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The Post Merger Socio-Economic Development in Darra Adam Khel: A Critical Analysis
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Abstract

Pakistan has inherited a pluralistic society with multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-ethnic society. The policy makers in the post-independence least bothered to introduce sincere doable governance reforms in the legal, political, economic, administrative, and constitutional sectors to overhaul the colonial inherited political system. Pakistan inherited colonial tribal areas consolidated under Frontier Crimes Regulations, 1901 with distinctive politico-administrative and legal and judicial system. This article highlights the development in Darra Adam Khel Tehsil of Khyber District in social and economic sectors on the basis of both secondary and primary sources of data.

Keywords: FATA, Jirga System, 25th Amendment, Dynastic politics, Darra Adam Khel.

Introduction

Democracy in Pakistan due to insincere leadership in post-independence period could not flourish; and dynastic political structure and pseudo-elections further hindered an effective democratic welfare state (Khan, Jaspal and Yasmeen, 2017:23). Moreover, Pakistan had had uneven geographical distribution with diverse legal, administrative, and judicial system (*Ibid*, 24). Under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, the country was territorially divided into Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Frontier Regions (FRs) semi-tribal areas, Provincial Administered tribal Areas (PATA), and settled areas (*Ibid*, 24). The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which directly fell under federal authority and remained so even more than 70 years after the independence of Pakistan, was one of the most remote and discrete of them. This special constitutional and legal position of FATA meant that it was not subject to the mainstream legal, administrative, and development structures that directed the rest of the country (Imtiaz, 2011). In addition, regarding bureaucratic approach towards reforms in former tribal areas Khan and others quote Senator Hilal ur Rehman as:

Civil bureaucracy showed reluctance since the inception of Pakistan to introduce reforms in former tribal areas and to replace Frontier Crimes Regulations with legal, judicial, political and administrative reforms because it could not afford to lose its dictatorial authority federal administered tribal areas. Political administration was the custodian of justice (Khan, Jaspal and Yasmeen, 2017:24-25).

Former FATA was in the northwestern border of Pakistan in a porous boundary with Afghanistan; and divided into seven tribal agencies Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and Bajaur Agency with territory of 1,290 km² and with a

population of 1,093,684. Among these agencies, Khyber Agency occupies a significant geo-political and geo-economic status by linking Peshawar with Torkham through the historic Khyber Pass, covering 2,576 km² and housing 986,973 people. In addition to these seven agencies, there were six Frontier Regions (FRs) including FR Peshawar, FR Kohat, FR Bannu, FR Lakki Marwat, FR Tank, and FR Dera Ismail Khan. The region also comprises several Frontier Regions (FRs). FR Peshawar lies adjacent to Peshawar District, spanning 261 square kilometers with a population of 64,761. Besides, FR Kohat, surrounded by Kohat District, covers an area of 446 square kilometers and has a population of 118,839 (Hopkins, 2015; & Khan, 2026).

Frontier Region Darra Adam Khel, formerly a part of FR Kohat, is an area of historical importance, between the two districts of Peshawar and Kohat in former FATA in Pakistan. It is situated in a mountainous terrain spanning about 446 square kilometers with arid hills and rough passes who lead to tribal hinterlands connecting the inhabited districts. In the Kohat Division listings, Dara Adam Khel Tehsil covers approximately 446 km². Darra Adam Khel has been a long-time passageway between the south and the north of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A variety of predominantly Adam Khel sub-tribe of Afridi Pashtuns, which is rich in tribal organization and historical independence, is represented by its demographic landscape. According to the 2017 Census, the estimated population was 118,578 (other estimates slightly lower) but the unofficial numbers might be lower as a result of displacement and migration of people during the course of the counterinsurgency operation (Khan, 2026; & Pakistan Bureau of Statistics). The region was administratively governed under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and also governed by the Political Agent and the overall administrative control over the region was vested in the Deputy Commissioner of Kohat. The traditional industry in Darra Adam Khel is most known as the indigenous arms manufacturing base in Pakistan, which goes through the informal tribal systems (malik, 2016; & Khan, 2026).

Khyber agency was comprised of various tehsils which is Bara, Jamrud, Landi Kotal, Mula Ghori with an area of 2576 square km having population 986973. Later on, the former Khyber Agency has been reorganized under the 25th Constitutional Amendment as Khyber District with Bara Tehsil being one of its main administrative units. Geographically, Bara lies in the Southern area of Khyber District bordering Peshawar, Mohmand District and Orakzai. It has an approximate size of 903 square kilometers of hilly topography with richly green valleys. Demographic makeup the demographic mix is mainly Afridi tribes, with predominance given to Kamar Khel, Malikdin Khel, Akakhel and Sipah sub-tribes with high rates of tribal affiliation and customs of tribal jirga. Having a larger population of over 444,000 (2017 Census), Bara has conventionally been the most central place in the trade and communication because of being near the provincial capital, Peshawar (Khan, 2026).

These regions used to operate under the Frontier Crimes Regulation, 1901 (FCR 1901) which was a colonial law that denied the people the fundamental civil rights to appeal, legal representation, and due process. Tribal jirgas and political agents were the controlling agents in these regions; and political agent was exercising unbridled powers. The indifferent approach of various regions and lack of political will hindered socio-economic development and caused backwardness in FATA (Ali, 2011).

Under 25th Constitutional Amendment in 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, FATA was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main purpose of the merger was to abolish the FCR, to extend constitutional rights to inhabitants of FATA, and to mainstream the region by application of modern governance and introducing a judicial system, as well as development planning. The establishment of the merger was also aimed at giving people of FATA a provincial voice, making them a part of the democratic system, and raising the standards of living by enhancing

infrastructure and service provision. Nonetheless, after these promises, post-merger has been characterized by implementation lapses and administrative confusion as well as slow uptake in development goals. The proposed research work will aim at examining the socio-economic growth in Dara Adam Khel and Bara within the post-merger environment. This research work will seek to assess milestones in the key outstanding areas of education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, and governance while applying qualitative approach case study methodology (Khan and Gill, 2024; Khan, 2026). The new tribal districts (Table-1) have been merged into Five Divisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Khan et al, 2025:176).

Table-1 NMDs in various Divisions

S. No	Division	NMDs
1	Bannu	North Waziristan
2	Dera Ismail Khan	South Waziristan
3	Kohat	Kurram
		Orakzai
4	Peshawar	Mohmand
		Khyber
5	Malakand	Bajaur

After the passage of 25th Constitutional Amendment and merger of former tribal areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, seven former Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (Table-2) have been given status of districts and divided into twenty Tehsils for administrative purpose (Khan et al, 2025:176).

Table-2

S. No	NMD	Tehsil
1	North Waziristan	Mirali
		Miranshah
		Razmak
2	South Waziristan	Ladha
		Serwekai
		Wana
3	Kurram	Central Kurram
		Lower Kurram
		Upper Kurram
4	Orakzai	Lower Orakzai
		Upper Orakzai
5	Mohmand	Central Mohmand
		Lower Mohmand
		Upper Mohmand
6	Khyber	Bara
		Jamrud
		Landi Kotal
		Mola Gori
7	Bajaur	Khar
		Nawagai

Source: Khan et al, 2025:176

Literature Review

Some most relevant literature is cited here so as to generate a research gap. These are following. Farhan Yousaf (2019) in his work pointed out the issues in the social-economic development the nations which remained as colonies of the empires. Pakistan's tribal areas were also the instant in this regard. These areas had malgovernance and politically, legally, judicially and economically were disconnected from the rest of Pakistan (Yousaf, 2019). Likewise, Naeemullah A. Shinwari pointed out the distinctive colonial inherited legal and judicial system in former tribal areas (Shinwari, 2022). Moreover, Amina Qadeer and Shabir Khan studied that the less job opportunities paved the way to youth to join terrorist organizations that posed a serious threat to Pakistan's national security (Qadeer and Khan, 2023). Similarly, Abdul Sattar (Sattar, 2023), Imtiaz Ali (Ali, 2018), Manzar Zaidi (Ziadi, 2025), and Waqas Paracha (Paracha, 2024) also discussed the same issues in their work. Khan (2014), Khan (2022), Khan (2014), Khan (2013), Khan (2012), Khan (2011) and Khan (2010) emphasised on local government institutions and women empowerment to flourish a true democratic culture in the Pakistan.

Methodology

To explore the area of socio-economic development in the selected case study (Dara Adam Khel), qualitative method has been used. Both primary (interviews and observations) and secondary data (books, research article, thesis and reports) have been employed. Moreover, thematic analysis approach is used in this work; while a purposive-stratified sampling method is also followed in this research work (Khan, 2026).

Issues

In the light of primary data gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews from local citizens, community leaders, teachers, young representatives, and local leaders, the following issues have been framed (Khan, 2026).

A. Issues in Education sector:

In the post-merger, the government has not bothered to introduce ample reforms in the former tribal areas especially Darra Adam Khel; and several major issues in education sector have been observed in merged districts especially Darra Adam Khel.

1. The paucity and late release of fund is one the issues;
2. In addition, less trained teachers also an issue because they have less capability to contribute in students' grooming;
3. Moreover, the shortage of staff overburdened the teaching faculty;

B. Issues in Health Sector

There are 18 total health facilities in Tehsil Dara Adam Khel which includes 1 Civil Hospital (CH), 1 Rural Health Center (RHC), 8 Basic Health Units (BHU), 2 Community Health Centers (CHC), 6 civil dispensers (CD). These are the total facilities in the region and all of them are functional, the civil hospital of Zarghun Khel remains functional 24/7, in which till 2 pm the OPD works and the remaining is for emergency purpose while the other facilities work at their time like 2 pm. However, the following health issues have been observed during study.

1. In the post-merger, new health facility has not been established in Dara Adam Khel.
2. There is also shortage of both medical and paramedical staff in various health facilities units.
3. In addition, basic facilities like medicines, plaster, bandage, etc are rarely available in these units.

C. Economic issues

Besides social sector issues, there are also some economic problems of the people of Darra Adam Khel. The common sources of livelihood of the local area were arms and ammunition business and drugs especially Hashish. The arms factories of Darra Adam Khel were famous across the country. Later on, the discovery of coal mines in Darra Adam Khel also contributed in financial benefits of the local people. However, the people are faced with major economic problems.

First, the merger of this area has declared the arms industry sector as unlawful as settled-areas laws have been extended and applied on it. This drastically affected the source of income of the local people. Second, coal has become a bone of contention between various tribes in the area and several conflicts have been taken place. Third, there are no such industrial zone or job opportunities to people.

Recommendations

Likewise, in the light of primary data gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews from local citizens, community leaders, teachers, young representatives, and local leaders, the following issues have been framed (Khan, 2026).

Education reforms

To overcome education issues, timely funds need to be released to education sector so as to meet their basic requirements. In addition, the syllabus also needs to be updated according to modern digital world. The government needs to focus on reconstruction of infrastructure demolished during wave of militancy.

Health reforms

The policy makers need to take some steps to introduce reforms in health sector. First, among the existing health units, another unit needs to be upgraded to civil hospital to bring further improvement in health sector. Second, the staff shortage needs to be fulfilled. Third, full time emergency and availability of doctor needs to be observed. Fourth, surgery facility needs to be provided in the hospital.

Economic reforms

Some major economic reforms need to be introduced by the provincial government in the area. First, the people of Darra Adam Khel should be awarded license to do legal business in arms and ammunition. Second, the royalty on coal needs to be amicably resolved among various tribes through their consultation. Third, local industry zone needs to be established so as to create employment opportunities for the local people.

Conclusion

The merger of the tribal areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has helped to bring the local people of former FATA and PATA in the mainstream national politics. It will help them to have access to easy justice system by getting rid of old colonial controlled justice system under FCR. However, this merger was a hasty adventure which created several social and economic issues for the local people. The aforementioned socio-economic problems of the people of tribal areas especially Darra Adam Khel need to be addressed on priority basis.

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