Beyond Military Operations: Fostering Good Governance and Resilient State-Society Relations in Newly Merged Districts (A Counter-Terrorism Strategy)

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Abstract

Newly Merged Districts (NMDs), formerly known as FATA, have historically remained underdeveloped and isolated regions of Pakistan. The areas remained politically backward, even though the central government has over the years introduced numerous reforms. The year 2018 brought a drastic constitutional reform when FATA was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the NMDs were created. However, introducing state institutions and improving governance structure in the area remains painfully slow. Moreover, with the recent surge in terrorism, the NMDs once again find themselves at the centre of this evolving national crisis. This research seeks to provide policy recommendations for decision makers by exploring prospects of a trust-building approach and resilient state-society relationship. For the purpose of this research, a qualitative research design incorporating in-depth interviews with the locals has been duly utilized.

Keywords: Constitutional Reforms, NMDs, Terrorism, Resilient State-Society Relationship, Governance.

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1. Introduction

Since 2001, terrorism in Pakistan has become a persistent phenomenon. It has created multifaceted challenges deeply intertwined with the socio-political landscape of the region. The decades long history grappled with different forms of terrorism, ranging from domestic violent resurgent movements to transnational interventions. The root of this problem often stems from a combination of factors including regional geo-politics, internal governance issues, socioeconomic disparities and religious extremism. Over the years Pakistan has witnessed numerous devastating terrorist attacks, targeting civilians, state institutions, and security forces resulting in loss of innocent lives and widespread fear.

2023 has been one of the worst years for Pakistan as regards to terrorism so far. During this year, there have been more than 400 terroristic incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone in which more than 200 civilians and 329 security personnel have lost their lives. Around 155 terrorist incidents out of 310 happened in the erstwhile FATA, now known as the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is an alarming situation for Pakistan as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is doing most of the attacks has now regrouped and consolidated its position in Afghanistan and border areas of Pakistan.[1] It is necessary for the state to feel the pulse and devise an effective counter terrorism strategy for NMDs as soon as possible to cope with this very serious problem. There is a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to determining the appropriate counter terrorism measures and strategies Pakistan should implement concerning NMDs.

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[1] Zahid Hussain, "The TTP's New Battleground." *Dawn*, September 13, 2023, https://www.dawn.com/news/1775603.

2. Literature Review

Literature on the issue has mainly focused on the causes of the resurgence and general suggestions regarding Pakistan's response. Scholars have identified two main causes of the resurgence: The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the political and economic instability in Pakistan.[2] Akhtar and Ahmed have described two factors of TTP's resurgence: structural factors and precipitant factors. Structural factors are the governance challenges and grievances of the people in erstwhile FATA. On the other hand, precipitant factors are the organizational strategies adopted by the new TTP leadership, small groups uniting under TTP's leadership, ideological and material gains from Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.[3]

A number of scholars have also evaluated the counter-terrorism strategy of Pakistan. Naeem Ahmad argues that neutralizing violent extremist ideology is essential for Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy.[4] Aatir Rizvi, Ahmad R. Khan, and Mansoor Elahi emphasize the importance of good governance for countering terrorism.[5] Ahmad suggests the creation of a favourable public opinion and a balance in civil-military relations are necessary steps for countering terrorism.[6] Habib contends that the missing link in the state's counter-terrorism strategy is a coherent counter-narrative. Zalmay Azad suggests that a comprehensive strategy

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[2] Zalmay Azad, "A Snake Rises from the Ashes in the West." *The Friday Times*, September 16, 2023, https://thefridaytimes.com/16-Sep-2023/a-snake-rises-from-ashes-in-the-west.

[3] Shahzad Akhtar and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Understanding the Resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 16, no. 3 (2023): 285–306, https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2023.2280924.

[4] Naeem Ahmad, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy: A Critical Overview," *Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 55, no. 2 (2016): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.46568/jssh.v55i2.79.

[5] Aatir Rizvi, Ahmad Raza Khan, and Muhammad Manzoor Elahi, "Navigating the Threat Landscape: A Study on Counter-Terrorism Measures in Pakistan," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 7, no. 4 (2023). https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023(7-iv)54.

[6] Naeem Ahmed, "Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Its Implications for Domestic, Regional and International Security," *FMSH-WP-2014-59* (January 15, 2014), https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00937552.

that combines military, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic measures is essential to safeguard Pakistan's security.[7] Akhtar Shah explains that Pakistan should formulate a new national policy based on the notions of constitutional supremacy, democracy, stable economy, non-alignment, friendly relations with all neighbouring countries, zero tolerance against violent non-state actors, and above all the rule of law.[8] Shah and Mahmood recommend a collective national response including law enforcement, reconciliation and socioeconomic developments.[9] There is a considerable gap in literature regarding a specific counter-terrorism strategy for the NMDs.

3. Rationale of the Study

This study is an effort to answer the question concerning the counter-terrorism strategy Pakistan should adopt in the face of the resurgence of terrorism in the country. In this vein the paper will argue that fostering good governance and resilient state-society relations can be an effective counter-terrorism strategy in NMDs specifically and Pakistan generally. Moving beyond the traditional approach, this study suggests that the lack of trust between the state and people in the NMDs is a factor contributing to terrorism. The people in these areas have suffered immensely by terrorism since many lives were lost and homes and properties were destroyed. Terrorism and kinetic counter-terrorism strategies caused immense psychological harm including anxiety, depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

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[7] Zalmay Azad, "A Snake Rises."
[8] Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, "Terrorism — Need for a New Public Policy."
[9] Syed Sibtain Hussain Shah and Arshad Mahmood, "Post-2019 Spike in Terrorism: A Threat to Internal Security of Pakistan." *Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses* 8, no. 2 (2022): 53–79.

In 2018, the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa occurred; however, the situation has not significantly ameliorated due to ineffective governance. Residents in this economically disadvantaged area continue to experience difficulties accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. These challenges, when compounded, breed resentment among the populace, presenting an opportunity for terrorist organizations to exploit for recruitment purposes. The people of NMDs have borne the brunt of terrorism and look toward the state to not let their land become a battle ground again. The general public is against TTP as evident from massive protests in Swat in late 2022.[10] Harnessing this sentiment is crucial for Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy. Nevertheless, for society to collaborate with the state against terrorism, there must be a foundation of trust between them. This trust can only be cultivated through initiatives aimed at enhancing and fortifying state-society relations.

Improving governance, building trust between state institutions and the populace, considering the people as partners in combating terrorism, and executing precise, intelligence-led operations can form a robust counter-terrorism strategy for Pakistan in NMDs. This research fills a void in the literature by advocating for a tailored counter-terrorism strategy for the NMDs, thereby enriching the broader discussion on counter-terrorism. Moreover, it also holds potential significance for policy and decision makers in Pakistan, tasked with resolving the issues of NMDs.

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[10] Abid Hussain, "Thousands Protest Increased Violence in Pakistan's Swat Valley." *Al Jazeera*, October 11, 2022. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/11/thousands-protest-rising-violence-in-pakistans-swat-valley.

4. Methodological and Theoretical Construct

The study employs an integrated approach combining exploratory and ethnographic approaches within the post-positivist research framework revealing a significant gap in understanding and fostering resilient state-society relations and good governance in NMDs. To address this gap, in-depth interviews were selected as the primary data collection method. However, two significant challenges emerged: firstly, language barriers hindered comprehension of local issues and perspectives, and secondly, conducting research in a socially conservative and distrustful environment where research activities are viewed with suspicion. To overcome these obstacles, a team of young scholars from the local areas, who incidentally were the author's students, were enlisted to conduct the interviews. These scholars engaged with local intelligentsia, political leaders, youth representatives, and select officials from local associations. Drawing upon the insights gathered from these interviews, the research has drawn a number of policy recommendations.

A snowball sampling approach has been adopted, anticipating that participants will recommend other potential participants, thereby facilitating the research process. This method not only assisted in forming a purposive sample but also streamlined access to potential respondents.

Crafting questionnaires is crucial yet complex in conducting sensitive research. In this study, the questionnaires were tailored to address interviewers' apprehensions and encourage their active engagement. Questions were modified with careful attention to the specific context, societal standards, security concerns, and overall sensitivities involved.

The research team, comprising Pakhtun students, conducted approximately twenty interviews across Wana, specifically South Waziristan, Kurram District,

Bajaur, and North Waziristan (four out of eight districts due to limitations in accessing the remaining areas despite extensive efforts). Key themes identified included the effective involvement of youth, the efficient functioning of institutions, and the active participation of media. These findings underscored the pressing need for intervention and prevention programs.

The theoretical framework is structured around the UK's 2011 counter-terrorism strategy known as CONTEST, which centres on four key elements: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare.

Pursue entails the disruption of terrorist schemes through law enforcement and intelligence endeavours. **Prevent** means to deter individuals from providing support to terrorists through community involvement, educational initiatives, and intervention programs. **Protect** concentrates on bolstering the security of vital infrastructure and densely populated areas to reduce the potential impact of terrorist assaults. Lastly, **Prepare** involves cultivating resilience and ensuring efficient response capabilities to handle the aftermath of terrorist occurrences.

As previously stated, the academic literature highlights the limited efforts by the state to establish good governance and foster resilient state-society relations in NMDs. To adopt this as a counter terrorism strategy, the state must prioritize non-kinetic measures, such as implementing preventive strategies to dissuade individuals from supporting terrorists through robust educational programs and community engagement. Additionally, it is imperative to enhance the protection of infrastructure and densely populated areas. Lastly, efforts should focus on preparing society to be resilient and supportive of state actions.

Prior to delving into the policy recommendations derived from interviews with locals of NMDs, it is essential first to provide a brief overview of the current realities on ground.

5. Contextual Understanding of the Issue

Historically, the erstwhile FATA region has been characterized by underdevelopment and isolation. During British rule, this area was governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), a stringent law granting extensive powers to the Political Agent and tribal leaders. These figures exploited the populace, withholding development and political rights to maintain their monopoly. Despite becoming part of Pakistan after partition, FATA's constitutional status remained unchanged. It was not until 1997 that residents were granted the right to vote.[11] Moreover, there were no regular party based elections up until 2013. There was no rule of law but the rule of one man, namely the Political Agent.[12] Courts had no access to the area. The literacy rate remained drastically low. As of 2016, merely two-third of the people lived in multi-dimensional poverty.[13] FCR was abolished in 2018 but the process of introducing state institutions and improving the governance in the area has remained painfully slow. Even today, the NMDs are drastically underdeveloped as compared to other parts of the country.

The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially from the erstwhile FATA (NMDs), have suffered immensely from terrorism. The Taliban militants found a safe haven in the said areas after they were driven out from Afghanistan by the

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[11] Umer Farooq, "Looking Back: A chronological review of the history of Fata reforms" *The News International*, June 3, 2018. https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/565641-looking-back-3.
[12] Umar Farooq, "Pakistan's FATA: Lawless No More?" *Al Jazeera*, March 22, 2014. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/3/22/pakistans-fata-lawless-no-more.
[13] Samra Anwar and Abdur Rehman Cheema, "The future of FATA: when reforms come knocking." *South Asia@LSE*, October 26, 2017. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2017/10/26/the-future-of-fata-when-reforms-come-knocking/.

NATO forces. They began to build their own rule in these areas and challenged the writ of the state. They unleashed a reign of terror in these areas and imposed their strict brand of the Islamic Sharia. They extorted people for money and undue favours, slaughtered anyone suspected of spying on them, and lashed people for violating the 'Sharia'. They reigned and people suffered.

The state of Pakistan ultimately decided to eliminate these militants and restore the writ of the state in the area. A number of security operations were carried out in FATA, mainly in South Waziristan, North Waziristan, and Bajaur. Two operations were carried out in Swat as well. During the operations, people became internally displaced and were compelled to live in camps amidst harsh weather and scarce resources. After the operations, most of the people upon return found their homes and properties damaged destroyed. People faced difficulties in form of check posts, landmines, search operations, among others.[14] The process for reconstruction, rehabilitation and compensation for damaged properties remained slow due to procedural and administrative discrepancies.[15] Both the historical and the recent factors made people feel alienated and this created deep resentment in the hearts of the people.

6. To Fight an Idea with an Idea – The Need for an Effective Counter-Narrative

It is an established fact that the support and trust of the local population is a significant factor in fighting terrorism. While the importance of other causes of terrorist resurgence such as the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the political and economic turmoil in the country cannot be ignored, the study propose that the

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[14] Akhtar and Ahmad, "Understanding the resurgence".
[15] Zulfiqar Ali, "Ex-Fata Compensation, Economic Recovery Initiatives in Slow Lane," *Dawn*, December 20, 2020. https://www.dawn.com/news/1596736.

main strength of terrorist groups lies somewhere else, namely the distrust between state and society.

TTP has also evolved over time and has renewed its strategies. Its new plan is not to attack the civilians only but the armed forces of Pakistan as well.[16] They are cashing the deprivation of the local population. The socio-economic underdevelopment in the NMDs further exacerbates the situation. By exploiting this sentiment of distrust combined with deprivation, TTP can sell the narrative against the state and recruit individuals from the society. With the prevalent narrative against the state, governance and development at a low, the soil of NMDs can be a fertile ground for fresh recruitment. The disillusionment of the local population with existing policies and the psychological impacts of the conflict further adds to the possibility. Given the sensitive nature of the situation, it is crucial to craft a counter-narrative that emphasizes the state's alignment with the community. As the resurgence of terrorism demands an assessment of societal behaviour, the study adopted the four key pillars of the UK's Counter-Terrorism strategy: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare.

7. Making The Population Resilient – Developing and Enhancing the Civil Society

Civil society has been defined by Charles Taylor as "a web of autonomous associations independent of the state, which bind citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions could have an effect on public policy".[17] The evolution and development of civil society is a comprehensive and time-taking process. However, once developed, it can act as a bulwark against
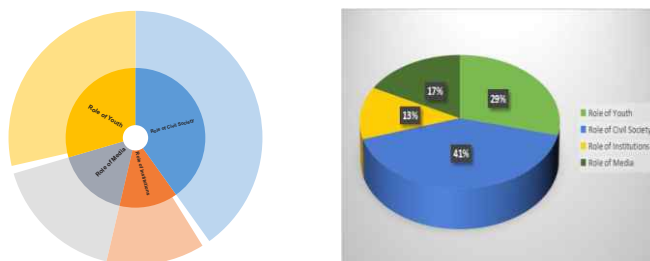
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[16] Akhtar and Ahmad, "Understanding the resurgence".
[17] G.U.O Gang, "Civil Society." University of Rochester, May 1998, https://home.olemiss.edu/~gg/paperhtm/civlsoct.htm.

terrorism and extremism.[18] A vibrant civil society can engage in educational initiatives to raise awareness about the root causes of terrorism and debunk extremist ideologies. It can discourage radicalization by creating an environment of dialogue and understanding. Additionally, civil society can provide support and rehabilitation for individuals who may be vulnerable to extremist influences. Civil society organizations advocate for policies to address the socioeconomic factors contributing to terrorism. They access marginalized communities to provide basic services that can address grievances that terrorists often exploit. Civil society can also act as a watchdog and can point out loopholes in the government's counter-terrorism strategy.

Some measures are necessary for the development of a vibrant civil society and resilient state-society relations in the NMDs. These measures are suggestions extracted from the interviews conducted for this research. The interview guide was based on following themes under the domain of civil society; role of local associations, human development and security, addressing the psychological impact of the conflict, effective involvement of youth, the efficient functioning of institutions (fostering political process), and the active participation of media. Some respondents even asserted the importance of the promotion of tourism in NMDs. The following figures drawn from NVIVO software show that a large number of people desire to have an engaging state-society relationship for countering terrorism.

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[18] Christopher Michaelsen, "The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Combating Terrorism." In *OSCE Yearbook 2007*, edited by IFSH, 341–49, https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/yearbook/english/07/Michaelsen-en.pdf.

All the respondents were of the opinion that following the suggested measures will help the state to win the support of the local population and fight terrorism effectively. While most of these suggestions are understandably time-consuming and protean in nature, ignoring or postponing them, however, will make the fight against extremism and terrorism even harder. It is worth noting that all these steps mutually reinforce one another, i.e. following one step adds to the effectiveness of the other.

a) Local Associations

The respondents emphasized the importance of state encouragement for the establishment of local associations in NMDs. These associations could be structured around various professions, such as traders' associations or local NGOs and welfare groups. It is essential to develop a legal framework that enables and streamlines the operations of these local associations in the region. Clear and straightforward registration procedures therefore must be established. Furthermore, the state could provide financial assistance to these associations in the form of grants, empowering them to initiate projects at the grassroots level and contribute to societal advancement. Meaningful engagement between the state and these associations is crucial, with a commitment to addressing their concerns. Currently, various welfare and skill-enhancing associations operate independently without coordination with government institutions. Therefore, it is imperative for the

government to collaborate with and support these existing associations, facilitating their efforts for community development.

As a case in point, Swat was also affected by militancy, but it had a vibrant civil society which strongly advocated for the timely return of IDPs and effective reconstruction and rehabilitation.[19]

The respondents also emphasized the pivotal role of organizations and associations as conduits facilitating interaction between individuals, the government, and society simultaneously. They serve to bridge the gap between the populace and governing bodies, fostering a sense of responsibility and purpose among people. It's crucial to promote a culture of responsive governance wherein the state actively seeks feedback and demonstrates a willingness to adapt its policies based on input from local associations.

b) **Human Development and Security**

The state needs to invest in human development, focusing on infrastructure and good governance. This includes expediting ongoing projects in education, health, and communications, along with targeted assistance for vulnerable segments of population. Initiating infrastructure projects, supporting SMEs, and strengthening the police and judicial systems are crucial. Solving tribal disputes, empowering local self-government, and prioritizing security will foster peace and prosperity. It was mentioned by one of the interviewees that local businesses are not protected from extortion. TTP is taking extortion from every contractor at the rate of 5% and

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[19] Muhammad Owais Khan, "Implications of Military Operations for the People of Swat and Their Response: Revisiting Disciplined Non-Violent Action." BS Thesis, University of the Punjab, Lahore, 2023

people are forced to pay such ransoms.[20] A significant concern raised was target killings, with a strong demand for identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators. It suggested that emphasis should be placed on empowering the police to handle law and order situations effectively. Initiatives like community policing, as seen in Swat post-military operations, can enhance trust between law enforcement agencies and citizens. It is advised that security personnel from the region or with local language proficiency be deployed, as they understand the community's values. Clear government policy on disappearances is crucial, with detained individuals promptly presented before courts and their whereabouts disclosed.[21] This will increase the people's trust in the state institutions and the cooperation between state and the society to fight terrorism together. Once the terrorists lose the support of the people, they can effectively be targeted through focused operations, minimizing cost and collateral damages.

c) Addressing the Psychological Impacts of the Conflict

It was reported that the conflict has caused immense harm to the mental health of the people in NMDs, who have seen their near and dear ones killed. In the post-conflict period, most of the people suffer from anxiety, depression and PTSD.[22] People with PTSD can be easily manipulated by the terrorists and can be recruited. The government should take steps to address mental health issues. Psychologists should be posted in local hospitals and awareness campaigns regarding mental health should be prioritized. In addition, de-radicalization and rehabilitation

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[20] Shehzad Ghias Shaikh, "TTP, Afghan Taliban, Refugees and Pakistan - Iftikhar Firdous - Khorasan Diary - #TPE 326," 2024, in *The Pakistan Experience,* podcast, ep. 324, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkuQg74wW7I.

[21] Masud Ahmad Khan, "Missing Persons." *The Nation*, May 15, 2023. https://www.nation.com.pk/15-May-2023/missing-persons.

[22] Abdullah Momand, "Ex-FATA's Unresolved Trauma: The Mental Toll of The War Within." *The Friday Times*, December 21, 2021. https://thefridaytimes.com/22-Dec-2021/ex-fata-s-unresolved-trauma-the-mental-toll-of-the-war-within.

programs should be target for low-profile militants or are not involved in major terroristic activities. They may be treated as citizens of the state who were exploited by the militants due to their ignorance.

d) Engaging Youth

The youth of NMDs should be engaged productively by the state. Approximately 70% of the population of NMDs is youth which can be a great asset for Pakistan.[23] Respondents emphasized the crucial need for government investment in youth education and skill development programs. This encompasses formal education, vocational training, and entrepreneurial initiatives to bolster employability. Offering extensive scholarships for national and international university studies is also highly recommended. Additionally, there is also a call to address leisure activities for youth, tapping into the region's potential for sports like boxing, karate, and gymnastics.

Establishment of sports complexes, organization of tournaments, cultural festivals and art exhibitions have also been proposed. These platforms will not only foster self-expression, creativity, and teamwork but also promote physical health and social cohesion. Constructing community spaces like auditoriums and organizing competitions and co-curricular events can further engage youth in meaningful discourse and diverse activities. This will contribute to the overall social development of the region as well. To develop a resilient state-society relationship, the government should prioritize supporting youth-led entrepreneurship and startups, empowering local youth and boosting economic development. Introducing civic education in schools and colleges can raise awareness about democratic principles, human rights, and civic responsibilities. Encouraging NGOs to engage local youth through employment opportunities and

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[23] Shehzad Ghias, "TTP, Afghan Taliban, Refugees and Pakistan".

community projects is also essential. Promoting a culture of volunteering and digital literacy programs will equip youth with modern skills and facilitate access to information and communication technologies. By investing in education and providing opportunities for societal contribution, the government can deter terrorist recruitment among the youth.

e) Role of Media

Local residents also advocate government support in facilitating enhanced media access to NMDs. Media coverage will not only shed light on government initiatives for peace but will also showcase their collaborative efforts with civil society organizations in the region. Through active specially designed campaigns, media can foster trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility in countering terrorism. Additionally, media can also play a pivotal role in raising awareness and shaping public opinion on important social issues like poverty, healthcare, and education. It can also portray the rich cultural heritage of tribal areas, dispelling negative stereotypes and promoting their peace-loving nature. The government can utilize media as a tool for engaging with the local population, conveying its stance and building trust, provided ofcourse that media operates independently and showcases genuine concerns and sentiments of the people.

f) Role of Tourism

Tourism has untapped potential for the socio-economic development of the NMDs. The NMDs have rich touristic destinations that can attract local and international tourists alike.[24] The Razmak and Shawal Valleys in North Waziristan,

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[24] Riaz Ahmad, "Tribal Districts Hold Allure for Tourists." *The Express Tribune*, September 20, 2021. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2321027/tribal-districts-hold-allure-for-tourists.

Ladha, Makin and Kaniguram in South Waziristan, Tirah valley in Khyber and Parachinar in Kurram are picturesque locations rich in natural beauty. Tourism can also help create job opportunities and stimulate economic growth. It can contribute to income generation and poverty reduction by promoting local businesses, handicrafts and services. It can also facilitate cultural exchange between tourists and local communities in the NMDs. This interaction will promote tolerance and understanding of each other and the people of NMDs will also get a sense of unity and shared identity with the rest of the country.

Tourism can also play an important role in infrastructural development as well. For tourists' attraction, there is a need to build proper roads, hotels and recreational facilities throughout the NMDs. If the government invests in tourism infrastructure, it will not only enhance visitor experience but also benefit the local residents and lessen their sense of deprivation. The example of Swat can be taken in this regard.

Swat was a popular tourist destination prior to the terrorist insurgency in 2007-09. The tourism infrastructure in Swat was relatively well-developed and the Swat Hotels Association was an important part of the civil society of Swat. During the operations in Swat, there was understandably little to no tourism in the valley, however, immediately after the operations the civil society there became active to revive tourism again. It pressed the government for reconstruction of roads and infrastructure and organized cultural festivals in collaboration with the military and the government which attracted tourists from all over the country. It announced free stays for tourists and organized a hospitality week to invite those people to Swat who had helped them and given them shelter during the operations. Due to the successful advocacy of the civil society in Swat, tourism was largely revived, and reconstruction was done at a much higher pace. The example of Swat

highlights the importance of the interconnection between tourism, development and the civil society.

Tourism can also contribute to peacebuilding by promoting positive interactions between the tourists and the local communities. When tourists experience the hospitality and warmth of the local people, they will be compelled to reassess their stereotypes and prejudices about the people in the tribal areas which will help create a more harmonious society. By promoting tourism in the NMDs the government can achieve dual goal of development in these areas and convincing them that the state cares deeply about them.

g) Introducing Political Process

The people of NMDs have historically remained the farthest from politics and political process. It has only been ten years that political parties were introduced in these areas. Much of these ten years were marred by conflict. Political parties play great role in the political socialization of the people. By joining a political party and working for it, citizens get a sense of entitlement and contribution to the affairs of the state. They become active rather than passive citizens. Political parties also play a role in policy advocacy for the people, they can use political platforms to advocate for policies that promote social justice, economic development and the overall well-being of the people.

Political parties can also be effective platforms for the youth of the NMDs. They can provide opportunities for young individuals to take on leadership roles and contribute to policy discussions. Both national and local political parties should be encouraged to work together in these areas. They should be provided security to organize their events in the area, share their manifestos with the people, and

conduct membership drives and community outreach programs. This will help the political parties to communicate their messages, policies and activities to the public. Political parties should also work to further the narrative that the state stands with the people. This will gradually introduce political process in the area and will promote political participation, ultimately bridging the gap between state and the society.

Implementing these measures to promote political participation, rebuilding trust through civil society development, and adopting a comprehensive approach to community resilience will not only turn the public opinion in favour of the state but will also cut off the recruitment source for terrorist organizations. By making society resilient and capable of resisting terrorism, these steps present a proactive and cost-effective strategy. Ultimately, prioritizing these initiatives is crucial for fostering lasting stability and security in the region.