**[Tribal transition](https://www.dawn.com/news/1814082/tribal-transition)**

[Mohammad Ali Babakhel](https://www.dawn.com/authors/2112/mohammad-ali-babakhel) Published February 14, 2024 Updated a day ago

HISTORICALLY, Pakistan’s tribal areas have long stood at the crossroads of governance, culture, and geopolitics. These areas have navigated the complexities of autonomy, marginalisation, and integration within the broader national framework.

From 1877 to 1947, during the British Raj, they were a focal point due to their unique administrative structure and greater autonomy. The British Indian government aimed to understand tribal cultures and adapt its response accordingly, yet these areas made headlines for their challenges. In both the pre- and post-partition eras, these regions were managed through special legal and administrative frameworks. However, aside from the 25th Amendment, governance was mostly security-focused, leading to isolation and weak governance, which affected their administrative and sociopolitical health.

Post-independence, the tribal areas experienced constitutional changes, with the 1956 constitution designating them as ‘Special Areas’ and the 1962 constitution limiting the applicability of central and provincial laws, enforceable only by presidential or gubernatorial directive. This exclusion maintained the areas’ administrative and legal isolation. The 1973 Constitution allowed 37,000 maliks voting rights, excluding ordinary tribal people from the electoral process and further alienating them. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1997.

Before the 25th Amendment, Fata was divided into seven agencies and Frontier Regions, which were reorganised into districts post-merger. In 2022, South Waziristan was further divided into two districts. The inclusion of the Newly Merged Districts in the provincial assembly and cabinet through elections promises national integration, development, and a stronger rule of law. This political devolution and the introduction of criminal justice system (CJS) components are expected to solidify state authority and public empowerment in NMDs, facilitating the merger’s goals.

Fata’s integration into KP represents a significant move from exclusion to inclusion after 70 years, enhancing KP’s role in national politics and sparking debates on administrative reforms, including the creation of new provinces. The merger has led to the integration of tribal forces into the police and the establishment of courts, aiming for unified law enforcement and CJS in KP.

Technological advances and globalisation have significantly impacted tribal communities, offering empowerment through social media while challenging traditional social structures. The arrival of Afghan refugees and fighters for the Afghan jihad further transformed the sociocultural landscape, leading to increased militancy and demographic shifts. These changes have prompted a complex mix of nostalgia for conservative values among older generations and a push towards political liberalism and modernity among the youth.

The ongoing war on terrorism has bridged the gap between tribal traditions and mod­ernity for the youth, highlighting the importance of political rights amidst transitions. The post-9/11 era has seen a fluctuation between religious and cultural identities, with kinetic operations against mili­t­ancy causing further displacements. The post-merger period has witnessed a surge in protests, a new phenomenon for Fata’s people, emphasising the need for land settlement as a critical component of reform.

Since its establishment, the northwest has seen various administrative changes, progressing through reforms but without their outcomes being thoroughly assessed. The North-West Frontier Province was officially formed in 1901 as a chief commissioner province, allowing the princely states of Swat, Dir, Chitral, and Amb to maintain autonomy until their integration into NWFP in 1969. The region’s status evolved, becoming a governor’s province in 1932, and saw the implementation of the Government of India Act, 1935, in 1937, leading to the creation of the NWFP legislative assembly. In 1955, NWFP merged with West Pakistan, only to regain its provincial status in 1970, with the inclusion of additional areas as settled regions. The 18th Amendment in 2010 addressed the long-standing request to rename NWFP ‘Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’.

Historically, the tribal areas served as arenas for conflicting ideologies and interests. Before the merger, these regions enjoyed autonomy, exempt from taxation, modern policing, and judicial systems. The transition post-merger emphasises gradual implementation of taxation, law enforcement, social empowerment, and development strategies. However, mere constitutional amendments and legal frameworks are insufficient for administrative stability. Effective governance relies on the synergy between revenue generation, public service delivery, economic growth, and peace.

*The writer is the author of Pakistan: In Between Extremism and Peace.*

*X:* [*@alibabakhel*](https://twitter.com/alibabakhel)

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