 1973 constitution, FATA was given constitutional status of a territorial part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The constitution endowed the *Maliks* with full autonomy to manage all social and political issues in the region. It gave unchecked powers to the political agents (who served as representatives of the federal government) to administratively govern the region with the powers of magistracy. The political agents blatantly exercised their powers on the judicial, financial and executive matters of the region. They kept tight control of the executions of decisions and policymaking processes.

An important reason for their virtually absolute powers was the FCR. It gave them unprecedented powers: political agents could punish the whole clan for a crime committed by an individual, impose hefty fines, detain members of a tribe, snatch and vandalize property; the entire tribe could be threatened and intimidated with dire consequences (Wazir, 2018). They had the power to convict or pardon an accused of any charge. In the case of conviction, their decisions could not be challenged in any court of law. Such concentration of power in one individual was in contradiction to the democratic spirit, but no attempt was made to assuage this problem. Therefore, aided by legal arrangements, political agents were able to rule the region for a century.

Nonetheless, their absolute powers could not keep the social status quo. FATA's geographical proximity with Afghanistan put it under the spotlight after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan's involvement in the war altered the social fabric of the region (Noor et al., 2018). Religious fundamentalist and jihadist groups from all over the world gathered in the region to confront the Soviet forces. Hence the region changed into what the US President Bill Clinton called 'the most dangerous place on earth' (Iqbal and Khan, 2014). Following 9/11 it became the epicentre of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Radicalization of the

local populace grew over time, making it lucrative for the religious extremist groups to recruit the FATA youth to fight in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan (Jaspal, 2010).

Alongside radicalization and militancy, the number of religious seminaries multiplied concurrently. Militant groups used the seminaries to indoctrinate youth in favour of Jihad. Drug trafficking and weaponization also increased over the years (Talbot, 2012). The lack of education facilities, widespread unemployment, crumbling infrastructure, poor health and sanitary facilities and the lack of economic opportunities made the region a breeding ground for *Jihadis* and radical religious outfits. Availability of weapons, decades-long neglect and the weak state writ helped increase violence and lawlessness in society. As expected, militancy, terrorist incidents and military operations became the hallmarks of the region.

Mainstreaming FATA

Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made the first attempt to mainstream FATA. He constituted a committee to devise a framework for FATA's integration into North-West Frontier Province (NWFP, now KP) of Pakistan (Ministry of States and Frontier Regions, 2016). However, in 1977 his effort was sabotaged by the military coup that deposed his government. For the next two decades, FATA was significant only in regard to the Afghan war and in strengthening Pakistan's position in the future political set-up in Afghanistan. Bhutto's mainstreaming effort was resumed by his daughter, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. In 1996, Benazir introduced adult franchise in the tribal areas. This move extended the democratic process to FATA (Talbot, 2012). Later, General Pervez Musharraf pledged to initiate political, economic, educational and administrative reforms in FATA by extending a local bodies system to the region. A special committee was constituted to look after the region, and an independent secretariat was formed. The government also allocated PKR40 billion for development purposes (Ali, 2018).

In 2008, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government, led by President Asif Ali Zardari (Benazir's widower), made amendments to the FCR. The amendments granted the right of appeal against decisions made by a political agent. They made it mandatory for an accused to be produced before a judge within 24 hours of arrest. The government also extended the 2002 Political Parties Order (PPO) to FATA, permitting political parties to organize campaigns and participate in electoral activities in the region. The mainstreaming process was precipitated by the massacre at the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014. The incident compelled the government to launch a comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP) to combat terrorism. A clause in the NAP document specifically dealt with the mainstreaming of the tribal region.

In 2015, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz, PML-N) government constituted a FATA reforms committee under Sartaj Aziz. The cabinet approved the committee's recommendations in March 2017. In May 2018, FATA was merged with KP province (Wasim, 2018).

Political trends in tribal areas

Article 1 of the 1973 constitution separated FATA from the rest of the provinces. Article 247 made the region a separate entity whose administration was the responsibility of the federal government (Wazir, 2013). FATA remained outside the domain of the executive authority of KP; however, the governor of KP province served as representative of the President of Pakistan to regulate the affairs of the region. The right to vote and adult suffrage for common men was denied under President of Pakistan Order No. 1 of 1975—also called the 'preparation of electoral roles (FATA) Order, 1975' (Sikander, 2017). Under the order, political agents registered only the *Maliks* as voters. Participation in elections, the nomination of candidates and casting votes were therefore exclusive to the *Maliks*.

An Electoral College of *Maliks* selected representatives to the National Assembly. Political parties were not allowed to organize any kind of political campaign; they were debarred from fielding candidates in tribal area elections. Representatives from the area were elected to the parliament on a non-party basis. (Financially stable and influential tribal elders mostly earned their candidacy in parliament from the tribal belt.) However, the political situation began to change after 1996 when the PPP government introduced adult franchise in the region. The 'one person one vote' formula opened avenues for newcomers and made elections competitive.

Tribal elders, with the backing of political agents, opposed the new formula. But they could not resist the change. In the 1997 general election, tribal people exercised their right to vote for the first time and elected their 12 members to the National Assembly. The elections underlined a visible shift in the political landscape of the region because the de facto institution of Electoral College with 35,500 *Maliks* had lost its relevance (Gull, 2015). Power devolved (although partially) from the hands of influential *Maliks* and political agents. The local populace actively participated in the election that marked a democratic beginning in a conservative, non-political region.

A similar attempt aimed at power devolution was made by the Musharraf regime. In 2002, the regime introduced local government regulations to FATA. The regulations aimed at setting up a local government system in the areas. Under the new system, all political and administrative powers were devolved to the local government and the status of political agents and *Maliks* was reduced to ceremonial figureheads (Khattak, 2018). However, the local government system could not be implemented in the region mainly due to the beneficiaries of the status quo. The then governors Syed Iftikhar Hussein Shah and his successor Commander Khalil-ur-Rahman were the main barriers to the implementation of the local government system (Aziz, 2017). They feared that the new system would largely reduce their power and authority.

Also, in 2002, the Musharraf regime constituted a separate secretariat for FATA through a presidential order. The primary purpose of a separate secretariat was to expedite and closely supervise the development projects launched in the area. The monumental shift came in 2011 when President Zardari extended PPO to the region. Enactment of the PPO and restoration (as well as formation) of regional parties encouraged and facilitated political activism. In August 2012, Zardari signed the 'FATA Local Government Regulation 2012' to establish local bodies. Nonetheless, despite the above efforts, the democratic process faced an array of challenges: an ongoing conflict, the opposition of radical groups and FATA's position as the centre of the conflict.

Political trends in 2008 elections

The general elections of 2008 in FATA were relatively fair and transparent. Despite threats and intimidation calls from militant groups, the tribal populace actively participated in electoral activities (Zia, 2009). Kurram Agency constituency (NA-37) had the highest turnout of 61%. The turnout in frontier regions (NA-47) and Khyber Agency (NA-45) was 36.66% and 35.03% respectively.

FATA held 12 seats for the National Assembly. The division of seats was as shown in Table 1:

On average, 17 candidates contested from each constituency (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2008). (However, the newcomers could not replace the old guards because most of the winners were rich, influential tribal leaders.) According to a Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) report, the wealthiest Member of the National Assembly (MNAs) from the region were Noor-ul-Haq Qadri (NA-45) with net assets of PKR179.61 million, followed by Shaukatullah Khan (NA-43) with PKR71.40 million, Hameedullah Jan Afridi (NA-46) with PKR62.43 million and Munir Khan Orakzai (NA-38) with PKR46.60 million (PILDAT, 2009).

Table 1.

Number	Area	Number of Seats
1	Bajaur Agency	2
2	South Waziristan	2
3	Khyber Agency	2
4	Kurram Agency	2
5	Mohmand Agency	1
6	Orakzai Agency	1
7	North Waziristan	1
8	Frontier Regions	1

Source: Ali (2013).

Table 2. The 2008 General Election results in FATA.

Name of Constituency	Name of Winning Candidate	Votes gained	Votes polled	Total votes	Turnout (%)	Other candidates
NA-36 Tribal Area-I (Mohmand Agency)	Bilal Rehman (Indept)	5270	48,235	126,007	18.46	19
NA-37 Tribal Area-II (Khurram Agency)	Sajjid Hussain Turi (Indept)	26287	87,296	141,190	61.83	24
NA-38 Tribal Area-III (Khurram Agency	Munir Khan Orakzai (Indept)	16,525	24,919	87,983	28.33	19
NA-39 Tribal Area-IV (Orakzai Agency)	Jawad Hussain (Indept)	21,844	49,507	123,335	4.14	13
NA-40 Tribal Area-V (N. Waziristan)	M. Kamran Khan (Indept)	5894	35,229	126,481	27.86	19
NA-41 Tribal Area-VI (N. Waziristan)	Mulana A. Malik (Indept)	7957	31,979	94,077	13.99	11
NA-42 Tribal Area-VII (S. Waziristan)	–	–	–	129,961	–	–
NA-43 Tribal Area-VIII (Bajur Agency)	Shaukat Ullah Khan (Indept)	7428	15,302	119,088	12.85	8
NA-44 Tribal Area-IX (Bajur Agency)	Syed Akhunzada Chittan (Indept)	6257	24,068	136,052	17.69	8
NA-45 Tribal Area- X (Khyber Agency)	Noor ul Haq (Indept)	13,876	35,479	101,272	35.03	12
NA-46 Tribal Area- XI (Khyber Agency)	Hameedullah Jan (Indept)	5660	22,443	94,208	23.82	22
NA-47 Tribal Area-XII (Tank)	Zafar Baig Bhatani(Indept)	21,426	48,108	130,662	36.66	19

Source: Government of Pakistan, 2010.
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas.
Total male votes = 985,994.
Total female votes = 424,332.
Registered Voters = 1,410,326.
Turnout = 26.93%.

The 2008 election brought about some positive changes in the region with a de-facto representation of mainstream regional, national political parties. The candidates affiliated with PPP and the Awami National Party (ANP) contested and won seats (Ullah A and Hayat Su, 2017). In 2008,

Table 3. The 2013 General Election results in FATA.

Name of Constituency	Name of Winning Candidate	Votes gained	Votes polled	Total votes	Turnout (%)	Other candidates
NA-36 Tribal Area-I (Mohmand Agency)	Bilal Rehman (Independent)	9005	54,087	179,304	30.16	39
NA-37 Tribal Area-II (Khurram Agency)	Sajjid Hussain Turi (Independent)	29,623	94,360	162,660	58	30
NA-38 Tribal Area-III (Khurram Agency	–	–	–	–	–	–
NA-39 Tribal Area-IV (Orakzai Agency)	Syed Ghazi Gulab Jamal (Independent)	7922	44,903	125,287	35.72	37
NA-40 Tribal Area-V (N. Waziristan)	M. Nazir Khan (Independent)	18,055	78,070	160,666	48.59	33
NA-41 Tribal Area-VI (N. Waziristan)	Ghalib Khan (PML-N)	8022	38,167	92,719	41.16	37
NA-42 Tribal Area-VII (S. Waziristan)	M. Jamaluddin (JUI-F)	3468	12,857	108,056	11.89	16
NA-43 Tribal Area-VIII (Bajur Agency)	Bismillah Khan (Independent)	13,929	44,279	16,8514	26.27	15
NA-44 Tribal Area-IX (Bajur Agency)	Shahabuddin Khan (PML-N)	15,114	60,461	18,5040	32.67	25
NA-45 Tribal Area- X (Khyber Agency)	Alhaj Shah Jee Gul (Independent)	29,697	70,548	175,036	40.30	15
NA-46 Tribal Area- XI (Khyber Agency)	Nasir Khan (Independent)	4135	16,999	161,727	10.51	23
NA-47 Tribal Area-XII (Tank)	Qaiser Jamal (PTI)	11,328	48,596	121,265	40.07	35

Source: Government of Pakistan, 2014.
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas; PML-N: Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz; PTI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf; JUI-F: Jamiat e Ulama e Islam (Fazal–ur–Rehman).
Male votes = 1,142,237.
Female votes = 596,079.
Registered Voters = 1,738,316.
Turnout = 29.22 %.

although PPO was not extended to tribal areas and candidates contested on a non-party basis, political parties backed their candidates. Overall, political campaign attracted a significant percentage of the populace despite the threat of terrorist attacks. The active participation of the tribal population was an impetus for the PPP government to extend PPO to the region (Khan, 2012). In 2011 President Asif Ali Zardari introduced a 'reforms package' for FATA that included the fulfilment of a long-awaited demand of PPO extended to the region.

Political trends in the 2013 election

The 2013 election brought about a substantial change. For the first time the people of tribal areas cast votes for candidates contesting on party tickets. The nature of electioneering changed. Election manifestos, party agendas and ideological tendencies became part of the campaign. Political participation and voter turnout were unprecedented.

The 2013 election changed the political outlook of FATA, for the mainstream political parties were able to launch their political campaigns in the region. Out of 339 candidates, 81 represented different political parties (Dunya News, 2013).

During the campaign, posters and banners of political parties were displayed across the region. Although militants had warned people from participating in electoral activities and termed democracy an un-Islamic system, the warnings and threats could not keep them from exercising their right to vote. Contestants held street meetings and rallies and openly campaigned in different parts of the region (Mohammad, 2013). People put badges and logos of parties on their chests. The enthusiasm of the locals was so high that on election day, voters were served with rice, food and black tea.

The introduction of political parties also changed the political realities of the region. Their candidates bagged four seats (Haider, 2013). (In 2008, candidates affiliated with political parties could only win two seats.) The entrance of political parties in FATA elections did not affect only independent candidates. Religious groups that traditionally had had a stronghold over the region also started losing their influence. Their vote bank significantly reduced because voters had started shifting their affiliations from right-wing to centre- and left-wing political parties (Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme, 2013).

The Taliban threat and conservative norms could not prevent change. They could not keep tribal women from exercising their right to vote. It was the first time in history that a significant percentage of women voters cast votes to choose their political representatives. The female turnout was the highest (34.3%) that showed a significant increase from previous general elections (Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme, 2013). However, female participation was not limited to voting. Badam Zari contested from the Bajaur agency against 25 male candidates. Aisha Gulalai from South Waziristan became a member of the National Assembly on reserved seats for women.

The 2018 election: a new beginning

The 2018 elections further empowered the people of FATA and enhanced their confidence in the electoral system. Compared to 2008 and 2013, the region was stable in 2018 due to military operations against militant groups. Most of the internally displaced persons (IDP) had returned to their homes. The influence of tribal chieftains had reduced. The unrestrained powers of political agents had been clipped through the 25th amendment. And an ethnic movement (PTM) was rapidly garnering public support.

In the 2018 election, a stronger sense of identity prevailed in the region. Its merger with KP and exposure to political activities had transformed the once lawless region. It was no longer the sanctuary of militants and a stronghold of tribal chieftains (in alliance with political agents). The people had experienced a bloodbath, military operations, suicide attacks and massive displacements after 9/11. For them, the return to normalcy and the democratic process was significant.[1] Their attitude towards political campaigning and elections underlined their propensity. During the campaign, party workers and supporters in all agencies and frontier regions hoisted party flags at streets, roofs and markets. Party songs and music resonated from the sky-touching mountains. Public gatherings and party meetings were in high momentum throughout the campaign period (Alam, 2018).

Election turnout also reflected their active participation. Turnout at the 2018 election surged to 36%, highest of the latest four general elections (FAFEN, 2018). The upsurge was not limited to male voters only. Unlike previous polls, female participation substantially increased in the 2018 election. According to a FAFEN (2018) report, the turnout of female voters was 26% despite the Taliban threat to attack polling stations. Some females also contested elections. Ali Begum was one of the most prominent female contestants; she contested from Kurram agency (MENAFN, 2019). During her election campaign she organized massive rallies, public meetings and political gatherings. Two other female candidates Naheed Afridi and Malasa contested from Khyber agency and Kurram agency, respectively (MENAFN, 2019).

A comparative analysis of the last three elections shows the change.

Table 4. The 2018 General Election results in FATA.

Name of Constituency	Name of Winning Candidate	Votes gained	Votes polled	Turnout	Other candidates
NA-40 Tribal Area-I	Gul Dad Khan (PTI)	34683	10,5203	41.16	13
NA-41 Tribal Area-II	Gulzafar Khan (PTI)	22,767	90,9492	38.34	11
NA-42 Tribal Area-III	Sajjid Khan (PTI)	22,742	93,026	36.10	17
NA-43 Tribal Area-IV	Noor ul Haq Qadri (PTI)	33,871	86,893	38.51	17
NA-44 Tribal Area-V	M. Iqbal Khan (PTI)	12,580	67,607	25.49	40
NA-45 Tribal Area-VI	Munir Khan (MMA-Pak)	16,255	57,987	35.06	37
NA-46 Tribal Area-VII	Sajjid Hussain Turi (PPP)	21,506	74,780	43.35	24
NA-47 Tribal Area-VIII	Jawad Hussain (PTI)	11,523	56,063	33.52	30
NA-48 Tribal Area-IX	Mohsin Javed (Independent)	16,526	64,055	23.36	34
NA-49 Tribal Area- X	M. Jamaluddin (MMA-Pak)	7778	37,158	20.84	24
NA-50 Tribal Area- XI	Mohammad Ali (Independent)	23,589	48,287	33.10	27
NA-51 Tribal Area-XII	Abdul Shakoor (MMA-Pak)	21,962	70,250	42.15	18

Source: Government of Pakistan, 2018.
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas; PPP: Pakistan People's Party; MMA-Pak: Muttahida Majlis–e–Amal (Pakistan).
Total male votes = 40.03%.
Total female votes = 23.8%.
Registered Voters = 2.51 million.
Turnout = 35.05%.

Table 5a. Number of candidates.

Number	Election Year	Number of Contesting Candidates
1	2008	175
2	2013	339
3	2018	429

Table 5b. Voter turnout.

Number	Election Year	Voter Turnout
1	2008	27.37%
2	2013	29.22%
3	2018	35.05%

Table 5c. Performance of party based candidates.

Number	Election Year	Winning Party based Candidates
1	2008	0
2	2013	4
3	2018	10

Table 5d. Party position after the 2018 election.

Number	Party	Number of Seats
I	PTI	6
2	MMA	3
3	PPP	I
4	Independent (Affiliated with PTM)	2

PPP: Pakistan People's Party; PTM: Pashtun Tahafuz Movement; PTI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf; MMA: Muttahida Majlis–e–Amal.

Table 5e. Female voter turnout.

Number	Election Year	Turnout
I	2008	17%
2	2013	21%
3	2018	26%

Source: Government of Pakistan, 2010, 2014, and 2018. Election Commission of Pakistan, Islamabad.

An important reason for the active participation of voters and an upsurge in the turnout was the direct involvement of political parties. Before the extension of PPO to the region, political parties could only indirectly support their candidates (as they did in 2008). But they could not carry out political activities in tribal areas. In 2013, they fielded candidates for the first time. The voters' response was encouraging because the party candidates managed to win four seats. In 2018, however, the party candidates overcame and won 10 seats. Two independent candidates who won seats were affiliated to the PTM (Mohammad, 2019). Overall, most of the contesting candidates were party ticket holders, which showed that the foothold of independent candidates and tribal chieftains had virtually diminished.

Chieftains and *Maliks* had enjoyed unparalleled status throughout the 20th century. The tribal elders were responsible for resolving all social and political matters. Before the promulgation of the Adult Franchise Act in 1996, the Electoral College of elders nominated candidates for the National Assembly and Senate as consensual representatives of tribal areas. Against this backdrop, the 2018 elections represented a completely changed modus operandi. All contestants started their campaigns from a lower level to garner the support of the masses. Popular candidates, enjoying public support, were able to defeat influential chiefs. For instance, two young, middle-class candidates Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar defeated the most influential and deeply entrenched tribal *Maliks* (Shah, 2020).

The 2018 election result affected the influence and political standing of tribal chiefs and *Maliks*. Earlier, they had worked in alliance with political agents and dominated the region, when the system of political agents had thrived over the years. Agents strengthened their position in the region and asserted full control.[2] The system benefitted them because they were not answerable to any local authority, so they tried to keep society static and apolitical (Khattak, 2015). However, their powers reduced after the 25th amendment. They could only exercise administrative powers; the rest of their powers were ceded to relevant provincial departments of KP.

Simply put, the political activities (campaigns, elections and merger) in FATA changed the nature of the relationship between the state and society. Overall, the change was ubiquitous. Political awareness increased mainly due to electoral campaigns organized by political parties.

And people showed a strong sense of electoral participation to be a stakeholder in the political process. Tribal norms and traditions could not keep them from casting votes. Thus, the myths associated with tribal people being jingoist, warriors and non-political were debunked.[3]

The history of tribal areas suggests that the myths were not entirely unfounded. Tribal structures and traditions are as old as the history of the tribal area itself. Tribal structures have served as the fulcrum of tribal culture, norms and values. The structure and traditions have tested what Edmund Burke calls the 'experience of history'. Therefore, the people of tribal areas consider their traditions and structures linked with their identity and the wisdom of their forefathers, so that any threat to these structures is perceived as a threat to the existence of tribal society and its enduring values. Tribal traditions are no less than an un-codified tribal law (Khan, 2014). Against this backdrop, political, electoral activities influenced tribal youth.

Political activities and the debate on FATA reforms provided an impetus to the aggravated tribal youth. They began challenging their exclusion from taking part in debates concerning their future. Young, educated Pashtuns considered their tribal elders (and the status quo) responsible for chaos by providing safe havens to militants, who later tried to enforce their rigid version of Islam. They considered their elders responsible for lawlessness and instability in the region. The elders' accommodative attitude toward security forces and collateral damage in the war against terror also became a matter of concern.[4]

In this regard, the killing of 27-year-old Naqeebullah Mahsud—a Pashtun who was accused of being a member of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—in Karachi became the catalyst.[5] The Pashtuns, led by a 25-year-old FATA resident Manzoor Ahmad Pashteen, organized widespread protests, demonstrations and processions across the country. Pashteen's PTM emerged as the voice of Pashtuns who succumbed to injustices committed by the state. PTM brought discrimination against Pashtuns into the limelight and mobilized tens of thousands based on Pashtun identity, regardless of tribal divisions (Shah, 2018).

The PTM became a rallying point for them. Educated youth took the lead and challenged the decades-old status quo (Hussein, 2018). Two of the PTM leaders contested elections as independent candidates and defeated the influential tribal chieftains. Their entrance into electoral politics and the growing popularity of their party reflected the maturity of the change, underpinned by political awareness, in the region.

Conclusion

The people of FATA had been deprived of their democratic political rights for decades. The absence of a proper governmental set-up allowed political agents and tribal chieftains to exercise unrestrained powers, which also created a vacuum that was filled by TTP and other militant groups. Thus, insecurity, lawlessness, chaos and uncertainty had become the prevailing features of the region for a decade. And bomb blasts, indiscriminate killings, assassinations and hit-and-run attacks had pushed the region into incessant turmoil. Although the ensuing military operations brought about stability and diminished militancy, the experience of continuous conflict, collateral damage, mass fleeing and curfews significantly affected the social fabric of the region.

However, the politics of the region also evolved. Circa 2000, political activities (as in other areas of Pakistan) and campaigns of party ticket holders was a farfetched idea. Concerned with survival, tribal youth could not organize themselves politically. Tribal elders were politically secure (the TTP was not a political threat); however, the extension of PPO changed the direction of local politics. It motivated the tribesmen to actively participate in the 2013 election. Voters responded positively to the electoral process with a hope that it would bring about positive change to the area. Women participation also increased; a significant percentage of families withstood the militant

threat and compromised on centuries-old customs to allow women to cast votes. However, the 2013 election was only a beginning because by the 2018 election women participation and overall voter turnout had increased.

After the 2018 election, it was evident that continuity of the political process and growing political awareness had worked in favour of the erstwhile FATA residents. For instance, mainstreaming of the region allowed the tribesmen to get rid of FCR. It also reduced the powers of political agents and *Maliks*. However, the change in the power structure did not create a vacuum this time; it provided youth with an opportunity to take the lead. Their political awareness and sensitivity to social, political issues matured. A significant percentage of tribal youth joined mainstream political parties and the rest became part of the PTM-led struggle. The latter based their politics on Pashtun identity to gather the masses and influence the government to improve its governance.

Politics in erstwhile FATA has undergone substantial change since the 2008 election. This change has not only brought hope to the young; it has also created opportunities for them. But the challenges facing the state are far from over. Mainstreaming and political process have encouraged the creation of political, ethnic organizations demanding more rights. If abandoned or suppressed, they can pose a significant challenge to the state, which will add to its problem. Thus, an important task for officials is to keep the erstwhile FATA residents engaged and help them to improve their lives.

However, there are several aspects that require the attention of scholarship. More studies are needed on perception management, women empowerment and integration of mainstream political parties, enhancing mutual trust and deradicalizing the youth in erstwhile FATA.

Funding

ORCID iDs

Raja Qaiser Ahmed https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3563-5471
Muhammad Shoaib https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9305-3766

Notes

1   Interview with a FATA resident, October 6, 2019.
2   Interview with a FATA resident, July 10, 2019.
3   Interview with a PTI worker, July 1, 2019.
4   Interview with a PTM worker, October 13, 2019.
5   Interview with a PTM leader, November 5, 2019.

References

Ahmed RQ and Khan R (2020) The rise of peripheral nationalism in Pakistan and the Pashtun Tahafuz movement. *Asian Ethnicity*. DOI: 10.1080/14631369.2020.1785840.
Ahmed RQ and Tamoor M (2021) State formation and the postcolonial decay in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Social Science*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajss.2020.10.002.
Alam F (2018) Dismantling Pakistan's tribal areas. *The Asia Foundation*, 24 October. Available at: https://asiafoundation.org/2018/10/24/dismantling-pakistans-tribal-areas/ (accessed 28 December 2020).
Ali I (2018) Mainstreaming Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas: reform initiatives and roadblocks. United States Institute of Peace Report No. 421, March 2018. Available at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/sr-421-mainstreaming-pakistan-federally-administered-tribal-areas.pdf (accessed 27 March 2021).

Ali Z (2013) Elections in Fata: a daunting challenge. *Dawn*, 5 May. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/812207 (accessed 16 December 2020).

Aslam W and Neads A (2020) Renegotiating societal-military relations in Pakistan: the case of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement. *Democratization* 28 (2): 265–284.

Aziz S (2017) History of fata reforms. *The Nation*, 8 March. Available at: https://nation.com.pk/08-Mar-2017/history-of-fata-reforms (accessed 28 December 2020).

Begum I (2018) FATA's merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: an historical analysis. *Pakistan Perspectives* 23 (2): 127–143.

Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (2013) Voices from FATA (monthly newsletter), June.

Dunya News (2013) FATA tribesmen embrace historic polls. 4 May. Available at: https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/172194-FATA-tribesmen-embrace-historic-polls (accessed 27 December 2020).

FAFEN (Free and Fair Election Network) (2018) Election observation report. Available at: https://fafen.org/category/publications/ (accessed 27 December 2020).

Government of Pakistan (2010) *Report on General Elections 2008*. Election Commission of Pakistan.

Government of Pakistan (2014) *Report on General Elections 2013*. Election Commission of Pakistan.

Government of Pakistan (2018) *Report on General Elections 2018*. Election Commission of Pakistan.

Gull I (2015) Reforms in FATA: a pragmatic proposition or a slippery slope. *Development Advocate Pakistan* 2 (3): 24–26.

Haider S (2013) Elections in Fata: an overview. *FATA Research Centre*, 3 June. Available at: http://frc.com.pk//commentaries/elections-in-fata-an-overview (accessed 28 December 2020).

Hopkins BD (2015) The Frontier Crimes Regulations and frontier governmentality. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74(2): 369–389.

Hussein K (2018) The Pashtun Spring. *Dawn*, 8 April. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1395375 (accessed 27 December 2020).

Iqbal H and Khan S (2014) Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA): from no-man's land to political mainstreaming. *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 3(1): 64–81.

Jaspal ZN (2010) Threat of extremism & terrorist syndicate beyond FATA. *Journal of Political Studies* 1(2): 19–49.

Khan GQ (2014) *CHEEGHA the Call from Waziristan, the Last Outpost*. Karachi: L' Aleph.

Khan I (2008) Challenges facing development in Pakistan's FATA. *NBR Analysis* 19(3): 13–20.

Khan RR (2012) FATA political regime: changing legal-administrative status of tribal areas. *Tigah: Journal of Peace and Development* 5(1): 115–132.

Khattak A (2015) Mainstreaming Fata for its people. *Development Advocate Pakistan* 2 (3): 18–19.

Khattak D (2018) Pakistan's FATA spring. *The Diplomat*, 24 February. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/pakistans-fata-spring/ (accessed 27 December 2020).

MENAFN (Middle East North Africa Financial Network, Inc) (2019) Women's participation in elections to bring positive change. 7 December. Available at: https://menafn.com/1098750356/Pakistan-Womens-participation-in-elections-to-bring-positive-change?src=Rss (accessed 28 December 2020).

Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (2016). *Report of the Committee on FATA Reforms*. Available at: http://www.safron.gov.pk/SiteImage/Downloads/Report%20of%20%20Committee%20on%20FATA%20Reforms%202016.pdf.

Mohammad M (2013) Making history: vernal parliamentarian set to shine on political stage. *Express Tribune*, 30 May. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/556256/making-history-vernal-parliamentarian-set-to-shine-on-political-stage (accessed 28 December 2020).

Mohammad M (2019) Political parties break chieftain's dominance in tribal districts. *Express Tribune*, 17 July. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2014944/universal-franchise-political-parties-break-chieftains-dominance-tribal-districts (accessed 28 December 2020).

Noor S, Hashmi AS and Bukhari ST (2018) FATA merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: prospects and opportunities. *ISSRA Papers* 10 (2): 17–37.

PILDAT (2009) *How Rich Are Pakistani MNAs? Key Points from Analysis of the Declaration of Assets Submitted by MNAs for the Years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008*. Islamabad: PILDAT.

Qaiser R (2015) Nationalism and political identity in Pakistan: the rise and role of indigenous identities. *SAIS Review* 35 (2): 105–116.

Rahi A (2014) Why Durand line matters. *The Diplomat*, 21 February. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2014/02/why-the-durand-line-matters/ (accessed 27 December 2020).

Shah AR (2020) The rise of the Pashtun Protection Movement (PTM): polemics and conspiracy theories. *Asian Affairs* 51(2): 265–285.

Shah KM (2018) The Political Awakening of Pakistan. *South Asian Voices*, 9 March. Available at: https://southasianvoices.org/the-political-awakening-of-pakistans-pashtuns/ (accessed 28 December 2020).

Siddique A (2019) The Pashtuns' year of living dangerously. *The American Interest*, 8 March. Available at: https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/03/08/the-pashtuns-year-of-living-dangerously/ (accessed 27 March 2021).

Sikandar S (2017) Mainstreaming of tribal area: FATA to Have COO to fast track reforms. *Express Tribune*, 9 September. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/1501678/mainstreaming-tribal-areas-fata-coo-fast-track-reforms (accessed 28 December 2020).

Talbot I (2012) *Pakistan A New History*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Ullah A (2015) Governance reforms in federally administered tribal areas (FATA) of Pakistan: the past and present. *Journal of Political Studies* 22(1): 215–235.

Ullah A and Hayat Su (2017) The recent electoral reforms in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA): an appraisal. *Journal of Political Studies* 24 (2): 351–363.

Wasim A (2018) National Assembly green-lights Fata-KP merger by passing 'historic' bill. *Dawn*. 24 May. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1409407

Wazir A (2018) Socio-economic dimension of FATA merger with KPK. In: *National Seminar on FATA Merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: the prospect and challenges*, Islamabad, National Defence University, 1 November.

Wazir AK (2013) FATA reforms: journey so far and the way forward. *Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies*, 5 July. Available at: https://www.pakpips.com/article/540 2013 (accessed 27 December 2020).

Zia SI (2009) Far-reaching Fata reforms unveiled. *Dawn*, 14 August. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/484054/far-reaching-fata-reforms-unveiled (accessed 28 December 2020).