

**Combating Militancy in Bajaur and North- Waziristan  
Agency in Federally Administered Tribal  
Areas (FATA) of Pakistan- A Comparative Analysis**

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**Abstract**

The Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan lies on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. The area is divided into seven agencies, Bajaur, Mohmand, Kurram, Orakzai, Khyber, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. The geographical dimensions of each agency depends by and large where tribal settlements end, as each agency has clans comprising of majority tribe (Javaid, 2011). Historically speaking, FATA has been a stable region, relatively isolated and with little inter-agency or cross border conflict. However, in the last decade, due to a compounding number of factors that will be expanded upon in the course of this paper the region has seen a stark rise in militancy and violence (Fair, 2009). In the light of qualitative and quantitative opinion polls carried out in the last few months, this paper will highlight the causes of the rise of militancy. It will further implicate solutions for the militancy issue in the region by exploring the historical, political, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to and perpetuate the problem in two agencies in FATA, namely Bajaur and North Waziristan. By analyzing these two agencies separately this paper anticipates to highlight that although grouped together for the sake of easy governance, different approaches must be taken in different agencies to facilitate development in the region as each agency is at a different stage from the other with regards their political, economic, and

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societal set up. This paper will further suggest solutions to the militancy issue in both Bajaur and North Waziristan, hoping that a separate and a comparative analysis can showcase the need for distinct courses of action in each agency in FATA.

### **Introduction**

In geographical terms, Bajaur is the smallest agency in FATA. Its 850,000 strong population is largely feudally organized, and the society is in a hierarchy-enforced order. The political set up in the region, dictated by the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) Act 1901 of Pakistan, is more effective in Bajaur as compared to other regions. It is largely due to the feudal system, and the government having the support of feudal lords who can exercise control over the society at large, as society deems their authority legitimate. The *Tarkani* tribes, having the greatest numbers in the region, are the majority stakeholders in Bajaur. The tribe is broken down into several clans, each practicing control in different regions of Bajaur. Militants in the region belong to different groups, including the Tehreek-I-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Dr. Ismail Group, and the Moulana Abdullah Group (FRC Third Quarter Security Report 2012).

Bordering Afghanistan in the west, South Waziristan in the south, and Kurram Agency in the north, the North Waziristan Agency (NWA) is 4,750 square kilometers of dry mountainous terrain. Although, having roughly the same population, the societal set-up in NWA is different from that in Bajaur as it is still tribal in its make up. Society is not organized according to hierarchy, and is more egalitarian in nature. This system is beneficial to the traditional folk who live there during times of peace; however, at this unstable time the egalitarian nature of society has led to an anarchic political structure, with little legitimate authority resting with anyone. The agency is split between two major tribes, the *Utmanzai Wazirs* and the *Dawar* tribe. Due to the rough terrain and the anarchic structure of society, there is heavy militant presence in NWA, including militants from the Haqqani Network,

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the Al Qaeda, the TTP, the Islamic Jihad Group, the Punjabi Taliban, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Javaid, 2011).

There are several theories and factors behind the emergence of militant groups in FATA. However, a majority of locals ascribe the emergence of militancy in the region to the US and Saudi support provided to Mujahideen who fought the Soviet presence in Afghanistan in the 1970s (Ghufran, 2009).

Militant groups were initially limited in terms of their support but they grew in influence because of their ability to exploit local religiosity and events in Islamic history, the Quran and the Hadith. These justifications facilitated the creation of analogies that legitimised the existence and tactics of such groups.

At the same time, militant groups capitalised on the wide public perception of injustice and corruption at the hands of the Pakistani government, both at the national and local levels. Militants understood local dissatisfaction and promised, for example, to replace the existing inefficient judicial system with Islamic law (Ghufran, 2009). When militant groups could not co-opt public support, they attacked the existing societal structure. For example, before the advent of militancy in FATA, *Maliks* were considered highly influential individuals and a critical component of the local power structure. Militant groups were responsible for killing or exiling many *Maliks* and other figures of authority. The interventions of Western forces in Afghanistan provided yet further opportunity for militant groups that played on local fears and claimed that US forces had invaded Afghanistan and were soon to try and take over Pakistan. Several groups reportedly enjoyed some level of support from the Pakistani government, which saw these groups as proxies through which Pakistan could pursue its regional strategic interests (White, 2008).

Militancy arrived comparatively late in Bajaur Agency in the form of *Tanzeem Nifaz-e- Shariat* (TNSM) established in 1989 by Sufi Muhammad, a former member of Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) and a veteran of the Afghan *jihad* (Javaid 2011).

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Support for TNSM accelerated in 2001 when TNSM recruit and member of the *Tarkani* tribe, Maulvi Faqir Muhammed, succeeded in generating mass condemnation of US intervention in Afghanistan. On October 30, 2006 a US drone struck a madrasa run by Maulvi Liaqat in Imam Khwaro Chinagai village in tehsil Mohmand in which eighty students along with their teachers were killed. TNSM grew in confidence and began to protest across the Agency. Islamic social ideologies (including the concept of a Sharia legal system) began to spread even to surrounding areas, penetrating deep into Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa's Swat District in 2007 (Javaid, 2011).

In the same year, following the Pakistan Army's siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad, Maulvi Faqir Muhammed (and the TNSM), in alliance with Maulvi Omar announced the creation of the Bajaur TTP branch. The TTP grew in strength across the Agency particularly within the *Tarkani* tribe. Since then, militants in Bajaur have been linked to a series of high profile attacks, including the 2005 train bombings in London and the 2007 attacks in Barcelona.

In response to growing national and international pressure, the Pakistan Army, led by the Frontier Corps (FC) Inspector General, initiated a military operation in Bajaur Agency in August 2008 to overthrow TTP and Al Qaida members living in the area. The campaign was brutal but despite considerable failures and setbacks, achieved some notable victories. For example, in March 2010, the Frontier Corps succeeded in seizing control of the TTP stronghold in Damadola.

Bajaur Agency was always a likely target for militant operations because of its geographical location. The Nawa Pass, for example, links Bajaur Agency to Kunar Province in Afghanistan and has regularly been used by militant groups (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba) to shuttle men and materiel between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The relative isolation of the Agency

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also made it attractive for militant groups looking to establish bases out of government reach.

Bajaur Agency is also known for a local population that is religiously conservative, often to a higher degree than those found elsewhere in FATA. This is visible, as elsewhere, in the growth of the takfiri ideology where the individual's interpretation of Islam is correct and that others who disagree are incorrect and should be punished. This ideology has influenced the doctrine of key militant groups such as the TTP and Al Qaida in Pakistan.

Militancy, both in the form of Pakistani Taliban and foreign militant groups, spread more quickly across NWA than many other areas. In the case of foreign militant groups, such as Afghan Taliban groups, Al Qaida and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan meant that it became necessary for them to seek refuge elsewhere. The relative ease of cross-border movement made South Waziristan and later NWA ideal locations from where to co-ordinate attacks both within Pakistan and Afghanistan (Javaid, 2011).

The Al Haqqani Network (AHN) was a special case; Jalaluddin Haqqani first moved to the town of Miranshah in 1978. This organization has had deeper roots in NWA than others. In 2001 the AHN committed more fully to NWA and settled there permanently. The AHN, like many other militant groups, sought to gain local traction by spreading their influence through madrassa schools and small bases for military training. Unsurprisingly, these AHN strongholds in areas such as Danda Darpa Khel, Saraj Darpa Khel, Tappi, Tolakhel and Khata Kali have been targeted by US strikes for several years.

Likewise, Al Qaida was forced to leave Afghanistan in the light of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001 and that is the time when it entered Waziristan. Under pressure from the international community, the Pakistani Army responded in October 2003 with aggressive action against local *Ahmedzai Wazir*

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tribesmen in the neighboring South Waziristan for refusing to hand over Al Qaida and Taliban members in their jurisdiction. Locals of NWA claim that the brutal methods used to extrapolate militants in these early years only served to disenfranchise the local population. However, they did cause Al Qaida some discomfort and the organization moved (albeit with relative ease) from South Waziristan to North Waziristan. Mir Ali and Miranshah are now reputed to host Al Qaida's external operations and military councils (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012).

By September 2005, the Pakistani Army realized that military operations should be more focused on NWA given the movement of militant groups into this area. A year later the Taliban groups, led by Hafiz Gul Bahadar and Maulana Sadiq Noor, signed the Miranshah Agreement with the Pakistani Government. The agreement stipulated that neither the Taliban nor the government would attack each other's personnel or property in the area, and that Taliban groups would not conduct cross-border attacks in Afghanistan. In return, the government no longer demanded that foreign militants get registered with the authorities but instead granted them permission to remain in the Agency provided that they respected the law of the land (Javaid, 2011).

Unfortunately, the Agreement did not hold and Taliban groups continued to conduct cross-border attacks in Afghanistan while at the same time establishing a parallel administrative system. The spread of Taliban groups met with little initial resistance from the public (Dawn News, January 7, 2005). The Taliban appeared to come with good intentions and co-opted support through strong Islamic argumentation. They were swift and brutal in quelling the spread of any local resistance against the spread of their influence. The Taliban have killed an estimated 1500 tribal elders in FATA so far (FRC, 2012).

The consolidation of Taliban control encouraged other militant groups to seek a foothold in the area. One example was the emergence of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which developed a presence through links with the AHN. The relationship was one of

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convenience - whereas the AHN focused on Afghanistan, militants with links to the LeJ have been responsible for attacks on domestic soil. For example, in April 2009, the Pakistan Karachi police arrested a group of LeJ fighters. The fighters admitted that they were involved in recruiting violent extremists in Karachi who were then trained in Miranshah and the surrounding areas. Another example of militant groups moving to NWA was the TTP. Faced with a renewed wave of Pakistan's Military operations across South Waziristan (called the Rah-e-Nijat operation), the TTP decided to establish a base in NWA from where they could launch attacks in SWA.

Over the past two to three years, the central government has marked a number of political successes in FATA. Perhaps the greatest of all was that the PPP government succeeded in passing the Political Parties Act in FATA in August 2011 (FRC, 2012). Previously, this had been rejected on the grounds that FATA was volatile, was the focus of ongoing military operations and was of strategic military interest. The absence of the act meant that political activity was prohibited in FATA. Now, candidates from FATA can legitimately contest elections as members of mainstream political parties. Most recently the Election Commission of Pakistan observed a 15 percent increase in the number of registered voters in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (The Express Tribune, October 18, 2012). Other political success in the region includes the National Finance Commission Award and the public approval given to the government's decision to stop NATO supplies transiting through Pakistan after the NATO attack on Pakistan's Salala Check post.

Despite these successes, there is an overall dissatisfaction with the government in FATA, particularly in NWA. Quantitative data shows that not only did respondents feel that the government was not doing enough to tackle militancy, but that the depth of feeling depended on the location in question. For example, 38 percent of respondents from Bajaur compared to 83 per cent of respondents from NWA 'somewhat' or 'strongly' disagreed that over the past year enough was done to counter the problem of militancy in their

area. Part of the reason for the strong feeling in NWA is that the community feels let down by the local government to a far higher degree than locals researched in the other Agencies. A large portion of the criticism was directed at *Maliks* for collaborating with the central government to serve each other's personal interests rather than to support the local community (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012).

As with opposition to the central government, disillusionment with local authorities has been for a long time. Even before the advent of militancy, in NWA there was a common belief that *Maliks* and Political Agents were conspiring, in some cases with local Mullahs, against NGOs. This perceived lack of honesty has undermined the ability of many local leaders to build credibility.

This lack of trust in the government often results in the delegitimization of power in a society that has no other means of reinforcement of power in place. The lack of a legitimate government creates a power vacuum that militant groups can take advantage of (Acharya et al, 2009). Offering security and some sense of stability to begin with, militant groups take hold of tribal society and can assert their power through brute force. It can be argued that militancy has flourished in the region, and in particular in NWA due to the lack of stable political institutions.

Economic decline in the region has badly affected employment opportunities in the region. This has led to a reported increase in the number of suicides and general depression, especially given the pressures of local culture on men to achieve dignity through earning their own livelihood. For many, the failure to access legitimate opportunities has obliged them to seek alternative sources of income and dignity. For some this has included membership to militant groups.

Locals expressed deep bitterness that development funds provided to the FATA Secretariat by both the central and local government are not being spent on FATA. For example, respondents complained that there is a lack of recreational



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activities and that the government has a duty to build sports complexes, libraries, computer labs etc. It was explained to the researchers that the lack of such development initiatives obliges the unemployed to seek entertainment through alternative means, including militancy (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012).

Those interviewed further claimed that despite the failure to invest in the area, there are plenty of resources in FATA that could be exploited to provide locals with jobs. Respondents highlighted the construction of roads, colleges and a number of large-scale projects. Likewise, areas such as Waziristan are reportedly rich in natural resources such as minerals and precious metals. Respondents described the status of marble mines in Bajaur Agency as well as a government-established edible oil mill. Both closed with the arrival of the Taliban as people were too afraid to go to work and the Taliban also imposed taxes (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012). The Pakistan Army now occupies the edible oil mill and the marble industry is reviving but security conditions prevent significant further development. It was also pointed out that the marble industry supports a large number of jobs, from mining to truck loading, transporting factories, and those who work on the marble in factories.

In the villages of Bajaur, farming remains the main economic activity. However, the security situation means that farmers are often forced by the Pakistan Army to leave 150 meters on either side of the road - in the most dangerous places this distance increases to 300 meters – for fear of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and ambushes.

North Waziristan suffers from a severe shortage of industry, yet the area is reportedly rich in resources. For example, there are an estimated 36 million tons of copper deposits within a 15 km squared area in Boya Shinkai (valued at many millions of dollars). NWA also borders Afghanistan and as such has strong potential to improve trade links. Developing such links would help build up the trade value of Miranshah. NWA also has significant

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agricultural potential. There is plenty of fertile land, especially in the lower areas of Shiratalah.

One of the most interesting findings was the difference in respondent opinions over the motivations driving new recruits towards militancy. Respondents from NWA held very different opinions to those from Bajaur. In NWA, money and status were not nearly as important as they were in Bajaur. For example only 39 percent of respondents from NWA agreed that this is ‘a little true’, ‘quite true’ or ‘very true’ that recruits into militant groups join for money (47 percent felt the same about status). By contrast, 93 percent of respondents from Bajaur agreed that this is true that recruits into militant groups join for money (91 percent felt the same about status) (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012). The findings imply that counter-militancy communication campaigns need to focus on very different themes depending on the area in which they are disseminated

The *Pashtun* culture remains unique for the importance it places on values such as bravery, hospitality (*melmastia*), traditional dance (*attan*), love and dignity – a code of behavior referred to as the *Pashtunwali*. Many respondents maintained that this code has always pervaded every aspect of life. For example, traditional dance was always a source of entertainment at weddings and during the festival of Eid. Likewise, the *Pashtun* duty to provide those in need with shelter (*nanwatay*) has traditionally been extended even to criminal and militant fugitives. A key vehicle for application of the *Pashtunwali* code at the communal level is the *Jirga*, where amongst other issues locals discuss and agree compensation for wrongdoing. There are several types of *jirgas* of which two are the most important - independent *jirgas* and those arranged by the Political Agent. Respondents claimed that those arranged by the Political Agent are more administrative and that an independent *jirga* is the true communal discussion forum. Although the *jirga* system remains extremely strong, there are signs that it has weakened over the past few years. This is partly because militant groups have sought to control the tribal decision making system and have attacked and

threatened *jirgas* in the past. It is also because the spread of the media and the increase in access to transportation have led to the fuller integration of parts of FATA into the rest of Pakistan.

Although many aspects of the Pashtunwali code are conducive to the existence of militancy, the same aspects could be harnessed to challenge the legitimacy of militancy (Ghufran, 2009). One example is the concept of honor. Another example is the concept of avenging the death of loved ones. Several respondents explained that those people who lose loved ones during military operations or in drone attacks join militant groups to take revenge. In this instance, when it is not possible to take revenge on Pakistani Armed forces or on foreign troops, vengeance can take the form of joining a militant group and targeting anyone else connected to public and government institutions, from journalists to social workers and tribal elders. However, the same need for vengeance can motivate opposition to militant groups when these are the ones responsible for the deaths of loved ones. Respondents in North Waziristan highlighted this trend most, claiming that militant killings of supposed spies is so exaggerated in number that the community is turning against groups such as the Taliban, even if the former currently lack the ability to oppose Taliban in practice.

In the struggle between militancy and *Pashtun* culture, militancy has won several battles but there are promising signs that it has failed to win the war. The community has gained awareness of militant hypocrisy, particularly when it involves attacking and kidnapping locals. As a result, support for militancy is more unpopular now than it has been for several years (Fair 2009). In Bajaur, some respondents went as far as to claim that life is slowly returning to normal. For example, in Khar, the administrative capital of Bajaur, it was reported that larger numbers of people wait at bus stops and visit markets.

Even in North Waziristan, the public is sensitized to the negative effects of a militant presence. This has obliged militant groups to conform to local norms and work within the existing

cultural system. For example, the Taliban has reportedly not destroyed a single school in North Waziristan, cognizant of how much this would erode support.

Several respondents believe that one of the main drivers towards militancy is suffering injustice at the hands of the FCR, the political administration or local figures such as the Political Agent. The research uncovered many past stories from locals who, after challenging the administration or committing a small crime, were arrested and jailed for years without access to their families. Others were victims of corruption on behalf of local authorities' for example; they lost development contracts to those with better connections to political decision makers. This imbalance has left some areas more developed than others and victims of such injustices can feel neglected, disrespected and driven to seek justice through alternative means – such as militancy (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012).

Quantitative data highlighted the ongoing dissatisfaction with the legal system and level of corruption. For example, 80 percent of respondents 'somewhat' or 'strongly' disagreed that over the past year the legal system has been fair and 98 percent of respondents 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' have seen corruption in their local area over the last year. The fear is that with such pronounced experience of unfair treatment at the hands of the government system, locals may turn to militancy as a means to address grievances. From Bajaur 15 per cent of respondents felt that the legal system had been fair over the past year, this figure rose in NWA to 28 percent (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012). At first glance, this figure seems strange when also taking into account that higher levels of corruption were reported in NWA than Bajaur. For example, 94 percent of respondents from NWA claimed to have known people over the past year who needed to bribe officials, whereas that number dropped to 79 percent in Bajaur. However, researchers explained how these findings were consistent. The legal system in NWA is the tribal *jirga* system, not the system imposed by central government; respondents in Bajaur are referring to the small courts run by

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feudal lords. It is not surprising that the tribal system is better – it is ultimately far more equitable. As for bribery, sadly, that is a way of life in areas like NWA.

There are certain key judgments we can draw from the aforementioned discussion on militancy, its causes and its context in Bajaur and NWA. There is a fundamental disconnect between what the West and the local community define as militancy. Locals reject attacks on domestic soil and denounce such actions as un-Islamic and threatening to Pakistan's sovereignty. However, militant groups that refrain from such attacks are seen in a much more sympathetic light, particularly given that they tend to oppose Western forces and perceived Indian interests in Afghanistan.

With this in mind, it is important to note that the situation in Bajaur Agency has improved the most – a possible contributing factor to the recent TTP decision to fire the Deputy Commander and Bajaur representative Maulvi Faqir Mohammad. A major factor contributing to the improvement in Bajaur is higher visibility of the damage caused by militant groups. However, just as important is the feudal and more developed nature of society that has made it relatively easier to accelerate unity in support against militants. Although Bajaur has improved greatly, areas close to the border with Afghanistan (such as Charmang) present the greatest challenge in the Agency.

The situation in North Waziristan has improved the least out of all the agencies in FATA. The vast majority of negative indicators of militancy are more pronounced here than elsewhere, with particularly alarming levels of support for groups such as Al Qaida. Part of the problem is that the area has been left relatively untouched by the government and armed forces (to the degree that locals perceive strong links between Gul Bahadur's Taliban and the Pakistani Government). Militant groups have had ample opportunity to consolidate their control and even co-opt public support.

There was a clear difference in the perceived driving factors that encourage youth towards militancy. In NWA, respondents felt much more strongly that recruits join militant groups because they perceive that Islam is under threat and that they have a religious duty to tackle Western interests. By contrast, these driving factors were far less important in Bajaur where instead, the emphasis is on the opportunity to gain money and status (FRC, Extremism and Radicalization 2012).

### **Recommendations**

In the spirit of these judgements, certain recommendations can also be drawn to further improve the current situation of militancy in FATA. Encouraging the growth of local business will be effective in tackling militancy. It will resonate most immediately in Bajaur where clear opportunities exist and where factors leading to militancy are based less on ideology and more on opportunism. Examples include reviving marble mining, sunflower oil production and leather tanneries in Bajaur and promoting and introducing irrigation facilities in parts of North Waziristan.

It is important to recognize that in different agencies, there are different factors that entice locals to partake in militant activities, and as such there is no uniform cure to rid the region of the problem. In Bajaur, potential recruits can be won over by better social development including better justice, more opportunities, improved education etc. In North Waziristan, the growing militant recruiting effort should be tackled through better religious debate on issues like the interpretation of *Jihad* or on sustainable resolution of sectarian issues.

There has been a reduction in militancy, particularly in Bajaur Agency, due to a better understanding of the dangers of a militant madrassa education and due to the feudal society found in areas such as Bajaur. It is essential to focus efforts on understanding how this reduction took place and under what conditions, so that it can be replicated into other regions.

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Combating militancy in NWA is trickier. A compounding number of factors, such as resistance to assistance and strong believe that the militant groups are aligned with the Pakistani government, it seems logical to let the armed forces forcefully restore order in the region before launching efforts at development.

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