

THE IDEOLOGICAL GOALS AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF THE UTMANKHEL QAUMI MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE UTMANKHEL TRIBE

FAZAL RAHIM¹, DR. YUNAS KHAN²

¹ PHD SCHOLAR (DEPARTMENT OF PAKISTAN STUDIES, ISLAMIA COLLEGE, PESHAWAR)
falerahcem1123@gmail.com

² ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, (DEPARTMENT OF PAKISTAN STUDIES, ISLAMIA COLLEGE, PESHAWAR)
younas@icp.edu.pk

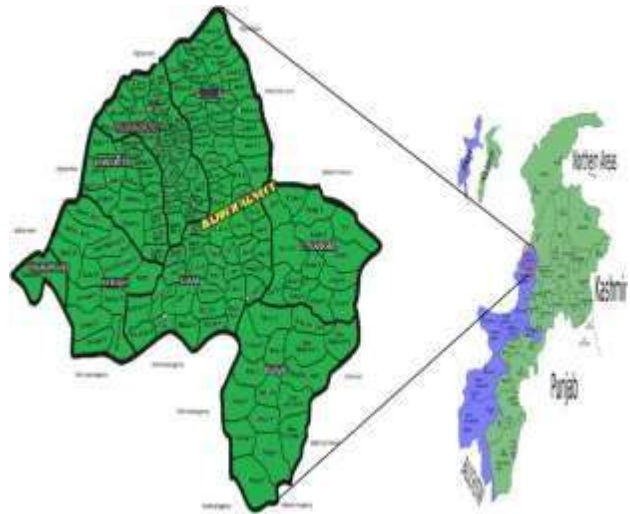
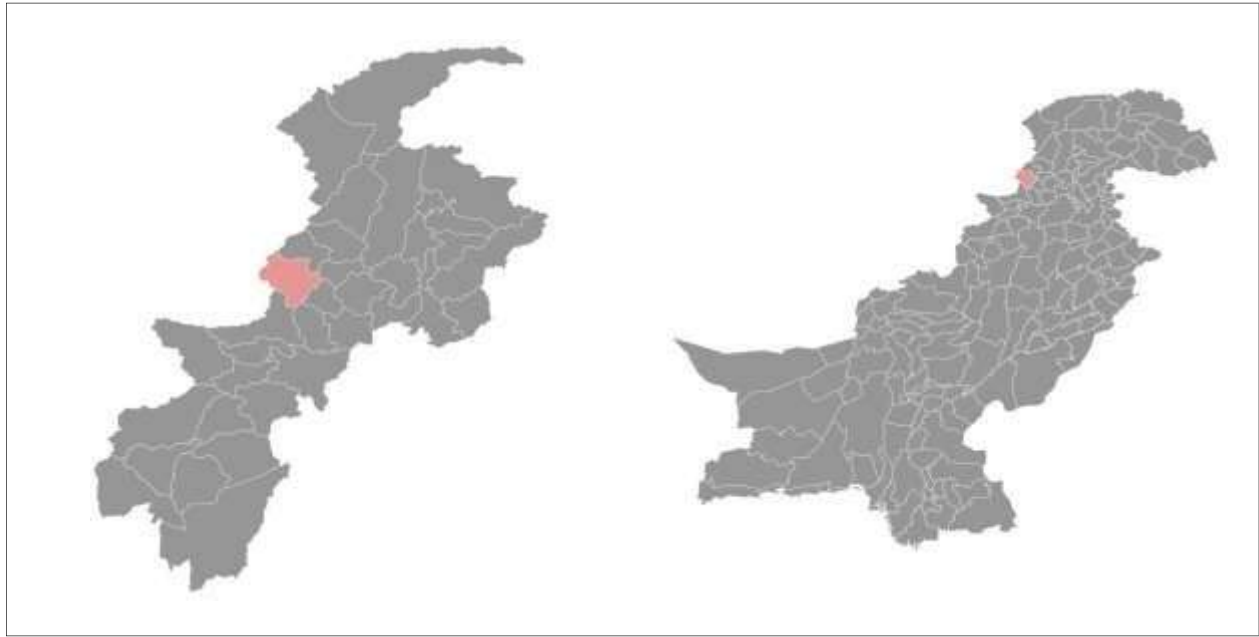
ABSTRACT

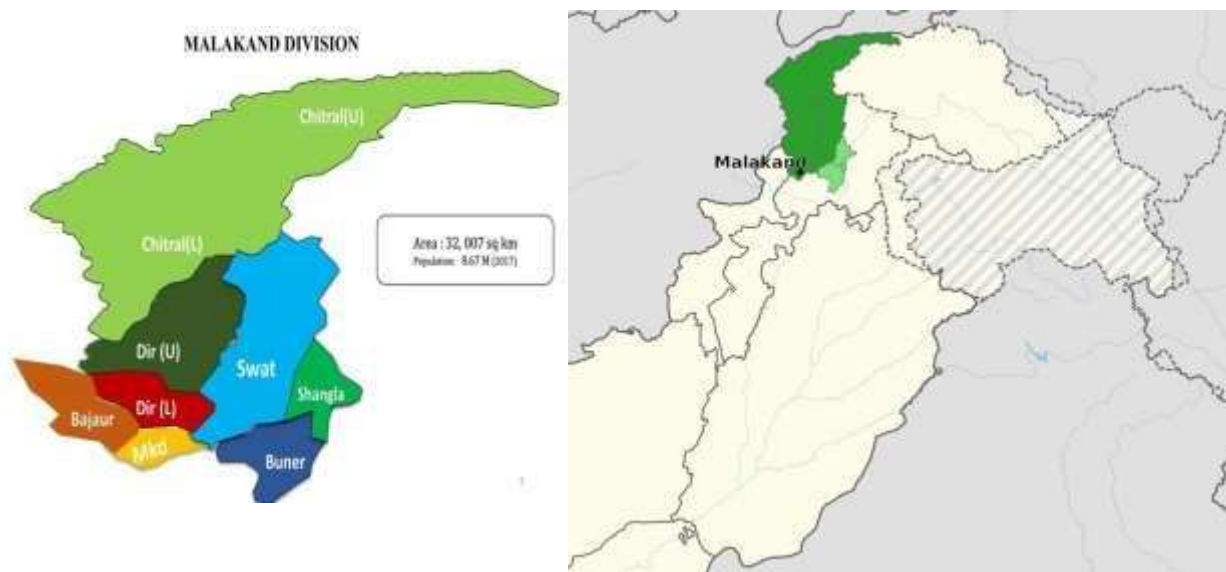
This paper examines the ideological goals and political strategies of the Utmankhel Qaumi Movement (UQM) and assesses how its mobilization has influenced (directly and indirectly) the socio-economic life of Utmankhel communities across Malakand Division and the (erstwhile) tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The analysis treats UQM as a tribe-centered “qaumi” (community/nation) movement that emerged publicly by 2011 amid structural underdevelopment, fragmented political representation, and a governance history shaped by colonial-era frontier administration and conflict spillovers. Empirically, UQM’s ideological repertoire—unity among scattered Utmankhel segments, demands for development and transparency, pro-education (including girls’ education), anti-corruption/anti-elite framing, and opposition to external violence such as drone strikes was consistently articulated through jirgas, public meetings, and media-facing statements. Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative, secondary-source design: (a) primary news reports (notably Dawn) documenting UQM events and claims; (b) governance and reform documents around the 2018 merger of the tribal areas (including the Constitution (Twenty-fifth Amendment) Act, 2018); (c) regional development and human rights assessments; and (d) baseline socio-economic indicators for newly merged districts (Bajaur/Mohmand) and adjacent areas. Findings indicate that UQM’s political strategies combined (1) identity-based consolidation (“unite scattered members”), (2) institutionally legible demands (development projects, schools, roads, gas supply), (3) electoral entry and bargaining (candidate committees; seat adjustments), and (4) coalition presence in broader civic protest. The socio-economic effect is most convincingly evidenced at the level of agenda-setting and political pressure: UQM repeatedly translated service deprivation and mobility constraints into collective claims, especially around girls’ access to schooling and basic infrastructure in remote Utmankhel localities. However, direct causal attribution to measurable improvements (e.g., completion of roads, establishment of new schools, district-level poverty change) remains largely unspecified in publicly accessible sources; thus, impacts are assessed primarily through mechanisms (mobilization, bargaining, framing) rather than outcome evaluation.

Keywords: tribal politics; social movements; Malakand; ex-FATA merger; socio-economic development; political representation; Pashtun borderlands.

INTRODUCTION

The Utmankhel (Uthmankhel) are widely described as a Karlani Pashtun tribe with communities spanning Malakand Division and several (erstwhile) tribal agencies/districts, including what is now Bajaur and Mohmand, as well as adjacent settled districts such as Lower Dir and parts of Malakand⁽¹⁾. Historically, borderland tribal formations in this region have been shaped by repeated encounters with external state-making projects—colonial pacification, frontier governance, and post-1947 security politics often reinforcing a political culture in which collective decision-making (jirga traditions)⁽²⁾, localized authority, and defensive mobilization coexist with economic marginalization. The late nineteenth-century frontier conflicts, including the 1897 rising in the Malakand region, are frequently cited as inflection points where Pashtun tribes (including Utmankhels) became targets of punitive expeditions and administrative exceptionalism, producing long-run institutional effects on political incorporation and development trajectories⁽³⁾.





Within this structural setting, the public emergence of the Utmankhel Qaumi Movement (UQM) can be read as a late-postcolonial articulation of tribe-centered political agency—an attempt to convert dispersed Utmankhel demography into a coherent bargaining bloc across administrative boundaries⁽⁴⁾. By late 2011, UQM was visible through organized jirgas and the inauguration of an office, where leaders explicitly framed the tribe as “scattered” and in need of unification to secure rights through “collective efforts,” while simultaneously claiming that the movement was not antagonistic toward neighboring tribes⁽⁵⁾. In 2011–2013 reporting, UQM’s organizational face included identifiable leadership figures (e.g., Haji Bahadar Khan⁽⁶⁾ and Shah Wali Khan⁽⁷⁾) and repeated public claims that mainstream parties had divided or ignored Utmankhel areas after elections, motivating a shift from conventional party dependence to a tribe-specific platform⁽⁸⁾.

Ideologically and programmatically, UQM’s most documented “milestones” are not revolutionary in the insurgent sense; rather, they are “revolutionary” as a reframing of political legitimacy—from party-centric representation to qaumi (community/nation) representation grounded in collective identity and socio-economic entitlement. In late 2011, a UQM jirga of several hundred notables demanded tangible development and transparency in funds, while also calling for research-based policies on social cohesion, de-radicalization, and education—directly linking economic deprivation and governance failure to broader security and social crises in the tribal belt⁽⁹⁾. In early 2012, UQM-associated jirgas foregrounded girls’ education, road access, and health emergencies in remote Utmankhel localities, and later broadened into populist critiques of political elites, calls for inter-tribal alliance, and opposition to drone strikes⁽¹⁰⁾. These milestones collectively position UQM as an identity-based development movement seeking political leverage and socio-economic recognition in a region historically characterized by institutional exclusion and uneven development⁽¹¹⁾.

Problem Statement:

Despite repeated public reporting on UQM-led jirgas, electoral announcements, and demands for development, the movement remains under-analyzed as a case of tribe-centered contentious politics in Pakistan’s postcolonial frontier. Existing scholarship on the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas⁽¹²⁾ (FATA) and adjacent districts emphasizes structural underdevelopment, governance exceptionalism, and post-merger institutional challenges, but rarely connects these macro-dynamics to meso-level identity movements such as UQM⁽¹³⁾. The empirical problem is twofold: first, UQM’s ideological goals and political strategies have not been systematically reconstructed from primary materials; second, its socio-economic “impact” is often asserted rather than assessed, with limited evidence tracing how mobilization and bargaining translate into service delivery, representation, or development outcomes for Utmankhel communities.

Research Questions:

- 1) How has UQM framed Utmankhel identity, deprivation, and political legitimacy, and what core ideological commitments are visible in its public discourse?
- 2) What political strategies has UQM employed (jirga mobilization, electoral entry, bargaining, coalition-building), and through what mechanisms have these strategies shaped socio-economic agendas affecting Utmankhel areas?

Research Objectives:

- 1) To map and critically analyze UQM’s ideological goals and discourse using primary reporting and contextual governance literature.

- 2) To assess UQM's socio-economic impacts through a mechanism-based approach (agenda-setting, bargaining leverage, mobilization for services), triangulated with regional socio-economic baselines and post-merger governance assessments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper the scholar used an integrative social-movement framework combining resource mobilization, political opportunity, framing processes, and social identity formation. Resource mobilization theory highlights how movements transform latent grievances into collective action by constructing organizations, leadership networks, and resource channels (e.g., jirgas, consultative committees, media access). Political opportunity approaches emphasize how shifts in institutional environments—electoral openings, reforms, or state crises—alter the costs and benefits of contention; for UQM, relevant opportunity shifts include intensified development discourse in ex-FATA contexts and later the 2018 constitutional merger process (though UQM's most documented activity predates the merger). Framing theory is used to analyze how UQM leaders constructed diagnostic frames (identifying deprivation and misrepresentation), prognostic frames (unity, elections, development demands), and motivational frames (calls to join UQM and struggle collectively), with special attention to gendered service claims (girls' education) that broaden legitimacy beyond elite bargaining. Finally, social identity theory helps interpret "qaumi" politics as boundary-making: defining an in-group (Utmankhel) across dispersed geographies and positioning out-groups not as rival tribes per se but as neglectful elites and exploitative structures enabling solidarity while limiting inter-tribal conflict narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A major strand of scholarship addresses the political economy and governance exceptionalism of the tribal belt through the lens of reform deficits and institutional exclusion. In a detailed analysis of political reforms in the tribal areas, Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah⁽¹⁴⁾ (2012) emphasizes how frontier governance structures constrained political participation and socio-economic transformation, arguing that development allocations often failed to translate into broad-based welfare under centralized control and exceptional legal regimes. While not focused on UQM, this work clarifies why local movements might turn to alternative representational projects when mainstream party politics are perceived as extractive or ineffective.

Security and stability analyses often connect socio-economic deprivation to conflict dynamics and institutional fragility in the former tribal areas. Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis⁽¹⁵⁾ (2014) positions the region as affected by militancy, displacement, and governance deficits, emphasizing that underdevelopment and weak service delivery can intensify social vulnerability and undermine state legitimacy. Such accounts provide the structural backdrop for UQM's "development-plus-cohesion" rhetoric (education, de-radicalization, social cohesion), even when they do not examine tribe-centered mobilization as a distinct political strategy.

Post-merger policy and development frameworks foreground the scale of deprivation and the governance transition after the 2018 constitutional change. A joint program document led by United Nations Development Programme⁽¹⁶⁾ (2018) describes the tribal districts as among Pakistan's most underdeveloped regions, emphasizing livelihood fragility and reporting that, in 2016, multidimensional poverty in KP's tribal districts was extremely high relative to the settled province. This literature helps interpret UQM's emphasis on tangible projects, transparency, and "research-based policies" as an attempt to make development legible and enforceable through collective pressure.

Human-rights oriented assessments emphasize that legal integration alone does not guarantee equal citizenship or improved welfare. Benford and Snow, (2000)⁽¹⁷⁾ recognizes certain post-merger improvements (courts, policing capacity, representation) but stresses slow implementation and persistent gaps that sustain a "promise-versus-delivery" tension. For UQM analysis, this matters because the movement's causal claims about neglect and misused funds resonate with a broader pattern: institutional reform is necessary but insufficient without accountable service delivery and inclusive development.

Finally, international policy research has examined the extension of constitutional rights and the complications of transitional governance in Pakistan's former tribal areas. United States Institute of Peace⁽¹⁸⁾ (2021) discusses how interim governance arrangements and legal contestation shaped the merger's implementation, highlighting that reforms can be undermined by administrative uncertainty and contestation over customary authority. This provides a lens for understanding why movements like UQM invest in jirga-based legitimacy while also seeking formal political leverage, effectively straddling customary and constitutional repertoires.

Research gap:

Despite robust literature on frontier governance, underdevelopment, and post-merger challenges, there is a notable absence of focused academic reconstruction of UQM as a tribe-centered movement: its ideology is usually visible only in episodic reporting, and its strategies (candidate selection committees, seat adjustments, inter-tribal alliance calls, transparency critiques) have not been systematically theorized or mapped. Moreover, "impact" is typically

presumed (through the language of deprivation and demands) rather than operationalized; no publicly accessible evaluations trace UQM mobilization to concrete project completion, educational access improvement, or poverty reduction. This paper addresses that gap through mechanism-based analysis and triangulation.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a qualitative design based exclusively on secondary sources, appropriate for three reasons. First, UQM's activities are primarily visible through mediated public records (news reports, press releases, policy documents), making documentary analysis a direct method for reconstructing ideology and strategy without introducing recall bias from retrospective interviews. Second, the study's focus is interpretive (framing, strategy, mechanism-based "impact"), aligning with qualitative thematic analysis rather than causal inference from quantitative datasets that rarely disaggregate by tribe. Third, triangulating diverse documentary genres media reporting, human rights assessments, government legal texts, and development baselines supports credibility by cross-checking movement claims against structural context. Sampling followed purposive and criterion-based selection. Inclusion criteria were: (a) documents explicitly naming UQM and describing its events, leadership statements, or resolutions (2011–2013 core corpus); (b) documents describing socio-economic deprivation and governance structures in Malakand/ex-FATA areas; and (c) legal-policy texts governing the post-2018 integration of tribal areas relevant to opportunity structures and service delivery. The primary event corpus is dominated by Dawn coverage (office inauguration, jirgas, candidate announcements), supplemented by conflict-timeline aggregation noting UQM statements on girls' education (used cautiously as secondary confirmation). Socio-economic baselines are drawn from district-level literacy statistics and regional development surveys (for Bajaur/Mohmand and nearby areas), recognizing these are proxies for Utmankhel communities rather than tribe-specific measures.

Data collection involved compiling documents into a chronological and thematic matrix, then coding text segments into: identity/unity frames, governance critique, development/service demands, electoral strategy, coalition/protest, and security/foreign-policy frames. Analysis proceeded through (1) open coding for emergent themes, (2) axial coding to link ideology → strategy → socio-economic mechanism, and (3) triangulation against governance/development literature to distinguish movement claims from contextual facts. Limitations include reliance on media visibility (possible underreporting), lack of verified internal party documents/registration details, and insufficient publicly available evaluation linking UQM actions to specific completed projects; where such details are unavailable, they are explicitly marked as unspecified.

Data Analysis

Timeline and relational map of UQM mobilization

Table A: Key reported UQM-linked milestones and demands

Date (reported)	Location (reported)	Event / claim	Salient ideological-political content	Primary evidence
Dec 24, 2011	Prang Ghar area, Mohmand (jirga at Naway Kallai)	Large jirga seeks uplift projects and transparency	"Tangible development," transparency of funds, research-based policies (social cohesion, de-radicalization, education), critique of stakeholders' "vested interests," demand for a separate administrative unit/agency, contest elections "under one banner"	Dawn reporting
Late 2011 (reported)	Malakand area	Office inauguration reported alongside anti-toll tax discourse	Unite "scattered" Utmankhels; rights through collective effort; not against other tribes; narrative of historical contribution + neglect	Dawn reporting
Jan 10–11, 2012 (reported)	Khanori village area, Malakand	Jirga demands girls' education facilities; roads	Girls' schooling + roads as enabling infrastructure; critique of absent services and emergency access	Dawn reporting
Jan 22, 2012	Malakand villages Naray Oba and Jabagai (reported)	Gathering calls for unity; criticizes elected reps	Anti-elite framing ("keep us uneducated and deprived"); call for inter-tribal alliance; demand stop drone attacks; urge direct engagement with tribes	Dawn reporting

Feb 6, 2012	Lower Dir (Bandagai Talash meeting)	UQM to field candidates; forms committee	Electoral entry; 15-member candidate committee; openness to seat-to-seat adjustment; demands gas supply; critique of party politics dividing tribe	Dawn reporting
Feb 10, 2013	Lower Dir (function)	UQM reiterates candidacy across seats	Broader geographic candidacy (Lower/Upper Dir + Bajaur); continued claims of neglect in development/employment; demand recognition of rights	Dawn reporting
Feb 17–18, 2012	Charsadda (protest rally)	UQM present in multi-actor protest	Coalition visibility with parties/civil society groups—suggests movement’s networking and local legitimacy beyond tribe-only forums	Dawn reporting
Nov 11–12, 2022	Ghani Ada area, Bajaur	Utmankhel jirga demands subdivision; threatens protest	Continued deprivation claims (hospital, colleges, stadium/park); political accountability claims; shift toward protest repertoire	Dawn reporting

Ideological goals as evidenced in public discourse

UQM’s ideological core is most consistently expressed as qaumi unity for rights: leaders repeatedly describe the Utmankhel as dispersed across multiple districts/agencies and argue that only a unified platform can secure political recognition and development. This is explicit in the office-inauguration narrative emphasizing a “countrywide organisation” to unite “scattered members,” and in jirga resolutions calling for a single administrative division/agency for the tribe. [10] In social-movement terms, this is identity consolidation: defining a coherent in-group across geography to increase bargaining power and reduce capture by external party machines. [56]

A second ideological pillar is developmentalism with accountability—a demand not simply for “reforms” but for tangible projects, transparent funds, and policy grounded in research. In December 2011 reporting, UQM-associated leadership criticized paper-only reforms and insisted on visible development and transparency in the use of funds, while explicitly linking development to social cohesion, de-radicalization, and education. [14] This is significant because it reframes development as a political right and a security policy at once: deprivation is not only poverty but a driver of instability, echoing broader analyses of governance failure in the tribal districts. [57]

A third ideological thread is anti-elite, anti-corruption populism, visible in claims that elected representatives keep tribes “uneducated and deprived,” and that external stakeholders extract resources or legitimacy from tribal suffering. In January 2012 reporting, UQM figures alleged that representatives benefited from donor funds “for our blood,” demanded direct engagement by parties and the international community with tribes, and called for struggle against “exploitative feudal and corrupt elements.” [58] While such claims are rhetorical and not independently verified in the cited reports, their political significance lies in constructing an injustice frame that legitimizes organizational exit from mainstream party channels and justifies building a distinct movement organization. [59]

A fourth ideological element is rights in a security-international politics register, most clearly expressed through opposition to drone strikes and condemnation of external violence in the tribal belt. In the January 2012 report, a UQM-linked jirga demanded an immediate stop to US drone attacks, arguing civilians were killed; in December 2011 reporting, speakers framed the region as subject to a “new great game” with vested interests that obstruct honest development. [60] This combination suggests a “borderlands rights” ideology: socio-economic neglect is linked with securitized governance and external interventions, reinforcing collective identity and strengthening moral claims for development and self-representation. [61]

Political strategies and repertoires

UQM’s most documented strategy is jirga-based deliberation and mass-notables gatherings. Large jirgas (reported at around 200–400 elders/notables in 2011–2012) served as legitimating assemblies for resolutions, leadership addressing, and collective demands: transparency in funds, educational and health facilities for girls, road construction, and administrative restructuring. [62] In resource mobilization terms, these gatherings function as mobilizing structures: they aggregate local authority, coordinate messaging, and generate collective decisions that can be publicly communicated as “tribal consensus.” [63]

A second strategy is symbolic institution-building, exemplified by the inauguration of a movement office and claims of a “countrywide organisation” intended to connect scattered Utmankhels. This signals an attempt to institutionalize the movement beyond episodic jirgas into a durable organization with local chapters (e.g., Lower Dir chapter) and leadership roles. [64] The organizational move is strategically important because it addresses a recurring grievance:

that party politics fragmented Utmankhel communities into “small groups,” implying that a tribe-centered structure could reduce intra-tribal vote-splitting and improve bargaining leverage. [65]

A third strategy is electoral entry and candidate-selection governance. In 2012 reporting, UQM announced it would field its own candidates, formed a 15-member committee to nominate candidates, and explicitly authorized leadership to negotiate seat-to-seat adjustments with other parties if necessary. [52] This indicates a pragmatic approach: the movement’s ideology is not separatist but oriented toward maximizing representation within existing electoral institutions, including tactical alliances. Political opportunity theory suggests that such strategies exploit openings in competitive party systems (e.g., dissatisfaction with incumbents, strategic bargaining where a movement’s vote bank is pivotal). [66]

A fourth strategic repertoire is issue-based development advocacy anchored in specific service deficits. The evidence is especially strong for gendered education and mobility infrastructure: UQM-linked jirgas highlighted the absence of girls’ educational and health facilities and the non-construction of an 18-km road in a hilly area, emphasizing how infrastructure deficits translate into educational exclusion and health risk in emergencies. [67] This is a classic framing move: connecting everyday hardships to collective injustice and proposing concrete solutions (roads, schools) that are legible to the state and donors. [68]

A fifth strategy is coalition visibility within broader civic contention, evidenced by UQM’s participation in a protest attended by multiple political parties, lawyers, traders, and civil society groups. This indicates that UQM was not only inward-looking but also sought legitimacy in multi-actor public spheres, aligning with the idea that movements increase influence by creating network ties and demonstrating cross-constituency relevance. [69]

Socio-economic impacts on Utmankhel communities

Because tribe-disaggregated socio-economic statistics are generally not available in official datasets, “impact” must be assessed through (a) documented agenda shifts and claims, (b) mechanisms through which mobilization affects resource allocation, and (c) district-level baselines as contextual constraints. In this evidence base, UQM’s clearest socio-economic intervention is the prioritization of girls’ education and associated infrastructure. The January 2012 jirga narrative explicitly links girls’ education to the construction of schools and roads, and frames lack of road access as a barrier to schooling and emergency health access—making socio-economic deprivation both a gender equity issue and a basic mobility/public service issue. [70]

Second, UQM elevated development accountability and transparency as socio-economic politics. By criticizing misuse of humanitarian/development funds and demanding transparency, the movement positioned itself as a watchdog on development delivery, addressing a long-standing critique in tribal governance literature: resource allocation often fails to reach communities due to administrative capture, corruption, or conflict constraints. [71] Even if specific recovered funds or reforms are not documented, the socio-economic “impact” can be conceptualized as agenda-setting—creating public pressure and reputational costs for representatives perceived to neglect Utmankhel areas. [72]

Third, UQM’s electoral strategies potentially impact socio-economic life by altering bargaining power for development projects. Candidate committees and the explicit willingness for seat adjustments suggest an attempt to convert collective identity into negotiated benefits (projects, services, administrative upgrades). [73] In practice, such bargaining may yield localized development commitments, but the publicly accessible corpus does not provide outcome verification (e.g., documented completion of the cited road, establishment of new schools). Therefore, outcomes remain largely unspecified, and the analysis treats electoral strategy as an enabling mechanism rather than a proven development delivery channel. [74]

Fourth, UQM’s discourse helped normalize a narrative that ties underdevelopment to insecurity and external intervention—linking socio-economic deprivation to drone violence and “great game” politics. This matters socio-economically because it reframes development not as charity but as restitution and stabilization, potentially strengthening claims for targeted investment in marginalized areas. [75] Such framing aligns with development policy logics that connect livelihoods, governance, and stability in the tribal districts. [76]

Finally, the socio-economic impacts must be read against severe baseline constraints in the newly merged districts. For example, district statistics for Bajaur report very low literacy ratios (about 20% overall, with substantially lower female literacy), indicating an environment where movement demands for girls’ education confront deep structural barriers. [77] Regional surveys also report high non-attendance rates and weak service infrastructure in newly merged districts such as Bajaur and Mohmand, which implies that even successful agenda-setting may translate into slow, incremental improvements rather than rapid socio-economic transformation. [78]

Table B: Strategy-to-impact mechanisms (evidence-based and inference-labeled)

UQM strategy	Documentary evidence	Intended socio-economic effect	Mechanism-based assessment
Jirgas and large notables' gatherings	Reported gatherings (200–400 elders/notables) issuing demands/resolutions	Collective articulation of needs; legitimacy for claims	High confidence as agenda-setting; direct outcome not documented [62]
Organization-building (office; “countrywide” unity claims)	Office inauguration; uniting scattered members	Sustained mobilization capacity; reduced fragmentation	Plausible capacity gain; internal organizational records unspecified [49]
Electoral entry and candidate committees	Field candidates; 15-member committee; seat adjustments	Representation leveraged for projects/services	Clear political strategy; socio-economic outcomes not verified in corpus [79]
Issue-based advocacy: girls' education + roads	Explicit demands for schools, roads, facilities	Reduce gender exclusion; improve mobility/health access	Strong link between demand and deprivation; results unspecified [80]
Coalition/protest participation	Presence in multi-actor protest space	Broader legitimacy; increased pressure on authorities	Suggests networking; impact indirect and context-dependent [69]

Table C: Selected contextual socio-economic indicators (district-level proxies, not tribe-specific)

District/area proxy	Indicator (selected)	Reported value / characterization	Source
Bajaur (newly merged district)	Literacy (overall; male; female)	Very low overall literacy with large gender gap (district statistics)	KP district statistics page [81]
New merged districts (incl. Bajaur, Mohmand)	Education non-attendance	High non-attendance rates reported for Bajaur and Mohmand in regional survey context	JICA survey (KP) [82]
KP tribal districts (aggregate)	Multidimensional poverty (2016)	Reported extremely high multidimensional poverty in tribal districts relative to settled KP	UNDP-led program document [83]
Bajaur (case of deprivation politics)	Lack of facilities cited in political mobilization	No hospital/PG college/stadium/park in Utmankhel region; sense of deprivation; planned protest	Dawn report on Bajaur jirga [55]

DISCUSSION

This paper's findings align with broader scholarship that portrays Pakistan's former tribal belt as structurally underdeveloped under exceptional governance regimes, where limited political participation and weak accountability mechanisms created space for both conflict and grievance-driven mobilization. [84] UQM's discourse—demanding tangible projects over paper reforms, criticizing misuse of funds, and linking development to social cohesion and de-radicalization—echoes development-policy critiques that under-investment and weak governance mechanisms in tribal districts contribute to fragility and socio-economic stagnation. [85] What UQM adds—relative to macro-level accounts—is a meso-level view of how a tribe-centered movement attempts to reconstitute political legitimacy through identity consolidation and locally authoritative institutions (jirgas) connected to electoral strategies. [86] Comparatively, post-merger human rights and policy assessments underscore that legal integration and expanded formal jurisdiction do not automatically produce equitable development, and that implementation delays sustain distrust and grievance. [87] UQM's earlier (2011–2013) insistence on transparency and direct engagement anticipates these concerns: it implicitly critiques a governance style where intermediaries (political elites, administrative managers, or NGOs) mediate resources without effective community oversight. [22] This continuity suggests that, even if UQM's organizational visibility fluctuated, the underlying grievance structure remained stable, as evidenced by later (non-UQM-specific) Utmankhel jirga demands for upgraded administrative status and facilities in Bajaur. [88]

From a social movement theory perspective, UQM provides a clear example of how framing processes operationalize deprivation: the movement's leaders articulated diagnostic frames (neglect; misrepresentation; underdevelopment), prognostic frames (unity; contest elections; demand schools/roads; transparency), and motivational frames (calls for collective struggle and inter-tribal alliance). [89] UQM's framing is also notable for its attempt to avoid inter-tribal antagonism while still asserting a strong in-group identity, consistent with social identity theory's emphasis on group

boundary-making and positive distinctiveness without necessarily escalating conflict. [90] The explicit statement that Utmankhels were “not against other tribes” but needed to organize their own people illustrates a strategic balance: maximizing internal cohesion while minimizing external backlash that could raise the costs of mobilization. [91] However, the study also reveals a limitation that mirrors the broader literature: the difficulty of connecting mobilization to measurable socio-economic outcomes in contexts where data are not disaggregated by tribe and where project delivery is shaped by many actors and institutional constraints. [92] UQM clearly elevated girls’ education and infrastructure deficits into public claims, but the documentary corpus does not track whether the cited road projects were completed or whether girls’ schooling access measurably improved as a direct result of UQM pressure. [74] In this regard, the paper’s mechanism-based approach is methodologically consistent with qualitative social movement studies but should be complemented in future work by district-level project tracing, budget analysis, or interviews with local administrators to test causal pathways more rigorously (beyond the scope of this secondary-source design). [93]

Finally, the discussion places UQM in the continuum of borderlands political repertoire: it blends customary legitimacy (jirga) with formal institutional engagement (elections and seat adjustments), reflecting how movements in transitional governance spaces often straddle informal and formal systems. [94] This hybrid strategy is consistent with analyses of the tribal districts’ integration challenges, where reforms must negotiate the coexistence of customary authority and state institutions. [95]

CONCLUSION

This paper finds that UQM’s ideological goals are best characterized as tribe-centered civic developmentalism: a project to unify dispersed Utmankhel communities, assert political legitimacy on a qaumi platform, and convert chronic socio-economic deprivation into actionable demands for services, transparency, and representation. Its political strategies combine jirga-based mobilization, organizational institutionalization, electoral participation with tactical bargaining, and selective coalition visibility, producing a movement repertoire that is neither separatist nor purely party-aligned. UQM’s socio-economic impact is most convincingly demonstrated through agenda-setting and pressure mechanisms—especially around girls’ education and infrastructure in remote Utmankhel localities—rather than through verified project outcomes, which remain largely unspecified in publicly available sources. In sum, UQM represents a significant but under-documented form of borderlands identity politics, showing how tribal collectivities pursue development and dignity through hybrid repertoires in contexts of enduring institutional transition and deprivation.

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