

State Legitimacy, Governance, and TTP's Enduring Terrorism



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Abstract: *There is a divided opinion in the existing scholarship about the role of poor governance including socio-economic marginalization and political grievances and their causal link with the occurrence of terrorism. Some scholars argue that socioeconomic deprivation such as poverty and political exclusion are not related to terrorism, while others argue that they provide an enabling environment where terrorist organizations or terrorism thrives. This article argues that peoples' perceptions of socioeconomic grievances and political exclusion or marginalization play a significant role in allowing a terrorist organization to thrive and excel. The TTP has accelerated its terrorist campaign by taking advantage of the weak governance structure in the ex-FATA region and the government's inability to alleviate the suffering of the people due to poor socioeconomic conditions. The TTP highlighted the grievances of the people to enlist their support in fomenting terrorism in Pakistan.*

Key Words: State legitimacy, Grievances, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Terrorism, Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan has witnessed an accelerated campaign of terrorism in recent years, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has emerged as the most lethal threat in the terrorist landscape of the country. The TTP's increased terrorist activities are partly attributed to the US forces' exit from Afghanistan and the resultant triumph of the Afghan Taliban in the country who are considered a close ally of the TTP because of the ideological connections and the TTP provision of material support to them. Therefore, some arguments were made that Pakistan's terrorist problem has grown significantly since the Taliban's return to Afghanistan in August 2021. However, the governance-related challenges such as poor law and order and more specifically poor socio-economic conditions in the ex-FATA region did not get serious scholarly attention in

exploring the recent revival of terrorism in Pakistan. Although safe havens in Afghanistan are an important factor, however, it does not provide a sufficient conditions for the TTP to expedite its terrorism campaign in the region. A close look at the weak governance indicators is imperative in assessing the reemergence of TTP-related terrorism as a credible threat to the country's domestic security. I argue in this article that persistent governance challenges in the region provide an enabling environment for the TTP to reestablish itself and expedite its terrorist campaign by launching terrorist attacks, mainly against the security forces of Pakistan. The following section discusses the theoretical literature on how poor governance structure not only challenges the legitimacy of a government but also generate grievances that terrorist organization exploit for their advancing their own objectives.

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Theoretical Framework: State Legitimacy, Governance and Terrorism

The concept of legitimacy is quite important in political science; however, it is a contested phenomenon owing to different connotations (Risse & Stollenwerk, 2018; Marques, 2016; Gilley, 2009). Generally, legitimacy is defined as the right to rule (Gilley, 2009) or the license to govern (Draude, 2018). More specifically, legitimacy is associated with the people's acceptance of a state and its government as the rightful and justified entity in providing governance to them (Bereketeab, 2020, 55). In addition, legitimacy requires governments/states to justify their power states to win popular support while advancing their authority (Ortiz, 2010, 146).

A government's legitimacy in the eyes of its population is highly contingent upon the effective governance or the services it provides (Collins, 2011). Francis Fukuyama defines governance as a government's ability to provide governance and services to the people while giving less importance to the form of government (Fukuyama, 2013, 350). In addition, a state's performance in its provision of services is believed to be directly proportional to the increase or decrease of its legitimacy (Bereketeab, 2020, 60). Similarly, legitimacy is best nurtured when the state and society enjoy a smooth relationship. For instance, the state is supposed to provide basic services including individual and collective security and other essentials of life, while society in turn confers legitimacy on the state, thus justifying its rule (Bereketeab, 2020, 58). However, the rule must be based on the consent of those who are being ruled. The state in the form of a dialogue asks its citizens to entrust authority and responsibility to it and in return the state will use all its means and sources available to benefit its citizenry (Faison, 2016, 4).

Upon its failure to deliver the basic services to its citizens, the state tends to lose its legitimacy. Redie contends that a state's capability and willingness to provide the best

possible social services to its citizens would directly determine the legitimacy a state holds in the eyes of its people (Bereketeab, 2020, 60). Apart from creating the legitimacy crisis, the weak governance system that is mainly attributed to the structural conditions such as a lack of state capacity also creates conditions that promote violence. Therefore, these structural conditions constitute a significant factor in predicting violence or terrorism. An expert on terrorism argued that states that are unable to extract legitimacy from their population and experience fragile economic conditions with poor security forces provide an enabling environment for terrorist groups to establish their foothold (O'Neill, 2002, 20). In addition, there is a growing consensus among scholars that a state's inability to provide material benefits related to governance motivates the rise of violent nonstate actors (Wozniak, 2018, 475).

Poor governance is mainly attributed to weak or poor states, a bulging youth population, political exclusion, and structural disparities that are often associated with violence. For instance, a US study found states having a weak governance structure, ethnic and religious divides among their population, staggering economies and weak border control provide a highly conducive environment for terrorism to flourish (O'Neill, 2002, 20). Ross in his study of causes of terrorism found a direct proportional link between weak governance and the number of terrorist attacks that occurred (Ross, 1993, 18). Human security issues are further believed to be directly linked with the incidence of terrorist activities. William O'Neill contends, "human insecurity, broadly understood, provides the enabling conditions for terrorism to flourish" (O'Neill, 2002, 20).

Recognizing the role of poor governance in promoting terrorism, Steinberg observes that terrorist groups will continue to endure unless necessary measures are taken to cut their recruitment supply and prevent them from sustaining their activities (Steinberg, 2002, 7). States with poor governance are often repressive in their tactics which further

complicate governance-related issues that aggravate the pre-existing grievances which in turn create support for terrorism. O'Neill explains the growth of terrorist organizations while claiming that terrorist leaders prey on those who are deserted, and dejected from society for their recruitment (O'Neill, [2002](#), 11). Similarly, Gunaratna concurs that terrorism grows in contexts facing bad governance, corruption and human rights violations (Gunaratna, [2002](#), 34). Therefore, taking effective and concrete steps to improve governance is indispensable to stop the proliferation of terrorist groups or terrorist activities (Simon, [2003](#); Mickiethwait & Wooldridge, [2003](#)).

These theoretical insights are supported by empirical evidence. Prevalence of the structural conditions are quite evident in countries like Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and Iraq which provided an opportunity for local or regional and international terrorist organizations to establish a base of operations and a source of support. Scholars have attributed the recent resurgence and persistence of terrorism in developing countries such as Sub-Saharan African countries and Afghanistan including others with poverty, marginalization, and weak governance (Donnell, [2022](#)). In countries with poor governance conditions, terrorist organizations exploit deprivation and alienation to attract recruits, thereby swelling their ranks. For example, Boko Haram offers significant financial benefits to its recruits in the Sahel region (Global Terrorism Index, [2022](#)). On the contrary, states that focus on addressing the grievances of people minimize the chances of the resurgence of terrorist groups. For example, the Egyptian army after crushing the Islamic State in Sinai followed a development program by rebuilding villages and residential communities destroyed during the military operations. This strategy effectively prevented IS militants from finding safe refuge in these areas (Al-Monitor, [2022](#)). This theoretical discussion guides the analysis

of the resurgence of the TTP's terrorist campaign in the ex-FATA region of Pakistan.

State Legitimacy, Weak Governance in ex-FATA, and the consolidation of TTP

Historically, the continuing challenges of governance in the FATA due to the semiautonomous status of the region and the resultant weak presence of the Pakistani state left the region in extreme underdevelopment that persistently poses challenges to the legitimacy of the Pakistani state. In addition, due to extreme poverty and abject socioeconomic conditions, the region has always remained combustible and vulnerable to militancy. The TTP rose amid these challenges when the region was persistently going through frustrations arising out of miserable socioeconomic conditions.

The Origin of TTP

The TTP owes its genesis to the American attacks in Afghanistan which were motivated by the US declaration of global war on terror to avenge the 9/11 terrorists' attacks that targeted the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, two symbols of American economic and military might. Pakistan's tribal areas, known as FATA (the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas), adjacent to the Afghan border received many Al Qaeda militants and the Afghan Taliban who fled the American attacks. They were warmly welcomed by the locals in FATA who participated in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets in the 1980s.

Regrouping of these fleeing militants later enabled them to launch attacks against the US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan which angered the US. Bound by its commitment to the US as a frontline ally against the war on terror, Pakistan acted against these foreign militants (Wilson & Akhtar, [2019](#)). The local militants fiercely opposed the Pakistani security forces' hunt for these foreign fighters which later developed into an organized resistance against the Pakistani state and its security forces.

The local resistance groups formally developed into an organization known as TTP

in 2007 and Baitullah Mehsud assumed the leadership role of the movement. TTP was established in December 2007 as an umbrella organization with Baitullah Mehsud as its leader with the approval of 40 Taliban leaders from the ex-FATA (Abbas, [2008](#)). The TTP leadership announced to wage a struggle for the Enforcement of *sharia* (Islamic law) in Pakistan, to support the Afghan Taliban against the NATO forces, and to carry out defensive *Jihad* against the Pakistani state which acted on the behest of US against its own people in FATA. Taking advantage of governance challenges in FATA and the resultant socio-economic deprivations of the local people, The TTP established its hold in different parts of FATA, especially in Swat Valley between 2009 and 2010. To overcome opposition and to strengthen control of FATA. The TTP carried out a massive terrorist campaign targeting civilians and the security forces alike. The most horrific terrorist attack perpetrated by TTP was the targeting of the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014 which led to almost 150 deaths, mostly children (Roberts, [2017](#)). TTP's indiscriminate targeting of civilians angered the local people who provided massive support for military operations against the organization (Boone, [2015](#)). TTP was once marked as the 'the gravest internal threat' to Pakistan's internal security, however, the group lost much of its organizational strength and operational capability due to the internal conflicts within the organization and pressure from the military operations against the organization (Jadoon & Mahmood, [2018](#)).

Several military operations, the most important one 'Operation Zarb-e-Azb' began in June 2014, and targeted the financial and organizational structure of the TTP which left the group very weak (Abbas, [2021](#), 45; Akhtar, [2019](#)). The group suffered a loss of nearly 3,500 fighters during this operation (Ghazanfar, [2016](#)). In addition, from 2015 to 2019, 641 people were convicted by the military courts and 345 received death sentences (Zubair, [2019](#)). A serious setback to the organization took place due to the US drone attacks that deprived the

organization of targeting the TTP leadership (Abbas, [2013](#)). Due to the loss of TTP's power, a considerable decline in terrorist violence was observed. TTP terrorist attacks dropped by 33 per cent in 2015 compared to the previous years' attacks (START, [2018](#)).

A schism and infighting within the group emerged due to the appointment of the leader of the group which further damaged the group. Mullah Fazalulla assumed the leadership of the organization after the targeting of Hakimullah Mehsud in 2013 in a drone attack which resulted in his death. Fazalullah did not belong to the Mehsud tribe which carried the mantle of the organization since its foundation. The transfer of leadership to a non-Mehsud member did not sit well with the organization leading to the TTP disintegration into various factions (Khattak, [2020](#)). A group known as Jamaat-ul-Ahrar was established by some members who separated themselves from the main organization. Furthermore, many TTP commanders defected from the TTP and paid their allegiance to the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) in late 2014. A TTP leader from the Orakzai agency was appointed the first head of IS-KP (Jadoon & Mehmood, [2018](#), 22).

The foregoing discussion demonstrated that various internal and external factors contributed to the loss of strength by TTP in the last few years, however, the organization continued to plan and execute terrorist attacks from their newly found sanctuaries in Afghanistan. The 2018 national elections witnessed massive TTP attacks targeting the politicians who were opposed to the group (Khan, [2018](#)). Furthermore, polio workers and the escorting policemen were also targeted by TTP as the campaign against polio was dubbed as a Western conspiracy against the Muslims. A relentless campaign against the polio workers in April 2019 in the Bannu and Buner districts in KP, and in Quetta, Balochistan, forced the government to shut down the national campaign (Shams, [2019](#)). The TTP militants attacked the two police officers escorting a vaccination team in December 2019 in Lower Dir District, KP (Radio Free Europe, 2019). TTP's total attacks in ex-FATA and KP

increased to twenty-one and twenty-eight in 2019 and 2020, outnumbering the twelve attacks in 2018 (Jadoon, [2021](#), 12). In TTP's terrorist campaign, the Pakistani security personnel received the main share, however, casualties remained largely low in number (Farmer & Mehsud, [2020](#)). Through the terrorist campaign, TTP attempted to revive itself, but it remained largely failed in galvanizing the organization. The TTP received much-needed relief when the Afghan Taliban defeated the international forces and took over Kabul in August 2021 accompanied by the withdrawal of the international forces from the country.

The Role of Afghan Taliban Success in Afghanistan in the Resurgence of TTP

The Ashraf Ghani-led government in Afghanistan and the Indian intelligence agency personnel were largely held responsible for using the anti-Pakistani militant groups to foment terrorism in Pakistan (Reuters, [2019](#)). With the Afghan Taliban back into power in Kabul in August 2001, the Pakistani government expected the new regime to reign in the militant groups operating from Afghanistan to carry out terrorist attacks inside Pakistan (Abbas & Ahmad, [2021](#)). Contrary to these expectations, the new regime in Afghanistan, the Afghan Taliban, seems reluctant to take any serious actions against these militants. The Pakistani government met a shock when the Afghan Taliban freed many TTP militants including the group's former deputy leader Maulvi Faqir Mohammad from the Afghan jails that were captured and detained by the previous Afghan administration. Faqir after his release from prison carried out a fight in Pakistan to establish Shariah in the country (Shah, [2021](#)). TTP expressed their pleasure and celebrated the Afghan Taliban's freeing of its militants by staging a huge motor rally in eastern Afghanistan. Some accounts believed that the Afghan Taliban takeover provided an environment conducive to the free movement of the TTP militants in Afghanistan without any fear (Sayed, [2021](#)). TTP has maintained a longstanding relationship with the Afghan

Taliban since the days the former were ousted from power in Afghanistan and the latter provided a crucial role in helping the Afghan Taliban to settle and reorganize themselves to stage attacks inside Afghanistan against the international security forces. Since, onwards, both established a symbiotic relationship with each other that paved the way to help each other in their difficult times (Mir, [2022](#)). So, the arrival of the Afghan Taliban did not help Pakistan to get rid of the terrorism emanating from Afghanistan, as most of the attacks were perpetrated by TTP militants (Mir, [2022](#)).

After securing freedom from the Afghan prisons and enjoying freedom of movement in Afghanistan, the TTP leaders showered huge praise on the Afghan Taliban by renewing allegiance to them and announced to replicate the Afghan Taliban's success in Pakistan to get Sharia implemented in the country. The Afghan Taliban's success in Afghanistan also provided huge moral support to those religious leaders who supported the TTP agenda in Pakistan. Molana Abdul Aziz, the former head of the Red Mosque in Islamabad which was destroyed in an operation sanctioned by President Pervaiz Musharaf due to its challenging the writ of the state and a longtime supporter of TTP, celebrated the Afghan Taliban victory by hoisting the Afghan Taliban flags in Islamabad. He threatened to challenge the writ of state if the law enforcement agencies took any action against him (Shah, [2021](#)).

The TTP's leadership has publicly stated to bring a revolution like the revolution experienced by Afghanistan in the guise of the Afghan Taliban's return to power. After the Afghan Taliban victory in Afghanistan in August 2021, there was a resurgence of a terrorist campaign which was ferocious. The TTP carried out 32 attacks in August 2021 and another 37 in September 2021. This increase in number demonstrated the highest number of monthly attacks in the preceding five years (Jadoon and Sayed, [2021](#)). The number of suicide attacks witnessed an exponential increase, and the security forces were mainly targeted in these attacks which also resonated with the insurgency mode back in the region.

Brian Glyn Williams, Islamic History Professor at the University of Massachusetts, hinted at the revival of the insurgency by the TTP while stating that the spectacular success of the Afghan Taliban against the most powerful state in the world has sparked hope and courage among the Pakistani Taliban to replicate success against the Pakistani state that motivate them to launch a ferocious insurgency (The Times of India, [2021](#)). Although the Afghan Taliban provided much relief to the organization by freeing the group's militants and giving them a moral boost, however, this does not provide sufficient conditions for the revival of the group in Pakistan followed by an accelerated terrorist campaign. The weak governance structure in the FATA and the resultant poor socioeconomic conditions provided the necessary space for the organization to reestablish itself and foment terrorism. Thus, abject socioeconomic conditions and political marginalization in the region provide a better explanatory power to take into account the revival of TTP-originated terrorism.

Persistent Governance Challenges in the ex-FATA Region and the Revival of TTP's Terrorism

Poor governance in the ex-FATA region poses a persistent challenge, the ending of the semiautonomous status of the region by merging it with the neighboring KPK has not made any serious progress towards improving the socio-economic conditions of the people. The process of integration involving establishing state institutions in the newly formed districts worked at a snail's pace. The FATA had long endured serious issues of political marginalization and socio-economic development (Zahra, [2014](#)).

Since independence in 1947, the Pakistani state has administered the FATA region through a system of indirect administration inherited from the British colonial government. The British colonial masters appointed a political agent (civil bureaucrat) in each of the seven agencies of the FATA who worked closely with the local leadership called Maliks

to administer the region. The political agent enjoyed huge powers and acted mostly in an authoritarian style. The local leadership was chosen by the political agent, and they were coopted by the government by giving them economic benefits and sharing power to control the people. The Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was introduced as the legal framework, which was despotic in nature, thus devoid of any people's political participation and deprived them of enjoying any fundamental rights (Wazir and Khan, [2014](#)). Some scholars have argued that political and socio-economic grievances strongly motivated the FATA people to become part of the terrorist organization (Zeb & Ahmed, [2019](#)).

Many people in the policy-making circles believed that the existing governance structure in the region and the resultant weak presence of the state led to the impoverishment of the region which created strong local grievances. They attributed these grievances to the problem of insurgency and terrorism in the region as the militants tapped these local grievances to increase the membership of the terrorist organization (International Crisis Group, [2018](#), 10). According to this prevailing thinking, reforming the governing style of the region could offer a solution to end the problem of terrorism and insurgency in the region. Therefore, there were callings for the integration of the FATA into the mainstream Pakistani state that envisioned the political participation of the people and as a first step towards the socioeconomic improvement of the people, thus preventing people from becoming easy prey to the terrorists' organizations (International Crisis Group, [2009](#)).

To transform these ideas into practical form, the then-political government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif devised a committee in August 2016 to suggest reforms in the existing legal and political framework. The reforms committee suggested the integration of the FATA region into the neighbouring province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by revoking the Frontier Crimes Regulations. These recommendations were well taken by the

government followed by the amendment made by the country's parliament in the constitution on May 28, 2018, that ended the semiautonomous status of the region by merging the former FATA into the neighbouring province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Dawn, 2018; The News, 2018). In an editorial, a prominent daily newspaper commended the step taken by the Pakistani government while stating that FATA has undergone a historical transformation through the annulment of colonial styled legal and governance structure, thus providing political and legal rights to the FATA people as these rights are enjoyed by people of Pakistan (Dawn, 2018).

In pursuance of the reform bill passed by the Pakistani parliament, the government took practical steps to formally integrate the FATA region into the political and legal structure of the country. The process for extending the formal judicial system to the former semi-autonomous areas, now called (the Newly Merged Districts, or NMDs), started in March 2019. The process of integration faced massive challenges due to a lack of political will and due to lack of financial resources. The government introduced the FATA Interim Governance Regulations (2018) to serve as a legal framework during the transition period. The people opposed and protested the interim regulations as the government retained the previous authoritarian powers and practices to govern the people, thus extending the previous era's despotic practices in a new guise. The Peshawar High Court intervened and gave a verdict against the interim regulations by marking these regulations against the fundamental spirits of the constitution (Khan et. al, 2021, 6) The Supreme Court of Pakistan in a January 2019 ruling emphasized that the people of the newly formed districts must enjoy all the rights enshrined in the constitution. In addition, observing a slow speed in the implementation of the reforms, the Supreme Court ordered the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to take necessary steps to provide the necessary infrastructure and required financial

resources within a time limit of six months to establish a uniform court system in the newly integrated areas. However, the process of the implementation of the judicial reforms faced massive challenges, thus impeding progress.

The FATA region has faced massive socio-economic impoverishment which left the region highly underdeveloped if compared with the rest of the country. These weak socioeconomic indicators are mainly attributed to the weak or no government presence in the region due to the continuation of the old colonial-styled governance structure and the indifferent attitude of the successive governments in Pakistan since the country's establishment in 1947. The region's socioeconomic development met a severe blow when the region witnessed an insurgency in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks followed by the American invasion of Afghanistan. A fierce fight between the insurgents and the counterinsurgency forces devastated the whole region by causing massive human and financial losses to the people. The people were trapped badly in the fight between the militants and the government. The local peoples' houses were destroyed, and their livelihood was demolished which led to thousands of people leaving their ancestral homes for the safety of their lives. After the insurgents were forced to flee the region and seek refuge in Afghanistan, the government allowed the people to return to their homes but only to see their destroyed homes and properties leaving any chances to restore their lives. The government took some initiatives to help people to settle but these measures were highly insufficient in the face of the destruction brought by the almost two decades of war. In these war-ravaged areas, basic facilities in terms of in terms of public services such as health care, education, and employment opportunities are almost nonexistent. Poverty is rampant in the region as two-thirds of the FATA's overall population live below the poverty line (Ahmad, 2016). A report from the United Nations affirmed that FATA witnesses abject socioeconomic and development indicators compared to

Pakistan's eighteen regions in terms of human development indicators (Khan et.al, [2021](#)).

The military forces were allowed to stay even after the mainstreaming of the region because of the fear of the return of the insurgency. However, the local people resented the stationing of the military forces as they felt restricted in their free movements and probably because they were not used to the security forces because of the long-held semiautonomous of the region. In addition, human rights violations by the security forces were also reported which further frustrated the local people (Farmer, [2019](#)). The local communities have expressed their disdain at the treatment they got from the security forces, for example, they complained about the forces' mistreatment including unnecessary inspections and rudeness of soldiers appointed at the checkpoints which have flooded the region as these checkpoints are established every few kilometres. They have also complained that the soldiers who manned these check posts hailed from other parts of the country and they are not familiar with the Pashtun local customs and traditions. Due to the lack of knowledge of local culture, the soldiers' frequent inspection and stopping at every checkpoint only aggravated the existing grievances of the local people. Frequent body inspections of the local people by the soldiers are perceived as undermining local culture which augments the pre-existing grievances (Malik, [2019](#)).

The local people hailing particularly from South and North Waziristan districts held strong grievances because these two places have faced the most destruction during the fighting between rebels and the government forces. The residents of these two districts have complained that their houses and businesses have been destroyed and the government has done very little to help us to rebuild our homes and start a basic life (Sayeed and Shah, [2017](#), 18). Therefore, contrary to the expectations of most of the people, the FATA merger into the neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has not made any real progress towards alleviating their socio-economic status or

improving their lives. The slow pace of development primarily due to lack of political will in implementing legal and administrative reforms has only served to aggravate the preexisting grievances of the local people.

The existing grievances have led to the rise of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), a civil movement of ethnic Pashtuns, which has demonstrated local communities' frustration over the government's indifferent attitude towards the people. The PTM is declared to be nonviolent in nature while protesting for the Pashtuns' constitutional rights in a peaceful manner without using any violence. Many of the frustrated youth of the FATA registered their support for the PTM, which many of them see as the only hope that could provide them with their basic rights. The PTM's demands are grounded in the rights enshrined in the constitution including the rights of the Pashtun population to put an end to the extrajudicial killings and removal of land mines in FATA, in a non-violent campaign (Ahmed, [2018](#)). The Pakistani government's responses to the rise of PTM were mainly seen in suspicion because of their alleged links with foreign agencies mainly from Afghanistan and India. Sometimes they are dubbed as traitors playing into the hands of the foreign powers who are bent on harming the country's interests.

TTP could potentially attempt to tap into the grievances of the local community by legitimizing their demands and the way they have chosen against the state and also, they could induce more people into their organization. The TTP has campaigned vigorously to highlight the grievances of the locals to win the sympathies of the local communities which in turn help the organization to attract more people in its struggle against the Pakistani state. In a propaganda video in 2019, the TTP media wing recorded interviews with residents of FATA districts who blamed the Pakistan military for their suffering and complained about the violation of human rights (Jadoon, [2021](#), 13).

Conclusion

An empirical analysis of the TTP's persistence

as a terrorist organization and the recent escalation of the group's terrorist attacks in the ex-FATA region and other parts of Pakistan demonstrates its resilience which is mainly attributed to the enduring governance-related challenges that have aggravated the people's pre-existing feelings of socioeconomic deprivation and political marginalization. The Pakistani government's efforts to initiate reforms including the merger of the ex-FATA region into the neighbouring districts earned much appreciation from every quarter and is considered as an effective antidote to the persistent problem of terrorism and militancy in the region. However, the government's purported unwillingness or inability to expedite the process of integration and implementing reforms and the resultant

persistence of the socioeconomic problems created frustrations among the people. These prevailing conditions effectively provide an opportunity for TTP to reassert itself in the region and accelerate its terrorist campaign. Therefore, this research bears policy implications for countering terrorism in the ex-FATA region. The findings suggest taking effective steps to alleviate governance-related issues in political and economic spheres aiming at alleviating peoples' socioeconomic deprivations and feelings of political marginalization could constitute a significant step towards reducing or eliminating the problem of terrorism in the region.

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