

Violent Conflict in North Waziristan, Pakistan: The Distortion and Re-emergence of Social Structure

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This paper examines how and to what extent the violent conflict in the North Waziristan Tribal District of Pakistan distorted the traditional social structure, which embodies the informal social institutions of Jirga and Hujra. This violent conflict between 2004 and 2014 has appeared as one of the most urgent and crucial humanitarian and development concerns for Pakistan where the whole region was under the siege of Talibanization and government was completely absent until the launch of military operation Zarb-e-Azb in June 2014 against the Taliban. Several studies have been conducted so far on the causes and consequences of this violent conflict, but most of these studies focused on the political dimensions even though the significant volatility of the region in recent times should be investigated empirically. This study adopted qualitative methodological and interpretive approaches to collect primary data from the study area. The study finds that the informal institutions like Jirga (council of elders), and Hujra (common male guesthouse) were being the prime targets of both the Taliban and security forces during the violent conflict. Moreover, the jirgawas used as a source of fund-raising by the Taliban groups in North Waziristan. Resultantly, these institutions lost its centuries-old traditional structure and underwent significant transformations.¹

Keywords: conflict, North Waziristan Tribal District, FATA, social structure/Institutions, Jirga, Hujra

The recent violent conflict in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has severely affected the local traditional social structure (Kerr, 2010). Anthropologists term this Pashtun² social

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Contribution of Authors:

1. The principle author of the article as the article is extracted from his PhD thesis
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3. As faculty member and teacher of the principle author, he provided guidelines during the whole write up of the article.

² Pashtun also spelled Pakhtun, Pukhtoon, Pashteen (in the study area) and known as Pathan; the Pashto language speaking people residing primarily in the regions that lie between the Hindu-Kush in

structure a 'segmentary lineage system'. The relationships are based on shared culture and kinship (Tainter & MacGregor, 2011). The most important societal institutions of this social structure include *Jirga* and *Hujra* which are also the symbols of unity in traditional society in the region (Elahi, 2015; Rome, 2010). The present study mainly focuses on the perceptions of local inhabitants of North Waziristan Tribal District on the impact of violent conflict on these two informal social institutions that significantly shape the local social structure. Numerous research studies have been conducted so far in the region on the conflict and its socio-economic and political impacts. But, these studies lack in addressing the local perceptions on the scale of distortion of certain informal social institutions of the local social structure, because of the inaccessibility and worse security situation in the region.

Social structure is the complex framework of societal institutions (i.e. economic, political, and religious) and the social practices that make up a society and that organize and establishes limits on people's behavior (Kendall, 2012). On the other hand, Brown defines social structure as, "the set of actually existing relations, at a given moment of time, which link together certain human beings" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). Functional theorists emphasize that social structure creates predictability and order in society and thus it is an indispensable part of it (Parsons, 1951). Sometimes a conflict can distort the existing pillars of a social structure, for example in the cases of North Waziristan in particular and FATA in general, we have observed that the violent conflict deteriorated numerous traditional informal institutions.

Across FATA, the militants targeted local communities with the strategy to weaken the people and their social institutions and to create such an environment which is more suitable for promoting their ideology³(Kerr, 2010). Literature shows that various mechanisms for resolving conflicts are deeply associated with the prevailing culture of a particular society and the conflict resolution mechanisms are vital for maintaining social order in a society. In the case of FATA, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of *jirga* and individual position of power, for example, the social position of tribal elders and *maliks* (tribal chiefs) have been degraded and the authority shifted from *malik* to *mullah* (Kerr, 2010).

In the pre-conflict scenario, *jirga* used to be fully functional for restoration of peace by resolving both inter-tribe and intra-tribe conflicts and disputes (Wardak, 2003) because *jirga* is the fundamental social institution of the Pashtun social structure (Faqir & Atta, 2013; Kerr, 2010; Röder & Shinwari, 2015; J W Spain, 1990; Wardak, 2003). *Jirga* is a centuries-old social institution that is being convened at times of conflicts, disputes, and to settle local issues. *Jirga* is not only functional in Pashtun dominated areas rather it has been practicing in Punjab, Baluchistan, Sindh, and other ethnic groups across Pakistan but with different names and nomenclatures. The Pashtun *jirga* is very much popular and carries a lot of significance across Pashtun-dominated areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan because it is a prominent tenet of *Pashtunwali*-the Pashtun code of conduct (Advocate & Sajid, 2013; Taizi, 2007; Wardak, 2003).

In recent years amid the violent conflict, *jirga* has been deteriorated and undergone significant changes. These changes also affected other traditional traits of the region (Kerr, 2010).

northeastern Afghanistan and the northern stretch of the Indus River in Pakistan (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). For simplicity, we used the term Pashtun in this paper.

³ This ideology focused mainly on the implementation and enforcement of Islamic Shariah law in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Almost in all parts of FATA, *jirga* gatherings have been attacked by the militants in order to gain full control of power in the region and to create fear among the tribal elders and the local population. The estimated number of *maliks* and tribal elders killed by the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda affiliates between 2001 and 2015 is 1,114 across FATA (Firdous, 2015). The killings of these elders have significantly negative effects on the local population by disturbing their social fabric and structure (Kerr, 2010). For example, militants undercut the role and influence of *maliks* by applying the tactics of intimidation, kidnapping, and killing, which eventually resulted in an anarchic situation in the region (Malik, 2013). Furthermore, killing and targeting *maliks* or those associated with political agent's (now Deputy Commissioner after FATA-KP merger) office resulted in the collapse of the governance system in the region and the towns of Miran Shah and Mir Ali had completely gone under the sway of various militant groups during the period 2006-2013 (Malik, 2013). The *Shurah* of Mujahidin in North Waziristan had banned *maliks* from visiting the Political Agent's compound in Miran Shah and those who used to not obey the orders were either kidnapped or killed (Ghumman, 2006). During the rise of Talibanization, the *maliks* were replaced with religious clerics-turned-Taliban who permanently altered the indigenous social structure of FATA (International Crisis Group, 2006). The Taliban established alternative dispute resolution *markaz* (centers) in the region and completely replaced the tribal *jirga* system and *maliks* (Malik, 2013).

Tribal social structure embodies another significant informal social institution of *hujra* which has been affected by the protracted violent conflict in the region. The term *hujra* is derived from Arabic which refers to a separate room, cell or house maintained for male guests (Claus, Diamond, & Mills, 2003). *Hujra* is one of the key tenets of *Pashtunwali* along with *Badal* (Revenge), *Panah* (Shelter), *Nanawati* (asylum), and *Melmastia* (Hospitality) (Banerjee, 2000; James W Spain, 1961). The former three tenets are also related to *hujra* because the *Panah* seeker is hosted by the *Panah* giver at his *hujra*. *Hujra* also carries various other names across Pashtun dominating areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, for example ranging from *Chawk* in Lakki Marwat, *Kotta* in Kabul, *Jammah* in Dera Ismail Khan and *Sarachah* in Khost (Khattak, Naeem, Khattak, Ullah, & Khattak, 2015). In the pre-conflict scenario, *hujra* was a commonplace for the tribesmen to spend their leisure time with friends and other villagers, and to entertain their male guests. Barth (1985) sees *melmastia* as a way of validating a *malik's* political position (Barth, 1985). The hosts were traditionally bound to entertain guests, whether a local or a stranger, with food, shelter, gifts, and protection in the form of *Nanawati* (asylum). Moreover, the young unmarried males from the village used to sleep in the *hujra* (ul Hassan, 2012). Unfortunately, the violent conflict weakened this pillar of *Pashtunwali*. Because the majority of *hujras* were owned by the local elders, and the Taliban targeted *hujras* in order to minimize the role of the elders and *maliks* across FATA and Swat regions of Pakistan (Elahi, 2015). Since almost 80% of *Pashtunwali* is practiced inside the *hujra*, a decline of *hujra* is actually a decline of *Pashtunwali* (Khattak et al., 2015).

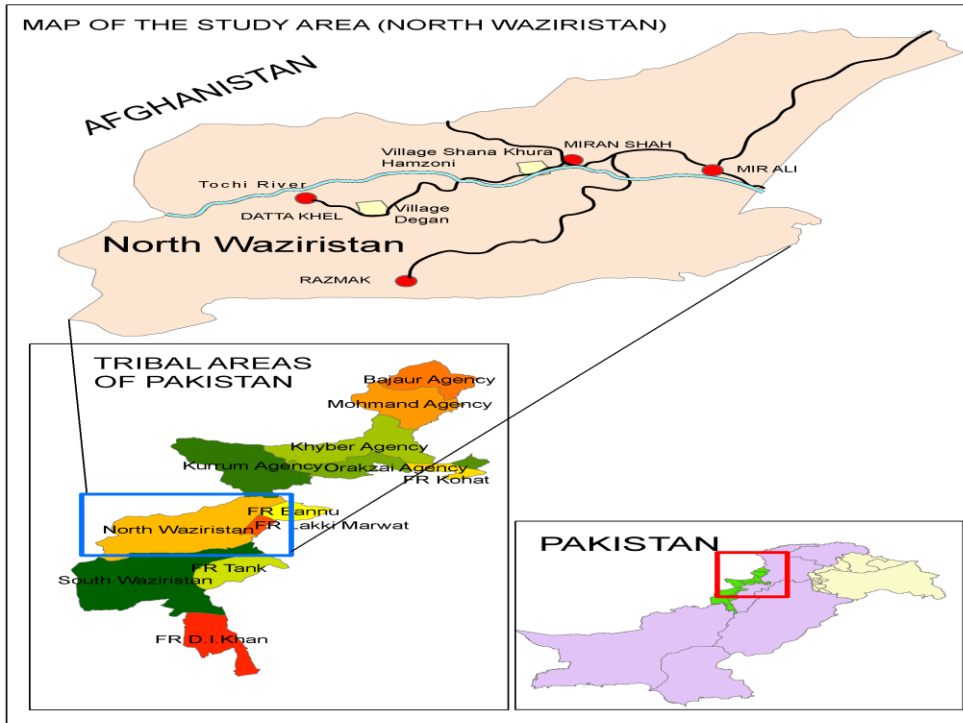
The objective to conduct this research study is to see the violent conflict and its impacts on the local informal institutions of *jirga* and *hujra* in the light of the perceptions of the local communities in North Waziristan Tribal District of Pakistan. The latter part of this paper reveals new explanations through local perceptions that can help us better understand the processes of distortion of these informal institutions for example *jirga* and *hujra* due to the protracted violent conflict in North Waziristan during the period 2004 and 2014. These informal institutions form a unique tribal social structure that has been the essence of tribal people for centuries.

Methods

This study has been conducted in North Waziristan Tribal District of Pakistan between June 2016 and February 2018. The focus of this study is on the timeline between 2004 and 2014 when the Talibanization was on the rise and government writ was completely absent in the study area. During the British administration, North Waziristan was given its present name due to a high proportion of its inhabitants from among the 'Wazir' tribe. North Waziristan borders the Durand Line between Pakistan and linking Afghanistan in the West at a distance of 25 km through Khost Province. The study area is surrounded by South Waziristan Tribal District in the South, while District Bannu and Karak lie in the East and Kurram District is situated in the North. The total area of North Waziristan is 4707 Sq.km and the approximate population of the agency is 543,254 (according to the 2017 census of Pakistan). The tribal district comprises of three sub-divisions and nine tehsils. Each of the sub-division is headed by an Assistant Commissioner (formerly known as Assistant Political Agent or *Khan Bahadur*) and each of the tehsil is headed by a Tehsildar (administrative head of a tehsil).

For conducting this study, two villages were selected in total from two tehsils of sub-division Miran Shah, i.e. village Shana Khura Hamzoni from Tehsil Miran Shah and village Degan (some locals termed the village as the *Pentagon of Taliban*) from Tehsil Datta Khel. While selecting the villages, efforts were made to have representation from diverse participants from almost all the clans and tribes. The selected villages have been closely connected with Afghanistan in terms of trade and had remained as a base for militants' activities both inside and across the border. Furthermore, Miran Shah was one of the growing business centers not only in North Waziristan but in the whole tribal belt. The reasons for selecting villages from Sub-division Miran Shah are because it has been affected the most and almost 100% of its population had been displaced to the neighboring areas due to military operation *Zarb-e-Azb* launched in June 2014 by the Pakistan Army. Another reason for selecting Sub-division Miran Shah is that it contains both urban and rural areas.

The purposeful Sampling Technique was used for the maximum representation of the respondents from both the selected villages. The purposeful Sampling Technique helps in identifying and selecting information-rich respondents for the most effective use of limited resources in hand with the researchers (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Patton, 1990). An open-ended question guide was used for data collection from respondents in the selected villages. A total of 60 in-depth interviews-IDs (40 male and 20 female) and four focus group discussions-FGDs (males only) were conducted in the selected villages at an average of 30 IDs and two FDGs per village. The dominance of males in both IDs and FGDs is due to strict cultural and religious obligations for women in the study area. The limited number of female interviews was conducted with the help of female teachers who were posted at the girls' schools in both the villages. Moreover, six key informant interviews (three from each village from notable persons) were also conducted for getting a firm grasp of the situation in the study area. Further, the techniques of participant observation and informal discussions with locals were also carried out to validate the qualitative data. The data was analyzed through the matrices method of data analysis because data matrices help in integrating and understanding a large amount of qualitative data.



Map of the Study Area (North Waziristan)

Conceptualizing the Informal Institutions

Informal institutions are the ‘usually unwritten, socially shared rules, that are created, communicated and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels (Helmke & Levitsky, 2006). Informal or customary institutions appear most often in studies of (a) the delivery of public services by state and non-state actors; (b) the practice of public authority by a range of actors both within and outside the state; (c) parallel justice systems, or legal pluralism; (d) and clientelism⁴(Shandana, 2015). O’donnell (1996) opined that the informal institutions are widely shared and deeply rooted, which makes them highly institutionalized and they are not simply the symptoms of the state’s dysfunctionality (O’donnell, 1996). In the same manner, the three most important informal institutions of *jirga* and *hujra* in the tribal areas in particular and Pashtun-dominated areas, in general, have been existed for centuries and deeply rooted in the local societies, but the protracted violent conflict in the region led to the breakdown of these informal institutions. The notion of ‘Governance without Government’ (Menkhaus, 2007) can best represent the role of these informal institutions in the st. Because the obsolete and outdated governance laws in the region compelled the local communities to utilize the local informal institutions for provision of security, justice, representation, and basic services which the state failed to provide. The basic argument of this notion is that societies have the capacity to run local affairs without any help from the government (Van der Haar, 2013).

⁴Relationship between individuals with unequal economic and social status.

This study also investigates the concept of '*Institutional Bricolage*' discussed by Frances Cleaver and Koning (2015). They explain the idea as, "Institutional Bricolage is a process through which people, consciously and non-consciously assemble or reshape institutional arrangements, drawing on whatever materials and resources are available, regardless of their purpose. In this process, old arrangements are modified, and new ones invented" (Cleaver & De Koning, 2015).

The existing body of literature shows that institutions matter considerably for economic progress (Hall & Jones, 1999; North, 1990; Scully, 1988; Williamson & Kerekes, 2011). They deliver significant public services to large segments of the local communities in many parts worldwide (Shandana, 2015). For example, the role of *jirga* cannot be ignored in providing speedy justice whilst resolving local conflicts and disputes in FATA and many parts across Afghanistan (Wardak, 2003). Similarly, *hujra* is an informal place where local communities meet and spend their leisure time in discussing local and global affairs. Several examples can be found of such informal institutions across the world, for example in Timor-Leste, such local and non-state networks play an 'intermediary' role between the state and the community by providing information to the community on how to deal with those governing procedures of the state with which the local communities are not familiar with. Similarly, Brick (2008) describes that *jirga* and other local informal institutions in Afghanistan in addition to providing dispute resolution and maintaining societal order, also manage access to land resources, water, and credit, by enforcing prevailing norms and rules (Brick, 2008). Dexter and Ntahombye (2005) observed that traditional informal institutions in Burundi (Bashingantahe) have performed multidimensional roles in maintaining peace and integrity amongst the local communities in cultural, political, judicial and social spheres (Dexter & Ntahombaye, 2005). In the same way, secret societies in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia carry out significant roles in conflict resolution with development and security implications (Jörgel & Utas, 2007).

Before the outbreak of violent conflict in North Waziristan and across FATA, these informal institutions of *jirga* and *hujra* played a vital role in promoting peace, harmony, and integration in the absence of government writ and outdated laws. These institutions were deeply embedded and well-organized in the tribal society. The informal institutions of *jirga* and *hujra* went through a series of such processes which led to its modification and alteration in the region. The local perceptions regarding the processes of distortion and re-emergence are of high significance in seeking novel explanations about these informal institutions.

Results and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the analysis of primary data collected in the field from respondents with diverse backgrounds. This section is a detailed presentation of the relationship of violent conflict with certain informal social institutions e.g. *jirga* and *hujra* embodied in the tribal social structure.

Jirga: A Pre-Conflict Scenario

Jirga is regarded as one of the most prestigious informal institutions in the tribal and rest of Pashtun-dominated areas. The local inhabitants value this centuries-old informal institution and try to discourage and eliminate any outsiders' influence over *jirga*. For example, during the start of Talibanization in 2004-05, numerous *maliks* and notables of the study area and rest of the tribal areas struggled to challenge the Taliban writ but unfortunately, they were either intimidated, threatened or in most cases got killed by the hands of the Taliban. Moreover, it is pertinent to mention that *jirga* is a male-oriented institution where there is no place for women to participate in its proceedings. If a

conflict/dispute involves a woman, she is not allowed to physically participate in the hearings, rather she must appoint a male representative to speak on her behalf in front of the *jirga* members.

It is important to know how a *jirga* functions in the study area, North Waziristan and how the local communities see it. There are two types of a *jirga* in the study area; one is *Qaumi Jirga* or *Olasi Jirga* (tribal *jirga*) and the other is *Hakumati* or *Sarkari Jirga* (Government-owned *Jirga*). It is mandatory for both types of *jirgas* that the selection process of its members is conducted with mutual consents of the conflicting parties. In case the conflicting parties plead to the Assistant Commissioner office for resolution of conflict or dispute through *Hakumati Jirga*, then the civil administration nominates *jirgamar* (*jirga* members) with mutual consent of the conflicting parties. The *jirga* members try to resolve the conflict and frequently report the proceedings back to the Assistant Commissioner in his office located in Miran Shah.

Majority of the non-*lungi* holder *maliks* (non-*lungi*-holder *maliks* are not registered with the Deputy Commissioner, formerly known as Political Agent and receive no incentives from the government) showed abhorrence for *Hakumati Jirga* because they think that once the case entered in the office of the Assistant Commissioner located in Miran Shah, then the case turns biased and the conflicting parties take advantage of its wealth, power, and resources. One of a researcher of this study himself participated in a *Hakumati Jirga* where numerous well-known tribal elders and *maliks* from the study area participated in the proceedings. It has been observed and witnessed that one of the conflicting parties had lots of grievances and concerns over the biased role of civil administration towards them. Moreover, they were also blaming both the officers and nominated *maliks* of bribery and nepotism and eventually they were demanding to replace the nominated *maliks*. It was also observed that civil administration takes signatures and thumb impressions of *jirga* members on a blank piece of paper, and later on, the officials write the verdict of their own choice. Local communities of the study area prefer to resolve their disputes through *Qaumi Jirga* because it is more indigenous to them and they don't feel pressure during the proceedings. This fact can also be endorsed by a survey finding conducted by the Community Appraisal & Motivation Program (CAMP) in the tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province where 835 (80%) out of 1050 people preferred *Qaumi Jirga* while 160 (15%) disapproved it. On the other hand, 757 (72%) said they did not trust *Hakumati Jirga* with only 141 (13.4%) saying they believe in the credibility of *Hakumati Jirga* (CAMP, 2013).

On the other hand, *Qaumi Jirga* is of vital importance in dealing with local affairs. Local people prefer to bring their cases to *Qaumi Jirga* because it is prominently functional and visible in the region because of its fewer formalities with civil administration and secondly it delivers speedy justice. Although few respondents were of the viewpoint that nowadays, tribal elders and *maliks* participating in the *Qaumi Jirgas* sometimes turn biased due to several factors, for example, bribery, clan's affiliations, and relativeness towards one of the conflicting parties. Although the majority of them consider *Qaumi Jirga* unbiased and less expensive than *Hakumati Jirga* in terms of expenditures because *jirga* members take money for their services equally from all the conflicting parties.

The data revealed an interesting fact that the *jirga* members take money from the conflicting parties with the purpose to bind them to resolve the issue as quickly as possible because the expenses go up with the increasing number of visits of the *jirga* members to the conflicting parties. The sooner the conflicting parties reach on an agreement, the better they can minimize the

sum of their expenses. Moreover, the conflicting parties are also bound to arrange expensive meals for *jirga* members along with the rest of the participants who accompany them on that occasion.

Whenever a conflict occurs between two parties, the tribal elders/maliks intervene immediately and take substantial *Baramta* (security) in the form of money or weapons from both the parties in order to mitigate the conflict. In case any of the conflicting parties violates the essence of *Baramta*, then the money or weapons are confiscated by the *maliks*. It is pertinent to mention that once the conflicting parties hand over the *Baramta* to the mediators and in case one of a conflicting party raises concerns over either of the mediators, then under the traditional laws of the land it is not possible to sideline that particular mediator. Most importantly if a mediator wants to sideline himself with his own will, he can take himself out of the conflict resolution process. In the next phase, those elders become *Lmanzghori* (mediators) in that particular conflict and become responsible for hiring *jirga* members for both the conflicting parties. Before approaching the *jirga* members, the mediators take written detailed information of the nature of conflict/dispute from both the conflicting parties and hand over to the nominated *jirga* members later on. These mediators play a very important role in the entire process. During the *jirga* proceedings, they bring forth the reservations from both the conflicting parties at every stage and communicate it with the *jirga* members. In a *QaumiJirga*, the *jirga* members give weightage to the viewpoints of the mediators because they are convened and involved by them. At the end of the proceedings, the *jirga* members issue their verdict and if in case either of the parties does not agree or turns down the decision, their *Baramta* will be confiscated by the mediators.

The Process of Distortion of Jirga

When the Taliban took over control of the region; they replaced both the mediators and *jirgamar* with *mullahs* and Taliban commanders belonging to various groups*. One of a tribal elder described an interesting story revolves around a dispute between two families where the Taliban were taking the side of one of the conflicting parties. He said that the aggrieved party came to him and asked for help regarding how to approach the Taliban commanders to convince them for fair treatment of the issue. He immediately accompanied the aggrieved party and went to the Taliban office located in Miran Shah Bazar. Because, that tribal elder had good relations with those Taliban commanders, so they got the permission to resolve the dispute according to their own will and emphasized both the conflicting parties to choose *maliks* of their own choice. Furthermore, the Taliban also warned the elders to end the dispute in just three days and if they fail to resolve then the case will be handled in the Taliban office. He further said that they succeeded in issuing the verdict on that particular matter in the specified time, but later on one of the parties challenged their verdict and again approached the Taliban. Resultantly, the Taliban adopted *Shariah* (Islamic laws) to handle the case and their nominated jury (comprised of Taliban and *mullahs*) pronounced a biased verdict in favor of one of the conflicting parties. The aim of telling about this incident is that the Taliban commanders had turned the *jirga* into monetary business and one of a resource for meeting their financial needs.

*There were dozens of Taliban groups operating in North Waziristan during the period between 2004 and 2014, for example, Hafiz Gul Bahadar, Mufti Sadiq Noor Hamzoni, Haqqani Network, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Sangeen Group, Gwad Abdurehman, Sadiqullah Group, and numerous other small groups as well.

On the other hand, the tribal elders tried their level best through soft tactics in order to minimize the role of the Taliban in *jirga* proceedings across the study area but eventually, they have been completely sidelined. Majority of the respondents told such stories where the Taliban forcefully used to intervene in conflict/dispute resolution and take sides with those conflicting parties who were comparatively more resourceful than others for acquiring money and other material for example vehicles or weapons in return. One of a tribal elder from village Degan Tehsil Datta Khel (IDI no.5, in-depth Interview, 15 June 2016)¹ stated that, “*the Taliban used to make a substantial amount of money during the proceedings of Talibanized jirgas (locally known as Taliban Shurahs) and they used to spend the money for various purposes ranging from running their offices across the region, acquiring weapons, vehicles, and food stock for their centers. The Taliban completely disrupted the structure of traditional jirga in the region with these tactics and the jirga was completely replaced by the Taliban's Shurahs.*”

No other conflict resolution mechanism than *jirga* can best be utilized for bringing peace, harmony, and development in the society and when it comes to tribal societies, then *jirga* has played a very important role in the past. During the times when *jirga* was fully functional, peace was restored, and the tribal society used to live in harmony until the advent of the Talibanization and the violent conflict in the study area. The data shows that elders of the study area agreed on the point that *jirga* can play a pivotal role in restoring peace and tranquility in the region, but the sincerity of the tribal elders is much more important for best utilization of this valuable conflict resolution mechanism.

The majority of the elderly respondents were against the participation of women in *the jirga* because they see it as a cultural taboo and against the essence of Islamic teachings as well. Because both *Pashtunwali* and Islam prevent women from sitting amongst men and that is why women are not allowed to go outside their homes as they are bound to look after domestic chores. Even the female respondents from both the villages were quite pessimistic about women's participation in the *jirga* and it was an incompatible act against the local culture and prevailing traditions. Albeit, most of the educated respondents were quite optimistic about the possible role women can play in the local affairs. In the past and even today, there are certain women who can indirectly influence *jirga*. One of a female respondent from village Shana Khura Hamzoni who is working as a school teacher in the government primary girls school in the village (IDI no. 25, 18 January 2017)² told, “*there are few such women in every clan or family who are aged, wise or well-informed and whose suggestions are quite helpful in jirga proceedings. These women participate in the consultation processes at home with their husbands, sons or other relatives on a particular conflict or dispute and eventually influence the jirga proceedings*”. So, few women though limited in number participate in such indirect ways in the local *jirga* where their indirect role influences the *jirga* members. Most of the educated respondents shared that women's indirect role in the local *jirga* is on the increase due to their exposure to urban areas of Pakistan resulted due to internal displacement in the wake of military operation *Zarb-e-Azb* in June 2014.

Hujra in the Pre-Conflict Scenario

Before the advent of Talibanization and militancy, *hujra* was a well-functioning informal social institution in the region. *Hujra* was a place of multipurpose use, whether to be a guest house, a community center, a shared house, a wedding club, and a local council. It was a commonplace where all the villagers used to sit and gossip together. The elders used to sit on the *charpoysoor kateena* (a bedstead of woven webbing of hemp stretched on a wooden frame on four legs) and the youngsters

used to sit on the ground around a bonfire in the middle. The elder respondents from the study area shared very interesting nostalgic moments of *hujras* with the researcher. They say that people in the *hujra* used to tell stories, play traditional music with *rabab* (a lute-like musical instrument) or *Sarinda* (a stringed folk musical instrument), discuss local issues, enjoying *Chillam* (Hubble bubble), cooking of Halwa and hold poetry contests locally called *Lughat*. *Hujra* was a platform where the youngsters used to learn Pashtun traditions, customs, ethics, and cultural values from the elders. A tribal elder from village Degan (IDI no.12, 29 August 2016)³ expressed; *“even an illiterate person of this region was much better than a literate from urban areas when it comes to indigenous knowledge about the local affairs because the social institution of hujra is like an informal school for everyone in the region. We used to discuss local, national, and international current affairs in the hujra, and all the youngsters used to carefully listen and learn from the elders. What you learn inside the hujra in terms of indigenous and traditional knowledge, you cannot learn it even from a university”*.

Moreover, it is pertinent to mention that the majority of the elderly respondents were illiterate but their understanding and insights regarding indigenous knowledge, contemporary politics, and regional affairs were deep because of *hujra*, as it was such a place where everyone used to learn new things on daily basis. The data also shows that most of the *jirgas* used to hold in the *hujras* where the youth were able to observe and learn the proceedings of *jirgas* and the place was a platform for them to become the leaders of tomorrow. The institution of *hujra* produces community leaders and it is also linked with the hierarchy of the Maliki system in the region. A Malik from village Shana Khura Hamzoni (IDI no.04, 30 June 2016)⁴ expressed; *“if a malik dies, then his elder son becomes the malik of the village. Because he is the one who spends most of his time with his father in the hujra while observing elders during various occasions of jirgas and local issues. Eventually, these processes of learning make him the preferable person to be chosen as his father's successor. He is the one whose father transferred his knowledge, skills, and experiences to him”*.

Distortion of the institution of Hujra

Numerous factors are responsible for the fall of the *Hujra* system in the study area and across the tribal region as well where Talibanization is one of the prominent among these factors. A young educated respondent (a graduate from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad) from village Shana Khura Hamzoni (IDI no.08, 04 December 2017)⁵ expressed his views this way, *“hujra system is gradually laid down by the effects of globalization, advancement in the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), an excessive number of hujras within the same clan or among the families, and poverty reduction as compared to the pre-1980s scenario”*. Various families in the study area got wealthy because majority of their family members migrated to the Middle East for jobs. As soon as their economic situation got strengthened, they built their own *hujras* near their homes in the villages and this made the common *hujra* deserted gradually. But there were some areas, where the institution of *hujra* was still reviving until the emergence of Talibanization in the region after the incident of 9/11.

With the rise of militancy and Talibanization in the region, the social institution of *hujra* started deteriorating and even completely vanished in some areas. The Taliban opened their centers for settlement of local conflicts and they also transformed the mosques into their centers which abruptly changed the characteristics of *hujra*. The Taliban banned all sorts of musical instruments in *hujras* or elsewhere, they confiscated all the drums, rababs, and other sorts of musical instruments, and they only permitted singing religious/Talibanpoems without using musical instruments which used to glorify their actions. The youth in both the villages shared that being a center of amusement

and learning, *hujra* got a severe blow to its sanctity and the local people failed to uphold this centuries' old informal social institution from the wrath of the Taliban. The data shows that *hujra* was a communal place and the Taliban occupied all such places of communal nature to stay their non-local guests (both regional and foreigners), running their local affairs, and preparation of logistics for attacks across the border in Afghanistan or inside Pakistan. It was also revealed from the data that more *hujras* as compared to mosques were hit by the US drone attacks across the region between 2005 and 2014, and this endorses the fact that *hujras* were occupied by the Taliban.

It was also observed that most of the respondents were quite hopeful about the revival of *hujra*. They shared that the vestiges of *hujra* which are still practicing in the remote areas of North Waziristan can bring back peace and serenity to the region because *hujra* is the central institution where most of the tenets of Pashtunwali are practiced. *Hujra* in the study area was not just a social hub rather with flowing conversations, it also used to give all its members exposure to current happenings, the people, global affairs, and politics. One of a *malik* from village Degan (IDI no.16, 02 February 2018)⁶ expressed his views this way; *“the institution of hujra can play a significant role in bringing peace and harmony to our region because people sit together, talk with each other, share their daily stories and bring forth communal challenges in the hujra. So, if all the people get aware of the common issues, threats, or challenges then they can also find mutual strategies to counter those issues or threats. The role of hujra cannot be diminished permanently particularly in North Waziristan because of its centrality in Pashtunwali”*.

Conclusion

The violent conflict brought down the importance of informal institutions of *jirga* and *hujra*, because as soon as the Taliban took control of the region, they replaced the *jirga* with Taliban *shurah* and the *jirga* members; the *maliks* and other tribal elders, with *mullahs* and Taliban commanders. The essence of *jirga* was deteriorated by sidelining the age-old practices whilst replaced with a misinterpreted version of Islamic *shariah* forcefully imposed by the Taliban. Even in its worst form, the Taliban commanders started nepotism and taking bribes from the locals during conflict or dispute resolution proceedings. It was explored that the Taliban used *jirga* as one of a resource for their fundraising. It was interesting to note that even though *jirga* is a male-oriented institution, but some of the young men in the study area were found optimistic about women participation in the local *jirga* because women are also part of the society and their role cannot be ignored further. In the post-conflict scenario, it is hoped that the institution of *jirga* will be made legalized by giving it a legal cover because North Waziristan and the rest of the tribal areas are now merged with KP province. *Jirga* can be made somewhat like a Dispute Resolution Council (DRC) which is now practicing across other districts of KP. DRC is an advanced and legalized form of a *jirga*, and it will be a good idea to modernize it according to the need of the time and circumstances of the study area.

On the other hand, the importance of *hujra* started diminishing due to globalization and poverty reduction but the real blow was given by the hands of the Taliban when they opened their own centers for settlement of local conflicts and transformed the mosques into their centers which abruptly changed the characteristics of *hujra*. Before the outbreak of violent conflict, *hujra* used to be a place where locals host the guests whether they be friends or strangers, locals could meet, interact, gossip, and discuss local and regional affairs. The elders used to share folklores with the younger ones, playing carrom board/cards, cooking *halwa*, and singing folk songs with *Rabab* and *Mangi*. The Taliban in the first instance started staying their militant guests at the common *hujras*, which compelled the common people to avoid visiting *hujras* and later on the Taliban gradually occupied.

The Taliban banned all sorts of musical instruments in *hujras* or elsewhere, they confiscated all the drums, rababs, and other musical instruments. They only permitted those religious epic poems without musical instruments that used to glorify their actions. Being a center of amusement and learning, *hujra* got a severe blow to its sanctity and the local people failed to uphold this centuries-old informal institution from the wrath of the Taliban.

This study suggests that the above-mentioned informal institutions are significant for bringing sustainable peace in the region. Because before the outbreak of violent conflict in the region, these institutions were responsible for law and order situation and as soon as these informal institutions got disturbed, the whole region experienced a socio-cultural and political breakdown. But it is also a fact that the world is changing fast, and society's trends are also changing with it. In the same manner, the institutions of *jirga* and *hujra* cannot remain unchanged because it will affect one way or the other. So, keeping in view the changing dynamics, both the institutions should be modified according to the prevailing socio-cultural and political needs.

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Appendix 1: List of cited interviews

Interview #	Profession	Date of Interview
¹ IDI-05	Tribal Elder, Village Degan	15 June 2016
² IDI-27	Female School Teacher, Village Shana Khura	17 January 2017
³ IDI-12	Tribal Elder, Village Degan	29 August 2016
⁴ IDI-04	Malik, Village Shana Khura	30 June 2016
⁵ IDI-08	Fresh Graduate, Village Shana Khura	04 December 2017
⁶ IDI-16	Malik, Village Degan	02 February 2018

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